



FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION
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“THE NEW DIPLOMAT FOR THE NEW ERA”

Remarks by George Cunningham

**Coordinator for EU Bilateral Trade Relations with the United States
Author, *Journey to Become a Diplomat***

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Ladies and Gentlemen. It is absolutely wonderful to be back in Manhattan, and it is so nice to see you all. I was here, as many of you know, for a period of three years as head of press and public affairs and as a political counselor. I met a lot of you and so pleased to renew that relationship.

I'm also very pleased to see many new faces, and I hope to make you acquaintance at the reception afterwards. I want to thank Noel Lateef for being kind enough to invite me here tonight to speak, and for publishing the book that I have written. Thank you Noel for all that.

And also to meet one of my keen fans as I have just discovered, Jack Bierwirth. Thank you Jack for your kind introduction.

Manhattan is certainly far from Cyprus, a small island in the middle of the Eastern Mediterranean, where I most recently served as a European diplomat. To paraphrase that famous British poet William Wordsworth, my talk today is not in "...some secreted island, Heaven knows where! But in

the very world which is the world for all of us – the place where in the end we find happiness or not at all” – that’s our Manhattan of course!

Many of you who rent an apartment in Manhattan know what a diplomatic clause is. Well, I inevitably have one for this talk as well. What I am about to say is, of course, entirely my personal views. Now I’m sure that will make for a safer world.

My book “Journey to Become a Diplomat” is meant to be an inspiration to those who wish to make a life-long contribution to world affairs. Its format is different from a typical careers book. It is much more than just advice on how to apply for jobs in foreign affairs and get in. Instead, FPA President Noel Lateef had the brilliant idea of illustrating this book with the story of someone’s journey to achieve that goal, to put some real life experience into that process.

The centre-piece is, of course, my walk across Africa – an epic journey of 7,000 miles across desert sands and African bush from Alexandria in Egypt to Cape Town in South Africa. It is a tale of adventure as well as an educational experience. The book tells the story in full.

To be a diplomat, I felt I had to understand the world. Africa was a continent furthest from the comfortable life that I had been used to. I wanted to immerse myself in the grass-roots of Arab and African societies, to experience both their joy and their suffering. This was to be my unique initiation into the field of international relations, very much from the bottom up.

It was a magnificent experience. I met peasants to Presidents. I discovered myself, both good and bad, both strengths and failings. The world opened in front of my eyes. Friendships were made with many people that came and walked with me. I learned tolerance, humanity and a healthy respect for views other than my own.

I look back on those halcyon days with the warm glow of memory nowadays from the ivory tower that I have now reached. The lessons have not been forgotten. The world is easy for a few and difficult for many. But sometimes its concerns touch everyone. I shared with New Yorkers that terrible day on 9/11 when it seemed the world had come crashing down on all of us.

It brought home to me as never before how essential diplomacy is and how it constantly has to grapple with the world's challenges in an unrelenting way to an attempt to resolve humanity's many complex problems.

What it takes to make a career in the diplomatic service

In this day and age, becoming a diplomat is still highly sought after career but has become more and more difficult to get into. A pass rate of less than one percent into the Foreign Service is not unheard of.

For a job that still relies a great deal on the "human touch", joining the Foreign Service in some cases has become subject to distant on-line testing and psychological screening before getting a chance to sit an interview face-to-face. This "impersonalization" of recruitment procedures is not necessarily conducive to finding a diplomat who is well-versed and sensitive to the realities of the world.

I too had to complete written and oral tests to join the European Commission in Brussels, but felt much essential had to be gained from the experience of life to know how to act as a diplomat in this ever-more complex world. This "journey to become a diplomat" then had to be based on a series of experiences of the world from different perspectives.

My preparation to become a diplomat did not just rest with my long voyage in Africa. There were other necessary experiences to make me understand the world better. This path led me to become an army officer, to work for a multinational company and to run an international non-governmental organization. I also had to get two languages other than my own under my belt.

This was my substitute school of diplomacy and more. It was only I had all these tools in place that I eventually joined the foreign service, much the wiser for the experience of knowing from different angles the roles played by many of the main actors in the international system.

New Diplomacy- in the 1980s and now

It was shortly after my walk across Africa had finished that I came across the term: “New Diplomacy”. It came from that distinguished former Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban.

In the early eighties, the world was still gripped by the Cold War. For Mr. Eban, the lack of Great Power cooperation or a strong post-war peace organization meant that the previously highly structured way of conducting diplomatic business was descending slowly but surely into – and I quote - “a disorderly network of concepts which have often been presented as incompatible with each other but which somehow co-exist side by side”

The new diplomacy consisted mainly of a newly evolving concept called public diplomacy, open to the media; summit diplomacy which was robbing ambassadors of their self-perceived function as the main interlocutors between states; and the rise of “private” diplomacy where non-governmental leaders, organizations, members of parliament and journalists were crowding into the hallowed grounds of the diplomats with their own ideas about the resolution of international issues and even trying to mediate conflicts.

There was speculation that the traditional diplomat ensconced in a diplomatic mission abroad was a dinosaur facing extinction. Yet much of our distinguished audience tonight bears witness that diplomacy is alive and kicking as it has always been. How is it that we have all survived?

The world has changed enormously in a space of little more than twenty years since Mr. Eban brought the issue to our attention. The fall of the Berlin Wall led to the rise of the United States as the sole superpower. Yet its own greatness is being “contained” in practice by the realities of an increasingly complex and inter-related world. Globalization has shrunk the world. Terrorism threatens the lives of our citizens. The previous hopes of a new world order seem to have been dashed into a mire of disorder.

The nation state –under pressure from above and below

However, I believe that the centerpiece of the change now taking place in international relations is the gradual hemorrhaging of the supremacy of the nation state, under pressure both by forces from above and forces from below.

From above, faced with the power of the United States and the rise of China and eventually India, other countries that do not have that potential or can no longer be big powers on their own are forming regional blocks to act as counter-weights. However, these are not hostile counter-weights towards anyone.

They are a move to a more peaceful version of an eventual “balance of power” mix of (very) big countries and regional power blocs in a new interconnected world where gaining sufficient critical mass to defend one’s interest in all fields of international negotiation is considered essential to avoid dominance by others.

Of course the best example of this is the enlightened logic of European countries combining their efforts into the European Union. The EU’s example has inspired the formation of the African Union (albeit a rather different body) and discussions amongst Latin American as well as amongst Asian countries as to how far they can go as well.

Indeed the EU has advanced so far in pooling sovereignty and adding new countries inspired by its vision that it has inevitably caused strains among its Member States – perhaps even provoking a temporary “counter-reformation” - as they feel their way forward towards more unity by securing more control over that process themselves. Governments can of course only ignore at their peril the cold logic of “united we stand, divided we fall” in this new era which revels in the unexpected.

From below, globalization, the internet and the constant expansion of the frontiers of high technology and communication in general has substantially empowered the individual to have a greater impact on the world.

On the positive side, it has encouraged civil society to flourish throughout the globe, mightily expanding its powers of advocacy and inevitably liberty and democracy. On the negative side, it has fuelled the abuse of high technology by terrorism. This has given power to the individual - through fear and action - to hold nations to ransom and to subvert the values on which they are based.

The pressure from terrorism “from below” on the nation state has meant a more multilateral approach which has in its stead also helped to fuel the moves towards supranational entities “from above”.

The nation state will not disappear but it will gradually become less and less the sole dominant force on the international scene, however much it may fight against this tendency. Instead, international affairs will become more “multi-layered” with decision-making not solely the task of nation state governments anymore, but a mix of regional, national and even sub-national actors.

The diplomat’s job - ever more complex and demanding

This rapidly changing environment is forcing change on the way diplomats work.

First of all, diplomacy has not been for some time the purview of foreign ministries alone. The growth in complexity and inter-relationship of issues in a globalized world has meant the widening of areas for international negotiation and reporting. Instead of foreign ministries ruling the roost, they are often nowadays reduced to the role of coordinators except in areas of conflict prevention and resolution – that is, of classic diplomacy.

Embassies abroad now include representatives from many different ministries such as finance, trade, economics, environment and agriculture. 9/11 has even provoked the stay-at-home traditional Ministries of the Interior to join the international circuit in order to try to secure the safety of their citizens from outside threats.

Foreign services have therefore become more multi-functional and technocratic. The diplomat, particularly in smaller embassies, does tasks in a multitude of areas. In Cyprus for instance, my roles has included political monitoring and reporting; chairing a needs assessment group comprising of representatives from the EU/US/UN/World Bank/IMF to evaluate the costs of a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem; and monitoring Cyprus’ EU accession process and the EU’s assistance program to that country.

It also meant running the mission’s press and information section; participating in tendering committees and drafting contracts; undertaking public opinion surveys; helping coordinate the European Commission’s policies with other EU missions; answering public enquiries, undertaking the

duties of the security officer for the mission as well as being the deputy to the Head of Mission, stepping into his shoes as Charge d'Affaires in his absence.

In such a complex set-up, an Ambassador's primary job now is to ensure the coherence and seamless presentation of their country's ministries' or departments' often conflicting priorities towards the country or international organization they are accredited to.

Despite the inter-connected world, embassies will continue to exercise their functions locally. The personal touch dealing with host Government officials and its public continue to be valid. This is especially true of delivery of development assistance where an understanding of local conditions, local coordination between donors and the proper monitoring of the expenditure of tax payers' money is essential.

It must however be said that the increasing workloads that globalization with its craving for instant action and responses have created almost untenable pressures. Work comes in by email from all directions with the most immediate of deadlines. Headquarters use video-conferencing increasingly to keep their Embassies on their toes. Every public enquiry expects an urgent answer.

Yet Governments' loathing of matching mounting responsibilities with increased human resources is creating untenable situations. In particular diplomats are being pressurized to be responsible for the good management of funds often without being given sufficient means to ensure the job is done properly.

The Oil-for-Food crisis which has faced the UN is the most prominent example of the dilemma. There, the need to make the program work quickly to save lives compromised those officials not given the appropriate resources and honest political support to manage such huge sums of money.

Ethical diplomacy is definitely difficult to achieve in a world still dominated by national self-interest. Yet more and more the public expects it of their diplomats, as they expect it of their politicians. Thus it is increasingly incumbent on diplomats to perform their duties under public scrutiny and be judged on their actions.

Foreign Services - at pains to keep up with the pace of change

Despite the mounting pressures of the world, foreign services have been remarkably slow to adapt to new ways. The command structure still rules almost everywhere with rigid hierarchies. Posts transferred from one department to another can still be subject to enormous turf battles based on trampled egos.

Yet temporary “Task Forces” and “Teams” are emerging, formed on an ad-hoc basis within departments to tackle certain immediate “hot” topics. This type of flexible mechanisms will need to be fostered, with diplomats rotating more frequently into a multitude of tasks and challenges to keep them on their toes, supplemented by training and being sent on temporary assignment to other related organizations as necessary, without detriment to their careers.

This need for flexibility has meant that embassies are becoming more tailored to the tasks at hand. Their sizes vary considerably.

On the one hand, the US Government is building an Embassy in Baghdad which is so vast that it is reputed to cost around two thirds of a billion US dollars to construct and will have an eventual staff of around one and a half thousand personnel. On the other hand, it is the era of “Laptop Diplomacy” when an Ambassador may suffice to do the job with only one or two secretaries in small countries where there is little national interest at stake.

The US Government is also looking towards devolving aspects of its diplomatic service to the regional level. An innovative diplomatic hub has recently been created in Frankfurt with over 800 staff to support 170 US diplomatic posts in Europe, Africa and Asia. Tasks include training and acting as a back-up and center of expertise for US missions in the region.

In a speech at Georgetown University last month, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice outlined an extensive administrative shake up of the US diplomatic service to let it serve better the Administration’s policy of transformational diplomacy. This means moving more diplomatic posts to transitional countries in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East as well as emerging regional leader countries such as China, Indonesia and South Africa. The US also wishes to establish a diplomatic presence in large population centers abroad where none currently exists. Where no such diplomatic presence is possible, creative use of the internet, including virtual presence posts’, are advocated to fill the gap and spread the word.

Synergies between foreign services are also taking place. The idea of a new EU external action service is one example. In June 2004, it was decided that Mr. Javier Solana would become the EU's first Foreign Minister. The appointment is linked to the EU constitution entering into force, the future of which is in abeyance for the time being. This new EU external service would not necessarily lead to the disappearance of individual national Embassies but, as with all EU things, no doubt the situation would evolve once people see how things are working out.

Several ideas are already on the table about the functioning of this new service, such as pooling consular functions. In times of cost-cutting, the possibility of some of the 25 Foreign Services locating their personnel into one EU mission in a given country while reducing the very time-consuming need for coordination is an attractive one. Heaven forbid, it may also one day lead to a reduction of the number of EU Ambassadorial posts available!

It has recently been estimated that the EU25 collectively has about four times the number of diplomats as the United States. Cold logic dictates that an eventual rationalization is highly probable under these circumstances.

New country players are having a growing impact in the diplomatic field. There is much speculation as to how Chinese diplomacy will evolve, given that country's recent entry into the WTO, its growing involvement in multilateral issues and how it handles the developing North Korean crisis.

Any possible future expansion of the UN Security Council should help increase the quality of diplomatic activity and practice among possible new permanent or semi-permanent members.

Some developing countries – such as Brazil, India and Thailand - are already a force to be reckoned with, not least at the World Trade Organization. And the African Union is trying to take greater charge over its region's problems, particularly through its nascent Peace and Security Council, in places like Darfur and Togo. The growing professionalism in diplomatic practices of an increasing number of countries and their foreign services certainly deserves further study.

Diplomatic structures are not easily adapting themselves to the complexities of the new world environment. The heat is most visibly on the management

and future evolution of multilateral organizations but the strain is also most certainly being felt at the national level as well. In societies where individual creativity increasingly counts, foreign services will have to adapt, or face losing talent to the private sector which is increasingly involved in its own right in the diplomatic field.

The citizen's involvement in diplomacy while even diplomats start networking amongst themselves

Civil society's involvement in world affairs is booming. The numbers of non-governmental organizations or NGOs have expanded enormously largely thanks to the internet. There are tens of thousands of trans-national NGOs dealing with anything from conflict prevention to development and human rights. Their cacophony of voices must be taken into account as part of the work of public diplomacy, although by no means do they sing from the same song-sheet.

Individuals are being increasingly empowered to take on roles on the world stage themselves. Often this is done by advocacy backed up by field research. For civil society actors – despite good intentions- do not have the diplomatic tools to resolve conflicts themselves. They cannot give guarantees to cement a deal nor can they legalize an agreement. Neither do they have democratic legitimacy.

Nevertheless the Landmines Convention and the setting up of the International Criminal Court are good examples of successes where advocacy brought results by persuading Governments to act. The Geneva Initiative for the Middle East has added pressure on both Palestinians and Israelis, showing possible solutions to that conflict if the Will existed for the deal to be done. There is also scope for individuals to act as mediators and interlocutors between parties searching for a solution, as has happened in Cyprus.

Some people have suggested that the future for new diplomacy is pulling together the main actors from Government, business and civil society into an integrated whole. Already of course this is partly happening. At WTO summits, for instance, Member States often have mixed Governmental, parliamentary, business community and civil society representatives in their delegations.

Yet ultimately it is still only Governments that have the authority to make the final decisions. And although there have been instances of temporary transfers of personnel from businesses and civil society to foreign offices, it remains doubtful to what degree such persons should be allowed to get fully involved in any formal Governmental negotiations unless there is clearly no conflict of interest.

Diplomats themselves are also learning a lesson or two from civil society. For the internet can be used to break down barriers between conservative foreign services and even could be used to help create new structures such as virtual Diplomatic Academies. Diplomats from different foreign offices can use informal networks to communicate with each other to create links between foreign services, exchange information about the development of foreign services worldwide and even advise young aspiring individuals how to join them. This is an area in which I intend to be involved as well.

The stuff of the New Diplomat in the New Era

Recruiting the right kind of diplomat into the Foreign Service has always been an issue but the qualifications have changed. The book “Journey to become a Diplomat” demonstrates that the New Diplomat should reflect the realities of the evolving world around him or her.

International events and developments have created a global society that demands a new type of training in life. The New Diplomat needs to have had a wide experience of the world before becoming cocooned in a foreign service. Nowadays this seems more possible, not least because of the difficulty of getting into a foreign service may mean a wait of some years after university, trying out different jobs.

The New Era for the New Diplomat is undoubtedly very challenging. The diplomat must be much more nimble, flexible, multi-faceted and open-minded in his or her daily operations. Increasing public scrutiny and accountability of their work is an added incentive for diplomats to be more careful about the consequences of decisions on people’s lives.

In this age of fighting terror, trying to keep a careful balance between security needs and the proper exercise of human rights is one of the most difficult acts to manage. Individual diplomats do have a lot of influence and need to exercise their responsibilities carefully. Public diplomacy cannot substitute for sound policies on the ground. The obfuscation of Old Diplomacy must be consigned to the “dustbin of history”.

The New Diplomat must be a good communicator, innovative and more open to new ideas. Foreign languages are an indispensable part of the toolkit. There is no room for elitist attitudes anymore. The subtle approach of some “Old Diplomacy” practices – “being diplomatic” – nevertheless needs to continue without descending into merely a charade of good manners without substance. Nations need to save face in times of crisis and a diplomat’s job is still to work that magic so that everyone is made to feel that they have won something in a given situation.

Throughout my career, I am grateful to those who have believed in me and helped me on my journey to become a diplomat, such as UN Under-Secretary-General Sir Robert Jackson, Field Marshal Lord Michael Carver of Britain and President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia. I take this opportunity to salute and thank them for what they have done.

It is only natural that I should try to help others in return. In the 1980’s, I ran an NGO to educate young people about international affairs. Now I have written the book “Journey to Become a Diplomat”, young Americans have started to email me about how to start up their careers in diplomacy. I find myself more and more working once again with young individuals who have the right attitude and need help to prepare themselves for the Foreign Service.

In this address, I hope I have inspired you to think a bit about all those young persons struggling to make it in international affairs. They need encouragement and help, just like the diplomats in this audience did once when you were starting out on your careers. That is why so many – just as I did – can find making a “Journey to Become a Diplomat” such an exciting and fulfilling experience.

Thank you.