

New Diplomacy

William R. Moomaw

Discussion Paper

Center for International Environment and Resource Policy

The Fletcher School, Tufts University

Diplomacy began as simple meetings between emissaries to discuss “next steps” in the relationship between and among tribes, states or empires. Today, diplomacy is anything but simple. A complex set of rules of engagement has evolved to deal with the ever more complex sets of issues that face modern nation states and their relationships.

Traditional diplomacy addresses the following major topics:

- War and Peace between nations (Middle East; India and Pakistan)
- Defining territorial borders and resolving border disputes (Kashmir, Middle East, Ecuador-Peru, Arctic Ocean, South China Sea)
- Trade rules between and among nations (GATT, WTO)
- Treatment of foreign nationals by governments (extradition, rights of foreign citizens)
- Operational rules for communication and transport between nations (postal service, air, sea and land transportation when crossing borders, international telecommunications, etc.)

The first two items listed above are often referred to as “spectacular diplomacy” because of the significance of the issues and their consequences. The goals of traditional diplomacy are to defend state *sovereignty* and *territoriality*. These are the two great principles that were defined for Europeans by the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 that ended thirty years of lethal warfare that killed approximately one-third of the population, and which gave birth to the modern nation state. The treaty ended years of religious wars among competing groups of Christians in Europe, and gave the sovereign in each state the right to choose the religion of his or her people. This principle has evolved into the notion that governments have the sovereign right to make all decisions within their borders that determine the behavior of their own citizens as well as those of foreign visitors, and to set the rules for operating their domestic economic and political systems. This has been confirmed and established by many subsequent international agreements. It is interesting that when European powers attempted to extend this principle to their colonial subjects, they rebelled and demanded sovereign rights for themselves. Today, the bulk of the world’s nations are former colonies that are the strongest defenders of sovereignty and territoriality.

The formation of the United Nations following World War II began a process that has generated a “New Diplomacy” that challenges many of the perceptions of “Traditional Diplomacy.” Perhaps “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (1948) was the first significant challenge to national sovereignty by asserting that other governments might have a concern about how a state treated its people. The newest aspect of the human rights agenda is “The Responsibility to Protect,” which argues that sovereignty includes a responsibility of governments to protect citizens from harm. Additional issues concerning not only human

rights, but also humanitarian, labor, environmental and global issues have begun to challenge traditional notions of sovereignty and the sanctity of national boundaries.

New Diplomacy addressed the following issues:

- Human rights (Apartheid in South Africa)
- Humanitarian intervention (Kosovo, Rwanda, Sierra Leon)
- Labor rights (Workers conditions in developing countries)
- National environmental issues (forestry and biodiversity)
- Transboundary environmental issues (transboundary acid rain and air and water pollution)
- Global environmental issues (marine fisheries, stratospheric ozone protection, climate change, Antarctica, outer space)
- Toxic substances, genetic engineering and biotechnology (Basel Convention, Persistent Organic Pollutants, Biosafety Protocol)
- Fair Trade (European Union, NAFTA, Free Trade Area of the Americas)

In all of these cases, national sovereignty is challenged, and in some cases foreign governments or coalitions of states have crossed national boundaries to address a violation of an *international* norm. The New Diplomacy is an evolving, incomplete, new set of rules that makes traditional diplomats and many governments very uncomfortable. Where will it stop? When is intervention in the internal affairs of another country justified? Is sovereignty the last refuge of the corrupt scoundrels governing countries, or is it all that stands between international chaos and us?

The New Diplomacy raises many questions and challenges, as it attempts to address emerging issues that arise from an ever more densely populated planet with ever more far reaching technologies that is becoming global on many fronts. Globalization is not just about the economy, and the ability of transnational firms to extract natural resources anywhere in the world, send them to a third country for processing, to a fourth for manufacturing, and then market and sell products to a global consumer class. Globalization is also about equity and the impact that resource extraction, manufacture and use of a product has on the environment and the health and well being of the workers who produce it as well as for bystanders and other species. It is about the ability of private corporations and NGOs to move across national boundaries in ways that governments and intergovernmental organizations cannot. It is about the globalization of knowledge, information and science, and about transparency. The world is still uncertain how to do New Diplomacy, and governments tend to treat the issues as just a part of “unspectacular diplomacy,” but the intensity of public response to the issues and the increasing share of diplomatic time being spent on these new topics suggests that it is addressing critical international issues. To succeed, this New Diplomacy needs to become Sustainable Development Diplomacy that addresses social, economic and environmental dimensions to create enduring societies that meet the needs of all people.

For access to the texts of many treaties including The Peace of Westphalia and many environmental, trade and human rights treaties, check the Fletcher Multilaterals website, <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/multilaterals.html>