

## **Part II**

# **Diplomatic Relations**

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# Introduction to Part II

On 10 February 2004 the Republic of Ireland established diplomatic relations with the oppressive government of Myanmar (Burma). 'In view of Ireland's responsibilities during our EU Presidency,' said the Irish foreign minister, 'this decision... will ensure that, during the Presidency, we can contribute more directly to promoting the process of democratisation and national reconciliation there.' This example illustrates the fact that when states are in diplomatic relations they can, in principle, communicate freely with each other and, so, in the most effective manner possible.

To be in diplomatic relations is the normal condition as between states enjoying mutual recognition; hence, diplomatic relations is often spoken of as 'normal relations'. This condition might have grown up naturally and be taken for granted, as in the case of states having dealings with each other over centuries. In other cases, the establishment of diplomatic relations – or the 'normalization' of relations – might be the result of a well-advertised written agreement to this effect, today typically taking the form of a joint communiqué signed by their permanent representatives to the United Nations in New York, as in the case of Sri Lanka and Paraguay in April 2009. Such communiqués commonly add that the step has been guided by the principles and purposes of the Charter of the UN and the VCDR (1961), and indicate both the date when and the manner in which normalization will commence.

The ways in which normal relations are conducted varies, and it by no means follows that they require an exchange of ambassadors. It is true that resident embassies are frequently established, but diplomatic relations – broadly understood – might also be conducted by means of consulates, summit meetings, conferences, and telecommunications.

It is the different channels, or modes, of diplomacy that are the subject of this Part of the book.

It has been argued in Part I that the most important function of diplomacy is the negotiation of agreements between states. It has also been noted, however, that this is not always the function to which those professionally involved in the conduct of diplomatic relations devote most of their time, and that diplomacy has other important functions. These include political and economic reporting, lobbying, supporting the activities of businesses from home, assisting distressed nationals, and propaganda. The opportunity will be taken in Part II to examine these functions also.

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## Embassies

Formally accredited resident embassies are the normal means of conducting bilateral diplomacy between any two states. The British scholar-diplomat Harold Nicolson called this the 'French system of diplomacy', because of the dominant influence of France on its evolution and the gradual replacement of Latin by French as its working language (Nicolson 1954). This chapter will commence with a discussion of this system as it evolved from the early modern period to the twentieth century. It will then proceed to an examination of the working of the resident embassy today, in the course of which it will be seen that this institution has proved remarkably resilient.

### The French system of diplomacy

In the Middle Ages, responsibility for diplomacy was placed chiefly in the hands of a *nuncius* and a plenipotentiary. The former was no more than a 'living letter', whereas the latter had 'full powers' – *plena potestas*, hence the later 'plenipotentiary' – to negotiate on behalf of and bind his principal. Nevertheless, they were alike in that they were temporary envoys with narrowly focused tasks (Queller: chs 1 and 2). It was the mark of the system that began to emerge in the second half of the fifteenth century that these *ad hoc* envoys were replaced or, more accurately, supplemented by resident embassies with broad responsibilities. Why did this occur?

Temporary embassies were expensive to dispatch, vulnerable on the road, and always likely to cause trouble over precedence and ceremonial because of the high status required of their leaders. As a result, when diplomatic activity in Europe intensified in the late fifteenth century, 'it was discovered to be more practical and more economical to appoint

an ambassador to remain at a much frequented court' (Queller: 82; also Satow: vol. I, 240–1). Continuous representation also led to greater familiarity with conditions and personalities in the country concerned, thereby producing better political reporting; facilitated the preparation of important negotiations (although it long remained customary to continue sending higher-ranking, special envoys to conduct them); and made it more likely that such negotiations could be launched without attracting the attention that would usually accompany the arrival of a special envoy (Queller: 83). The spread of resident missions was also facilitated by the growing strength of the doctrine of *raison d'état*; that is, the doctrine that standards of personal morality were irrelevant in statecraft, where the only test was what furthered the interest of the state. This sanctioned what, in the seventeenth century, Richelieu called 'continuous negotiation': permanent diplomacy 'in all places', irrespective of considerations of sentiment or religion (Berridge, Keens-Soper, and Otte: ch. 4). Anticipating this doctrine by a century, in 1535 His Most Christian Majesty, François I, King of France, established a resident embassy in Constantinople at the court of Suleiman the Magnificent, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Shadow of God on Earth – and spear of the Muslim holy war against Christendom.

The resident embassy, which initially meant the ambassador and his entourage but came to mean the building they occupied, was at first treated with suspicion in most quarters. Nevertheless, its value was such that it was steadily strengthened by the customary law of nations, which evolved quite rapidly in this area after the late sixteenth century. Reflecting the change in practice, the premises rented for long periods by the envoy – as well as his person, domestic family, and staff – were soon attracting special immunities from local criminal and civil jurisdiction (Adair; Young 1966). As might have been expected, the more powerful states, including France itself, were slower to dispatch than to receive resident embassies. The Ottoman Empire did not experiment with residents of its own until 1793. As for Manchu China, this first had to be encouraged to view foreign states as sovereign equals rather than as barbarous vassals whose representatives must acknowledge this status by the delivery of tribute and performance of the kow-tow at the feet of the Emperor (Peyrefitte). As a result, it did not entertain occidental-style embassies until 1861.

Continuity in diplomacy via the resident embassy (or 'legation', if the mission were headed by the lower-ranked minister rather than an ambassador) was not the only characteristic feature of the French system. Another was secrecy. In current usage, 'secret diplomacy' can

mean keeping secret all or any of the following: the contents of a negotiation, knowledge that negotiations are going on, the content of any agreement issuing from negotiations, or the fact that any agreement at all has been reached. Nevertheless, in the French system secret diplomacy normally meant keeping either the fact or the content of negotiations secret. This was considered important chiefly because a successful negotiation means, by definition, that each side has to settle for less than its ideal requirements, which is another way of saying that certain parties – radical supporters of the governments concerned, some other domestic constituency, or a foreign friend – have, in some measure, to be sold out. If such parties are aware of what is afoot at the time, they might well be able, and would certainly try, to sabotage the talks.

Another important feature of the French system was close attention in protocol to elaborate ceremonial with religious overtones. This was used to enhance a ruler's prestige, flatter his allies, and solemnize agreements (Anderson: 15). Ratification of agreements concluded by plenipotentiaries, which was juridically unnecessary, was also often accompanied by high ceremony, in order to reinforce the compact (Queller: 219–20). Ambassadors, in contrast to mere 'publick ministers', were of special value in ceremonials because they were held to have the 'full representative character'; that is, to represent their sovereigns 'even in their dignity' (Vattel: 367); accordingly, they came to be reserved for relationships of special importance.

Protocol, although it now has a reputation for stuffiness and excessive formality, has always had an important task: that of making it unnecessary for diplomats to have to argue afresh about procedure each time they meet, thereby enabling them to concentrate on the substantive issues that divide their governments (Cohen 1987: 142). A vital point of protocol has always been the regulation of diplomatic precedence; that is, the order in which diplomats are acknowledged on official occasions – who comes first and who last. This is because of the sensitivities of sovereign bodies to their prestige, which is such a valuable currency in international relations. It was a major achievement of the French system to overturn, at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the controversial scheme of precedence laid down by the Pope in 1504 (Box 7.1). Henceforward, diplomats would take rank according to the date of the official notification of their arrival in the capital concerned, the longest serving being accorded the highest seniority. It also became customary that plenipotentiaries at a conference would sign treaties in alphabetical order.

**Box 7.1 The papal class list**

'The Pope, not unnaturally, placed himself first among the monarchs of the earth. The Emperor came second and after him his heir-apparent, "The King of the Romans". Then followed the Kings of France, Spain, Aragon and Portugal. Great Britain came sixth on the list and the King of Denmark last. This papal class-list was not accepted without demur by the sovereigns concerned' (Nicolson 1963: 98–9).

According to Nicolson, however, what really distinguished the French system was its adoption of the critical principle that deceit had no place in diplomacy. He probably exaggerated the depravity of the diplomatic methods popularized by Machiavelli (Hale: 272–5; Mattingly: 109; Queller: 109) but as the resident ambassador won acceptance, acquired higher social standing, and gradually became part of a profession, more importance did come to be attached to honesty in diplomacy. François de Callières, the theorist of this system, emphasized that the purpose of negotiation was not to trick the other side but, rather, to reconcile states on the basis of a true estimate of their enduring interests. This was right; it was also prudent. For agreements are only likely to endure if made on this basis – and, if they are unlikely to endure, they are unlikely to be worth concluding in the first place. By contrast, if a state secures an agreement by deceit, or subsequently throws over an agreement immediately it becomes inconvenient, it is likely to breed a desire for revenge in the breast of its victim (Callières: 33, 83, 110). It is also likely to find other states disinclined to enter negotiations with it in the future. Greater honesty in diplomacy was a sign of the maturing of the diplomatic system.

An additional feature of the French system was the professionalization of diplomacy: controlled entry, some form of training, a code of conduct, clear ranks, payment that was at least nominally regular, and a pension on retirement. For Callières, diplomacy was too important and too much in need of extensive knowledge and technical expertise to be treated otherwise (Callières: 99–100). The transformation of diplomacy into a profession was a slow and fitful process, and was not seriously under way, even in France itself, until well into the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, movement in this direction had been signalled well before this by the emergence of the *corps diplomatique*, or diplomatic body.

The 'diplomatic corps', as it was corrupted in English, is the community of diplomats representing different states resident in the same



capital. (It is not to be confused with the diplomatic *service* of individual states, although it usually is – not least by diplomats.) The evolution of this institution, with its own rules of procedure – such as the rule that the longest-serving ambassador should be the spokesman or dean of the *corps* on matters of common interest – was clear evidence of an emerging sense of professional identity among diplomats (Berridge 2007: 15). In other words, diplomats under the French system had come to recognize that they had professional interests that united them as diplomats, as well as political and commercial interests that divided them as, say, Englishmen, Frenchmen, or Austrians. Foremost among these professional interests was defence of their immunities under the law of nations. The diplomatic corps perhaps reached its apogee – or, at any rate, its most glorious moment – in the successful defence of the Legation Quarter in Peking during the Boxer uprising in 1900.

In his elegant lectures, Harold Nicolson remarked that the French method was ‘that best adapted to the conduct of relations between civilised States’ (Nicolson 1954: 72). Nevertheless, he was aware of weaknesses and drawbacks, and others were much less charitable. Indeed, although Nicolson vigorously disputed this, some held the old diplomacy – as the French system came to be more usually called – to have been one of the causes of World War I. Prominent among the charges against it were its secrecy, leisurely pace, domination by the traditional aristocracy, and tendency of its representatives to ‘go native’.

Going native, or succumbing to ‘localitis’, is an occupational hazard experienced by professional diplomats who have been posted for a long time in the same part of the world. It has been recognized since the birth of resident missions during the Italian Renaissance. At best, they lose touch with sentiments at home; at worst, they become mouthpieces for the governments to which they are accredited, rather than those they nominally represent. Localitis is not difficult to understand. In order to be effective in a foreign posting, a diplomat has to learn at least something of the local culture and, ideally, the language. This does not, in itself, lead to sympathy for the local point of view but it presents the opportunity to acquire it, which might be more enthusiastically taken if the culture in question prizes values and personal attributes that are important to the diplomat’s own nation and social class. This was certainly a part of the explanation of the admiration developed by British diplomats for the desert tribes of Arabia (Monroe: 116–17). Diplomats can also be won over by gifts and decorations. This was why Queen Elizabeth I of England is said to have remarked, with her ambassadors in mind: ‘I would not have my sheep branded with any other

mark than my own' (Satow: vol. I, 369). A more important cause of localitis, however, is the fact that – as we shall see – resident diplomats need constant access to local officials and other influential persons. It is a short step from regularly having to listen to their point of view to showing sympathy for it as a professionally expedient courtesy – and it is perhaps not a much longer step to sharing it.

It was, in part, because it was known that diplomats might go native that it became normal to rotate them between postings, typically after three or four years. This means some sacrifice of hard-won area expertise but this should not be exaggerated, because rotating does not mean that diplomats must never be allowed to return to a previous post. In fact, it is quite common in properly run diplomatic services for ambassadors to have served at the same post earlier in their careers. Country expertise is also conserved by rotating diplomats between posts and the desks of the foreign ministry at home dealing with the same countries.

What of the stranglehold on the profession of the traditional aristocracy? Although the earliest resident diplomats were not generally of the highest social standing, special envoys normally were. This was necessary to maintain the prestige of their ruler and flatter the parties with whom they were dealing, as well as to make it easy for them to move in circles of influence. However, as the French system matured, resident embassies – at least in the important capitals – attracted leading notables, and the emerging foreign services of the various European states became the province of the traditional aristocracy.

Aristocratic dominance of diplomacy was significant because of the considerable uniformity of outlook that it fostered across the diplomatic services of different states. As Anderson says, 'The aristocracies which ruled so much of Europe could still see themselves even in 1914 as in some sense parts of a social order which transcended national boundaries... A diplomat who spent most of his working life in foreign capitals could easily feel himself part of an aristocratic international to which national feeling was hardly more than a vulgar plebeian prejudice.' For one thing, they often had foreign wives (Anderson: 121; Nicolson 1954: 78–9). Similarly, it made them uncomfortable with the growing trend towards more democratic control of foreign policy in Europe in the early twentieth century, and attracted hostility – generally unwarranted – towards their methods, such as secret negotiation. Since the traditional aristocracy was also contemptuous of trade, its dominance of diplomacy made this a poor instrument for promoting the commercial and financial interests of the state abroad (Platt 1968). This, along with other menial tasks, was generally left to consuls (see Chapter 8).

Finally, as the number of states increased, the complexity of the problems confronting them multiplied, and the urgency attending them grew, the operating pace of the French system of bilateral diplomacy became simply too slow. This was realized during World War I and was demonstrated by the rash of conferences – many of them achieving permanent status – that were hurriedly organized to cope with the crisis. Afterwards, multilateral diplomacy was properly inaugurated with the creation of the League of Nations, and it was widely believed that the old diplomacy had been replaced by a ‘new diplomacy’. This was an exaggeration but some things clearly had changed, and these changes will be discussed more fully later in this chapter, as well as in Chapter 9. Nevertheless, the French system remained at the core of the world diplomatic system after World War I – and remains, albeit sometimes disguised, at its core today. It is necessary, therefore, to turn to an examination of its modern manifestation, which is legally anchored in the VCDR.

### **The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, 1961**

By the 1950s, it was broadly accepted by jurists that diplomats must have special privileges and immunities under local criminal and civil law for the reason given two centuries earlier by Emmerich de Vattel, a native of Neuchâtel who was, at the time, in the diplomatic service of the Elector of Saxony. ‘It frequently happens’, he wrote, ‘that a minister [diplomat] is entrusted with commissions that are disagreeable to the sovereign to whom he is sent. If that prince has any power over him, and particularly if he has sovereign authority over him, how is it to be expected that the minister will carry out the orders of his master with the requisite fidelity, courage, and freedom?’ (Vattel 1758: book 4, para. 92). In short, diplomats needed special treatment under the law because, without it, they would be unable to carry out their functions properly.

The ‘functional theory’, as it was called, had certainly given a more persuasive justification of diplomatic privileges and immunities than the previously popular theories. (The theory of embassy extritoriality mistook a metaphor for a justification, while that resting on the ambassador’s character, as full representative of a sovereign power, protected His Excellency but left the rest of his staff in the cold.) It was one thing to accept that diplomats needed special treatment, and to agree on why this should be so; it was quite another to be complacent about the condition of the existing rules, which were found chiefly in customary

international law. Indeed, there was growing anxiety, especially in the West, that looseness in the diplomatic rules was permitting some embassies to be used for illegitimate purposes and others to be subjected to improper harassment; that the existing rules were inadequate to cope with the size of the diplomatic corps – by the 1950s, being swollen by diplomats arriving in the major capitals from the many ex-colonial states; and that traditional diplomatic institutions would be tarred with the brush of neo-colonialism if the new states of Asia and Africa were not allowed to give them official sanction. As a result, the VCDR, which was shaped by a draft produced by the UN's International Law Commission (ILC), codified and 'progressively developed' the customary law on diplomacy: clarified and tightened it, adjusted its content to modern conditions, and relaunched it in the more impressive form of a multilateral convention.

Consistent with the functional theory, early attention was given in the new Convention to listing the proper functions of diplomatic missions (Box 7.2). In addition, privileges important to their functioning were generally strengthened, while the categories of those by whom they could be invoked were tightened. On the all-important point of the inviolability of embassy premises, which it later made clear applied equally to the private residences of diplomatic agents, the Convention made strong statements. 'The premises of the mission shall be inviolable', it stated baldly in Article 22.1, adding by way of clarification that 'The agents of the receiving State may not enter them, except with the consent of the head of mission'. So, there was no provision – as some

**Box 7.2 Article 3 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, 1961**

1. The functions of a diplomatic mission consist *inter alia* in:
  - (a) representing the sending State in the receiving State;
  - (b) protecting in the receiving State the interests of the sending State and of its nationals, within the limits permitted by international law;
  - (c) negotiating with the Government of the receiving State;
  - (d) ascertaining by all lawful means conditions and developments in the receiving State, and reporting thereon to the Government of the sending State;
  - (e) promoting friendly relations between the sending State and the receiving State, and developing their economic, cultural and scientific relations.
2. Nothing in the present Convention shall be construed as preventing the performance of consular functions by a diplomatic mission.

had wanted – for such consent to be assumed in a public emergency, which would have permitted an unscrupulous receiving state to contrive such an event itself; for example, by deliberately starting a fire at the embassy. ('Aha! You have a fire. We must rush in and put it out! And...ahem...inspect your documents to make sure they have not been burned.'). The VCDR also placed a special duty on the receiving state to protect the embassy premises.

The Convention stressed that the inviolability of the mission extended to its contents, bank accounts, and movable property, especially its means of transport and documents. The inviolability of the mission's communications was the subject of a long article, although the controversial qualification was added that 'the mission may install and use a wireless transmitter only with the consent of the receiving State'. This was a concession to the developing states, which were particularly afraid that unrestricted diplomatic wireless communication would permit intervention in their internal affairs (Kerley: 111–16; Denza: 175–9).

The VCDR also made a strong statement of the customary position on the inviolability of the person of the diplomat, while reiterating the right of receiving states to expel those whose actions were regarded as pernicious. Among other things, it underwrote the freedom of movement of the diplomatic agent, so vital to a number of functions, not least that of political reporting. Affirmation of this right had been made necessary by the Soviet bloc policy, introduced following World War II, of limiting the travel of foreign diplomats to 50 kilometres from the capital, unless they obtained special permission to make longer trips. This had provoked a number of Western states, notably the United States, to retaliate in kind. However, freedom of movement was also qualified by permitting receiving states to bar a diplomat from certain zones on grounds of national security, and the result was that state practice did not change a great deal (Denza: 168–72).

The Vienna Convention also detailed the obligations of missions to the receiving state. This was hardly surprising, since resident missions had always run the risk of being suspected of espionage and subversion, and this had been heightened by the Cold War activities of the superpowers in the non-aligned world (Berridge 1997: 157–61). Thus, the Convention stressed that diplomats must 'respect the laws and regulations of the receiving State' and repeatedly referred to the duty of non-interference in its domestic affairs, making a number of practical stipulations to reduce its risk: diplomatic missions were required to confine their conduct of official business to the receiving state's foreign

ministry unless agreed otherwise; failing prior permission, embassy offices could not be established 'in localities other than those in which the mission itself is established'; *agrément* might be required for service attachés (always suspected of being spies) as well as new heads of mission; receiving states could insist on the slimming down of missions they believed to be too large; and finally, as noted earlier, radio facilities could only be installed in missions with the consent of the receiving state.

The VCDR was signed in Vienna on 18 April 1961 and came into force three years later when, on 24 April 1964, it had been ratified by 22 states. When the PRC acceded to it in November 1975, it enjoyed the support of the entire Permanent Five (P5) on the UN Security Council. At the time of writing (June 2009), 186 states are parties to this Convention – all but a very small handful of the total number of states in the world. Practice has revealed certain gaps and ambiguities in this seminal instrument, but it remains as true today as when remarked in 1988 that it is 'without doubt one of the surest and most widely based multilateral regimes in the field of international relations' (Brown: 54).

The VCDR dealt only with traditional bilateral diplomacy, and thus excluded both relations with international organizations and special missions (on the later attempts to codify and develop the law in these areas, see Chapter 14). This limited brief was one of the reasons for its success. Among the others was the fact that all states send as well as receive diplomats, and that, where there were serious disagreements at the Vienna conference (as, for example, over diplomatic wireless communication), the major powers – whether East or West – had tended to be on the same side (Kerley: 128).

### **The case for euthanasia**

It is one of the ironies of the history of diplomacy that, not long after the VCDR had reinforced the resident embassy, voices began to be heard – at least, in the West – claiming that it had become an anachronism. Prominent among these were those of Zbigniew Brzezinski and Henry Kissinger:

- First, it was maintained, direct contact between political leaders and home-based officials had been made much easier by dramatic improvements in travel and communications, and the growth of international organizations, thereby enabling them to bypass their ambassadors.

- Second, functions such as representation and negotiation (especially where experts are needed to deal with technical business) were actually better executed via direct contact.
- Third, embassy political reporting had been overtaken by the huge growth in the international mass media, an argument reinforced by the dramatic broadcasting from Baghdad of Cable News Network (CNN) reports during the Gulf War at the beginning of the 1990s.
- Finally, it was suggested, serious ideological tensions and deepening cultural divisions across the world meant that the exchange of embassies by hostile states provided – quite literally – dangerous hostages to fortune.

The Iranian crisis at the end of the 1970s, during which the Shah's regime was replaced by a revolutionary theocratic government under Ayatollah Khomeini, seemed to provide spectacular confirmation that the resident embassy was both an anachronism and a liability. The US ambassador in Tehran, William Sullivan (at the time, the most senior member of the US Foreign Service on active duty), was repeatedly bypassed by direct communication between the White House and the Shah, and subsequently took early retirement (Sullivan: 199–287). As for the embassy that he had left on 6 April 1979, nine months later this was seized by militant supporters of the new Islamic government and its staff held hostage for 444 days. This humiliated the administration of Jimmy Carter, and provoked a crisis that dominated his last year in office.

Against such a background, it is hardly surprising that supporters of the resident embassy should have been on the defensive throughout most of the post-war period. In Britain, traditional diplomacy came under increasingly hostile official scrutiny after the mid-1960s and suffered remorseless attacks on its budget. The same trend was observable in the United States and other countries. Nevertheless, not only are resident embassies still to be found everywhere, but some of them are also larger than ever. For example, the staff of the British embassy in Turkey is four times the size that it was during the heyday of Lord Stratford de Redcliffe in the Crimean War, and twice the size it was in 1878 despite the fact that, in that year, it was temporarily inflated by the first cohort of student interpreters from the newly-created Levant Consular Service and a flood of military attachés caused by the outbreak of the Russo–Turkish war (Berridge 2009: 274). Why has the case for euthanasia failed to persuade? The best way to answer this question is to show how the functions of the resident embassy cannot be performed as well – if, in some cases, at all – in its absence.

Generalizing about the significance of the work done by resident missions is perilous, for it varies with the diplomatic services of which they are part and the countries in which they are located. Nevertheless, many important tasks are performed to some extent by almost all well-run embassies of at least medium size. It is to these that we must now turn.

## Representation and friendly relations

Representation, that often overlooked or naively minimized function of diplomacy, is chiefly concerned with prestige and is, in certain instances, impossible to distinguish from propaganda. Principally involving the head of a mission, it embraces entertaining, giving public lectures, appearing on television and radio shows, and attendance at state ceremonial occasions. In principle, it can be conducted by government ministers and officials, but they cannot be everywhere and have important jobs at home. As a result, it devolves chiefly on ambassadors. On the occasions when it is, nevertheless, expedient for senior government figures to go abroad on representative duties – either to attend some special occasion, or simply on a goodwill visit – they are also highly dependent on the support of the local embassy: this applies as much to the forward planning and aftermath as to the period of the visit itself (Berridge 2009: 234–6).

The existence of a resident embassy also broadens a state's representative options and, thus, its repertoire of non-verbal signals. For example, at the funeral of Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in Moscow in 1982, most foreign delegations were headed by dignitaries flown in for the occasion. Nevertheless, a few countries found it expedient to be represented merely by their resident ambassadors; in their absence, it might have been difficult to avoid showing either too much or too little respect (Berridge 1994: 142). For representational purposes, resident missions are generally of special importance to new states and established ones in declining circumstances. What of their duty to promote friendly relations?

The first duty of an embassy is to advance its country's interests, and this might require a diplomat to behave in an unfriendly manner (James 1980: 937–8). Nevertheless, it remains an important task of the embassy to promote friendly relations with local elites *insofar as this is compatible with policy*. The report of the Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS) into British diplomacy called this the 'cultivation of contacts' and commended it (CPRS: 259). A well-networked embassy will obviously find



it easier to gain influence and gather information; it will also be better placed to handle a crisis in relations should one subsequently develop. It is for this reason, as well as others, that a good embassy will honour local customs (provided they are not flagrantly objectionable), mark important local events, and make extensive social contacts.

It is also an important job of the embassy to ensure that gratuitous offence is not given to the host government in the event that some unpleasant message has to be delivered. Diplomats who are liked, familiar with the understatement of their profession, fluent in the local language, fully acquainted with protocol, and sensitive to local prejudice – in short, professionals – are more likely to achieve this than anyone else. Friendly relations can be cultivated by other means – for example, by summitry (see Chapter 10) – although this can have the opposite effect when there are personality clashes between leaders. For this task, then, the resident embassy has the greatest opportunities, and is likely to have the most appropriate knowledge and skills.

### **Negotiating and lobbying**

In negotiation, the most important function of diplomacy broadly conceived, resident ambassadors and their staff also continue to have more than a walk-on part. Indeed, the settlement of some matters might still be left largely, or even entirely, to the embassy, acting under instructions that are now so easy to issue and update electronically. These include: subjects of relatively minor importance; amendments to existing agreements of greater significance, such as the rescheduling of the repayment of a loan; and important topics that require many months, perhaps years, to conclude and sometimes need great secrecy (CPRS: 117–18; Henderson: 335; Berridge 2009: 278–9; Jackson: 149–51). Among the latter in some parts of the world, and often with the assistance of secret service officers, are negotiations with kidnappers, which for good reasons Western governments regularly deny conducting but which, under intense and understandable pressure from the families and friends of victims, they are widely suspected of doing nevertheless.

When home-based experts or, more rarely, government ministers take the lead in a bilateral negotiation abroad, embassies still play an important role, although one that is less visible. The prenegotiations are often left entirely to them and these, as we know (see Chapter 2), can significantly influence the atmosphere in which the negotiation proper is conducted – and so shape its outcome. For example, in conducting the prenegotiations with Turkey for the International Road Transport

Agreement of September 1977, which had long been sought by Britain, the commercial counsellor of the British embassy in Ankara negotiated an important interim agreement in February 1976, an extension of this in March 1977, and several other points of substance shortly after that, quite apart from making all of the other preparations for the visit of the negotiating team from the British Department of Transport. As it was, the Department's specialists only needed to be in Turkey for a few days. During a negotiation led by home-based experts, it is also normal for the embassy to occupy seats at the table, as well as provide bed and breakfast for the visitors and briefs on key local personalities; and the vital task of following up any agreement reached usually falls chiefly to them as well, as already noted in the previous chapter in the case of bilateral MOUs on torture (Trevelyan 1973: 72; Henderson: 214–16, 225–6; Berridge 2009: *passim*).

Sometimes, too, ambassadors are brought back to reinforce a negotiation being conducted at home. The US ambassador to Egypt, Herman Eilts, and to Israel, Samuel Lewis, were so respected for their knowledge of their respective countries (see p. 118) that they were called home to be members of the 11-man US negotiating team at the Camp David summit in September 1978 (Carter: 327).

Closely related to negotiating is lobbying by the embassy: encouraging those with influence in the receiving state to take a favourable attitude to its country's interests. The targets of the embassy's attention, the extent to which lobbying is even prudent, and the style judged most efficacious vary with the receiving state's constitution and political culture. In general, however, personal contact is the most effective device of lobbying, and typical targets are government departments and opinion leaders in business and the media. Only where elected assemblies have real influence, as in the United States, do legislators (especially the chairmen of key committees) also attract an embassy's attention. All former ambassadors to the United States report their heavy involvement in lobbying during their periods in Washington. Allan Gotlieb, who was Canadian ambassador in the US capital from 1981 until 1989, gives the impression that the head of mission in Washington has time for little else (Gotlieb: 44, 56, 76). Increasingly, too, embassies in Washington are calling on the assistance of its numerous public relations and law firms, and many states now rely entirely on them for lobbying purposes. They do this for the same reason that European embassies employed dragomans to pursue their cases in Constantinople – the vast and baffling character, to outsiders, of its government and legislative institutions (Newhouse: 74).

## **Clarifying intentions**

States always need to make sure that others know enough in order to behave conveniently. Depending on the situation, another government might need to be reassured ('relax – we're only invading your neighbour'), alarmed ('these sanctions are just the first step'), encouraged ('we like what you're doing'), or deterred ('do that and you'll regret it'). Once more, the resident embassy is not the only option. For example, if a message needs special emphasis or flattery is important, telephone diplomacy might be employed (see Chapter 12) or a special envoy might be sent (see Chapter 14). Nevertheless, there remain situations in which the resident embassy is either at least equally appropriate, or distinctly preferable, as the vehicle of clarification.

An ambassador can supplement a written message with an oral explanation and be more appropriate than a special envoy, if it is thought advisable to keep the exchange in a low key. The manner of the ambassador's presentation might also reinforce the message, as might the local reputation that the envoy has acquired. If reassurance is the import of a message, a statement by a trusted ambassador will be as good a medium as many, and better than most. In time of war, the ambassadors of allies play a particularly important role in this regard. The embassy might also be employed for the clarification of intentions in order to avoid erosion of its local standing, which needs preserving for other aspects of its work.

## **Political reporting**

Gathering information on political – and, indeed, on military, economic and other developments – and reporting it home has long been recognized as one of the most important functions of the resident embassy. Immersed in the local scene and swapping information with other members of the diplomatic corps, embassy personnel are ideally situated to provide informative reports, and it is difficult to see this function ever being adequately performed in any other way. Only in unusual circumstances – such as those of Beijing during the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s, when the diplomatic quarter was virtually besieged by Red Guards – is an embassy not peculiarly well-placed to know what is going on. It is true that service attachés (army, air force and navy), who are charged with obtaining military information, sometimes find this difficult even in friendly states, and next to impossible in hostile ones, but what they manage to discover continues to be valued by military intelligence.

A mission at the UN can obtain some information from another on conditions in its country of origin, but it would be sanitized and limited. Special envoys can also obtain information, but the brevity of their visits and their slender resources make it likely that their reports will be impressionistic. Spies – except for that rare specimen, the agent in place – do not enjoy regular, high-level access. Neither do journalists, who, in any case, do not always ask the questions in which governments are interested, or attach the same priority to the *accuracy* of their information. And, while a journalist's dispatch might be censored, a diplomat's might not. In closed societies, the information provided by a diplomatic mission is especially important.

What is particularly impressive is the extent of reliance on embassies for knowledge of the mind of the local leadership. For example, during the American-mediated negotiations between Israel and Egypt in the 1977–79 period – in which accurately sensing the mood of the Egyptian president, Anwar Sadat, was of vital importance to the Carter administration – great reliance was placed on the reports of the US ambassador in Cairo, Herman Eilts, who, by 28 November 1978, had had more than 250 meetings with the Egyptian leader (Carter: 320–1; Quandt: 166, 284). Carter also paid close attention to the on-the-spot reports of the US ambassador in Tel Aviv, Samuel Lewis (Carter: 321).

It is true that during the last days of the Shah, President Carter ultimately lost faith in the reports of his ambassador in Tehran, William Sullivan, despite his regular meetings with the Iranian leader. However, Carter continued to rely on some of Sullivan's reports for a while after the two men found themselves at odds over policy. Moreover, when the president lost faith in him, he did not dispense with a resident envoy but sent another (Carter: 443–9). This case shows, too, that intelligence on a foreign government can also be sought by gentle interrogation of its own ambassadors abroad. Both Carter and Brzezinski testify to the usefulness in this regard of the Iranian ambassador in Washington, Ardeshir Zahedi, who was known to be close to the Shah (Carter: 441; Brzezinski: 359–60).

It follows naturally, from the respect still generally accorded to the local knowledge of the competent embassy, that its advice on policy is usually welcomed as well. The Duncan Report in Britain picked this out for special emphasis in 1969 (HCPP 1969: 18, 91), as did the Murphy Commission Report in the United States six years later. Advice on policy is particularly valued when ambassadors have acquired a high professional reputation. Moreover, advances in telecommunications, widely believed to have weakened their office, also enable heads of mission to communicate their views to their own governments with great rapidity. The advice of

an ambassador can be obtained by recalling him for consultation, as well as by direct telecommunication. In some countries, there is also a tradition of discussing policy at periodic or *ad hoc* conferences where chiefs of diplomatic and consular missions from a particular region meet senior foreign ministry officials for brain-storming sessions.

### Commercial diplomacy

Until well into the twentieth century, the diplomatic services of most states regarded commercial work either as the responsibility of the socially inferior consul or of an autonomous or semi-autonomous foreign trade service. However, a major change was foreshadowed in the 1960s when trading states such as Britain began to grow increasingly concerned at their diminishing share of total world exports, and took off against the background of the global economic turbulence of the 1970s. Since that time, commercial diplomacy has generally been regarded as a first order activity (Rana 2000: 96–7). This is true even in Germany, where the powerful chambers of commerce were formerly left to deal with matters themselves. In Britain, the first major postwar push to commercial diplomacy came from the Duncan Report in 1969, which concluded that export promotion ‘should absorb more of the [Diplomatic] Service’s resources than any other function’ (HCPP 1969: 68).

Commercial diplomacy includes use of the embassy’s resources to promote both exports and inward investment; and, in the case of poor countries, the cultivation of aid donors. Important features of the work of the embassy’s commercial section are the supplying of market intelligence, opening doors for trade missions and companies from home (especially small and medium-sized businesses that cannot afford their own agents), and contributing to the negotiation of bilateral commercial agreements; for example, on landing rights for a national airline. If the sending state is an arms exporter, service attachés are expected to exploit their contacts with the local defence establishment to assist in promoting weapons sales. When the foreign government is itself the customer, or when businessmen are trying to create new markets in ‘closed, remote, or unfamiliar places’, the embassy’s political expertise is especially valuable to them (Rana 2000: 111).

### Versatility and adaptability

Embassies can fulfil any number of subsidiary functions, symbolic as well as practical. In recent years, they have also shown themselves able

to cope with changing circumstances abroad and a difficult climate at home. Their versatility and adaptability are further explanations of their survival in the world of advanced transport and communications.

The opening or maintaining of an embassy highlights the recognition of the receiving state by the sending state, but the simple presence of an embassy can be used to good symbolic effect in other ways. For example, the opening of embassies by Canada in francophone Africa in the 1960s was designed, in part, to establish Canada's own credentials as a francophone state (Wolfe: 34). Similarly, the decision by the Soviet Union in the mid-1920s to be one of the first states to shift its embassy in Turkey from Istanbul to Ankara – the new capital so cherished by the Turkish leader, Mustapha Kemal – was not just a sensible practical move, but also a gesture designed to consolidate a new relationship. And when, in 2006, Costa Rica and El Salvador, the only states with embassies in the disputed Israeli capital of Jerusalem, removed them to join the rest of the diplomatic corps in Tel Aviv, it was a sign that they wished to come in from the cold.

Embassies are also valuable in the administration of foreign aid by donor states in the developing world. One reason for this is that the bigger powers commonly have a variety of agencies involved in aid work and the embassy is the natural vehicle for the coordination, as well as the protection, of their efforts. Another is that the political relationship between givers and receivers is notoriously fragile and, thus, needs delicate handling (Trevelyan 1973: 106).

Embassies are also expected to provide cover for the activities of intelligence officers. This is a function that has always made ambassadors uneasy, and there is sometimes an agreement between the foreign ministry and the 'intelligence community' stipulating the maximum proportion of embassy staff that can serve as agents. Similarly requiring diplomatic cover in embassies because of the sensitivity and dangers of their work are drugs liaison officers (DLOs) and immigration liaison officers (ILOs). These agents are now quite strongly represented in European and American embassies in countries along the transit routes of illegal narcotics and people trafficking. Their work consists chiefly, but by no means exclusively, of intelligence gathering (Berridge 2009: 255–61). All sorts of different officers working for the Department of Homeland Security are now making some US embassies bulge at the seams (OIG 2006; see also Box 7.3).

A further non-core function of the embassy, and one in which intelligence officers are sometimes involved, is intervention in the political affairs of the receiving state. The major powers – during the Cold War,

### Box 7.3 US Embassy Singapore: sections and attached agencies

#### *Department of State*

- Consular Section
- Economic/Political Section
- Public Affairs Section
- Management Office
- Regional Security Office

#### *Department of Homeland Security*

- Immigration and Customs Enforcement Attaché Office (ICE) (including Customs and Border Protection)
- Transportation Security Administration (TSA)
- US Coast Guard Marine Inspection Detachment Singapore

#### *Other Agencies and Sections*

- US Commercial Service
- Defense Attaché Office
- Drug Enforcement Administration
- Federal Aviation Administration
- Office of Agriculture Affairs
- Office of Defense Cooperation

Source: Embassy of the United States Singapore [www].

notably the Soviet Union and the United States – have found their embassies to be excellent forward bases from which to conduct political operations. Such operations might be aimed at propping up a friendly regime or undermining a hostile one, and involve anything from the secret channelling to the friendly faction of funds, arms and medical supplies, to organizing a military coup against the opposition. Zbigniew Brzezinski, who saw no use for embassies before he joined Jimmy Carter's administration, wanted the US ambassador in Tehran to persuade the Iranian military to seize power. The ambassador had no objection to this in principle, opposing it only on the grounds that it would not work.

Resident missions have also proved useful to some states in providing cover for the prosecution of their wars. These include wars against exiled opposition movements, and even other states. It is notorious that North African and Middle Eastern embassies have been involved in this sort of activity. As for US embassies, since 9/11 many of them have become 'command posts in the war on terror' and witnessed a major

influx of military personnel – including members of special forces, as well as military propagandists. Better resourced than the civilians, as well as increasingly numerous, these personnel have quite changed the character of many missions and, with the tacit encouragement of the Pentagon and the Bush White House, presented a serious challenge to the traditional idea that a US embassy consists of a ‘country team’ of which the ambassador is in charge (*Foreign Service Journal*, 2007a: 55–6; 2007b). British embassies in countries, such as Turkey, that were neutral in World War II served exactly the same military purposes – and had exactly the same problems, especially with the hell-raisers of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) (Berridge 2009: ch. 8).

Finally, embassies might well be useful in conducting relations between hostile states on the territory of a third. If the United States and the PRC had not both had resident missions in such places as Geneva, Warsaw, and Paris, a channel of communication that played an important role in limiting their conflict and ultimately in facilitating their *rapprochement*, would have been unavailable (Berridge 1994: ch. 5). Similarly, communication between the United States and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was facilitated by their missions in Bangkok, and between the United States and North Korea by their missions in Beijing. Following a breach in relations, disguised embassies might serve the same purpose (see Chapter 13).

The embassy has also proved remarkably adaptable to changed circumstances, including increased violence against its buildings and staff, and budget cuts imposed or threatened by legislators at home. To improve security, the design, building standards, and location of new embassies – especially those of the United States – have, where possible, been changed to make them less vulnerable to car and truck bombs (Berridge and James: 134–5; *Inman Report*). To achieve economies, as well as increase local knowledge and institutional memory, many more locally engaged staff (‘Foreign Service Nationals’, in US embassies) are being employed; they raise security concerns, but are much cheaper to hire than staff sent from home. This trend can even be seen in the PRC, which abandoned a long-established prohibition on the employment of locally engaged staff in the mid-1990s (Xiaohong Liu: 165). The missions of some closely aligned states, particularly the Nordic countries and those within the EU, have also begun to share premises. This ‘co-location’ of posts obviously facilitates coordination of local tactics and information pooling, as well as saving money. And a recent trend in American practice is to concentrate certain embassy functions in major embassies or consular posts, such as the US embassy in Singapore, which



is a major 'regional platform' for south-east Asia. Perhaps the most extraordinary evidence of the adaptability of the embassy, however, is the appearance of the 'flat-pack' or 'rapid reaction' embassy. This is a basic facility which, flat-packed and containerized – along with equipment and essential supplies – can be swiftly assembled in a city where peace has only recently been restored and where any former building might still be unsafe to occupy. A British embassy of this sort was established in Baghdad in early May 2003.

## Summary

The resident embassy, concerning which obituaries were so confidently drafted in the 1970s and early 1980s, is still alive. It has survived the communications and transport revolutions, chiefly because it remains an excellent means by which to support, if not lead in, the execution of key diplomatic functions. However, it is also versatile and adaptable, and enjoys a strong legal regime in the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. Furthermore, the communications revolution has made it both more responsive and more able to make inputs into policy-making at home. It is not surprising that the death of the resident ambassador has been indefinitely postponed.

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# 8

## Consulates

'Welcome to the Consulate in Lille', says the website of the British embassy at Paris beneath the heading 'Consulate-General in Lille', thereby neatly making the point that although, technically, a consulate is only one kind of consular post, in common usage it is the term used to describe them all. Only pedants, protocol departments and lexicologists wince at this and hasten to point out that consulates are distinct because there are vice-consulates on which they might look *down*, as well as consulates-*general* to which they must look *up*. This chapter therefore discusses all of them – as, indeed, also the consular sections of embassies, even though international law is unclear as to whether the latter should be treated as consulates.

Consulates today are attracting unprecedented attention. What are their origins? Why do they no longer inhabit what D. C. M. Platt, the historian of British consuls, called a 'Cinderella Service'? Why are they now so important? How is their work organized?

### **Merchants' representatives to public servants**

The consulates of European states, which were first established chiefly around the Mediterranean and its adjacent seas, had their origins in international trade. When cargo vessels from distant lands arrived in a port, the scope for misunderstanding and trouble was obvious. Sailors speaking strange tongues, displaying unusual habits, and – having been cooped up at sea, sometimes for months – soon drunk, were rarely impressive advertisements for their homelands. Attitudes to commercial dealings and the civil and criminal law generally were also often at serious odds, especially when religions were different. To make matters worse, there was usually intense competition between ship-owners

from different states; and, where foreign merchants settled and formed a community at an important port, they needed to be internally regulated, as well as defended against rivals and rapacious local officials. If trade between distant lands was to flourish, therefore, there had to be some representative of the merchants in the ports who had the authority and ability to sort out these problems. Enter the consul: spokesman for the merchants and, where this suited the local authorities – as in the Ottoman Empire – magistrate over them. Consuls appointed by Italian merchant colonies in the Levant pre-dated the emergence of the resident embassy in the late 1400s by at least three centuries, and probably encouraged it (Mattingly: 63).

The first consuls, then, were part-timers: merchants chosen from the ranks of a local trading settlement by the merchants themselves. They were supported financially by the small tax they were permitted to charge on the goods moving through their settlements ('consulage'), as well as by what they earned from their private trading; their duties concerned exclusively the affairs of their fellow merchants. In short, although home government authorization might sometimes be given to them and minor political duties performed in return (Mattingly: 63–4; Busk: 125), the first consuls were, in general, neither appointed nor paid by the state, and had nothing to do with advancing its interests, except indirectly.

In Britain, it was only in the middle of the seventeenth century that the state began to assert its control over the consuls and require them both to take on additional responsibilities (notably the organization of naval supplies) and place the national interest first: at this point only did private sector spokesmen become public servants (Platt 1971: ch. 1). But even after a partial reorganization in the early nineteenth century, many consuls – especially at minor posts – still survived for years on the basis of fees and private trading. These 'trading consuls', as they were known, were unpopular at home but they were cheap (Berridge 2009: ch. 4). It was to be the beginning of the twentieth century before the general consular service in Britain was put on a modern footing, although the French service had long been much better organized, as had certain specialized services in Britain itself, among them the Levant Service.

### **Amalgamation with the diplomatic service**

Until well into the twentieth century, there was an entrenched view among diplomats not only that consular work and diplomacy were

quite different, but also that a person suited to the one was not suited to the other. Diplomats busied themselves at royal courts and foreign ministries, where refined manners and the self-assurance that came from an aristocratic lineage were essential. By contrast, consuls, who were of middle-class origin, grubbed around in seaports and needed limited ambitions and the rough and ready ways of the tough ships' captains and corrupt provincial officials with whom they had to deal. Clearly, so the argument went, they had neither the money to live in the style of a diplomat nor the personal qualities necessary to deal with foreign leaders as equals.

From this perspective, therefore, it was entirely appropriate that there should be completely separate diplomatic and consular services. This also had the effect of making it still more unlikely that even the most outstanding consul-general would be able to obtain promotion to a diplomatic post, although in some states – such as Austria-Hungary – this was easier than in others. This state of affairs was deeply resented by the consuls.

By the late nineteenth century, consuls were engaged in a much broader range of duties – in the Ottoman Empire there were even many 'political consuls' – and they were shaking off their seaport image. Conversely, diplomats were being forced more and more to support the commerce of their nationals. In other words, the differences between diplomatic and consular work were eroding. The result was that a consul or consul-general at an important post was usually doing more or less the same kind of work in relation to a regional authority that a diplomat was doing in relation to the central government. In the embassy itself (which by then might also have a consular section), and especially in the European embassy in the east (where members of specialized consular services had usually come to take the senior positions in the 'oriental secretariat' or 'dragomanate'), the consuls might even find themselves doing most of the work of the diplomats, while the latter spent much of their time riding, picnicking, or bathing in local waters. For their troubles, the consuls were paid far less and often treated with breathtaking condescension. An easing of transfers between the services was not the solution to this situation: such concessions were seen by the consuls as acts of grace by the high and mighty aristocratic establishment that monopolized the diplomatic career. What the consuls began to push for instead was *amalgamation*: the creation of a unified foreign service in which, at least in principle, there was no such thing as 'a consul for life'.

Fortunately, in the late nineteenth century, political and social attitudes were slowly changing. It was beginning to be felt, even by some diplomats, that it was not only unfair, but also imprudent to deny diplomatic appointments to persons who were perfectly qualified for them in every way except for the fact that they had previously been a consul and came from the wrong social class. In a situation where the best person could not be placed in a vacant diplomatic post, and where there was contempt on the one hand and envy on the other, the first casualty was efficiency. Eventually, therefore, the consuls got their way. In the United States, the separate diplomatic and consular services were amalgamated by the Rogers Act of 1924, although it was not until 1943, as part of the general reform of the 'foreign service', that the same step was taken in Britain. The white paper announcing the change in Britain said:

What is aimed at it is wider training and equality of opportunity for all. Every officer of the combined Service will be called upon to serve in consular and commercial diplomatic as well as in diplomatic posts and in the Foreign Office and will have the opportunity of rising to the highest posts. Interchange between the different branches, and between posts at home and those abroad, will be facilitated with the object of giving every man as wide an experience as possible and of enabling the best man to be sent to any vacant post (HCPP 1943, para. 6).

In the course of the twentieth century, the diplomatic and consular services of most other states were also amalgamated; for example, Germany in 1918, Norway in 1922, Spain in 1928, Belgium in 1946, and Italy in 1952.

### **A separate activity, if not a separate service**

A strong trend towards the administrative fusion of their previously separate services, and a growing overlap between what consuls and diplomats actually did, there might have been. Nevertheless, it is still true, as the quotation from the British white paper of 1943 unmistakably implied, that there remained – and remains – a great deal of difference between *typical* consular work and *typical* diplomatic work. (This is why the currently fashionable term 'consular diplomacy' is unhelpful.) The former deals chiefly with the problems of individuals and corporate bodies; the latter is concerned mainly with issues of general policy

in intergovernmental relations, especially those of a political nature. Besides, a sending state can only establish one embassy in a receiving state; if it needs representation in provincial ports and inland cities, it must have posts of a different kind where the mission premises and staff, lacking the full representative character of the embassy and usually handling matters of less political sensitivity, will not be justified in claiming quite the same privileges and immunities. Traditionally, such posts have been called consulates and, until very recently, no one appears to have seen any reason to change the designation. So, while separate consular *services* might have been abandoned, consuls and consulates remain.

Reflecting this understanding that consular work remains a distinct activity, separate consular corps in major cities, as well as in major provincial centres, remain alive and well; for example, the Washington consular corps as well as the North Carolina consular corps. Analogous to the diplomatic corps (see Chapter 7), the consular corps is often better organized and more collegial; this is probably because of its relatively non-political interests and its strong leaven of honorary consuls who are either nationals or permanent residents of the same country – the receiving state (see p. 136). The consular corps of New York City, organized in 1925 into the Society of Foreign Consuls, claims to be the largest in the world. In the United States, where consuls are numerous and particularly well-organized, there is even a National Association of Foreign Consuls with its own ‘Consular Corps College’. In Britain, the Manchester Consular Association, founded in 1882, claims to be one of the oldest in the world.

Recognition that consular work was a separate activity was acknowledged when the customary and treaty law on consuls was codified and amended in a separate multilateral convention in 1963: the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (VCCR). This convention neither overrode existing bilateral consular treaties nor precluded the negotiation of new ones. Nevertheless, it became ‘an accepted guide to international practice’ (Gore-Booth 1979: 212) and, in so doing, brought the privileges and immunities of consuls closer to those of diplomats, although differences remain (see Box 8.1). In insisting on these differences, the conference held at Vienna in 1963 that produced the final convention played a more significant role than the ILC, the final draft of which had gone much further to assimilate consular into diplomatic law, notably by assigning complete inviolability to consular premises (ILC, ‘Consular Intercourse and Immunities’). What is the burden of consular work today?

**Box 8.1 The main differences between diplomatic and consular privileges and immunities***Immunity from jurisdiction*

Consular officers and employees are immune from the jurisdiction of the receiving state's courts and administrative authorities only in respect of their official acts. By contrast, diplomats generally enjoy this immunity in respect of their private acts as well; as, indeed, where criminal jurisdiction is concerned, do members of the administrative and technical staff of embassies.

*Liability to give evidence*

Consular officers might be called upon to give evidence at judicial or administrative proceedings (except in matters connected with the exercise of their functions), although not under threat of coercive measure or penalty. By contrast, diplomatic agents are under no such obligation.

*Personal inviolability*

In the case of a grave crime, a consular officer might be liable to arrest or detention pending trial; required to appear in court in person, if facing a criminal charge; and be imprisoned in execution of a final judgement. By contrast, the personal inviolability of a diplomatic agent is unqualified.

*Inviolability of premises*

Consular premises may be entered by the authorities of the receiving state without the express consent of the head of the post 'in case of fire or other disaster requiring prompt protective action', and may also be expropriated with compensation. By contrast, inviolability in the case of embassies is unqualified.

The private residence of a career consular officer (including the head of a consular post) is not part of 'consular premises', and so does not enjoy its inviolability or protection. By contrast, the private residence of a diplomatic agent shares these rights in equal measure with the premises of the diplomatic mission.

*Freedom of communication: the consular bag*

A suspect consular bag may – if a request to open it is refused – be sent back. By contrast, no diplomatic bag may be detained, let alone opened.

**Consular functions**

The work of consuls is famously rich in variety and is easily appreciated by looking at the list of consular functions in Article 5 of the VCCR, or at the consular services page of the website of any large embassy or consulate-general. A more detailed list of consular functions can be seen in



the European Convention on Consular Functions (1967), the handiwork of a committee of experts appointed by the Council of Europe in 1960. This has not entered into force, most European states seeming to prefer the greater flexibility afforded by the VCCR's more summary treatment of consular functions; its list is also not exhaustive, although certainly exhausting. Nevertheless, the European Convention's influence should not be discounted because of the great political and economic weight of Europe, and the continuing use of west European consular practice as a model in the world beyond (Lee and Quigley: 113).

Reflecting their origins, many consuls are still greatly preoccupied with encouraging the exports of their countries in the receiving state, promoting inward investment, and – depending on their location – supervising and assisting, as need arises, the progress of any national flag shipping and aircraft. However, commercial work is less characteristic today of the consular sections of embassies (see p. 119), since the large embassies, at least, now tend to have separate commercial sections. More characteristic of their daily diet, as also a high priority of the consular posts in the provinces, is providing help to any nationals in need. This is to be expected because the modern media coverage of this aspect of consular work makes it probably the most important activity by which the diplomatic service, as a whole, is judged.

As foreign travel has become easier and cheaper, so population movements across national frontiers have increased enormously, whether for purposes of holiday, education, business, political asylum, or better paid employment. For example, in recent years hundreds of thousands of skilled and semi-skilled workers have flooded out of India to the oil-rich states of the Gulf and north Africa (Rana 2000: 198), while the number of overseas trips from the United Kingdom has tripled in the last 20 years (FCO 2007: 27). Many states now have large communities of their nationals living permanently abroad; in 2005, Britain had over 13 million (National Audit Office: 8).

Whatever their reasons for being abroad, individuals might find they need the services of one of their consuls. It might be for a relatively routine matter, such as the issue or renewal of a passport, the registration of a birth or death, or the issue or witnessing of a certificate of life – a document verifying that a retired person living abroad is still alive and entitled to continue receiving a pension from home. However, individuals might also need a consul when they are in difficulty or acute distress, whether because they have lost a passport, had an accident, fallen ill, been a victim of crime, arrested on a charge of committing a crime, been caught up in a natural disaster such as the Asian tsunami that devastated holiday

resorts around the Indian Ocean in December 2004, or found themselves in the middle of a civil emergency such as the fighting in Lebanon in the summer of 2006. In situations such as these, consuls are required to do anything from providing new travel documents, advising on local lawyers, visiting in prisons, trying to trace the missing, arranging evacuation – and, all the while, keeping family at home in the picture. In the worst cases, consuls help to identify the dead, look after such of their relatives and friends as might fly out, and make arrangements for funerals or (if necessary) the transport home of bodies or ashes. In *True Brits*, there is a grim photograph of a British vice-consul in Bangkok overseeing the cremation of a British national who died in the city, one of an average of six a month with whose deaths he was dealing; he was known as the ‘Death Man’ (Edwards: 172). The stresses of this kind of consular work are not made easier by the public’s unreasonably high expectations of what consuls can do for them. They might not be expected to revive the dead, but many of those thrown into foreign prisons assume that their consul will be able to secure their immediate release. Others behave so badly abroad that the odd consul, weary of having to clear up after them and ashamed of their behaviour, resigns in disgust (see Box 8.2).

Another consular responsibility that is related to the last function – now, more so than ever – is that of information gathering. As with embassies, consulates have always been required to report on conditions and likely developments in their regions, although it has traditionally been commercial and, to a lesser degree, political intelligence that they were expected to supply. But, a priority now is reporting on

### Box 8.2 Disgusted in Ibiza

In August 1998, after only 18 months at his post, the locally engaged British Vice-Consul on the Spanish holiday island of Ibiza, Michael Birkett, resigned in disgust at the way too many young Brits behaved when they turned up in their hundreds of thousands for sun, sex, booze, and drugs. ‘I have always been proud to be British’, he told *The Mail on Sunday*, ‘but these degenerates are dragging us through the mud.’ The officer who stepped into this particular breach, Helen Watson, was subsequently honoured with the MBE and given a pro-consul. (This is a British term for a senior administrator of a consular post – at a small one, typically a locally engaged individual serving as personal assistant to the head of post.) In 2008, the consulate was renovated and expanded, and opened in the presence of the Under-Secretary of State for Consular Affairs at the Foreign Office, the British Ambassador to Spain, and the President of the Island Council. Not a bad repair job.

conditions that might affect travellers, on the sensible argument that prevention is better than cure. 'Know Before You Go' campaigns and 'Travel Advice', which are prominent features of foreign ministry websites, depend heavily on information supplied by their consular networks. The State Department, for example, has a 'Consular Information Programme' consisting of country specific information, travel warnings, and travel alerts.

A third task that falls to the lot of some consuls, especially those of the richer states in the West, is that of entry clearance: deciding to whom, among the many applicants for travel to their countries, they should issue visas. In light of the spread of poverty, insecurity and disease in many areas of the world, the numbers of those seeking visas for travel to the safer and more prosperous countries has grown enormously; and people-smuggling by organized crime gangs has increased with them. This has produced a mounting concern in the West about a floodtide of immigrants and asylum-seekers. The outbreak of the so-called 'War on Terror' has also produced a much greater anxiety about the sort of people who are trying to cross borders, as well as about their numbers.

There is great variation in the emphasis given to the work of sifting travellers not only between consulates of the same diplomatic service located in different countries (not all are in 'migration hotspots'), but also between diplomatic services themselves. In Britain, for example, a great deal of the burden of processing potential immigrants is placed on consular posts, whereas in others, such as France, most of this is done at home. The British view, which is similar to that of America, is that, although expensive, offshore migration control reduces delays at ports of entry, facilitates investigation of the applicants' circumstances, and minimizes their inconvenience – especially if they are refused. Another probable reason is the avoidance of heartrending scenes at ports and airports, and fear of what the media would do with them. In migration hotspots in Africa and the Asian sub-continent, consular posts are increasingly outsourcing the more routine aspects of visa work to private sector companies, thereby allowing more time for consular visa staff to concentrate on difficult cases.

Where there are normal relations but there is no diplomatic mission, a consular post might also be employed – subject to the approval of the receiving state – to perform *diplomatic* functions. On grounds of economy, this idea was strongly canvassed by the smaller states at the Vienna Conference in 1963, although it is impossible to tell the extent to which it has been put into practice. It appears not to be popular, and why should it be? A poor state wishing to put some flesh on

its diplomatic relations with another state can always concurrently appoint to it an ambassador based in a neighbouring country. And if it wants, instead, a permanent representation by career officers, it might as well designate it an embassy rather than a consulate, which will be more flattering to everyone concerned and give its staff more privileges and immunities. On the other hand, sometimes an existing embassy has to be closed for reasons of economy, and it might prove useful to be able to transfer its functions to an existing consulate. Furthermore, use of an *honorary* consulate for diplomatic purposes saves money and might play some such role, provided the consul is not a national of the receiving state.

The least advertised role of consular posts, as with embassies, is providing cover for spies and serving as instruments of political warfare. In World War II, Britain's consulates in neutral Turkey were even used by SOE agents as dumps for explosives, in case the country should seem in danger of falling to Nazi Germany and it would be necessary to blow up key installations (Berridge 2009: ch. 8). It is not just the consulates of major powers that might be used for political purposes, as was vividly demonstrated by the activities in 2001 of the consulate of the Afghan Taliban regime in the Pakistani port city of Karachi. The head of this mission had supported Islamic movements in the country and addressed rallies in protest at Pakistan's pro-NATO policy. This, however, was obviously going too far, and the consulate was subsequently closed down by order of the government in Islamabad.

### Career consuls

Career consular officers are so called in order to distinguish them from honorary consular officers, not to suggest that they are consuls for life, as would have been the case prior to the early twentieth century. They are members of a foreign service who happen to have a consular posting at the time but might have come from – and, in future, be destined for – a diplomatic posting. They are found in the consular sections of embassies (discussed separately later in the chapter), but chiefly at posts in the provinces of the receiving state, typically in major ports and inland cities. In descending rank order, these posts can be consulates-general, consulates, or vice-consulates, depending on the size of their staff or district, their importance, or the personal status of their head of post. Vice-consuls might be found in consulates (strictly defined), and both vice-consuls and consuls might be found in consulates-general, although the last is always headed by a consul-general.

In theory, this traditional hierarchy suggests a pyramidal structure, with a broad base of numerous vice-consulates tapering upwards to just a few consulates-general at the top. However, in practice, this was only ever seen, as a rule, with the consular networks of major or medium powers in receiving states of particular importance to them – as when, in 1879, Britain had 30 vice-consulates, 9 consulates, and only 4 consulates-general in the Ottoman Empire. Today, a pyramidal structure of career consular posts is difficult to discern, even in similar situations to this. In fact, the picture is often turned upside down: vice-consulates (as opposed to vice-consuls) have virtually disappeared, while consulates, and especially consulates-general, have multiplied. The Dutch and the British still use vice-consulates occasionally, especially on islands such as Ibiza; and the American ‘presence post’ – with its single foreign service officer – looks very much like a vice-consulate by another name. But most states appear to have consigned them, along with the diplomatic legation, to the past, and chiefly for the same reason – their lowly status makes them unflattering to both the receiving local authorities and to those who have to run them. France, for example, has a total of only 4 vice-consulates against 97 consulates-general and consulates. Nevertheless, it must not be concluded that the disappearance of the pyramidal structure of career consular posts means the disappearance altogether of the pyramidal structure of consular representation as a whole, as we shall see in a moment.

Many states have a number of consular posts in countries where they have important interests, and where many of their citizens are regular visitors and permanent residents. In France, for example, Britain has a consulate-general at Lille and consulates at Bordeaux, Marseilles, and Lyons. These are supplemented by numerous honorary consulates and consular correspondents (explained later in the chapter). Each post has its own consular ‘district’ (see Box 8.3).

All consular posts are formally subordinate to their ‘sovereign’ embassy in the state in which they are established. This no longer extends to hiring and firing consular staff, as it often did in earlier centuries, but it still gives an ambassador a considerable degree of authority over the general lines of their conduct. As subordinate posts, therefore, and except in emergencies, consulates usually take their orders from the embassy and report to it. (By the same token, those vice-consulates that remain are superintended by consulates.) Nevertheless, a consul-general in a major provincial city might accept this subordination only with reluctance and, in practice, act in some respects as if it did not exist. It can well be imagined that this is particularly likely to be so if the post is

**Box 8.3 Consular districts**

When a state has more than one consulate in a particular receiving state, each is given a 'district' in which to exercise its functions. If the receiving state is large and the number of consulates is relatively small, the districts will inevitably extend far beyond the urban area in which they are located. The district covered by the British Consulate-General in Lille, for example, includes all five of the northernmost *départements* of France: Nord, Pas-de-Calais, Somme, Aisne and Ardennes. But this is nothing compared to the jurisdiction of the Indian Consulate-General at San Francisco, where Kishan Rana, the author of *Inside Diplomacy* (see 'Further reading'), was once head of post. This embraces Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

physically remote from the capital, as is, say, Perth in Western Australia or any of the major cities on the west coast of the United States; it is likely to be even more so if the consul-general had previously been an ambassador. It is not necessary to look far to find such cases (Berridge 2009: ch. 10).

Consulates have always placed great reliance on locally engaged staff, and this has increased even more in recent years: some posts are run entirely by nationals of the receiving state or permanent residents who are nationals of the sending state. Another trend – prompted by concerns over security, as well as economy, especially on the part of the United States – has been the creation of 'virtual consulates'. These are websites that are locally branded and customized, although they are ideally supplemented by periodic visits to the region in question by staff from the nearest 'real' consular post or embassy, and also by cultural and commercial initiatives, telephone links, and video-conferencing facilities.

**Honorary consuls**

At this point, it is appropriate to consider those consular officers who have, to some extent, rescued the pyramidal structure of consular representation as a whole; namely, honorary consuls and their close cousins – consular agents and consular correspondents. These represent the second category of consular officers.

At the ILC in 1960, honorary consuls were reckoned to be in charge of half of all of the consulates in the world (ILC 1960: vol. 1, 171). But they were thought by some of the jurists – and hoped by others, as earlier

by the League of Nations Committee of Experts for the Progressive Codification of International Law – to be on the way out (Lee and Quigley: 515–16). The Soviet Union and its client states, together with the PRC, regarded them as nothing more than bourgeois spies and, with little tourism in either direction, had little use for them in any case; accordingly, they refused either to appoint or accept them. Other states were less squeamish and more in need of their services.

Honorary consuls are usually nationals of the receiving state with close connections to the sending state, or nationals of the sending state permanently resident in the receiving state; in either case, they know their way around. Honorary consuls are frequently self-employed businessmen, shipping agents, or professionals of one sort or another who have control over their own time. They undertake the role on a part-time basis; and they are paid (at most) a small salary (usually none at all), fees for certain services, and their expenses. Under the VCCR, they enjoy more limited privileges and immunities than career consular officers, largely because of their more limited functions and the suspicion of not being entirely respectable that they have tended to attract. The sad, whisky-drenched character of Charley Fortnum in Graham Greene's novel *The Honorary Consul* has probably done nothing for the reputation of the institution either. Fortnum supplemented his income by importing, duty free, and then selling a new Cadillac every two years, although he had redeeming features.

While some honorary consuls simply like helping people in difficulties, it is usually assumed that most of them undertake the responsibility chiefly for the social, commercial, and other advantages generated by its prestige. Honorary consuls can at least fly the national flag, display the national coat-of-arms, and have freedom of official communication; they have the same immunity from jurisdiction in respect of their official acts as career consular officers; and, among other things, they are entitled to especially respectful treatment in the event that criminal proceedings are instigated against them.

Despite the arrival of virtual consulates, honorary consulates, at least, are not in retreat; on the contrary, since the 1960s resort to them has been steadily growing. They found vigorous – even outspoken – support in the ILC and at the Vienna Conference in 1963 – especially from the Scandinavian countries, and the separate chapter on them in the VCCR both stabilized and legitimized their role. The United States, it is true, still does not appoint honorary consuls, and – although it has accepted them since 1895 – as with some European countries, it no longer admits those appointed for purely political or honorific reasons

(Dunham; Rana 2004: 239, n. 35); the PRC still holds out against them altogether. But China is now alone among major states in this regard. The Soviet Bloc began to relent on its hard line in the 1970s, and the later collapse of the Soviet Union itself merely accelerated the process. The Russian Federation now embraces honorary consuls, as do the numerous states formerly in the Soviet orbit (Lee and Quigley: vii, 518).

States that have traditionally had large merchant fleets, as well as the many poor countries in the modern world, depend heavily on honorary consuls, despite the fact that they are usually unable to offer the full range of consular services. In 2008, the representation in the United States of Iceland – then still rich, as well as small – consisted of an embassy in Washington, a consulate-general in New York, and 20 honorary consulates in major cities across the country. In 2009, 400 of Sweden's 413 consular posts were honorary ones. But even larger states also find them immensely useful. For example, in 2009 Germany had 35 honorary consuls in the United States, in addition to its 8 consulates-general and its embassy; it had 350 honorary consuls worldwide.

The base of the pyramid of consular representation is broadened further by consular agencies, although this venerable institution is more problematic. The VCCR identifies consular agents as a class of the category of *career* consular officer – the lowliest, ranking below vice-consuls – but not all states accept this or even recognize the term, and practice varies among those that do.

In Britain, 'consular agent' (or 'commercial agent') was actually the title first given to those now more often called 'honorary consuls', the preference for the latter title gradually gaining ground in the twentieth century because it sounded better to the ears of 'merchants of standing' and gave them an edge in the tussle over precedence in the consular corps of provincial ports and cities – although the need for grander titles for these purposes had been recognized in parliament much earlier (HCPP 1858: *passim*; HCPP, 1872: paras 2313–36). 'Honorary Consul-General' sounded even better. Similarly, in the French service, the terms 'honorary consul' and 'consular agent' are virtually synonymous. The United States employs consular agents and pays them according to how much work they do, but this is exceptional: generally, there is little doubt that they are 'more akin to honorary consuls than career consuls' (Lee and Quigley: 35). In other words, consular agents are either a component of, or identical to, the *category* of honorary consuls, rather than being a fourth *class* of the category of career consuls. The functions of consular agencies also vary: some, such as the 'Honorary British Consular Agent' at Nis in Serbia, have responsibility only for the protection and relief



of distressed nationals; others have more extensive duties. In 2009, the United States operated 14 consular agencies in Mexico, all of which were explicitly described as 'extensions' of their superintending consular posts in the country, including the embassy in Mexico City.

The final addition to the pyramidal base to be noted is the consular correspondent, an individual employed by states such as Italy, the Netherlands and Britain. Such persons are voluntary representatives who serve as contact points between a consular post and a particular section of the community of their nationals resident in the receiving state. Their liaison role is particularly useful when such a group finds itself in a hostile environment, as is the case with the British community in Zimbabwe. It is a moot point whether consular correspondents are 'consular officers' in the meaning of the VCCR.

### Consular sections

Last, but by no means least, it is necessary to say a few words about the consular sections of embassies, which are staffed chiefly by career consular officers. Most embassies had been concerned with consular affairs in their immediate vicinity long before the twentieth century, especially when the capital city in which they were located was also a major port, as in the case of Constantinople. In these circumstances, consular matters might be dealt with in a separate building, closer to the dockside – but still close enough to the embassy to be regarded as, more or less, a part of it. Sometimes, the head of a diplomatic mission, whether the capital was a port or not, even doubled as consul-general, as at the British missions in Tokyo, Tehran, Cairo, and elsewhere. Nevertheless, encouraged by the merging of the two services and the need to reduce expenses, following World War I a trend developed physically to re-house consular staff within the embassy proper (Strang: 124; ILC 1961: vol. 1, 271). But numerous anomalies remain. For example, the consular 'section' of the British embassy in Paris, at 35 rue du Faubourg St Honoré, is still located some distance away in the rue d'Anjou; it is also described officially as the 'British Consulate-General'.

Only larger embassies tend to have whole sections devoted to consular affairs. At the other extreme, some embassies are so small that one officer has to combine functions of both a consular and diplomatic character. But, whether in a full section or not, the discharge of consular functions by the embassy has another great advantage to the sending state: the consular staff has full diplomatic privileges and immunities, awkward though this is for the functional theory of these immunities. This was

useful to the representation of Western states in Moscow during the Cold War (ILC 1961: vol. 1, 7), and it remains useful to many states today. In this connection, it is a striking fact that, in 2009, over half of the states with embassies in London had no consular representation – honorary or career – outside the capital but all handled consular affairs themselves. Whether this is to the advantage of their own citizens is another matter.

## Summary

Consulates have a longer history than the resident embassy. In the twentieth century, consular services merged with diplomatic services, and the differences between their respective privileges and immunities narrowed. But typical consular work remains, in many respects, different from typical diplomatic work, and is often more stressful; this is why it tends to be less popular. This is a pity because consulates are the foreign service's shop window to both foreigners and its own nationals abroad. To the latter, this should represent protection; to the former, a warm welcome if entry can be permitted, and a polite and regretful farewell if it cannot. As international trade has expanded (at least, until recently) and population movements have increased dramatically, the demand for consular services has grown commensurately. This is why the consular representation of larger states still tends to have a pyramidal structure, even though, for reasons of economy, honorary consuls now play an even more important role in supporting the broad base. Nevertheless, many smaller states rely entirely on the consular sections of their embassies. In Chapter 13, we shall see how consular posts also play an important role when diplomatic relations are severed.

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# 9

## Conferences

If the role of the resident ambassador was modified in the course of the twentieth century, this is, in part, because of the explosion in the number of conferences attended by three or more states – multilateral diplomacy. These conferences vary hugely in subject, scope, size, level of attendance, longevity, and extent of bureaucratization. At one extreme is an *ad hoc* conference on a mundane topic lasting perhaps for a week, and attended at the level of officials and experts; in between will be found an ‘informal forum’ such as the Group of 20 (see Box 9.1); and, at the other extreme, a major permanent conference, or international organization, such as the United Nations, grappling with many topics of major importance. In 1909, there were already 37 international organizations and, by 1962, the number had risen to 163. In 1985, a peak was reached when the existence of 378 was recorded (IO: 2357). This chapter will consider why this enormous expansion has occurred, and look at the characteristic procedures associated with what, in the earlier decades of the twentieth century, was inevitably called the ‘new diplomacy’.

### Origins

It is common to assume that multilateral diplomacy is essentially a twentieth-century phenomenon, but its origins lie much earlier. It was important in diplomacy between allies in ancient India, and even in diplomacy beyond alliances in the Greco-Persian world of the fourth century BC (Watson: 91, 85–8). Within the European system of states, somewhat chaotic multilateral conferences devoted to peace settlements (referred to as ‘congresses’, when of special importance) were a feature of the seventeenth century. Multilateral diplomacy began to take on

### Box 9.1 The Group of 20 (G20)

This multilateral body received unprecedented attention in late 2008 and early 2009, when the world plunged into deep financial crisis. Comprising finance ministers and central bank governors, it is an informal forum launched in 1999 in order to bring important emerging-market countries into the discussion of key issues of the global economy, hitherto reserved to the G8. Its members are: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, *Canada*, China, EU, *France*, *Germany*, India, Indonesia, *Italy*, *Japan*, Mexico, *Russia*, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, *UK*, *USA* (G8 members are italicized). The IMF and the World Bank are also strongly represented. The G20 has no permanent staff, continuity being preserved instead by a chair that rotates between member states and is part of a troika of past, present, and future chairs. The state occupying the responsible chair at any one time establishes a temporary secretariat for the duration of its term; this coordinates the group's work and organizes its meetings. In normal times, these meetings occur only once a year, but are usually preceded by two deputies' meetings and much technical work. Because of the seriousness of the financial crisis, the G20 met at summit level in Washington in November 2008 and in London in April 2009.

modern form in the early nineteenth century, following the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Since the global states-system of today emerged most directly from the European states-system, the immediate origins of modern multilateral diplomacy are to be found here.

Multilateral conferences emerged most emphatically in the nineteenth century, and blossomed in the twentieth because they were essential to the conduct of negotiations when states became more numerous, the number of international issues multiplied, and more urgency attached to their resolution. A conference is subject-focused and concentrates minds on one issue or series of related issues, brings together all the parties whose agreement is necessary, and encourages informality; its members might even develop a certain *esprit de corps*. It has a president with a vested interest in its success, and – at least if it is an *ad hoc* conference – will provide a deadline to concentrate minds because it cannot go on forever (see Chapter 4). Sir Maurice Hankey, who played such an important role in the development of multilateral diplomacy, laid great stress on the impetus given to this device by 'the perils and the overwhelming press of war business' during the great conflict of 1914–18 (Hankey: 14).

Multilateral diplomacy also owed its growing popularity to the fact that conferences in the European states-system were essentially

conferences of the great powers. (Small states were allowed to attend if their vital interests were touched, but were usually condemned to the margins.) They were, therefore, a device for identifying and advertising membership of the great power club. For the state able to play host to such a conference – and thus, by custom, secure the presidency – so much the better; this counted not only in terms of prestige, but also in influence over the conduct of conference business. Because it raised the question of the authority under which the great powers presumed to dispose of the fate of the world, the great power conference was also an unrivalled opportunity to affirm and justify their special rights. Finally, such a conference was a subtle device whereby a great power could express respect for, and a bond of solidarity with, its most dangerous rivals (Webster: 59–6, ch. 9; Bull: ch. 9). With such a calculus of great power interest behind it, it is hardly surprising that multilateral diplomacy should have gathered such momentum once the idea got off the ground. It reached its twentieth-century apogee in the Security Council of the United Nations.

The great power conferences of the nineteenth century that gave birth to the multilateralism of the twentieth might have been important because they advertised the great powers. However, they were also important because they advertised national priorities, and the vastly improved opportunities for propaganda provided by the revolution in mass communications in the twentieth century made the advertising potential of such conferences even more attractive as time passed – for NGOs, as well as states. It is much easier to demonstrate a commitment to the resolution of an urgent international problem by staging a conference on it than it is by discussing the issue through normal diplomatic channels. Even if an invitee thinks that a conference on a subject is untimely, it might find it difficult to resist participation. Apart from the possibility that it might wish to avoid giving offence to the conference sponsors and the fear that any decisions taken in its absence might threaten its interests, it might not wish to risk being thought hostile to its aims. It is in this light that the conference attendance of some states should be seen – not least that of the United States under the presidency of George W. Bush at the rolling conferences of the parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which started with the Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

Conference diplomacy has also prospered because of the impetus that it can give to bilateral diplomacy. This point has two aspects. First, a multilateral conference can provide opportunities for participants to discuss matters outside the formal agenda. This is particularly true of

major standing conferences such as the United Nations, and is of special value to states not enjoying diplomatic relations. Second, powerful mediators can hold a multilateral conference in order to kick-start, and then discreetly shroud, a series of essentially bilateral negotiations taking place elsewhere. This was the function performed for the Arab–Israeli bilateral by the Geneva Conference of December 1973 (Kissinger 1982: ch. 17) and then by the Madrid Conference in October 1991, and for direct US–North Korea negotiations on the latter’s nuclear programme by the Six-Party Talks in Beijing after March 2007.

Multilateral diplomacy was also encouraged in the early years of the twentieth century by that strain in liberal thought that emphasizes the importance of popular consent in sustaining political authority. If governments were to be democratically accountable in the domestic sphere, it followed that they should be similarly accountable in the international sphere. An important means for achieving this was ‘open diplomacy’: the conduct of negotiations under the glare of a public scrutiny that (this was axiomatic) was ‘creative and pacific’ (Keens-Soper: 76–7). In an extension of the same thinking, the procedures of open diplomacy also permitted some formal influence, however limited, to the smaller states. In practice, conference diplomacy was not necessarily open diplomacy. This was certainly not what Hankey, for example, had in mind when he sang its praises in his lecture to the Royal Institute of International Affairs in 1920. Nevertheless, conference diplomacy was a necessary – if not a sufficient – condition for open diplomacy; hence, the one tended to encourage the other. The League of Nations Assembly was the first great example of open diplomacy, and was followed after World War II by the United Nations.

Finally, multilateral conferences hold out the prospect of making agreements stick. They do this partly by solemnizing them through signing ceremonies that display the consensus achieved in the most visible manner conceivable; and partly by their reflexive disposition to provide monitoring or follow-up machinery of one sort or another (see Chapter 6).

## **International organizations**

The advantages of multilateral diplomacy noted so far do not altogether explain why some conferences have become permanent: standing diplomatic conferences or, as they are more commonly known, international organizations. No doubt they have achieved this status partly because, in the case of those that are politically important – such as the

United Nations or the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – it suits the powers with the greatest influence in them to have the world permanently reminded of their claims to high status. After all, the alternative – the periodic calling of *ad hoc* conferences – would cause much justified anxiety to those whose real international weight had been called into question in the interval between one meeting and the next. Indeed, had a series of *ad hoc* great power conferences been employed for the purposes of preserving ‘international peace and security’ instead of the UN, Britain and France would probably have lost their seats at the top table many years ago. Some multilateral conferences have also become permanent under the impact of the enduring functionalist notion that it is out of such structures that regional – and perhaps even, ultimately, global integration – will grow. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the multilateral conferences that achieve permanent status do so principally because the problem with which they were established to grapple is itself seen as a permanent problem. The paradigm case is the unceasing problem for the UN of preserving international peace without jeopardizing the immediate security of its member states.

An international organization has a constitution or charter in which its aims, structure, and rules of procedure are laid out. Most important is provision for a governing body and a permanent secretariat housed in permanent headquarters. In important cases such as the UN, the governing body – in this instance, the Security Council – is in virtually continuous session. The international organization will also have periodic meetings of the full membership. In normal circumstances, these meetings do not have much influence, but this might be greater in emergencies, when special meetings can be held. It is also important that substantial contributions to the budget of the international organization should come from at least three countries (IO: 2404). A good example of an international organization, and one of great significance, is the International Atomic Energy Agency (Box 9.2).

Apart from their permanent secretariats, none of the assemblies, councils, committees, or working groups of international organizations would find it possible to operate in the absence of temporary delegations and diplomatic missions permanently accredited to them by the member states. As a result, in 1975 an effort was made to extend to them the same sort of privileges and immunities in which permanent missions accredited to states had been confirmed by the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, 1961 (see Chapter 7). This attempt foundered because most international organizations are hosted by a small number of wealthy Western states. Evidently appalled at the extent to which the



### Box 9.2 The International Atomic Energy Agency

The IAEA, which was established in 1957, is an autonomous organ linked to the UN General Assembly. In 2009, the Agency had 146 states members and 64 international organizations and NGOs formally linked to it. Its chief aims are to promote the peaceful uses of atomic energy, and ensure that any assistance given to its development is not diverted to military ends. Thus, its 'safeguards system' is of great importance and, in 2009, it had 237 safeguards agreements for inspections in force with 163 states. It is this activity that brought it into conflict with Saddam Hussein's Iraq and continues to cause tension in its relations with North Korea and Iran. The IAEA has a General Conference that meets annually; a 35-strong Board of Governors that meets five times a year and, in early 2009, was chaired by the Algerian ambassador in Vienna, Mrs Taous Feroukhi; a Secretariat with 2200 professional and support staff from 90 countries; and a plethora of scientific committees, advisory groups, and working groups. In addition to its headquarters in Vienna, it has offices in New York, Geneva, Toronto, and Tokyo.

Source: IO: 1231-2; and IAEA official website.

armies of specially privileged diplomats in their capitals would be swollen were this proposal to go through, in effect, they killed it (Fennessy). Nevertheless, the representatives of states at the headquarters of international organizations were not left without protection, their positions having been already regulated by specific agreements between individual host states and the organization concerned.

A multilateral conference that settles down to permanent status has obvious advantages. It permits the initial breakthrough to be consolidated, keeps the problem under constant surveillance (see 'Review meetings' in Chapter 6), encourages the accumulation of specialized knowledge, signals serious commitment, creates a lobby for the cause in question, often provides technical assistance to states requiring it, and does all this without raising the excessive expectations often generated by *ad hoc* conferences. There is a price to be paid for this, it is true: permanently constituted conferences tend to freeze the power structure in existence at the time of their creation, together with the culture convenient to it. In this connection, it is perhaps significant that the real negotiations seeking to restrain the nuclear ambitions of North Korea in the late 1980s and early 1990s did not take place within the ambit of the IAEA, from which it resigned in June 1994. Neither did they take place within the UN, of which it had never been a member. Instead, they took place in an altogether bilateral context with the United States (Berridge and Gallo).

## Procedure

Whether multilateral conferences are *ad hoc* or permanent, they tend to share similar procedural problems, although the solutions with which they come up are by no means identical. Among others, these problems include questions of venue, participation, agenda, style of proceedings, and decision-making.

## Venue

This question of sometimes symbolic, and always practical, significance in prenegotiations has already been discussed at some length in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, it must also be mentioned here, since venue is of special importance when the creation of an international organization is contemplated; and the more important the organization, the greater the excitement that this issue tends to generate.

A case in point is the controversy surrounding the site for a permanent home for the United Nations, a question that fell into the lap of the UN's Preparatory Commission in late 1945. Although many different sites were suggested, the argument – inspired in the main by concerns over prestige, but rationalized in a different language – resolved into one over whether it should be located in Europe or America. The argument for Europe was that this had always been the major cockpit of international conflict and, hence, where the UN was likely to have most of its work to do. Besides, the pro-Europe camp maintained, the old buildings of the League of Nations remained available in Geneva, itself in a neutral country and within easy reach of the Middle East and the east coast of the Americas, as well as from Europe. As for the case for the United States, this rested on the view that a US headquarters was essential to sustain American interest and prevent a return to isolationism, while many Latin Americans preferred this solution for practical and political reasons of their own. In the end, a decision was made for the United States – but where in that country exactly? New York was finally chosen over the opposition of the Arabs, who disliked its strongly Jewish character and favoured San Francisco instead (Gore-Booth 1974: 151–2; Nicholas: 44). For sound political reasons, the UN's other major agencies were distributed among important cities elsewhere – notably Paris, Vienna, Geneva, Washington, and Rome.

Venue might be of special importance for permanent conferences, but it is also significant for those of an *ad hoc* nature. Today, this is principally because only a limited number of cities have the communications

systems, hotel space, and pools of qualified interpreters to cope with the huge size of many of these conferences. Venues are also sometimes chosen, however, because it is believed that they will assist the publicity of the conference, which is no doubt why Botswana was chosen as the site for the 1983 meeting of the signatories of the Convention on Endangered Species (Aurisch: 283–4). Finally, an old and enduring reason why the venue of *ad hoc* conferences is important is that it is customary for the presidents of such conferences to be the foreign minister or principal delegate of the host country. Conference presidents have important duties: stating the background and purposes of the conference, and setting its tone in an opening speech; directing administrative arrangements; orchestrating any ‘diversions’ (which might include showing off local achievements); and, above all, chairing plenary sessions and perhaps drawing up any final report. It is true that the host country will generally have a special interest in the success of the conference, and that this might put it under pressure to make concessions of its own to ensure that this is achieved (Putnam: 61). But its possession of the conference presidency is a position of influence, as it was in the Concert of Europe in the nineteenth century. ‘The question of president never raised any difficulty,’ noted Sir Charles Webster. ‘It belonged to the state in whose territory the meeting took place, an advantage’, he added, ‘of which both Palmerston and Metternich were very conscious’ (Webster: 63).

For largely political reasons, the presidents of plenary sessions of permanent conferences tend to be less influential than those of *ad hoc* conferences. They are commonly chosen from smaller states, and also lack the ability to determine the ambience of a conference that is available to a senior politician operating on home territory. Furthermore, UN Security Council presidents, for example, rotate every month in the English alphabetical order of the names of the Council’s members.

### Participation

The sponsors of conferences dealing with matters of peace and security are traditionally great powers or regional great powers. In other matters, they are those – great powers, or not – who have a major interest in the subject and are anxious to get something done about it, willing to shoulder the administrative and financial burden, and prepared to risk the possible political complications of staging the conference.

Who should be invited? This is a sensitive question, since an invitation acknowledges the importance of the invitee to the outcome of the conference, and might even amount to *de facto* recognition of a

government or state. An invitation also acknowledges legitimacy of interest, which might have far-reaching consequences.

Before the twentieth century, the rule of thumb was that invitees should be limited to important states with a direct interest in the subject matter of the conference. Those with an important indirect interest, or whom it was hoped might be encouraged to take a future interest, could be accorded observer status. This remained substantially the case in the twentieth century with the great majority of *ad hoc* conferences, other than those of the 'open-to-all' type spawned by the UN system. For example, the Geneva Conference on Indo-China in 1954 was limited to the United States, the Soviet Union, France, Britain, the PRC, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and the Vietminh. To cite another case, the Arab–Israeli multilaterals, inaugurated in January 1992, were limited to the main regional parties, together with those external parties who had, in effect, assumed a mediating role of some kind (Peters: 6).

Employment of the criterion of interest in determining the membership of a conference is often insufficient to remove all problems. For one thing, the concept of interest is so slippery that there is ample room for disagreement on whether or not a state or other agency has a legitimate interest in a subject. The twentieth century witnessed a more liberal attitude to the inclusion of small states in *ad hoc* multilateral diplomacy – liberal to the point of universality in the case of UN conferences. Nevertheless, there was resistance to including representatives of bodies other than states. This was particularly noticeable in conferences dealing with the termination of military hostilities and territorial settlements. For example, the Vietminh were not admitted to the Indo-Chinese phase of the Geneva Conference in 1954 until the last minute (Randle: 159–60); the Afghan *mujahedin* were not present at any stage of the Geneva talks on Afghanistan in the 1980s; and none of southern Africa's large and well-known guerrilla movements was a participant in any round of the decisive Angola/Namibia talks in 1988. In each of these cases, there is little doubt that the excluded, or nearly excluded, parties had an extremely strong interest in the outcome, and not a little power to shape future developments.

Conference participation is also problematical since, in practice, the sponsors are often influenced by considerations of political rivalry in deciding whom to invite, sometimes finding themselves in a classic dilemma: excluding interested rivals dents their prestige and makes the deliberations of the conference easier, but including them provides an opportunity to carry them along and forestall the subsequent sabotage of any agreement reached. This was the uncomfortable position

occupied by US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles apropos the British agitation to invite the Chinese Communists to the Geneva Conference on Indo-China in 1954. It was also in a similarly uncomfortable position that US President Jimmy Carter found himself in 1977 in considering whether or not to keep the Soviet Union involved in the multilateral diplomacy over the Arab–Israeli conflict. In view of their quite different reputations, it is ironic that it was Dulles who agreed to open the door to his rival and Carter who decided to keep it closed.

A special case of problematical conference participation that, in some measure, reflects the dilemma described in the previous paragraph is the question of membership of the UN Security Council. Presently consisting of five permanent, veto-wielding members (the United States, Russia, France, Britain, and the PRC – the ‘P5’), plus ten members appointed for non-renewable two-year terms, there has for many years been a growing belief that this membership is no longer appropriate. The General Assembly has had an Open-ended Working Group considering this and related questions since January 1994 and, in February 2009, an ‘intergovernmental’ negotiation on the subject finally commenced at the UN.

Supporters of reform claim that the Security Council comes nowhere near to reflecting the distribution of either power or diversity among the world’s regions and, therefore, lacks authority. Britain and France, it is pointed out, are no longer great powers, while Russia is but a pale reflection of the former Soviet Union (in 2008, Russia contributed only US\$20m to the UN’s regular budget, a little over a half of that paid by Mexico); besides, the less-developed countries have no permanent representation at all. Features common to most of the more radical reform proposals are a net increase in the size of the Security Council from 15 to 24 or 25; election on a regional basis; no granting of the veto to any new permanent members for a long probationary period, if ever (an African proposal in 2005 dissented on this); and more restricted use of the veto by existing members. There is less agreement on the character of the additional members: whether they should be a mixture of permanent and non-permanent members; include non-permanent members of a different kind (for example, 4-years renewable – hence, in effect, semi-permanent); or just non-permanent members, however constituted. According to one view with strong support, the Security Council would carry more authority if permanent membership were to be given to the G4: Japan and Germany (the second- and third-largest contributors to the UN’s regular budget after the United States), plus India and Brazil.

Against the reformers, it is argued that it is a mistake to tamper with the Security Council when, since the end of the Cold War, it has at long last started to work – ‘if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it’ sums up their position. In any case, it is stressed, steps have been taken to ensure greater transparency. It is also said that powerful members such as Japan are virtually permanent members anyway – since they are re-elected so often to a non-permanent seat, and are carefully consulted by the P5 even when they are not sitting. Defenders of the *status quo*, traditionally led by the United States, add that reform entailing enlargement would make the Security Council unwieldy; they conclude their case by underlining the undeniable fact that there is no consensus, either on how the membership should be restructured or on which states should be given the great prizes – permanent seats.

The defence of the *status quo* on the Security Council glosses over the issue of prestige. It also fudges the question as to whether the Council is working because of, or in spite of, its present composition – if it is, in fact, working that well anyway. And it wobbles, even if it does not fall, on a tension between the claims that consulting powerful outsiders informally enables the Security Council to function smoothly, while bringing them formally into the decision-making by enlargement would paralyze it. Nevertheless, the conservative rearguard is a sophisticated one and, although there were strong signs in late 2008 and early 2009 that the reformers were getting the upper hand, it will still be a miracle if a consensus on reform can be found in the current negotiations at the UN. Reform is urgently needed, but it generally takes a cataclysmic upheaval to alter the composition of the councils of the major powers.

Finally, it is important to note that states or other agencies that are widely acknowledged to have a legitimate interest in a particular subject, and that might be prepared to engage in confidential bilateral discussions, might be reluctant to be observed on the same conference platform. This was a constant problem for the multilateral diplomacy in Africa sponsored by the South African government in the 1950s, and – until the early 1990s – for all attempts to involve the Israeli government in multilateral talks in which the PLO was a participant.

In many international organizations, the problem of participation is in principle solved, as already noted, by admitting all states. These are the so-called universal membership organizations, which have the added advantage of permitting discreet contact between states lacking diplomatic relations, as in recent years between the United States and North Korea at the UN in New York – the ‘New York channel’. However, the United Nations itself was not a universal organization at the start of

its life or for many years after, during which period participation was confined to the founding members and 'all other peace-loving states which accept the obligations' of the Charter and 'are able and willing to carry out these obligations'. This permitted the blackballing of many important states for long periods (Nicholas: 86–7), most signally in the case of the PRC, which was not admitted to membership until October 1971. Unpopular countries such as South Africa were also forced out of some international organizations, despite being founder members.

However, universal or near-universal membership brings problems of its own. The most important of these returns us to the concept of interest. This is because throwing the doors of a conference wide open permits, and might even encourage, each participant to have a say in the affairs of all of the others, whether they have a direct interest or not. Such problems will be exacerbated if discussion is conducted in public and decision-making proceeds, as it did for some considerable time in the UN General Assembly, by means of majority voting (discussed later in this chapter). In short, universal membership might well be anti-diplomatic, gratuitously worsening relations between states that, in an earlier era, would either have had little contact at all or would have had contact only on issues where both had a direct interest. It is, for example, unlikely that relations between Britain and Ireland (so important to resolving the problems in Ulster) would have suffered as a result of the Falklands crisis in 1982 had they not both been members (the one permanent, and the other temporary) of the Security Council of the United Nations.

## Agenda

Problems concerning the agenda of a multilateral conference vary in some degree between *ad hoc* and permanent conferences. If a party is invited to an *ad hoc* conference, whether it will attend or not is likely to depend on the draft agenda. This might contain items that are embarrassing or, in themselves, innocuous, although prejudgement is obvious from the manner in which they are worded: for example, 'Chinese aggression against Vietnam', rather than 'the situation concerning China and Vietnam' (Nicol: 41; Bailey and Daws: 83–4). As in any kind of negotiation, the draft agenda might even be so framed as to amount to a proposed deal (see Chapter 2).

One agenda problem is peculiar to permanent multilateral conferences. Such conferences are provided with a general agenda by their founding charters or statutes, usually under the heading of 'functions' or 'purposes'. This is translated into a working agenda by the most

influential members before each session (Peterson: ch. 2), and those who dislike it can only refuse to attend with difficulty, since they have already accepted permanent membership. Even one of the P5 on the Security Council cannot veto the inscription of an item on the agenda or veto its inclusion at a particular point on the agenda. This is because the customary law of the Security Council states that these are procedural, rather than substantive, matters (Bailey and Daws: 84–5).

On the other hand, devices exist to ensure that the sessional agendas of permanent multilateral conferences are broadly acceptable, typically the requirement that they should be approved by two thirds of the members present and voting; in any case, broad consultation usually ensures that a vote on the agenda does not need to be taken. If some states remain hostile to the inclusion of a particular item, they might be mollified by a vague, general, or altogether obscure formulation of it. This is the practice the UN Security Council has increasingly adopted (Bailey and Daws: 83–4). If all else fails, they can temporarily absent themselves from meetings or maintain only a token presence, as South Africa did at the General Assembly for several years after November 1956 in protest at the Assembly's insistence on discussing the policy of apartheid. States in a minority tend to stay for the discussion of items on which they would prefer silence to prevail. This is partly because they want their answer to any charges to be heard, and partly because they have other reasons for wishing to remain a part of the organization.

### **Public debate and private discussion**

It is the character of public debate in the plenary sessions of international conferences that has caused multilateral diplomacy to gain a poor name. When discussion takes place between numerous delegations in a public setting, the political necessity of playing to the audience outside is inescapable, and the give and take of genuine negotiation goes out of the window. The style of proceedings is self-consciously point-scoring or 'parliamentary', and the result is that propaganda is substituted for diplomacy. Until recent decades, this was typically the case with both the UN General Assembly and the formal meetings of the UN Security Council. Even closed plenary sessions of conferences are hardly likely to encourage real negotiation when, as is often the case, well over 150 states are represented and the corridors outside are crawling with journalists and lobbyists from NGOs.

Widespread recognition of the drawbacks of over-reliance on public debate in multilateral diplomacy has led to increased employment of subcommittees, private sessions, and informal consultations. Since



the 1970s, the UN Security Council itself has regularly met informally in private, and the P5 have caucused in secret since the mid-1980s (Berridge 1991: 3–6, ch. 5). Conferences within the broader UN system are now preceded by preparatory committees and, once launched, now employ an elaborate mix of different kinds of session – private and public, plenary and small group. In the Arab-Israeli multilaterals, overseen by a largely ceremonial steering group, the real business was conducted in five functionally defined and informally conducted working groups, and in their ‘inter-sessional activities’ (Peters: ch. 3). Where there is a constitutional tradition of public meetings, however, these are generally retained. In any case, while public sessions of conferences that effectively rubber-stamp agreements thrashed out in private might induce cynicism, they are valuable in demonstrating unity on important international problems.

The number of participants and the technicality of the issues in most multilateral conferences held today make them extremely complex. Despite the procedural advances just noted, therefore, it might be imagined that this alone would vitiate the advantages of conducting diplomacy by this method. Complexity is, indeed, a problem – but it is not normally fatal. This is because, in most large conferences, the order of battle is simplified by the formation of coalitions. In the UN Conference on the Law of the Sea, for instance, 150 states participated but, in reality, this boiled down to the West Europeans, the East Europeans, and the Group of 77 (Touval 1989: 164). Furthermore, there is invariably a small number of states both willing and able to make the running, while their need to carry the rest usually inclines them to make their own demands with moderation. In his memoir, Michael Alexander praised in this connection the ‘informal directorate’ in the NATO Council, consisting of the United States, Britain, Germany, and France (Alexander: 199–200). The opportunities for package deals are also far more numerous than in bilateral diplomacy.

### **Decision-making**

The method by which decisions are finalized in bilateral talks has never been an issue: when there are only two parties, there can be no agreement unless both concur. By contrast, multilateral conferences provide the opportunity to make decisions by majority voting. As a result, the strength of the democratic idea, together with the fear that a rule of unanimity might induce paralysis when large numbers of states are involved, has produced widespread support for voting. Indeed, despite important exceptions such as the North Atlantic Council and the Council of the

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), this has been a formal feature of decision-making in all major international organizations, notably the United Nations, since 1945.

Where majority voting is employed there are, typically, differences in the treatment of procedural and substantive issues. Furthermore, some international organizations employ weighted voting while others do not, and some require special majorities while others require only simple majorities (over 50 per cent). In the UN Security Council, for example, an affirmative vote of only 9 of the 15 members is required for a decision on a procedural question. Decisions on 'all other matters', says Article 27 of the Charter, require 'an affirmative vote of nine members *including the concurring votes of the permanent members*' (emphasis added) – the great power veto. (It was subsequently accepted that an abstention did not amount to a veto.) For its part, the UN General Assembly was authorized to pass resolutions on a simple majority of members present and voting – except in the case of 'important questions', which require a two-thirds majority.

In practice, however, decision-making by voting has not been as significant across the whole spectrum of multilateral diplomacy as this picture might suggest. *Ad hoc* conferences, especially those with few participants and not constituted under UN auspices, have rarely employed voting, while those that have, including the permanent, large membership ones within the UN system, have generally found it necessary to qualify their voting arrangements. This has been observed since at least the mid-1960s.

The problem for the UN system is that its 'one state, one vote' rhetoric has collided head-on with political reality as a result of the admission (especially since the late 1950s) of a huge number of small, weak states. In these circumstances, even the requirement for a two-thirds majority can fail to block the 'wrong' decision. This has rendered 'majority voting increasingly useless for lawmaking decisions because of the danger of powerful alienated minorities' (Buzan: 326). Having lost its own majority following in the United Nations in the 1960s, the United States emerged as the most powerful member of just such a minority. Increasingly being expected to provide the lion's share of the money for programmes that it found objectionable, it drastically scaled back its funding of the organization in the 1980s. The result was that the UN, together with particularly anathematized satellites such as UNESCO, was threatened with collapse.

Could this dangerous position not have been prevented by giving more votes to the bigger battalions by using a system of weighted voting?

Although perhaps attractive in principle, this idea has three main problems: it is politically sensitive, because it draws attention to real differences between states when all are supposed to be equal; it might avoid the risk of alienating powerful minorities, but only at the price of running the opposite one – namely, alienating weak majorities; and it raises complex practical issues concerning the criteria to be employed in computing the differences between states. As a result, weighted voting has only proved acceptable in specialized economic organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank, where the size of financial contributions provides a ready claim on the size of votes.

Rather than weighted voting being generally adopted, then, what has happened is that multilateral diplomacy has witnessed a growing acceptance of decision-making by *consensus*, especially following its successful employment at the Third UN Conference on the Law of the Sea in the period from 1973 until 1982 (Buzan: 325–7; Peters: 7–8). In practice, most decisions are taken by consensus, even in the IMF and the World Bank. It is also this procedure that has saved the United Nations: the General Assembly itself has, for many years, been passing its own resolutions and decisions largely on the basis of consensus.

Consensus decision-making is the attempt to achieve the agreement of all the participants in a multilateral conference without the need for a vote and its inevitable divisiveness. A consensus exists when all parties are in agreement – which, on the face of it, is another way of saying that they are unanimous. However, a consensus might include some members whose support has been given only grudgingly and who have simply registered no *formal* objection, whereas unanimity implies broader enthusiasm – hence the view that, in fact, they are not the same. It might be more accurate to say that a weak consensus is not the same as unanimity, but that a strong one is.

But is consensus decision-making – that is to say, the method by which consensus is obtained – simply negotiation by another name? After all, if the reluctant agreement of all participants is to be obtained, those most in favour of a proposal must either water it down, make concessions to the unenthusiastic in some other area, or alarm them with the prospect of isolation. In short, they must negotiate with them. Nevertheless, it is now common to find even a strong consensus fostered by special procedural devices.

One of these methods is to give a secretary-general or chairperson the right to conduct straw votes – that is, count opinions by means of informal, confidential consultations with permanent missions or delegations; among other things, this provides the opportunity to hint at

the way the wind is blowing to those being polled. Another device, which builds on this one, is 'silence procedure': the rule that a proposal with strong support is deemed to have been agreed unless any member raises an objection to it before a precise deadline: silence signifies assent – or, at least, acquiescence. This procedure relies on a member in a minority fearing that raising an objection will expose it to the charge of obstructiveness and, thereby, the perils of isolation. Silence procedure is employed by NATO, the OSCE, in the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union (EU) and, no doubt, in numerous other international bodies. Finally, voting itself might still be employed, although its function is the limited one of ratifying a consensus already negotiated.

It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that consensus decision-making is something more than ordinary negotiation: it is the unanimity system adjusted to the prejudices of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. More in tune with these prejudices although it might be, consensus decision-making is no guarantee that a decision can be reached, or reached in time, or that (if one is reached in time) it will be a good one. The notorious vagueness of UN Security Council Resolution 1441 of November 2002 on Iraq, notably in its reference to the 'serious consequences' that would follow non-compliance, is a case in point.

The return of a system of decision-making in which the more powerful states were able to exert the influence to which they thought they were entitled also marked a 'crisis of multilateralism' (Aurisch: 288). At least, it marked a crisis of the kind of multilateral diplomacy by means of which, in the 1970s, the weaker states had hoped to create a New International Economic Order. It is perhaps, therefore, not surprising that the number of international organizations should have gone into sharp decline after the mid-1980s, dropping by over one third by the turn of the millennium, although the level of universal membership international organizations remained steady. The total number of NGOs, by contrast, rose by roughly the same proportion.

## Summary

Multilateral diplomacy took firm root in the early twentieth century under the impact of world war and the strength of the democratic idea. It blossomed after World War II with the great expansion in the number of states and the belief of the new ones that conference diplomacy within the UN system – based on majority voting – was their best chance of securing influence. Ultimately, they were disappointed.

The major Western powers became tired of paying for programmes to which they took strong political objection and, gradually, under the name of consensus decision-making, began to make their weight felt. In the 1980s, with the UN system reeling under the impact of American budgetary withholdings and the poorer states increasingly disillusioned with the meagre results obtained by their large voting majorities, a crisis of multilateralism set in. However, multilateralism is here to stay: it has weathered its crisis, and it has emerged a little leaner. It has also emerged a little more diplomatic.

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# 10

## Summits

Today an astonishing degree of multilateral diplomacy takes place at the highest level of political authority: heads of state and government, and heads of international organization, not forgetting the leaders of factions in civil wars (Young 2008: 118). But this is multilateral diplomacy of a special kind; besides, the bilateral diplomacy that also takes place at the summit is also special. For these reasons, it is necessary to treat summitry separately. This chapter considers the origins of summitry, its advantages and disadvantages, and the bearing on its contribution to diplomacy – as opposed to propaganda – of the different patterns it assumes.

### Origins

Summits were not so-called until the 1950s, when the term was taken up in the press following its use by the British prime minister, Winston Churchill, during a speech in Edinburgh at the beginning of the decade. However, similar meetings occurred sporadically between the Bronze Age and the late Middle Ages, when they reached their pre-modern high-point. Thereafter, at least in Europe, they fizzled out. This was not only because resident missions had by this time become widely established. It was also because rulers had usually been poor diplomats; because they were more attractive than their envoys as targets for embarrassment, capture for ransom, or murder; and, above all, because the old idea that diplomacy was the prerogative of rulers because their territories were their private estates was being steadily undermined by the new notion of the modern state – among other things, a juristic person separate from and, in some sense, above its temporary custodians (Frey and Frey: 83–4, 130–1; Reynolds: 17–18).

In the nineteenth century, the Concert of Europe saw summit diplomacy flicker sporadically into life, but it did not become a significant technique again until the first half of the twentieth century. Growing out of the pall that had spread over professional diplomacy during World War I, the return of summity was announced by the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Here, Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau, and Woodrow Wilson held centre stage. Its return was consolidated by the meetings in 1938 between Hitler and the British prime minister, Neville Chamberlain. These were prompted by the latter's belief that avoiding the terrible prospect of the aerial bombing of cities warranted the risks of personal diplomacy with the Nazi leader, and that coverage by the new cinema and arrival by plane would add drama to the proceedings (Reynolds: 6, 33–6, 47–9). In mid-century, the wartime conferences of the Big Three – Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin – confirmed that summits were unlikely to go away.

Encouraged at great power level especially by Churchill, summity had really begun to take off within about a decade after World War II. In addition to being stimulated by the same political and technological trends promoting multilateral diplomacy (see Chapter 9), summity increased owing to the risk that the Cold War could lead to hot war between the superpowers: even more than in 1938, diplomacy in the nuclear age was believed to be 'too important to be left to the diplomats' (Dunn: 5). Decolonization in Africa and Asia, where few of the new states possessed impressive diplomatic services, was another propellant; and the regional organizations that were becoming fashionable gave summity a natural focus. The growing vulnerability to arrest on criminal charges of serving – as opposed to retired or deposed – heads of state, demonstrated most vividly by the case of President Bashir of Sudan (see Box 10.1), might in future dampen the enthusiasm for summit travel. However, the evidence for this is as yet slender.

### **Professional anathemas**

The massive, twentieth-century return to summity produced deep unease among professional diplomats, causing many to recall the objections to it of Philippe de Commines (Box 10.2). Since summity was an insult to their competence and, at least, a limited threat to their careers, this might be put down to special pleading. Nevertheless, their arguments are persuasive and find loud echoes outside their ranks. Most eloquent among their number was George Ball, US under-secretary of state during the Democratic administrations of the 1960s and author



**Box 10.1 ICC arrest warrant for Sudan's president, March 2009: a dampener for summitry?**

On 4 March 2009, the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague issued a warrant for the arrest of the Sudanese President, Omar al-Bashir, on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the conflict in Darfur. This required all 108 parties to the Rome Statute of the ICC of 17 July 1998 to arrest him if he entered their territory, including their airspace. (Note: The USA is not a party to the ICC.) However, while some Arab states, including Sudan itself, had signed the ICC's Statute, only Jordan among them had ratified it. The Arab League, together with the AU – where many leaders are afraid that one day they could end up in the same boat as President Bashir – condemned the ICC judgement, and the Sudanese leader was emboldened to visit the heads of state of three neighbouring countries in the following weeks: Eritrea, Egypt and Libya. He even attended the annual Arab League summit in Qatar at the end of March, and stopped off in Saudi Arabia on the way back, although this required him – unlike his visits a few days earlier – to fly through international airspace. Nevertheless, the Sudanese government had obviously been nervous about the visit to the summit in Qatar and the *ulema*, the state's highest religious body, had issued a *fatwa* advising that it was too risky. Special security precautions had to be taken for it, and the foreign ministry hinted that, in future, the President's summitry would have to be more selective and furtive. A visit to Ethiopia scheduled for 10 March was postponed until late April.

Sources: *UN Treaty Collection* (Status of Treaties); *Welt Online*; *Guardian Online*; *Sudan Tribune*.

**Box 10.2 Philippe de Comynes**

Comynes (c. 1447–1511) was a French diplomat and historian, and wrote the best-known political and diplomatic memoirs of the late fifteenth century. Great princes, he believed, were in general spoiled, vain, and badly educated. Unusually suspicious because of the many false stories and groundless reports brought to them by court intriguers, they were also too ready to believe the worst of any prince with whom they happened to be negotiating. Most seriously of all, summitry could place them in physical danger. Therefore, he famously concluded, 'two great princes who wish to establish good personal relations should never meet each other face to face but ought to communicate through good and wise ambassadors'. Comynes' attitude to summitry might not have been entirely unconnected to the role that he was required to play when his master, Louis XI, met Edward IV on a bridge over the Somme at Picquigny, in order to discuss the peaceful retreat of the English invasion force of 1475. Louis instructed Comynes to wear identical clothes to his own as a precaution against assassination.

of the account in *Diplomacy for a Crowded World* on which this section draws heavily.

The case against summitry turns chiefly on certain assumptions about heads of state and government as a class. They are held to be poor negotiators because they are vain, ignorant of details, pressed for time, addicted to publicity, over-tired if not actually suffering from insomnia or more serious form of ill-health, prone to cultural misunderstandings, and too readily swayed by personal likes and dislikes towards fellow leaders. Furthermore, in the event of a deadlock in a negotiation they are leading, there is, as a rule, no one at home to whom they can claim the need to refer in order to secure a postponement; after all, they are themselves the ultimate authority. (In states such as Britain and Israel, with a firm tradition of cabinet government, a prime minister can, however, claim to be only *primus inter pares* – first among equals – and therefore need to seek the approval of colleagues.) This means that, in these circumstances, they are always likely to make one or other of two mistakes: either they break off the negotiations prematurely, if faced by the prospect of failure; or they make unwise concessions in order to achieve a ‘success’, and one that is the more difficult to retrieve because it has been made on their personal promise rather than on that of a disavowable official. In short, diplomacy conducted at the summit is not only likely to lead to more mistakes, but also to mistakes that are irrevocable.

The scope for exacerbating relations between states by summitry is greater still, since key points in any agreement reached by this means might have been vaguely formulated in the absence of aides and, even, of any written record. In any case, agreements or understandings achieved by summitry, and thereby in some measure personalized, tend to be weakened by the fall from office of one or other of the leaders concerned. In short, summitry ‘obscures the concept of relations between governments as a continuing process’ (Ball: 40). Summing up the argument, David Watt wrote: ‘Heads of government, with their massive egos, their ignorance of the essential details and their ingrained belief in the value of back-slapping ambiguity, simply mess everything up’ (*Times* 1981).

The examples of summit failures are legion – quoted by the professionals sometimes with sadness, sometimes with anger. The mistakes made in the Treaty of Versailles were, in part, ascribed by Harold Nicolson to the decision of the American president, Woodrow Wilson, to attend in person – a ‘historical disaster of the first magnitude’ (Nicolson 1937: 71). In order to underline his own hostility to summitry, Dean Acheson

chooses the example of President Truman. '[I]n the privacy of his study', he remarks, the president unwittingly altered American policy in a most sensitive area by informing the British prime minister, Clement Attlee, that the United States would not use nuclear weapons without first consulting the British (Acheson 1969: 484). William Sullivan's story is how the Shah of Iran, on a visit to the United States, told President Carter of his belief that the Organization of African Unity was an 'impotent' [powerless] body; the president – with the ear for words of a Southerner – agreed that it was indeed 'impohtant' [important] (Sullivan: 129). For his part, George Ball gives us a whole list of summits that have been a 'source of grief', among them the conference held by Chamberlain with Hitler at Munich in 1938, from which he returned with the conviction that he had secured 'peace for our time'; the East–West summits of the 1950s and 1960s that did nothing but raise false expectations; the meeting in 1962 at which US president, John F. Kennedy, gave Polaris missiles to British prime minister, Harold Macmillan, because he had a soft spot for the avuncular older man, though this fitted ill with American policy on nuclear proliferation and gave de Gaulle an excuse to veto Britain's application to the EEC; the personal encounters between another American president, Lyndon Johnson, and another British prime minister, Harold Wilson, in the 1960s that impaired Anglo–American relations because the two men simply did not like each other; the discussions, dogged with misunderstandings, between President Nixon and Prime Minister Sato of Japan that blighted US–Japanese relations in the early 1970s; and so on. Among recent summit failures, David Reynolds singles out the Blair–Bush meetings between 2001 and 2003 prior to the attack on Iraq, during the course of which Tony Blair – ignoring Foreign Office warnings – sold British military support to the United States too cheaply. The slide to this disastrous war, he argues persuasively, was 'lubricated by Blair's summitry' (Reynolds: 389).

But this is not the end of the case against summits. Their financial cost is also now enormous. Summits were always expensive, but their cost has risen exponentially over recent years as they have become a perfect target for anti-globalization protesters and opposition groups, as well as terrorists. In July 2001, the Italian government had to spend £100 million on the G8 summit in Genoa, which included the cost of installing a missile defence system at the airport. Even the slimmed down G8 summit in June 2002, hidden away from anti-globalization protesters at Kananaskis, a resort village in the Rocky mountains, cost the Canadian government at least £140 million. The cost to the Japanese

government of the G8 summit at remote Toyako on Hokkaido Island in 2008 was reputed to be a staggering £238 million (*Guardian* 2008).

A leader who proposes to visit only one of two others locked in a traditional rivalry is stoking up trouble of a different kind, or makes the visit in the expectation of having to make a side payment to head it off. When President Obama announced that he would be visiting Turkey on his way home from the G20 summit in April 2009, he immediately provoked an outcry in Athens. Had he been proposing to go to Greece rather than Turkey the uproar would have emanated from Ankara. This is a well-established ritual that the British have found particularly trying ever since Cyprus – then its colony – poisoned Greece–Turkey relations in the mid-1950s; but it is no less consequential for that. A related problem is the need to return a visit paid by the leader of another state of roughly equal standing, even though this may be inconvenient.

Heads of state and government who over-indulge the summit habit, or just find themselves doomed to it, might also find themselves giving insufficient time to domestic affairs and might, in consequence, even lose their jobs. This was the fate of General Smuts in the election of 1948 that gave South Africa the hateful racist doctrine of apartheid. In June 1977, James Mancham, president of only recently independent Seychelles, was overthrown by an armed coup while attending a Commonwealth summit in London. While the cat is away, the mice will play.

### **Case for the defence**

Summitry has been so roundly anathematized that it is, at first glance, not easy to understand why it remains so common – but only at first glance. It is valued chiefly for its enormous symbolic or propaganda potential, and it is no accident that it became an art form during the middle and later phases of the Cold War, itself essentially a conflict fought by means of propaganda. Summits between Soviet and American leaders symbolized the attachment of their governments to peace, while intra-alliance summits symbolized each side's internal solidarity; President Nixon's one-hour conversation with the legendary leader of Chinese Communism, Mao Zedong, in Beijing in February 1972, was 'an earthquake' in the conflict and symbolized the fact that 'the Eastern Bloc no longer stood firm against the West' (Macmillan 2006: 1); and the end of the Cold War was also symbolized by a summit, held in Paris in November 1990.

In democracies, summits are of special value to political leaders because they demonstrate to their voters that they are personally doing something about a current problem, and are important actors on the world stage. For this reason, bigger states might issue a summit invitation to the valued but insecure leader of a lesser one in order to boost his position at home (Young 2008: 120–1). Add to the pot of democracy the power of television, and sprinkle its contents with exotic locations of symbolic significance, and it is clear why summit diplomacy is an irresistible dish to those with an eye on a leader's poll ratings. Nixon simply could not pass over the opportunity virtually to kow-tow before Mao in 1972 – an election year – and pose for the television cameras at every opportunity, even though Washington still did not recognize the People's Republic of China.

Fortunately, while summitry might well be irrelevant and even highly damaging to diplomacy, and often serve principally foreign and domestic propaganda purposes, it can also have diplomatic value – provided it is employed judiciously. To help explain this, it is useful to distinguish between three main kinds of summit: serial summits, which are part of a regular series; *ad hoc* summits, which are generally narrowly focused, one-off meetings, although they might turn out to be the first of a series; and the less ambitious, high-level exchange of views, which might be part of a series but is more likely to be *ad hoc*. What are the diplomatic purposes served by all these summits, those served more by some than others, and those served by some but by others not at all?

Bearing in mind the functions of traditional diplomacy conducted via embassies discussed in Chapter 7, there are five functions that might usefully be advanced by summitry. These are: promoting friendly relations, clarifying intentions, information gathering, consular work (principally export promotion and interceding on behalf of detained nationals in high profile cases), and negotiation. Let us consider the degree to which the different types of summit are suited to carrying out these functions, broad though these categories are and treacherous though this makes the task of generalizing about them.

### Serial summits

Important examples of the serial summit can be seen in Box 10.3. Of all types of summit, this is probably the best suited to serious negotiation, although the extent to which this is true turns, to some extent, on its length and frequency. Longer meetings allow subjects to be treated in greater depth and allow time for a return to the table following a deadlock. The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM),

**Box 10.3 Serial summits: some important examples**

- *US-EU summit*. Inaugurated in 1990. Now meets annually in June. An 'informal summit' was held with President Obama in Prague in April 2009.
- *US-Russia summit*. US-Soviet summits were occurring once a year by the second half of the 1980s. Following the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, US-Russian summits became more frequent but latterly less so.
- *EU-Russia summit*. Meets twice yearly under each 6-month EU presidency.
- *Franco-German summit*. Started in January 1963. Normally meets at least twice a year.
- *ASEAN summit*. Members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, established in 1967. Over recent years has met on average roughly every 18 months. An experiment with holding 'informal summits' between three-yearly formal ones, which was launched following a decision in 1995, was short-lived.
- *SAARC summit*. Members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, established in 1985. Meets once in most years.
- *G8 summit*. The Group of 8 countries (Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, USA) plus the EU. Meets annually.
- *CHOGM*. Meets every two years.
- *AU summit*. Formally known as the 'Assembly of the African Union', this meets at least once a year in ordinary session. First met in Durban in 2003.
- *Arab League summit*. Held annually since 2001.
- *Summit of the Americas*. Members of the Organization of American States (OAS). Takes place at 3–4 year intervals, with occasional special summits. Launched in 1994.

which lasts between five and seven days, is one of the best in this regard. Frequent summits at predetermined intervals are also more conducive to serious negotiation, because they are likely to arouse fewer public expectations and to have developed – provided informality is not overdone – clear and comprehensive rules of procedure. In this regard, the Franco–German summit, which in practice often meets as many as five or six times a year, is one of the best. Unfortunately, frequent summits in this category tend to be brief and long ones less frequent.

Whether serial summits are frequent or separated by a year or more, and whether they last for hours or days, they might contribute to a successful negotiation between the parties concerned for one or more of the following reasons:

- First, they educate leaders in international realities: they are forced to do their homework in order to avoid looking foolish among their

peers, and they cannot avoid learning from the mouths of fellow leaders about the influences working on them.

- Second, they make package deals easier: sitting astride the apex of policy-making within their own administrations, heads of state and government are well-placed to make trades involving bureaucratically separate issue areas.
- Third, they set deadlines (see Chapter 4) for the completion of an existing negotiation, or stage of one, between the parties: because leaders might be publicly embarrassed by a failure to announce an agreement at a summit, their junior ministers and officials are under intense pressure to have effectively concluded much the greater part of the negotiation with their opposite numbers before the summit is held; in short, serial summits sustain diplomatic momentum.
- Fourth, if the negotiations have been brought to this stage, the summit – even if brief – might serve to break any remaining deadlocks by virtue of the authority of the assembled negotiators and their greater breadth of vision: the ‘final court of appeal’ function of the summit.

As for the other functions, serial summits are also the best suited to information gathering, including the gathering of information on personalities. Serial summiteers themselves stress this point; in 1992, Chancellor Kohl of Germany noted, in its support, that he had met President Mitterrand of France in excess of 80 times (Bower: 37). They are also probably the best for clarifying intentions, for these rarely appear more clearly than in the give-and-take of genuine negotiations.

On the other hand, precisely because it is the summit most suited to negotiation, the serial summit is perhaps least well suited to the promotion of friendly relations. Serious negotiation invariably generates tensions and these are almost bound to be greater at summits, as their critics have so frequently pointed out, since the protagonists can rarely pretend that their word is anything other than the last word of their governments. Besides, politicians tend to find it harder to resist point-scoring than professional negotiators, as Arab League summits are notorious for demonstrating. Summits where serious negotiation occurs also allow little time for the elaborate courtesies, observance of which is so important to the pursuit of friendly relations by the resident ambassador. Having said this, serial summits would not occur if there were not an appreciation of some significant overlap of interests or strong sense of cultural affinity among the participants. This will usually ensure that tensions are not permitted to become destructive, as the Franco–German summit and the CHOGMs demonstrate.

Also worth mentioning here is the SAARC summit that was held in Islamabad in 1988. This was the setting for a warm encounter between the Indian prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, and the Pakistani prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, whose recent election had been widely welcomed in India.

The paradigm case of the serial summit is the French-inspired European Council, the regular conference of heads of state and government of the European Union that was designed, principally, to ensure that supranationalism in Europe did not get out of hand. This had its origins in informal summits starting in 1957, formally came into being in Paris in December 1974, and was finally embodied in the treaty regime of the then EC in the Single European Act in 1986. Despite a deliberate attempt to maintain flexibility and informality, clear rules of procedure have developed, some of which are to be found in documentary sources (Werts: 77) and some in custom and practice. Among the more important is the requirement that the Council shall meet at least twice a year, although in practice it is normally summoned three times, with ministers and members of the Commission also in attendance. A first draft of the agenda is prepared by the Committee of Permanent Representatives in Brussels but the final draft is submitted by the country holding the presidency; the agenda is only finally agreed, however, at the start of the meeting (Bulmer and Wessels: 51–3; Werts: 78–9). The chairman is the head of government of the country holding the presidency. The Council normally lasts for no more than 24 hours, starting at noon and ending at noon on the following day. In order to encourage frank exchanges, and although it can subsequently lead to arguments, no official minutes of the plenary sessions are recorded (Bulmer and Wessels: 57–8). These sessions are also intimate and restricted (ministers and officials are kept in a separate room), though ‘not at all secret’ since ‘everybody goes out and tells great numbers of people exactly what they think has happened’ (Jenkins: 75). After dinner on the first day, there is a very informal ‘fireside chat’ on general political questions beyond the formal agenda (Callaghan: 316–17; Werts: 80). Decision-making is by consensus (see Chapter 9).

What role has the European Council played? In theory, it was designed to promote frank exchanges of views, and to enable government heads to negotiate agreements on matters of high policy, especially those on which the Council of Ministers was deadlocked. In practice, the informal sessions have proved particularly useful, at least during some periods; they appear to have been vital, for example, in facilitating the establishment of the European Monetary System



(Bulmer and Wessels: 84). And, in general, the European Council has proved valuable in signalling to the world European solidarity on some key foreign policy questions. It must be admitted, however, that, as the scene of sometimes extremely tough negotiations in the plenary sessions, it has not been famous for its contribution to the promotion of friendly relations. Neither did this begin with the appearance of Margaret Thatcher in its ranks, and the bitter and protracted arguments that she stimulated in the 1980s over Britain's budgetary contributions. Even in Paris in 1974, when Britain was represented by Harold Wilson, the exchanges on this subject were 'long, argumentative and tense at times' (Callaghan: 315). But this is simply the price of seriousness.

### *Ad hoc* summits

As with the serial summit, the usefulness of the *ad hoc* version in negotiation is, to some extent, a function of its length: the longer the better. The Camp David summit, for example, which took place in September 1978, lasted for a full 13 days, and the Wye River summit two decades later stretched from a planned four to eight days. On both occasions, extremely tough negotiations took place between the American, Israeli, and Arab leaders (and their senior advisers), and important breakthroughs were made; namely, the Camp David Accords and the Wye River Memorandum. In other words, these summits did not merely ratify an agreement made earlier. As *ad hoc* summits go, however, Camp David and Wye River were the exceptions rather than the rule. Most of them last no more than two or three days. Because of this, and because they also tend to generate more publicity than the serial summit, *ad hoc* meetings are unlikely to be so useful for negotiations during the meetings themselves.

But, precisely because this kind of summit is able to produce more publicity, it is well suited to gaining momentum for an ongoing negotiation, as when the G20 met for the first time at summit level in late 2008 and early 2009 (see Box 9.1) in order to energize the search for a consensus on the urgent steps needed to sort out the international financial chaos then reigning. Because there is no guarantee of a subsequent meeting to which an unresolved agenda item can be postponed, the *ad hoc* summit also represents a better deadline for a negotiation than the serial summit. For example, in May 1972, the prospect of the Nixon–Brezhnev summit in Moscow put huge pressure on the arms control negotiators of both sides to wrap up the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty in time for signature before Nixon had to return home.

Since *ad hoc* summits are characteristically designed, principally, for symbolic purposes rather than negotiation, it seems reasonable to suggest that, whether they have an emphasis on ceremonial functions or not, they are better suited to the promotion of friendly relations than the serial summit. In fact, many *ad hoc* summits are designed deliberately and openly for this purpose: the summit symbolizes this, and fosters it by providing a format that encourages relaxed encounters between the leaders. Good bilateral examples of such summits are provided by the meetings between President Clinton of the United States and President Hafez al-Assad of Syria in Geneva, in January 1994. A multilateral summit with heavy symbolic emphasis and the general aim of fostering increased economic and cultural ties between its participants was the two-day Ibero-American summit held in Mexico, in July 1991. A multilateral *ad hoc* summit designed for a quite different purpose can also be exploited in order to promote friendly bilateral relations, as when President Obama met the Russian president, Dmitri Medvedev, in the wings of the London summit of the G20 in April 2009.

As for clarifying intentions and gathering information, the qualifications of the *ad hoc* summit are a mixed blessing. On the one hand, the typically low emphasis on negotiation and high emphasis on photo-calls and ceremonial will reduce the opportunities for these purposes to be pursued. On the other, the more relaxed and less adversarial atmosphere might produce a frankness in the exchanges that suits them very well. As for raising the cases of any detained nationals, it is highly unlikely that the *ad hoc* summit will be an appropriate occasion for such a sensitive exercise. This will be especially so if nurturing an old friendship or putting the seal on a new one is the main object of the event.

An important and interesting category of *ad hoc* summits is the funeral of a major political figure attended by high-level delegations from the region concerned or, as is now very common, from all over the world (Berridge 1996). It is a special case, however, because it is more or less useless for the diplomatic purpose for which, it has been argued here, the typical *ad hoc* summit is principally conceived: generating significant diplomatic momentum on a major issue. This is partly because of its theme, and partly because of the unavoidable shortness of notice received by the countries sending delegations. Furthermore, funeral summits carry risks: existing diplomatic schedules are upset, and decisions on attendance and on level of attendance sometimes have to be made in the absence of perfect knowledge about what other states will be doing and of how the delegation will be received.

Nevertheless, 'working funerals' – which, at least by the 1960s, had fallen into a predictable pattern – are of considerable value to the world diplomatic system. This is partly because the shortness of notice available to the mourners has compensating advantages: it provides heads of state and government with a good excuse to break existing schedules in order to have urgent discussions on current problems without arousing public expectations; a decision to attend is unlikely to prove embarrassing as a result of changed circumstances in the short period that elapses before the funeral takes place; and, if attendance is likely to cause controversy, there is little time for domestic opposition to mobilize.

A working funeral is of special diplomatic significance if it is the funeral of an incumbent leader. This is because it is likely to be the first opportunity not only for foreign friends of the bereaved government to confirm their relationship with the new leadership, but also for its foreign rivals to explore the possibility of a change of heart. The leaders of Warsaw Pact satellite states always attended the funerals of Soviet leaders for the former purpose, while Western leaders attended them for the latter, at least in the 1980s. The funeral summit also provides a perfect cover for discreet consultations between foreign rivals seeking to keep their conflict within peaceful bounds, or striving for a way out of an impasse. Funerals of this kind are times of political truce.

Because there is so little time for preparation or for discussions during the event, funeral summits rarely serve for serious negotiation. Their functions are diplomatic signalling, promoting friendly relations (particularly between the mourners and the bereaved), clarifying intentions, and gathering intelligence.

### **The high-level exchange of views**

The exchange of views, which is the final category of summit, is also usually *ad hoc*, but is a more modest affair. It is more likely to be bilateral than multilateral, and have a miscellaneous agenda, if it has an agenda at all, and a lower profile. Sometimes, it is nothing more than a courtesy call; for example, when a foreign leader visits London for medical treatment and is there met briefly by the prime minister (Young 2008: 122–5).

Heads of government who visit a number of countries on a foreign tour are usually engaged in this kind of activity, which is extremely common. For example, in September 1994 the British prime minister, John Major, accompanied by officials and businessmen, went on a week-long trip of this kind. It took in both the Gulf, where he had 'several hours of "very friendly" talks' with King Fahd of Saudi Arabia

before proceeding to Abu Dhabi, and South Africa (*Financial Times*). Newly-elected American presidents have a particular weakness for this least ambitious form of summitry, or perhaps are just able to gratify it more readily.

Where new leaders are concerned, the educational argument for this kind of summitry is a strong one, though perhaps more in friendly relationships than adversarial ones. In the latter, there is hardly likely to be such frankness and, as illustrated by the famous Soviet–American summit encounter in Vienna in 1961, the pitfalls for the inexperienced are, in any case, more numerous. In the prior White House discussion on whether or not President Kennedy should seek a face-to-face talk with Nikita Khrushchev, the American ambassador to Moscow, Llewellyn Thompson, strongly supported the idea. His argument was that ‘it was impossible for the new President to get at second hand the full flavour of what he was up against’ (Schlesinger: 277). However, while the subsequent encounter was clearly educational for both leaders, Kennedy came to the conclusion that Khrushchev’s own education had been poor, the latter having wrongly formed the impression that the new American president lacked the necessary resolve to defend Western positions.

The exchange-of-views summit is probably the best of all summits for cementing friendly relations. It also serves well in the promotion of trade, and in taking up serious cases of maltreatment of nationals or those involving the human rights of prominent individuals. It is not self-evident, however, despite its self-styling, that the exchange of views is necessarily better at clarifying intentions and gathering information than the serial summit, or even the average *ad hoc* summit. As for serious negotiations, this kind of summit can nudge continuing talks forward, and even rescue those deadlocked on a particular point, although it will not generally be up to the standard of the serial summit in the last regard or the *ad hoc* summit in the first.

### Secrets of success

Chances sometimes have to be taken with summits, especially when the stakes are high. For example, the Americans had no firm guarantee that Nixon would be allowed to meet Mao before he left for China in 1972, and this was a gamble that courted humiliation (Macmillan: 8). But, as a rule, the key to the success of a summit is meticulous preparation by senior officials known as *sherpas*, a term that comes from the name for the locally hired bearers who assist mountaineers in the Himalayas. Assisted by *sous-sherpas*, the *sherpas* might even have the task of arranging a series

of bilateral pre-summit summits. In the case of the G8 summits, these take place not only with the other participants, but also with important outsiders. However, if not staged properly, pre-summit summits can backfire. For example, if they include only a small number of the most powerful participants scheduled to attend the summit proper, some of those excluded can be angered. This happened when the leaders of Britain, France, and Germany met alone immediately prior to the European Council in Ghent in October 2001.

Where a summit dealing with a negotiation is concerned, the conventional wisdom is that the preparation should be meticulous – to the point of leaving the summiteers with little more to do than sign the agreement in front of the cameras. Although sometimes disregarded without mishap, as at the Reagan–Gorbachev summits at Geneva in 1985 and at Reykjavik in the following year (Shultz 1993: 596–607), the pre-cooking of agreements is obviously of great importance when the summit is of the highly delicate kind designed to seal a new friendship between erstwhile enemies, as in the case of the Nixon–Mao summit in February 1972. The famous Shanghai Communiqué, released at the end of President Nixon’s visit, was substantially negotiated by Henry Kissinger on his own trip to China in the previous October, although it still took him a further 20 hours of negotiation in the wings of the summit to finalize it (Kissinger 1979: 781–4, 1074–87; Macmillan: ch. 19). Pre-cooking is also particularly important when the summit is a friendly encounter, but one that is only scheduled to last for a fleeting period – as in the case of the European Council.

The communiqué issued immediately after the summit should be prepared well in advance, but this is not all. Prior agreement, or agreement at the outset, on what might and might not be said to the media is another important requirement for successful summitry, as it is for any diplomatic encounter involving private discussion. A perfect example of what can happen when there is no script was provided by the joint press conference following the private meeting between Tony Blair and the Syrian leader, Bashar al-Assad, in Damascus at the end of October 2001. (Tony Blair was on a hurried tour of Middle East leaders designed to encourage support for the military action in Afghanistan and stimulate Israeli–Palestinian diplomacy.) To Mr Blair’s obvious discomfort, his host condemned the bombing of Afghanistan, and stated that it was Israel and not Syria that was responsible for promoting state terrorism. The British prime minister was generally portrayed in the press as having been publicly humiliated.

There must also be detailed planning of the choreography of the summit. This means the pattern of meetings and events (such as visits, speeches, motorcades, 'walkabouts', joint press conferences, and so on), the mix depending on the character of the summit. Pre-planned choreography is always important, but is especially so if symbolism is expected to take precedence over substance, as at the Reagan–Gorbachev summit in Moscow in 1988. In preparation for this occasion, the White House planning group worked for three months to 'write a script that would resemble an American political campaign with strong emphasis on visual impressions'. Not surprisingly, the analogy that sprang to the mind of former B-movie film star Ronald Reagan was a Cecil B. De Mille epic (Whelan: 89). Among other requirements for successful summity is not arousing excessive expectations. This might involve repeated prior statements that, say, a planned *ad hoc* summit will merely involve an 'exchange of views', which was the line taken by the Americans in the run-up to the Churchill–Eisenhower–Laniel summit at Bermuda in December 1953 (Young 1986: 901).

These secrets of success are necessary conditions; they are not sufficient ones. The best actors can fumble their lines when the curtain goes up, or simply fall ill. Churchill was unwell at the Bermuda summit, while the French prime minister, Laniel, took to his bed with a high temperature on the second day. Boris Yeltsin, President of the Russian Federation, apparently fast asleep, failed altogether to emerge from his Tupolev after it landed at Shannon airport in the Irish Republic in September 1994. What was going through the mind of the Irish prime minister, Albert Reynolds, who was waiting for his guest on the tarmac – complete with band, red carpet, and local dignitaries – is not difficult to imagine. Unforeseeable external events can also poison the atmosphere of a summit, or cause acute embarrassment. The shooting down over the Soviet Union of an American U-2 spy-plane two weeks before the opening of the East–West summit in Paris in May 1960 reduced this event to a fiasco. The occupation of Tiananmen Square in Beijing by pro-Democracy students prior to the Gorbachev–Deng summit in May 1989 turned this into a humiliation for the Chinese leadership: the programme had to be hastily revised and the Soviet leader brought into the Great Hall of the People through the back door (Cradock: 221). The Thai government had to use helicopters to rescue the leaders attending the 14th ASEAN summit in Pattaya in April 2009, following its abandonment after 'Red Shirt' activists successfully stormed the conference centre. In short, thorough preparation can minimize the risks of summity, but not eliminate them.

## Summary

Summitry might sometimes be highly damaging to diplomacy, and is always risky because of the publicity it attracts; also, it might serve only foreign or domestic propaganda purposes. Nevertheless, judiciously employed and carefully prepared, it can – and does – serve diplomatic purposes as well. This is especially true of the serial summit, an institution to which resort seems to have become reflexive following the establishment of an important international relationship. But the *ad hoc* summit and the high-level exchange of views are also of some importance to diplomacy, if only as devices to inject momentum into a stagnant negotiation. The pattern of summitry has changed in the past, and might change again. Nevertheless, there seems little reason to believe that it will go into a general decline as a mode of communication between states, as it did with the rise of the resident ambassador at the end of the Middle Ages. Television and democracy have seen to that.

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# 11

## Public Diplomacy

Propaganda is the manipulation of public opinion through the mass media for political ends. It might be more or less honest, more or less subtle, and sometimes directed more at achieving long-term, rather than short-term, changes in opinion. Its target might be foreign public opinion, domestic public opinion, or both. Makers of propaganda have traditionally distinguished between white propaganda and black propaganda – the former admitting its source, while the latter does not. ‘Public diplomacy’ is the modern name for white propaganda directed chiefly at foreign publics. Why has it acquired this new name? Why are the activities it embraces now so popular? What contribution is made to them by foreign ministries and diplomats posted abroad?

### Propaganda about propaganda

Propaganda directed abroad cannot be called ‘propaganda’ by governments because this term has long been associated with the systematic spreading of lies. What it needs, therefore, is a euphemism. But ‘public diplomacy’ was not the first euphemism for propaganda to be employed by governments; neither is it self-evident why it should currently be in fashion. How this came about is instructive, because there is an influential body of thought that maintains that public diplomacy is *not* propaganda but something quite new and altogether more enlightened.

Propaganda acquired a bad reputation in the first half of the twentieth century because in World War I, and especially in the hands of the totalitarian regimes that emerged afterwards, it was particularly slippery, strident, and mendacious. As a result, most governments, although forced to resort to methods that were, in principle, identical, balked at the idea of *publicly* admitting that they were making

propaganda. Instead, they claimed, what they were engaged in was 'information work'. Ministries of Information were created, especially during World War II, and although these tended not to outlast the duration, the inception of the Cold War in the late 1940s ensured that the residues they left were soon being used to build 'information services'. The result of this was that 'information sections', or 'information and cultural relations sections' (later known in the US Foreign Service collectively as 'public affairs sections'), together with their 'information officers', became an established feature of many embassies for the rest of the century; even the French employed *attachés d'information*. The United States Information Agency (USIA), with its arm's length relationship with the Department of State, which was the best-known supplier of such officers, was created in 1953. In the following year, a summary of the then still-confidential report of the Drogheda Committee on Britain's 'Overseas Information Services' – which was eventually so influential on British practice – was published (HCPP 1954). But the point is that no one involved in or discussing this 'information work' was under any illusions that what they were really talking about was overseas *propaganda* (HCPP 1954: *passim*; Plischke: 149). The British prime minister, Winston Churchill, had no hesitation in describing even the cultural work of the British Council as propaganda, although others were sometimes more coy about this (National Archives, London).

The point is neatly illustrated by the memoirs of Sir Robert Marett, a British diplomat who specialized in propaganda and served as secretary to the Drogheda Committee. The sub-heading of his book is *An Inside View of Britain's Overseas Information Services*, but the first part is called 'An Introduction to Propaganda'. In describing his appointment as head of the Foreign Office's 'Information Policy Department' immediately after working for Drogheda, he even observed that he had achieved the 'doubtful distinction' of being the 'Dr. Goebbels of the Foreign Office' (p. 171). (Dr Joseph Goebbels was Hitler's notorious Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda from 1933 until 1945.) In short, when it was publicly using a term such as 'information work', the political class knew that it was simply making propaganda about propaganda.

Referring to information work a decade later, the Plowden Report on the British foreign service observed that 'It is easy to see why it was necessary to adopt the more urbane label', though it regretted that the phrase lacked the 'sense of purpose and direction' conveyed by the term 'propaganda'. It added that information officers should not think that their task was merely to provide information to foreigners for its own sake. 'The Information Services', Plowden reminded its readers, 'grew

out of the need, in two world wars, to help achieve political aims by means of propaganda' (HCPP 1964: para. 260).

It might be that the term 'information' had some success in camouflaging the propaganda activities of states such as Britain and the United States as far as their broad audiences were concerned, but it is unlikely to have fooled the foreign political classes. It also had other problems. Not only was there a worry that the label failed to convey a sufficient sense of political purpose to its practitioners, but also in some states, such as Turkey, it aroused suspicion of them: since 'information' suggested 'intelligence', it implied that their business was *gathering* information rather than imparting it – spying (Arndt: 28; Berridge 2009: 216). The consequence was that the term 'information work' gradually fell out of favour and a fresh euphemism was required.

In 1965, Edmund Gullion, a former US Foreign Service officer and then Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, decided to press into service the vintage phrase 'public diplomacy', which was, up to this point, nothing more than a synonym for the 'open diplomacy' allegedly exemplified by the pre-war League of Nations. With its old echoes of this idealistic enterprise, 'public diplomacy' certainly generated better vibrations than 'propaganda', while, at the same time, suggesting it – because most observers of the League's successor, the United Nations, had come to the conclusion that open diplomacy was nothing more than propaganda anyway (Cull 2006b). Moreover, 'public diplomacy' does not suggest spying. The most important reason why this 'ill-defined portemanteau phrase' (Arndt: 480) eventually took off in the United States, however, was that its very vagueness served the purpose of those in Washington who wished to bring all of America's overseas propaganda activities under one roof – that of the US Information Agency. This was achieved in 1978, when – to the dismay of traditionalists – the USIA also assumed responsibility for US cultural diplomacy by absorbing the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (Arndt: chs 23 and 24; Cull 2006b). Thus, ironically, did the allegedly more benign label 'public diplomacy' help to taint all agencies with the cruder style of propaganda: the 'poetry of diplomacy' in the US Foreign Service began to be heard less and less (Arndt: 546).

In the course of the 1990s, more states adopted the euphemism 'public diplomacy' to describe their propaganda operations and, today, it is more or less ubiquitous (although 'information' has by no means disappeared). But the term had been hijacked to give propaganda cosmetic surgery and to facilitate a successful campaign in American bureaucratic politics. It was not introduced to identify a new activity (Gullion,

its author, knew this and would have preferred the term 'propaganda', but for its negative connotations). Neither does it now equate to a new activity, despite the popular view that public diplomacy 'at its best' is different from propaganda because it invites the absorption of as much influence from foreign publics as it seeks to achieve over them (Cull 2007). This might amount to nothing more than a claim that public diplomacy is a new *style* of propaganda, but sounds like a political doctrine. In this case, the answer has to be that listening to foreigners is one thing; giving equal weight to what they say is another. In the hard world of governments, 'public diplomacy' remains a euphemism for propaganda. This is obvious from what they do under its heading, as well as from how – despite the deep lake of semantic convolutions that they feel the need to fill and then wade through – they end up defining it (Wilton: 12; Carter of Coles: 8; US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy: 4).

### **The importance of public diplomacy**

While one of the aims of conventional diplomacy is to exert direct influence on foreign governments, the aim of propaganda, or public diplomacy, is usually to do this *indirectly*; that is, by appealing over the heads of those governments to the people with influence upon them. In a tightly controlled authoritarian regime, these might be just 'the influential few', to borrow a phrase favoured by the Drogheda Committee; in a broadly based liberal democracy, it is likely to be the great mass of voters.

Propaganda has grown in importance since the start of World War I, albeit fitfully, because, after that time, the motives to reach for it strengthened while the means to employ it multiplied. The spread of democracy and total war both vastly increased the political importance of public opinion; then followed the emergence of ideology, a simplified, quasi-religious mode of political argument peculiarly suited to propaganda; and, finally, arrived the invention of nuclear weapons, which made too risky anything other than a 'war of words' between states incapable of serious diplomacy – as in the Cold War. In such circumstances, the appeal of being able to use propaganda to turn a foreign population against its own government on a key issue, or even to the point of overthrowing it, was enormous. And to all this was added a steady improvement in the means of delivery: first, via the printed word (and photograph) to increasingly literate populations; then, via short-wave radio broadcasting in indigenous languages, which reached

the illiterate and is relatively cheap and virtually impossible to block; and, most recently, by television and the Internet.

In the course of the twentieth century, much was also learned about the ingredients of successful propaganda – notably, that it is best used to reinforce existing attitudes and stimulate action on the part of the already well-disposed, rather than to try to change entrenched opinions. There were sometimes doubts about its effectiveness, chiefly because of the methodological problems that have always dogged research into this subject, but these doubts were always overcome in the end (Berridge 1997: 138–43). This was generally a result of a consensus of informed opinion that propaganda had played a key role in certain dramatic developments. In recent years, these include the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe, where broadcasting by Western radio stations is believed to have been critical; and the spread of Islamist thinking – not least, via the Internet, to Muslim communities in the West. Certainly, there is great fear of propaganda, which is why the Chinese government censors the Internet and the Iranian government did likewise during the turbulence in Tehran that began in June 2009.

In 1954, the Drogheda Committee probably summed up the view of those who assessed the value of propaganda most cautiously when it wrote that ‘The effect of propaganda on the course of events is never likely to be more than marginal. But in certain circumstances it may be decisive in tipping the balance between diplomatic success and failure’. As a result, it concluded, ‘The Information Services must today be regarded as part of the normal apparatus of the diplomacy of a Great Power’ (HCPP 1954: 6–7). Since the notorious attacks on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City on 11 September 2001, which drew attention so dramatically to the widespread hostility to the West in the Muslim world, this axiom has been taken to heart more than at any point since World War II: it has become a major instrument in the new, commanding conflict, the so-called ‘War on Terror’.

‘Public diplomacy’ today, then, is not merely a fashionable phrase; it is also a fashionable practice – and a fashionable one over which to agonize. In 2002, the Wilton Review pronounced on it in Britain, but only two years later the government commissioned a further report on the subject, this time under the businessman and Labour life peer, Lord Carter of Coles, which appeared at the end of 2005 (neither appeared to have heard of the Drogheda Report, which was far more penetrating than either). But this was nothing compared with what was happening in the United States, where 25 reports had appeared in the previous two

years (Carter of Coles: 68). In order to develop this epic rediscovery of the wheel, foreign ministries have generally been given the lead role.

### **The role of the MFA: player and coordinator**

Ministries of foreign affairs, even of small states, commonly play a number of roles in connection with propaganda. Some of these are routine, well-known and uncontroversial:

- providing embassies with printed and other publicity materials for distribution (still in demand, despite spreading access to the Internet), and training for their press and public affairs officers
- dealing with foreign correspondents based in the capital (see Box 11.1)
- putting out their own propaganda directly, in recent years especially via their multi-language version websites, with Arabic pages increasingly popular on those of Western foreign ministries and even foreign ministers' personal blogs, and
- perhaps funding associated broadcasting organizations and cultural and educational bodies such as the Goethe-Institut (Germany), the Alliance Française (France), the Cervantes Institute (Spain), the Dante Alighieri Society (Italy), the Camões Institute (Portugal), and the British Council (Britain), whose audiences are, in the main, the *next* generation of decision-makers and opinion-leaders.

#### **Box 11.1 'News management': dealing with foreign correspondents**

Making sure that foreign correspondents see things from the 'correct perspective' is particularly important because, as the Wilton Review noted in 2002, there are good grounds for believing that their articles have a greater impact in their home countries than 'any of our [*sic!*] other public diplomacy outputs'. News management normally includes the provision of official briefings on current events, helping to arrange interviews with ministers and officials, and laying on tours. It might even, as at the 'Foreign Press Centers' in Washington and New York (the former opened in 1946, and the latter in 1968), extend to the provision of computer work stations and other facilities. The number of foreign correspondents based in Western capitals has increased greatly in recent years. In 2005, the Carter Review estimated that there were over 2000 foreign correspondents in London. The Israeli MFA is believed to be particularly effective in dealing with foreign correspondents, as also is the Quai d'Orsay. The Information Department of the Chinese MFA opened an 'International Press Center' in May 2000.

Sources: Wilton: 11, 20; Carter of Coles 2005: 52–4; US Department of State; www.

Some of these tasks are also far from new. News management, at least on an organized and systematic basis, goes back only to World War I, but one favourite device goes back to the early nineteenth century. This is the selective publication by foreign ministries of documents from their archives. These were not only carefully chosen, but also sometimes 'corrected' – a practice for which, in Britain, Lord Salisbury was notorious (Roberts: 509). It even became quite common for 'secret' diplomatic despatches to be drafted with a view to their possible later publication, the real messages being confined to 'private letters'. The one-off publications containing these selections were called 'Blue Books' in Britain, 'Yellow Books' in France, 'White Books' in Germany, and so on. The US State Department favoured what was, for a considerable time, an annual publication, the *Foreign Relations of the United States*, which first appeared in 1861 (Hamilton: 49).

Foreign ministries, or functionally equivalent bodies under other names, also have public diplomacy tasks that are sometimes more controversial at home and raise serious public policy questions. These include the elaboration of public diplomacy strategy and relating it to foreign policy priorities; the monitoring of implementation and measuring of performance; and the coordination of the activities of the various bodies engaged in propaganda to minimise duplication of effort and ensure that they are in tune with the strategy.

It is especially in liberal-democratic states – that is, in those where individual liberties from state control exist independently of broadly based democratic institutions, and where such liberties remain strong – that foreign ministry coordination of public diplomacy raises awkward questions. This is because, in such states, some of the most effective propaganda – gentle, stimulating, honest as far as it goes, and associated with the provision of valuable services to its audiences – has usually been conducted by bodies with a marked degree of independence from state control. The paradigm cases are the BBC World Service (since March 2008, including BBC Arabic Television) and the British Council, which, despite their financial dependence on the Foreign Office, have generally been able to maintain editorial independence and day-to-day operational independence, respectively; in the United States, the Fulbright Programme has traditionally had a similar status. Moreover, it is, in large part, precisely because of their arm's length relationship with government that they have always been so effective.

The problem for the liberal-democracies is how to improve coordination without undermining the credibility of the arm's length public

diplomacy bodies. This is not surprising, since there is a very thin line between coordination and 'direction'. In the last few years, the British government's answer to this has been to create a Public Diplomacy Board representing the Foreign Office, the British Council and – as an observer – the BBC World Service. It is chaired by a Foreign Office minister but is supposed to have a 'strong independent vice-chair', and is supported by a unit within the Foreign Office that is, in effect, its executive arm. The Public Diplomacy Board – which is supplemented by an advisory board on which other organizations are represented – is responsible for agreeing strategy, advising on resource allocation, and performance measurement. Similar steps have been attempted in the United States, where already, in 1978, the previously separate oversight commissions on 'Information' and 'Educational Exchange' established under the Smith–Mundt Act of 1948 had been merged into the politicized, if bipartisan, United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, and (as noted) USIA took over cultural diplomacy as well. In 1999, albeit chiefly for reasons of economy, USIA itself was absorbed by the Department of State and a new position of 'under secretary of state for public diplomacy' created, while the former agency's area offices were rather awkwardly integrated into the appropriate geographical bureaus (US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy: 26–7). Oversight of the Voice of America (VOA) was also transferred from USIA to a 'politically appointed' Broadcasting Board of Governors (Cull 2006a). In both Britain and the United States, some nervousness (at a minimum) on the part of cultural diplomatists has been generated by this trend.

### **The role of the embassy**

When asked by a member of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Commons to comment on views expressed to it in support of more public diplomacy, Sir John Kerr, former British ambassador in Washington and then permanent under-secretary in the Foreign Office, replied:

I think it is a very elegant re-invention of the wheel. Embassies have always had such a role. While they exist to talk privately to governments, they also exist to talk to people and populations at large, and that is *probably the modern ambassador's principal function, to be on television, to be on the radio, to accept all the platforms...* We are not shut away but we never really were (FAC: para. 119, emphasis added).



Sir John Kerr was right, and it is not difficult to find early examples to illustrate his point; neither do they always feature eccentric ambassadors acting without instructions.

Sir Henry Wotton, British resident ambassador in Venice at the beginning of the seventeenth century, distributed Protestant publications among members of the political elite as a key part of his attempt to stir up the republic against the Pope; it is true that he seems not to have been acting on written instructions, but he knew that he could rely on the sympathy of James I (Smith 1907: 89–90). To take another example, at the end of the eighteenth century, the new French minister plenipotentiary to the United States, Citizen Charles-Edmond Genet, was formally despatched from Paris as primarily a ‘revolutionary missionary to the American people’, rather than as an envoy in the ordinary way to its government, and he behaved accordingly, determined to ‘excite, display, and exploit American enthusiasm for the French Revolution’ (O’Brien: ch. 5). Nevertheless, as in the case of foreign ministries, it was the twentieth century before embassies became routinely involved in public diplomacy, and only in recent years that, as Sir John Kerr maintained, it has become arguably the principal role of the ambassador, as opposed to the embassy generally.

Having said this, the ability of an ambassador to engage in public diplomacy varies with the political culture of the receiving state and the sensitivities of the government of the day. This is especially true when there is a risk that the ambassador’s propaganda might be construed as interference in the domestic affairs of the state concerned. In a totalitarian state such as North Korea, where diplomats are very tightly controlled and even the telephone directory is a state secret (Hoare: 116–21), it is inconceivable that an ambassador would be either willing or able to make direct appeals to the public on questions of any kind. Even in France, remarked Sir Nicholas Henderson, a former British ambassador to that country, ‘it would be thought odd and might prove counter-productive with the French government for a foreign diplomat in Paris to appear to be advancing his country’s cause in public’. But in the liberal democracies, as a rule, the ambassador is able to adopt a propaganda role with considerable freedom. In Washington, to which Henderson was moved in 1979, it was quite different, he noted: ‘It would be regarded there as a sign of lack of conviction in his country’s case if an Ambassador did not go out of his way to promote it publicly’ (Henderson: 287–8). Henderson famously did just this, putting the British point of view directly to the American people on television on a number of issues of considerable sensitivity in Washington, notably

Northern Ireland and the Falklands crisis; it is generally believed that he had considerable success. Ambassadors from authoritarian regimes enjoy the same rights. For example, during the Gulf War in early 1991, Iraq's ambassadors in Europe and the United States were at the forefront of Baghdad's propaganda campaign. This is perhaps one reason why Saddam Hussein did not sever diplomatic relations with the Coalition powers until three weeks after the outbreak of the war (Taylor: 97–8, 106, 181).

Resident ambassadors are well-placed to engage in public diplomacy, because they are attractive to the local media as interviewees and to a variety of local bodies as speakers. In the absence of a high-ranking visitor from home, they are the most authoritative representatives of their governments. They are also likely to have mastered the sound-bite and the after-dinner address. It is improbable that they will make any great fuss about having to appear at an inconvenient time. And they will expect neither a fee nor payment of their expenses.

But the ambassador is by no means the only member of the embassy with a public diplomacy role. Even small embassies usually have one officer who is required to devote at least some time to handling the local media and trying to coordinate the activities of local representatives of any public diplomacy 'partners'. Such a person used to be known – and sometimes still is – as the 'press attaché', but is now, more often than not, known as an 'information officer'. Larger embassies might have a whole section devoted to public diplomacy, usually relying heavily on locally engaged staff. They also often have responsibility for cultural relations: in this case they are known in US embassies as the 'public affairs section', as already mentioned; and, in British embassies, as the 'press and public affairs section'. The Danish embassy in Washington has a 'public diplomacy and communication section'. These sections are not always as large as the recent enthusiasm for public diplomacy might lead us to expect, because some diplomatic services believe that the embassy's other sections are best placed to conduct their own public diplomacy – the commercial section should handle commercial publicity, and so on. The Wilton Review formed the impression that information activities could sometimes form as much as 50 per cent of a British embassy's work (Wilton: 17).

An information officer's role does not only involve distributing publicity material, but also 'working the media'; that is, persuading local journalists to run friendly stories: this is the counterpart activity of what the foreign ministry should be doing at home with foreign correspondents (Box 11.1). In the past, this has involved bribing individual

journalists and subsidizing local newspapers, and it would be surprising if the same sort of thing does not go on in some states today. One of the reasons why the British embassy in Turkey retained a major presence in Istanbul after it was forced – along with other embassies – gradually to shift its presence to Ankara in the 1920s, and also why the ambassador continued to spend a great deal of time in the former capital, was that this was where the editors and leader writers of the major Turkish newspapers were still located.

The work of an embassy's information officers is particularly prone to bursts of frenetic activity; some of them anticipated, some of them not. In the former category falls that provoked by the long-planned arrival of high-level visitors from home, which must be preceded with the sort of advance publicity that will ensure their enthusiastic reception, and be accompanied by solicitous attention to the needs of the local media for interviews, photo-opportunities and background briefings during their stay. In short, the information section must ensure that a glow of warmth and approval is left behind after the visitors' departure, and so assist other aspects of the embassy's work. In the 'bursts of unanticipated activity' falls that required, for example, by a furious explosion on the part of the local media, perhaps accompanied by hostile demonstrations in the streets, at criticism of some aspect of the host country's domestic habits by the press at home. Information sections often find themselves fire-fighting for this and other reasons. The sudden increase of the workload of information officers in Denmark's embassies, especially in Muslim states, following publication of the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in a Danish newspaper in early 2006, is not difficult to imagine.

It will be apparent that, in contrast to the long-term outlook of cultural attachés or cultural affairs officers, the horizon of the embassy's information officers is much more proximate: their task is the manipulation of public attitudes in the following hours, days and weeks, and is obviously political. Because cultural diplomats have a quite different style of operation, and usually wish to avoid the impression of having any kind of political agenda at all, there has – at least, where they are members of bodies such as the British Council – always been some resistance to the idea of serving under the embassy's roof. Those sharing this view maintain that a separate physical presence not only makes them more approachable, but also makes it more probable that they will be able to remain even if the embassy is forced to depart. However, the 'coordinators' reply that appointing them to the embassy as cultural attachés makes coordination easier. They also point out that, in practice,

it does not do significant harm to the reputation of the educational bodies – because foreign publics are aware that they are sponsored by the sending state anyway, that putting them under the embassy roof is more economical than having to maintain (and guard) separate premises for them, and that it gives them diplomatic privileges and immunities that might well turn out to be valuable in unstable states. In recent years the calls to coordination and economy have been difficult for the ‘culturalists’ to resist. A compromise solution is to give them diplomatic rank, but still permit them to operate from separate premises, although this has given the British Council offices in Russia little protection from severe police harassment in recent years.

## Summary

‘Public diplomacy’ is what we call our propaganda; ‘propaganda’ is what the other side does. It remains true that this activity, the aim of which is to influence foreign governments by trying to win over their own people, varies enormously in both its character and its targets. Renewed emphasis has been given to it in the West in recent years, chiefly because of fear of the consequences of mounting popular hostility in the Muslim world. The lead role in public diplomacy is frequently given to foreign ministries. For ambassadors, it is probably now their most important duty – although, for the rest of the embassy staff, only one among many.

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# 12

## Telecommunications

From ancient times until well into the nineteenth century, all messages, including diplomatic messages, were carried by hand. Even at the beginning of the twenty-first century, diplomatic couriers are still employed for the delivery of certain top-secret packages (Angell). But over the past century and a half, diplomatic messages have been increasingly carried by telecommunication: any mode of communication over a long distance (*tele* is Greek for 'far') that requires human agency only in the sending and reception of the message that it contains and not, as with a courier, in its conveyance. This chapter will consider the advantages and disadvantages of the different kinds of telecommunication. It will also give some emphasis to crisis diplomacy, because it is in this activity that telecommunication is often held to be of greatest value, and it is certainly here that it has received the greatest attention.

The communication by drums and smoke-signals that originated in ancient times, and the optical telegraph or semaphore systems introduced in Europe in the late eighteenth century, were forms of telecommunication. Nevertheless, it did not make a major impact on diplomacy until the introduction of the electric telegraph towards the middle of the nineteenth century. Soon, using submarine as well as land cables, written messages sent by telegraph cut delivery times over some routes from weeks to hours, although they were insecure and so needed to be enciphered, and for a long time were also expensive and prone to garbling. The invention of radio telegraphy in the 1890s improved this medium further, although it remained insecure. In the early twentieth century, it became possible to deliver the spoken word over vast distances by telephone (available in the late nineteenth century only over short distances) and short-wave radio. Since World War II, further well-known refinements have been added, among them fax, electronic mail, instant

messaging, mobile phones, and multi-media video-conferencing; and other exciting developments in information and communications technologies (ICTs) are no doubt in the pipeline.

Worries over security have traditionally caused governments to employ the latest form of telecommunication only with great caution – and after considerable hesitation. Nevertheless, eventually the appeal of these various means of communication has generally won the day, and the appeal of none has been greater than that of the telephone, especially in a crisis.

### Telephone diplomacy flourishes

Telephone diplomacy has serious drawbacks, some of which are common to most forms of telecommunication. For one thing, it foregoes all forms of non-verbal communication. The use of body language, dress, venue, and setting – by means of which, in a personal encounter, a summiteer or diplomat can add nuance or emphasis to an oral message, or even *say* one thing but *mean* another – are all foregone in telephone diplomacy. A corollary of this is that, compared with a personal visit by a foreign minister, with all its attendant preparations, a telephone call is far less effective in forcing officials to focus on the questions at issue. It also passes up the opportunity, should this be advantageous, to generate news coverage for a message. These points were both made by critics of Colin Powell, US secretary of state from 2001 until 2005, who undertook far fewer foreign trips than his predecessors and relied instead more on the telephone, sometimes making as many as 100 calls a day (*Washington Post* 2003).

Furthermore, telephone conversations cannot be scripted: the issues that come up are not entirely predictable and remarks made spontaneously might not convey exactly the meaning intended, even if simultaneous translation is not needed. A particular danger that flows from this, as well as from the immediacy of the exchange, is that there is ‘no time for reflection or consultation’ (Satow: vol. I, 157). This might have one of two results, neither of which is desirable: either the receiver of the call is bounced into a hasty decision on what might well be a matter of vital importance; or the receiver refuses to make an immediate decision – thereby creating resentment on the part of the caller because the gambit has failed, and on part of the receiver because it has been attempted (Thatcher 1995: 230).

Things said over the telephone cannot be unsaid, either, and there is no telling to what use an adversary might put a suitably edited

tape-recording of a conversation. Written messages that subsequently prove embarrassing might plausibly be dismissed as forgeries but this is more difficult with taped conversations, as President Nixon found to his cost during the Watergate affair in the early 1970s. While there might be disadvantages to the recording of a telephone conversation, a disadvantage might also attach to its absence: a subsequent difference of opinion as to what was actually said (Shultz 1997: 6). In a relationship where there is mistrust, a profound cultural gap, and only a limited understanding of the rival's machinery of government, there can also be no confidence that a promise to pass on a message has been acted upon, or even that the person at the other end of the line is who they say they are. The last risk is not merely hypothetical. President George W. Bush once had an extended telephone conversation with a person purporting to be President Hashemi-Rafsanjani that was later traced back to the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security; some time later a 16-year-old Icelandic high school student pretending to be the president of Iceland and passing background security questions by getting the answers from Wikipedia, got as far as President George W. Bush's secretary.

Different time zones and congested schedules can also create serious logistical difficulties for use of the telephone, especially at head of state and government level: 'preparing a phone call can sometimes take days', remarks a former senior minister and ambassador of Saudi Arabia (Algozaibi: 238). If a call is arranged at this level, there are also circumstances in which the choice of the medium – irrespective of what is said by means of it – might have the effect of inducing a crisis atmosphere when the opposite effect is what is intended. It appears to have been fear of this that, after some debate in the Situation Room, induced President George W. Bush to leave to traditional channels resolution of the dispute provoked by the collision over the South China Sea between an American EP-3 spy plane and a Chinese jet fighter in April 2001, rather than telephone his Chinese opposite number, Jiang Zemin (*Guardian* 2001a). Finally, unless exceptional precautions are taken, telephone diplomacy is vulnerable to eavesdropping by the sophisticated and well-resourced SIGINT agencies of the major powers. The UN secretary general has fallen victim to this (Boutros-Ghali 1999: 276–7), and there has been much publicity about the electronic interception of the communications of permanent missions at the UN in New York.

But telephone diplomacy has such appeal that great efforts have been taken to minimise these risks, and the remaining ones are courted every day. Unlike the various forms of written telecommunications, the



telephone is easier to use and does not involve squinting at a desk-top computer screen or hand-held device, or require manual dexterity; it can also send signals by means of tone of voice and volume. The telephone is, above all, more *personal*, which means that it is more flattering to the recipient; by contrast, written messages, especially at the highest level, are usually drafted by someone else and recognized as such. The telephone also provides considerable certainty that a message has got through and, because it rarely generates a verbatim transcript, is deniable if this should prove to be expedient. It also makes possible the *immediate* correction of a misunderstanding or *immediate* adjustment of a statement that has given unintended offence (provided this is realized), so that neither is allowed to fester. Finally, the telephone provides the opportunity to extract an *immediate* response from the party at the other end of the line – and many people find it more difficult to say ‘no’ over the telephone than in a written response. Thus, the possibility of being bounced into a hasty decision might be a danger to one party, but the corollary is that it is an attractive opportunity to the other.

At head of state and government level, advisers can prepare talking points and take notes (Patterson: 57–9); and internal regulations of government can – and do – expressly forbid the treatment of classified issues on the telephone at the sub-political level. Technical steps can also be taken to assure the security of sensitive messages and, in any case, much of the information contained in telephone calls is out of date long before hostile intelligence agencies can track, digest, and circulate it to their customers. It is chiefly for all of these reasons that political leaders and senior government officials, both in foreign ministries and OGDs, attach such importance to using the telephone in maintaining their overseas communications.

Telephone diplomacy, despite its appeal, is more appropriate in some circumstances, and in some relationships, than in others. Its advantages are particularly apparent during fast moving situations and major international crises, although less so for making contact with an adversary than with allies and other friends, whether to orchestrate their response to a crisis or sort out a serious problem among them. In either case, ‘conference calls’ can be employed.

Madeleine Albright claims to have been the first to use a conference call, while US secretary of state at the time of the NATO air war against Serb forces during the Kosovo conflict in 1999. It was the best means, she believed, of coordinating the actions and statements of the alliance, which in all had 19 members (Albright: 409, 412). Unavoidably using the more traditional method in the run-up to the Gulf War at the

beginning of 1991, the US President, George H. W. Bush, used the telephone to contact the Malaysian prime minister in a Tokyo restaurant in order to secure his support for a vital Security Council resolution. Between the opening of this crisis in August 1990 and the end of the year, Bush exchanged 40 telephone calls with another leader whose support was even more vital to him in this crisis, Turgut Özal, the president of Turkey (Stearns: 11). On the morning of Good Friday, 10 April 1998, when the Northern Ireland talks in Belfast were on the verge of an historic breakthrough (see Chapter 4), US president, Bill Clinton, made personal calls to many of the key participants, urging them to grasp the moment. 'The calls were very helpful', says the US mediator, as almost certainly they were (Mitchell: 178).

A particularly vivid account of the effective use of the telephone in an intra-alliance crisis is provided in the memoirs of James Callaghan, British foreign secretary in the mid-1970s. Here, he describes in some detail the many calls he exchanged in the hours immediately following the entry of Turkey's forces into Cyprus on 20 July 1974, which led to an immediate threat of war with Greece. This was a crisis in which Britain could not avoid playing a key role because not only was Cyprus a member of the Commonwealth, but also Britain was one of the three guarantors of its constitution, independence, and territorial integrity under the Treaty of Guarantee of 1960. The other two guarantors were fellow NATO allies Greece and Turkey. Callaghan wished to obtain an immediate ceasefire and instigate talks between the Greeks and the Turks, for which he needed American assistance. In the course of 'mad activity' on 21 July, Callaghan spoke on two occasions each to the Turkish president, the Greek foreign minister, and the French foreign minister (acting for the European Community). He also spoke to the Austrian chancellor, Bruno Kreisky, about the possibility of using Vienna as the venue for the talks. And he spoke to US secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, 'about nine or ten times'. By means of these 'almost continuous telephone exchanges', amplified massively by the fact that Kissinger was also calling both the Greeks and the Turks, shortly before midnight Callaghan learned that the Turks had finally accepted a ceasefire effective from 14.00 hours on the following day. Talks between the foreign ministers of the three guarantor powers began three days after that (Callaghan: 342–6).

A further example of the use of the telephone in an intra-alliance crisis is provided by the calls exchanged in October 1983 on the White House–10 Downing Street 'hotline' (Box 12.1). The first was made by the British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, and was designed

to underline the importance of a written message that had just been dispatched imploring the American president, Ronald Reagan, not to invade the Commonwealth state of Grenada. (Only the previous day, the British foreign secretary had publicly stated that he had no knowledge of any American intention to intervene in Grenada. A subsequent invasion of a Commonwealth state by Britain's closest ally, without consultation, would make Mrs Thatcher look weak and foolish.) As it turned out, her telephone diplomacy was ineffective – it was already too late. However, the story was different with the call that she received back from Ronald Reagan the following day. The president began with a gallant and disarming preamble, which was just as well because, on her own admission, the Iron Lady was 'not in the sunniest of moods'. He then apologized for the embarrassment that had been caused and explained the practical considerations that had made full consultation impossible. This clearly had a soothing effect on Mrs Thatcher. 'There was not much I felt able to say', she records in her memoirs, 'and so I more or less held my peace, but I was glad to have received the telephone call' (Thatcher 1995: 331–3). This exchange over the hotline was the more effective because, despite the closeness of these two leaders, it was at that time still rarely used (see Box 12.1).

More examples of both sorts accumulate every day: Tony Blair keeping in touch on the Lebanon crisis with allies and friends during his holiday in the Caribbean in August 2006; President-elect Barack Obama phoning the German, French, and British leaders about the global financial crisis immediately after his election victory in November 2008; the foreign ministers of China, Japan, and South Korea having to resort to the telephone over the mini-crisis provoked by North Korea's missile launch in April 2009 after the summit they were attending in Thailand

#### Box 12.1 The White House–10 Downing Street hotline

This telephone hotline was probably set up in the early 1960s. In an interview enquiry in 1993, Mrs Thatcher, the then prime minister, was asked whether it was used very often. She replied: 'No, I don't think these things ought to be used very often. But I sometimes received a very welcome call at difficult times from Ronald Reagan, who was very, very thoughtful' (Thatcher 1993: 10). This was consistent with the traditional Whitehall view that personal, top-level exchanges of this sort should be regarded as 'the diplomatic weapon of last resort'. However, times were changing. In 1998, Bill Clinton and Tony Blair are recorded as having spoken on the phone on average once a week (Patterson: 57).

had to be abandoned (see Chapter 10); in the same month, Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi missing a NATO group photograph to take a call on his mobile from his Turkish counterpart about the election of the alliance's next secretary-general; and so on.

In all of the above examples, what is apparent is that the telephone excelled as an instrument for achieving rapid personal exchanges between friendly states when urgent decisions were essential. The absence of language barriers, and confidence that any slips of the tongue or ill-considered statements would be treated charitably, also favoured use of the telephone. The last point is particularly important, and is one reason why the telephone is only rarely a feature of diplomacy between hostile states. It is true that a 'hotline' between the White House and the Kremlin was established following the alarm caused by the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962 but – contrary to the popular impression fostered by films such as *Dr Strangelove* – this was not a telephone connection but a direct telegraph link, designed chiefly to help cope with the consequences of accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons. Letters delivered via ambassadors were the normal medium of direct communication between the rival superpowers during the Cold War.

Telephone diplomacy might be a rarity in the delicate diplomacy between hostile states, but it is certainly not unknown. It also seems to be growing in popularity as statesmen become more used to it and so reach for it almost reflexively. President Reagan employed it with his Syrian counterpart in 1985, albeit not apparently with much success (see Box 12.2). It appears to be used more fruitfully following a reduction in tension caused by some natural disaster or secured by other means, and when the moment needs to be seized quickly. For example, a North Korea–South Korea telephone hotline was installed following

#### **Box 12.2 The Reagan–Assad exchange**

In July 1985, President Reagan placed a telephone call to President Assad of Syria, a Soviet-backed state regarded in Washington as a sponsor of terrorism. He thanked him for his role in ending the crisis provoked by the hijacking to Beirut of a TWA airliner, and urged him to use his influence to secure the release of the remaining American kidnap victims being held in Lebanon. The president added, however, that he wanted Assad to end his support for terrorism. Not surprisingly, the conversation was 'stiff and cold' (Shultz 1993: 667–8). 'He got a little feisty', the President subsequently recorded in his memoirs, 'and suggested I was threatening to attack Lebanon' (Reagan: 497).

the improvement in relations marked by the summit meeting in June 2000, and reportedly used to good effect for several years afterwards (Lim Dong-won); calls exchanged between US deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage and Iran's UN ambassador, Mohammad Javad Zarif, helped facilitate acceptance by Tehran of the offer of American aid at the time of the earthquake in Bam in December 2003; and an impetus to an improvement in the deeply embittered relations between Islamabad and New Delhi was provided by a telephone call made to the Indian prime minister by his Pakistani counterpart on 28 April 2003, after the former had made a speech ten days earlier in which he promised the hand of friendship.

Tony Blair, British prime minister from 1997 until 2007, was particularly ready to use the telephone in such circumstances. 'Blessed with a fluent tongue and great personal charm', determined to make the world a better place, and confident that he could persuade to his point of view even the most unlikely persons (Reynolds: 381–3), he is credited, among other achievements, with employing his telephone to win a point with that legendary thorn in the side of the West, Colonel Qadhafi of Libya. According to evidence given to SIAC by the British ambassador at Tripoli, it was the prime minister's personal telephone call to the Libyan leader in August 2005 that led to the swiftness with which the sought-after 'No Torture' agreement was concluded between the two states (see Chapter 6). Tony Blair's confidence had, no doubt, been earlier reinforced by the remarkable conversation he had held with the Iranian president, Mohammad Khatami, from his aircraft en route to New York following the 9/11 attacks in 2001. Perhaps it is since this time, and especially in view of Iran's fear of an American attack in recent years, that its foreign ministry has become adept at reaching out to other ministries by telephone; numerous examples of this activity are easily located on the Internet.

### **Video-conferencing stalls**

Video-conferencing, in principle, allows any number of persons at remote locations, provided they have compatible facilities, to see and hear each other in real time and, so, hold a conference without having to go to the trouble and expense of travelling to a distant venue. It is, therefore, in some ways a significant advance on a telephone conference call, and has for some time been a mouth-watering prospect to the prophets of virtual diplomacy. Its great advantage is that the visual images it produces enable body language to be conveyed more

readily. Smiles – forced or genuine – and nods of agreement can clearly be witnessed, as can frowns, glares, yawns, bored expressions, rolling eyes, slumped shoulders, fingers drumming on table tops, shaking heads, and lips curling with contempt. As at real conferences, it is also possible to look for clues to the health of other parties in their appearance, movement, and mannerisms: facial tics indicating high levels of stress are, no doubt, readily discerned on high definition screens. Something of the influence of particular individuals might also be read into their physical proximity to a lead negotiator, and the gestures and comments exchanged between them. Video-conferencing is also becoming increasingly sophisticated, with larger screens and more versatile software, as well as high definition images; and it is becoming cheaper.

But the technical problems associated with video-conferencing remain considerable, and its fundamental limitations as a vehicle of either bilateral or multilateral diplomacy immense. Among the former are the poor quality of ‘multicasting’ – linking persons at multiple locations – and the impossibility of producing eye contact. But, even if these problems are eventually solved, the fact remains that video-conferencing will never be able to replicate the advantages of the personal encounter.

The participants in a video conference will always miss the physical dimension of body language – for example, the handshake or embrace – and, in some cultures, physical touch and bodily closeness are particularly important (Cohen 1987: ch. 5). Video conferences are also known to be intimidating because of the awareness of being ‘on camera’; politicians are used to this, but most officials are not. Furthermore, unlike a real conference, they provide no opportunity to relieve the tension inevitably associated with some diplomatic encounters by gracious social ritual and acts of hospitality. Video conferences also provide no opportunities for corridor diplomacy; that is, for informal personal contacts, where the real breakthroughs in negotiations are sometimes made and useful information gleaned. And, by leaving delegations at home, these so-called conferences also leave them under the immediate influence of their constituencies and, thus, in the position in which they are least likely to adopt an accommodating outlook; to this extent they are actually anti-diplomatic.

In the light of these drawbacks, it is not surprising that even Gordon Smith, one of the best known apostles of virtual diplomacy, believes that negotiations ‘are best done face to face’, and that ‘video does not work very well unless the parties know each other and the stakes are relatively minor’ (Smith 1999: 21). On this, there seems broad agreement,

and there is little evidence at all that video-conferencing has so far been prominently employed in serious negotiation. A trawl of the website of the Canadian foreign ministry, which has long prided itself at being at the forefront of space-age diplomacy, seems to confirm this. In connection with negotiations for an agreement to coordinate enforcement activities between the Canadian and Japanese authorities responsible for regulating commercial competition, there is a reference to the employment of several video-conferencing sessions in 2003, following negotiations *in Ottawa* in the previous November – but that is it. This seems to exemplify the role of video-conferencing in the negotiations between friendly states with the resources to support it: supplementing face-to-face negotiations, especially in the follow-up stage (see Chapter 6), when there is often an emphasis on information exchange, technicalities, and the need for reassurance. Tony Blair used video-conferencing, especially for his regular communications with George W. Bush, who had a video-conference room at his ranch at Crawford in central Texas, as well as in the White House; Blair's successor, Gordon Brown, did likewise.

None of this is to deny that video-conferencing might – and does – serve other useful diplomatic purposes. Some foreign ministries use it to engage with groups at home in order to garner their support, as well as to provide more intimate contact with their embassies abroad. Some of these embassies, such as the Canadian embassies in Berlin and New Delhi, use it to assist their public diplomacy. Some international organizations, including the UN, also use it for internal meetings. But all of this is quite different from using video-conferencing to conduct negotiations between governments.

### **Other means multiply**

One reason why video-conferencing has failed to take off is probably the extraordinary progress that has taken place in other areas of telecommunication, and not only in the mobile phone technology and text messaging that is now so cheap and ubiquitous. Radio and television broadcasters (with 24-hour news channels at their disposal) now reach wider audiences, not least by streaming over the Internet. So do foreign ministry websites, which are now more informative, available in more languages, easier to use, and more numerous. These media can be used for direct communication between states, as well as for communication with their peoples (see Chapter 11).

In a crisis, radio and television channels and foreign ministry websites are particularly valuable if, for example, an urgent 'no change in

policy' message needs to be sent to a large number of allied states simultaneously. The fact that the commitment has been made publicly also gives added reassurance. If all other channels of communication with a rival state or alliance have collapsed, broadcast communications might be indispensable. With its capacity to present visual images of political leaders, ministerial spokespersons, and ambassadors, television broadcasts and webcasts streamed over the Internet are particularly useful because – as with video-conferencing – they can send non-verbal, as well as verbal, messages. Also, there is little risk that these messages will be missed, because certain official monitoring services pick up foreign broadcasts, together with the content of other open source media; they then translate and summarize them with an eye to the special interests of customers in the governments that support them, and those abroad who are friends or are willing to pay. The best known are the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) of the United States and the BBC Monitoring Service, which work in partnership.

Finally, it is necessary to emphasize the impact of electronic mail and the text messaging (SMS) with which it is progressively converging. This has now, more or less, replaced the telegram or cable, and – via Wi-Fi hotspots and, especially, the BlackBerry – has the capacity to place diplomats in continuous contact virtually anywhere. It appears to have been only relatively recently, however, that there has been sufficient confidence in its security – when especially enhanced – to permit its use at head of state and government level. Bill Clinton tested the medium with a message to the Swedish prime minister, Carl Bildt, on 16 February 1994 (Patterson: 59). Later, however, there were reports that Israeli intelligence had tapped into his emails, and the Bush White House developed an acute allergy to electronic mail; George W. Bush never used emails at all (*Washington Post* 2007). This changed with the inauguration, in January 2009, of President Barack Obama, who wears a BlackBerry on his hip, albeit one with special features, a highly restricted address list and frequently changed personal address. The secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, also uses a BlackBerry (*New York Times* 2009). Whether either of them uses emails for their personal diplomacy, however, is unclear. They probably still prefer the telephone.

Electronic mail and text messaging have brought their own perils, some of which – for example, the risk of impulsive decision-making – are identical to those of telephone diplomacy. However, email probably presents a more serious threat to security. Messages can be accidentally forwarded too easily, and the 'reply to all' facility with a distribution list of thousands is a particular hazard. The latter is not only a particularly



clear security threat, but can also create a perfect email storm with the capacity to capsize a whole service. In January 2009, just such an event caused the US Department of State to threaten employees worldwide with disciplinary action in the event of its careless use. (This threat was issued by means of a cable.) The temptation to diplomats of some countries with poor government email services to use, instead, free web-based services such as Gmail, Yahoo and Hotmail for official business on ministry computers can also be difficult to resist. This is a security threat because of the risk of importing viruses and spyware, and led the Indian foreign ministry to ban it in February 2009. And then there are weak passwords and poorly understood encryption systems, which can easily render email accounts public knowledge. In 2007, such failings were responsible for embarrassing numerous governments – including those of Russia, India, China and Iran – when the login credentials of many email accounts at embassies were published on the Internet by a Swedish hacker (the password for the Iranian embassy in Tunisia was – you guessed it – ‘Tunisia’). Because it makes it so easy for everyone to have their say, this kind of communications technology also weakens, or (depending on your point of view) makes more democratic, the authority structure in foreign ministries and embassies.

## Summary

Direct telecommunication between governments is now a very important channel for the conduct of diplomacy, both in crises and more normal times, despite its risks and limitations. In crises, the telephone is especially valued by allied and friendly states, not least at head of state and government level. Here, it seems to be used chiefly as a vehicle for providing reassurance and intelligence, urging support, explaining attitudes, and agreeing joint responses. Adversaries in a crisis are more likely to use written telecommunication, although use of the telephone might be essential when an opportunity to improve relations is a fleeting one. Video-conferencing has had little impact on the world of serious international negotiations, while, in routine diplomacy, email is now the written mode of telecommunication of choice.

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