

# CROSSROADS

THE MACEDONIAN FOREIGN POLICY JOURNAL



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## DIPLOMACY IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM TOWARDS IMPROVED INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Dimitar MIRCEV, Martina SKOK, Predrag SIMIĆ

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### *21st Century Diplomacy as a Network Diplomacy*

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Philip SEIB, Sieglinde GSTÖHL, Jorge HEINE and Joseph F. TURCOTTE

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### *Contemporary Diplomacy & Global Challenges*

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# Tweeting as Statecraft: How, Against All Odds, Twitter Is Changing the World's Second Oldest Profession

*Jorge HEINE and Joseph F. TURCOTTE*

## Introduction

The literature on digital diplomacy, or e-diplomacy, is growing in leaps and bounds<sup>1</sup>. The electronic revolution has affected this “labor in exile” in a myriad ways, in substance and in form<sup>2</sup>. The purpose of this brief note is to examine one particular platform, Twitter, to explore the manner in which these new tools are affecting the practice of a highly traditional craft, more set in its ways than most.

Twitter has taken diplomacy by storm. Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt has, as of last count, 148,707 followers<sup>3</sup>. He uses Twitter to convey his views on various matters under the sun, and to provide links to his blogs and op-eds. Twitter thus works as a substantive communications medium and as a megaphone of sorts, to amplify the reach of his longer, presumably more analytical pieces. One Latin American Foreign Minister is such an active Twitter user that his nickname

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<sup>1</sup> For one of the earliest studies on the subject, see Dizard Jr., Wilson P. *Digital Diplomacy: US Foreign Policy in the Information Age*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001. See also Batora, Jozef. *Foreign Ministries and the Information Revolution*. Leiden, NL: Martinus Nijhoff, 2008.; Potter, Evan H. *Cyber-Diplomacy: Managing Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002.; Gross-Stein, Janice, ed. *Diplomacy in the Digital Age: Essays in Honour of Ambassador Alan Gottlieb*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2011.; Morozov, Evgeny. “High-Tech Diplomacy”, *Newsweek*, 18 September 2009.; DuPont, Sam. “Digital Diplomacy”, *Foreign Policy*, 3 August 2010.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent discussion of social media and the policy sciences, see, Auer, Matthew R. “The Policy Sciences of Social Media”, *Policy Studies Journal* 39:4, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> See Freeland, Chrystia. “Blending Governance and Twitter”, Reuters, *The New York Times*, 5 April 2012.

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\* Jorge Heine, CIGI Professor of Global Governance, Balsillie School of International Affairs, Wilfrid Laurier University, and Distinguished Fellow, The Centre for International Governance Innovation, Waterloo, Ontario.

\*\* Joseph F. Turcotte, PhD Candidate and SSHRC Doctoral Fellow in Communication & Cultural Studies, York University, Toronto.

is “Twitterman”<sup>4</sup>. Shashi Tharoor, an Indian MP, and former Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, an avid user, with 12,412 tweets, has (in August 2012) 1,468,434 followers, many of them in his home state of Kerala. While in the Indian MFA, his tweets were so provocative that they routinely landed him into trouble. Beyond the preferences of “head honchos” around the world, the use of Twitter and other such digital platforms is being “mainstreamed” for its regular use in a number of MFAs, mainly, though not exclusively, in the Northern Hemisphere. The US State Department has taken the lead in this regard, though the UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is not far behind.

With the full support of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (who does not tweet) the by now legendary duo of Alec Ross, the senior advisor for innovation to the latter, and Jared Cohen, a member of the Department’s Policy Planning staff, have been instrumental in bringing Twitter (among other e-tools) into the daily routines of US diplomats. According to them, the key question in 21<sup>st</sup> century dynamics is not whether it is liberal or conservative, but whether “Is it open or is it closed?”<sup>5</sup>. Far from being mere technical matters, the issues on and around digital diplomacy have tangible political consequences. Not too long ago, the US State Department, faced with making a choice between providing continued financial support to various Iranian opposition groups abroad and allocating it to opposition organizations based inside Iran, to fend off the government’s electronic interference with their social media networks, opted for the latter<sup>6</sup>.

And while one can understand the appeal of Twitter to politicians and activists keen to spread their message in 140 characters or less, it is less obvious why it should be an effective platform in diplomacy. Webpages, e-mail, even blogs, are one thing. In the end, they are instruments to convey content, and it is hard to imagine any modern organization without a webpage and an e-mail address. Blogs, of course, are all over the place, though, according to some studies, two thirds of them are only read by the blogger himself.

But Twitter?

Conceived initially as a tool of private value, Twitter began to be used by individuals telling each other what they were doing and where they found themselves at any given point in time. In response to the question “What’s happening?”, the emphasis was on immediacy, on brevity, and on the personal. Therein lies Twitter’s appeal and the source of its success. Nonetheless, many were put off by the notion

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<sup>4</sup> One country in Latin America where Twitter has made a strong impact is Colombia. The mayor of Bogotá, Gustavo Petro, is accused, on Twitter, of spending more time tweeting than running the capital city. Former president Alvaro Uribe spends much time tweeting criticisms of his successor, President Juan Manuel Santos. See “La Colombie prise de “Twitterpolitik”, *Le Monde*, 19 July 2012, p26.

<sup>5</sup> See Lichtenstein, Jesse. “Digital Diplomacy”, *The New York Times Magazine*, 18 July 2010.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*



that was value in knowing whether Fred (or John, or Bill) was preparing himself a salami sandwich at home. To many, it seemed the epitome of TMI (Too Much Information), or of TME (Too Much E-Content), of the online society run amok. Given the heavy demands on the modern-day diplomat's life, with more and more activities pressed into a single day, and seemingly ever greater budgetary constraints, presumably the last thing FSOs would want is to spend their days communicating with associates about such trivia.

Yet, Twitter soon morphed into something else. Users discovered that they could just as easily ventilate their opinions about upcoming elections as they could about what they were eating, and proceeded accordingly. Given that, quite naturally, users want to reach more people rather than fewer ("It's all about the followers!"), a premium was placed on being as witty, provocative and unpredictable as possible in the sparse 140 characters the medium allows. The greater the provocation, the bigger the response, and the more followers latched on to you. Once again, this mixed uneasily with diplomacy as we have known it. Humor in statecraft, particularly in writing, if it does not fall flat, often backfires. Provocation is generally considered an unfriendly, if not downright hostile act. And the last thing governments want is unpredictability in their foreign relations. All of this goes on top of the highly compressed and immediate nature of Twitter messages, so much at odds with the long-form and reflective character of that long established genre, the diplomatic cable.

Given all these cons, and the initial, well-founded skepticism of many MFAs around the world, why is it that Twitter is thriving in diplomatic circles?

Exhibit A of this success is U.S. Ambassador Michael MacFaul in Moscow. Moscow is not one of the easiest of diplomatic postings, and U.S. diplomats have traditionally been hampered by a variety of limitations, of which getting through the gatekeepers of traditional communications media is but one. Yet, Ambassador Mac Faul, an avid Twitter user, has 32,318 followers. He writes in Russian, and communicates directly with the Russian public. Twitter gives him a country-wide presence that would be difficult to replicate by any other means. His tweets are amplified many times over through the Internet. As befits, the medium, he typically mixes the personal and the political, adding to his forays into policy issues details of his daily life<sup>7</sup>.

How do we explain the paradox of Twitter's success in a craft so ostensibly unsuited to it? Initial premonitions about how dangerous it would be for diplomats to put instantly into a short, snappy sentence whatever first came to their minds, have proven to be unfounded. Although there have been some "foot in the mouth" cases, they have not diminished the growing popularity of the medium.

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<sup>7</sup> See Freeland, *op.cit.*

## From the Network Society to Network Diplomacy

The early 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen a growing number of digital and Internet-based communication media. The ‘network society’ that Manuel Castells and others describe<sup>8</sup> has not only facilitated the rise of new communication technologies and capabilities, it has also altered the scope and complexity of the diplomat’s role:

*Diplomacy today takes place among multiple sites of authority, power, and influence: mainly states, but also including religious organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), multinational corporations, and even individuals, whether they be celebrities, philanthropists, or terrorists.*<sup>9</sup>

Twitter is an Internet-based social-networking service that allows its users to send messages in 140 character instruments to their contacts, or ‘followers’, as well as to the broader Twitter community. These ‘tweets’ are a form of micro-blogging that enables digitally networked communications and information gathering. According to the service’s own webpage, Twitter allows its users to “instantly connect to what’s important to [them]”.<sup>10</sup> This community has grown at an enormous rate. Created and launched in 2006, as of February 2012 Twitter reached over 500 million users<sup>11</sup> with the majority over 35 years old<sup>12</sup> that span the globe, although nearly a quarter of users are located in the United States.<sup>13</sup> Accessible via traditional web browsers and increasingly on apps downloaded to an individual’s mobile phone, the service connects users to a vast network of fellow users disseminating information that is both seemingly trivial as well as informative. Twitter has been celebrated and derided for its simplicity and ability to ‘broadcast’ and/or ‘narrowcast’ a message depending upon the user’s individual preference. Users simultaneously craft messages that are intended for their particular set of followers while also being open, unless technological preference measures are taken, to attracting attention and provoking interaction with the broader Twitter community online. Increasingly dominated by a number of entertainment and sports celebrities, Twitter, as mentioned above, has also taken diplomacy by storm.

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<sup>8</sup> Castells, Manuel. *The Rise of the Network Society*, Second Edition. Oxford: Blackwell, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Cooper, Andrew F. and Jorge Heine, Ramesh Thakur. “Introduction: The Challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Diplomacy”. In Cooper, Heine, and Thakur, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2013, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Twitter.com, accessed 8 August 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Dugan, Lauren. “Twitter to Surpass 500 Million Registered Users on Wednesday”. Mediabistro.com. 21 February 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Pingdom. “Report: Social network demographics in 2012”. Pingdom. 21 August 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Alexa, The Web Information Company. “Twitter Site Statistics”. Alexa.com. Accessed 28 August 2012.

In the remainder of this article, we begin with a survey of the changing social, cultural, and political circumstances of the Information Age. We then examine the expanded role of public diplomacy in an increasingly media-driven social and political environment. This emphasis on public diplomacy from governments across the world furthers the diplomats' interaction with the public on a more visible and individuated basis. Twitter embodies this trend, opening new pathways for social engagement via 'Twitter diplomacy'. We then turn our attention to the benefits and consequences for the diplomatic profession from engaging in more open forms of communication via online social networks.

## **Digital Disruptions: Diplomatic Challenges in the 'All Access' Era**

Describing the transformative potential of digital technologies and networked communications has become a growth industry.<sup>14</sup> While the extent and novelty of these changes are open to debate, what is apparent is that changes *are* happening. The diplomatic profession has not been immune to them. The Wikileaks release of some quarter million United States' diplomatic cables in 2010<sup>15</sup> is but the most glaring instance of how traditional methods of diplomatic practice are being tested by them. The release of these cables laid bare the thoughts of American diplomats and in some cases the machinations of US foreign policy. At a time when supposedly confidential and inherently sensitive information is at risk of being intercepted and disseminated globally, the ability of diplomats to foster and maintain trusting relationships with foreign interlocutors is critical. Missteps in this regard can imperil the work of years if not decades.

The possibility of such massive access to sensitive communications is not the only change that diplomats must adjust to. Contemporary international relations is now the domain of a host or previously excluded or unforeseen actors. Official representatives of nation states are now in increased contact with a host of actors from business, domestic and international civil society, religious and other cultural groups. Elsewhere, Jorge Heine has described this changing relationship as a shift from the traditional 'club' model of diplomacy—wherein diplomats are largely confined to their own peers and fellow government officials—to a 'network' model of diplomacy, which sees diplomats increasingly creating and maintaining

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<sup>14</sup> For a critical response, see Morozov, Evgeny. "The Naked and the TED" *The New Republic*. 2 August 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Shane, Scott and Andrew W. Lehren. "Leaked Cables Offer Raw Look at US Diplomacy". *The New York Times*. 28 November 2010.

relationships with actors outside of the immediate diplomatic community.<sup>16</sup> The diplomatic pace has in turn accelerated as instantaneous communication media and an influx of actors have quickened the speed and extent to which diplomats must operate.<sup>17</sup> Thus, “the advent of the network model is due not only to increased democratization and the growing number of relevant actors for policy-making—all of whom must be ‘kept in the loop’ for ‘things to happen’—but also to the growing interpenetration of different societies”.<sup>18</sup> Diplomats are ideally placed to represent the positions of their governments while abroad. Accessing traditional media outlets as well as emerging decentralized communication routes extends this capacity. While digital technologies have disrupted traditional modes of diplomatic practice, they have also provided new opportunities.

The central task of diplomats in contemporary diplomacy is to project the diplomat’s country’s perspectives into their host country.<sup>19</sup> By bridging the gap between home and host country via an elaborate network, the diplomat can act as a bridge between them and highlight what they share. Diplomacy in the network society requires forging relationships within and across seemingly disparate groups.

With more and more foreign policy decisions being undertaken by heads of state and negotiated by issue-specific technical specialists, the role of the contemporary diplomat is increasingly that of the face, voice, eyes, and ears of the home country. Expanding digital communication technologies multiply the number of actors, interests groups, and individuals diplomats can relate to while also enabling her to access the general public directly, skipping the intermediaries.

## The Rise of Public Diplomacy

Network diplomacy should not be reduced to, nor confused with, public diplomacy. The latter embodies but one subsection of the former. Network diplomacy represents the sum total of efforts deployed by diplomatic representatives to reach out to government and private sector, NGOs and civil society to project their home country’s interests and perspectives. Public diplomacy, on the other hand, embodies efforts to reach out directly to foreign publics, skipping the intermediaries altogether. In an increasingly media- saturated environment, the number of ways to reach out to members of the public has grown exponentially. International and foreign

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<sup>16</sup> Heine, Jorge, “On the Manner of Practising the New Diplomacy”, In Andrew F. Cooper, Brian Hocking and William Maley, eds., *Global Governance and Diplomacy: Worlds Apart?*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 271-287.

<sup>17</sup> Leguey-Feilleux, Jean-Robert. *The Dynamics of Diplomacy*. Boulder: Westview 2009. Ch. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Heine, Jorge. “From Club to Network Diplomacy” In Cooper, Heine, and Thakur, eds. forthcoming 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Heine. *Ibid.*

relations discussions have been affected by this rise in communication possibilities. New 'diplomatic' actors have joined traditional diplomats in competing for public attention. Celebrities such as George Clooney, Bono, and Angelina Jolie, with their attendant cultural *cachet* and presumed influence, have become the faces, voices, and representatives of various causes.<sup>20</sup> These "celebrity diplomats"<sup>21</sup> join a chorus of other voices hoping to attract and influence public attention and action. Public diplomacy has become a way for foreign governments to employ their diplomats in similar but distinct capacities.

As Bruce Gregory describes it, public diplomacy is "an instrument used by states, associations of states, and some sub-state and non-state actors to understand cultures, attitudes, and behaviour; build and manage relationships; and influence thoughts and mobilize actions to advance their interests and values".<sup>22</sup> Public diplomacy is thus but one of the means (albeit an increasingly significant one), by which the practice of network diplomacy becomes manifest. This helps to democratize foreign policy discussions by addressing the members of a country's public. It must be distinguished "from lobbying, which is focused on policy-making circles, public diplomacy aimed to influence broader opinion in foreign societies".<sup>23</sup> For the most part, these efforts take a proactive approach towards seeding and incubating ideas in public forums in the hopes of generating broad-based public support for foreign policy proposals. At the same time, these efforts work to catalyze or counteract public opinions about a home country. That said, public diplomacy is not an entirely one-sided conversation.

Jan Melissen reminds us that "public diplomacy today is increasingly based on listening to 'the other', that it is about dialogue rather than monologue, and is not just aimed at short-term policy objectives but also at long-term relationship-building".<sup>24</sup> Particularly for Western countries, public diplomacy has become a form of engagement with a broader spectrum of the public than had previously been the case. This engagement includes collaborative relationships with a multiplicity of stakeholders who are addressed in a manner more akin to partners than to passive recipients of promotional messages. These public diplomacy initiatives work to include broad perspectives and support from various actors in order to

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<sup>20</sup> Cooper, Andrew F. *Celebrity Diplomacy*. New York: Paradigm Publishers. 2008; and Cooper, Andrew F. and Joseph F. Turcotte. "Celebrity Diplomats as Mobilizers? Celebrities and Activism in a Hypermediated Time". In Tristan Borer, (ed.) *Media and Mobilization: The (de)Mobilizing Effects of Media Portrayals of Human Rights Activism*. London, UK: Zed Books. 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Cooper, *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Gregory, Bruce. "American Public Diplomacy: Enduring Characteristics, Elusive Transformation", *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*. 6:3/4 2011, p. 353.

<sup>23</sup> Melissen, Jan. "Public Diplomacy Revisited". In Cooper, Heine and Thakur, eds., forthcoming 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Melissen. *Ibid.*

garner support for certain initiatives. Public diplomacy in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is increasingly designed to build up support from members of the public, civil society and business groups.

## **Social Engagement: Twitter Diplomacy**

At a time when both network and public diplomacy are viewed as necessary components of many foreign policy strategies, emerging communication and media technologies are enabling new ways of addressing and engaging the public. In the wired world the contemporary media landscape now includes a number of digital and Internet-based communication outlets. The term ‘Web 2.0’ is now used to describe a number of social networking platforms that allow users to personalize their online communication outlets and publish them with little or no oversight from institutionalized gatekeepers. Web 2.0 platforms, including blogs, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, Twitter, and a host of similar and emerging sites, facilitate the interaction between individuals as well as organizations. For diplomats, these media channels allow direct access to and communication with the public as well as targeted communities of users. Web 2.0 diplomatic engagement is in line with the modes of practice and goals of both network and public diplomacy.

Leading the charge in these innovative online engagement strategies has been the United States. Fergus Hanson describe the US’s efforts as “eDiplomacy ... the use of the web and new ICTs to carry out diplomatic objectives”.<sup>25</sup> Individual social media tools and Web 2.0 do not constitute the totality of Internet-enabled diplomatic efforts, nor do they replace traditional practices. Social media and Web 2.0 represent only a fraction of the work being undertaken by foreign ministries and diplomats. Alongside these social media initiatives, the US State Department operates a number of interagency and open network services to communicate information to relevant stakeholders at home and abroad. These efforts include sources and services that help shape conversations globally. Tapping this global network and seeding this information allows US goals, aspirations, and norms to circulate. However, especially in terms of the US’s public diplomacy social media and Web 2.0 have become integral components of interacting with foreign publics.

As Hanson notes:

*“Social media has dramatically shifted the ground rules of public diplomacy. In the past a competent diplomat might have been able to reach hundreds and possibly thousands of individuals through external engagement.*

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<sup>25</sup> Hanson, Ferguson. “Revolution @ State: The Spread of eDiplomacy”, Lowy Institute for International Policy. 2012. p. 3.

*For a rare few, it might have been possible to occasionally reach hundreds of thousands or millions of people via newspapers, radio and television, but that required going through gatekeepers.*

*Social media has changed this old dynamic. State now effectively operates its own global media empire reaching more than eight million people directly through its 600 plus social media platforms. To provide a sense of the scale of this operation, this reach is as large as the paid subscriber base of the ten largest circulating daily newspapers in the United States, combined (although the impact and influence of the two platforms is likely quite different).<sup>26</sup>*

This expanded reach allows diplomats, staff, and foreign ministries to pursue their objectives without relying upon media industry elites for column inches or broadcast time. The two-way nature of social media communication also allows for direct feedback. This communication loop is achieved at a fraction of the cost of previous media techniques.

The latest trend in the ongoing transformation of diplomatic practice is the increasing use of Twitter. That a micro-blogging web service such as Twitter should become a key means of interaction in a profession built upon nuance seems odd. Limited by the technological characteristics of the medium, diplomatic professionals must make due with individual messages that are limited to 140 characters or less. However, the networked nature of the Internet and its hyperlink culture allows diplomats to pepper messages with links to longer pieces of writing, video, audio, and a vast array of multimedia offerings. Also, the brevity necessary for engaging on Twitter means that diplomats and staff can interact with the public and other stakeholders without dedicating copious amounts of time, if they so desire.

Twitter is a dynamic and interactive medium. It has the benefits of broadcasting media (disseminating messages to large audiences), and of interpersonal communication (enabling responses from receivers and direct communication and interaction). Tellingly, Twitter has moved from the stationary PC to a variety of devices. Currently, a host of mobile, digital, networked technologies (MDNTs) are reorienting individual's communication and transportation patterns.<sup>27</sup> These technologies allow individuals to remain connected to networks of communication and information while moving through their daily lives. With its mobile applications, Twitter can be accessed and used while on the go, allowing diplomats to connect with individuals even when they do not have access to a traditional PC. Twitter users can now be addressed in new ways as well as in new places. This has expanded

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<sup>26</sup> Hanson. *Ibid.* p. 17.

<sup>27</sup> Turcotte, Joseph F. and M. Len Ball. "All Transportation is Local: Mediatization, Mobilization and Emerging Mentalities", *Transfers – Interdisciplinary Journal of Mobility Studies*. Special Issue edited by Dorit Müller and Heike Weber. forthcoming.



the ways in which embassies, consulates, and foreign ministries can interact with the citizens of their host nations as well as with visitors from their home countries. Consular information and services can be transmitted and accessed from mobile devices, allowing the foreign ministry staff to provide its citizens with an increased array of opportunities for navigating daily life while traveling. These broader eDiplomacy tools can be disseminated using Twitter and other social media or Web 2.0 outlets, improving the overall integration of a diplomatic post with both its host and home countries.

These capabilities allow foreign ministries to react and respond to emerging social issues and events in a flexible manner. Robert Ford, the US Ambassador to Syria, has used his Twitter presence to bring the condition on-the-ground in Syria to domestic and international attention. Ford has posted images of “tanks moving on cities and a pipeline fire spreading toxic fumes” and has responded to misinformation that has been spread by pro-government sources.<sup>28</sup> Ford’s actions demonstrate the possibility of using social media tools including Twitter and Facebook to address issues of critical importance without going through traditional, and at times restrictive, communications media. These tools can be used to advance specific causes, such as the US’s pro-Internet freedom policies by providing links and information for services that allow foreign citizens to bypass state-imposed filters and other restrictive technologies.<sup>29</sup>

The Indian MEA has also been at the forefront of deploying Twitter. It is allowed for heads of mission, and has already proven its usefulness. During the 2011 popular uprising in Bahrain, the Indian ambassador relied on Twitter to keep the Indian resident community abreast of developments. As India’s former ambassador to Argentina, Rengaraj Viswanathan, known for using the full panoply of Web 2.0 tools, puts it, “(Twitter) is short and quick. I pass news and views of others, mostly. Plus also to publicize my articles and speeches. When you want others to know something quickly in a short form, it is an ideal tool”<sup>30</sup>.

It is thus not difficult to see why many diplomats favor Twitter. It is short, crisp and informal—precisely the sort of communication favored today, particularly by the young, who view e-mail as already slightly *passé*. In a world in which “time is power”, tweeting makes it possible to reach a large number of people in a minimum of time<sup>31</sup>. Much as frontline politicians find themselves under enormous digital and media pressure to be always available for commenting or reacting to the developments of the day, as diplomacy changes from the “club” to

<sup>28</sup> Keleman, Michelle. “Twitter Diplomacy: State Department 2.0” NPR: All Things Considered. 2012.

<sup>29</sup> BBC.” Paper says after sanctions, US using ‘digital diplomacy’ against Iran”. BBC Monitoring Service. 8 September 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Personal communication, 28 August 2012.

<sup>31</sup> See Jochen Bittner, “Zeit ist Macht”, *Die Zeit*, 26 July 2012, pp.8-9.



the “network” model, something similar, albeit on a smaller scale, is happening to heads of mission, at least to the most active ones.

And here we can distinguish at least three levels of Twitter use:

- a) *Basic:* This is tweeting to convey official information—speeches, press releases or consular matters. Peru’s MFA (and many others) for example, has an official Twitter account at headquarters that is deployed in such a manner.
- b) *Intermediate:* This entails a more personalized approach— with heads of mission recommending recent articles in the press and otherwise highlighting events of interest, in what we might call the “Viswanathan approach”, with the diplomat as a largely (though not totally) neutral, media guide.
- c) *Advanced:* In this case, diplomats participate fully in the national and international debate. Not only do they not shy away from polemical subjects, but they actively pursue them, courting controversy and thus increasing their number of followers and their impact. This is certainly the trickiest and potentially the most dangerous type of “diplo-tweeting” ( as it can easily land its users in hot water ) but also the most rewarding.

Jon Benjamin, the UK’s ambassador to Chile, is a prime example of the latter. Though the ever steeper budgetary cuts of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) have meant that the traditional diplomatic means to curry favor with the host nation’s opinion makers (embassy dinners and receptions, invitations to journalists to visit the UK, cultural events) have been drastically reduced, he has developed one of the highest profiles of the 70-odd members of the diplomatic corps posted in Santiago. This he has done by using to the hilt Web 2.0 tools, including Twitter. With 1628 tweets (mostly in Spanish, though also in English) and 7584 followers (in August 2012), he has made quite a splash. Although he writes for the press, and make himself otherwise available to the mainstream media, it could well be argued that tweeting is the driving force of his success. Through it, he champions causes as controversial (in a society as conservative as Chile’s, where, until a few years ago, divorce was not an option) as gay rights, opines on the latest film about Margaret Thatcher, questions the decisions of MERCOSUR on the Falklands/Malvinas and otherwise keeps himself very much in the center of Chile’s national debate. For the 2012 Olympics, he traveled to his native London, from where he acted as a self-appointed reporter, tweeting on the Games for his largely Chilean followers.

While people may have different opinions on Benjamin’s various stances on the issues of the day ( he is regularly attacked by conservative columnists, who differ from his views on gay rights), it cannot be argued that his unorthodox approach

has not served him and his country well. Through Twitter, Benjamin projects the image of a modern, hip Britain, at the cutting edge of social change.

In many MFAs, the intermediate and advanced uses of Twitter are still not allowed, and for good reasons. By definition, the use of such a tool of informal, quick comments, is seen as threatening to an established order in which often the only person authorized to speak for the ministry is the Minister himself. It is true that “words are like arrows”, and once spoken, cannot be taken back. Diplomats, trained from early on in the use of the written word (as Sir Harold Nicolson put it, “diplomacy is a written rather than a verbal art”) must thus be especially careful with what they write and take responsibility for it. That said, not to be present in the Twitter-sphere in this day and age entails giving up an important part of the public debate realm to others, something MFAs should ponder before keeping those restrictions in place.

More and more, using Twitter allows FSOs to connect to domestic stakeholders and to promote the objectives of their home government. Opening the diplomatic profession to more intimate and interactive forms of communication serves to democratize the ways in which information can be accessed and generated. Yet, the potential of digital technologies for facilitating innovative forms of diplomacy is not an unalloyed blessing.

## **The Potential Consequences of ‘Open’ Engagement**

For a profession steeped in tradition and discretion, the ‘opening up’ of diplomacy via tools like Twitter has its pitfalls. A mistimed tweet can trigger unintended consequences. The onslaught of emerging technologies can baffle even experienced practitioners of the craft. Swedish foreign minister Carl Bildt discovered the unintentional consequences of a message that does not sit well with the sensibilities of the global, online community. Prior to the 2012 World Economic Forum Bildt was criticized by a tweet deemed to be insensitive: “Leaving Stockholm and heading for Davos. Looking forward to World Food Program dinner tonight. Global hunger is an urgent issue! #davos.”<sup>32</sup> The irony of a well-placed diplomat tweeting a missive about a dinner that would be unimaginable to many of the people the meeting intends to assist was not lost on the members of the so-called ‘Twittersphere’. Bildt was criticized for his seeming insensitivity to the plight of some of the poorest members of the global community, serving to derail his well-intentioned efforts. Communication management and message foresight is an integral component of operating in online environments. Diplomats and their

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<sup>32</sup> Bryant, Nick. “E-Diplomacy: Foreign Policy in 140 Characters”. BBC News Magazine. 17 July 2012.

staff must carefully construct their messages in order to minimize any unintended meanings that may be derived by a diverse number of stakeholders.

Engaging with previously unaddressed groups and individuals dictates sensitivity to different meanings and cultural norms. Using Twitter diplomacy also entails recognizing the unintentional consequences it may generate. Evgeny Morozov highlights the unintended consequences that may arise when digital and Internet-based technologies are used to promote foreign goals and ideals: "The authorities in target countries might stiffen censorship and impose even tighter restrictions on the use of Internet. The threat of foreign interference might even trigger a crackdown on dissenters in some countries".<sup>33</sup> The US's promotion of Internet freedom may provide the impetus for repressive regimes to further their efforts to restrict access to information and freedom of expression in online environments. Digital technologies can be used to further repress, manipulate, and reinforce existing inequities.

The security of users and of the information must be considered in order for the potential of digital technologies to be realized. Digital technologies can be used to coordinate responses to insurgencies and protests. Posting information and intentions in open and accessible forums allows responses to be crafted and measures to be enacted. Digital surveillance is increasingly important as counterintelligence operations look to the public musings of diplomats and foreign ministry staff for opportunities to influence decisions and manage intentions. The security of one's digital presence must also be maintained so that these media channels are not open to nefarious abuses.<sup>34</sup> While the growth of Twitter diplomacy has entailed a number of benefits, these emerging media open new possibilities for the spread of misinformation and the interception of private communications.

## **Conclusion: Making Diplomacy Work in the Digital Age**

Twitter diplomacy is but one component of a broader trend towards integrating digital communications technologies into diplomatic practice. Academics and practitioners alike should be wary of falling prey to technological determinism and putting too much faith in Twitter or other eDiplomacy practices. Digital media and Internet-based technologies are not a panacea. They are best employed as a means for expanding and extending diplomatic practices and negotiations into new areas and social settings. Spurred by the accelerated tempo of modern life, and by the desire to engage members of the public, the use of Twitter is just

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<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Chernenko, Yelena. "An Interview with Alec Ross, Senior Advisor for Innovation to US Secretary of State" WPS: What the Papers Say. 15 September 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Pinkerton, Alasdair and Stephen Young, Klaus Dodds. "Weapons of Mass Communication: The Securitization of Social Networking Sites" *Political Geography* 30. 2011, pp. 115-117.

another expression of the switch from club to network diplomacy and the need to reach out to a larger number of stakeholders. That diplomats and politicians engage with a medium that is often decried for its fleeting, ephemeral nature may come as a surprise. In an online environment where it is often the loudest and most provocative voices that garner the most traction and attention, diplomacy may seem out of place. Yet, the point is a different one. The changes brought about by the electronic and media revolution over the past two decades are of such magnitude that not even a traditional craft steeped in centuries-old customs and patterns of behavior, such as diplomacy, is able to avoid them.<sup>35</sup> The considerable pressures on the diplomatic profession, considered by some as anachronistic (in the words of Ross Perot, “embassies are relics of the days of sailing ships”) makes the motto “adapt or die” an especially apt one, as diplomacy comes to terms with the challenges of the new century.

Thus, Twitter and other social media and Web 2.0 platforms are key tools to make the transition from “club” to “network diplomacy”. Social and emerging media will play an important role in the daily functions of diplomats and foreign ministries. In years ahead, the challenge for diplomats will be to manage the emergence of new technologies in order to better represent their home governments and interact more effectively with their host nation.

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Copelad, Daryl. “Digital Technology”. In Cooper, Heine, and Thakur, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming, 2013.