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► **To cite this version:**

Nicolas De La Grandville, Béatrice Heuser, Richard Jones, Lori Maguire, Paul Patin, et al.. Diplomacy in the Era of Digital Communications. Colloque States of Criticism / Disciplinary Crossings, Université de Paris 8, Saint-Denis, 19 novembre 2011, 2014, Saint-Denis, France. pp.159-165. hal-03185312

HAL Id: hal-03185312

<https://hal.science/hal-03185312>

Submitted on 19 May 2021

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Nicolas de la Grandville, Beatrice Heuser, Richard Jones, Lori Maguire, Paul Patin, Raphaël Ricaud, « Diplomacy in the Age of Digital Communications » dans “Naming and Narrating”, *Transferts critiques et dynamiques des savoirs* n° 1, 2014, pp. 155-179

Diplomacy in the Era of Digital Communications

Round Table

University of Paris 8

19 November 2011

Participants :

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Directeur, chef du Protocole de la Commission européenne

Nicolas de La Grandville a obtenu sa Licence et maîtrise de droit international et européen, à Paris II, 1984-1985. Il est aussi diplômé de l'Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris, et ancien élève de l'ENA, Promotion Marc Bloch.

Avant d'être chef du Protocole de la Commission européenne, il a occupé plusieurs postes dont ceux de Secrétaire adjoint des Affaires étrangères, 1987; Volontaire du service national en administration (VSNA), Délégation française à la réunion de Vienne de la CSCE, 1988-1989; Troisième secrétaire à la Représentation de la France aux négociations de Vienne de désarmement conventionnel, 1989-1992; Secrétaire des Affaires étrangères (Orient), 1990; Chargé de mission auprès du Directeur d'Europe, 1992-1993, puis auprès du Secrétaire Général adjoint 1993-1994; Détaché auprès de l'École Nationale d'Administration, 1993-1997; Chargé de mission au Secrétariat général du Gouvernement, juin 1997 – octobre 1998; Conseiller diplomatique au Cabinet du Président du Sénat, octobre 1998 – août 2001; Deuxième conseiller près l'Ambassade de France en Espagne, août 2001 – août 2004; Deuxième conseiller à la Représentation permanente de la France auprès de l'Union Européenne, Bruxelles, septembre 2004 – avril 2007 : conseiller en charge du processus euro-méditerranéen (septembre 2004 – mars 2005) ; Porte-parole, conseiller de presse et de communication (mars 2005 – mai 2007); Conseiller technique à la cellule diplomatique de la Présidence de la République (juin 2007 – février 2008); Directeur-adjoint du Protocole au Ministère des Affaires étrangères et européennes (février 2008 – août 2010).

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Beatrice Heuser a obtenu son B.A. en Histoire et sa Maîtrise en Histoire Internationale à l'Université de Londres, et son Doctorat en Sciences Politique à l'Université d'Oxford, puis son Habilitation en Histoire moderne de l'Université Phillipine à Marbourg. De 1991 à 2003 elle enseignait au Département d'Études de Guerre, King's College, Université de Londres, où elle tenait depuis 2001 la Chaire en Relations Internationales et Études Stratégiques. En 1997-1998 elle travaillait au Quartier Général de l'OTAN à Bruxelles. De 2003 à 2007 elle était Directrice de la Recherche au Bureau de Recherche d'Histoire Militaire de la Bundeswehr. Elle a aussi enseigné en France à l'Université de Reims et à l'École supérieure de Journalisme à Lille, et en Allemagne à l'Université de Potsdam et l'Université de la *Bundeswehr* à côté de Munich. En 2010 elle était boursière de la Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme à Paris, et en 2011/2012 elle était professeure invitée, d'abord à l'Université de Paris 8 (St Denis), puis avec une Chaire Dupront à l'Université de Paris IV (Sorbonne).

Beatrice Heuser a publié plusieurs livres et beaucoup d'articles sur la stratégie et la mentalité ("culture"), des relations internationales, l'histoire de la guerre et paix entre États, y inclus plusieurs livres et articles sur la Stratégie Nucléaire et l'OTAN. Elle est aussi auteur de *Penser la Stratégie* (Eds Picard, 2013).

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Deputy Director of the International Energy Agency and former U.S. Ambassador

Richard Henry Jones served as an American diplomat for 32 years and as Deputy Executive Director of the International Energy Agency for five years. During his diplomatic career he served as United States Ambassador to Israel (2005–2008), Senior Advisor to the Secretary of State and Coordinator for Iraq Policy (February–September 2005), Ambassador to Kuwait (2001–2004), Chief Policy Officer and Deputy Administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad (2003–04), Ambassador to Kazakhstan (1998–2001), and Ambassador to Lebanon (1996–1998). Earlier in his career Jones was twice posted to the US embassy in Riyadh (1984–86, 1989–92) and also served in Paris (1980–83) and Tunis (1983–84). He was director of the Division of Developed Country Trade (1987–1989) in the State Department, and later director of its Office of Egyptian Affairs (1993–94). Jones was born at Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana. He received his Bachelor of Science degree with distinction in mathematics from Harvey Mudd College in Claremont, California and earned masters and doctoral degrees in business/statistics from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He is literate in Arabic, French, German, and Russian. He has been awarded two U.S. patents and served on the board of the Saudi Arabian International School in Riyadh.

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Lori Maguire is currently professor of British and American Studies at the University of Paris 8 (Vincennes-St. Denis) and at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris (Sciences Po). She received her doctorate in modern history at St. Antony's College, University of Oxford and her *habilitation* (advanced doctorate) at the University of Paris-Sorbonne (Paris 4). She has published extensively both in French and English. Her main focus has been on the political history and foreign policy of Britain and the United States as well as on the presentation of the Cold War in popular culture.

Paul PATIN

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Paul Patin joined the United States Information Agency (subsequently merged into the Department of State in 1999) in January 1988. His overseas postings include – Douala, and Yaounde, Cameroon – 1989-1992, Bujumbura, Burundi – 1992-1994, Harare, Zimbabwe – 1988-1989, and 1994-1997, Tel Aviv, Israel – 2001-2005, Cape Town, South Africa – 2005-2009, and Paris, France – 2009-2012.

He has been at the US Mission to the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, since July 2013. He has also been posted to Washington, DC, 1997-2001 and again in 2012-13, both times in the Bureau of African Affairs. He has worked in public diplomacy/public affairs throughout his career as a foreign service officer.

Raphaël RICAUD

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Raphaël RICAUD est professeur agrégé et docteur à l'université de Paris Ouest où il enseigne l'anglais aux étudiants non spécialistes (Sciences Economiques, Droit & Science Politique, Sciences et Techniques des Activités Physiques et Sportives) et la civilisation américaine aux étudiants de Langues Etrangères Appliquées et de Langues et Civilisations Etrangères.

Sa recherche porte sur la projection extraterritoriale de l'image des Etats-Unis à des fins de politique étrangère, actuellement désignée par l'appellation *public diplomacy*.

Parmi les publications récentes, on notera : [“Emotions, Media and Political Campaign” by Professor Ann Crigler](#) Actualité de la Recherche, *Transatlantica*, Compte-rendu du séminaire LabTop du 27 juin 2011, université de Paris 8 Vincennes St Denis et "De la vérité comme propagande sous l'Administration Truman", *Revue Française d'Etudes Américaines*, 2012:3, dossier Vérité.

Abstract:

In November 2011 a round table was organized at the University of Paris 8 to assess the impact of new media on diplomacy. In order to get a well-rounded view of the question both academics and career diplomats participated. The academics were all specialists of international relations. Two American diplomats and a French one also participated and they were each highly experienced diplomats who had held a number of positions. Discussion ranged over subjects like the impact of Wikileaks, social media, and internet. We asked them what changes they had seen in diplomacy and what difficulties and advantages they saw arising from these changes, among other subjects.

“Diplomacy in the Era of Digital Communications”

Lori Maguire: In November 2011 a round table was organized at the University of Paris 8 to assess the impact of new media on diplomacy. In order to get a well-rounded view of the question both academics and career diplomats participated.

Let us begin by defining our terms. According to Merriam Webster “diplomacy” is “the art and practice of conducting negotiations between nations”. It generally, therefore, takes place at a very high level and, because vital national interests are often involved, much of it has traditionally been held in secret. “New media” is much more difficult to describe, and there is no standard definition. Essentially it involves the impact of the internet, notably through websites, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, among other things. In particular, on the international scene, new media have been associated with democratic movements, notably the protest movement that developed after the Iranian elections of 2009 (which received the nickname of “Twitter revolution”) and the “Arab Spring” of 2010-2011. It has, therefore, been associated with openness (often against the will of the regime concerned). There is an inherent tension between the foreign policy conducted by international elites and the openness and availability of new media – a point that Raphaël Ricaud will develop in more detail later.

But while this facet of the question has attracted a lot of attention, in many other areas diplomacy and new media can work in harmony. The impact in public diplomacy, for example, has been as profound. Public diplomacy is a term used to describe what are essentially propaganda activities by a government towards the population of foreign countries. To quote one of the standard texts on diplomacy, it aims to assert indirect influence on foreign governments “by appealing over the heads of those governments to the people with influence upon them”.² It tries to establish a positive vision of one nation among the citizens of another.

The United States pioneered public diplomacy, notably during the Cold War, in order to counter anti-American rhetoric and improve the nation’s image. Most countries now practice some form of public diplomacy, and certainly much of the job of a modern ambassador involves this.

Public diplomacy can take many forms. It may be as simple as sponsoring a film festival or as advanced as the American Peace Corps which sends volunteers to under-developed countries throughout the world to work in various sectors there like health, education or technology. An important element clearly concerns the dissemination of information about the nation in question and this has been greatly facilitated by the development of new media. A large number of embassies now have websites catering to both their own citizens (supplying information on passport renewal, among other things) and non-citizens (how to get a visa, for example). Such websites also generally highlight recent developments in the country and activities by the ambassador in the host nation. Many embassies also have Facebook pages and Twitter accounts to increase their profile.

In the coming pages, three career diplomats will discuss the impact of new media on their jobs – what has changed and what remains the same. Two academics will also analyse the question from their point of view. We asked them to discuss a number of aspects of the question. Has the actual job of being a diplomat changed because of new media? What challenges do these developments present? What particular difficulties must diplomats today be sensitive to? What are the problems and possibilities of these new media and what is changing on a day-to-day basis? What is the

² G.R. Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, 4th edition, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p.182

impact of Wikileaks and how has it effected the actual work of diplomacy? We also asked the diplomats for any ideas about what they would like to do.

Raphaël Ricaud: In light of recent political upheaval across the globe, one may wonder whether the advent of new media has affected the conduct of diplomacy. In order to consider this, let us start by defining new media first, and then diplomacy. New media are fast, digital, dense, modifiable, networkable and interactive technologies. They are more democratic, in terms of source, content, and audience, than traditional media.³ Last but not least, they are new. Although most of us are awed by their novelty, we must keep in mind that they are nothing but tools used to deliver information. Diplomacy –a completely different matter—is the art and practice of conducting negotiations between representatives of states.⁴ Etymologically, the Latin *diploma* means folded document. Hence, when one uses the term “diplomacy”, there is always an element of secrecy involved.

So on the one hand, new media is a term which encapsulates the democratization of information dissemination. On the other, diplomacy is the relationship between a happy few, and the relative secrecy of their exchanges. There are tensions between new technologies and diplomacy. There is openness versus secrecy, democratization versus the elect, information versus relationships, and what is public versus what is private. With these tensions in mind, let us ponder two questions. The first is: at what point in history did new media and diplomacy meet? The second is: can new media foster geopolitical change? A recent case study will illustrate the latter point.

At what point in history did new media and diplomacy meet?

It is a truism to say that new media are only new when compared to older ones. Yet, for the benefit of younger generations, let it be remembered that at one point, the radio was a new medium. Therefore, by broadening the historical scope, one could argue that the encounter between new media and diplomacy goes back decades.

³ Terry Flew, *New Media: An Introduction*, Oxford Higher Education, Oxford, 2007, p.1

⁴ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diplomacy>

After World War One, United States president Woodrow Wilson called for a change in the diplomacy between nations: he championed less secrecy.⁵ But his vision did not materialize immediately. On top of his radical proposal for transformation in the conduct of international affairs, the mass-production of radio sets and the adequate International Relations environment were needed for the change in diplomacy to occur. In other words, the aftermath of the Great War was too soon. It was the advent and democratization of radio transmitters and the Cold War context that pushed diplomacy towards less secrecy. The combination of these three factors led to what we'd call "public diplomacy" today.

Public diplomacy during the Cold War: where new media and diplomacy meet?

Even though there is no agreed-upon definition of what public diplomacy is⁶, let us consider a few consensual *topoi*. Former USIA / USIS employees claim that the term encapsulates what they did during the Cold War. Among such FSO's, some like to think of public diplomacy as the US projecting **information** abroad⁷. In International Relations terms, they are called realists. Others believe it was more a case of establishing lasting **relationships** with the peoples of foreign countries⁸. In IR terms, they are called idealists. In both cases, the tough-minded (the realists) and the tender-minded (the idealists) agree that their action enabled the US government to "tell its story" to the rest of the world, aiming at peoples more than governments (hence the term "public"). In turn, they believe public diplomacy benefited American interests. Thus, public diplomacy during the Cold War can be summed up as America telling its story to the rest of the world, by way of information, or of cultural relations.

How then were new-media involved? One example of information dissemination was the broadcasting of American radio programs over foreign airwaves⁹, which depended on the technology of the time (powerful transmitters and their capacity to evade jamming). An example

⁵ http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/fourteen_points.shtml

⁶ John Robert Kelley, "Between 'Take-offs' and 'Crash Landings', Situational Aspects of Public Diplomacy", in Nancy Snow & Philip M. Taylor (ed), *The Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, Routledge, New York, 2009, p. 73.

⁷ R.S. Zaharna, "Mapping out a Spectrum of Public Diplomacy Initiatives, Information and Relational Communication Frameworks", in Nancy Snow & Philip M. Taylor (ed), *The Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, Routledge, New York, 2009, p. 86.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The most famous radio station to do so was the Voice of America (VOA).

of the US building relationships with foreign peoples was the case of exchange programs.¹⁰ Whereas the VOA required the use of the latest technology, Fulbrighters did not. But in both cases, it was the geopolitical context that created a need for public diplomacy. New media were only a tool, one among many to carry out that public diplomacy.

The new public diplomacy: where newer media and newer diplomacy meet?

What about new media and public diplomacy in the 21st century? First, let us acknowledge that the new media are indeed *new* media. They have changed the way and the time-frame within which we communicate. They have decentralized the propagation of information, created myriads of outlets and unearthed niche target audiences.

Meanwhile, the international environment has also evolved. The Cold War offered a bilateral world-view in which information was either that of the East (state-controlled propaganda) or of the West (supposedly objective news). In all cases, information was a scarce resource. Conversely, the post 9/11-environment is saturated with information, and broadcasters are fighting for ways to get people's attention. Attention, not information, is today's scarce resource.¹¹ And the world has gone from being bilateral to unilateral to multilateral. Plus, the authority of States is challenged by a variety of actors, or networks of actors.

All the while, diplomacy has evolved too. Diplomats are more and more expected to engage with regular people, and with an ever-expanding network of people. Embassies now include Twitter, Facebook and the likes in their arsenal of information dissemination and network-building tools. Some embassies have even been virtualized.¹² This is sometimes called public diplomacy 2.0. But what is the link between these three phenomena? Is it because of technology that public diplomacy

¹⁰ One such program has since become a household name: the Fulbright International Educational Exchange program.

¹¹ Bruce Gregory, *Upgrading Public Diplomacy's Tools – New Challenges, Old Realities*, NATO Public Diplomacy Workshop Brussels, Belgium July 2 - 3, 2007,

<http://www.gwu.edu/~smpa/faculty/documents/NATOPDD_PDTtools_7-2-071.pdf>

¹² "In the spring of 2007 the Maldives and Sweden opened the first 'embassies' (or cultural centers) in the 'virtual world' of Second Life (launched in 2003)" in Nicholas J. Cull, "WikiLeaks, public diplomacy 2.0 and the state of digital public diplomacy", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* (2011) number 7, p. 4.

has evolved? Is it because of the international environment? Or have all changes occurred simultaneously? In order to try to make sense of it all, let us consider a case-study.

Can new media foster geopolitical change? The case of Tunisia in 2011.

When one mentions new media and political upheaval, the Arab spring immediately comes to mind. Yet how is one to know exactly what happened in the entire Arab world in the span of a season? Focusing on a single country would be more appropriate. Dr. Taoufik Djebali, associate professor at the University of Caen, has both personal expertise and propositional knowledge in the Tunisian upheaval of January 2011. This is what he told me.

To start off, he does not believe that what happened in Tunisia in 2011 was a “revolution” proper. For him, it was more a case of people being in revolt. In other words, Dr. Djebali points out that it was not ideology that made the people take to the street; it was the unbearable reality of every-day life. People had been angry for years. All that was needed was a spark. The spark came in the shape of street-vendor Mohamed Bou Azizi, who set himself on fire to protest the confiscation of his wares by a municipal official. This generated, in turn, demonstrations and riots throughout Tunisia. The turning point, according to Taoufik Djebali, was when the protests reached the streets of the capital (which technically meant that even the upper middle-class and the elite joined the protesters). This was when Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia and resigned.

What got the upper-middle class and the elite involved? The answer is: new and traditional media. Cell phones spread word-of-mouth information and unbearable pictures and short films of the extent of the repression. The Internet further disseminated these pictures. Al Jazeera picked up on these stories and relayed them. So, the news went from being local to national to regional to international (France 24 propagated the news as well).

But the new media are not only about technology. They are also about users. This revolt could not have happened without the younger Tunisian generation¹³, which is literally addicted to the Internet. This window to the world has generated nothing short of an upheaval in Tunisian youth

¹³ To describe the degree of youth implication, Al-Najma Zidjaly has coined the expression “youthquake”.

mentalities and expectations, and changed the way they challenge authority as well. The Tunisian diaspora also played an important part in contributing to the world-wide spread of the information, which in turn shocked the international community. Finally, this could not have happened without infrastructures. Cyber-café, affordable Internet connections, wide-geographical coverage also contributed to the revolt. Ironically, it was one of Ben Ali's daughters (Cyrine), who presides over the leading Internet provider in Tunisia, who enabled such coverage in the first place, and begged him not to shut the Web down during the revolts.

Given the role the new media played in the Arab Spring, one could wonder whether the US might have in fact been "leading from behind". We know that over the past ten years, Washington adopted public diplomacy 2.0 because going from real diplomacy to virtual diplomacy might cut costs.¹⁴ Then, a bet was made. The cyber-optimists counseling US leaders anticipated that the Internet and mobile technology would take hold even in the world's most remote regions.¹⁵ Once the infrastructures developed, it was hoped that such media would help spread democracy.

Is that what happened? We can only speculate on whether the US played a part in the Arab Spring, comments Djebali. Historians thirty years down the line will study recently-opened archives and have a documented opinion on this. For the time being, there is no way to tell. What we do know is that until recently, negotiations were being held with Ben Ali or his government, but not with the people of Tunisia. In other words, public diplomacy 2.0 does not replace traditional diplomacy. And sometimes, they have separate objectives.

Conclusion:

At the end of the day, to what extent has the advent of new media affected the conduct of diplomacy? My answer is that only the combination of the international environment and new technologies impact diplomacy. Technology alone does not. What is more, if one considers public

¹⁴ Nicholas J. Cull, "WikiLeaks, public diplomacy 2.0 and the state of digital public diplomacy", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* (2011) number 7, p.3. Evgeny Morozov, "Texting Towards Utopia: Does the Internet Spread Democracy?", *The Boston Review*, March-April 2009, < <http://bostonreview.net/BR34.2/morozov.php>>

¹⁵ Ibid.

diplomacy to be a subfield of diplomacy¹⁶, it must be remembered that one does not replace the other. No matter how transparent public diplomacy claims to be, the element of secrecy that characterizes diplomacy has not disappeared, as the Wikileaks affair has shown.

What new technologies do enable is the propagation of information (and sometimes disinformation)¹⁷ without any trace of the source, with the illusion that it is a democratic, not to mention fun, process. This is what Jacques Ellul calls horizontal propaganda in his seminal piece *Propagandes*.¹⁸

Last but not least, the way in which the Arab spring has been sold to us is very appealing because it strikes a chord with the history of Western democracy: power to the people. The choices that people shall make in the future however, might not be so appealing to us. Will new technologies be heralded as magic tools of democracy and substitutes of diplomats then?

Nicolas de la Grandville: To underline the relevance of the subject, I would like to recall a personal memory: in January 1989, during the final negotiations of the mandate for the Conventional Armed Forces reduction talks in Vienna, I experienced the coincidence of the breakthrough of a new technology and of a classical diplomacy example of discussion! While the negotiators were trying to find out the appropriate wording in order not to name a city because of political reasons relevant for one partner, thus creating an imprecision in the text, I saw for the first time a mobile phone equipping the US Delegation! Since then, many examples, including the Wikileaks affair, have shown the importance of today's subject.

1) Digital communication brought a revolution to the objectives of diplomacy, as defined by the Vienna Convention of 1961

– Representation: are traditional embassies and diplomats assigned to foreign countries still adapted to a time when leaders travel to summit meetings and their images are broadcast all around

¹⁶ Some, as Lois W. Roth, consider public diplomacy to be propaganda, American-style. See her article Lois W. Roth, "Public Diplomacy and the Past: The Search for an American Style of Propaganda (1952-1977)", *The Fletcher Forum*, 8, number 2, summer 1984.

¹⁷ See Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008.

¹⁸ Jacques Ellul, *Propagandes*, Economica, Paris, 1990.

the world? My answer is yes, because nothing replaces personal contact and direct experience, for diplomats as well as for their leaders;

- Protection of interests: media and communication add emotions to the scope of diplomacy, primarily motivated by the Nations' interests; but of course, seeing starving children, boat people and the victims of a war changes the focus of a discussion on whether or not to intervene in a conflict;

- Protection of fellow citizens: again, live broadcast images of victims or prisoners contribute more to enhance awareness on the fate of fellow citizens abroad than written reports, but they also rise expectations and increase the pressure for results;

- Negotiate: much has been said and written on this art, but time, confidentiality, intermediation and respect of the negotiating mandate are not best served with microphones and cameras inside the room;

- Inform: through licit means, even if modern communication technologies increase the range of possibilities; very often, cell phones are banned from confidential meetings; diplomats no longer have a monopoly in this field since there is more often an excess of information than a lack of it; so diplomats have to be proactive, imaginative but also accurate and honest;

- Promote friendly relations: this is as needed as ever, in all fields of international relations, of course political, but also economic, cultural, people to people...

2) Digital communication entails considerable changes to the work of diplomats

- In the field of communications between Headquarters and Embassies : from dispatches to emails via encrypted cables ; emails have brought new ways of drafting and have shaken hierarchies within administrative organisations;

- The ability to provide a safe and fast communication network has consequences for the place of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Government organisation;

- Transparency rules and access to documents obviously change the way reports and comments are being drafted;
- More than ever, we live in a time when any diplomat is supposed to be well informed;
- Diplomats' relations to the press have dramatically changed: 1/ visits are conceived and carried out as public events, with a choreography, pictures, even drama; any summit meeting must entail concrete results (deliverables: agreements, contracts...); 2/ diplomats are no longer bringing information to journalists, who are most of the time faster than them, instead they react to the information and bring their government's views on its political background.

3) Does digital communication mean the death of diplomacy?

No, because diplomats can bring an important added value, even if it may take them longer than before to identify what it can be.

- Personal contact always brings a human dimension that is essential; it allows direct negotiation and a higher capacity to convince one's interlocutor;
- Diplomats can and must compensate the "dark side" of modern communication: they bring background information, political clues, sense of proportion, balanced points of views, appreciation of the different parties' credibility, professional judgement; I could compare it to the debate on direct or representative democracy.

4) Communication, as a subject of diplomacy

The scope of diplomacy has expanded with time: it now encompasses inter alia human rights, environment, and also communication. This covers many subjects like freedom of media and pluralism, free access to Internet, working conditions for journalists, data protection, citizens' rights...

As a result of technical innovation, digital communication multiplies the opportunities, speed and content of information exchange. It has an impact on diplomacy, as I have tried to briefly reflect upon. As a conclusion, I would simply like to recall the three Socratic criteria one should keep in mind, on this issue like on many others: truth, goodness and usefulness!

Paul Patin: Diplomacy is not what it used to be. In the 21st century, it is no longer a business between/among rulers, but among nations, which is to say citizens. This is primarily a consequence of two things: the growth and spread of democracy and of information technology – although we must admit that this spread has not been equal across the globe. Although we can see this evolution over 200 years, it has been especially pronounced since about the mid-20th century. In less than a generation, the acceleration of the rate of technological evolution has left everyone scrambling to keep apace.

Ten years ago no embassy would have considered using Facebook, even if it had existed. Today, not to use Facebook and Twitter is unthinkable.

But what are we doing with these tools? We're not at all sure.

We are however attempting to go where the audience is. And the audience is on Facebook and Twitter, particularly young audiences, who are the future. The goal is to develop relations, to share experiences, not to give lessons. But to paraphrase T.S. Eliot, between the goal and the reality, lies the shadow.

The role of the press office has been altered irrevocably by the advent of new media, in particular social media. When I arrived here in August 2009 the embassy had no Facebook or Twitter program or policy. Today we have a full-time social media specialist, whose job it is to tweet about virtually everything that we do at the embassy. The same person also ensures that our Facebook page is updated not merely on a daily basis, but numerous times daily. Of course we've had, as has every embassy worldwide, a web page for well over 10 years now. We have at least two blogs, one written by the Information Research Center and the second coming from our consulate in Strasbourg.

As you noted, these new tools are just that - tools. We use them because our goal, our reason for being, is to reach people in France. We have therefore to be where people are. And where are they? They are on Facebook and Twitter, among other places. We know this through research. Our Facebook page is currently closing in on 60,000 friends/fans, and our tweets are followed by thousands of people. The ambassador also has his own Twitter account (we often re-tweet his tweets).

Social media are now as privileged a means of communication as any other traditional medium (press releases, interviews, conversations) that the embassy uses. Nothing that we do of any importance, no matter how minor, does not find its way to Facebook/Twitter.

There is a tension between spontaneity and respect for official State Department policy. Obviously spontaneity, or sincerity if you prefer, is a high value in social media communications. But so is adhering to State Department policies and guidance. This is not a new issue. It has always existed. But it takes on a new dimension in the world of social media.

The future is, as Hamlet said, an undiscovered country. Who knows what the next big thing will be? But the State Department as an institution has fully embraced these new media, and devotes thousands of person-hours to producing content for social media, as well as for thinking about how best to exploit them.

Wikileaks – a different subject really. Let me say this – imagine if every private conversation that you ever had with a spouse or a best friend or a family member, in which you discussed intimate details related to third parties, were reported to anyone and everyone. Imagine if, what you thought was a private conversation, were revealed to the world. How would you feel about that? Transparency is a value. But it is not the only value. Privacy is a value too. In diplomacy there is a need for privacy. This is not to say that diplomats are always right and outsiders are inevitably wrong to seek transparency. It is to say that there is a legitimate need for privacy sometimes, in diplomacy as in normal life. And Wikileaks takes the view that privacy is always wrong.

Richard Jones: The last decade has seen a fundamental shift in the way information is shared throughout the world, by individuals, journalists, businesses and governments.

Use of “new media” technologies has grown exponentially: Over 3 billion videos are viewed a day on YouTube; 200 million Tweets per day are being sent on Twitter.

What is the power of social media?

The power of social media lies in its ability to organise action, and gather significant support for an idea. Take two examples:

Those taking part in the Occupy movement, which spread to hundreds of cities throughout the world from Melbourne to Bogota, became mobilised by using new media platforms. Globalrevolution.tv, which has shown live coverage of the movement since its inception, attracts between 1,000 and 20,000 viewers at any one moment.

After HSBC bank announced it was changing its policy of offering an interest-free overdraft to university graduates, a campaign was set up on Facebook, which thousands signed up to. This ultimately prompted HSBC to reverse its shift in policy.

With these, and in countless other instances, individuals and groups have demonstrated the power to self-organise. In the past, there were relatively few platforms available to make their voices heard. That is no longer the case.

New dawn

Social media has ushered in an age where individuals or groups can much more easily voice opinions and exert pressure or influence over decisions taken by those in positions of power.

Recent revolutions in the Middle East, although certainly not caused by new media, were aided by it as messages on social networking sites challenged the state monopoly of power.

Similarly, the release of classified documents by Wikileaks shows how a small group can use the power of the internet to jeopardize the security of nation states. Power has been diffused towards the periphery.

There has been a shift from ‘real-world’ to ‘virtual’ forms of mobilization and action. Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are now indispensable tools of electoral mobilization – as was seen with President Obama’s campaign three years ago – and civic organization.

Social media offer tools to organize action, and people in power – whether politicians or businessmen – notice collective action. They can decide to listen and act, or not – that is up to them. Many leaders, from local councillors to Chief Executives, may be more comfortable listening to established interlocutors, such as academic experts, businessmen, social activists and other lobbyists. But the world is changing.

So how does all of this affect diplomacy?

Benefits and risks

Diplomacy, according to the US State Department, is fostering relationships around the world in order to resolve issues and advance interests. While this is as true today as it was a hundred or maybe even a thousand years ago, there are now new methods through which the aims of diplomacy are achieved.

There are certainly risks associated with new media technologies. However, the benefits to diplomacy from the effective marketing of ideas to build constituencies of action that new media offer probably far outweigh any dangers and uncertainties. And that goes for the diplomatic community as a whole, whether a small local government department or a big intergovernmental organization.

One clear benefit is that never before have so many low-cost channels been available through which to communicate a message and share it with different audiences. This enables much greater access to information. For the diplomatic community, having a wide range of avenues at its disposal to present these ideas, is surely positive.

Another benefit is that of transparency. Rightly or wrongly, in certain cases throughout the world there is a lack of trust between the public and the state. By using the many channels available

through new media technologies, diplomats can help build up trust by sharing more information and engaging with different audiences.

However, despite these and other advantages, there are also some clear risks with new media platforms, which cannot be underestimated. Individuals and groups can also use social media to organize violence.

For example, the “Dark Web” research project at the University of Arizona has tracked Jihadist extremist groups using Web 2.0 media. The researchers found Jihadist blogs, including one posting news updates about so-called “occupied Islamic countries”. They also tracked Jihadist bloggers on YouTube, uploading videos featuring explosives, attacks, bombings, and hostage-taking.

In addition to such outright threats, Wikileaks showed the clash between official diplomacy, which relies on individual trust and discretion, and the supposed new openness of the electronic age. (One wonders whether Julian Assange would welcome full disclosure of the lurid details of the allegations against him for sexual crimes.) While some herald this era of openness, we must be careful to maintain a balance that respects legitimate needs for privacy, building on methods that have worked in the past and improving them, while ushering in the new.

Despite such notable risks, at its heart the internet offers opportunities to connect and engage with more people than ever before. That idea also lies at the very heart of diplomacy, which is why it should be and is being embraced as a force for good.

What is the International Energy Agency (IEA) doing?

At the IEA, we are working towards re-launching our website by the end of the year. Our aim is not simply to spruce up the design and give it a fresh look, although that is certainly important. The central focus is to explore ways of making our messages as accessible as possible to a broader range of audiences. And in so doing, we hope to significantly broaden the scope of who, where, when and how our messages are read, or rather received.

So how are we going about doing this?

We produce short videos, which get posted on YouTube as well as on our website. These videos aim to answer specific interesting questions which many people may be looking for answers to on the web. ‘What sources of energy will the world run on in 2035?’ is an example of a video we have produced in the last few months.

We produce information graphics, which aim to make complex subjects more easily understandable. For example, we recently put together a graphic which explains Carbon Capture and Storage in what we hope is an engaging way. (CCS is a nascent and sometimes controversial, dare I say "misunderstood", technology that would store CO₂ emissions from fossil fuel or biomass power plants and industrial processes underground before they ever reach the atmosphere.) We write articles and factsheets for our website, which highlight key conclusions and nuggets of information from our publications.

And, with all of the above, we are more and more active on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, presenting key facts in a palatable and engaging way. The idea is to spread our information as widely as possible so that people have access to the facts, research and analysis necessary to understand and engage responsibly in national and global debates on energy-related issues. Social media offers new and powerful channels for doing this.

What should diplomatic organizations be doing in the future?

Diplomacy is about listening, learning, discussing, and advancing ideas to achieve specific outcomes. While the topics that diplomats discuss range from the rights of individual citizens to sensitive matters of economic and national security, this basic set of activities always remains the same. Ultimately the era of new media is ushering in a new wave of tools for listening, learning, discussing and attaining results.

The risks associated with new media, which I outlined earlier, are clear. However, these challenges can be tackled and overcome by engaging in the debate, as opposed to ignoring it.

Take the US State Department, as an example. A ‘digital-outreach’ team has been set up in order to slow or disrupt terrorists' efforts to convert vulnerable people online to support or even participate in terrorist activities. This team trawls social networks and openly engages directly with individuals who are being coaxed and recruited by the likes of al Qaeda.

In response to the Arab Spring, the State Department’s Public Affairs team launched nine foreign language Twitter feeds in Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, French, Hindi Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Urdu. To quote Michael Hammer, Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs: ‘We are listening, communicating our views, and participating in the conversations that will shape this century.’

If they ignore the opportunities new media can offer, diplomatic organizations risk missing an enormous opportunity to engage in and influence local, national and global discussions that no one could have conceived of two decades ago. The world has changed and diplomatic organizations must keep up to remain effective.

I can’t finish a talk on new media without giving a plug to the IEA’s social media presence! So please connect with us on Facebook and Twitter – @IEA_OECD.

Beatrice Heuser: Lori Maguire has already referred to definitions of diplomacy. While the one given by Merriam-Webster is “the art and practice of conducting negotiations between nations”, it is in fact that of negotiations between the *representatives* of nations, or rather, as the world is not neatly divided only into democracies with representative governments, *representatives of the rulers* of nations. Very misleadingly, it is customary in NATO, the EU, and perhaps other international organisations, to claim that “nations are deliberating”, when what they mean is, the representatives of *governments* are conferring with their ministries about the positions to adopt on some issue. The phrase always evokes the image of diplomats leaping onto the Clapham Omnibus to ask its passengers what they think of the issue in hand, and I also imagine the puzzled look of the nurse or the worker or the school child confronted with that question. Diplomacy, traditionally, was precisely the area on which the population of the states on whose behalf it was conducted was *not* consulted, although with a Western notion of democratic accountability, it was supposed to be conducted *in its interest*.

Two factors flow from the large diversity of political systems of the states engaging in diplomatic activities: first, that the interests of the nations on whose behalf negotiations are taking place may differ from nation to nation, and indeed may diverge *within* nations. Picture the negotiations over the closure of a foreign-owned car factory in constituency X1 in country X, and the negotiations between the government of X, under pressure from the deputy/parliamentary representative of constituency X1, with the foreign owners of the factory. Government X may have a very long agenda of things to discuss with the government of the country Y which is the main address of the factory owners. The urgency felt by the representative of constituency X1 may well be counterbalanced or indeed outweighed by other considerations, affecting constituencies X2, X3, and X16, perhaps a dispute over fishery rights affecting the coastal regions Y4-7 of the other country Y. What in the greater scheme of things are the interests of country X which its representatives are to defend? Remember that in real life, one can rarely have one's cake and eat it, and that gains must be balanced by concessions in any equitable relationship. So who is to be the arbiter of what interest to prioritise? The answer is the governments themselves, who will prefer to keep the debate about this low-key and away from the media, so that decision-making can proceed fairly quickly, rather than develop a cumbersome momentum of its own, resulting in calls for the impossible when something else might have been within the realm of possible agreement.

Second, beyond national selfishness, there may be fundamental ideological differences between the *governments* whom diplomats represent, especially if some govern nations as their democratic representatives, and others mainly represent the interests of an oligarchy, a family, a political monopoly party. These fundamental divergences may well question the legitimacy of negotiations in the first place: how can one negotiate with a government that has been denigrated for years in one's own media as tyrannical, criminal, etc? Inversely, how can a fanatical Muslim regime negotiate with the Great Satan? The very fact that negotiations are taking place might in some cases have to be kept secret from the very nation on whose behalf the government is negotiating, not without raising ethical questions of accountability and legitimacy that need to be debated, at least within governments, and will in democracies be judged by historians once the archives are open.

So, diplomacy is the negotiation between *governments*, whether they claim to be negotiating by divine authority or on behalf of sovereign nations, and even then, each government is the judge of

which interests – as perceived by this government – of the nation it will prioritise, as a function not least of what it thinks is “negotiable”.¹⁹ Governments, as Raphaël Ricaud has noted, structurally need a certain amount of confidentiality to negotiate, as diplomacy presupposes the possibility of finding some common ground, a concept that is diametrically opposed to the notion of irreconcilable national interests or ideologies with irreconcilable aims. The mere act of negotiation can be seen as treason; think of the ethical question of whether it is acceptable to negotiate with terrorists, or the often-invoked myth of “Munich” as warning against negotiating with dictators.²⁰

How can this be reconciled with constant media statements? Even the most benign of negotiations revolve around the possibility of making concessions, giving up earlier demands. On the whole, British government decision-making, with usually one party in government and with a majority in parliament, and thus diplomacy, has tended towards greater confidentiality vis-à-vis Britain’s own public, while the American has tended, at least on big issues, towards greater internal paralysis due to open debates between presidents and Congress.²¹ American administrations have been pushed, time and again, to take positions in public on issues, which are then difficult to give up without being accused of weakness by their own media and by Congressional opposition.

In such a tricky domestic environment, how can public statements be handled? Most governments face this problem, as do international organisations such as the EU or NATO. Their diplomats have to be spin-doctors, and they all would prefer to keep the ability to make statements to very few people – the leading politicians themselves, and well-chosen spokespersons. For example, in the 1990s and early 2000s, NATO had an extremely talented spokesman in the person of Dr Jamie Shea, who in closest co-operation with the respective Secretary General, through public statements, could subtly push along the development of NATO’s positions (especially on the Balkan conflicts) even when negotiations in the North Atlantic Council (NAC) seemed to have reached an impasse. This was complemented by the subtle and nuanced speeches of the Secretary General, most written by only one or two speech-writers, especially Michael Rühle. At first glance these sounded anodyne and wooden, but the more closely read, the more clearly they advocated tiny shifts in

¹⁹ In the sense of “possible to achieve by negotiation”, beware of the alternative sense of “open to discussion”.

²⁰ Fritz Taubert (ed.): *Mythos München/Le Mythe de Munich/The Myth of Munich* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2002)

²¹ Zara Steiner: “Decision-making in American and British foreign policy: an open and shut case” in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 13 No.1. (1987), pp. 1-18

NATO's position when these seemed to have got stuck. At most times, no-one other than the Secretary General, the Deputy Secretary General, and Dr Shea was allowed to communicate with the public. The effects of individual members of NATO's staff tweeting or face-booking would have been very counter-productive: these two informal means of communication – the NATO spokesman and the Secretary General's many speeches – complemented the fully wooden statements made by the NAC or the various ministerial meetings, by presenting narratives of what was happening, and how NATO's stance (and actions or inaction) fitted into this. It was crucial – as it is still for governments and international organizations – that the narrative presented to the outside, both to the domestic and to the international audiences, should be coherent.

This is all but impossible to achieve with many individuals making their own *ad hoc* statements, openly. At the Round Table we were given examples of top diplomats being cornered by the media, thinking on their toes, making statements, and either getting away with it or being hauled over the coals by their governments for doing so. Making public statements is a risky business, even if, as a top diplomat, one is fairly confident what the overall concerns of one's government are and can “think in parallel” to officials and leaders back home, i.e. independently come up with the answer they would want to opt for. Diplomats will tell you that, often enough, an initiative they are praised for one day may be what seems to merit a severe rebuke on another, with little to suggest which way the wind will turn on the day. There is thus much to be said for exercising caution when the temptation of ceaseless commenting through the new media arises.

You may think it is due only to my age that I show such scepticism of the new media with their constant outpouring of information. The numbing effects of an “all-source glut of information” have been commented upon long before the existence of the internet. The structural, in-built tendency of institutions to seek to prove their usefulness by constantly producing information (or publications, as anybody who has got onto the mailing list of any think tank knows) results in the recipient's fatigue – the more we get, the more we tend to throw it out. The internet as a new medium has changed this in so far as one can now more easily set out to look for information one wants, rather than having to plough through masses of information that may be of moderate or little relevance, before finding the occasional needle in the haystack. Blogs and tweets, however, seem to return the situation to the previous “glut”, with the additional feature that what is presented has rarely been submitted to any quality control. To my mind only the secret services of the host

nation, the security services, an infatuated teenager, or an autistic hacker would want to know about every move of the staff of an embassy.

At the same time, the constant monitoring of every twitch of the eyebrow of busy diplomats and politicians is, in my opinion, producing ever more mediocre policies. Achievements are measured in terms of not having attracted too much public flak with a statement or a policy, which usually means, that this is probably watered down, anodyne, and will not have much effect either way.

And remember, for many of society's ailments, administering too little medicine, and too late, may be like fighting an infection with too small a dosage of antibiotics, and for too short a time – you risk making it worse, not better. The diplomats' remit – to get those statements prepared, agreed (if they are working for international organisations, by the member states' representatives; if they are working within a government, across the ministries and other government agencies concerned), and finished in time – is dominated, not by the efficiency of the cure, but by the pressure to meet deadlines. This is a most unhealthy state of affairs, even without any media interest looming, ready to pounce on any formulation that could provide ammunition for an attack on the government or international organisation concerned. So instead of refocusing the minds of key players – diplomats, but also leading military officers on operations abroad, or other civil servants – on the aims beyond bureaucratic politics and inter-service rivalry, the need to spend additional time on tweeting and blogging and – worse still – following the unchecked ramblings of others on Twitter and blogs takes precious time away from what they should really be doing: studying the issue in hand, and addressing it with means available in order to resolve it – ideally peacefully, in the interest of all sides.

The argument that this constant monitoring of every little move is a function of a healthy public interest in government activities, or that it is a vital imposition of democratic accountability, must of course be taken seriously. Nor should any servant of a nation – which is how all civil servants and military personnel should see themselves – ever think they are allowed to get away with unprofessional behaviour. And indeed, all servants of the public should think, at all times, that their actions might one day come under scrutiny, and should at all times serve the public interest (and not just that of their own careers, their section chief who can promote their careers, their sections, their agency, the political party in government, etc.). But just as it would be absurd to

insist on the admission of public spectators to all surgery conducted in a hospital, even when the environment needs to be sterile, there is diplomatic business that is best conducted in private. And forcing diplomats to engage ceaselessly with the new media takes valuable time away from what *should* be their main occupation: to resolve international problems.

Not that the realisation what *should* be will change what *is*.