

PRIME-TIME DIPLOMACY

By Patricia A. Karl

Yesterday's front page foreign policy is today's instant history and tomorrow's stale news. The media have not only conditioned changes in the traditional methods and practices of diplomacy; the media have also become primary participants in contemporary diplomacy. As technology expands the range and capabilities of communication the media alter and redefine the traditional conventions of diplomacy in three ways: access to, volume of and dissemination of information.

Participating Diplomacy

We live in an age of what one could call participatory diplomacy. Today's diplomat shares his access to his own government and foreign sources of information with correspondents, cameramen, commentators, and with what Denis Stairs has called "alien bureaucratic interlopers." (1) In the United States, for example, sixty-one government departments and agencies are involved in what John Krizay calls "the Foreign Affairs Act." (2) In many instances the media and non-diplomatic personnel have access to groups or individuals (dissidents, opposition parties and terrorists) denied to the envoy or head of state. One recent restriction placed on the American diplomat, for example, was a Summer 1977 State Department directive to American Embassy personnel in Moscow that requires Embassy personnel to get a twenty-four hour advance approval from the ambassador before they meet with ordinary Soviet citizens. (3) Although this may meet security needs, it gives the media representatives an advantage over the professional diplomat.

As a result of the two-way access route between the media and sources, the media have become a channel of competition and communication within and among governments. Access, then, has altered diplomacy in several ways. First, the ability of the media to present foreign policy menus from a variety of sources has an impact on policy to the extent that alternative policies are grist for the public mill. However, the increase in alternatives guarantees mixed reviews for any policy. In foreign policy circles this is known as the "foulup factor." (4)

The "foulup factor" may restrict the ability of a government to pursue a particular policy. The recent debates in the United States over the Panama Canal Treaties, SALT II, and an American policy toward Angola, South Africa, and Somalia and Ethiopia are current examples. The "foulup factor" may also confuse or antagonize domestic and foreign opinion. On his recent trip to Peking, for example, Sir Neil Cameron, Marshall of the British Royal Air Force, caused a row with both the Soviets and members of the British Labor Party when it was reported and publicized that he had told Chinese tank officers that the Soviet Union was the common enemy of Britain and China. (5) Finally, the "foulup factor" may lessen the appearance of support and consensus for a policy. Witness Western Europe's, especially West Germany's, response to the neutron bomb question.

The Press Leak

The access route between media and sources has also had an impact on policy to the extent the media have been used to preempt traditional diplomatic procedures. President Nixon found the press leak more expedient than the diplomatic note when he placed U.S. forces on alert in the Middle East War of 1973. (6) The media may also be used to signal shifts in policy. We are all familiar with the traditional trial balloon. Leonard Woodcock, the American envoy in Peking, for example, caused a mild murmur in diplomatic circles when he said that he was sure that the United States would seek full diplomatic relations with Peking and that the lack of normal relations was "founded on an obvious absurdity." The State Department, of course, said the views of Mr. Woodcock were his own. (7) The media have also been used to signal immediate or actual shifts in policy. The October 1, 1977 Joint U.S.-Soviet statement on the Middle East is a recent example of where the media played a role in the effort to promote a new public diplomacy. The Sadat trip to Israel is another example.

Unequal Media Access

The media also have an impact on diplomacy to the extent that a lack of media access or use may weaken the position of governments or groups who do not use the media. Harry

Schwartz of *The New York Times* recently commented on the political situation between Quebec and English Canada. Schwartz observed that:

The sympathies of the average American are going to be overwhelmingly on the side of the English speaking people, in part because the French speaking Canadians have not done a very good job of communicating their cause to us. (8)

The media have also altered the traditional conventions of diplomacy because the access route between media and sources means that the diplomat must compete to have his voice heard. As James Eayrs has noted this has resulted in an expansion of the diplomat's functions to include that of "public persuader" or "propagandist." (9) James W. Symington, former U.S. Chief of Protocol, relates the following conversation during the visit of Soviet Premier Kosygin to the United States in June 1967.

'What is a public relations advisor?' asked the Premier (Kosygin). Mr. Gromyko, (Soviet Foreign Minister), who had been silent up to that point, said quietly, 'He is like a foreign minister.' I laughed and (Soviet Ambassador) Dobrynin laughed, and that was it for laughter. (10)

The expansion of the diplomat's functions has altered diplomacy in two ways. First, the diplomat relies on the media channels of communications to inform his own government. John Kenneth Galbraith, former U.S. Ambassador to India, for example, tells us: "I found it easier to bring my views to bear on the President of the United States by way of *The Washington Post* and its New Delhi correspondent than by way of the State Department." The media have also become a main instrument for conducting diplomacy. During his Saigon tour of duty, Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge commented, "The leak is the prerogative of the ambassador. It is one of my weapons for doing this job." (11)

The access route between media and sources is also altering diplomacy to the extent that the media are often the only guaranteed conduits of communication in policy differences within the foreign policy bureaucracy or between the foreign office and the head of state. For example, in late 1965, the U.S. State Department was anxious to persuade the Administration that the Pentagon bombing of targets in North

Vietnam close to the border of the People's Republic of China should not be permitted. Unable to do so through official government channels it succeeded in stopping the bombing after its warning received front page attention in *The New York Times*. (12) Closer to home is the tale of William Porter, former U.S. Ambassador to Canada. Mr. Porter believed that Canadian-U.S. relations were deteriorating, that Canada was not receiving the proper American attention, and that his own advice was being ignored. He tried repeatedly in 1974 and 1975 to arrange a meeting between Prime Minister Trudeau and Presidents Nixon and Ford. After being rebuffed by Ottawa and Washington, Mr. Porter found a more receptive audience among Canadian journalists. His views, when published, caused a diplomatic tiff between Ottawa and Washington. (13) Hell hath no fury like that of an envoy ignored!

Results of Increased Volume of Public Information

The media are also altering and redefining diplomacy by their ability to transmit a volume of information. The access of and competition between media and sources has resulted in an increase in the quantity and quality of information available to governments, publics, and diplomats. The data deluge ranges from the trivial (who ate what at a diplomatic gathering) to the sophisticated descriptions of weapons and economic systems (the MX, the Cruise Missile, SDR's and Floating Snakes).

The media's transmission of the volume of information has resulted in the addition of new terminology to what Harold Nicolson called "diplomatic currency." Jargon is the new pet hobby. As a result, the diplomat has to master bureaucratese, government newsspeak, and journalese if he wants to understand and communicate with his own and foreign governments. Secondly, traditional diplomatic terminology is being devalued by the immediacy requirements of the media. Almost every issue today is of major significance, of crucial importance, or of crisis proportion. For the diplomat this penchant may decrease the ability to maintain an official definition of a given situation because there is no distinction of priorities among issues.

Thirdly, the volume of information has created specific problems for the diplomat in foreign post or home office. Kazuo Ogura, First Secretary of the Japanese Embassy in

Washington, recently remarked that even a Japanese who spoke and read English "quite well" needed five or six hours to cover daily political reporting in the United States. John Krizay also tells us that the diplomat's fear of being "scooped" by the media has resulted in a proliferation of reports. Field assigned foreign service officers in the U.S. State Department, for example, produce some 350,000 reports each year. (14)

"The Tyranny of Technique"

The media are also redefining the traditional conventions of diplomacy with the control and dissemination of information. The control and dissemination of information, once the preserve of governments, is now shared with and sometimes dominated by the print and electronic media. Control and dissemination of information has had an impact on diplomacy in three ways. The first is what James Reston has called the "tyranny of technique." The selection and timing of events that receive coverage, the amount and type of news coverage (column space or air time, film footage, or first hand accounts), and whether or not the event is suitable to media coverage may determine what is and what is not given attention by publics and governments.

The tyranny of technique has three consequences. First, it may project a situation incompatible with the actual policy of a government. One recent example is the post 1968 North Vietnamese Tet Offensive coverage of the Vietnam War by the U.S. media. While the coverage gave the impression that U.S. participation in the war was winding down, American bombing did, in fact, increase. The tyranny of technique may also exaggerate or lessen the significance of an event. One can hardly transmit the significance and complexity of the SALT II in the same fashion as the televised Sadat trip to Israel or the Begin journey to Egypt. The tyranny of technique may also alter existing relations between states by surprising or annoying allies or adversaries. Two recent examples are the release of the Carter SALT II proposals prior to the arrival of Secretary of State Vance in Moscow to negotiate SALT II, and the Joint U.S.-Soviet Middle East statement on October 1, 1977.

Media Control over International Information

The control and dissemination of information also alters

diplomacy to the extent that the multinational media extend the capability for what Andrew M. Scott called "informal penetration." The multinational media have an impact on diplomacy in three ways: the source, range and content of information. The Western news media dominate the flow of international information. As a result approximately two-thirds of all news about the Third World comes from these Western sources. This transborder information capability is creating concerns in many quarters because there is no clear distinction between news, information and propaganda, and the almost unlimited reach of the media place it beyond the control of national governments. The reaction in the Third World to the media's informal penetration capability has taken several forms: developmental journalism, the expulsion or restriction of foreign reporters, and the creation of regional news services.

On the international level the Third World states have also attempted to promote developmental journalism. In fact, even the United Nations has recently gone into the public relations (or propaganda) business as a result of these Third World pressures. In December 1977, for example, the General Assembly mandated the publicizing of its resolution on the rights of the Palestinian people through a \$500,000 advertising campaign. In that same month the General Assembly also passed a resolution calling for a world wide radio campaign against South Africa. (15)

The Third World countries are not the only states concerned with the question of the role of the media. The present debate in Canada over the proposed Canadian Telecommunications Act parallels the concept of developmental journalism. On one hand, the Canadian Federal Government is trying to maintain control of the media to promote national unity. On the other hand, the Quebec counter proposal is an attempt to protect French language and culture through control of the media in Quebec.

The communist countries have for years attempted to restrict the impact of the media in their countries by jamming radio broadcasts from the West. In a rather unique response to this jamming (what one official called a "civilized alternative to jamming"), the Board of International Broadcasting in the U.S. (which controls Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty) has

offered the communist countries a “free-time proposal.” This would allow the communist countries air time to respond to broadcasts they found objectionable. As of now there has been no official response to this proposal from the communist countries. (16)

Media Problems in the Third World

The control and dissemination of information by the media also has an impact on diplomacy because while communications technology has linked all corners of the globe, the discrepancy between the industrial and “developing” states in terms of their respective capabilities may exacerbate the gap between the developed and Third World countries.

Most small states and developing countries do not have the technical capability, the personnel resources, or the expertise to reproduce their own diplomatic and media machinery. In many instances these states rely on the developed countries for information and machinery. If one looks at the Third World it is obvious that much of the communication within and among Third World states is disjointed due to the lack of ethnic homogeneity in these newly created political states. In Africa, for example, Somalia is the only country with a single language. Cameroon is the only state with two languages. There are, in fact, over 2,000 ethnic groups in Africa, each with its own language. In 1975, when President Kenyatta announced that Swahili would replace English as the language of the Kenyan Parliament, he left many members of the Parliament literally speechless because many members did not speak Swahili. (17)

The control and dissemination of information and the problems associated with news, information and propaganda are exacerbated by the murky relationship between the media, diplomats, and spies. Diplomats, reporters and spies have one function in common, the gathering of information. One could cite numerous examples of current cases that demonstrate this tangled web between diplomats, reporters and spies. One of my favorite stories involves the Pentagon Papers. Evidently in the midst of the publication of the Pentagon Papers by *The New York Times* in 1971, a copy of the Papers was delivered to the Soviet Embassy. Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin, sensing a provocation, returned the papers to the State Depart-

ment saying he preferred to read them in the newspapers! (18)

The Media as Catalysts and Participants

The coupling of media's technical capabilities, access to, and dissemination of information has altered the traditional methods and practitioners of diplomacy. It has also conditioned the ability of the media to become part of the events, issues, and procedures of diplomacy by allowing the media to participate in foreign policy as catalyst, conduit and censor.

The media act as a catalyst in diplomacy by utilizing the traditional government tools of communication (the press conference, press leaks and briefings). They have also created parallel instruments for their own participation (exclusive interviews, special reports, and documentaries). Unlike the diplomat in negotiations, the reporter always has time on his side. The media act as a catalyst by: coaching public opinion, setting the public foreign policy agenda, and by encouraging media events. (19)

The media also act as a catalyst by promoting or disrupting existing relations between states. In February 1977, a top level U.S. mission, headed by Secretary of State Vance, was enroute to Jordan for talks with King Hussein on the Middle East question. President Carter requested that *The Washington Post* delay a story of CIA payments to King Hussein for twenty-four hours in light of the Vance mission. The paper published the story on schedule. According to newspaper reports, President Carter told Congressional leaders that as a result of the story the meetings between Vance and Hussein were "mere formalities." (20)

While the media act as channels of competition and communication within and among governments, they also provide the main avenue of entrance into the political arena for groups and individuals previously excluded. Media recognition is an admittance ticket to participation on a global scale. The media, as conduit, for example, have given Soviet dissidents a measure of protection from their own governments and have become allies with them in a form of policy in exile. The media have also catapulted various terrorist organizations into the public realm and, some have argued, have actually encouraged terrorism as a form of mass communication through coverage of terrorist activities.

Media Censorship

All governments attempt to restrict the flow of certain types of information, but media censorship may be independent of government or a reaction to it. Recent incidents of media censorship suggest that decisions made by the media permit them to participate in foreign policy to the extent that the selection and restriction of information published may influence government or public reactions. The media, like government, have the ability to make independent decisions on what is and what is not in the public or national interest. For example, Kenneth Lamb of the British Broadcasting Corporation informs us that much of the coverage of the war in Northern Ireland was censored by BBC officials during the sectarian strife following August 1969. (21)

The media have altered and redefined the traditional conventions and practitioners of diplomacy. It is also clear that the media have become primary participants in the "Foreign Affairs Act." The marriage of the media and diplomacy has produced rival offspring, however. While the diplomat's ability to influence policy is often diminished because of the two-way access route between the media and competing sources, his functions increase as he seeks to influence policy through the media. The media participate in diplomacy as they provide a forum for policy alternatives, act as a conduit of communication and competition, and make independent decisions regarding foreign policy issues. Public diplomacy as practiced by the media is an inevitable, if sometimes disruptive, activity in an open society. Any attempt to restrict or control media participation in policy debate, domestic or foreign, threatens to undermine a key tenet of the open society itself, i.e., the free market place of ideas. Public diplomacy, however, presents the diplomat or head of state with a strategy of chance. While declamatory diplomacy may be dignified, it is rarely delicate or discerning. It may disrupt the stability of existing relations and lessen the credibility of a diplomat or head of state without achieving the intended goal. It is a risky strategy because it leaves both allies and adversaries in doubt as to what the actual policy of a government will be on a given issue. While it commits the envoy or official to a specific policy public, it is hard to reverse it in the same fashion without loss of support, credibility or prestige. Public policy is the safeguard

against secret diplomacy; public diplomacy may be an antidote or an overdose.

FOOTNOTES

(1) Denis Stairs, "The press and foreign policy in Canada," *International Journal*, Vol. XXXI, No. 2, (Spring 1976), p. 299.

(2) John Krizay, "Clientitis, Corpulence and Cloning at State — The Symptomatology of a Sick Department," *Policy Review*, No. 4 (Spring 1978), p. 39.

(3) Dusko Doder, "U.S. Said to Curb Moscow Embassy," *The Washington Post*, 5 January 1978.

(4) Henry M. Jackson, ed., *The Secretary of State and the Ambassador*, Jackson Subcommittee Papers on the Conduct of American Foreign Policy, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1964), p. 5.

(5) "Anti-Soviet remark brings dismissal call," *The Globe and Mail*, 3 May 1978.

(6) James Reston, "Those Leaky Taps are Safety Valves," *The New York Times*, 24 June 1974.

(7) Lee Byrd, "Woodcock Sees U.S. Establishing Full Peking Ties," *The Washington Post*, 2 February 1978; "Woodcock's Views on China His Own, State Dept. Says," *The Washington Post*, 3 February 1978.

(8) "Most People in U.S. unaware of situation in Quebec, panel says," *The Globe and Mail*, 9 May 1977.

(9) James Eayrs, *The Art of the Possible*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), p. 160.

(10) James W. Symington, *The Stately Game*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971), p. 160.

(11) James C. Thompson, Jr., "Reporters and Officials," a review of Leon V. Sigal, *The Organization and Politics of Newsmaking*, *The New York Times Book Review*, (17 February 1974), p. 14.

(12) James C. Thompson, Jr., "Government and Press," *The New York Times Magazine*, (25 November 1973), p. 48.

(13) John Picton, "Kissinger, U.S. Envoy tangled over relations with Canada," *The Globe and Mail*, 20 February 1978.

(14) John Krizay, "Foreign Correspondent: The Diplomat's Fantasy," *Washington Journalism Review*, (January/February 1978), p. 60.

(15) "The U.N. as Advertising Agency," *The New York Times*, 17 February 1978; "Voice of Kurt Waldheim," *The Washington Post*, 31 January 1978.

(16) David Binder, "U.S. Planning to Offer Communist Leaders Time on Radio Free Europe," *The New York Times*, 23 January 1978; "A Fairness Doctrine?" *Wall Street Journal*, 24 January 1978; "U.S. Radio May Air Communist Replies," *The Washington Post*, 24 January 1978; "Jamming the East Bloc's Arguments," *The Los Angeles Times*, 26 January 1978. As of May 23, 1978, there had been no official response from the communist countries to the "free-time proposal." Conversation

with Tony Shub, Board of International Broadcasting, May 23, 1978. The bill, H. R. 10963 is incorporated in the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Year 1979, (H. R. 12598). H. R. 12598 has been approved by the House of Representatives and Senate and is now before a Conference Committee.

(17) David Lamb, "Slaves to the Language," *The Washington Post*, 19 February 1978.

(18) Daniel Schorr, "Nixon and the Tangled Web in 'Ellsberg Papers' Case," *The Buffalo Evening News*, 7 May 1978.

(19) Morton Mintz, "Spread the Word," *Politics Today*, (March/April 1978), p. 30.

(20) Peggy Simpson, "Carter Reportedly Asked Post for Hussein Story Restraint," *The Washington Post*, 26 February 1977.

(21) Kenneth Lamb, "Disclosures, Discretion and Disselement: Broadcasting and the National Interest in the Perspective of a Publicly Owned Medium," in Thomas M. Franck and Edward Weisband, eds., *Secrecy and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1974), p. 243.

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BOOK REVIEWS

CARRINGTON, FRANK

Neither Cruel nor Unusual

Arlington House, New Rochelle, 233 pp., \$8.95.

The ever-higher wave of violent crime that has swept the U.S.A. has in turn created a current of support for tough measures to combat it. Sentiment for the return of the death penalty has been particularly strong. Since *Furman v. Georgia* thirty-five states have reimposed it. Referenda in Illinois, Washington and California saw two-to-one majorities in its favor. Recent polls in New York are running 80% in favor.

To bolster the arguments for capital punishment, Frank Carrington, Executive Director of Americans for Effective Law Enforcement, has produced a book which marshalls enough facts to destroy the arguments of those who wish to abolish the death penalty. Whether dealing with the deterrent effect, the morality of the measure, the alternative of life-sentences, the salient facts are presented in a balanced and comprehensive manner, and they support capital punishment.

The volume is flawed by Carrington's heavy-handed prose style — not in the first, or even the second rank of literary artists — his arguments still triumph despite these shortcomings, and the result is an essential handbook on this controversial question of public policy.

Proponents of the death penalty's abolition often claim that crimes of passion constitute the majority of American murders. This is demonstrably false, says Carrington, citing data from New York City, and while we can feel sympathy for someone who suddenly snaps and commits mayhem, we can feel little compassion for those who kill viciously and cold-bloodedly in the commission of a felony.

"At the same time [of the murder] we thought it was kind of funny, really," said one particularly callous killer, "because well, everything we were really doing at the time we thought was funny . . . And I think one of us even commented on, 'Did you see the way he squirmed? Wasn't that funny?'"

It is said that vengeance does not bring back the dead and the deterrent factor of execution is practically nil, but the