DIPLOMACY

EDITORIAL

A stable world order is a rare thing, especially when the rules that govern the conduct of international relations are constantly called into question by major powers. In times of renewed geopolitical thinking and rapid technological and economic transformation, throwing past certainties into flux, diplomacy becomes all the more important.

We understand diplomacy in a very broad sense. Alongside conventional diplomacy an unprecedented number of new actors and topics have evolved. Most challenges we are facing do not stop at national borders; in an increasingly interlinked and interdependent world, communication and dialogue change, they become faster and definitely also less formal. In this information—or disinformation—flood, the demand for reliable analysis and serious discussion is increasing.

The 'DIPLOMACY' series, published at least once a year, is intended to reflect these changes and to contribute from an Austrian perspective to a broad debate of international relations. Every volume of 'DIPLOMACY' also includes a revised version of a selected Master's thesis of a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien – Vienna School of International Studies (DA).

The core activity of the DA is to prepare its approximately 200 students from more than 50 countries and all continents to navigate these changes in the geopolitical landscape, and train them for international careers. One of the main pillars of the DA is interdisciplinarity, which is imperative for tackling global political, technological, economic and environmental phenomena that are difficult, but vital issues for our planet. This puts increasing demands on decision-makers, who require a broad knowledge and profound understanding of the political, legal, economic and historical dimensions of geopolitics. In the research activities of our faculty and graduate students we lay emphasis on issues that are of particular

relevance to the understanding of contemporary international problems.

Additionally, the DA has initiated the "Forum außenpolitische Think-Tanks" (FaTT; see www.fatt.at), a network of more than 30 organisations and institutes seated in Austria which focus on foreign and European policy, to exchange research papers and ideas, and to strengthen the interest of European and foreign policy topics in the public sphere.

Vienna is a host to the UN and a large number of other international organisations, as well as being an economic and cultural hub at the heart of Central Europe. Serving its historical function as a diplomatic forum and bridge builder, it is quite simply one of the best locations in the world to experience and understand what our globalised, yet increasingly fragmented world requires in terms of tradition and innovation. The "Diplomatische Akademie Wien" is the oldest existing institution of its kind. Its very foundation as the Oriental Academy in 1754 was a reaction to the perceived need of diplomacy and dialogue.

Emil Brix   **Vienna, November 2021**

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DIGITAL DIPLOMACY INTRODUCTION

EMIL BRIX & MARKUS KORNPROBST

One of the most intelligent and readable books about diplomats in the digital age starts its preface with the title "The Diplomat Who Arrived Too Late".[1] Long after IT-nerds, trolls and stock brokers had begun to use ever more sophisticated logarithms in their daily work, diplomats started to use social media platforms. For diplomacy, the digital world seemed to provide just another new toolbox, just as any of these machines from telephone to television had done which had already speeded up communication. However, the technological leap of our times (cybernetics, computation, binary machine code, big data, block chain, Artificial Intelligence...) is different.

In analytical terms, we may say that for diplomacy digital technologies don't only pose the usual challenge to learn how to make best use of new tools of communication. The digital leap of our times is a challenge because there is an obvious governance gap resulting from the lack of parameters for technology creators to engage in international public policy, and the ensuing lack of a system of internet governance. What are the main ingredients for "future-readiness" of diplomacy, with a view to leveraging the potential of digital technologies as enablers for global governance?

About a year and a half ago, we started to organise a conference on digital international politics, meant to take place, as so many other conferences before, at the great hall of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien – Vienna School of International Studies (DA). So we had

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Emil Brix is the Director of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien – Vienna School of International Studies (DA). Markus Kornprobst is Professor of International Relations at the DA.

planned. It all turned out rather differently though. SARS-CoV-2 spread around the world, and lockdown after lockdown made us move our public lectures and panel discussions online. This way, our project on digital international politics went, well, digital. Not only did we discuss digital international politics but we did so digitally.

We organised two workshops, a more theoretically-minded one and a more applied one. The former is forthcoming as an edited book entitled Digital International Relations with Cambridge University Press while the latter is published in two issues of this journal. This special issue is dealing with "digital diplomacy" and the next one more broadly with "digital international affairs".

There is no question about it that we are in the midst of a major transformation. Technological revolutions have always left a major mark on world politics. Just to give a few examples, progress made in mapping territories made it much easier to conceive of territorially demarcated territories, i.e. sovereign states.[2] The invention of the printing press led to the development of vernacular languages, which, in turn, made it possible to imagine nations.[3] Without the industrial revolution, virtually any component of politics within and across states would be very different in our days.[4] Many globalisation scholars, especially those focusing on finance and trade, contend that the industrial revolution sparked the first globalising age.[5]

The digital revolution is very much comparable to any of these examples. It makes for epochal change. Whatever issue area of international politics we look at, no matter whether it is in international security or the international political economy, international development or migration, global health or the environment, we encounter increasingly pervasive digital dimensions.

A technological leap is hardly either good or bad, progressive or regressive, just or unjust, and so on, in and of itself. Digitalisation is anything but an exception in this regard. In the last decade, digital

technology has helped democratisation movements gain momentum from the Middle East to Africa and from South-East Asia to Eastern Europe. In many established democracies, the digitalisation of politics meant an increase of actors having a voice in politics. At the same time, authoritarian governments, putting to use digital surveillance technologies, censoring and even shutting down the internet have strengthened their grip on power. Even in some established democracies, digital spin doctoring, ranging from spreading rumours and lies to producing echo chambers, has increasingly spurred the line between truth and fiction, undermining processes of democratic decision-making.

Digital technology can be used to counter international crime, including human trafficking, it made possible the fastest ever identification of a genome sequence of a virus (SARS-CoV-2) as well as an impressively quick process of producing a vaccine against the disease it causes (COVID-19), delivers tools for a new kind of agriculture that may be able to address some of the adverse effects of climate change, and opens up new opportunities for international development. By the same token, however, digital technology sparks new arms races involving semi-autonomous and possibly even fully autonomous weapons systems, makes global financial flows less transparent, and hides political responsibilities behind algorithms. As early as in the 1970s, the French philosopher Paul Virilio wrote "In fact, the strategic value of the non-place of speed has definitively supplanted that of place".[6]

It is up to politics to channel technological development into certain directions rather than others. This special issue does not engage in deterministic techno-pessimism, joining the chorus of voices that reduces digital international affairs to, say, killer robots or cyber-threats. The contributors to this issue explore pessimistic and optimistic scenarios, putting strong emphasis on agency. Politics makes a difference. The digital revolution does not only cause plenty

of disruption but also provides plenty of opportunities to move towards a better future.

Diplomacy is an ancient institution that has adapted successfully through the centuries. The digital revolution is yet another challenge for this institution. It needs to invent and re-invent itself to a considerable degree. The latter is perhaps especially important. Digital innovation is proceeding at a breath-taking pace and we would not be surprised if the digital revolution switches gears in the next decades and moves towards quantum computing. To some extent, diplomacy will always have to catch up, but it matters a great deal how much it trails behind.

In a narrow sense, diplomacy's catching up has something to do with converging upon regulations. How are we to define "semi-autonomous" weapons, for example? How are we to regulate them? Note that answering these questions has something to do with anticipating technological innovations to come. Otherwise, new international instruments may be outdated already when they enter into force. In a broader sense, diplomacy's catching up has something to do with re-inventing diplomatic communication. Diplomacy revolves around communication across different international actors.[7] If this communication goes increasingly digital, diplomatic communication has to follow suit. It has to engage non-state and sub-state actors, build bridges across the scientific-political divide, become ever more versatile and innovative in terms of how it diffuses its messages and, at the same time, listen out carefully for feedback to its initiatives. If Wilson's ideal of New Diplomacy was about leaving an era of bilateral back-door deals behind and Global Diplomacy is about the multiplication of issue areas and actors,[8] then Digital Diplomacy is probably the multiplication and pluralisation of communicative encounters in an ever more diverse network of actors.

This special issue is divided into three parts. First, two contributions put under scrutiny the extent to which diplomacy has adapted to the

digital revolution. Clara Blume and Martin Rauchbauer explore how diplomacy adapts while interacting with tech firms, the sciences and the arts. While their article is written very much from a practitioner's perspective—they do digital diplomacy in the San Francisco Bay area—Veronika Wittmann follows up with a social science perspective. Yet the two contributions share considerable common ground, especially when it comes to normative questions. They both advocate for a digital humanism.

The second part zooms in on how technological parameters come to affect—and ought to affect—diplomatic practices. Heather Pace Clark addresses how artificial intelligence fuses into diplomacy and, vice versa, how diplomacy seeks to regulate artificial intelligence. Anna Grichting Solder examines the nexus of diplomacy, peace and digital technology. Diplomacy purports to serve peace. What does this mean in the digital age? How can digital diplomacy be put to use to further peace? The author provides evidence for the transformative potential of digital diplomacy in numerous cases, ranging from territorial conflicts to environmental issues.

The third part features an abridged version of a Master thesis that Veronika Bramböck submitted to conclude her Master of Advanced International Studies in June 2020. She focuses on mid-career training of diplomats, drawing from her extensive empirical research of ministries of foreign affairs in Europe. There are pronounced differences in how ministries handle this kind of training, which has become so important in the catch-up game with digital technology and also some non-state actors using this technology very quickly very efficiently.

NOTES

[1] Tom Fletcher, *The Naked Diplomat. Understanding Power and Politics in the Digital Age* (Glasgow: William Collins, 2017), 1.

[2] John Gerard Ruggie, "Territoriality and beyond: problematizing modernity in international relations", *International Organization* (1993), 139–174.

[3] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

[4] Peter N. Stearns, *The Industrial Revolution in World History* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993).

[5] Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992).

[6] Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics,* new edition (Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e), 2006), 149.

[7] Adam Watson, *Diplomacy: The Dialogue between States* (London: Methuen, 1982).

[8] Corneliu Bjola and Markus Kornprobst, *Understanding International Diplomacy* (London: Routledge, 2016).