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Diplomacy Before and After Conflict

By Marc Grossman

Conflict is a universal condition,¹ older than diplomacy. While conflict is a constant in human history, the nature of armed conflict, and especially the nature of 21st-century warfare, has been transformed. General Rupert Smith identified these changes in his book *The Utility of Force*: "The ends for which we fight are changing; we fight amongst the people; our conflicts tend to be timeless; we fight so as not to lose the force; on each occasion new uses are found for old weapons; the sides are mostly non-state."²

The nature of 21st-century diplomacy is also changing. To be successful, diplomats must simultaneously shape, act upon, and react to global challenges. As Hans Binnendijk and Richard Kugler of the National Defense University argue, no single problem, danger, or threat holds the key to the world's future. What matters is their interaction and the simultaneity of our responses.³

The definition of victory, too, is different today. Twenty-first-century national security success will encompass a comprehensive definition of security, and will be achieved by the broadest simultaneous application of all elements of national power. This is the key to understanding Philip Bobbitt's concept of "preclusive victory," which he describes as "anticipatory, precautionary attention to possible futures,"⁴ requiring an expansive and integrated approach to modern diplomacy, defense, and development. A diplomatic strategy designed to produce preclusive victory will include conflict prevention, successful negotiation, deterrence, the preparation for conflict should all else fail, and efforts to establish order, ensure stability, and promote political and economic pluralism after conflict.

Diplomats have always been participants in both the prevention and management of conflict and its aftermath. The conflict prevention side of diplomacy occupied much of my time at the State Department from 1993 to 1997 as the Department's Executive Secretary and U.S. Ambassador to Turkey. Postconflict diplomacy was a defining issue of the last third of my career at State as Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs and as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs from 2001 to 2005. I have tried to draw upon my experiences and observations to discuss here the scope and complexity of modern diplomacy, the methods and goals needed to

prevent conflict, diplomacy's role when conflict is or seems to be unavoidable, and the contribution diplomacy can make to restoring stability following conflict.

Diplomacy and Conflict Prevention

Thanks to the efforts of scholars and practitioners, we can now make better use of the methods and theory of conflict prevention. The United States Institute of Peace and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars are two among many institutions that have taken a leadership role in these efforts. Michael Lund, a practitionerscholar, notes that the present uncoordinated and patchy nature of preventive diplomacy reflects the absence of any accepted international conflict prevention regime or system of governance—that is, of agreed upon arrangements through which geographic jurisdictions are allocated, functional responsibilities are assigned, norms and procedures are formulated, and actors are held accountable for their responsibilities.⁵ He asks the crucial question to all those who seek to "coordinate and rationalize" a system of preventive diplomacy: where should responsibility for the tasks of preventive action be located—early warning, the decision to act, the formulation of a response, or the provision of bureaucratic and political support? Should it be horizontal, across different organizations or actors, or should it be vertical, up or down their chains of command?⁶

An example of conflict prevention that meets Lund's tests was the effort undertaken by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), in close collaboration with the European Union (EU) and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and supported by the United States, to avoid civil war in Macedonia in 2001. It is difficult now to recall that, until September 11, 2001, the possibility of civil war in Macedonia was a leading international headline. This successful campaign of conflict prevention was defined by the remarkable personal and institutional cooperation between the NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson and the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (and a former NATO Secretary General) Javier Solana. I spoke often during this period to Lord Robertson, Solana, and Ambassador James Pardew, whom President George W. Bush and Secretary Colin Powell appointed as the U.S. representative to the effort and who, along with Francois Leotard, the EU Special Envoy, played a crucial role in negotiating and implementing the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

As a direct participant, senior NATO official Mark Laity stated that there are insights about modern diplomacy and conflict prevention to be drawn from this effort, including the need for personal and institutional teamwork, the importance of early engagement in trying to head off violence, the need to choose the right people for tasks of this kind (including 21st-century diplomats who can act "unconventionally"), and the necessity of being able to apply appropriate force quickly.⁷

Diplomacy When Conflict Is or Seems to Be Unavoidable

When diplomacy fails to prevent conflict, the role of the diplomat changes. The new requirement may be to justify the use of force when all efforts to avoid conflict fail or to seek to

address the underlying source of conflict when force is or seems to be inevitable and imperative.

The February 1999 diplomatic negotiations in Rambouillet, France, were designed to show the world that NATO and the Contact Group were willing to make one last effort to avoid using military force to stop Slobodan Milosevic's attacks in Kosovo. I was in Rambouillet as Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs to support Secretary Madeleine Albright. After the first day or so of the meeting, there was so much chaos that I urged Secretary Albright to depart Rambouillet and leave the "negotiating" to those of us more junior. My strategy was that by not being present, the Secretary of State—and the administration—could keep a distance from an outcome that might be unacceptable to the United States. The Secretary had a different vision. Albright hoped Rambouillet would end the brutality against the Kosovars, but she was also prepared for the meeting to fail, and thereby all options for avoiding military conflict would be exhausted. Her idea was that we had to be seen to be doing everything we could diplomatically, including her continued presence, so that if Rambouillet was a failure, there could be no further excuses against taking military action.

Secretary of State James Baker had pursued a similar strategy before the first Gulf War in 1991. Baker relates in his memoirs, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, that President George H.W. Bush had concluded the United States should offer a meeting in Washington for Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz followed by a Baker trip to Baghdad to show America's commitment to avoiding war if possible. Baker writes that he thought this proposal had three merits: it would give the administration one last diplomatic opening to avoid war; it would shore up domestic support for conflict; and it would show that, as the deadline for Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait neared, the administration was doing something other than just preparing for war. The President's offer turned into the famous meeting between Baker and Aziz on January 9, 1991. As Baker recounts, "I was under no illusions. I assumed the talks would be unsuccessful and that within a matter of days, we would be at war."⁸

In 2001–2003, the State Department leadership generally saw Iraq as a diversion from Afghanistan and not central to the war on terror. Saddam Hussein was a dictator and a menace—but "in a box," posing no immediate, direct threat to the United States; focus should be kept on defeating al Qaeda in Afghanistan and supporting the new Afghan government.⁹ Iraq had been a source of tension and disagreement inside the State Department since the beginning of the administration, and there were some who sought to move the policy from support for "smart" United Nations (UN) sanctions toward an aggressive posture against Saddam.

Secretary of State Henry Kissinger wrote in *Years of Upheaval* about the second term of the Nixon administration that State Department culture emphasizes negotiability, which is a consciousness of what the other side will accept.¹⁰ Kissinger did not consider this trait a particular positive at the time, and the department's culture of negotiability did not serve as a good guide to institutional behavior for most of the senior State officials who participated in the interagency debate leading to the invasion of Iraq. If that was so during the period surrounding 1970s détente with Russia, diplomatic efforts with the Shah of Iran, and the crisis in the Middle East and the resulting 1973 war, this culture of negotiability no longer served as a good guide to

institutional behavior for most of the senior State officials who participated in the interagency debate leading to the invasion of Iraq. We took part in planning for the conflict and its aftermath assuming—or hoping—that events either at home or abroad would turn preparations for conflict into successful coercive diplomacy rather than the military action that was ordered in the spring of 2003.

The State Department's Director of Policy Planning, Richard Haass, observed that while he was "60:40 against going to war . . . no organization could function if people left every time they lost out on a 60:40 decision."¹¹ Haass was operating under the belief that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction; if he had known they did not, he says he would have been 90:10 against the war.

And no senior Department of State officer resigned in protest. The department sought instead to try to recreate the successful Gulf War coalition of President George H.W. Bush and argued that the United States and its allies might compel Saddam to submit through a deployment of force in the region in early 2003. If this failed, there should be a sustained diplomatic effort to create a broad coalition to move militarily later in 2003. This possibility of a broad international coalition lost all relevance on January 20, 2003, when the French government announced that it would never support a second UN Security Council resolution to authorize the use of force in Iraq.

Diplomacy in Preparation for Conflict

Once conflict is inevitable or is initiated, one job of diplomats is to support military commanders in getting what they need to make conflict as short as possible, with the fewest casualties for Americans, allies, and civilians. This was the objective that the United States pursued in Turkey before the first Gulf War, which resulted in President Turgut Özal's support of American efforts. The diplomatic effort to prepare for conflict in Kosovo also involved the whole of the U.S. Government and the governments of the NATO Allies. To pursue a successful bombing campaign, diplomats in many NATO countries arranged for overflight and support for Allied forces. A similar effort by U.S. diplomats took place before the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. American and allied diplomats worked closely with nations surrounding Afghanistan, including forging contacts with Central Asian states on security issues for the first time in order to achieve transit, overflight, and bed-down rights for American and coalition forces before the October 7, 2001, beginning of action in Afghanistan.

Before the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, and especially after January 20, 2003, a similar effort began in earnest. Diplomats supported U.S. Central Command commander General Tommy Franks in order to make the war as short and successful as possible and to limit American, allied, and Iraqi civilian casualties. American diplomats worked with military commanders to seek access to facilities for U.S. forces and to participate in the public diplomacy effort to gain as much support as possible for the armed liberation of Iraq. American diplomats and Pentagon officials again paid particular attention to Turkey in an effort to convince the Turks to allow the 4th Infantry Division to transit that country to create a northern front in the battle against Saddam's forces. Although the State Department worried about the

size of the Department of Defense (DOD) request to Ankara, it worked closely with both civilian and military authorities at the Pentagon to try to meet the need that had been identified by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Joint DOD–State diplomacy, however, could not overcome a negative vote in the Turkish parliament, which reflected strong public opposition to the war.

The way the debate about using force is carried out inside the government influences attitudes and actions during and after conflict as well as future decisions on whether or not to use force. Military force may restore security, but it cannot resolve political or cultural sources of conflict. As Rupert Smith writes, "We are engaging in conflict for objectives that do not lead to a resolution of the matter directly by force of arms, since at all but the most basic tactical level our objectives tend to concern the intentions of the people and their leaders rather than their territory or forces."¹² Smith argues that the civil-military structure designed to make political-military decisions is "deeply problematic" and distorts decisionmaking in many ways.¹³ In his book, Smith imagines a debate between British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Ministry of Defense (MOD) officials about how to address the genocide taking place over a number of weeks in Rwanda during the summer of 1994.

FCO: *What can we do in the face of events in Rwanda?*

MOD: *What do you want us to do?*

FCO: *We ought to act. Something must be done. We can't have people being massacred. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council we cannot be seen to be doing nothing.*

MOD: *So you want us to use military force?*

FCO: *Yes.*

MOD: *To do what? To stop the killing?*

FCO: *Yes. Exactly.*

MOD: *Who do you want us to fight? We are not clear who is doing the killing: is it tribe on tribe, or is it a force found from a tribe? And Rwanda is a big country. Where do we start? Kigali, presumably, it's the capital and we would want an airhead.*

FCO: *Well, there must be an international force, of course.*

MOD: *And what would be the British aim in joining the force?*

FCO: *To play our part as a permanent member of the UN Security Council.*

MOD: *Is Britain to lead the force?*

FCO: *No, it should be led by the UN—a proper UN mission.*

MOD: *That will take some time to assemble, so it will probably be too late to stop the killing.*

FCO: *Then the mission should be aimed at bringing postconflict order.*

MOD: *OK. But we need to be clear how many British troops are currently available. Given our deployments in Ireland, Bosnia and a few other places, not many.*

FCO: *What do you suggest?*

MOD: *What are our government's priorities? Is contributing to this force a higher priority than these other tasks we are already undertaking?*

FCO: *Probably not.*

MOD: *In that case, these UN forces always lack expeditionary logistic support. And if we want to speed up the deployment of this force, offering a logistic unit would probably be the most valuable contribution.*

FCO: *Will that put our soldiers at risk?*

MOD: *Hardly any.¹⁴*

Many American diplomats will recognize this imaginary conversation, having participated in something like it dozens of times since the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the American debate, the issue also quickly focuses on who pays the bills. It is worth stating, at least in the American case, that officials at the Pentagon and DOD often were legitimately frustrated by the State Department's inclination to promote military missions for the Pentagon and the Armed Forces in an increasing number of situations that were important, but not vital, to U.S. national interests. While this readiness to volunteer U.S. military forces to solve problems around the world was a direct result of the lack of civilian capacity to do the jobs required, it leads to understandable consternation among those in uniform.

Diplomacy and Restoring Stability Following Conflict

There are many issues—defeating extremism, promoting pluralism, bringing the benefits of globalization to those who have not yet benefited, living sustainably on the planet, nonproliferation—that will be part of any definition of successful 21st-century diplomacy. But getting postconflict diplomacy right—creating the conditions for a preclusive victory—may be the most crucial of all. This is not an easy assignment. The concept of success can be redefined after the fact, further complicating the assessment. Successful democratic governance and economic development cannot be delivered on a certain date, and therefore the need for time and patience is a necessity on the ground. However, patience is limited in home countries, and "fatigue" often sets in. Thus, the potential for failure is high. Industrial war produced winners and losers; today's lines are not so clearly drawn, and the timeline may be longer.

Rupert Smith again brings clarity to this assessment:

*We intervene in or even decide to escalate to, a conflict in order to establish a condition in which the political objective can be achieved by other means and in other ways. We seek to create a conceptual space for diplomacy, economic incentives, political pressure and other measures to create a desired political outcome of stability, and if possible democracy. . . . if a decisive strategic victory was the hallmark of interstate industrial war, establishing a condition may be deemed a hallmark of the new paradigm of war amongst the people.*¹⁵

Smith's point can be pressed even further by recognizing the additional distinction between a military operation carried out following Smith's rules and the ambiguity inherent in trying to create the conditions Smith identifies as objectives. Christopher Schnaubelt has noted that a typical military operation will have unambiguous geographic boundaries (areas of responsibility) and will assign specific units to be responsible for every inch of ground or cubic foot of airspace. There is an obvious chain of responsibilities and expected actions between each individual Soldier or Marine on the ground and the commanding general. Nothing comparable exists for economic development in governance tasks, which tend to be assigned by function rather than local geography or rigid hierarchy of authority.¹⁶

Postconflict diplomacy was among the defining diplomatic issues of the last third of my career at the State Department.

In the aftermath of the first Gulf War in 1991, almost 500,000 Kurds fled to the mountains between Iraq and Turkey. Stranded in harsh conditions, they began to starve by the thousands each day. I was then the Deputy Chief of Mission in Turkey. Inspired by the leadership of Ambassador Morton Abramowitz, American diplomats, followed by American military forces and then an international coalition of governments and nongovernmental organizations, initiated Operation *Provide Comfort* (which became Operation *Northern Watch*). This was not just a "whole-of-government" but a "whole-of-theinternational-community" campaign to provide humanitarian assistance and then return the Kurds to their homes in Northern Iraq. Once home, they needed to be protected, and for 11 years, the United States and some of its allies, including Turkey, worked on the ground there to recreate a functioning society and then protected this area from Saddam by enforcing a no-fly zone.

These years were also punctuated by activity in the Balkans. As Richard Holbrooke recounts, some of the pre-Dayton negotiations with Bosnian leader Alija Izetbegovi took place in my residence while I was Ambassador to Turkey.¹⁷ As one of Holbrooke's successors as Assistant Secretary for European Affairs, I watched the effort made by Ambassadors Robert Gelbard and James Dobbins to implement the Dayton Accords by applying whole-of-government efforts in postconflict post-Yugoslavia. I picked up the diplomatic thread again as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs promoting reconciliation, development, political progress, and nationbuilding in Kosovo.

Other postconflict diplomacy efforts in Haiti, East Timor, and Liberia called upon the resources of the United States and other governments to try to create the conceptual space for development and sustained peace. The U.S. effort in Colombia, too, highlighted the need to focus on an integrated and cross-sectoral approach, which included disarmament,

demobilization, and reintegration of former combatants and promoted justice in postconflict society. But the main events in modern diplomacy's postconflict paradigm are Afghanistan and Iraq.

The key to understanding U.S. diplomacy in postconflict Afghanistan and Iraq is to recall the profound disagreement inside the U.S. Government, especially between DOD and State, about whether the United States should engage in "nationbuilding," a policy President Bush had campaigned against in 2000. State Department professionals were generally proud of the effort the United States had made in nationbuilding and in peacekeeping, supporting the deployment of U.S. military forces to participate, for example, in the Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai and in peacekeeping and nationbuilding activities in East Timor, Haiti, and the Balkans. Most believed that nationbuilding, properly funded and executed, was an effective long-term tool of integrated modern diplomacy for the United States.

The effort to create a new Afghan government after the overthrow of the Taliban was a piece of classical diplomacy carried out in the 21st-century context.¹⁸ Secretary Powell directed Ambassador Dobbins to support the regional negotiation hosted by the Germans in Bonn in 2001 to create a new Afghan government. To succeed, Dobbins worked with all the key players, including representatives from Iran, to support a major role for the United Nations and put Hamid Karzai in position to lead a new Afghanistan.¹⁹ But, as Dobbins has written, the "Bush Administration, having overthrown the Taliban and installed a new government in Kabul, determined that American troops would do no peacekeeping and that peacekeepers from other countries would not be allowed to venture beyond the Kabul city limits. Public security throughout the rest of the country would be left entirely to Afghans, despite the fact that Afghanistan had no army and no police force."²⁰

The struggle over nationbuilding also hampered American attempts to get sufficient amounts of U.S. or international assistance to Afghanistan. Washington accepted the diffusion of responsibility there, with the British taking charge of counternarcotics, the Italians reforming the justice sector, and the Germans training police. This satisfied the need for burden-sharing but did not lead to success. In addition, postconflict resources focused by the United States on Afghanistan were small compared to other recent postconflict situations, even including Kosovo.²¹ American diplomats who followed Dobbins to the Embassy in Kabul over the years faced the legacy of this lack of attention and underinvestment.²²

The State Department participated at many levels in the National Security Council–led planning for postconflict Iraq. Much of the planning was detailed, but focused on lessons learned from the first Gulf War. The department's Future of Iraq Project, while important, would not have solved Iraq's postwar problems. State did not have the capacity to take responsibility for the immediate postconflict administration of Iraq, and its leadership agreed to the Executive order creating a postconflict Iraq structure that reported to the Secretary of Defense.

There is no need here to recount the lost lives and lost opportunities so well chronicled by others in the immediate postconflict period in Iraq, although Dobbins's argument that, looking back, the Coalition Provisional Authority accomplished a great deal under trying circumstances

is worth noting.²³ On July 1, 2004, the State Department did officially open (on time and on budget) an Embassy in Baghdad, which allowed an expansion of diplomacy and led to more comprehensive senior civilian-military cooperation.

There is another important lesson to draw from recent postconflict efforts: the need to have adequate civilian capacity to respond, including a role for a revitalized U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). As this journal chronicled in an article²⁴ by Ambassador John Herbst, the Secretary of State's Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS), his office was mandated to develop a whole-of-government civilian response to stability operations and to ensure civilian-military coordination.

The Civilian Response Corps (CRC) is in an early stage, and ultimately will be made up of a reserve component, in addition to the existing active and standby components. The personnel are anticipated to represent the full range of sector experts: engineers, lawyers, judges, corrections officials, diplomats, development experts, public administrators, public health officials, city planners, border control officials, economists, and others. Currently, the active and standby components that are being stepped up are drawn from State, USAID, and a core group of domestic U.S. Agencies.

Once congressionally funded, the reserves would be drawn from state and local governments and the private sector. Between January 2008 and May 2009, 56 CRC members deployed to 11 countries, including Afghanistan for planning purposes, and there are realistic plans to have 250 active members and 1,000 standby members ready to deploy by the end of 2010. There are now at least 14 other countries with whom the United States allies that have a civilian peacebuilding capacity—some including stability or civilian police, and employing whole-of-government or "comprehensive" approaches similar to that created by Washington. Several, in fact, have higher budgets proportionate to their gross national products than America's.²⁵

One way for State to further support the S/CRS effort would be to consider creating a new personnel specialty: the "expeditionary diplomat." Washington's diplomatic personnel have, of course, always been in one sense expeditionary; the majority of the Foreign Service is deployed abroad the majority of the time. But the post-9/11 diplomatic experience, and especially the effort in Iraq and Afghanistan, means that State needs to be more explicit about the expeditionary nature of some of its future diplomatic work and should prepare a small but significant number of people to serve successfully in the hardest places at a moment's notice.

Experience with the Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq and Afghanistan, the lessons learned with S/CRS, and the example of diplomats who have pursued careers in the toughest posts should lead State leadership to conclude that this is a step worth taking. The first requirement would be advanced training, some of it provided by DOD and some by the Central Intelligence Agency, for those entering diplomats who believe they want to pursue this special career path. These entering officers would make an explicit choice and understand that an investment in their extra training would require their service in hard places, just as we now ask diplomats who take the hardest languages—Chinese or Arabic, for example—to serve more than one tour using their skills. Since these expeditionary diplomats will not need to meet the

same age and physical requirements as special operations in the military, the State Department could allow people to opt in and out of this "special force" during their careers as long as they have the proper training. This would allow flexibility across the institution and encourage those who desire or whose family circumstances might change over time to participate as well. The department would also need to make sure those taking this career path are recognized for a career beyond the norm for Foreign Service and are promoted and rewarded.

The creation of S/CRS is a symbol of the comprehensive, simultaneous diplomacy needed for the future, and this expeditionary diplomat could form the backbone of the State and USAID commitment to the civilian response capacity. There are still key questions to be answered about civilian capacity. In the face of a real world situation, will DOD really support a State Department-led operation? Will Congress adequately fund S/CRS, including a reasonable contingency fund? How will S/CRS and a resurgent USAID work together? Where will the lines be drawn between immediate postconflict needs and nationbuilding? There seems to be no question that the path is the right one, consistent with the administration's focus on diplomacy, development, and defense. Success will come with clear direction and active implementation.

If we combine the observations made by several authors,²⁶ we arrive at this question: What national policies, supported by adequate human and financial resources, will create the conditions during and after war to bring about a preclusive victory? Nation building, post-conflict reconstruction and stability operations, and counterinsurgency strategy (call it what we will) will be part of modern diplomacy for years to come. Accomplishing this task does not have to be an exclusively American responsibility, and, indeed, one of the goals of modern American diplomats will be to make these efforts more international. But for the foreseeable future, the United States will need to learn the lessons of its role in nation building from Germany to Iraq.²⁷ These lessons include support for new institutions that bring all of the elements of power and influence together in the same theater, at the same time, and in close coordination so the United States and its allies and friends have a chance to succeed.²⁸ As Philip Bobbitt has written, "The problem is the picture of warfare to which we cling. This picture unfolds in this way: peace making by diplomats; war making by the Armed Forces; peace building by [US]AID and reconstruction personnel. The reality of 21st century warfare, however, is that all of these tasks must be performed simultaneously."²⁹

While the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century can be observed and analyzed individually, none of them can be solved without reference to the others. Diplomacy is not the answer to every question, but it has utility both before and after conflict. As General Smith writes at the end of his volume:

For the general purpose of all interventions is clear: we seek to establish in the minds of the people and their leaders that the ever present option of conflict is not the preferable course of action when in confrontation over some matter or another. This applies as much to the state possessing nuclear weapons or seeking to obtain them, rogue or otherwise, as it does to the terrorist or the machete-wielding rebel; each is posing an armed threat to people to establish a condition in which to achieve its political goal. To do this, military force is a valid option, a lever of intervention and influence, as much as economic, political and diplomatic levers, but to

*be effective it must be applied as a part of a greater scheme focusing all measures on the one goal.*³⁰

The connection to the utility of a modern diplomacy is clear. Twenty-first-century diplomacy, working to prevent conflict, trying to get ready for it if it is inevitable, or dealing with the consequences, can be an effective tool of national security if it is adequately funded, carried out by well-trained, dedicated people, focused on clear goals set by national leaders, and backed by effective military force. This is the diplomacy of the future.

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