

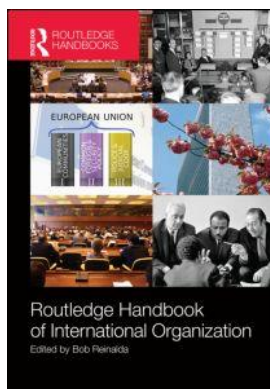
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Part III

Actors within international bureaucracies

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Multilateral diplomats in the early twenty-first century

Yolanda Kemp Spies

Individual agency has always been crucial in the bedrock institution of international society. Not surprisingly, classical diplomatic literature displays a preoccupation with profiling of the ‘ideal diplomat’ (Berridge et al. 2001: 2; Sofer 1988: 207). Profiling presupposes that specific characteristics, skills and knowledge are sought in candidates for the profession, but until well into the twentieth century, formal diplomatic training was the exception rather than the rule. Diplomacy was historically an elitist endeavour, premised on the assumption that ideal diplomats were a breed apart, rather than a professionally trained corps. This changed when the vast socio-political changes that transformed the international system of the twentieth century made diplomacy more diversified, less Eurocentric and more representative of a heterogeneous international society. In the process, merit-based recruitment and career-specific training became a necessity. Taking into account the prevalence of multilateral diplomacy at the start of the twenty-first century, profiling of multilateral diplomats *per se* is important because it sheds light on the contemporary evolution of diplomacy. From a practical perspective, it assists with recruitment and curriculum design for the continuous training of these specialized diplomats.

In order to analyse the mandates, roles and functions of multilateral diplomats, the conceptual framework of diplomatic theory is required – even if the latter has a lingering reputation as an underdeveloped part of International Relations theory (Cooper et al. 2008: 1; Sharp 1999: 34, 37; Sofer 1988: 196). As in the case of diplomatic law (the least controversial area within international law) there has not been much impulse to contest the theoretical assumptions underpinning this ancient ‘civilizing as well as . . . civilized activity’, as Berridge et al. (2001: 5) refer to it. But scholarly indolence in this regard is waning, as a surge of writing on diplomacy has attended the advent of the current century. One reason may be the more flexible career paths of diplomatic practitioners, many of whom now leave active diplomatic service and enter academe during their most productive years. The contributions of former practitioners such as Ronald Barston, Jovan Kurbalija, Shaun Riordan and Geoffrey Wiseman, among others, have facilitated a more integrated combination of practical and theoretical reflection on the profession.¹

The growing academic attention to its practitioners mirrors the fact that diplomacy is a growth industry (Cohen 1999: 14; Reychler 1996: 1; Spies 2006: 294). At the beginning of

the twenty-first century diplomacy is more institutionalized, more codified, more taught and above all more practiced than ever before in the history of mankind. Much of this growth can be attributed to the sheer volume of multilateral diplomacy, which has gained currency (in practice, if not always in reputation), and exponentially so, over the past half a century. Multilateral diplomacy – the simultaneous interaction of three or more diplomatic actors – can be distinguished from various other modes of diplomacy, depending on the number and identity of parties that are involved. The other modes include bilateral diplomacy (the most traditional method); third-party diplomacy (mostly manifesting as mediation, and in recent times also as post-conflict reconstruction and development); and polyilateral diplomacy (a collaborative diplomatic venture between state and non-state actors) (Barston 2006: 11; Hocking 1999: 24; Wiseman 2010: 24). If multilateral diplomacy has bloomed in quantity, however, it has not supplanted any of the other modes. Rather, its institutions facilitate and perpetuate the practice of diplomacy in general. This accommodating quality has added to its ubiquity within contemporary international relations.

Multilateral diplomacy's permanent institutional manifestation – intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) – are full-fledged subjects of international law and generate their own distinct culture, practices and rules (Leguey-Feilleux 2009: 221; Pigman 2010: 49; Van Langenhove 2010: 8). As international actors,² just like sovereign states, they have the ability to accredit diplomatic representatives to individual states and even to other IGOs. The actors *within* IGOs, namely the thousands of professionals who work within the multilateral environment of international bureaucracies, will be the focus of this chapter. The various manifestations of multilateral diplomats will be identified, after which the unique challenges associated with their functions will be considered, in the light of the international legal parameters of diplomatic functions.³ As codified by Article 3 of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, these include representation of a sending state, protection of state interests, negotiation, information gathering and reporting thereon, and promotion of friendly inter-state relations. First, however, the global 'arena' in which multilateral diplomats operate will be examined.

The multilateral diplomatic arena

Globalization has affected diplomacy as sweepingly as it has any other domain of international relations. The two main variables of the diplomatic arena, actors and issues, have both been multiplied in quantity and in turn fuelled the groundswell in multilateral diplomacy.

During the latter half of the twentieth century (in a process that has slowed down but not stopped yet), the sovereign actors of the diplomatic arena underwent quantum changes, predominantly as a result of state formation through decolonization. For new states with nascent national identities, membership of multilateral organizations offers symbolic legitimization of their acceptance into international society. Within the diplomatic (albeit nominal) 'democracy' offered by IGOs, even the weakest states can be seen and heard on the global stage. Moreover, decision making through majority voting in universal forums such as the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) facilitates collective action, and allows the developing world to advocate for change in the architecture of global political and economic governance (Barston 2006: 39; Langhorne 2005: 331; Leguey-Feilleux 2009: 222; Van Langenhove 2010: 7). The opportunity to express political solidarity against historical marginalization has rendered multilateral diplomacy a 'chosen means of struggle', in Sasson Sofer's (1988: 201) words, for the vast majority of the world's states. It has allowed states in general to place even obscure issues on the global diplomatic agenda and to obtain attention from states that would otherwise not have prioritized such concerns in bilateral forums.

Apart from its political attractions, multilateral diplomacy has also been of economic advantage to countries with insufficient resources and diplomatic infrastructure: the bulk of a state's diplomatic business, including all other modes of diplomacy, can be conducted via a small number of strategically placed representative missions at IGOs. This consideration has prompted even rich industrialized countries, under tax-payers' scrutiny, to reduce the operational costs of their foreign services by rationalizing bilateral diplomatic representation abroad (Barston 2006: 28). Multilateral forums have thus proliferated in response not just to the growth of multilateral diplomacy, but indeed to the practice of diplomacy more generally.

Democratization of diplomatic engagement beyond the state-centric environment has made diplomatic interaction in the 'global village' even more voluminous. More and more civil society, sub-national and transnational entities demand – and are granted – participation in diplomatic processes. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in particular network widely and galvanize international solidarity to demand accountability and transparency from states and IGOs. To an increasing degree (and as pioneered by the Nordic countries), representatives of civil society are included in national delegations to international conferences. Their inclusion has been prompted by a practical imperative: the technical nature of many issues that are discussed within diplomatic assemblies (Berridge 2010: 154; Langhorne 2005: 332; Pigman 2010: 64, 65; Saner and Yiu 2003: 4, 10; Wiseman 2010: 32).

One of the most dynamic intruders into the diplomatic arena has been the mass media. The speed, range and omnipresence of media coverage have caused public opinion to be a much greater consideration in the conduct of diplomacy (Berridge 2010: 144; Pigman 2010: 68; Riordan 2003: 5). Inevitably, it has encouraged political posturing in the 'transparent' milieu of multilateral forums, as diplomats and their political principals play to a global audience. The volume and diversity of state as well as non-state stakeholders in diplomacy have made diplomacy within the multilateral arena particularly complex (Saner and Yiu 2003: 10; Van Langenhove 2010: 7).

The demographic explosion in the multilateral arena has coincided with normative changes in global rules of engagement and expansion of the substantive scope of diplomacy. Enabled by unprecedented advances in information, communications and transport technology, and rendered imperative by porous, globalization-eroded borders, a host of state concerns transcends the traditional boundaries between domestic and international politics. In addition to the high political concerns about international security (considerations that induced the founding of the United Nations [UN], its predecessor, the League of Nations, and most regional IGOs), low political issues that diplomats historically considered *infra dig* (such as environmental degradation, communicable diseases and migration) have become fixtures on the global diplomatic agenda.⁴

Multilateral diplomacy is thus a response to a crowded agenda of issues that cannot be solved by individual states, however powerful they may be *vis-à-vis* other states. The transparent processes, continuity and multi-stakeholder involvement associated with this mode of diplomacy bestow legitimacy on the collective management, or 'global governance', of human concerns. The implications for states are that their domestic policies are increasingly subjected to international trends, standards and obligations that are organized through the international regimes negotiated within IGOs (Berridge 2010: 146; Saner and Yiu 2003: 3).

Leadership in addressing global concerns in multilateral forums has become a form of niche diplomacy, associated with 'middle power' status. The 'good citizens' of the multilateral arena – states such as Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Sweden – exhibit a normative predilection for multilateralism in their foreign policy.⁵ They are stabilizers of global order, network with like-minded states and non-state actors alike and seek to legitimize

global public policy. Since the end of the Cold War, the ranks of middle powers in the multilateral arena have been swelled by emerging economies from the developing world: countries like Brazil, Mexico, South Africa and Turkey. Eduard Jordaan (2003: 167) calls these states 'emerging middle powers' and points out that, as semi-peripheral states who face acute developmental challenges themselves, they are able to act as intermediaries between industrialized states and the resource-rich periphery of the global economy. They display peculiar multilateral diplomatic behaviour, specializing in high-profile multilateral diplomacy and taking on a broader, activist role as representatives of the global South. Whereas traditional middle powers have a concessionary attitude to global reform, emerging middle powers have a much more assertive and reformist approach, hence their prominence, for example, in the debate about UN Security Council reform.

The shared multilateral umbrella offered by IGOs thus by no means prevents diplomatic fragmentation based on states' ideological, regional, linguistic or other affiliation (Barston 2006: 6; Langhorne 2005: 335; Leguey-Feilleux 2009: 218–19). To be sure, IGOs with a universal character, such as the UN, tend to be microcosms of global structural power: states and associations of states compete for diplomatic clout, with diplomacy taking place within and among and often straddling the various groups. In some cases, blocs become institutionalized – the 1964 formation of the Group of 77 (G77) within the UN is an example of bloc diplomacy obtaining permanence within a multilateral forum.

Diplomats operating in the multilateral arena

Both *de jure* and *de facto* diplomats operate within the multilateral arena: *de jure* when they have diplomatic status (immunities, privileges and obligations) under international law; *de facto* when they have no legal status as diplomats, but function in that capacity. At a very practical level, one can distinguish between persons who are entitled to carry diplomatic passports, vis-à-vis those who are not. All of them are multilateral diplomatic actors because they engage in one or more of the core functions of diplomacy.

Career diplomats

The most traditional of diplomatic actors are the official representatives of sovereign states. They are employed by ministries of foreign affairs (MFAs) that preside over networks of resident diplomatic missions. Some of these missions have a multilateral mandate and are accredited to IGOs, but even at the head offices of MFAs, it is increasingly common to find specialized divisions dedicated to multilateral work. The responsible MFA officials are thus not only based at permanent missions to IGOs, but also conduct multilateral diplomacy in their own capitals and elsewhere on *ad hoc* assignment. Based at head office, they advise political principals and other sectors of government on multilateral relations, and network within the local foreign policy community, in tandem with colleagues who do the same in multilateral missions abroad. They also travel to IGOs to boost mission staff capacity during plenary sessions, and attend the meetings and summits of diplomatic organizations that do not have permanent secretariats; for example, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation or Group of Twenty (G20).

Multilateral diplomats based at MFA headquarters are instrumental when a country hosts a major international conference, such as the various UN Framework on Climate Change Conferences, or the series of UN 'Earth Summits' on sustainable development. Presidency of an *ad hoc* conference is automatically allocated to the host state, affording it the opportunity

to impact proceedings substantively (Berridge 2010: 149). It also allows a host country to showcase national attributes to the world, and the instant publicity and prestige thereof makes it a very attractive foreign policy instrument. The complexity of managing an international conference has the advantage of 'socializing' a state's diplomats into the multilateral arena, as it necessarily involves a large number of diplomats from the host state, ranging from the most junior through to political principals.

Nevertheless, the notion of multilateral diplomats conjures up primarily those career diplomats posted to permanent representative missions at IGO headquarters, where they represent their states. These diplomats enjoy the same privileges, immunities and obligations in terms of their operational environment as diplomats serving in bilateral missions, despite the fact that there is no single convention on the status of multilateral diplomats under international law. During 1975, the Vienna Convention on the Representation of States in their Relations with International Organizations of a Universal Character sought to codify the legal status of multilateral diplomats. However, the Convention was subsequently not ratified by the required minimum of member-states and therefore did not enter into force (UN 2012c). Under customary international law, the provisions of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations apply to multilateral diplomats as well, and IGO secretariats typically negotiate with host state governments to ensure that these rights are incorporated into municipal law (Berridge 2010: 146, 147). Multilateral diplomats accredited to the African Union (AU) headquarters in Addis Ababa therefore enjoy the same legal status as their counterparts in bilateral missions who are also based in Addis Ababa but accredited to the government of Ethiopia.⁶

Other state representatives

Thus far in the discussion, reference to representatives from sovereign states has denoted career diplomats as employed and deployed by MFAs. But within the domain of global governance, as indeed within diplomacy more generally, foreign ministries no longer operate exclusively: increasingly, other government ministries have dedicated divisions or specialized agencies tasked with policy dialogue at the international and transnational levels. Representatives from these government departments can be seconded to diplomatic missions, in which case they are accorded diplomatic rank and serve alongside their MFA counterparts (Barston 2006: 23). A non-member-state mission to the European Union (EU) in Brussels may, for example, have as part of its staff component attachés (as they are usually called) from ministries such as science and technology, health, or whatever technical areas feature prominently in that state's relations with the EU.

International civil servants

Most IGOs are designed in such a way that professionally staffed permanent secretariats manage their day-to-day business (Pigman 2010: 65). To a certain extent, secretariats replicate the foreign services of member-states, in the sense that staff serve at headquarters, participate in *ad hoc* international events or are posted to resident missions that are accredited to other states or IGOs. As in the case of MFAs, IGO employees can serve in a range of non-diplomatic capacities including administrative, technical, legal and other positions. Notwithstanding these support functions, a large portion of secretariat staff assumes full-fledged diplomatic roles, either formally or informally (Leguey-Feilleux 2009: 229; Pigman 2010: 66–9).

Intergovernmental organization representatives sent on resident diplomatic postings to states or other IGOs enjoy diplomatic immunities and privileges similar to those accorded to diplomats from individual states (Pigman 2010: 55). When accredited to other IGOs, various forms of participation (short of the voting rights of member-state diplomats) can be granted to these representatives. At the UN, for example, many IGOs have applied for or received invitations to engage with the organization in a continuous, structured manner (UN 2012a). Most regional IGOs and others that are active in global governance maintain permanent diplomatic missions at UN headquarters and their representatives participate as observers in the sessions and the work of the various main organs. They receive copies of all official documentation, and in some instances are allowed to address the meetings they attend (Leguey-Feilleux 2009: 229).

Geoff Pigman (2010: 55) explains that IGOs 'from the outset took seriously the need to construct their own professional, and hence diplomatic, identities and cultures'. This included the setting of nationality quota systems and enforcing employment standards that exceeded, in many cases, those of member-states. The cosmopolitan workforces of IGOs, it follows, display in every case a distinct sense of mission, *esprit de corps* and institutional identity. As in the case of traditional diplomats who engage consistently with their foreign counterparts within the diplomatic corps of a specific host country, IGO staff members over time develop a sense of kinship with one another and find that they 'have more in common with one another than with fellow nationals of their home countries' (Pigman 2010: 55).

Multilateral 'paradiplomats'

From the previous discussion it is clear that IGOs, even though they per definition comprise state members, increasingly allow participation by non-state actors. The UN Charter does not make provision for this type of engagement, but it has become accepted practice to grant, via UNGA resolution, observer status to important diplomatic actors even if they are not states or IGOs. As in the case of IGO observers, this allows the representatives of NGOs to network among, and negotiate with, the official representatives of member-states (Langhorne 2005: 338; UN 2012a; Wiseman 2010: 31, 34). The delegates of entities such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and liberation movements such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)⁷ can therefore operate as *de facto* diplomats. This hybrid diplomatic mode of poly-multilateral diplomacy confirms that the expertise and cooperation of NGOs are essential for the operationalization of multilateral diplomatic objectives, especially projects with a developmental or humanitarian mission (Leguey-Feilleux 2009: 230; Meerts 1999: 89; Pigman 2010: 60; Riordan 2003: 82).

Functions and challenges of multilateral diplomats

As referred to earlier, the basic functions of (bilateral) diplomats are enshrined in Article 3 of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. When the mandate of multilateral diplomats is considered, it transpires that all five of these functions apply, but each involves superimposed challenges generated by the dynamics of the multilateral arena.

Representation

The most salient of diplomatic functions, that of representation, takes on a compound nature when exercised in a multilateral context. All diplomats who work for individual governments

primarily represent one specific sovereign state, but for those officials who are accredited to an IGO, the reality is that they are an integral part of the entity to which they represent their states. This means that, to a certain extent, they also represent the collective mission of the IGO itself, as bestowed on it by its member-states (Leguey-Feilleux 2009: 217).

Moreover, most diplomats working within the multilateral domain by implication also represent various other multilateral entities of which their sending states form part. A diplomat from Namibia, for example, would have to heed his/her government's membership of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the AU; and by the same token, a diplomat from Turkey would implicitly also represent the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as well as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

'Pooled' representation becomes more complex when an IGO assumes a supranational identity, as does the EU. The EU, which now has its own European External Action Service (EEAS) is widely represented to states and other IGOs. Pigman (2010: 61) explains that this representation, which in most instances takes place in parallel with the bilateral diplomatic missions of EU member-states, can yield 'diplomatic synergies' when the bilateral (EU member-state) and multilateral (EEAS) diplomats pursue common objectives. However, as he cautions, 'this system of parallel representation can also lead to conflicts of emphases and priorities, if not policies, between the EU and its member states'.

An additional layer of representational duty within IGOs is conferred on state representatives when individuals are designated temporary multilateral leadership positions; for example, when they are required to act as bloc representatives in conducting liaison with an IGO's secretariat (Leguey-Feilleux 2009: 219). An individual diplomat could be required to do so because s/he is the dean of an intra-IGO regional group, or has the personal integrity, reputation and diplomatic skills to aggregate and communicate a communal bloc position. Other than bloc leadership, state representatives also assume rotational presidency of various organs within an IGO, such as the UNGA or the UN's Economic and Social Council.⁸

Paul Sharp (1999: 53) adds yet another dimension of representation to the work of diplomats, in the sense that, as he explains, they do not just represent their states to the world, but 'represent that world back to their respective states'. Multilateral diplomats, in particular, project back to their MFAs standards, trends and norms of global governance – a role that arguably makes them potential norm 'importers'. Conversely, the receptive milieu of multilateral forums accounts for the active norm entrepreneurship by diplomats from middle powers.

International civil servants can also be norm entrepreneurs at the intergovernmental level, as Geoffrey Wiseman (2010: 30) points out. He gives the example of pioneering diplomacy associated with senior UN officials such as Lakhdar Brahimi and Sergio Vieira de Mello. Arguably, the diplomatic role of international civil servants is strengthened by the fact that it transcends the representational authority granted by individual states. At the UN, Secretariat personnel are required to take an oath of allegiance to the UN and 'not to seek or receive instructions from any Government or outside authority' (UN 2012b). And, under the UN Charter (Article 100), member-states undertake 'to respect the exclusively international character of the responsibilities of the Secretary-General and the staff and not to seek to influence them in the discharge of their duties'. This allows them to cultivate an autonomous institutional ethos.

Protection of state interests

As representatives of sovereign entities, diplomats are historically entrusted with the protection and promotion of their sending states' national interest. This role demands

comprehensive knowledge of a state's vulnerabilities as well as its comparative advantages. In multilateral forums, however, sub-regional, regional and other multilateral foreign policy interests widen the parameters of a state's interests. Diplomats need to be *au fait* with the amalgamated multilateral interests of their sending states, because global interconnectivity induces spillover of both threats and opportunities in the foreign policy domain.

This is where smaller, less developed states face daunting challenges. The larger the IGO, the more complicated is its organizational structure. In the case of the UN, deliberation on the agenda items of the General Assembly is delegated to six main committees. Each of these replicates the UNGA in the sense that all member-states are entitled to attend their meetings. Less developed states have limited diplomatic capacity and often they do not have enough staff to populate a range of committees that operate simultaneously – in addition to the UNGA plenary work. The result is disproportionate pressure on their diplomats, who are left exhausted and without opportunity for specialization to the degree that peers from more amply staffed missions can manage (Leguey-Feilleux 2009: 226). On a more positive note, the committee system offers opportunities for junior diplomats to interact with senior diplomats from other missions, as various states attach various levels of importance to the mandate of committees, and thus allocate staff accordingly. This departs from the (bilateral) tradition that diplomats interact at a level commensurate with their professional hierarchy.

Regardless of other challenges, multilateral diplomats can only pursue their sending states' interests effectively when they have thorough knowledge of the institutional ethics, working methods and bureaucracy of the IGO itself (Barston 2006: 28, 30; Saner and Yiu 2003: 5; Sofer 1988: 200–201). A diplomat who can 'navigate' this specialized terrain is far more likely to use opportunities to full advantage, and by the same token, to avoid pitfalls. A matter as seemingly simple as a deadline for submission of policy papers can be pivotal. With so many participants and inputs to coordinate, large IGOs necessarily have strict deadlines for member-state submissions. This is not nearly as important in bilateral diplomacy, where time frames hinge on mutual agreement (Leguey-Feilleux 2009: 227).

Negotiation

The concepts of diplomacy and negotiation are often used interchangeably in diplomatic theory. When diplomacy enters the multilateral mode, the nexus between the two becomes conspicuous. Massive and multi-layered volumes of continuous diplomacy take place within the multilateral arena, as multiple stakeholders consult on agenda matters. This is not restricted to the official assemblies of IGOs. In the margins of multilateral forums, informal diplomacy becomes as important as anything happening 'on the record' (Cohen 1999: 2; Berridge 2010: 25; Leguey-Feilleux 2009: 219).

As discussed, for diplomats from individual states part of the challenge lies in the multidimensional nature of their representational role. The foreign policy objectives of a national government, its relevant regional IGO and other minilateral groupings it may be aligned with, can be mutually exclusive (Saner and Yiu 2003: 10). Diplomats therefore negotiate continuously within their own blocs to harmonize strategy, often engaging in bilateral negotiations with key partners. The critical mass of negotiation outcomes depends in part on the nature of the multilateral forum. In parliamentary-style assemblies such as the UNGA, majority voting holds sway and quantitative support for resolutions is of the essence. On the other hand, in *ad hoc* conferences it is more important to determine a minimum common denominator so that general consensus can be reached.

A subtler but equally vital need for negotiation relates to intra-governmental liaison. When civil servants other than MFA staff interact directly with their foreign counterparts, it is inevitable that erosion occurs in the traditional international leadership monopoly of MFAs. This is most prevalent within economic affairs. At the World Trade Organization (WTO), for example, ministries responsible for international trade and industry take the lead, as do finance ministries and central banks which represent their governments on issues of global financial management at organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (Barston 2006: 10; Pigman 2010: 63; Saner and Yiu 2003: 5). Pigman (2010: 64) observes that ministries of agriculture have become key diplomatic actors in the 'perennially difficult' WTO negotiations about farm subsidies and in the conduct of diplomacy within the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. And Leguey-Feilleux (2009: 221) gives the example of the International Labour Organization where government officials in the labour sector have been accorded the right to participate and vote independently of their foreign ministry counterparts.

In response, MFAs have had to adopt a greater managerial role vis-à-vis the rest of government, and it is reflected in much more inter-ministerial policy strategizing at headquarters. Paul Meerts (1999: 90) describes this process as 'inter-civil-servant negotiations'. The same applies to the increasingly important role of civil society groups. Apart from actually being included in official delegations, NGO representatives also participate in the drafting of position papers and conference documents. One of the most striking examples of successful polyilateral diplomacy during the preparatory strategizing prior to a major multilateral conference was the conclusion of the 1998 Ottawa Treaty, which banned anti-personnel land mines (Wiseman 2010: 27). *De facto* diplomats are thus granted a consultative position in the formulation of negotiation strategy while *de jure* diplomats remain formally in charge of national delegations at multilateral meetings (Saner and Yiu 2003: 5).

In addition to the myriad competing national, regional and other agendas within an IGO, and despite agreed-upon institutional procedures within IGOs, negotiation becomes enormously complicated and unpredictable by the sheer diversity in the culture, style and professional habits of individual diplomats. It is therefore much more difficult than in bilateral forums for multilateral diplomats to negotiate successfully (Leguey-Feilleux 2009: 218; Sofer 1988: 200–201). As in so many other respects, the multilateral negotiation playing field is hardly level for the delegations of developing nations. Their governments can seldom spare the requisite technocrats from domestic ministries to strengthen multilateral negotiation teams, and this leaves their diplomats ill equipped to deal with the technical aspects of negotiations (Barston 2006: 21). The 'digital divide' exacerbates their dilemma, as their missions lack sufficient ICT-enabled link-ups to technical experts, or political principals, in sending states. John Hemery (2002: 142) argues that these disadvantages turn delegations from poorer states into 'a mere object of negotiation' and prevent them from participating as equal partners. In the same vein, Pigman (2010: 65) gives the example of the WTO's biennial ministerial meetings that are held away from its Geneva headquarters, to which powerful states dispatch large delegations with huge technical backup expertise at their disposal. Less powerful states are represented at the same meetings, but are thinly stretched and therefore operate 'at the relative disadvantage that smaller numbers and depth of expertise confer'.

Negotiation is also a routine part of the diplomatic functions of international civil servants. As mentioned, many engage in full-fledged diplomatic work both at IGO headquarters and when posted to permanent missions. An additional practice has become common, namely the deployment of IGO negotiators on *ad hoc* field assignments. A very visible example within the UN community is the appointment of a special representative of the secretary-general

(SRSG). According to Langhorne (2005: 336), the deployment of SRSGs was initially a rare occurrence but nowadays characterizes almost every diplomatic intervention by the UN in a conflict situation. He notes that the practice has also spread to thematic areas other than conflict resolution, and is being replicated increasingly by other IGOs within and beyond the UN system.

Information gathering and reporting

The diplomatic function of information gathering and reporting has become infinitely more difficult in a world where, ironically, information is in abundance and accessible to more people than ever before. Rather than diminish the need for diplomatic reporting, this has played up the need for more critical analysis of information and succinct reporting by state representatives, who have a holistic understanding of a given foreign policy context (Kurbalija 1999: 183).

Within a multilateral context, opportunities to gather information are multiplied by the proximity of so many potential sources: the representatives of states and non-state actors, and the institutional memory of the IGO itself. Networking skills are crucial in this regard, and increasingly also the ability to access available technology (including social media) to full advantage.

Since the codification of the 1961 Vienna Convention, the information-gathering function of diplomacy has assumed an equally important, parallel dimension, that of communicating information as part of public diplomacy. Bilateral diplomats actively engage with the civil society of their host states, whereas multilateral diplomats do not have this mandate. However, the media-accessible nature of multilateral forums means that they have opportunity to engage with a global audience.

Intergovernmental organization staff also actively engage in public diplomacy. An example is the UN's maintenance of a network of Information Centres (UNICs) across the world. There were 63 such UNIC offices during 2012 (Pigman 2010: 67; UN 2012b). Much as diplomats from individual states do, UNIC officials disseminate information about the organization they represent, promote its image and interests, and interact with host government officials as well as with civil society, the media and other entities in the foreign policy community.

Promotion of friendly inter-state relations

Raymond Cohen (1999: 16), in defence of the enduring need for professional diplomats, contends that the role of diplomacy is 'to work on the boundary between cultures as an interpretative and conjunctive mechanism'. Within the rich tapestry of cultures and interests that are multilateral forums, multilateral diplomats are the spokes of the wheels that propel international relations forward: they manage the growing network of agreements that allow people, goods and services to cross sovereign jurisdictions (Cohen 1999: 14; Hocking 1999: 32; Spies 2006: 294). This is why middle powers see multilateralism as a normative choice: IGOs are not just microcosms of international society, but offer unrivalled opportunities for international cooperation. Within multilateral forums diplomats can strengthen bilateral relations, conduct polyilateral relations, practise third-party diplomacy and promote every manifestation of multilateral relations: intra-region cohesion building, minilateral 'club' diplomacy, inter-bloc synergy and even inter-IGO relations. Intergovernmental organizations also famously offer occasion for states that do not have diplomatic relations to use the

proximity of adversaries and the organization's facilities for discreet diplomatic encounters (Barston 2006: 41; Berridge 2010: 144–5, 152).

In the case of international civil servants who have diplomatic roles, the very *raison d'être* of their intergovernmental organization is to foster friendly inter-state relations. The secretaries-general of IGOs typically have prominent diplomatic profiles in this regard, but many other secretariat members, on a routine basis, assist with negotiation and consensus building to foster closer inter-state and inter-bloc relations within the organization (Leguey-Feilleux 2009: 229; Pigman 2010: 66–9).

Conclusion

The 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, drafted for the reality of the international system half a century ago, understandably focused exclusively on bilateral diplomacy between sovereign states. Had it been formulated at the start of the twenty-first century, it is quite possible that it would have paid particular attention to multilateral diplomacy, which has in the interim irrevocably impacted the form and substance of international relations. At the start of the twenty-first century, its arena offers a snapshot of global politics in terms of the number and variety of stakeholders and the range of issues that are dealt with. This consideration in itself has made participation in its processes an imperative for international actors, regardless of their relative structural power. Multilateralism is also a normative choice for some actors, notably middle powers, which emphasize the legitimacy bestowed by global governance of human concerns. As an umbrella mode that facilitates and accommodates all the other modes of diplomacy, it has fuelled a massive growth in diplomatic practice, yielding a particularly voluminous output within the context of IGOs.

The individuals who are tasked with the conduct of multilateral diplomacy are both *de jure* and *de facto* diplomats. They include the traditional, official representatives of states, officials from government departments and agencies other than MFAs, international civil servants and individuals who act on behalf of NGOs. Of these, official state representatives experience the greatest challenges in the execution of their traditional diplomatic functions: negotiating on behalf of and promoting the interests not only of their sending states, but implicitly also of various, often overlapping, other multilateral associations of which their governments form a part. To this complex mandate is added the pressure of media scrutiny and the huge variety of diplomatic styles and cultures that are superimposed on the distinct institutional culture of a given IGO. With an ever-increasing number of non-MFA officials involved in the negotiation of issues on the agenda, the role of official state representatives is therefore becoming managerial in nature. As 'specialist-generalists', with holistic knowledge of their countries' foreign policy agendas and the broader nuances of international relations, they are well placed to fulfil this function.

The benefits of the multilateral system are, however, asymmetrical. Less developed states, as a result of their peripheral position in the international system, are enthusiastic about the practical and symbolic opportunities of multilateral diplomacy. They are however also most vulnerable to the outcomes of global governance, yet struggle to match the levels of representation of their rich counterparts in the myriad forums of multilateral diplomacy.

The compounded challenges encountered by diplomats from these states, and indeed diplomats in general, make a case for strategic recruitment and customized training of multilateral diplomats. As Cooper et al. (2008: 1) note, diplomats are not traditionally trained for a role in global governance, because diplomacy is considered an exclusive activity whereas 'global governance, by contrast, is an open-ended way of looking at and navigating in the

world, with a high degree of inclusiveness about whom and what is included in its machinery and agenda'. One can argue that even experienced diplomats need to be 'rehabbed' to navigate the multilateral diplomatic arena. The work of these 'governors' of our interdependent and interconnected world is of critical importance.

Recommended for further reading

Berridge (2010), Leguey-Feilleux (2009) and Pigman (2010).

Notes

- 1 Their contributions have also become important in the context of 'privatized' diplomacy. An example is the International Crisis Group (ICG), founded in 1995 as an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organization that provides diplomatic reporting and analysis on areas of potential or actual crisis to supplement the work of ministries of foreign affairs and intergovernmental organizations. The ICG employs teams of political analysts – many of them former diplomats – from countries across the globe (International Crisis Group 2012). One of the advantages of a private diplomatic actor like the ICG is its pro-active research, which contrasts with the often re-active work done by individual ministries of foreign affairs, and its ability to select and focus on a small range of issues. This is something the foreign services of sovereign states cannot do, having to contend with the full spectrum of foreign policy priorities.
- 2 According to Clive Archer (1992: 68) international organizations have assumed three distinct roles within the international environment: they serve variously as arenas for interaction among global actors, are wielded as instruments by such actors, and act proactively and independently as actors in their own right.
- 3 From a professional procedural perspective, the term diplomat is applied to those officials who are accorded legal diplomatic status when working abroad and who, in hierarchical professional ascent in their ministries of foreign affairs, are in line to attain the eventual rank of ambassador. The term excludes, therefore, other categories of transferred personnel who are employed in diplomatic missions, such as administrative, technical and service staff.
- 4 The term 'infra dig' means 'beneath one's dignity' (from Latin phrase *infra dignitatem*).
- 5 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of New Zealand has since 1949, published an annual *United Nations Handbook*. It is widely distributed within the UN community in an attempt to foster greater understanding of, and effective operation of, the multilateral UN system. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said of this handbook that it is 'yet another sign of New Zealand's dynamic presence in the world Organisation' (United Nations 2011: back cover).
- 6 The Constitutive Act of the African Union (2000) spells out, in Article 24(1), that the 'Headquarters of the Union shall be in Addis Ababa in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia'. The legal provisions pertaining to diplomats' immunities and privileges are further elaborated on, in an 'Agreement between the African Union and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia on the Headquarters of the African Union' signed on 25 April 2008 (African Union 2008).
- 7 The United Nations General Assembly voted on 28 November 2012 (UNGA. Resolution A/RES/67/19) to enhance the participation of Palestine at the UN, by granting it the status of 'Observer State'.
- 8 With the exception of the UN Security Council, where presidency is rotated among the full Council, it is customary for these positions to be allocated to smaller or medium-sized states.

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