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EDITORIAL OFFICE:

INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC POLICY & ADMINISTRATION
UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR, CALABAR, NIGERIA
E-mail - issappra@unical.edu.ng

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THE FAILURE OF DIPLOMACY IN CONTEMPORARY WORLD POLITICS: PROGNOSSES FOR ACTION

BY

PATRICK A. ASSIBONG

Abstract

This analytical research identified and discussed the theoretical relevance of diplomacy as a sharp instrument for foreign policy management and diplomatic practice and after presenting incontrovertible empirical facts from case studies which include Iraq, Somalia, Liberia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Burundi the paper opined that in practice, diplomacy has become a blunt tool for foreign policy management hence irrelevant in contemporary world politics. From this basic premise, the exposition concludes that given the multiplicity of woeful failures of diplomacy to settle world conflicts and the fact that mankind prefers diplomacy instead of wars, the paper still expects diplomacy to prevail. May diplomacy prevail? (*International Journal of Social Science and Public Policy* 2000:3(2) pp 14-23)

INTRODUCTION

Recent events in Nigeria, Liberia, Rwanda, Burundi, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Algeria, Morocco, Ethiopia/Eritrea, Angola, Democratic Republic (DR) of Congo (former Zaire); Yugoslavia, Israel/Lebanon, Iraq and Chechnya/Russia to mention but a few troubled spots in Africa and the rest of the world, are sad reminders of the seemingly interminable series of epileptic fits that has gripped Diplomacy on the eve and dawn of the third Millennium making Foreign Policy Managers and Diplomats worried about the state of Diplomacy as a "sharp" instrument of foreign Policy objectives.

However, the woeful failure of diplomacy to settle crisis in the troubled spots in the world and the almost conspiratorial blunders of the United Nations peace keeping forces to prevent the escalation of wars has brought to question the relevance of Diplomacy in contemporary world politics - hence this reassessment which will try to examine the efficacy and/or failure of diplomacy in solving the problems of some countries engaged in nihilistic, catastrophic and ruinous wars. The paper examined the Origin and development of Diplomacy, the supposed indispensability of diplomacy in contemporary world politics and an appraisal of the empirical evidence of the success and/or failure of diplomacy in some countries and finally suggests agenda for progressive action.

Patrick A. Assibong teaches Political Science in the Department of Political Science, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria.

Among the instruments of Foreign Policy Management such as the use of threats, containment, force, cultural assimilation, "settlement", foreign aid, consensus, and propaganda, the most widely used is diplomacy. Scholars and laymen alike are aware of the "stabilizing" role diplomacy plays in international politics.

Through diplomacy, the morale of an unpopular government can be boosted, negotiations between states is consummated as the best alternative to war; students' exchange programmes between nations will benefit both, the symbolic representation of countries can be manifested; tension between nations can be stopped; wars avoided and political and legal representations made possible.

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF DIPLOMACY

Nicholson (1964) stated that the first diplomatists were angels like Angel Gabriel who served between God in Heaven and Man on Earth, while in the 16th Century, the Greeks assigned diplomatic posts only to tribal heralds invested with some religious authority like the "God" Hermes who was known to possess the qualities of charm, trickery and cunning which could be used to outwit any other "diplomat" during negotiations.

In the later part of the 16th Century, the Greeks selected only the finest orators, and the most plausible forensic advocates the community had for the job.

The Romans later adopted the Greek example but were ruthless in their objectives and brutal in their *modus operandi* because they introduced the idea of crushing their recalcitrant and bellicose opponents and sparing the submissive.

In the Justinian period, the orator type diplomat was replaced with those with long experience, sound judgment capability and a strong ability to observe.

Although the "employment of diplomatic envoys is as ancient as politics themselves" (Burns, C.D. 1931), it was not until after the congress of Vienna in 1815 that four categories of permanent diplomatic representation was enshrined in their "reglement" namely:- Ambassadors, papal legates, and Nuncios, envoys extra ordinary and Ministers plenipotentiary; Minister Resident; and *Chargés d'affaires*.

From the above institutionalisation of diplomacy as a profession via the failure of France to secure French in the 1919 Versailles Treaty as the World's diplomatic language, the failure of the Munich agreement of 1939, the Kissengerian era of "shuttle diplomacy" to the recent Jesse Jackson's initiatives in Africa and other parts of the world, diplomacy has witnessed a stupendous shift from the primitive herald typology through the orator type to the trained diplomat. However, "Precedence was to be based on the rank of the appointment conferred by the home government and on seniority of service in the particular capital" (Nicholson 1931:28).

CONTEXTUALIZATION

The word "diplomacy" means different things to different scholars engaged in Foreign Policy Management and Diplomatic Practice (FPM DP). To Professor Morgenthau, "Diplomacy ... is the brains of national power, as national morale is its soul" (Morgenthau 1973:40). To him, a sound diplomatic base, is an element of national power.

Palmer and Perkins see diplomacy "as an instrument of national policy" (Palmer and Perkins 1964:155) while Nicholson in his book *Diplomacy* (1939) attempted a trifurcation of diplomacy. At one instance, "it is employed as a synonym for foreign policy" as when we say British diplomacy in Africa is lacking in rigour. At another moment, it signifies "negotiation" as when we say the war problem is one which might be solved by diplomacy and he argued finally that diplomacy could also mean a "branch of the Foreign service" as we can say, my wife is working for diplomacy!

Diplomacy is seen by some scholars as the ability or skill to conduct international negotiations while "in its worst sense, implies the more guileful aspects of tact" (Nicholson 1964, pp.3-4).

Certainly the above definitional polemics, fall short of situating the concept within the context of contemporary world politics hence we shall use the subsequent working definition from the Oxford English Dictionary as our working definition - "Diplomacy is the management of international relations by negotiation; the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys, the business or art of the diplomat" (Hornby 1995:325).

THE SUPPOSE INDISPENSABILITY

Exponents who stress the indispensability of "Diplomacy" in world politics opine that despite the fact that the glamour and prestige of the concept has diminished, its role in international politics is too important to be ignored because during the dynastic period, Kings and Queens rose and fell according to the number of international marriages consummated, alliances formed and favours won.

It is also believed that diplomats are the legal, symbolic and political representatives of their countries hence they serve as the "eyes, ears, mouths and finger tips" of their governments. They also serve as liaisons between the host country and their home governments. Their support of the above view is so strong that they believe that it is via the diplomat's "hands and mouths" that the impulses emanating from the nerve centre are transformed into words and actions.

It has become clear that most governments hardly use the "mouths", "ears", and "fingers tips" of their diplomats for all official contacts and connections of a peaceful or war-like nature between state units (Satow 1962:1). The above postulations were corroborated by Schlesinger (1965) who stated that the Cuban and US governments used many "unorthodox ways" to settle the 1962 missile crisis thereby dispensing with the role of the diplomat.

The idea that diplomacy can create favourable standing for a bad government is rather seen here as the prescriptions of tyrannical governments in power because in Abacha's Nigeria, all attempts made by the Foreign minister - Tom Ikimi to rejuvenate the bastardized foreign image of his regime, failed woefully because of his pathological quest for bloodshed. Instead of boosting the morale of the unpopular Abacha's government, sanctions imposed by the Western Nations crippled the economic, social and political fabric of Nigeria even further. (Oladebo 1995:8). With these examples, it can be rightly stated here that even during the "glorious age of diplomacy", it failed to perform her role as a stabilizing force.

THE FAILURE OF DIPLOMACY: CASE STUDIES

Some case studies of selected countries in the recent past, clearly show the limitation of diplomacy as an instrument of Foreign Policy Management (FPM). In one of Bassey's vivid, and graphic expositions of "conflict diplomacy" as a yardstick of Nigeria's power and influence over a multiplicity of issues, he sadly concluded thus:

... the record has been undeniably bleak. On the surface and measured against the scale of effort and investment ... Nigeria has registered more frustration than success in regional conflict diplomacy and management. Instead of apparently successful exertions such as those in support of MPLA in Angola in 1975-6, Patriotic Front in Zimbabwe ... have been overshadowed by the failure of peace-missions in the horn of Africa, ... Chad between Habre and Weddeye/Libyan forces ... Tejan Kabbah's government against the rebel Revolutionary United Front and ... (Bassey 1999, pp 42 - 43)

It is pertinent to note here that diplomacy failed first, before the failure of the peace keeping missions for if diplomacy had succeeded, there would have been no need for war, which would have in turn called for peace missions.

Somalia: It was the failure of diplomacy that exposed sixteen United Nations peace keepers in Somalia to danger. On the risky situation in Somalia, Ojewale has this to say "The militiamen again went on the offensive last Monday, killing seven and wounding nine Indian soldiers in an ambush at Burlego, 115 kilometres southwest of Mogadishu, the capital" (Ojewale 1994:31). In an earlier development in 1993, when the UN peace makers went in offensive against Mohammed Farah Aided - "whose forces were accused of killing 23 Pakistani peace-keepers ..." (Ojewale 1993:26) - by bombarding his headquarters, the casualty figure increased forcing the UN - Somali (UNOSOM II) soldiers to have preferred diplomacy as alternative to the senseless killings. Criticisms emerged from many quarters thus:

Among the latest critics of the UN's handling of Somali imbroglio are the OAU, the Italian government and the ANC President Dr. Nelson Mandela. In their reactions, shortly after the US helicopter gunships rained 20-mm cannons and missiles on General Mohammed Farah Aidid's headquarters last week, the trio employed the UN to explore the part of dialogue (diplomacy) in ending the conflict in strife - torn Somalia. (Uwujaren 1993, p.31) emphasis mine.

No expressions aptly captured the mood in the capital Mogadishu more than those of Faduma Ahmed Alimi, a participant in the UN - Somali thus "Now it seems as if the UN is responsible for most of the killings" (Alimi 1993:31).

The most undiplomatic move (*Faux Pas*) by the UNOSOM group was the \$25,000 price tag placed for the arrest of General Aidid. This diplomatic blunder played into the hands of Aidid because Aidid has by the grace of the unnecessary UN raids, rallied more Somali and international sympathies for his cause. The United Nations decision to place a \$25,000 price tag on General Aidid, exacerbated the already traumatised Somalian national psyche and only earned amusement from his aids and supporters.

Sierra Leone: In the case of Sierra Leone, the vaulting ambition of Rebel leader Foday Sankoh to become the country's President, the intransigence depicted by Jonny Paul Koromah who seized power from Tejan Kabbah in 1997 and the power-hungry incumbent President Kabbah's

antics have only helped to make the utility of diplomacy as an instrument of Foreign Policy Management very blunt.

The collapse of the Lome peace talks caused by both the factional leaders Sankoh for the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), Koromah for the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and the President Kabbah backed by government, ECOMOG and the Civil Defence Force or the "Kamajors" only help to cement the view that diplomacy has become a spent force in contemporary international politics. Perhaps the recent capture and hostage taking of some 500 members of the United Nations peace keeping force in Sierra Leone (UNOSIL) by the RUF and their subsequent peace-meal release after much pressure from the international community, to say the least, is very disgusting and despicable especially to the UNO which parades herself as the guarantor and custodian of international peace, security and stability.

Iraq: The Iraqi case where the UN secretary General Kofi Annan was sidelined and the US usurped the mandate of the UN and started the bombardment of her (Iraqi) territory will help to empirically expose the weakness of diplomacy as a tool of foreign policy management. On the failure of Diplomacy, Romesh Ratnesar writing in Time Magazine has this to say:

... Peter Burleigh, acting American ambassador to the UN, called Annan and suggested he begin pulling UN personnel out of Iraq. When Annan consulted Berger on Wednesday morning, the National security Adviser told him the situation was "very serious" but not that Clinton had already ordered an attack. Except Britain, no security council members received so much as a phone call informing them of the pending action.

As soon as the missiles started flying, at 1.06 am Thursday, Baghdad time, so did the questions and recriminations. The bombing was a particularly cruel blow to Annan, who had brokered deal after deal to ward off military action. "This is a sad day for me personally", he said. "What has happened cannot be reversed". (Ratnesar 1998 - 1999, p.34) emphasis mine.

That Thursday was indeed Annan's darkest day in office because he must have tried to implement what he must have been reading in text books little did he know there is a big difference between diplomatic requirements and actual implementation. And that powerful nations can circumvent the best laid down diplomatic procedures when their national interest is at stake. Bill Clinton taught Kofi Annan that lesson from the Pentagon in the White House that Thursday.

-Kosovo and Chechnya: In Kosovo and Chechnya, international diplomacy "went to sleep" when the American led NATO forces and the Russian troops attacked Kosovo and Chechnya respectively leaving on their trail, blood, fire, tears and death.

When Slobodan Milosevic the former Yugoslavian President refused to accept the autonomy given to the people of Kosovo in 1968 by President Tito, and refused other ethnic groups (apart from the Serbs) to produce the President according to the 1974 constitution, diplomacy failed to address the issues even before the parliaments of Croatia and Slovenia declared themselves independent of the Federation. Holbrooke had this to say about diplomatic attempts made to avoid war in the Balkans "Negotiating with Milosevic has always been difficult because he is tricky, evasive, smart, dangerous, calm and unyielding" (Holbroke 1999:19). This shows that diplomacy cannot succeed without the will for it to succeed.

Before President Putin rolled Russian tanks into Chechnya in 1994, the world's renowned diplomats failed to convince both the Chechen "rebels" and President Vladimir Putin to stop the war which the Russian government equated with that in Kosovo thus their reluctance to support succession in Kosovo.

This dismal failure of diplomacy in world politics was noticed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR) where Kabila is now at war against factional leaders; Burundi and Rwanda where the UN forces stood by watching the people kill themselves; Liberia before Charles Taylor took control of the country; Morocco where the Frente popular para La Liberacion de sangnia el Hamray Rio de oro (POLISARIO) are still fighting for independence; Angola where Jonas Savimbi has spent his whole life time fighting the government; and Ethiopia/Eritrea where fierce fighting is on now with no place for diplomatic Manoeuvres. From the above catalogue of shame and failures, we can conveniently assert that diplomacy as a tool of foreign policy management is becoming anachronistic and has failed to resolve crisis in many parts of the world.

PROGNOSES FOR ACTION

The epistemic and ontological antecedent of modern diplomacy lies on gathering information especially secret information upon which the foreign policy of a diplomat's nation could be founded. Diplomatic representatives should not only be the "eyes" and the "ears" that report the events of the other countries to their home countries, they should also complement their roles by being the mouths and hands through which the "impulses emanating from the nerve centre are transformed into words and actions" (Morgenthau 1973:46).

Diplomats should make the people among whom they live and especially the mouth pieces of their public opinion and their political leaders understand and approve the foreign policy they represent. To "sell" his country's foreign policy therefore, the personal appeal of the diplomat and his understanding of the psychology of the foreign people are essential prerequisites.

Similarly, the diplomatic functions of trying to preserve peace, negotiations and threat of force can be done efficiently by the diplomat and not their home governments via telephone as was the case during the 1962 America - Cuban missiles crisis because even if his home government gives him directives on the objectives to be pursued and the means to be used, the execution of directives must *ipso facto* rely heavily upon the judgement and skill of the diplomat.

All other things being equal, a diplomat should be able to ask himself what gains a negotiated agreement will yield to his country and the international community; what will result if threat of force is used; how vigorous a persuasion should be considered seriously by any diplomat if he has to avoid a weak foreign policy posture for his country.

Conversely, a good diplomat can make a mediocre diplomacy of his predecessor look rigorous and better via tact and experience.

Although diplomacy has failed woefully to prevent wars in the close of the last century and the early days of the third millennium, it remains the cheapest way used by countries to exercise power in International Relations because no matter the cost of an international conference or that of maintaining staff in foreign countries, nations are ready to foot the bills or sponsor it. "Even the

poorest country can afford a modest diplomatic corps and keep it in reasonable style" (Organski 1968:401).

Diplomats should not only be seen as errand boys to their home governments preoccupied with creating only favourable prejudice in favour of their home countries nor should powerful countries like the United States of America snub and by-pass the United Nations secretary General (the recent case of Kofi Annan and attack innocent civilians (in Iraq) no matter the level of provocation. Why did the world appoint a secretary General in the UN the members cannot respect? Should the duty of foreign diplomats be only to arrange for cultural exchanges? Should the secretary general of a global organization such as the UN only serve as a robot who should be manipulated at will by powerful nations particularistic national interest? Certainly not!

On the other hand, are diplomats and the United Nations secretary general to adopt the "preventive diplomacy" approach which was current during the epoch of East/West ideological tension? Collective security was associated to woodrow Wildon as Dag Hammarskjold was to preventive diplomacy which he defined as "United Nations intervention in an area of conflict of, or marginal to; the sphere dominated by cold war struggles, designed to forestall the competitive intrusion of the vital power blocs in that area" (Claude 1964:313). With the demise of the super power status of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R) and the current craze for globalization, Dag Hammarskjold's prescription in the 1960's have no place today in modern foreign policy management and Diplomatic Practice (FPMDP).

The failure of the practitioners of FPMDP in using "preventive Diplomacy" in avoiding the internecine and catastrophic 1960 Congo crisis, the 1956 and 1958 middle East crisis; and the war in Laos in 1957 are all exhibits to show that Dag Hammarskjold's prescription was at best mere arm-chair speculation which had no relevance to the conflagrations. It is an open secret that the 1960 UN peace keeping force in the Congo (ONUC) took sides supporting their Western surrogate-Sese Seko Kokogbenzu Wazabanga Mobutu to become President while the (ONUC) supervised the beheading of Patrice Lumumba the Russian favourite for the job of President in the Congo.

This parochial manifestation has haunted the UN diplomacy and conduct of their peace keeping missions over the years. It seems that the UN diplomatic and peace keeping missions have sunk to the level of ridicule in many theatres of war. In Somalia, the UN peace keeping troops were not only killed but were forced to pull out in shame because as usual, the Western democratic model and the advancement of christian values was paramount in the relations between the UNOSOM forces and the Somalian people.

The same biased and despicable treatment is what the Iraqi people are now experiencing from the American attacks and until the UN stop taking instructions from US and stop compartmentalising international conflicts into

- i) ideological divide (capitalism and socialism);
- ii) religious moulds i.e. moslems versus christians;
- iii) Europe first before any other part of the world with Africa coming poor last in her agenda, diplomacy led by the US will always end in a fiasco as what they painfully experienced in Vietnam which culminated to their shameless withdrawal on January 4, 1974.

Perhaps this treacherous diplomatic moves founded and made popular by the US has now been adopted by most African countries flirting with the concept of democracy for how can one explain former President Babangida's romance with the "butcher" of Liberia Sergeant Samuel Doe who together with Quiwonkpa, Wey Syen, Nicholas Podiah, Nelson Toe and David Kimeh plunged their country into a protracted civil war which took many lives?

From all indications, the Nigerian government under the vilian Abacha took sides with Lady Perry (one of the Presidential candidates) against the widely supported Charles Taylor who later won the Presidential elections in Liberia.

The problems now in Sierra Leone are traceable to Abacha's backing of an unpopular candidate Tejan Kabbah because of their religious affinity - Moslem solidarity.

The lessons we have to learn from the above examples are namely, that:

- (a) Diplomats and Presidents who are not popular in their home countries like Abacha was - have no business pretending to make peace in other countries because "he that goes for equity" must as a matter of principle, do so "with clean hands".
- (b) Members of peace keeping forces - be it in East Timor, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR), Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia and now Sierra Leone should "pocket" their religious and ideological biases and take a dispassionate and cursory look into the politics and economy of the nation, get the majority of the people's view and either support the person the majority wants or remains neutral because most "peace keeping forces" have often degenerated into war mongering forces getting involved in petite politics of the people they are supposed to protect. President Mobutu built for himself an empire of graft and when he was finally pushed out of kinshasha, "the house he built" crashed on his head and the end product? - he died like a rat and was buried like a thief in Egypt. If the Americans who installed him as their anchor man in Zaire thought he was a genuine "democrat", they were mistaken because it was not long before the Leopard started showing her colours "Late Joseph Mobutu of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) ruled his country for 32 years. During these wasted years, many of his political opponents met their untimely death" (Akpan 1999:125). The fear of Lumumba (a socialist) by the US, was the beginning of the institutionalization as President of one of the most vicious and die-hard tyrants (Mobutu) in modern African politics. The DR is still not stable despite diplomatic shuttles by many US secretaries of state for Africa and the conspiratorial elimination of Patrick Lumumba "the only trouble maker" in the then Belgian Congo.

From the above catalogue of shame, it is our contention that the United Nations secretary general and other diplomats engaged in finding "lasting" solutions to world peace will stop using force to keep the peace. Perhaps the Italian Defence minister, Kubio Fabri's remarks about the UNOSOM's mission in Somalia best captured the situation then "... the Italian contingent was sent to Somalia to take part in peace keeping and humanitarian work defined by a UN resolution, not to impose peace by force" (Fabri 1993:27). The era of "Gun-Boat diplomacy" (Peakcock 1971:273) that characterised the 1911 Agadir incident in North Africa is over, hence statesmen should be concerned with how to identify bluff, bluster and intemperate attack of anarchist who are prepared to sign treaties and negotiate with governments without keeping to her spirit and letter.

RECAPITULATION AND CONCLUSION

As can be discerned from the above exposition, the growth of diplomacy from her religio-centric epistemic antecedent of Angel Gabriel via the Wilsonian "collective Security"; the Dag Hammarskjoldian "preventive diplomacy"; the kissengerian "shuttle diplomacy" to the most recent Jacksonian "initiatives in Africa" and the middle east was fraught with definitional polemics and failures hence losing her substance, prestige, colour and glamour.

The arguments advanced by Scholars who expect diplomacy to play the important role which is expected of her, are however disappointed after pursuing the balance sheet and score board of world diplomacy in the recent past. The despicable and woeful failure of diplomacy to settle the imbroglios between Farah Aided and Ali Mahdi in Somalia; Charles Taylor and Sergeant Doe of Liberia; Foday Sankoh and Tejan Kabbah of Sierra Leone; Laurent Kabila and Mobutu Sese-Seko of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; President Clinton of US and Saddam Hussien of Iraq; Clinton and Slobodan Milosevic of Yugoslavia to mention but a few, is an empirical pointer to the declining role of diplomacy in contemporary world politics.

On the other hand, it is the wish of many in the world for diplomacy to prevail in order to avoid wars with her attendant evils of bloodshed, rape, torture and death.

As expected, there will be charge and countercharge, definitions and redefinitions which could mount to a crescendo of dissonance, suspicion and confusion that could make diplomacy seem the third millennium's counterpart of the proverbial tower of Babel.

In this inquiry into the facts and fictions of Foreign Policy Management and Diplomatic Practice in contemporary world politics it is the wish of many for diplomacy to prevail, thus, May Diplomacy Prevail?

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