



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

School of Foreign Service
Institute for the Study of Diplomacy

Force and Diplomacy in the 21st Century

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On the Occasion of the 15th Oscar Iden Lecture and the 75th anniversary of the School of Foreign Service

THE WORLD HAS so fundamentally changed that it is time for us to think anew of the relationship between U.S. diplomacy and force. We are now firmly into a multipolar world. And, compared with yesterday, it is a far more complex, fluid environment. Two challenges lie before us: first, to guide, harness, and balance force and diplomacy as we enter the 21st century and, second, to learn how to deal with “operations other than war.”

The theme of “diplomacy and force” could not be any more timely or appropriate. Just last month some of you may have noticed that very title, “diplomacy and force,” splashed across the cover of *Time* magazine. And Henry Kissinger’s latest book wrestles with this same subject, as did Anthony Lake’s recent lecture at Harvard.

So it seems that we are seeing a revival of interest in these two fundamental elements of American power. But that should not surprise us. For what we have come to realize over the past several years is that the world has in fact so fundamentally changed that it is time for us to think anew of the relationship between American diplomacy and force. And I believe there are two challenges that lie before us and that we must come to terms with:

First, to redefine this relationship between diplomacy and force in the post-Cold War era, to guide, to harness, and balance these two elements of our national power towards a common purpose, par-

ticularly as we enter the 21st Century.

And second, to learn how to deal with the growing number of what I call “operations other than war”: the Somalias, the Rwandas, the Haitis, and the Bosnias of today and tomorrow. For I believe that these sorts of “operations other than war” will stay with us well into the next century.

The Relationship between Diplomacy and Force

I remember reading in George Kennan’s autobiography his prognosis that in peacetime, soldiers are the servants of diplomats. But when war erupts, the relationship shifts and suddenly diplomats are no more than the lawyers of the Department of Defense. At the time Kennan wrote this he was expressing a view he learned during the years between the First and Second World Wars. However, the peculiar conditions of the Cold War certainly changed this equation. Throughout the long decades of the Cold War, in almost everything we did, it was simply accepted that security was our paramount concern because, after all, our survival was at stake almost every day. And so we had a strategy—containment—that placed the security dimension of our power at the forefront.

From the very beginning of the Cold War an interagency process was developed and then matured to ensure unity between our diplomats and our military. But if truth be known, whatever differences existed, were generally very slight. Sure, there were debates over arms control or the diplomatic difficulty of supporting certain military measures, such as bringing new missiles into Europe, or constructing bases and training agreements, or how to work

through burden-sharing arrangements, particularly in Europe.

But compared to the kinds of issues and decisions we have had to face over the past several years, the issues of the sixties, the seventies, and even the eighties appear undramatic in retrospect. As containment matured as a strategy, there was simply less and less room for disagreement between the diplomats and the soldiers.

Then came the great events of the late eighties and early nineties, when our colossal threat suddenly collapsed and the bipolar structure that we were so long accustomed to disintegrated right before our eyes.

Immediately, there was a drumbeat to go back to something resembling George Kennan's old relationship. Economics would displace security as the foremost priority of our national strategy and the military would shrink considerably as a tool of our influence. And so, our diplomats were told, sheathe your swords and relearn the art of trade agreements.

Now, three or four years later, in the aftermath of the Gulf War, Somalia, Rwanda, Yugoslavia, and our latest troubles in North Korea and Haiti, some of us are beginning to recognize a degree of wishful thinking in that particular view.

We have found that our global leadership is something we value highly. And we have also learned to appreciate that it is probably not possible to sustain our leadership if we are unwilling to use one of our two principal strengths, namely, military force. We now understand as well, that Kennan's formula worked when our nation had no significant commitments outside its own territories, whereas commitments like those in Korea and Kuwait and many others you can think of rely heavily on the use of American force, or the preparedness to use American force.

But if we are not back to Kennan's model, we are also not back to the Cold War relationship between diplomacy and force. Where, then, are we, and how should we proceed?

Needed: A Framework for a Multipolar World

I am not sure I have the answer to that question, but I would like to offer you some things to think about. Because, if we are going to get it right for the

next century, I think we are going to have to find the proper balance in this partnership between diplomacy and force.

In the first instance, both diplomacy and force are operating in a new kind of global climate and structure. That's no news to anyone. We are now firmly into a multipolar world. And compared with yesterday, it is a far more complex environment, and a far more fluid environment, one that moves and changes at a much faster tempo than we have been accustomed to these last few decades.

The United States still has unequaled global power and persuasiveness. We are the richest nation, even though, as a total percentage of world production, our position has diminished considerably since World War II. We still have the world's finest and most powerful military. But to project this force abroad, we rely upon other nations for bases, for overflight rights, for cost-sharing, and very often, as coalition partners.

It is the combination of these two, our economic might and our military might, that gives us such extraordinary diplomatic leverage all around the world. They are what make America's diplomats the first among equals.

Most importantly, perhaps, as you look into the next century, it is clear that there is going to be more multipolarity, not less. As China gets richer and more powerful, as the Russians recover from the loss of an empire, as Germany recovers from the costs of reunification, and as Tokyo finds a new role in Asia and the world, the combination of all of this will reduce our latitude to influence unilaterally or to act independently.

It is not that our strength will decline—I am very optimistic about our prospects in the next century. But because I am optimistic about the prospects of others as well, I think there is a real need for us to build the framework of this multipolar world.

In the past, this may have meant striking a balance of power between competing powers, the traditional European solution to finding security. But, the world is not so simple today. There are nuclear weapons that tilt the equation of power in odd ways. How else could the Soviet Union, with an economy that was so backward and impoverished, have been considered such a powerful opponent?

It is axiomatic as well that in a balance of power there is a nemesis you are balancing against. Today, whom do you want to balance power against? And is this an optimal solution if the opportunity exists instead to bring all of the major powers into cooperative global roles?

This is the first great challenge we face. How do we define this new relationship between diplomacy and force in this very different era? And then, how do we guide, and harness, and balance these two elements of our national power toward a common purpose?

Operations Other Than War

There is a second challenge that has also been with us since 1990, and you cannot separate the two. That challenge is the growing number of what we in the military call “operations other than war.” These are the Somalias, the Bosnias, the Rwandas, and the Haitis, which range from peacekeeping to peace enforcement, from humanitarian operations to the counterdrug efforts we are pursuing in Latin America and other regions.

These operations sit in that netherworld between war and peace where the lines between diplomacy and force are intermingled and certainly muddled.

We conducted such operations during the Cold War, but they were few and far between. And frankly, we did not always do them very well. So we lack a time-tested template that we can lay down every time we commit to one of these operations.

These operations become even more complex when the effort involves United Nations or coalition forces, because the job of the warrior and the job of the diplomat, both become more difficult in such cases.

Any of you here who have been involved in one of these United Nations or coalition operations will, I hope, agree that there is much less leeway than when you are operating unilaterally, because any daylight or confusion between our diplomatic and military strategies quickly becomes a source of confusion to our partners. And if we are leading the effort, as is often the case, it is all the more deplorable, and all the more dangerous.

Our record over the past year, on the other hand, has been getting better. If you look back on Rwanda

and on what we have done so far in Haiti and, in a slightly different way, in North Korea, you would, I think, conclude that the interaction between diplomacy and force has, in fact, been quite good.

Learning to Work as a Team

We have learned a few lessons that we will be able to apply to the future, and I would like to discuss some of these with you.

I can remember a time when the military viewed diplomats as elitists in striped pants who put greater stock in turning an elegant phrase than in action. And this disenchantment was reciprocated. For their part, diplomats viewed the military as men who saw the world simply as black and white, and who admired action for action's sake. We were quite uncomfortable in one another's presence and studiously sought to avoid each other. When we met, we very often talked past each other.

But the time when these feelings prevailed passed long ago, probably because the pressures of the Cold War forced such a constant interaction between us.

To fully appreciate how far we have come, all you have to do is to spend a day with Ambassadors Madeleine Albright and Charles Redman, as I have recently done, flying into the bullet-riddled city of Sarajevo. For that particular trip, both of them had traded in their striped suits for flak jackets and steel “pots”. And instead of riding around in shiny limousines, both spent the day in French armored cars, surrounded by tough and vigilant young guards.

Instead of going to meetings and exchanging pleasantries, both of them were completely absorbed with going to the site of the latest atrocity in Sarajevo, and studying the logistics of how we were going to keep the people of that city fed for just another year.

I have seen the same kind of sharing of understanding and of risks in Rwanda and Somalia and Haiti, as well. In these kinds of operations, because of their complexity, and because of the blend of diplomacy and force, it is especially vital that our diplomats and warriors operate completely in tandem.

Recognizing Institutional Differences

There remain very real differences between our

two institutions. We must all understand these differences, because they tend to become clearest whenever a crisis emerges. And that is surely not a good time to become enlightened.

The military are, in fact, most comfortable when the objectives are clear and precise. Institutionally, the military are solution oriented. When force is used, we have a strong preference that its use result in achieving that state we call victory. When we fight, our first recourse is to apply overwhelming force to achieve a rapid and a decisive conclusion.

his is partly because we think lives are at risk, but also because once diplomacy turns to force, rationality falls prey to emotion and unpredictability.

On the other hand, as Henry Kissinger observed, diplomacy is often the art of managing the insoluble. So the diplomat operates inside the milieu of rationality, a world of half measures, of compromises, and of the kinds of complex arrangements that we call "peaceful relations." An experienced diplomat is an expert at finding just that particular line in the sand that leaves both sides least dissatisfied. When force is used, a diplomat might reasonably ask whether it is possible to use just the right amount of force to accomplish the precise purpose in mind.

Traditionally, this has been the great clash in outlooks between diplomats and the military. One looks to apply just enough force to gain a negotiated agreement; the other, the military, to apply so much force that it gains acquiescence from the antagonist.

But in "operations other than war" this traditional clash of outlooks tends to get confused and turned on its head. Nearly always, these kinds of operations are not about vital interests. And because our interests are limited in such operations, so are the means we are willing to apply and what we want to achieve. There is thus an intangible struggle to find the right balance.

There is also a struggle to find the right way to use force, because very often in these "operations other than war," the adversaries are not opposing states but are instead warring factions, tribes, or ethnic groups, and the effects of either diplomacy or force are not easily calculable, rational, or predictable.

In the Cold War, we were wary of limited operations, because there was always the risk of a limited conflict getting out of hand and escalating to a su-

perpower confrontation. Now that the Cold War is over, our visceral concern in these limited operations is that the operation might escalate in risks and costs beyond the level of our more limited interests.

We recognize, as well, that once American lives are lost, our interest will swell. So we necessarily ask ourselves, how many casualties can we stand in this particular operation?

On The Use of Force

When it was first announced that I was to be nominated by the president to become the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a national magazine carried my picture on its cover under the dubious title of "Globocop." More recently, several newspapers have referred to me as a pacifist, and others have argued that I have a phobia about placing American lives at risk. So apparently I have traveled quite a distance in this past year!

But, really, the issue is not a reluctance to use American force for the right reasons or in the right ways. The issue is, for what interest are we using force? And then, how do we balance our risks and use force appropriately and effectively to protect that particular interest? The issue is also understanding that once we commit American prestige and lives, can, or should, we resolve to achieve something less than a decisive outcome?

In Bosnia, for example, there has been a recurring debate about using American airpower to influence the Bosnian Serbs to stop the fighting. I am not sure there is anywhere in the world where airpower, by itself, is enough to convince a determined nation or people to do anything in particular, but I know with nearly complete certainty that Bosnia is not the place to try such a thing. Once you move down this road, you begin a chain of events in which you are not the only one making decisions. And once American prestige and lives are committed, we always have to ask if we are willing to follow through. I am not saying that we cannot use airpower to help enforce the United Nations-protected safe zones in Bosnia, or to protect UN peacekeepers from attacks in that country. For those limited purposes airpower has a legitimate role. But you have to understand what is lurking around the corner before expanding beyond this purpose.

In another place, Rwanda, some proposed that we needed to expand our humanitarian support and intervene between the warring factions. This would have been a large step beyond providing clean water, medicines, and food. Our risks would have been much greater and this step could have dragged our forces into a very deep and tempestuous well.

Along the same vein, in Haiti, where we are today, some have called for us to use our forces to do more—to perform civil police functions, for example. Again, we have to carefully examine what it is that we must accomplish and what it is that the Haitians must accomplish for themselves, to build what is, after all, their own nation.

I am not saying that we should stand idly on the sidelines and watch Haitians get beaten and murdered. Long before we entered Haiti, one of our purposes was to keep this from happening. But there is a dangerous line between acting to prevent this and becoming the police force for an entire nation.

Vital Interests

Secretary Perry has recently proposed what I believe to be a sound formula for making these kinds of choices. There continue to be interests that are vital to the security of our nation. If Saddam Hussein were to attack tomorrow, we would not pause nor hesitate, nor debate for a moment whether to send an overwhelming force to defend the region and to achieve decisive victory. We would go immediately and, if need be, we would fight until the job was done. In fact, we did go just recently, and because we went, we did not have to fight!

We also have interests that are other than vital interests—important but clearly not vital. In these cases, we are willing to use our military power primarily for coercive purposes in support of our diplomacy. But because our interests are limited, so are the means we intend to apply. Haiti is a good example where we were prepared to use limited force in support of diplomacy. Had diplomacy failed, we would have used force to get the job done. Fortunately, it was not necessary.

Finally, there are cases where our interests may not be very strong but where our humanitarian motives may come into play. Here a good example is Rwanda, where the need was so great and the ac-

tions of one party to the conflict so morally reprehensible that we, as Americans, could not just turn away.

Even with this equation, there is one other thing we must understand if we are to keep a proper balance between our risks and our stakes. There will always be a temptation to shift the mission a little this way, or use a little more force for this or that purpose. The only way to guard against these temptations—this urge to allow mission creep—is to have a very firm, and very clear, understanding of what it is that we want to achieve before we commit; and then we must all adhere to a principle called perseverance. Or, as we say in the military, “Steady as you go. Keep your eye on the objective.”

This is what has succeeded so far in Rwanda and is succeeding today in Haiti, and it is what has led to a smooth partnership between our diplomats and our military in both those places.

But I am not so optimistic that we have learned all that we need to learn about how to manage this in all future circumstances. We still need to have the best minds working on the very real quandaries and kinds of problems that are endemic in these “operations other than war.”

It is equally important that our best minds continue to explore how we arrange the balance and purpose of our diplomacy and force to construct the right arrangements for the challenges and demands of the next century.

About the Oscar Iden Lecture

The Oscar Iden Lecture series, presented under the auspices of ISD, commemorates the late Mr. and Mrs. Iden, who contributed the endowment for lectures in American foreign policy and international diplomacy. Oscar Iden was a graduate of the School of Foreign Service, class of 1924. This lecture was given on November 16, 1994, in Gaston Hall, Georgetown University.

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