



SPEAKING OUT

Defining the Ideal Diplomat

BY MARC GROSSMAN

I recently read Harold Nicolson's classic 1939 study, *Diplomacy*, and President Barack Obama's May 2010 National Security Strategy back to back. Though the two publications were produced seven decades apart and are unlikely to be paired for anyone's monthly book club, they have more in common than one might expect.

Nicolson's volume reflects its era. He never mentions female or minority diplomats, and some of his characterizations of national traits would be considered politically incorrect today. Yet the work contains some lessons that today's diplomats would do well to apply.

In particular, consider Nicolson's plea that people should be clear about the definition of his chosen topic: "This word 'diplomacy' is carelessly taken to denote several quite different things ... as a synonym for foreign policy or for negotiations or for the processes and machinery by which negotiation is carried out."

Nicolson turns to the *Oxford English Dictionary* for the following definition: "the management of international relations by negotiation, focused on official ambassadors and envoys." Some pages later, he expands his view by recognizing that diplomacy is also about "the ordered conduct of relations between one group of human beings and another group alien to

Once we craft a clear definition of what diplomacy encompasses, our profession will receive its due as a national security tool.

themselves."

With that definition in mind, let us turn to the president's National Security Strategy document, which contains its own descriptions of the purposes of diplomacy and is based on four themes that will define the jobs of today's and tomorrow's U.S. diplomats.

First, the NSS recognizes the power of simultaneity. It highlights the fact that while the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century can each be observed and analyzed individually, none of them can be successfully addressed without reference to the others. As Hans Binnendijk and Richard Kugler, both of National Defense University, have put it, no single problem, danger or threat holds the key to the world's future. What matters is their interaction and the coordination of our responses.

Second, the NSS acknowledges that diplomacy is not the answer to every question. Maintaining the strongest

possible defense and being ready and willing to use force (preferably with others, but alone if necessary) are essential to protecting national security.

Third, just as diplomacy must be backed by the strongest possible defense, our capacity to influence events abroad requires a strong, resilient domestic foundation.

Fourth, the strategy conveys the message that American diplomacy will not succeed unless our allies and friends around the world support it. As *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman has written about European involvement in Afghanistan, "Don't just show us the love; show us the money. Show us the troops. Show us the diplomatic effort." *Washington Post* writer Anne Applebaum puts it this way: "Halfway through his presidency, George W. Bush found he had to drop unilateralism in favor of diplomacy. Now one wonders: at some point in his presidency, will Obama find he has to drop diplomacy in favor of unilateralism?"

Definitions Matter

Reading *Diplomacy*, with its emphasis on being clear about definitions, and the NSS together, I was reminded that while President Obama took office last year promising to engage the world by offering an open hand to America's adversaries, his statements sometimes conveyed the idea that engagement



was the same thing as diplomacy. This left him open to criticism that such an approach was naive.

Indeed, Nicolson might say that a challenge for diplomatic professionals is the temptation to view diplomacy as somehow synonymous with engagement. In fact, leaders and practitioners alike need to be clear that engagement is only one element of diplomacy. While engagement is important, diplomacy is about more than talking to America's adversaries. In addition, though it does not produce results overnight, diplomacy lays the groundwork for success in the long run — at least when strategically conceived and properly executed.

In more recent statements the president has been clearer about this key distinction. For example, in a commencement speech at West Point in May, he declared that: "Engagement is not an end in itself."

U.S. relations with Russia and Iran are two examples of the need to think clearly about the distinction between engagement and diplomacy.

Some observers criticized President Obama's pledge to reach out to Tehran in the early months of his administration. They cited Iranian declarations that it would build even more nuclear enrichment plants, deny or delay access to IAEA inspectors, and enrich fuel to higher percentages as evidence of the policy's failure.

In fact, offers of American engagement at that time helped expose fissures inside the Tehran regime and between the regime and the Iranian people. Moreover, talks with Tehran last fall produced a modest nuclear deal that hardliners then rejected. Pres. Obama used this backsliding as part of a larger diplomatic strategy to rally the international community to

***We must resist the
temptation to view
diplomacy as
synonymous with
engagement.***

get tougher with Iran. In November 2009, Russia and China voted with the United States in favor of an International Atomic Energy Agency resolution demanding that Iran freeze operations at its once-secret nuclear enrichment plant. And in May 2010 they supported tough United Nations Security Council sanctions on Iran, despite a Turkish and Brazilian effort to head it off.

Engagement with Iran is now only a part (and perhaps likely to be a shrinking part) of a broader U.S. diplomatic strategy to end Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons. The Obama administration can continue a policy of engagement to strengthen those in Tehran who want a diplomatic solution while simultaneously pursuing international support for even tighter sanctions. But in doing so, it should engage not only the regime, but the people of Iran, including the pro-democracy movement. Toward that end, senior U.S. officials should speak out in defense of those championing freedom and human rights.

Washington should also sound out Tehran's neighbors on creating multilateral structures to dissuade Iran from pursuing its nuclear ambitions. For ex-

ample, the U.S. could propose joint military exercises between NATO and the nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Relations with Russia have followed a similar course. Although the Obama administration has been heavily criticized for pressing the "reset button" in U.S.-Russian relations, the policy has already yielded tangible results. As he engaged the Kremlin, the president changed direction on missile defenses in Central Europe, abandoning missile and radar sites in Poland and the Czech Republic to which Moscow had objected. This shift helps explain Russia's IAEA and U.N. votes against Iran.

Although serious differences with Russia remain, engagement became part of a plan that has also led to the New START arms control treaty awaiting Senate ratification. To make further progress in this area, the administration can now leverage its strategic arms dialogue with Moscow to bring together Russia, China, India, Japan and the NATO allies in support of a joint missile defense effort to protect our peoples from the threat of state or non-state extremists armed with ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction.

The Modern Diplomat

Nicolson says in his book that the type of people we choose to be diplomats is important. This will surely be proven true as the administration seeks to realize the goals in the National Security Strategy. In concluding a chapter on "The Ideal Diplomat," Nicolson describes the qualities such professionals possess as "truth, accuracy, calm, patience, good humor, modesty and loyalty." He continues: "But the reader may object, you have forgotten intelligence, knowledge, discernment,



MARKETPLACE
WWW.FS.JOURNAL.ORG

Click on the Marketplace tab on the marquee

AFSA Legacy
www.afsa.org/CFCFAD.cfm

AFSPA
afspa.org/FSBP

AKA Hotel residences
stay-aka.com

Clements International
clements.com

Cort Furniture
cort1.com

Fox Hill
foxhillseniorcondominium.com

Hirshorn Company, The
hirshorn.com


Kendal
Kendal.org

Lockheed Martin Corporation
lockheedmartin.com

Potomac Books
potomacbooksinc.com

SDFCU
sdfcu.org

WJD
wjdpdm.com



When contacting an advertiser, kindly mention the *Foreign Service Journal*.

SPEAKING OUT

prudence, hospitality, charm, industry, courage and even tact. I have not forgotten them. I have taken them for granted.”

The State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development are benefiting from a welcome, long-overdue infusion of talent, thanks in large part to the efforts of Secretaries of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell. A key factor in meeting Nicolson’s high standards for diplomats will be the professional education these new employees receive. The curriculum should include respect for the history of American diplomacy, a focus on leadership and accountability, guidance on how to link policy and resources, skill at program direction, and readiness to use new media.

Their training must also combine the transfer of experience with a recognition, well highlighted in the NSS, that much about the future will be different. Otherwise, as former Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban has cautioned, the influence of experience and analogy in the training of diplomats may blind them to the original, unpredictable, innovative factors in international conduct.

This insight is especially relevant to thinking about the point the NSS makes about the importance of developing and supporting a whole-of-government approach to meeting the challenges of this complicated century. Today’s diplomats must be able to work effectively with the interagency community, as well as overseas counterparts, nongovernmental organizations and the private sector.

Pres. Obama’s National Security Strategy gets a very great deal right. But we find ourselves, as Nicolson did so many years ago while writing *Diplo-*

***U.S. relations with
Russia and Iran are two
examples of the need to
think clearly about the
distinction between
engagement and
diplomacy.***

macy, needing to be careful about how we define our terms. If we can get that task right, diplomacy will receive its due as a national security tool. Equally important, the people we recruit and train to carry out our nation’s diplomatic business will be better prepared to manage the challenges of the 21st century. ■

Marc Grossman, a Foreign Service officer from 1976 to 2005, served as ambassador to Turkey (1994-1997), assistant secretary of State for European affairs (1997-2000), director general of the Foreign Service (2000-2001) and under secretary for political affairs (2001-2005), retiring with the rank of career ambassador. He is now vice chairman of The Cohen Group, a consulting firm. Ambassador Grossman wishes to thank the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and the Harvard Kennedy School’s Program on the Future of Diplomacy for their support in thinking about these issues. The views expressed here are, of course, his own.