The Strategic Use of Digital and Public Diplomacy in Pursuit of National Objectives

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Executive Summary

1. The development of Public Diplomacy and Digital Diplomacy has been driven by changes in the international environment. Specifically it has been driven by the arrival of new international actors, both governmental and non-governmental, the evolution of new Information Communication Technologies (ICT) and the emergence of a New International Security Agenda (NISA).

2. Public Diplomacy and Digital Diplomacy are not ends in themselves, but rather tools to help advance broader diplomatic strategies. They should be integrated into these strategies, together with other tools, to promote the objectives of the diplomatic actors, whether governmental or non-governmental.

3. Public Diplomacy either amounts to little more than propaganda+marketing, even as pursued by sophisticated western foreign ministries, or is reduced to nation-branding. Serious nations should not attempt to brand themselves.

4. Public Diplomacy should aim to shape the political and social environment in such a way that specific policy proposals then receive a favourable welcome. Successful Public Diplomacy programmes render lobbying superfluous.

5. A more radical approach to Public Diplomacy sees it as a new diplomatic paradigm for promoting direct contact between civil society groups at an international level. This focuses especially on the global issues of the New International Security Agenda, which require global collaboration extending beyond governments. In as far as government diplomats are slow to take the initiative it opens up a space for civil society groups to take the lead.

6. Digital Diplomacy so far has focused almost exclusively on the use of existing social media platforms. It risks being reduced to “a presence in the social media” rather than the strategic use of those media to pursue diplomatic objectives. This can undermine the credibility of the diplomats and waste valuable time and resources. Social media strategies are time and resource intensive.

7. Existing social media platforms have uses which extend beyond mere social media presence. They can be used for networking, information gathering and assessing public opinion. They are increasingly used to assess reactions to policy initiatives. But the Twitterati are a self-selected group who do not necessarily represent public opinion as a whole. Social media platforms can also be used for cam-
paigning, although there is a large element of chance in which campaigns go viral.

8. The focus on existing social media platforms has diverted attention away from other digital tools and platforms. Diplomats have been slow to pick up on the possibilities of Big Data and crowd-sourcing. Diplomacy agents, both governmental and non-governmental, need to sit down with software designers to explore the possibilities of platforms and tools that are tailor made for diplomatic needs.

9. Some more imaginative approaches to the use of digital tools or platforms in pursuit of broader diplomatic strategies are already emerging:
   · Gamification: using computer games to inform, educate or shape international debates.
   · Crowd-sources analysis: using digital platforms to create an online space for forums, simulations or scenario exercises can multiply analytical capacity, especially for civil society groups and small nations.
   · Online Platforms: giving access to isolated groups or groups in conflict allowing them to participate in policy debates or scenario building exercises, for example by giving migrants a voice in the European migration debate.
   · Simulation exercises: allowing world leaders and their officials to “game” conflict situations and explore possible outcomes before committing themselves to policy decisions.

10. Telecommunications is about to be revolutionised again by the introduction of 5G technology (due in the EU in 2020). This will open up new digital possibilities, especially for mobile devices. This will be especially important in those countries where smartphone ownership increases even as they suffer food shortages. Diplomacy agents, both governmental and non-governmental, need to be exploring these possibilities with the software designers now if they are not to miss out.

Introduction

The world of international relations has changed radically in the last decade. The changes have focused on three key developments: the entry of new actors, the development of new information and communication technologies (ICT), and the emergence of a new international security agenda (NISA). The three developments are inter-related and self-reinforcing. New technologies have facilitated the entrance of new actors, while the NISA has increased their relevance in international debates. While states and their diplomats have not disappeared (as predicted by some), they must share the international stage with a broad range of other governmental and non-governmental actors. This has impacted on how they think about, and practice, the arts of diplomacy. It also means that diplomacy is now not an activity unique to states and their representatives.

There is in fact nothing new about non-governmental actors participating in international relations. The Anti-Slavery League was active as a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) in the early 19th century lobbying for the abolition of slavery, including putting pressure on Lord Castlereagh to secure its abolition at the Congress of Vienna (the League still exists today, making it possibly the oldest lobbying NGO). The British and Dutch East India Companies were major players in Asian geopolitics, with the British East Indian Company governing an entire continent until the Indian Mutiny in 1857. There are other examples of what might be described as corporate or civil society actors throughout the history of international relations. However, no previous period has seen such a large number and variety of such actors, and they continue to multiply. Whereas a decade ago analysts would talk
of the participation of big corporations and organised NGOs like Amnesty International or Greenpeace (the conflict between Greenpeace and Shell over the disposal of the Brent Spar rig was the classic case study of the time), now analysts must take account of the transformative role of SMEs and smaller, less formal civil society groups, or even individuals. Whereas in the past, non-state governmental participation in international relations was largely limited to regions and “non-recognised” would-be states, now cities and even smaller towns are increasingly important actors.

This explosion of international actors has been facilitated by the development of new ICTs. Web 1.0 opened up a wide range of sources of political, economic and social information about countries and their inter-relations. Government diplomats and even journalists who were used to having privileged access to information and analysis through their postings abroad were suddenly confronted by NGOs who were at least as well, if not sometimes better, informed. The development of email allowed NGOs and others to communicate cheaply and efficiently at a global level, both to develop global contact networks and launch international campaigns. As the author pointed out at the time, an individual sat at a terminal at home could gather information and develop networks to help analyse it and give it context in a way previously possible only for a diplomat stationed abroad. Both governments and corporations became wary of the global campaigns NGOs were able to launch about their behaviour abroad, to the extent that a whole new area of business activity, Corporate and Social Responsibility (CSR), emerged. However, this technology was still clunky compared with what was to come. It was Web 2.0, and in particular the development of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, that has radically transformed how we act and think about international relations over the last decade. Now small groups and even individuals can shape international debates and events. Facebook has been largely credited with the launch of the Arab Spring, while hashtag campaigns like #BringOurGirlsBack have rapidly gone viral, shaping thinking on geopolitical issues at a global level. Governments have had to engage with the new technologies and platforms, both as sources of information and in attempts to shape global debates in ways that favour their own interests. This in turn has led to a new area of diplomacy, variously described as digital diplomacy, e-diplomacy or cyber diplomacy.

The relevance of the new actors, both governmental and non-governmental, and the use of the new ICT has been reinforced by the NISA. In part this resulted from the 11 September attacks on New York and Washington. Until then International Security had been defined in terms of the security or the stability of the state. The 11 September attack had not really threatened the security or stability of the United States of America, but at the same time it seemed odd to exclude international terrorism from the list of international security issues. This led some analysts to propose a new definition of international security for the 21st century, focused on the security and economic welfare of the individual within the state. This clearly included international terrorism within the definition of international security, but it also included a range of other global issues such as climate change, pandemic disease, migration, poverty, organised crime and financial stability. On reflection it became clear that these are indeed international security issues. It also became clear that they shared three common threads. Firstly these issues are all inter-related: they feed off each other and must be dealt with holistically. Secondly they are global: no single country, or even group of countries, can deal with them on their own. They must be dealt with through global collaboration. And thirdly, collaboration in dealing with these issues must extend beyond governments to collaboration between civil societies.

In tackling what are sometimes called “wicked issues”, a broad range of governmental and non-governmental actors not only want to participate: their participation is essential. This has been demonstrated in the climate change conferences, where multi-level and heterogeneous coalitions have been for-
that are engaged by governments, corporations and NGOs built around shared objectives or interests. The need to engage with non-governmental actors, and indeed with civil society in general, has forced governments and their diplomats to focus more on Public Diplomacy, diplomatic activity aimed at influencing foreign public’s rather than engaging directly with foreign governments.

Thus it can be seen that the importance of both Public and Digital Diplomacy have grown out of, and been reinforced by, the broader changes in the international environment. They are closely associated in as far as much Digital Diplomacy focuses on using digital platforms as effective ways of shaping foreign public opinion. Indeed, it can sometimes seem that they are identical, with much Digital Diplomacy being limited to the use of social media to convey Public Diplomacy messages. But this seriously limits the potential of Digital Diplomacy. There is also the danger that Public Diplomacy and Digital Diplomacy are seen as ends in themselves, even as substitutes for traditional diplomacy, rather than as tools to promote and secure broader diplomatic agendas. The argument of this article is that the effective use of both Public and Digital Diplomacy, whether by governments (national and sub-national) or civil society groups, depends on the prior identification of strategic objectives. Once the strategic objectives have been identified, actors can explore the most effective digital and non-digital tools to promote or secure them. Without this prior stage, Public Diplomacy can descend into little more than branding and Digital Diplomacy into social media presence for the sake of presence. Neither are credible, and both mean significant missed opportunities.

Public Diplomacy

The author once devoted an entire day to debating the definition of Public Diplomacy with fellow contributors to a collection of essays on Public Diplomacy and Foreign Policy, without any clear conclusions, other than that we had probably wasted the day. For the purposes of this article, Public Diplomacy will refer to the use of a broad range of tools to inform and influence foreign publics. Frequently when undertaken by governments the aim is to influence foreign decision-makers and opinion makers, for example journalists and politicians, as traditionally these have been easier to reach than the wider public. This has been a criticism of even innovative public diplomacy programmes, that they are focused too much on political elites rather than wider publics. Prior to the development of social media, perhaps the focus on political elites was inevitable. This type of Public Diplomacy is not new, as made clear by the diaries of Ivan Maisky. Maisky was Soviet Ambassador in London in the 1930s. He developed a broad range of contacts on both the political left and right, as well as among journalists, writers and artists. His aim was clear: to generate a political and social environment in the UK that would be favourable to Soviet policy objectives. In addition to cultivating a broad network, he also sought to use Soviet culture and visiting writers and musicians to advance his cause. By any modern definition, this was Public Diplomacy. It demonstrated both the possibilities and limitations of Public Diplomacy campaigns. Maisky had clear strategic aims, which structured both his network building and his broader Public Diplomacy activities. At the same time, the success of the campaign was limited by the policies adopted by the Soviet Union. Thus while Maisky had been very successful in influencing elite public opinion during the Munich crisis (to the extent that the then Prime Minister Chamberlain complained about his influence), his campaign was brutally undermined by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939. Public Diplomacy, however effective, cannot make up for bad policy making.

There is a close relationship between the kind of Public Diplomacy exercised by Maisky...
and the approach to conflict outlined by Chinese strategist Sunzi in the Art of War. For Sunzi, the best General manoeuvres in such a way as to win the battle without having to fight it. Similarly, the aim of Public Diplomacy can be seen as generating a political and social environment favourable to your political thinking, so that when specific policies are presented they are accepted without the need to argue, far less lobby, in their favour. In this sense, Public Diplomacy and lobbying are not only different, but the use of lobbying demonstrates a failure of Public Diplomacy. Public Diplomacy seeks to promote national interests indirectly by shaping the political climate in a foreign country so that when specific policies are presented they are readily accepted. A more recent example illustrates the point. The author carried out a Public Diplomacy campaign in the British Embassy in Spain in the late 1990s. The Embassy had noticed the enthusiasm that had greeted the election of Tony Blair as Prime Minister of Britain in 1997 across the political spectrum in Spain. Blair’s espousal of the Third Way between left and right allowed leaders of the Centre Right to show as much interest in his ideas as those of the Centre Left. The Embassy therefore ran a Public Diplomacy Programme inviting key advisors and Third Way thinkers to Spain. Discussions and events were organised with think-tanks and interviews with newspapers set up on both the left and right. More senior advisors had exchanges with the Spanish President and leader of the opposition, as well as the former President of Spain. The campaign generated a political climate in Spain enthusiastically favourable to the ideas and focus of the Third Way. The upshot was that when Blair presented his programme for economic reform in the EU, it immediately received the enthusiastic support of the Spanish government, and in effect became an Anglo-Spanish project. The key points here are that political events in the EU were favourable for a Public Diplomacy campaign, the campaign was driven by broad strategic objectives and that it created the environment in which later specific policy proposals received immediate support.

Without strategic direction, Public Diplomacy risks becoming little more than marketing exercises in branding. One of the major problems of the excessive focus on Public Diplomacy as an end in itself, rather than as a tool to secure broader diplomatic objectives, has been the obsession with nation-branding. This has generated good incomes for nation-branding consultants, but has contributed little to international relations or the promotion of the interests of individual nations. Despite the hours devoted by branding consultants and government officials to designing countries’ brands, they essentially all end up the same: country A combines a long history with deep traditions and culture with the innovative and networking spirit needed in the 21st century. The author tested this with students in the Diplomatic Academy of Armenia. He showed them adverts for Armenia and Azerbaijan culled from CNN, but with the countries’ names removed. The students could not distinguish between the advert for their own country and that of its enemy. This is not a criticism of the students - the author himself could not have distinguished between the adverts if he had not known in advance. Rather it is a criticism of the dumbing down of national identities that nation-branding generates. Despite this, even a medium European power like Spain has gone to the extent of creating a High Commissioner for Brand Spain, whose task is to define and promote Spain’s “brand”. At the same time considerable efforts are devoted to monitoring and polling how Spain’s brand is seen by the rest of the world. The effort would be better spent developing and implementing an effective foreign policy. A country’s reputation, as opposed to its brand, is decided by the reality of the country and the role it plays in the wider international community. While a brand can be manipulated to generate an exaggerated reputation while things are going well, this tends to lead to the opposite extreme when things go wrong. If the work on nation-branding led to an exaggerated reputation for the Spanish “economic miracle” before 2008, it led also to an equally unjustified blackening of Spain’s reputation when the economic crisis hit.
Even where Public Diplomacy is being driven by strategic objectives, there is sharp disagreement on whether its aim is to sell messages to foreign publics, or engage with them in genuine dialogue. For many governments, Public Diplomacy amounts to little more than propaganda plus marketing. The aim is to shape foreign public opinion by being more effective in convincing them of the rightness of a country’s policies. It recalls the old parody of British foreign policy making: the British government identifies a problem and a solution; British diplomats then sell the solution to foreign governments who either accept the solution or not; if they do not accept it, it is either because they are wicked or stupid; if they are stupid, the diplomats keep repeating the arguments, ever more slowly, until the foreign governments understand them and accept the policy; if they are wicked Britain bombs them. Like all good parodies, this contains more truth than is comfortable. In the case of Public Diplomacy, the communication remains one way, with the diplomats convinced of the rightness of their positions. The problem is to win over foreign publics and civil society (and even domestic publics and civil society - there is increasing literature on the development of Public Diplomacy strategies at home). Public Diplomacy techniques, from organising conferences and visits to writing newspaper articles and more recently blogging and tweeting, are deployed as more effective means of winning over those key foreign publics. It can be argued that even the Public Diplomacy campaign in the British Embassy in Madrid in support of the Third Way was essentially one-way communication aimed at selling messages. The aim of the strategy was to take advantage of and reinforce Spanish enthusiasm for Tony Blair and the Third Way. It did not aim to engage Spanish civil society in a genuine discussion of the problems and questions the Third Way poses about western societies and economies in the 21st century.

This one-way communication, message-selling form of Public Diplomacy is being undermined by a combination of new technologies and the “wicked problems” of the New International Security Agenda. Web 2.0, and especially social media, do not only make genuine engagement with foreign publics and foreign civil society technically feasible, they also create an expectation of two-way communication. Users of social media do not only expect to listen. They also expect to be listened to. Any Public Diplomacy strategy that seeks to sell messages on social media without appearing to listen to the replies quickly loses credibility and effectiveness. But the problem goes deeper than just effectiveness. The common features of the global issues of the NISA were identified above: interdependency, requiring global collaboration, and requiring collaboration that extends beyond governments to civil society. Another feature common to most of them is that there are no clear cut answers. Indeed, it may often be the case that the precise question is unclear as well. If the question is difficult to define and there are no clear answers, then a Public Diplomacy strategy built on selling messages or solely one-way communication can offer little. Yet the need to extend collaboration beyond governments to foreign civil societies makes Public Diplomacy central to any strategy for tackling these global or “wicked” issues. This suggests that any effective Public Diplomacy for the 21st century, at least in as far as it relates to the New International Security Agenda, must be built around two-way communication and genuine engagement with foreign civil society. Dialogue must replace monologue. Diplomats must learn how to listen as well as preach. Elsewhere, the author has suggested that a dialogue-based, participative Public Diplomacy could amount to a new paradigm of diplomacy.

The point can be illustrated by pandemic disease, and in particular the global campaign a few years ago to combat Avian Flu, which showed both good and bad practice. As with other “wicked” issues, the fight against pandemic diseases requires global collaboration that extends beyond governments. Governments may often be reluctant to provide the rapid, real time information necessary to identify new pandemic threats. This is understandable. A government may not wish to adverti-
see the possible presence of a new pandemic disease or strain of an old disease in its territory if that will undermine its tourism industry, for example, or restrict travel by its citizens. At the very least, it will not want to advertise it, and risk the consequent economic damage, until it is absolutely certain of the data and its interpretation. But waiting for that certainty may be too late. Thus diplomats calling on the local Ministry of Health may be a necessary, but certainly not a sufficient, response to the threat from pandemic disease. Foreign governments and international organisations need to get access to the health workers at a local level, especially in remote areas, who can provide the necessary early warning. This is not a task for diplomats, because they do not have the skills or style for this kind of networking, they do not have the relevant expert knowledge and most governments would regard it as unacceptable interference in their internal affairs (under the Vienna Conventions). The WHO has adopted an alternative approach in which it is constructing virtual networks which put together local health workers from around the world with WHO experts. In this case health worker talks to health worker, significantly increasing the chances of early identification of new strains of pandemic diseases in time to take preventative measures. In terms of Public Diplomacy, global collaboration between civil society actors supplants action between governments.

The outbreak of Avian Flu in Turkey in 2006 offered an example of bad practice. Instead of a collaborative approach based around dialogue and two-way communication, Western governments presented the Turkish government with ready-made solutions. Western diplomats lectured Turkish government officials on what should they do, and western governments criticised Turkey when it did not fully follow through on their recommendations. There was little, if any, direct contact between health and veterinary professionals, certainly not at a local level. Turkish officialdom felt itself patronised. Instead of engaging with, and securing, genuine collaboration from Turkish civil society, this more traditional diplomatic approach irritated and alienated Turkey’s political elite and failed to secure the cooperation or measures sought. Instead of laying the ground work for good cooperation in the future, it made the prospects for such cooperation more remote. The downsides for the fight against pandemic disease from this more traditional approach are clear.

The pro-active Public Diplomacy suggested by the New International Security Agenda poses serious questions for diplomats and traditional diplomacy. If traditional diplomacy eschews interference in the internal affairs of other countries, Public Diplomacy positively demands it as diplomats seek to shape and influence political and social debate (hence Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain’s complaints about Ivan Maisky’s hyperactive Public Diplomacy in the 1930s). In dealing with the “wicked issues”, diplomats are going beyond influencing elite opinion to shape and change civil society. Moreover, given their own limitations in engaging directly with broader publics, diplomats instead function as facilitators, building links and relationships between the civil societies in their own countries and those in the countries where they are posted. This has sometimes been described as the diplomat entrepreneur, seeking opportunities to put different civil society groups or elements together. This can appear threatening to foreign governments, especially authoritarian ones, who believe that western diplomats are facilitating these relationships to overthrow them. This is even truer given that the emergence of the New International Security Agenda has been accompanied by the resurgence of a more traditional geopolitical agenda which requires more traditional behaviour and practices of diplomats. The importance of these geopolitical agendas has been made clear by events in the Ukraine, the Middle East and the South China Sea. Demanding that the same diplomats, or even the same organisation, should manage these relationships to overthrow them. This is even truer given that the emergence of the New International Security Agenda has been accompanied by the resurgence of a more traditional geopolitical agenda which requires more traditional behaviour and practices of diplomats. The importance of these geopolitical agendas has been made clear by events in the Ukraine, the Middle East and the South China Sea.
asking too much. The point was made during the Arab Spring, when British diplomats in Cairo were expected to maintain relations with the Mubarak government, while at the same time developing contacts with the protestors. The problem is that the extent to which they gained credibility with the one undermined their credibility with the other. If they remained credible with the Mubarak Government, the protestors would not trust them. If they gained credibility with the protestors, they raised being declared persona non grata by the government.

It may be that the conflicting agendas of international relations in the 21st Century will demand the development of separate organisations and personnel, with more traditional diplomats managing the geopolitical agendas while more entrepreneurial facilitators promote the civil society engagements needed for the global New International Security Agenda. To some extent this is already beginning to emerge in Britain, with the British Council taking on much of the promotion and facilitation of civil society relationships. But it also has implications for civil society itself, and its centrality to international relations and diplomacy. If the “wicked” global issues demand collaboration beyond government between civil societies, and require that diplomats facilitate and promote that collaboration, it also opens up space for the autonomous action of civil society groups and actors. Rather than waiting for governments and diplomats to invite them to engage abroad, they can take the initiative themselves, becoming the protagonists of their own diplomatic strategies. By the nature of civil society organisations, their diplomatic strategies will be based around two-way communication, seeking to engage their overseas counterparts in genuine conversations and exchanges of ideas. Civil society groups that seek to ape governments and more traditional diplomats by preaching rather than listening will have limited influence and, possibly, limited organisational life expectancy. Foreign civil society groups will have no more patience with one-way monologues from other civil society groups than they will have from governments and diplomats. In as far as civil society groups will be forced into good practice, they will become major protagonists of the “new” collaborative Public Diplomacy, and key players in the New International Security Agenda. Given their limited financial and human resources, they will also have to be innovative and creative users of the virtual tools offered by Digital Diplomacy.

Digital Diplomacy

Digital Diplomacy has generated a considerable literature already, as scholars and practitioners struggle to grasp its possibilities, how it can be integrated into diplomatic practices and what this means for diplomacy and diplomat.\textsuperscript{17} Much of this literature has been very disappointing. Both theory and practice has focused on social media, and how these can be more effective in helping diplomats and governments “get their message” across. Like Public Diplomacy at the beginning of the Millennium, there is a danger that this enthusiasm for Digital Diplomacy will lead it to being seen as an end in itself, rather than another tool to help deliver broader strategic objectives. Many theorists and practitioners seem to believe that Digital Diplomacy is something that must be done, regardless of what a country or individual diplomat is seeking to achieve.\textsuperscript{18} Thus presence on the Web 2.0 platforms is valued in itself, without any evaluation of what that presence has achieved, or whether Web 2.0 presence was the most effective tool to secure the strategic objective. Some countries have gone as far as to instruct their Ambassadors to have a blog, or even to lay down a minimum number of tweets per week.\textsuperscript{19}

While much of the literature still focuses on whether Ambassadors and more junior diplomats can be trusted to blog or tweet, and
what autonomy they should be given, practice has already moved on. Diplomatic use of social media risks has become an irregular verb: the Ambassador blogs, the First Secretary tweets and the Third Secretary has a page on Facebook. Non-strategic use of social media can distract diplomats from other more important work. Effective use of social media demand time and resources. Time spent maintaining Twitter or Facebook accounts is time diverted away from the face-to-face contacts still essential to the construction of diplomatic networks. This does not matter if the social media are an effective means of securing the diplomat’s objectives, and are being deliberately deployed to that end. It is more serious if diplomatic opportunities, and key geopolitical information, are being missed simply to ensure presence on the Web 2.0. Diplomats should also consider if the content of their postings really advances the interests of their country, or promotes their reputation in a way that improves their chances of doing their job. An Ambassador blogging about a children’s party he has attended may have secured extra presence on the Web 2.0, but he may also have undermined his seriousness in the eyes of his diplomatic interlocutors, and thus his ability to deliver on his objectives. Finally, the obsessive focus on Digital Diplomacy as social media distracts attention from the far wider range of digital tools available to governmental and non-governmental actors in the international environment, while trivialising the value of the social media themselves.

If national government diplomats have fallen too easily into the social media trap, by confusing activity with outcomes and presence with influence, sub-national governments and civil society actors are equally vulnerable. For them the trap can be even more dangerous. They enjoy fewer resources than governments, and must husband those that they have well. If sub-national governments and civil society actors focus solely on social media presence, they risk their messages being drowned out by the noise of mass social media activity. Having many thousands of followers on Twitter does not necessarily mean that you are reaching the right followers, or that your followers actually read your tweets. There is a similar mistake made by the media. Digital newspapers have obsessed about the number of clicks on their pages, which in turn they use to promote themselves with potential advertisers. Social media departments have been built up at the expense of journalistic quality. Long-serving foreign correspondents, with the relevant linguistic skills and historical knowledge, have in particular been cut. The upshot is that online newspapers still struggle to make money, despite the effort in securing clicks, while the content of the articles has declined. Reliant essentially on the same sources of information, they distinguish themselves by grafting on more or less ill-informed opinion, rather than in-depth analysis of original content. Newspapers no longer produce anything that readers would be willing to pay for so end up in an endlessly downward spiral of competition for diminishing advertising revenues. Similar dangers exist for sub-national governments and civil society actors. The criterion should not be how many followers, links or friends they have on social media, but rather are they the relevant ones (those with relevant influence) and are they reading what is being posted.

If digital tools are seen as just that, tools, then they can be successfully integrated within a broader diplomatic strategy. But the strategy, and the objectives, must come first. If diplomatic actors, whether governments, sub-national governments or civil society actors, establish clear objectives - understand what it is they are trying to achieve - then they can choose among the broad range of diplomatic tools, including public and digital tools, to select the right combination to best secure those objectives. Successful strategies are likely to be hybrid, in as far as they combine digital with non-digital tools. While digital tools are successful communicators and influence multipliers, they are not necessarily good at generating the content to be communicated, or what will form the basis of the influence. In a world drowning in digital communication, the content does matter. If you do not have anything original and interesting to say, whether you are a govern-
ment, sub-national government or civil society actors, no-one will listen to you. Nor will anyone listen to you if you talk only about yourself. Governments are learning that they can influence key international conversations only if they have something to contribute to resolving key international problems (as discussed above, nation-branding - the equivalent of marketing for governments - does not cut it). The same is true for sub-national governments and civil society actors. Digital tools function best as influence multipliers, not influence creators.

As suggested above, much of the discussion, and practice, of digital diplomacy has focused on social media. In doing so it has looked at how to adapt diplomacy to the social media tools already in existence, whether Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn or, to a lesser extent Instagram. Consular protection, a central part of diplomacy for governments (although perhaps less so for civil society actors), has focused on using social media to alert nationals to crisis situations and trying to identify where distressed nationals might be. Thus, at the low-tech end, the Spanish Foreign Ministry has worked together with the Spanish telecommunications giant Telefonica, to inform their citizens of the contact details of the nearest Spanish consulate. As Spanish citizens arrive in a foreign country, they now receive an SMS message, along with those detailing the roaming charges, giving the telephone number of the local Spanish consulate, and any key travel advice. Following the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, western embassies sent out streams of tweets and SMS texts seeking to identify where their citizens were and offering advice on how to reach safety. Rescue plans were based on the response to these online efforts. The Nepal earthquake was also interesting because of the role played by civil society in an international emergency response. Volunteers from around the world worked with Nepalese volunteers on the ground armed with smartphones to produce a digital map of the earthquake within 48 hours. The map became an essential tool for aid agencies like the Red Cross and Medecins sin Frontières.

But if the Nepal earthquake demonstrates the ability of governments and civil society actors to make effective use of existing social media and other digital tools, digital diplomacy may be reaching the stage where instead of depending on what is already available it begins to demand its own tools. A recent Clingendael policy brief argues that diplomats need to get together with software and app designers to explain what kind of things diplomats need to do in the 21st century, and then explore with the designers what they can offer in terms of tailor-made tools. In other words, instead of diplomats depending on pre-existing tools designed for non-diplomatic uses, they should work with software designers to develop their own. An example of the potential is offered by consular services. One of the major problems for any Foreign Ministry is knowing where their citizens are, and how many of their citizens are in a country if a crisis, whether natural or man-made, strikes. In the past, when international travel was less frequent and expatriate communities abroad were smaller and more stable, this was less of a problem. Most expatriates abroad would make a point of registering with their Embassy (the author recalls this from his own experience as a diplomat in the British Embassy in Beijing during the Tiananmen crisis - the Embassy had a very clear idea of how many British citizens lived in China and where they were). Today, with cheap air travel and the exponential growth in foreigners living abroad, either long term or on short-term postings by their companies, an Embassy may have little idea of how many of its citizens are resident in a country, let alone where they are. However, Big Data technologies allow vast quantities of data to be scraped from smartphones. These technologies are used now largely for market research. However, algorithms are being developed to allow advertisers to target tailor-made adverts at individual smartphone users, based on the data scraped from their smartphones. Similar algorithms could be developed that would identify the nationality of the smartphone user, where they travelled abroad, whether they did so as tourists, for work or because they were resident abroad,
and how likely they were to be in any given country at any given time. In the event of a consular crisis in a given country, Foreign Ministries would be able to target tailor-made messages at their citizens they thought likely to be there. Reading the messages would tell the foreign ministry exactly where each smartphone owner was, allowing it to plan rescue missions accordingly. More controversially, the foreign ministry could turn on remotely the GPS localiser in the smartphone to determine where it was even if it was not turned on (which could be helpful if its owner was dead or injured). Such approaches are controversial because of their potential use by security services and criminals for surveillance, both legal or illegal. They raise major privacy issues. But similar technologies are already in place or being developed for marketing and advertising purposes. It would need little adaptation to enable Foreign Ministries to use them for improving consular services.

The rest of this article will focus on different aspects of diplomatic activity, or rather the activities associated with the effective development and implementation of diplomatic strategies, and consider how different digital tools and platforms may be adapted to reinforce them. In doing so it will consider the development and use of the tools or platforms not only by governments, their foreign ministries and diplomats, but also how they can reinforce the effectiveness of non-state actors, whether sub-national governments or civil society groups, in influencing key international debates. A key theme will be that there is a much wider range of possible tools and platforms than normally discussed in debates about digital diplomacy, and that civil society groups can be more flexible and imaginative in taking advantage of them. A second theme will be to reiterate yet again the main argument of the article, that digital diplomacy consists of tools that need to be integrated within a broader diplomatic strategy. Digital diplomacy tools are most effective when chosen, engineered and deployed in pursuit of clear objectives, whether by governments, sub-national governments or civil society actors. Indeed it is more important that civil society actors, with their more limited human, financial and often reputational resources, know what they are trying to achieve with digital diplomacy tools and platforms, and have clear criteria of success. For the purposes of this paper, the core “diplomatic activities” will be divided into 4 categories:

- Public Diplomacy: shaping the international political and social environment;
- Network building;
- Information gathering and knowledge management;
- Conflict resolution and mediation.

Several of the digital tools and platforms, which either exist already or which could be developed, will of course be applicable in more than one category.

Public Diplomacy and Digital Tools

In as far as new approaches to Public Diplomacy have focused on the use of existing social media, the article has already discussed the interaction of Public and Digital Diplomacy at some length, especially stressing that presence in the Web 2.0 just for the sake of that presence does not necessarily mean influence, and can distract valuable resources from more effective activities. There are, however, some other aspects that should be considered. Social media can be very unpredictable and unreliable tools. Launching a message through them may go viral, or sink without trace. Commentators tend to focus on examples where online campaigns were successful. Thus Facebook is assigned a key role in the Arab Spring. SMS texting was central in convoking the anti-government demonstrations following the Ato-
cha bombing in Madrid in 2004. However, we tend to overlook the many more campaigns or messages launched on social media which have disappeared without trace. In his 2007 book “The Black Swan” Nassim Taleb makes an impassioned plea to remember graveyards as history, as he rails against the narrative fallacy. Likewise, we must remember to investigate digital graveyards for the thousands of campaigns which did not go viral. In doing so we should also realise that whether a particular campaign does or does not go viral may have nothing to do with the quality or importance of the message, or indeed the digital skills of those launching the campaign. It is much more to do with luck and contingency. Therefore, depending only on social media to launch campaigns, especially for civil society actors, can be a high-risk strategy.

It is also worth bearing in mind that even if a campaign does go viral, it may not achieve anything. The #GiveBackOurGirls campaign, launched on Twitter and Facebook after Boko Haram had kidnapped 276 schoolgirls from a government secondary school in Chibok in Nigeria, certainly went viral. It was successful in as far as it forced world leaders to confront the issue. But it failed to get the school girls back. Boko Haram were not on Twitter or Facebook, and if they were, they didn’t care. This points up the importance of campaigns being designed to have consequences that are relevant to what they are trying to achieve. In the case of the Chibok schoolgirls the campaign could not influence those who would take the decision, and those whom it did influence had no leverage. There may also be a degree of online campaign fatigue, even cynicism. The Kony 2012 campaign, whereby a YouTube film sought to promote the arrest of Joseph Kony, leader of the Lord’s Resistance Army wanted for crimes against humanity and recruiting child soldiers, undoubtedly went viral. But subsequent revelations about the motivations of the group that produced it (e.g. that their main aim was to maintain US military support for the government of Uganda) and the mental instability of one of their leaders undermined the impact, and left many feeling they had been manipulated. Social media users may become less trusting and more critical of future online campaigns, reducing the number that go viral.

Online campaigns can be likened to governments lobbying for specific policies. As argued above, one way of looking at Public Diplomacy is as a series of tools designed to create favourable political and social environments in which specific policy proposals can then flourish. If Public Diplomacy is effectively implemented in this way, then lobbying for specific policies becomes almost unnecessary - they are automatically accepted. Lobbying for specific policies without preparing the ground first is an uphill struggle, and often counter-productive. The same may be true for online campaigns. If governments, at state or sub-national level, or civil society groups want to promote a specific project or campaign through social media, they can maximise the chances it will have an impact by preparing the ground first. This has several implications. Firstly it is important to identify the key figures relevant to the objectives you are trying to achieve. These can be individuals or institutions, but you have to find ways of reaching them and ensuring they read your content. As with non-digital public diplomacy, content matters. Establishing a long-term reputation for having interesting and relevant things to say will increase the chances that your targets will pay attention when you launch a specific campaign. Secondly, you have to establish long-term credibility. Thirdly, hybrid campaigns combining online and offline tools are more likely to be successful. As we will see below, building virtual networks works best when they are reinforced by personal contacts. Organising a workshop and then promoting its conclusions through Twitter and other social media, or using a workshop to bring face-to-face thinkers and decision-makers previously contacted only online can both be effective approaches to hybrid campaigns.

Finally, different social media platforms have different characters, and characteristics. Like newspapers in the past, what you can do on one platform, and the way that you do it, is not the same as on another platform. Individual social media users are well aware of this. They
do not post accounts of the previous night’s party on LinkedIn. Equally, even work-related posts on Facebook require a lighter touch than they would on LinkedIn. Twitter, used mainly on mobile devices, needs sharper thinking and is more immediate. Those using social media as a public diplomacy must be similarly discriminating and subtle in their use of the different platforms.

But social media are not the only digital tools that governments and civil society groups can use to shape policy environments. Increasing attention is being paid in education to gamification, the use of games, specifically computer games, as educational tools. In part this seeks to take advantage of the enthusiasm of whole generations for playing computer games - if they are playing the games anyway, why not make them educational? But it is also the realisation that computer games can be much more effective than traditional teaching in promoting autonomous learners who are able to adapt flexibly to rapidly changing environments. But if gamification can be used to educate, it can also be used to shape the political and social environment. Instead of using social media, or as content to be promoted on social media, diplomatic actors can design games that encourage players to think about certain problems or experiment with certain environments in ways that can shape their thinking about key issues. By playing simulation games they increasingly see the world in the way the game designer has shaped the simulation. There are already some examples. The Dutch Government some years ago used a computer game about water to promote knowledge of the Netherlands. More recently the European Central Bank (ECB) produced a game to teach high school students about monetary policy. The game, Economia, provides players with a variety of economic data and then invites them to set central bank interest rates. The players score according to how successful they are in keeping to the ECB’s inflation target (close to but just below 2%). Although the game claims to be purely educational, it also inevitably shapes the way that players think about European economic and monetary policy, in particular the way in which the issues are framed and the language in which they are discussed. It does not guarantee that players of the game will be open to specific policy proposals of the ECB (and the ECB would claim that that is not the idea of the game) but it does make it more likely. As gamification becomes more important in education and other forms of training (the author is exploring developing online games for training diplomats and business executives in analysing and managing geopolitical risk), the use of simulation or scenario-based computer games in public diplomacy strategies is likely to increase. They can offer special advantages to civil society groups, which are short on other resources, who are able to link up with game designers to build games around the issues they are most interested in.

Network Building

The value of social media in network building should be clear. Whereas in the past networks had to be built largely by personal contact, which imposed severe geographical limits, now global networks can be assembled through social media platforms. Like the use of social media for public diplomacy, the different platforms are often used for constructing different kinds of networks. Whereas Facebook tends to be used for personal networks, LinkedIn is used more for professional networks and promoting services. In terms of effectiveness, quality is more important than quantity. It is easy to acquire 20,000 followers on Twitter, but pointless if they are not reading your tweets. Network construction thus also becomes strategic, based on the objectives that have been set for the diplomatic strategy. The diplomatic strategy establishes the kind of contacts the network should focus
Networks serve both to collect information and to convey and multiply influence. They thus connect public diplomacy and information gathering functions, and reflect aspects of both. While network building is facilitated by online social media, it is more effective when hybrid, combining the online tools with personal contact. This can work both ways. Networks constructed initially through social media can then be reinforced by more personal contact, whether by sending personal messages or by physical contact during visits or invitations to conferences or other events. Likewise, relationships initially established through physical contact at conferences or other events can be reinforced and maintained through social media and other digital platforms. Social media can also facilitate indirect network building with those contacts who might not want to have direct contact with you, either because of political disagreement or because it would cause embarrassment in their social or political circle. Although a hybrid approach, combining online and offline relationship building, is generally the best approach to network building, sometimes the absence of offline contact can be an advantage.

The author recently explored the cycle of hybrid network building. He sought to take advantage of the publication of his book in Bulgaria to develop a network in the country. By analysing his Twitter followers he was able to identify some with whom he regularly exchanged geopolitical views and whose profiles said they spoke Bulgarian (ironically none lived in Bulgaria). They agreed to put him in contact, online, with possible partners in Bulgaria who might be interested in the topic of the book and promoting it. These contacts led to a visit to Sofia with a series of meetings and conferences, during which a wide range of contacts were established face-to-face. These contacts have now been integrated into the author’s social media networks and are being maintained online. They are also being used to prepare the ground for a further visit to Bulgaria. At the same time contacts made during the visit to Sofia who are resident in Serbia and Greece are now being leveraged in a similar way to support visits to and network building in those countries.

The author’s experience in Sofia illustrates several aspects of the hybrid approach to network building. The combination of social media tools and face-to-face contact enables an individual to construct and maintain international networks in a way that was impossible before the development of social media. Even government diplomats tended to develop contact networks in the country where they served. They could build up international networks, but generally by serving in several countries, or multinational organisations, and such networks took years to construct. Contrast this with clear objectives and a strategy combined with content in the form of the book. As in public diplomacy, content, having something of interest to say, is crucial to establish credibility and motivation in network building. Trading information and ideas was central to diplomatic network building in the pre-digital age, and remains so in the era of social media. Finally, online and offline techniques alternate in a self-reinforcing cycle that promotes the progressive growth of the network. Social media speed up and broaden the network building, and greatly facilitate network maintenance. But they do not offer the content or depth of relationship provided by face-to-face contact. What is clear is that these hybrid approaches to strategic network building could prove of especial value to civil society groups looking to build the networks essential to public diplomacy and information gathering.
Information Gathering and Knowledge Management

Foreign Ministries, and governments in general, are already using social media to gather information. Following international media on Twitter, for example, is a useful way of keeping abreast of news headlines as well as spotting interesting opinion pieces and analysis. In a sense this follows on from the Web 1.0 monitoring of online media sources. Identifying reliable information sources and then following their Twitter or other social media feeds is a more effective way of monitoring, which allows diplomatic actors to then follow up on the more interesting items. As with any monitoring of the media it is important to understand the reliability, biases and agenda of the media sources. In the flood of information being made available on Web 2.0 this is not always obvious, and requires at least some research. As ever the temptation, especially, but not exclusively, for civil society groups is to follow the sources that best confirm their own view of the world. Understanding the reliability of the media source is all the more important because there are far more sources in Web 2.0 than Web 1.0, where media sources were largely limited to digital versions of existing newspapers or news agencies, with already established reputations (good or bad). Now, in addition to established online media, there are numerous smaller operations, often specialising thematically or regionally (e.g. Central Asia News). In some cases they originate stories, in other cases they compile news from other sources relating to their focus of interest. In as far as this expands the range of sources and information, especially about regions like Central Asia which feature less in the established western media, these smaller operations can be useful resources, especially for civil society actors. But it can be difficult to know on whose behalf they may be operating. Some governments, notably Russia and China, have taken advantage of this plethora of new sources of information on Web 2.0 to reinforce their own media operations. RT, the main Russian English language news service and television channel, is a highly sophisticated operation to get across Moscow’s view of events. More subtly, Moscow also employs an army of bloggers to participate in online debates, especially in western newspaper comments sections. While initially the blatant pro-Russian views and grammatical errors made these pro-Russian bloggers easy to identify, in recent years they have raised their game and their levels of sophistication. It can now be difficult to distinguish between a pro-Russia blogger and a western commentator with a more nuanced view of the West’s relations with Russia.

Western governments are also monitoring social media to understand public reactions, including foreign public reactions, to their policy initiatives. This increasingly replaces polling and other public opinion surveying techniques (e.g. contact groups) that were used from the beginning of the millennium to assess national reputation and brand. This applies to domestic opinion as much as international opinion. Some commentators have suggested that social media monitoring could replace polling and contact group surveys in domestic elections, for example in the US. Although social media could scarcely be worse in assessing public opinion than some polling (e.g. in the recent British and Spanish elections), and they do offer a wider sample, especially of international opinion, they do have serious drawbacks. Firstly, they are self-selecting. Whereas pollsters (in theory at least) carefully select their poll samples or contact groups, they have no such control over social media. Those expressing their views are likely to vary from social media, but are likely to be biased towards the young and tech savvy. Secondly, comments on social media, especially instant
messaging platforms like Twitter, tend to be short-term reactions to events rather than considered analysis. That a person expressed frustration on Twitter with a government policy (or enthusiasm) does not mean that that reaction will be long-lasting, or have consequences (in voting patterns etc). Finally, social media surveys of public opinion cannot be interrogated. Unlike contact groups and other interactive survey techniques, mass social media surveys, which are in themselves a form of Big Data collection, do not allow analysts to return in order to ask what a reaction means or ask other clarification questions. More traditional surveying organisations like the Pew Center will remain in business for some time. However, provided the caveats are borne in mind, social media can offer quick snapshots of public opinion, especially foreign public opinion.

Social media and other digital tools do not just offer ways of gathering information about events and public perceptions. They can also help analyse that information and manage the knowledge and understanding thus generated. This is particularly important for smaller governments and civil society groups who do not have a significant in-house analytical capability. Careful monitoring of social media, e.g. Twitter or LinkedIn, can help identify analysts in particular areas, whether thematic or regional. Not only does this allow diplomatic actors to read the blogs and other online analyses published by these analysts, but it also allows direct contact with and cultivation of them. Whether through direct messages, or first preparing the ground through “liking” and “sharing” their posts, or “favoriting” and “retweeting” their tweets, and online relationship can be developed that can later allow the diplomatic actors to tap directly into their analytical capabilities. As suggested in the section on networking, such online approaches can be even more effective if they form part of hybrid strategies that incorporate face-to-face interactions. In the case of analysts, initial online cultivation can be followed by invitations to participate in conferences or workshops, which can then be followed up by continued online relationships.

Social media platforms like Facebook can be used to set up fora, simulations and other forms of online interaction with activists. However, this is an example of where digital innovation should be able to create platforms more specifically tailored to the need of online analytical methods. Wikistrat is a global crowd-sourced geopolitical consultancy. It has designed a digital platform that allows it to bring together over 2000 thematic or regional experts from round the world to take part in scenario generation, simulation or red teaming exercises or topic debate fora. The platform is designed in such a way that it can offer rewards and incentives to analysts for participating as well as allowing the exercise leadership teams to moderate the debates. Exercises are either launched at a client’s request, in which case the client buys the final report, or as general exercises, in which case the reports are made available to the participating analysts and, sometimes, the general public. The general exercises serve to allow analysts to hone their analytical skills while exchanging information and sources with each other, and to allow Wikistrat to identify the best analysts who can be used for client-driven exercises. In this way, Wikistrat has access to a number and variety of analysts beyond what even medium-sized governments could hope for. Such platforms, albeit on a more modest scale and focused on a smaller number of identified and trusted analysts, offers sub-national governments and civil society groups the prospect of a step change in their analytical capabilities. It offers just one example of where innovation in platform design can deliver results considerably beyond what is available through existing social media tools.
Conflict Resolution and Mediation

Conflict resolution and mediation are key functions of government, and international organisation (e.g. UN), diplomacy. But increasingly civil society groups are becoming involved, either because of frustration with the ineptitude of governments or because participants in a conflict prefer to deal with non-governmental actors. At first sight, it appears an area where the contribution of digital tools will be limited to the areas we have already examined - public diplomacy, networking and information gathering/analysing - and where the tools themselves will be largely social media. However, provided diplomacy agents themselves, both governmental and non-governmental, are able to be sufficiently innovative, there may be a series of digital tools and platforms which could transform the approach of diplomats to conflict resolution, ranging from online scenario building to simulation exercises drawing on the latest gamification techniques. The development of these approaches could significantly enhance the role of civil society groups in this area.

In 1991-92 a scenario building exercise was held on the future of South Africa in the Mont Fleur centre. South Africa at the time was at the beginning of the transition away from Apartheid. The participants came from across the South African political spectrum and were moderated by a team led by a senior Shell scenario builder Adam Kahane. The exercise produced four scenarios - Ostrich, Lame Duck, Icarus and Flight of the Flamingos - with the participants agreed that Flight of the Flamingos was the preferred outcome. The exercise allowed the participants, from different political background and with different political objectives, to develop a shared view of the possible futures of South Africa and a shared language for discussing them. Many credit the exercise with a significant role in South Africa’s successful transition. In the case of the Mont Fleur scenarios the participants were physically brought together in one place for an extended period. This may not always be possible. There may be security concerns, or issues of personal animosity. There may problems of distance and travel costs. The innovative design of online platforms tailored to scenario building exercises could overcome these problems, allowing the benefits of the Mont Fleur type exercise even when participants could not physically come together. For example, online scenario building in Libya could allow the different factions to work through the implications of current policy decisions and blockages without running the physical risks of meeting together. Similarly, an online scenario building platform for migrants would allow bringing together migrants already in Europe, migrants in transit in the Middle East and North Africa and fellow nationals who have not yet left their countries to debate different scenarios for the futures of their countries, including which would be most likely to end migration and permit migrant return. This would also give migrants a crucial voice in the debates about the migration crisis (which until now has been missing).

Simulation exercises, and especially simulation games, offer another approach to conflict resolution. Simulation games offer diplomats and political leaders the opportunity to “play out” conflict situations before actually committing to an irrevocable course of action. One can speculate whether, if they had been able to game out the consequences of their decisions in advance, Europe’s political leaders in 1914 would have been as keen to mobilise. Such “gaming out” can of course be done offline. But doing it online makes it more real and immediate. It fits the experience and inclinations of the upcoming “gamer generation”. It also, ultimately, offers the opportunity of linking the simulation games of the various participants, generating a virtual conflict instead of a real one. There are serious challenges with developing such digital simulation tools, not least the issue of who would be seen as sufficiently neutral to be trusted with the design of the game architecture (the UN or a role for civil society
groups, depending on the level of the conflict?). It is very much at the outer limit of digital diplomacy possibilities at the moment, as it is at the edge of broader conflict resolution techniques. Some diplomats dismiss it as science fiction. But as the gamer generation matures, not only those who have played video games, but those for whom this is another form of reality, and begins to succeed to senior political positions, the possibility of a genuine digital diplomacy, including in conflict resolution, will increase.

Conclusions

The emergence of Public and Digital Diplomacy has been driven by the entry of new actors, both governmental and non-governmental, into the international environment, the development of a New International Security Agenda and facilitated by new Information Communications Technology. Both are powerful tools in support of broader diplomatic strategies. But they are tools, the means to ends rather than ends in themselves. They are most effective when integrated into broader strategies designed to secure national objectives (in the case of governments) or organisational objectives (in the case of NGOs or civic society groups). When not in the service of clear strategic objectives, Public Diplomacy risks being reduced to little more than branding, while Digital Diplomacy becomes an obsession with presence in the social media for its own sake. Both undermine the credibility of the diplomatic actors involved, and thus their ability to deliver on their strategic objectives.

In its narrower sense, Public Diplomacy seeks to create a political and social environment among foreign public opinion that will be favourable to specific policy proposals when and if they are presented. In this sense it is preparatory and indirect - it prepares the ground for more direct diplomacy later. In its broader sense, Public Diplomacy serves almost as a new diplomatic paradigm, in which diplomats seek to facilitate interactions and conversations between civil society groups to help tackle the global issues (also called the “wicked issues”) of the New International Security Agenda. Sadly, as practised by governments, Public Diplomacy amounts to little more than propaganda plus marketing, trying to find marginally more subtle means of “selling” policy measures. This opens up a space in which NGOs and civil society groups can take the lead in developing the new paradigm themselves.

Digital Diplomacy must escape its obsession with social media. The Ambassador blogs, the First Secretary tweets and the Third Secretary is on Facebook mentality will not cut it anymore. Instead Digital Diplomacy must focus on the four areas in which it can support broader diplomatic strategies - public diplomacy, networking, information gathering and knowledge management, and conflict resolution and mediation - and evolve the technologies and online platforms and tools that can deliver most effectively. Existing social media will continue to have a role to play, when used innovatively and creatively, but diplomatic actors should not depend on them. Rather they should now be working together with software designers to develop tailor-made platforms designed specifically to meet the needs of 21st century diplomacy. This will include online platforms that will promote the greater use of scenario building, simulation and gamification techniques. These new Digital Diplomacy tools will be of particular value for NGOs and other civil society groups, for whom they can compensate their otherwise shortage of resources.

The diplomacy of the 21st century will be played out by a broad range of governmental and non-governmental actors through multi-level and heterogeneous networks. Success will need genuine engagement and a willingness to converse rather than preach (Public Diplomacy) and the technical facilitation of the networks (Digital Diplomacy). Non-governmental actors will be as important as governmental actors in developing and implementing both.
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