

**THE
FUTURE
OF**

#DIPLOMACY

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Introduction

For centuries, diplomacy was the domain of an insular elite. The protagonists worked quietly, often secretly, until ready to unveil their accomplishments or lack thereof. Diplomats were comfortable in this closed environment, speaking just to one another and paying little heed to those publics whose future might be shaped by their work. British diplomat Harold Nicolson, in his 1939 book *Diplomacy*, wrote, "In the days of the old diplomacy it would have been regarded as an act of unthinkable vulgarity to appeal to the common people upon any issue of international policy." He lamented "the invention of the wireless," which gave "a vast impetus to propaganda as a method of policy" and allowed manipulators such as Adolf Hitler to wield "a formidable weapon of popular excitation" that could obstruct or even supersede the work of diplomats.¹

Today Nicolson's "unthinkable vulgarity" has become integral to diplomacy, and it would be an act of unthinkable stupidity to disregard the "common people" (now more felicitously referred to as "the public") when conducting international relations. The "wireless" of Nicolson's time has evolved into devices that individuals carry in their pockets and consult almost constantly to peruse a vast array of venues ranging from satellite television channels to social media properties such as Twitter and Facebook. For a member of the public to intrude into the diplomatic process may require only a tap on an app.

In this new information era, people gather information from diverse sources, disseminate their own views, and participate in nonstop virtual conversation. The governmental gatekeepers who controlled access to information and shaped much of its content have been nudged aside by the individual seeking out and disseminating "news" as she or he defines it.

Hunger for information has political ramifications, as does the ability of "citizen journalists" with their own agendas to reach large audiences in real time. Diplomats feel the reverberations from this process, and although diplomacy may have been an elitist enterprise for many centuries, it has now, for good or ill, been opened up in the sense that people (at least in democratic societies) can know more about diplomatic activity and can make their voices heard. This is largely the result of media-based empowerment of the public. Diplomats know that