

# CHANGES IN DIPLOMACY OVER THE AGES

**In the past, the uppermost goal of classical diplomacy was simply to safeguard national interests with farsightedness and skilful negotiation. In today's globalised information society, diplomacy has a broader range of tasks to perform and the basic situation has also changed. Media pressure, new technologies and political integration processes have given rise to alliances and dependencies of all kinds and created complex fields of action. When a crisis arises, people expect diplomacy to respond immediately. Certainly, diplomacy will continue to play a key role in the future.**

*by Urs Kürzi, Customer Segment Manager*

The desire to complete transactions as quickly as possible and the need for a rapid exchange of digital information are two factors impacting the modus operandi of all sectors, including diplomacy. Only a few years ago, it still took days to go through all the traditional procedures involving agreements and consultations, support for decisions and communication of results. Today, official bodies and the general public expect to be informed of the facts almost within seconds. These expectations do much to set the pace of diplomacy. The media put so much pressure on diplomats that they simply cannot afford to remain passive. In this context, diplomats often refer to the "CNN factor". During the 1991 Persian Gulf Conflict, governments received real-time information about the course of events in an armed conflict for the very first time, thanks to CNN. The cable TV network's approach led to a round-the-clock influx of unfiltered information.

## **Growing demand for specialists**

There has been a noticeable increase in the number of actors on the diplomatic stage. The issues involved are highly complex and can frequently only be handled by experts. International organisations and conferences steer the debate on climate protection, while multinational teams of experts devise strategies for fighting terrorism. Health ministers cooperate closely with medical experts and the pharmaceutical industry when organising conferences on the registration of new drugs or drawing up guidelines for the mitigation of pandemic diseases. IT security experts form international coalitions for consultations on how best to ward off cyber attacks.

## **The power of economic policy**

Multinational companies are also important players where diplomacy is concerned. Given their enormous economic power, international companies sometimes try to wield maximum influence on politics in a host country in order to favour freer trade. In exchange, they invest in facilities, provide jobs and inject technology and knowledge into the region concerned. Diplomacy with multinational companies is comparable to diplomacy with governments.



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## *Diplomats as transnational communicators.*

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In this context, diplomacy helps to ensure compliance with laws, bilateral agreements and taxation regulations. Not least, it also involves negotiations with the countries of origin of the multinationals.



### **Constant threats from cyber space**

The Stuxnet virus announced in July 2010 was initially suspected of having been developed for industrial espionage. On closer analysis, the computer pest was found to spread via USB stick. It would then become lodged within the Windows systems where it was able to monitor industrial plants, including nuclear power plants. The supplier of the power station control system was baffled. The incident showed just how vulnerable critical infrastructures really are. Neither the motivation for these attacks nor the perpetrators were ever detected. Stuxnet vividly illustrates the complexity and importance of these issues. Representatives from the business community sat round the table with security experts, IT specialists and delegates and government ministers to negotiate the development of strategies to protect critical infrastructures. Now this is where diplomats come in: who else would mediate and bring delegations representing the full range of civilian and military authorities to the negotiating table? With modern networking, a regional event can quickly take on international dimensions. What constitutes cyber warfare and when should cyber attacks elicit a military response? Diplomats are called upon to answer these questions.

### **The end of confidentiality**

A lone wolf has affronted diplomacy with Wikileaks. Governments are outraged about the publication of secret documents. As so often, all these revelations were made possible by the interplay of several different factors. A computer was needed for accessing the documents and the Internet was used for distributing the documents to the general public. What remains is the certainty that privacy has become a thing of the past since the shake-up caused by Wikileaks.

### **Homage to technological progress**

As legend has it, some 2,500 years ago, a Greek herald and professional runner ran the 40 kilometres from Marathon to Athens in just three hours. After relaying his message, he collapsed and died. Only handwritten messages existed up to 1875. To have duplicates of important written documents, people went to the trouble of copying the entire contents all over again. In 1875 the typewriter was invented and, with it, the possibility of using carbon paper to make copies. The first phone connection was successfully established in 1878. A good 20 years later, Marconi demonstrated the first radio connection. The photocopier was invented in 1937, followed in 1965 by the launch of the first news satellite into outer space. The first televised coverage of the Olympics was broadcast to the world in real time from Mexico in 1968. In 1990 the World Wide Web was launched. At the turn of the year 2011, about seven million Swiss people sent 116.1 million text messages (SMS and MMS). Technological progress has dramatically reduced transmission time and expanded the group of recipients who can be called at the click of a mouse.

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*Diplomacy has always used the latest means of communication and made maximum secrecy a top priority.*

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Information security has been a top priority of this progress, too. Scarcely any other industry needs such a decentralised organisational structure. The major mishap with Wikileaks was nonetheless impressive. There were 2.5 million employees with access to confidential information; 280,000 of them were at the next higher classified level of secrecy. So how can information security be guaranteed?

