Communication: An Essential Aspect of Diplomacy

Christer Jönsson & Martin Hall
Department of Political Science, Lund University
christer.jonsson@svet.lu.se
martin.hall@svet.lu.se

Communication is to diplomacy as blood is to the human body. Whenever communication ceases, the body of international politics, the process of diplomacy, is dead, and the result is violent conflict or atrophy. (Tran, 1987: 8)

Observers and practitioners alike testify to the vital role of communication in diplomacy. In fact, diplomacy is often defined in terms of communication − as "a regulated process of communication" (Constantinou, 1996: 25) or "the communication system of the international society" (James, 1980: 942), to mention but two examples. Symbolic representations of diplomacy as well tend to highlight its communicative aspects. For instance, the illustrations in Byzantine manuscripts of a scroll handed from a bowing envoy to a seated figure are "a clear shorthand for an embassy" (Mullet, 1992: 204).

The association of diplomacy with communication goes far back in history. It is sometimes argued that the first diplomats were angels, messengers between deities and human beings (see, e.g., Nicolson, 1963: 5-6). Even if this notion may be dismissed as "mytho-diplomacy" (Der Derian, 1987b: 44-67), we should remember, "in two classical languages, Hebrew and Greek, the words for messenger (_'mal'ach'_ in Hebrew and _'angelos'_ in Greek) convey the idea of sacredness as well as of secular mission" (Eban, 1983: 333; cf. Der Derian, 1987b: 65). In Ancient Greece Hermes, the divine messenger, was the deity of language and diplomacy, and the most prominent diplomatic emissaries, heralds (_kerykes_), were regarded as the offspring of Hermes. The sanctity of diplomatic messengers in the ancient world implied inviolability and thus foreshadowed more recent notions of diplomatic immunity (Frey & Frey, 1999: 11; Eban, 1983: 333).

Communication also looms large in critical reflections upon contemporary and future diplomacy, as epitomized in such labels as "techno-diplomacy" (Der Derian, 1987b: 199-209), "media diplomacy" (Rawnsley, 1999; Cohen, 1986) and "digital diplomacy" (Dizard, 2001). Thus, this paper will focus on transhistorical or timeless aspects of diplomatic communication. It forms part of a research project, in which we pursue three essential aspects of diplomacy: representation, communication and the reproduction of international society

We proceed from the notion that diplomacy "expresses a human condition that precedes and transcends the experience of living in the sovereign, territorial states of the past few hundred years" (Sharp, 1999: 51). Diplomacy, in short, exists whenever "there are boundaries for identity and those boundaries of identity are crossed" (Constantinou, 1996: 113). Thus, a first step in our research strategy has been to abandon the state-centric perspective that has dominated the study of diplomacy.

Instead we conceive of diplomacy as an institution structuring relations among *polities*. A polity can be understood as a political authority, which "has a distinct identity; a capacity to mobilize persons and their resources for political purposes, that is, for value satisfaction; and a degree of institutionalisation and hierarchy (leaders and constituents)" (Ferguson and Mansbach, 1996: 34).

The modest purpose of this paper is to outline a number of pertinent dimensions of the communicative aspects of diplomacy and to proffer examples taken from different eras and geographic regions. More specifically, we will discuss continuity and change in the following dimensions: verbal / nonverbal communication, information gathering, diplomatic signaling, interaction capacity, and ritualisation. Our paper is exploratory in nature; it might be seen as a first step toward theory building in a field that has not been the object of much theorizing (Der Derian, 1987a: 91). If diplomacy is "as old as social history" (Eban, 1983: 332) or perhaps "much older than even recorded history" (Mookerjee, 1973: 4), what are its enduring features and variable traits? That is the overarching question guiding our project in general, and this paper on communication in particular.

Verbal and nonverbal communication
Social communication, including diplomatic communication, involves the transmission of messages to which certain meanings are attached. These messages can be either verbal or nonverbal. Just as the verbal components in a normal person-to-person conversation have been estimated to carry little more than a third of the social meaning (Johnson, 1974: 74), so nonverbal messages or "body language" constitute important aspects of diplomatic communication. Diplomatic "body language" encompasses everything from personal gestures to the manipulation of military forces. A handshake, for example, is commonly used as a metaphor for the quality of inter-state relations, transferring the language of personal relations to the international arena. The venue and format of meetings as well as the shape of the negotiating table (symbolizing prestige and power) and the level of delegations (signaling interests and intentions of the parties) are other aspects that can be used for subtle "body language" (cf. Cohen, 1981: 39-40).

Nonverbal communication has certain advantages. It is often better able to capture the attention and interest of various audiences than is verbal communication. If nonverbal communication did not exist," argues Raymond Cohen (1987: 24), "it would have been invented by public relations officers." Another advantage of nonverbal signals, from the viewpoints of diplomats, is that they are inherently ambiguous and disclaimable and thus allow retained flexibility (Cohen, 1987: 35-40).

In diplomatic communication "saying is doing" and "doing is saying." The "semantic obsession" of diplomats rests on the realization that "speech is an incisive form of action" (Eban, 1983: 393). On the other hand, every gesture or action by diplomatic agents sends messages. In fact, both behavior and non-behavior may constitute messages. The observations of one student of interpersonal persuasion are equally applicable to diplomatic communication: "Activity or inactivity, words or silence, all have message value: they influence others and these others, in turn, cannot *not* respond to these communications and are thus themselves communicating" (Simons, 1976: 50).

Today we commonly associate diplomacy with linguistic skills, a carefully calibrated language allowing cross-cultural communication with a minimum of unnecessary misunderstanding, along with protocol governing interstate "body language." Similarly, the management of verbal as well as nonverbal aspects of communication has characterized variants of diplomacy throughout history.

In one of the earliest records of diplomatic communication, the so-called Amarna Letters (see Cohen and Westbrook, 2000), a collection of cuneiform tablets dating back to the fourteenth century BC, the exchange of gifts stands out as a prominent form of "body language" in the Ancient Near East. Gifts were symbols of the status of, and relations between, rulers. In one of the letters the king of Assyria, reminding the Egyptian Pharaoh how much gold his predecessor had sent to the Pharaoh's father, complains about the amount of gold the Pharaoh has sent him − "not enough for the pay of my messengers on the journey to and back" − implying that his proper status has not been recognized. In another letter the king of Mittani makes it clear that he views the Egyptian Pharaoh's dispatch of statues which turned out not to be of solid gold as a symbol of souring relations (cf. Jönsson, 2000: 194-95).

In addition to the verbal messages of the tablets, the selection of envoys obviously sent important nonverbal messages in the Ancient Near East. Tushratta, king of Mittani, made it abundantly clear in his correspondence with Egyptian Pharaoh Amenhotep III that the selection of messenger was of importance. In his opening bid for a renewed alliance, he sent no less a person than his chief minister, Keliya, as messenger, while being quite explicit that the Egyptian selection of messenger mattered to him as well. In another letter the Egyptian Pharaoh complained to the Babylonian king who, instead of sending "dignitaries," had dispatched a delegation of "nobodies," one of whom was an "assherder" (cf. Jönsson, 2000: 202-3).

The significance attached to the selection of envoys appears to be a perennial aspect of diplomatic communication. Students of Ancient Greek diplomacy point to the great care taken in the appointment of envoys. At Athens envoys were popularly elected rather than chosen by the favored democratic process of drawing lots (Mosley, 1973: 43). The Greek city-states developed a nomenclature of diplomatic ranks, which could be used to send nonverbal messages. Thus, to send envoys whose credentials bore the title of *autocrator*, or plenipotentiary, was a mark of respect to the receiving *polis* (Mosley, 1973: 36), and the presence of *kerykes*, heralds, in exchanges between city-states was a virtual acknowledgment that was existed even if it had not been declared (Adcock and Mosley, 1975: 153).

To make a giant leap in history, a more contemporary example may illustrate the enduring symbolic significance of the selection of envoys. The selection of Averell Harriman to lead the U.S. negotiating team in the test ban talks in Moscow in the summer of 1963 was one in a series of conciliatory signals on both sides. Harriman was well known to the Soviets and had become well acquainted with Khrushchev during the Soviet leader's visit to the United States in 1959. In the words of one official from the Soviet embassy in Washington: "As soon as I heard that Harriman was going, I knew that you were serious" (Seaborg, 1981: 252).

The sense of protocol that we associate with classic diplomacy, dating back to Renaissance Italy, is prevalent in the Amarna Letters as well. The address and greeting phrases of the tablets constituted symbolic expressions of status. Only if the

sender was superior or equal to the addressee did he name himself first. Deviations were noted and given sinister interpretations, as in this exchange (see Jönsson, 2000: 195)

And now, as to the tablet that you sent me, why did you put your name over my name? And who now is the one who upsets the good relations between us, and is such conduct the accepted practice? My brother, did you write to me with peace in mind? And if you are my brother, why have you exalted your name…

In the diplomacy of the Roman Empire, protocol seems to have developed only among equals or near equals. Whereas sophisticate rules of protocol developed between the Roman and Persian Empires, Rome's diplomatic relations with the "northern barbarians" seem to have involved no protocol (Lee, 1993: 170).

If the Ancient Near East foreshadowed later refinements of diplomatic protocol, Ancient Greece may be seen as the forerunner of the verbal skills and eloquence associated with modern diplomacy. Diplomatic communication among the Greek city-states depended on direct and oral exchange and face-to-face contacts between representatives. Moreover, communication was open and public, relying on oratorical skills. "Diplomacy by conference and, by implication, confidential negotiation, were largely unknown in the relations of the Greek city-states, where envoys reported to public assemblies and argued in public" (Mosley, 1973: 14). It is significant that *keryx* (herald) is an indo-European word already found in Mycenean Greek, which refers to the clarity of the speaker's voice (Jones, 1999: 18). Celebrated orators, such as Pericles and Demosthenes, were frequently entrusted with diplomatic missions.

In Ancient India, as well, eloquence was considered an essential criterion in the selection of envoys (Roy, 1981: 72). A student of Islamic diplomacy argues that Arabs added an element of poetry to the Ancient Greek diplomacy by oratory (Iqbal, 1977: 76). And the diplomatic letters of the Byzantine period often had "literary pretensions" (Mullet, 1992: 211). In short, there is no shortage of precursors of the "semantic obsession" of modern diplomats.

Information gathering
The introduction of resident ambassadors – one of the most important innovations of Renaissance diplomacy – flowed from the growing need not only to send messages but to gather information about neighbors among vulnerable yet ambitious Italian city-states (cf. Hamilton and Langhorne, 1995: 32). Since then information gathering has come to be regarded as a basic function of modern diplomacy, explicitly listed in the Vienna Convention of Diplomatic Relations of 1961. In the words of one textbook: Gathering information on the local scene and reporting it home has long been recognised as one of the most important functions of the resident embassy. The state of the economy, foreign policy, the morale of the armed forces, scientific research with military implications, the health of the leader, the balance of power within the government, the likely result of any forthcoming election, the strength of the opposition, and so on, have long been the staple fare of ambassadorial dispatches. (Berridge, 1995: 41)

While often associated with the emergence of permanent embassies, information gathering has been an enduring aspect of diplomacy. In Ancient India, for example,

intelligence played a prominent role, as is evident from Kautilya's classic work *Arthasastra*. Once a diplomat had obtained whatever information he could gather, he had fulfilled his chief mission and had to ask for permission to return (cf. Nag, 1997: 101; Roy, 1981: 150).

Byzantine diplomacy is another historical example of intelligence taking center stage. The Empire was poorly equipped for, and thus wanted to avoid, war. Therefore, the Byzantine considered information gathering crucial and saw it as the chief purpose of all diplomatic exchanges. The deeply ingrained expectation that intelligence must be any visitor's intention explains the care with which foreigners were watched, confined and guarded in Constantinople (Hamilton and Langhorne, 1995: 17-19). "The candid Byzantine practice of including the gathering of information among the tasks of embassies gave birth to the reputation of ambassadors as spies," argues Abba Eban (1983: 336): "They have never recovered from this suspicion."

In short, François de Callières (1716/1919: 46) had good historical reasons to label a diplomat an "honorable spy." Today, on the other hand, the question seems rather to be whether modern information technology has reduced the importance of diplomats in information gathering to the verge of obsolescence. Even before the breakthrough of television, Hans Morgenthau (1966: 546) argued, "diplomacy owes its decline in part to the development of speedy and regular communications." The 24-hour news reporting of today's global electronic media tends to make diplomatic reports redundant. Zbigniew Brzezinski's quip in 1970 to the effect that if foreign ministries and embassies "did not already exist, they surely would not have to be invented" is frequently quoted in that connection (James, 1980: 933; Hamilton and Langhorne, 1995: 232; Hocking, 1999: 23). The common counterargument is that the information available via various media, including Internet, will remain significant complements to, but no substitute for, information gathered through diplomatic channels.

Signaling

Signaling is as essential to diplomacy as to a busy airport. One crucial difference is that there is much more scope for ambiguity in diplomatic signaling. Ambiguous signaling between pilots and traffic controllers may be a prelude to disaster, but in diplomatic communication ambiguity is considered constructive and creative (cf. Bell, 1971: 74).

There are several reasons why "constructive ambiguity" characterizes – and probably always has characterized – diplomatic signaling. While needing to communicate, polities want to conceal vital information from each other. Moreover, ambiguity may be a deliberate means to retain flexibility and make signals disclaimable. Ambiguous signals allow the sender to argue, "I never said that," "this is not what I meant" and the like, if the situation calls for it.

The possibility of duplicity and deception contributes to the ambiguity of diplomatic signals. The characterization of a diplomat as "an honest man sent abroad to lie for his country" has gained notoriety. In fact, the association of diplomacy with deception can be traced back to Ancient Greece. The Greeks identified Hermes with charm, trickery, cunning, and deception and subsequently transferred those traits to envoys; ever since they have continued to be associated with diplomacy in varying degrees (Frey & Frey, 1999: 14-15; Iqbal, 1977: xviii). The fact that there is no way of

knowing for sure which signals are false and which are true makes for a diplomatic penchant for mistrusting messages and always "reading between the lines." Yet there are obvious restraints on lying in diplomatic communication, the most important of which is the loss of reputation should the deception fail. "The fact that states send and pay attention to signals indicates that statesmen feel they are more apt to give true than false information" (Jervis, 1970: 70).

In addition, ambiguity is often prompted by the need to take multiple audiences into account. Explicit and unambiguous signaling, while desirable vis-à-vis one category of receivers, might have disastrous effects on the sender's relations with another category of receivers. In diplomatic signaling the potential audiences may be both international and domestic.

Another factor, contributing to the ambiguity of diplomatic signals, is the prevalence of nonverbal messages and "body language" in communication between states. The problem, as we have seen, is that whatever diplomats do or don't do, whatever they say or don't say, will assume message value and be interpreted by their counterparts, whether they want it or not.

In sum, the tension between the need for clarity and the incentives for ambiguity impels diplomats to spend much time and effort on the *formulation* and *interpretation* of signals. It should be noted that *signaling* does not necessarily imply intentionality. Even unconscious, unintended behavior and non-behavior may convey messages in a diplomatic setting. Hence we may refer to signaling whenever one actor displays behavior that is perceived and interpreted by another, whether or not it is spoken or intended or even within the actor's conscious awareness. Yet the tendency among diplomats and statement to look for message value in most behavior and non-behavior seems to rest on an implicit assumption of intentionality. "Since all actors know (or quickly learn) that all public acts, except those self-evidently accidental or inadvertent, may be considered significant, the assumption tends to become a self-fulfilling prophecy" (Cohen, 1987: 20). Thus: all acts, verbal or nonverbal, intentional or unintentional, are potential signals which feed into the network and are liable to reach all listeners and be read by them for the message which they convey. Moreover any message may be read together with, and understood in the light of, the collective body of evidence already communicated or later to be communicated.

We may think of diplomats as "intuitive semioticians," as conscious producers and interpreters of signs. Although semiotics is rarely part of their formal education, diplomats are by training and experience experts at weighing words and gestures with a view to their effect on potential receivers (Jönsson, 1990: 31). We may also be reminded that hermeneutics, the science of interpretation, is explicitly associated with Hermes, the Ancient Greek deity of diplomacy (cf. Constantinou, 1996: 35).

Academic semioticians emphasize the arbitrary nature of signs. Meaning does not reside in the message itself but is produced in interactive interaction:

Semiotics sees communication as the generation of meaning in messages – whether by the encoder or the decoder. Meaning is not an absolute, static concept to be found neatly parcelled up in the message. Meaning is an active process, semioticians use verbs like create, generate or negotiate to refer to this process. Negotiation is perhaps

the most useful in that it implies the to-and-fro, the give-and-take between man and message. Meaning is the result of the dynamic interaction between sign, interpretant and object: it is historically located and may well change with time. It may even be useful to drop the term "meaning" and use Peirce's far more active term "semiosis" – the act of signifying. (Fiske, 1982: 49)

Successful communication, according to semioticians, presupposes a common *code*, a certain (often unconscious) preknowledge that is necessary for understanding a message. A common code establishes what German hermeneutic philosophers call *Interpretationsgemeinschaft*, initial commonality with respect to interpretation (Rommetveit, 1974: 88). Professional diplomacy rests on such a shared code. On the other hand, diplomatic agents are members of separate national cultures with their specific codes. The code and conventions of the diplomatic culture do not necessarily take precedence over the code and conventions of national cultures. When interpreted by members of different national cultures who bring different codes to them, even verbal signs may produce different meanings. Conversely, national cultural conditioning does not represent "a cognitive straight jacket" (Fisher, 1980: 46). Both types of codes and conventions usually apply, in a varying mix.

Diplomats, therefore, have to be content with saying both less and more than they mean: less, because their verbal and nonverbal signaling will never immediately convey their meaning; more, because their signaling will always convey messages and involve them in consequences other than those intended. The interpretation of signals, in other words, includes both "selective" and "constructive" elements.

Whereas the reasoning thus far has primarily referred to contemporary diplomacy, there is reason to believe that these observations concerning diplomatic signaling tend to be timeless. Let us illustrate this with a number of examples of skilful uses of signal ambiguity taken from different eras and various parts of the globe. We start with a recent example, an episode from the 1971-72 American-Chinese parleys resulting in President Nixon's momentous visit to China.

During one of his trips to Beijing, Henry Kissinger was taken for an ostentatious public appearance at the Summer Palace in plain view of hundreds of spectators. Among them was a North Vietnamese journalist taking photographs, as his host, Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, later told Kissinger apologetically. Zhou could thus signal to North Vietnam –and ensure that Washington grasped – that China would not permit North Vietnam's problems to stand in the way of a *rapprochement* with the United States (Cohen 1997: 152).

The example captures well several of the outlined dimensions of "constructive ambiguity" characterizing diplomatic signaling. The Chinese were able to exploit *nonverbal* behavior to send desired messages to *multiple audiences*, while retaining *deniability*.

Our second example is taken from the Amarna Letters, recording diplomatic correspondence in the Ancient Near East more than 3,000 years earlier. They reflect a keen and jealous preoccupation with status and reciprocity. In one of these tablets the Babylonian king recounts an incident, which would seem to put him in an unfavorable light (cf. Jönsson, 2000: 197-98). His initial bid for the pharaoh's daughter had been

refused with reference to a marriage taboo – "From time immemorial no daughter of the king of Egypt is given to anyone." The Babylonian king then had requested the daughter of a commoner instead: "Someone's grown daughters, beautiful women, must be available. Send me a beautiful woman as if she were your daughter." The pharaoh again refused. Why should the Babylonian king recall a seemingly humiliating episode like this in his dispatch?

The key to a possible answer can be found in the latter part of the letter, where the Babylonian king offers his daughter to the pharaoh in marriage: "Should I, perhaps, since you did not send me a woman, refuse you a woman, just as you did to me, and not send her? But my daughters being available, I will not refuse one to you." He goes on to demand a heavy bride price in gold and establish a deadline for payment. If the main purpose of the Babylonian king's letter was to bargain for the highest possible bride price in return for his daughter, the references to the pharaoh's dual snubs make sense. The king probably knew that his request for the pharaoh's daughter would be refused. And the following offer of a ruse might have been a tactic to expose the pharaoh's hypocrisy – the second refusal to provide a bride could not be accounted for by religious taboos – and gain the moral upper hand. The Babylonian king, in short, made cunning use of the convention of strict reciprocity between Great Kings. By reminding the pharaoh of his failure to maintain the customary reciprocity, he hoped to increase the compensation for offering his daughter in marriage.

While the architects of diplomatic signaling in the Amarna period did not have to worry about multiple audiences, we can discern similarities with the previous example in the subtle manipulation of a common code to send messages beyond the manifest ones. Knowledge of prevalent conventions makes the signals perceptible and understandable by "insiders."

Our third example, highlighting adroit nonverbal signaling, rests on a numismatic analysis of the early efforts by Philip II to make Macedonia the core of Panhellenic unity in the fourth century BC (West, 1923). Philip's early choice of choice of coin standard arguably was used to send powerful diplomatic messages to multiple audiences. Of the three standards from which to select – the Attic, the Rhodian, and the Phoenician – Philip chose the Phoenician. His rejection of the Attic standard signaled that he refused to recognize Athenian commercial supremacy. The popular Rhodian standard was almost as dominant in the Aegean during the fourth century as the Attic had been at the height of Athenian power in the fifth. While reflecting the lack of direct contact between Macedonia and the cities where it was used, Philip's rejection of the Rhodian standard signaled that he was not looking toward Thrace and Asia Minor for commerce or alliances or conquest at that time.

The Phoenician standard was used by the Chalcidic League, a commercial rival and bitter enemy of Athens. By choosing this standard, Philip signaled to the skeptical Chalcidians "that their interests were his, and that the Chalcidic peninsula and Macedonia together formed an economic unit in which Chalcidian merchants might claim a privileged position and a practical monopoly of trade and commerce" (West, 1923: 33). Thus, Philip's adoption of the Phoenician coin standard "was not a meaningless gesture, but the first step in the formation of a cooperative enterprise in which the Chalcidians were equal partners" (West, 1923: 36).

Our fourth example of diplomatic "body language" concerns, in fact, dead bodies. In the ninth century the city of Venice was squeezed between the Byzantine empire in the east and the Carolingian advances in the north and west. One way of remaining independent was to have a local religious focus for the construction of a political identity. Such foci could be provided by relics of appropriate saints, and these relics were often used as diplomatic gifts. In our example, the Byzantines were pressing for the Venetians to accept relics from St. Theodore (who indeed was Venice's first patron saint), whereas the Carolingians wanted the Venetians to accept St. Martin as patron saint. In 829, however, some Venetian representatives managed to smuggle out the relics of St. Mark from Alexandria – under a cargo of pork, as it happened – and he promptly became the patron saint of Venice. Not only did Mark, as an apostle and evangelist, outrank both Theodore and Martin, but he came without political implications. Alexandria, of course, had been in Muslim hands for over two centuries, and the Venetian could continue to steer its course between Franks and Byzantines without any spiritual debt (Osborne 1999).

Taken together, these four disparate exemplifications illustrate the broad range of verbal and nonverbal signaling instruments as well as the variety of sources and uses of "constructive ambiguity." Moreover, they indicate the timelessness of the practice and problems of diplomatic signaling.

Interaction capacity
As a system of communication between polities, diplomacy has been influenced by the development of available means of communication and transportation. Most importantly, the speed of diplomatic communication has varied greatly over time. In the Ancient Near East, diplomatic missions could take years to complete. In the Amarna Letters there is reference to a messenger being detained, and thus bilateral communication being interrupted, for six years (cf. Jönsson, 2000: 203). In the sixteenth century it took four months for a Hapsburg diplomat to travel to Moscow, and in the seventeenth century it took eleven days to send a courier from Paris to Madrid. (Örn, forthcoming). The well-known expression that Napoleon did not travel faster than Caesar is not merely a figure of speech, but reflects the reality that still in the eighteenth century the Ancient Roman roads remained the best communication routes on land. Still by the end of the eighteenth century U.S. President could write a memorandum to his Secretary of State, lamenting the fact that the ambassador in Spain had not been heard from for two years. "If we do not hear from him this year," he added, "let us write him a letter" (Eban, 1983: 358).

It was only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that technological revolutions changed the premises of diplomatic communication. In the nineteenth century the advent of steamships and railways increased the mobility of diplomats significantly, at the same time as the invention of the telegraph permitted fast and direct communication between governments as well as between foreign ministries and embassies. The development of air travel and information technology (IT) in the twentieth century added to the ease and speed of movement and communication.

While facilitating the exchange of diplomatic communication, these technological innovations have been seen as challenges to ingrained diplomatic procedures. For instance, the Royal Commission of 1861, which investigated the British Diplomatic Service, dwelt on the influence of the telegraph on diplomacy and wondered whether

ambassadors would become unnecessary when such rapid communication could be made with foreign powers (Busk, 1967: 238). The dramatic development of today's media and information technology has elicited similar concerns. Thus a recent CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies) report admonishes, "the conduct of American diplomacy faces unacceptable performance gaps between its outdated practices and the requirements of the new age of information" (see www.csis.org/ics/dia/).

One of the obvious effects of the IT revolution is that diplomacy has lost its position as the main facilitator of contacts and communication across state boundaries. Another effect is that, compared to earlier periods when it took a long time to relay instructions, the actions of diplomats are today much more circumscribed (Hamilton and Langhorne, 1995: 132). Moreover, direct contacts between political leaders have become more frequent – "as communications become easier the nomadic instinct is given greater scope," in Abba Eban's (1983: 360) words. George Ball, a senior US diplomat, lamented in the early 1980s "jet planes and telephones and the bad habits of Presidents, National Security Assistants and Secretaries of State had now largely restricted ambassadors to ritual and public relations" (quoted in Berridge, 1995: 52n). The contemporary emphasis on speed often forces decision-makers to react instantaneously to international events, bypassing traditional diplomatic channels. In the age of abundant and instant information combined with intrusive media, the moderate tempo of traditional diplomatic communication, which allowed for careful deliberations of signaling strategy and interpretation, seems irrevocably lost.

At the same time, diplomats are adjusting to, and learning to use, the new communication media. They become engaged in "media diplomacy," exploiting the media for their purposes (cf. Cohen, 1986; Jönsson, 1996). Television, for example, provides ample opportunities for creative diplomatic stage-managing, yet frequently requires instantaneous improvisation without the possibility of retakes. And foreign ministries have discovered the potential of the Internet as a powerful medium for the worldwide dissemination of information to an audience of highly educated and influential members of foreign societies (Kurbalija, 1999: 185).

Ritualization
The links between communication and ritual are emphasized by theorists representing different disciplines. Several anthropologists view ritual as a special form of human communication (cf. Bell, 1992: 73; Bloch, 1989: 122). From another vantage point some students of communication argue that "ritual and communication are kin; they are logically related and share family characteristics" (Rothenbuhler, 1998: 26) and advocate a ritual conception of communication.

It is also noteworthy that an ethologist and a political scientist analyze the ritualization of communication in strikingly similar terms. Sir Julian Huxley from his ethological perspective maintains that ritualization among animals – and by extension among humans – serves to secure more effective communication or signaling and to reduce intra-group damage and facilitate bonding (Bell, 1992: 73). On the basis of a study of industry-labor union negotiations, political scientist Murray Edelman (1971) characterizes ritualization as a process facilitating both the resolution and escalation of a potentially damaging struggle in a conflicted relationship. The common denominator, which seems equally applicable to diplomacy, is that ritual forms of

communication tend to arise "in situations where any misunderstanding, or 'missignaling,' would be catastrophic" (Bell, 1992: 73).

The development of diplomatic protocol is a case in point. "Until the early eighteenth century, diplomacy was full of endless crises caused by intended or unintended slights occurring between ambassadors or their retinues – usually the latter – and also resulting from attempts by ambassadors to gain a higher status in their treatment by the ruler to whom they were accredited, sometimes by seeking to perform highly personal services" (Hamilton and Langhorne, 1995: 65). This triggered efforts to develop "a body of rules governing diplomatic conduct at official functions and other encounters" (Cohen, 1987: 142). Protocol enabled states to concentrate on substantive issues without adding unnecessary disagreements about the external forms of intercourse.

If we bring the ritualization of communication into focus, the contention that "diplomacy without ritual is inconceivable" (Kertzer, 1988: 104) makes sense. The key word, then, is *ritualization*, which draws attention to "the way in which certain social actions strategically distinguish themselves in relation to other actions" (Bell, 1992: 74). Ritualization is seen to involve "the formal 'modeling' of valued relationships so as to promote legitimation and internalization of those relations and their values" (Bell, 1992: 89). It endows certain social agents with ritual mastery, an acquired "sense of ritual" (Bell, 1992: 80). As applied to diplomacy, the term "ritualization" reminds us (a) that "saying is doing" and "doing is saying" in diplomatic communication, and (b) that the common diplomatic code facilitates cross-cultural communication among members of the profession while rendering communication between professionals and non-professionals more difficult.

Ritualization can be said to represent a movement away from referential toward condensed symbols that are characterized by layers of meaning and multiple, simultaneous referents. As condensed symbols are also richly ambiguous, flexible and adaptable to different social uses, they are especially useful for diplomatic signaling (cf. Rothenbuhler, 1998: 16-18).

Ritualization also implies institutionalisation. "There is always something about ritual that is stereotyped, standardized, stylised, relatively invariant, formal" (Rothenbuhler, 1998: 20). Ritualised communication, in other words, is not fully authored by individual agents but involves to a considerable degree the performance of a "script," a stereotyped sequence of events in well-known situations. The ritualised diplomatic language is therefore also useful as a socialization device.

If the rich theoretical literature on ritual may give us useful insights into the origins of ritualised diplomatic communication and tools for analysis, history offers a rich variety of exemplifications. In Ancient Near East diplomacy, for instance, standardized greeting phrases and other ritualised formulations were used to indicate relative status. When a new monarch succeeded to throne there were pledges of, or demands for, "ten times more love" than for the predecessor. For a *demandeur*, who wanted to deflate the size of requested concessions from the more powerful Egypt, it was commonplace to use the phrase "gold is as plentiful as dirt" in Egypt (cf. Jönsson, 2000: 193). Various expressions of deference adhered to what scholars of the Ancient Near East call "prostration formulae." Kings or vassals "touched the hem" of the

receiver's garment (Munn-Rankin, 1956: 91), "fell at their feet," or considered themselves "dirt under their sandals" (Avruch, 2000: 138).

One study of diplomacy in the multi-state system of Ancient China, focusing on the Ch'un-ch'iu (Spring and Autumn) period 722-481 BC, elaborates on the "great amount of ritual in the relations between the states," which "strove to outdo each other in their ceremonies to such an extent that their ability to put on a rich ceremonial front frequently determined their position among their associates" (Walker, 1953: 77). The elaborate rituals served as a reflection of economic strength and, since their rigidity required much discipline, as an indication of the efficiency of the current regime. The extreme formality of diplomatic relations required a lot of the emissaries. For example, they could not attend any ceremonies to which their rank did not entitle them; at banquets in their honor, they had to be able to respond appropriately to toasts, which usually involved the ability to select for the occasion a fitting verse from the well known songs of the time; and practically all the major events in the life of a ruling family required some sort of diplomatic representation (Walker, 1953: 77-78). It is significant that still a millennium later, in the seventh century, China's diplomatic relations were handled by officials at the Court of State Ceremonies (Sen, 2001: 8).

The conclusion of treaties seems to have been associated with rituals throughout history. In the Ancient Near East oaths were sworn by the gods of both parties, so that each ruler exposed himself to the punishment of both sets of deities should he fail to comply. Each ruler "touched his throat," and often an ass was killed at the conclusion of treaties – gestures symbolic of the fate of treaty breakers (Munn-Rankin, 1956: 89-91). There is a striking similarity with treaty rituals in Ancient China. There, too, an animal – usually a calf – was sacrificed. "The left ear of the sacrificial victim was cut off and it was used to smear with blood both the document bearing the articles of agreement, and the lips of the principals" (Walker, 1953: 82). The document, one copy of which was buried with the sacrificial animal while the signatories kept one copy each, contained "an oath invoking the wrath of most important deities upon anyone who transgressed the agreements" (Walker, 1953: 82). Early diplomacy, in short, seems to validate the common view among anthropologists that ritual sacrifice is a substitute for the primal violence that threatens to destroy society (Bell, 1992: 173).

In Ancient Greece the conclusion of a treaty was accompanied by a libation to the gods, *spondai*, and was generally affirmed by oaths, *horkoi*. Both terms came to be used figuratively to refer to treaties (Adcock and Mosley, 1975: 183, 229). The ritual sacrifice had thus taken on a more symbolic form, which has survived until our days in the form of the ritual champagne toasts accompanying the signing of modern treaties.

Concluding remarks
This sketchy overview has tried to identify continuities and discontinuities in a number of dimensions of diplomatic communication. Most contemporary commentaries tend to emphasize the "newness" and "decline" (Hocking, 1999: 21) of diplomacy associated with new information and transportation technologies. We have put more emphasis on transhistorical continuities and similarities in several of the fundamental dimensions of diplomatic communication.

If television has enhanced the significance of nonverbal signaling and body language, diplomacy still rests on the creative combination of verbal and nonverbal communication. The accelerating speed and abundance of information has, as we have seen, both facilitated and complicated the traditional information-gathering function of diplomacy. Whereas diplomatic signaling has traditionally been addressed to exclusive and clearly delineated audiences, with a high degree of control and possibilities to vary the message according to audience, the advent of new media has made the differentiation among audiences more difficult. On the other hand, the repertoire of signaling instruments has been expanded. And the ritualization of diplomatic communication is a continuous process, which may take different forms and be less conspicuous today than in earlier times yet is not likely to cease.

Diplomacy, in short, has proved to be a resilient and adaptable institution, and communication has been, and remains, an essential aspect of diplomacy. The lesson we draw from this exploratory essay is that the understandable preoccupation among researchers with the changes resulting from the revolution in communication technology should not blind us to the timeless features of diplomatic communication.

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