

**Ambassador Ronald Neumann**

*Formerly Deputy Assistant Secretary and U.S. Ambassador to Algeria, Bahrain, and Afghanistan, and currently President, the American Academy of Diplomacy*

Thank you Yonah, thank you for having me. I guess we do have a lot of ambassadors. It reminds me when I first joined the Foreign Service, to make me understand the true importance of diplomacy, a colleague sent me the page he tore out of a magazine. It was a page for a white owl cigar called diplomats, and it said you could get two for a quarter at your cigar store.

That has helped me keep to a certain balance since then. When I was asked to do this and I got around to looking at the program, it talked particularly about reflections based on our experience which maybe was a caveat not to pontificate about things we haven't experienced. In any event I'm going to follow those instructions or guidance. I'm not particularly looking at a whole range of issues from disease to cybercrime to things that other people are working on and I'm staying in the lane of my own experience.

My own experience is somewhat unusually tilted to conflict having served in Algeria during a very bloody period, in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Yemen in a more peaceful period (even though we still had threats of assassination) and Bahrain, when we had mobs storming the embassy occasionally. So, it's not quite the traditional experience. I would note one or two caveats. One is that I think diplomacy has long been adding to its kitbag besides traditional statecraft, that's hardly a new change. But I would also note, less people get too carried away with what's new, that we still have almost all the old responsibilities. We have turned in our electric quill sharpeners, but it's very difficult beyond that to think what it is that the 19<sup>th</sup> century diplomat was responsible for, for which a 21<sup>st</sup> century diplomat is not also responsible.

Now there is a great deal for which 21<sup>st</sup> century diplomats are responsible for in addition to those 19<sup>th</sup> century duties. Lest one get too caught up in focusing on the new, it's useful to remember how much the old needs to be done as well. Further, it is necessary in reflecting on my own experience to remember that there is always a danger in lessons learned that the diplomats and politicians as much as the generals may fight the last war. You cannot always trust the last lesson to be the right lesson.

Nonetheless, since I have watched a lot of interventions over my period, in diplomacy and starting from experience of infantry in Vietnam, I would say my first lesson is that we are not done with war and we are not done with interventions. It is the mood of the country right now not to want to do these sorts of things and there is a tendency to say never again, which means for many that the answer of "how do we prepare to do things better" is no we won't do it. This is a profoundly ahistorical view, as every administration since Truman's has had foreign interventions. Since WWII, that an American administration has not had a foreign intervention. So, the idea that we are going to avoid it, as desirable as that might be, is misplaced. At the least it demands that history stop.

So, what are the lessons for diplomacy assuming you take that as a starting point? One is that, while you can make war without diplomats, you can't make the peace. We have tried that in Iraq which is a particular example, but let me give you two others.

We need allies even in war which is a primary diplomatic task. You can threaten but it's a lot cheaper not to fight which means diplomacy again is the essential tool of war prevention. Now Iraq is in many ways a poster child for how to mess up by making a war without making diplomacy. There was no provision for the aftermath. The planning done in the State

Department, of varying quality was simply brushed aside and not utilized. Intellectually, it wasn't really in the military lexicon, and I wish I had a dollar for every military briefing slide I've seen which has 4 phases from the preparation that goes up through phase 3, which is war and phase 4, which is afterwards and never detailed how that aftermath was to be done. In those days, the presumption was that diplomats would solve it. That has changed enormously. I don't know any current senior officers who have that view anymore. They have quite gotten beyond it, but I don't know that our politicians have. That's not only a dig at this administration, because you know one feature of American politics is that in the decades since WWII we have only elected three individuals who came to office with any real knowledge of foreign affairs before they arrived in the presidency. That was Eisenhower, Nixon, and the first Bush. No other president had any real experience with foreign policy before they came to office, so we are not sure what will be known.

There was very little diplomacy in the run up to the Iraq war and one of the things you see is a war of the willing can lose support much faster than a war of allies. And all that tells you is that diplomacy remains critical. Interestingly enough, when ISIS broke out with a new insurgency in Iraq, we needed a lot of diplomacy to support the fighting. The news reports were all about sending troops and fighting the Islamic State. One of the things we do in my day job at the American Academy of Diplomacy is a number of podcasts. One is called the General and the Ambassador, and there are actually three different ones that deal with the phases of the Iraq War. If anyone wants to get deeply into how diplomacy and military work together, there is one of Gen. Petraeus with Ambassador Crocker and another one featuring Ambassador Jeffrey with Gen. Lloyd Austin who was CENTCOM commander at the time. Sometimes I think that one could have been retitled "together how we fought Washington and ISIS". There is a lot about

policy in it. And there is one that just went up a few weeks ago with the Ambassador Stu Jones and Gen. McFarland and that goes through an enormous number of political issues which went through how they worked together and how they could talk to certain Iraqi militia units and other units were off limits because of their terrorist affiliation and how the diplomacy had to maneuver with the Prime Minister to make possible many of our military arrangements.

I think there is a misconception in the minds of many Americans that you just send troops into a country and they go fight. In fact, that kind of fighting is enormously political and there is an enormous role for diplomacy in it. I think this is one of the lessons one can carry away.

One can look at two other experiences, and I won't go into detail because I think these things are pretty well known. Two contrasting wars and experiences are the First Gulf War and Afghanistan. In the First Gulf War, you needed an enormous amount of diplomacy in order to bring together a coalition, and it was also the last war America fought at a profit. We had a lot of allies who could contribute, and we actually had a budget surplus by the end of the war. The coalition put together NATO troops, allied troops, Syrian troops, and Egyptian troops, side by side with American troops, to launch the liberation of Iraq. It was a stupendous feat of diplomacy, and one that we have not equaled since, but it shows the difference in organizing.

Then in Afghanistan, one of the things I think is so interesting is that when we finally decided we needed allies, which was not at the beginning, NATO really joined us, and NATO has stayed vested. We are 18 years in and we have not had nearly as much donor fatigue as one might have expected to have by this point in the war. It's very interesting that in the lead up to the Trump administration's major decision last year about staying in Afghanistan, you had

countries like Germany and Italy pushing us to remain involved in Afghanistan because they understood the importance of it and were prepared to keep their own troops there. But they couldn't do it without us being there as well. So, when you have real alliances and real friends, you have more support. All those are requirements of diplomacy which I believe will continue to be requirements of diplomacy as we go forward in the world. There are a lot of other kinds of interventions that I haven't been so much involved with, such as those involving UN peace keeping, and I'll leave that for others to reflect on.

The conflicts of the kinds I've experienced don't have easy answers. We are still in Afghanistan, and I would say that, while diplomacy cannot substitute for a good policy, it can make a bad policy work much better. A bad policy without diplomacy will be doubly bad, and this comes back to the enduring question of what the future looks like. Based on my experience, there will be absolutely no shortage of the need for diplomacy, and employment is guaranteed. There really are no lanes. There are no modern examples in which military and diplomacy are separate. They constantly affect each other, and you can't intelligently or responsibly use one tool without the other.

I remember general Zini who put this in a very simple way. He said, if I remember correctly, "My uncle Guido was a plumber, and if you asked him if you need plyers or a screwdriver more, he would have thought you were crazy." That stuck in my mind as a pretty good example of the proper answer to that question of whether one needs troops or diplomacy more. There are no other lanes, and they are going to be bound together. So, we are going to

need diplomacy. Since the subject is not well understood, I would submit that there is a huge need to educate the public. Thank you.