

INTERNATIONAL LAW INSTITUTE
THE ROLE OF DIPLOMACY IN THE WORLD'S FUTURE

2.00 – 4.00pm : 14 May 2014

Professor Wallace
Professor Alexander
Ambassadors
Colleagues and friends

Our question today is what kind of diplomacy do we need for the future?

Since the essential purpose of diplomacy in any age is to reduce the risk of war and to increase security, let's look first at the nature of the risks diplomacy is expected to help reduce or resolve – now and in the future.

(Acknowledge points made by previous speakers)

The World Economic Forum's 2019 Global Risk Assessment identified rising geopolitical and geo-economic tensions as the most urgent global risks, followed by environmental risks and technological vulnerabilities – from fake news to loss of privacy.

The report notes that "Global risks are intensifying but the collective will to tackle them appears to be lacking". It saw the world as moving into a phase of state centred politics where the idea of "taking back control" behind national borders resonates in many countries.

A symptom of this inward turning trend is a retreat from multilateralism; a loss of confidence in the global architecture we have built together over the last 70 years.

These trends run contrary to the purpose of traditional diplomacy, which has been to draw nations into closer understanding of each other, to keep channels of dialogue open where there is the risk of conflict, and to create and keep in order an architecture of regional and international rules and norms.

There is a strong temptation on occasions like today's seminar to be drawn into analyses of the known problems rather than grappling with the much harder question of what to do about it. Admiring the problem is the expression.

So I shall make the possibly rash assumption that we all share an approximately similar analysis of the challenges ahead of us and move on to the contributions that we as diplomats can make – now and in the future.

Before I set out down this path, and in the spirit of the Māori culture of New Zealand I shall share with you my *whakapapa* – that is, where I have come from and the life experience I bring to this discussion.

My diplomatic career began more than 40 years ago, after growing up in the country and attending Canterbury University in Christchurch and then London School of Economics.

My previous postings as ambassador were to Paris and earlier as Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York. I have also served in Australia, the Solomon Islands and at the United Nations in Geneva.

My views of diplomacy are shaped by my experiences representing a democratic country of now 4.7m people which has always had to win its place on a crowded global stage.

We are an open society, a country that despite our geographical isolation has throughout our history been ready to contribute to global peace and security.

Our diplomacy has rested on our reputation as a reliable country, on the leverage we have gained from our integration into global and regional architecture, and on our network of connections.

Our diplomatic successes have come from our ability to be a bridge between cultures, regions and sometimes larger powers. Our diplomatic

“brand” has been to be independent in our analysis, solution focused, and good at interpersonal relations.

These capabilities – of independent analysis, being solution focused and able to create trust through good interpersonal relations are timeless, and universal across countries and cultures.

They are necessary, but not sufficient to bridge some of the most dangerous gaps in today’s world – growing mistrust within and between nations; how to deal with the existential threat of climate change and a lack of consensus on what kind of global rules we need.

What has already changed in diplomacy during my career has been the breadth of issues now considered to be part of diplomacy. When I began my career trade policy and economic issues were dealt with in other parts of government.

We did not need to understand tariffs or global energy markets, or know what to do when phytosanitary problems held up a shipment of kiwifruit.

All that changed for us in the 1980s when we recognised the inseparability of political and economic relations, restructuring and renaming our foreign ministry to take on responsibility for trade policy.

Then environmental issues came to the fore - oceans and fish stocks management, followed by climate change, which is now one of the larger teams in our Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

At the same time as the diversity of issues has increased, so has the diversity of our diplomats. When I joined I was one of only a handful of women diplomats. There were even fewer Māori diplomats and almost none from New Zealand’s other major ethnic groups – Asian and Pacific people.

Today our diplomats look a lot more like the population we represent, and that is an intellectual strength, by bringing in different viewpoints and cultural backgrounds.

Diplomacy for the world's future

Now for the question of what ongoing changes and adaptation diplomats in all our countries need to make to help close those dangerous gaps I mentioned a minute ago.

The basic structure of diplomacy I do not see as changing – in future as now we shall still need rules (to ensure that every country has a voice, irrespective of size and economic or military weight).

We shall still need architecture – the forums at international, regional and sub-regional level for our voices to be heard and our problems to be discussed.

We shall always need relationships of trust, based on being on the ground, speaking the language, understanding the culture.

But within these unchanging parameters there are shifts of emphasis we need to make to adapt and update our methods of diplomacy.

My first recommendation would be to intensify our use of all available tools of modern communication; to better explain the value we get from our political and economic relationships; to sell the value of the open and rules-based trading system.

My second would be to pay much closer attention to social change and the permission space that society allows for foreign and trade policy. The combined impacts of globalisation, climate change and rapid technological change have produced uncertainty and anxiety in all our societies.

To such an extent that for the first time the WEF has identified as a global risk that people are feeling a lack of control and seeing the world as an increasingly, unhappy and lonely place.

In these circumstances people become suspicious – of government, of authority, of change. They are less likely than in the past to simply accept that “the government knows best” when setting foreign, defence or trade policies. They need to be convinced.

In New Zealand our diplomats are now expected to conduct diplomacy at home as energetically as they would if on an overseas posting, establishing networks with civil society, advocacy and ethnic groups.

We are expected to engage actively, including through social media, with audiences whose views would have been ignored in the past.

In the diplomacy of the future, diplomats will need a great deal more technical knowledge and specialised training, or self-education, in such areas as climate change, cyber security, alternative proteins, space, artificial intelligence and robotics.

I revert one last time to the WEF Global Risks Report. It singled out the need to renew and improve our international political and economic systems as “this generation’s defining task”.

The global architecture we have inherited is seen by many as too cumbersome and bureaucratic for the speed and complexity of our interconnected world. But the response should not be to seek to discredit or abandon what we have.

President Macron in addressing Congress just over a year ago gave a similar challenge. He called for a “new breed of multilateralism..a more effective, accountable and results oriented multilateralism”.

If there has been little take up it is partly because today’s global problems are seen as so complex that no one knows where to start. But the diplomats of the past managed to create global order out of the chaos of World War II.

Here political leadership is required, as well as diplomats working together, technical knowledge and the communication skills to “tell the story” of why action is needed.

We can still learn lessons from the leadership of President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who had the courage and

the optimism to inspire others to go beyond what they believed they could do.

These qualities of courage and optimism, together with patience and persistence, are as old as humankind but will be needed more than ever by the diplomats of tomorrow.