

OPERATION DIPLOMA

With the **MILITARY**
carrying out much of
U.S. FOREIGN POLICY,
two **UT SCHOLARS**
look at the
VANISHING ROLE
of the **AMERICAN**
DIPLOMAT.

BY ROBERT HUTCHINGS
AND JEREMI SURI

CY



ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN STAUFFER



s American forces withdraw from the difficult terrain of Afghanistan, two things have become glaringly clear: Our nation over-relies on the military and under-invests in diplomacy. Since the boots

of U.S. soldiers first hit the ground 12 years ago, American civilian experts on politics, economics, and culture have been present in very small numbers throughout the region. In their place, American soldiers have taken on tasks for which they are poorly prepared, like negotiating agreements on resources, monitoring elections, and helping to build representative institutions. The same is true at a national level, where American military commanders in Afghanistan have frequently assumed the lead in negotiating with the country's vain and corrupt leader, Hamid Karzai.

The failures of diplomacy in Afghanistan are, in part, a consequence of the imbalance between overwhelming American military force and inadequate civilian capabilities. A similar pattern has played out in Iraq, Libya, and most recently Syria, where the inconsistent, stop-and-go diplomatic approaches toward the Assad regime have exposed the lack of strategic thinking at the highest levels of the U.S. government.

Our soldiers constitute one of the best-trained fighting forces the world has ever seen, but they are clearly asked to do too much. Our diplomats, in contrast, struggle to find the resources for adequate training. Our soldiers are stretched too far; our diplomats are too few and too poorly prepared.

The U.S. defense budget is roughly 20 times as great as the combined budget of the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development. There are more lawyers in the Pentagon than diplomats in the State Department, and more musicians in military bands than members in the entire U.S. diplomatic corps.

As defense secretary Robert Gates argued in 2008, the U.S. government risks the “creeping militarization” of its foreign policy by giving such overwhelm-

were, above all, diplomats. They constituted what some historians have called a “republic of letters,” where extended debate about deeply held political beliefs was *the* standard mode of communication.

The founders did not have the military or economic power to force their vision of democracy and constitutional government on many others. They relied on creative compromises to bring people together behind their goals. Success in attaining independence depended, above all, on the ability of the revolutionary leaders to maintain a coalition among diverse North American colonies, as well as alliances with France and Spain. Failed diplomacy on either side of the Atlantic would have meant a failed revolution.

The most original political contribution by the founders was the concept of pluralism. It promised that diverse groups of citizens on the vast North American continent could learn to live together by balancing their interests, rather than seeking domination of one over the other. In advocating for ratification of the Constitution, the framers promised that the new central government would act as a referee or an arbitrator, not an oppressor. The *Federalist Papers* described the process of republican government as a mix of perspectives in complex and ever-evolving negotiation, with elected officials representing specific constituencies in pursuit of broadly beneficial compromises. One can hardly imagine a better definition of diplomacy.

Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Monroe all spent formative moments in their careers serving abroad. For them and their successors, politics was about negotiation and dialogue. The two most important documents in the founding of the United States—the Paris Peace Treaty of 1783 that ended the Revolutionary War, and the U.S. Constitution of 1787 that created our federalist system of government—resulted from intensive diplomacy. The brilliant political ideas of the time would have amounted to very little if a remarkable series of Americans had failed to forge the compromises necessary to create a new world in relative peace.

Despite his own background as a military leader, George Washington recognized the importance of diplomacy in his Farewell Address of 1796. The departing first president advised Americans, “Nothing is more essential than that permanent, inveterate antipathies against particular nations, and passionate attachments for others, should be excluded; and that, in place of them, just and amicable feelings towards all should be cultivated. The nation which indulges towards another a habitual hatred or a habitual fondness is in some degree a slave. It is a slave to its animosity or to its affection, either of which is sufficient to lead it astray from its duty and its interest.”

Washington's Farewell Address made little mention of military force, coercion, or war. He advocated shifting and temporary alliances with foreign powers that benefited American interests. This was an argument for skilled and careful collaboration to influence others through trust and respect. Washington anticipated what observers in the late

There are more lawyers in the Pentagon than diplomats in the State Department, and more musicians in military bands than members in the entire U.S. diplomatic corps.

ing priority to our military services and paying so little attention to the diplomats who work to advance American interests and values through non-military means. Gates reminded Americans that current and future wars are likely to be “fundamentally political in nature” and that military means always need to be harnessed to political ends.

For answers to how we can reimagine our nation's foreign policy, history offers many valuable insights. The founders of the United States



20th century would call “soft power.” He explained, “Harmony, liberal intercourse with all nations, are recommended by policy, humanity, and interest.” American diplomacy would protect the national interest by displaying “an equal and impartial hand; neither seeking nor granting exclusive favors or preferences; consulting the natural course of things; diffusing and diversifying by gentle means the streams of commerce, but forcing nothing.”

For the century and a half after Washington’s presidency, Americans largely followed his advice, favoring flexible diplomacy over permanent alliances and frequent warfare—the normal modes of international behavior in Europe at the time. As the British, French, Germans, Italians, and Russians built large permanent military forces and frequently confronted one another in limited wars over territory, the United States steered clear of great power conflicts. With the notable exception of the Civil War, the United States had a small and poorly trained standing military from the time of George Washington until the nation’s entrance into World War I in 1917. Two years later, after that war’s end, Americans quickly returned to their non-military posture outside the Western Hemisphere.

Throughout this long period the United States was deeply engaged in international trade, law, and politics. American representatives negotiated treaties on all continents to open access for U.S. businesspeople, missionaries, scholars, and students. By the late 19th century the United States was widely recognized as a world power, despite its very small military capabilities. American influence came from the nation’s informal and formal diplomatic representation in cities around the world. Although an official Foreign Service wasn’t created until after the Civil War, the United States sent ministers to far corners of the globe for decades before that. American diplomacy was often inconsistent and



For answers to how we can reimagine our nation’s foreign policy, history offers many valuable insights.

under-resourced, but it established a critical presence for the United States in many foreign societies, often as an alternative to European militarism. In Qing China and the Ottoman Middle East, to take two prominent examples, local leaders often welcomed relations with Americans who were less threatening than the aggressive imperialists from London, Paris, Berlin, St. Petersburg, and Tokyo. The United States relied on diplomacy for its global influence, and it paid enormous dividends.

After rapidly expanding its diplomatic and military capabilities during World War II, the United States emphasized diplomacy as a fundamental lever for international influence. This was the golden age of the U.S. State Department, when Secretary of State George Marshall and his successor, Dean Acheson, oversaw the reconstruction of Western Europe and Japan. Following the advice of the leading State Department expert on Russia, George Kennan, the United States coupled containment of communism with concerted efforts to cultivate new partners in foreign societies. That was the essence of the European Recovery Program (“the Marshall Plan”) and what became known as the “Reverse Course” in Japan, focusing American efforts after 1947 on rebuilding Japanese industry and infrastructure.

Just emerging from a devastating economic depression and a global war, the United States spent \$17.6 billion in Western Europe and \$1.3 billion in Japan. The American commitment to helping former adversaries was staggering. The adjusted cost in current dollars is more than \$100 billion for Western Europe and more than \$15 billion for Japan. The only comparable American foreign expenditures after the 1940s were for the conventional and nuclear

From left: Aid from the Marshall Plan funds reconstruction in Germany after WWII; On Nov. 29, 1948, President Truman conferred with the top leaders of the Marshall Plan—(left to right) George C. Marshall, Paul G. Hoffman, and Averell Harriman.

CREDITS: From left, National Archives; Harriman, A. 1972. *The Men Responsible*. Library of Congress: Exhibitions.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 95

arms race—as well as the wars in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

American money in the 1940s went primarily to local business councils, labor unions, and municipal authorities that managed economic development in foreign countries. American advisors accompanied the money, not to direct its use, but to forge partnerships with the actors on the ground who took the lead. Much of the American foreign policy machinery at the time focused on this effort. As soldiers returned home from Europe and Japan, American diplomats took up residence in these regions in unprecedented numbers. Men like John J. McCloy in Western Germany and John Foster Dulles in Japan oversaw large teams of U.S. civilians who spent their days working closely with local counterparts to feed starving populations, rebuild cities, open factories, and write new constitutions. They crafted compromises that served American and local interests alike. Most important, they established close relations between leading figures in multiple societies that have endured to the present day. In this way, American diplomacy was the key to post-war peace after 1945.

The great diplomats of this period had their successors, including Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, James Baker, and many others. These figures also made great strides to establish close American relations with important foreign societies, including the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union, Egypt, Israel, and the states of Eastern Europe. They each strengthened American power by broadening the nation's roster of partners on key strategic issues. And they got things done—things that few dreamed possible, and that never could have been accomplished through military means. The historic opening to China, the brokering of an Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, and the end of the Cold War were among the historic breakthroughs that were achieved through diplomacy.

Yet the Cold War embedded some lingering bad habits in American foreign policy, most notably a shift toward the very militarism and policy rigidity that George Washington had warned against. Well-founded American fears of communist expansion and nuclear conflict triggered an unprecedented tolerance for permanent war preparations. This is what George Orwell recognized when he popularized the term “Cold War” to signify a “peace that is no peace,” an era when fears of conflict would diminish openings for constructive engagement across a distrustful superpower divide. As the United States and the Soviet Union divided the world into hostile camps, they empowered

the guarantors of force in their societies, and they undermined the diplomats who sought to escape the “inveterate antipathies” derided by George Washington. Cold War hostilities created a powerful assumption against displaying “an equal and impartial hand,” especially when communists appeared ready to exploit perceived American weaknesses.

The widely respected journalist Walter Lippmann predicted this difficulty in 1947. He warned that prioritizing communist containment would discourage diplomacy. Similarly, collecting anti-communist supporters around the globe contributed to American alliances, often with dictators, that undermined fundamental U.S. interests. The United States found itself offering permanent support to repressive regimes. Leading diplomats and regional experts consistently criticized these counterproductive relationships in countries like South Vietnam, Iran, and Argentina. Communist containment, however, made reliable military collaboration more important than deeper and open engagement with the peoples of these societies.

Beginning in the 1950s, the peacetime American military and intelligence establishment began to grow so large in size and influence that the State Department and Foreign Service became secondary actors for many of the most important regions of American interest. Prominent diplomats like Kissinger and Shultz were still hugely influential, but they drew power more from their ability to call upon military force rather than traditional diplomacy. They were indeed skilled figures, operating from very strong public commitments to military strength and very weak public commitments to negotiation and trust-building.

This militarization of diplomacy meant that the non-military forms of activity that dominated American foreign policy before the Cold War now received far less support. Why train people to negotiate and compromise when they can threaten enough force and offer enough military aid to get their way? Since World War II, Americans have seen a clear reason to maintain a dominant military; they have not recognized how important a world-leading diplomatic corps is to that same mission.

International diplomacy remains one of the least studied and most misunderstood elements of foreign policy. Although diplomatic training occurs in the U.S. Foreign Service Institute and in diplomatic academies around the world, this is mostly confined to foreign language and area studies with a thin veneer of “how-to” training for junior diplomats.

Few diplomats, American or other, have ever enrolled in a course in diplomacy—before or after entering diplomatic service.

The problem is not exclusively with government; the academy deserves blame, too. Scholarly research is too often abstract and theoretical, written by academics for other academics. A gulf has developed between the worlds of learning and policy: of the 25 international relations scholars who produced the most important research over the past five years, only three ever held policy positions.

Last spring The University of Texas convened a major international meeting of scholars and practitioners to investigate the key elements of successful diplomacy. We all know what failure looks like; we also need to recognize success when we see it. When have diplomats worked effectively to influence international outcomes? How can current diplomats learn from past experiences?

The discussions at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs produced a series of historical case studies examining the evolution of successful diplomatic efforts in diverse settings, including the U.S. opening to China, the negotiation of the Camp David Accords in the Middle East, the management of Germany's reunification after the Cold War, and the completion of the North American Free Trade Agreement, among other topics. Participants worked to consolidate “lessons learned” from these cases that diplomats can use when they approach current opportunities and challenges. We will do more of this work in coming years as part of a campus-wide “Reinventing Diplomacy” initiative.

The Founding Fathers remain valuable guideposts for an era when overwhelming American military power is not a sufficient response to the challenges of the contemporary world. Confronted by a range of traditional and non-traditional threats, the United States will be well-served if it returns to George Washington's wisdom about pursuing “temporary alliances” as well as “just and amicable feelings” in international affairs.

To accomplish this goal the nation will need better-prepared diplomats. It is the best way to fulfill Washington's farewell wish that through diplomacy citizens can “control the usual current of the passions,” and “prevent our nation from running the course which has hitherto marked the destiny of nations.” ❧

Robert Hutchings is the dean of UT's Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs and a former U.S. diplomat. Jeremi Suri is a professor of history and public affairs, and holds the Mack Brown Distinguished Chair for Leadership in Global Affairs.