

PART II

Diplomatic Institutions



Embassies, Permanent Missions and Special Missions

Kishan S. Rana

Even more than the foreign ministry, the resident embassy symbolizes the international system. Embassies are older than the institutions that came up in home capitals to manage them; it was the need to furnish manpower for embassies, absorb their reportage, and manage them that led to the establishment of foreign ministries, starting with France. As foreign country outposts embedded in the receiving state, embassies manifest for each country their connection with the outside world. For the host country, embassies are accessible representations of the 'other', in culture, ways of life, and often language as well.

The public sees diplomatic missions as expressions of their international personality. For countries that were colonies and struggled long for their independence, the exchange of embassies is proof of sovereignty, i.e. their presence in the international system, and also their equality with other nations. In every capital, the media track news and activity of foreign embassies with a particular fervor,

since in common perception they are cloaked in exotica, glamor and mystery.

In times ancient, kingdoms of varied hue sent out emissaries, often on special missions, sometimes to reside at foreign courts. The Amarna Archives (1350–1330 BC), clay tablets of ancient Egypt, contain correspondence between the administration of the Pharaohs and representative of kingdoms in Babylonia, Assyria, Syria, Cyprus and elsewhere. In other world regions, too, that same method was used, sending empowered representatives to foreign kingdoms. Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, compiled in the 3rd century BC as a comprehensive treatise on statecraft, offers advice to the envoy residing in the foreign court.¹ Rudimentary notions of immunity of envoys emerged in those days, founded on the understanding that they were messengers of other powers, and that their ill treatment would invite reciprocal action. Reciprocity remains the central ingredient of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (VCDR), the universal doctrine governing the functioning of diplomatic missions.

RECENT HISTORY

Up to the beginning of the 20th century, embassies were exchanged mainly between monarchies and republics. Some were at the level of legations, a lesser form of diplomatic representation than the embassy; for instance, even in 1945, the majority of foreign missions in London and Washington DC were legations, headed by ‘ministers plenipotentiary’. But as decolonization moved forward after the end of World War II, newly independent states opted for embassies as their standard form of representation and the legation has gone the way of the Dodo.

The 1961 VCDR was negotiated for more than two years, on the basis of a draft produced by the International Law Commission; it codified existing international regulations and conventional practices, but also brought in some innovation.² VCDR is a child of the Cold War, and incorporates some provisions that are rooted in that ethos.³ Some of its regulations have been overtaken by technology; for instance, elaborate provisions governing the installation of radio links by embassies have become redundant in an internet age of quotidian global connectivity. But its key provision of untrammelled immunity for diplomatic officials is as vital today as when it was framed; it is the pillar on which ambassadors and embassy personnel function. VCDR essentially covers the activities of governments acting through embassies, to reach out to the official agencies of the receiving country, specifying that the foreign ministry is the prime channel of contact for foreign embassies, a provision that embassies routinely breach today.⁴ VCDR did not anticipate the development of ‘public diplomacy’ as an activity undertaken by official agencies and by non-state actors, reaching out to publics and non-state actors in foreign states, to project their own viewpoints, to influence them. A few scholars and practitioners hold VCDR to be outdated, and would like to see its provisions concerning immunity to be modified; some wish to bring activities directed at

non-state actors, including public diplomacy under some regulation. But there is little appetite among states for starting a revision process, and even less prospect for crafting new consensus over a revised framework.

In sum, the resident embassy is unchanged in basic structure over several hundreds of years, while its ways of work have evolved. In contrast, the permanent mission is of recent origin, as a key player in multilateral and regional diplomacy.

CONTEMPORARY EMBASSY: IN REGRESSION OR RENAISSANCE?

Conventional wisdom suggests that advances in communications have tightened control by foreign ministries and governments over embassies, reducing their latitude for ‘plenipotentiary’ or discretionary action. That has indeed been the case, but other trends have also been at work in parallel, producing a complex net outcome that reflects interplay of counter-currents. Thus, while embassies are tied more closely to the home capital than anyone might have imagined even two decades back, one result is a counter-intuitive enhancement in the embassy’s role.

Let us briefly list the elements that influence the work of embassies, before we consider the consequences. These are: the entry of many new state and non-official actors in international affairs; an expanded direct role of the head of government in foreign issues, including participation in bilateral, regional and global summits; new technical, interlocking and amorphous issues in international dialogue that bring in issues of human and environmental security; intermingling of foreign and domestic issues as a consequence to globalization and interdependence; an expanded role played by publics, domestic and foreign, in shaping outcomes; and the emergence of an international order that is more democratic and region-focused than before, in effect mediating the exercise of conventional power, with new

concepts such as 'soft power' and 'country brands'. How do these impact on the embassy?

First, as a consequence of the explosion in information, the bilateral embassy is now the best resource for the country on developments in the assignment country. With feet on the ground, it can offer a holistic perspective on developments there, and how these impact on the interests of the home country. With plural actors, state and non-state, involved in the bilateral relationship, it is only the embassy on the ground that has information on the activities they undertake in that assignment country, on which the foreign ministry is often out of the picture. For instance, very few business enterprises keep their governments informed of their foreign activities, but it is often one's embassy in the target country that is likely to have some information; that applies even more to foreign collaboration by academic institutions and think tanks. Not all foreign ministries fully take this into account, because superficially it goes against the tenet that it is the headquarters that gives authoritative assessments on bilateral relations.

Application of information and communications technology (ICT), especially the use of 'intranets' for MFA–embassy communication, means that embassies can be virtually embedded into the MFA, permitting them access to foreign ministry dossiers, and engaging them in continual conversation. For instance, in contrast to the past when an embassy might only be consulted once or twice during the formulation of a proposal in the ministry, it is now possible to treat the embassy as a constituent in the decision process; even before a proposal takes shape, a desk officer can consult an embassy counterpart for a first reaction, through point-to-point confidential communication that may not be subject to the protocol that applies to cypher messages.⁵ This happens in some Western countries, notably Austria, Canada, Germany and the UK, which have consequently thinned out staff in their foreign ministry territorial units, and redeployed them to work on cross-cutting, thematic issues.

Second, a further consequence of the above situation is that the embassy needs alertness, and a wide local network of contacts, for a holistic understanding of developments, to offer to the home stakeholders, not just the MFA, the full range of information they require on the assignment country.⁶ The embassy is no longer the lead negotiator on most issues, since it is the functional ministries that handle such bilateral dialogue. But they depend on the advice of the embassy on the cultural cues and negotiation techniques they are likely to encounter from the other side. The old requirement for language expertise and area specialization is thus reinforced; countries that had reduced emphasis on these skills, such as the UK, are now reinforcing them (House of Commons, 2011).

Third, the embassy gains in value as a contributor to the MFA's domestic outreach, because of the breadth of its contacts with home partners that are involved in economic, cultural, educational, media, S&T and other activities in the assignment country. In practice, the embassy depends on these varied stakeholders for its own contacts and actions in the assignment country, as an agent for 'whole of government' and 'whole of country', holistic diplomacy. This too rebalances the MFA–embassy equation.

Fourth, aid delivery and management is witness to disintermediation. Most Western donors have transferred to their embassies responsibility for aid disbursement within the allotment for the recipient country. The fact that more of this aid now goes to local NGOs and for small schemes, with direct impact on local beneficiaries, also adds to the embassy's role. Developing countries that increasingly implement their own aid programs also use embassies as delivery agents for their project aid, and even more for the deployment of their technical assistance that has special focus on training programs, necessarily based on the needs of the recipients.⁷

The above developments impact on the embassy's role in the bilateral relationship. If the embassy is the locus of information, and

has the best concentration of specialists on the country concerned, why not also use it as a partner in decision-making? Countries such as the UK and Germany now do this, partly as a consequence of staff reductions in territorial units at the foreign ministry. But the notion is anathema to other countries such as China and the US, where such reductions have not taken place, and where the MFA–embassy personnel balance remains tilted heavily in favor of the MFA.⁸

While the above narrative takes into account most of the new trends noted at the start of this section, how does more direct involvement of the head of government into foreign affairs impact on the embassy? When heads – and even foreign ministers – communicate with one another via smart phone messages and other forms of personal communications, the foreign ministry establishment is often left out of the loop, at least in real time. The situation for the embassy is no better, but it has slightly better prospect for catch-up, by virtue of its local contacts, not just at the foreign ministry but also vis-à-vis the office of the foreign head of government. In this respect, too, it becomes a resource for the home foreign ministry.

Rather little of the above applies to embassies of developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, except insofar that: first, all countries are party to the information explosion that has made foreign ministries depend on their embassies for comprehensive information on the assignment country; second, with plural actors engaged in external activity, the MFA depends on the embassy to provide a more complete picture of the home country's engagement overseas. Both these factors enhance the utility of embassies.

Who are the main entities that guide embassies? Are embassies only answerable to the home country, or do some elements in the receiving country also affect their work? Let us first look at the home agencies. Under the classic format, the foreign ministry has been the master of the diplomatic system, with direct day-to-day control over embassies.

But the embassy represents the entire country, and is now seen to be at the disposal of the government as a whole. In particular, the head of government is now a direct participant in international affairs, which makes the ambassador sometimes directly answerable to the head, and more frequently to the office of the head. The new element today is that indirectly the embassy is under the influence of a wide range of non-official agencies that have a strong stake in the assignment country, including but not limited to: opposition political parties, in strongly democratic states, which expect to receive briefings from embassies on their foreign visits;⁹ associations of business and even individual enterprises; academic and S&T institutions and think tanks; the media; civil society actors and development agencies; and the public at large, if an issue gains popular attention, as with consular cases or evacuation of one's citizens in the midst of foreign conflict. Among these, business exerts a strong influence much of the time.

While the embassy is not directly answerable to entities in the receiving state, official and non-state actors may exert some influence on it, as a relatively weak force. The diaspora is an element of rising importance, given heavy international movement of people, both in pursuit of work and as migrants; in our globalized world, the home public also show sharp concern for their welfare. That makes embassies concerned with their diaspora, even if they have taken up citizenships in their new homeland. Increasingly, the diaspora is now a link between the states concerned.

To sum up:

- The bilateral embassy has a bigger role than before in the formulation of policy and in its execution, which adds to its work demands.
- It functions more closely with varied state and non-state partners, both in the home country and in the country of assignment, including diaspora groups. This adds to its ability to monitor issues, giving it a holistic perspective.
- The embassy also finds itself answerable to a wider range of home actors than hitherto.

NEW EMBASSY FORMS

In most countries, foreign ministries are confronting budget cuts and manpower reductions. In consequence, networks of overseas missions are often, but not always, shrinking. At the same time, international commitments have expanded for most, so that they look for different kinds of representation options, going beyond the established method of 'concurrent accreditation' under which one embassy simultaneously handles representation in other countries, usually in its neighborhood. A few countries, such as Brazil, China, Mexico and Turkey, have significantly expanded their embassy networks; India is slowly adding new missions.

One method is a 'non-resident ambassador', when someone typically based in the home country – it may be a senior foreign ministry official, a businessman or public figure – takes on a part-time ambassadorial position, traveling to the assignment country a few times in the year, sometimes accompanied by a young MFA official.¹⁰ Malta and Singapore appoint some twenty to thirty such envoys. It is not a substitute for resident representation, but is an effective alternative to no representation at all.

A variation on the above, used especially by Scandinavian countries, is the 'laptop ambassador' who visits the country of assignment for a few weeks at a time, say in advance of a major event like an outbound visit by a high personality from the home country, operating out of a hotel. For the rest of the time, the official attends to his duties from the home capital. On occasion they embed an ambassador in a fellow-Scandinavian embassy, sharing some services, usually without any direct staff support. The UK and a few others have also resorted to sending from home an ambassador unsupported by any home-based staff, relying on the services of locally recruited personnel for support.

An entirely different approach is to bring into the overseas representation network a substantial number of honorary consuls, who

are often nationals of foreign countries, or members of one's diaspora, or other long-term residents in the target country (see chapter 13 in this Handbook). This does not provide diplomatic representation; honorary consuls work on consular, commercial, cultural and related tasks, but not political tasks. They do 'fly the flag', and provide limited support to the home country at almost zero cost. Honorary consuls, who may be located in a foreign capital or in other cities, can be of considerable practical assistance in building local contacts, and help businessmen and visiting delegations, in addition to undertaking some consular tasks. Many developing states could benefit from more extensive use of honorary consuls, but are perhaps inhibited by perceived difficulties in choosing the right individuals. Managing an extensive network of this kind also requires the foreign ministry to invest in manpower and effort to assist and supervise them.

Other approaches have emerged. One is to concentrate staff in select regional embassies, which become service providers to smaller missions in that neighborhood. For instance, an agriculture or IT expert based at one embassy can serve neighboring missions. Such a hub-and-spoke arrangement pools services; sometimes it engenders the thought that a regional embassy under a senior ambassador might also supervise neighboring missions, but no one has tried this, perhaps as it would add a needless intermediate layer.¹¹

In sum:

- It is likely that new forms of representation will be tried out more in the years ahead, including embassies that are trimmer, and share facilities with others, as well as replacing some resident missions with 'non-resident ambassadors', and wider use of honorary consuls, to cope with budget cutbacks.
- In contrast, some countries are still at a phase of expanding their diplomatic representation networks.

PERMANENT MISSIONS

Diplomatic representation attached to an international organization is called a 'permanent mission', distinguishing it from delegations sent to take part in conferences and other activities at these organizations. In practice these permanent missions are attached by member-states to the UN and its agencies, and also to regional organizations, to work with these entities on a continuous basis. They serve as a mechanism for uninterrupted negotiation. The 1961 VCDR, which does not mention permanent missions, applies to them loosely; they are governed by the rules established by the UN or the concerned entity, and by agreement between the organization and the country where it is located, a so-called 'headquarters agreement'.¹²

This has several consequences. Ranks and designations of officials do not follow VCDR norms.¹³ Permanent missions often have two or more 'ambassadors'; this rank becomes an honorific, since the head of mission is usually called a 'permanent representative'. The work handled by permanent missions is narrower in focus compared with embassies. Their principal interlocutors are the permanent missions sent by other countries, i.e. representatives of fellow member-states, plus officials at the organization's secretariat. Mutual cultivation among missions is intensive. No less important, especially today, are the non-state actors that are active in multilateral and regional diplomacy. This includes the media, from the home country and foreign, key information multipliers, and non-government organizations (NGOs) active on the subjects handled by that international organization, often with 'consultative' status. These NGOs act as information providers and as connectors with civil society, at home and internationally. Thus, public diplomacy has become a major new task for permanent missions.

The skills needed for multilateral diplomats are not intrinsically different from those entailed in bilateral diplomacy, but with special emphasis on the negotiation craft. As always,

personal credibility and interpersonal skills are at a premium. Chairing a meeting, or acting as a 'rapporteur', calls for domain skill that comes mainly from practice, as does work in a drafting group that hammers out a resolution or statement; this is part of the essential training in multilateral work. Permanent missions do not engage in economic, cultural, consular or other kinds of outreach, though on the margins of conferences and other meetings, bilateral contacts are pursued by leaders, be it at New York, Geneva or elsewhere. Small countries with limited global networks use these places for bilateral contact with countries where they do not have resident representation; here the permanent mission plays a post office function, transmitting messages as needed. New York in particular is a global listening post. The diplomats stationed at permanent missions mainly act as political officers; some are specialists. Functional experts on climate change, disarmament or other issues in dialogue may be brought in as needed as 'advisers', or may be stationed at these missions, but in general, these diplomats are less diversified in the work handled than those at embassies.

The Organization of American States, headquartered at Washington DC, was one of the first regional organizations to which member-states sent permanent missions, by tradition separate from their embassies in the US capital. At the EU headquarters at Brussels, the permanent missions of member-countries are vast in size, some with over a hundred diplomat-level officials.¹⁴ An increasing number of regional organizations now have permanent representatives attached to their secretariats, be it the African Union at Addis Ababa or ASEAN at Jakarta; some non-members also feel obliged, depending on their stakes, to send their permanent representatives to important entities.

How has the work of permanent missions changed over the years? What further evolution should we anticipate? Three main changes are so far evident. First, the subjects in dialogue have grown, so that diplomats attached to such missions now deal with many

new subjects. They need to be quick learners, not so much to become instant experts, but to absorb new ideas, work with domain specialists, and integrate their knowledge with national objectives, to advance the home country's interests. Second, they have to deal with a wider gamut of non-state actors and master the public diplomacy aspect of multilateral activities. Third, bilateral issues crop up increasingly at multilateral fora, adding to the work burden. This demonstrates the connectedness of global, regional and bilateral themes.

Multilateral problem solving is less effective than many have hoped. Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria have taught us that eradication of terrorism and elimination of abhorrent regimes involves complex human security issues. Seemingly decisive initial results from military intervention engender deeper, persisting challenges. New concepts such as 'peace-enforcement' and 'responsibility to protect' are increasingly difficult to practice on the ground. Some scholars have hoped that diplomats might practice 'enlightened multilateralism', and follow a professional ethic that rises above national interests.¹⁵ Decades earlier, Harold Nicolson had also spoken in such an idealistic vein, but that is neither feasible nor likely in an international system that remains animated by sovereign states.

We may expect growth in permanent missions, especially those attached to regional organizations, working along traditional lines, but more agile and serving the interests of diverse home constituencies, beyond the foreign ministry. Diplomats working at these would continue to widen skillsets and competencies.

In sum:

- Diplomatic missions that are embedded with international and regional organizations are in essence permanent mechanisms for negotiation, focused on much narrower agendas, compared with bilateral embassies.
- They deal with wide range of subjects, in an environment that is dynamic and volatile, calling for high professional skills. Their numbers are likely to grow.

IMPROVING EMBASSY PERFORMANCE

The diplomatic system of each country requires its overseas missions to contribute to national objectives. This would typically include national security and a peaceful environment in its neighborhood, development and prosperity through trade, investments and technology, and advancing the welfare of people through education, international travel and other exchanges. In our globalized age, countries are more dependent on one another than ever before, as reflected in the ratio of the country's international trade and foreign investment to national GDP, and also in the interconnections between national development and the regional and global environment.

Do all embassies rise to their potential? Much hinges on the degree of professionalism, as well as the motivation and leadership, in the embassy, and the training provided to its personnel. To the extent that politicians and other non-career ambassadors are sent abroad in many developing countries, notably in Africa and Latin America, embassies start with an initial handicap. Such recourse to non-professionals is distinctly less in Asia, and rare in Western diplomatic systems.¹⁶ If we accept that diplomacy is a profession that requires its domain knowledge and expertise, it stands to reason that in the main embassies should be headed by experienced professionals.

Embassies are governed by rules framed by the MFA, and are typically supervised jointly by MFA territorial units and by the administration mechanism, the former concentrating on functional output and the latter on managing personnel and rule compliance. How they perform depends on: selection of personnel, especially the ambassador; the training given to both them and locally engaged staff; aligning their work to the objectives of the MFA; the quality of their tasking and supervision; monitoring performance, typically through annual assessments; and mentoring, morale and motivation.

The traditional methods for performance enhancement include periodic inspection of

embassies through visits by senior officials from the MFA, who examine staff strength and suitability to the assigned tasks, and the working of different sections of the embassy, ranging from political to economic and consular, plus the quality of supervision over all these activities by the ambassador. In the better systems, the focus is not so much on assessment and grading of individuals, important as this is, but also help for the embassy to overcome problems and to deliver better results.

In well-managed MFAs, performance evaluation methods have been refined, accommodating ideas borrowed from corporate management that are applied across public services (Rana, 2013: 89–93). They may include:

- Aligning embassy tasks to the MFA's major priorities. The MFA typically sets these at three cascading levels: principal national objectives; several goals articulated under each objective; and finally a compendium of desired outputs or 'deliverables' for each goal. Embassy tasks thus become an extension of these MFA objectives. Some foreign ministries stipulate elaborate embassy tasks without setting out their own objectives, which produces responses from embassies that are unrealistic and difficult to assess or implement.¹⁷
- Some countries, ranging from Botswana to Malaysia to the UK, require their embassies to project their activities against 'Key Performance Indicator' matrices. Other countries, including Canada, Kenya and Switzerland, take this a step further to sign 'performance contracts' with ambassadors. This has shown mixed results.
- The French have pioneered the method of 'ambassador's instructions', under which every envoy setting out at the start of a mission receives in Paris elaborate, custom-tailored guidelines on the tasks that this individual is expected to accomplish, on behalf of all the ministries that have a stake in that bilateral relationship. Within six months the ambassador presents to Quai d'Orsay a 'plan of action' to implement these instructions, along with a request for resources, human and material, that are deemed essential (Rana, 2013: 91). A few other European countries have adopted a similar method, with mixed results.
- Other countries have come up with their own methods. India requires its embassies to produce an 'annual plan of action', but does not enforce this with any rigor.¹⁸ In the mid-2000s, the Thai Foreign Ministry prepared a five-year projection of what it sought to achieve in its relations with some 25 major partner countries, with inputs from other ministries and official agencies. This is a particularly wholesome method of forward planning, for managing bilateral relations.

Performance enhancement actions are of real utility if they help embassies to better work on their tasks. That depends on whether the stipulated norms are relevant and applied in realistic fashion, taking into account the intrinsically unquantifiable nature of diplomatic work. It is also essential to distinguish between process and outcomes; for instance, an embassy or a foreign ministry can stipulate that *x* number of ministerial visits or delegations are to be exchanged, but says nothing about the results from those visits. Outcomes in diplomacy are notoriously difficult to quantify. Further, one can set a target for bilateral trade or flow of foreign direct investment, but since the result hinges on actions by business enterprises, official agents, be they embassies or ministries, can only speak of their facilitator roles, the more so as outcomes depend on many exogenous factors.

With all such caveats, monitoring embassy performance is an inexact science. No particular method can be identified as best. Yet it is useful to benchmark, and refine, one's monitoring and assessment mechanism. It is also worthwhile to heed the advice of a 2011 British parliamentary committee, which cautioned the Foreign and Commonwealth Office against an excess of 'managerialism', saying:

We received evidence that this was a factor behind the claimed decline in the quality of FCO foreign policy work, as it led to managerial skills being emphasized rather than geographic knowledge, and time and attention to be diverted from core diplomatic functions. (House of Commons, 2011: 3)

In sum:

- Embassies and foreign ministries confront demands that are common to public services across the world: to deliver value and to be measured in their performance. The essentially unquantifiable nature of the bulk of diplomatic tasks makes this problematic.
- To the extent that priority is given to setting goals and direction, such methods can deliver value. But rigid application of evaluation criteria borrowed from the corporate world leads to pointless form filling and applying standards that miss the real work of diplomacy management.

Table 12.1 Embassy functions: past, present and anticipated

| <i>Function</i> | <i>Traditional</i> | <i>Contemporary</i> | <i>Future</i> |
|-------------------|--|--|--|
| Representation | Core activity, embassy as exclusive agent. | Somewhat taken for granted. Embassies rub shoulders with other official representatives, face problems over establishing primacy coordinating local actions (US issues Presidential Letters; Thailand has law naming ambassador as 'CEO' of Team Thailand) (Rana, 2013: 74). | Expect greater plurality, including within embassies; diplomats will jostle with representatives of other official agencies, sub-state entities, and non-state actors. Embassy will remain prime channel for official contact, and best source on local information. |
| Main influencers | Foreign Ministry of home country, plus other branches of government. Especially answerable to the head of government. | A wide range of official agencies, across the entire government are its 'customers'; also parliament entities; plus non-state actors that have a stake in the assignment country. Indirectly, the embassy is also indirectly under the influence of official and non-official agencies of the receiving country. | All the agencies mentioned earlier, plus the publics in general, in the home country, and to an extent also the publics of the receiving state. The diaspora in the receiving country is a special responsibility for the embassy. |
| Negotiation | Embassies as prime channel. | Functional ministries handle their own negotiations; they involve embassies to a limited extent. | Embassies act more as facilitators, with reduced direct role in negotiations; will remain key resource for advice on cultural and other local characteristics. |
| Relation building | Central task, under close supervision from home, with main focus on official actors, and limited outreach to non-state agents. | In practical terms, this is highest priority, involving full range of official actors, including sub-state entities; business actors; media; academia and think tanks; diaspora; plus publics across entire range, including NGOs and civil society, and anyone that influences bilateral, regional and international activities of target country. Embassy is increasingly a 'co-manager', together with the MFA. | Will become multi-dimensional activity, in which public diplomacy dimension will be especially important. Much of the process – but of course not all – will be open, and accessible to outside scrutiny. Further growth in interactive social media will add to openness. |
| Promotion | Starting in 1950s, trade promotion grew in importance; attracting FDI became new task from end 1960s. | Economic promotion, and public outreach have become core tasks. | Likely to remain major priority. Public-private partnerships will grow in importance. |

(continued)

Table 12.1 Embassy functions: past, present and anticipated (continued)

| <i>Function</i> | <i>Traditional</i> | <i>Contemporary</i> | <i>Future</i> |
|------------------|---|---|--|
| Image projection | Not treated as a priority initially, though emergence of electronic media made diplomatic systems aware of importance of country image. | First priority has been to build favorable image to attract tourists, which has morphed into wider image projection. Concepts of 'country brand' and 're-branding' embraced by many states. | Will be mainstreamed as key activity. But image marketing specialists may encounter more savvy diplomatic clients, who better understand long-term nature of image building. |
| Reportage | MFAs depended on embassy assessments as key input into policy making | Embassy no longer first source for hard information; does not compete with instant news sources. Focus has shifted to predictive analysis, and home country perspective on external developments. Embassy only one of many other sources for MFA. | Embassy remains key source for: comprehensive analysis, joint reports by several missions, giving full picture; prediction of likely developments; identification of future key actors, in political, economic & public fields. Reportage telescopes into relationship building. |
| Aid management | Embassies had little role, foreign aid emerged after World War II. | Has grown in importance; for donors, embassy is now prime delivery channel, with some disbursement decisions delegated; for recipients, outreach to govt. agencies and to NGOs is major task. | Embassies will have to mediate between multiple actors; greater role of non-state agents among both donors and recipients. Also close monitoring by publics and media. |
| Services | Consular, not a priority activity | Consular work has strategic value in age of extensive foreign travel, migration. Public outreach and information services also important. Student exchanges also larger. | Migration, travel and diaspora communities will demand more attention. Education diplomacy will also gain further traction. |

WILL EMBASSIES BE NEEDED IN THE FUTURE?

Are embassies indispensable? Contemporary information and communication technology permits countries to maintain contact with one another 'virtually', overcoming distance and geography. Officials and delegations can visit foreign capitals as needed, without maintaining expensive permanent establishments. We saw that some countries have employed the method of 'non-resident ambassadors' and 'laptop envoys' in such fashion. We can count on further innovation.

Will there be a shift towards greater professionalism? The US, which is unique among major states in drawing up to 30% of its ambassadors from outside the diplomatic career

track, has witnessed even a slightly greater swing in favor of such 'non-professionals'. To the extent the latter come from public life, often with a wide range of experiences, they add real value, but not when the appointees are drawn from the ranks of presidential campaign contributors¹⁹. The situation is much less favorable in a number of developing states, especially in Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America, where such appointments are seen as the head of government's prerogative, with little care for job competence. That degrades the performance of embassies, and leads to demoralization in the professional cadre.

One scholar has described the contemporary work of embassy officials as 'gumboot diplomacy'.²⁰ Another has spoken of the professional as 'a high-functioning, street-smart,

renaissance humanist with well-developed instincts, a Blackberry, and where necessary, a Kevlar vest' (Copeland, 2009: 259). Attired in tuxedos or cargo pants, as circumstances mandate, countries will always need representatives on the ground, to reach out to diverse foreign actors, to engage with them and negotiate, and to furnish authentic ground information. Will they need to operate out of lavish residences and project an aura of glamor? Perhaps not. But image is also part of public diplomacy. It is likely that these swans on the seemingly gilded lake will need to pedal harder than ever beneath the surface. Embassies will endure; if they did not exist, they would need to be invented.

NOTES

- 1 See LN Rangarajan, *The Arthashastra* (Penguin, New Delhi, 1992). Kautilya advised the envoy to uphold his king's honor, and to deliver the message entrusted to him 'exactly as it was given to him, even if he apprehended danger to his own life'; the envoy was advised not to let honors go to his head, avoid liquor, and 'sleep alone'.
- 2 For example, Article 3, setting out the functions of embassies, brought into the draft a vital concept that was not in the original draft prepared by the International Law Commission: 'promoting friendly relations between the sending State and the receiving State, and developing their economic, cultural, and scientific relations' (Article 3, 1 (e)); this was proposed by Yugoslavia and the Philippines.
- 3 Example: VCDR Article 3 1(d) reads: 'ascertaining by all lawful means conditions and developments in the receiving State, and reporting thereon to the Government of the sending State'. The convoluted language is intended to ensure that receiving governments do not restrain embassies from gathering information for their reports to home governments; it also reflects the concern of Soviet bloc countries of the time over activities of Western embassies in their countries.
- 4 Article 39 of VCDR says that embassies should 'conduct official business through the foreign ministry'.
- 5 This is based on research interviews with diplomats. See Rana, *The 21st Century Ambassador*, 2004, pp. 16–7.
- 6 This increasingly includes non-state entities, such as chambers of business, think tanks, and other credible entities. Many foreign ministries do not have specific regulations covering embassies sharing reports with domestic non-state actors, but my experience at different embassy posts was that handled with discretion, this seldom posed problem.
- 7 This has been the Indian experience; the Ministry of External Affairs established its Development Partnership Administration (DPA) in 2012 for holistic oversight over an expanding aid program, in which Indian embassies are the key implementing agents.
- 8 The concept of the MFA–embassy manpower balance is based on empirical study. See Rana, *Bilateral Diplomacy*, p. 121.
- 9 In a growing number of countries, including India, it is customary for ambassadors who come home on consultations to meet with opposition leaders.
- 10 Non-resident envoys also look after high or influential visitors from the assignment country, which helps them build contacts. Combining this method with a 'virtual embassy' would render it even more effective, though this does not seem to be the practice in Malta or Singapore.
- 11 This was one of the notions advanced by the Sen Committee in India in 1983; that report has not been published, though its main findings were disclosed in JN Dixit's book (2005).
- 12 The 1975 Vienna Convention on the Representation of States in their Relations with International Organizations of a Universal Character sets out privileges and immunities, but it has not been widely accepted, much less incorporated into the municipal law of most member-states.
- 13 In 2000, India's BJP government sought to appoint an Indian 'Green Card' holder living in the US as a special envoy for overseas Indians; the US State Department turned down his designation at the Indian Embassy as 'special adviser' in the rank of ambassador, on the ground that this was not in accord with VCDR. He was eventually given that designation and rank at the Indian Permanent Mission to the UN at New York. The appointment was terminated in 2004 when a Congress government came to power in New Delhi.
- 14 Daily 'prayer meetings' at large EU missions are held in auditoria; the permanent representative often delegate this coordination task to their deputies.
- 15 Former German ambassador Karl Theodore Paschke set out some of these ideas in a statement at a Wilton Park conference in January 2003.
- 16 Spain is one exception now, and sends a number of political appointees as ambassadors. In most Western countries, at any point of time one

would not find more than one or two non-career ambassadors. In Asia, such appointments are relatively few, compared with Africa or Latin America. Brazil has a law that mandates that ambassadors must belong to the diplomatic service. In Trinidad and Tobago, or Uganda, the majority are political appointments, which demoralizes their professional diplomats.

- 17 This observation is based on research and interviews with diplomats from several countries.
- 18 I had pioneered this method at Algeria in 1977, and applied it at other missions I headed; in 1980 it caught MEA's attention and was thereafter applied to all Indian embassies (Rana, 2002: 81–2); it now receives cursory attention, and many Indian embassies ignore this.
- 19 Bloomberg Business, 25 July 2013: 'Obama Ambassadors gave \$13.6 million in campaign money', <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-07-25/obama-ambassadors-gave-at-least-13-6-million-in-campaign-money>. See also: 'BBC, 28 June 2013: 'Should campaign contributors become ambassadors?' <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-22894459>
- 20 This evocative metaphor comes from Professor Dietrich Kappler, former President, DiploFoundation.

FURTHER READINGS

- American Foreign Service Association, *Inside a US Embassy*, 2nd edition (AFSA, Washington DC, 1996).
- Barber, Brian, *What Diplomats Do: The Life and Work of Diplomats* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).
- Berridge, GR, *The Resident Ambassador: A Death Postponed* (Discussion Papers, No. 1, Diplomatic Studies Program, Centre for the Study of Diplomacy, Leicester, September 1994).
- Berridge, GR, *Diplomacy: Theory & Practice*, 4th edition (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2010).
- Eban, Abba, *The New Diplomacy* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1988).
- House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, *The Role of the FCO in Government*, 7th

Report of Session 2010–12, Vol.1, The Stationary Office Ltd, London, 2011.

- Jett, Dennis C, *American Ambassadors: The Past, Present, and Future of America's Diplomats* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2014).
- Langhorne, Richard, *Who are the Diplomats Now?* (HMSO, London, 1996).
- Locke, Mary and Yost, Casimir A (ed.), *Who Needs Embassies? How US Missions Abroad Help Shape Our World* (Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, Georgetown University, Washington DC, 1997).
- Paschke, Karl Th, *Report of the Special Inspection of 14 German Embassies in the Countries of the European Union* (German Federal Foreign Office, Berlin, September 2000).
- Wolfe, Robert, *Still Lying Abroad? On the Institution of the Resident Ambassador* (Diplomatic Studies Program, Paper No. 33, University of Leicester, 1997).

REFERENCES

- Copeland, Daryl, *Guerrilla Diplomacy: Rethinking International Relations* (Lynne Reiner, Colorado, US, 2009)
- Dixit, JN, *The Indian Foreign Service: History and Challenge* (Konarak, New Delhi, 2005).
- Rana, Kishan S, *Inside Diplomacy*, revised paperback edition (Manas, New Delhi, 2002).
- Rana, Kishan S, *Bilateral Diplomacy*, DiploFoundation, Malta and Geneva, 2002.
- Rana, Kishan S, *The 21st Century Ambassador: Plenipotentiary to Chief Executive* (DiploFoundation, Malta, 2004; Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005).
- Rana, Kishan S, *The Contemporary Embassy: Paths to Diplomatic Excellence* (Palgrave-Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2013).
- Rangarajan, LN, *The Arthashastra* (Penguin, New Delhi, 1992).