

## CONCLUSION

*Robert Hutchings*

One of the most striking things about our survey of diplomatic services in ten key countries is how different their histories and cultures are, despite the many structural and procedural similarities among them. With the exception of China's diplomatic service, all of them drew their structure and organization from a shared European tradition, Brazil's and India's originating in the colonial periods, and Japan's and Turkey's from the Westernizing reforms of the Meiji and Kemalist eras respectively. Yet each of these diplomatic cultures grew out of a unique historical experience.

More than a century after his death, the Baron of Rio Branco still hovers over *Itamaraty*, Brazil's foreign ministry, just as the Iron Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, continues to stand over the German foreign office. In Japan, the "American school" of US-trained diplomats continues to dominate leadership positions in the foreign ministry (*Gaimushō*, in Japanese). Contemporary French diplomacy reflects the nationalist aspirations of Charles de Gaulle, and in India, the complicated legacies of Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohandas Gandhi continue to be a source of internal diplomatic tension. In China, despite the "great divide" of 1949 with the establishment of the Communist party-state, contemporary leaders regularly

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invoke two figures from the fifth century BC, Confucius and Sun Tzu. These cultural differences have made for a fascinating study, but they make comparisons and generalizations challenging.

### THE IDEAL DIPLOMAT

From these extensive surveys of ten very different services, is it possible to construct the Ideal Diplomat? Surely not: skilled diplomats come in various shapes and sizes. Some are master strategists, others are gifted linguists with deep regional expertise, and still others are experienced administrators and leaders. Diplomatic services need officers with these varied talents: the attributes one seeks for the head of the planning staff are not the same as those sought for the director of a regional bureau or a UN ambassador. *Vive la difference!*

There are, nonetheless, certain important features gleaned from our surveys that can be said to constitute the best of diplomatic selection and professional development. What are they?

To start with, our “Ideal Diplomat”—an imaginary figure who is a composite of the best of diplomatic attributes—comes out of a rigorous selection process that identifies and selects for excellence, yet is open to a broader pool of applicants than those coming through traditional pipelines like Oxbridge or ENA (the *École Nationale d’Administration*). In most cases, the Ideal Diplomat had academic training in a field directly related to international affairs. After selection, our Ideal Diplomat receives substantial, rigorous training in the arts of diplomacy and in the culture and operations of the foreign ministry and other government departments, so that before she takes up her first posting she is already a trained diplomat, prepared to represent her government competently. In cases where an entry level officer does not have an academic background in international affairs, she would be given additional academic training to prepare her for a diplomatic career. She does not begin her career by adjudicating visas, because in her ministry visa work is either outsourced or performed by those in a separate career track. Important as visa work is, having professional diplomats take on these tasks entails a high opportunity—as well as financial—cost.

Our Ideal Diplomat would receive periodic training throughout her career. Often these are short courses in key aspects of diplomacy: negotiation, cross-cultural communication, commercial diplomacy, management, strategy, coercive diplomacy, ethics, and others. These may be academic,

experiential (“on the job”), or a combination of the two; some would be mandatory, while others would be elective, with the requirement that a certain number of electives be completed before she is eligible for promotion to higher levels. Additionally, she would routinely receive language and regional training before taking up a new post. At least twice in her career, our Ideal Diplomat would be afforded a full year away, to pursue advanced academic work, have a stint in another government department, be seconded to the staff of an international organization, or spend time in a think tank, foundation, or commercial enterprise. She would spend at least one tour back in her home country for every two tours abroad, and would be expected during these home stays to engage in public diplomacy at home so that she better understands her own country and so that her fellow citizens better understand her and her work.

Our Ideal Diplomat would be a member of a well-funded diplomatic service that enjoys a strong *esprit de corps*, a reputation for excellence among other parts of government (rivaled only by the finance ministry and office of the president, prime minister, or chancellor), and a general level of trust within the legislature and public at large. Mindful of the special stresses of a transient profession, her service would provide generous accommodation of tandem assignments and family leaves. The personnel or human resources department would be modern and mission-driven, led by career officers who put the needs of the service and its officers above adherence to standards. Rising diplomats would be given a sequence of early postings to afford them exposure to all aspects of the ministry’s work, and they would engage with senior diplomats through a formal mentoring program as part of their career development.

Our Ideal Diplomat’s rise might well be quite rapid, because her ministry’s promotion boards, led by senior diplomats, prize excellence over time in grade. Also, she would not be competing with political appointees, because her ministry has none—only a handful of staff appointees in the minister’s office and some select subject matter experts in the functional bureaus.

The ministry would be characterized by a culture of creativity rather than of conformity, in which officers are encouraged to exercise responsibility even at junior levels—and entrusted to do so, because they had been well versed in the culture and mission of the ministry starting at entry level and continuing throughout. Although the ministry’s organizational chart might look hierarchical, its operating style would be characterized by “subsidiarity,” the devolution of decision making to the lowest level

feasible. Officers are not only permitted to act independently; they are expected to do so, and those who do not show themselves capable of exercising sound independent judgment would be winnowed out early on.

Through careful selection, mentorship, screening for promotion, and above all by socialization in the very culture of the service, our Ideal Diplomat would have developed the critical personality traits of humility, patience, emotional intelligence, empathy, and grace under pressure. Although such traits may have to be nurtured rather than taught, the service would have built into its training and mentoring programs innovative modules in role playing, resiliency training, psychological awareness, and crisis management.

The foreign minister would be a senior political figure with experience in party affairs as well as in at least one other ministry, and would have a national reputation. The minister would be recognized as the principal voice on foreign policy beneath the head of state or government and would have the stature to be an effective defender of the professional foreign service within government and before the public. The minister might not be a foreign policy expert but she or he would have had considerable direct experience abroad either in a party capacity or as a member of senior delegations. The minister would be supported by a small number of staff appointees, but below that level, the ministry would be staffed by career diplomats, career civil servants, or other professionals.

By the time our Ideal Diplomat is ready for promotion to the highest levels, she would have received an advanced degree (if she did not have one when she entered the ministry), acquired real expertise in one region and secondary expertise in another, developed competency in two functional areas (such as security, development, foreign trade, or public diplomacy), held senior leadership positions within the ministry, and gained broad experience with policy making at the inter-agency and political levels. She would speak multiple languages and have acquired expertise in negotiation, strategy, and other key elements of diplomacy. She would combine specialized knowledge with a strategic worldview and sense of national mission.

Above all, our Ideal Diplomat would have become a global citizen and leader, in keeping with the ethos and mission of her ministry. Recognizing that her country's interests cannot successfully be pursued from a narrow, nationalistic perspective, she would have become a representative and advocate not only of her own country but also of an international

community of diplomats who share a commitment to diplomacy, empathy, and principled compromise as the irreducible elements of a cooperative global order.

### THE REAL AND THE IDEAL

Obviously, we have described an ideal type, but the traits described earlier are not fanciful or unrealistic. One encounters real world diplomats, past and present, who exhibit these attributes. Such individuals are rare, but they do exist. How well do the ten services nurture these qualities in their diplomats and in their diplomatic services? The record is mixed. None of them do all of these things associated with our ideal foreign service and ideal diplomat, but all of them perform well in at least some of them.

All are elite services and proudly so. Once the preserve of those of means and title, they have gradually traded the privileges of aristocracy for the more democratic but no less exclusive ones of meritocracy. They recruit from leading universities and institutes, many of them, like ENA in France and MGIMO (Moscow State Institute of International Relations) in Russia, specifically geared for the preparation of public servants. In most services, entry level officers have strong academic training in history, politics, economics, or law, as well as fluency in at least two languages. Brazil is a unique case in that every diplomat without exception is a graduate of the *Instituto Rio Branco* in Brasilia, creating a powerfully cohesive diplomatic corps (perhaps at the cost of insularity). The elite character of the services is of course a tremendous strength because they are populated by officers of high academic achievement and great skill.

Yet, there is a growing recognition in many countries that their elite diplomatic services are out of step with their more egalitarian political cultures. Many have made public commitments to diversity and most—Russia being an extreme outlier—have made strides in gender diversity. Ethnic diversity is another matter, and most services have made only scant progress. The United States and India, although far from perfect, are the clear leaders in this respect, and Brazil and the United Kingdom also have made serious attempts to improve ethnic diversity. The main impulse seems to be to promote equity and representativeness, so that public institutions better reflect the diversity of the populations they purport to represent, but this focus on diversity may also reflect an effort to build public understanding and trust by narrowing the distance between diplomats and the wider pub-

lic. Interestingly, few of the services have stressed the rationale that a more diverse diplomatic corps would improve diplomatic effectiveness by strengthening cross-cultural familiarity and competency.

Most services do well in providing appropriate entry-level training designed to familiarize officers with the ministry as well as acquire diplomatic skills. While there is a diverse assortment of coursework and training lengths among countries, most require that entry-level officers take courses in foreign languages, history of the country's foreign service, and diplomatic language and protocol. The Brazilian, German, Indian, and Japanese services have the most extensive initial training, ranging from three semesters in the Brazilian case to as long as three years in the German. The German training period includes an internship and final examination before new officers are assigned to their first posting. France, Russia, and the United Kingdom do not provide the same level of initial training, relying instead on their rigorous selection process from elite institutions and the professional education entering officers received there before they joined the service. Russian diplomats in particular are known for their strong language and regional expertise. So are the Chinese, though the service has been criticized for promoting "translator diplomacy" over core diplomatic competency.

India's practice is unique among those we studied. New Indian diplomats are drawn from the highly selective Indian Civil Service examination process, which means that the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) recruits candidates alongside domestic counterparts such as the Indian Administrative Service. IFS officers begin their training with civil servants from across ministries and levels of government, and subsequently undertake almost two additional years of training on top of the induction they received as civil service recruits, including extensive rotations throughout the central government's ministries including military attachments. This training also includes innovative features meant to ensure that Indian diplomats are well connected to their country at the grass roots: a 10-day trek in the Himalayas followed by a 12-day visit to a remote village, and the *Bharat Darshan*, a tour of major cultural, commercial, and historical sites. Brazil has an analogous but less extensive practice whereby officers spend time in various states to experience something of the diversity of their country. China has a similar program required of newly appointed ambassadors.

Several services offer short and focused training courses at various points throughout a career, in addition to regular language courses. As noted in the introduction, Brazil and China link mandatory mid-career

training courses to eligibility for promotion, and France requires mid-career management training after 15 years of service. The US Foreign Service also has a range of short courses in diplomatic tradecraft available at different stages of an officer's career. Until recently, China selected a large number of mid-career officers for a full year's academic training, often at American or European institutions, but this practice reportedly has been curtailed owing to security concerns. In Brazil, diplomats must complete the equivalent of a master's thesis before qualifying for promotion to the highest levels. In other services, opportunities for mid-career "sabbaticals" are very limited. Cost and staffing constraints are the reasons usually cited for not doing more, but it is worth noting that many other institutions, notably the armed services but also a growing number of private companies, build mid-career training or sabbatical opportunities into their professional development.

Penetrating the organizational cultures of ministries is difficult, but our surveys allow a few general conclusions. The German and French services seem to be the most advanced in promoting a "work-life balance" through generous family leave policies, flex time work arrangements, and job placement help for partners. Brazil's is perhaps the most professional, in that every diplomat, and usually the Minister as well, is a career diplomat and graduate of the Rio Branco Institute. France seems to be the leader in cultivating a climate of creativity and innovation, and in nurturing in their officers the habits of strategic thinking. To regularize promotion procedures and make them more transparent, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office has Assessment and Development Centers (ADCs), which administer a mix of written and interactive exercises, focused mainly on management and leadership. Similarly, Turkey requires meritocratic examinations between the sixth and ninth years of service.

A special feature in the United States is the presence at senior working level of many "irregulars" who come in from academia, the think tanks, or law firms to take up staff positions at the National Security Council, National Economic Council, the State Department's policy planning staff, and elsewhere. The ability of the US government to bring in such skilled outsiders, often mentioned by other diplomats with admiration, is a way of bringing a wider array of talent into the foreign policy decision making process. Of course, this practice needs to be done judiciously, lest it displace equally skilled foreign service professionals and limit their ability to influence policy at the highest levels.

On the other hand, the United States is a conspicuous outlier in the number of purely political appointees as ambassadors, even in key posts, and the growing politicization of the Department of State, with political appointees dominating the senior ranks (Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and Under Secretary levels) and extending all the way down to the Deputy Assistant Secretary level. Thirty percent of ambassadorial posts and around seventy-five percent of its top State Department positions are held by political appointees. Of course, there have been highly accomplished political appointees who have been superb ambassadors, but there have been many more patronage appointees with no relevant qualifications, having been chosen principally for their support in presidential election campaigns.

Ambassadorial posts in most other countries are almost entirely reserved for career diplomats. Japan has a few non-career officials from the corporate world serving as ambassadors in posts other than the most critical ones, and the United Kingdom is considering expanding the number drawn from outside the Foreign Office. The vast majority of ambassadors to key posts are career diplomats, have been ambassadors already (usually at lesser posts), have served before in the country to which they are accredited, speak the language fluently, and have served in senior levels back in their home ministries.

### REINVENTING DIPLOMACY

We are hesitant to draw sweeping conclusions about which practices are most relevant or most deserving of emulation by the United States or other services around the world. A “best practice” in one country is not necessarily best for another. What emerges from this ten-country survey is not a set of clear “lessons learned” but rather the troubling conclusion that the value of diplomacy itself is under threat in most if not all of the countries we studied.

Almost all of the diplomatic services we studied are underfunded, sometimes woefully so, in comparison with other government ministries and departments. Even venerable institutions like the British Foreign Office have fallen on hard times, ranking last among forty-eight UK government institutions surveyed in terms of satisfaction over pay. The US State Department had to fight back a Trump Administration proposal for a huge 31 percent budget cut. Underfunding of course leads to understaffing, fewer opportunities for mid-career professional training, dimin-

ished capacity to “surge” to respond to new priorities without compromising core functions, and less flexibility to bring in skilled outsiders or to contract out essential but more menial functions. Diplomatic services are forced to operate in perpetual crisis mode, scrambling to meet the latest emergency requirement, with little time to attend to the long-term vitality of the service or address the growing problems of morale and retention.

In the United States, there is a stark contrast between the Foreign Service and the uniformed military, whose services receive priority funding. Unlike Foreign Service Officers (FSOs), military officers routinely receive year-long training at least twice in a career, along with details to other services or government agencies. The armed forces consider that they have made a large investment in a career officer, and that it is important—for professional development and retention—to protect and nurture their investment throughout that officer’s career. They also know that operational readiness demands regular training and retooling at every step of an officer’s career. The very few Foreign Service Officers who are afforded mid-career academic opportunities most often receive their training at the Army War College, with the result that diplomats learn their strategy from the military rather than the other way around.

The role of diplomats abroad is also being eroded by the ready availability of information and analysis in today’s globalized, networked world, and the many channels available for direct communication between capitals. Senior leaders tend to devalue the reporting cables from their missions abroad, though the more perceptive of them recognize the undiminished—perhaps increased—importance of reporting cables from their own trusted diplomats in vetting and putting in context the information they receive from other sources. Likewise, the ease of communication between capitals, many of which are connected by secure phone lines, makes it easy for senior leaders to speak directly with their counterparts in other countries, bypassing embassies altogether. These direct lines are convenient, but they raise dangers of miscommunication and misperception that could be prevented by relying on trusted ambassadors and their staffs, who are much more attuned to local circumstances, as intermediaries.

Meanwhile, many of the traditional roles of diplomatic services back in capitals are being eroded by the simultaneous fragmentation and centralization of policy making. Contemporary foreign policy increasingly involves a wide range of bureaucratic “actors” dealing with trade, finance,

energy, justice, immigration, the environment, and many other issues; they vie with foreign ministries for a seat at the table and often take a lead role on a given issue. Coordination among these various actors as well as growing public scrutiny of foreign policy has led to growing centralization of decision making in the offices of presidents, prime ministers, and chancellors. In the past few years, several of the countries covered in this volume have created new coordinating bodies akin to the US National Security Council in an effort to gain control of decision making. Amidst these cross-pressures, top leaders are tempted to surround themselves with loyal staffers and create self-contained bubbles—not only in the United States under the Trump Administration but in other countries and other administrations as well.

With their privileged place in framing, shaping, and directly influencing policy decisions weakened, foreign ministries and the US State Department are struggling to redefine their roles in this crowded field. Foreign policy tends to be made incrementally, with different ministries or departments in the lead depending on the issue. Foreign policies become fragmented, ad hoc, and transactional, as different mixes of domestic stake-holders compete for the optimum outcome on the specific issue in play, with little sense of broader strategic purpose or the overall state of the international system. Foreign ministries need to be put back in the driver's seat for the sake of strategic coherence and a functioning system of relations among states.

An underlying problem that affects all others is that there is little public awareness of the role and value of diplomats, who typically have not seen outreach to legislatures or the public at large as among their responsibilities. In the past, they relied on governmental authority more generally for their protection; as governments themselves face growing populist pressure, foreign ministries find themselves with few advocates or defenders. This is certainly true of the US Department of State, but it is increasingly the case even for such revered institutions as *Itamaraty*, Brazil's foreign ministry. The very idea of diplomacy as an essential attribute of a country's security and well-being is under question.

Thus, our survey of the world's largest diplomatic services ends with an appeal: an appeal for diplomacy itself. The world has grown not only more complex, calling for a nuanced understanding of a larger array of global issues and actors, but also more violent, as nations and non-state actors

resort increasingly to violence to settle their disputes or advance their agendas. International institutions at every level—from the United Nations and the international financial institutions at the global level to the many regional and sub-regional organizations—have been weakened by growing nationalism and diminished commitment on the part of national governments. The need for diplomacy and for skilled diplomats, committed not only to their own country's interests but also to those of a functioning international system, has never been greater.

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