

A New Diplomacy in the Age of the Global Binary: Digitalisation, Pandemics and the Search for a Global Reset

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A REPORT

RICHARD HIGGOTT & GIULIA TERCOVICH¹

Introduction

June 17th and 18th, 2021 saw the Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy (CSDS) of the Brussels School of Governance and the London School of Economics' think tank LSE IDEAS hold an international workshop on the key issues in contemporary diplomacy in what the organisers identified as an emerging global binary world order driven by increasing digitalisation and global pandemic (see Appendix 1 for the workshop programme). The workshop was driven by the, now widely accepted, assumption that the old American-led order is waning and that we have yet to understand what a new order will look like.

The workshop design assumed we are witnessing an implicit (and for some explicit) contest for primacy between the USA and China that is very different from that which dominated during the Cold War. Unlike the first Cold War, the new bifurcation would not, or not yet at least, be between hard and fast ideological blocs. China is not seen as representing the same threat of mutually assured destruction that drove strategy and diplomacy in the US-Soviet Union bi-polar era. Rather, competition between the USA and China is assumed to be found across a range of cross-cutting strategic, political, economic, technological and increasingly socio-cultural policy areas. The implications of these changed circumstances

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¹ Richard Higgott and Giulia Tercovich are respectively Distinguished Professor of Diplomacy and Assistant Director of the Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy (CSDS) at the Brussels School of Governance. Along with Professor Christopher Coker and Sarah Coolican of LSE IDEAS, they developed and oversaw organization of the workshop. We were incredibly well supported in the delivery of the Workshop by Jess Callebaut and Paula Cantero Dieguez. Our thanks go to them.

for diplomacy, when coupled with the growing influence of the contemporary digital instruments of communication, are profound. Diplomacy, as we once knew it, has changed dramatically in recent years.

For several centuries following the Peace of Westphalia, diplomacy was largely an exercise led almost exclusively by the (usually all male) establishments of the major states. Its focus was on sovereignty preservation and influence enhancement. Initially the substance of diplomacy was about hard issues: it was the exclusively state-led 'high diplomacy' of politics and strategy, information-gathering and influence peddling, pursued by fair means or foul. In the late nineteenth century, trade and commerce gradually came to be seen as a legitimate, if secondary dimension, of diplomacy. Often seen as 'low' diplomacy, it was an area of activity engaging the major trade and finance houses as forerunners to modern corporations. It was only in the last quarter of the twentieth century that countries began to formally rationalise the relationship between foreign policy and commercial policy with the merger of Foreign Offices with Departments of Trade and Commerce.

In the second half of the twentieth century diplomacy began to face wider, trans-sovereign challenges with consequences for the functioning of the global system, at the same time as it essayed, with the growth of public diplomacy, to integrate socio-cultural interests—of state and non-state actors alike—into the practices of diplomacy. Driven by changing understandings of sovereignty, post-Second World War processes of decolonisation, the growth of economic globalisation and the revolutions in communications, the post-Cold War era has seen

dramatic changes in both the theory and practice of diplomacy that the workshop examined in a range of specific areas. These were:

- (i) The shifts in traditional diplomacy reflecting activity in the political and security domains.
- (ii) The international economy and notably the changing nature of trade or commercial diplomacy and the increasing use by governments of global finance as an element of economic statecraft in an era of growing, first globalisation, and subsequently anti-globalisation.
- (iii) The changing nature of diplomatic actors and especially the stronger need for gender-led diplomacy in both theory and practice.
- (iv) The increasing role of science and technology in international relations and the need for a more sophisticated and embracing science diplomacy and energy diplomacy.
- (v) The role of ideology and ideas, especially understandings of 'civilisational culture', as a vehicle for political and diplomatic influence has returned in a manner not dissimilar to that of the early Cold War era.² In combination these areas are constructing a generic level contest between the world's two dominant powers leading to disturbing arguments of a coming second Cold War and an increasingly combative diplomacy.
- (vi) The challenges facing multilateral diplomacy in attempts to reset the global, post-US-led, 'liberal' order.

² On civilisational culture and the civilisational state see Christopher Coker, *The Rise of the Civilisational State*, Cambridge, Polity, 2019 and Richard Higgott, *States, Civilisations and the Reset of World Order*, London, Routledge, 2021.

If, minimally, we may be evolving toward a new bifurcated *geopolitical order* (as opposed to an all-out new Cold War) then this poses two core questions for international relations in our age that the workshop wished to consider:

- (i) Can this global competition be managed by diplomacy?
- (ii) Are our diplomatic institutions and skills 'fit for purpose' in the 2020s?

Implicit in the discussions of the workshop was also a third question; namely what are the implications for, and potential role of, Europe in addressing the first two questions?

These questions are not just for the scholar but are also questions that cast practical shadows over modern day global public policy. Implicit in these questions are two assumptions:

- (i) That the polite fiction implicit in the traditional notion of sovereignty has reasserted itself in international relations in a prominent way under the influences of populism and nationalism. But the long-standing understandings of state-led diplomacy that emanated from assumptions of sovereignty will prove wanting in a world where digitalisation eradicates boundaries to communication and disrupts the practices of diplomacy as we once knew them.³
- (ii) That we lack the diplomatic skills for an age afflicted with trans-sovereign challenges (be they in the domains of security, economy, health, ecology, or the environment) that can only be solved by collective action. And this at a time when multilateral diplomacy is found increasingly wanting and indeed, wanted even.

In developing the workshop, the organisers were not assuming that the changing nature of diplomacy has gone unnoticed. Much good work has been done in the last decade on the changing nature of diplomacy.⁴ However, all that has changed in the last five years alone demands a major rethink. The workshop aspired to examine the theory and practice

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3 On the impact of digitalisation see Kate Coyer and Richard Higgott, *Sovereignty in a Digital Era*. <https://doc-research.org/2020/09/digital-sovereignty>

4 See for example, the recent essays in Andrew F Cooper, Jorge Heine and Ramesh Thakur (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, Oxford, OUP, 2013 and Pauline Kerr and Geoffrey Wiseman (eds.) *Diplomacy in a Globalising World: Theories and Practices*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013 and the growing number of relevant essays in the increasingly excellent *Hague Journal of Diplomacy*.

of diplomacy in this most difficult of times in the context of *four eras*:

- (i) ***The era of the growing recourse (one might say return) of bilateral transactional approaches to diplomacy*** at the expense of multilateral institutional processes. Though discussion at the workshop did not assume this trend began with Donald Trump it can plausibly be thought of as the principal legacy of Trumpism to international relations and diplomacy.
- (ii) ***The era of hybridisation of actors in diplomacy*** in which diplomacy's state-driven past has evolved into its more complex and hybrid present, where numerous other actors play an increasingly important role in global policy discussions. This is illustrated best, but not exclusively, in the policy domains of the environment, health, finance, science, cultural, human rights and migration. Where a range of non-state actors from NGOs, universities, think tanks, corporations, and even prominent individuals have secured a greater presence, if not in all circumstances a greater influence.⁵
- (iii) ***The era of the global pandemics***—of which we can expect more—where national as opposed to global problem solving has prevailed. Notwithstanding that COVID-19 is a global problem, the global institutions and international diplomacy—from the WHO through to the G7 and G20—have been found truly unfit for purpose. By contrast, the, at times spectacularly, successful cooperation to be found in scientific communities has put to shame the disutility of traditional state-

led diplomacy, found for example in the spectre of 'vaccine nationalism', conducted by all the major powers.

- (iv) ***The era of digitalisation*** and the changes it is bringing to how we deal with global challenges in an unstable world order where the social media ecosystem has had the ability, as we have seen with the COVID-19 pandemic but also more generally, to weaponise contrarian anti-scientific opinion and conspiracy theories in any crisis.⁶

The workshop asked what might be done to ensure that modern diplomacy—increasingly digital in form—might become an important channel through which to enhance constructive cooperation at a time of increased geopolitical tensions and acute strain on existing modes of multilateral collective action problem solving in the face of major global challenges. We were particularly keen to ask if collective action problem solving—that is multilateral diplomacy—might be reset as an institutional diplomatic form? And if so, how?⁷

What follows is a retelling of each session of the workshop. This report captures (accurately we hope) the essence of the speakers' arguments, while also attempting to embed them in a useful wider analytical commentary that draws out the major themes and arguments articulated in the sessions, and how they inform the core questions of modern international relations and diplomacy posed in this brief introduction to the report. Readers can watch and listen to the proceedings of the workshop sessions online, should they wish, at;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1s6Oyi1Ems&list=PLJlyTj2FU3I-xv0PdQehNNGRPSP6v20MB>.

⁵ On the role of individuals see Andrew Cooper and Louise Freschette, *Celebrity Diplomacy*, London, Routledge, 2008.

⁶ See Phillip Hall, "Ten Lessons of the Covid 19 Epidemic", *The New Statesman*, <https://www.newstatesman.com/international/coronavirus/2020/10/ten-lessons-covid-19-pandemic>.

⁷ For some early thought on how we might attempt a reset of multilateralism see *Can Multilateral Cooperation be Saved?* https://doc-research.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Rhodes-report_Download-file2.pdf.

Session 1: The Old Diplomacy: A Changing Role for Traditional Actors and Practices?

As the old cliché would have it, ‘where you stand depends on where you sit’. This was acutely demonstrated in the workshop’s first session in which two of the world’s most distinguished and experienced diplomats and a senior international journalist reflected on the state of contemporary diplomacy. While much of what they said complemented each other, the distinctions in their observations captured the essence of the current dilemma of the contemporary world order. Former Singaporean Ambassador to the UN and two-times President of the UN Security Council, Kishore Mahbubani opened the workshop. He was followed by Peter Westmacott, former British Ambassador to France and the USA and Judy Dempsey, a distinguished international journalist with decades of experience writing about Europe for *The Financial Times* and think tanks like the Carnegie Foundation.

Kishore Mahbubani, who in his post-ambassadorial life is also one of the world’s major public intellectuals, calls it how he sees it. Through his finely ground Asian tinted lenses, he opened the workshop with a provocation to Europe, embedded in a double-barrelled salvo at the G7 fresh from its June 2021 meeting in Cornwall, UK. Europe, he told us, has a major opportunity to play a leading role in multilateral diplomacy. It supports the idea of a rules-based order and could, and should, lead by example. We must, he argues, prepare for the world of tomorrow which will be very different to that of the last 30 years. But as someone from Asia, he described the G7 meeting ‘as a circus’, before asking, ‘what the hell is going on here? Who are these people? Why do they think they can speak for the rest of the world?’ Western powers represent less than 12% of the world’s population and their share of global GDP has shrunk from 50% of the total in 1980, to 31% in 2021. Meanwhile, developing Asia’s GDP has grown from almost 9%

to 33% of the global GDP in the same timeframe, with the trajectory of both sets of numbers to continue in the same direction. Europe and the rest of the world needs to understand that this has implications for a shifting balance of power in international relations. Power is shifting and will continue to shift to Asia. So, says Mahbubani, ‘learn to live with it ... stop these stupid circuses of G7 meetings. They are absurd. You have got to change course’. The US-China contest—driven not only by the agency of US presidents but perhaps more by these changing deep structural forces—is going to gain momentum in a manner that will affect all. Moreover, we are not grasping the ‘metaphysical message’ that COVID-19 should have sent to us. ‘All of humanity is affected’. There is no point, says Mahbubani, trying to insulate your country from it if we are to deal with the world of tomorrow.

It is not all bleak news from Mahbubani. Europe has a ‘fantastic geopolitical opportunity in the next ten to twelve years’. The world needs more, not less, multilateralism and, for him, the EU is by far the most successful ‘regional multilateral organisation’ that lives with a rules-based order rather than simply talking about one. It should play a core future role. This of course begs two questions; first, how does Europe see itself and indeed how will it manage itself? Second, what would be the nature of the actual contribution it might usefully make to the wider global order? For it to address these questions, Europe needs to do three things, says Mahbubani;

- (i) It must first stop being a complicit partner of the US in weakening the UN and its family of institutions. International organisations need support if they are not to become redundant.
- (ii) It must, not only support, but lead the way in creating institutional sites where the world’s 7.5 billion people can hold a real conversation—a setting in which the 12%

of the world's population living in the West, can/will listen to the other 88%. Europe could do this by championing the UNGA as a serious forum for dialogue.

- (iii) It must hold the US to account on those issues that fuel insecurity and raise the spectre of conflict. It is in America's interest to have a rules-based order and it is the role of the EU to strengthen it and lead its ally in that direction.

Sir Peter Westmacott, in general agreement with Mahbubani on the need for reform of the post-Second World War generated multilateral institutions, nevertheless looked at the world through the lenses ground in over 30-plus years in the British Foreign Office, and all that implies. He did not entirely share Mahbubani's 'Asian view' of the changing world order nor, unsurprisingly, Mahbubani's very negative view of the G7. Both Westmacott and Judy Dempsey, rising to Mahbubani's provocation, found themselves giving partial support to the continuance of the G7. But, reflecting a gentler, arguably more westernised, view than Mahbubani, both accepted its weaknesses and limitations and indeed the tired nature of the post-Second World War institutional order in general. Both also offered the argument that you do not replace something until you have a replacement for it.

In further contrast to Mahbubani's structural analysis, Westmacott offered what we might call an agency focused approach to the G7 which, in more traditional diplomatic parlance, he saw as a useful venue for groups of, more or less, likeminded leaders of the world's major (supposedly representative) democracies to 'get the measure of each other'. Indeed, his comments overall were more person focused—Trump, Biden, Putin, 'world leaders'—noting that 'diplomats do diplomacy'. This is not to suggest these are not *necessary* components of diplomacy, rather that they are no longer *sufficient* explanations of diplomacy in their own right. To be fair to Westmacott, in stressing

the continued importance of diplomacy and diplomats of the traditional kind he was at pains to point out that 'diplomacy can no longer operate in a bubble' in the contemporary era.

In his final contrast to Mahbubani, he also expressed a much less benign reading of China's growing role and influence in world affairs. While recognising the utility of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which the UK joined when the US did not, he nevertheless stressed what he saw as the negative, or at least problematic and politically instrumental, nature of Chinese wolf diplomacy, the BRI and project financing in developing countries. Like Mahbubani, however, and unlike the views held in some quarters of the US foreign policy establishment, Westmacott was fully committed to the need to engage rather than isolate China. He sees China as less a threat to be thwarted, and more of a challenge to be managed but in a collegiate and collective manner.

Westmacott also identified an important trend of the last few years: collective action is occurring less through multilateral institutional organisations, which are losing their effectiveness, and more through semi-formal, inter-state cooperation reflecting a return to what he sees as the 'Westphalian pattern of nation states' engaging in a more pragmatic, but non-institutionalised, diplomacy. This is of course, even amongst those like Westmacott who did not wish the UK to leave the EU, very much the prevailing view in a post-Brexit Britain.

Judy Dempsey articulated the view, implicit in the presentations of both Mahbubani and Westmacott that the diplomatic environment has changed rapidly in the twenty-first century, but the ability of many practitioners to adapt their practices have failed to keep up with these changes. Specifically, transatlantic diplomacy has been caught off-balance and managed badly, not only by Donald Trump, but also by what Dempsey calls the aggressive, often confrontational, 'school of diplomacy' of states. The

likes of Russia, Turkey, India and especially China, with its deliberately intimidating 'wolf diplomacy' of recent years, are characterised here.

Old style diplomacy, she says, must change radically in a number of ways to deal with this new aggressive style of diplomacy. First, diplomacy needs to be conducted among and by a more hybrid and inclusive group of actors in the manner discussed in the introduction. Secondly, diplomacy must do more to reconcile the always uneasy but important relationship between values and interests, in contrast to the traditional imperatives of purely state-led, interest driven diplomacy. Thirdly, echoing Westmacott, she warns against the 'bubble' mentality that can prevail in diplomacy. The diplomatic community at large needs to move beyond their bubbles and engage interested parties in wider society.

Probing Mahhubani's reflections on Europe, Dempsey too reflected a mix of optimism and pessimism. But her core point was that Europe (the EU) lacked a common strategic culture. France, Germany and the UK each had an individual strategic culture of their own. Other states varied in the degree to which they had a strategic culture at all.⁸ Such fragmentation clearly has implications for the prospects of multilateral diplomacy and, in brute practical terms, for the effectiveness of the EU's External Action Service as a diplomatic actor. Nowhere is Europe's failure to practice joined-up diplomacy better seen than in France and Germany's June 23rd ill-fated announcement of an initiative to re-engage Russia, absent in initial wider discussion, with other member states.⁹

The absence of an EU strategic culture is always likely to undermine the ability of the EU to think and act collectively and notwithstanding its stated desire to develop a policy practice based on strategic autonomy, much of its practice rather reflects an often uncoordinated hedging on an issue-by-issue basis.¹⁰ Given what Dempsey sees as the huge divergence of interests between Germany and France, she even questions whether the EU actually wants to play the role of the multilateral anchor envisioned for it by Mahhubani.

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8 See the work on European Strategic culture of the European Council for Foreign Relations (ECFR), <https://ecfr.eu/category/europeanpower/cohesion-governance/rethink/eu-strategic-culture/>

9 "Merkel and Macron Fail in their Push for EU Summit With Putin", The Financial Times, June 25, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/3c397438-d662-4c02-8f1e-2cf1e5a66426>

10 Richard Higgott and Simon Reich "Hedging by Default: EU Strategic Autonomy in Binary World Order," <https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/publications/reports/hedging-by-default>,

Collectively these three presentations, albeit in different ways, offered a powerful representation of the manner in which the international order is changing and the implications this has for the diplomacy of the future. Three features are perhaps worth noting: (i) They see the old post-Second World War order as passing, if it has not already passed. (ii) The rhetoric of sovereignty is growing at the very time when the world's transnational challenges deny the very utility of many of sovereignty's accompanying practices. (iii) The need for national social resilience in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic is not waning anytime soon.

Session 2: From Economic Diplomacy to Economic Statecraft: A New Mercantilism in an Era of Deglobalisation?

In this session Professor Simon Evenett from St Gallen University, Dr Patrick Low, former Chief Economist at the WTO and Professor Manuela Moschella of the Scuola Normale Superiore in Florence examined the evolving dynamic of the international economy and economic diplomacy writ large, to include both trade and finance. In developing the structure of the session, the conference organisers asked the panellists to consider the degree to which 'economic statecraft'—that is the direct use of international trade and financial instruments—has become, or is becoming, increasingly central to the wider foreign policy goals and practices of states, especially the world's major states.¹¹ Respectively, Evenett focussed on the changing dynamic of global 'commercial diplomacy'; Low, the growing malaise in the multilateral structure of the international trade regime and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in particular and, to complement their focus on the diplomacy of international trade, Moschella examined the growing political and diplomatic roles of central banks in international finance.

Evenett focussed on the ends, rather than the means, of governments in their commercial diplomacy. He looked at the essence of change in the objectives of governments. Traditionally focussed on deal making to enhance market access, governments now, Evenett suggested, concentrate instead on different goals, notably:

- (i) Preserving the room for governments to respond to geopolitical trends. Hence the return of once unfashionable recourse to industrial policy and resistance to multilateral institutional intrusions into commercial activities that might challenge a government's ability to ensure 'resilience' in the face of crises such as COVID-19. Likewise, we have seen the increase in governmental willingness to screen FDI using the often-specious argument of national security. Donald Trump for example, raised objections to the import of BMWs to the US from Germany on security grounds even though BMW's largest plant is in South Carolina.
- (ii) Using commercial diplomacy as a vehicle for building coalitions of like-minded states against competitors or perceived adversaries. US pressure on the EU to support its policy towards China being the prime example of this kind of coalition formation. Similarly, its pressure on allies not to engage in 5G equipment purchase from Huawei or in the 'heterodox issue linkage' of US objections to the Nord Stream 2 pipeline from Russia to Germany. As Evenett notes, the US and Germany clearly have different incentive structures and trade-offs to make here.
- (iii) Perhaps more positively than (i) and (ii) is the growing role of state-led, welfare-enhancing exercises in standard

¹¹ See Robert Blackwill, and Jennifer M. Harris (2016) *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

setting for the *future* regulatory regimes of international trade. For example, in the formation of the US-EU Council to formulate future rules for AI, the emphasis is on the future. Limited prior historical success in securing standard setting agreements, as Evenett notes, is perhaps best not dwelt on.

In sum, as Evenett argues, traditional trade objectives, especially of the United States as the major global actor, are becoming subordinated to the new dynamics identified in the Introduction and Session one. As he also delightfully notes, in their responses to growing rivalry with China, the US and Europe—with their enhanced domestic subsidy activities, for which they are only too happy to criticise the Chinese—are in effect becoming more Chinese themselves. The effect is not so much a trend towards deglobalisation, as it is a trend towards the distortion of globalisation by this recourse to non-trade instruments of protectionism.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Evenett notes that the new commercial diplomacy increasingly takes place, and will continue to take place, beyond the confines of the multilateral institutions and rules of the international trade regime. It will take place in regional FTAs as in the Asia Pacific through vehicles such as Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and, especially for powerful states, in their increasing recourse to politically driven, asymmetrical, bilateral, transactional arrangements with weaker partners. That Evenett does not articulate a role for the WTO is not without significance, and it also provides what Patrick Low calls the persuasive backstory to his intervention into the current trials and tribulations of the WTO.

For Low, the WTO, with no surprises here, is facing very difficult times. It has functioned sub-optimally for a quarter of a century, most notably in its

failure to deliver the Doha Development Round of multilateral trade negotiations. Despite widespread calls for WTO reform, it is not clear what any reforms would look like. Beyond its failure to negotiate a major multilateral trade negotiation, the WTO has proved less than optimal in monitoring agreements and managing disputes. Behaviour at the WTO has been caught up in the growing geopolitical rivalry of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The WTO has had to function in the context of the US, in weak political alliance with the EU and Japan, asserting the need for the universalisation of market-based outcomes on the one hand while China, on the other hand, has been advocating for a model of state-based capitalism in a minimalist, consensus-based agreement, pushed to ensure respect for different development models.

Low notes that the prospect of common ground emerging between these positions was, and remains, slight. Especially prior to the emergence in early 2020 of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nobody, says Low, wants to 'call time' on multilateralism and the WTO, but neither do its major members seem prepared to try to bridge the chasm that exists on this issue or indeed on other issues of contest such as the rights and entitlements of developing countries to 'special and differential treatment'. Indeed, the very question of which states are entitled to developing country status for trade purposes remains a contested issue at the WTO.

Most publicly of course has been the concerted attack on the Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM) throughout the life of the Trump Administration. For sure the Appellate Body, as Low notes, had engaged in overreach and had gone beyond its terms of reference in a number of decisions; this had been noticed, and not only by the USA. But the US veto of any and all appointments to the Appellate Body effectively hamstrung the DSM. The action was designed to disable the organisation, not bring about reform. However, multilateral action absent the US under Trump could still be seen at the WTO notwithstanding the endeavours

Should the issues present in the WTO not be resolved, there will be a real question mark over the organisation's future and, by implication, the multilateral regulation of trade as we have known it since the end of the Second World War

of his administration to emasculate it. In a seemingly innovative diplomatic move, the EU, Australia, Canada, Singapore and twelve other members established a *Multiparty Interim Appeal Arrangement* to substitute for the Dispute Mechanism rendered inoperative by the refusal of the US to ratify the appointment of judges to the Appellate Body.¹²

Low also identified the strain that the nature of WTO decision making processes was having on the trust and legitimacy of the institution. In 2017 the WTO looked as though it was moving away from consensus-based decision making towards 'Joint Statement Initiatives'. In essence these were meant to be negotiations amongst a sub-set of members built on two assumptions: (i) that unreachable unanimity amongst states, as opposed to potential critical mass agreement of key players (state and non-state alike), can hinder much good progress in collective action problem-solving and (ii) a presumption that any decisions would be non-discriminatory is an inevitable long shot and similarly inhibiting of agreement.¹³ The implications, as Low notes, are profound. The challenges to the MFN principle in the hard-to-regulate, fast growing sectors, such as E-Commerce, are significant. Serious agreements can only come with the jettisoning of non-discrimination in the current negotiations; to which both the USA and China are parties. But that would undermine a bedrock principle of the WTO. Should this issue not be resolved, Low sees a real question mark over the organisation's future and, by implication, the multilateral regulation of trade as we have known it since the end of the Second World War.

Manuela Moschella turned her attention to the role of central banks as diplomatic actors in the domain of global financial governance in the twenty-first century and especially post the 2008 and 2010 global financial crisis (GFC). Specifically, she suggests we should expect more continuity than transformation in their roles as international actors in an international economy that she thinks *is not* undergoing deglobalisation. She starts by reminding us that there is a strong historical tradition of central

12 See www.mfa.gov.sg/Overseas-Mission/Geneva/Mission-Updates/2020/04/Multiparty-Interim-Appeal-Arbitration-Arrangement.

13 As early as 2008 Low was amongst those identifying the need for the WTO to move in the direction of "critical mass" decision making. He, with Evenett, was a member of the 2008 Warwick Commission *The Multilateral Trade Regime: Which Way Forward?* <https://warwick.ac.uk/research/warwickcommission/worldtrade/report> that raised the importance of considering such a change to the decision-making process. See also Ian Goldin, "Multilateralism and the Search for Collective International Leadership and Governance", in *Dialogue of Civilisations, Can Multilateral Cooperation be Saved?* https://doc-research.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Rhodes-report_Download-file2.pdf.

banks, especially but not only the US Federal Reserve Bank, being key actors in financial diplomacy, for example in support of the gold standard. So, their forward leaning activity in the context of the contemporary COVID-19 pandemic is not an original nor unique phenomena.

Historically, and perhaps unsurprisingly, their cooperation is highest in times of financial market stress and crisis. Their *modus operandi* is both formal and informal. As Moschella points out, the stimulus funds pumped into the system during this COVID-19 crisis by central banks, especially into their domestic markets, exceeds that in previous historical crises. But the direction of activity is not static, and change occurs over time. The nature of this pump priming, again perhaps unsurprisingly, reflects a state-interest driven process with an inbuilt tendency to unbalance the financial system overall with particularly adverse effects for developing countries. There is also an unbalanced relationship between public and private authority, as public authority plays a greater role in what she depicts as 'steering the market'. This is not, however, to suggest that central banks lack sensitivity to the interests of the market. Indeed, critics would argue that they are often too accommodating to private market interests and expectations at the expense of public interest.

Moschella points to two big differences between now, and the first decade of the twenty-first century. These are the growing role of (i) green finance and (ii) digital currencies in global financial activity, that are shifting power relations among countries and between public and private actors. Perhaps

the best example being the growing potential of China's digital currency activities to change the nature of international financial relations vis a vis the long-standing hegemony of the US dollar. The big, and perennial, question becomes, are the days of the dollar providing the US a position of 'exorbitant privilege' numbered?¹⁴

The three presentations in this panel demonstrated that nothing better illustrates the move from the multilateralist international order (in aspirational terms at least) of the twentieth century to the more nationalist, bilateral, transactional, sovereignty-driven diplomacy of the twenty-first century than the rise of economic statecraft and its attendant consequences, especially since the time of the global financial crisis at the end of the first decade of this century.

Session Three: The Need for Women-Led Diplomacy in a Reformed International Order

This session focussed on the issue of international leadership in diplomacy but with special reference to what the organisers called the need for 'women-led diplomacy' if we are to ensure a more inclusive diplomacy and wider global cooperative dialogue—a more precise term than 'world order'. The organisers wanted to ensure that gender is, or should be, seen as one of the core problematics in the theory, organisation and practice of modern international relations and diplomacy.¹⁵ As a consequence, the organisers deliberately gave the panellists a free hand as to what they might like to speak about. It led to an open-ended and rich

14 See Barry Eichengreen, *Exorbitant Privilege: The Rise and Fall of the Dollar and the Future of the International Monetary System*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

15 See the recent empirical work by Karin Aggestam and Ann Towns, "The gender turn in diplomacy: a new research agenda", *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 21 (1) 2019: 9-28, Valerie M. Hudson, Donna Lee Bowen, and Perpetua Lynne Nielsen *The First Political Order: How Sex Shapes Governance and National Security Worldwide*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020) and the pioneering and agenda setting theoretical work of the last decade of the 20th century by, *inter alia*, Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bayonets: Making Sense of Feminist International Politics*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989; J Ann Tickner, *Gender in International Relations*, New York, Columbia University Press and her collected essays in *A Feminist Voyage Through International Relations*, Oxford, OUP, 2014; Christine Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Post Modern Era*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994; V Spike Petersen, *Gendered States, Feminist Revisions of International Relations Theory*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1992; Jan Jindy Pettman, *Worlding Women: A Feminist International Politics*, London Routledge, 1996.

conversation ranging over both the practice and theory of the nature and role of women and gender in modern day diplomacy.

The opening presentation offered us a practitioner view of diplomacy from a senior British diplomat, Dame Judith Macgregor who, in addition to having held several senior ambassadorial appointments has also served as President of the Foreign Commonwealth Office (FCO) Women's Association. Her opening remarks noted that the route to leadership roles in diplomacy for women has been a long and difficult 'grind' and is still an unfinished and on-going endeavour. Diplomacy, she noted, was a 'job designed by men' and, one might say, initially for men. Its barriers to entry and promotion have needed to be tackled one by one and in stages. She also noted that this change process was, and remains, more difficult in some countries than others. But that things had improved, if not necessarily in proportion to the growing number of talented women in diplomacy and whose merit was not automatically recognised in the way a man's might be.

Further, Macgregor noted how the changing nature of communication—especially via advances in digitalisation—and the growth of international women's networks have dramatically helped women; making it easier for them to interact and to work remotely and more flexibly. The 2020 recruitment to the British diplomatic service saw a 50/50 split in its intake and 40% of those admitted to its accelerated promotion 'fast stream' were women. 30% of current UK ambassadors are women and all UK ambassadors to the UN P5 countries and the G7 are women. She also pointed to the growing number of women in senior posts in some of the major international organisations.

The trends of the last few years have not only changed the look of diplomacy, Macgregor argues, that at least with regards to the UK, the

substantive style of diplomacy has also changed. One small example she identifies is the remarkable transformation of consular services which often affect families and women, more than men. Her empirical experience bears out much of the theoretical literature on the differing impact of male and female characteristics in the diplomatic dialogue process. At the risk of dangerous stereotyping, the often-unspoken generalised view of the male personality in international relations and political leaders, especially those often referred to as 'strongman leaders', is entirely the opposite of what is required for international dialogue and the development of international cooperation and indeed often constructive diplomacy generally.

Not argued by Macgregor, one counterfactual argument that may be drawn from what she does not say is that many major global leaders are, by personal socio-psychological disposition, ill-suited, indeed often opposed, to international dialogue and international cooperation. At the extreme, 'strongman leadership' is often identified with what the scholarly psychological and management literature increasingly sees as a series of destructive personality traits. These traits can include self-absorption, self-admiration, overconfidence and a high but fragile sense of self-esteem in which arrogance, power, and loudness, rather than humility, wisdom and calmness seem to predominate. By contrast, growing substantial and reliable evidence, especially but not only from the world of business, suggests that women generally outperform men in leadership roles.¹⁶

Creativity, flexibility, self-control, fairness, communication and empathy are emerging as key characteristics for effective leadership. These are clearly attributes required for successful international diplomacy in the more complex international environment of the twenty-first century. Macgregor provides some empirical insight into the salience of the argument that women, as a

¹⁶ This literature is reviewed in Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, *Why Do So Many Incompetent Men Become Leaders?* Cambridge MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2019.

whole tend, to be more capable of listening, more supportive in relationships and consensus-focussed in negotiations. Women, she suggests, work more naturally and more easily in the wider people-to-people elements of the increasingly hybrid nature of diplomatic practice that have taken on a much greater importance in the twenty-first century. Without over-egging the pudding, she concludes by listing how women have been major promoters of a more diversified diplomacy engaging actors from across the social and political spectrum, especially in the policy domains of development, environment, health, education and gender equality.

The second presentation by Professor Roberta Guerrina of the University of Bristol took a more theoretical turn towards diplomacy. She treats gender as a lens (or prism) through which to look at leadership in diplomacy. Recognising the growing policy concern and theoretical interest in the role of women in international relations she posed what we might call the why, how and what is to be done questions:

- (i) Why are there not more women in leadership positions?
- (ii) How do women behave in leadership roles?
- (iii) What are the obstacles to gaining, retaining and succeeding in leadership roles?

Guerrina starts from the position that leadership is an institution, albeit soft and informal, an institution nonetheless. Structured by a range of norms, and not only gendered ones. Echoing a theme from the first presentation, gender is seen to be only one of several issues that needs to be contended with in the structuring of leadership. Race and (in)equality are clearly others. In the area of diplomacy and foreign service, gender stereotypes should be seen as complex, or what Guerrina calls 'sticky issues' when it comes to

the observation of gendered patterns of role behaviour. Psychology tells us that the behaviour roles opened to traditionally marginalised groups, in this regard women in the domain of diplomacy, are invariably more constrained than those of the traditionally dominant group, in this context men.

This has implications for women in both a theoretical and an applied practical context of power and structure. Women must operate in a context where male roles are the dominant norm. In Macgregor's words, 'diplomacy is a job designed by men'. This in turn leads to the recurring question first articulated by Cynthia Enloe in her seminal study of international politics over 30 years ago, addressing this question of 'where are the women?'¹⁷ Presence and numbers are important.¹⁸ As Guerrina notes, 'counting matters', and it is important to understand not only where women cluster but also where men cluster and indeed, who puts them there? In short, again drawing on Enloe, 'what role does gender play?' In the context of diplomacy as an institution—remembering that the first session of the workshop asked to what extent diplomacy writ large remains a core institution of international relations—Guerrina reminds us that it is a gendered institution in which women have traditionally performed specific functions and where gender stereotypes limit their scope for leadership potential.

Guerrina identifies the rise of a gendered approach to core foreign policy concerns. For example, this includes the growth of senior women's representation, a rise in the women's peace and security agenda, the growing importance of the gendered dimension of trade and development diplomacy, the growth of feminist foreign policy agenda but above all the shifting pattern of how women enter diplomacy and external affairs. Guerrina offered us a couple of brief case studies of women in leadership in international relations through the roles of Cathy Ashton and Federica

17 Enloe. *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. [op.cit.](#)

18 See Saskia Brechenmacher, Katherine Mann and Lauren Meadows, "Representation is Not enough", *Foreign Policy*, March 2, 2021.

Mogherini as High Representatives for EU External Relations. Guerrina points out that they do not need to see themselves as feminists or advocating a feminist agenda to be playing the role of gendered actors—often obscured by the ‘add women and stir’ approach—in leadership, especially in times of crisis which, because of their precarious nature, ironically often provide chances for women to lead.

Henriette Müller, a professor of leadership studies at New York University Abu Dhabi, began her presentation with a brief recap of the numbers—currently only 22 heads of state and 22% of ministers world-wide are women, although the percentage varies dramatically from country to country and region to region.¹⁹ Europe really is a leader in advancing the cause of women in this regard. The forward leaning role of the European Parliament in its drive to enhance the proportion of women as legislators has grown dramatically in recent years but, as Müller notes, there is still a massive disjuncture between the number of men and the number of women holding senior international and foreign policy leadership roles. Hillary Clinton and Madeleine Albright as Secretaries of State in the US, Ashton, Mogherini and von der Leyen in the EU, are still exceptions to the norm.

Like Guerrina, Müller also notes women’s leadership roles in the policy process are not, as a rule, at the centre of economics, politics, and international relations, although again there are now prominent exceptions to the rule—Christine Lagarde at the IMF and ECB, Helga Schmid at the OSCE. But, as she points out, our primary interest and focus on the transatlantic and OECD world gives us a narrower perspective and creates a false impression of the extent of change globally. Indeed, the pace of change is becoming a growing generational issue in the women’s movement globally with the younger generations complaining to their more established seniors about the lack of movement. These concerns were aired most recently at the

June 2021 Paris Gender Equality Forum.²⁰ And as slow as progress might be, it is not inevitably linear. Indeed, it is difficult to be sanguine about advances made in the role of women outside the OECD world. Nothing illustrates this better than the fate of women in Afghanistan. Any gains made in that country in recent decades will almost certainly be wiped out under a Taliban administration following the abject departure of the US. The role and progress of women, as what Guerrina calls ‘minoritised’ (as opposed to minority) groups, say in certain countries of the Middle East and Central and Southern Asia, remain fragile in the prospects of continued diminution of gender and other forms of discrimination.

Müller’s second intervention, made on the basis of her empirical research on the European Commission (co-conducted with Pamela Pansardi), addressed the question of the degree to which women *exercised* leadership differently to men. Looking at EU Commissioners between 1999 and 2019, she focussed on the issues of charisma and rhetoric. She started from the assumption that there were no major differences between men and women in terms of performance but that women in addition had to work to counter the ever-present constraint of gender stereotyping similar to that identified by Guerrina.

Women leaders, argues Müller, are frequently more skilful speakers able to take advantage of the greater variance they exhibited in their speech patterns when compared with men. Notwithstanding the continuance of greater selection hurdles to be overcome in order to access leadership positions, women perform well above the norm exhibiting not only so-called male characteristics of assertiveness but also female traits of greater conciliation; a point supported by Macgregor. This tends to support the view that the under-representation of women in leadership roles has little or nothing to do with the absence of talent, competence, and motivation

¹⁹ See report by, UN Women 2020.

²⁰ <https://www.passblue.com/2021/06/30/spirited-demands-for-better-lives-dominate-the-gender-equality-forum-in-paris/>

in women. It has as much, if not more, to do with our inability to ensure consistently fair and transparent leadership selection processes and supportive retention environment that can control for the incompetence and lack of actual talent of some male leaders.

In this context, the problem is not only the structural barriers to entry for women, which of course are substantial, but also the lack of career obstacles for incompetent men. This is a problem given that: (i) the established evidence from the world of business and the growing evidence from international public policy—that women generally outperform men in leadership roles (and not only in crisis situations)—is substantial and reliable and (ii) that the characteristics they bring to their roles as leaders—especially creativity, flexibility, self-control, fairness, communication and empathy²¹—are clearly attributes required for international and diplomatic dialogue. But the skills that women are traditionally expected to exhibit are not those typically associated with leadership positions. While there is no clear-cut distinction that can be made, we can identify the generalised personality traits and practices that are needed to be chosen as a leader. These are more often those considered to be exhibited by men – especially self-centredness, self-promotion, self-confidence, and a sense of entitlement to high office.

Also, as all speakers on the panel noted, there has been and indeed there remains, a normalised culture of '(often hyper-) masculinity' in international political leadership. Strongman leaders adopt a top down approach to leadership in which the language of zero-sum power politics prevails and where 'status, respect and recognition... and gendered leadership symbolism' are seen as critical to them as they engage in what Aggestam and True call 'visceral male bonding'.²² Nowhere has this been better recently

seen than in the relationships that Donald Trump developed with other strongman leaders such as Mohamed bin Salman, Kim Jong-Un, Rodrigo Duterte and Recep Erdogan and in his unrequited love affair with Vladimir Putin. In policy terms this approach invariably emphasised a tough talking transactional and bilateral approach to diplomacy at the expense of dialogue, multilateralism and cooperative decisions making or indeed even vestiges of old-fashioned civility that long characterised traditional diplomacy more generally.

The panel offered us a series of interesting insights that, if considered collectively, suggest a powerful dynamic in the role of women in leadership in contemporary international relations and diplomacy. If, in a thought experiment, we assume that we had listened to Guerrina and Müller first, and Macgregor last, we can see the manner in which the evolving role of women in diplomacy, or more precisely the British foreign service discussed by Macgregor, conforms to the theoretical constructs set out by Guerrina and Müller and pertinently the degree to which change is coming about.

But the big questions remain. Is there evidence that the gender stereotyping of the kind identified by Guerrina and Müller is diminishing? Has change been linear? Has it been substantial? Does it look irreversible? Given what we know about the increasing role of women in both diplomacy, and leadership more generally, the answers are in part geospatially and culturally determined. There are societies—especially in Western and Northern Europe—in which it is impossible to imagine the increasingly substantial structural roles gained by women in diplomacy and international relations diminishing. The changes Macgregor has identified in the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and what we know about an increasingly strong feminist

21 Chamorro-Premuzic *op cit*, 85-102.

22 Karin Aggestam and Jacqui True, "Political Leadership and Gendered Multilevel Games in Foreign Policy", *International Affairs*, 97 (2) 2021: 385-404.

influence on foreign policy among the Nordic countries, could fairly safely be assumed to be here to stay, provided they continue to be mainstreamed. However, as noted earlier, numbers count and the 'pipeline issue', or more precisely the 'chutes and ladders' issue for women in the professions more generally remains.²³ That we remember the names of women in prominent leadership positions is because they are still the exception that proves the rule. Middle management in most foreign services is still largely male dominated.

These changes can also be, thanks to the insights of Guerrina and Müller, much better contextualised than in days gone by. Guerrina, for example, notes that the increasing prominence of women in senior roles can be explained as much by sponsorship (both male and female) within a male-dominated context rather than by fundamental normative change. And Müller, again supported by Macgregor's practical insights, identified the positive salience and success of the combination of *both* masculine and feminine styles in the rhetorical practices of diplomacy. Here, Müller's research also shows that both women and men move across the gender binary in leadership performance, incorporating both so-called male and female styles into their daily leadership practices.

As Müller concluded, moving beyond this duality of masculine and feminine characteristics is essential for effective leadership given the increasingly complex transnational global challenges we face and the increasingly hybrid nature of both actors and practices in modern diplomacy. While successful leaders already practice a more combined leadership style, being both assertive and conciliatory, it seems that conceptualisations and understandings of 'ideal' leadership have to catch up with this reality. As Müller implies, it is not based on sex but on the multi-fold constraints women have to overcome to reach the top in the first place. The duality or dichotomy thus seems to be more ingrained in the

notions and understandings of 'ideal' leadership rather than being actually applied on a clear-cut basis by leaders themselves.

Session Four: Diplomacy of Science, Technology and Energy

Session four saw presentations by Professor Luk Van Langenhove of BSoG, and Dr Marga Gual Soler, founder of *SciDipGLOBAL* and a private sector analyst and advocate of science diplomacy, both on the growing importance of science diplomacy. Dr Cho Khong, the Chief Political Analyst at Royal Dutch Shell, reviewed the current state of energy diplomacy in the context of long-term geopolitical change. Both topics are of increasing salience against a background of the global race to secure a net-zero environmental equilibrium by 2050.

Van Langenhove offered an informal balance sheet of the constraints and opportunities for science diplomacy in the modern era. He asked what in an ideal world can science diplomacy deliver and how do we do it? Science diplomacy has developed overtime as a reflection of the changing nature in the relationship between science and society. It has, as Van Langenhove noted 'a long past but a short history.' He points to examples of good international science cooperation including that conducted via the IPCC, which he sees as a model for international scientific policy cooperation along with such activities as the joint Apollo/Soyuz mission and the Iran nuclear deal.

In the present day he argues, science diplomacy offers us, or at least should offer us, one of the best opportunities to address the major global challenges, especially climate change in the time of 'the great acceleration'. In this world four trends are changing the relationship between international economics and international politics.

²³ But see Kerry Crawford and Marieke Breuning, "Not a Leaky Pipeline Issue: Success is a Game of Chutes and Ladders", *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 54 (3) July, 2021, 509 – 512.

They are; (i) greater geopolitical instability; (ii) digitalisation; (iii) growing domestic political polarisation and antagonism in many OECD countries; and (iv) the growing importance of global environmental governance considerations.²⁴ Together, and perhaps in contrast to the heyday of neoliberal globalisation, they privilege the power of politics over that of economics in the organisation of global order. The need to combat these trends also enhances the need for better science diplomacy. For sure, collaboration is important for its own sake in the advancement of science, but it can also serve a wider diplomatic function of encouraging and opening doors to cooperation in key policy areas in which better science is essential for good decision making.

Cooperation, or more precisely international interaction, Van Langenhove also notes, can have its down sides, especially if the appropriate ethical standards are not followed. Data theft and aggressive talent wars have become more common in an age of the digitalisation of knowledge. This has major implications for the collection, storage and use of science data. Guarding, and in some instances stealing, scientific data has become a cornerstone of the desire of states to safeguard or enhance what they see as their technological sovereignty.

A further problem arising from digitalisation and the growth of social communication is that the old distinction between the expert and non-expert has changed and with it the status of expertise. Experts can only be 'expert' in a very tiny area of knowledge. But the wider community, qualified or not, can now access all types of knowledge, of which they may or may not have a good understanding. This access can not only be used for good, but also in improper or unethical ways. Without elaboration here, but in a manner we can all understand, at its crudest, data is growing exponentially and its availability via social media has generated the modern-day challenge of fake news and conspiracy theory in the hands of the unscrupulous.

So, Van Langenhove concludes, it is important that we distinguish between the benefits of open science and the abuse and social disruption that an anarchy of information can produce. Global science diplomacy needs scientists. Science diplomacy is currently too much driven by states and state interests. Scientists do not lead, but they need to lead more than they do in science diplomacy if we are to protect the values of science and ensure the integrity of the translation of science into public policy—a problem that has been brought into sharp relief by the development of COVID-19. Hence, the need for a new

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24 For a discussion see Alexander Chartres, "The Great Acceleration", <https://www.ruffer.co.uk/-/media/Ruffer-Website/Files/Ruffer-Review/2021/Ruffer-Review-2021-The-Great-Acceleration.pdf?la=en&hash=C01A9AB0842A451C9A0606312494A041>

kind of science diplomacy that can be labelled as *knowledge diplomacy* and that should be driven by scientists and universities.²⁵

Marga Gual Soler, picking up this theme from Van Langenhove, discussed the need for scientists to learn a 'new skill set' if we are to see effective science diplomacy. Without it, scientists will not participate positively in the public policy process. She identified the current problem in the asymmetry of practice that currently informs the science diplomacy relationship. Scientists need to learn the language of diplomacy, which is very different to that of science, not only stylistically but also substantively. The ideal type of scientific community in theory, and mostly (although not always) in both language and practice, tends to be non-partisan, analytical, specialist, flexible, risk-tolerant, transparent, collaborative and with common goals and interests. In sharp contrast, the diplomatic community (again in theory but not always in practice) is typically thought to privilege the formal language and practice of, risk-aversion, generalism and consensus-seeking behaviour imbued with a clearly defined sense of particularist, usually national, interest.

These are stylistic discursive differences that would, at first sight, seem irreconcilable. But Soler recognises that in reality they are often caricatures, rather than tightly bounded, ideal types of the scientist and diplomat's view of the world. She saw no reason why these differences cannot be reconciled in the interests of greater scientific cooperation and well-being. The key to success in this resolution, is trust-building which is secured by cross-cultural flexibility, networking, knowledge brokerage and facilitation achieved through both training and interaction. The aim should be to build a 'science diplomacy ecosystem' in which a common understanding can emerge to anticipate

both the positive and negative outcomes of scientific innovation, especially in technological areas such as AI and digitalisation that are capable of 'changing what it means to be human.'

Both Van Langenhove and Soler, argue that the EU, through a range of initiatives—notably Horizon funding of science diplomacy—are making a positive contribution to traversing the science-diplomacy divide. Given the traditional importance of UK science in the EU science community one cannot help but ask what will be the impact of its post-Brexit departure from future Horizon programmes?

Focussing specifically on the issue of energy, Shell's Cho Khong identified the geopolitical challenges facing the energy policy domain; especially their implications for attempts to secure the 2015 Paris Accords on climate change and what needs to be done if we are to have any chance of securing them. As a long-time senior scenario planner, Cho looked at the longer-term consequences of geopolitical change identified by previous speakers such as Kishore Mahbubani, Van Langenhove, Falkner and others, if we are to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. Human survival, no less, requires a recognition of these longer-term changes.

But, while interested in the longer-term, as Cho notes, the decade of the 2020s is when the hard choices must be made if we are to achieve these 2050 targets. He also argues that the challenges of climate, the energy transition and indeed global pandemics are connected. The choices we make today in how to deal with the pandemic are going to influence the manner in which we make choices about energy transition. COVID-19 was not the first pandemic, and it may not be the last. And while it may be the most consequential to-date, we cannot

25 See Luk Van Langenhove and Luc Burgelman. "Viewpoint: Science diplomacy needs a refresh to meet contemporary European needs." <https://sciencebusiness.net/viewpoint/viewpoint-science-diplomacy-needs-refresh-meet-contemporary-european-needs>

know of the future or the degree to which we will be equipped to act collectively in the face of any further pandemics. Although intuitively we might know, on the basis of the poor collective response to COVID-19 (described in some detail by Clare Wenham in the last panel of the workshop), that 'more of the same' in terms of collective diplomatic endeavour will not suffice.

So, a global corporate player like Shell has identified, Cho tells us, these global challenges as changing energy production and consumption, along with changing the relationship between Shell, and other players (state and non-state alike). This is the case on both the production and consumption sides of the equation. Sensible, deliberative cooperative decision making cannot be assumed. But states, their newly found desire to build national resilience notwithstanding, cannot address these challenges without cooperation. Resilience, for Cho, must be global, not simply national. Indeed, Cho stresses that there is no global challenge—be it in the domains of climate or health—that can be resolved absent cooperation, and that such cooperation must take due account of the hybrid nature of the actors and especially, as Cho reminds us, the private sector.

The core message from our three presentations in this session is that science, technology and the related policy sectors of climate and energy are the stuff of high politics in the twenty-first century. The policy shadows they cast mean that the need for cooperation, and *ipso facto* better diplomacy, is becoming progressively more, not less important. The big unknown of course is the nature of the cooperative endeavour that will emerge out of the decline of the old order and whatever replaces it. This is a theme to which the Workshop returns in the final plenary session.

Session Five: Cultural Relations or Cultural Diplomacy in an Era of Digitalisation: What's in a Name?

The purpose of this panel was twofold: (i) to discuss the importance of culture as a core factor in modern international relations²⁶, and (ii) to see what we think about the role of digitalisation, especially the development of modern social communication in it. Our working assumption was that what we might call a cultural dynamic is now every bit as important as the politico-security dynamic and the economic dynamic in determining the nature of contemporary international relations and a future world order.

By way of introduction, we should however note that the concept of culture always presents a problem for analysts of international relations and practitioners of diplomacy alike. The impact of cultural diversity on international politics is not well understood. In particular, the growing influences of non-Western powers, ethno-nationalism and religiously inspired violence give a lie to our traditional assumptions that cultures are tightly integrated, neatly bounded, clearly differentiated and causally powerful as explanatory factors in how civilisations work. The conclusion we now have to draw in the wake of events such as Brexit, 'Making America Great Again', the rise of populism, identity politics and culture wars in the US and Europe and the re-assertion of Confucian nationalism in China and Hindu nationalism in India, is that cultural contests and conflicts are likely to be as present as order in international relations. The current debate about civilisational states is telling us that we need to recognise that shared ideas shape the interests and practices of states as much as politico-strategic and economic material forces.²⁷

26 This is now a major issue in both the theory and practice of contemporary international relations. For a discussion see Christian Reus-Smit, *On Cultural Diversity: International Theory in a World of Difference*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

27 See Coker, *op cit* and Higgott, *op cit*.

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This is something relatively new for us to think about in the applied global public policy domains of a post neoliberal era. It is something with which modern diplomacy seems ill-equipped to deal. Thus, the organisers were pleased to have for this session two speakers who have made prominent interventions into the debate over the differences of culture and the culture of difference in international relations: Gideon Rachman, Chief Foreign Affairs Commentator of the *Financial Times*²⁸ and Bruno Maçães, former Portuguese Secretary for European Affairs and author of *Dawn of Eurasia: On the Trail of the New World Order*.

Professor Caterina Carta of BSoG, opened up the session by asking pertinently just how effective is culture as an instrument of foreign policy in great power contests? Indeed, is it possible for states to develop an international cultural strategy given that states have no monopoly of control over national cultures? Normatively, Carta asks is it not culture's role to diffuse rather than exacerbate international misunderstanding? And should it not be the supportive role of digitalisation to mitigate misunderstanding in this process?

By way of response, the opening sentence of Maçães's bleak presentation put it bluntly. We live, he said, 'in an age of cultural war and propaganda, with a negative dark side'. For example, Maçães notes, learning about China is no longer seen as a good thing in many parts of the West, especially in the USA as it had been from the time of Nixon's visit to China in 1972 until the last couple of years. The pressure to take sides in geopolitical disputes is growing stronger in a world moving beyond an erstwhile liberal order. Using the language of Samuel Huntington, he suggests that assumptions of a 'clash of civilisations', notwithstanding that it is often a misunderstood concept 'cuts very deep'.²⁹ The degree to which any consensus on a set of universally liberal ideas might have existed, or at least have been tolerated, in the heyday of US hegemony, has now substantially diminished, he says.

Classical understandings of culture as art, creativity and the positive representation of nations as exercises in soft power of the kind that Federica Mogherini tried to develop for the EU during her time as the EU's High Representative for External

28 See Rachman's many thoughtful writings in the *Financial Times* such as "China, India and the 'civilisation state'", *The Financial Times*, March 4, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/b6bc9ac2-3e5b-11e9-9bee-efab61506f44>.

29 Samuel Huntington *The Clash of Civilisations*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963

Relations are in short supply.³⁰ To talk of cultural power is now to 'talk about different universes that communicate very little and very badly'. It now makes more sense to talk about propaganda between different 'value spheres' rather than cultural diplomacy, says Maçães. COVID-19 has been caught up in this propaganda war at the same time as it has fuelled it. How well a state is coping with the pandemic says Maçães, is seen as a reflection of civilisational virtues such as individualism versus collectivism, respect for science or not, and so on. Put, as a question he asks 'does culture produce results?' The answer is yes. But not as advocates would hope when it is in the hands of the populist politician.

Gideon Rachman, equally realist(ic) although perhaps not, as he noted, in as 'gloomy a mood' as Maçães, nevertheless could see what he was worried about and cautioned us against an over-expectation of the benefits of culture in international relations and the role of digitalisation as a vehicle for its positive dissemination. He endorsed Professor Carta's initial point that governments try to use cultural power notwithstanding that they do not actually create it. He gave the obvious examples of the importance of pop music (the Beatles), fashion (blue jeans) as a major instrument of western soft power during the Cold War. But, as he notes, things are different in the current era and one of the major factors in explaining that change for Rachman is digitalisation. It shapes what he sees as 'the international cultural struggle' and has done so by 'shrinking the world in an incredible way'. Though we are now all much more visible to each other this has not enhanced cultural understanding. If anything, the reverse is the case. Google Translate

opens up partial or superficial insight, as opposed to deep understanding, into the domestic politics of other states—understanding that was once only open to language speakers and area specialists.

Similarly, in 240 characters, Twitter offers the prospect of instantaneous viral, and often inflamed, comment accessible to all those who might be interested. Governments lose control of the debates over how crucial issues of public policy are framed. This can be both a good thing and a bad thing. However, as Rachman notes, 'populations are talking to each other and interpreting [or, as is often the case, misinterpreting] what each other are saying'. In essence, the engagement of the international 'twitterati' on any given issue can affect the 'control of the narrative' (to use the popular cliché) and the subsequent way in which countries see each other.

The implications for diplomacy are complex. It is only a small community of scholars, analysts and journalists who wax lyrical about global in an effort to mitigate the prospect of culture wars in the hands of politicians and the wider community. As Rachman notes, the most heated cultural wars are often domestic civil wars, as is clearly the case in the USA, but not only the USA, in the contemporary era. Digital technology gives those who would wish to, and who have the digital capability to, take advantage of this situation. This would seem, fairly non-controversially, to be what Russia has done to considerable effect since at least 2016. And as both Maçães and Rachman plausibly argue, the Russians (and indeed the Chinese) see such action not as interference but as legitimate retaliation for past US interference in their own domestic political affairs.

30 We should note here the distinction between cultural diplomacy and international cultural relations. On international cultural relations see *Cultural Relations, Dialogue and Cooperation in an Age of Competition*, London, British Council, https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/cultural_relations_dialogue_and_co-operation_in_an_age_of_competition_0.pdf, 2021 and Stuart MacDonald et al. *Soft Power and Cultural Relations Institutions in a Time of Crisis*, London, 2021 for the British Council https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/soft_power_and_cultural_relations_in_a_time_of_crisis.pdf. For a discussion and critique of the evolution of European cultural diplomacy during Mogherini's time as High Representative for External Relations see the essays in Caterina Carta and Richard Higgott (eds.) *Cultural Diplomacy in Europe: Between the Domestic and the International*, (Basingstoke, Macmillan 2019

This manipulation easily takes domestic cultural conflict into the international domain. The Biden Administration is acutely conscious of the fact that it needs to rehabilitate its image internationally if it is to regenerate trust and support lost in the previous four years. ‘America is Back’ may have replaced ‘Make America Great Again’ as the Presidential slogan of choice du jour in the shift from Trump to Biden. It is clear that some lost ground has been regained with allies—as the welcome Biden received at the June 2021 Cornwall G7 attests. But as Jonathan Kirshner noted in *Foreign Affairs*, the USA will forever be the country that elected Trump, and ‘the world cannot unsee the Trump Presidency’.³¹ His long shadow is not going away anytime soon.

In short, digitalisation is a ‘new generation tool’ that not only generates cultural content but also facilitates intervention across international borders—sometimes overtly, sometimes covertly. But its newness means that governments have yet to really figure out how to respond. Russia is only now beginning to catch up with China in limiting public access to those digital platforms (Google, YouTube, Twitter, etc.) that have been vehicles for groups critical of the Putin government policy and behaviour.

In sum, it seems we must assume a more, rather than a less, conflictual set of international cultural relations and diplomacy in an age of the global binary. Governments will become more aggressive in their desire to control narratives in defence of national pride and values. Well, some will. It is to be seen how strongly western nations are prepared to defend what they see as liberal values. Non-western governments, such as China and India and even more prickly leaders such as Erdogan in Turkey, do resent what they see as the decades of the patronising cultural agendas of the US and Europe—recall Federica Mogherini’s assertion the ‘Europe is a cultural superpower’. It should not be assumed that a softening of this position is likely

with the current regimes in power. For example, Modi’s increasingly strident Hindu nationalism and Xi Jinping’s equally strident warning to China’s adversaries on the 100th anniversary of the CCP show no signs of a keenness for cross-cultural dialogue. Geopolitics is now clearly about much more than simply material prosperity and security.

Closing Plenary Session—Diplomacy for a New World Order: Can We Re-Boot Multilateral Diplomacy?

The closing plenary session saw presentations from Professors Andrew Cooper from the University of Waterloo, Clare Wenham from LSE, Mills Soko from the University of Witwatersrand and Amitav Acharya from the American University of Washington DC. The aim for the session that the organisers had in mind was to finish with a broad discussion of the future of world order, the role of multilateralism in any reform process and the nature of the diplomacy required to secure such reform where many of the big-ticket policy items such as climate change and global health consideration cannot be satisfactorily addressed by reassertions of sovereignty and national resilience strategies alone.

Cooper opened the session by identifying what he saw as two major areas of contest in the world of multilateral diplomacy. His first area was formal, treaty based, charter based, multilateralism which he saw as the most ‘normatively attractive’ and ‘most difficult’ but ‘not impossible’ form of multilateralism. He refers to The United Nations Climate Change Conferences (COP) process meetings and summits in the climate context, as an example of a trend towards an evolving form of multilateralism that in some ways has got ‘too big’. This is what he calls, ‘jamboree diplomacy’. What is gained in terms of legitimacy is often a trade off against technical efficiency. For a couple

31 Jonathan Kirshner, “Gone, But Not Forgotten: Trump’s Long Shadow and the End of American Credibility”. *Foreign Affairs*, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-10-29/trump-gon-but-not-forgotten

of decades across the turn of the century, the 'more is better' approach to multilateral diplomacy became fashionable, not only in the context of climate issues but also issue areas like human rights and women's rights.

Cooper's second domain was what he called competitive multilateralism. This he sees in the binary polarisation. His prime example here is what we now refer to as Chinese 'wolf diplomacy'. Normally bilateral in practice, multilateral wolf diplomacy can be seen in China's active diplomatic response to the June 2021 G7 meeting, and the growing salience China attaches to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. One diplomatic implication is that a lot of smaller countries will try to straddle this binary divide, especially but not only in the trade domain, Singapore here being an excellent example or even classic middle powers like Australia and Canada.³² Similarly, countries like South Africa, with its BRICs membership, or even, a country like Italy has shown to be keen to ensure good relationships with both the US and China across the binary divide. This nicely illustrates what was described as the 'fuzziness' of a binary order in the introduction to this report.

For Cooper, the hopes and aspirations of multilateralism are still there, but as a perfect transition to Clare Wenham, he notes that aspirations have remained unfulfilled in the latest of global challenges—pandemics in the health domain. Picking up Cooper's theme Wenham offered us an insight into what we have learned about the multilateral diplomatic effort towards COVID-19 and global health policy more generally. The prospects of pandemics requiring collective action, she points out, has been on the radar screens of international organisations, especially the WHO, and some national governments for many years. SARS in 2002-03 was, in theory, a warning shot across the bows that generated wide shock waves as to the potential global effects of pandemics.

SARS did trigger a normative shift in thinking, in some policy communities, around the way we think about pandemics and the reframing of global health to make it a security issue, as a way of escalating it up the international policy agenda. 2005 saw the codifying of a series of salient international health regulations that, through the WHO, could be activated in the event of a global health threat. This situation was more or less working until COVID-19 which, Wenham claims, was 'the straw that broke the camel's back'. The pandemic represented a failure of governance not only at the global level but at the domestic level too. Governments departed rapidly from the agreed norms of multilateral health security established in the interim between SARS and COVID-19. Instead, they charted their own national paths.

Specifically, major states rejected WHO guidance. We cannot know what would have happened had the multilateral path been pursued. But we do know, she says, that to get beyond COVID-19 in the longer term, some form of collective global policy response is required. As Wenham puts it, we are caught in a vulnerable position by a failure of multilateralism but need multilateralism to help us resolve our global vulnerabilities to this pandemic. The basic problem is the lack of trust in the WHO by the major players. Initiatives like COVAX will always be inhibited by a donation model based on theoretical norms of solidarity and cooperation which governments are not keen to support in practice in the contemporary era.

Wenham is also sceptical of how much to expect from the G7. Historically there are precedents of it making major commitments to support global health initiatives as it did in the past with tuberculosis and HIV. However, the June 2021 G7 meeting dialogues were, she says, 'nothing short of underwhelming in its response to the pandemic.' No real concrete actions. Some weasel words about strengthening the WHO from those very

32 On the theory and practice of middle power behaviour see Andrew F Cooper, Richard Higgott and Kim Richard Nossal, *Relocating Middle Powers: Australia and Canada in an Evolving World Order*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1993

governments that walked away from it when the crisis began. No enhanced financial commitment was proposed nor any agreement to respond to its policy advice. The G7's vaccine commitment was upped to 2 billion (including prior commitments). But the world needs 16 billion doses in total. Without a meaningful IP waiver and enhanced production capability, that number will not be met anytime soon. Health diplomacy is further stymied by the pharmaceutical lobby's insistence on patent protection. The G7 2021 summit, Wenham asserts, represents a major failure of global health diplomacy.

However, the G7, EU and WHO have proposed a pandemic treaty. It would be rooted in shared norms, shared vulnerability and global solidarity. Practically it would improve surveillance, detection and lab capacity with pre-agreed vaccine distribution. Effectively, these proposals already exist in other forms of international agreements. All it needs is leadership and will. But Wenham correctly questions why we should expect future leaders to respond in any better fashion than current leaders. Undeniably, some governments will push back against it. India, for example, sees no point given the lack of evidence of solidarity in the past. The US is sitting on the fence. The treaty negotiations begin at a World Health Forum in November 2021. But it is already clear that a radical treaty will not secure ratification and a bland treaty, what Wenham calls a 'vanilla' treaty, will be pointless.

Mills Soko opened by supporting Wenham's arguments about the limits of COVAX and an unsurprising displeasure at what he called the 'predatory behaviour' of the vaccine producers towards developing countries, especially Africa. Nothing has illustrated Africa's 'global power asymmetries' more than COVID-19. Soko also looked at the tensions between China and the US in Africa in the contemporary era. He argued that they appear very similar to the contest on the continent that took

place between the Soviet Union and the US during the Cold War. Africa, as new young nations during the Cold War, made many mistakes responding to this contest and these should not be repeated now. Rather they must take the opportunities this contest offers to establish positions more representative of African interests while at the same time avoiding some of the more egregious pitfalls of asymmetrical dependence. This, Soko says, will be a major test of African learning and diplomacy. It needs to ignore ideological contests and focus on technological innovation, global supply chain management and trade integration.

African leaders need to design strategies of engagement that ensure its access to technological innovation—vital to its development process. Traditional technologies will not do it. Nothing, says Soko, provides for the prospect of African countries leaping stages in the development cycle more than fifth generation mobile technology (5G) and its provision of high-speed broadband and the digital economy. In 2019 the US embargoed Huawei, including both hardware and software. The spill overs from the US action were significant for Africa with many of its telecommunications companies heavily reliant on Huawei. South African technology leaders urged its government to intervene diplomatically with the US on their behalf. South Africa took a stance in favour of Huawei and China, in a manner unthinkable in the first Cold War.

This current situation, says Soko, demonstrates two things: firstly, the difference between the Soviet Union's Cold War role in Africa and that of China now. China is much more economically engaged than the USSR ever was. Secondly, he noted a growing African willingness to try to resist pressure from the US. COVID-19 has had a major negative effect on Africa's economy and its position in global supply chains, especially for exports of agricultural products, other primary resource exports and also tourism. It has also impacted its imports of digital products and

pharmaceutical products. But, Soko also notes, the impact of the pandemic has been to enhance Africa's incentive to greater intra-regional economic cooperation and integration.

Amitav Acharya opened his remarks by questioning what we mean by 're-booting', 'resetting' and 'reforming' the multilateral system. Most revisionist leaders he says—citing Modi and Xi Jinping as examples—use the idea of reform, not resetting or rebooting. Reform he sees as a more conservative term, but it reflects the view that they do not want to pull the system down rather than pull it more in a direction that suits their interests. In this context he asks just exactly how much change we need in the international system if we are to deal with the problems of today rather than those of the second half of the twentieth century and, importantly, how is it to be brought about without creating major system disruption. While it is, says Acharya, extremely difficult to create new multilateral institutions in the current circumstances, 'simple reform is not going to be enough'.

We are in a period and a process of what he calls 'creative fragmentation' in the international system. Picking up a running theme of the Workshop he notes that US-led multilateralism is 'no longer the only game in town' and issue areas incapable of respecting boundaries and not amenable to national solutions—notably climate change—'have proliferated'. Hence the need to think constructively beyond simple reform. However, if this is so, where do the fresh ideas come from? We need, says Acharya, critical thinking beyond the system of state-led institutional organisation. He is not dismissing problem solving. Rather he is looking for some new ways of organising international collective action problem solving beyond traditional multilateralism.

Acharya points out that multilateralism has a history going back three-thousand years. The histories of Indian international relations and of Chinese order in Asia and indeed the colonial system, all he says, have exhibited elements of multilateralism that warrant re-examination. Using the language of technology, he says it is time for the West not only to download their ideas to the rest of the world, but also to upload ideas from it too. Particularly relevant says Acharya is recognising that what works for the US—in the governance of digital communications for example—does not necessarily work in the Global South, whose interests may be much more closely aligned with those of China. We should be looking at what patterns of diffusion work better for developing countries. In empirical terms this suggestion is supported by the importance to Africa of Huawei's provision of 5G technology attested to by Soko.

Particularly relevant... is recognising that what works for the US—in the governance of digital communications, for example—does not necessarily work in the Global South, whose interests may be much more closely aligned with those of China

All four presentations had some core themes, especially concerning the limits of multilateralism dealing with the global pandemic and other transnational problems. Wenham's analysis of the G7, Cooper's analysis of the G20 and Soko's analysis of the role of big pharma all exposed multilateralism's limitations. The panellists were asked by the chair to consider the degree to which the current pandemic and climate change might be sufficient catalysts for the reform of international cooperation in the guise of multilateralism in a manner similar to the way in which the Second World War provided the impetus for the creation of the UN and the Bretton Woods system. None of the speakers felt confident identifying any new understanding of community or solidarity at the international level. Cooper saw no change in the current structure. Less pointedly than Mahbubani perhaps, he nevertheless expressed concern that the G7 perceived its mandate as a global one rather than one primarily reflecting the interests of its members. Cooper thinks that, post-Trump, the G7 has reverted to a like-minded club exhibiting what he sees as an air of normative superiority.

Potential alternatives to the G7, for Cooper, are a much larger state-based organisation. If the G20 'worked better', he would be a fan of it, however, currently, the G20 and the UN system both operate sub-optimally. So maybe, he says, we need to work to develop a stronger network-based activity committed to collective action problem solving populated by a hybridity of actors beyond the international institutions. Wenham also shared Cooper's normative reading of the G7 but by way of a reality check pointed out that in the last 30 years it, not the WHO, has been the major driver in terms of both research and practice on the issue of global health. It is the major funder of health-related initiatives both publicly, and by private actors such as the Gates Foundation.

Acharya was very concerned by the language we might use to discuss international cooperation. On the one hand he was very doubtful that the language of international 'community' in any way shape or form would have any purchase in an age where the language and practice of realpolitik is stronger than at any time since the Cold War. On the other hand, and notwithstanding what he saw as the 'arrogance' of the very idea of a new Atlantic Charter in 2021 Acharya, somewhat surprisingly perhaps, argued that US policy would be much more G20 than G7 focussed after its initial bouts of 'America is back' diplomacy, epitomised by the June 2021 G7, are over. Other institutional arenas are going to be of equal if not greater significance than the transatlantic region in the future, especially the Asia Pacific and the newly fashionable Indo Pacific.

Conclusions

What common themes could we draw from the presentations and discussions of the workshop? Several presented themselves. At the level of grand narrative, International Relations (IR) as a field of scholarship, and international relations and diplomacy as a domain of practice, have both gone through a series of theoretical and practical turns over time. IR as scholarship, since its origins in the wake of the First World War, can be broadly caricatured as a shift from the privileging of states, war and law (the traditional stuff of high politics), up to the end of the Cold War, followed by a brief period in which the theory and practice of globalisation and global governance, with an increasing role for non-state actors, captured the imagination of many scholars and practitioners.³³

Similarly, the role of diplomacy, as a core institution of both IR and international relations has evolved over the same time. Traditional nationally

33 For a discussion of this changing narrative over time see Richard Devetak, "An Introduction to International Relations: The origins and changing agendas of a discipline", in Richard Devetak, Anthony Burke and Jim George, *An Introduction to International Relations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007

focussed state-led diplomacy expanded to see an enhanced role for multilateral diplomacy. This evolution proceeded in a fairly secular fashion until the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Since then, and especially since the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, multilateralism as an instrument of diplomacy has at best stalled, and at worst seen a process of roll back, as states have become less enamoured with it in both theory and practice. As the presentations at this workshop have demonstrated, we are now at a crossroads in the theory and practice of diplomacy occasioned by several fundamental factors. Notably; (i) the impact on the domestic politics of many states occasioned by the growth of nationalism and populism which appears to have infected countries across the political spectrum; (ii) the return of geo-politics as a driving force of international relations; (iii) the growth of new, potentially existential global transnational challenges—especially in the domains of health (pandemics) and the environment (climate change)—that did not feature on the international policy agenda until the closing stages of the twentieth century and (iv) the societally transforming impact of digitalisation on global communication.

The effects of these factors are affecting our understanding of contemporary diplomacy in a number of ways. The first and perhaps the largest is what we might call the crisis of international institutionalism as the principal instrument of multilateral diplomacy. Nowhere was this better demonstrated in the workshop than by the range of comments on the strength of transactional bilateral diplomacy and the accompanying declining in the functionality of bodies like the WTO and elements of the UN system such as the WHO in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A second significant impact on diplomacy has been the effects of digitalisation on the nature of diplomacy as a discourse. This has occurred in at

least three ways. Firstly, the ease with which fake news can be manipulated and used in international relations has escalated almost exponentially yet both national and global policy communities have failed to generate the necessary skills and abilities to contain this trend. We have yet to find a way to harness the best effects of digitalisation while containing the bad. This was seen to be particularly the case in our discussions of both science and cultural diplomacy.

Secondly, we should not underestimate the implications of virtual summitry's replacement of in-person multilateral gatherings of political leaders as venues for moderation. For example, recent research on the G20 shows, online meetings lose a range of flexible possibilities for moving towards agreement. These losses include: 'Those critical elements of summitry which render it a valuable and unique practice within the overall institution of diplomacy. ...The elimination of summitry's performative and interpersonal dimensions fundamentally renders online meetings unable to achieve what in-person summits can.'³⁴

In contrast to online diplomacy, Peter Westmacott as the practitioner in the first plenary and Andy Cooper as the scholar in the last plenary both made clear, in-person diplomacy still has power. Direct diplomacy offers the opportunity for the kinds of breakthroughs that can come about from *off-piste* meetings around the margins of a summit as occurred between Obama and Xi Jinping's in their unscheduled bilateral breakthrough discussion on climate at the 2014 APEC Summit.

Thirdly, the international cooperative dialogue as it has widened away from simply issues of security and economy to include issues of culture and values has become increasingly polarised and is showing no signs of stopping. It is quite clear that the US, even with an empathetic, President in the White House has not come to terms with the

³⁴ See Tristen Naylor, "All That's Lost: The Hollowing of Summit Diplomacy in a Socially Distanced World", *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 15, 2020, 583-598

need to share global leadership. It is not yet in the mindset of a post-hegemonic world. Underpinning Biden's 'America is Back' slogan is an assumption, if not explicit then at least implicit, that the US can retake the mantle of global leadership and others will acquiesce in this process.

However, mitigating this memory will take more than four years of deft diplomacy and not a little forgiveness. It will not be resolved in the period of a single presidential administration. A key issue will be the degree to which other states, allies and competitors alike, will come to the party. This will be determined by the degree to which the US can 'come back' collegially with allies (especially Europe) and, minimally, co-exist with competitors, especially China and Russia. Even in an environment where the worst cases of poor international behaviour—such as China's lack of transparency and deceit over the origins of COVID-19—must be called out, for the US to propose that its allies assist it along a spectrum from containment to confrontation of those with different values or systems rather than negotiating a new global compact that accommodates them, is a recipe for conflict and a failure of diplomacy that the global order cannot afford.

What are the prospects of avoiding this route? The omens are not good. The ability to which the US in particular, but also the West more generally, can come to terms with the growth of value pluralism in international relations is yet to be determined. Presently, the major actors on both sides of the global binary seem to be stuck with a normative agenda on which they are unlikely to

compromise. Dempsey, for example insisted that there were universal values (or 'universal instincts' as Rachman preferred to call them) that were largely western derived. For sure, Mahbubani says, while the rest of the world wants to modernise, it does not necessarily want to Westernise. And the West, Mahbubani opines, has lost the art of listening. As he noted in the opening session, over 88% of the world (including 1.4 billion Chinese, 1 billion Hindus, 1.3 billion Muslims and 500k Buddhists) live outside of 'the West'. Most aspire to the material well-being the West has achieved. While his language is sharp, his point is valid. The world can no longer be run by what he calls 'Western feudalism'.

But the governance of the future order remains to be determined. US liberal scholars such as Joseph Nye expect more of the same—a mildly reformed but still predominantly liberal order albeit with geopolitical characteristics.³⁵ US realists assume a new Cold War, *toute courte*.³⁶ The organisers of this workshop suggested a fuzzy binary order with stronger but leaky regions. In similar vein, Acharya is on record as suggesting that the future order will be 'multiplex'.³⁷ Mahbubani in this workshop suggests the world will be multi-civilisational by disposition, multipolar in structure and, if it can get its act together, multilateral in many of its practices. Whatever the outcome, diplomacy as a core institution of international relations will remain. The question is the degree to which it is flexible enough to navigate—and if possible strong enough to offer some meaning and structure to – the vagaries of future world order.

35 Joseph Nye "No, the Coronavirus Will not Change the World Order", *Foreign Policy*, April 16, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/16/coronavirus-pandemic-china-united-states-power-competition> and "Does the International Liberal Order Have a Future, *The National Interest*, December 28, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/does-international-liberal-order-have-future-175117>.

36 John Measheimer, "The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order". *International Security*, 43(4): 7–50, www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/International%20Security_Bound%20to%20Fail.pdf.

37 Amitav Acharya, "After Liberal Hegemony: The Advent of a Multiplex World Order", *Ethics and International Affairs*, www.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/2017/multiplex-world-order/.

Postscript; After Afghanistan— The Need for a 'New' New Diplomacy?

This report was written prior to the US exit from Afghanistan, the collapse of the Ghani government and the dramatically swift installation of a Taliban regime. The withdrawal represents not only a failure of both political and military strategy and tactics but also, germane to this report, a failure of diplomacy and a blow (fatal or not remains to be seen) to the prospects of resetting the global multilateral endeavour under any kind of American leadership. President Biden's global appeal—'America is Back'—has proved short-lived. It has been outgunned politically by the popular domestic public appeal of the withdrawal within the US. Here is not the place for detailed, and premature, analysis of the withdrawal. Its full implications across a wide spectrum of issues will only be properly understood with the fullness of time.

However, given its relevance for this report, it cannot be allowed to pass without comment. Afghanistan is a time for a grand retrospective on its wider international implications. It does indeed seem to be the end of the post-world war two post liberal era. Of course, the *possible* end of the liberal American order has long been predicted. But the odds on its demise following the US exit from Kabul have now shortened to anywhere between *probable* and *certain*. But what does that mean in detail? Prudence suggests that we respond via a series of questions—rather than answers—that analysts and practitioners will need to address over both the short and long-term. A series of linked questions arising from the withdrawal are identified below:

- (i) To what extent will it reinforce the growing tendency to dismiss the continued utility of the notion of 'a liberal West' as a meaningful category in international relations? Will we see the end of the idea of *exporting* 'Western liberal' values as a core element soft power diplomacy?
- (ii) If the notion of international interventionism as a way to promote democracy and protect human rights was the high watermark of the liberal order's aspirations shared by the USA and its allies, then the departure from Afghanistan (although not the first setback) has to be the low watermark. At the very least the exit reflects a total absence of humanitarian care for those left behind. So, does the withdrawal represent the end of two decades of liberal interventionism and the doctrine of responsibility to protect (R2P)? How will the US respond to future mass atrocities?
- (iii) Given that this is not the first time that the US has jumped ship with forebodings of permanent reputational damage—as in the exit from Vietnam—only to recover fairly quickly afterwards, will the Afghanistan exit diminish its long-term, as opposed to short-term international standing and credibility as a diplomatic actor?
- (iv) Has the withdrawal effectively defined a set of increasingly shrinking and introverted boundaries of US international interest for once and for all, or, as in the past, will this prove to be a continuation of an historical rotating cycle of intervention and withdrawal? How long will the new cycle last?
- (v) If Afghanistan is dispensable, what price is the territorial integrity of Ukraine and Taiwan?
- (vi) What has the withdrawal done to President Biden's G7 posturing about a 'new world order' and a Club of Democracies built on an 'alliance of values' with like-minded countries?

- (vii) Of course, we should not assume that withdrawal reflects an end to American power and its use. But what it does do, by default at least, is enhance the potential role of other major powers like China, Russia (and others) as powerful diplomatic actors in international relations. Must we assume that the situation will be, to a greater or lesser extent, exploited by the great, and maybe not so great, powers? If so, how?
- (viii) Is the withdrawal a warning to all US-aligned states to preserve an appropriate modicum of strategic distance (autonomy, even) from it in the future? This is not about allies separating from the US but about being able to act with some degree of individual licence in the absence of the US.
- (ix) How will it change European thinking about its transatlantic ally? Specifically:
- Will it enhance the lack of trust in the US that had grown during the years of the Trump Administration?
 - Will the EU now feel more obliged to seek accommodation with China on a range of core issues, absent a similar accommodation with the US?
 - To what extent will it confirm to the EU the limits of its capabilities to act on major international issues in the absence of coordinated action with the US? At the very least can we expect the current EU tendency towards hedging in its international relations to increase?

- Alternatively, after a decade or so of cavalier treatment of its allies by previous administrations (especially Trump's treatment of NATO) will it suggest to the US, in keeping with Biden's rhetoric, that it is seriously time to rebuild alliance bridges? Specifically, if confronting/blocking China's further rise remains the major US goal, how successful will it be without support from allies like Europe?

The very manner in which these questions are posed does, in part, suggest, if only implicitly, answers to them. But international politics does not work so predictably. While there will be no quick fix to offset the adverse impacts of the US exit from Afghanistan, perhaps the key lesson for us is that military intervention, even for superpowers, can be overrated and is not always destined to be successful. Agency matters as much as structures. The principal tool of agency in any re-build of the US position will not be military capability alone but also substantial and long-term trust-building diplomacy. Future global stability will be determined as much by enhanced *positive* diplomatic activity as by brute power. The task ahead is to rebuild the role of diplomacy as a core institution of international relations. ■

APPENDIX: THE WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

A New Diplomacy in the Age of the Global Binary: Digitalisation, Pandemics and the Search for a Global Reset

1) OPENING REMARKS

Giulia Tercovich, Assistant Director of the Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy (CSDS) of the Brussels School of Governance (BSoG-VUB).

Opening Plenary Session – Security and Diplomacy: Still the Core Institutions in an Era of Global Bifurcation?

CHAIR:

Christopher Coker, Director of LSE IDEAS

SPEAKERS:

- **Kishore Mahbubani**, former Singaporean civil servant and diplomat, now Distinguished Fellow at the Asia Research Institute at National University of Singapore
- **Judy Dempsey**, Senior Fellow at Carnegie Europe
- **Peter Westmacott**, KCMG, LVO, former British Ambassador to the US, France and Turkey

2) SESSION 1 – FROM ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY TO ECONOMIC STATECRAFT: A NEW MERCANTILISM IN AN ERA OF DEGLOBALISATION?

CHAIR:

Linda Yueh, Visiting Professor at LSE IDEAS

SPEAKERS:

- **Simon Evenett**, Professor of International Trade and Economic Development and MBA Director at the University of St. Gallen
- **Manuela Moschella**, Associate Professor of International Political Economy at the Scuola Normale Superiore
- **Patrick Low**, Former Chief Economist at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and Fellow at the Asia Global Institute, Hong Kong.

3) SESSION 2 – NEED FOR WOMEN-LED DIPLOMACY FOR A NEW WORLD ORDER

CHAIR:

Karen Smith, Professor of International Relations and Head of the Department, LSE

SPEAKERS:

- **Henriette Müller**, Professor of Leadership Studies at New York University Abu Dhabi
- **Roberta Guerrina**, Professor of EU gender politics and policies, University of Bristol
- **Dame Judith Macgregor**, British diplomat, former High Commissioner to South Africa and former Ambassador to Slovakia and Mexico

4) SESSION 3 – THE DIPLOMACY OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND ENERGY

CHAIR:

Robert Falkner, Associate Professor of International Relations and Interim Director, Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, LSE

SPEAKERS:

- **Luk Van Langenhove**, Research Professor at Brussels School of Governance (BSoG) and Senior Fellow at the Comparative Regional Integration Studies Institute of the United Nations University (UNU- CRIS).
- **Cho Khong**, Chief Political Analyst at Royal Dutch Shell
- **Marga Gual Soler**, international expert, advisor and educator in science diplomacy and founder of SciDip Global

5) SESSION 4 – CULTURAL RELATIONS OR CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN AN ERA OF DIGITALISATION: WHAT'S IN A NAME

CHAIR:

Caterina Carta, Professor of International Relations at the Centre for Security Diplomacy and Strategy, BSoG-VUB

SPEAKERS:

- **Naciye Selin Senocak**, Chair Holder of UNESCO Cultural Diplomacy, Governance and Education and Director of the Diplomatic and Strategic Studies Center (CEDS) and President of Eurasian Institute of Development (ANKAD) (unable to take part)
- **Gideon Rachman**, Chief Foreign Affairs Commentator of the Financial Times
- **Bruno Maçães**, former Portuguese Secretary of State for European Affairs

6) CLOSING PLENARY SESSION – DIPLOMACY FOR A NEW WORLD ORDER: CAN WE RE-BOOT MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY?

CHAIR:

Richard Higgott, Distinguished Professor of Diplomacy, Centre for Security Diplomacy and Strategy (CSDS), Brussels School of Governance (BSoG-VUB) Emeritus Professor of International Political Economy, University of Warwick

SPEAKERS:

- **Amitav Acharya**, Distinguished Professor of International Relations at American University, Washington, D.C.
- **Mills Soko**, Professor of International Business and Strategy at Wits Business School
- **Clare Wenham**, Assistant Professor of Global Health Policy, LSE
- **Andrew F. Cooper**, University Research Chair, and Professor, the Balsillie School of International Affairs, the University of Waterloo. ■



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