Diplomatic Cooperation: An Evolutionary Perspective[1]

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In 1937, Harold Nicolson, still the best-known modern writer on diplomacy, wrote a slim volume with the title *The Evolution of Diplomatic Method.* In 2011, Keith Hamilton and Richard Langhorne released the second edition of their *The Practice of Diplomacy: Its Evolution, Theory, and Administration.* The last century has seen a series of books, essays and even blog spots on diplomacy that advertise themselves as somehow evolutionary. However, almost all of them use the concept of evolution in the everyday sense of emergence.[2] They do not make reference to evolutionary theory, and they do not try to understand diplomacy as an institution evolved by the species. On the contrary, pre-Darwin style, they tend either to place the beginnings of history with writing or, following Hegel, with the emergence of what they refer to as states. Either way, they tend to treat diplomacy as something evolved not by the species in general, but by specific states or by diplomacy itself. As a result, seventy

years after Nicolson, the standard thing to do in the general literature is still to place the beginnings of diplomacy in ancient Greece (Nicolson 1937; Kurizaki 2011).

Within the multidisciplinary field of diplomacy studies that has emerged over the past three decades or so, there is a slight twist to this theme where the beginnings are concerned. Impressed by work carried out by the likes of Munn-Rankin and Raymond Cohen (Munn-Rankin 1956; Cohen and Westbrook 2000), the beginnings of diplomacy are now increasingly placed in the Eastern Mediterranean during the third millennium B.C. It is certainly the fact that the first documented diplomatic system we know of, the so-called Amarna system, emerged in this geographical area some time around the middle of the second millennium BC. The word 'documented' should give their game away, however, for this way of dating the origins of diplomacy hangs on the nineteenth century idea that history equals writing. The basic idea behind this dating is still that the institution of diplomacy follows the emergence of a particular political order, namely that sustained by what is usually but misleadingly referred to as pristine ancient states such as Mesopotamia, China and the Aztek polity(Fried 1967; compare Renfrew and Cherry 1988).

The take in this chapter is different. Following the definitions made by Dirk Messner, Alejandro Guarín and Daniel Haun in the introduction to this volume, I treat diplomacy as a meso level of cooperation, with environmental factors understood as social selection processes taking the role of macro level. Put differently, the perspective taken here is that diplomacy as an emergent institution is shaped by its social and material environment. Humanity shapes diplomacy, and diplomacy shapes humanity. The two are co-constitutive. The overall theme of the book is how

cooperation in general, with diplomacy being one kind of cooperation, constitutes humanity, and this is a theme here as well. The stress is on the other story, however; how humanity evolves diplomacy. This is because one point of the exercise is to say something about how diplomacy is changing here and now, and in order to do that, it is optimal to focus on how it has changed in the past.

There are obvious costs involved in using an evolutionary perspective on diplomacy. When the focus is on humanity's agency in general, the agency of specific humans is occluded. So are issues of power, and also of meaning. An evolutionary perspective is necessarily functionalist, which easily spells circularity if a causal reading is insisted upon. By the same token, organicism is a dangerous trap. Natural selection is guaranteed by biological factors that do not immediately translate into the social. There is no biological mutational logic in the social. When we speak of social mutations, we are speaking metaphorically. There is no such thing as social natural selection. Social selection processes are to do with factors such as density of habitat, social complexity, competition and cooperation regarding resources. They give rise to social phenomena such as specific forms of signaling and communication. The emergence of language would be a key example. A more recent one would be the emergence of the world wide web. These are stochastic factors, as opposed to natural ones. These are all very good reasons why nobody has really applied an evolutionary way of thinking to diplomacy before. When I nonetheless think this is an exercise worth the candle, it is because an evolutionary frame gives us a kind of longue durée overview that is not readily available from elsewhere. It is in this spirit, and keeping in mind how evoking evolution may all too easily steer us down an asocial biologistic path, that I nonetheless find it useful to take evolutionary thinking to the case of

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diplomacy. In terms of beginnings, there is no reason why we should not begin our investigation as early as extant proof of human cooperation allows. The longue durée view allows us to speculate about further evolution of diplomacy from a wider and hence more solid base than if we think more short-term, say in centuries. Here we may already complement dominant approaches within diplomatic studies, which tend to see change in diplomacy as a result of dynamics internal to diplomacy itself (but see Der Derian 1987; Neumann 2011; Bátora and Hynek forthcoming). Applying an evolutionary perspective to diplomacy is one way to demonstrate how diplomacy grows out of general social and environmental change.

I begin this chapter by discussing the general emergence of human cooperation and how it relates to diplomacy. Given the state of our knowledge, this part is necessarily speculative, and so I throw in some notes on method. Part two discusses earlier evolutionary work, or, to be more precise, *the* earlier work, on diplomacy. Part three tries to move the discussion forward by introducing and applying the idea of evolutionary tipping-points to the study of diplomacy. Tipping-points are understood here as the moment when long-term selection processes crystallise in diplomatic institutionalization. To be absolutely clear, let me give an example of concrete procedure. I do not argue that, say, the founders of the League of Nations had no agency, or that questions of culture-specific power were not very important indeed to this process. Far from denying this, I use an evolutionary perspective to focus on the long-term preconditions for this tipping-point of multilateral diplomacy. Evolutionary thinking enables a focus on the line to be drawn from early gathering of tribes in a number of global locations, via Christian church meetings in the mediaeval period and so-called congress meetings by states, to the early stirrings of permanent multilateral

diplomacy in nineteenth century institutions such as the Central Commission for the Navigation on the Rhine and the International Telegraph Union. Having introduced the idea of tipping-points, the rest of part three looks for moments when the institutionalization of diplomacy firmed historically, and identity six such tipping-points. In conclusion, I speculate about the emergence of a seventh tipping-point, which challenges the present hierarchy of diplomatic agents.

Evolution and cooperation

If, in the spirit of evolutionary theory, we discard the idea that history starts with writing and that civilization somehow starts with the Ancient Greeks, and instead think of diplomacy as the institutionalized communication between groups, we get another picture. We must then start not from today and go back, genealogy fashion, but reverse temporality and ask how the species was able to evolve cooperation in the first place. Humanity evolves cooperation, and cooperation evolves humanity, in standard evolutionary circular fashion.

Homo Sapiens has lived in foraging bands since it emerged some two hundred thousand years ago, and also has a prehistory of doing so. Such bands are dependent on a certain level of cooperation for finding and processing food, reproducing, etc. Note that inter-group relations were probably fairly intense: 'Contemporary foraging groups, which are probably not that different in migratory patterns from their prehistorical ancestors, are remarkably outbred compared to even the simplest farming societies, from which we can infer that dealing with strangers in short-term relationships was a common feature of our evolutionary history' (Gintis et al. 2005: 26).

By archaeological consensus, the level of cooperation increased radically as a response to an environmental factor, namely the possibility of capturing big game. Regardless of hunting method (driving animals into abysses, digging holes, spearing etc.), this would take a group rather than an individual. As demonstrated by a succession of scholars reaching from Peter Kropotkin (1902) via John Maynard Smith (1964) to Matt Ridley (1996) and Christopher Boehm (1999, 2011), the result of collaboration was pivotal in evolutionary terms, because it immediately led to a change in the unit of natural selection. To riff off a quote from Messner, Guarín, and Haun's introduction to this volume, '[p]erhaps the most remarkable aspect of evolution is its ability to generate cooperation in a competitive world. Thus, we might add 'natural cooperation' as a third fundamental Principle of evolution beside natural and sexual selection (Nowak 2006: 1563).

When the species was young, selection was individual. With increased cooperation, the unit of selection changed from individual to group. I will follow Boehm and take the increased level of cooperation to follow on from the event of big game hunting, and to see big game hunting as ushering in a political revolution. For leading individuals, this revolution posed a challenge, for the superior individual hunting skills which had made them leading were no longer an optimal environmental fit on their own, but had to be complemented by skills pertaining to leadership and collaboration. This change was driven by leveling behavior, which means that alpha males were lived down by coalitions who went in for sharing of food, group sanctions and suchlike (compare Shostak 1976).[3]

As is the rule in archaeology, if we want to date this, we are dependent on material findings. We have no guarantee that our findings equal the first occurrences of the phenomenon in question, for new findings may always antedate our oldest ones to date. Boehm talks about the explosion in cooperation as a 'Late Pleistocene revolution', and dates it to about 100.000 BC. This dating is not very convincing. In the mid-1990s, eight throwing spears were found together with thousands of horse bones in Schöningen, Germany (Thieme 2007). That find dated big game hunting to about 300.000 years ago. Big game hunting may be even older, however, witness the find of stone-tipped spears used by Homo Heidelbergiensis, the common ancestor of Homo Sapiens and Neanderthals, that dates back more than half a million years (Wilkins et al. 2012). We simply do not know whether these spears were used for big game hunting. What is reasonably clear, however, is that the advent of big game hunting happened magnituides before the time suggested by Boehm.

Note that even if qualitative increase in cooperation was immense, changes were rather limited in terms of group size. Our best estimate of the average size of hunter gatherer groups based on anthropological studies of bands living under conditions roughly similar to those that dominated Pleistocene habitats would be around 37 (Marlowe 2005). Most groups would have been larger, however, so that the Pleistocene human would probably have lived in a group numbering perhaps 70 to 120 individuals.[4]

All this is fairly well established by archaeologists. The key reason why this knowledge has not been applied to the study of diplomacy is probably to do with the focus on another social response to group selection, namely war. Extant evolutionary

literature has focused on how cooperation may help one group outcompete another. In a primer on microeconomic foundations, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis state that

> [I]t has been conventional since Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* to attribute the maintenance of social order to states. But for at least 95% of the time that biologically modern humans have existed, our ancestors somehow fashioned a system of governance that without the assistance of governments avoided the chaos of the Hobbesian state of nature sufficiently to become by far the most enduring of social orders ever. The genetic, archaeological, ethnographic, and demographic data make it quite clear that they did not accomplish this by limiting human interactions to a few close genetic relatives. [Rather,…] a particular form of altruism, often hostile toward outsiders and punishing toward insiders who violate norms, coevolved with a set of institutions— sharing food and making war are examples—that at once protected a group's altruistic members and made group-level cooperation the *sine qua non* of survival (Bowles and Gintis 2011: 5).

Following Darwin ([1873] 1998: 134-5), they argue that group conflict is an important driver of evolution, for it lays down an imperative that groups have to galvanize against other groups, and those who evolve the highest level of what they call parochial altruism will have an advantage that will crowd out other groups (Bowles and Gintis 2011: 133-47).[5]

The debate over whether war is an evolutionary necessity or not—and this debate is of interest to us as its existence is arguably the main reason why so little attention has

been paid to Pleistocene non-conflictual inter-group relations—is as old as the social sciences themselves. From Darwin there winds a continuous line of thought that argues in favour of war's necessity, usually under the banner of conflict theory of the origin of the state. Conflict theorists tend to stress the key evolutionary advantage of effective leadership for war, and war's key role in securing new ecological niches for certain groups at the expense of others.[6] Against these thinkers stand those who stress how war is but one of the institutions of social history. An early example is Kropotkin, author of a famous 1902 monograph on cooperation, but Kropotkin had little to say on intra-group relations. Another is the last of the post-war generation of evolutionists, Elman Service, whose work on the origins of large-scale political organization focused on the classical functionalist theme of systems maintenance rather than on conflict. But Service, too, no more than hints at the importance of what he refers to as external relations. Here is the key quote on the matter from his *magnum opus*:

> [...] primitive people recognize the danger of warfare and take measures to reduce its likelihood. These measures are various, of course, but they are all reducible to one generic mode of alliance-making, the reciprocal exchange. Reciprocal exchanges are the ways in which all kinship organizations extend or intensify the normal interpersonal bonds of kinship statuses. Any two relationships of kinship imply standardized obligations and rights that are symbolized by exchanges of goods and favors (as well as by prescribed forms of etiquette). Such exchanges are normally both utilitarian and symbolic. [...They are mainly of two kinds:] marriages and exchanges of goods (Service 1975: 60-1).[7]

Standardized obligations and rights, reciprocal exchange, prescribed forms of etiquette; here we have come to the subject at hand, namely diplomacy. With the partial exception of Ridley's (1996) already referenced book, later archaeological work has not followed up on Service's observation, however.

To sum up so far, for reasons that are to do with pre-Darwinian approaches to our past, the field of diplomatic studies have largely ignored the period before the third millennium BC. Whereas some kind of small-scale collaboration seems to be as old as the species itself, with the dawn of the late Pleistocene some 126.000 years ago, big game hunting inaugured a political revolution based on heightened levels of cooperation. Pleistocene inter-group relations have, however, been largely studied in one aspect only, namely that of warfare. The observation is sometimes made that other environmental challenges, such as natural catastrophes, may make for inter-group collaboration, and it is acknowledged that gift-making, most basically in the Lévi-Staussian tapping of the exchange of women, is an ancient phenomenon. That, however, is where extant scholarship seems to stop.

Earlier work on diplomacy in evolutionary perspective

Well, not quite. As far as I am aware, there is one, and only one, scholar who breaks with this pattern. In the 1930s, Ragnar Numelin left his native Finland to write his doctorate with his compatriot, evolutionary anthropologist and LSE professor in sociology Edvard Westermarck. The result was published in 1950 (when Numelin was working at the Finnish legation in Brussels) as *The Beginnings of Diplomacy: A*

Sociological Study of Intertribal and International Relations.[8] Numelin (1950: 14) is a bit shy, stating at the outset that he is

> not thinking in terms of evolutionary anthropology or history […but only wants] to emphasize the sociological side of the question: that we should study also the social 'diplomatic' culture in the savage world and not, as has often been done, confine ourselves to conditions prevailing among 'historical' peoples.

Already on the next page, however, he states that 'it is an astonishing fact that we can observe, among savage peoples, the beginnings of a great many forms of development which actually belong to far higher stages of civilization'. If this is not evolution-speak, then what is? There follow chapters that set out detailed catalogues of embryonic forms of hospitality, inter-group heralds and messengers, peace negotiators and war emissaries, treaty-making and trade.

Numelin begins, in the tradition from Kropotkin, with a critique of other theorists, evolutionists included, for making the unwarranted assumption that war was the key political phenomenon of hunter and gatherer existence. For example, he notes that Herbert Spencer admitted 'the peaceful origin of primitive political organization', but nonetheless held the 'false conception' that war was key to it, simply because he had, by drawing on Ratzel and other German researchers, 'deliberately selected features from later savage and 'barbarous' life as the starting-point of his political theories' (Numelin 1950: 67). Here, Numelin is foreshadowing present-day attacks on the entire political canon from Hobbes to Pinker for having, willfully and on weak or

even non-existent empirical grounds, created a prehistory which the archaeological evidence such as it is, does not support (see any chapter in this book). Numelin goes on to note examples which were known at the time, such as pre-contact Tasmania. He sees what we may call an early tipping-point in totemism, as '[M]embers of tribes with the same totem are generally well treated even if they should be strangers' (Numelin 1950: 111). Drawing on Malinowski's classical work on the Trobriands, he notes the practice of cleansing strangers of their taboo by having a village girl 'act as the stranger's partner for the night' (Numelin 1950: 113). Another widespread practice was the presentation of (other) gifts (1950: 156). There is also the practice of the peace-invoking festival, such as the Mindarie-feasts of the Diery of Australia (1950: 141). The general practice on display here is hospitality, offered not least out of a fear of unknown supernatural powers.

Numelin (1950: 130) goes on to detail the emergence of the messenger, who was personally inviolable and who was 'selected with great discrimination out of those members of the tribe or local group who enjoy general esteem and often belong to the most outstanding persons in the tribe'. Inviolability sometimes spread to commercial agents (1950: 152). War messengers are widespread amongst hunter-gatherer populations; Numelin (1950: 178) takes issue with older literature which held that formal declarations of war amongst 'primitives' were not necessary. The central case is the peace messenger, however.[9] Numelin (1950: 170-71, comp. 214) gives as one example the Arunta of Australia:

> When a fight breaks out among the Arunta, and one of the parties wish to
> make it up, they send a man and his wife as messengers to the other camp. In

order to try the adversaries' readiness to make peace the messenger has to put his wife at their disposal. If the offer is accepted and the men accordingly enter into intercourse with the messenger's wife – this act is called *Noa* (conjux) or *Ankalla* ('cousinship') – a favourable issue of the political situation may be expected; if it is rejected, the fighting continues.

Note the use of kinship terminology here. A typical accoutrement of tribal messengers, which may be traced on all continents, is the message stick (1950: 164) which served as identification and as a mnemonic aid for the messenger, a clear forerunner of the ancient Greek double-folded sheets framed and carried around the neck by messengers and called *diploun* – the phenomenon that has given diplomacy its name.

A key finding, from which Numelin (1950: 203) struggles in vain to find exceptions, is the appearance of 'feasts and drinking bouts' when peace is negotiated. The seemingly ubiquitous appearance of feasts gives the lie to those who see all the eating and drinking entered into by diplomats as an unnecessary luxury. The commensality of eating and drinking is an institution which can be observed amongst all known polities who do business with one another, and must therefore be seen as a historically necessary practice of diplomacy (Neumann 2013a). A special, and widespread, case is the blood-brotherhood, often sealed by the drinking of blood.[10] We need not heed Numelin's (1950: 211) speculation that this may be a forerunner of the drinking of one another's health, but do note that kinship terminology makes yet another appearance in the so-called pledging in blood.

To sum up, Numelin certainly looks at diplomacy as something that is being evolved by the species itself. He does identify a number of precursors of phenomena that we may trace down through written cultures (more on this below). As seen from the present, however, there is a key weakness in Numelin's method. His sources are, and had to be, given the time at which it was written, exclusively those of anthropologists who have studied hunters and gatherers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and he jumbles them all together. Some of these groups may be similar to pre-sedentary human polities in their material base, but we would not know, for Numelin does not discuss the matter. In their social organisation, however, these groups have had just as much time, roughly 11.000 years, to evolve as have sedentary societies, and a number of them will have been marked by their contact with those sedentaries. James C. Scott (2009), who has written insightfully on how states actually may *produce* non-state societies, has gone so far as to argue that, '[W]e have virtually no credible evidence about the world until yesterday and, until we do, the only defensible intellectual position is to shut up' (Scott 2013: 15). This is clearly an overstatement. As demonstrated at the beginning of this article, archaeologists have excavated a lot of stuff that they have turned into evidence, although Scott is of course right that this evidence is tentative, and so not necessarily credible, particularly to someone who does not seem to have taken the time to examine it. This is, however, a point one could wage against *all* knowledge about the social, as Scott himself has repeatedly underlined. Principally, it is therefore an untenable position for a working academic not to build on our scholarly knowledge such as it is, and try to widen and deepen that knowledge. Exit Scott.

A new approach to the history of diplomacy: Tipping points

When Numelin is building exclusively on evidence culled from hunter-gatherer groups observed by anthropologists, this is because the data available at the time when he was writing, in the 1930s, made it very hard to do anything else. As a result, Numelin was condemned to stop at cataloguing relevant phenomena (as they were evident from the anthropological record) and could not go on to attempt much theorization. He does not look at what the evolutionist Morton Fried (1967, in the context of the change from chiefdoms to states) refers to as 'leaps' of evolution. It seems to me that an attempt to pinpoint candidates for such leaps, tipping points or, to use evolution-speak, punctuated equilibrium effects (Eldredge and Gould [1972] 1985; for a recent critical assessment, see Scott 2007) must be the next logical step in applying evolutionary thinking to the case of diplomacy.[11]

For an illustration of how such leaps or tipping-points work analytically, let me reproduce an example from a much-used primer on game theory, whose sub-title is 'An Evolutionary Theory of Institutions' (Young 1998). The example concerns not diplomacy, but the rather less unwieldy (because binary) example of which side of the road to drive on:

> In the early stages, when there was relatively little traffic on the roads and its range was limited, conventions grew up locally; a city or province would have one convention, while a few miles down the road another jurisdiction would have the opposite one. As use of the roads increased and people traveled further afield, these local rules tended to congeal first into regional and then into national norms, though for the most part these norms were not codified as traffic laws until well into the nineteenth century. In areas with highly

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fragmented jurisdictions, the congealing process took longer, as an evolutionary model would predict. Italy, for example, was characterized by highly localized left-hand driving rules until well into the twentieth century. Once conventions became established at the national level, the interactions are between countries, who [*sic*] are influenced by their neighbors: if enough of them follow the same convention, it pays to follow suit. Over time, we would expect a single convention to sweep across the board. While this intuition is essentially correct, it ignores the effect of idiosyncratic shocks, which can displace one convention in favor of another. Remarkably, just such a shock occurred in the history of European driving: the French Revolution. Up to that time, it was customary for carriages in France as well as in many other parts of Europe to keep to the left when passing. This meant that pedestrians often walked on the right to face the oncoming traffic. Keeping to the left was therefore associated with the privileged classes, while keeping to the right was considered more 'democratic.' Following the French Revolution, the convention was changed for symbolic reasons. Subsequently Napoleon adopted the new custom for his armies, and it spread to some of the countries he occupied. From this point onward, one can see a gradual but steady shift—moving more or less from west to east—in favor of right-hand rule. For example, Portugal, whose only border was with right-driving Spain, converted after World War I. Austria switched province by province, beginning with Vorarlberg and Tyrol in the west and ending with Vienna in the east, which held out until the Anschluss with Germany in 1938. Hungary and Czechoslovakia also converted under duress at about this time. The last continental European country to change from left to right was Sweden in 1967.

Thus we see a dynamic response to an exogenous shock (the French Revolution) that played out over the course of almost two hundred years (Young 1998: 16-17).

Since this is a multi-disciplinary volume and I have tipped my hat to economics by quoting the likes of Samuel Bowles and Peyton Young, it is only fair that I now be allowed a moment to blow my own horn: When Young the economist is looking around for a key example, he comes up with stuff foregrounding politics: the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, the First World War, the Anschluss. There is a pointer here to how tipping-points, understood as the culmination of long-term trends, are institutionalized; it often happens in the context of attempted learning once the victors (and sometimes the losers, too) have had the chance to sit down and ponder what went wrong the last time. Note, however, the contingent character of the social changes that brought on right-hand driving. By the same token, I am not prepared to privilege any one set of factors that determine diplomacy. Social evolution does not work like that. Stuff emerges, becomes problematized and leads to cooperational and conflictual behavior without the organic laws of biology to underpin the process, which therefore remains stochastic.

Young's binary example (left-hand driving vs. right-hand driving) may only help us part of the way, for it occludes the analogue nature of more complex social changes such as those pertaining to diplomacy. Most social stuff is not like the question of which side of the road to drive on, but rather preserves pre-tipping point stuff as part of the whole picture. The social is like a palimpsest, where older practices shine through amongst the dominant and newest ones.[12] Specifically, diplomacy may reach

a tipping point, and as seen from the time intervals between them, history seems to be speeding up so that we now spend centuries or even decades rather than millennia in reaching a new tipping point. Once the tipping point has been reached, however, previous practices do not simply disappear, but tend to hover. One contemporary example would be how a state like Russia is markedly less involved in multilateral practices than is, say, Germany.

In part one of this chapter, we already encountered one leap or tipping-point that has been further evidenced by fossil findings, namely the late Pleistocene political revolution brought on by the possibility of big game hunting some 300.000 years ago. Here, the selection process was driven by increased complexity in signaling. While this revolution first and foremost had the effect of increasing the value of in-group cooperation, it also suggested the possibility of cooperation between groups. Such cooperation would take diplomacy to come into being. Let us call the Pleistocene revolution a proto-diplomatic tipping-point.

Note that 'cooperation' is a positively loaded word, and this occludes the importance of social relations for it to work. Every social scientist is, for example, familiar with Rousseau's fable of the stag hunt, where the point is that if only one of a hunting party spots a hare and breaks rank by killing it, the cooperative scheme to catch a stag will fall apart. The antidote to this is the wielding of social power. To pick an example from the life of contemporary hunters and gatherers once again, in an ethnographic study of the !Kung, Shostak (1976) found that of the hours of quotidian conversation that she had recorded on tape, over one-third was spent on criticising selected good hunters for not being cooperative enough, often within their earshot or even to their

faces. If all known human settings display the use of power to keep cooperative schemes on the tracks, it is a safe assumption that the same went for the late Pleistocene revolution, and that it was, consequently, power-laden.

This is important, for it should remind us of how cooperative schemes such as diplomacy are shot through with power relations. It is, for example, not the case that diplomacy is the opposite of war (see Barkawi, forthcoming). It is, rather, the opposite of not talking to the enemy. Diplomacy is attempts by socially designated representatives at handling difference on group level by means of a cocktail of practices with talk being paramount amongst them. The major importance of the late Pleistocene revolution to diplomacy, then, lies in the way it further institutionalized cooperative schemes as a standard *modus operandi* of human life in general. It enhanced the social space for action taken on other bases than at spear-point as well as for non-verbal and, in historical perspective, verbal communication of a non-violent but definitely power-laden kind.[13]

Numelin's work suggests a second tipping-point, namely totemism, which may serve as a template for turning living beings who were before considered impossible to talk to into *interlocateurs valable* by offering a ground on which to cooperate, namely the fact of sharing a common totem. While this is a highly tentative idea, if we fast-forward from hunter-gatherer groups to societies about which we have written knowledge, we do see a similar mechanism in operation. In all known early examples of diplomatic practices, kinship appears as a template. The Amarna system, named after the findings of stone tablets documenting correspondence between 1300 BC polities such as Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria and the Hittite polity Hatti, a key theme is

the ongoing attempts by the other Kings to have the Egyptians acknowledge them as brothers, and not sons. The ancient Greek practice of 'discovering' kin, invariably groups of barbarians so strong that they could not be ignored but had somehow to be dealt with, with the Macedonians being a prime example, brings out the logic (Neumann 2011). Kinship offers a language of categorization within which diplomatic maneuvering may take place. This still goes on within what is, appositely, often diplomatically called the 'family' of nations, i.e. the states system. Similar practices are known from other diplomatic systems, such as the Iroquois League which operated ca. 1300-1750. Given the overwhelming importance of kinship for all political organization, we are on fairly safe ground in assuming that the use of kinship-speak constituted a tipping-point of very old standing. How old, we have no way of knowing. Note that, contrary to the first tipping point, which springs from a material factor, namely that the end of the Pleistocene ice age brought a warmer climate conducive to the emergence of edible megafauna, this tipping point is brought on by social organization itself.

A third tipping-point is suggested by recent archaeological research, and concerns the process of sedentarization. The selection processes that drove this was certainly habitat density, which led to increased competition between like units and also to cooperation amongst them. First, consider the emergence of villages. The earliest known cropped up in Anatolia some 7000 years ago, and were not directly tied to agriculture. However, those that emerged in Sumer around 3500 BC were. For our purposes, the key thing to note is that there was more than one. Thus a pattern was initiated where culturally similar but politically distinct entities emerged in the same place. Renfrew and Cherry (1988) have called these peer-group polities. These

polities interacted on a regular basis, from territorially stable positions. The result was institutionalized patterns of interaction, which we may see as the first embryonic diplomatic patterns. They have been studied first and foremost for their state-building results; Sumerian polities were united under a King already around BC 2900.

The Neolithic period is better understood than earlier periods because it overlapped with human memory in a sufficient degree to leave accounts in early writing, and because it left more material remnants. One example of these are the stone megastructures of what we now call Northern Europe, which have been interpreted as constituting a second variant of this third tipping point. Some of these monuments have been read as representing the graveyards of different polities, gathered in one place, and serving not only as focal points for gatherings of the tribes, but also as material constitutive elements of what we may see as early diplomatic systems. For example, Renfrew (2007) interprets Stonehenge in this way. Noting that there was too much rainfall in Northern Europe for conditions to allow the kind of mud-hut based villages that were in evidence in places like Sumer and further south in Europe, he postulates that the emerging sedentary culture needed a focus, and that 'the great henges would have served as ceremonial centres and perhaps also as pilgrimage centres for their parent communities […] the end product was the emergence of a coherent larger community where none was before' (Renfrew 2007: 155-6).

If Renfrew is right, then there is a line to be drawn from the constitution of diplomatic relations centred on henges to the further rise of chiefs heading peer-group polities and on to these chiefs vying for supremacy in early state building processes that resemble those found in Sumer. Examples include not only British kingdoms, but also

Scandinavian ones and their offsprings, such as the Rus', arising around AD 800-1000 (Earle 1997, Neumann 2013b). What we may call the Viking world evolved stable patterns of diplomatic relations in the area stretching from Britain in the West to Rus' in the east, as well as diplomatic contact with dominating polities further south, such as the Byzantine empire.

Byzantium, with its patterned diplomatic relations with surrounding polities, was late to the ball, however, for the large-scale diplomatic relations between culturally distinct polities in evidence here was spearheaded in the area where Sumer was based, the East Mediterranean. Sumer's successor polity, Akkad, had regular diplomatic contacts with other Kingdoms already in the third millennium BC, and eventually became a founder member of the first diplomatic system, the second-millennium BC Amarna system, consisting of polities such as Babylonia, Egypt and Hatti, whose lingua franca was indeed Akkadian (Cohen and Westbrook 2000). The emergence of this first large-scale diplomatic system clearly constitutes a fourth tipping-point in the evolutionary history of diplomacy, driven by increased social complexity. Note that Greece, which is so often seen as the cradle of Western civilization and of diplomacy both, constitute an example of the third tipping-point, culturally similar peer-group polities interacting, at a time (the fourth century BC) when the fourth tipping point had been in evidence elsewhere for 1500 years or so. Where diplomacy is concerned, the Greek *poleis* are an example of evolutionary re-emergence; it is not a tipping-point. The same would be the case for the already mentioned Iroquois diplomatic system in Turtle Island (ca. AD 1300-1750; see Neumann 2011).

A fifth tipping-point was reached as social interaction between large-scale polities intensified, and the need for more permanent exchanges than that afforded by messengers made itself felt. Once again, increased social complexity and more advanced signaling characterize the process. The answer was to base exchanges not only on messengers, but also on letting people who were sedentary within one polity handle relations with other polities on a running basis. There are early examples on this, for example traders within the Amarna system, the institution of the *proximos* in ancient Greece, which involved citizens of one *polis* who were particularly close to some other Greek *polis*, and also in Africa. From the fourth century AD, different branches of Christiandom evolved the institution of *apocrisiarii,* whereby some representative of the Catholic Church was resident in Byzantium. The first permanent, reciprocal and so fully-fledged example of this institution, which came to be known precisely as permanent diplomacy, hails from the fourteenth-century Italian city-state system (Neumann 2011). After centuries of wrangling about reciprocity, permanent diplomacy went on to become a global phenomenon in the twentieth century.

By then, a sixth tipping-point was already well in the making, driven by increased social complexity but also by technological innovation in the area of communication, particularly in infrastructure. We know it as internationalism. Its pre-history reached back to the institution of the gathering of the tribes, which we touched on already in our discussion of Stonehenge. A more elaborate form of this institution took the form of the irregular church meetings of the Catholic Church from the fourth century onwards and the *kurultais* that were called to choose successor rulers in the Turko-Mongol tradition of Eurasian steppe politics. The emergence of 'international' (that is, with states as members) organizations such as the Central Commission for the

Navigation on the Rhine (1815) and the International Telegraph Union and International Postal Union during the second half of the nineteenth century brought permanence to what was soon to be called multinational diplomacy, just as permanence had been brought to bilateral diplomacy some centuries before. With the founding of the League of Nations in 1919, permanent multilateral diplomacy went global. The work of the thousands of international organizations in evidence today has increased the number of people doing diplomatic work enormously, and has lent to global diplomacy a much, much more socially dense quality than it had only a hundred years ago. Whereas the number of diplomats on the eve of the First World War could be counted in four-digit numbers, diplomats working for the state today are counted in six-digit numbers, and if we add international civil servants, activists in non-governmental organizations, consultants, spin doctors and so on, we probably reach a seven-digit number.

To sum up, the evolutionary history of diplomacy may be told by way of identifying six tipping points: the late Pleistocene political revolution 300.000 years ago; classificatory kinship as a template for regular cooperation (date unknown); regular and ritualized contacts between culturally similar small-scale polities (5.500 years ago); regular and ritualized contacts between culturally different large-scale polities (4.000 years ago); permanent bilateral diplomacy (five centuries ago) and permanent multilateral diplomacy (one century ago). This story is summed up in Table 1.

<Here Table 1>

What's ahead?

24

The nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century saw a tipping-point in the evolution of diplomacy as it went permanently multilateral, and the years since then have seen an enormous quantitative increase, as the number of practitioners have gone from a five-digit to a seven-digit number. In evolutionary terms, diplomacy, as an institution of human cooperation, is a great success.

If ask whether today's diplomatic practices are optimal for the development of further cooperation given ongoing changes in environment, then we may observe that today's diplomatic practices have primarily, but not exclusively, grown out of aristocratic European social institutions. Since the aristocracy was out-manuoeuvred by the bourgeoisie as the leading class more than two centuries ago, and Europe's century and a half long leading role in global politics ended about half a century ago, we may wonder whether the diplomatic institutions they spawned are not also being overtaken by other forms. There is certainly enough movement away from the stylized diplomacy of eighteenth century Europe to make this a legitimate question. On the other hand, the changes in state-based diplomacy, be that in the bilateral diplomacy of states or in the multilateral diplomacy of international organizations whose members are states, have been incremental, and nothing suggests that the dynamism of change has been so slow that these institutions will simply be thrown away as a new tipping point emerges.

As noted at the outset of this chapter, extant work on diplomacy tends to discuss change in the institution as a function of developments internal to it. However, diplomacy is embedded in everyday social life. One strength of an evolutionary approach is that it can clearly demonstrate this, by directing attention to how

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diplomacy's social and material environment sets in motion developments which lead to tipping points. So it is with possible future developments; their origins must be sought outside of the institution of diplomacy itself, in diplomacy's environment. There is little doubt that candidate number one is the shift away from a world centred around the states system, toward a globalized world, with globalization referring to the increase in global social density and the condensation of spatiality and temporality. Like its forerunner, internationalism, the selection process is characterized by technological innovation in the area of communication, particularly software infrastructure and so-called social media. The explosion in public diplomacy is a key development here. As a result, an unprecedented degree, what happens in one local site is imbricated in developments elsewhere. As flows of people, ideas, trade and services increase rapidly, the importance of boundaries between states changes. State discreteness is challenged, and with it, state agency. To put it differently, the environment for state action changes rapidly, and this cannot but have repercussions on a diplomacy whose major agents are state, for it puts the centrality of the state system to global politics in question, and raises the question of how states change as they try to optimize their role in the new environment.

There are two conventional answers to this question.[14] The first is that other, non-state agents threaten to overtake states. The second is that states keep on as before, with the one proviso that they delegate functions to other agents and become the principal agent of those other agents. In an evolutionary perspective, the first answer is wanting, for there is little or no evidence that the new environment fits other agents better than it does states. The second answer also comes up short, for in an evolutionary perspective, state delegation means reshuffling, and reshuffling has

recursive effects that will change the states that delegate. We must somehow account for all that, and I think the best way to do it is to grant the point that new agents become more important, and also the point that states seem to be able to harness most of the activity of these new agents for their own uses. What is about to happen, then, is that the former hierarchy of agents, with states firmly on top and with various kinds of non-state agents layered below them, is being condensed and hybridized. States retain their key status, but they become less like territorially bound entities that serve as containers for social life, and more like central nodes in networks of agents.

This has immediate repercussions for diplomacy, for it means that state agents may be found in other kinds of organizations. The posting of British and French diplomats to posts in ostensibly non-state development organizations dates back more than a decade. Non-governmental presence in Canadian and Norwegian negotiation teams emerged in the 1990s. Less formal use of seemingly free agents by key diplomatic agents is as old as institutionalized diplomacy itself. It also means that other organizations try to copy diplomatic organizational models for how to operate 'in the field'. Military attachés have done this for centuries. The 'expat' divisions of transnational companies are usually organized along lines first laid out by diplomats, and former diplomats are often employed by them. Non-governmental organizations specializing in development aid, humanitarian relief, peace and reconciliation work and so on similarly organize their expatriates on models lifted from diplomatic services. The new tipping- point, which is already well advanced, is what we may call the hybridization of diplomacy; state and non-state actors become more similar, they face similar cooperation problems as did other constellations of diplomatic agents before them, and they partake of shifting alliances. The central role of states will

probably not fade, but states will increasingly have to work *with* and *through* other

kinds of agents, rather than *on* them, as they usually did before. As always when a

new tipping point arises in social spheres, this is not totally new. In a social setting, as

the example of how right-hand driving conquered Europe bore out, a tipping-point is

something that is reached gradually. Britain and most of Asia still drives on the left

hand of the road. A tipping-point is not something that does away with previous

practices overnight. When looking back at the emergence of diplomacy with a hunch

that the next tipping-point is hybridization of agents, one spots plenty of forebodings.

Neither—and this is where the digital example of left-hand vs. right-hand driving no

longer more complex social stuff such as diplomacy—do new practices totally

eradicate old ones. The coming of hybridized diplomacy does not mean that a number

of time-hallowed diplomatic practices will automatically disappear.

We may now, finally, turn to the question of how diplomacy relates to the more

general question of human cooperation, as it is discussed in the introduction to this

volume. Messner, Guarín, and Haun write that:

> Although all the elements in the cooperation hexagon are important, we
>
> contend that four of them are necessary to create conditions conducive to
>
> reciprocity: trust, communication (a key mechanism to develop trust), the
>
> ability to determine people's reputation as trustworthy partners, and the
>
> perception that the interaction is fair. In addition to these four mechanisms, we
>
> can use enforcement (via punishment or reward) as a means to rein in
>
> uncooperative partners. And finally, these mechanisms that enable
>
> reciprocation are much more likely to emerge within groups that are physically

similar or that share a common narrative—in other words, with those with which we share a we-identity (Messner, Guarín, and Haun 2013: 16).

When run up against the case of diplomacy, this certainly holds. Punishment is famously costly (war) or innefectual (sanctions, embargoes), as are rewards (development aid, intention agreements), but the logics are broadly the same as those we may identify for cooperation generally. As for the mechanisms concerned, while diplomacy is ubiquitous throughout human history, reciprocity was key to the formation of diplomatic systems such as the Sumer system, the Amarna system, the Iroquois system and the European post-Renaissance system. While scattered cases of diplomacy based on symmetrical reciprocity may be observed elsewhere—Sverdrup-Thygeson (2011) looks at the Chinese case and highlights relations with the Liao in the ninth century and the relations with the Russian empire in the seventeenth, and we could add relations with the Hsiung-nu during the last two centuries before our era— they were not permanent enough to take root. While power asymmetries between Europe and the rest of the world over the last two hundred years are of course absolutely central to understand how European practices became the major source for today's global diplomacy, and examples of how European states drew on power asymmetries to ram through diplomatic rules and treaties are rife, the fact that there already existed a European system based on reciprocity that could be exported globally is, in the light of the introduction to this book, also a factor in understanding why it is that other origins have left so few marks on current diplomatic practices (Neumann 2012). A particularly illuminating example is the emergence of permanent representation, where powers such as the Ottoman Empire and China failed to reciprocate by not sending permanent representatives to European powers exactly

because this would be a sign of accepting these powers on an equal basis, and so give up on the claim to superiority. As late as twenty years ago, the importance of reciprocity was perhaps most easily observed in the quid pro quo practices of declaring foreign diplomats as personae non grata. Interestingly, since then, there has been a movement away from host countries expelling people, towards a practice where states which expect that the host country are about to take such action voluntarily send the diplomats involved back. In our perspective, such anticipation must be interpreted as yet another victory for cooperation, because it forestalls overt quarrels.

The factors that create an institution are not necessarily the same as those that uphold it, however. When discussing the future of diplomacy, the relevant thing is not how trust, communication, the ability to determine people's reputation as trustworthy partners, and the perception that the interaction is fair played out in previous centuries, but rather what is the current state of play. Trust and communication are fairly well established. So, as is evident in the existence of an increasingly thick diplomatic culture, is we-feeling. To give but one example, Wille (2013) recently reported that, when asked why he taught diplomatic skills to young Eastern European diplomats that his own country would one day meet in negotiations, their German instructor answered that the higher the common understanding of the rules of the game, the easier the negotiations, and the higher the chance of getting to yes.

If present-day diplomacy scores highly on all these, we are still left with a major problem. In a situation where establish and rising powers are in the middle of a prolonged face-off, the key problem is fairness. Emerging powers such as Brazil,

China, and India complain that they are not given their due either in institutionalised terms or in terms of practices. This is obviously correct. To take a key example, there is no reason whatsoever why the country that is already a major player in Asia and is about to become the most populous on earth, India, does not have a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. A good, if weaker, case may be made for Brazil. Further down the list, we find Nigeria. Conversely, there is no reason why Britain and France hang onto forty per cent of the permanent seats, instead of the EU having one of, say, seven seats. By the same token, it is not immediately clear why G7 decided intermittently to include Russia, a weak and probably fading power, while neglecting China. In a key arena of cooperation like global warming, rising powers rightly point out that established powers became established by burning off a lot of non-renewable resources, and that this contributed to us landing where we are. Established powers rightly point out that, given where we are, things will certainly deteriorate if rising powers follow suit. Once again, the major stumbling block to cooperation in this area is fairness.

At certain historical junctures, diplomacy has been singled out as the root cause of the world's ills. After the First World War, many liberals pointed to secret diplomacy as the major cause for why war broke out. Revolutionary regimes from France via Russia to Iran have blamed diplomacy for why the world order was like it was. Today, we sometimes hear that diplomacy is not so much evil as it is out of touch with key issues that call for more cooperation. I would argue that all these views are mistaken. As I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter, diplomacy is a hard-won triumph of the species. In an evolutionary perspective, it is the recursive result, and not the cause, of cooperation between human polities. It has intensified from small-

scale to large-scale, from intermittent to permanent, from bilateral to multilateral. Viewed closer up, all kinds of specific changes in diplomatic practices are in the making, with the articulation of sundry non-state agents to state agents being perhaps foremost amongst them. A new tipping-point is on its way. Since evolutionary explanations are by definition functionalist and long-term, it makes little sense to apply an evolutionary perspective to small-scale changes. Suffice it to say, therefore, that it would be highly detrimental for the future of human cooperation to throw away the hard-won institution of diplomacy, for it would do no more than face us with the task of building something similar all over again.

Notes:

1 I should like to thank Józef Bátora, Corneliu Bjola, Daniel Cadier, Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Håkon Glørstad, Silke Weinlich and Ole Jacob Sending for comments on earlier drafts.

2 I will return to the one exception, namely the work by Ragnar Numelin.

3 'The regulation of social interactions by group-level institutions plays no less a role than altruistic individual motives in understanding how this cooperative species came to be. Institutions affect the rewards and penalties associated with particular behaviors, often favoring the adoption of cooperative actions over others, so that even the self-regarding are often induced to act in the interest of the group' (Bowles and Gintis 2011: 5). Where political theory is concerned, it is interesting to note (but not necessarily damning to Hobbes, since he is operating at the analytical plane) that these findings rather puncture Hobbes' thought experiment of the social contract, which turned on humans giving up their freedom and uniting under a leader. Historically, it was the other way around; cooperation evolved exactly to take leaders down some

notches, and not to exalt them. Exaltation came later, with large-scale polities. On the other hand, Rousseau's thought experiment of the stag hunt overlaps with an absolutely essential evolutionary moment, for it is groups that are able to cooperate in bringing down big game and megafauna that gain an evolutionary edge by dint of which they crowd out less socially advanced groups.

4 '[…] during the Late Pleistocene [126.000 BC – 12.000 BC] a far greater fraction of hunter-gatherers than today lived in large, partially sedentary villages in the relatively densely populated resource-rich coastal and riverine environments from which they were subsequently expelled by Holocene farmers' (Bowles and Gintis 2011: 95).

5 Pointing to the frequent need for galvanizing against natural disasters, however, Bowles and Gintis do not see war as a necessary driver of social evolution, as did Darwin.

6 Service (1975: 41) notes a line running from Darwin via Spencer and Bagehot to sociologists such as Ludwig Gumplowicz, Franz Oppenheimer, Albion Small and Lester Ward.

7 In a Kantian moment some pages later, he adds hospitality: '[I]ntersocietal relations are typically maintained by reciprocal exchanges of presents, people (in marriage), and hospitality. And if two groups can exchange local specialties that the other lacks, amiable relations are better assured' (Service 1975: 100).

8 Numelin also published a later and more detailed monograph about Australia and Oceania, as well as books in his native Swedish and article in both languages, but they add little to his doctoral work.

9 Numelin (1950: 176) stresses its relative rareness in South America, though.

10 Numelin (1950: 213) also notes the Maasai habit of letting women from opposite parties in peace negotiations suckle one another's unweaned children.

11 Mention should be made here of Hendrik Spruyt's (1994a; 1994b: 188) work on the states system, which did bring the idea of punctuated equilibria to the study of IR. However, as Bátora and Hynek (forthcoming) argue in a forthcoming book, 'since diplomacy is not seen [by Spruyt] as a specific institution, but rather as a centralized gatekeeping tool of newly formed political units, it cannot be linked to the discussion of social evolutionary change per se. This can be seen when Spruyt tackles adaptation to environmental demands in the context of evolving units in the international system but never in the context of diplomacy'. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) talk about 'turning points' in the life cycle of a norm when enough states join its institutionalized form; this is an agency-focused use which is very different from an evolutionary take.

12 Sometimes, only a metaphorical echo remains. Where humans are concerned, the expression prick up your ears would be an example of this.

13 The use of 'verbal' here may not be correct, for we do not know when language emerged, or even if it emerged suddenly or gradually. Most guesses places the event in the BC 100.000-70.000 range. One unresolved tension is the relationship between the actuality of big-game hunting, which demands advanced signaling, and the emergence of language.

14 This paragraph summarizes Neumann and Sending 2010.

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