

## Democratic Diplomacy: How Far Feasible?

DIPLOMACY generally means management of the relations between two independent states by process of negotiation. The professional diplomat is the servant of the sovereign authority in his own country. In a democratic country that sovereign authority is represented by the majority in the Parliament and by the government. The 'sovereign people' in a democracy only exercise their sovereignty during a general election and thereafter for a certain period only. The majority at the previous general election actually govern. Even their governance is indirect. Thus to a certain extent representative government is based upon a fiction; yet on the whole it is the fairest and most convenient fiction that the brain of man has yet been able to devise.

The diplomatic service is supposed to possess no politics. Its duty is to place its experience at the disposal of the government in power, to tender advice. Even if that advice is ignored by the minister it is the duty and function of the diplomat to execute his (minister's) instructions without question. In democratic countries usually there is an implicit contract between the government and the civil service. The latter is expected to be loyal to all constitutional governments irrespective of party.

However, there is confusion of thought and action because of misconception about 'policy' and 'negotiation'. While 'policy' is legitimately under the control of the public, 'negotiation' is not. The anomalies created by such confusion can be illustrated by the gulf opened between the

theories of president Wilson and his actions. Wilson was the prophet of 'open diplomacy'. In 1918 he declared that in future there should be 'open covenants of peace openly arrived at, after which there should be "no private international understanding of any kind." Within a year after this announcement Wilson himself was called upon to negotiate one of the most important covenants, namely the Treaty of Versailles. This treaty was an open covenant yet it was not "openly arrived at." Germany, her allies, all minor powers and press were kept in the dark about the negotiations. President Wilson shut himself in his own study with Lloyd George and Clemenceau and an American marine with fixed bayonet marched up and down to prevent the intrusion of all experts, diplomats or plenipotentiaries. This proved that the strongest advocate of 'open diplomacy' found that the open negotiation was totally unworkable.

Until 1914 it was not generally realised that the control of foreign policy was not really vested in the elected representatives of the people. The terms of the Franco-Russian alliance were not known either to the Russian or the French peoples.

On realising that they had in this manner been committed without their consent, the democracies of the world determined

that this should not happen again. Two essential steps were taken to prevent a recurrence of such situation. The first measure was a provision inserted as article 18 in the covenant of the League of Nations ('every treaty or international engagement entered into hereafter by any member of the League shall be forthwith registered with the secretariat and shall as soon as possible be published by it. No such treaty or international engagement shall be binding until so registered'). The second was definite alteration of the former theory and practice of "ratification".

Although these provisions do in fact constitute a tremendous safeguard against secret treaties of policies and although they represent the veritable buttress of democratic control, the present system cannot in any sense be regarded as a final solution. It is in fact highly inconvenient and inefficient. It is clear that the whole process of negotiation will be much encumbered if the negotiator on each side is totally unable to guarantee that what he gives or takes will be accepted by the sovereign authority in his own country. The art of negotiation is severely hampered when one powerful negotiator demands concessions from his fellow negotiators without being in a position to guarantee that his own promises will similarly be fulfilled.

Every system of government has its peculiar virtues and its peculiar faults. One of the great achievements of democratic diplomacy is to have abolished the pernicious system of secret treaties. At the same time it has introduced other complications which not only hamper the art of negotiation but also the amity and stability of international relations.

by ABMS Zahur

have been published, debated in parliament and discussed in the press. The ordinary elector is not merely ignorant, lazy and forgetful regarding the international commitments for which he has himself assumed responsibility, but he does not apply to the general theory of foreign affairs that thought and intelligence which he devotes to domestic matters. More dangerous even than popular ignorance are certain forms of popular knowledge. The professional diplomat is very chary of basing generalisations upon hastily observed phenomena. The elector shows no such hesitation.

The third danger is the danger of delay. The democratic decision is generally more sensible and more stable than the somnambulist certainties of a dictator. Inordinate delay, however, made in ascertaining public opinion is often fatal to efficient policy or negotiation. The fourth danger is the danger of imprecision. The vagueness and fluidity of democratic policy is one of the most salient vices. It often occurs that democratic governments by couching their statements of policy in vague or ambiguous language invite the very dangers which they wish to prevent.

New problems have also arisen in regard to diplomatic practice. The first problem is publicity. In the dictatorial states the con-

trolled press is used as a vehicle of propaganda. In democratic countries the aim is to employ it for purpose of information and education. Yet a satisfactory adjustment between the needs and rights of a popular press and the requirements of discretion has yet to be found. However, the advantages of a free press are immeasurably greater than its disadvantages. A more dangerous innovation in diplomatic practice is the tendency of democratic countries to allow their politicians to take a personal part in negotiation. It is true that there are moments when it is essential that the Prime Minister or the Foreign Minister should attend important conferences. Yet repeated personal visits often lead to misunderstandings, and create confusion.

Throughout the world some of the main problems remain in theory and practice which diplomacy under a democratic system has yet to solve. It is only by long processes of trial and error that we can hope to come to some universally acceptable principle. However, there are certain principles of adjustment which may be well to bear in mind. Such principles as (a) to make the electorate to understand the difference between policy and negotiation, (b) to fortify the professional side of diplomacy and to enlarge its basis, and (c) to educate the public in regard to those principles of good sense and experience have been evolved by generations of gifted and reasonable persons.

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Dr. Rubaiul Murshed

All health information to keep you up to date

We hope that you and your family never face any medical crisis. However, it is important that you know what to do when crisis comes. We hope our health tips will provide some assistance to you.

### Always children first

#### No self-medication of babies with antibiotics, please!

There has been unnecessary use of antibiotics in recent years. The advancement in the knowledge and use of fluid and electrolyte therapy has improved the prognosis of diarrhoea cases in general. The importance of breast feeding which was known for the prevention of diarrhoea, has now been affirmed on scientific grounds. Most cases of diarrhoea are due to viruses and antibiotics are not required. Many mothers like to self-medicate their small babies with medicines containing antibiotics. Antibiotics should only be given on the advice of your doctor.

### Around the world

#### Dengue

The global prevalence of dengue has grown dramatically in recent decades. South East Asia and the Western Pacific are most seriously affected. Before 1970 only nine countries had experienced Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever (DHF) epidemics, a number which had increased more than fourfold by 1995. WHO currently estimates there may be 50 million cases of dengue infection worldwide every year.

#### Few statistics:

\* During epidemics of dengue, attack rates among susceptible are often 20-25 per cent, but may reach 80-90 per cent.

\* An estimated 500,000 cases of DHF require hospitalisation each year, of whom a very large proportion are children and roughly 5 per cent die.

\* Without proper treatment, DHF case fatality rates can exceed 20 per cent. With modern intensive supportive therapy, the mortality can be reduced to less than 1 per cent.

### Natural healing

#### Common cold

To take the chills out of your cold, fix yourself a traditional herbal remedy. Combine 30 gms of sliced fresh ginger, 1 broken-up cinnamon stick, 1 teaspoon coriander seeds, 3 whole cloves, 1 lemon slice and half a litre water. Simmer for 15 minutes and strain. Then drink a hot cupful every two hours.

### High cholesterol

All those who are on long-term treatment with cholesterol lowering drugs need to take vitamin supplements daily. This is because these drugs inhibit the absorption of vitamins. Studies have shown that drugs which act on the liver to prevent cholesterol formation, e.g. Clofibrate, may increase the risk of gall-stone formation. Therefore, a yearly sonography of the gall bladder will be helpful.

Tomorrow: Caring for your blood pressure, and other tips.

## Up the Social Ladder with the Cell-phone Set

Everyday items and modern gadgetry are giving West Africans the opportunity to enrich the English language. There are national variations of course. A Gemini News Service correspondent reports that cell-phones might bring Ghana's young lovers together quicker, but many Nigerians find them a liability in their newly rich lives.

by Cameron Duodu

ENGLISH-SPEAKING West Africa is notorious for seizing hold of the language that is Britain's gift to the world and spicing it with a regional flavour.

Where else but in Nigeria could a traffic jam be named a 'go-slow'?

Or a hold-all-all bag be called 'Ghana-must go!' perhaps as an unkind reminder of the expulsion of Ghanaians from Nigeria in 1982.

Most recent imports of Mercedes Benz cars are not called either a 200 or 300 series, as is done elsewhere, but a 'V-boot' to denote the shape of its rear.

Ghana itself is not far behind. There, some Mercedes models are known as the 'Smiling Benz'. And the more modest models are called the 'Baby Benz'.

This is kinder by far than the name given to another German import much favoured by young civil servants promoted to senior grades in the late 1950s and early 60s: the ubiquitous Volkswagen Beetle. Because the Beetle was a rear-engine model with a fragile front that made the driver vulnerable in accidents, Ghanaians tongue, sure enough, gave it their own somewhat dubious name: the 'Slayer-of-young-men'.

Of late, the instrument that has come in for much mirth-making among Ghanaians is the mobile telephone, a favourite

ment attempts to open up the mobile phone industry. Nitel, the state telecommunications corporation, they say, is resisting by making it difficult to connect cell-phones to local landlines, over which it has the monopoly. In any case, Nitel's equipment is so old and badly-maintained that it unintentionally sabotages connections.

The advent of electronic mail could have been a godsend to those who can afford a computer, modem and Internet connection. But even here, West African state telephone companies use their monopoly power to charge Internet servers extra-high prices, which the servers in turn pass on to their customers.

As a result, owning an e-mail address has become a status symbol for the nouveaux-riches. The following conversation was heard outside a nightclub in Accra:

"I am relying on you to relay the information to me as soon as you get it, okay?"

"Oh, you don't worry! As soon as I get it, I shall dot.com you!" (that is, send you an email).

All that is needed now is for cell-phones to come to Ghana equipped with e-mail ability. Then, perhaps friend will tell friend: 'I shall dot.com you with my on-the-way.'

And it will not sound a tiny bit odd.

TOM & JERRY

