

Reviews

GUERRILLA DIPLOMACY

Rethinking International Relations

Daryl Copeland

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Daryl Copeland sets out a very ambitious and personal agenda in this book, namely, to rethink international relations. For the most part, Copeland, a seasoned Canadian foreign service officer with some 30 years of experience, succeeds in making the case that diplomacy—dialogue or “talking”—needs to be “reimagined and linked integrally to development...and should displace defense at the center of international policy and global relations” (xii). This will not come as news to a new generation of military leadership, which is acutely aware of the realities of nation-building in Iraq and Afghanistan and has accepted the inherent limitations of blunt force or hard power.

However, what sets Copeland’s analysis apart from other sweeping attempts to reconceptualize contemporary international relations is that his is the first to highlight the instrument of diplomacy, which is frequently ignored in the academic study of international relations. In particular, he focuses on the potential of science diplomacy, as a form of soft power, to bring about greater development and thus reduce the levels of inequality between and among states that so often lead to military conflict. Surprisingly, he gives this interesting thesis rather short shrift, discussing it in two relatively

brief chapters that follow a five-chapter exegesis of the implications of the end of the Cold War and the acceleration of globalization.

Copeland finds his voice in chapters 9-12, in which he develops the argument that foreign ministries “as knowledge-rich information producers” have a “catalytic” role to play in helping governments to manage globalization. He contends that for there to be a renaissance of foreign ministries and, by definition, of diplomacy, there must also be a shift away from the classic diplomacy of concentrating resources on privileged state-to-state contacts to one that values branding, advocacy, lobbying, and partnership-building. Clearly inspired by Joseph Nye’s writings on soft power and the creation of willing followers, Copeland sensibly calls for foreign ministries and their diplomats to take the lead in facilitating two-way communication, transparency, cooperation, respect, and agreement on shared goals: “the centerpieces of public diplomacy are empathy and dialogue, the very antitheses of coercive power” (167). Dismissing what he sees as anachronistic diplomacy for the 21st century (the ongoing preference for Gucci rather than denim within foreign ministries) and—somewhat ironically—echoing the US military’s embrace of “strategic communication,” Copeland calls for an emphasis on the “human dimension” in international relations—from protocol to persuasion, from *démarche* to dialogue.

In essence, this book seeks to rethink the role of foreign ministries in order to forestall their further marginalization in international relations. This becomes evident in Copeland’s penultimate chapter, in which he proposes the creation of so-called “guerrilla diplomats,” who would function on the far edge of the continuum of public diplomacy. These officers would not be involved in traditional “public” diplomatic activities such as cultural diplomacy and media relations; rather, they would be defined by, for example, their agility, cultural awareness, linguistic and communication skills, affinity for collaboration and teamwork, and “the capacity, enhanced by [science and technology], to act with *souplesse*” (207). Copeland suggests that these personal qualities are those of the “guerrilla” who blends into the local environment. As he puts it, “doing things by the book is not among the guerrilla diplomat’s favoured tactics: awaiting instructions, following orders, and referring to operating manuals rarely suffice in the sorts of fast-paced, high risk environments best suited to [guerrilla diplomacy]” (208).

But here one gets the whiff of a “boy’s or girl’s own adventure”—a romantic journey into the land of the Other. Except that we are not referring to a lone world adventurer or evangelist or exuberant do-gooder, we are talking about the “guerrilla diplomat” as a representative of a state. And while the guerrilla

diplomat may think that he or she is dealing with a situation with a certain amount of “souplesse”—living in the moment, as it were, with local tribal leaders—this “souplesse” may actually be at variance with the spirit or letter of a country’s policy. The result could be not only potential embarrassment for the local embassy to which the guerrilla diplomat is attached (how will this reflect on the ambassador’s ability to control his or her staff?) but also a certain amount of confusion (and tension) in bilateral relations with the host government. Copeland wants to demilitarize foreign policy and reassert the positive influence of dialogue and development through the combined efforts of aid agencies and foreign ministries. Fair enough. But this will not happen if more diplomats function like intelligence officers behind the lines, though he does not suggest that this new breed of diplomats should be covert and deniable. It is precisely here at the far end of the continuum of public diplomacy that the theory of guerrilla diplomacy crashes headlong into the reality of diplomacy as practiced in any century.

Nevertheless, Copeland is certainly right to call for a fundamental rethinking of the values and instruments of diplomacy if this honourable profession is to be saved from what James Eayrs famously referred to as its “deliquescence” and to return from the margins of international relations to its centre.

‘ This is a highly readable and entertaining book and will be appreciated by undergraduate and graduate students alike. Practitioners may have more than quibbles with Copeland’s solutions to the marginalization of diplomacy, but they are unlikely to disagree fundamentally with his diagnosis.

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