

THE PRESENCE AND ESSENCE OF BIO-DIPLOMACY

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Diplomacy is the art of persuasion. Is persuasion really necessary to protect bios? It would seem logical that everyone should feel it natural to protect and maintain life around us, because every threat against life is ultimately a threat against humanity itself. But we are not logical when it comes to our immediate desires, the consequences of which we generally prefer to avoid thinking about. We see examples all around us; in the pollution of nature, of politics, of economic affairs.

The Global Village has created instant communications but not the Global Community of which we dreamed. On the contrary, every community seems to feel an urge to proclaim its own existence by disclaiming that of its neighbour's. The natural feelings of co-operation and friendship between neighbours are easily destroyed by centralised demands for loyalty to ethnic beliefs and groups, which create suspicion, distrust, fear and hatred among individuals who have long lived together in peace.

How can the international community prevent destruction of life and property? For 30 years, the United Nations has been used for peace-keeping operations which come into effect when peace, or a cease-fire, is already established between fighting parties. Now the discussion is focusing on peace-making, that is, enforcing peace against the wishes of the fighting parties in order to protect the civilian population. This is possible in smaller conflicts, for example against local bands in Somalia, but what happens when the United Nations' forces withdraw, without having been able to impose a lasting peace in the area? The outside world prefers to forget that conflict, and attention is then focused on another one, like that which is now destroying Rwanda. However, most conflicts get very little attention or international assistance, especially long-lasting ones like those in Angola and Mozambique which seem very little influenced by outside interference.

Dag Hammarskjöld, Secretary-General of the United Nations in the 1950s, dreamed of the establishment of a permanent United Nations force that could be used to make peace, and to keep peace, in conflicts all over the world. His great problem, in the conflict in Katanga, Africa, where he lost his life, was: how much force can a peace-maker use without losing his credibility as an instrument of peace? This problem is still with us today. If the risks and the costs are considered to be too great, governments tend to avoid sending troops and spending money on issues not of direct concern to them. Humanitarian intervention is one thing, but intervention by an international police force is quite another.

War is always proof of the failure of diplomacy. The conflict must be buried as soon as possible by means of preventive diplomacy. This kind of diplomacy is a priority within the European Security Conference, and also the core of the so-called Balladur Plan with regard to Eastern Europe. Parties with interests that could develop into a conflict should sit down to sort out their differences, with or without the help of a third party. Here, the art of persuasion is a necessity. The aim of all persuasion is to make the parties understand that the profits of the deal are larger than the losses.

The art of diplomacy also includes ways and means of saving face. A face-saving device may create the last chance to accept a difficult compromise. Losing face closes the door and invites violence, whereas saving face opens the door to future co-operation.

Form and content are linked in diplomacy - as they are in bios. Form is the visual presence of bios, content is the invisible essence of bios. If they are not in harmony with each other, bios is threatened. The aim of diplomacy is to find, and to preserve, the harmonious interdependence of essence and presence.

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