

## **What is e-Diplomacy?**

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## *The Puzzle of e-Diplomacy*<sup>1</sup>

Despite the significant changes in communication and transportation that globalization has brought to the world, the structure of international politics and diplomacy has, in many ways, remained unchanged. Today's leaders and diplomats travel the globe to meet personally with friends and adversaries just as their counterparts in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries did. Indeed the stasis of diplomacy arguably goes back to antiquity<sup>2</sup> and has changed only on the margins. Peculiarly, teleconferencing and internet communication technologies (ICTs) have fundamentally changed the way that business and other types of social interaction are conducted,<sup>3</sup> yet the basic process of negotiating while looking the other in the eye continues to dominate diplomacy efforts, both bilaterally and multilaterally. With the advent of these new communication tools, some have questioned whether these tête-à-têtes are necessary. Consider the recent United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. Political pundits astutely observed the irony in negotiators traveling thousands of miles in high-emissions aircraft in order to discuss how best to reduce overall emissions. Similar criticisms have been levied at other multilateral conferences, such as the G-20 Summit. Critics of the 2010 Toronto conference asked whether it was wise for statesmen and women to engage in costly extravagant meetings at a time of global recession.<sup>4</sup> These concerns are important and go

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<sup>1</sup> There is little consensus on how to refer to the concept of "e-Diplomacy" or even how to spell it. I will use e-diplomacy/e-Diplomacy throughout and note here that my usage is synonymous with what is sometimes referred to as "digital diplomacy" (Dizard 2001).

<sup>2</sup> There is evidence to suggest that diplomacy and diplomatic practices go back to tribal practices, predating European antiquity as well as ancient Asian civilizations. See Bjola and Kornprobst 2013; Nicolson 1957.

<sup>3</sup> Denstadli, Julsrud, and Hjorthol 2012.

<sup>4</sup> "The G20 Summit: A Billion-Dollar Waste of Time," Macleans Online, June 17.

beyond partisan rankle. They are indicative of an important theoretical puzzle: why has diplomacy not been affected by the technological revolution?

One answer is that it actually has. While perhaps not affecting a core aspect of traditional diplomacy - the personal meeting - technology has affected the ways in which foreign ministries and departments of state do business. A survey of OECD countries foreign ministries, public diplomacy scholarship, and popular press and media suggest that e-diplomacy is not only a cottage industry of academic study but a strategy that states take seriously, often at considerable cost and attention. The United States, for instance, as of September 2012, had over 150 full-time staff members “working in 25 different ediplomacy nodes at Headquarters,” with over 900 individuals using ediplomacy at U.S. missions abroad.<sup>5</sup> Other countries, diverse in terms of power, have followed suit, with the United Kingdom, Russia, Serbia, Montenegro, and China all embracing some form of e-diplomacy strategy, typically including the use of the social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.<sup>6</sup> According to press reports, around two-thirds of the 193 United Nations member states have Twitter accounts (though usage of those accounts varies considerably).<sup>7</sup>

While it would be easy to dismiss such activities as a particularly thin version of diplomacy – forms of marketing or epiphenomenal activities to the core processes of international politics – recent political events and scandals, such as the Benghazi embassy attack and Edward Snowden leaks, suggest a more prominent and central role for ICTs in politics. Further, as analysts of e-diplomacy have pointed out, ICTs, if nothing else, have

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<sup>5</sup> Hanson 2012.

<sup>6</sup> DiPLO 2010. Economist: <http://www.economist.com/node/21563284>

<sup>7</sup> *Washington Post*, July 26.

facilitated communication between foreign ministries and diplomats in the field as well as communication between foreign ministries and local populations.<sup>8</sup> One of the insights from the 1998 East Africa US embassies attacks was the lack of effective communication channels within the State department.<sup>9</sup> Similarly 9/11 highlighted the need for the diplomatic and intelligence communities to have access to each other, and pooled data, in order to perform effectively.<sup>10</sup> The benefits of constructing ICTs to aid in this type of information sharing was seen recently in the Boston marathon bombings. During the attack, the earliest information about the incident was being shared via social media 12 minutes before it was reported by major news organizations.<sup>11</sup> Today the State department maintains over 70 “communities” of information sharing, typically interagency in nature, that are used to provide a platform for analysis for policymakers at home and diplomats on the ground.

The existence of these activities and use of ICTs by foreign ministries raises deep theoretical questions. Are these examples of using ICTs by government tantamount to a new form of diplomacy? Or, alternately, are they simply moving existing processes online, with the fundamental meaning and significance of diplomacy remaining unchanged? Secretary of State John Kerry seems to share this view, having argued in May 2013 that “[t]he term digital diplomacy is almost redundant – it’s just diplomacy, period.”<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, even if he is right, what do technologies such as the Facebook, Twitter, and secure networking interfaces *mean* for diplomacy, if anything? This paper

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<sup>8</sup> Hanson 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Hanson 2012, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Department of Homeland Security.

<sup>12</sup> Kerry 2013.

will argue that these questions can only be assessed by examining the nature of diplomacy itself. Whether or not the tools and technologies of diplomacy indicate transformation or have the potential to transform diplomacy depends first and foremost on what diplomacy is. What *is* e-diplomacy? Put another way, it is difficult to adjudicate whether Kerry is right or wrong and understand how e-diplomacy differs from traditional diplomacy without first examining what diplomacy, and diplomatic activity, is fundamentally about.

This paper will build upon recent work that views diplomacy broadly as, among other things, a form of change management in the international system. Change is conceptualized here in two basic forms, top-down exogenous shocks and bottom-up incremental shifting. Diplomacy helps to manage both sources of change, though there is variation in process and tool effectiveness depending on the type of change that states are actively managing. e-Diplomacy is defined as a strategy of managing change through digital tools and virtual collaboration. I argue below that the tools of this collaboration, specifically ICTs and online communities, are most valuable for bottom-up incremental shifting, though under certain conditions can be helpful for exogenous shocks as well. Contrarily, traditional diplomacy, specifically face-to-face interpersonal meetings, are most valuable for managing change that occurs through exogenous shock, typically in crisis situations, though can also be helpful for incremental change under certain conditions. I base my argument in insights from social psychology and practice theory, which present conditions for change as well as conditions for when change management will be most successful. In creating this argument I hope to add to an existing and useful debate on the nature of diplomacy and e-varieties thereof, but from a different angle. As

will be discussed below, the existing literature on e-diplomacy has tended to view its activities as the realm of public diplomacy. This is a welcomed move but it has overshadowed other uses of ICTs in diplomacy. Put simply, to reduce e-diplomacy to public diplomacy is to miss much of the power and capacity that ICTs provide.

In what follows I briefly review arguments regarding the nature of diplomacy and suggest that e-diplomacy has typically been understood as a form of public diplomacy. I problematize this characterization by turning to practice theory and examining sources of change that occur in the international system. I then develop conditions under which traditional diplomacy, the personal face-to-face meetings that have tended to dominate diplomatic activity through the ages, and e-diplomacy the use of digital tools and virtual collaboration to further state interests, will be most useful in managing particular types of change. I conclude by suggesting what the analysis in this paper might mean for the study of diplomacy and, in particular, predictive theory.

### *The Renaissance of Diplomacy and e-Varieties*

#### Diplomacy in Practice (and Theory)

Diplomacy has traditionally been dismissed in structural accounts of international politics as irrelevant. Structural theories, at least since Waltz, typically overtly or subtly reduce diplomacy, and its inherent dynamics, to the distribution of power, understood typically as the distribution of capabilities.<sup>13</sup> This is the source of leverage for states and is, by and large, outside the scope of agency for any particular diplomat. Stronger states from a power perspective will have the advantage in a bargaining situation, whereas

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<sup>13</sup> Waltz 1979.

weaker states will typically be in a position where they must compromise. As such negotiating power and the strategies that diplomats pursue are endogenous to the structure of the system. While states may be able to send costly signals that convey their resolve, this is largely outside the realm of the activities of diplomats.<sup>14</sup> Even worse, because individuals have strong incentives to deceive, or at the very least cloak their true views and intentions, diplomacy is often dismissed as cheap talk at best and potentially quite dangerous. Indeed one need not look far for examples of diplomacy resulting in suboptimal outcomes for certain states. In addition, the actors of diplomacy, the diplomats, tend not to be imbued with the power of other important actors, such as statesmen. As Iver Neumann has argued, the diplomat is not a hero in IR theory.<sup>15</sup> Statesmen are understood as participating in the conveyor belt of power in international politics; the diplomat simply plays a supporting, perhaps even nonessential, role.

Further distancing diplomacy from mainstream IR is that the study of diplomacy has typically been undertaken by practitioners of diplomacy or historians of diplomatic practice. As Jönsson and Hall argue, this means that diplomacy has been relatively resistant to theory-building, since practitioners and historians take a different perspective, typically a practice-oriented view, on diplomacy.<sup>16</sup> IR scholars, on the other hand, have tended to be theory-focused, largely resistant to analyzing the discrete practices of diplomats for reasons mentioned above. The result of this is a relatively strict division, or dualism, between the theory and practice of diplomacy.<sup>17</sup> Prediction follows theory in

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<sup>14</sup> Fearon 1994; Fearon 1995; Schultz 2001.

<sup>15</sup> Neumann 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Jönsson and Hall 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Bjola 2013.

neo-positivist models; consequently it is difficult to make predictions about diplomatic practices.

Recently, however, this dualism and separation has been problematized and re-examined for a number of reasons. First, most generally, there has been growing recognition that structural theories alone have difficulty accounting for change in the international system.<sup>18</sup> The failure of IR to predict the end of the Cold War is often cited as a salient moment of recognition for IR theory,<sup>19</sup> which predictably led to re-examination of core assumptions and approaches of extant theory, including advances in neo-realism, neo-liberalism, and constructivism.<sup>20</sup> For instance, structure gained an intersubjective/ideational component to complement the existing material conceptualization.<sup>21</sup> In addition to looking at structural factors such as diminishing capabilities or a dwindling economy that may have contributed to particular outcomes, such as the end of the Cold War, scholars have complicated the picture by investigating the diplomatic practices that accompanied the change itself. In this particular example some have suggested that interpersonal meetings between Mikhail Gorbachev and his United States counterparts, first in Ronald Reagan and then in George H.W. Bush, clarified intentions and made the transition out of the Cold War a smooth one.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore in addition to revisiting core concepts such as structure, anarchy, and so forth, there has also been a Gestalt shift with respect to the aforementioned practices of international politics. Practice theory, which emerged out of the “practice turn in social

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<sup>18</sup> Though see: Wendt 1999.

<sup>19</sup> Bjola 2013, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Cornago 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Wendt 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Hall and Yarhi-Milo 2012; Holmes; Yarhi-Milo 2013.

theory,” including Goffman, Bourdieu, Giddens, Dewey, and so forth, seeks to bridge many of the dualist positions that obtained from constructivist approaches. International practices are defined as competent, usually patterned, performances.<sup>23</sup> For example, international practices arguably “close the traditional divide between ideas and matter.”<sup>24</sup> Practices are material in the sense that they are things that take place in and on the world, engaging the environment and structuring the environment at the same time, thus “changing ideas that individually or collectively people hold about [the world].”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, practices are both agential and structural at the same time, since practices, either individually or collectively, are an exercise in agency while constrained by structure in the form of standards of competence.<sup>26</sup>

The link between practice theory and diplomacy has been particularly fruitful in a number of different areas. First, practice theory reorients questions about diplomacy’s ontology away from understanding diplomacy through the lens of structural theories. Rather than viewing diplomacy as something epiphenomenal to power politics, examining diplomacy as a discrete practice illustrates its productivity in the international system. One of the important aspects of practice theory is the re-emphasis not just of the individual and humanism,<sup>27</sup> but the specific effects of the environment on the individual psychology at the body level. For instance, Ted Hopf combines practice theory with social neuroscience to examine the “logic of habit” at work in the international system.<sup>28</sup> Drawing upon the social theorists discussed above, Hopf argues that habit, rather than

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<sup>23</sup> Adler and Pouliot 2011.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 14; Holmes 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Adler and Pouliot 2011, 15.

<sup>27</sup> Constantinou 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Hopf 2010.

consequences or appropriateness, drives much of international practice. This is reflected in the brain, articulated by dual process theory, suggesting that much of social life and social interaction is unreflective, automatic, unconscious and habitual (system 1), whereas IR theory has focused on the analytical, conscious, rational, controlled, rule-based processing (system 2). Marcus Holmes has similarly illustrated how these unconscious processes are particularly important in face-to-face social interactions, such as interpersonal diplomacy, where individuals are able to unconsciously share information (even when do not want) about their intentions with others.<sup>29</sup> Keren Yarhi-Milo and Todd Hall have investigated the emotional cues that are transmitted in interpersonal meetings.<sup>30</sup> These works suggest growing room for social psychology, in the form of investigating actual international practices of diplomacy, in order to understand outcomes.

Examining diplomacy as practice also highlights the links between diplomacy as knowledge creation and maintenance. While rationalist models of diplomacy tend to look at diplomacy as an act of negotiation, with both sides vying for the better position in a zero-sum game, diplomacy from a practice perspective adopts a broader understanding. As Jovan Kurbalija has argued, diplomatic practice is in some sense *about* knowledge construction: information gathering, automating workflows and routines, information dissemination, and cultivating knowledge as a specific institutional resource.<sup>31</sup> Recent studies of the role of technology in diplomacy have tended to focus on the practice of information dissemination as type of knowledge management; this is viewed as a key

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<sup>29</sup> Holmes Forthcoming.

<sup>30</sup> Hall and Yarhi-Milo 2012; Yarhi-Milo 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Kurbalija 1999.

benefit of ICTs and other information systems: at least potentially, the efficient handling of vast amounts of information (and subsequently, and arguably, knowledge).<sup>32</sup> The advent of new web technologies included in the “Web 2.0,”<sup>33</sup> such as Facebook, Twitter, and so forth, have spurred much attention in how states are able to disseminate information of their choosing to particular constituencies and groups abroad. Thus the e-diplomacy professionals, referenced above, working in state departments and foreign ministries are ultimately engaged in the practice of politics through engagement with foreign others, understood as a form of “public diplomacy.”<sup>34</sup> e-Diplomacy as a form of public diplomacy has generated significant attention and criticism, with views ranging from technology allowing “people around the world to obtain ever more information through horizontal peer-to-peer networks rather than through the old vertical process by which information flowed down from the traditional sources of media authority”<sup>35</sup> to claiming that efforts in public diplomacy often are understood as little more than top-down dissemination of (counter)-propaganda.<sup>36</sup>

From a public diplomacy perspective then the goal of utilizing ICTs, or e-diplomacy strategies, is the production, dissemination, and maintenance of knowledge that helps to further state interests. The advent of these technologies has fundamentally changed the ways state can both engage and inform foreign audiences:

In the past a competent diplomat might have been able to reach hundreds and possibly thousands of individuals through external engagement. For a rare few, it might have been possible to

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<sup>32</sup> Hanson 2012.

<sup>33</sup> DiNucci 1999, 32.

<sup>34</sup> Cull 2013; Hayden 2013; Hayden 2012; Melissen 2007; Metzgar 2012; Snow and Taylor 2008.

<sup>35</sup> Cull 2013, 136.

<sup>36</sup> Hoffman 2002.

occasionally reach hundreds of thousands or millions of people via newspapers, radio and television, but that required going through gatekeepers.

Social media has changed this old dynamic. [The State Department] now effectively operates its own global media empire reaching more than eight million people directly through its 600 plus social media platforms. To provide a sense of the scale of this operation, this reach is as large as the paid subscriber base of the ten largest circulating daily newspapers in the United States, combined (although the impact and influence of the two platforms is likely quite different). This reach is still considerably smaller than Voice of America's estimated 187 million weekly audience, but [the State Department] has no editorial control over its content. After launching State's new Turkish Twitter feed Deputy Assistant Secretary of Public Affairs for Digital Strategy Victoria Esser put it this way: 'We are always seeking to expand the ways in which we can inform and engage... Social media offered us a way to do that in real time with much broader reach than we could ever hope for with traditional shoe leather public diplomacy.'<sup>37</sup>

One need not look far for examples of this type of information penetration. In 2009 President Obama released a YouTube video message to Persian-speaking peoples of world to mark the occasion of the Nowruz holiday. While the Iranian government did not necessarily appreciate the gesture, everyday Iranians did; according to Politico the video had more views in Tehran than San Francisco.<sup>38</sup>

This is not to suggest that e-diplomacy as a public diplomacy strategy is immune from critique. Criticisms of the use of social media in politics have included ineffectiveness and danger. For instance, Clay Shirky points out that social media in national politics is often viewed as an example of what Malcolm Gladwell calls "slacktivism."<sup>39</sup> It is much easier to join a cause on Facebook, for example, than to

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<sup>37</sup> Hanson 2012, 17.

<sup>38</sup> *Politico*.

<sup>39</sup> Shirky 2011.

produce more effective policy change through costly means. Applied to e-diplomacy as public diplomacy, this is an important critique. It is relatively easy for the United States to produce a video message to be shown to Iranians, and indeed the low cost and ease of production partially explain the strategy's attraction. But real change on the ground in Iran likely would require much more costly activities, and thus YouTube videos could be interpreted as particularly low-cost, low-effectiveness slacktivism. Second, precisely because of the ease of use, social media can often get states into trouble. The infamous Cairo tweet from the U.S. embassy in September 2012 provides a compelling example. After protests occurred outside of the embassy the staff posted a tweet say, "We firmly reject the actions by those who abuse the universal right of free speech to hurt the religious beliefs of others." As Alexis Wichowski points out, "the tweet made waves"<sup>40</sup>:

The conservative Twitter-watching website Twitchy posted it under the headline "US Embassy in Cairo chooses Sep. 11 to apologize for hurt Muslim feelings." Republicans quickly called the embassy's actions an example of the Obama administration's appeasement of U.S. enemies, and the Romney campaign denounced it as "disgraceful." The White House soon disavowed the statement, saying it "was not cleared by Washington and does not reflect the views of the United States government." @USEmbassyCairo deleted the tweet within hours, and, according to media reports, within weeks the senior public affairs officer on duty in Cairo that night was recalled to Washington.<sup>41</sup>

As easily as states can tweet and produce videos, that is create and disseminate information, they can as quickly find themselves creating problems with the very publics they seek to engage.

Nevertheless, the move to investigate diplomacy as a productive and competent practice of international politics is a welcomed one and delineating precisely what these

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<sup>40</sup> Wichowski 2013.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

new technologies allow states to do is important. Practice theory's emphasis on the individual, including the body, and problematization of basic concepts that we take for granted, such as the nature of diplomacy, helps to provide a new and important understanding of just what diplomacy is. Yet, as I will argue below, while the emphasis of technology in diplomatic practice on the creation and dissemination of knowledge incorporates an important aspect of practice theory, it belies the more profound contribution practice theory makes to the study of international politics: theorizing change. Put simply, e-diplomacy is not just about dissemination information to foreign publics, it is also about effectively managing a specific type of change in the international system. By reducing e-diplomacy to public diplomacy we effectively overshadow one of its most important functions.

### Diplomacy as Change Management

In addition to a re-emphasis of the individual and underscoring the problematization of knowledge creation and dissemination, practice theory offers a theory of change that is distinct from existing structural accounts. At first blush change and practice seem to be at odds. If Bourdieu's *habitus* predisposes individuals for particular practices, and unreflective processing - acting on what comes naturally - accounts for much of what occurs in the international system, then *stasis* rather than *change* would seem to dominate. Put simply, a focus on competent performances would seem to reify existing order and structure precisely because "competence is always in relation to existing norms and mores." Hopf's logic of habit<sup>42</sup> and Pouliot's security

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<sup>42</sup> Hopf 2010.

practices<sup>43</sup> are excellent examples: stability and foundations are privileged over instability and change. Nevertheless, habits and ingrained practices *do* change, resulting in fundamental changes in social relations and material underpinnings (often in the form of bodily changes, such as neuroplasticity in the brain).

In taking up the challenge of how this change occurs through practice, scholars have identified two distinct sources. The first is through the incremental change that occurs through alterations in daily practices over time. Incremental change is represented as a bottom-up process of individuals conducting competent performance of international politics in such a way that through both unreflective and reflective action changes occur in the international system. This is international change through quotidian policy-making<sup>44</sup>, the everyday decisions of discourse, practice, exchanges, triviality, mistakes, slippage, and so forth that at once reifies the existing order while subtly and slowly changes it at the margins. This is the realm of change through everyday life, invoked by social theorists as diverse as Michel de Certeau, Butler, Heidegger, Goffman, and Habermas.

de Certeau, for example, finds change potential in the ability for individuals to subvert the “strategies” of organized power structures through “tactics” that allow the subjugated to transcend the rules and transform norms. In everyday life individuals develop alternatives to objects that may subvert their intended use by a more powerful actor. The city planner, for example, may determine what streets there will be, which direction they will run, and so forth, but the individual who lives in and on the streets may creatively determine how they will live, taking advantage of opportunities provided

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<sup>43</sup> Pouliot 2010.

<sup>44</sup> Neumann 2012.

by the system. In this way people in everyday life have the ability to “poach” or recreate what they need from the system, often in ways that were unintended. While not necessarily a thick version of agency, and perhaps existing only temporarily, this may, through an incremental process, prompt social change. Put more generally, as Hopf argues, “[b]y varying the stylization of our performances/habits, we often subvert, often unintentionally, the cultural norm that is materialized in them.”<sup>45</sup> In international politics, the norm lifecycle and discourse that features prominently within processes of norm acceptance and propagation is an excellent example. Norms regarding land mines, debt relief, often do not arise through one monumental event that changed minds, but rather through incremental, subtle, and slow internalization. This involves working with individuals and groups creatively find opportunities within the given power structure to make changes to social reality.

The second form of change occurs through significant changes to background conditions that make change in practices possible. These background conditions may change through exogenous shock, such as being exposed to “strange (unassimilable) and powerful (instrumentally and/or normatively costly)” events.<sup>46</sup> For instance, Berger and Luckmann theorize that liminals, those on the margins or thresholds of societal groups and structures,<sup>47</sup> are capable of providing the type of innovation required for change.<sup>48</sup> Bourdieu similarly suggested that *doxa*, that occurring beneath the radar, are only foregrounded “in the face of divergent, novel, or competing discourses and practices” that

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<sup>45</sup> Hopf 2010.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 543.

<sup>47</sup> Douglas 2003.

<sup>48</sup> Berger and Luckmann 1966; Hopf 2010, 543.

come through crisis, encounters with unlike others, liminals, and so forth.<sup>49</sup> Part of the reason change requires such powerful exogenous shocks is the material changes that occur in the brain.<sup>50</sup> The end of the Cold War may indeed be the type of exogenous shock required cause actors to reflect on current discourse and practice. Whereas incremental change is represented as a bottom-up process, exogenous shock change, on the other hand, is represented as top-down structural level shifts that change the conditions and constraints under which individuals conduct those processes. Whereas quotidian change is a slow process, the latter occurs with more alacrity and drama. While difficult to define precisely, exogenous shocks can be conceptualized as events that trigger agents to intersubjectively interpret them as requiring change.<sup>51</sup> Critical to this understanding is that the shock is not necessary just a material change but rather one of intersubjective ideational understanding.

Critically, with respect to international politics and practice theory, both forms of change need to be managed. Recent work suggests that this is precisely the role of diplomacy.<sup>52</sup> Corneliu Bjola, for example, argues that states manage incremental change with respect to the friend/enemy distinction through diplomacy. “[D]iplomacy offers a specialized form of knowledge for understanding how to draw distinctions between potential allies and rivals, and how to make and unmake relationships of enmity and friendship in world politics.”<sup>53</sup> More specifically, traditional diplomacy allows states to develop collective intentionality, which allows diplomats to both create and change

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<sup>49</sup> Bourdieu 1977; Hopf 2010, 543.

<sup>50</sup> Holmes 2013.

<sup>51</sup> Widmaier, Blyth, and Seabrooke 2007, 748.

<sup>52</sup> Bjola and Kornprobst 2013.

<sup>53</sup> Bjola 2013, 19.

relationships. This is incremental change, managed through diplomacy. Similarly Marcus Holmes argues that diplomats manage change by assessing and reassessing the intentions of others in personal meetings.<sup>54</sup> By routinized and regular face-to-face interactions diplomats are able to understand where others stand and where they might be headed from a policy perspective. Intentions, in this case, provide insight into the incremental change is occurring among allies and enemies alike. Diplomacy allows states to both assess where partners and enemies are on a specific policy and where they are going.

Exogenous shocks, on the other hand, are typically managed through crisis diplomacy and conflict resolution.<sup>55</sup> Rather than assessing and responding to incremental changes, diplomats involved in exogenous shocks are responding to the changing of significant structural conditions, both material and ideational. When Dennis Ross and other diplomats under the George H.W. Bush administration highlight the significance of personal diplomacy the end of the Cold War, specifically the question of Germany reunification, they were referring to the need to manage the most significant exogenous shock to the international system in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>56</sup> While clearly this did not occur overnight, and the degradation of the Soviet economy occurred through incremental steps, the event foregrounded the taken-for-granted relations between actors, understanding of identities of self and other, and forced the major players in the system to reflect on their new position.

The preceding analysis suggests that, from a practice perspective, at least two sources of change exist in the international system. Both incremental and exogenous

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<sup>54</sup> Holmes.

<sup>55</sup> Kaufmann 1998; Reynolds 2007.

<sup>56</sup> Bush and Scowcroft 1999; Holmes; Ross 2007; Zelikow and Rice 1995.

shocks have the ability to change structure, background conditions, habits, practices, and so forth, and thus need to be actively understood and managed by states. This, I have suggested, is the role of diplomacy. Importantly, different sources of change require different diplomatic tools in order to be effectively managed. Incremental change is characterized by subtle and minute variations in quotidian practice that may be difficult to detect due to the vast amounts of data and information generated from daily political life that needs to be analyzed. The difficulty in managing incremental change then is on the “supply side”: gathering and analyzing the data to supply knowledge creation is difficult. Exogenous shocks are more easily detected, when they occur, but managing them requires a challenge on the “demand side”: major changes to the international political structure demands significant attention to reputations, negotiations, shared understandings and relationship construction.

These divergent requirements, supplying of information for assessing and responding to incremental change, and demanding relationship care for exogenous shocks, imply that different diplomatic tools will be more or less beneficial depending on the type of change being managed. As scholars in information systems and computer-mediated communication have demonstrated, technologies such as Web 2.0 social media platforms and virtual collaboration, excel at data gathering and analysis though they do not fare as well when it comes to understanding and predicting intentions, managing relationships, reducing uncertainty, and so forth. Conversely, social psychologists, neuroscientists, and political scientists have repeatedly demonstrated that face-to-face human interaction excels at intention understanding and relationship building, while

cognitive biases and limitations severely reduce our ability to process vast amounts of information effectively.

### Digital vs. Traditional Statecraft: A Typology of Tools and Change

The amount of data generated from statecraft is overwhelming.<sup>57</sup> As the recent National Security Agency (NSA) and Edward Snowden events/debates have highlighted, at least in the case of the United States, information management and data mining is a massive undertaking. According to *The Guardian*, during a single month (March 2013) the NSA gathered 14 billion reports from Iran alone. Pakistan created 13.5 billion reports, and Jordan another 12.7 billion. While the information contained in those reports remain classified, and therefore the usefulness or even epistemological status of the knowledge created from the data cannot be known, the numbers provide insight into the amount of statecraft data that is mined on a day-to-day basis. Much of this data is accumulated efficiently through automated intelligence systems, though much remains collected by diplomats on the ground. The recent WikiLeaks publication of U.S. diplomatic records illustrates the scope of these activities. For example, in April 2013 WikiLeaks published over 1.7 million diplomatic reports, covering the period of 1973 to 1976, implying an average of approximately 1500 reports a day for that period of time. The number of reports 40 years later is likely much greater.

This vast array of data is a stark change from previous epochs of history where information gathering and data collection was a challenge.<sup>58</sup> Today the problem is not too little data but too much. Cognitive limitations to dealing with “information overload,”

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<sup>57</sup> Hanson 2012, 21.

<sup>58</sup> Bronk and Smith 2012.

“data asphyxiation,” or “cognitive overload” are sufficiently well-known, so will not be belabored here, except to highlight the need for information systems to help transcend those limitations. Effective use of this amount of data requires sophisticated use of visual analytics that help practitioners to transcend human cognitive limitations in processing information.<sup>59</sup> By visually analyzing connections and changes in the data against baselines, through digital technology, diplomats and policymakers are able to, at least theoretically, gain insight into the types of incremental changes identified in practice theory. By moving the analysis outside of the scope of individual psychology, problems of cognitive limitations are overcome, making digital tools an ideal fit for assessing and managing incremental change.

In addition to the complex visual analysis of vast amounts of data, diplomats also utilize digital tools to perform less data-intensive monitoring of important individuals and themes. As *The Economist* reports, the U.S. State Department monitors social media in five different languages and attempts to flag potentially important individuals that envoys can befriend online.<sup>60</sup> This type of thematic monitoring potentially allows diplomats to assess changing conditions and react quickly to them. Tom Fletcher, British ambassador in Lebanon, puts the rhetorical question succinctly: “Would we have been better prepared for the Arab spring if we had discovered the hashtag #tahrir earlier?”<sup>61</sup> Digital tools thus provide, at the very least, the possibility of assessing and managing incremental change through both sophisticated data mining techniques as well as more mundane monitoring of social media outlets.

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<sup>59</sup> Arias-Hernandez, Green, and Fisher 2012; Dill et al. 2012.

<sup>60</sup> *The Economist*, September 22.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

Managing change through exogenous shock is more difficult with digital tools. As suggested above, exogenous shocks do not produce problems of information so much as they produce problems of relationships. Questions emerge regarding how to move forward, not whether we are moving at all. Studies of social media platforms and digital tools when it comes to understanding intentions suggest that trust becomes a major issue to overcome in a digital setting.<sup>62</sup> Individuals may have difficulty reading and trusting the intentions of others they are engaged with in an online environment, prompting serious concerns about the ability to manage exogenous shock change digitally. One reason this may be the case is that social psychologists, cognitive scientists, and neuroscientists are increasingly convinced that face-to-face interactions represent a fundamentally different type of interaction modality with respect to a number of salient characteristics. The value of face-to-face interactions is that they provide information about the sincerity of intentions, difficult to obtain through other modalities. Hall and Yarhi-Milo suggest that personal interactions allow leaders to not only exchange information through what they say but also through what they do not say. “Facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, even unconscious movements or reactions” all provide clues to sincerity and intentions.<sup>63</sup> Robert Jervis concurs, “When an actor is able to directly observe one of his adversaries he will not only try to understand the other’s general outlook, but also scrutinize those presumably uncontrolled aspects of personal behavior that are indices to the adversary’s goals, estimate of the situation, and resolve.”<sup>64</sup> “Uncontrolled aspects of

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<sup>62</sup> Wainfan and Davis 2004.

<sup>63</sup> Hall and Yarhi-Milo 2012.

<sup>64</sup> Jervis 1989, 33.

personal behavior” include clues such as expressional cues and voice timbre,<sup>65</sup> micro expressions of emotion,<sup>66</sup> generalized facial features,<sup>67</sup> and even deception.<sup>68</sup>

At least conceivably, digital tools such as virtual collaboration through video conferencing should be able to replicate these processes, yet empirical studies suggest that they fall short. As Wainfan and Davis point out, the literature suggests that while the technology has increased greatly in recent years, there are still distinct and important differences between videoconferencing and face-to-face interaction:

Although [video conference] image quality has improved since the early [video conference] studies, it is still difficult to maintain eye contact due to image resolution and the distance between the camera and the monitor, and it is challenging to interpret body language and gestures, especially as the number of participants increases. Mediated communication—even [video conference] —limits nonverbal, paraverbal, and status cues and reduces the “richness” of the information communicated. Studies show that [video conference] participants may have difficulty identifying a remote speaker, detecting movements, attaining mutual gaze, and gaining floor control.<sup>69</sup>

Further, when engaged in video conference discussions, researchers find individuals tend to be less social and more task-oriented.

These findings suggest that while virtual collaboration is useful, particularly in the ability to bring disparate actors together to work on tasks independently in a shared responsibility environment,<sup>70</sup> there is reason to believe that such collaboration is less useful for diplomats managing exogenous shock change than incremental shifting.

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<sup>65</sup> Frank 1988.

<sup>66</sup> Ekman 2009; Ekman and O'Sullivan 1991.

<sup>67</sup> Mondak 2010.

<sup>68</sup> Ekman and O'Sullivan 1991; Holmes Forthcoming.

<sup>69</sup> Wainfan and Davis 2004, 19-20.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

Typically virtual collaboration is utilized because face-to-face interaction is not practical, either for geographical dispersion reasons or cost. The preceding analysis suggests that it may also not be utilized in situations where intention-understanding and trust-building is required. On the other hand, for incremental shifting virtual collaboration may be sufficient. As discussed above, incremental shifting is characterized by less concern regarding intentions, trust-building, and so forth, while more concerned with generating data and knowledge about subtle changes in the environment. In these cases virtual collaboration may help diplomats to perform the very types of task-oriented fact-finding that virtual collaboration excels at.

This is not to say that e-diplomacy tools have no value in exogenous shock situations, though it is often difficult for states to know precisely what is occurring in terms of change. Not all examples of exogenous shocks are as clear as the end of the Cold War. For instance, were the problems encountered in Cairo representative of exogenous shock? Despite the problems that eventually would occur because of a particular tweet, minutes after the September 2012 attacks on U.S. installations in the Middle East, the embassy in Cairo was utilizing Twitter to relay emergency phone numbers for U.S. citizens. The embassy also criticized Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood on their Arabic channels and tweeted condolences after the death of Ambassador Christopher Stevens.<sup>71</sup> Thus social media may have a role in managing the change that occurs in intersubjective structures and understanding between actors, though it may be only in retrospect that states realize they were responding to, and managing, top-down structural change.

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<sup>71</sup> Economist 2012.

<b>Relative Levels of Usefulness for Change Management in Diplomacy</b>		
	Exogenous Shocks	Incremental Shifting
Face-to-Face Diplomacy	High	Low
e-Diplomacy	Low	High

*Conclusion*

This paper has had two broad goals. First, I have sought to define and conceptualize e-diplomacy as a form of international practice that is not just a strategy of public diplomacy but also a mechanism for states to manage international change. The change considered here is rooted in practice theory, which focuses on the competent political performances of different types of actors, including individuals, in the international system. In doing so I have identified two major sources of change, incremental shifting and exogenous shocks. Second, having argued that diplomacy is, in its essence, about managing both exogenous shocks and incremental shifting, I have developed conditions under which e-diplomacy and traditional face-to-face diplomacy will be most beneficial for change management.

By way of conclusion it is worth considering what the preceding analysis might mean broadly for the study of diplomacy and specifically for predictive theory. One of the interesting developments in diplomacy studies, likely because of the focus on the experience of practitioners and efforts at defining and conceptualizing precisely what diplomacy is, has been the lack of predictive theory. Put simply, we do not, as of yet, have a theory of diplomacy that can predict how it will be practiced or that can answer a number of salient questions. When will diplomacy be favored over other forms of statecraft? Under what conditions will statesmen attempt personal diplomacy or shuttle

diplomacy? When should states be expected to heavily invest in, and utilize, public diplomacy? The preceding analysis suggests some provisional answers.

First, we should expect states to engage in traditional face-to-face diplomacy when there are significant questions about the intentions of the other and concerns about relationship-building abound. We should also expect that face-to-face diplomacy will be less useful, though not useless, in detecting and responding to incremental shifting, and thus states should seek other forms of statecraft to manage that type of change. Most notably, because e-diplomacy is defined as the use of ICTs for information dissemination, collection, and analysis, we should expect states with the requisite resources to utilize technology to manage change defined by incremental shifting. Finally, because ICTs and virtual collaboration tool such as social media cannot replicate the traditional face-to-face interaction experience, largely because of the degradation of information richness, we should expect that e-diplomacy will be less useful for relationship management during times of exogenous shock, such as international crises, and thus states will seek other forms of statecraft, such as personal diplomacy, to build and repair relationships with salient others. This is not to suggest that predictive theory should be the only goal in creating a theory of diplomacy, but rather simply that by delineating conditions of possibility, we can begin to point toward a comprehensive predictive theory that includes the conceptualization debates discussed above with testable and falsifiable hypotheses. This may have an ancillary benefit of increasing diplomacy's appeal as a unit of study for neo-positivist-oriented political scientists.

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