The Information Age and Diplomacy: An Emerging Strategic Vision in World Affairs

by

Amir Dhia

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AN EMERGING STRATEGIC VISION IN WORLD AFFAIRS

BY

AMIR DHIA, (B.A., M.A.)

UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF DR. THIERRY GARCIN

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To my leader in life, my dear Father;
to my loving Mother;
to my three supportive brothers Yasir, Thaar, Hadir;
and to my generous sister Rana…
all with utmost admiration and gratefulness.

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INTRODUCTION

More than ever before, advances in the fields of information and communication technologies (ICTs) have substantially affected most segments of our individual life in today's world. Manifested in various aspects and to varying extents, the changes and evolution are often collectively referred to as the "Information Age," or the "Information Revolution."

It is this Information Age that has been posing a direct or indirect influence–whether positive or negative–on the way we think, behave, communicate, work, and even on how we earn our living. 'Information' has become a principal 'commodity' by which one measures levels of not only education, skills and knowledge, but also levels of well-being, prosperity, wealth, and development on a personal, local, national, and international scale.

The ability to acquire and efficiently employ knowledge and information is a critical consideration for success in an information-based society, with "knowledge workers" and "information workers" becoming an ever-increasing fraction of the work force in all countries. Appropriately developing 'human capital' is a key priority for both individuals and nations as they cope with the Information Age. Over time, numerous businesses in "knowledge industries" relocate to new areas more suitable for information work than for "manufacturing work," affecting in turn where people live. As a consequence, the rise in information work has an implication on the education people are required to have, both initially and throughout their career. This, in turn, has a long-term impact on educational establishments and systems all over the world.

As the worldwide information landscape becomes more and more interconnected and interdependent, it is argued that the existing gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" will diminish. Interdependencies growing in all aspects of our lives should, after all, lead to real possibilities for achieving economic prosperity and attaining global peace. Nevertheless, they also produce powerful

forces of social fragmentation, open critical vulnerabilities, and breed violence and conflict. Crises now bypass traditional state borders. The expanding global economic interactions, the spread of knowledge, the dispersion of advanced technologies, and the movements of people are just some of the threats, which are global in scope.

It is, hence, not surprising that concerns over the ever-widening gulf between knowledge and ignorance, the development gap between the rich and poor nations, and the distancing margins within societies of a given country, all pushed the United Nations to adopt the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in its agenda in its first and second phases, in Geneva in 2003, and in Tunisia in 2005.

Scholars differ in defining and marking the early signs and stages of the Information Age. Nevertheless, the evolving era of the Information Age in the contemporary world may be credited for four distinctive global developments. First, the end of the Cold War–as celebrating Germans swarmed over the graffiti-covered Berlin Wall in November 1989–instantly rendered superfluous the Western world's highly expensive political-military infrastructure. During the Cold War, the United States of America had one principal target in terms of information and intelligence gathering, namely the Soviet Union. Its narrow set of intelligence 'customers' was mainly composed of political-military officials in the U.S. government, and it drew its limited information from limited sources, namely surveillance satellites and spies. Information analysis and gathering was designated to a central (although not monopolized) agency. Now, the wide-scale dissemination of information on open-network systems, minute by minute, no longer characterizes the feature as "secret business."

Second, a seismic shift has been acknowledged in the tremendous proliferation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international governmental organizations (IGOs), private voluntary organizations (PVOs), and other non-state actors. Thousands of organizations in the global arena (ranging in activity from humanitarian relief to landmines to HIV/AIDS to environment protection to anti-war campaigns) often set the agenda for defining priority issue policies. Thanks to their intellectual members and elites, theses organizations are

enjoying more compelling concerted global action. More of a frequent trend, street barricades and tear gas have become standard expectations at world summit gatherings of political and economic leaders.

Even more so, the global reach and influence of transnational corporations (TNCs) have ended any remaining illusions that states will continue to hold a quasi-exclusive monopoly over the conduct of foreign affairs. Seldom is the case now of a state leader traveling to another state without being accompanied by a number of businessmen and company chiefs. In other words, governments of sovereign states will continue to play the major role in world politics, but will have to share the stage with actors who can make better use of information to enhance their "soft power" and mobilize their publics and potentials.

Third, an expansion and redefinition of a state's foreign policy agenda has occurred, which covers both traditional and non-traditional issues. The conventional diplomatic practice of establishing and promoting bilateral and multilateral relations among countries is still in place. However, much attention is increasingly being devoted to issues such as climate warming, global health matters and standards, the mobility and trafficking of people (whether illegal, refugees, or immigrants), and more recently global terrorism threats. The diplomatic world is fully aware of the heat of competition, especially from non-state actors, which are being enforced by the Information Age. The conditions for classic diplomacy, currently based on "hard power," are gradually being undermined to favor the emergence of a more adaptable diplomacy based on the concept of "soft power."

Even at the local government level, certain traditional mechanisms of governance, such as taxation, regulation, and licensing are turning out to be problematic, since the Information Age allows for action beyond the reach or control of national governments. While governments attempt to meet those challenges, new mechanisms are being introduced, usually making use of Information Technology (IT) and under the concept of "electronic governance" (e-governance), to upgrade and improve interaction with and provide public services to their citizens.

The fourth development that has significantly speeded the evolution of the Information Age is the constant and rapid advancements in ICT (along with a variety of other technologies). Some further 'technology' developments may be foreseen for at least the new few decades or so such as continued exponential growth in computing power, continued convergence in voice and data communications as well as in available bandwidth, improvements in machine translation for useful and practical applications, and strong synergies emerging between info-, bio-, nano-, and material technologies.

Future developments in 'products' will enable information devices to be ever-present, wearable, and in constant link to one another. Among the expectations are a multitude of powerful, inexpensive sensors and devices permitting wireless communication; increasing convergence of wireless telephones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), radio, voice and electronic mail messaging; and smart home appliances. Last but not least, developments in 'services' are predicted to greatly extend access to, and the usefulness of, information services. Kiosks are to provide easy access to some services, with entertainment taking the leading edge of novel information services. This prospective will also play a growing role in health care and telemedicine. Online education will increase but with specialized, tailored effects; and micro payment schemes will emerge to handle essential online financial and payment matters.[1]

This work seeks to cover the emerging trends of diplomatic practice in the rapidly expanding Information Age. It focuses on both its opportunities and threats, with the overall objective of forecasting current and future implications. Chapter One traces the evolution of the Information Age, and highlights its main features. Chapter Two examines the course of classic diplomacy, and how it needs to cope with the era–leading in one way or another to a transformation in the manner diplomatic affairs are conducted. Also outlined are the characteristic qualifications of diplomats required at the present and coming stages of professionalism.

[1] The foreseen developments are summarized from: Richard O. Hundley et al., *The Global Course of the Information Revolution: Recurring Themes and Regional Variations*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, 2003, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

Chapter Three deals with the cultural and social implications directly associated with the Information Age, namely rising cultural and identity awareness and the evolution of languages. This work concludes with a set of observations in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States of America. The observations concern particular notions and events that have a certain influence, in one way or another, on the global practices of diplomacy and on our common way of life.

Stemming from the fact that the Information Age is currently evolving at unprecedented speed, it is deemed necessary to note that both effort and attention have been devoted to provide, whenever available, up-dated details and data to the possible extent. Also, where appropriate as well as illuminating, a number of illustrations have been documented, with the mere objective of reflecting global perceptions on the issues concerned. Finally, it is to be acknowledged that the vast scope of the Information Age and the diplomatic practices implied remain infinite in volume to be all covered in this work.

I. CHAPTER ONE:

THE INFORMATION AGE

I.I. The Evolution of the Knowledge Society

Humanity is in the midst of a social, economic, and political transformation, just as far-reaching as the Agricultural Revolution was thousands of years ago. As that revolution utterly changed the way we live and relate to one another, so too has the Information Revolution.

The early signs of this transformation go back some five hundred years to the Renaissance in Western Europe.[2] Yet deeper in history, traces of the evolution root even back to the Sumerians who were the first to introduce and use clay balls and tokens to treat information (transactions, memory, management and control).[3] Individual initiatives and scientific exploration flourished and gave birth a few centuries later to the Industrial Revolution. New forms of energy, such as steam, coal and oil were discovered and used to power new forms of production and transportation such as the assembly line and the railroad. These inventions in turn, brought the world to the present Information Age, symbolized by technologies such as radio and television, telephones and fax machines, and above all, computers.

Accordingly, a shift is taking place in the basic resource of human society- from land to knowledge. Today, almost everything people use to live, from clothing to food and from houses to means of transportation and communications, is produced by scientific knowledge. Whereas land is a fixed pie lending itself to destructive fights over its division, the new basic resource is, as in hunter-gathered times, an expandable pie. And while there are limits to land and material resources, there are no known limits to knowledge since everyone can make use of it and contribute to it.

Land, however, is not the only major source of destructive conflict. People and groups also fight fiercely about power. Like land, power over others is a fixed

[2] William Ury, *Getting to Peace: Transforming Conflict at Home, at Work, and in the World*, New York: Viking, 1999, pp. 83-84.

[3] See: «Histoire de l'informatique: Traitement de l'information et automatisation», ('History of Computer Science: Treatment of information and automation'), at: http://www.histoire-informatique.org/grandes_dates/1_2.html.

pie. Here knowledge represents a different kind of power, one that can be used to satisfy needs and desires. This new kind of power–power to do things–is not a fixed pie, but an expandable one as well. This knowledge power should not be applied to subdue others but rather be employed to liberate and empower them. Thanks to it, billions of ordinary citizens all over the world with virtually no power over others possess the force to live longer, travel faster and further, and interact globally–both virtually and physically.

While it may make sense to go to war to acquire territory, there is little logic to go to war to acquire the new reward of knowledge. For knowledge cannot easily be conquered. It is best acquired through learning and cooperation. In contrast to land, which is typically improved through the act of possession, knowledge is improved through the act of sharing. The core entity of knowledge, science, relies on the exchange of theories and information. Scientists compete with one another but the decisive factor in the competition, past and present, is mostly in the timing. Through effective cooperation and sharing, knowledge as a resource eventually grows more and more abundant for everyone.

With knowledge emerging as a key resource of our present society, "knowledge workers" constitute the dominant group in its work force. Drucker qualifies it to three essential features:

- borderlessness, because knowledge travels even more effortlessly than money;
- upward mobility, available to everyone through easily acquired formal education; and,
- the potential for failure as well as for success. Anyone can acquire the "means of production," but not everyone can win. [4]

These three features together make the knowledge society a highly competitive one, for individuals and organizations alike. Information Technology (IT), for example and although only one of many new aspects of the current development in

[4] Peter Drunker, "The Next Society," *The Economist,* online edition at*: www.economist.com*, November 1, 2001.

knowledge, is already having a huge impact by allowing information and knowledge to spread near-instantly, and even more importantly, making it accessible to everyone. Given the ease and speed at which information travels, every institution in the knowledge society–not only businesses, yet also schools, universities, hospitals, and increasingly, government agencies–has to be globally competitive, even though most organizations and structures will remain local in their activities and in their respective sectors.

Respectively, job skill requirements have been shifting across all sectors thanks to new technologies. Machines with microprocessors, for instance, can now be programmed to do the sort of routine activities that less-skilled workers used to do. Meanwhile, business computer systems generate demand for highly skilled labor in the form of technical staff that operate (and repair the equipment), develop (and install) the software, and build (as well as monitor) the networks. Furthermore, computer systems normally generate more data that may be profitably analyzed, and thus increasing the demand for analytical, problem-solving competence, such as communication skills of workers, managers, and other professionals. The term *knowledge workers* applies more and more to the workers who go beyond just proving information to these new being responsible for generating and conveying knowledge needed for decision making.

As the recent technological advances may favor either skilled or unskilled workers (depending on the application), the overwhelming evidence is that on balance, recent technological advances favor more skilled workers and the same can be expected for future advances. Those demand differentials have, obviously, been driving up the salary premium paid to workers with higher education levels. Between 1973 and 2001, for example, the wage premium for a college degree compared with a high school diploma increased by 30%, from 46% to 76%.[5] (See Figure 1.1.)

[5] Lynn A. Karoly and Constantijn W.A. Panis, *The 21st Century at Work: Forces Shaping the Future Workforce and Workplace in the United States*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, 2004.