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Net Diplomacy III: 2015 and Beyond

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The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policies.

I am probably going to bring in some of my colleagues from that world I was in for the last seven years--Steve Case, Michael Bell, Andy Grove, a few other people like that--who really know what they're talking about ... to come in and find out what we can do.

— Secretary of State Colin Powell, January 25, 2001

Introduction

As the Communist Revolution ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the Information Revolution reached the tipping point as corporations embraced the new technologies. The U. S. Department of State, while marking the end of the Cold War, continued to be guided by practices more fitting to an earlier age. Indeed, decision making has become more centralized, access more restricted, and information flow more inhibited.

This state of affairs has been documented by several studies, including *Reinventing Diplomacy in the Information Age*, *Equipped for the Future: Managing U.S. Foreign Affairs in the 21st Century*, and *America's Overseas Presence in the 21st Century*. In the first week of the Bush administration, former Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci presented to Secretary of State Colin Powell a "resources-for-reform" proposal calling for the Department of State to undertake fundamental change, including upgrading information technology and adopting modern management practices. Cosponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the proposal, *State Department Reform*, represents a consensus among research institutions, scholars, and professionals that the time has come for action. "In short," the task force said, "renewal of America's foreign policy making and implementing machinery is an urgent national security priority.

The National Intelligence Council invited a group of scholars to look ahead and describe the security environment of 2015. Their discerning report, entitled *Global Trends 2015: A Dialogue About the Future with Nongovernment Experts*, was published in December 2000. The panel concluded that "diplomacy will be more complicated. Washington will have greater difficulty harnessing its power to achieve specific foreign policy goals: the U.S. Government will exercise a smaller and less powerful part of the overall economic and cultural influence of the United States abroad."

In July 2001 *iMP: The Magazine on Information Impacts* invited twenty-three American and British experts to examine the *Global Trends* study and imagine the state of diplomacy in 2015. How will it look? And how will we get there? Among the writers, broad agreement exists that diplomacy must change if it is to continue to be an effective element of statecraft in a world endangered by a panoply

of destabilizing threats. They also agree that even as information technology wisely deployed is a necessary element of a new diplomacy, profound changes in its culture and practice will be required to restore its primacy by 2015. And practically everyone agrees that the public dimension of diplomacy increases in importance as the world's population becomes more engaged.

Beyond Foreign Ministries

Henry E. Catto, Jr. reminds us that there are certain core diplomatic practices that must be retained, but urges more attention to public diplomacy and an appreciation of "soft power" as a central element of international relations. **Anthony C. E. Quainton** posits that diplomats must assume the role of "change insurgents," thereby creating a state of dynamic turbulence that will lead to the internal reform of current diplomatic practices. **Jeffrey R. Cooper** explains the external forces that are driving changes in diplomacy: political revolution, economic revolution, and the information revolution.

Brian Hocking insists that we differentiate the mechanisms and processes of diplomacy to resolve the apparent paradox between expanding and contracting diplomatic requirements. **Sheryl J. Brown** and **Margarita S. Studemeister** describe the diffusion of diplomacy whereby academics, corporations, nongovernmental organizations, and others assume traditional diplomatic roles through the power of networking. **Howard Cincotta** writes that effecting the transition from the hierarchical, closed, and classified nature of modern diplomacy to the openness, flexibility, and speed of postmodern diplomacy is one of the chief challenges for the diplomatic community.

Beyond Old Borders

Donna Oglesby, pointing to the limits of military power in dealing with fragmenting states, persuasively calls for cultural dialogue as a necessary precondition for solving the emerging problems of the twenty-first century. **Larry Seaquist** writes that the diplomat of 2015 must be prepared to build peace in a world where local conflict and civilian warriors threaten the stability of communities and nations. **Jody K. Olsen** and **Norman J. Peterson** urge that technology be used to complement, but not replace, educational and cultural exchanges. **Mark Leonard** and **Liz Noble** suggest that traditional diplomacy needs to be broadened beyond foreign ministries to address increasingly important publics throughout the world. These five authors would agree that creating trust underpins diplomacy in 2015.

Walter R. Roberts argues that state broadcasting will continue as an element of public diplomacy in 2015, but believes the array of U.S. government services today is duplicative, expensive, and even counterproductive. **Adam Clayton Powell III**, celebrating the breadth and reach of the Internet, hints that state-sponsored broadcasting may become irrelevant. The Internet is the wild card in 2015, **Robert Coonrod** points out. He suggests that traditional government broadcasters will regard radio as a means to counter specific challenges or threats, but will abandon the practice of projecting their societies and cultures.

2015 and Beyond

Charles A. Schmitz, writing with savage wit, describes the diplomatic environment of 2015, enhanced by technology and constrained by politics. If this mind-stretching disquisition strikes you as far-fetched, **Richard P. O'Neill** goes out on a technological limb as he considers what 2015 may offer from three categories of predictive structure: the linear extrapolation, the missed discontinuity, and the breathless proclamation. And **Steven Livingston** shows how high-resolution public satellite imagery will further change the diplomatic landscape by introducing still another dimension of transparency in international relations.

Stephanie Smith Kinney calls for a new culture of diplomacy that puts as much primacy on action as it does on observation and reflection. **John Hemery** says that training diplomats for 2015 must reflect changes in the role of foreign ministries and give greater attention to interaction in cyberspace, public diplomacy, international financial markets, and results-oriented management. **Wilson Dizard, Jr.**

asserts optimistically that the State Department is about to witness a dramatic upgrading of its information resources; the new agenda of diplomacy-from trade issues to human rights-he writes, is being increasingly shaped by the information revolution. **Jamie F. Metzl**, insisting that overclassification of information has become a national liability in the Information Age, calls for a new diplomacy that replaces an obsession with secrecy with a culture of openness.

As the revolution in military affairs moves ahead at the Pentagon, a counterpart revolution in diplomatic affairs must surely follow. Not just desktop Internet connections, but a bottom-to-top overhaul of the conduct of diplomacy. Not just in Foggy Bottom, but throughout the democratic world. If the vision of the year 2015 represented in this edition of *iMP* is on target, it is past time for the revolution to begin.

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A Vision of an American Embassy in 2015: A Disquisition in Three Acts and Six-and-a-Half Sets of Premises

'Frankly, Mr. Secretary, none. Only half a dozen of our folks come to the chancery regularly anyhow. All are equipped to do their jobs on the move, and they stay in good touch with each other and with me through Bladders.'

—Charles A. Schmitz

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Premises Set I: Modern American embassies have been built and staffed according to dozens of premises. Among them are the following:

1. The U.S. government ought to have diplomatic relations with the central governments of all recognized states, (barring warlike relations, in which diplomacy is judged to be too dangerous or connoting a blessing). Indeed new and "developing" countries consider foreign embassies a mark of their arrival as independent states.
2. The government's people in foreign locations most important to the United States live and work in the city designated as their "capital".
3. That which is done by national governments is important to the U.S. government.
4. The U.S. government is the most important channel of information from overseas that is important to Americans.
5. Proximity is essential to maintaining important communications links.
6. Working in one building optimizes coordination and security.
7. Only U.S. government-produced encryption systems are good enough for U.S. government confidential communications.
8. Foreign policy ought to be coordinated so that the nation speaks with one voice overseas.

By 2015, all of these premises will have been reexamined, and most will have been discarded.

Act 1:

Place de la Concorde, Paris, July 1, 2015, 0900 Eurotime.

Mr. and Mrs. Bridge approach the majestic iron fence protecting the American embassy and its entrance parking lot. It seems that a festival is going on. Red, white, and blue bunting is everywhere, LED and laser signs of a tasteful and stylish variety exhort readers to "Visit the U.S.," "Hunt buffaloes with Red Indians," "Descend into Grand Canyon on mules," "Smell the cool breezes of Banf," "Try a real American Tamale!" Crowds of mostly teenagers mixed in with scattered adult-children combinations, swirled around and between the old-fashioned "wooden" picnic tables set up in the former parking lot. Clusters and couples emerging from under the "Sortie" arch from the interior of the embassy could be heard marveling at the special effects that made the buffalo hunt a truly bone-jarring, frightening and exhausting experience, and "the taste of that warm buffalo heart!" and "the smell of those tanning hides!"

Mr. Bridge is courteously stopped by a French policeman in front of the pedestrian access gate.

Policeman: "Carte ou amulet d'identité?"

"No, see, that's just it. Somebody snatched my fanny pack with everything in it, including my passport, and I don't have one of those Swatch identity amulets! I came to the embassy to see if I could get a replacement for my passport."

"Ah, bon, Monsieur. [pointing with his chin] Allez là-bas, à l'autre côté, back in ze corner. Use one of ze machins."

Mr. Bridge, followed by Mrs. Bridge, moves off to the side of the still-majestic front entrance and, following the line of the fence to the left, turns the corner and spies, protected in its own cage of iron bars and under a softly glowing plastic roof, still some distance from the elegant embassy building itself, a row of Diebold ATM machines, or some things that look just like ATM machines, including tiny cameras mounted just above eye level on each one.

As Mr. Bridge approaches one of the machines, a cover slid back from the waist-high monitor. "Welcome to the U.S. Embassy," he both heard and read on the newly surfaced monitor screen. "Press here to speak English." Mr. Bridge does so, and a new screen appeared. "Passport Services" is one of the new selections, which Mr. Bridge presses. "Please swipe the front cover of your current passport through the slot at the right."

"Damn," said Mr. Bridge under his breath. "That is the stupidest....If I had my passport to swipe through, I wouldn't need to be here! Now, what?"

A few seconds later, as if on cue, a small, flashing yellow box in the lower right-hand corner of the video screen starts to blink, and the message appears: "If you do not have your current passport, please touch here."

Mr. Bridge does so. An outline drawing of a large right hand appears on the screen.

"Place your right hand flat on the screen within the outline. If you are wearing a glove on your right hand, please take it off first. (If your hand is very dirty, please go wash it and come back when it is clean.)"

"Pretty snide," thought Mr. Bridge, although he had to admit to himself that the huge "Airtrains" had brought transatlantic prices so low that now all kinds of riff-raff from the United States could be here in Paris, and he was sure that a lot of them had filthy hands. Well, the screen looked clean enough, so he put his hand on the indicated spot.

“Thank you. Remove your hand and look at the American flag between the two flashing red lights straight ahead.”

“Thank you.” A few seconds later, “According to your palm and retinal scans, you are registered as American citizen and U.S. permanent resident Harry L. Bridge of 6534 Swope Parkway, Kansas City, Missouri, DOB 5/21/68. Touch here if you concur with this identification.”

Mr. Bridge does so. “Your previously issued ‘Gaslight Style’ passport has been canceled. If you require a material replacement for your passport for identification at non-participating establishments or if you will be traveling to any of the following locations”; (There followed a map of cities and areas, mostly in Africa, Oceania, and Central Asia.) “Please provide your universal credit information for a charge of \$250. Upon confirmation of payment, your new passport will be delivered in the bin below.”

“If you do not require material proof of identity and will be traveling only to or through the following areas.” (Here, the map included all of the European Union countries, all of the Western Hemisphere, and Northeast and Southeast Asia.) “you do not require a Gaslight passport. You will complete departure and arrival formalities with the “Palm-retinal Identification” protocol located in kiosks at all major ports. “Have a nice day!”

Premises Set II: What is technologically inevitable by 2015 (at least in principle) and therefore must be taken into account in the functioning and design of embassies.

1. Wearable, wireless appliances, allowing multimedia communications from anywhere;
2. Low cost, portable, wireless, digital encryption;
3. Software information filters for rapid retrieval of unorganized raw data;
4. All current, and most archived, information in digital, retrievable form;
5. Personal computers displaced by special purpose computing systems (communicators, organizers, locators, retrievers, scanners, printers);
6. Information via broadband, multimedia systems, including sound, video, graphs, maps;
7. Formal face-to-face meetings are relatively expensive therefore rare;
8. Retinal scanning displays for portable, screenless information;
9. Permanent (perhaps embedded), ubiquitous global positioning system (GPS) transponders for anyone or anything that might need to be located with precision;
10. Porosity of national borders to information flows;
11. Light, flat and flexible screens (no bulky monitors); and
12. Telecommuting displaced by teleworking: regular, not intermittent work from distant locations or mobile facilities.

Premises Set III: What new technology makes possible and desirable for diplomacy:

1. Faster, more complete information about anything detectable;
2. Searchable and customizable databases available at all times (reducing need for that staple of every foreign ministry, the special-purpose information memoranda);
3. More teleconferences, less travel, and fewer extended stays overseas;
4. After the first “wet” introductory meeting between diplomats or officials, more “dry” communication by long distance;
5. Decentralization of power creating more centers;
6. Reduction of hierarchy in information systems;
7. Point-casting to potential consumers (e.g., nongovernmental organizations [NGOs]) of foreign

information;

8. Démarches with multimedia presentations (e.g., direct appeal by president or secretary of state to foreign government officials or publics);
9. Electronic language interpreters;
10. Multi-sensory information and communication about most things; and
11. Detailed, real-time satellite imagery of land and sea uses, pollution, agriculture, fires, battles, refugees and migrations.

Premises set IV: Political, psychological, and social changes that will have affected embassies by 2015.

1. National security will have become as much a domestic, as a foreign, affair (e.g., weapons of mass destruction).
2. With the rise of global trading, financing, travel, study, etc., “nationality” will have declined in significance, and some institutions, businesses, and NGOs will have become forthrightly non-national, or even anti-national.
3. With the decline in the critical significance of national borders, diffusion of “foreign” policy responsibilities from foreign ministries to line ministries will have taken place (e.g., telecomm “policy” is shepherded by the Federal Communications Commission anywhere in the world without coordination by the State Department).
4. Foreign affairs “authority” will have partially devolved from national to state and local governments.
5. Many kinds of international affairs will have become the province also of NGOs, and NGOs and business organizations will carry the heavy water on many formerly government issues, such as public health, economic assistance, humanitarian relief, family planning and environmental protection.
6. Regional organizations (e.g., the European Union, Association of Southeast Asian Nations [ASEAN], Western Hemisphere trading group) will have taken more responsibility away from national governments to deal with trade, migration, disease and environmental issues.
7. The perceived need for a unified, national foreign policy will have declined and then disappeared with the end of the ideological Cold War and the reduction of state-conducted warfare.

Premises Set V: Threats to the traditional roles of embassies.

1. Embassies were set up to be the most important intermediaries between one government and another. Information technologies (IT), however, disintermediates, and early twenty-first century IT made the disintermediation of G2G relations both possible and desirable for increased efficiencies.
2. Embassies provide human, on-the-spot eyes and ears. Remote sensing, imaging, teleconferencing, etc., will have eliminated much of that need.
3. Embassies “show the flag” and otherwise “represent” the sending state. IT has provided better and more immediate means for foreigners to understand the sending state; and home-based, high-ranking officials have been able to do more representation through IT than ever before, as when they had to actually travel abroad to create local impact.

Act 2:

January 20, 2015, 8:15 EST, Washington, D.C., State Department, Office of the Secretary of State.

Secretary of State Adams Stimson strides into his huge, elegant eighth-floor office with its views of the Potomac, the Tidal Basin and the jam of various monuments on what used to be the Mall. He is

carrying the secretary's traditional briefcase with the embossed Great Seal of the United States on one side, but, as he would readily admit, it is simply an old habit. The briefcase contains only his golf scoring logbooks, some old-fashioned paper photos of his large family and his medicated jellybeans.

The secretary's notes, instructions, approvals and other dictation from his "homework" and "carwork" were already processed inside "Dog Bladders," as the department regulars insisted on calling the "department's element of the Overall U.S. Government Data Base and Retrieval System," finally installed in the fall of 2010. Once the National Security Agency reluctantly conceded at the turn of the century that even it could not break the commercially available, "public key" encryption systems, the State Department and other national security agencies of the U.S. government were able to send and receive classified materials from anywhere in the world, and in almost any kind of vehicle, using light and tiny communications appliances. Not only the secretary of state, but every Foreign Service officer still left in the radically down-sized State Department could communicate to, from, and through Bladders from any point on earth, the moon and Mars, at any time.

Thus, Secretary Stimson already was fully aware of the mob rioting in downtown Kabul and the intention of its leading participants to march out to the suburban site of the old American embassy and to try to starve out its inhabitants. The public news services were on the story, of course, and Stimson had watched their cursory coverage, but more usefully, he had "commed" with "Turk" Prince, the embassy's first secretary, who was in downtown Kabul, where he thought he could get a better feel for the mood of the crowd and where it was more reliable, anyway, to edit and adjust the short-range feeds from his agents and remotes. With the instant messaging feature of Bladders, Stimson had been able to call up Prince from his limousine on the way to work and have a personal conversation with his man-on-the-spot. Stimson could see Prince on his monitor, but, for "security" purposes, all Prince got on his retinal scanner was a static image of a rather formal Secretary Stimson sitting behind his oak desk in the department. In fact, Stimson, like most higher ups did not want to risk looking the slightest out of control, mussed or haggard, so Bladders incorporated a see-but-not-be-seen option that worked exactly like the old State Department hierarchy: the secretary could see everybody; assistant secretaries could see down, but not up; ambassadors could see their staffs, but not the other way around, and so forth. Of course, the option could be overridden if a higher-up actually wanted the eye contact of authority to personalize the message.

Actually, Prince did not look like your traditional Foreign Service officer, or even most of those scattered around the world in 2015. He was dressed in a dirty brown cloak with the hood up, partly to give himself a bit more cover, and partly to allow the hood-mounted lens to give his superiors the eye contact he learned he needed for credibility. Prince had gotten himself a deep tan and had grown a shaggy beard, the better to move easily around Kabul. He looked, in fact, thought Stimson, pretty much like any other male pedestrian. If it weren't for the bio-validation registry built into Bladders, Stimson thought, he might not be able to trust that this report was coming from one of his own people.

"Turk, I've just screened the highlights of your last twelve hours of transmissions, but I still don't know whether this thing is dangerous for us or not. In your commentaries, you seem pretty relaxed, but Jack (Amb. Johnston Sewell) seems to think that the mob is going to trash the embassy." At his mention of Ambassador Sewell, Stimson remembered to branch the ambassador into the conversation, as much as a courtesy to traditional channels as a quest for more opinions. So, he pushed the "conference" icon on the limousine's tablet screen and then "Kabul--" Ambassador (Johnston Sewell)." Immediately, a stock photo of Johnston Sewell popped into the top quarter of the screen. A few seconds later, the photo was replaced by the real-time, blinking Jack Sewell, looking a bit rumpled and puffy.

"Jack, I'm sorry as hell to bother you this late, but I know that the president is going to want me to tell him that we don't have anything to worry about in Kabul. The last thing we need is a repeat of the Tehran hostage crisis. Now, Turk was about to tell me why he is so relaxed about the situation downtown, and I thought that you ought to join in."

“Thank you. Good morning, Mr. Secretary. Yes, Prince is down where the action seems to be. So, let’s hear what he says now, and then I’ll give you my two cents.”

“Well, sir,” Turk began, “wait just a second until I can slide around the next corner where I can talk a bit more openly. In the meantime, take a look at these images that my guys got for us just a few minutes ago.” Turk touch-typed a few commands to a key pad inside the pocket of his cloak (he was wearing his flexible, dwarf communicator in the folds of his robe), and in the bottom-left quarters of the ambassador’s and secretary’s screens began to roll full-color, talking images of almost instantly translated hot-heads, first haranguing the crowd, then pointing to burning tires in the streets. Maps showing the locations and densities of the crowds popped up in the “image” quadrant of the ambassador’s and secretary’s screens. A few seconds later, the maps drew in the locations and densities of the Royal Afghan Civil Guards.

Turk’s face came back on the screens. “Gentlemen, I am in a little quieter position now. I think that you could see from the transmissions that the situation looks hot, and that is what the CNN/NBC/CBS guys are showing, but take a look at this conversation that I had with Abdullah Ibrahim (the commander of Capitol Defense of the Civil Guards) a little while ago.” In less than a second, Prince’s face was replaced by that of Colonel Ibrahim, who seemed to be talking over the viewers’ heads, literally. (State’s now-standard shirt-button-mounted lens caused the under-the-chin angle during most conversations, but frequent viewers soon got used to it.) In response to Prince’s questions and comments, Ibrahim, as interpreted from Pushtu by the same language-interpretation software now standard in Bladders, portrayed the street disturbances as having to do much more with the internal politics of several dissident factions, rather than any animus against U.S. policies to the Afghano-Pushtun Federation. After a few minutes of the Prince-Ibrahim conversation, Prince’s face returned to the screen, but it was Ambassador Sewell who first spoke.

“Mr. Secretary, I have no reason to think that Ibrahim was not leveling with Prince. But the fact of the matter is that, whatever motives are driving the disruptions downtown, things get out of hand pretty fast around Kabul, so I want to do the prudent thing.”

“And what might that be, Jack?” asked the secretary.

“I think that the right thing, Mr. Secretary, is to get the remainder of our people out of the chancery and dispersed around town where they will be out of sight and won’t create new targets for a bunch of young hotheads, who mostly want to see themselves on CNN doing something heroic, like shooting a SAM over our wall and hitting the Great Seal. That’s what they did twice last summer.”

“Well, Jack, you’re our guy for Afghano-Pushtun, and you’ve got all the authority you need to get your people out of harm’s way, so do what you think best. But, just so that I’ll know, if the chancery stays closed down for a couple of days or a week, what kind of capabilities do we lose for our diplomacy over there?”

“Frankly, Mr. Secretary, none. Only a half dozen of our folks come to the chancery regularly anyhow. All are equipped to do their jobs on the move, and they stay in good touch with each other and with me through Bladders.”

“All right, Jack. Do what you need to. Tell your folks for me that they’re doing a great job.”

“I certainly will, Mr. Secretary. I’ll do that right away; and after I get back to Kabul in a couple of weeks, I’ll treat them all to a burger fry at the residence.”

“Where are you now, Jack?”

“In Sri Lanka, Mr. Secretary. It’s a lot quieter down here, and I can get our messages through to the Afghans a lot better by tele-démarche from here than if I had to rattle in from Kabul’s ‘burbs, where the chancery is, and try to find where any part of the government might be at the time. Since the

Afghans started licensing their own version of Bladders from us a few years ago, they are very seldom in their offices.”

“Right you are. Good night, Jack. Good night, Prince.”

Premise VI: Embassies will not have disappeared altogether.

Tradition: Since the early nineteenth century, embassies and the notion of diplomacy have been intertwined. [Note: The early nineteenth century predated much of the IT revolution.] Tradition is not bad in and of itself when not positively harmful, but it can be harmful when it consumes resources otherwise put to good use and when it substitutes for original thought. The question by 2015 will have become, “How much is the Congress willing to pay to staff, and to maintain and protect facilities more traditional than useful?”

Politics: Embassies will have continued to provide high-status, enjoyable employment for political supporters of the administration in power. The reward of an ambassadorship is part of the currency of presidential elections. Nonetheless, with the eroding functions of embassies, both the glamour and significance of diplomacy and even ambassadorships will have been progressively diminished, and it will have become harder to persuade serious-minded political appointees even to remain overseas at their posts unless the residence is truly lush and the entertainment budget is large.

Premises Set VI and a half: New opportunities for embassies in 2015.

1. “Global” issues (environment, pollution, migration, disease, etc.) will have become more important. Embassy staffs will be government lobbyists in foreign capitals to deal with such issues.
2. With foreign ministries being effectively out of the policy and information loop, embassies can deal directly with domestic ministries and with nongovernmental entities.
3. The rise of NGOs and businesses in important programs gives embassies new functions in influencing important NGOs and businesses. [NB: The rub here is that NGO headquarters may not be in the same location as national capitals.]
4. Decentralization of foreign interests means that embassies have a legitimate need to accomplish local representation outside of capital cities. This might be done by consulates, legations, detached officers, or roving specialists.

Act 3:

September 30, 2015, 18:20 EST, Washington, D.C., General Services Administration (GSA), Office of Foreign Buildings Management, 19th and E St., N.W.

Deputy Administrator Carolyn Keene has invited Senior Manager Tom Sturdy into her sixth-floor executive suite for a sundowner. This one, though, at the very end of fiscal year (FY) 2015 is special.

Sinking into her deep leather club chair and slipping off her shoes so that she could prop her feet up on the coffee table between them, Carolyn took a sip of her fifteen-year-old Scotch and said, “Tom, we haven’t been face to face for quite a while. More than a year I guess, but I feel that we have been almost alter egos in getting the reins on those remaining embassies. I am particularly proud of what you have done with Tokyo. Tomorrow we are going to show that Tokyo broke even in FY 2015 and is on course for net profit next year. Ted (Theodore Jackson, administrator of the GSA) has been pushing for that good news for the past three years, and I know that the president is going to be pleased as punch that he can finally tell the taxpayers, now that our overseas real estate costs have been tamed, that the federal government is as business-like in its management operations as any of the big corporations.”

“So, you think that he will pull through in 2016?” Tom asked.

"Look, in 2012 he got elected pretty much on his promising to finish the job of bringing rationality to government management. The electorate was just fed up with the trillion dollar Defense procurement scandal back in the Luck administration, so the president was just pushing the right buttons by telling them how he was going to fix things, especially since the federal deficit ballooned again just before the election. What a bitter joke all that budget surplus talk at the turn of the century turned out to be. The economy pretty much flat-lined during the first decade, and tax revenues fell through the floor; but Congress couldn't face the tax issue again, so soon after the big charade in 2001; and everybody in government had lost any semblance of cost-containment discipline, with all the surplus nonsense." Carolyn took another sip of her Scotch.

"Tom, this isn't a political question, of course, but aren't you just a little bit proud to have helped this administration pound in the last nail?"

"Well,...sure,...of course. As a former Foreign Service officer and now a civil servant, I put it in terms of being proud to have helped my government with one of its important programs." He continued, "Of course, the overseas real estate is not the biggest fish in the pan, but it has been fun to work with because of the significance and value of some of the embassies and consulates. Back in the days when State still hadn't worked out that it was in the diplomacy business and not the real estate business, a lot of my former colleagues over there treated those buildings like the crown jewels--not to be touched or handled by the unwashed. It's funny, and a little sad, that when they thought of, say, embassy Rome, they honestly thought in terms of the building."

"I know," said Carolyn, "but they weren't alone. The Congress didn't help much either by deciding back in the nineties that to protect our diplomats overseas, we had to make sure that no more truck bombs could get close enough to our embassies to do any real damage. Then we spent fourteen billion on defenses for our buildings. That was supposed to be new money, but of course it wound up having come out of the 150 Account and so really squeezed out expenditures that would have helped diplomacy itself."

"Yep, I remember when we did that because I was assigned to a couple of our certified, defended embassies. They were out on the edge of town, where they could get the required setbacks and worked just like medieval castles, except that the drawbridges were those damned vehicle barriers that did more damage to U.S. vehicles and to those of our invited guests than a hundred cells of the old Red Army Faction. When we got decent mobile information gear that would let us encrypt on the fly, most of us figured out that the only time we needed to go out to the embassy was to show up for the once-a-week show-your-face. And that was before it sank in that you could show your face without actually going out to the embassy. Besides, after the ambassadors themselves quit keeping regular work hours at the embassy, for the many of the same reasons as everybody else--plus, they had better decorations in their home offices than the rest of us--the whole idea of the pilgrimage out there got ridiculous. After a while, the only people who did keep regular hours in those remote embassies were the admin folks, who were paid to run the place. Talk about a self-licking ice cream cone!"

"Well, Tom, among the things I wanted to tell you in person is that I can see what good use you made of your early diplomatic training in this job. It's been, what?, seven years now since GSA took over the little OFB (Office of Foreign Buildings), a supposedly independent operation, and started giving the job the serious consideration that it deserved. You came to us at the same time. So, for seven years, you have been jaw-boning your former colleagues and pulling them along, slowly and patiently, without breaking a whole lot of crockery. If that ain't diplomacy, I don't know what is."

"Thank you, Carolyn. I really appreciate your saying that. Even more like diplomacy, this job could not have been done without the stick and carrot, and GSA, with some help from the Congress did a good job of supplying both at the same time with the 'Rational Management Act.' You don't show the stick, of course; that's not good diplomacy. But it's okay if the counterpart decides on her own that you have one in your pocket. The carrot, you pull out and wave around. What I had going for me was

the 'money fungibility rule' that State admin people really liked at first because it freed them to spend their budgeted funds in the best way they saw fit to carry out the mission of the department. At first they said that the mission of the department was to run embassies and consulates. That went all the way to the White House before they would accept that their mission was to conduct diplomacy, period, full stop. Whatever did not benefit that bottom line was a candidate for cutting. What really did the trick, though, was that they could reprogram the money of the cut programs for the conduct of diplomacy. That's really how we got big embassy offices turned into small embassy offices and then into no embassy offices, while the line diplomats in the field got more training, communications equipment, and moving-around money. And the thing snowballed, a virtuous circle: with fewer demands on embassy and consulate work space, we needed less logistical tail--fewer clerk/aides, general service people and telephone operators, smaller char forces with less snack bar and commissary amenities, and no budget and personnel offices. By 2012 or so, the department was able to convince itself that the big fortress embassies were white elephants."

"Right, Tom, and the administration is going to get some credit for that with the taxpayers. What I want to do, though, is to make sure that in any announcements or speeches that we make around here, we give due credit to those pioneers over in State who did the heavy lifting earlier this century. Without them, the various agencies that used to fill up our embassies and consulates would have simply continued, even while State was reducing the number of real diplomats overseas. When they started having to pay the real costs for their embassy offices, a lot of them moved out to commercial space or brought their people back to the United States, where they could do just as good a job keeping tabs on Ukrainian wheat production, or whatever else they were watching."

"Yes, ma'am, I'll see to that. But, you know, it's a sore point, still, in the department that the same cost-accountability system eventually squeezed most of their own people out of what they considered their own buildings. Look at Paris, for example, one of State's crown jewels. When State got permission from the Congress back in 2006 to spend its money on 'diplomacy,' rather than adhering to the old line-item rigidities, it took only three or four years to realize that they could do a more cost-effective job by bringing a lot of the diplomats and support staff home and by spreading out the rest of them into little one-person posts around France, wherever they might be needed. Remember the department's stubborn refusals in the late nineties to let Ambassador Rohatyn, who was then in Paris, to send one or two of his 800 people then in the embassy out to important cities, like Lyon? After about three years of fighting, he finally had a success or two. State had all sorts of reasons, including security, as to why the basic idea was impossible. Rohatyn called the embassy-centric setup a "main-frame" system, when what he wanted, and never really got, was more of a networked system of free-standing PCs."

"I do remember that, Tom; and nobody came to Felix's assistance. What an irony that just ten years later, when the department had to start matching up its budgetary inputs with its usable outputs, it found out that it didn't make sense for its own people to be in the main chancery, not with its competing commercial value. Now, State is doing quite well, with the income that it has from that Disney operation on the Place de la Concorde. The French are getting their virtual trips to the United States, with those multi-sense simulations, without having to get on an airplane at all. Of course, the French would never have permitted such a thing if Disney had not become a Franco-American corporation. I heard that the mule ride down the Grand Canyon is a great favorite--heat, flies, mule smell, extravagant scenery, sore derrières, the whole thing....And you never leave the American embassy!"

Not the end.

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