Asia–Pacific Challenges for Diplomacy

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ABSTRACT

There has been a threefold change in the world of diplomacy and diplomats: in the levels of diplomatic activity; in the domain and scope of the subject matter or content; and in the numbers and types of actors. In consequence, the business of the world has changed almost beyond recognition over the last century. In the classic formulation, the overriding goal of foreign policy was the promotion, pursuit and defence of the national interest. The overriding goal of foreign policy in the contemporary world is to forge issue-specific coalitions with like-minded actors through issue-specific ‘network diplomacy’.

The world of international relations too has changed dramatically since 1945, including the Cold War and its ending, decolonisation, the rise of the human rights and environmental protection norms and the advancement of international humanitarian law, shifts in the locale, nature and victims of war and armed conflict, a progressive shift from national to human security as analytical framework and policy template, and globalisation. The end of the
Cold War had different results in the Euro-Atlantic and Asia-Pacific theatres. The structure of power relations in Asia–Pacific is more fluid and complex than in Europe, resting on five powers: America, China, Japan, Russia and India. Regional diplomatic challenges include managing nuclear risks in South and Northeast Asia; the intersecting strategic triangles of China-Japan-US and China-Japan-India as the anchors of regional stability, security and prosperity; becoming norm entrepreneurs and setters, not just norm takers and spoilers; and embedding regional norms and best practices in resilient institutions.

New Age diplomacy is increasingly about issue-specific and goal-directed partnerships between different actors. Asia-Pacific is no exception to this rule. The diplomatic challenge is to form coalitions of the winning to achieve sustainable resolutions to disagreements, disputes and conflicts. This article proceeds in five parts. I will begin with a brief overview of the changing world of diplomacy and diplomats, then canvass changes in the world at large since 1945, followed by the lagged changes in Asia–Pacific. Fourth, prompted by North Korea’s nuclear test last year, the unprecedented nuclear deal between India and the United States, and the continuing crisis over suspicions about a clandestine nuclear weapons program in Iran, I will take up the theme of the anomalies undermining the global governance of nuclear weapons. Finally, I will conclude with a catalogue of challenges to diplomacy in Asia–Pacific.

I. Changes in the World of Diplomacy and Diplomats
There has been a threefold change in the world of diplomacy and diplomats:

i) In the *levels* of diplomatic activity, from the local through the domestic-national to the bilateral, regional and global;

ii) In the *domain and scope* of the subject matter or content, expanding rapidly to a very broad array of the different sectors of public policy and government activity; and

iii) In the rapidly expanding *numbers and types of actors*, from governments to national private sector firms, multinational corporations, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and regional and international organizations.
The business of the world has changed almost beyond recognition over the last century. Four decades ago the influential French theorist Raymond Aron argued that ‘the ambassador and the soldier live and symbolize international relations which, insofar as they are inter-state relations, concern diplomacy and war’.¹ Today, alongside the hordes of diplomats and soldiers, the international lawyer, the multinational merchant, cross-border financier, World Bank technocrat, UN peacekeeper and NGO humanitarian worker jostle for space on the increasingly congested international stage.

In the classic formulation, the overriding goal of foreign policy was the promotion, pursuit and defence of the national interest. The über-realist Hans Morgenthau defined diplomacy as ‘the art of bringing the different elements of national power to bear with maximum effect upon those points in the international situation which concern the national interest most directly’.² The four core tasks of the diplomat were to represent his country’s interests, protect his country’s citizens visiting or residing in his accredited country, inform his own and host government and people about each other, and negotiate with the host country.³ This was conducted in a world of ‘club diplomacy’ (and occasionally the even more intimate ‘boudoir diplomacy’).⁴ Because of the threefold changes identified above, the overriding goal of foreign policy in the contemporary world is to forge issue-specific coalitions with like-minded actors. China and India teaming up with Brazil and South Africa to ensure that any Doha accord will be a development outcome in reality and not just in rhetoric is a good example.

The matching core task of diplomacy is to engage in issue-specific ‘network diplomacy’.⁶ The latter has more players than club diplomacy, is flat rather than

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³ Women diplomats were a rarity.
⁵ Jorge Heine (at that time the Ambassador of Chile to India), *On the Manner of Practising the New Diplomacy*, Working Paper No. 11 (Waterloo, Ontario: Centre for International Governance Innovation, October 2006), p. 568.
⁶ Ibid., pp. 2–12.
hierarchical, engages in multiple forms of communication beyond merely the written, is more transparent than confidential, and its ‘consummation’ takes the form of increased bilateral flows—of tourists, students, labour, credits, investments, technology, and goods and services—instead of formal signing ceremonies. The motto of new diplomacy could be: networking to promote welfare and security by managing risk and reducing vulnerability in a world of strategic uncertainty, increasing complexity and rapid globalisation.

Those attached to the old world of pomp and pageantry, rituals and procedures, are increasingly detached from the real world of modern diplomacy, and are the less effective for it. Not only can presidents, prime ministers and foreign ministers go over the ambassador’s head directly to their counterparts in other countries; often so can business executives, trade union leaders, journalists and NGOs. The bigger departments from the home country’s bureaucracy, better staffed and resourced, often place their own personnel in overseas embassies: not just defence, but also agriculture, education, and so on. The agenda-setting capacity of NGOs—Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) – is greater than that of many governments. If, therefore, the diplomat wishes to escape from Peter Ustinov’s withering description as ‘nothing but a headwaiter who is allowed to sit down occasionally’, then he and she must learn to engage and communicate with the full range of social, economic and political actors, across all domains of subject matter, and at all levels of interactions.

Ambassadors’ lives no longer consist, if it ever did, of equal parts of protocol, alcohol and geritol. They must engage with the host society in which they live, not merely negotiate with the government to which they are accredited. No longer is the ambassador an honest man sent abroad to lie for the good of his country, in the famous epigram by Sir Henry Wotton (1568–1639); prime ministers and presidents manage to do that quite well at home directly. Instead, in attempting to navigate the shoals while exploiting the opportunities of a globalised and networked world, the diplomat must cultivate all manner of constituencies in

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7 Quoted in ibid, p. 10.
home, host and sometimes even third countries. That is the key to network diplomacy: cultivating all relevant constituencies.  

II. A Changed World
The world of international relations—the ‘field’ in which diplomats operate—has also changed substantially since 1945. We operate today in a global environment that is vastly more challenging, complex and demanding than the world of 1945. Just consider the vocabulary and metaphors of the new age: Srebrenica, Rwanda, DRC, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, East Timor, Darfur; child soldiers, ethnic cleansing, blood diamonds, 9/11, regime change, Islamophobia, HIV/AIDS, global warming, climate change; Microsoft, Google, iPod, Blackberry; metrosexual, heteropolitan, localitarian—the list is endless.

The issues and preoccupations of the new millennium present new and different types of challenges from those that faced the world in 1945. With the new realities and challenges have come corresponding new expectations for action and new standards of conduct in national and international affairs. The number of actors in world affairs has grown enormously, the types of actors have changed very substantially, the interactions between them have grown ever more dense and intense and the agenda of international public policy has been altered quite dramatically in line with the changing temper of the times.

1. THE COLD WAR
The celebrations and joy at the ending of World War II soon turned into a dark and sombre mood as the iron curtain descended down the middle of Europe and the two blocs’ rival armies, backed by formidable arsenals of nuclear weapons and doctrines of nuclear deterrence, eyeballed each other through what John Gaddis appropriately labelled the long peace.  

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8 In 1948–49, a young Pierre Trudeau set out on a backpacking adventure across Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific. He found overseas Canadian diplomats to be aloof, disdainful and condescending—an experience he never forgot and an attitude he reciprocated as prime minister two decades later. See John English, Citizen of the World: The Life of Pierre Elliott Trudeau. Volume One: 1919–1968 (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2006), pp. 180, 190. A cautionary tale for young consular officials: the ragged and dreadlocked young backpacker seeking your assistance today could be your minister in years’ time.

mutual hostility between the United States and the Soviet Union as superpowers; the second axis was a transcendental conflict of ideas and values that divided the world into two groups of states. The Cold War was a global struggle centred on and dominated by two superpowers who were able to structure the pattern of international relationships because of a qualitative discrepancy in military capacity and resources. And the conflict was transcendental because it involved a clash of ideologies: the existence of a strong Marxist and capitalist state that could not accept permanent relations with each other, believing instead in the eventual destruction of the other.

The end of the Cold War terminated the US-Soviet great-power rivalry, brought victory for the liberal over a totalitarian ideology, and marked the triumph of the market over the command economy model. We are the better for the Cold War having been fought, for how it was fought, and for who won. As a benign hegemon that is rare if not unique in great power history, the United States underwrote world stability and prosperity and embarked upon an ambitious and largely successful agenda of regional and global institutions, including the United Nations, built as part of a great liberal normative enterprise.

The elimination of countervailing power to check the untrammeled exercise of US power did not just produce a unipolar world; it also ushered in a quasi-imperial order. Imperialism is not a foreign policy designed to promote, project, and globalise the values and virtues of the dominant centre, but a form of international governance based on an unequal hierarchy of power.10 The reality of inequality structures the relationship between the imperial centre and all others. This is not a matter of malevolence on the part of a particular administration in Washington, but an artefact of the reality of a unipolar world that will shape the foreign relations of any administration.

This is perhaps the biggest challenge for diplomacy at the global level: how to interact with a unipolar Washington that views itself as uniquely virtuous,

resistant to ‘Gulliverisation’ (that is, the giant tied down by innumerable threads of global norms and treaties), exempt from restrictions that apply to all others, oscillating between neo-isolationism and neo-conservatism. The challenge is as acute for Finland and Germany as it is for China and India. If friends and allies are to be useful, they must avoid both slavish obedience and instinctive opposition; be prepared to support Washington when right despite intense international unpopularity; but be willing to say no when America is wrong, despite the risk of intense American irritation. A second and related challenge is how to interact with one another without always routing relations through Washington in a hub-and-spoke model.

2. DECOLONISATION
One of the historic phenomena of the last century, powerfully championed by Washington in the decade after World War II, was the emergence of large swathes of humanity from colonial rule to independence, even if for many the reality of oppression did not materially change, or at least not for long. The first great wave of the retreat of European colonialism from Asia, Africa and the South Pacific was followed by the collapse of the large land-based Soviet empire and a fresh burst of newly independent countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. There has been something of a revival of the enterprise of liberal imperialism which rests on nostalgia for the lost world of Western empires that kept the peace among warring natives and provided sustenance to their starving peoples. This is at variance with the developing countries’ own memory and narratives of their encounter with the West. Typically, their communities were pillaged, their economies ravaged and their political development stunted. Afro-Asian countries achieved independence on the back of extensive and protracted nationalist struggles and then engaged simultaneously in state building, nation building and economic development. The parties and leaders at the forefront of the fight for independence helped to establish the new states and shape and guide the founding principles of their foreign policies, including a strong anti-colonial impulse. The experience of the former Soviet satellites is not all that different in essence, with the one significant exception of the abiding sense of gratitude towards the United States for unstinting support in the long shadow of Soviet oppression.
There are several resulting diplomatic challenges. For most former colonies, from the South Pacific to Southeast and South Asia, the triple challenge of national integration, state-building and economic development remains imperative. We also need to avoid state collapse and failure and the resulting humanitarian emergencies, from Pacific Island states to East Timor, North Korea, Myanmar, Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and some others. Former colonial powers and settler societies have to be sensitive to the foreign policy input of historical trauma, while former colonies must make an effort to escape the trap of viewing current events and motives from a historical prism. One of the clearest examples of the dual danger is in relation to providing international assistance to victims of atrocities inside sovereign borders.11

3. ChangIng nature and locale of Armed conflict

The number of armed conflicts rose steadily until the end of the Cold War, peaked in the early 1990s, and has declined since then. The nature of armed conflict itself has changed, with most being internal struggles for power, dominance and resources rather than militarised inter-state confrontations.12 Battle lines, if they exist at all, are fluid and shifting rather than territorially demarcated and static. Because they merge seamlessly with sectarian divides, contemporary conflicts are often rooted in, reproduce and replicate past intergroup atrocities, thereby perpetuating hard-edged cleavages that are perceived as zero sum games by all parties. Thus all sides are caught in a never ending cycle of suspicions, atrocities and recriminations.

Until the Second World War, war was an institution of the states system, with distinctive rules, etiquette, norms and stable patterns of practices.13 In recent times the line between war as a political act and organised criminality has become increasingly blurred. The locale of warfare has also shifted. Today we have more wars, and more UN peace operations, in Africa than the rest of the world combined. Often, wars of national liberation leading to the creation of new countries were followed by wars of national debilitation as the new states faced

13 See Kal J. Holsti, War, the State, and the State of War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
internal threats to their authority, legitimacy and territorial integrity by secessionist movements.

Even most ‘internal’ conflicts have regional and transnational elements. Civil conflicts are fuelled by arms and monetary transfers that originate in the developed world, and in turn their destabilising effects are felt in the developed world in everything from globally interconnected terrorism to refugee flows, the export of drugs and the spread of infectious disease and organised crime.

The net result is that noncombatants are now on the frontline of modern battles. The need to help and protect civilians at risk of death and displacement caused by armed conflict is now paramount. Diplomats will be judged on how well they discharge or dishonour their international responsibility to protect.

4. HUMAN RIGHTS
The multiplication of internal conflicts was accompanied by a worsening of the abuses of the human rights of millions of people. International concern with human rights prior to the Second World War dwelt on the laws of warfare, slavery, and protection of minorities. In 1948, conscious of the atrocities committed by the Nazis while the world looked silently away, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The two covenants in 1966 added force and specificity, affirming both civil-political and social-economic-cultural rights without privileging either set. The United Nations has also adopted scores of other legal instruments on human rights.

Human rights advocacy rests on ‘the moral imagination to feel the pain of others’ as if it were one’s own, treats others as ‘rights-bearing equals’, not ‘dependents in tutelage’, and can be viewed as ‘a juridical articulation of duty by those in zones of safety toward those in zones of danger’.14 The origins of the Universal Declaration in the experiences of European civilisation are important, not for the reason that most critics cite, but its opposite. It is less an expression of European triumphalism and imperial self-confidence than a guilt-ridden

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Christendom’s renunciation of its ugly recent record; less an assertion of the superiority of European human nature than revulsion at the recent history of European savagery; not an effort to universalise Western values but to ban the dark side of Western vices like racial and religious bigotry.

The challenge for diplomacy, therefore, is how best to interpret and apply universal values with due sensitivity to local contexts and Asian sensibilities. Far from cross-cultural divisions, the loss of a son killed by government thugs unites mothers of all religions and nationalities in shared pain, grief and anger. A challenge for Asia’s diplomats is how to convince Western governments and people that the Palestinians are not exempt from the universalism of human rights, and that occupied Palestine should not be declared a human rights-free zone.

5. RESOURCE CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

The rise of environmental consciousness, the need to husband resources more frugally and nurture our fragile ecosystems more tenderly as our common legacy for future generations, was another great social movement of the last century that contributed greatly to the greening of the agenda of international affairs. The concept of ‘sustainable development’ was one of the major norm shifts, with the Bruntland Commission being the midwife.15 How best to operationalise the concept in concrete policy and actual practice remains intensely contentious and thus a major diplomatic challenge.

Nothing illustrates this better than climate change. There is substantial agreement among scientists that the rate of climate change driven by human activity dwarfs the natural rates of change. Yet much of the media has preferred to give ‘equal’ time to contrarians whose scepticism is sometimes supported by the fossil fuel industry. ‘Balanced’ coverage reflects, not the balance of scientific consensus on the subject, but rather the ability of special-interest groups to capture media and political attention. The failure of major countries to participate

in the Kyoto Protocol undermined its effective implementation and delayed the international effort to slow down carbon emissions of the industrial countries. The Stern report issued a deadly sober warning. Without urgent action, global output will fall by some 20 percent, producing economic devastation and social dislocation on a scale comparable to the great depression and the two world wars. Some have argued that given scientific uncertainties built into the climate change models and the high costs of action that may ultimately prove surplus to requirements, the prudent policy is to wait, see and adapt if necessary. Sir Nicholas Stern reversed the argument: given the same uncertainties and the relatively much lower costs of acting now rather than later, the best policy is immediate action. Delayed action will cost more and deliver fewer benefits.  

The speed and amount of global warming will be determined by the increase in greenhouse gases and will in turn determine the rise in sea levels. The gravest threat of climate change for all living species, including humans, lies in the potential destabilisation of the massive ice sheets in Antarctica and Greenland. If carbon dioxide emissions continue to increase at current rates for another fifty years, temperatures are predicted to rise by 2-5 degrees centigrade by mid-century and 3-10 degrees by the end of the century. In this scenario, we will continue to exploit fossil fuel resources without reducing carbon emissions or capturing and sequestering them before they warm the atmosphere. Life may survive, but on a dramatically transformed and far more desolate planet. In the alternative to the business-as-usual scenario, carbon emissions stabilise within one decade before falling over several decades, first gradually and then rapidly, helped by curtailed consumption patterns, revenue-neutral taxes that reward consumers who save while charging consumers who prefer not to change their lifestyles, and new abatement technologies. Temperatures will still rise, but by 1-2 degrees centigrade, buying time to develop coping strategies.

Kofi Annan commented that climate change sceptics are ‘out of step, out of arguments and just about out of time’. The award of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize jointly to former Vice-President Al Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel

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17 Kofi Annan, ‘Climate change to test our adaptability’, *Japan Times*, 10 November 2006.
on Climate Change (IPCC) for their championing of the need to address the urgent and critical threat of climate change underscores the intensity of the diplomatic challenge. Effective programs for tackling what may well be the gravest challenge confronting humanity require active partnerships among governments, scientists, economists, NGOs and industry. The traditional paradigm of value-maximising national interest is simply irrelevant.

6. HUMAN SECURITY

Its irrelevance has been accentuated also with the rise of the human security paradigm which puts the individual at the centre of the debate, analysis and policy. He or she is paramount, and the state is a collective instrument to protect human life and promote human welfare. The fundamental components of human security – the security of people against threats to personal safety and life – can be put at risk by external aggression, but also by factors within a country, including ‘security’ forces, acid rain, forest fires, rising sea levels, floods, earthquakes and tsunamis.

The reformulation of national security into human security is simple, yet has profound consequences for how we see the world, how we organise our political affairs, how we make choices in public and foreign policy, and how we relate to fellow-human beings from many different countries and cultures. To many poor people in the world’s poorest countries today, the risk of being attacked by terrorists or with weapons of mass destruction is far removed from the pervasive reality of the so-called soft threats: hunger, lack of safe drinking water and sanitation, and endemic diseases. These soft threats kill millions every year—far more than the so-called ‘hard’ or ‘real’ threats to security. A major diplomatic challenge is to recalibrate the balance between national and human security and reallocate human and material resources accordingly.

7. GLOBALISATION

National frontiers are becoming less relevant in determining the flow of ideas, information, goods, services, capital, labour and technology. The speed of modern communications makes borders increasingly permeable, while the volume of cross-border flows threatens to overwhelm the capacity of states to manage them. Globalisation releases many productive forces that can help to uplift millions from poverty, deprivation and degradation. But it can also unleash destructive forces –
‘uncivil society’—such as flows of arms, terrorism, disease, prostitution, drug and people smuggling, etc. that are neither controllable nor solvable by individual governments. Because global capital is not self-governing, stability in financial markets requires the judicious exercise of public authority; maximising global allocative efficiency cannot be the only goal of international financial policy. Questions of legitimacy and distributive justice are as important as allocative efficiency, currency convertibility and capital mobility.

The growing interdependence under the impact of globalisation is highly asymmetrical: the benefits of linking and the costs of delinking are not equally distributed between all partners. Industrialised countries are highly interdependent in relations with one another; developing countries are largely independent in economic relations with one another; and developing countries are highly dependent on industrialised countries. There has been a growing divergence, not convergence, in income levels between countries and peoples, with widening inequality among and within nations.\(^{18}\) Assets and incomes are more concentrated. Wage shares have fallen while profit shares have risen. Capital mobility alongside labour immobility has reduced the bargaining power of organised labour. The rise in unemployment and the accompanying casualisation of the workforce, with more and more people working in the informal sector, has generated an excess supply of labour and depressed real wages. Joseph Stiglitz in particular highlights the unequal distributional consequences of a restricted labour market with an increasingly deregulated market for flows of investment and capital.\(^{19}\) The ease of capital movement leads to threats of exit unless taxes, wages and worker benefits are reduced, and accommodating such demands of capital feeds the growing inequality in incomes within and disparity between countries.

Financial crises of the 1990s in Asia, Latin America and Russia showed how much, and how quickly, regional crises take on systemic character through rapid contagion. They also highlighted the unequal distribution of costs among the victims of financial crises. The international financial institutions (IFIs) embed


unequal market power relations in global financial governance; the promotion of free capital mobility as a universal norm reflects the market dominance of the major economic powers; and outbreaks of financial crises in the emerging markets highlight the role of the IFIs as ‘global’ norm enforcers. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is both the symbol and the agent of the unequal distribution of economic power and the resulting asymmetric distribution of the risks of international financial flows and the costs of adjustment. Hence the claim by Michel Camdessus, the former managing director of the IMF (1987–2000), that to the duty of domestic excellence and rectitude we must add the ethic of global responsibility in the management of national economies. He goes on to describe the widening inequality within and among nations as ‘morally outrageous, economically wasteful, and socially explosive’.20

Even the industrial countries are now experiencing something of a blowback effect of globalisation. The phenomenon of outsourcing (where the rich countries outsource jobs to the Indias and the Philippines of the world, while the latter outsource their brains) and the rise of challenges from China and India, including takeover bids, is giving the Western world a taste of the dark side of globalisation. The powerful global labour arbitrage generated by globalisation has put unrelenting pressure on the income earning capacity of high-wage workers in the industrial economies like Japan and Canada. At the same time, and indeed partly in reaction to globalisation, communities are beginning to re-identify with local levels of group identity.

The challenge of diplomacy is how best to harness the productive potential of globalisation while muting the disruptive forces, taming the destructive forces and protecting (ethno)national identity.

8. NONSTATE ACTORS
NGO-led sceptical dissenters in the streets offer an antidote to the unbridled enthusiasts of global capital in boardrooms and treasuries. Governments can satisfy only a small and diminishing proportion of the needs of human beings as

social animals. ‘Civil society’ refers to the social and political space where voluntary associations attempt to shape norms and policies for regulating public life in social, political, economic and environmental dimensions. The new actors have brought a wide range of fresh voices, perspectives, interests, experiences and aspirations. They add depth and texture to the increasingly rich tapestry of international civil society.

The net result of expanding global citizen action has been to extend the theory and deepen the practice of grassroots democracy across borders. We are likely to witness increasing issue-specific networks and coalitions. Global policy networks can constitute highly effective coalitions for change that bridge the growing distance between policy-makers, citizens, entrepreneurs, and activists.

Civil society operating on the soft and well-lit side of the international street poses fewer and lesser problems than ‘uncivil’ society: nonstate actors operating among the shadows on the rough and dark side of the international street who too have become increasingly globalised and interlinked in their operations, funnelling drugs, arms, hot money and terrorists across state borders. The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 were dramatic proof of the democratisation of the means of violence, as a result of which a motley collection of fanatics was able to inflict on the US homeland casualties on a scale that has been beyond the capacity of any state actor since 1941.

The threefold challenge for diplomacy is how to counter uncivil society, give voice to civil society, but neither a vote nor a veto to them: for that would be an abdication of responsibility to govern on behalf of all citizens. Some Asian–Pacific governments complain about the activities of international NGOs as interference in their internal affairs and view them suspiciously as instruments of ‘soft’ Western intervention. They are surely right in the implied belief that NGOs augment foreign policy tools. The US is indeed a more powerful world actor for being able to draw on a rich civil society, a depth of scholarly knowledge and a media that has market dominance and reaches into the farthest nook and cranny around the world.
But this begs the question: instead of keeping NGOs at arms’ length, should not governments learn how best to strengthen civil society in their own countries and enter into partnership with them in the pursuit of shared international goals? Even more crucially, why is it that non-Western governments complain about biased coverage by Western media instead of doing something constructive? Journalists are censored, manipulated, harassed and sometimes even imprisoned and liquidated. To be sure, English is the dominant medium of global communication, and the BBC and CNN are truly global brands in the world of media. Yet today they are being challenged by Al Jazeera, to the point where Washington has had a strained if not antagonistic relationship with the group in relation to their coverage of Afghanistan and Iraq. Of the large and well-established Asian democracies, India and Japan could easily by now have supported the emergence of truly global media brands as well. Quite a few Indian journalists have world recognition but, almost without exception, they work for Western print and electronic media. In its desperation to control information, news and analyses, the Indian government has effectively aborted the rise of independent Indian news services with the authority and credibility to command a global following. The BBC provided the model; is it the West’s fault that Indians failed to emulate such a positive example? The net result is that India does indeed lack a key agent of international influence and a crucial ingredient of soft power in the modern networked world. In this respect, sadly, India is a metaphor for all of Asia.

The challenge for enlightened national interest diplomacy, therefore, is how best to nurture civil society and credible media so that they help to project local values and perspectives to a receptive international audience.

III. A Changed Asia–Pacific
The framework for the world order resting on superpower rivalry was adopted at Yalta in 1945. Reflecting the two theatres of the Second World War, that order had two geographical components: Europe and Asia–Pacific. The kaleidoscope of cultures, cleavages and conflicts in Asia–Pacific does not permit a simple intercontinental transposition of the Euro–Atlantic security architecture. The Yalta-based order has crumbled in Europe but not Asia–Pacific. Here, walls have not come tumbling down, Korea is still divided, empires have not dissolved nor
come apart, and armies have not gone marching home. Internal developments in
the former Soviet Union had immediate and far-reaching consequences for
Eastern Europe but lacked a similar resonance in the Asian communist countries.

There is a greater variety of political systems in Asia–Pacific, ranging from
robust and explosive democracy, fragile democracies and something less than full
democracies to communism. Many countries are characterised by socio-economic
fragility and regime brittleness and some suffer from enduring low-intensity
insurgencies. The disparities in social and economic indicators are greater.
Terrorist cells are feared to have taken deep root in parts of Indonesia and the
Philippines, while Northeast Asia is the setting for such other non-traditional
security concerns as worsening water and energy scarcity, environmental
degradation and human trafficking.21

The mantle of being the most heavily militarised region—entailing massive
armies, fortified and mined borders, heavy long-range weapons systems and nuclear
weapons—has passed from central Europe during the Cold War to Northeast Asia
today. Intensive militarisation is proof of the persistence of the national security
paradigm across Asia–Pacific. Yet the challenge posed by the massive earthquake and
devastating tsunami of 26 December 2004 was a vivid illustration of the advantages
of conceptualising security within the inclusive framework of human security.

The structure of power relations is more fluid and complex, resting on five
powers: America, China, Japan, Russia and India. Even while attempting to
improve relations with one another, they are also jockeying for advantages in case
relations should deteriorate sharply, for example in their control over sea lanes of
communication and choke points through which critical and potentially very
vulnerable energy supplies transit.

In summary, US influence and prestige have fallen due to Iraq’s
demonstration of the limits to American power, its perceived hostility to the
Muslim world and its relative retreat from engagement with Asia–Pacific, but it

21 See Ramesh Thakur and Edward Newman, eds., Broadening Asia’s Security Discourse and Agenda: Political,
remains the most influential external actor; Japan’s has continued to decline, albeit slowly over the decades rather than precipitously as with the US; Russia is marking time, still; India is starting to recapture the region’s and world attention and interest; and the real winner is China with an ascendant economy, growing poise and self-confidence and an expanding array of soft power assets in regional diplomacy.

The corresponding diplomatic challenges are how to dampen prospects for conflict among the major powers of Asia–Pacific and promote cooperation instead as a regional public good; how to encourage policies by the major economic players that will cushion economic shocks for others and draw them into region-wide economic expansion and prosperity; how to promote trade policies, practices and arrangements that are inclusive, open and market-led but also fair and equitable; and how to cope with the growing list of non-traditional security threats like energy and water scarcity, drug and human trafficking, and pandemics, for example by creating an Asian energy grid.

**IV. Nuclear Weapons, Anomalies, and Global Governance**

India was the first country to break out of the nuclear arms control regime centred on the NPT with a nuclear test in 1974 and then several more in 1998. In doing so, India challenged not just the NPT but also the system of global governance. Last year North Korea did the same and now even Iran is throwing down the gauntlet, yet again, to a basic inconsistency in our definition of the problem. Is it nuclear weapons, on the ground that their very destructiveness somehow makes them so evil that they should be proscribed for all? Or is it rogue states, whose behaviour is so bad they cannot be trusted with weapons which are tolerable, if not desirable, in more mature and responsible hands?

Sensible policies to deal with the problem cannot be devised if our understanding of the problem is itself riddled with conceptual confusion. Even an administration that prides itself on moral clarity fell into the trap of conflating the two by saying that we cannot tolerate the world’s most destructive weapons falling into the hands of the world’s most dangerous regimes.

It truly is remarkable how those who worship the most devoutly at the altar of nuclear weapons are the fiercest in threatening to excommunicate as heretics others
queuing to join their sect. If the problem is not nuclear proliferation, but nuclear weapons, then the solution is not nonproliferation, but disarmament through a nuclear weapons convention. The core nonproliferation-disarmament bargain of the NPT is based on the assumption of nuclear weapons being the problem. From this follows the compelling conclusion that the logics of nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament are essentially the same. The focus on either nonproliferation or disarmament to the neglect of the other ensures that we get neither.

The quadruple crisis today arises from non-compliance with NPT obligations by some states engaged in undeclared nuclear activities; other states that have failed to honour their disarmament obligations; states that are not party to the NPT; and nonstate actors seeking to acquire nuclear weapons. The only way to escape the trap is to think outside the NPT box.

The world has managed to live with five, followed by eight, nuclear powers. Over the course of four decades, however, six significant anomalies have accumulated and now weigh it down close to the point of rupture.

First, the definition of a nuclear weapon state is chronological—a country that manufactured and exploded a nuclear device before 1 January 1967. India, Pakistan Israel, North Korea, Iran or others could test, deploy and even use nuclear weapons, but cannot be described as nuclear powers. In principle, Britain and France could dismantle their nuclear edifice—what is life without hope?—and destroy their nuclear arsenals, but would still count as nuclear powers. This is an Alice-in-Wonderland approach to affairs of deadly seriousness. But can the NPT definition be opened up for revision through a formal amendment of the treaty with all the unpredictable consequences?

Second, even as the threat from nonstate actors has grown frighteningly real, the NPT can regulate and monitor the activities only of states. A. Q. Khan’s underground nuclear bazaar showed how porous is the border between private and state rogue actors.22 A robust and credible normative architecture to control

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the actions of terrorist groups who can acquire and use nuclear weapons must be developed outside the NPT.

Third, North Korea’s open defiance, spread over many years, shows that decades after a problem arises, we still cannot agree on an appropriate response inside the NPT framework. It is impossible to defang despots of nuclear weapons the day after they acquire and use them. The UN seems incapable of doing so the day before. If international institutions cannot cope, states will try to do so themselves, either unilaterally or in company with like-minded allies. If prevention is strategically necessary and morally justified but legally not permitted, then the existing framework of laws and rules—not preventive military action—is defective.

The fourth anomaly is lumping biological, chemical and nuclear weapons in the one conceptual and policy basket of ‘weaponsof mass destruction’. They differ in their technical features, in the ease with they can be acquired and developed, and in their capacity to cause mass destruction. Treating them as one weapons category can distort analysis and produce flawed responses. There is also the danger of mission creep. If nuclear weapons are accepted as having a role to counter biochemical warfare, how can we deny a nuclear-weapons capability to Iran which was actually attacked with chemical weapons by Saddam Hussein?

Fifth, the five NPT-licit nuclear powers (Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States) preach nuclear abstinence while engaged in consenting deterrence. Not a single country that had nuclear weapons when the NPT was signed in 1968 has given them up. Can the country with the world’s most powerful nuclear weapons rightfully use military force to prevent their acquisition by others? Such behaviour fuels the politics of grievance and resentment. It is not possible to convince others of the futility of nuclear weapons when the facts of continued possession and doctrines and threats of use prove their utility for some. Hence the axiom of nonproliferation: as long as any one country has them, others, including terrorist groups, will try their best (or worst) to get them. If nuclear weapons did not exist, they could not proliferate. Because they do, they will.
The final paradox concerns the central doctrine underpinning the contemporary Westphalian system, which holds that sovereign states are equal in effectiveness, status and legitimacy. In reality, states are not of equal worth and significance, neither militarily, economically, politically nor morally. The nonproliferation hawks lump India, Iran, Israel, North Korea and Pakistan together without discriminating between their respective records, but do discriminate between nonproliferation and disarmament. It seems unlikely that in the eyes of most people and countries, nuclear weapons in the hands of Britain and North Korea are equally dangerous. The logical policy implication is either to condemn nuclear weapons for everyone, or to distinguish bad and rogue from responsible behaviour and oppose regimes, not the weapons. But that threatens the core assumption of the NPT, that nuclear weapons are immoral for anyone.

Like Iran’s insistence on its NPT-based right to peaceful nuclear development, North Korea’s test was a symptom, not the cause, of the NPT being a broken reed.23 The same is true of the now-stalled India-US agreement on civil nuclear cooperation.24 So how do we articulate a post-NPT vision?25

V. Conclusion – The Unfinished Diplomatic Agenda
Like Iran, the nature of the North Korean nuclear challenge and possible ways of responding illustrate, only too well, the threefold change that I began with. With regard to levels of activity, efforts have to range from Iran and North Korea to bilateral relations, Middle Eastern and East Asian regional diplomacy, and the United Nations. The domain and scope have to include not merely national security issues directly and narrowly, but also issues of energy security, technology transfers, food supplies, recognition of North Korea as a ‘normal’ country and, at the opposite end, criminalisation of North Korea as an actor that has carried out state kidnappings of Japanese nationals in Japan and taken them to North Korea and exported proliferation-sensitive material and equipment.

The expanded range and number of actors is also relevant. For example, a nuclear weapons convention as the meta-solution will likely involve a similar coalition of governmental and NGO actors as produced the Ottawa Convention banning antipersonnel landmines and could emulate the Chemical Weapons Convention in involving the private sector. And of course with respect to threats, there is considerable anxiety about nuclear weapons falling into the hands of and being used by terrorists. The prospect highlights a major shortcoming in the normative architecture of arms control and the use of force, namely, that they are signed by and regulate the activities of state actors only. Any solution to the challenge will require creative and innovative thinking.

The old world order has faded. The new world order is not yet set. The contours of Asia–Pacific are changing. Items for continuing discussion include:

- The economic recovery of Asia–Pacific;
- The short, medium and long-term roles of China, Japan, the United States, Russia, India and the Central Asian states;
- The immediate future of fragile states like the Solomon Islands, East Timor, North Korea, Myanmar, Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc;
- The medium and long-term future of Taiwan;
- The future of the two Koreas;
- The integration of Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar into the Southeast Asian mainstream;
- The nature of links between ASEAN, ARF, APEC and European countries;
- The place of Australia and New Zealand in Asia–Pacific: should the East Asian community take the form of ASEAN+3 (Japan, China and South Korea—China’s preference) or ASEAN+3+3 (Australia, New Zealand and India—Japan’s and US preference);
- The proliferation of bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements and other preferential trading arrangements;

The new security agenda of international terrorism, illicit arms and narcotics flows across borders, human trafficking, pandemics, the looming food, water and energy scarcity, and climate change; and

The nuclearisation of Asia and the Pacific.

In the main, Asians have been norm takers rather than the setters and enforcers of regional and global norms. They urgently need to learn the art of being norm entrepreneurs and setters instead of playing the role of spoilers, for example with respect to whaling, nuclear weapons, climate change, and the new norm of the responsibility to protect. Even better, they need to develop regional skills in articulating regional norms as global ones and embedding them in regional and global conventions and regimes. The Europeans in particular excel at this. That Asia punches well below its weight in international forums like the United Nations, reflecting the fact that it is less cohesive and united than any other regional grouping, should be no more acceptable to governments than to peoples.

They could begin by addressing the need to adapt the classical tenets of sovereign statehood to modern-day realities. Else they will be forced into reactive and defensive positions, yet again. National sovereignty is the mother of all anomalies, befuddled by empirical and conceptual challenges alike, for example with respect to nuclear weapons. We know that many of the most intractable problems are global in scope and will most likely require concerted multilateral action that is also global in its reach. But the policy authority for tackling them remains vested in states, and the competence to mobilise the resources needed for tackling them is also vested in states. The very strength of the United Nations, that it is the common meeting house of all the world’s countries, is a major source of weakness with respect to efficient decision-making. For diplomats dealing with Asia and the Pacific, the biggest challenge is to fashion regional responses to the accumulating anomalies of a state-based order with respect to nuclear weapons, human rights abuses and humanitarian atrocities, environmental degradation and resource depletion, the pursuit of national security amidst multiplying human

insecurities, the rise in numbers, activities and influence of nonstate actors both good and bad, and the march of globalisation that respects no passports.

The optimistic scenario postulates continuing strengthening of cooperative security relations embedded in regional institutions in Asia–Pacific. Enhanced interdependence through increasing intra-regional flows of people, goods and services will foster and nest a growing sense of community. The pessimistic scenario is of intensified volatility, turbulence and conflict beyond the managerial capacity of the embryonic regional institutions. The prophets of doom fear the re-emergence of old power-political rivalries, or else the rise of new security threats rooted in energy, food and water scarcity.