

Presentation by Ambassador (ret.) Robert M. Beecroft
Wilton Park Conference 1090:
“The art of the possible: Conflict diplomacy in an era of new global challenges”
Saturday, 12 February 2011

This afternoon’s theme is “Creating the new diplomat.” It’s an issue I’ve been deeply involved with in Washington over the past year and a half. I confess that I only recognized its importance relatively late in my career. With the exception of two assignments at NATO, the focus of my first thirty years as a diplomat was overwhelmingly bilateral. My personal epiphany came when I led the OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2001 to 2004.

At the time, the OSCE Mission in Bosnia was the largest that the organization had yet deployed. I had two deputies – ambassadors from France and the Russian Federation. Eight hundred international and Bosnian staff members were active in four regional centers and twenty-four field offices around the country. Our mandate covered a broad range of state-building issues, including: human rights; refugee return; judicial and legal reform; media reform; military reform; municipal development; and development of good governance at all levels. I added education reform to the list, based on my conviction that failure to change young peoples’ attitudes and assumptions about their fellow citizens of other ethnicities would eventually result in failure to build a viable state.

It was not long before I concluded that post-conflict peace-building, such as the OSCE was conducting in Bosnia, was a prime example of a new diplomatic function that would inevitably be in greater demand. Subsequent developments in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere confirm this.

In August 2009, Ambassador (ret.) Ronald E. Neumann, the president of the American Academy of Diplomacy, invited me to take the lead in producing a report on how the State Department educates and trains its professionals for their roles and missions, to include specific recommendations for changes and improvements. We assembled an advisory group of some 25 people, chaired by one of America’s most distinguished senior diplomats, Ambassador (ret.) Thomas R. Pickering. Participants included retired U.S. diplomatic and military officers, corporate executives, academic experts, congressional staff members, representatives from the QDDR team at the State Department (about which more later) and the U.S. Institute of Peace, and both the Director General of the Foreign Service and the Director of the Foreign Service Institute. In addition, through the good offices of the American Foreign Service Association, we were able to tap into the views of serving U.S. diplomats in the field and in Washington.

Shortly thereafter, the advisory group held its first meeting, and a small drafting group got to work. We also assembled a separate “red team,” whose task was to

question the assumptions, conclusions and recommendations in the draft. Two of our colleagues visited a number of embassies in Washington, including those of Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Mexico and the UK, to learn how other diplomatic services educate and train their professionals. We also investigated in detail the professional education requirements of U.S. military officers, which are as strict and systematic as the State Department's are haphazard.

As we were doing our work, an in-house project was also under way at the State Department: the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, or QDDR. Consistent with the Obama Administration's efforts to rebalance the foreign policy relationship among diplomacy, development and defense, Secretary of State Clinton launched "a sweeping assessment of how the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development can become more efficient, accountable and effective in a world in which rising powers, growing instability and technological transformation create new threats, but also new opportunities." The QDDR, which focuses on what it calls "civilian power," was released in December 2010. It can be found on the State Department website, at <http://www.state.gov/s/dmr/qDDR/>.

It is worth recalling that the idea of conducting a State/USAID strategy review every four years was inspired by the Defense Department's Quadrennial Defense Review, or QDR. The QDR was mandated by Congress in the mid-1990's, and is taken very seriously by the Pentagon. It will be interesting to see whether the next iteration of the QDDR, scheduled for 2014 after the next presidential elections, appears as scheduled.

The QDDR and our American Academy of Diplomacy study complement, but do not duplicate, each other. Most important for our purposes today, the QDDR consistently refers to *training*, while the Academy study's stress is on *professional education* across a diplomat's career. In a word, our study concentrates on how intellectual skills, informed analysis and structured thinking are acquired and applied by our diplomats, as they proceed through the ranks.

Early on in the project, there were intense debates in the working group about whether diplomacy is truly a profession, and if so, what qualifies it as such. Here is one definition, drawn at random from the Web: "Diplomacy is the art and practice of conducting negotiations between accredited persons...representing groups or nations. It usually refers to international diplomacy, the conduct of international relations through the intercession of professional diplomats with regards to issues of trade and war. International treaties are unusually negotiated by diplomats prior to endorsement by national politicians."

I suspect that many U.S. Foreign Service officers these days would say: "How quaint." They might also recall a more succinct definition: "Diplomacy is the art of

being able to tell someone to go to hell in such a way that he looks forward to the trip.”

More seriously, it seems to me that if – to quote another definition from the Web – a profession is “a discipline whose activities are carried out by a group of specifically prepared and like-minded individuals,” then diplomacy most certainly qualifies, certainly as much as the military profession does.

The American Academy of Diplomacy study, entitled “Forging a 21st-century Diplomatic Service for the United States through Professional Education and Training” (DPET for short), will be released this month. There will be intensive follow-up – on Capitol Hill, in the media, at State, and inside the White House. It will also be available at the Academy’s website: <http://www.academyofdiplomacy.org/>.

The study is direct and to the point. The first paragraph reads as follows:

Since at least 2001, America’s “smart power” equation has been out of balance. Increasingly, under-investment in diplomacy and development has led to our military taking on responsibilities traditionally met by diplomats and development experts. Driven by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the need to respond to the global threat of terrorism, resources and influence have flowed, abundantly and too often uncritically, to the Defense Department, which more than anyone has pointed to the limitation of bullets in addressing the challenges in this region. While the root cause of this imbalance lies in a lack of broad understanding about the value and requirements of diplomacy and development at this point in history, the lack of resources allocated to the State Department and other foreign affairs agencies, the inconsistent and uncoordinated response of those agencies to rapidly changing international priorities and demands have also played a contributing role.

The core of the study consists of eight succinct, specific recommendations. They focus on the need to redress America’s country’s chronic under-investment in diplomacy, the need to strengthen and expand the State Department’s professional development process, and – most crucial, in my view – the requirement that as necessary resources are phased in, every U.S. Foreign Service Officer must complete a year of advanced study relevant to his or her career track as a condition for promotion to senior diplomatic ranks. We have come a long way from the days when being “pale, male and Yale” helped assure advancement in the Foreign Service.

Predictable obstacles will have to be overcome. Diplomacy continues to be little understood and nearly invisible to much of the American public. In the Congress, negative stereotypes about diplomats persist, and -- unlike the military, with its bases and industrial infrastructure -- the State Department can count on relatively few allies within the U.S. Congress. But we are giving it our best shot, and current budgetary concerns might be our ally. (The U.S. fiscal year 2010 defense budget was a little over \$650B. The State Department’s 2010 budget amounted to a little over \$16B, while USAID’s program obligations amounted to

\$19B.) Tellingly, some of our best allies are turning out to be Defense Secretary Gates and senior U.S. military officers, who have long been concerned with relentless force overstretch and mission creep.

Thank you for your interest and attention. I look forward to discuss our study and the issues it addresses in our discussion period.