**The Imperative of Digital Diplomacy for Pakistan**

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A diplomatic mission of a country is historically considered as a symbol of sovereignty in the host country and a diplomat is the vicesurgent of the sovereign.Diplomacy as an art and science which owes its developments to the societal changes, has become complex , as the world moved from city states to Nation states, to empires, to present day global world, interconnected with internet and other fast means of physical communication . Several stakeholders have emerged ; apart from states who interact globally and have greatly influenced diplomacy in its content as well as its conduct .

The 21 st Century world is unrecognizable from 17, 18th,19th and even 20th century world, in terms of foundational societal transformations , and the resultant impact on the state structure and functions. In today&#39;s world the interaction is not confined to two sovereigns, but an interaction between several stakeholders who interact independently with their counterparts in other countries. There is a proliferation of institutional and professional platforms who in most cases interact independent of state, , Professional bodies like ,Journalists Unions, , Engineers, and scientists , Doctors academessions etc and not to forget Political Parties and Parliaments , Judiciary , Accountants, Advocates, Chamber of commerce meet regularly and have fairly developed global structures .However, the most prominent of these stakeholders are civil society organizations who claim to represent citizens in their respective countries .The UN and its affiliated organizations like UNICEF , UNHCR WHO etc, and SupraNational Organizations like EU OIC, Arab League , African Union, GCC etc ,have decisive roles in diplomacy. The citizens as individuals or groups ; now use digital social media platforms to express their support to the global Political ,social , Economic , Environmental ,climate change, Human Rights,Right to Information, Minority Rights and Gender issues etc, on the one hand on the other they seek and leverage the digital technology for the causes/issues of concern to their society /countries, like Arab Spring , banning of Mines , and more recently the Black Lives Matter movement etc. These all are complex and varied inputs for Foreign policy and will become challenges for the 21st century Diplomates , who have to understand the digital transformation , and use the technology to formulate and articulate Foreign Policy stances on the issues with multi sectoral stakeholders who compete with the state for policy formulation and in some cases policy implementation.

The days of cocktail party Diplomacy are over ,and our Foreign office should adapt to the age of Digital Diplomacy

The 140 character limit by Twitter which was increased to 280 characters is indeed a test of vaculabry and brevity for the user . This limited and a casual choice of words in social ,personal, or group messaging is fine , but when Twitter Warrior Politicians use it as a tool of statecraft , supported by their Social Media brigades and carry out political blitzkrieg on the domestic rivals or diplomatic offensive on their adversaries across borders , the game gets muddy , and when Twitter enters the realm of Diplomacy , a science and art of nuances, choice of words and even punctuations it gets messy . One recalls brief stint at Pakistan Mission to the UN in New York where, merchants of vocabulary and dare I say in the lighter vein , of Punctuations ,who would put to shame the ambiguous oratory of the Greek oracles would have to contain and damage control the reaction to cryptic utterances of whimsical leaders conducting diplomacy on Twitter .

Twitter is just one platform for messaging and is being used by over 140 world leaders as a political communication tool but there is now a plethora of Social Media Platforms available. One still recalls good old days when a statement by a head of state or head of Government would be put on a long chain of drafting , redrafting , vetting and final approval. But now the Twitter handle has replaced the entire hierarchy. This does not mean the Ministry of Foreign Affairs doodles its thumbs, while the political heads use their thumbs typing Twitter messages. The job becomes more challenging for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs , this manifestation of current technological disruption , requires that the flow of information and its processing and final communication to the intended leader has to be constant and swift, again the digital tools would be of immense value .

The digital technological advances have brought about disruptions , which will require an ecosystem based proactive and network oriented adoption in the Government and Corporate Governance. The challenge for the 21st century Diplomate is finding a fusion between the corporate and state interests, while interacting with other countries , and Digital Diplomacy can be operationalized to find this fusion. Digital Diplomacy is likely to enter the deep core of the diplomatic DNA , therefore there is a need to prepare our future diplomats equipped with digital tools to understand the international challenges posed by the digital disruption in the conduct of diplomacy , and equip themselves technologically so that ,they are able to understand digital diplomatic landscape and conduct effective diplomacy .

In my assessment , the Multilateral diplomacy on global issues is likely to dominate the agenda of the world , eg , climate change, pollution in space due to space exploration and space exploitation , drugs, cross border terrorism, Human Rights and Pandemics. This change will require our diplomatic corp to acquire skills for use of big data , digital platforms, etc for conduct of effective diplomacy , and this is where I see the scope for training our diplomats in Digital Diplomacy.

As the saying goes Change or Perish. Given the Geostrategic Geo-economics Challenges facing Pakistan , it is imperative that our Diplomatic corp which is considered the first line of defence must transform itself into a Digital Diplomatic Corp . The days of cocktail party Diplomacy are over ,and our Foreign office should adapt to the age of Digital Diplomacy . I would strongly propose formation of a” Digital Diplomacy Directorate” in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for effective Public Diplomacy , to start with, which should have mass communication experts, software negineers and hard core diplomates , to prepare strategies and Digital Tools for conduct of our Public Diplomacy in the Era of Digital Diplomacy. Our Missions abroad should be part of the Digital Diplomacy ecosystem built around our Embassies in the world and The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Islamabad .