

Book Review



Philip Seib (2016)

The Future of #Diplomacy, Cambridge: Polity, ISBN 978-150-950720-7, 154 pp.,
US\$ 19.95.

In a world of the fastest evolution ever, Philip Seib, Professor of Journalism, Public Diplomacy and International Relations at the University of Southern California, contributes to the ongoing debate in diplomatic studies with a short yet very accurate and interesting title that mixes the current points of view on both, the communications' and international relations' epistemic communities.¹

His book entitled *The Future of #Diplomacy* is composed of five chapters and an introduction, each written in an easy and accessible vocabulary so that even non-academics can understand.

The first chapter ('Open Diplomacy') argues that social media are not at the core of diplomacy as the reader might believe, and that the term 'digital diplomacy' is misused (p. 15), in accordance with Shaun Riordan,² but in disagreement with Jovan Kurbalija's ideas.³ Seib states that the use of 'digital diplomacy' gives the technology great impact in the diplomatic arena, but that diplomacy is still a matter of the five elements listed by Nicholas J. Cull: listening; advocacy; cultural diplomacy; exchange diplomacy; and international

¹ This book was awarded the International Studies Association's 2018 International Communication Book Award.

² Shaun Riordan, *Cyber Diplomacy vs. Digital Diplomacy: A Terminological Distinction*, CDP Blog (Los Angeles, CA: USC Center on Public Diplomacy, 2016), retrieved from <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/cyber-diplomacy-vs-digital-diplomacy-terminological-distinction>.

³ Jovan Kurbalija, 'Digital Diplomacy in Three Graphs', *Diplo* (Malta: DiploFoundation, 2016), retrieved from <https://www.diplomacy.edu/blog/digital-diplomacy-three-graphs>.

broadcasting.⁴ However, Seib supports the idea that ‘new technologies only provide an array of tools that make the process more efficient’, while he believes in the development of diplomacy side by side with the new media technologies. Here, social media play a central role, which in Seib’s opinion leads to the debate about open diplomacy. The internet and smartphones, security and privacy, an empowered public and connecting to the public are some of the topics discussed in this section.

The second chapter (‘The Rise of Public Diplomacy’) is a review of several aspects that appeared in scientific and practitioners’ debates after Open Diplomacy was established. China’s cultural outreach, Russia’s broadcasting, Israel’s policy-making and the United States’ grass roots outreach are some of the examples that Seib portrays in order to explain different practices and approaches that diverse states have chosen to expand their foreign policy, making good use of cheap and easy access worldwide to the internet. The debate under the subheading ‘Tomorrow’s Public Diplomacy’ (pp. 58-69) is especially interesting, because it makes an in-depth point on the credibility, speed, scope and results of the new diplomat’s job in the twenty-first century, something that Tom Fletcher addresses in more detail in his own book.⁵

A complete new set of ideas can be found in chapter three on ‘States and Non-States’, where Seib introduces new actors to the international arena and explains in general the way in which, for example, Facebook addresses diplomacy, as well as how traditional diplomats can adopt that platform. Seib also makes an analysis of the technological changes throughout history that have allowed people at different times to master war, pursue diplomacy and achieve peace. Yet the author goes specially in depth on the several factors that shape the new challenges for diplomacy in the twenty-first century, including new technologies in the information and communication field, the new types of wars and even the religious factor (not only Islam, but also Christianity and Judaism).

Chapter four — ‘Staying on Track’ — talks about the interferences and detours of which diplomats must be aware. Seib goes back to acknowledge the importance of analysis that is less focused on the technological aspects and better centred on the political duties of the diplomat’s job. Here he explains in lively terms how the selection and nomination of diplomatic posts and

4 Nicholas J. Cull, ‘Public Diplomacy: Taxonomies and Histories’, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 616, no. 1 (2008), pp. 31-54, DOI: 10.1177/0002716207311952.

5 Tom Fletcher, *The Naked Diplomat: Understanding Power and Politics in the Digital Age* (London: William Collins Books, 2016).