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Guerrilla Diplomacy for the 21st Century: Rethinking International Relations in a World of Insecurity

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DARYL COPELAND, APR 6 2010

Diplomacy, in recent years, has been neglected, if not scorned by journalists, think tanks, international relations scholars and, most surprisingly, by governments. That neglect, acute since the events of 9/11, has proven costly. Recent experience with the unsuccessful use of armed force by the USA in Iraq and NATO in Afghanistan suggests that the case for revisiting diplomacy is compelling. With the arrival of the Obama administration and departure of the neoconservatives from Washington, that stage appears set for change, and the case for advancing diplomatic alternatives – and alternative diplomacy – is gaining momentum.

The timing is right for a de-militarization of international policy. And the arguments in favour are formidable. The abiding need to rethink key elements of international relations – security and development – from the perspective of diplomacy in the age of globalization is clear. It must be asked: does diplomacy still matter? Yes, but the entire diplomatic edifice is in crisis and radical reconstruction is required. Viewed through the lens of those who favor talking over fighting, dialogue over diktat, and negotiation and compromise over compulsion, too many governments are still relying on armed force as the foreign policy instrument of choice, with calamitous consequences. Diplomacy can help make the world a better place, but it has failed to adapt to the imperatives of world order management in the 21st century. It has been sidelined, under-resourced and marginalized by governments almost everywhere. If this is to change, grand strategy will have to be reconsidered, and the foreign ministry, foreign service and, most crucially, the diplomatic method re-imagined and transformed from the ground up. This will involve addressing both the immediate and underlying drivers of insecurity and underdevelopment by generating better intelligence, working smarter, engaging strategically, and... by building a better diplomat. Diplomacy's front lines are now far removed from quiet clubs or closed meeting rooms, grand hotels or formal chancelleries. Today's diplomatic encounters tend to take place publicly and cross-culturally: in a barrio or a souk, in an internet chat room or a blog, on main street or in a Quonset hut set astride the wire in a conflict zone. Unlike all too many serving envoys, the guerrilla diplomat will know how to swim with comfort and ease in the sea of the people rather than flop around like a fish out of water, and prefer to mix with the population rather than mingle with colleagues inside the embassy walls. Thoughtful readers will enjoy meeting this renaissance polymath – part activist, part analyst, part alchemist – and seeing the pearl and pin-stripe archetype punctured by the characterization of a street-smart, Blackberry-toting, policy entrepreneur in sandals and denim. The 21st century emissary must be street-smart, tech-savvy, self-reliant and relentlessly innovative. *Guerrilla Diplomacy* sketches the erstwhile global village, showing that it has come to resemble a patchwork of gated communities surrounded by a roiling sprawl of shantytowns. In that kind of operating environment, long-term, equitable, sustainable and human-centred development has in large become the new security, and accordingly diplomacy must replace defence at the centre of international policy. The volume demonstrates that the conventional causes of conflict, such as ideological rivalry and territorial conflict, have been displaced by a raft of transnational issues, many rooted in science and driven by technology. These include criminality, terrorism and religious extremism, but also the more profound threats of state failure and climate change, and resource scarcity and environmental collapse, pandemic disease and genomics. In mapping the transition from the Cold War to the globalization age, the book traces the transformation of traditional, Westphalian-style, state to state relations, with all

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of their associated conventions and rigidities, to a post-modern politics dominated by new actors from civil society, supra-national bodies and the private sector. *Guerrilla Diplomacy* concludes with an analysis of the conceptual, institutional and practical tools required to identify the vectors of insecurity and underdevelopment and to manage the spectrum of current global crises and challenges. Those convinced by the guerrilla diplomacy thesis will be left feeling both an urgent need for collective, non-violent action and a deeper understanding of contemporary international relations.

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*Daryl Copeland is an analyst, author and educator specializing in diplomacy, foreign policy, global issues and public management. From 1981 to 2009 Mr. Copeland served as a Canadian diplomat with postings in Thailand, Ethiopia, New Zealand and Malaysia. During the 1980s and 1990s, he was elected five times to the Executive Committee of the Professional Association of Foreign Service Officers. His first book, **Guerrilla Diplomacy: Rethinking International Relations**, was released in July 2009 by Lynne Rienner Publishers. For more information visit: www.guerrilladiplomacy.com*