

## **DIPLOMATIC CHALLENGES IN A CRISIS WORLD**

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Diplomacy has an intimate and longstanding relationship with international crises. The institution of the resident ambassador was created, *inter alia*, for the purpose of managing crises: to serve as a check and as a means of raising the diplomatic alarm when political tensions between sovereigns perilously deviated from 'business as usual'. This basic principle arguably remains valid even today, but increasingly questions arise as to whether the growing complexity and interconnectedness of the global system does not actually deprive diplomacy of critical assets for effectively managing international crises. The succession of global crises in the past decade - the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, the global financial meltdown in 2008, or the revolutionary upheavals of the Arab Spring - support the claim that diplomacy is being increasingly practiced under conditions of permanent crisis: as soon as one international crisis ends another one springs into place.

The objective of this forum section is to provide a framework for intellectual exchange and debate about the role of diplomacy in negotiating global crises and the latter's impact on the evolution of diplomatic leadership, identity and method. Little is understood, for instance, of how the perception of perennial crisis – real, exaggerated or imagined – is changing the conduct of diplomacy. Is the space for reflexivity shrinking and if so, what are the implications for diplomatic practice and possibilities of leadership and responsibility in world politics? Can a state of crisis offer new opportunities for engaging in diplomatic innovation and for shaping new forms of diplomatic leadership? How far is it necessary to view diplomacy beyond statecraft, to pluralize it, so as to adequately address the multiple sites and causes of current crises? The contributions to this forum do not claim to provide definitive answers to these

questions but they rather invite readers to reflect upon the analytical implications of theorizing crisis diplomacy.

They do so by calling attention to five different perspectives by which the relationship between diplomacy and international crises could be examined. Corneliu Bjola takes issue with the view that diplomacy is primarily about rule-following and protocol enforcement. He instead argues that established procedures, practices and rules of diplomatic management are being severely disrupted in times of international crisis. This in turn enables the rise of three distinct profiles of diplomatic leaders: the maverick, the congregator and the pragmatist. Piki Ish-Shalom finds that diplomatic crises could be politically beneficial to leaders. As a result, a state of perpetual crisis or “crisisized routine” is artificially sustained on behalf of a new type of political actor, the King Diplomat. Marcus Holmes challenges the conventional view that international crises are conducive to poor decision making due to the intense psychological pressure applied to political leaders. He instead highlights the pro-social effects such as trust-building and “tend-and-befriend” reactions that international crises may forge among diplomats. Rebecca Adler-Nissen takes issue with the view that diplomats are mere custodians of international society and mediators of estrangement. She suggests that the constant flow of crises means that questions of power trump the mediating potential of diplomats who more often than not need to “take sides”. She thus underscores the role of responsibility and leadership in international crises. Costas M. Constantinou draws on the implications of approaching crisis diplomacy as both crisis management and crisis creation. He argues that there are currently two opposing tendencies: one being the regional and global institutionalization of crisis management mechanisms and the other the persistent disruption of the routine operation of the diplomatic system. He also suggests that network diplomacy is changing the role of leadership in crises.

Overall, this forum section focuses on both conceptual and practical issues concerning diplomacy in the contemporary crisis world and seeks to contribute to our understanding of what challenges have been successfully or inadequately addressed, and still lie ahead.

