



CARL BILDT

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden

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Perhaps Carl could give us his view of in what sense, if any, his diplomacy has been damaged by the lack of secrecy.

Carl Bildt, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden

We are about to enter a year in which I think there will be a profound European debate on the lessons of 1914 and the outbreak of the First World War and the enormous catastrophe that that meant for Europe. If we go back, we will remember that it was widely said that one of the things that caused it – the guns of August and all of that – was secret diplomacy and the fact that there had been secrets between the Royals and so on at the time and agreements that had been concluded that were not known about. There was then the escalation of these treaty arrangements which in combination with other things brought us to catastrophe. After the First World War, there was then a major reaction against secret diplomacy and the view was that all treaties should be open.

I still think that there has to be room for secret diplomacy, although I would argue that there is much less that we need to keep secret but that what we need to keep secret needs to be kept even more secret, and that goes for the previous debate. Nevertheless, there is less that needs to be secret and less that we can keep secret. Nowadays, you cannot conduct a foreign policy that is one thing in public and another thing in secret. If you do that, you then get the Snowdens and the Bradley Mannings because you do not have the loyalty of the system and you end up with whistleblowers and so on. There therefore now needs to be a kind of congruence between public diplomacy and the public image and the secret details and secret mechanics. I think that that is the big change that has occurred if we go back to previous times and, essentially, I think that it is quite a good change.

However, you then occasionally need secret diplomacy to break through and the number one example that I would use is Nixon-Kissinger. Would that have been possible without some amount of secrecy, with Kissinger going to Beijing and negotiating in secret? The House of Representatives would probably have started a civil war in the US if that had been known. However, when the fact was there it was accepted by everyone. You therefore need an element of secrecy sometimes, but on the main elements there is no longer room for it.