



DEBATE

Jim Hoagland, Contributing Editor, *The Washington Post*

I am going to take two questions and I will start with Renaud Girard.

Renaud Girard, journalist, *Le Figaro*

I am a journalist for *Le Figaro*. Both of you, Hubert and Carl, have been ministers and have attended a lot of councils in Brussels [Conseil des ministres des Affaires étrangères] every month. It seems that there is a paralysis in Brussels. What is your analysis of this paralysis and what do you suggest we do to overcome this dysfunction of diplomacy in the council in Brussels?

Hubert Védrine, Former French Minister of Foreign Affairs

I think we're about to reach a point where it's nearly impossible to have real exchange in a European discussion. It's become nothing more than grandstanding. I'd say the same thing about economic or trade union negotiations within a given country. In the talks over the grand coalition's programme and the make-up of the government in Germany, it seems to me that many things are public knowledge while there's also a secret dimension for a certain time. I defend elements of secrecy and keeping secrets for a certain amount of time. But I'm not in favour of secret diplomacy.

Nevertheless, with regard to the First World War and, contrary to what President Wilson said, and to what all of us have repeated ever since, if everything had been out in the open, things could've been worse, or at least not better, given the jingoism of public opinion in all the countries involved. If everything had been out in the open, public opinion would have demanded an even harder, more aggressive line even earlier.

That was a digression on the First World War. I'm not in favour of secret diplomacy.

As far as the European process is concerned, over the years I've seen a trend where Ministers or Heads of State or Government spend less and less time in serious discussion with each other and more and more time grandstanding or making declarations because we need to go back home saying, "Thanks to me, we made such-and-such a decision. Thanks to me, we prevented such-and-such a decision." Likewise, some lawmakers take the floor just twice a year so they can go on record and show they've been busy. It's the same phenomenon.

A long time ago we even invented the famous Gymnich meeting, which gave Ministers of Foreign Affairs an opportunity to speak frankly, directly, off the cuff, without collaborators. That, too, has become trickier and more bureaucratized. Likewise, the G5 has become the G7. At first it was a small meeting with a note-taker. Now it's a three-ring circus. So I'm in favour, including at the European level, of bringing back meetings where we can really talk to each other without worrying about public opinion, although we respect it. One Minister must be able to explain to another why, in this country, it's impossible to use such a formula without it being an element of revelation or theatre. I'm in favour of bringing that back. It's not secret diplomacy. It's just being able to work in normal conditions. Most normal professions would be destroyed if we applied the demands for continuous disclosure that are imposed on politics and, now, a little bit on diplomacy. I'm in favour of a balanced response.

Carl Bildt, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden

I fundamentally agree with a lot of that. I would say the main danger is that we tend to be too mediatory. I should not say that to you. For example, take the Gymnich meetings that we used to have and still have. The foreign ministers are supposed to come together and spend a day and a half talking to each other. That was the way it used to be. Now it has been prepared by all sorts of things and everyone is rushing out to have a press conference all the time. That is



good for the media and I am all in favour of public diplomacy, as you have noted, but it decreases the room for informal dialogue, not necessarily secret, but I would say informal dialogue that is necessary in order to forge consensus.

There are 28 nations in Europe. We are all small nations. Not everyone recognises this, but everyone is a small nation de facto. We can only have an impact on global affairs and be a partner on the global stage if we work together. We are shaped by our geography, our history, our culture. We can only come together by more profound dialogue and I think it is essential to give that somewhat more time and space to happen.

We have the European heads of state coming together at the end of next week to discuss what we are going to do with the European Security and Defence Policy. There are lots of technical details about refuelling and so on, but one of the things that we have been driving is that we need a profound European strategic debate. If we do not get the strategic cultures and debates of the European countries more aligned with each other, which is going to take some time, then we are never going to sort out the technicalities about refuelling or what to do in the different conflicts or different crises.

I think more profound public discourse and more time and space for the leaders to discuss it informally would go a long way. After that, we can talk to the media.

Jim Hoagland, Contributing Editor, *The Washington Post*

Hubert's discussion of the Iranian nuclear diplomacy reminds me that perhaps I should let you know that there are some indications that the Iranian foreign minister's mother is doing much better in the sense that in Washington last night, it was said by John Kerry and others that this is simply a break in the negotiations and they expect to resume the talks in a few days. That is not the view in Tehran, of course, but that is part of the problem, I guess.

Steven Erlanger, London Bureau Chief, *The New York Times*

Thank you, Jim. I have a specific question about Edward Snowden. I would like both of you to tell us whether you think Edward Snowden has done something good for the world and for diplomacy or something bad. Is he a hero or is he a traitor? Thank you.

Carl Bildt, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden

I do not know. I do not know because I think so far, the media that have access to this material have not been publishing things that are truly damaging. I have an ongoing debate with the Swedish media about these issues at the moment concerning our activities because we conduct activities in Sweden, surprisingly enough.

I always give the example of what we did during the World War II. We tapped the cables going through Sweden, so we found the German diplomatic and military traffic and we were able to break the codes. We were one of the few who could do it. That was an extremely sensitive affair. We saw Barbarossa and everything else coming. We tried to keep the knowledge of that particular thing extremely secret, but one person who was on the margins of the operation made a chance remark to one person, who made a chance remark to another person, who happened to be a German intelligence agent and it broke. They stopped the traffic and we lost that source of information, which we had also supplied to the Allies.

Still, the technology that we used to break the codes was so sensitive that it took until the mid-1990s to even disclose the fact that we had done it. Of course, that shows that some of these things will have to be extremely sensitive. If they are disclosed, it does serious damage to the ability of our countries to safeguard our security.

Has Snowden done that? You need to know exactly what the Americans are capable of doing and you also need to know what happened with the material that has evidently been handed over to journalists, but not published, if that ends up in different hands. That is where I see the great risk of losing abilities.



I think one lesson that we should all learn is that we should be more public about these sorts of things. As public officials, state officials, we should say, 'The state has an interest in safeguarding security. There are certain activities we need to undertake.' However, we should have laws governing them. We should have oversight bodies. We should have legitimacy anchored in our respective parliaments for what we do and there should be clear limits on what we do.

I think that is something that quite a number of countries have been sinning against and now we are learning that particular lesson.

A participant

Has the amount of information that is available and the data we have - made decision making in diplomacy better? Is the processing of information a problem? Is there an improvement in what flows in and comes out?

My second question is around the war on terror paradigm. How much of this is something we will live with for some time? Is it an aspect of the failure of diplomacy or the failure of states? As you know, a very tense issue for the United States is the use of drones in this aspect of the war on terror. I wanted to hear your insights on why this is an aspect of diplomacy today.

Carl Bildt, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden

The first question is about whether the abundance of information makes policy making easier or not. I think the answer is both yes and no. Information is available so that we can feel the pulse of the world. We can access information openly as well as through these other means in a way we never could before. At the end of the day, it is about what reaches the policy maker at the top at the relevant time.

You need to get the right information to the right person at the right time. That has become more challenging. I think one of the problems for certain bureaucracies acquiring information is that they do not really do that. At the end of the day, to take the US example, the US president gets a president's brief every day, which is the result of all of the US intelligence agencies. I would guess that *The Washington Post* editorial page has a more significant input into his decision making because they digest the information faster than others.

With all the information, we put a premium on digesting it and sorting out what is relevant. The bigger bureaucracies are at a disadvantage versus the more agile ones.

The second question was about the war on terror. No, it is not a diplomatic thing because diplomacy is essentially about state-to-state relationships. That is about security, counter-terrorism and counter-terrorism cooperation. That is a question of building states that are stable. Americans call this nation building so that the states can handle the challenge of terrorism, but that is a slightly different question.

Hubert Védrine, Former French Minister of Foreign Affairs

As far as shorter and shorter reaction time is concerned, I think it's destroying public decision-making. That's why I think it's necessary to manage a reaction while at the same time keeping the ability to think, reflect and have a strategy. The reaction to which most modern politicians or ministers' spokespersons are forced to submit themselves should be to say, "We're thinking", in order to gain time for reflection. That sounds like a joke but I think it's very dangerous. A few great statesmen or diplomats manage to resist.

As far as terrorism is concerned, it was more of an issue a few years ago. I think the phrase "war on terrorism" has always been gibberish. We're not waging a war on a technique. We're waging a war on an enemy, on something dangerous. We can wage a war to keep terrorists from achieving a specific goal. Considering the war against terrorism the centre of international activity was stupid, in my opinion. It obviously cannot translate into a foreign policy. The real objectives remain. There are too many decision-makers in the world interfering with the thought process. On the other



hand, fighting the terrorists, containing terrorism with surveillance, eavesdropping, police, information technology or action on the ground, is a necessity.

The real problem with Georges W. Bush's legacy is confusing both. We must never let up on ruthlessly fighting the terrorists, who, in any case, will end up losing. Terrorists cannot win against the modern world and the democracies. Democracies are not overthrown. The cards are stacked against them. The fight must be waged relentlessly. I don't think it should've been made the top priority, much less a foreign policy. Theoretically, the Americans turned the page by electing Obama, but too many people still mix the concepts up in their minds.

Jim Hoagland, Contributing Editor, *The Washington Post*

Je vous remercie pour les réponses sérieuses apportées aux questions sérieuses.

I am going to end the session.