THE ROLE OF ENABLERS IN CONTEMPORARY CONFLICTS — AND THE ENABLING OF DIPLOMATS TO RESPOND TO THEM: AN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE*

Alan Henrikson

The word "enabler" is not an established term of art in international relations. It is not known to International Law or to academic IR theory — or to Diplomatic Studies. Nonetheless, in the real world, the actions of those who make it possible for conflicts that now rage around the world to *continue* and even to *spread* are felt, sometimes painfully — even if not clearly seen, closely tracked, or well understood.

The nature of "contemporary conflict" is itself problematical. No longer is conflict only the clash of military arms or even another form of violence. Conflict need not always be the result even of explicit antagonism, of "ancient hatreds." It can nowadays be almost any situation of extreme tension that arises from human desperation within and between societies as, for example, when natural disasters, economic crises, or disease outbreaks such as the current Ebola flare-up in West Africa occur. Conflict is struggle — inner as well as outer. Its nature and shape can change, sometimes suddenly, owing to events. Or, simply, from fear. A recent program on PBS television in the United States, "The Roosevelts," recalled President Franklin D. Roosevelt's saying in his inaugural address in 1933, during the Great Depression, that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." The antidote to fear, as he knew, is confidence. That is what the institution of diplomacy is based on, and it is what diplomats, too, can bring.

Dealing with "contemporary conflicts" today can require new structures, new measures and methods, and, for diplomats, additional knowledge and new skills. Different kinds of training might be needed. I shall suggest — after a brief listing of what enablers are doing in today's world, and then a consideration what the notion of "enablement" is, and what its implications are — several ways in which diplomats themselves might need to be further enabled, with new resources and further training.

"Enabling," generally, seems to be an intermediary role. Those who do it are not the policy makers. Nor are they those with their "boots on the ground," whether soldiers or other field workers. What "enablers" do ranges from giving direct support to providing more indirect, even contextual, kinds of assistance. Among the various ways of enabling in conflict that one witnesses today are:

(1) infiltrating fighters, often disguised as "volunteers," who thus can be said to be acting individually and from their own will;

(2) recruiting fighters by preaching hatred and violence and otherwise inciting others to violent action;

* Discussion Paper for the 41st Annual Meeting of Deans and Directors of Diplomatic Academies and Institutes of International Relations —The International Forum on Diplomatic Training (IFDT) — held at the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) Pretoria, South Africa, September 25–26, 2014.

(3) supply in garms, and other materials used in warfare, including even weapons of mass destruction (WMD) such as poison gas, contagions, or radioactive materials;

(4) contributing money, for the payment of combatants and other operatives and for the purchase and shipment of weapons and other supplies they use;

(5) providing technical help, including communications technology and intelligence data;

(6) offering diplomatic "cover," by publicly defending the positions taken by the parties in a conflict, and possibly even "harboring" the persons or groups actively involved in the fighting; and

(7) manipulating the world's media, not just through propaganda campaigns but also through more subtle methods such as influencing the language, including names and other terms, of a conflict. One thinks of words and phrases such as "crusade," "jihad," or "war on terror."

The above is hardly an exhaustive listing. No doubt there are additional ways of enabling — including some that haven't been tried or perhaps even thought of yet.

As is clearly suggested by what I have said so far, the word "enable" considered in the context of today's security-related conflicts has a *negative* connotation. In certain other present-day realms, such as that of business enterprise and economic development, however, the word has an entirely *positive* connotation. To "enable" something, to make it possible, seems a good thing. Even in the field of international politics and diplomacy, it should be remembered, the idea of providing assistance to a party to a conflict may be viewed only favorably. This is, of course, partly a matter of perspective. An enabler, from the point of view of an adversary, is an "enemy." From the point of view of the party receiving the support, however, an enabler might be a highly valued "friend" and "ally".

To give an example of the favorable use of the word "enable," from my own particular field of study and teaching, U.S. diplomatic history, I would cite the role of monarchical France in supporting the American Revolution. There is a passage in Richard B. Morris's *The Peacemakers: The Great Powers and American Independence* (1965) which reads: "In 1776 Louis XVI's uncle joined with his nephew in setting up an initial fund for the thinly masked operation by which Caron de Beaumarchais was *enabled* [emphasis added] to ship desperately needed munitions to America." It has been estimated that as much as nine-tenths of all the military supplies used by the Americans in the early years of the Revolutionary War came from French sources — from French "enablers." The very existence of the United States of America today, it could be argued, is the result of this early French support.

This realization is, for me as an American, "nationally" self-revealing. My own country, the United States, might today be in fact the world's biggest enabler. One thinks of the range of support it has given and still gives, sometimes surreptitiously, to those it views as freedom fighters — including certain of the rebel forces now engaged in Syria, whether contending against the Assad regime or in opposition to ISIS. The United States is not alone, of course, in supporting military as well as humanitarian efforts inside that deeply-conflicted country and its surrounding region.

Enabling thus can be viewed very differently, depending in part on what side or (in complex situations like Syria) sides one is on. It is an ambiguous term. The phenome-

non of enabling conflict and perhaps its ultimate resolution is, historically, so recurrent that it should be possible to describe it comprehensively, and objectively — "scientifically," if you will. Enabling — the word and what it describes — is something that should be readily recognizable to all, irrespective of the partisan positions of those involved in it. In order to try to develop something approaching a *neutral* concept of what enabling is, as a basis for considering how enablers should be dealt with by diplomats (who *themselves* might be involved in "enabling"), I would offer for consideration this set of defining characteristics:

(1) an enabler is not *itself* directly engaged in the conflict — that is, a party to the fighting or other violent contention;

(2) the support that an enabler gives to those that are directly involved in a conflict is to some degree *hidden*, and, accordingly, not acknowledged — not necessarily with an outright lie, i.e., with a denial, but with perhaps a "neither confirm nor deny" ("NCND") response to questions that might be asked;

(3) the support that is given by an enabler is, for the most part, *intentional*, if not necessarily the expression of a publicly stated or otherwise well-defined policy. The degree of intentionality, however, can be highly variable, especially as enabling activity proceeds through long and sometimes very "loose" chains of command and delivery;

(4) What is fairly certain, even when intention is not acknowledged or otherwise clearly evident, is the fact of an underlying *interest* that an enabler has in providing aid. There can sometimes even be a "codependent" relationship, in which the donor *needs* the recipient — as occurs in the realm of interpersonal psychology (regarding eating disorders, gambling, alcoholism, etc.) where the term "enabler" is well established.

(5) Even without the existence of an actual *relationship* — analogous to that between a drug dealer and customers, for example — there can be enablement-cooperation in a situation where a government has an *independent* interest in a subject, and acts separately, but also *in effect* helpfully — entirely for its own reasons. This observation may apply also to media organizations, with their appetite for news and the intense competitive pressures they are under — to get there first, and to spread the "story" fastest and farthest. Although news organizations and professional journalists consider themselves — as only observers — to be impartial, they also can *in fact* be enablers of conflict. The "CNN effect" was in part an enabling effect. Especially at risk of interfering in conflict in this way are reporters "embedded" with combatting forces, whether on a government side or that of an insurgency.

(6) The unstated goal of enablement, all too commonly, may be less the *conclusion* of a conflict — with one side or the other actually winning or, perhaps, withdrawing from a fight — than its *continuation*. The motivation behind such an apparently cynical attitude (if this interpretation is correct) can vary. Basically, however, the explanation probably comes down to the realization that an existing conflict is, in Donald Rumsfeld's sense, a "known". To bring a conflict, such as the evenly balanced war between Iraq and Iran in the 1980s, to an end would take policymakers into the "unknown" realm, even the dreaded world of "*unknown* unknowns".

(7) Implicit in enablement is *control*. By contributing to the maintenance of a conflict, especially in a way that is not public and committal, an enabler can carefully

limit, calibrate, and time the assistance given so as to attempt the *management* of the conflict. This observation might even be applied, fairly or unfairly, to United Nations peacekeeping operations, such as the continuing UN presence in Cyprus, which, as some critics have suggested, has served to perpetuate that island's division by making resolution of its conflict unnecessary.

(8) The very involvement of outsiders-as-enablers does have the effect of *enlarging* a conflict, despite even a declared purpose of confining, or "containing" it. The involvement of additional countries in a containment effort, in a paradoxical way, can spread the conflict as an *issue* of international concern, if not in the physical sense of extending the fight itself. History is full of examples. The Non-Intervention Committee, composed of France, Great Britain, Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union, that was set up after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War to control the flow of war materials into Spain, with eventually some twenty-four countries involved, is a case of such "internationalization" of a conflict. "Non-intervention" then became almost a synonym for *intervening*. The various "contact groups" of recent decades also sometimes have widened the scope of a conflict-*issue*, if not the actual conflict itself

(9) To give aid, comfort, and "cover" to the parties in a particular conflict can *instrumentalize* the recipient regime, political faction, or insurgent group — making a *tool* of it. In the 1980s the United States and the Soviet Union waged in various regions of the world, including Central America and parts of Africa, a series of "proxy wars" — that is, conflicts between local parties waged, to some degree, *on behalf of* their more powerful distant donors. Owing to the unacceptable risks involved, including that of strategic nuclear war, leaders in Washington and Moscow did not dare to engage, directly and openly, in the struggles themselves. "Better to let others fight" — *enabling* them to do so. Some of the U.S. and Soviet proxies, to be sure, were quite willing to be "used." Their own interests, and even survival, were at stake.

(10) For professional diplomats, whose own governments may be involved in a double game of "*non-intervening" but intervening* in the affairs of countries in conflict, the role of enabler, to the extent that diplomats themselves share in it, can be a very uncomfortable one. Like their government masters, they are, as official representatives of an individual state with distinct national interests to defend, committed also to uphold "the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations concerning the sovereign equality of States, the maintenance of international peace and security, and the promotion of friendly relations among nations" (Preamble of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations). Furthermore, as accredited members of a diplomatic mission in a foreign capital, they have the stated "function" of "promoting friendly relations between the sending State and the receiving State" (VCDR, Article 3 (e)).To do this and, at the same time, to be involved in the clandestine and possibly illegal "enabling" of operations relating to a conflict within a host country or its region — no matter whether in support of a government or in opposition to it — is, at best, compromising. The role of the enabler is, one might even go so far as to say, *anti-diplomatic*.

A strong inference that could be drawn of the above line of argument is that diplomats *as diplomats* are, and also should

be, largely **left out** of contemporary conflict. Yet such a conclusion seems unrealistic, and even unacceptable — as I suspect it would be to most diplomats themselves. During the Second World War, U.S. and other Allied diplomats "fought" alongside soldiers, using all-but-military means in order to achieve victory in a cause that their peoples considered to be right and just. Peace, of course, was the ultimate objective. Even during the Cold War, almost no holds were barred, with diplomats being involved in political, economic, and psychological warfare, not only enabling it but sometimes themselves conducting it. East-West agreement on the VCDR was a remarkable, and welcome, mutual constraint. With the ending of the Cold War in the late 1980s, a "new world order" seemed possible, a globalized world in which diplomacy and peaceful resolution would prosper. The nature of today's "contemporary conflicts" in the Middle East and elsewhere, however, has challenged this diplomatic assumption.

Within the United States at least, government officials involved in the work of dealing with conflicts abroad recognize the inadequacy of military solutions and the necessity of diplomatic — more broadly, civilian — involvement in coping with them. The most prominent such proponent of an increased role for diplomats in this context is former Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates. While in office he even managed to shift funds from the Department of Defense to the Department of State in order to enhance its role in Afghanistan and Iraq, for example in the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). Secretary Gates said in a widely quoted, still-mentioned speech at Kansas State University on November 26, 2007: "Despite new hires, there are only about 6,600 professional Foreign Service officers — less than the manning for one aircraft carrier strike group." He added: "What is clear to me is that there is a need for a dramatic increase in spending on the civilian instruments of national security — diplomacy, strategic communications, foreign assistance, civic action, and economic reconstruction and development."

Diplomats, properly trained, funded, and authorized, can be positive *enablers* in all of these fields, which involve new challenges not just to "national security" but, more fundamentally, to human survival on earth. I would like to suggest, and very briefly to describe in concluding, three general areas in which diplomats — U.S. diplomats and other countries' diplomats as well — need to be further empowered and also more specifically trained. A first area is that of international law and organization — more precisely, in what I would describe as *the organizing of legitimacy*. A second area is that of economic development — more precisely, what I would call *the business of enterprise*. The third area is that of politics — more exactly, let me call it, *the diplomacy of domestic engagement*.

First, **the organizing of legitimacy**. For most action at the international level today, cooperation between the United States, which finds that it cannot act effectively alone, and other countries is essential. Many problems, such as global warming, are inherently "multilateral." Even "bilateral" ones, such as those connected with the history-based relationship between the United States and Liberia, often have regional and still-wider dimensions. Especially in the peace and security field, action by the international community is very difficult to achieve in the absence of an international legal mandate — that is, a clearly and strongly stated United Nations Securi-

ty Council Resolution — without the convincing appearance of "legitimacy." Coordinated acceptance by leading governments of common principles, often already incorporated in the national laws of countries, that may warrant and support joint action is required. This needs to be coordinated by diplomats.

Among the current examples of areas in which such inter-governmental legal-diplomatic coordination is needed is that involving restrictions on nationals of the participating countries who have become, or who are inclined to become, "foreign fighters." Profound issues of freedom versus security are involved. With President Barack Obama presiding, the UN Security Council, acting under Chapter VII of the Charter, on September 24, 2014, *decided* by a 15-0 vote "that Member States shall, consistent with international human rights law, international refugee law, and international humanitarian law, prevent and suppress the recruiting, organizing, transporting or equipping of individuals who travel to a State other than their States of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, and the financing or their travel and of the activities."The Council *decided* further "that all States shall ensure that their domestic laws and regulations establish criminal offenses sufficient to provide the ability to prosecute and to penalize in a manner duly reflecting the seriousness of the offense" (S/RES/2178). That cannot happen automatically. Diplomacy will be needed, within the Global Counterterrorism Forum and also in bilateral exchanges of "best practices." Embassies must have personnel with legal training and with knowledge of the legal systems of the host country as well as their own country in order to be able to help in — to enable — the establishment of the desired legislative and administrative regimes necessary for effective, and "legitimate," enforcement. In the health diplomacy field as well, careful coordination of national policies, rules, and procedures will be required.

Second, **the business of enterprise**. For areas of the world that have been devastated by conflict, as well as regions where economic development has hardly begun, help in getting "enterprise" started — that is, future-oriented, constructive effort capable of being sustained locally and even of transforming countries and their regions — is urgently need. Such business-based action requires imagination, investment, planning, expertise, and adroit implementation. While diplomats themselves are rarely authorized to carry out such projects, let alone be their sponsors or their architects, today's foreign ministries should include persons having financial knowledge, business acumen and awareness, and also management experience who can help — enable — projects that are envisioned to become realities. The Marshall Plan — and the role of diplomats, not only American, in devising the European Recovery Program and helping it to succeed — is acontinuing object lesson, both as an instruction and as an inspiration. The administrator of the Plan for the United States was Paul G. Hoffman, a leading business executive. Increasingly, the need for public-private cooperation in any grand collaborative undertaking such as the ERP, or proposed "Marshall Plan"-like projects for other damaged regions including areas of the Middle East in need of reconstruction, has become obvious. It will surely be prominent in any rebuilding efforts that that

are undertaken — as eventually must occur, in Gaza, in Aleppo, and in many other places in the Middle East. Diplomats, properly trained, can be in the lead in enabling the business and other partnerships necessary for the recovery and future growth of this and other regions.

Third, **the diplomacy of domestic engagement**. Most, though certainly not all, of the most pressing problems in the world today are internal to nations' societies. They arise locally, they have been enabled there, and they therefore must be dealt with there. Foreign and domestic affairs are more and more intertwined. Diplomats must be trained in, and able to act in, *both* spheres. "Public diplomacy," in particular, knows no territorial bounds today. State boundaries, of course, do exist and political jurisdictions are limited. Any action that crosses jurisdictional lines must be carried out with great sensitivity. This applies to humanitarian action no less than to military action. Here, too, transnational "legitimacy" needed. Interventions by Western powers can engender suspicions of being "neo-colonial." In order for the World Health Organization and also purely private groups such as Partners in Health or *M decins Sans Fronti res* to intervene successfully in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and neighboring parts of West Africa, the way must often be cleared diplomatically, and with tactful diplomacy.

In order to be able to work directly with people in communities in Africa, in trying to arrest the spread of the Ebola virus, explicit authorization and local permission may be needed. This must be negotiated. On-the-spot personal "credibility" also is necessary if any progress is to be achieved. Diplomatic staff who have medical training as well as medical staff with diplomatic skills can be enablers of life-giving help. Given the "critical nature" of health diplomacy work, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services states, as part of its Global Health Strategy, it is essential "to provide increased structure in both short- and long-term career development for staff" in carrying out vital new "functions". These include serving as health attach s with selected U.S. embassies as advisers to ambassadors and also for purposes of international cooperation, as well as partnering with the Department of State "to bolster knowledge about global health among the diplomatic corps" and strengthening "diplomatic knowledge, negotiation skills and understanding of development principles for HHS field staff and technical health experts" themselves. Diplomacy must be pervasive in a whole-of-government approach to dealing with global health issues.

In addressing this novel topic — "The Role of Enablers in Contemporary Conflicts" — from an American perspective, as I inevitably do, I confess that my mind's eye initially was cast *elsewhere* in the world for "trouble spots" to countries and places distant from the United States. But I quickly realized that the United States, too, is a locale of "contemporary conflict". I had in mind not so much "9/11" — the Al Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the Global War on Terror that ensued. I was thinking about what had just recently happened in Ferguson, Missouri, where a young black man was shot multiple times by a white policeman, and rioting and militarized repression followed. One of the de facto "enablers" of that race-related and, partly for that reason, very widely reported struggle, it was soon realized, was the U.S. Congress, which had passed a law enabling local police forces to obtain surplus heavy

military vehicles and other military-style equipment never intended for domestic use. Grant funds from the Justice Department and the Department of Homeland Security, which was set up following 9/11 to protect the country fro hane m future terrorism, also contributed to the "military force" image of the local police response and that of the National Guard, which the Missouri governor called in. Amnesty International, intervening for the first time ever within the United States, sent a human rights observer team to Ferguson. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, through his spokesman, called on the local authorities "to ensure that the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression are protected", and for law enforcement officials "to abide by U.S. and international standards in dealing with demonstrators".

At the time I received an e-mail message from a recently graduated Fletcher School student, a Haitian-American who had gone to work for the State Department. Stéphane asked: "How is the unequal treatment at home making our foreign policy agenda more difficult? Has there been any research done on that? How can American foreign policy professionals attempt to make the rest of America understand that their actions have a direct negative effect on our initiatives abroad? I don't have the answer to this..."

I didn't, and don't, either. The best I then could do in response to St phane Larochewas to write: "Maybe our foreign policy leaders, including ambassadors abroad, when at home, should speak out — even by going to Ferguson, for example — and tell Americans what commentators and ordinary persons in the countries to which they are accredited are saying, disappointedly, and maybe angrily, about the United States".

The *domestic* aspects of public diplomacy are today becoming more and more important. Local audiences, though not always receptive, are less and less *narrow*-minded audiences. They are willing to be informed. Encounters and conversations with diplomats can further broaden their horizons and deepen their understanding of issues known otherwise only through the global media.

Diplomats, with their knowledge and skills in negotiation, should be available to engage in local mediation. Former U.S. Senator George Mitchell, by profession a lawyer and a judge, offered his mediating help to the people of Northern Ireland, where peace finally was achieved with the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. He later tried mightily to achieve the same as the U.S. Special Envoy for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Other American emissaries, too, have in the past served as peace emissaries and local mediators abroad. So also, in unusual circumstances, have foreign diplomats contributed to stability and peace within the United States. This happened during the 1977 Hanafimilitants' siege in Washington, D.C., when three leading Muslim ambassadors — Egypt's Ashraf Ghorbal, Pakistan's SahabzadaYaqub-Khan, and Iran's ArdashirZahedi — successfully interceded, thereby preventing further loss of life in the nation's capital.

Civilization, today, is global, and indivisible between home and abroad. Diplomats are instruments of the entire international community as well as of the states that send and receive them. In that sense, they are and should be "at home" everywhere. Ambassadors, as François de Callières wrote long ago, are men (and today women too) "of peace". What they enable, for themselves and for their sovereigns and their peoples, should be for the common good.

Роль возможностей в современных конфликтах и возможности дипломатов реагировать на них: американский подход

Алан Хенриксон, профессор истории дипломатии,
директор центра исследования дипломатии
Факультета права и дипломатии Университета Тафтс

Аннотация. *Природа современного конфликта сама по себе вызывает вопросы. Конфликт уже не представляет собой только столкновение вооруженных сил или даже иную форму насилия. Он не обязательно всегда является результатом проявления открытой враждебности или давней ненависти, сегодня им может быть практически любой случай крайней напряженности, которая вызвана человеческим безрассудством как внутри, так и между обществами. Конфликт — это борьба, внутренняя или внешняя. Его сущность и форма могут изменяться, подчас внезапно, вследствие тех или иных событий. Для того, чтобы разрешить современные конфликты, могут потребоваться новые структуры, меры и методы, а для дипломатов — дополнительные знания и навыки.*
Ключевые слова: *теория международных отношений, конфликт, условия.*

The Role of Enablers in Contemporary Conflicts — and the Enabling of Diplomats to Respond to them: an American Perspective

Alan K. Henrikson, Lee E. Dirks Professor of Diplomatic History and the Director of Diplomatic Studies at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University

Abstracts. *The nature of "contemporary conflict" is itself problematical. No longer is conflict only the clash of military arms or even another form of violence. Conflict need not always be the result even of explicit antagonism, of "ancient hatreds." It can nowadays be almost any situation of extreme tension that arises from human desperation within and between societies. Conflict is struggle — inner as well as outer. Its nature and shape can change, sometimes suddenly, owing to events. Dealing with "contemporary conflicts" today can require new structures, new measures and methods, and, for diplomats, additional knowledge and new skills. I shall suggest — after a brief listing of what enablers are doing in today's world, and then a consideration what the notion of "enablement" is, and what its implications are — several ways in which diplomats themselves might need to be further enabled, with new resources and further training.*
Key words: *IR Theory, Conflicts, Enablers.*