

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Diplomats: The Changing Role of British Diplomats

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## Bridget Kendall

Hello, good afternoon everybody. I'm your chair for this lunchtime event. My name is Bridget Kendall and I am a BBC diplomatic correspondent. In fact I've been diplomatic correspondent for some time, since 1998, so I've had the opportunity to also see how the world of diplomacy is changing and that's our subject today. Before we get onto that, let me tell you that this is on the record, even though we're here in Chatham House, but would you please put your phones on silent, if you've got a phone with you. Put it on silent so it doesn't disturb us, but you are very welcome to tweet about this if you'd like to. The Twitter feed is #CHEvents.

As I said, we're here to discuss the changing world of diplomacy, what its role is in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and particularly the changing role of British ambassadors and it's an appropriate day to do it because just down the road from here in Lancaster House, Britain's top diplomat, the Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond is co-hosting a high profile one day event with 20 other foreign ministers and other top dignitaries to discuss what more to do to tackle the threat from ISIS or ISIL or Islamic State, whatever you want to call it. Which is a reminder that there's plenty of diplomacy still going on at the top level, especially when facing issues of security and crisis.

It's also clear to all of us in our interconnected world that blogs and Twitter and other social media and all sorts of interaction have changed the way this sort of communication happens and the idea of international relations only being sorted out and conducted behind closed doors at the top level just isn't going to work in the same way that it used to. So, the question is, what is the role of a diplomat today and specifically the role of a British diplomat, of Britain's changing role? What should an embassy's top priorities be and how has the job of a British ambassador changed?

Well, we've got two practitioners with us here today, two distinguished members of our Foreign Service. Tom Fletcher is our current ambassador in Lebanon and has been there since 2011. He's also worked for Number 10, he was awarded CMG in the New Year's honours for services to the Prime Minister and been in the think tank.

And Sir William Patey, who is retired, but has been in some of the world's top trouble spots in the Foreign Service as ambassador. His rankings include being ambassador in Sudan, in Iraq, in Saudi Arabia and finally in Afghanistan. I remember that it was in Sudan that I first met you, I went out there to report on the foreign secretary visiting Darfur and I remember we took over the grand floor of your ambassador's residence in the garden in order to do BBC reports, which is obviously one role of an ambassador, to make the BBC welcome when you descend on him.

## Sir William Patey

It's there that Tony stole my hat!

## Bridget Kendall

I do remember that hat, yes.

## Sir William Patey

And I was the bald one.

## Bridget Kendall

Both Tom and William are going to speak for about 10 to 12 minutes each and maybe we'll throw around a couple of questions between us and then we'll open the floor for questions from you and the meeting is going to end at 2:00. So without any further ado, let's start. We thought we'd start with the old, the former ambassador, the view of Sir William Patey.

## Sir William Patey

Yes, the old and the new and I'm definitely the old. Well, it's a pleasure to be here. I suppose it's 40 years to this year that I joined the Foreign Office in 1975 and I see some of my former colleagues here, some of whom go back even before that. So there's some professional expertise in the room, so we'll have to be a bit careful, but 1975, I remember in 1975 when it only just happened that female diplomats no longer had to ask permission to get married. So it spans quite a long time.

I will focus on the role of ambassador, which I first became ambassador in 2002 in Sudan, so the last 10 years and clearly, in looking at the role of an ambassador, the ambassador is just the leader of a team. So you have to look at it more widely in terms of embassies, the ambassador is the spokesman, the leader of that team. So in a way, I suppose, what has happened to embassies is not just ambassadors in a world of modern communications. Now, I'm going to leave it mainly to Tom, of the new, to talk about the new media and blogs. I mean my only decision was later on in the latter stages of my career, was whether to tweet or to blog. You were encouraged to do one, some people managed to get away with doing none, but you had to tweet or you had to blog.

I decided that tweeting was slightly easier, that I was less likely to get into trouble in 140 characters than if I was given free rein on a blog. Some of our colleagues have gotten themselves into trouble on their blogs and indeed one of Tom's predecessors, you might mention that in the blogging, but it was symptomatic of a new age. You were reaching a different audience. Diplomacy is no longer something secret between the Foreign Office and the embassies in between the... a sort of hidden art, it's all much more public. One of the biggest changes, of course, is that the speed of news media, we're no longer the purveyors of the news, first.

I mean when I first started out as a diplomat it was a great black mark against an embassy if the foreign secretary or the Foreign Office found out about an event overseas from the media rather than from the embassy. The embassy was supposed to be first there with the news and in the 1970s and 1980s that was possible, but very quickly we were no longer the first with the news and the evolution of embassies, we stopped trying to be first with the news. And I often used to say to my staff in Afghanistan, we'll send a dip tel, the old telegram, we still called them telegrams for a long, long time when they ceased to be telegrams, in any real sense of what the telegram is in communications terms. Let's wait 24 hours, they already know what's happened, let's take some time to think and to tell them what the significance of what has happened is.

So we can't compete with the news media on what has actually happened unless the media get it wrong, which they do sometimes. Let's reflect and let's think about what this means for the government, for Britain, depending on the event. There is a higher premium on analytical capability, intelligent comment, knowing the significance of what that is. Now, ironically, that premium, and I don't want to sound like some old fart who has left the Foreign Office and is about to criticize it, but I think it's probably true that our ability to have the in-depth knowledge and take the time to have the depth of analysis is gradually diminishing.

I mean budget cuts and cuts generally have reduced the amount of time that an ambassador or an embassy have to take the time to reflect. I mean the days of having a second or a first secretary travel up country for a week or two and get to know the local tribes and maybe write an interesting report for the ambassador and keep it, just clock it away as we might need that one day, that is becoming increasingly impossible. There is just too much else going on and so that time that you can take, the resource involved in accumulating that depth of knowledge is, we're losing that. I think we are skating on some pretty thin ice at the moment.

I've joined a risk management consultancy called Control Risks and actually looking at them, we are able, as a commercial organization, to invest in knowledge about regions and countries and sell it to other companies in a way that the Foreign Office doesn't have. If you look at the sort of, our analytical desks in our company, pit them against the Foreign Office desk of that country, our people will probably be no more than that Foreign Office official now, because that Foreign Office has just moved there, probably hasn't served in the country, is doing a job for a year or two and is moving on. So it's not true everywhere, but it is a reflection that we are skating on very, very thin ice.

Now, I know the foreign secretary with the diplomatic academy, William Hague, the previous foreign secretary, has sought to correct this and make sure we have, and that's about engendering and making sure we keep diplomatic skills, but that geographical expertise, that knowledge, that deep knowledge of the country, I think we are probably, we're less capable now than we were. Maybe I could speak a bit about, we've been asked to talk about how important particular embassies are and how the role of ambassador changes with strategic priorities and I'll talk about that.

One of the things that is clear is that there are some embassies that have remained important forever and the ambassador is a very senior person. Washington and Brussels remain the top two embassies and always have, but in the 1980s we didn't even have an ambassador in Kabul. We closed Kabul towards the end of the Soviet era saying, 'Well, this is an unimportant country and we don't need an embassy here, we'll never be back.' and [indiscernible] at the time came to Australia where I was currently serving. Times change. When I was in Afghanistan, it was the biggest embassy in the world, bigger than Washington in terms of UK based diplomats and if you actually want to know how embassies are ranked, all you have to do is get a, I don't know if we still do it, but get a list of the pay grades of all the ambassadors. It's now very scientific.

The embassies used to be in clumps, so there'd be clumps of, there used to be category one, category two, category three and now it's SMS one, SMS two, three and four, four being the top, Washington and Brussels another [indiscernible]. Each one of these jobs

has a pay grade attached to it based on a review as the new ambassador goes out there, there's meant to be a review of the strategic importance of that country and how difficult a job it will be. That tells you exactly in, to the pound, how much that country matters to Britain. It's all public now, so if you ever want to know where Britain's, the degree of difficulty, the importance of that, just go and get the list and you can just look down and that tells you, because it's done every time.

So it is evolving, I mean in the early days, I think in Steven Wright's day, it was a pretty fixed list, the top 10 European... Steven was in Bonn, Berlin, Paris, Bonn, Rome, Brussels, Washington, New Delhi, Beijing, Moscow, they were all in the big 10 and of course what's happened is some of the embassies like Rome have slipped down the rankings a bit. Embassies like Brazil have come up the rankings, South Africa is more important and there is, the importance of embassies and the strategic importance does reflect Britain's strategic priorities and our priorities for emerging economies. Mexico and Brazil are two big examples where the embassies have got bigger, the seniority of the ambassador has increased.

So it is an evolution and it's quite a deliberate exercise now in a way it wasn't before. So when Tom's successor in Lebanon is chosen and when my successor in Kabul was chosen, somebody has to sit down and say, 'Has this changed?' You do see an evolution in Iraq. I was in Iraq when we had 10,000 troops on the ground and now we no longer have any troops in Iraq.

Whether Iraq will go back up in importance again, in terms of its seniority because of the ISIL threat and Britain's re-engagement to some extent, that is likely. I've always said to anyone who asks me what sort of job, you know, young people come to me and ask for career advice, I say, 'You should really aim for the jobs where there are 10,000 troops in the country because these are the most exciting ones and these are the ones, 10,000 British troops and those are the ones that attract the most attention.'

You don't have to beg the prime minister to visit, you don't have to beg the foreign secretary or the defence secretary to visit. In fact what you have to do is tell them, 'No, you can't visit at this time because I've got two other ministers and this is how it's going to work.' You're basically telling the ministers they can't come and that's, for all those ambassadors who are trying to promote the relationship between the UK and those countries, that's quite a different, it's quite a different feel.

I think, I knew that... only once in my life and Tom can tell me because he worked in Number 10 where it was done more often, but only once in my career did I ever get my personal instructions from the prime minister when I... you often get to chat with the foreign secretary and the director will tell you what the priorities are.

When I was going to Iraq, I got my instructions from Tony Blair, the prime minister and I just got a sense, just from that meeting alone of how important an issue this was for him. He gave me, very clear, everyone worries about Tony Blair's leadership qualities, I can tell you, he's very clear, as a leader, 'This is what I want you to do ambassador, I want you to go out into Iraq, I want you to help them get a constitution, I want that constitution to be approved in a referendum. We want you to help, we want there to be a fair and free election based on that constitution and we want to have a first democratically elected

government and we also want to reduce the number of British troops in the country so we can send them to Afghanistan.’

Now, I was only going to be there for a year. I asked him what I would do in the afternoon. I have to say, we succeeded on the first four and I think we failed miserably on the getting the troops out. The troops were still there when I left, but you know, the sense of, you know, in those areas where national security and strategic priorities are right up against it, those are the most challenging and the most interesting times for a diplomat. Weekly calls from Number 10, a real interest in what’s going on and a real sense that you have a greater capacity to act. Now, it’s ironic because in the era of modern communications, ministers seeing each other, visiting each other, talking to each other, you might, sometimes you think the role of the ambassador is diminished and it can be in some countries, I would think.

When you’re in a country like Iraq or Afghanistan where the prime minister visits two or three times a year, where you see the foreign secretary, you know what they’re thinking, you know what the politics are and that’s very empowering for an ambassador. If you know where the prime minister is coming from, because you’ve just sat down and talked to him, it does enable you to be a bit more old school. When I say ‘old school’, the days when there were no communications and you had to make your own decisions because there wasn’t somebody, you weren’t getting instructions from the Foreign Office.

I remember when I got my review, even senior ambassadors have objectives and review and I think it was Mark Lyall Grant was the political director at the time, so he was my line manager. Mark Lyall Grant said to me, he said, ‘Doing a good job, [indiscernible] feedback, everyone is very pleased,’ he said, ‘Just had some criticism from the department that you don’t always follow instructions,’ and I said, ‘I wasn’t aware I ever saw instructions,’ and he said, ‘I think that may be part of the problem.’

I think that’s, the idea that, you know, with all due respect to the desk officer in London, the idea that the desk officer in London will be giving me tactical advice or telling me what to do in respect, was faintly ludicrous and I think that’s what does happen in some places. If you’re fortunate enough to serve in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, as I was, you have a certain empowerment.

So I mean when we were working on the constitution and the Kurds and the Shia had reached an agreement, they thought, on what the constitution would be and we were in the American ambassador’s residence and he said, ‘Well, that looks like we’ve got a deal,’ and I’m sitting there thinking, where are the Sunnis in all this? Without any instructions, without any guidance other than I knew what my government wanted and what they were thinking, I said, ‘I’m sorry, my government couldn’t possibly support this constitution,’ and brought the meeting to a halt.

I came out the meeting thinking, oh shit, what have I done? And I thought, and I waited, I told the Foreign Office what I’d done and waited for a bit and then the Americans came around to the same idea, that maybe a constitution in which there was no Sunni buy-in whatsoever might create problems for the future. Well, I think we’re still living with some of that, but it was that, I mean that is kind of old school. I mean getting, being able to take

that and it only comes from having that sort of direct connection and that, rather unique circumstances.

I'll just say a little bit about the media because I think the Foreign Office is not very good, the government is not very good at letting its diplomats speak. I think, and I understand why because I'm sure the media would try and say, 'Oh, you know, ambassador so-and-so is saying this,' that seems to run, but I served in Australia for four years, you get one good posting in a career, although I found that the most difficult one, especially when British teams were coming in, getting thrashed 5-0 in cricket. But you have that, Australia was much better at allowing, much more tolerant of allowing its diplomats to talk about issues.

The expert in Indonesia would be allowed to talk about Indonesia and without being seen to be used against the government and it's quite difficult. We are still quite rigidly controlled over when and where we can't speak to the media. I mean Bridget, when we were having a sandwich was lamenting the fact that we, sort of even now, no longer do the 'off the record' briefings. I remember doing an off the record briefing and I think Bridget was actually there at the time, when I was ambassador in Iraq and all the correspondents were sitting around there, all, you know, just talking, giving them the usual guff about Iraq and how we were achieving our objectives and how progress was being made and one more push and everything was going to be fine... this sort of thing that we say, even believe it sometimes.

Somebody asked me and they were all bored, you see it was quite a hot day and they were all soporifically, and somebody asked me a question about EFPs which the Iranians were supplying to the Shia militia at the time, these are these, electronic foreign projectiles, they were lethal, they were basically some new device that would pierce armour and kill our troops.

This was going on and I don't know, they must have caught me at a period of frustration, I'd probably just written to the family of a soldier who had been killed or something and somebody asked me about the Iranians and the official line was, because it was the period of Jack Straw's constructive engagement to Iran and reaching out to them and not doing anything to offend them and I basically said, 'Yes, the Iranians are supplying these, the Iranians are behind this,' and suddenly you could see I'd said something because they all woke up and started to write and Simon Shircliff, I think, was our press officer at the time, the colour drained from his face and something had happened and I kind of, oh crikey, maybe I shouldn't have said that.

## Bridget Kendall

It's interesting, afterwards we all went into a huddle, all the papers, BBC agencies and we looked at our notes, we transcribed what you said and looked at it again and we all said, 'We've got a story here, did he mean to say it?' and then we said, 'Well he is the ambassador, he's a very senior diplomat, so yes.'

## Sir William Patey

It was off the record but none of you bothered to, it was off the record, but it was too good a story. But the problem was, I went off to Scotland straight after that and I hadn't realized for 24 hours the Foreign Office was in a complete tizz because arriving the next day was President Talabani of Iraq and holding a joint press conference with the prime minister. The Foreign Office was in a complete tizz about what they were going to say. I have to say, Jack Straw was all for sacking me. Tony Blair, who I won't have a word said against, said, 'But it's true, isn't it?' and they said yes, he said, 'Well, I'm going to repeat it,' and Tony Blair saved my skin there. So as far as I'm concerned he's a fine man, on the record. I'm going to stop there, we can sort of cover -

## Bridge Kendall

That was fabulous, it's so interesting, I mean it's fascinating for me, I'm sure it is for all of you getting this insight. It just shows how there is still this sort of barrier between what goes on inside the Foreign Office and what we all know about it outside. Well, William has given us a little insight into some very hot spots. But Tom is another hot spot because Beirut, now, it's not just posting in Lebanon, it's right on the border with Syria where there is no British ambassador and not far from Turkey, the whole region which is now up in flames. So give us your take Tom.

## Tom Fletcher

Right, good afternoon, it's great to be here. It's lovely to see some Lebanese faces as well who can probably share with us some good questions and thoughts later on as well. It's also lovely to be, once again, in the position of cleaning up after William who is always incredibly entertaining and then others must kind of shuffle in and sort of say, 'I think what Bill meant to say about this.'

It's also nice to be introduced as the young bit of the panel. I was saying to Bridget and William just now before, at the back, I recently put in a very audacious and cheeky bid for a senior position in the Foreign Office and part of my application was to say, I think my age may be a problem. Up front, I think my age is a problem, I think I'm too old for the job. My point was that in so many of the countries that we're now trying to influence, and this was one of them, as one of the bigger emerging economies, the people that we most need to get to are actually much younger than me. So we need to reflect on that as we work out how to engage with those new groups.

In order to prove that I am young and kind of innovative and so on, my notes are on an iPad. This is actually not just because I only function digitally, it's because the choice on the plane was between my iPad and a sick bag. I thought turning up here with notes on a sick bag would not be the best way to start off.

I guess I am here to be the kind of slightly heretical, everything is going to change viewpoint, as a younger ambassador and someone who has, those of you who know, spends a lot of time tweeting and blogging and engaging digitally. Actually I'd like to start by saying, in order to change, a lot of stuff has to stay the same and we make a big error,



those of us who are trying to reinvent diplomacy in different ways if we think that we can chuck out everything we've learnt in thousands of years with that digital bathwater.

Diplomacy has been around since the first caveman convinced another caveman to stop clubbing him for long enough to go and hunt together. We've built up in that period huge amounts of trade craft which we have to be very, very careful not to lose. Of course, you know, people say ah, but that's all changed now because now the internet has come along. So everything is up for grabs. Well, yes and no, I mean we have ridden, as diplomats, our predecessors have ridden the invention of the stirrup, they've ridden through the invention of the steam engine, electricity, you know, there's that famous line about you can replace the Foreign Office or the fax, well, we saw off the fax. We recently saw off the telegram. Harold Nicholson wrote that the telephone was a dangerous little instrument unfit for diplomacy. We're pretty much seeing off the telephone now.

Diplomats have always been told they're about to go out of business and we have always found ways to evolve. It's a Darwinian profession and we have found ways to move forward and use new tools and that's what we're going to do in this phase. The basic qualities of a diplomat through that period, I would argue, haven't really changed that much either. I've been writing recently about the history of diplomacy and consistently find that the people who make good diplomats tend to have a certain amount of courage, tend to have a certain amount of tact and can probably eat anything. That will be the case for diplomats in 100 years' time as it was for diplomats 200 years ago and beyond.

It's the same in the Renaissance courts when diplomacy really started up as a profession. It was the same in, I think 1815 I always think was the best year to be a diplomat but even there it was about, you know, the Congress of Vienna was about tact and courage, eating everything and trying not to get caught sleeping with the foreign minister's wife of a different country. Also, the other thing that hasn't changed at all, since that period, is that division of our roles between the representational role and it would be good to talk later a bit about who we now think to represent, because that's changing, you know, the formal protocol, outward looking role, whether on Twitter or going to see the monarch of the day.

Then that role as a confidential channel, and those two aspects still remain very, very much the same and sometimes in competition. That hasn't changed and the internet hasn't changed that at all. I think the final point on why we have to stay the same, so much of this, yet people say, you know, it's such a new age and we have to, these new issues about balancing security and liberty and so on, well yes, but these have been debates that have been running for centuries and centuries and centuries and very smart people have found ways to work through them in the past.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is about as beautiful a document in the English language I think as anyone has ever written. We have handbooks to get us through these big new questions. It's not all as new as it seems. But that said, because I am here with my iPad and so on, I'm going to give you the counterargument about the things we do need to change, the things that are changing very fast. One is to recognize the shifts in power that are lying ahead of us now.

The scientists tell us that the change that we'll see in the next century is equivalent in sociological terms to the change we've seen in the last 43 centuries. So imagine that's like going from the cave painting to the atom bomb in three generations of diplomats. This change as we're seeing in all sorts of industries is disruptive. It is going to put a lot of businesses out of business. It's going to put a lot of states out of business, though not I would argue states altogether. It's going to put a lot of ideas out of business and for all of us who care about diplomacy, we have to make sure that we're not one of those businesses that is disrupted.

We are moving from that world of maps and chaps that we feel very familiar with, to a world of networks. And if we are going to be on the pitch as diplomats we have to understand how those networks are moving and how that power is shifting. It is maybe, too Lebanese a metaphor, but I've almost had four years in Lebanon, but power is no longer like a British banquet, very structured, very ordered. We all know where to sit, we all know what's on the menu, we all know who is in charge. It's moving towards a Lebanese mezze, it's kind of chaotic and anarchic and we're going to have to get used to that. We're going to have to embrace our inner anarchists as diplomats.

That change in power also reflects those of us who represent a Western state as diplomats. I have to be honest, states are becoming weaker and the West is becoming weaker and so we're going to have to try harder to remain relevant. We're going to have to think more about, do we only represent the government of the day? Her Majesty's ambassador, I represent Her Majesty. Traditionally that was my representational role. It goes beyond that, of course, in the last couple of centuries, we represent the government of the day, but I think you're finding now that diplomats will increasingly feel they represent something more than that and they will need to represent that national brand.

I will need to show that I own David Beckham as a brand, just as I own the British Museum or the BBC World Service and I will have to use all those tools if I'm actually going to get my message across in country. Yet, we are still surrounded, despite all that, by some of the most grotesque 19<sup>th</sup> century paraphernalia you could imagine. Just a couple of examples. Credentials, credentials are a classic, an ambassador arrives in post, you wait for three or four weeks to present your credentials to the head of state. In that time you can't actually do any work, you can barely appear outside the mission, the credentials are, I would argue, a fairly sort of meaningless and impenetrable set of instructions.

You know, you can replace the credentials now with a Google search to show that you're actually the ambassador of the country. There's a lot of that paraphernalia that gets in the way and I'm not just saying that because, you know, I'm not just saying rip it all up. What I'm saying is, it slows down diplomacy, it makes it harder for us to connect in authentic ways. I would argue that a lot of the language that traditionally we use in diplomacy, the platitudes of diplomacy are a classic example of that. I have a personal hatred for the line 'warm bilateral relations'. You can go back and read many, many telegrams, every ambassador writes, I do as well, of how bilateral relations are so much warmer now than three years ago when I began in my position.

It's completely meaningless and when you're not communicating authentically with people outside the profession – Bridget, you touched on this – and Bill as well, then you

will lose their attention. So when you're using those kinds of platitudes, you find that you're becoming less and less relevant.

Another classic Foreign Office one is 'warm atmospherics', and it's one of those completely meaningless things we drop into our communication. So, we're going to have to drop a lot of that junk and jargon and we're going to have to accept as well that we're facing much, much more competition. You know, Bill, you mentioned, you are my competition, you're disrupting diplomacy with your risk consultancy. You're right, that a company is more likely to go to Bill to find out what is going on in Iran than it is to come to us and so that is a disruptive force and that competition is from those sorts of groups, it's from Chatham House, it's from businesses.

So the DNA of diplomacy is changing completely. Very briefly, the three things I think that you'll notice will be different about envoy 2020 to say envoy 2015 or envoy 2010, one is that we will have to do more crossover. A diplomat will have to be even more a jack of all trades and that means actually, and it feels a bit distasteful sometimes, but we're going to have to really understand PR, we're going to have to understand brand management. We're going to have to become, in a way, spin doctors for the national brand. We're going to have to look at the best of other professions and learn from how they are responding to digital technology so that we can improve the way we do our jobs.

Second point, we will be, by 2020, digital or dead. Bill mentioned that most ambassadors now are on Twitter or Facebook or some form of digital engagement. I think four or five years ago it was only four, now it's maybe 140 and that argument is won. There is not a debate anymore inside the Foreign Office, inside most foreign offices about whether to be in that space. You need it for knowledge management, information harvesting, you need it for engagement in order to actually connect with a wider cross section of people, but most excitingly and potentially most radical is that you need those new tools to influence.

We're just learning now how we use those new tools to influence. We can talk about that later if you like. We don't yet know whether the smart phone that people have in their pocket is going to be a super power. We don't yet know whether greater democratization of foreign policy making will make it harder to do foreign policy, will slow us down, as you could argue it did over the, has done over Syria in the last year or two. We don't know whether the smart phone is going to be something that just creates apathy and distance from politics and actually strengthen some of our opponents or whether we can actually use this new tool to influence, to project our brand and to get our way in the world which is what we've always tried to do through more traditional tools.

I think personally that the democratization of power overall is a very good thing. My grandkids are 200 times less likely to die violently than my grandparents were. We're doing something right, despite this sense of the 24/7 media cycle that everything is going in the other direction.

Final point on that, as part of this effort to project the national brand, we'll need to get back to the original idea of embassies and ambassadors, which is as an idea and not a building. We've become very focused on ourselves as buildings. We think of an embassy as a building. An embassy is much, much more than that and is that much broader and more influential kind of engagement.

So I say, to conclude, if diplomats didn't exist, we would need to reinvent them. There's no doubt that we need diplomats to navigate all these massive global challenges that we are facing in the period ahead. That will be the case in the era of robotics, in the era of big data, it will be the case when you can do sentiment mining to discover national public opinion in a country rather than just talking to the ambassador. You will still need diplomats to help us navigate through those issues but our ability as diplomats to influence at a time when it matters more is actually in decline. So that's going to mean that we have to work in these, to embrace these new ways of working if we are to remain relevant.

I would say without doubt that diplomacy matters much too much, especially now, to be put out of business and all of us, I assume because you're here you're on the same team, all of us who care about diplomacy and coexistence, the basic purpose of diplomacy, have to fight much harder for this craft in the future.