

**Forum:** Disarmament and International Security Committee (GA1)

**Issue:** Evaluating the effects of Secret Diplomacy on Global Security and Peace

**Student Officer:** Konstantia Rammou

**Position:** Co-Chair

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## INTRODUCTION

The practice of keeping information secret from particular people or groups is a defining quality of many institutions. Businesses, for example, keep economic secrets to gain a competitive edge, by choosing to conceal newly developed products. Parallel to formal diplomacy, back channel diplomacy is frequently conducted. This also means that secret diplomacy will not be used synonymous with covert operations, espionage, or military intelligence.

Governments do not differ from businesses on that field. They hide information from other governments, the media, and the general public, including weapon designs, military operations, and diplomatic negotiation strategies and many more. The majority of countries have formal secret laws, secret services, and intricate regulations governing access to sensitive information relating to national security. In the anarchic international sphere, secrecy is a competitive, entrenched aspect of state discourse; “it is a murky, clandestine, and contentious international business that is frequently shrouded in mystery.”<sup>1</sup>

Even though secrecy is acknowledged as a crucial aspect of international relations, it is frequently criticized as being excessive by the media or civil libertarians because it conflicts with privacy, openness and transparency, as it destabilizes global relations and creates an environment of distrust.

These issues surface during a state's diplomatic endeavors. Secrets have been kept and/or purposefully shared with audiences at home and abroad throughout all historical eras of diplomacy. In order to mend fences between estranged states, nations, and peoples, secret diplomacy has long been an essential—if occasionally mocked—part of the process.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Defence - Sri Lanka, [www.defence.lk/upload/ebooks/\(Routledge%20New%20Diplomacy%20Studies\)%20Corneliu%20Bjola,%20Stuart%20Murray%20\(eds.\)-Secret%20Diplomacy\\_%20Concepts,%20Contexts%20and%20Cases-Routledge%20\(2016\).pdf](http://www.defence.lk/upload/ebooks/(Routledge%20New%20Diplomacy%20Studies)%20Corneliu%20Bjola,%20Stuart%20Murray%20(eds.)-Secret%20Diplomacy_%20Concepts,%20Contexts%20and%20Cases-Routledge%20(2016).pdf).

## DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

### Ad-hoc meetings

“Ad-hoc meetings refer to any impromptu meeting that is scheduled to address a specific need. They usually occur when something out of the ordinary happens in the workplace and requires an immediate solution”<sup>2</sup>

### Covert

Covert can be defined as “made, shown, or done in a way that is not easily seen or noticed”<sup>3</sup>

### Covert operations

“Covert operation is an intelligence operation so planned as to permit plausible denial by \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ sponsor”<sup>4</sup>

### Democracy

Democracy is defines as the belief in freedom and equality between people, or system of government based on this belief, in which power is either held by elected representatives or directly by the people themselves.

### Old diplomacy

“Diplomacy in its traditional form is known as Old Diplomacy and one of its main features is the secrecy”<sup>5</sup>

### Overt

Overt can be defined as being done or demonstrated openly, obviously, and without secrecy

<sup>2</sup> "Ad Hoc Meetings: What You Need to Know." Fellow.app, 24 Feb. 2022, [www.fellow.app/blog/meetings/ad-hoc-meetings-what-you-need-to-know/](http://www.fellow.app/blog/meetings/ad-hoc-meetings-what-you-need-to-know/).

<sup>3</sup> "Covert Definition & Meaning | Britannica Dictionary." Encyclopedia Britannica | Britannica, [www.britannica.com/dictionary/covert](http://www.britannica.com/dictionary/covert)

<sup>4</sup> "Covert Operation - Definition, Meaning & Synonyms." *Vocabulary.com*, [www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/covert%20operation](http://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/covert%20operation)

<sup>5</sup> "Diplomacy: Meaning, Nature, Functions and Role in Crisis Management." Your Article Library, 7 Apr. 2015, [www.yourarticlelibrary.com/international-politics/diplomacy-meaning-nature-functions-and-role-in-crisis-management/48491](http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/international-politics/diplomacy-meaning-nature-functions-and-role-in-crisis-management/48491)

## Public diplomacy

Public diplomacy refers to all forms of diplomatic activity that concern a state's interactions with citizens of other nations.

## Permanent missions

"Permanent missions were established in the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, which recognized that such practices contribute to the development of friendly relations among nations, irrespective of their differing constitutional and social systems."<sup>6</sup>

## Negotiations

A negotiation is a deliberate discussion that finds a mutually agreeable solution to a problem. Each party in a negotiation tries to convince the other to accept their point of view. All parties involved attempt to avoid conflict through negotiation while agreeing on a compromise. Given that there is some compromise on both sides during negotiations, one party will always prevail. But even a small concession must be made by the other. Different parties may participate in negotiations. Talks between buyers and sellers, a potential employer and employee, or governments of two or more nations can be included.

## Secret diplomacy

"Secret diplomacy means diplomacy carried on by presidents and other rulers, without the knowledge or consent of the people and behind closed doors. Through secret diplomacy the presidents and other rulers, intent to pursue the goals of foreign policy through effective means of compromise, persuasion, and threat of war."<sup>7</sup>

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **The role of diplomacy**

Diplomacy's primary goal is to maintain friendly relations between nations. This could entail settling disputes, establishing new regulations, and negotiating trade agreements. Conflict, violence, and even war may result from a lack of diplomatic connections, which can have very catastrophic repercussions. Countries can hold meetings through diplomacy in order to negotiate and make crucial choices regarding how to handle crises in the international system. Countries cooperate diplomatically with one another to discuss policies that serve both states' interests while avoiding violating the rights of any member state of the international

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<sup>6</sup> "Permanent Missions." *Welcome! | UN GENEVA*, [www.ungeneva.org/en/practical-information/permanent-missions](http://www.ungeneva.org/en/practical-information/permanent-missions)

<sup>7</sup> US Legal. "Secret Diplomacy Law and Legal Definition." *Legal Definitions Legal Terms Dictionary* | [www.definitions.uslegal.com/s/secret-diplomacy/](http://www.definitions.uslegal.com/s/secret-diplomacy/)

community. These actions contribute to the peaceful coexistence of states. As a result of the diplomacy used in the negotiations, there is less chance that a crisis will develop because of miscommunication between states. Additionally, should a crisis arise between two countries, the governments of the two countries through diplomacy hold a meeting in order to manage or avoid a protracted crisis.

In international relations, diplomacy serves as a channel for representation. States position themselves in the international system and expose themselves through the practice of diplomacy. In order to express the opinions, policies, and concerns of these nations as participants in the international system, the majority of sovereign states are represented by accredited diplomats. These representations lay out the legal framework for systemic acceptance and give people everywhere the opportunity to offer and receive any kind of assistance. For instance, Ghana is acknowledged and open to receiving any assistance from other nations in situations where there are difficulties such as famine, war, political instability, and economic instability, among others, because it is represented at the international level.

### **Secret diplomacy characteristics**

Secret diplomacy, at its most basic, is the activity of gathering information from specific people and organizations, concealing it from everyone or just some of them, and/or sharing it with others. Depending on the circumstances, information can be manipulated, spun, or propagandized to serve national interests or foreign policy objectives. Information is gathered overtly and surreptitiously. Old Diplomacy was thought to be characterized by secrecy. Old diplomacy was thought to require that all negotiations and the results of those negotiations be conducted in the utmost secrecy. Only their counterparts in other nations were with whom diplomats exchanged messages. The best ways to conduct relations for the maintenance of peace and problem solving were considered to be secret negotiations leading to secret undertakings, agreements, treaties, or alliances.

### **The benefits of secret diplomacy**

Back-channel negotiations have the main advantage of shielding discussions from observers, such as constituents, the media, and even other members of one's own negotiating team. When observers put pressure on the negotiators to adopt a tough stance, they may resort to counterproductive aggressive strategies and forego considering potential concessions and tradeoffs. Before exploring real commitments, potential dealmakers can test the waters by engaging in secret negotiations to see if the other party is willing to negotiate in good faith. Therefore, secret negotiations can be especially alluring to senior leaders who are worried of being disrepute in front of the public if their efforts to reach a deal fail.

Secret negotiations also aid in avoiding potential deal-breakers. Taking discussions secret at least temporarily, can provide negotiators with much-needed cover to look for

cooperative solutions when certain stakeholders have an interest in undermining the parties' ability to reach an agreement. They might be able to come to groundbreaking agreements before the spoilers have a chance to organize their opposition. Maintaining secrecy during international negotiations can interrupt the unforeseen information flows that could influence the anticipated agreement. Transparency might exacerbate conflict in this context by providing too much information and making it more challenging to make accurate assessments about the intentions of another state.

Back channels assist parties in avoiding the requirement to satisfy prerequisites before negotiating. Front-channel negotiations for instance between Israeli and Palestinian leaders have frequently failed because one or both sides insisted on preconditions before sitting down to negotiate, like the release of prisoners or a troop withdrawal. The two sides have engaged in back-channel negotiations throughout their protracted dispute to maintain communication even when they aren't formally supposed to be speaking to one another. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu suggested a policy of restraint regarding a suspension of new permits and new construction in Judea and Samaria (West Bank) for a period of ten months on November 25, 2009, to help launch meaningful negotiations. Schools, synagogues, and the 3,000 housing units currently under construction are exempt from the government structures, as well as any necessary security-related infrastructure or Jerusalem.

## The disadvantages of secret diplomacy

### Endless game

There is a risk that a back channel intended to be an "end game" will instead turn into a "endless game," in which the parties feel they are under no obligation to come to an agreement because the negotiations are taking place in secret, so they avoid facing the more difficult issues, meaning the publication of the results of the negotiations to the public. Maintaining secrecy becomes more difficult as time goes on, but it is also more difficult to expose the back-channel process due to the fact that it has accumulated so many different components, making its revelation even more explosively possible.

### Impractical

Due to advancements in communication technology and the rising demand for public accountability, secret diplomacy has become more and more impractical. It is not a coincidence that secret diplomacy predominated during a time when diplomatic communication was slow, disorganized, and erratic. The situation has changed. In addition to being forced to respond to the 24-hour news cycle, diplomats increasingly

find themselves having to compete for the public's attention in a world where the media is oversaturated.

### **Protecting secrecy within diplomatic relations**

Whether it is through the permanent missions they have established in one another's capitals, within the framework of international organizations, or at ad hoc meetings, states constantly engage in global interaction. The diplomatic game is challenging because it is built on presumptions, goals, the use of power, high level politics, and, most importantly, the pursuit of national strategic interests, which are frequently restricted to trade and security. Rules needed to be established to allow players to hide certain content from their diplomatic counterparts because of the volume and political significance of diplomatic interactions. Rules that are intended to keep instructions from foreign ministries, preparatory documents, and diplomatic archives private are outlined in international treaties and customary international law, such as the Article 21 of the UN Declaration.

### **Media reports on diplomacy: the delicate task**

The freedom of expression and, in particular, the freedom of the press is closely related to the human right to information. Both conventional such as major newspapers, television broadcasting companies, and business magazines and alternative medias such as graffiti, street theatre, fanzines, pamphlets, and community newsletter have had experiences covering diplomatic issues and, ultimately, having restrictions placed on their freedoms to inform the public.

Like freedom of speech, press freedom is not unrestricted. A case regarding the protection of diplomatic cables at the expense of press freedom was brought before the ECHR (European Court of Human Rights) in 2007. The applicant, Mr. Stoll, was a professional journalist who had previously been found guilty of publishing several articles that included quotations from diplomatic correspondence. The journalist used a secret briefing document created by the Swiss ambassador in Washington, DC, which had been leaked to him by a Swiss government official, as the basis for his articles. The cable covered the approaches that Swiss officials and other diplomats should take when negotiating compensation for Jewish Holocaust victims with Swiss restrictions.

### **The Hoare-Laval Pact**

During the 1935 conflict between Ethiopia and Italy, there was a significant instance of secret diplomacy. French Prime Minister Pierre Laval and British Foreign Secretary Samuel Hoare held the confidential talks in Paris, meaning that no information of the discussion was released. Italy desired to colonize Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia) in order to exact revenge for

the humiliating loss suffered by Adowa in 1896. French Premier Pierre Laval encouraged Mussolini in a meeting in Rome in 1934 to pursue his goal of conquering Abyssinia. By upholding collective security, the British government attempted to strike a balance between the need to appease Mussolini and preserve the legitimacy of the League of Nations. Anthony Eden, the British secretary in charge of the League of Nations' affairs at the time, traveled to Rome in June 1935 to offer a compromise. Using British Somaliland, he proposed, the UK would grant Abyssinia access to the sea. In exchange, Italy would receive a portion of Abyssinia's peripheral territory. He emphasized the necessity of upholding the League Covenant, but Mussolini rejected his suggestion.

In October 1935, when Italy invaded Abyssinia, British Foreign Secretary Samuel Hoare denounced the attack and demanded financial penalties. Even though they also advocated for economic sanctions, the US and France focused their calls primarily on issues that did not significantly impact their trade with Italy. For instance, the oil supply to Italy was not interrupted, and the nation's position in world trade was unaffected.

In order to appease Mussolini and avoid the possibility of an Italy-Germany pact, Secretary Hoare and Premier Laval came to an agreement in December 1935. Ethiopia was divided by the Hoare-Laval Pact, which also gave Italy administrative and economic control over southern Ethiopia. On December 13, 1935, a French newspaper was informed of the covert agreement. The pact was criticized by the British public as "selling out Abyssinia," and the League of Nations' frailty in failing to defend a member state was revealed. The plan was initially supported by British Premier Stanley Baldwin, who later withdrew his support and replaced Samuel Hoare as foreign secretary by appointing Anthony Eden. The covert agreement damaged the reputation of covert diplomacy and demonstrated the futility of the League of Nations. French Premier Pierre Laval and British Foreign Secretary Sir Samuel Hoare tried and failed to bring about reconciliation between France and Italy. The plan was immediately and widely denounced after word of it leaked.

## **MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED**

### **France**

Since the advent of the early modern state system in the fifteenth century, France has engaged in secret diplomacy. There were numerous instances of covert diplomacy during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, as well as attempts to resolve disputes by diplomats like Maurice de Talleyrand. French diplomacy between the Wars has tried to find a new path between the open diplomacy of the League of Nations and a long history of the old diplomacy.

## United States of America

President McKinley employed secret diplomacy in the United States as well. He thought that keeping negotiations secret would maximize their chances of success. He put a lot of effort into ensuring that no sensitive information leaked to the media and stoked unfavorable public sentiment. On July 6, 1897, he secretly communicated with Spain via Stewart Woodford, the American ambassador to Madrid. Spain was given the opportunity to accept US mediation in exchange for the US ensuring some of Spain's rights on the island of Cuba, according to Ambassador Woodford. In order to maintain neutrality in the event of a war between the United States and Spain, Woodford also conducted covert inquiries among the Great Powers of Europe. In mid-April 2021 President Biden announced that all American troops would depart Afghanistan by September 11 after claiming that the country's mission to deny terrorists a haven there had long since been accomplished. Later, he changed the date to be on August 31. After almost 20 years of conflict, Mr. Biden stated that it was obvious that the American military was unable to turn Afghanistan into a contemporary, stable democracy. During the Afghanistan war the Afghan politician that served as the president of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani maintained back channels negotiations to American politicians in order to end the war and bring peace to Afghanistan. In February 2020, an accord called the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan was signed between the U.S. and the Taliban.

## United Kingdom

The majority of previous cases of secret diplomacy had been carried out between rival nations or allies with diverse goals. An intriguing diplomatic case is the "secret understanding" between the United States and the United Kingdom. In this instance, two of the closest allies used covert operations to reach an agreement on a matter where their interests and viewpoints were essentially similar. The agreement on the use of strategic weapons was at issue in the decision-making process. British Prime Minister Clement Attlee visited Washington in 1950 during the Korean War attempting to reach an agreement with President Truman regarding the use of nuclear weapons. On December 7, 1950, President Truman assured Prime Minister Attlee in a private discussion that he would not use nuclear weapons without first consulting the British Prime Minister. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century he British aristocracy ran a clandestine campaign, which included secret negotiations from 2016 to 2020 to remove the country from the European Union and install Prime Minister Boris Johnson in that position.

## Cuba

The secret negotiations between Cuba and the USA began with an American outreach to Cuba and a run of nine meetings in Canada starting in June 2013. Pope Francis made an unusual contribution to the process by helping to seal the deal and opening the Vatican. He also



personally wrote letters to President Obama and Cuban President Ral Castro calling for a prisoner exchange and the resumption of diplomatic relations. The talks initially stalled over definitions of what constituted a spy, but they ended on an emotional high as three planes exchanged freed prisoners between the two nations in a planned exchange. Two of Obama's national security advisers instead of experienced diplomats led the negotiations behind the scenes, letting the Cubans know that the opening came directly from the White House.

## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
1814-1815	Congress of Vienna
6 July 1897	Secret communication of the President McKinley with Spain via an American ambassador in Madrid
October 1925	The Treaty of Locarno was signed
December 1925	Treaties of Locarno were signed from Switzerland
October 1935	Italy invaded Abyssinia
13 December 1935	a French newspaper was informed of the Hoare-Laval Pact covert agreement
1935	Conflicts between Ethiopia and Italy
1950	Korean War
7 December 1950	Private negotiation between President Truman and Prime Minister Attlee
1955	The "Alpha" project took place
1978	La Commission d'access aux documents administratifs was adopted
29 December 2009	The Executive Order 13526 was redefined
2013	Secret negotiations between Cuba and the USA

## RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

### Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

*“Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives”*

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which lists 30 rights and liberties that apply to everyone, was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948. Article 21 emphasizes on the fact that everyone has the right to participate in the political life of their nation, whether they do so by freely electing representatives or by holding office themselves. Therefore, the citizens should be aware of the discussions made from their leaders and thus no secret negotiations should take place.

## PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

### The secret project “Alpha”

Another significant effort to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict was jointly launched in 1955 by the United States and Great Britain. "Alpha" was the project's top-secret code name. Sir Evelyn Shuckburgh, the British Foreign Office's Under-Secretary for the Middle East, created the original plan. Before writing the plan, Shuckburgh visited the Middle East and met with regional authorities. The main goals were to conduct covert diplomatic missions to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict, to strengthen the West's position in the Middle East, and to prevent communism from spreading there. The ambitious "Alpha" project sought to ensure close cooperation with the US, Israeli territorial concessions, and US security guarantees from the major powers, an agreement with Egypt, and a comprehensive settlement.

### Executive Order 13526

The classification system was redefined on December 29, 2009, by President Obama. He first acknowledged the need for a standardized system for classifying, protecting, and declassifying information related to national security and information necessary for fighting international terrorism. The American people's right to know what their government is doing is mandated by democracy, the President acknowledged. He reaffirmed that the free flow of information within the government and with the American people was essential for the development of the United States.

## The Treaty of Locarno

European statesmen attempted striking a balance between secret and open diplomacy after the treaty of Versailles. The Treaty of Locarno, signed in October 1925, was one of their early diplomatic successes. Using private and public negotiations the French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand, German Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann, and British Foreign Secretary<sup>8</sup> Austen Chamberlain came to an agreement. Seven agreements known as the Locarno treaties were negotiated in Switzerland and officially signed in December 1925 in London. Ratification of the Locarno Treaty and entered into force in 1926. The goal of the treaty was to ease Germany's reparations burden and strengthen her ties with Belgium, France, Italy, and Great Britain. When Germany rejected the Locarno Treaties and sent troops into the neutral Rhineland in 1936, the Treaty fell apart.

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

### Alternative forms of Diplomacy

Alternative diplomacy methods are crucial since secret diplomacy despite its effects also runs risks. First and foremost, it is necessary to thoroughly assess the viability of using alternative diplomatic channels to break the impasse in the negotiations. Public scrutiny gives negotiations more legitimacy, which increases their chances of being implemented successfully. Back channels, however, could assist in removing barriers and resuming public negotiations when the public channel is blocked. For instance, back-channel negotiations between China and its regional rivals may be successful in resetting the agenda of open negotiations given the overall ineffectiveness of the ASEAN-China framework in managing the rising tensions in the South China Sea thus far. All the crucial for the public safety and peace negotiations that take place should via webcams be livestreamed in the state channels so as to prevent the dangers of the spread of false information concerning the details discussed in the negotiations.

### Statistics

Furthermore, statistics should be created, which will be announced to the citizens concerning the number of successful negotiations that took place the past years, where the secret diplomacy played a significant role in achieving the end result.

### Strengthening of the international network

Administrative complication is an additional risk of secret diplomacy. When there are too many diplomatic channels being used, there is a risk of disarray and inconsistency, which could have an impact on effectiveness and result in the erosion of international credibility.

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<sup>8</sup> "Image 1 of Locarno Treaties: Treaty Between Germany, Belgium, France, Great Britain and Italy." *The Library of Congress*, [www.loc.gov/resource/gdcwdl.wdl\\_11586/?sp=1&r=-0.826,0.2.651,1.53,0](http://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcwdl.wdl_11586/?sp=1&r=-0.826,0.2.651,1.53,0).

Therefore, when engaging in the secret statecraft, extreme caution must be used. This could be achieved by strengthening the international network as nowadays due to the technological development more and more secret negotiations can take place via internet.

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