

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE INFORMATION AGE: REDEFINING DIPLOMATIC PROCESSES, AND CHALLENGES FOR THE COMMONWEALTH CARIBBEAN*

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1. INTRODUCTION

As the 21st century unfolds, evolving political, economic, social and technological developments are converging to shape a "New World Order" that is impacting on the nature and scope of international relations as we know it. No longer can international relations be construed solely the interaction amongst nation-states. In the evolving international landscape the state is but one actor setting the diplomatic agenda. Powerful non-state actors are utilising information and communications technologies to sensitise global public opinion to a host of issues previously considered "domestic". Non-governmental organisations and grassroots lobbies, often linked across borders electronically, are promoting a "global civil society", pressuring governments to adhere to principles of social justice and democratisation.

By adapting production processes to a digital international trading system global corporations can easily relocate operations. This has had the effect of adding a new dimension to the diplomatic agenda, and of weakening the government's role as regulator of fiscal and monetary policies, transforming them into negotiators. The global media and the Internet have rendered ineffective a state's ability to suppress or control the dissemination of "sensitive" information by making information easily available, virtually instantaneously. These features make the global media an important factor in contemporary diplomacy, impacting on the manner in which diplomacy is conducted and in a very real sense, is helping to shape the content and direction of foreign policy. At the institutional level, intergovernmental organisations such as the World Trade Organisation

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(WTO) supported by the industrialised countries (G-8) have been established to oversee the dismantling of barriers to trade with the aim of levelling the playing field. Under this current wave of trade liberalisation, regional blocs are becoming competitive forces that influence their members into relinquishing areas of authority in anticipation of socio-economic prosperity.

Clearly, this rapidly changing environment poses intense new challenges for the manner in which diplomacy is perceived and conducted. The emergence of new pressure groups, global in orientation and equipped with digital tools to wage campaigns of "netwar" to effect policy changes, illustrates the importance of Information Technology (IT) as a mechanism for enhancing the diplomatic capabilities of states in the digital age. Increasing interdependence and interaction amongst actors are forcing governments to re-examine diplomatic approaches to deal more effectively with issues the impacts of which are trans-global in nature and thus cannot adequately be addressed by domestic efforts alone. Money laundering, the HIV/AIDS threat, environmental conservation and international terrorism require global approaches to solving these problems. Capital and financial markets have become so internationally structured that instability in one country can trigger negative responses in several states.

This changing international context in which states must function demands the incorporation of new diplomatic tools into their resource capabilities. Understanding that information and economic globalisation are the new realities within which the state must now operate will be significant in redefining its new role in twenty-first century diplomacy. Undoubtedly the task of adaptation is a difficult undertaking for any country. For small countries with weak institutional structures and limited financial, technological and human capital, such as those of the Commonwealth Caribbean (CARICOM), the challenges appear to be even more daunting.

Even in the region's more developed countries where information technology is being embraced at a much faster pace, the challenges go beyond issues of infrastructure and human resource costs. Reshaping values, attitudes and reconfiguring organisational structures to incorporate new technologies must also be addressed. Effectively redefining a role for the Caribbean state within a global system in which it has very little room to manoeuvre and over which it has little control has become a real challenge for the region.

This paper starts from the premise that diplomacy is a dynamic process that is impacted upon by changes in the international system. The contemporary international system is in a state of change, with

globalisation and rapid advances in information and communications technologies being the major catalysts for such change. The paper argues that 21st century diplomatic practice must respond to these realities by incorporating IT and communications tools as part of a state's diplomatic machinery. A brief analysis of the evolution of diplomacy from "old" to "modern" to "digital" will be undertaken to illustrate how developments in each stage have impacted on diplomacy. Having described the general contextual scenario in which "digital" diplomacy must be conducted, the paper then examines some of the current international relations challenges facing the CARICOM region and makes a case for the redefinition of diplomatic processes to include IT. The costs and benefits of IT tools in the conduct of CARICOM's complex diplomatic agenda will be analysed from a World Systems perspective.

The view advanced is that notwithstanding the peculiar problems facing the region within a global system which perpetuates economic, political, social and technological inequalities, it is possible for the region to extract benefits from the system if it can recognise the changing role of the state and devise innovative strategies and approaches to reflect these changes. It argues that precisely because of the severe challenges that confront the region, IT can play a key role in the effective conduct of its international relations. Finally some of the major issues involved in making the transition to e-government are examined.

II. THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF DIPLOMACY- FROM "OLD " TO "MODERN"

Diplomacy, the "art of negotiation", has undergone significant structural changes since its formalisation in the eighteenth century. It is this author's contention that diplomacy has progressed through three stages: "Old" diplomacy which distinguished the relations of states, from the 18th century to post World War II period; "new" diplomacy, which spans the period from 1945 to 1990; and "digital" diplomacy which characterises contemporary international relations.

Traditional or "Old" diplomacy defined the conduct of relations between heads of European states. using officially accredited representatives. In an era of scant communications and access to information, bilateral, "secret" diplomacy was the principal method of diplomatic interaction. The primary function of envoys was representation for the maintaining peace and security between states.

In the post World War II period, the nature and scope of diplomacy was altered in response to a number of developments in the international system. Communications was expanding and information was becoming

more accessible to the public. Post-war reconstruction saw the rise of multilateral institutions such as the United Nations (UN), and the World Bank. By the 1960s the Cold War era emerged that divided the international political system into two blocs - East and West- on the basis of political ideology becoming one of the major influences shaping diplomacy. Threat of nuclear confrontation and brinkmanship gave rise to shuttle diplomacy. Bloc and conference diplomacy became significant as regional security alliances such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) played a key role in the diplomatic process.

During this period too, as a number of former colonies gained independence the international community expanded. The international arena was now further reconfigured along socio-economic lines emphasising sharp disparities in socio-economic developmental levels between these newly independent nations (NICs) and the industrialised economies of Europe and North America. New issues, developmental in nature were introduced into the diplomatic arena. Diplomatic groupings such as the G-77 and the Non-Aligned Movement emerged as vehicles for bloc voting to strengthen the negotiating position of NICs at international fora. The one-country, one-vote structure of the UN also provided an important forum for NICs to exercise their newly gained rights in the area of international decision-making.

In this setting of multilateral diplomacy, “secret” diplomacy was no longer the principal negotiating method. Instead, a “Modern”, more democratic concept of international relations emerged that emphasised public accountability and “open” diplomacy. It must be stressed that bilateral diplomacy continues to play a significant role in international relations, as does secret diplomacy as the case of China's recent application for membership to the WTO illustrates. Although China formally lodged its application before the WTO, its diplomats were secretly lobbying the USA in an effort to gain that country’s support. Conversely, the powerful US business lobby has worked behind the scenes to persuade its government to forge trade links with China, in anticipation of the lucrative billion-dollar market. This is despite the US' condemnation of China's human rights record.

Diplomacy in the latter half of the 20th century also had to take account of schools of thought that attempted to explain the developmental problems within the context of dependency and exploitation.¹ Although the principal function of diplomacy, i.e. the articulation of national interests through representation, information gathering/reporting and negotiation has remained largely unchanged, one finds emerging in this period, the phenomenon of “reactive” diplomacy where interaction is often a response

to some unforeseen occurrence rather than planned strategies designed to achieve domestic objectives.

By the early 1990s a number of forces were beginning to reshape the international relations landscape. NGOs, which until this period were viewed mainly as championing development issues at international fora, were assuming amore aggressive stance as lobbies and “watchdogs” of governments. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the ideological divide that had polarised the world for almost four decades signalled a new commitment to international peace and security. The US emerged as the world's superpower and there seemed to be consensus on the part of the West that economic prosperity was the key to maintaining this new era of peace. Economic globalisation was perceived as the vehicle through which global prosperity could be realised. It was envisaged that if all barriers to free trade were removed, a level playing field could be created where competitiveness would flourish and benefits redound to all states. This idea was reinforced by a combination of factors, sluggish domestic economies, the impetus of capitalist systems which recognised the investment and market potential of the former Soviet states and the establishment of multilateral organs to facilitate the “globalisation” process. At the centre of all these developments is IT, fuelling the new globalized system, significantly altering the international relations environment and in the process is prompting yet again a redefinition of the approaches to diplomacy in the new millennium.

III. GLOBALISATION, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE DIPLOMATIC ENVIRONMENT

Within the last decade globalisation, fuelled largely by advances in information and communications technologies, has been creating a system of world wide interdependency ostensibly to promote a global free trade that is supposed to redound to the benefit of all nations and promote some measure of prosperity, democracy and peace. In this emerging world system, powerful players utilising IT capabilities are changing the nature of the diplomatic game, challenging states’ authority, forcing them to share the international stage and leaving states scrambling to redefine diplomatic approaches to more effectively conduct the business of diplomacy.

It was a foregone conclusion that the citizens of the various countries expected to be represented only by their Governments. But now new actors are appearing on the scene, many of them small "grassroots" groups, along with an increasing number of powerful new actors awesome in their size and influence. The extraordinary growth of civil society, whether in the mushrooming of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the extra-

ordinary power of private business and finance as it moves more than a trillion dollars a day, or the dramatic entry of information technology as an independent actor on the world scene have radically altered the parameters of power and governance today (Mach, 1997).

As the pace of economic globalisation intensifies the role and importance of NGOs are being realised while the welfare role of the state diminishes.² These groups, utilise IT tools such as the Internet and e-mail, to source and disseminate information globally on a wide variety of developmental issues from environmental protection to democratic inclusion minorities in domestic political processes. The fact is that technologies such as newsgroups, e-mail, databases and websites provide the electronic means whereby ideas and discussions on various issues can be advanced and exchanged in real-time. This has led to the emergence of specialist organisations, more knowledgeable than states on specific issues, that have become major players capable of influencing policy outcomes at international meetings. Their aggressive, outspoken positions on issues now make them a formidable negotiating force at international negotiation. Increasingly, NGOs are being called upon to lend their expertise to devising solutions to a variety problems.

These technologies are engendering "information-societies" of ordinary people, well informed and united across borders by single issues, capable through their global association and commitment of affecting domestic and international policies and often presenting serious challenges to the national security of states. Anti-globalisation protests at the G-8 summit in Genoa, Italy and the anti-FTAA/Globalisation protests in Quebec City, Canada this year, as well as the anti-WTO/globalisation protests in Seattle, Washington in 1999 attest to the strength and global reach of these NGOs. Websites, analyses and fact-finding reports on the destructive potential of globalisation flooded the Internet prior to these meetings. Supporters were encouraged to converge on these cities in their numbers to protest vociferously to convey their rejection of globalisation and its fundamental tenets. These often-violent protests and the issues they represented were broadcast globally via network media forcing participating governments to defend their positions publicly. Indeed these lobbies united along common lines via the Internet "...are providing the nerve system of increasingly global challenges to the dominant economic policies of this period and in the process [are] undermining the distinction between domestic and foreign policy and even the present constitution of the nation-state (Cleaver, 1997).

The Zapatista rebellion provides another interesting example of the role of IT in affecting policy. The rebels had for decades campaigned

unsuccessfully for equitable land reforms for Mexico's indigenous population and land-starved campesinos, and for political autonomy within the framework of the Mexican nation. When the Zapatistas took their campaign internationally using the Internet and e-mail, observers and media flooded into Chiapas sending first-hand, live accounts of Zapatista confrontations with the Mexican government to audiences globally.³ The global media, Internet newsgroups and websites devoted to the the Zapatistas cause enabled real-time debates and analyses in which people anywhere could now participate. The impact of world public opinion was so overwhelming that when the Mexican government in 1995 engaged in a military offensive against the Zapatistas, international condemnation forced it to halt its offensive. The cumulative effect of the "netwar" waged by the Zapatistas and its global sympathisers in part contributed to a loss in investor confidence that resulted in capital flight, \$US 10 billion left Mexico in 10 days, destabilising the country and causing reverberations in capital markets worldwide, the "Tequila Effect".⁴ More significantly, the "Zapatista Effect" has spawned grassroots movements of human rights and environmental NGOs globally that are challenging the policies of "democratic" governments and the forcing a redefinition of the role of the nation-state in the 21st century.

Media diplomacy in which governments utilise the media to explain foreign policy decisions and relations with other actors is commonplace. Conversely, the wireless and satellite capabilities of networks enable them to cover "breaking" news anytime, anywhere in the world. News networks on the scene before government officials are aware of an incident or have had time to formulate "official" positions, are putting the spotlight on heads of state/governments forcing them to comment "on the fly" with little time for consultation or preparation. As Strobel [2000] aptly notes "foreign policy isn't made by the media. But in the Information Age, it can't be made without it."

News networks are also helping to determine the nature and direction of foreign policy by their focus on particular issues. Former US president George Bush's 1992 decision to send US troops to Somalia was due to a coalition of relief groups and members of Congress who directed his attention to the starvation by encouraging and facilitating media coverage. (Strobel: 2000) The power of the global media lies in its ability to reach so many people simultaneously, providing it with a formidable instrument for shaping public perception and influencing public opinion about what is the "truth" or even what issues warrant coverage. For example, little media focus was given to the suffering of ordinary Iraqis as a direct consequence of the sanctions imposed on that country by the US. Or the potential fallout

for Caribbean states of the US' challenge before the WTO to European Union preferential market access for Caribbean bananas.

It is not surprising that Newt Gingrich assessing the impact of IT on diplomacy noted that IT is "...transforming not only the intimacy and speed of communication, but the very nature of diplomacy." (Boorstein, 1998). Global firms are more powerful than many governments often placing the latter in positions of negotiators instead of regulators of the domestic economy. As economic processes become increasingly global in orientation, domestic fiscal, and monetary policies are becoming largely ineffective. Global interdependency has spawned new security concerns, transcending borders, which domestic policies cannot adequately address. Traditional areas of state responsibility such as defence, economic management, and even foreign policy are now being co-ordinated at the supra-national level, e.g. the EU, or at the regional level, e.g. ASEAN. (Waters, 1995) Diplomacy is shifting from state-centred interchanges to transnational interactions in which global firms, NGOs and the global media have become key actors in the diplomatic arena, influencing foreign and domestic policies, eroding the state's authority and sovereignty in the process. The internationalisation of economic, social and security issues beyond the capabilities of the nation-state are creating new diplomatic channels in which states, through bloc associations and supra-national governance, are attempting to deal with these issues. This is international relations scenario within which CARICOM states must now operate.

IV. CARICOM IN THE EMERGING GLOBAL ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

CARICOM countries are caught up in a tidal wave of uncertainty and instability as they adjust to the new, rules-based international trading system. A number of complex trade negotiations all inter-linked and occurring simultaneously, have compelled these nations to redefine diplomatic strategies, replacing unilateral approaches with multilateral approaches to international trade negotiations.

The Lomé Convention, which for more than two decades defined the dependent nature of the aid, trade and development relationship that existed between CARICOM countries and Europe, expired in February 2000. The latest negotiated package embodied in the Cotonou Accord gives the region just two years to determine how they want to negotiate a new preferential trade arrangement with the EU until 2008, and possibly longer through a transitional period. (Hart, 2000). Evidently, the preferential trade system fostered under successive Lomé Conventions, and on which much of the region's economic existence is predicated, is no longer tenable, and

so any new arrangement must be formulated within the context of a WTO rules-based trading system.

Signals from the EU suggest that new arrangements will be structured with fewer resources diverted to trade. Instead, the role of democratic principles in development is being emphasised, so that African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries' adherence to principles of democracy and human rights, may become the vital determinant of assistance. More ominously, the EU has proposed to negotiate trade and economic co-operation agreements designed to facilitate private sector development and regional integration, and assistance, on a *regional* basis, in effect seeking to diminish the negotiating strength of the ACP as a group. (Barnett, 1999) The shape a new post-Contonou trading arrangement will take presents formidable negotiating challenges for the region.

While preparations are proceeding for trade negotiations for new ACP-EU trading arrangements, CARICOM is confronted with accelerated deliberations for the establishment of the FTAA no later than 2005.⁵ Additionally, the region's negotiators must prepare for November 2001 fourth WTO Ministerial Conference, and for bilateral negotiations between CARICOM and Cuba, and CARICOM and the Dominican Republic scheduled for later this year. Discussions too are underway for a CARICOM-Central America, and a CARICOM-Mercosur arrangement, while renegotiations of existing arrangements between CARICOM and Venezuela, CARICOM and Mexico and CARICOM and Colombia are approaching.

An important dimension of the negotiation scenario confronting the region is that all trade negotiations are now inextricably bound to WTO rules and regulations, leaving CARICOM with little negotiating space to secure arrangements that would benefit the region or allow for any reasonable transition phase.

There is an ongoing debate as to whether CARICOM, like any other developing region can truly benefit from globalisation, the latest manifestation of capitalism. The WTO has become the principal mechanism through which the most recent wave of capital accumulation is being entrenched, and "information technology has become the number one competitive weapon in world trade" (Girvan, 2000). Some have argued that the current system with its emphasis on IT and trade liberalisation give developing countries little chance to secure any significant benefits. This paper contends however that liberalisation is a reality that we cannot wish away. The region must focus on how it can participate fully in the global economy. Shrewd negotiations may be an important factor to CARICOM

states obtaining the concessions and reasonable transition period required to restructure their economies. Careful preparation for international negotiations is therefore critical for these negotiations. In this respect, incorporation of IT tools in the conduct of diplomacy can be invaluable to the region. The argument posited that IT cannot be viewed solely as physical infrastructure, but rather as the knowledge base from which innovation and competitiveness can emanate. Information has become the new competitive tool and determinant of power. The suggested approach therefore suggest which will enable the region to move beyond theoretical labels of “center” vs. “periphery” or “haves” vs. “have-nots” to channel our knowledge capabilities into more innovative approaches to maximise outcomes for the world system. Information technology can therefore play a decisive role in redefining our diplomatic strategies and organisational structures.

Just as information technology has permeated all aspects of daily life, from business to entertainment to politics, so too its impact on the diplomatic arena has not gone unnoticed. Increasingly states are recognising the role IT can play in enhancing diplomatic functions. The use of technologies such as e-mails, virtual and online conferencing at international negotiations now make it possible for delegations to communicate in real-time with the home office for information on official positions, or for advice on formulating responses to unanticipated issues, reactive diplomacy. The use of IT tools also enables resource-deficient states, which would otherwise be unable to attend many of these meetings to maintain a “virtual” presence and to participate via electronic media. This feature could be an important one for the smaller CARICOM states who often find it onerous to participate in international meetings and negotiations for the reasons previously outlined.

Another major benefit of IT to diplomacy is its informational capabilities. The Internet, emails, websites and newsgroups can be used to source and disseminate information, these are critical tools in the effective conduct of diplomacy in the digital age. The Internet provides users with access to thousands of databases from which information can be obtained to provide background data for briefs, negotiation papers and reports. Further, the use of database management software offers foreign ministries a more cost and space-efficient alternative to storing and accessing data than the traditional paper-based filing systems. The storage of data electronically makes updating of information, cross-referencing of data and data analysis much easier. All these features are important to the conduct of diplomacy for one simple reason: effective negotiations are predicated on preparation. Preparation involves accessing pertinent data that can be

converted into relevant information and ultimately knowledge, which informs negotiating positions.

The Regional Negotiating Machinery (RNM) established in 1997, was the region's response to the financial and human resource constraints faced by individual member states in promoting and protecting their interests at these multilateral trade negotiations. The RNM, the negotiating arm of CARICOM, was mandated to undertake negotiations on behalf of all member countries in four broad areas: Lomé/Europe; Western Hemisphere Trade and Economies including the CBI/NAFTA; the FTAA and the Summit of the Americas; and non-economic issues and global issues including the WTO (Barnett, 1999).

Several problems have hampered effective negotiation efforts. This small group of technical/professionals and negotiators are required to participate in negotiations, many of which occur simultaneously, in different locations. Limited financial resources and the size of the RNM team have restricted participation. Secondly, the scope and complexity of negotiations have increased incorporating not only trade in goods and services investment, but new areas like E-commerce, intellectual property rights, anti-dumping countervailing duties and competition policy safeguards, which are straining the limited human and administrative capabilities of CARICOM states. In the FTAA, for instance, 12 working groups have been created to negotiate these areas and arrive at a consensus based on inputs from all member countries. The difficulty faced by CARICOM countries is that they simply do not possess the technical skills and the finances to participate in every meeting, which denies them the opportunity to have their interests articulated and included in negotiations.

A third and critical issue is the level of the region's preparedness for negotiations. The scope of the FTAA for instance, is expected to span not just trade arrangements, but intellectual property rights, investment, and financial services, which is likely to exhaust the administrative and technical capabilities of these small states. A case can thus be made for greater inclusion of non-governmental professionals as part of a country or regional negotiation team to lend their expertise in these areas that traditionally have been outside the purview of the state.

In light of the overwhelming international relations and negotiating challenges confronting CARICOM, IT is proposed as a cost-effective, efficient tool for the conduct of diplomacy. The idea is not to replace existing methods of diplomatic conduct, but rather to use IT where appropriate to increase the effectiveness of diplomacy. One tangible area in which IT can assist is the research and preparation that inform negotiating positions. The RNM must identify, incorporate and reflect the interests of

every member state in its negotiating agenda. RNM members for example, held consultative meetings in various member countries in 1998/99 in its preparation for WTO negotiations. Clearly this is a costly, inefficient and time-consuming approach to information gathering, given funding constraints facing the RNM.

The use of e-mail provides a cheaper, timelier alternative, since interest groups can send information directly to the RNM's headquarters. Additionally, the RNM's website can be designed with a notice board feature where individuals can express their opinions and ask questions. In this way, discussion is generated and new approaches can be analysed. The use of websites as an information dissemination tool cannot be overlooked. The RNM, banana interest groups like WIBDECO⁶, and governments can utilise this media to highlight the potential impact of globalisation and loss of preferential trade arrangements on their countries to a worldwide audience. Links from these websites to NGO websites can help to intensify public opinion and gain international support for certain positions advanced by CARICOM. In particular its request for a longer phase-in period for the removal of trade barriers, and consideration for continued preferential access for the region's banana and other agricultural exports to the EU.

The establishment of a *Virtual CARICOM Trade Negotiating Forum*, (managed by the RNM or CARICOM Secretariat) can provide a facility for analytical discussions and research on various negotiating agendas. The Internet too, can be a useful tool in preparing for negotiation. The Working Group on Smaller Economies under the FTAA, which is chaired by Jamaica, is well placed to highlight the various problems confronting small states in the context of WTO's trading regime. Although there is no firm commitment by other Working Groups to accept the findings and recommendations of this Group, they have been asked to take these recommendations into account in their specific deliberations. In this way, small states such as the CARICOM members can draw on the Internet's wealth of information to conduct historical referencing, comparative analysis and even trend analysis that can be beneficial to Working Groups' negotiating positions. The financial and human resource limitations, which prohibit effective representation at international meetings/conferences, can be circumvented through the use of on-line and video conferencing tools. On-line conferencing tools enable virtual participation at a meeting while not being physically present in the room. Similarly, the establishment of virtual consulates enables resource-deficient states to have a diplomatic presence in targeted countries without the costs associated with setting up and maintaining a consulate/embassy and staff. Routine functions such as the processing of visa applications can be automated so that clients may

remotely submit requests which can be processed and returned to them electronically. In this information age, the region can ill afford not to utilise IT.

V. TOWARDS E-GOVERNMENT AND AN ELECTRONICALLY LINKED REGION: SOME ISSUES AND THOUGHTS

The region, unlike Africa and much of Latin America, already has in place acceptable communications infrastructure i.e. telephone landlines and in many cases, marine cables and satellite connections. Initial set-up costs of computerising foreign ministries may not be prohibitive, particularly since computer hardware prices have been falling. Further, the options available now permit alternatives to the linear development path which most developing nations have been following. Wireless communication systems make it possible for countries like the Congo, devastated by years of civil war, to institute technological systems that are as advanced as, or superior to many countries of the North. Utilising knowledge and accessing technology can narrow the “digital-divide” and allow CARICOM nations to actively participate in the international system on their own terms. Computerisation of foreign ministries, i.e. electronically linking all internal departments and foreign missions via a local area network (LAN) is the first step in confronting negotiating and other diplomatic challenges.

The electronic linking of all government departments and ministries via a wide area network (WAN), “e-government” can speed communications and data exchange within the WAN. The creation of electronic databases shared by all government departments allow for a more comprehensive, timely and cost-efficient information management system. The main concern of access and secrecy of information can be addressed by utilising encryption and other security technologies such as Secure Socket Layer (SSL) and secure mail exchange (SMIME). The government of Trinidad and Tobago has recognised the benefits incorporating IT into its operations. Its Nine Point Plan to transform the nation into an information society includes the creation of an e-government to more efficiently and effectively serve the interests of the nation internally and internationally.

Small size and financial constraints can no longer be advanced as a valid reason why the region cannot make the shift to e-government, since the small, resource-deficient island of Malta proves otherwise. Malta has been able to develop e-government, with its foreign ministry providing consular and informational services virtually via its website. This ministry is utilising IT tools to sensitise and lobby for Malta’s inclusion in the EU. At this juncture in our development, Caribbean states must make the conceptual shift away from maintaining the status quo. The international

system is changing and reliance on preferential treatment is no longer a viable option for promoting socio-economic development. Likewise, traditional concepts and practices that previously defined diplomacy are largely irrelevant given the trans-national nature of issues. Trade, new security issues and lending/donor agencies' redefinition of "development" make it imperative that foreign policy agendas include the active participation of the private sector and relevant NGOs. These actors are utilising new technologies to facilitate interactions. In light of all these factors, it is suggested that 20th century diplomatic methods may be useful but not sufficiently for 21st century requirements.

National inputs must be used to inform regional policies so that negotiations can be conducted for the entire region from a position of unity and more critically, on the basis of solid information and analysis. It is therefore essential that CARICOM governments work toward setting up *a Regional WAN* linking electronically important government departments (e.g. foreign affairs, national security, trade and tourism) throughout the region into a shared database. The establishment of a *Regional Information Repository*, which facilitates information exchange and sharing, will assist smaller countries with limited technical, negotiating and information-gathering capabilities to electronically access data for negotiation preparations. Such an Information Repository need not be limited only to trade data but can include regional crime statistics, particularly money laundering, repatriated criminals and convicted drug and arms dealers.

Another dimension worth consideration is the creation of a *Virtual Technical and Planning Facility* in which technical experts, trade professionals and experienced negotiators from the larger states can assemble under the direction of the respective ministries, foreign affairs for example, to provide advice, critique strategies and simulate negotiation scenarios for the benefit of the less developed islands. CARICOM states, out of necessity, have already relinquished some of their authority and sovereignty to a regional authority, the RNM. However, it is not uncommon for national interest to still supersede those of the region, even in commonly negotiated areas such as trade. Trinidad and Tobago for instance, through its trade facility, the Tourism and Industrial Development Company (TIDCO) is engaged in a series of bilateral negotiations for the private sector with Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica and Cuba (TIDCO Website, 2001). These negotiations are separate from those being conducted by CARICOM on behalf of the region *with the same countries*.

Trinidad and Tobago is positioning itself as the industrial hub of the region and is determined to negotiate the best possible arrangements that advance its national interests. At a time when most countries are

relinquishing sovereignty to better negotiate complex trade and social issues within blocs, the CARICOM region can ill afford to have sovereignty and national interests jeopardise negotiations. A redefinition of the role of the state, its functions and by extension the conduct of diplomacy is critical if the region is to participate effectively in **the** new international system.

The CARICOM Secretariat has recognised the urgency of transforming the traditional modes of conducting diplomacy and has, in association with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), embarked on a regional programme to upgrade the skills and IT capacities of ministries of foreign affairs. The Institute of International Relations of the University of the West Indies, in collaboration with the University of Malta has assisted the Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Foreign Affairs in designing and creating an electronic database of legal materials. The Institute also plans to conduct workshops on trade negotiations and trade diplomacy for regional diplomats as an attempt to better prepare the region's diplomats for upcoming trade negotiations.

Finally, it is becoming clear that officers and their organisations must adopt knowledge management principles and procedures to maximise the benefits of information resources in today's competitive environment. Successfully presenting the region's demands at complex trade negotiations necessitates that knowledge management techniques, i.e. data mining and contextualisation⁷ become central to the information management process. Recognising the value of knowledge to the organisation and the designation of knowledge information officers can assist tailoring specific information for specific purposes. This will entail fundamental changes in attitudes at all levels of the organisation.

These recommendations call for commitment on the part of all CARICOM states to recognise the need to redefine organisational structures, institutions and strategies to better cope with the economic realities of the current international environment. In the final analysis the major factor in determining in the direction of the region's development will be political will.

VI. CONCLUSION

The nature and scope of diplomacy continues to be redefined as the international system evolves. As the information era unfolds, new actors are utilising IT and communications technologies to engage states in a new type of diplomacy, one driven by technology in which informational assets and "real-time" delivery are key components for desired outcomes. Developed nations have been quick to recognise that in the emerging

diplomatic environment new electronic mechanisms must complement existing approaches if they are to effectively reach “net” constituents. Already the use of IT tools has become the norm at international negotiations, facilitating speedy communications and more comprehensive information gathering and analysis. The trend towards bloc negotiations further accentuates IT’s usefulness in facilitating interchanges amongst member states.

CARICOM states are seeking to renegotiate and redefine more tangible benefits for themselves in an international system whose institutions and theoretical underpinnings seem designed to promote the interests of the developed North. Effective diplomacy will therefore become the key to articulating and securing maximum benefits for the region as a whole. How successful the region is in obtaining desired outcomes will depend in large measure on whether it can utilise knowledge to target realistic outcomes using innovative diplomatic strategies. Preparedness for negotiations, the region’s ability to internationalise its causes and influence public opinion become key elements of the new diplomatic game. The use of IT tools and knowledge systems should be viewed as major assets for the region’s diplomatic success in the future.

Notes

- 1 Wallerstein and Addo are among the main proponents of the “*World Systems*” approach which argues that the capitalist world structure and the accompanying themes of development which the Third World is asked to participate in and adopt, are Eurocentric in nature, aimed at perpetuating the West’s dominance of the World. See: Herb Addo ed.: *Transforming the World Economic System? Nine Critical Essays on the New International Economic Order*. Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1984 . Also *Development as Social Transformation: Reflections on the Global Problemmatique*. London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1985.

Gunder Frank and Samir Amin introduced the crisis of over accumulation in the capitalist world system as the basis for explaining problems of underdevelopment in the Third World. See: Gunder Frank. *Rhetoric or Reality of the New International Economic Order*. Norwich, University of East Anglia, 1979 and *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*. Harmondsworth, Penguin, New York, 1971. Also see Samir Amin. *Class and Nation*, New York, Monthly Review, 1980.
- 2 There is an abundance of literature on the role of NGOs in the New International System. For an overview of this theme, See: Peter Willetts, *Pressure Groups in the Global System: the Transnational relations of Issue-Oriented Non-Governmental Organisations*, New Your, St. Martin's Press, 1982 & Malcolm Waters, *Globalisation*. Routledge, London & New York, 1995.
- 3 For an analysis of the role of the Internet in highlighting the struggles of the Zapatistas see: Harry Cleaver, *Cyberspace and the End of Foreign Policy? Social Mobilization and*

the "Zapatista Effect". http://flag.blackend.net/revolt/mexico/comment/cleaver_zap_effect_dec97.html. Html.

- 4 For analysis of the origins and impact of the Mexican Peso Crisis see: Marco Espinosa and Steven Russell, "The Mexican Economic Crisis: Alternative Views" and Joseph A. Whitt, Jr., "The Mexican Peso Crisis" in Federal Bank of Atlanta *Economic Review*, January/February 1996, Volume 81, Number 1 and Nora Lustig, "The Mexican Peso Crisis: The Foreseeable and the Surprise" *Brookings Discussion Papers in International Economics*, 1996.
- 5 For analyses of the FTAA in general and CARICOM's membership in the FTAA see: Terry L. McCoy: The Free Trade Area of the Americas: Opportunities and Challenges for Florida, University of Florida. http://www.latam.ufl.edu/publications/ftaa_paper.html; Carla Barnett, The Caribbean Community [CARICOM] – Preparing for and Adjusting To The New Rules of the International Trading System, CARICOM Website, <http://www.caricom.org/speeches/speech4.htm>.
- 6 Windward Islands Banana Development and Export Company (WIBDECO) as well as other interest groups that are affected by loss of EU trade preferences, the Caribbean Rum Association, the region's sugar and rice associations and respective trade unions.
- 7 Data mining is a tool that enables the user to effectively extract relevant data from databases and transform these into relevant information that can guide/inform decisions. Contextualisation is the application of experiences, and relevant historical information, situations to better understand a particular incident, occurrence. See, Jovan Kurbalija, *Knowledge Management in Diplomacy* in Knowledge and Diplomacy. Kurbalija ed. Malta, The Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, 1999 & Deitrich Kappeler, *Diplomacy of Tomorrow: New Developments, New Methods, New Tools*, in Kurbalija ed. Malta: The Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, 1998.

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