

Chapter 8

Diplomacy and Foreign Policy Management

GENERAL PRACTICE OF DIPLOMACY

8.1 In many respects a skilful use of diplomacy within the framework of a prudent and well thought out foreign policy is a small state's first line of defence. Since these states have no military or economic power to wield they are forced to rely on diplomatic means in order to convey to other countries the nature of their national interests in the different areas of international relations that are vital not just to their security but to their very survival. And it is only through effective diplomacy that they can hope to persuade wealthy and powerful nations to enter into relationships with them which can work to their material advantage without necessarily entailing unacceptable constraints on their sovereignty and genuine independence.

8.2 All nations need to pursue diplomatic initiatives simultaneously at the bilateral and multilateral levels. Yet small states are seriously handicapped in this regard by their extremely limited personnel, and often financial resources. They are not able to have either enough overseas diplomatic missions or adequate representation in all the important international fora whose deliberations directly affect their political and economic interests.

8.3 In small states, as for most states, bilateral relations are of the highest importance and, given the size of the international community, careful assessments have to be made on which states to focus, although certain major powers and neighbouring states must naturally have priority. Because the need to project their goals and image is no less vital for small states than for others, they should be conscious of the

importance of selecting personnel appropriate to a particular posting. Moreover, their diplomatic officers should be especially skilled in information gathering, as there is greater need for them to perform this function than in large states which possess sophisticated information-gathering mechanisms. As a consequence, their paramount concern should be to provide adequate training for all their diplomatic officers and to formulate sound foreign policy management strategies to ensure that the small service complement at their disposal is deployed tactically.

8.4 We also believe that small states would be wise to seek to maximise their representation at intergovernmental bodies. Throughout our Report we have laid great stress on the benefit of regional co-operation and we were therefore pleased to note that every state included in our study belongs to at least one of the various bodies that have already been established within their respective regions. But essential though participation in regional organisations is, what is really required for a small state to substantially enhance its capacity to promote its general security interests and deter external threats is to enlist backing and friendship from beyond its own area. While the development of significant bilateral relationships can obviously be advantageous, the small state also needs to cultivate the collective support of several geographical groupings. The most effective method of achieving this objective is clearly through membership of at least one of the more important transregional intergovernmental organisations which normally function as a sort of informal mart for the trading of support between different groups. By giving support to one geographical group on an issue with which it may not be directly concerned, a small state can win reciprocal backing on an issue that is of pressing national interest.

8.5 To small states, which can maintain very few overseas missions, representation at international bodies has the added advantage of providing an alternative means of facilitating bilateral relationships. Membership of the United Nations is particularly helpful in this respect because it is the only organisation where virtually every nation is represented. In addition, the opening three weeks of each annual General Assembly, when most of the world's Foreign Ministers are in attendance, affords small states a unique opportunity to cultivate such relationships at the requisite high level; overtures made at that time can then be followed up through contacts at the various national United Nations missions.

DIPLOMACY IN THE UNITED NATIONS SETTING

8.6 It was particularly heartening to find that, besides being members of the Commonwealth, all but four of the small states in our study—Kiribati,

Nauru, Tonga, Tuvalu—are members of the United Nations, and we are encouraged that Commonwealth regional support has made representation at the United Nations in New York possible for some of the other small South Pacific countries. We were also pleased to learn that 17 Commonwealth small states had joined the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) by the time of its 1983 summit.

8.7 We have focused on the United Nations because we believe that membership of the world organisation is probably more important to small states politically than that of any other trans-regional body. It was, after all, the establishment of the United Nations regime, on the basis of principles of equity and co-operation, that originally created the framework for the kind of international community which would be ready to welcome and sustain the presence of very small independent states. Without that framework, indeed, it probably would not have been possible to generate the necessary political ethos to persuade the colonial powers to release their small territories into independence. It is only through membership of the United Nations, where the principle of sovereign equality of all states is written into its constitution, that the right of a small state to have its independence and territorial integrity respected on the same legal terms as other nations is formally recognised. None of the intergovernmental bodies established outside the United Nations system—which by their nature have only a limited membership and sometimes also admit dependent territories as well as liberation movements—can confer the same authoritative recognition of statehood. Small states can however use these bodies to considerable advantage, both as a means of initially gathering support which is later translated into action at the United Nations forum and as a source for additional measures to reinforce decisions taken at the United Nations level.

8.8 Membership of the United Nations in itself, then, provides some element of deterrence against the possibility of total obliteration by a predatory neighbour. The United Nations is also the one forum where a state can alert and sensitise the entire international community to the existence of a specific security threat. In this section we indicate the various types of initiatives which small states can pursue in order to turn the United Nations' underlying deterrent capacity into a positive asset which can be used, not only to meet immediate needs in the face of a particular external threat, but also to serve more indirect, long-term political security interests. An analytical survey of the ways in which certain small states have already made use of the United Nations for these purposes, carried out by the Secretariat on our behalf, provided ample material to illustrate how much can be achieved by such initiatives.

8.9 The survey showed that for three small Commonwealth countries under a permanent security threat from neighbouring states—Belize,

Cyprus and Guyana—it was possible through a systematic use of Assembly procedures and subsidiary bodies to mobilise overwhelming majority support from the rest of the membership, including some of the major powers. In the case of Guyana and Belize, both of the larger states involved—Venezuela and Guatemala—have so far refrained from attempting to make good their respective claims by force and are now engaged in negotiations to reach a peaceful settlement. We would not, of course, pretend that majority support for sympathetic United Nations resolutions can prove the decisive factor in deterring a really determined potential aggressor, particularly if it is a major military power, from moving in to attack a small state. But what seems certain is that such support can be an important additional consideration that many Third World nations contemplating aggressive action are likely to take into serious account, especially if it is then reinforced by direct bilateral representations from major powers.

8.10 The Cyprus case, by contrast, precisely illustrates the limitations inherent in this type of political deterrence enacted through United Nations mechanisms. Majority support undoubtedly initially helped to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations peacekeeping force that had been stationed in Cyprus since 1964 to keep peace between the Greek and Turkish communities and thus to serve as a political deterrent against an attack by Turkey. Both the force and majority opinion ceased to be an effective deterrent, however, when a crisis developed in the Greek Cypriot community which led to Turkey's invasion of the northern sector of the island in 1974. Moreover, Turkey's continued occupation of Cypriot territory after the crisis was resolved, despite United Nations condemnation, demonstrates that once a violation of territory is allowed to become entrenched, it is not easy to marshal sufficient political pressure through the normal United Nations channels to compel a recalcitrant and military powerful nation to withdraw, unless such pressure has the support of the Security Council, and particularly the super powers.

8.11 Nevertheless, Cyprus' experience should not be allowed to obscure the very real value of widespread political backing at the United Nations in helping to safeguard a small state's territorial integrity from encroachment by a larger Third World country. It should be remembered too that any small nation can have direct recourse to the Security Council's procedures for peaceful settlement of disputes, which can sometimes also be helpful in warding off aggression. Malta provided a case in point in 1980, when it found itself suddenly confronted by a security threat from Libya arising from competing claims to national jurisdiction over an area of their common continental shelf. It immediately took the issue to the Council which initiated a negotiating process through the Secretary-General that successfully prevented the

threat from materialising as an act of aggression. Other small states may be able to make use of the Security Council's peacemaking machinery in this manner in the future.¹

8.12 The various diplomatic initiatives taken by all these countries centred on a basic strategy of seeking to play an active and constructive role within the United Nations setting. The actual tactics employed naturally varied with the circumstances. Cyprus for instance was able to capitalise on the fact that its particular situation became a permanent item of the General Assembly's regular agenda, as well as on the continued presence of a United Nations peacekeeping force on the island. Guyana on the other hand was not in a similar position and so had to follow a more indirect route by pursuing an activist role through election to the Security Council and offices on a number of the United Nations' subsidiary bodies. Both countries also used the NAM as a supplementary forum for mobilising support, and Cyprus additionally sought assistance from the Commonwealth. Belize's case history has been somewhat different in that its entry to the United Nations was preceded by an assiduous international campaign, spearheaded by small Caribbean nations, to hasten its independence and the new state had therefore attained considerable political visibility before it even joined the world body.

8.13 Another technique a small state can use to achieve a high profile is through a sustained sponsorship of Assembly agenda items and resolutions reflecting important political goals that are sought by a substantial number of other states and which it perceives as having a particular relevance to its own long-term security interests. This is a tactic which has been employed to good advantage by small states that are not under any specific threat. As long ago as 1967 Malta, for example, became known as the country which ushered in an entirely new application of the equity principle, by proposing an agenda item aimed at designating the resources of the sea-bed as the "common heritage of mankind". By so doing it initiated the political process that was to lead, 15 years later, to the adoption of the comprehensive new Law of the Sea Convention. And that same process, as played out in the protracted United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, in turn provided the institutional framework which enabled Fiji to achieve prominence through its effective efforts in helping to promote the concept of the "archipelagic state" designed to ensure that multi-island countries like itself would gain sovereignty over the waters between component islands.

¹ Additionally, it can be noted for the record that four small Commonwealth countries—Botswana, Cyprus, Lesotho and Seychelles—have sought the Council's assistance after acts of aggression have been committed against them, in order to mitigate their consequences and/or to provide mechanisms for negotiating a settlement. These cases do not however fall within the scope of an analysis of initiatives aimed at deterrence and prevention.

In acknowledgement of its useful role a Fiji national was later appointed as the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative on Law of the Sea matters.

8.14 If deployed with the requisite political discrimination, such diplomatic initiatives can materially assist a small state to register its presence in the world community. Furthermore, by projecting a distinctive and well respected national personality in this manner it will have the added satisfaction of knowing it is making a positive contribution to strengthening the United Nations' own capacity to fulfil its Charter role as protector of the international order, of which small states are after all among the principal beneficiaries.

PRUDENT FOREIGN POLICY MANAGEMENT

8.15 In order to carry out useful diplomatic initiatives like those just described, it is vital that a small state's foreign policy objectives and strategies take fully into account the manifold implications of being a tiny entity in the international arena. We have in mind more than just the recognition of the unavoidable limitations of being small. Rather we are recommending the development of positive techniques of foreign policy management to compensate for these limitations. Such techniques would seek to achieve a balance between the utility of the occasional judicious use of bold initiatives and a realistic appreciation of the need to husband slender human resources by deploying them tactically.

Pointers for consideration

8.16 As in other areas of management, prudent management of foreign policy must be founded on a number of principles and procedures. On the basis of the experience of different groups of small states, we have abstracted a series of pointers which we believe could be helpful.

(i) Maintenance of channels of communication

8.17 Direct and indirect channels of communication, the latter through friendly powers, should be carefully maintained and utilised to ensure that policies and actions are fully understood. In view of their limited financial and manpower resources, use could be made of honorary consuls, special missions and non-resident representation whereby ambassadors on the staff of ministries travel at regular intervals to the states to which they are accredited. While such arrangements are unavoidably second best, experience has shown that they can be made to work effectively. Where appropriate some states may wish to consider joint representation.

(ii) Foreign policy posture

8.18 It is in their own national interest that small states should, without appearing to lose any of their sovereignty, adopt a generally discreet posture in the conduct of their foreign policy. This can help avoid provoking suspicion and hostility from other states, particularly the larger powers. At the purely practical level, the importance of an even-handed provision of appropriate facilities, conditions and personnel for the various overseas missions within their jurisdictions must not be overlooked.

(iii) Exercise of influence

8.19 We have already indicated our view that, within the parameters of a prudent foreign policy posture, a small state's capacity to manage its policy in its own interest can be much facilitated if it is seen to occupy a prominent and influential position in intergovernmental organisations. However, an activist role may have its perils as, unless there is a careful choice of issues for support, it might attract the hostility of larger powers. It is important therefore that in playing such a role small states should plan their international activities on a highly selective basis and focus on issues that have a direct bearing on their national interests.

(iv) Relevance of internal policies

8.20 Decisions on internal matters in certain areas can not only significantly contribute to the projection of the national image abroad but may have direct implications for the state's own foreign policy. Thus while the adoption of a particular ideology could have the effect of attracting sympathy and assistance from some major powers it could also antagonise others. It would therefore seem prudent for small states always to ensure, and be able to demonstrate, that their domestic policies are the outcome of carefully assessed responses to their own specific internal conditions and needs.

Co-ordination of foreign policy within groups of small states

8.21 The co-ordination of foreign policy by small states belonging to the same geopolitical group can enable them to make effective practical use of modest national resources in a number of ways. The experience of Caribbean countries has, for example, shown that this can be achieved:

in bilateral postings by providing, inter alia, common facilities and common office and consular services;

in the multilateral context, by organising joint coverage of committees and sharing information collected through the provision

of reports on important conferences which only one or two states in the regional group may have attended.

8.22 Co-ordination of foreign policy can also provide an important source of support for an individual small state confronted with a particular security problem, by:

effectively mobilising on its behalf international diplomatic and public support;

establishing a group position as a countervailing influence in an unequal bilateral power relationship;

making possible the promotion of issues supportive of its interest where the state concerned might attract censure or hostility if it pursued these individually.

8.23 To assist the development of a co-ordinated foreign policy strategy and practice, we see a particular value in an informal exchange of ideas on common concerns in the shaping and implementation of foreign policy between the foreign ministry and all the other departments whose work directly affects national security: the prime minister's office, the cabinet, the defence department, and so on. We would even advocate that when the constituent states share a common view on some substantial issues of foreign policy, they should seriously consider arranging either formal or informal routine consultations to discuss the desirability of establishing a co-ordinated position, which could then be conveyed to the rest of the international community. We gather that this is already done on a formal basis in the Caribbean. The procedures of the Caribbean countries for this purpose, as well as those of the EEC and ASEAN, could serve as helpful models.

8.24 We appreciate that certain states might feel that agreement on joint positions could entail some loss of sovereignty, but we ourselves cannot view it in that light. On the contrary, we believe that for any small state to take a decision of this nature, in the interest of promoting its own security in concert with others, essentially represents an exercise of sovereignty and not its denial.

TRAINING FOR DIPLOMACY AND FOREIGN POLICY MANAGEMENT

8.25 It is clear that a small state requires accomplished diplomats of skill and resource if it is to be in a position to maximise its possibilities in the global arena. While some Commonwealth small countries, for example

those that employed the kind of useful initiatives described, may possess sufficient numbers of qualified personnel, most are probably not so happily placed. It is of paramount importance in our view for their governments to acknowledge frankly the necessity for developing an adequate cadre of trained diplomatic officers and to be willing to take the appropriate measures. Moreover, training in techniques of negotiation and in some basic aspects of international relations is also needed for other relevant officials such as those who service cabinets, prime ministers' departments, defence ministers, and development ministers.

8.26 Fortunately there already exists within the Commonwealth a diversity of established sources for the necessary training. At the national and bilateral levels, a number of the larger member countries have academic institutions offering courses in the diplomatic field; and several of them have also introduced special arrangements for hosting trainee diplomats from individual small states either in their external affairs departments or in their overseas missions. At the regional level, the Caribbean is to some extent served by training facilities provided through the Institute of International Relations at the University of the West Indies as well as through CARICOM which, in co-operation with the Commonwealth Secretariat, has organised short-term intensive training courses; we note, however, that there are as yet no equivalent resources in other regional groupings of small states.

8.27 At the pan-Commonwealth level, the Secretariat, having successfully provided a special training programme for Zimbabwe when it became independent, recently organised a similar but more extensive course for the Pacific island states based in Papua New Guinea and is contemplating others. These programmes have made use of existing expertise and facilities, both within the region and in the larger member countries geographically close to the respective groupings of the smaller countries, markets and the use of relevant technologies.

8.28 Beyond the purely Commonwealth context, the United Nations itself provides some training for new diplomats through UNITAR and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and there are also specialised courses in negotiations, peacekeeping and peacemaking conducted by the International Peace Academy (IPA).

8.29 Although there is more than adequate availability of training opportunities readily available to most small states, we consider that a more co-ordinated Commonwealth approach would be helpful. Such an approach should focus not only on the provision of classic diplomatic training but on areas and techniques specially required for the development of small states. Thus diplomatic training should include the

techniques of trade and investment promotion, the maintenance of markets and the use of relevant technologies.

8.30 An essential first step, which can be set in motion immediately, is to ensure that all the small states are made aware of the full range of suitable training opportunities currently on offer. To assist in this objective the Secretariat could be asked to prepare a comprehensive listing. In addition, we would suggest that the Secretariat's foreign service training programmes should be adapted to take account of the specific types of requirements indicated above.

Studies in the management of foreign policy

8.31 So far very little comparative analysis of the management of foreign policy by small states appears to have been undertaken. There would be value in studies which collate the experiences of small states to date and provide practical guidelines for the conduct of their foreign policy. We strongly recommend that the appropriate Commonwealth institutions should facilitate the pursuit of these studies.