

PEACE AND WAR IN THE 21ST CENTURY – THE OPINIONS OF A DIPLOMAT

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to share some of my opinions from the perspective of a diplomat, of a practitioner, who has worked for four decades in the Romanian, European and multilateral diplomacy. Each of these areas of diplomatic practices have particular specificities, perceptions and representations when it comes to the developments of the bilateral and international relations which highlight some significant aspects for the present work. Distilled in the background of experience, they simply and essentially mean: the recognition of the value of diplomacy as an active and loyal commitment to defending the national interests, the spirit of international cooperation, in favour of dialogue, negotiation, the search for possible reciprocal accommodations, moderate concessions and reciprocal benefit. I am certain that there are multiple opportunities for people to benefit from the information and assessments that are communicated by well-known sources. I wish to further this understanding with my reflections and to encourage people to take part in debates, which are encouraged by the academic environment of the city of Iasi and of Apollonia University.

Keywords: *diplomacy, war, peace.*

As a diplomat I worked in European and Asian countries. As ambassador and head of department in European structure, in Brussels, or as a diplomatic envoy in missions in Asian capitals, I took part in negotiations and in signings of political agreements in a friendly spirit between the European Union and states such as Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Singapore, Vietnam, India or Pakistan. It is precisely this diverse and intense experience that I lived and my entire forty years of diplomatic career which make me believe in the affirmation chances of the value of diplomacy at an international level.

I do by no means ignore the fact that we are currently sailing on the disturbed waters of the geopolitical turbulences, at a moment of worrying

convergence of multiple crises. Up to 2020 we were almost tempted to celebrate interconnectivity as a beneficial connection of states through the multiple effects of globalisation and of the comparative advantages. The COVID 19 pandemic turned everything upside down. The classical illnesses of the relationships among states have reappeared: nationalism, xenophobia and intolerance.

The war in Ukraine dramatically accelerated and altered mutations in the international scenery. The international community struggles for a new equilibrium, the geopolitical power axes are adrift, many people are scared by the perspective of shifting from a unipolar to a multipolar world.

Progressively, we witness the reconfiguration of the block policies. The US and the EU reached new levels of cooperation, NATO was reinvigorated. The emergent markets, People's Republic of China, The Russian Federation, India, the Arab, African and Latin-American countries prefer to navigate in the area of a new alignment, practicing prudent or neutral positionings.

The tendencies that we witness frighten us: there is a lower appetite for cooperation and compromise within the international organizations; the unilateralism of the powerful states weakens the dispute solving multilateral mechanisms; the value divergence retakes its ideological disguise and comes up with new political disputes; consequently, sensitive present-day subjects require time, mediation and long negotiations in the search for consensus and cooperation, regardless if we speak of human rights, the regulation of biotechnologies, of the digital space, the problems of the alien space or the polar regions.

All these developments invite us to ask ourselves questions in order to come up with solutions. Let us now consider one of the essential questions of humanity:

What is peace?

I shall start with the words of the former German chancellor, Willy Brandt, one of the promoters of post-war reconciliation and a pioneer of European economic integration: "Peace does not represent everything, but without peace everything is nothing!"

Academic research furthered the issue, but at the same time it led some simple and straightforward answers. Peace is the opposite of war. The rich history of mankind and the abundance of historical chronicles did not lead to unanimously accepted definitions, the theoretical controversies representing a warning related to our difficulties as individuals, regardless of our state as partners, adversaries, competitors, or researchers, to understand each other!

Three ideas enjoyed increasing popularity:

- peace means the absence of war and this simple truth throws us on the other side in an insidious manner, in examining the opposite, because what is war? Simple, a killer and destructive conflict between at least two armed and military organised parties. Can such an attempt to define peace be satisfying, basically "a negative definition of peace?" It appears in 1651, in a work entitled *Leviathan*, belonging to the British philosopher Thomas Hobbes. Nowadays, this definition can no longer be applied since mankind encounters situations in which the military conflict between military organised formations stopped, but violence continues threatening community lives and welfare. An example for this was the situation from the East area of Congo.
- another approach offers some even more ambiguous terms for peace. It starts not from the violence and the intensity of armed confrontations, but from the conditions that generated the conflict. Let us reflect. What are the odds of having a clear understanding of peace if we review the numerous causes, dissensions, confrontations and tensions

which lead to conflict? This remains an attempt to be explored, meaning if we want peace we have to know the sources of conflict, regardless of how material or immaterial, volatile or detectible they are. In this context, we speak of understanding in a chaotic and competition world, violence and war representing the main elements of peace and stability. Well-known thinkers such as the Chinese strategist Sun Tzu, the philosopher Aristotle or the Roman general Vegetius expressed, in different manners, the idea that "if you want peace, prepare yourself for war!" Or, in the famous words of president Theodore Roosevelt "speak softly, but keep a bludgeon close by."

- a more realistic attempt appears from the mixture of the two suppositions. The absence of war, as a starting point, basically makes us acknowledge the fact that peace represents a process, the cessation of hostilities being only the first step. Progress can be achieved if we eliminate the aspects which nurtured the war and made it possible – the weapons and the army, the conflict and the reciprocal lack of trust. We are still at the level of the primary definition of the British philosopher, at the level of the 17th century, but we cannot deny the fact that this definition might also serve and inspire, in our century, on a European continent currently shaken by unforeseen earthquakes.
- The German philosopher Immanuel Kant goes, one hundred years later, one step forward towards the present-day and develops the idea that peace represents a complex process. Kant has the merit of having been an exponent of the idea that "perpetual peace" is possible through universal democracy, international cooperation and economic integration

Doesn't it seem to you that we have reached the 21st century? We have, but we haven't reached eternal peace! At the end of June 2022, a German think-tank presented, during an extended press conference, a 2022 Peace Report. I am sure you can guess its content – the description of the consequences of Russia's aggression in Ukraine, the recent stages of escalation, cracks, frictions and the dangers to the European security architecture. This report does not ignore the

reorientations of the European states when it comes to security, starting with Germany and going through all the recent phases of NATO'S expansion. The report also includes the terrible globalization risk inventory of some regional crises, the danger represented by the violent jihadist agents, etc.

In the spirit of understanding peace as an active process, the Report has some pages regarding the significant elements: the need for a rigorous democratic control over the more extended competences of the security institutions and services, which have gained more authority and influence on the background of the fight against terrorism, pandemics and extremism. At the same time, it assesses the boundaries and the conditions that have to ensure the efficiency of the sanction regime and it analyses the crisis of the global control regime of the nuclear armament.

The fact that this report has 150 pages is not important, its title however is relevant. It represents a clear imperative: "Let us be capable of peace in a time of war."

We could baptize this very facile and paradoxical 21st century as the one which enshrines the synthesis of opposites and the dominance of complexity! Because it embraces the coexistence of peace, be it partial and circumscribed - geographical, territorial, conventional or apparent, with war, no matter by what definition, broader or stricter, more violent or hybrid, total or local, real or virtual! Polemics continue between those who consider the war unavoidable, even necessary in some circumstances, just and preferable to an "unjust" peace, on the one hand and, on the other hand, there are the ones who incriminate war and ask for its eradication. The ones who embrace the religious perspective consider that the human nature suffers from the sin of violence and it gives away to the temptations of avarice, fear and xenophobia. On the other side the ones who are against the war believe in the perfectibility of the human nature and of the human institutions. Being on an important educational mission, we can subscribe in good faith to hope and progress!

It may be worth mentioning the 1963 words of the former American President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, whom I quote: "the true peace, not only

the peace in our time, but the peace for all time, peace of the world, peace of the community, does not require that each man love his neighbour, it requires only that they live together in mutual tolerance, and submit to disputes a just and peaceful settlement. Just like history teaches us, hostilities between nations, just like the ones between individuals do not last for ever. Let us, therefore, persevere, peace is not unpracticable nor is it necessary for the war to be unavoidable!"

However, the realities of the complex present-day world confirm the previous label of our century: contradictory and complex.

Although many historians considered that the period of the Cold War was the one which made the demarcation between peace and war even clearer, theoreticians state that the present-day distinction is more obscure than ever. The political relation between the Israeli and the Palestinians cannot be classified either as war or peace. For almost 70 years, between the North and the South in the Korean Peninsula there is a truce with a notable absence of a peace agreement. Just as the negotiations on a post-war peace treaty between Japan and the Russian Federation have not ended, despite the broad bilateral agenda that incorporates multiple aspects, from economic cooperation to the tense ones regarding the "northern territories," or the recent developments following Japan's alignment with the sanctions regime applied to Russia.

Following the many years spent as a diplomat in the European External Action Service I am entitled to think, as a result of my direct experience, that the effort of building communities on the ground of associating the nations to the common values and principles represents an antidote effect against the limited or parochial interests of a national state and against the monopoly of violence as a state attribute. We all know that this was the main factor in creating "the European communities of coal and steel" and, finally, of the European Union. There is still an attempted relevance to manage a fertile interdependence, to reduce the significance of national boundaries, to manage together and to prevent the spectre of a war in Europe. I allow myself to believe that neither the destructive consequences of the pandemic that has seriously tested the European solidarity, nor Great Britain's

retreat for a faith in restoring the real sovereignty, have not undermined the true value of the community project! We must still manage, with political wisdom and diplomacy, the ongoing implications of the war in Ukraine and the relations with the Russian Federation! Enough topics for the remaining decades of the 21st century!

What more has the 21st century brought to understanding peace

Basically, this article should not only be about peace and war. Otherwise, it would be much too poor in understanding the times that we are living. We are obliged to acknowledge that the global peace that we know today is confronted with numerous convergent crisis, torn and fragilized by them, regardless of the ones that we wish to analyze: the armed conflicts are more numerous than ever, the armed non-statal groups proliferate, the war in Ukraine triggered the most serious wave of refugees following World War II, the accelerated impact of the climate changes is becoming more and more obvious, affecting the security of the societies and nations. When we think of our clash with all these, we have to also consider some other disturbing aspects: anthropologists state that, for approximately 180 000 de ani, Homo Sapiens lived in the absence of wars. Historians noticed that in the last 3421 years there were only 268 years, scattered over the centuries, in which no wars took place!

What happens with the war?

In complete sync with the evolution of the human society, the wars of our century are characterized by multiple significant evolutions, three of them having already been noted: asymmetry, demilitarization, as well as privatization and commercialization. The asymmetry between the combatant camps was not only already noted in the conflicts of recent decades, but also studied in the aspects that indicated how a guerrilla war or insurgent actions demonetized the military technical superiority of the opposing camp.

Many of the "new wars" took place less between the people in uniform or were less directed towards military objectives. This

demilitarization of wars accompanied the destruction of the conflicts and their shift in the transnational register.

Another characteristic was highlighted by the tragical events of September 9, 2001, when it was visible that the opposing sides included transnational criminals and terrorist groups. They were accompanied by many conflicts from the underdeveloped parts of the world in which "the lords of war" made profits and business in the context of supporting some local disputes.

Beyond these aspects, the period following the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis, the consequences of the sanction regime against the Russian Federation and intensification of the competition between the USA and China, among which we have the problem of Taiwan and the disputes in China's South Sea, led to evolutions which tense the international scene and accentuates the weight of the new sources of conflict, along with the persistence of the other already existing crisis elements.

I am sure that military specialists are abundant in explaining the dimensions of the new forms of cyber-war, more sophisticated and developed, the war in the virtual space or the hybrid war. As an irony of history, probably, the most extended analyses of the hybrid war might contradict and fully annihilate the old definition of peace, as an absence of war. Welcome to the 21st century! The war is everywhere, and peace represents a noble illusion!

However, I cannot preserve this pessimistic mood. But, either directly or indirectly, it contributes to the broad panorama of the aspects which negatively load the atmosphere of the global society, introduce new turbulences in the efforts of preserving the international order grounded on the rules and norms included in the UN Charter. Launched as coherent policies or tentative measures, many of these are only in their infancy and their implications for the peace-war binomial in the global context are difficult to estimate.

I limit myself to enumerating some of these phenomenon, which are still developing: the re-ideologization of international relations; the transformation of the economic or commercial sanction tool, in the predominant state policy, the accentuation of coercive measures to the

detriment of those cooperatives; the selective deglobalization associated with commercial regrouping measures based on non-economic criteria, mainly ideologically oriented; the weakening of multilateral organizations and the potential return of the world, as a whole, or of some regions, to the bipolarity climate specific to the Cold War.

And, if for now these evolutions can only be briefly stated, other debates draw our attention and of those preoccupied with the passing of time and the persistence of the war in Ukraine. Some theoreticians say we should take a look at the war in Afghanistan, which lasted for twenty years. The war takes place as long as there are shootings. Peace is established after there is no more smoke coming out of the barrels of weapons of any caliber! Others say, wars last for generations. According to some people, the US Civil War is not over yet, and perhaps the events of January 2021 proved it. What about the war on the Korean peninsula? What about the Cold War with Russia?

In some situations, one has moved into another register, where history changes the terms of defining the end of war and victory! Japan capitulated, but then its auto and electronics industries nearly brought the similar branches in the US to their knees. US troops were hastily evacuated from Saigon and Vietnam was unified under the communist rule, but today there are over 20,000 Vietnamese students studying in the US and the US investment and bilateral military cooperation are skyrocketing.

DIPLOMACY “represents the third dimension,” alongside peace and war, of international relations, according to ambassador Fletcher M. Burton, in an outstanding article published in the July-August issue of the *American Foreign Service Journal*. The 21st century diplomacy offers more questions than answers – there were periods in which the art of the one who played the role of communication between the state’s authorities and that of negotiator of the multiple aspects of these relations was seen as a generator of transformations.

Historian Garrett Mattingly speaks about the diplomacy of Renaissance as a “revolutionary diplomacy,” and the feeling of intense

transformation of the manner in which the diplomat is analytically analysed by the classical and impeccable British citizen Harold Nicolson in his 1939 work. The same understanding of the imperative need to adapt diplomacy to circumstances appears in former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s 1994 synthesis paper. But, let me invite you to an exercise of common sense, to ask ourselves together what is new now in these years?

What do we notice in every day of our existence and of the present?

All the above-described evolutions, both in the international community and in the national societies, require more than diplomacy!

The diplomat, as an agent of the relations between states, sent, representative, negotiator and mediator, is in the centre of all these developments. It is precisely his basic abilities that are now necessary: in times of eroding trust, it is he who can communicate and promote networks of contacts and relationships! In times of intolerance and strife, he has to seek understanding and consensus. In times that prefer walls and demarcations, let him build bridges!

Following my retiring at the end of 2019, I benefited from numerous occasions, together with my colleagues for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to reflect together on the present and the future of our diplomatic service and on the current condition of the diplomat. Not all the opinions were enthusiastic and optimistic, but I allowed myself numerous occasions to confess how much I envy them for their chances of remodelling this noble profession, not only as an answer to the new challenges of the immediate agenda, but because the social and technological transformations equipped them better, through education, in various foreign universities, by equipping with means of performance communication, by connecting and absorbing in the national diplomatic agenda some elements from the collective, complex and sophisticated policies and strategies of the European Union and NATO

And yet what is happening with diplomacy?

All the above-described evolutions, both in the international community and in the national societies generate severe repercussions on

diplomacy, regardless if we speak of the renationalisation of foreign policies, the crisis of the internationalist spirit, the populism or the isolationist tendencies. On this background, the diplomat goes through a crisis of legitimacy when it comes to his role and skills. He is surpassed by the breadth and speed of news and information broadcasted by CNN and the cascade of reactions flowing on Twitter and Facebook. Social networks monitor him and sanction his apparently moderate pace of action and the lack of transparency imposed by the discretion of the profession. Too little is recognized of his career as a "perpetual pilgrim", which takes him to various foreign countries as an envoy of his government (with sometimes dramatic effects for his family members - wife, children, always separated from what was close to them and comfortable). His merits of continuously putting in efforts to adapt to such different social, institutional and cultural environments, to find adequate and effective ways of knowing and communicating with more than diverse interlocutors, are not recognized.

Just like the journalist, the diplomat writes analyses, reports, deciphers the subtle resorts of events and the reasonings behind the policies adopted by one government or another. But these pages distilled through the expertise and the understanding of not being on the front page of newspapers the next day (with the exception of "the good duties" of Wikileaks!), are preserved to load the reading map of the ministries from the capital always thirsty for confidential information and analysis. For the public they do not exist! Maybe, following some years, after a few decades of prescribing the confidentiality term, the archives might reveal and enlighten the public and historians with the merits of a diplomat who was "on the front lines" and managed to inform his government about the key decisions and policies made behind closed doors.

Has the golden age of diplomacy passed or not?

Many people are inclined to regard diplomacy as anachronic, unsynchronized with the imperatives of our era which, confronted with the acceleration of international developments, ask for immediate solutions! Traditionally,

theoreticians saw the diplomat as an essential agent of external relations, a significant messenger and a representative of the national power. Important studies revealed the necessity of a reform and also an overcoming of the classical skills and limits. An aspect recently noticed refers to the necessity of "democratization," of openness towards the society, a transition from the feeling of belonging to a select club, a distinct body of governmental employees, working for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to an increased integration within the society. The diplomat has to be part of a broader gearing, to work together with other public life participants, with media organisms, NGOs, research institutes, business circles or universities. On the other hand, the modern means of communication allow the information to surpass distance in real time. Nobody awaits the diplomat to inform people from an embassy what and how things happened in the world. The head of states and of governments meet directly, seem no longer to require intermediaries, messengers or interpreters of other people's thoughts. They seem to need only protocol and security officers.

The diplomats? They remain in the shadow. Their mission was to prepare the ground and to establish the choreography - they negotiated the agenda, the program, the draft of the press releases which are to be signed, in front of the cameras, by the political protagonists. And they will be more convinced than ever that they have done everything. And why wouldn't they be? They meet more often, speak on the phone, practice "a personal chemistry" with or without hugs and (more often) the intimacy of whispering in the ear of the interlocutor.

It seems that the only duty of the diplomat, in these important reunions, is to "implement" what the leaders have agreed on. Or to keep on the waterline everything that was not agreed on. Because, unexpectedly and unpredictably, the world is becoming more and more complicated. The current international environment encounters new characteristics which influence the manners of the diplomat: the developments are multidirectional, unpredictable, volatile and intense! It is enough to go over the events that appeared from the beginning of the year to the events in Ukraine, the political or diplomatic

regulation attempts, as well as the continuous changing nature of military operations.

The well-known international relations theoretician, Hans J. Morgenthau, noticed in 1948 the decline of the efficiency of diplomacy, in circumstances which do not seem completely different from our present-days: "two superpowers, centers of the two force blocks go against each other in an inflexible opposition. They cannot back down and let go of what is considered to be vital. They cannot move forwards with risking to clash! Therefore, persuasion appears as a deceiving maneuver and compromise as treason!" He also formulates some recommendations whose validity also remains undisputable even today: the rehabilitation of the diplomatic valences of diplomacy has to assume a series of precepts: four fundamental aspects – the definition of the foreign policy objectives in the terms of national interest; the avoidance of the cruciate spirit; the attempt to also look at things from the perspective of the other nation; the acceptance of compromises when it comes to matter which are not vital; he considers that compromises are possible in the virtue of a realistic approach: without the excess of a legal approach; without placing oneself on a position from which it is impossible to withdraw; not to allow a weak ally to decide in your place; not to allow the armed forces of the public opinion to take control of the external policies.

In the present context, these pertinent recommendations invite us to reflect. At the

same time, the demystification of diplomacy calls for a profound realism in the reception of its virtues: its promises are not related to prestidigitation nor to the blunt effectiveness of the application of force instruments. Probably, to the disappointment of many, sensitively, diplomacy means concessions, compromises, partial and temporary solutions. Basically, diplomacy accepts that misunderstandings and frictions are unavoidable. That is why it proceeds with tact and persuasiveness in solving them, in calming the spirits and tempering the clashes.

Tempted by the metaphor, an Australian researcher allows herself to define the traditional patience of the diplomat as "an idealism of low intensity with a dog perseverance!" Because it refers to nuances, not to obvious contrasts. It refers to going back to the negotiation table (even if this might sound as a defeatist spirit!)

The effort of understanding the opposite opinion remains compulsory and difficult and it requires patience and time – elements to which some politicians might be allergic. Consecutively, diplomacy may seem anachronic in our era rich in labels such as "post-truth," "fake news", "hyperemotional world" – a world in which the solution has to be immediate, practical and trenchant. However, realities have proved us exactly the opposite, no matter if we speak about the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic or the search for finding a solution to the war in Ukraine.

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