Digitization and its Role in the Development of the Diplomatic Work Practice with Reference to the Virtual Embassy

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to shed light on the embodiment of digitization in the practice of diplomatic work. It relies on descriptive and deductive approaches in order to define the conceptual framework of digitization and diplomacy, to identify the concept of digital diplomacy and its tools, its advantages and disadvantages, and its main requirements. The study also addressed virtual embassies, which are considered one of the tools of digital diplomacy. The findings indicate that digital diplomacy is an extension of traditional diplomacy, and its emergence is the result of the development of information and communication technologies worldwide. Diplomatic work has thus become easier, faster, and less costly, while expanding the scope of diplomatic action. However, the digital revolution also poses risks to the practice of diplomacy, particularly regarding the confidentiality of digital diplomatic communications, which may be exposed to hacking and code breaches. Therefore, ensuring the security and protection of communication platforms, software, and applications used in diplomacy is essential.

Keywords: diplomacy, digitization, digital diplomacy, virtual embassy.

INTRODUCTION

The field of information and communication technology (ICT) is among the most impactful domains shaped by electronics, as it has provided numerous tools and means that eliminated geographical borders, shortened distances, and facilitated instant access, collection, storage, and dissemination of information, thereby overcoming the constraints of time and space. Within this technological environment and its diverse applications, it has become possible for any individual to connect to the world through mobile phones and the Internet at low cost and with ease. This reality influences all human activities and enables individuals and international entities alike to engage in activities at the international level, whether in official relations between governments and states, or in non-governmental interactions among organizations, companies, and people themselves.

This era has been termed the "Digital Age" due to the unprecedented and tremendous development in the field of ICT. Since ICT, especially the Internet, generates profound and long-term changes in modes of thinking and behavior, it inevitably influences the way communication occurs between

international actors. There exists a strong relationship between communication tools and diplomacy in general; the latter is directly and indirectly affected by the former. Every major development in communication and information tools consequently leads to transformations in the realm of diplomacy, compelling diplomats to prepare for and adapt to such changes. This raises essential questions: What will diplomacy look like amid this tremendous development in ICT? And what are its key tools?

The significance of this topic lies in exploring the transformations brought about by ICT in the practice of diplomacy. Contemporary diplomacy is often seen as undergoing a transition from the traditional form, characterized by its known tools and means, to digital diplomacy, which relies on new tools operating at higher speed and lower cost. Among these is the virtual embassy, which functions as a channel for conducting digital diplomatic work and does not differ significantly from the traditional embassy.

To address the research problem and cover all dimensions raised by this topic, the study is divided into two sections. The first section clarifies the concepts related to the terms "diplomacy" and "digitization." The second section defines digital diplomacy, explores its origins, examines its advantages and disadvantages, identifies its main tools, and highlights the virtual embassy as one of its most important instruments.

SECTION ONE: DEFINING THE CONCEPTS OF DIPLOMACY AND DIGITIZATION

First Requirement: Definition and Types of Diplomacy

1. Definition of Diplomacy

There are various definitions and approaches to determining the meaning of diplomacy, which has evolved over time in line with the development of the international system and the interests of states. International relations were essentially established to preserve pragmatism, encompassing the political, economic, military, cultural, and other fields. Consequently, the concept of diplomacy has evolved in its meaning and, therefore, developed as both a phenomenon and an instrument in international relations.

The word "diplomacy" in its original meaning comes from diplôma, a Greek word meaning "to fold." Diplomacy referred to an official document issued by the rulers of the Greek city-state, granting its bearer special privileges. It is also derived from the Roman verb dipun, which likewise means "to fold." At that time, important documents were made of metal, tightly sealed, and issued by kings and princes. These documents contained crucial secrets of the Roman Empire in both war and peace, representing instruments through which rulers exchanged their interests. They conferred privileges and included recommendations for good reception and respect. The killing or assault of a bearer of such a document amounted to a declaration of war. With time, the term became associated with official procedures and documents regulating international relations, particularly in their legal and organizational dimensions. Individuals who served this purpose were called archivists. Thus, the word diplomacy became confined to the study of treaties between states.

In Arabic, the word diplomacy was used to express the granting of safe conduct to envoys. The foreign term diplomacy was Arabized when the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961 was translated [1].

In its general sense, diplomacy is the process through which allies cooperate and resolve conflicts without resorting to military force, which was the dominant feature in the international arena, especially during the 19th century. International relations, therefore, were conducted in a framework of peace during diplomatic activity. In its narrower sense, diplomacy represents one of the mechanisms of foreign policy, conducted through official meetings between states via their representatives, whether ministers, ambassadors, or heads of state [2].

Diplomacy is also considered both a science and an art, practiced by members of the diplomatic corps who carry out representational functions abroad through permanent diplomatic missions. This practice is regulated by the rules of diplomatic law, which derive from international law, international custom, auxiliary sources, and the texts of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961 [3].

Muawiya ibn Abi Sufyan described diplomacy in human relations as follows: "If there were but a hair between me and the people, I would not cut it; if they slackened it, I would pull it taut, and if they pulled it taut, I would slacken it." This famous statement[4] provides an accurate description of relations between people, likening diplomacy to a hair—characterized by precision, flexibility, and the care taken to ensure continuity without rupture, even if it hangs by a single thread.

In Arabic, there is no literal translation for the word diplomacy, but its essence and methods were already in use. Arabs employed two words to describe diplomatic activity. The first was kitab, referring to the documents exchanged between rulers granting protection and privileges to the bearer. The second was sifara, meaning mission or negotiation, derived from the verb safara, "to mediate or reconcile between groups." The safir was the messenger or mediator. In a narration attributed to Imam Ali (peace be upon him), he said to Uthman ibn Affan: "The people have asked me to be a safir (ambassador) between you and them" [5].

One of the most remarkable examples of pre-Islamic Arab diplomacy was that of Hashim ibn Abd Manaf, who forged significant political and commercial alliances that revitalized the economic and security situation of the Arabian Peninsula. These agreements were called Ilaaf, documented in the Holy Qur'an in Surat Quraysh.

The Quraysh required their envoys to embody noble and wise qualities when sent to rulers. They advised: "Seize opportunities discreetly; spend the night close to the leaders' counsel; avoid weak intercessors, for they are the feeblest of means; avoid incompetence, for it is the lowest of positions; embrace patience, for it is the key to victory. Do not wade into deep waters until you know their depth."

With the advent of Islam, the international relations established by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ were characterized by universality, peace, harmony, and treaties. The Islamic state was built upon peace as the norm, while war was the exception either defensive war against aggression or offensive war to curb the power of hostile forces.

The peaceful call of Islam was reflected in diplomatic methods, as illustrated in several Qur'anic verses, including: { وقُلْ الحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيَكْفُرْ }

Naturally, implementing these verses and establishing global or social peace requires mechanisms, which form the essence of diplomacy in Islam. These mechanisms included envoys (messengers), kutub (diplomatic notes), and negotiations. Moreover, institutional structures such as the Diwan al-Insha (chancery) and Dar al-Diyafa (guest house) were established. Diplomatic protocols were

introduced, including reception ceremonies and the granting of immunity to envoys. The Treaty of Hudaybiyyah was one of the earliest manifestations of negotiation and diplomacy in Islam [6].

2. Types of Diplomacy

Diplomacy varies according to the following criteria [7]:

- **In terms of the parties to the international relationship and the form of managing international relations:**

  There is **bilateral diplomacy**, i.e., diplomacy between two states, as well as **multilateral diplomacy**, i.e., diplomacy between a group of states through conferences or international organizations. The latter has been known since the League of Nations and continues to this day. As for the form of managing international relations, there is **secret diplomacy**, which takes place behind the scenes and whose results remain concealed, and **open diplomacy**, whose outcomes become evident immediately after it concludes, even if the negotiations were conducted in a non-public manner. In this regard, it is worth noting the attempt by the founders of the League of Nations to eliminate the era of secret diplomacy that had prevailed for so long, as the League's creation—with its public bodies and councils and the treaties concluded among its member states—was conditioned upon their publication, failing which they were considered null and void.

- **In terms of the means used in managing international relations:**

  There is **peaceful diplomacy**, which is fundamentally based on negotiations between the concerned states, and there is **coercive diplomacy** (sometimes called *gunboat diplomacy*), which manifests in the achievement of state objectives through coercive and violent measures, including war. For some, war itself is viewed as merely the continuation of a state's diplomatic activity in another arena beyond negotiations.

Some scattered types of diplomacy can also be highlighted, such as:

- **Diplomacy of International Organizations:** Characterized by continuity through states' permanent missions to international organizations, and governed by rules derived from the organization's constitutional charter.

- **Crisis Diplomacy:** Refers to diplomatic activity directed at resolving an urgent international crisis, serving as an alternative to war and a way to ease tensions between states.

- **Psychological Diplomacy:** Based on understanding the weaknesses in the negotiating party's position with the aim of controlling the course of negotiations.

- **Public Diplomacy or Media Diplomacy:** Traditional diplomacy in the past relied mainly on intergovernmental dealings, but with the rise of modern communication technologies, states now seek direct relations with peoples. This is called media diplomacy. It is therefore natural for a diplomat to be knowledgeable in computer science, informatics, media, economics, and other fields. Today, public diplomacy is regarded as one of the most prominent forms of political communication, with its defining feature being the long time span it requires to achieve its natural objectives.

- **Preventive Diplomacy:** Refers to undertaking necessary diplomatic measures as early as possible to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to stop existing disputes from escalating into conflicts, and to limit the spread of such conflicts should they occur. Notably, the diplomacy of international organizations is closest to public opinion and its mood due to the transparency that characterizes its proceedings.

Although diplomacy is as old as societies and inter-state relations themselves, it has always been diverse reflecting the variety of international actors and the forms of managing their relations. As a political function, diplomacy may take place through permanent bilateral diplomatic missions, multilateral diplomatic missions, or special missions. Hence, it is no longer confined to the mere exchange of diplomatic missions between states but also encompasses diplomatic relations between states and international organizations, as well as among international organizations themselves.

Second Requirement: The Concept of Digitization and Its Dimensions

Information and communication technology constitutes the foundation for strengthening relations among stakeholders, businesses, citizens and consumers, and external relations. This is evident through key types of relationships, whether at the domestic level including employees with their institutions, customers with institutions and administrations, and institutions with one another—or at the international level, represented in external international relations. These models indicate the development of the communication process and the facilitation of service delivery. Indeed, information and communication technology has enabled the emergence of numerous services designed to meet individuals' diverse needs, while reducing the need for direct interactions through tools such as teleconferencing, e-mail, and e-commerce services.

The importance of information and communication technology also lies in enabling the transition from a local economy to a global economy, founded on the rapid flow of information, quicker responsiveness to sudden changes, and the ability to compete through broad imagination, creativity, innovation, and boldness in proposing solutions to complex problems. The progress and prosperity of societies is now measured by their ability to use information and communication technologies in ways that maximize the vast advantages evident in nearly every aspect of our daily lives [8]. To address the concept of digitization, we will attempt to define it and highlight its general benefits.

1. Definition of Digitization

Digitization is the process of transferring any type of paper-based document into digital form, whereby text, still or moving images, sound, or files are encoded into numbers. This transformation allows the document to be received and used by information systems. Thus, text digitization is the process of converting printed or handwritten text from its paper-based form into its digital equivalent, making it viewable on a computer screen.

"Dog Hodges" offers another definition, adopted by the National Library of Canada, which considers digitization a process or procedure of converting intellectual content available on a traditional physical storage medium into a digital format. From the above, it can be inferred that digitization is the process of converting data into a digital format in order for it to be processed by an electronic computer.

However, this term assumes multiple meanings depending on the context in which it is used. For example:

- **In accounting:** digitization refers to converting data into a digital format so it can be processed by computers.

- **In the context of information systems:** it refers to converting printed texts and other traditional materials from human-readable analog forms into binary signal forms readable by computers, through the use of scanning devices or digital cameras, producing digital forms displayed on computer screens.

- **In telecommunications:** it refers to the conversion of continuous analog signals into binary digital signals.

From these definitions, it can be concluded that digitization does not only mean obtaining sets of electronic texts and managing them, but more fundamentally it involves converting information sources available in paper form or on traditional storage media into electronic formats. Consequently, the traditional text becomes a digitized text that can be accessed through computer technologies [9].

2. Advantages and Dimensions of Digitization

Digitization contributes to achieving economic growth and creating new job opportunities. Moreover, it is closely linked to innovation and encourages the smarter use of human, natural, and economic resources. Despite the weak global economic growth in recent years, digitization has contributed to 5.9 million jobs, representing 3.9% of total employment in the United States (150.3 million), compared to other industries.

The potential of digitization as a tool for development and progress lies in its ability to impact every aspect of life within a country, such as reducing poverty, improving the quality of education and healthcare services, enhancing the delivery of government services, boosting economic activities, and simplifying citizens' daily life requirements. Therefore, it is essential to design a strategy that ensures technological advancements are accessible to all. With regard to the specific goals of digitization, its multidimensional impact can be seen in the use and adoption of information and communication technology (ICT). More specifically, this concept encompasses various aspects such as affordability, infrastructure reliability, the ability of states to access networks, and the training and use of human resources to develop digital products and services.

Digitization has three fundamental dimensions: economic, social, and political. As illustrated in the following figure, there is a strong relationship between digitization and the requirements of meeting societal needs, particularly within the economic and political dimensions, which represent essential demands of society that must be addressed by businesses. At the same time, society expects businesses to play a greater role in the social dimension, which in essence reflects legitimate aspirations that society prefers to see adopted by all organizations. Furthermore, each dimension relies on the others in a realistic manner; businesses are unlikely to launch digitization initiatives unless they have already made significant progress in fulfilling their economic, political, and social responsibilities toward the communities in which they operate [10].

Figure (01): Dimensions of Digitization
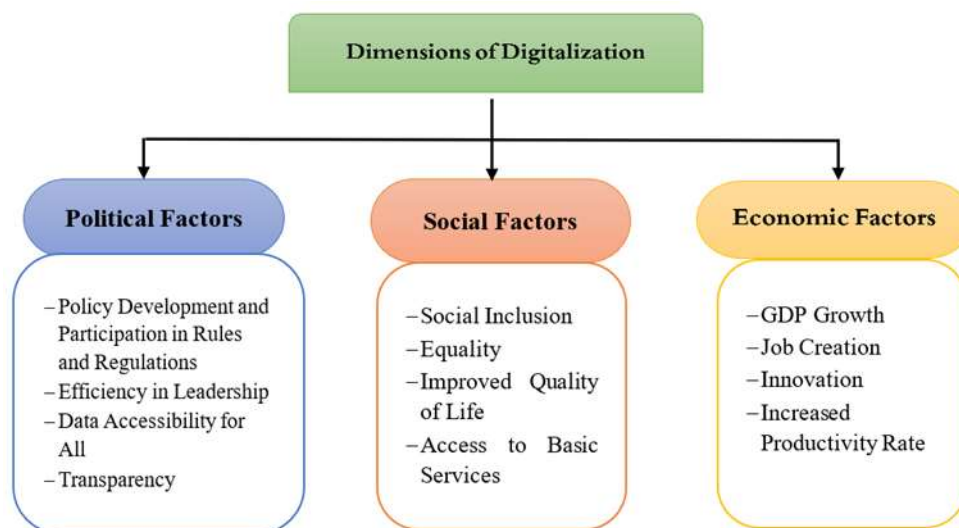
Source: Nagham Hassan Naghmah, Raghad Mohammed Najm, Hebatallah Mostafa El-Sayed Ali, **Harnessing Digitalization to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals 2030** – The Experience of Dubai Emirates, Iraqi Journal of Market Research and Consumer Protection, Vol. 11, No. 01, 2019, pp. 103–104.

SECTION TWO: DIPLOMACY IN THE CONTEXT OF DIGITALIZATION

Subsection One: Definition, Emergence, and Objectives of Digital Diplomacy

1. The Emergence of Digital Diplomacy:

The Industrial Revolution of the 19th century left a significant mark on diplomatic practices, as steamships and railways accelerated the movement of diplomats. By the 1920s and 1930s, three major historical developments had a notable impact on diplomacy: first, the rise and widespread use of the radio; second, the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 and the rise of Nazism; and third, the use of radio by both the Bolsheviks and the Nazis to communicate with neighboring populations in order to secure acceptance of their expansionist foreign policies.

The technological developments witnessed after World War II, particularly electronic data processing, immersed the international community in the globalization of information transmission and reception within short timeframes—something that had previously required weeks or even months. After the end of the Cold War, Joseph Samuel Nye, a specialist in security studies, coined the concept of soft power to describe new sources of state influence, based on the ability of ideas to inspire prestige and attraction among other nations through persuasion rather than military coercion. Modern technology and social media became crucial tools in embodying this concept.

The journey of digital diplomacy began as a three-dimensional experiment in virtual space, often described as a "second life," in which some states established embassies within what came to be known as the Diplomatic Island. This initiative was created by the DiploFoundation, an institution specialized in preparing future diplomats, as part of the broader project of virtual diplomacy.

Several studies trace the early signs of digital diplomacy back to the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, when international civil society groups exchanged numerous emails about environmental threats to the planet. By 2008, the Internet had played a decisive role in recruiting more than 80% of young people into jihadist organizations, particularly Al-Qaeda. Some diplomats, however, argue that the roots of digital diplomacy emerged more clearly during the Arab Spring in

2011, when activists used social media to broadcast live footage of confrontations with regimes and their security and military institutions. These tools began to be taken seriously and acknowledged for their weight in political processes.

The most striking event that highlighted the power of digital communication was the 2010 WikiLeaks scandal, which revealed 250,000 diplomatic cables [11].

The United Kingdom, France, and the United States are considered pioneers in adopting this new form of diplomacy. In 2016, the United Kingdom ranked first globally thanks to the efforts of the Digital Diplomacy Unit within its Foreign and Commonwealth Office, followed by France in second place, and then the United States.

2. Definition of Digital Diplomacy

Countries differ in how they define diplomacy in the era of digital transformations. In the United States, it has been termed political efficiency in the 21st century; in the United Kingdom, it is known as digital diplomacy; while in Russia it has been referred to as creative diplomacy [12].

Digital diplomacy refers to the process of harnessing the Internet and modern communication technologies to interact with others, whether at the local or international level, with the aim of promoting a state's foreign or domestic policy through digital platforms that have become the new nervous system of the world [13].

Digital diplomacy denotes the increasing use of social media platforms by a state to achieve its foreign policy objectives and to manage its strategy. Digital diplomacy operates on two levels: within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and through a country's embassies around the world. By working across these two levels, nations can tailor their foreign policy messages and national branding to align with the unique characteristics of each society its history, culture, values, and traditions thus facilitating the acceptance of its foreign policies and the image it seeks to promote, support, and strengthen.

Digital diplomacy essentially refers to diplomatic practices conducted through digital technologies and networks, including the Internet and mobile devices. In its simplest definition, it is the use of the Internet and modern communication technologies to help carry out diplomatic objectives.

Digital diplomacy is therefore an extension and evolution of diplomatic work rather than a substitute for traditional diplomacy. It does not replace it but instead coexists and complements traditional diplomacy rather than competing with it. Online activities and digital diplomacy can significantly aid in presenting foreign policy positions to both domestic and foreign public opinion.

The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs views digital diplomacy as an extension of traditional diplomacy, relying on innovations and new uses brought about by information and communication technologies.

Similarly, in her book Diplomacy of the 21st Century: A Practitioner's Guide, Rena Kishna notes that diplomacy has become multifaceted, multidirectional, dynamic, and intensive, due to the growing complexity of actors, dialogue topics, communication media, and the multiplicity of objectives [14].

3. Objectives of Digital Diplomacy

Several objectives drive states to adopt and integrate digital diplomacy into their public policies, among them: [15]

- ❖ **Pooling efforts among all state institutions** to manage relevant resources and harness human capital for optimal use in achieving national interests abroad.

- ❖ **Maintaining communication with audiences in the virtual world**, leveraging electronic communication tools to listen, interact, and influence them, while conveying the state's official messages through digital networks.

- ❖ **Benefiting from the massive flow of information** and using it in policy-making directed at the public, as well as anticipating emerging social and political movements and responding to them.

- ❖ **Establishing digital mechanisms** to benefit from the expertise and external resources of diplomatic and consular missions, in order to strengthen ties with citizens living in the host countries.

- ❖ **Creating direct personal communication channels** with traveling citizens and diaspora communities residing in different countries.

- ❖ **Developing technologies to keep the Internet open and free**, with goals linked to freedom of expression, democracy, and undermining authoritarianism in governance.

In addition, digital diplomacy provides **further advantages** that highlight its growing necessity in today's world, such as:

- ❖ **Speed of operations**: advances in communication have accelerated the flow of information between missions and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, enabling mission heads to receive instructions on a daily basis.

- ❖ **Lower costs**: modern communication technologies are significantly cheaper compared to traditional diplomatic travel, which is highly expensive, particularly for less developed countries.

- ❖ **Wider influence**: digital diplomacy allows for the rapid dissemination of diplomatic messages to the global or local public in a very short time, ensuring that state positions on any issue whether global or domestic can reach audiences effectively.

Section Two: Tools of Digital Diplomacy, Its Advantages, Disadvantages, and Requirements for Success

1. Advantages of Digital Diplomacy

Here, we review some of the positive aspects resulting from the use of digital diplomacy, alongside the challenges that accompany it. We begin with the positive points: [16]

- ❖ **Enhancing Communication**: Digital diplomacy facilitates communication between official representatives and citizens from different countries, contributing to greater mutual understanding and strengthened cooperation.

- ❖ **Transparency and Accountability**: Digital diplomacy provides channels for sharing open information and data, increasing government transparency and making them more accountable to citizens and the international community. Officials' statements now reach an unlimited audience directly, and this audience can discuss and critique them.

- ❖ **Strengthening Public Diplomacy**: Digital diplomacy allows individuals and civil society to participate in the diplomatic process, which strengthens democracy and makes diplomacy more representative of the people.

- ❖ **Rapid Support in Emergencies and Crises**: Digital diplomacy enables states to coordinate relief efforts and deliver humanitarian aid more quickly and efficiently in cases of natural disasters and humanitarian crises. It has also improved consular services by using the Internet and remote communication to process citizen requests, ensuring continuity of work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- ❖ **Education and Awareness**: Digital diplomacy is used to spread knowledge and raise awareness about issues such as human rights, the environment, and sustainable development, thereby increasing international cooperation in these areas.

- ❖ **Cultural Diplomacy**: Through social networks and digital platforms, cultural content can be disseminated, and engagement with new, broader audiences is possible. This provides access to cultural resources and facilitates the organization of virtual events and conferences, enabling participation from individuals across different countries and cultures without the need for travel.

2. Disadvantages of Digital Diplomacy

Despite the many positives and benefits resulting from the use of digital diplomacy, it also comes with several drawbacks that may affect the quality and success of international relations. These disadvantages include:

- ❖ **Security and Privacy Issues**: Since it relies on Internet tools, digital diplomacy is vulnerable to security breaches and cyber espionage. This may lead to the leakage of sensitive information that could impact foreign policy and international relations.

- ❖ **Impact of Fake News and Rumors**: False information and rumors spread online can distort diplomatic communications and create tensions between states.

- ❖ **Cultural Communication Challenges**: Digital diplomacy may lack the human interaction and face-to-face meetings that foster cultural understanding and empathy between nations.

- ❖ **Overreliance on Technology**: Excessive dependence on digital diplomacy could weaken personal negotiation skills and traditional diplomatic practices.

- ❖ **Rapid Spread of Crises**: Sometimes, digital diplomacy can accelerate the spread of crises and escalate tensions due to the fast circulation of information and reactions online.

- ❖ **Identity and Credibility Issues**: Verifying the identity and reliability of online sources can be difficult, which may lead to misinformation or distorted facts being shared among negotiators and decision-makers.

- ❖ **Digital Inequality**: Digital diplomacy may widen the gap between technologically advanced countries and developing nations, which may struggle to participate effectively in international negotiations due to limited access to technology and infrastructure.

- ❖ **Reduction of Human Bonds**: The use of digital diplomacy may reduce direct human interaction between diplomats and negotiators, leading to weaker intercultural communication and trust-based cooperation. The traditional handshake, long considered a symbol of diplomacy and negotiation, cannot be replaced by digital exchanges.

❖ **The Shortcomings of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations**

❖ The discussion here concerns the provisions of the Vienna Convention in general, and Article 27 in particular. By examining the text of Article 27 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, it becomes clear that it enumerates several means of diplomatic communication, but only the traditional ones (such as diplomatic pouches, parcels, and letters). Considering that the Convention was adopted in 1961, it failed to keep pace with the tremendous technological advances that have since permeated all aspects of diplomatic practice. The Convention addressed only traditional correspondence and the methods of its protection. This has led to significant legal gaps regarding the regulation, structuring, and adaptation to technological developments, especially given that much of diplomatic work today requires speed of communication and is now conducted electronically—through calls, the exchange of information, and the transfer of documents. Consequently, this has opened the door to cyber-espionage, electronic attacks, and even the intervention of artificial intelligence, all of which pose serious risks to diplomatic activity.

❖ Sixty-five years have passed since the adoption of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations without any amendment to keep pace with contemporary developments in the field. This has generated numerous shortcomings that increasingly undermine diplomatic practice, exposing it to failure or to the disclosure of sensitive information. The "WikiLeaks" incident, involving the leaking of highly classified documents, further revealed the deficiencies of the Vienna Convention, contributing to widespread political tensions on a global scale.

In conclusion, it cannot be denied that digital diplomacy has become a lived reality that has improved the efficiency and effectiveness of international communication and negotiations. However, this does not mean it is without flaws. These challenges can be managed by maintaining a balance between human and technological elements, training diplomats in cybersecurity skills, strengthening IT capacities within diplomatic institutions, and developing clear digital communication strategies. In practice, countries with well-defined digital strategies advance faster than those without them.

3. Tools of Digital Diplomacy

There are many methods and approaches for using information and communication technology tools to strengthen foreign policy. The most important include: [17]

❖ **Social Media Platforms**: These are a variety of web-based applications and technologies that enable people to interact socially with one another via the Internet. They can also be used as powerful tools to promote certain ideas or policies. Today, **Twitter** and **Facebook** are the most popular social media platforms used by ministries of foreign affairs worldwide, as they are considered good examples of integrated platforms. Through Twitter, individuals can express their views on different issues, engage in discussions, and present or explain their positions.

Twitter is now regarded as an effective and successful tool of digital diplomacy, serving as a direct and objective media channel for self-presentation. It is also an important tool employed in conflict situations where other media sources are absent, since it allows access to a wide network in which governments can engage with the public. This has led to the emergence of the term **"Twiplomacy."**

Similarly, **Facebook** is increasingly used for professional purposes through the creation of personal or public profiles and pages. Recently, it has also given rise to what is known as **"Facebook Diplomacy,"** particularly with the appearance of pages belonging to presidents, officials, and official bodies that engage directly with the public. Other platforms, despite their varied names and roles, also play an important part.

❖ **Virtual Embassies**: Ministries of foreign affairs in many countries have resorted to creating virtual embassies that perform the usual diplomatic functions of traditional embassies. These also provide consular services electronically. Virtual embassies serve as a form of diplomatic representation for states wishing to establish a presence in countries where they do not have a physical embassy, or in cases where no formal diplomatic relations exist between two countries—such as between Iran and the United States. Sometimes, virtual embassies are created to complement real-world embassies.

❖ • **Diplomatic E-mail:** Among the most important and fastest means of communication between diplomatic missions and their ministries, secured through advanced encryption protocols to ensure the confidentiality of information and protect it from breaches. At the same time, it is characterized by its speed, flexibility, and practicality, allowing for immediate coordination between diplomats and decision-makers.

❖ • **Live Video:** Virtual meetings using encrypted video systems through platforms such as *Whereby, Microsoft Teams, Jitsi Meet, Signal, Webex,* and *Zoom* have become common and rapid means of communication among diplomatic officials.

❖ **Official Websites**: These typically include the foreign policy objectives of the represented country, along with lists of addresses and web links to its embassies and consulates around the world. In the case of embassy websites specifically, they provide information about the mission's purpose and objectives, as well as essential consular contacts and details about the host country.

4. Requirements for the Success of Digital Diplomacy

Activating digital diplomacy requires fulfilling several key considerations, the most important of which are: [18]

❖ Funding technology development programs across various diplomatic positions;

❖ Establishing a technology cooperation center with embassies abroad;

❖ Securing dedicated funding for technological innovation and the use of electronic administrative programs;

❖ Expanding information and knowledge sharing;

❖ Developing a comprehensive system for relationship management;

❖ Enhancing research capabilities and the retrieval of digital materials, as well as broadening their use for satellite-based conferences;

❖ Adopting new communication tools such as digital neighborhood discussion forums and online video services, which transform the way people interact across the world.

Subsection Three: Virtual Embassies

The virtual embassy is considered a channel for practicing digital diplomacy, as it means the effective use of the Internet and communication technologies to help achieve diplomatic goals. It is also a

manifestation of virtual diplomacy, which in essence is real diplomacy from the perspective of the validity of interactions carried out between officials of different governments.

The Maldives was the first country in the world to open a virtual embassy on May 22, 2007, followed by Sweden and the Philippines. At the opening ceremony, then-President of the UN General Assembly, Serkan Kerm, delivered a speech online, stating: "Modern diplomacy must keep pace with the changes the world is witnessing today, the most important of which are the development of the Internet and new models of embassies, as well as new developments in diplomatic practice." For his part, Abdullah Shahid, the Maldives' Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, emphasized the importance of utilizing information technology, especially the Internet, to help small states participate meaningfully in international affairs. The virtual embassy, he stressed, provides an additional channel to deliver information about the Maldives, to present its views on global issues of common concern, and to interact with organizations in the international community.

In this context, Jovan Kurbalija, Director of the DiploFoundation, noted: "Communication is the backbone of diplomacy, and when communication changes, diplomacy must adapt… Today, one billion people use the Internet, and it has become widespread. New demands have emerged, and it has become common for public opinion to use blogs and digital platforms for diplomatic engagement. One such project provides immediate solutions like virtual embassies, acting as a key mediator in communication and negotiations for the future of diplomacy."

In 2007, Estonia launched its virtual embassy with the aim of strengthening its global presence in the virtual world, disseminating Estonian culture and information, and reaching wider audiences through conferences and events delivered by diplomatic experts, as well as hosting high-level cultural meetings. At the time, Foreign Minister Urmas Paet stated that Estonia's virtual embassy acts as a digital cultural center for Estonia's friends and those interested in exchanging knowledge and expertise. That same year, Sweden established a virtual embassy in Second Life at a cost of $75,000, serving as a cultural embassy. Visitors could learn about Swedish art and culture and attend seminars hosted by the virtual embassy. The project, however, did not issue travel visas; its purpose was to provide comprehensive information about Sweden and raise awareness. This site was eventually closed in January 2013.

In 2011, the U.S. Department of State launched a virtual embassy, a web page designed to foster dialogue between the United States and the Iranian people. While both the Maldivian and Swedish initiatives aimed to reach global audiences and promote dialogue, the U.S. virtual embassy was more ambitious, representing the belief that digital diplomacy could succeed where traditional diplomacy failed, using cyberspace as a neutral meeting ground. The idea was to allow Americans to build bridges across turbulent waters. However, the Iranian government blocked the initiative, preventing it from establishing meaningful connections with much of Iranian society. [19]

The Iraqi Virtual Embassy in Israel was established with the goal of using all diplomatic channels to facilitate communication and build relationships between various groups in Iraq and Israel. Its mission and vision are to foster a culture of mutual understanding and respect between Iraqis and Israelis by promoting cultural and educational exchange, creating opportunities for interaction, and building trust between the two countries. It encourages dialogue and the exchange of ideas on key issues, and supports the development of joint initiatives and projects that can benefit both Iraq and Israel, such as business partnerships, scientific research collaboration, and cultural events. It also advocates for peace and stability in the region by encouraging constructive engagement, reconciliation, and providing a platform for civil society organizations, academics, and experts from

both Iraq and Israel to collaborate on issues of mutual concern such as environmental sustainability, public health, and human rights.[20]

CONCLUSION

The technological and scientific developments witnessed by the world today have created a new communicative reality that has reshaped the nature of diplomatic practice. Modern technology has facilitated diplomatic work, significantly increasing its speed and enabling the transition from traditional diplomacy to digital diplomacy, which some have described as a revolution in the realm of international relations. Digital diplomacy is characterized by numerous advantages, such as improving communication, reducing costs, saving time, and enabling negotiators to communicate more effectively through multiple means, including email, chat, video calls, social media platforms, electronic platforms, as well as artificial intelligence, big data technologies, and data analytics.

At the same time, there are notable drawbacks facing this type of diplomacy, including the absence of an international legal framework to regulate it and the lack of traditions and norms that could establish balanced digital international relations. Another major challenge lies in cybersecurity threats, such as hacking and cyberattacks targeting officials' accounts, which highlight the need to secure sensitive data. Digital diplomacy thus requires strong protection of sensitive government information and the security of the communication platforms, software, and applications it employs. Among its tools, the virtual embassy stands out as a significant innovation, offering real possibilities for interaction between diplomats and visitors. Likewise, the websites of diplomatic missions are generally used to provide information.

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