ENVIRONMENTAL DIPLOMACY

INTRODUCTION

Diplomacy as is traditionally known is the conduct and managing of bilateral or multilateral relations among nations as well as international organisations.

Diplomacy is a tool to resolve international or regional disputes or conflict resolution mechanism through mostly peaceful means. The creation of League of Nations and later UN was an attempt towards that means so the world could be saved from the scourge of war through negotiated solutions to international disputes. In the same way last century saw the emergence of another kind of diplomacy which is called ENVIRONMENTAL DIPLOMACY. It emerged as a global attempt to slow down and even try to reverse the environmental degradation of this mother earth. Not only governments but NGOs and international or regional organisations started pondering over this disastrous phenomenon as it has threatened the existence and survival of the mankind.

Environmental diplomacy was first talked about after the end of the Cold War, when everyone dreamed about shedding the peace dividend and addressing global change questions like the economic development of the South, population growth, the spread of democracy and human rights, and last but not least the looming global environmental crisis.

Environment and development policy were put at the top of the international agenda in 1992, when the United Nations organized the Earth Summit in Rio, the largest meeting of heads of state and government ever. But the spirit of Rio did not prevail. The Rio paradigm of sustainable development was overshadowed by another global trend, the rapidly growing economies in Asia and Latin America and the economic crisis in Western Europe. This phenomenon was referred to as globalization. Globalization has removed the global environmental crisis from the agenda of the world's political leadership for short period of time due to new international political and military happenings.

THE NEW GENERATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL DANGERS

In recent years, scientific warnings have been accumulating that the impacts on the environment of the enormous economic expansion and prosperity of the last half-century are beginning to upset delicate natural cycles upon which all life on Planet Earth depends. Unprecedented growth in population, in consumption, and in use of land and other natural resources have had the unintended effect of bringing forth a new generation of environmental problems that are significantly different from those of the past. Twenty to thirty years ago, the nascent environmental movement was fully preoccupied with such essentially localized issues as urban air pollution, unsafe water supplies, and waste disposal. These problems are, to be sure, still relevant—most particularly in developing and newly industrializing countries of the South.

However, the environmental challenges of which we have become more recently aware are quite different in scope. Climate change —thinning of the stratospheric ozone layer—spread of drylands and soil erosion—pollution of oceans and depletion of fish stocks— massive destruction of forests—widespread extinction of plant and animal species—persistent organic pollutants that spread their poison all over the globe: these problems represent a new kind of threat to human well-being. Interrelationships among these apparently disparate issues exist in the form of common causal factors and physical, chemical and biological feedbacks.

The global dimensions of the risks have awakened calls for more far-reaching solutions, for new levels of international cooperation. It has become evident that no nation or group of nations, however politically powerful or economically strong, can by themselves solve these planetary problems The following citation is representative of a new sense of alarm over the ecological situation:

"Today's environmental problems are too critical to be dealt with solely through measures to prevent industrial pollution. . . .(S)ociety itself must be fundamentally changed. We must radically revise various social and economic systems. . . .The task before us is not merely one of rethinking the problems caused by the pursuit of affluence in a culture that encourages mass consumption; we must also come to grips with the global problems of poverty and population increase. . . .People throughout the world must join hands to create new social and economic system

(These words come from the 1991 "Global Environmental Charter" of *Keidanren*, the association of Japanese industry —not normally a hotbed of extremism.)

DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES

The past few years have witnessed a virtual explosion of multilateral negotiations aimed at addressing the new global environmental issues. These include the 1985 Vienna Convention on Protecting the Ozone Layer; the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer; the 1989 Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes; the establishment in 1991 of the Global Environment Facility; the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, and its offshoots, Agenda 21 and the Commission on Sustainable Development; the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change; the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity; the 1993 UN Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks; the 1994 UN Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States; the 1994 UN Convention to Combat Decertification; the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development; the 1997 Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change; and numerous intergovernmental negotiations and working groups on such subjects as sustainable forest management, land and water resources, economic instruments, and biotechnology.

Environmental diplomacy truly came of age at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro. Also known as the "Earth Summit," UNCED was the largest gathering of heads of state ever held up to that time: nearly 180 nations participated, 118 at head-of-state level. In addition, there were dozens of United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations, plus thousands of observers representing hundreds of nongovernmental organizations and media sources from every corner of the world.

Paradoxically, at Rio the environment ministers themselves lost control over their own domain. Even as the environment captured global headlines for the first time over a sustained period, the subject matter itself became too important to be left to "environmentalists." The forty chapters of "Agenda 21," negotiated during two years of preparations for the Rio conference, covered nearly every realm of human experience. Foreign ministries increasingly took over the issue, while other parts of government—notably finance, economics, science, energy, agriculture, and development cooperation ministries—hastened to buttress their own competence in environmental themes. Special ambassadors were commissioned to coordinate and oversee the increasingly complicated negotiations, which required expertise not only in traditional ecological subjects, but also in economics, finance, technology, and often arcane branches of science.

As a consequence of the UNCED process, foreign offices and finance ministries could no longer dismiss environmental concerns as irrelevant to "grander" aspects of national policy. It became clear that everyone has a stake in the condition of the environment. Most countries have by now established national councils on sustainable development that bring together relevant ministries as well as local governments and citizens' groups.

UNCED was not a culmination, but rather a milestone along a diplomatic pathway that began a decade earlier. In many ways, the road to Rio began with the initiation of negotiations in 1982 that led to the signing of the Montreal Protocol in 1987. The ozone protocol was the first international agreement to mandate worldwide preventative actions *before* any environmental harm had occurred: the treaty was designed to protect human health and the environment against future threats that were at the time largely still in the realm of unproven scientific theory. The accord contained unprecedented provisions that significantly influenced future environmental negotiations and tthat, taken together, represented a sea-change in international diplomacy.

At least five major factors distinguish the new environmental diplomacy: (1) the nature of the subject matter; (2) the role of science and scientists; (3) the complexity of the negotiations; (4) the unique equity issues involved; and (5) innovative features and approaches. Let us consider each of these in turn.

The nature of the problems themselves requires coordinated actions on a global scale. Ecological interdependence is perhaps even more extensive than the widely acknowledged economic interdependence among nations. Even if the industrialized countries were to cease using fossil fuels, this would not be sufficient to halt impending climate change if the far more populous developing countries continue to clear forests and burn cheap coal and oil to fuel their growing economies. New forms of cooperation among nations are necessary— hence, an environmental diplomacy.

Science and scientists have a role of unprecedented importance in the new environmental diplomacy. The complexity of analyzing global environmental issues has generated research at the frontiers of modern science. In this process, scientists must occasionally emerge from their laboratories and offer judgments on the policy implications of their findings. Sharing the political limelight with policymakers is an unaccustomed role that may occasionally be uncomfortable for a scientist. Nevertheless, the fruitful interaction between scientists and diplomats proved to be an indispensable element in the success of the Montreal ozone protocol. Never before have so many scientists played such a prominent and continuing role on the international stage as in the new environmental diplomacy.

Complex Negotiations

It is often forgotten that only twenty-four nations signed the Montreal Protocol in September 1987. Less than five years later in Rio de Janeiro, more than 150 nations signed both the climate change and the biodiversity conventions. By the mid-1990s it has become common for up to 180 nation-states, not to mention dozens of intergovernmental organizations, to take part in environmental negotiations. Similarly, nongovernmental actors in unprecedented numbers are finding roles in the new multilateral diplomacy. In 1985, the only NGO observers at the signing of the Vienna Convention were three industrial associations—not a single environmental group was present.

During the 1992 UNCED negotiations, hundreds of NGOs were active, representing the interests of environmentalists, women, religion, industry, science, academe, youth, labor, parliamentarians, indigenous people, agriculture, and local community governments. This development has been paralleled by a growing media interest that can attract thousands of journalists to a major international environmental conference. All of this makes for increasingly complicated negotiations. For the traditional diplomat, it can mean negotiating in a goldfish bowl. Observers from NGOs, parliaments, and media carefully monitor the diplomatic manoeuvres, ever alert to signal their misgivings back to the home capital in an effort to influence the government's position in the ongoing negotiation. Hundreds of negotiation sessions on multilateral diplomatic levels were done till this year's COP27 conference on environmental issue.

Equity Concerns

Environmental diplomacy entails some rather unique issues of equity. The global environmental threats have their historical origins in the untrammelled production and consumption over the last half-century of a relatively small number of industrialized nations. These approximately 35 countries have achieved remarkable levels of economic prosperity. But in the process they have inflicted great potential damage—albeit unintentionally—on the global commons, through their use of energy, their generation of hazardous wastes and chemicals, and their huge demand for forest products, beef cattle, fish supplies, and other natural resources. The much greater number of poorer countries, which currently account for four-fifths of the world's population and over 90 percent of future population growth, are developing in the same economic patterns. These developing countries are thus imposing ever greater ecological strains on the planet, even as the industrialized nations become more sensitive of the need to change patterns of production and consumption. It is estimated, for example, that because of developing countries' growing demand for energy, their emissions of greenhouse gases will surpass those of the North in about twenty years.

This situation has led to considerable mistrust between North and South. Most developing countries have argued that it is the responsibility of the rich nations to first change their own policies, while at the same time providing new and additional financial resources, as well as modern technologies, to the South. The poorer countries insist that their first priority must be to eliminate poverty and raise their standards of living. Occasionally, they seem to view considerations of environmental protection as a possible technique by the North to prevent the South from becoming competitive in the industrial sphere.

Finally, there is the issue of intergenerational equity. To what extent should the current generation change its standard of living and incur short-term costs to pay for measures that will benefit future generations much more than themselves? Conversely, to what extent is it legitimate for the current generation to satisfy its own perceived needs, heedless of the possibly dangerous legacy it may leave for future generations?

Creative Diplomacy

An important innovation of the Montreal Protocol was the intentional design of its creators not to set the treaty in concrete—as is customary in diplomacy— but rather to provide for its continual revision in response to changing conditions. To this end, the treaty established an ongoing process of periodic reassessments of scientific knowledge, technological discoveries, and economic developments. These assessments were undertaken by an elaborate structure of international expert groups that interacted with the government negotiators. This enabled the protocol to be strengthened as scientific understanding of the threat to the ozone layer increased: the original list of controlled chemicals was expanded from 5 to over 95 and the time deadlines for phase-out were consistently tightened.

CONCLUSION

The recent history of environmental negotiations reflects the reality that nations must work together in the face of global dangers, accepting a common responsibility for stewardship of the planet both for today's generation and for those that follow. In order to adequately address the global environmental threats, multilateral agreements must be forged that lead to new policies, new technologies, and new ways of reconciling economic well-being with protection of the environment. This will require an unprecedented degree of cooperation among governments, international agencies, private industry, and the full array of nongovernmental groups.

As a British peer observed during 1988 debates over the Montreal Protocol in the House of Lords: "Politics is the art of taking good decisions on insufficient evidence." For the negotiators of modern international environmental agreements, this observation assumes the quality of a maxim.

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