

Business Diplomacy in Emerging markets: Intersection of Roles between States and Multinationals

Doudou Sidibé & Raymond Saner

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Abstract

The aim of this chapter is to describe and discuss the growing intersection of roles and functions between states and multinationals in the field of diplomacy and how diplomatic skills are needed to support transnational companies in their search for markets in emerging countries. Transnational enterprises face multi-stakeholder engagements in the BRICs and increasingly employ techniques and strategies similar to the repertoire of tools used by diplomats and foreign affairs departments. Given the rapidly changing international business environment, we can observe the emergence of business diplomacy. This article provides a detailed analysis of these new developments and seeks to explore the relations between multinational corporations and states, between multinationals and other stakeholders (local authorities, traditional leaders, NGOs etc.) and between multinationals.

Key words: Business diplomacy, Negotiation, state actors and non-state actors, economic and commercial diplomacy, multinationals in emerging countries.

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe and discuss the growing intersection of roles and functions between states and companies in the field of commerce and diplomacy, a field which is no longer reserved exclusively to states. In effect, states have often provided companies with aid and advice in the task of seeking out foreign markets. This is even more true today, to the degree that their diplomatic activities are now even more focused on economics and commerce (Chavagneux: 1999,1), in a world in which conflicts between states are increasingly rare. Since the end of the Cold War in 1990, commercial diplomacy has become as much important as traditional diplomacy. Indeed, commercial interests are central to diplomacy in the 21st century. Even Heads of state are willing to act as salesmen and women in order to help companies from their countries find new markets and defend their roles in existing ones. State visits are often transformed into business trips.

Multinationals have acquired the same diplomatic tools as states, thereby becoming increasingly autonomous and effective in their commercial relations with foreign governments and firms. In regard to this rapid evolution of the role of companies on the international scene, we have observed that a form of private commercial diplomacy is currently developing. Multinationals, aware of hard competition and of western markets saturation, turn now towards foreign markets. This will to go and seek foreign markets is achieved most of the time without their home state help. So, this article will attempt to answer the following questions:

Why is there an intersection between the role of states and companies and how does it function? How do multinationals free themselves from the diplomatic corps and exercise “diplomacy” directly in order to seize opportunities in emerging countries? What are the main factors to consider in their negotiations with foreign firms, States and a certain number of

stakeholders, ranging from NGOs to associations and local authorities? What are the limitations of private commercial diplomacy, also referred to as “business diplomacy”?

Definition of terms: commercial diplomacy, economic diplomacy and “business diplomacy”

The literature mentions economic diplomacy, commercial diplomacy and business diplomacy. Economic diplomacy and commercial diplomacy are often confused.

G.R. Berridge attempts to define commercial diplomacy as a “way of providing information about business opportunities and trade” (Berridge: 2005, 128). For Raymond Saner and Lichia Yiu, “commercial diplomacy describes the help provided by diplomatic missions to firms in the commercial and financial sectors as they attempt to further their economic development. It includes the promotion abroad of domestic investors and facilitating foreign investment and trade in the host country” (Saner & Liu: 2001). Meanwhile, economic diplomacy refers to the work carried out in international economic bodies like the WTO, the World Bank, the OECD, etc. (Saner & Liu: 2001). Based on these embryonic definitions, it appears that the authors mentioned above seek to distinguish between the two fields. This is not true of Guy Carron de la Carrière, who declares that, “economic diplomacy was once simply a form of commercial diplomacy” (Carron de la Carrière: 1998, 1). His argument is that “until recently, trade in goods was the basis of international economic relations.” Basically, it is difficult to dissociate commerce from economics. That is the opinion of Evan H. Potter who attempts to make a distinction between the two, while at the same time maintaining that they are intimately linked:

“While there is an extensive literature on economic and trade diplomacy, encompassing international negotiations on market access, far less attention has been devoted to commercial diplomacy, defined as the application of the tools of diplomacy to help bring about specific commercial gains through promoting exports, attracting inward investment and preserving outward investment opportunities”. This is not to suggest that commercial and economic diplomacy are separate activities; they are irrevocably intertwined (Potter: 2004).

In effect, it should be noted that commercial diplomacy befitting this study consists of two kinds; the kind practiced by Heads of State and embassies, and the kind exercised by Multinationals. The diplomacy employed by multinationals, also termed “business

diplomacy” focuses on stakeholders (States, NGOs, local authorities, associations, etc.). What interests us here is to see how multinationals use diplomatic tools to conquer emerging markets and how diplomats representing governments function in the commercial milieu. However, before concentrating on this aspect, we should first study the links between diplomacy and commerce.

Links between diplomacy and trade

According to Peter A. G. van Bergeijk, diplomacy may have no link with trade and the two fields may be distinct:

“At first sight the tough dynamic world of commercial exchange and the subtle glamour of diplomacy do not seem to have much in common” (Bergeijk: 1994; 143).

Using France as an example, Laurence Badel makes a similar point when she says:

“associating diplomacy and the market is no longer, in France, as incongruous as it may have been a hundred years ago, when it seemed that it was a question of two worlds with extremely different visions, practices and codes” (Badel: 2006).

According to these authors, a link between diplomacy and trade has already been clearly established and trade diplomacy is gaining ground. There can no longer be any doubt that the development of foreign trade is a way for a country to accrue power on the international stage.

The intersection between the roles of the State and of Multinationals

Governments are increasingly taking an interest in commercial diplomacy and multinationals are focusing more and more on diplomatic methods that were once the exclusive preserve of governments.

Changes in classical diplomacy

Diplomacy is the art of resolving conflicts. Since 1990, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world has become increasingly “peaceful”. Conflicts between states have given way to other types of conflict referred to as intra-State or internal conflicts. These “new types of conflict” should certainly be taken into account in world geopolitics, but it is highly unlikely, for the time being at least, that they will transform or fashion the international political order in the way that the two World Wars and the Cold War did. Nations which are no longer linked

by war in the true sense of the term are now linked by trade, encouraged by the reign of relative peace.

In the contemporary period, relations between states are defined by “...structural, economic and political developments in the global economy...” (Lee & Ruël: 2012) illustrated by treaties such as NAFTA-North American Free Trade agreement (1994), TTIP-Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (negotiations started in 2013). Nevertheless, states compete with each other to ensure that the profits generated by companies are generated within their own territories so that their populations can benefit. In the past, military and territorial power meant economic power. But even if this realist notion has not entirely disappeared, it is no longer necessary to control a large amount of territories to accrue wealth, as the examples of Hong Kong and Singapore attest (Strange: 1992).

Strategies for these “new forms of war” or, rather, for competition, are defined and executed by Heads of states and by Ministries of Foreign Affairs via their embassies, which increasingly recruit personnel with economic and commercial skills. The tools and resources of classical diplomacy have been transferred to commercial and economic diplomacy.

In France, Presidents like Giscard d’Estaing, François Mitterrand, Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy have all attempted, either during state visits, or while welcoming one of their peers, to promote links between French and foreign business people. Numerous contracts signed by France and China of a total value of €20 billion (Le Monde, 2010) bear witness to this. It is thus clear that Heads of states indulge in commercial diplomacy, acting as the leading salespeople of their countries, as the following comment from Jacques Chirac attests: “when I go abroad – and I have no problems with this – I’m there to sell French products” (Cambon: 1997).¹ In the same sense, Laurence Parisot, President of the French business confederation, Medef (“Mouvement des Entreprises Françaises”), who accompanied President Nicolas Sarkozy on one of his foreign trips, declared: “the more contracts we sign, the more our companies can develop and expand their export markets; and eventually everyone in France will benefit.”(Koszarek, 2008). Interestingly, governments have long played a role in commercial diplomacy (Coolsaet: 2004). Indeed, studies conducted by Guy Carron de la Carrière (1998) and Laurence Badel (2009) clearly demonstrate that they have always done

¹ Quoted by Laurence Badel, in *Diplomatie et entreprises en France au XX^e siècle*, Les Cahiers IRICE 2009/1 (n°3), p.103-128. She quoted Paul Cambon, « *Diplomatie économique : l’esprit de conquête* », Label France, No. 29, October 1997.

so. However, it is undeniable that, due to world peace, globalisation and the advent of the WTO, governments are now more heavily involved in commercial diplomacy than ever before. This expansion of commercial diplomacy prompted Ioan Voicu to talk about a “profound transformation of classical diplomacy (Voicu: 2001).

Aware of its central importance, many governments have made a priority of trade with the framework of their foreign policy approaches. The United Kingdom was prompted to invest in this field by the 1969 Duncan Report which suggested that diplomacy should focus on promoting exports. Following this recommendation, the government boosted commercial diplomacy by closing certain embassies (Chavagneux: 1999) and opening new ones increasingly focused on promoting British trade in emerging countries. This change is illustrated by the declaration of William Hague, the British foreign secretary:

“We have opened or are opening new British Embassies in South Sudan, Madagascar, Kyrgistan, Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia, El Salvador and as security improves, in Somalia; we have opened two new consulates in Canada and Brazil and plan to open six more in the emerging economies” (Hague: 2012).

In Canada, commercial diplomacy has always been a major concern for diplomats. As Evan H. Potter observes:

“In Canada, business has in fact always been a core diplomatic function” (Potter: 2003).

The Report “Winning in a changing world: Canada and emerging markets” clearly recommended that the Canadian should target emerging markets.

*”Government and business must adapt and move quickly to seize the potential in key emerging markets. It will require a concerted and sustained partnership between the public and private sectors”*², said the Report. However, it should be pointed out that this kind of trade diplomacy is often carried out at a local, rather than a federal level.

According to Harry Kopp, the United States was one of the first countries to place an emphasis on trade diplomacy:

² This Report called « Winning in a changing world : Canada and emerging markets» is written by Canada’s top business leaders, Policy expert and academics. It is given to the Prime minister Stephen Harper on 04 July 2012

“From the Treaty of Tripoli, which sought to establish U.S. commercial rights in North Africa, to later well-known U.S. policies such as the Monroe Doctrine in the Western Hemisphere and the Open Door policy toward China, United States diplomacy has always had commercial motives at its core” (Kopp:2004).

A number of agencies, most of them dependent on the Ministry of Trade, were set up to serve American commercial interests abroad. Amongst these agencies is the Foreign Commercial Service, the United States Trade Representative attached to the White House. In his 2010 trip to Asia, President Barack Obama stopped off in India-one of the most important emerging market- to sign contracts worth \$10 billion which will create 50,000 American jobs (RFI: 2010).

Developing countries are also involved in this process. After having long practiced a sovereignty-based form of diplomacy, Senegal recently entered the era of commercial diplomacy by sending employees of the Apix, a government agency specialising in major building projects and foreign investment, to its most strategically important embassies, for example, Paris, Washington, and the capitals of the BRICS countries. These employees – economists and marketing specialists – are responsible for promoting trade and attracting foreign investment. Indeed, since there can be no doubt that trade diplomacy is being practiced by an increasing number of governments, it is useful to know how embassies work on behalf of firms from their countries. Every country has its own methods and all embassies base their approaches on the characteristics of the host country. However, it is possible to take recourse to various data to generate a more or less precise idea of the approaches used by Heads of states touring foreign countries and the work of diplomats stationed abroad.

In the level of Heads of State commercial diplomacy, it is notably a question of:

-Preparing the trip of the Head of State. In order to do so, the Ambassador will consult his address book, containing the names of the host country’s most important business people. A lack of proper preparation may have a negative impact on the commercial objectives of the visit. In 2006, due to poor preparation, the French President, Jacques Chirac, came back from his trip to India without a single signed contract and no promises. The trip was wrecked by diplomatic botches and differences over economic issues (Koszarek, 2008).

- Doing a test visit. This visit is carried out by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, often a month before the arrival of the Head of State, with a view to smoothing out potential conflicts and

gauging the interests of local business people so that the speeches made by the Head of states reflect those interests.

- Talking with businessmen in public or in private in order to measure the dynamism of the economic and commercial sector and to detect possibilities capable of being exploited.
- Making offers to their counterparts in the case in which the sector they want to promote depends exclusively on public funding.
- Attracting foreign investors by providing information about incentives such as tax breaks, reductions in administrative delays, the non-intervention of the State in the private sector, etc.
- Developing private sector links by creating opportunities for firms from the two countries to meet.

However, it should be noted that these trips often do not result in contracts immediately being signed. More frequently, politicians return home with a series of promises and potential business opportunities.

In the level of Embassies and Consulates, preparations are made by diplomats working with a view to producing long-term results. This approach consists of:

- Building up a network in the political, economic and cultural and intellectual milieus of the host country by periodically organising business receptions and dinners. For example, the French ambassador in Japan receives between 13,000 and 15,000 guests per year.³ This makes it possible to gather information and facilitate the process of commercial lobbying.
- Reading the press on a daily basis in order to get an overview of the economic and commercial situation of the host country.
- Doing press reviews in order to ascertain how the economic sectors of the country of origin are viewed by the business community.
- Providing advice to business people who want to sell their products and set up a subsidiary in the host country.

³ Figure quoted by Maurice de Gourdault Montagne in Bernard George's documentary, « Un businessman au Japon », broadcast on the TV channel, La Cinquieme, 10/08/02.

- Making gifts to the host country which involve the input of interested firms.⁴ For example, « La Flamme de la liberté » (“The Flame of Freedom”), a work by Marc Couturier, offered to Japan by France, was financed by the City of Paris and a number of French enterprises (Air France, Sanofi, Air Liquide, Cogema, Société du Louvre) which have interests in Japan.

- Organising dinners featuring the logo of sponsor Multinationals.

It should be noted that the process described here is not exhaustive but that, generally speaking, it reflects the bulk of the work carried out by diplomats with a view to helping companies. Diplomats are often imaginative in terms of adapting to local realities, building up an arsenal of techniques enabling them to promote firms and attract investment. This includes the use of “digital communication channels in their commercial services”(Ruël, Gesink & Bondarouk: 2015). Of course, the kind of trade diplomacy practiced by Heads of State and diplomats is an interesting and growing field both in terms of practices and research. However, the kind of diplomacy carried out by multinationals and SMEs, referred to as “business diplomacy”, into which little research has as yet been done, should not be ignored.

Multinationals and business diplomacy in emerging countries

The objective of business diplomacy in this context is to manage relations between enterprises and their stakeholders. Some Multinationals are increasingly interested in diplomacy as a tool for breaking into new markets or setting up subsidiaries abroad. They can use business diplomacy in any country (industrialized, developing or emerging countries) but this part of the study will focus on emerging markets which are buoyant. Therefore, we will see if Multinationals can use diplomatic tools to conquer emerging markets. We think that they sometimes need such competences due to the fact that they find themselves in hostile environments characterised by social unrest, anti-capitalist movements, and NGOs involved in environmental causes.

Realists inspired by Hobbes and Machiavelli have long considered States as the only actors in international relations and that, “beyond the State as actor, there can only ever be extras supporting its actions” (Brillard & Djalili: 2004). This State-centric conception of international relations tends to minimise the role of other actors such as multinationals. Unlike the realists, advocates of liberalism consider multinationals to be actors capable of playing an

⁴ Ibid.

economic role on the international scene. Today, this role transcends economics, involving a form of “diplomacy” exercised by multinationals with or without the involvement of states. Such companies attempt to throw off the shackles of State power and exert an increasing degree of influence in the sphere of international relations. We should thus ask ourselves if this new approach, which consists of laying claim to the right to act autonomously on the international scene, is a threat to State sovereignty or a way of being more effective.

For multinationals, state support does not seem to be indispensable, and embassies are not an obligatory port of call for gaining access to emerging markets and negotiating with foreign states. In 2007, out of 140,000 French companies active in the export market, only 10% were clients of the UBIFRANCE network (Badel: 2009) which helps firms expand internationally and which now has representatives in all French embassies. The question that should be asked is how do the other 90% go about successfully developing export markets. Did they ignore embassies and create their own networks?

Most of them have now acquired the capacity to apply diplomatic skills in their international strategies. For example, the penetration of the Japanese market in the 1980s and 1990s by American firms can be put down more to their contacts than to the effort of the US government (Paquin: 2005, 102).

Today, the desire of Multinationals to deploy on their own is exacerbated by globalization and the development of emerging markets. They know now that emerging markets are alternative to the saturated markets in industrialized countries. In the coming years, much of the global growth will occur in today’s emerging markets.

In order to see if they use diplomatic tools in their markets conquest, it would be of interest to compare the attributes of an embassy – representation, gathering economic and commercial information, negotiation, lobbying, – with the methods that a number of multinationals currently apply.

Representation

The budget of many multinationals is larger than that of certain countries. For example, Ford’s budget is bigger than the annual GDP of Denmark or the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa with the exception of the RSA. Such multinationals are capable of rivalling with national governments, even if they benefit from their support and profit from their image

around the world. General Motors is present in 120 countries, with branches in every one of them able to play the same kind of role as embassies.

Gathering information

Thanks to agencies based around the world, multinationals have the capacity to gather the information that they need in order to develop in the countries in which they are implanted. In embassies, the *charge d'affaires* or economic and trade advisor reads the press, meets with economic decision-makers and writes summaries for the Ambassador on the state of business in the host country. Such summaries are later handed on to companies considering the possibility of investing in the host country. Today, the role of these summaries is not longer as important as it once was since similar information can be gathered by local corporate agencies. Companies without foreign branches can gather information on any country on earth by means of the internet. With the globalisation of means of communication, many governments and corporations have regularly updated internet sites containing pertinent information. The development of press agencies like Reuters, AFP and Panapress has encouraged the circulation of a huge amount of information. According to Marcel Merle, "Press agencies have now replaced embassies as sources of relevant data" (Merle, 1984).

Multinationals employ local agents or firms not only to gather information, but also to act as facilitators in their dealings with local authorities.

Negotiation

While, in the past, multinationals often received support from their governments, today, a number of them have developed mechanisms enabling them to negotiate directly with states. Many companies not only have foreign corporations but also foreign governments on their client lists. This is true, for example, of mining companies and road and dam construction firms. Whatever companies' products and services, setting up in a foreign country and selling and marketing products requires not only negotiations with government agencies by also with other actors external to the business. In order to conduct such negotiations, multinationals now ensure that they are thoroughly familiar with the political and cultural aspects influencing their potential outcomes. For Manuel London: "International business executives need to understand the cultural differences that affect business" (London, 1999: 133). Attention must be paid to such cultural aspects, not only since they reduce the chances of inadvertently offending one's interlocutors, thereby running the risk of losing the

market, but also deciphering the styles of negotiation characteristic of individual nations, styles which can be observed in culture-specific behaviours. For example, in cultural practice of some emerging countries like Turkey, establishing personal relationship and showing respect to religious beliefs can help to ease business negotiations (Katz: 2007). In Chinese culture, patience is fundamental, and getting to know the other party takes time (Faure, 1999: 207). For the Americans and for many Europeans, however, “time is money.”

Cultural and religious aspects may be important, but political, social and legal factors can also have an influence both upstream and downstream. Multinationals need to know the legal and social environment in emerging countries: unions, qualified labour, Child Labour etc. They also need to be familiar with local decision-making networks and be able to negotiate with individuals whose preoccupations are more political than commercial. Similarly, the number of administrations involved in a single negotiation means that Multinationals need to be able to call on several teams competent in specific fields in order to be able to deal with their interlocutors. Today, a substantial number of Multinationals are aware of the need to develop diplomatic skills with a commercial sensibility to enable them to organise such teams. That is why Alstom, AREVA, Eurocopter, Thalès, Total, Vinci, Vivendi, as well as AXA, BNP Paribas Assurances, Groupama, Louis Dreyfus, Michelin etc. employ diplomats (Badel: 2009) who are *au fait* with the ins and outs of the local political situation and the psychology of politicians.

Companies’ negotiating power vis-à-vis governments

It should be noted in passing that in negotiations between corporations and states, the former are in a stronger position. Their advantage resides in the fact that all governments are concerned with developing the economies of their countries and addressing the issue of unemployment in order to keep their electorates happy. That is why governments make so many concessions to attract companies. Emerging countries that need foreign investments cleanse their business environment by changing the legislation if necessary. Most of the time, new anti-corruption laws and one-stop shop for the speed of business services are set up to lure multinationals wishes to locate. Infrastructures (roads, highways, airports, business centers etc.) are created for the comfort of Multinationals. From this perspective, Multinationals have a real influence on the behaviour of emerging countries.

On the other hand, States can reclaim their power of negotiation by levying taxes once the firm in question has made heavy, non-transferable investments. This demonstrates that, in

the final analysis, negotiating power is relative (Rojot: 2006, 58) or limited. On whatever side of the equation power is located, there is always a “zone of interdependence” (Stimec: 2005, 25) in which power relations can be readjusted. After all, both parties need each other.

Negotiations between companies from different countries

Multinational companies not only negotiate with states, but also with other private and public enterprises from other emerging countries. In such negotiations, the intercultural dimension and asymmetry of power are strongly present and have been widely analysed by a number of specialists (Ghuri & Usunier: 2003; Weiss: 1993; Fisher: 1980; Faure: 1999). But it should be noted that other factors also have an impact: for example, geography, or, in other words, distance, and time, in that negotiation teams spend only a limited period in host countries (Dupont: 2001). These factors, a perennial source of conflict, have always rendered international inter-company negotiations complex. That is why Multinationals need diplomatic tools to overcome these difficulties and that caused by the actors external to business.

Multinationals and actors external to business

Enterprises operating abroad are sometimes obliged to negotiate with actors which are not directly concerned with business. These actors include local political authorities, NGOs, and local chiefs. Local political authorities wield a good deal of power within their geographical ambit and, in certain countries their competencies are completely separate from those of the State. For this reason, multinationals negotiate separately with governments and local authorities.

A number of NGOs work to further human rights and environmental protection. However, certain multinationals fail to acknowledge the importance of this approach and, consequently run into difficulties in some countries, local chiefs hold political power and power deriving from the ownership of land. Consequently, companies wanting to set up in the areas of governance of such chiefs will need to obtain their prior approval.

Multinationals interested in setting up in emerging countries should integrate a CSR approach by investing in hospitals, sports centres or cultural facilities on behalf of local people (Saner & Yiu: 2016, 54) or by employing individuals who have expertise in the local

area. If there is a shortage of qualified people, it is advisable to set up a training centre. This will facilitate not only relations with local people but Multinationals will also contribute to poverty as one of the characteristics of emerging countries remains wide dissemination of poverty. In the same vein, the program against AIDS launched by Coca Cola designed for Africa and that consists of distributing condoms and antiretroviral drugs has been expanded to Russia, China and India.

Multinationals should also pay particular attention to the environment and periodically meet local NGOs to discuss such issues. Funding local associations that defend causes compatible with the objectives of the firm is another way of facilitating its implantation.

So, one of the best way to implement the recommendations above is to comply with the OECD guidelines that are directly linked to their activities. Because these guidelines to multinationals show the way forward to avoid a negative impact on their stakeholders and the environment but help them to circumvent conflicts that would harm their business activities as well as their reputation (and Saner Yiu, 2014).

Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to study the intersection of roles between states and corporations in terms of commercial diplomacy and to see how these latter negotiate with various stakeholders on the international scene. We have established that states are taking a greater interest in commercial diplomacy since competition between them is no longer based on military power but, rather, on the capacity of individual countries to conquer new markets in order to develop both its corporations and the national economy. This conquest is more pronounced in emerging countries as their economy is experiencing rapid growth.

Multinationals are taking advantage of globalisation to boost their exports and set up subsidiaries abroad. According to our study, it is legitimate to claim that this intertwining of roles has now become established and that traditional diplomacy, while it cannot be said to be experiencing a decline, in spite of those who maintain that it has lost its verve, has changed direction. Increasingly involved in diplomacy, multinational companies, in their conquest of emerging markets, are conscious of the fact that many political, legal, cultural and financial factors impact on negotiations; that is why they need diplomatic tools to succeed.

In spite of applying diplomatic approaches, they are unable to entirely go it alone and require at least some help from national governments.

Perspectives

Multinationals need a great deal of expertise in order to be able to operate successfully in the new field of business diplomacy. In effect, they have to recruit employees with diplomacy skills. Consequently, they need to develop training programmes in business diplomacy for middle managers which means that experts must elaborate training strategies to meet requirements in this field.

Governments must also be able to use marketing and commercial tools effectively. While they are conscious of the need to recruit specialists in this field, they also need to think about how to develop training programmes in business diplomacy.

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