



Diplomacia en la era digital
La ayuda alimentaria como maniobra neoliberal

(Diplomacy in the Digital Era. Food Aid as a Neoliberal Maneuver)

Camelia Tigau

CISAN, UNAM/Cenzontle

Mexico City, 2009, 164 pp.

The complex phenomenon Camelia Tigau describes in her book could be clearly seen at the recent United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen. A great many actors, visions and interests converged on that capital to set positions and conceivably negotiate framework agreements that would replace the Kyoto Protocol. What was demonstrated was that not only were there differences among the conceptions of the official and non-governmental actors, but that, with the unquestionable contribution of the media, the very exercise of diplomacy has changed.

While Danish royalty dined with heads of state from around the world, President Nasheed from the Maldives, at risk of disappearing due to climate change, criticized the diplomatic stance of the most developed countries and the emerging economies on a Danish television program.¹ Felipe Calderón, for his part, told the BBC and Danske Radio, “We are going to ask the government and the people of the United States to commit to this [binding] accord, and we will do exactly the same with the Chinese.”² On his radio and television program “Aló Presidente,” Hugo Chávez stated that Barack Obama left by “the back door” because he did not achieve inclusive accords, but only considered the interests of the economic powers and the large gas-emission producers like China, India, Brazil, Russia and South Africa.³ This picture was filled out with the thousands of citizens and social and environmental organizations protesting in the streets of Copenhagen, linked together through networks using information and communications technologies.

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Undoubtedly, these collectives have created a kind of world citizens' diplomacy.

This dynamic, multi-factor scenario is what Tigau looks at in her book, whose solid, didactic structure allows the reader to delve more deeply into the elements that have given rise to the transformations in the exercise of diplomacy, particularly contemporary diplomacy up until the so-called digital era. Her starting point is the communications sciences and systems theories. Her complex vision makes it possible to reflect on aspects that frequently escape traditional analysis of international relations, like the infinity of inter-relations and correlations, nodes and vacuums that make up the fiber of diplomacy and the communication and action networks implicit in its workings. To this is added the emergence of new official actors (non-central governments, specialized national agencies, international and supranational bodies) as well as non-official ones (NGOs, companies, universities, scientists) on the international stage, and the construction of multi-level regional, international and global agendas.

The book is divided into two parts and sub-divided into six original, illuminating chapters. The first part offers the theoretical groundwork for understanding Tigau's specific vision. The second part focuses on evaluating the real significance and results of international food aid policy without being distracted by official discourse. The objective is to look at how diplomacy has evolved from an empirical activity by incorporating certain attributes into a difficult task within contemporary international relations.

The second chapter looks at what dynamic factors have favored the development of inter-relations among actors and networks for the chaotic expansion of diplomatic activities in different ways and areas. In the following section, the author defines the importance of the networks and so-called catalytic actors for the *good* functioning of diplomacy, since *good*

results will depend on the quality and quantity of relationships maintained with the many participating actors and networks. The end of the state's monopoly of international relations and the transformation of political, economic and civil power have led diplomacy to "more open" spaces. This is why neologisms like "netpolitik" and "noopolitik" have been coined.

In her fourth chapter, the author delves into the role of communication in public diplomacy and the adaptation of the state to globalization in the design of international image and communications strategy. This allows the reader to understand something essential to diplomacy in the digital era: the need to design a comprehensive strategy for diplomatic negotiations in the face of multiple counterparts, contacts and agents who define this form of international relations.

To conclude, Tigau exemplifies all this using the case of world food aid, dismantling it from a profoundly critical position. Behind food aid is the experimentation with and introduction of genetically modified organisms into markets opened up by the crisis and neoliberalism; the production of bio-fuels; and the elimination of transgenic commercial surpluses in producing countries. That is, Camelia Tigau offers us a well-argued analytical position that provides the reader with a broader view of current international relations and the way they may evolve. ■■■

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NOTES

¹ Claudia Beltrán Herrera, "Insta Mario Molina a sacar por lo menos una agenda en Copenhague," *La Jornada*, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2009/12/19/>.

² Ibid.

³ AFP, DPA and Notimex, "Critican Castro, Morales y Chávez resultados de la cumbre climática," *La Jornada*, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2009/12/21/>.