

An Analysis of Diplomacy in the 21st Century

Research Report

Introduction and Method

Overview:

This research examines how diplomacy is evolving in the 21st century in response to artificial intelligence, technological advancements, and shifting geopolitical tensions. Using a qualitative methodology (interview questions) I conducted interviews with professionals in diplomacy and international affairs to gain first hand insights into their experiences, challenges they face, and the skills future diplomats will need. I analysed the interviews for recurring themes, including the role of AI, the importance of human/public relations, and the changing international order. As someone aspiring to become a diplomat, this research project really allowed me to get a sense of the job profession I want to step into and the subject matter I want to study.

Example Questions in My Interviews:

- What misconceptions do people commonly have about the life and work of diplomats?
- How has technology, including artificial intelligence and digital communication, changed the way diplomats work?
- What skills do you believe are most important for diplomats today, and how have those skills changed compared with previous generations?

Two Recurring Themes I Noticed:

- Relationships still matter most. Diplomacy is still about building trust, understanding people, and knowing how to work with others.
- AI can help, but only to a certain point. It can make research and accessing information faster, but it cannot replace human connection or the ability to read a situation.

Diplomats



*Honorary Consul General Gul Kriplani:
Former Honorary Consul General of
Iceland in Mumbai, India*

In June'26 I had the opportunity to interview Honorary Consul General Mr. Gul Kriplani, who unfortunately passed away in September'26. Out of the four interviews I conducted, my conversation with Mr. Kriplani was one that was

insightful but at the same time very authentic and practical. Lasting for over an hour, our chat covered a range of topics, beyond the questions I had scripted. Our conversation started by me asking him some of the questions I had prepared with regards to my overarching topic of tech advancement, AI, and what it's like to be a diplomat in the 21st century given the international fragmentation. While speaking to Mr. Kriplani, about AI and tech advancements in the field of diplomacy he always boiled it down to public relations. He emphasised that regardless of how advanced technology becomes, diplomacy ultimately depends on the ability to build relationships and sustain those public relations. From his perspective, AI and digital tools may change how information is accessed and communicated, but they cannot replace the human element that is the underlying factor of diplomatic engagement. This was particularly relevant to my research into international fragmentation, as it highlighted the importance of maintaining open channels of human communication even when political interests diverge and the world faces tech advancement. What made our conversation particularly valuable was its practical nature; rather than approaching diplomacy solely through theoretical frameworks, Mr. Kriplani drew on his experience to demonstrate how relationships and public engagement shape the profession. One of his examples was how he once hosted a marathon in Mumbai and Mark Carney (current Prime Minister of Canada) was invited, and how he was able to still keep in touch with Mark Carney because of the relationships he had built through his human to human connections.

*Ms. Lucy Maskell Pederson: Former Head of Defense Collaboration and Exports & Trade Manager
for Defense, Security, and Aerospace British Embassy, Singapore*

In this conversation, I interviewed British defence diplomat Ms. Pederson who served as the Former Trade Manager for Defense, Security, and Aerospace until May of 2026. After which Ms. Pederson took on a new role as Head of Defense Collaboration and Exports in April of 2026. In July Ms. Pederson moved to Colorado to take on another role there in the capacity of a diplomat. Drawing on 12 years in the British Army's Intelligence Corps and experience working with multinational organisations such as NATO, Ms. Pederson describes how participating in high-level engagements with international leaders revealed the value of diplomacy beyond traditional military capabilities. As Ms. Pederson explains, these experiences demonstrated the “leverage of soft power engagements” in advancing relationships between nations. This to me really showed how traditional public relations still remains a core part of diplomacy despite the world going into significant technological change. Our conversation explored how defence cooperation can strengthen bilateral relations. Ms. Pederson's experience highlights how modern diplomacy often

develops at the intersection of defence, international security, and government, illustrating the importance of sustained engagement and relationship building in navigating geopolitical uncertainty. Ms. Pederson has now relocated to the US to continue her career in foreign service



Mr. Steve Okun: Former Deputy General Counsel at the U.S. Department of Transportation, International Affairs Executive

In this interview, I spoke with a former senior government official and international affairs executive whose career has spanned the U.S. government, corporate public affairs, and international negotiations. After studying government at the University of Virginia and working in the Clinton administration as Deputy General Counsel at the Department of Transportation, he went on to lead international aviation negotiations for UPS before holding public affairs roles at global firms like UPS and KKR and then going on to establish his own public policy firm in Singapore. Our conversation focused on how technological advancement, particularly artificial intelligence, intersects with a continuously changing geopolitical landscape. Mr. Okun argued that AI is

currently less disruptive to international relations in comparison to what he believed was more pressing and that was the shift away from multilateral cooperation towards countries increasingly focusing on national interests.

However, Mr. Okun did warn that AI could become another instrument of geopolitical leverage as countries seek to control their own technologies and infrastructure. Mr. Okun also emphasised that the fundamental skills required for diplomacy remain unchanged. Cultural awareness, negotiation, and a detailed understanding of another country's political system to name a few. This reminded me of my interview with Mr. Kriplani who was firm in his belief of public relations and human connection in diplomacy. Mr. Okun's insights highlighted how diplomacy in the 21st century requires not only adapting to emerging technologies, but also understanding the political and economic interests that shape international cooperation not only today but in the foreseeable future as well. One quote that really stuck with me through our conversation was when Mr. Okun said "You're not playing against the guy or woman across the table. You're playing against whoever's speaking in their ear". Ultimately, our conversation showed me that diplomacy begins with understanding not just what countries want, but the forces and ideas that shape why they want it.



Ms. Lisa Liao: Senior Regional Management Officer, Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs Executive Office, US Embassy, Singapore

In this interview, I spoke with U.S. diplomat Ms. Lisa Liao based in Singapore about how technology and artificial intelligence are changing the workings of diplomacy in the 21st century. Ms. Liao explained that while AI can make research and administrative tasks more efficient, it, however, cannot replace the human relationships at the heart of diplomatic work. This was a recurring theme I started to notice, ever since I interviewed Mr. Kriplani. As Ms. Liao put it, “the fundamental aspect of diplomacy is about relationship building.” Ms. Liao emphasised that diplomacy requires understanding people, persuading counterparts, and building trust over time, aspects that require strong social bonds and connection that can never be replaced by AI or technology.

One of the most memorable points from our conversation was her prediction that “humanism and humans are gonna be king.” Ms. Liao explained that as younger generations become increasingly reliant on digital communication, the ability to interact confidently in person may become an even more valuable skill. Ms. Liao further notes that those who will be able to master human connections will be the ones that excel the most in the field of foreign service.

As Ms. Liao noted, diplomats “cannot only use WhatsApp” but must also make the effort to meet people physically and build genuine connections and long lasting bonds. Beyond interpersonal skills, Ms. Liao highlighted the importance of clear written and verbal communication, leadership, and the ability to analyse complex information quickly. Ms. Liao also explained that AI has not fundamentally changed the skills required for diplomacy, even though the tools available for diplomats have significantly evolved in the 21st century. Ultimately, our conversation reinforced the idea that in an increasingly technology driven world, a diplomat’s greatest strength may lie not in their ability to use the latest tech tools, but in their ability to connect with other people and build solid public relations.