



Diplomatic Relations in the Digital Age: How Diplomatic Relations Are Conducted via Twitter/X vs Traditional Diplomatic Channels.

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*Received 15 Jul., 2026; Revised 22 Jul., 2026; Accepted 30 Aug., 2026 © The author(s) 2026.
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I. Introduction

In an age defined by instantaneous global communication, the tools of diplomacy have undergone an unfathomable transformation. Whilst statesmen once conducted international affairs through closed-door negotiations and precisely worded communiqués, world leaders today can reshape or rupture bilateral relationships with a single 280-character post. This phenomenon, widely termed "Twiplomacy," represents one of the most visible disruptions to traditional diplomatic practice in modern history.

Traditional diplomacy has long been defined by confidentiality and deliberate pacing. Conducted primarily through established channels, bilateral meetings, diplomatic cables, and multilateral treaties, it provided the structured environment necessary to navigate complex and sensitive international issues. Its strength lay particularly in its slow speed: time allowed for careful deliberation, nuanced negotiation, and certain trust. As Secretary of State Dean Acheson observed, "negotiation in the classic diplomatic sense assumes parties are more anxious to agree than to disagree." Yet this same architecture, built for depth and security, proved ill-suited to the accelerating pace of a hyper-connected world.

The emergence of Twitter, now rebranded as X, as a platform for state communication has introduced a fundamentally different logic to international relations. Real-time, public, and unmoderated, Twitter diplomacy allows heads of state and foreign ministries to speak directly to global audiences, certainly bypassing traditional media gatekeepers and bureaucratic intermediaries. The scale of its adoption is striking: Twiplomacy studies conducted by BCW indicate that 97-98% of United Nations member states now maintain an official presence on the platform through their leaders or foreign ministries.

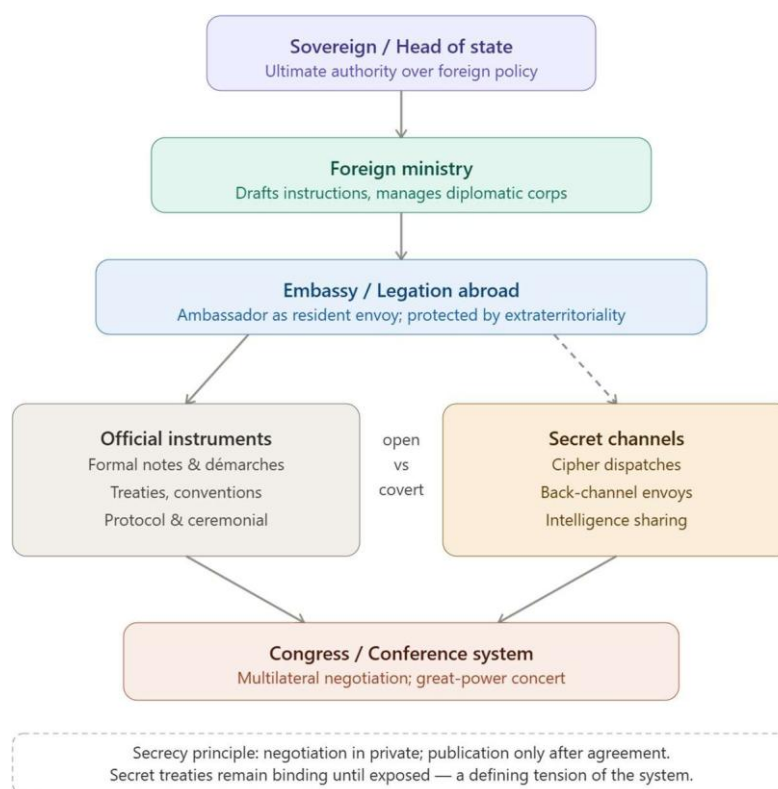
Yet the ramifications of this shift are deeply ambivalent. The same directness that enabled India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj to orchestrate the evacuation of thousands of stranded workers through real-time, Twitter intervention also allowed a single Canadian government tweet criticising Saudi Arabia's human rights record to trigger a diplomatic crisis - expelling envoys, severing trade ties, and recalling thousands of students. Speed and reach, the great virtues of social media diplomacy, can become liabilities when the guardrails of traditional protocol are absent.

While traditional diplomacy remains essential for meticulous negotiations, X/Twitter has reshaped international relations by accelerating and increasing transparency, allowing leaders to bypass bureaucratic channels and communicate directly with foreign publics. This paper, therefore, asks: "How Are Diplomatic Relations Conducted via Twitter/X vs Traditional Diplomatic Channels"? This paper argues that Twiplomacy and traditional diplomacy are not competing systems but complementary ones. Twitter accelerates and amplifies, whilst traditional diplomacy consolidates and secures.

Diplomacy consolidates and secures. The challenge for the contemporary international order lies in learning to wield both with wisdom.

II. Traditional Diplomacy: Structure and Secrecy

Section A: Structure



Traditional diplomacy evolved over centuries into a highly structured system operating through two parallel tracks - the visible and the isolated.

The visible track was elaborate by design. States maintained permanent embassies staffed by career professionals whose occupation was to observe, report, and negotiate on behalf of their sovereign. Formal notes passed between foreign ministries in carefully calibrated language; each word carried legal weight and was chosen accordingly.

Treaties were signed, ratified, and eventually published. Protocol governed perhaps everything that happened in public: 1. who called on whom first, 2. the order of signatures on a document, 3. the precise rank of the official sent to receive a visiting dignitary. This visible apparatus was not mere theatre, though it had theatrical elements. It had a function: it signalled commitment, legitimacy, and created a shared procedural framework within which states that distrusted each other could still transact.

The hidden track ran alongside it continuously, and no one considered this scandalous. Cypher dispatches bore the blunt judgments that formal notes could not carry: honest appraisals of a colleague's true intentions, suggestions of compromise positions not to be put in writing, warnings of domestic political constraints not to be mentioned in official correspondence. The ambassadors would send messages via “back-channel” envoys, often merchants, clergy, personal confidants or people with no diplomatic standing at all. In the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century, secret articles attached to public treaties were the rule; the printed text might promise one arrangement, and the secret article might qualify or reverse it altogether. Both parties were aware of this. Both parties agreed to this because the alternative, complete transparency, would have made many deals impossible to reach.

(Source: Harold Nicolson, "Diplomacy," 3rd ed., Oxford University Press, 1963. Nicolson documents the convention of secret articles and the dual-track nature of European diplomatic practice across this period.)

The relationship between the two tracks was not one of corruption versus legitimacy. It was one of complementarity. The visible track created the institutional scaffolding: the embassies, the protocol, the legal framework, within which states could engage at all. The hidden track provided the operational flexibility that allowed that engagement to produce results. A diplomat who could only say what could be published was a diplomat with very limited utility. The professional value of the career envoy lay precisely in the ability to explore, to float, to probe, and to do so with the confidence that those explorations would not immediately become domestic political liabilities for either side.

This architecture reached its most refined expression in the European Concert system that emerged from the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The great powers, Britain, Austria, Prussia, Russia, and eventually France, established an informal but effective mechanism for managing continental order. They met periodically in congresses and conferences; they exchanged views through their ambassadors in the capitals of Europe; and they maintained an understanding that certain questions were to be settled among themselves before being presented to the wider world as settled facts. The system was not democratic, and it was not intended to be. It was designed to be stable, and for roughly a century, with notable lapses, it functioned as such.

(Source: Paul W. Schroeder, "The Transformation of European Politics 1763-1848," Oxford University Press, 1994. Schroeder provides the authoritative account of the Concert's emergence and operating logic.)

What held the architecture together was a shared professional culture of European diplomats that transcended national borders. Though diplomats of rival states were educated in the same classical tradition, wrote in the same diplomatic French, and were trained in the same conventions of protocol and discretion, they nevertheless shared a set of procedural commitments that made negotiation possible even during periods of acute political hostility. The culture was self-reinforcing: its norms were transmitted by apprenticeship, its violations were remembered, and its performers knew that the long-term value of the system was dependent on adhering to its conventions even when short-term advantage might seem to recommend otherwise.

(Source: Nicolson, "Diplomacy," Ch. 3, on the formation and maintenance of the diplomatic corps as a professional community.)

The defining tension within this architecture was always the question of secrecy's limits. Secret treaties were binding until exposed, but exposure, when it came, could be extremely devastating. The revelation of the secret clauses of the Treaty of London 1915 (TOL), by which the Italian Republic was promised territorial gains in exchange for entering the war on the Allied side, contributed directly to the poisonous atmosphere at the Paris Peace Conference (PPC) in 1919. It was partly in response to episodes like this that Woodrow Wilson (28th President of the United States) demanded, in the first of his 14 Points, "open covenants of peace, openly arrived at."

(Source: Margaret MacMillan, "Paris 1919," Random House, 2001, pp. 12-14, 63-65. MacMillan details the Treaty of London's secret clauses and their role in the tensions in Paris. Wilson's Fourteen Points address of 8 January 1918 is the primary source for the quotation.)

Wilson's demand proved easier to state than to implement. In Paris, he quietly abandoned the second half of the formulation, the "openly arrived at" portion, once negotiations began. The peace conference was conducted mostly in private among the major Allied leaders. The tension Wilson identified had not been resolved; it had merely been deferred. Diplomacy, it turned out, required the hidden track whether or not one approved of it in principle. The real problem was not the continued existence of private negotiation but its control, its terms and its accountability.

(Source: MacMillan, "Paris 1919," pp. 180-195, on the closed-session structure of the Council of Four and the gap between Wilson's stated principles and the conference's actual conduct.)

That tension between the transparency that democratic accountability requires and the confidentiality that effective diplomacy requires would remain unresolved throughout the 20th century. It would be managed, imperfectly, through the conventions of the traditional system. And it would be fundamentally destabilised by the arrival of social media, which collapsed the distinction between the two tracks in ways that neither diplomats nor publics have yet fully reckoned with.

Section B:

The architecture described previously was not merely a historical curiosity. It produced real and concrete advantages that no amount of digital communication has yet fully replicated.

Understanding those advantages is essential to understanding what is lost, or at a minimum placed at risk, when diplomacy migrates to public platforms.

First and most importantly was the matter of confidentiality. The confidentiality of these negotiations helped participants test out many positions that they did not want to make public and allowed them to be flexible without showing any weakness. This was not a privilege claimed by authoritarians alone. Democratic governments depended on it equally. The back-channel arrangement through which the Kennedy administration secretly agreed to remove American Jupiter missiles from Turkey in exchange for the Soviet withdrawal from Cuba in October 1962 is among the clearest examples on record. Had that undertaking been public at the moment it was made, the domestic political cost to Kennedy would have been severe enough to make the agreement impossible. The confidential channel was not a workaround; it was the mechanism through which the crisis was resolved.

(Source: Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow, eds., "The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis," Harvard University Press, 1997, pp. 690-691. The secret Turkey undertaking is documented in Robert Kennedy's account and confirmed in later declassified Soviet and American materials.)

The second strength was that of careful pacing. The process of diplomacy used by the ancients was designed to proceed slowly, and this was an asset rather than a liability. Orders needed to be issued from capitals; treaties needed to be written, rewritten, and rewritten again; positions had to go through a bureaucracy for clearance. In this way, second-order implications could be considered, legalities could be carefully defined, and political problems at home avoided through anticipation. Agreements reached through careful negotiation tended to be more durable precisely because the process forced each party to confront the full range of implications before signing. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), negotiated over three years between 1965 and 1968 through sustained multilateral diplomacy, remains in force and has been signed by 191 states. Its durability is inseparable from the care of its drafting.

(Source: Mohamed I. Shaker, "The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty: Origin and Implementation 1959-1979," Oceana Publications, 1980, Vol. I, pp. 1-40, on the negotiating history and its relationship to the treaty's subsequent resilience.)

The third advantage was the reduction of public escalation risk. When diplomatic exchanges were private, misunderstandings could be corrected before they hardened into public positions. A harsh phrase in a confidential cable could be walked back with a follow-up; the same phrase delivered in a public statement, once reported and responded to by the other side's domestic audience, became far more difficult to retract without political cost to both governments. The absence of public audiences removed the structural incentive to perform toughness for domestic audiences.

constituencies, an incentive that has driven a substantial number of preventable escalations in the years since social media platforms entered the diplomatic space.

The fourth advantage was professional expertise. Career diplomats gathered knowledge across decades: knowledge of international law, of the specific history of a bilateral relationship, of their counterpart's institutional constraints and personal negotiating style. This expertise was stored in foreign ministries and embassies as institutional memory, providing continuity across changes of government and allowing states to maintain coherent long-term strategies regardless of domestic political cycles. A foreign minister changes with an election; the embassy's political counsellor, who has spent eight years in the capital and knows every senior official in the host government's foreign ministry, does not.

The 5th advantage was strategic ambiguity. Traditional diplomacy was highly skilled in creating such formulations which could be understood in different ways by both parties involved, for them to use them for their political purposes. One of the best examples is the Shanghai Communiqué signed in 1972, which marked the normalisation of relations between the USA and the People's Republic of China. The formulation regarding Taiwan, where the U.S. had acknowledged the Chinese view that

Taiwan is part of China but not recognised it, made it possible for both sides to interpret the agreement as they needed to. That formulation has anchored the relationship for over five decades.

(Source: Robert S. Ross, "Negotiating Cooperation: The United States and China, 1969-1989," Stanford University Press, 1995, pp. 53-57, on the drafting of the Taiwan formulation and its deliberate ambiguity.)

Taken together, these advantages point toward a single underlying principle: leaders could compromise privately without public backlash. This capacity was not a concession to elite secrecy at the expense of democratic accountability. It was the mechanism through which most of the twentieth century's significant international agreements were reached. Public opinion legitimately constrains the range of outcomes a democratic government can accept; private negotiation creates the space to reach beyond that range when both parties understand that the alternative is worse for everyone. The sequencing mattered: negotiate privately, then present the completed agreement for ratification and public debate. That sequence is what social media has fundamentally disrupted, forcing negotiators to manage real-time public reactions at precisely the moment when the flexibility to explore and concede is most essential.

III. Diplomacy Through Twitter/X (Twiplomacy)

Section A: How Twiplomacy Operates

The emergence of Twitter, which has now been renamed X, has brought about an entirely different kind of communication strategy as compared to conventional diplomacy. Diplomatic communications normally follow a process where they are relayed via embassies, foreign ministries, lawyers, and various stages of the bureaucratic system before finally becoming public knowledge. Twiplomacy, on the other hand, allows for immediate communication by state representatives to an entire global audience. Foreign ministers, embassies, or even heads of state can make public declarations without having to relay messages to journalists or the media through diplomatic channels.

The effect on the target audience is also quite dramatic. While traditional diplomacy mainly focused on communicating with other governments and officials, Twiplomacy can address multiple global audiences simultaneously.

A single post may thereby function as a diplomatic signal, a domestic political message, and a media event all at once.

The operational logic of Twiplomacy rests upon visibility. Diplomatic messages that would once have been delivered privately are now frequently communicated in public. Foreign ministries routinely announce policy positions, condemn international actions, provide crisis updates, and engage with foreign publics through official accounts. In emergencies, embassies may use Twitter/X to quickly spread information to their citizens living abroad, whereas governments employ the medium to influence global discourse before traditional media organisations frame the situation. The platform's design further amplifies this effect. Retweets, replies, hashtags, and algorithmic recommendations allow diplomatic messages to spread far beyond

(Source: Corneliu Bjola and Marcus Holmes, eds., "Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice," Routledge, 2015, on the shift from closed government-to-government communication to open, networked publics.)

Their intended audience. Statements that once circulated among a limited number of officials can now reach millions within minutes.

This shift has also reduced the distinction between formal and informal diplomatic communication. Historically, official government positions were conveyed through carefully drafted communiqués and diplomatic notes. On Twitter/X, however, leaders frequently communicate in a more personal and immediate style. The account of a president or prime minister may simultaneously function as a personal platform, a political campaign tool, and an instrument of statecraft. The result is a diplomatic climate where the personal qualities, modes of

The communication and public behaviour of political leaders affect foreign policy, comparable to official policy and diplomacy.

Perhaps most significantly, Twiplomacy has compressed the diplomatic decision-making cycle. Reactions that

once required days or weeks can now occur within hours. Governments monitor social media continuously, respond rapidly to developments, and increasingly find themselves conducting diplomacy in real time. This immediacy has created new opportunities for engagement but has also introduced new risks, as public statements made under pressure may carry consequences that are difficult to reverse.

(Source: Burson Cohn & Wolfe, "Twiplomacy Study 2018," documenting the near-universal adoption of Twitter by governments and heads of state and the resulting acceleration of diplomatic communication.)

While Twiplomacy does pose significant security challenges to diplomacy, it should not be overlooked that any official social media page is vulnerable to hacking, spoofing, and intrusion by unauthorised users. Once the page falls into the intruder's hands, misleading information can spread rapidly across the platform and be shared by millions within seconds. One example includes a widespread cyber-attack in July 2020 that targeted many verified Twitter accounts of political personalities and representatives of governments worldwide. While the purpose of the attack was primarily financial, it revealed the vulnerability of any official account as a medium for spreading misleading news. If such a situation had taken place at a time when there were some geopolitical tensions, false news regarding the launch of an armed conflict, imposition of sanctions, and even diplomatic conflicts would likely have created an international problem.

Section B: Advantages of Twiplomacy

Despite concerns about its informality, Twiplomacy offers several significant advantages that help explain its widespread adoption by governments worldwide.

The first advantage is speed. Traditional diplomatic communications often require multiple institutional steps before information reaches relevant audiences. Twitter/X eliminates many of these delays. Governments can communicate positions immediately during international crises, rapidly clarify misunderstandings, and provide updates as events unfold. During emergencies involving citizens overseas, this immediacy can have practical consequences for public safety and crisis management.

The second advantage is direct communication. Twiplomacy gives leaders and foreign ministries the power to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and communicate directly to domestic and international audiences simultaneously. In previous eras, diplomatic statements were filtered through multiple journalists, editors, and broadcasters before reaching the public. Social media enables governments to present their message without external interpretation, significantly reducing the risk of misrepresentation and increasing control over strategic narratives.

Thirdly, Twiplomacy enables transparency. As mentioned above, traditional diplomacy often takes place behind closed doors. Twiplomacy, on the other hand, allows citizens to witness elements of diplomacy in real time. Governments' statements, policies, and diplomacy itself become more transparent to the public. The citizens who were not informed about international affairs can start witnessing direct interaction between governments through social media platforms like X.

Fourthly, public diplomacy and soft power are major advantages. Many countries nowadays try to build their image abroad by using social media to create a positive perception of their culture, values and politics. Through direct contact with foreign citizens, and not only with governments, countries can also create good relations with other nations. This element of Twiplomacy is very much related to Joseph Nye's theory of soft power.

(Source: Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power," Foreign Policy, no. 80, 1990, pp. 153-171. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/1148580])

Another benefit of Twiplomacy is accessibility. Twiplomacy provides easier access to diplomatic communications, especially those conducted by smaller countries. A small country does not usually have sufficient financial resources to establish embassies around the world, but it can build a strong international presence through digital diplomacy.

India's digital diplomacy provides a notable illustration of these advantages. During crises affecting Indian citizens abroad, government officials have repeatedly used X to coordinate assistance, respond to requests, and rapidly disseminate information. The platform enabled officials to engage directly with citizens in need, demonstrating how social media can supplement traditional diplomatic mechanisms and enhance governmental responsiveness.

(Source: Ilan Manor, "The Digitalisation of Public Diplomacy," Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, on the Indian Ministry of External Affairs' use of social media for consular outreach.)

Taken together, these advantages make it easy to see why Twiplomacy has become an important part of foreign policy today. It helps governments communicate faster, reach more people, and react quickly when events occur. At the same time, these benefits can also create problems.

Because information can be shared so quickly, officials may post messages without fully thinking through the consequences. Greater transparency can make private negotiations harder to manage, while the public nature of social media can cause small disagreements between countries to attract wider attention and escalate. For this reason, it is important to consider both the benefits and drawbacks of Twiplomacy when evaluating its role in modern diplomacy.

IV. Limitations and Risks of Twiplomacy

Section A: Escalation of Diplomatic Conflicts

The very features that make Twiplomacy appealing make it highly likely to escalate into diplomatic confrontation. In the context of traditional diplomacy, governments had the opportunity to express their grievances, clarify misunderstandings, and look for compromise before going public with any issues. Social media takes away this ability from politicians by making diplomatic discussions a kind of show. Whatever is said on Twitter/X becomes instantly accessible to domestic publics, other governments, the media, and political opponents alike.

Once an opinion has been made public, it is politically costly to back out of it or alter it in any way.

The 2018 dispute between Canada and Saudi Arabia illustrates this danger. After Canada's Foreign Ministry published a tweet calling for the release of imprisoned Saudi human rights activists, the reaction of the Saudi government was to expel the Canadian ambassador from the country, stop any new deals involving trade and investments, and recall thousands of Saudi students who were studying in Canada. While disputes among nations are normal, the manner in which they transpired made matters worse, especially since they were conducted through public discourse, thereby limiting room for diplomatic manoeuvring.

(Source: Al Jazeera, "Saudi Arabia expels Canadian ambassador over criticism of arrests," 6 August 2018.)

Section B: Lack of Nuance and Context

Diplomatic negotiations usually involve extremely difficult legal, political, & historical considerations that cannot easily be communicated through short social media posts. Effective diplomacy frequently relies upon carefully composed language, strategic ambiguity, and detailed explanations that allow multiple parties to interpret agreements in acceptable ways.

Twitter/X, however, rewards brevity, simplicity, and immediacy.

Consequently, messages sent out on social media in diplomatic communications may lack the subtle tone needed for the accurate conveyance of complex policies. Short messaging may simplify matters without providing adequate background information, or lead to misinterpretations of the sending state's intentions. In addition, the constraints of the medium might encourage the simplification of extremely complex international issues into very simple forms.

Section C: Domestic Political Pressures

Twiplomacy exposes diplomatic communication to constant public scrutiny. Unlike traditional diplomatic exchanges, which are often conducted privately until agreements are finalised, social media interactions occur in front of a visible audience that can react immediately. Political leaders are therefore incentivised to consider not only foreign policy objectives but also the reactions of domestic supporters, opposition groups, journalists, and online communities.

This situation will drive states to engage in performative diplomacy, which means that the leaders will craft their messages not for foreign policy purposes but for domestic political consumption. They will use stronger rhetoric to impress voters and project strength, even though it makes diplomacy much harder.

(Source: Bjola and Holmes, "Digital Diplomacy," on performative signalling directed at domestic audiences rather than foreign counterparts.)

Section D: Misinformation and Misinterpretation

Another issue that may emerge from this is misinformation. Misinformation may spread at an incredibly fast pace, regardless of whether the information provided is accurate or not. This is because whatever information is being circulated on social media becomes accessible all around the world in a matter of minutes.

Additionally, diplomatic messages are often interpreted by audiences with different cultural, political, and linguistic backgrounds. A statement intended for one audience may be understood very differently by another. Because social media lacks the contextual safeguards present in traditional diplomatic communication, misunderstandings can emerge more easily and spread more rapidly. Cybersecurity threats further intensify the risk. Official government accounts may be hacked, impersonated, or used to disseminate false information. The 2020

Twitter cyberattack, which compromised numerous high-profile verified accounts, demonstrated how vulnerable even prominent accounts can be to unauthorised access. As governments increasingly rely upon social media as an instrument of diplomacy, the challenge of ensuring accuracy, security, and context has become a critical concern for international relations. *(Source: BBC News, "Major US Twitter accounts hacked in Bitcoin scam," 16 July 2020.)*

V. Case Studies

Section A: India's Digital Diplomacy and Crisis Response

No government has demonstrated the constructive potential of Twiplomacy more vividly than India. Under External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj (2014-2019), the Ministry of External Affairs transformed its Twitter presence from a broadcast channel into a functioning consular helpdesk. Swaraj personally responded to distress messages from Indian citizens abroad, at times within minutes, and her famous assurance that even an Indian stranded on Mars could expect the embassy's assistance captured a new ethos: the state, through social media, had become directly reachable by the individual citizen.

The clearest test of this model came in April 2015, when civil war engulfed Yemen. Under Operation Raahat, India evacuated 6,688 people, 4,741 Indian citizens and 1,947 foreign nationals from more than forty countries, by air and sea whilst airports were closed and the country was under bombardment. Twitter was central to the operation's coordination. Swaraj and the Ministry's spokesperson circulated helpline numbers, tracked individual distress cases, and issued real-time updates on naval evacuations from Aden and airlifts from Sana'a. Citizens who could not reach an embassy telephone line could reach a hashtag.

(Source: Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, statements on Operation Raahat, April 2015; Ilan Manor, "The Digitalisation of Public Diplomacy," Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, on the MEA's use of social media for consular crisis response.)

Yet the Indian case is instructive precisely because the tweets were never the whole story. The evacuation depended on traditional instruments operating out of public view: naval vessels and air force transports, and, most critically, quiet political negotiation, including direct contact between the Indian leadership and Saudi authorities, to secure pauses in the bombing during which aircraft could land. The pattern repeated in later crises, from the Vande Bharat repatriations during the COVID-19 pandemic to Operation Ganga, which brought home more than twenty thousand Indian nationals from Ukraine in 2022. In each instance, the public channel gathered information and reassured citizens whilst the private channel secured the corridors through which they escaped. India's experience is therefore less a triumph of Twiplomacy over traditional diplomacy than a demonstration of the two working in sequence.

(Source: Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, statements on the Vande Bharat Mission (2020) and Operation Ganga (2022).)

Section B: Saudi Arabia-Canada Diplomatic Dispute (2018)

If India illustrates the constructive ceiling of digital diplomacy, the 2018 rupture between Saudi Arabia and Canada illustrates its destructive floor. On 3 August 2018, Canada's foreign ministry and Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland posted tweets expressing grave concern at the arrest of Saudi civil society activists, including

the women's rights advocate Samar Badawi, and urging their immediate release. The substance of the message was unremarkable; Canada had raised human rights concerns with Riyadh before. What was new was the medium: a public demand, in Arabic as well as English, addressed to a global audience rather than delivered privately to the Saudi government.

(Source: Foreign Policy CAN (@CanadaFP), Twitter post, 3 August 2018.)

The response was extraordinary in its speed and severity. Within days, Saudi Arabia declared Canadian Ambassador Dennis Horak persona non grata and gave him twenty-four hours to leave, recalled its own envoy, froze all new trade and investment, suspended flights to Toronto, and ordered the withdrawal of roughly fifteen thousand Saudi scholarship students and medical trainees from Canadian institutions. The escalation itself played out on the same platform that had triggered it: a verified Saudi account even posted, and then deleted with an apology, an image of an airliner flying towards the Toronto skyline. A single tweet had produced consequences that a formal démarche would almost certainly never have provoked.

(Source: Al Jazeera, "Saudi Arabia expels Canadian ambassador over criticism of arrests," 6 August 2018; Atlantic Council, "The Saudi Arabia-Canada Feud, Explained," August 2018.)

The dispute's trajectory confirms the escalation logic described in the previous chapter. Because both positions had been staked out in public, neither government could retreat without visible loss of face, and the standoff persisted for nearly five years. Its resolution, notably, owed nothing to social media. Relations were restored in May 2023 following private discussions between Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on the sidelines of the APEC summit in Bangkok, a settlement reached through precisely the quiet, face-to-face diplomacy that the original tweet had bypassed. The episode thus offers a controlled experiment of sorts: the public channel started the crisis in a single afternoon; the private channel required years to end it.

(Source: Reuters, "Saudi Arabia and Canada agree to restore diplomatic ties," 24 May 2023.)

Section C: Iran-United States Nuclear Negotiations

The Iran-United States nuclear file offers the most complete natural comparison available between the two modes of diplomacy, because the same relationship, the same issue, and in some cases the same officials passed through both. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) of 2015 was a product of traditional diplomacy in its purest form. It began with a secret back channel, opened through Oman in 2012 and early 2013, in which American officials, including William Burns and Jake Sullivan, met Iranian counterparts entirely out of public view. Only after these exploratory talks established that agreement was possible did the negotiation move into formal, though still confidential, sessions among Iran and the P5+1 powers, culminating in a

159-page agreement dense with technical annexes, verification schedules, and carefully engineered ambiguities.

(Source: William J. Burns, "The Back Channel: A Memoir of American Diplomacy and the Case for Its Renewal," Random House, 2019, on the Oman channel; Wendy R. Sherman, "Not for the Faint of Heart," PublicAffairs, 2018, on the conduct of the formal negotiations.)

Every advantage of the traditional architecture identified in Chapter II was on display. Confidentiality allowed both governments to test concessions that would have been politically fatal if exposed prematurely; a hardline audience existed in both Washington and Tehran. Careful pacing permitted technical experts to resolve questions of centrifuge counts and enrichment levels that no 280-character format could carry. Strategic ambiguity papered over disagreements that could not be resolved outright. The sequencing principle held: negotiate privately, then present the finished agreement for public debate.

The years that followed inverted the model. President Trump announced the American withdrawal from the agreement in May 2018, and the relationship thereafter was conducted substantially in public, on Twitter. In July 2018, the President addressed an all-capitals tweet directly to President Rouhani, warning Iran of consequences the likes of which few throughout history have ever suffered. In January 2020, following the killing of General Qasem Soleimani, he tweeted that the United States had targeted fifty-two Iranian sites and would strike them if Iran retaliated. Iranian officials, led by Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, an accomplished practitioner of English-language Twitter despite the platform being blocked for ordinary Iranians, replied in kind. Each exchange was instantaneous, public, and addressed as much to domestic audiences as to the adversary; none produced an agreement, and the January 2020 exchanges accompanied the closest approach to open war between the two states in decades.

(Source: Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Twitter posts, 22 July 2018 and 4-5 January 2020.)

The contrast could hardly be sharper. The agreement was constructed in private and dismantled in public. Twitter proved a powerful instrument for signalling resolve, satisfying domestic constituencies, and escalating pressure, and an entirely useless one for the patient, technical, face-saving work of actually negotiating. Whatever one's judgment of the JCPOA's merits, the episode demonstrates that the two channels are not interchangeable: they perform different functions, and confusing them carries real strategic cost.

VI. Twiplomacy and Traditional Diplomacy: Competition or Complementarity?

Section A: Speed vs Deliberation

The most obvious axis of comparison is temporal. Twitter compresses the diplomatic cycle from weeks to minutes. In genuine emergencies- an evacuation, a natural disaster, a rapidly moving crisis- that compression saves lives, as the Indian case demonstrates. But speed is only a virtue when the task is transmission; when the task is judgment, it becomes a liability. The

deliberate pacing of traditional diplomacy was not bureaucratic inertia but a designed safeguard, creating intervals in which drafts could be reviewed, tempers could cool, and errors could be caught before they became positions. The two speeds are suited to different tasks, which suggests not that one should replace the other but that statecraft requires access to both: a fast channel for communication and a slow channel for decision.

(Source: Nicolson, "Diplomacy," on deliberate pacing as a designed safeguard of negotiation.)

Section B: Transparency vs Confidentiality

The second tension is between the democratic demand for openness and the practical requirement of secrecy. Twiplomacy has delivered a real measure of transparency: citizens can now observe diplomatic exchanges that previous generations never saw, and governments must account in public for positions they once held only in cyphered cables. Yet the historical record examined in this paper, from the Congress of Vienna to the Cuban Missile Crisis to the Oman back channel, shows consistently that the concessions which end conflicts are made in private, because they are precisely the concessions that public audiences punish. Wilson's own retreat from "openly arrived at" covenants in Paris in 1919 anticipated the dilemma exactly. The workable arrangement is the one the twentieth century stumbled towards and social media now threatens: private negotiation followed by public ratification. Transparency about outcomes is compatible with confidentiality about process; transparency about process tends to prevent outcomes altogether.

(Source: MacMillan, "Paris 1919," pp. 180-195, on Wilson's retreat from "open covenants openly arrived at.")

Section C: Public Engagement vs Private Negotiation

The third axis concerns the audience. Traditional diplomacy spoke government to government; Twiplomacy speaks government to publics, foreign and domestic simultaneously. This is a genuine enlargement of diplomacy's reach. For public diplomacy, the cultivation of image, values, and soft power, the platform is unmatched, particularly for smaller states that cannot afford global media operations. But the same multiplicity of audiences corrupts negotiation. A message crafted to impress domestic voters will rarely be the message best calculated to move a foreign counterpart, and the Saudi-Canada dispute shows what happens when the two purposes collide. Each government performed firmness for its own public whilst the bilateral relationship collapsed. Public engagement and private negotiation are both legitimate diplomatic functions, but they obey different logics and cannot safely share a channel.

(Source: Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics," PublicAffairs, 2004, on public diplomacy and the cultivation of soft power.)

Section D: The Hybrid Future of Diplomacy

The evidence assembled in this paper points not towards the victory of either mode but towards their institutionalised coexistence. Foreign ministries have already begun to build this hybrid in practice: dedicated digital diplomacy units draft and vet official posts, social media guidelines discipline the personal accounts of ambassadors, and crisis protocols specify which messages belong on public platforms and which in cables. The emerging division of labour assigns to Twitter/X what it does well, rapid signalling, consular outreach, public

diplomacy, and agenda-setting, and reserves for traditional channels what only they can do: confidential bargaining, technical drafting, and the face-saving management of retreat.

The hybrid is not without risks. Leaders' personal accounts remain outside institutional control, hacking and impersonation threaten the integrity of official channels, and the incentive to perform for domestic audiences has not diminished. The hybrid future, in other words, is not self-executing; it must be built deliberately, through professional training, institutional guardrails, and a recovered appreciation of what the older diplomatic architecture was for. The question is no longer whether diplomacy will be digital, but whether it will be disciplined.

(Source: Bjola and Holmes, "Digital Diplomacy," on the institutionalisation of digital diplomacy units within foreign ministries.)

VII. Conclusion

This paper set out to compare how diplomatic relations are conducted through Twitter/X and through traditional diplomatic channels, and to determine whether the two are rivals or partners. The evidence supports the thesis stated at the outset: they are complementary systems performing different functions, and the health of contemporary diplomacy depends on keeping those functions distinct.

Traditional diplomacy, examined in Chapters II and III, evolved its defining features, confidentiality, deliberate pacing, professional expertise, and strategic ambiguity, because they solve real problems: they allow adversaries to test concessions without domestic punishment, to correct misunderstandings before they harden, and to reach agreements that public negotiation would have made impossible. Twiplomacy, examined in Chapters III and IV, offers what the old architecture never could: speed, direct access to global publics, transparency, and a voice for states and citizens previously excluded from diplomatic communication. The case studies of Chapter V showed each system operating at its best and at its worst. India's crisis response revealed a public channel amplifying a traditional operation; the Saudi-Canada rupture revealed a public channel destroying in an afternoon what private channels needed five years to repair; and the Iran-United States nuclear file revealed, within a single relationship, that agreements are built in private and dismantled in public.

The deeper finding concerns sequencing. The twentieth century's unresolved tension, between the openness democratic accountability demands and the discretion effective negotiation requires, was managed through an implicit bargain: negotiate privately, ratify publicly. Social media has not resolved that tension; it has collapsed the sequence, moving the negotiation itself into the public square where compromise is punished as weakness. The task facing foreign ministries is therefore not to choose between the tweet and the cable but to restore the division of labour between them, assigning signalling, consular outreach, and public diplomacy to the platform, and reserving bargaining for the private channel.

Twitter accelerates and amplifies; traditional diplomacy consolidates and secures. Neither can perform the other's function, and a state that relies on only one negotiates half-armed. The challenge for the contemporary international order, as this paper argued at the outset, lies not in choosing between them, but in learning to wield both with wisdom.