



PKSOI View Points

Planning for Diplomatic Engagement
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Diplomats do plan!

When I talk about "diplomatic planning" I am talking about planning for political or diplomatic engagement. By political/diplomatic engagement I am talking about the engagement between a USG official and an official of another country, or in the case of public diplomacy the people of another country, to influence them in a way that will help achieve US objectives and interests. Diplomatic engagement can be in a national forum (host nation) or international forum (coalition, UN, OECD/DAC etc.). Diplomatic or political engagement can be carried out in a formal or informal setting and is often done in both. While State Department personnel routinely plan for and carry out diplomatic/political engagement this function is also carried out by other USG officials, USAID in development policy dialogue, DoD in working with foreign militaries, trade negotiators, commerce department officials, etc. I will focus my remarks about planning on what I have observed with State and US Embassies as the Embassy process is "interagency" by nature.

While clearly State Department personnel are very involved at the policy formulation level, diplomatic engagements, other than Presidential Summits and Secretary of State meetings, are usually at the "operational level", i.e. carrying out or making policy operational. I will use the Embassy level planning as an example of what I have observed.

Planning for Diplomatic Engagement at the Embassy Level:

Some characteristics of political/diplomatic engagement:

- Most time and effort is focused on clearly identifying and interpreting US interests and foreign policy objectives for the country or situation at hand. Usually is done collaboratively by Chief of Mission (COM) and Country Team on an annual basis. Updates and adjustments are usually annual but interests and objectives are normally pretty constant unless there is a radical change in the country or region.
- General approaches or lines of effort for furthering the US interests and foreign policy objectives are identified and articulated. Usually is done collaboratively by COM and Country Team on an annual basis.
- Planning for specific engagements along the identified general lines of effort is usually

continuous, rapid and short cycle in response to the actions of the country leaders or people you are trying to influence. Usually this is done by a senior officer (Ambassador, Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM), ECON/Political Officer, USAID Director, military commander) and a small group of key supporting senior officers drawn from the Country Team.

Country Plan or Strategy Development and Implementation:

- **US Interests and Foreign Policy Objectives:** US Ambassador and Country Team clearly identify and interpret US interests and foreign policy objectives as they apply to the country at hand or the region if we are dealing with a region (i.e. Central America, Horn of Africa, etc.). A good deal of time and energy is spent on this. Basic US interests and foreign policy objectives for relations with a country, region or international entity are usually redefined and interpreted on an annual basis or when the situation in the US or with the foreign entity changes substantially (new administration, sudden, unexpected change in governance, natural disaster, widespread violent conflict.) Usually has a relatively short term outlook – 1-3 years. This then gives you the framework for your diplomatic engagement and answers the question of what we (USG) are specifically trying to achieve with this country over the next year or two. This is most often articulated in a Chief of Mission Statement. Adjustments are made annually because you are almost always dealing with a highly dynamic and complex situation when you are dealing with other sovereign countries. Your aim is to influence the country – you cannot control it.
- **Lines of Effort:** The COM and Country Team then decide the general lines of effort they are going to carry out to achieve each of the identified objectives, i.e. 1) use of one-on-one diplomatic engagement by Ambassador or other top diplomats with the Ambassador focusing his/her principle messages on the top (i.e. four) priority issues; 2) use of public diplomacy carried out by “given officials” in these ways; 3) bring in these top level US officials (i.e. Treasury Secretary) to deliver “these specific messages” to the country leaders and/or people at “these key event driven points” in the year; 4) promote formation of a working group of interested country embassies to carry out joint policy dialogue with the country on a priority issue, i.e. corruption, bank oversight, drug trafficking, dealing with gangs; 5) use US foreign assistance in these general ways to achieve our objectives; 6) sponsor trade delegations to or from the US to enhance economic ties; etc.
- **Individual Diplomatic/Political Engagement:** Planning for individual engagements occurs on a continuous, rapid, short cycle basis. These political/diplomatic engagements can be triggered by the Embassy in moving the US agenda forward, a Washington request, or by something that happens in the country. Examples of routine political/diplomatic engagements to advance the agenda along a line of effort: the Ambassador will meet with the President to bring up “these three issues;” the DCM will have a lunch for women political leaders to discuss “these issues and send these

messages;” the USAID Director will meet with the Chief Justice to discuss “these issues” in moving forward with a justice sector reform program. Examples of Washington driven engagements: Washington sends a demarche to ask the country to support a particular position in an international forum. Examples of those driven by the country: a president or prime minister is deposed by a military or civilian take over; the country’s leader removes the Chief Justice in a non-constitutional way: the country takes a position against a US position on a critical issue in an international forum; etc.

Usually the senior officer responsible for the particular engagement will pull a small group of key people, often from across the Country Team, together to plan for the engagement or engagements. If the plan is in response to a major action by the host government the senior officer is likely to be the Ambassador or DCM and the resulting plan might include multiple engagements: the Ambassador will meet with the President; the Public Affairs Officer will draft an OP-ED for the Ambassador to run in the paper; the USAID/Director will meet with democracy or rule of law promoting local civil-society groups concerned about the government’s actions; the Defense Attaché or MilGroup Commander will meet with the host country military leaders; etc. Each of these engagements also require plans – i.e. talking points will be drawn up, participants in the meeting will be identified, etc.

This type of (“tactical level”) planning goes on constantly, occurs rapidly on short notice, and is short cycle. However, it is always done with a view to protecting US interests in the country and furthering US foreign policy objectives.

While I have focused on the Embassy/Country Team as an example, the same type of process is carried on at the Washington level in engaging with the international community on either a world or regional basis.