

War on Peace: The End of Diplomacy and the Decline of American Influence

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Reviewed by Amna Ejaz Rafi*

Ronan Farrow is a journalist, lawyer and an activist. He is the winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service. His writings primarily cover issues related to foreign policy and human rights. Ronan has served as a foreign policy advisor under President Barack Obama's government. He has also been a United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) spokesperson for eight years and contributed to the cause of women and children. Ronan's book titled: *"War on Peace The End of Diplomacy and the Decline of American Influence"* offers an insight into the US role in world politics. The author seems to be convinced that the US foreign policy over the years is more militarily driven and the role of diplomats in policy formulation has been considerably marginalized.

The book begins with highlighting the importance of diplomacy in inter-state relations. It refers to the US diplomatic efforts after the First World War in forging closer ties with the UK. The Washington Naval Conference on Disarmament (CD) and the Pact of Paris were efforts to diplomatically engage the international audience (p. 32). The years, 1940 to 1945 witnessed reform in the US State Department. The Foreign Service was restructured and modernized, new offices were created in other countries. These

*Amna Ejaz Rafi is Assistant Research Officer at Islamabad Policy Research Institute, Islamabad.

diplomatic endeavors, other than serving the US national interest, also had a profound impact on the international political order. The US-UK alliance, creation of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (negotiated between the US, Canada, Western Europe, Australia and Japan) were the new global trends. The era also saw the divergence of interest between the US and the former Soviet Union in quest of international supremacy. The Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan and the formation of NATO were aimed at countering the Soviet influence. The “architects” behind these political overtures were officials from the Foreign Service, often referred to as “Wise Men” (prominent ones namely George Kennan, Charles Bohlen and Under Secretary Robert Lovett). The author opines that these diplomatic efforts did lead to new alliance structures, however, simultaneously; it also prompted conflict that, in fact, was the beginning of the Cold War politics (pp.33, 34). The Cold War represented an ideological divide between the Capitalist and a Communist bloc, this divide was orchestrated by the two major global players with an aim to downplay each other. The success of America made the country the lone Super Power; it was a win of capitalism. The argument that the diplomats were the force behind the success of the US global win cannot be denied altogether. But the fact of the matter is that diplomacy cannot function without the support of military muscle, thus, there has to be a balance between the two. Diplomacy has to be on the forefront, supported/backed by the military.

Seeing the US recent involvement in military theatres world over, there appears to be a lack of diplomacy, and the policy reflects a military posture. In Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia and Afghanistan, the US has employed coercive approach to deal with extremist/disgruntled elements. The author is of the view that the US troops deployment in these wars are reflective of a military mindset; “in Yemen and Somalia, field commanders were given

authority to launch raids without White House approval. In Afghanistan also, the Secretary of Defence, General James Mattis had the authority to set troop levels” (p. 181). The author also refers to the presence of serving/retired military officials in the National Security Council, and their influence in the foreign policy making. The author has pointed towards the sale of weaponry to other countries, with no or little say of State Department. The author has cited the example of sale of F-15 fighters to Qatar, the deal was signed between the Secretary of Defence General James Mattis and the Qatar Defence Minister. Another example is the US arms deal worth US \$ 100 billion with Saudi Arabia, despite the Arab country’s abysmal human rights record (p. 182). In view of the author, such deals may serve the US in short term, but in the long run they could be detrimental to peace. The author also appears critical of the US Syria policy. As mentioned in the book: “the CIA covertly armed and trained the loose coalition of so called moderate rebels in the Free Syrian Army (FSA). The Pentagon set up and began arming a coalition called the Syrian Democratic Forces, dominated by the Kurdish YPG (Yekineyen Parastina Gel or People’s Protection Units)” – p. 184. Another important aspect highlighted in the book is the US policy of “low footprint intervention”, and employing of foreign militaries to intervene in other countries. The former US President Obama while addressing the cadets at the US Military Academy in New York stated: “Why send American sons and daughters to do work that Yemenis or Pakistanis could be paid to do for us?” The drone attacks were also part of this legacy (p. 187).

The author sees the US diplomacy towards Iran and North Korea yet another failure. The provocative statements to downplay the North Korea has heightened the security threat, “they will be met with fire, fury and frankly power the likes of which this world has never seen before” (p. 304). The author sees the China’s

growing role in global affairs as a diplomatic success. As per the figure, China has committed approximately US \$ 10 billion annually on “external propaganda” programs. In comparison, the US State Department spends US \$ 666 million on public diplomacy (p.312). China’s participation in regional/international organizations as well as interaction with other foreign players is economically driven. China is the second-largest funder of United Nations peacekeeping missions. In Afghanistan, China has not employed a coercive muscle, rather it’s position is to negotiate a settlement politically with all the stakeholders, and economically empower the war-torn country. These diplomatic moves accompanied by soft power approaches have considerably enhanced Beijing’s image among the regional players. In sharp contrast, the US has abandoned the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement, which has cut the economic arm of the ‘US rebalance strategy’, launched during Obama administration to forge closer ties with regional states. The vacuum left would be filled by the regional power, China. Another move, which could harm the US interests in Afghanistan/Central Asia is the cutting of assistance to Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan (p.313). This will gradually fade away the US’s influence in adjacent areas to Afghanistan, and Russia. Meanwhile, China’s belt and road initiative passes through the region, and opens up prospects of inter-regional connectivity. This will not only provide Beijing with alternate trade routes but in the long-run will enhance her regional role.