

Negotiating Our Economic Future: Trade, Technology, and Diplomacy, by Geoffrey Allen Pigman, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020, 224 pp., \$118.35 (Hardcover), ISBN 9780228004219

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Scholarship that assumes diplomacy has moved beyond a dominant focus on bilateral and multilateral diplomatic relations between national governments is no longer rare. Embracing terms such as polylateral and network diplomacy, scholars and many practitioners now direct their attention to the sub-state diplomacy of polities within states and to global firms and civil society organizations as diplomatic actors. Thick globalism, transformational technologies, and blurred boundaries between traditional categories – foreign and domestic, governance and civil society – are changing the nature and processes of diplomacy. Geoffrey Pigman brings a deep understanding of these changes to his assessment of how diplomacy is shaping, and being shaped by, emergent trends in trade and the global economy. His book is a welcome addition to a literature that tends to emphasize diplomacy's changes in the context of geopolitics, armed conflict, and “wicked” problems (climate change, pandemics, migration, cyber threats).

Pigman ranges easily, and with clarity for non-economists, across a spectrum of trends and issues. He explores how technological forces in the last half century have transformed trade and capitalism, bringing benefits and human flourishing as well as great inequality and wrenching disruptions. On the up side, advances in communication and transportation have created larger more efficient markets for producers and abundant e-commerce choices for consumers. On the down side, we see anti-globalization populism, ultranationalist sentiments, resurgent protectionism, xenophobic opposition to migration, and technologies with hidden costs for good things that seem to be free. Big data, global value chains, digital connectivity, increased mobility, robots, artificial intelligence, internet surveillance, and data harvesting are

just some indicators of fundamental changes in global economics and trade. How technology, trade, and diplomatic actors intersect is key to understanding institutions and practices.

Representation and communication have been core elements of diplomacy since the beginning of human interaction across borders, a widely accepted premise in diplomacy studies that Pigman endorses. What has changed, he and others argue, are the kinds and relative power of diplomatic actors and the technologies, forms, and speed of communication in diplomatic processes. Diplomacy has become enduringly multi-level. An expanding number of states, sub-national governments, multilateral institutions, global firms, and civil society organizations now engage in diplomacy in an array of complex issues of mutual concern. Most of today's diplomacy is "inherently 'public.'" Digital tools and social media are changing diplomatic practices. A pioneer in the research that led to this now standard repertoire in diplomacy's transformation, he persuasively explains these changes, noting they will continue and that their implications have yet to be reckoned with effectively.

Trade, like diplomacy, is also one of the oldest human practices. Because it crosses borders, trade requires diplomacy. Technologies have shaped trade throughout history. Today, powerful new technologies are changing not only what counts as trade, they are remaking the global economy and capitalism. No longer just the transfer of goods and services, trade now includes capital, labor, data, information, and knowledge. It has become more important in overall economic activity, making it the focus of increased diplomatic practice in a mosaic of global, regional, and bilateral trade institutions and agreements. For Pigman, critical actors in trade diplomacy are the global firms that now participate with governments, multilateral institutions, and civil society organizations as diplomatic actors. Size matters in determining which firms. Apple, Facebook, Google /Alphabet, Amazon, J.P. Morgan Chase, Alibaba, and other large firms that operate across borders are diplomacy actors, he contends, because their relationships with governments resemble diplomacy more than the lobbying relationships of smaller, domestic firms seeking to influence national governments. Large firms maintain a diplomatic presence in national capitals and megacities. They engage in diplomatic negotiations. And because so much more diplomacy is public, they pay attention to understanding audiences, digital tools, press relations, and social media strategies.

Pigman's analysis casts a needed spotlight on how technology, the global economy, trade, and diplomacy are connected and how they are changing. It also raises questions insufficiently addressed in his book and the diplomacy studies literature more broadly. What is the boundary between diplomacy and other forms of cross-border relationships? Which firms and civil society organizations are autonomous diplomacy actors? Corporations, foundations, universities, media organizations, religions, political activists, humanitarians, and other civil society actors participate in regional and global networks that embrace almost every domain of human activity. Clearly, much of this activity is not diplomacy. Corporations exist primarily to earn profits and satisfy shareholders. Universities are committed to teaching and learning. Media organizations gather and report news. Transnational activists pursue a multitude of goals ranging from the benevolent to the malevolent. These actors are accountable primarily to their members, shareholders, funding sources, and other stakeholders.

Most serve private interests rather than political governance and public interests. Although they communicate, negotiate, engage in “diplomacy-like” practices, and occasionally partner with governments, these activities are insufficient to qualify them as diplomatic actors.

An approach to this issue could begin with recognition that diplomacy actors communicate on behalf of the *public* interests of the groups (states, cities, public international organizations) they represent, rather than *private* interests and sectors within government entities. Today, civil society organizations engage in many public services and regulatory activities beyond the reach of governments. For example, they provide global health services, a degree of internet regulation, sustainability standards, codes of corporate conduct, product certification, and other rules regulating negative externalities of economic activity. Research on what qualifies firms and civil society organizations as autonomous actors in political governance and polyilateral diplomacy is a fruitful area for further inquiry prompted by Pigman’s excellent analysis.

Those who close the door to an autonomous role for civil society actors in diplomacy draw the line too narrowly. Those who make expansive claims that any civil society actor or firm with large size and global reach is a diplomatic actor draw the line too broadly. Greater attention to boundaries, concepts, and practices in the gray area between these extremes is an inviting challenge for diplomacy scholars and practitioners.

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