# Arts of Power: Review of Statecraft and Diplomacy

## Introduction

First published in 1997 and reprinted for the fifth time in 2005, Arts of Power: Statecraft and Diplomacy (hereafter simply Arts of Power) was written by Chas. W. Freeman. Having served a long and illustrious career in the US Foreign Service, Freeman wrote Arts of Power to provide “a handy means of revisiting the fundamental principles of the arts of power”. At just 159 pages, Arts of Power is, if nothing else, a remarkable effort of concision, considering the complexity of its subject matter. While aspects of Freeman’s work, such as its realist perspective, may limit its scope; and while certain sections may be lacking in concrete advice, Arts of Power provides a much needed, sound overview of the diplomatic craft, and its place in statecraft generally. In conjunction with other reviews, some of Freeman’s other work, and other relevant literature, this review seeks to critically analyse Arts of Power in terms of its stated aims.

## Overview of text

The introduction of Arts of Power defines statecraft as “the strategy of power”, and it breaks the concept up into the three arms through which that power is exercised. They are the military, intelligence services, and the diplomatic service. Through these three forces, the state can gain information, covertly or otherwise, and use that information to exercise power. Freeman defines power as “the capacity to direct the decisions and actions of others”. Although Freeman’s focus is necessarily on the tools employed by the diplomatic services, in the first section entitled “The Power of the State”, he also considers how war and espionage can be used to direct decisions and actions. What is notable about this first section is that Freeman attempts to touch on a number of different means through which states can leverage power. While “Cultural Influence” and “The Use of Economic Measures” are both clearly within a diplomat’s purview, the inclusion of sections on intelligence and the non-violent and violent applications of the military indicate a broad understanding on Freeman’s part of the variety of tools at a state’s disposal. This first section serves to provide an overview of statecraft; a big picture view that allows the reader to see the diplomat’s role in context.

Having provided said overview, Freeman then narrows his focus down to the role of diplomacy in statecraft. He begins this approach by describing strategy at the state level. He defines grand strategy as the integration of “all elements of national power in policies calculated to advance or defend national interests and concerns in light of anticipated trends and events.” This echoes the previous section by showing diplomacy as part of a broader picture incorporating both espionage and warfare. Freeman goes on to outline how diplomatic strategy specifically can feed into an overarching grand strategy. Here Freeman shows the first indication of a preference for numbered lists. In his list of 13 diplomatic manoeuvres, Freeman outlines the ways that states may reposition themselves against other states to gain advantage. This is the first of several lists that Freeman uses to present what he considers to be the essential skills in a given facet of diplomacy.

In the final section entitled “The Tools of the Diplomat”, Freeman narrows his focus again to the

skills and qualities needed in individual diplomats. This gradual narrowing in focus lends a flow to what may otherwise have been an arbitrarily designed list of maxims and prescriptions. Again, he presents the reader with a list of ten core functions of the diplomat that tie in to their roles as agents, advocates, informants and counsellors. After briefly expanding on these ten functions (which I will not reproduce here for the sake of brevity), Freeman details each of the four main roles of the diplomat, finding within them a total of 27 core functions. The preponderance of lists may by this point seem overwhelming to the casual reader; Freeman's use of formatting doesn't present these traits in easy to read tables or graphics, but rather leaves the reader to wade through prose littered with scattered numerals. Despite this, even a reader not well acquainted with the halls of power can see how central these tasks are to the conduct of diplomacy. In lieu of a conclusion, Freeman closes with a reflection on the need for a state to pursue its safety, tranquillity and other interests "in the most efficacious manner it can", defining this need as "reasons of state". He acknowledges the possibility of conflict between the individual diplomat's conscience and the actions that the state can demand from it, poignantly admitting that sometimes the demands of the state "dictate silence where the heart argues for public protest".

## Analysis

In analysing Arts of Power, it is necessary to examine its standing in the broader oeuvre. Freeman's work fills a particular niche of approachable diplomatic treatises that has as yet gone unfilled. In his preface, Freeman points to the shortage of works focussing on diplomatic principles as a motivating factor for writing Arts of Power. Having noted works such as The Art of War by Sun Tzu, which famously focusses on the core principles of warfighting, Freeman looked for an equivalent in the field of statecraft and diplomacy but reports "I did not find it". The surfeit of works professing to have distilled the essence of war, as well as the dearth of works doing the same for diplomacy, is echoed by Burns in his 1998 review of Arts of Power. Burns also notes that (in the United States, at least) military officers enjoy "an extensive, graduated, and practical educational system" that focuses on practical skills to enhance their effectiveness; US Foreign Service officers have no such system at their disposal. This further reinforces the importance of a guidebook in the style that Freeman is aiming to produce in Arts of Power. It is interesting to note that the reasons for this absence may be found in Freeman's other writings. Writing for the Hague Journal of Diplomacy, Freeman (2011) describes the evolution of the military-industrial complex out of the paranoia of the Cold War. The "many decades of focus on the military preparedness and armament effort that were necessary to preclude a Soviet use of force against the United States" have created a state geared towards protecting its sovereignty and its interests through military force. Freeman goes on to credit the longevity of the "containment" grand strategy, in which the USSR was left to collapse under its own internal faults, with the atrophy of the US' diplomatic faculties. Arts of Power, then, comes in against a backdrop of overemphasis on military might and scholarship and an underappreciation of the diplomatic arts. Whether it achieves its aim of being a concise, practical guide to diplomacy must be assessed.

Freeman's realist interpretation of the state and its role gives his advice longevity, but fails to consider a trend towards multilateral behaviour. The realist underpinnings of Arts of Power are immediately apparent to a reader with some experience of international relations theory. Exemplified by the works of Kenneth Waltz, realism describes a number of core assumptions; namely that the state is the primary international actor; that states are primarily concerned with

their own survival; and that the international system is characterised by anarchy, to name a few central tenets (Waltz, 2000). In Arts of Power, these ideas are manifested throughout the book, though particularly in the first section, The Power of the State. An early quote reads “the survival of the state and the polity that gave birth to it are by definition a matter of overriding concern to it”. This, clearly, is a realist vision of the state. Realism’s staying power as a theory suggests that its assumptions are at least partially true, some of the time. If Freeman’s vision is to produce a text on diplomacy and statecraft that will be as enduring as Sun Tzu’s Art of War, then building his advice around realist doctrine is a sensible move. In focussing on how diplomacy can serve the interests that states have had for centuries, Freeman lends a timelessness to the advice within.

Despite that, the focus on the ins and outs of bilateral relationships does ignore an increasing trend towards multilateral agreements. While the United Nations and other symbols of liberal institutionalism are absent from Arts of Power, many contend that the proliferation of “Group of X” groups such as the G20 show a new trend towards informal governance (Cho and Kelly, 2012). Freeman acknowledges the failures in policy and representation that have plagued bodies like the International Monetary Fund since the end of the 20th century in other published work (Freeman, 2011); his concerns are echoed elsewhere in the literature (Woods, 2008). Omitting both the institutions that dominated international relations in the 20th century and the informal arrangements that have begun to supplant them seems a curious oversight. The clear counterargument is that these considerations are beyond the scope of what Freeman is trying to achieve. Influential though the UN may be, it has existed for less than a century; the principles that the author is trying to capture are eternal.

The heavy realist overtones in the first section lessen somewhat as Freeman shifts into a more strictly pedagogical mode. That isn’t to say that realism just disappears from Freeman’s thinking; the section on Diplomatic Negotiation is a fine example of how realism still informs his work. Freeman defines diplomatic negotiation to be obtaining “the acquiescence of another state… in adjustments in relations that advance national interests”. It is plain to see that Freeman’s state-centric, cutthroat view of the international system pervades the book. But as he begins to move from general descriptions of state power into more specific entreaties on how to leverage power using diplomatic means, international relations theory loses its potency as a device for analysing his work.

As described above, Freeman leans increasingly on numbered lists in these sections to encapsulate the points he considers to be important. Paradoxically, he is on both his strongest and weakest ground here. The latter two sections focussing on diplomacy and the skills it requires play more obviously into Freeman’s personal expertise, rather than relating easily to scholarly theory. This is significant as Freeman’s professional experience is essentially the authority upon which the entire book stands. Arts of Power is an empiricist’s nightmare; it offers no clear evidence for the claims it makes other than to refer back to Freeman’s long career. The reader, being made acquainted with Freeman’s admitted impressive career summary in the foreword by Richard H. Sullivan, is more likely to take on faith those aspects of Arts of Power that specifically relate to diplomacy. However, the practicality so praised in other reviews flickers a little at points in the final section.

Burns (1998) practically gushes when he praises the “practicality and conciseness [that] shine forth” in Arts of Power. Scheuler (1993) points to the usefulness of the text to “military officers thrust for the first time into an assignment requiring diplomatic skill”. However, this pragmatism

is little in evidence where Freeman lists the qualities of a diplomat; phrases such as “diplomats must embody acuity of observation and accuracy of memory... and facility as tersely vivid but scrupulously accurate writers” are lovely examples of evocative prose, but are somewhat lacking in grounded advice. These qualities may well be admirable, but they are admirable in any number of fields, and Freeman isn’t terribly illuminating in suggesting just how these traits may be cultivated. The concision that the author has so carefully nurtured here leaves some confusion as to how to enact his advice.

## Conclusion

Arts of Power provides a compelling, lucid overview of statecraft, diplomacy and the role of the diplomat. It is testament to its accessibility and wide appeal that the book has been reviewed by military officers, set on academic reading lists, and yet is still applicable to practitioners of statecraft. Realism underpins both the book, and one suspects, Freeman’s worldview. While this appears to limit the scope of the work, it undeniably assists it in its goal of universality. While Freeman stumbles in places to give clear advice, Arts of Power still manages to provide clearly distilled principles in a field sorely understocked with practical literature.

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