

SvD

Ambassador for countries that don't exist

By Jenny Nordberg, 21 Sept 2009

“I couldn't speak one word of Arabic and I had never been to Iraq. But I was sent to negotiate laws that would govern the country.”

Carne Ross was the British governments most prominent Iraq Expert. He had been schooled for the UN in New York, and he did his best. It was perfectly normal to both discuss and take decisions on the matters of others, Ross soon learned. 80% of the matters that were on the table were about non-state actors who often missed a government and recognized borders. Mostly the matters could even be negotiated by professional diplomats, representing almost all the corners of the world, but the places the diplomats were making decisions about, rarely got the chance to be heard.

A couple of years later Ross left his job, when he understood that even the British government lied about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. He walked out on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London as a free man, with a small idea about what he wanted to do with the rest of his life.

He called up an old contact in Kosovo, which at this time did not formally exist and did not have permission to have its own ministry of foreign affairs. In it's drive towards independence would they possibly be interested in someone who knew how the diplomatic game worked? This was how Ross in 2005 got his first client and became the world's first freelance diplomat.

Now he takes advantage of all his knowledge of bureaucracy to evade it, and he is not ashamed to call up old colleagues and the opposition [his client faces] and demand of them more than their countries official position. “Diplomacy is unnecessarily mystified. It is about communicating,” he says. But often diplomats talk a delicate language of oracles with one another. At the moment Ross for example represents an eastern European country that is trying to become a member of the EU. The country has its own diplomats that are very good. But when Ross speaks with EU representative they tell him other things – and more things – than they tell his client directly.

Ross diplomatic services are not welcome to those who are engaged in war or terrorizes their own people. The clients that can pay get a bill, but those who are poor hardly pay at all.

He also represents Western Sahara, that is trying to become independent, and a row of small island states who wonder why nobody listens to them in the climate negotiations, even though they are about to sink before all the other states. He is also talking with South Sudan; a poor space full of weapons, where much can happen in the future.

That Carne has so much to do in his small office in the East Village explains some of what is wrong with international diplomacy. It is also not difficult to imagine how much more can be done a little faster, here and at the real meetings on First Avenue.

Manhattan is swarming with irresponsible tailor-made suits postulating to be professionally stationed international conflict solvers. It is good to know that they have been infiltrated by someone who walks like a diplomat and looks like a diplomat, but who does not talk like a diplomat at all.