

## 'The Darroch affair'

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## 'The Darroch affair': assemblage lines, components, and transformations

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### Introduction

“British engineering at its best. It almost looks like a real human” (Champion 2016). This caption of a photograph of the UK’s ‘man in Washington’, Sir Kim Darroch, presenting his ambassadorial credentials to President Barack Obama in January 2016 was typical of many on twitter. The photo shows a startled Darroch, arms held stiffly by his sides, next to a beaming Obama, radiating positivity. The UK’s *Times* newspaper commented how “[Darroch] stood before the Oval Office desk as awkward as a recruit facing a drill sergeant on the parade ground and unsure whether to salute” (Pavia 2016). Similar remarks on Darroch’s appearance spread on social media. In doing so, all acknowledged implicitly that bodies absorb and reflect choreographies of geopolitical power: in this case, the affective charge of the President receiving a new Ambassador into the Washington diplomatic corps. And while rebuked for his wooden presence, Darroch’s arrival in the US capital would in fact have explosive consequences for bilateral diplomacies.

I argue here that bodies are as much part of events as representational practices and performances. Embodied geopolitics have of course been central to ‘big picture’ diplomacy: well-known examples include John F. Kennedy’s and Ronald Reagan’s speeches made at Berlin’s Brandenburg Gate, and Colin Powell’s United Nations Security Council presentation in New York on Iraq’s supposed Weapons of Mass Destruction programme (Hodges 2011). Extensive work in feminist geopolitics examines embodiment and the formation of the ‘social body’ (Poovey 1995), the state’s imprinting on bodies (Enloe 1989; Dowler and Sharp 2001), and how governments intervene directly in the bodily states of individuals (Mountz *et al.* 2013). Geopolitical worlds are thus always in the making through a “continuous [bodily] enactment of relations that produce...[geopolitical] actions” (Muller 2015, 410).

Arguably scholarship informed by assemblage thinking – a corpus of critical thought derived from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987; see also interpretation of this work from DeLanda 2006 and Protevi 2009) – compliments this feminist geopolitical focus by providing a means to explore how bodies as components intersect with objects and material-affective forces (though see Kinkaid 2020). Certainly “assemblage geographies” (Kinkaid 2019, 555) is a growing field of inquiry, depicting the human body as both distributed across assemblages and constituted from them (Dittmer 2014). From this vantage, the human body comprises innumerable assemblage components, each with their own spiralling trajectories buffeted and recomposed by events.

DeLanda (2006) characterises assemblages as constellations of forces and objects that exceed the sum of their parts and are always open to exterior relations. As Dittmer (2014,

393) notes, these relations are conditioned by latent assemblage capacities, pointing to the significance of interior components in producing external attraction (eg. personal dispositions explaining why individuals gravitate toward for example sporting, musical or political groups). I build on this work here by elaborating arguments around intra- ('within') and interassemblage ('between') lines of flight. Given "Assemblages are complexes of lines" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 505), their role is crucial though understudied in assemblage geographies. Lines define trajectories of desire that simultaneously demarcate and imbricate the virtual and actual, the human with the posthuman, and interior components with exterior relations (inside-outside). Lines therefore give rise to assemblage properties, capacities and tendencies, yet we lack empirical consideration of how this arises.

As most studies focus on practices of assembling, here I consider how lines effect disassembling and recomposition. I do so by examining the ways lines build affective charge around components that code the assemblages of which they are part. This is not to privilege some components over others, since codings of 'centrality' continually change given assemblages are always becoming. Rather it is to shed light on how the linear trajectories of components coded this way can affect couplings with other assemblages, with consequences for how "milieux" (worlds) cohere in places at particular times (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 346). So just as there are assemblage geographies, there are also mutable geographies of assembling, with the (dis-)assembling role of specific components changing with the ceaseless flow of events.

Codings "consolidate and rigidify the identity of the assemblage" (DeLanda 2006, 19) through the density and complexity of assemblage lines. In diplomacy, I argue one such

coding is the role of the Ambassador, which orders numerous intrassemblage ('within') and interassemblage ('between') lines to give identity and coherence to diplomatic milieux by valorising meanings, understandings, and material-expressive relations. Here I examine the Ambassador as a nexus of assemblage lines enmeshed in the ongoing struggle to recode the transatlantic diplomatic assemblage (TADA) by UK-US governments, sceptical of its consensual *modus operandi*, and openly questioning the global rules-based order. I contend this struggle has opened a massive material-affective rift between the TADA's constituent governing and bureaucratic assemblages, exemplified by UK-US government reaction to confidential diplomatic material leaked from the British Embassy in Washington DC in July 2019. Focusing on UK assemblages of the TADA and using multi-method qualitative approaches, I show how these variable tendencies to the leaks' material agency arose from jarring linear entanglements causing dissonance between successive UK governments and its civil service, so disrupting the everyday repetitions of the TADA. Moreover, the potent material-affective charge of these leaks attracted other assemblages of people-objects-things, including lobbyists and online media, into engagement with the TADA, to create new diplomatic publics (Sharp 2020).

I show how this twofold impact has caused folding of the TADA as 'within' and 'between' components variously de- and recompose. Key to these recompositions – and indicative of how lines condition components in assemblage transformations – was Sir Kim Darroch, who as British Ambassador to the US (2016-2019) was at front and centre of the leaks imbroglio. The article conceptualises Darroch as a distributed component of the TADA with high structural complexity via vertical and transversal lines of assembling, whose historical trajectories accelerated assemblage de- and recompositions as his body came to occupy

more and more possibility spaces across the TADA. The article considers how this structural complexity of Darroch arose and played out, and its consequences for the TADA's nested diplomatic worlds.

In the following sections, I consider the role of the line in diplomatic assemblages. Building on existing work in assemblage geographies on the distributed human body and more-than-representational and materialist thinking by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), I sketch out how assemblage lines contribute to realising diplomatic milieu; their interrelation with coding via diplomatic regimes; and their importance in triggering transformative events that can dissolve and recompose assemblages. Discussion of the methods I used to trace lines of assembling of diplomatic bodies follows. I then examine the empirical case of Sir Kim Darroch's resignation following the 2019 e-letters leak, to explore how different assemblage lines – some striating space as diplomatic sites in Washington and London, others channelling affective forces via myriad transversal links to build new diplomatic publics – conditioned the Ambassador's distributed body to accelerate, rather than prevent, recomposition of the TADA.

### Components, lines, and the diplomatic regime

Assemblage thinking depicts the human body comprised from and distributed across innumerable assemblages. Human capacities – the ability to do things – derives from the objects with which our bodies are in assembly, although as Dittmer (2014, 389) notes bodies differ from “(most) non-human components in that they exercise intentionality and reflexivity, and this is crucial to any analysis. However it would be a mistake to see this as a fundamental difference, as this would disavow the embodied materiality of humanity that

links us to the rest of the world". The body is thus a constellation of assemblages conditioned by events which mould (but do not determine) bodily capacities in the present, while informing potentials for what is to come. This provides a foundation for exploring bodies as assemblage components in 'big picture' diplomatic events – notably, how their lines of assembling influences the realisation of transformative events by/through them, which I examine here.

Assemblage components are coded differently in relation to specific events – ie. they may or may not act to stabilise or rigidify assemblages. Nonetheless, over time some components will intercept material-affective flows of events more often than others by being at the intersection of more lines of assembling, and so will play a greater role in conferring on assemblages (in) coherence and (in)stability. This lends these components greater significance in changing assemblage capacities. To examine this aspect, we need to consider briefly the specific role of these intra- ('within') and inter- ('between') assemblage lines. I argue both are instrumental in the becoming of assemblages, but they serve quite different purposes.

For Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 312), intraassemblage lines determine assemblage properties by connecting components to confer stability and wholeness. These lines striate space to create difference. In turn, this bestows a sense of the 'inside' against which exterior relations are contrasted, a quality generated through repetitions of one sort or another. Deleuze and Guattari for example describe how a bird asserts its identity by singing a sequence of notes as a repeated linear "refrain" to stabilise interior spaces (for example, a feeding range, or a nesting territory) against the unknown outside.

By contrast, interassemblage lines are transversal and exterior, connecting assemblages attracted by the mutually enhanced capacities that alignment brings to each. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) exemplify this relation with reference to a wasp and an orchid: the wasp benefits by feeding on the orchid's nectar, while its feeding action pollinates the orchid. Interassemblage lines bring wasp and orchid assemblages together through a shared desire for new capacities, yielding change and complexity. These 'between' lines increase connectivities to multiply the spatial or temporal extent or dimension of assemblages ('becoming'), characterised by Deleuze and Guattari's image of the spreading rhizome.

Clearly then there are tensions between intraassemblage lines connecting components up as ordered striated spaces, and the irregular exploratory transversal flows generative of interassemblage associations (DeLanda 2006). Diplomatic assemblages for example are realised by lines connecting numerous distributed components to delineate materialities such as Ministries of Foreign Affairs, embassy tweets and business visas, as well as licit (preferred) behaviours. Thus the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961) codes internationally recognised diplomatic privileges (eg. the right to travel without let or hindrance, the inviolability of the 'diplomatic bag'), immunities (eg. exemption from law suits or from prosecution), and behavioural or performative expectations (Jones and Clark 2015; McConnell 2018). Yet diplomacy relies on these striated spaces of the diplomatic regime being drawn into attraction with the incessant transversal flow of events – and even barely perceptible happenings can have unforeseen consequences for its everyday operation.



Crucial then is to understand *how* these lines of assembling inform specific components in particular places at particular times to inform events. Examining the ways lines connect the historical trajectories of components to the present can I suggest cast light on how “any assemblage is vulnerable to incursions from both its internal components and its environmental relations” (Harman 2015, 120), and the means by which “the [material and relational] multiplicity of assemblages ensures the constant possibility of subversion from above or below” (Harman 2015, 121). Further, by their animating the distributed components of the human body, assemblage lines can show “...how people and things remain (or are made to remain) relatively durable and stable across events, while also remaining (potentially) open to transformation... . Lines carry affects and materialities from the past as they project, uncertainly, into the future” (Dilkes Frayne and Duff 2017, 956, 959).

I argue the Ambassador coding is well suited for such analysis, as it acts as nexus for vertical (intra- or ‘within’) and transversal (inter- or ‘between’) lines to valorise the material-expressive components of diplomatic assemblages. This coding thus stabilises (and is stabilised by) intraassemblage lines connecting objects such as emails, Treaties, and the materialities of Embassy compounds as ‘Ambassadorial’. However, important though these non-human objects are to building Ambassadorial properties, as Dittmer (2014) notes the Ambassador’s body exercises greater capacity over external assemblages by its exercising intentionality: the capacity to purposefully bring exterior transversal flows into alignment with properties, capacities and tendencies defined by intraassemblage lines. The ‘Ambassador’ thus emerges as a coding working within and between diplomatic assemblages. Like graphite rods in a nuclear reactor, the lines radiating from the

Ambassador not only delineate and make coherent socio-materialities of the diplomatic assemblage, but also tame the constant churn of materials-objects-forces by relating these to wider diplomatic milieux. Ambassadorial coding thus tethers prevailing frames of diplomatic reference, while boosting possibilities for “reassembling as the ground shifts” (Li 2007, 268) in the wake of transformational events.

Conversely where these lines will not converge, or for some reason cannot be coded, I argue the nexus position of Ambassador can channel energetic flows through diplomatic assemblages in other, potentially destructive ways. This ‘affective lensing’ is amped up by the striated distributive capacities of diplomatic space just described. Historical encounters of the human body can play a significant role here, as Jones and Clark (2018, 43) observe: “Diplomatic assemblages are also the product of historical processes; mixtures of material and expressive components that exercise capacities at different historical moments. The diplomatic assemblage therefore has a past that affects its composition, emergence and interactions in the present”. I argue that where forceful events resonate with the historical trajectories of bodily components, they can accelerate transversal flows to ramp up their affective power. In this case, components (including those of the distributed human body) stretch and fold, as the torque applied by lines turns them into surfaces of tension. Numerous possibility spaces of decomposition may then open up to transform, rather than stabilise, ‘larger’ diplomatic assemblages.

Coding plays a key part in defining these destructive events. Events become transformational when their material-affective flows are coded similarly across multiple assemblages. As discussed, important here is how diplomacy as a distinctive “regime”

(Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 83) is rendered by intrassemblage lines as sites (eg. Embassies), objects (e-letters), doings and sayings (the need for impartiality and objectivity), and, crucially, accepted/licit behaviours (codes of trust, confidentiality). Behaviours that flout these codings include those “deemed unfitting to particular setting[s] and audience[s]” (McConnell 2018, 376). From this perspective, ‘leaking’ of diplomatic material is clearly transgressive. By breaching confidentiality codings of the diplomatic regime, leaks can ‘short out’ material-affective circulations in assemblages. Crucial to buffering this effect is balance between the depth and breadth of intra- and interassemblage lines. The affective force of a diplomatic leak is proportionate to the imbalance in these linear affinities, culminating in energies overwhelming assemblage structure and coherence to cause outages of diplomatic apparatus. One can think here of the 2010 ‘Cablegate’ dump of confidential correspondence, bringing a trove of classified information into the public domain resulting in ‘shorting’ of diplomatic circulations as excessive energies flowed through and overwhelmed assemblages. Crucially, the overflow created tendencies around the disclosures that multiplied affective potentials to create transversal lines of assembling – “axes of escape” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 173) – yielding novel diplomatic publics of people-object-things. Thus ‘leaks’ can exercise material agency to tangle, stretch and twist the diplomatic regime.

Assemblage lines may seem abstract. But as I show here, they have profound geographical expression and meaning: for ‘nexus’ and ‘intersections’ of lines, ‘trajectories’ of components and ‘transversal connections’ fundamentally alter everyday experiences of diplomatic sites, help explain the vagaries of foreign affairs career postings and personal rivalries, and illuminate the playing out of often combustible geopolitical differences over time and space.

The role of the line in building capacities and tendencies is under-researched, and a geographical perspective helps realise these lines as vectors that can fold assemblage components into surfaces of tension. Assemblage thinking shows us how these surfaces are charged by basal flows of affective-material attraction within, across, and beneath the everyday registers of diplomatic life – while, as I show here, geography can bring new understanding of *how* these surfaces are capable of folding, with major consequences for diplomatic milieux.

#### Methods to trace lines assembling the diplomatic body

I used multiple methods to engage in tracing lines of flight of Kim Darroch, and how his distributed body assembled with other people, objects and forces in the tumultuous events that became “the Darroch Affair” (Cavendish 2019). Illuminating these often difficult-to-discern linear trajectories posed significant challenges, not least exploring Darroch’s upbringing, the (dis-)assembling processes of his diplomatic career on three continents, and tracking the distributed-single body entanglements as the political tsunami of the leaks broke across the TADA in July 2019.

To turn these trceries and trackings into substantive empirical materials required me to use a range of qualitative methods. To contextualise Darroch’s career history, I consulted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) website and documentary materials held in the National Archives. I sought this way to follow the material-affective traces of Darroch’s career encounters as interassemblage lines bringing his single and distributed bodies together in events. I then analysed voluminous print and audio media reporting of the 2016 and 2019 Washington leaks. To gain a sense of the non-representational registers of

assembling of the 2019 event, I followed Lapworth's (2019) recommendation to use visual media by watching film and video coverage, including televised press statements given by UK and US politicians, White House, Downing Street and FCO spokespersons. Then to understand how new diplomatic publics were created around the leaks (particularly how interassemblage lines connect physical and digitised spaces of the event), I consulted blog posts and the twitter feeds of leading protagonists in Darroch's resignation. I also watched televised UK Parliamentary Select Committee evidence given by Sir Simon McDonald and other senior FCO staff on Darroch's departure, and examined the UK Parliament's Foreign Affairs Select Committee's written evidence and final report from this enquiry (House of Commons 2019). Transcripts of full debates of the UK Houses of Parliament in response to an urgent Parliamentary question on the "UK Ambassador to USA: Leaked Emails" were also scrutinised (Hansard 2019; House of Lords Hansard 2019). These extensive materials were complimented by four off-the-record interviews used for deep background, each between 30 and 45 minutes duration, held with retired FCO diplomats and with serving staff at a British Embassy.

Together these data allowed examination of how intra- and interassemblage lines build tendencies across the TADA, and the role of diplomatic bodies in their intensification. Empirical materials also enabled me to tease out the role of assemblage lines in triggering assemblage recompositions. Exploration of the historical trajectories of the diplomatic body is thus fraught with challenges, and no single account can hope to trace all actualised trajectories through time and space, much less excavate traces of virtual worlds that can never be fully captured (Stoller 2008).

The article uses these qualitative materials to explore how assemblage components (especially the distributed body of Kim Darroch, and materialities of e-letter leaks across disparate large-small assemblages) were brought together as events unfolding in specific places to generate novel geopolitical effects/affects. Specifically, I examine the ways in which inter- and intraassemblage lines condition components to transform assemblages of which they are part; how, through their lines of (re-)assembling, specific components become surfaces of tension influencing assemblage recompositions; and how these recompositions change relations and actualise to recontour the geopolitically possible, by changing diplomatic milieux.

This mapping of part-whole assemblage interactions around intra- and interassemblage lines is an aspect that, from a diplomatic perspective, researchers have not considered to date. It enables me to respond to Kinkaid's (2020, 467-468) observation of "the need for an accounting of how different bodies inhabit and navigate social systems... . This kind of accounting is largely missing from assemblage geographies". First however I contextualise the TADA, and recent attempts by US and UK governments to overcode its activities.

#### The Transatlantic Diplomatic Assemblage: desire and recoding 2016-2019

Close political ties have underpinned UK-US transatlantic relations for almost a century (Dumbrell 2006). Affective resonances and material transfers of two world wars have realised numerous assemblages of objects-bodies-relations, including diplomacy (Dittmer 2015). Since 1945, 'flat' affective relations between US and UK political leaders and senior diplomats have informed the relative stability of the TADA. Key here has been their close observation of diplomacy's "regime of signs" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987 84) to maintain the

coherence of transatlantic relations. This has persisted even when these relations have ebbed in intensity over the years: the warmth of UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill's homespun intensive 'Special Relationship' with Franklin Roosevelt had its polar opposite in Anthony Eden's dealings with Dwight Eisenhower over the Suez crisis, for example.

However, transformative changes have occurred recently across the TADA, with the diminished geopolitical attraction of Atlanticism under the Obama Presidency noticeable as US foreign policy pivoted to the Pacific Rim. Under the Trump administration, these changes have accelerated with the President wanting to exercise direct control over foreign policy, for example his insistence on dealing personally with leaders in China, Russia and north Korea. Indicative is how diplomatic expertise in the State Department and intelligence agencies – traditional lodestones of US foreign policy – has been disparaged, with the President convinced he can strike a better deal if he works alone.

Concurrently in the UK, two populist Governments have allegedly been "captured by a Trumpian ethos, marked by contempt for international institutions, democratic norms and diplomatic protocol" (*Guardian* 2019), following the country's decision to leave the European Union (EU) in June 2016. For both US and these UK governments, a key aim has been overturning TADA's apparatus and codings of postwar foreign policy based on mutual longterm political-economic advantage. In the UK this has been replaced by an all-consuming desire for a post 'Brexit' UK-US trade deal, even if this has no longterm national economic benefit<sup>1</sup>. Refiguring the 'special relationship' with the US around a future trade

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Government estimate that a deal with the US would be worth at most an increase of 0.16% of GDP over 15 years. Securing a free trade deal with the EU would see UK GDP grow 6.7% less over the same period than it would have done as an EU member state, and 9.3% less with no deal at all (Payne 2020).

relationship of questionable value has challenged British diplomatic codings severely, creating tensions particularly between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the private offices of two successive Prime Ministers, Theresa May and Boris Johnson. These have been ratcheted up by both UK Governments intensifying velocities of attraction with the US and abruptly terminating foreign policy arrangements with Europe – evidenced by encouraging transversal relations unsettling civil service and UK institutions seen as against ‘Brexit’, firing senior Whitehall civil servants, and restructuring Government Departments and Ministries.

This radical shift in governing is also I argue indicative of novel attractors in some of TADA’s constituent assemblages. Here the visceral desire of UK Governments to conclude a post-Brexit trade deal is matched by the Trump White House’s hunger to take advantage of a politically weakened UK<sup>2</sup>. Material-affective tendencies were sweetened in June 2019 by the UK Government offering a State visit for Trump at a cost of over £14 million.

Consequently an ongoing struggle is now under way between governing and bureaucratic assemblages over the TADA’s coding, with US and UK governments sceptical of its consensual *modus operandi* and its support of a global rules-based order. In the UK this has opened a massive affective rift between governing and bureaucratic components of the diplomatic regime, posing a direct challenge to its established operation.

Arguably in the UK an ‘inside-outside’ state is now emerging. The established model of the UK state sees the Whitehall (executive)-Westminster (legislature) assemblage working in

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<sup>2</sup> Though at the G-20 summit in Hamburg (2017), Trump claimed “We [US and UK] have been working on a trade deal which will be a very, very big deal, a very powerful deal, great for both countries, and I think we will have that done very, very quickly” (Reuters 2017).



lockstep – Westminster articulating a coherent political vision that is debated and discussed by the bicameral legislature of the UK Parliament, with Whitehall delivering day-to-day administration of the government’s agreed programme. In this way ‘Whitehall-Westminster’ is a striated state space of hierarchal governing assemblages. Increasingly however, the ‘inside-outside’ arrangement supplants Whitehall with hybrid conservative thinktanks and media assemblages linked to Westminster via flat transversal rather than hierarchal relations, based on opaque circulations of information. Assemblage lines are crucial to this reorientation, whereby Whitehall-Westminster’s striated state spaces and its key codings are undermined “meaning that outside can bend to inside and back again without ever breaking a plane or crossing a boundary” (Ghertner 2017, 740). Thus government and media can plug in and out of the state structure, institutional expertise is an increasingly redundant category, and state accountability is replaced by denial, evasion and contradiction. In these circumstances Ghertner (2017, 743) notes governing “...should be seen less as a stable power-sharing arrangement between state and nonstate actors and more as a figure in which the location of authority is defined by its instability”.

Human-technological agencies have also reconfigured the TADA. After the Cablegate dump of over 250,000 unencrypted items of confidential foreign correspondence, diplomats have been drawn to the material power of alternative messaging and digital communication platforms. As McTague and Rao (2019, 32) comment, “Sensitive information, which might previously have been included on cables, is now being copied and pasted into WhatsApp messages and distributed among small circles of trusted officials; important communications are being shared on private email accounts outside the official systems of surveillance; government-issued laptops are being abandoned for the anonymity of airport

computer stations to communicate with foreign governments in moments of crisis". This has multiplied the TADA's inherent 'leakiness' as digital platforms furnish multiple possibilities for dissemination, some authorised while others evade state control.

In this turbulent geopolitical context Sir Kim Darroch took up the post of British Ambassador to the US in January 2016. Despite his wooden entry into US diplomacy, he rapidly established a sure-footed presence, organizing Embassy functions at which many of the Obama and latterly Trump White House attended. It was in an online forum discussion on 14 May 2016 with David Mortlock, an ex-Obama staffer at the National Security Council, that he was asked about the UK's imminent referendum on membership of the EU: "It's been forty years since the question was last posed to the British people. The EU has changed massively since then. We can't be afraid of asking the people whether they still believe in membership of what the EU has become: that's democracy. I spent five years in Brussels negotiating for the UK. I reckon we got what we needed pretty much every time. So my experience was of Britain winning its arguments and showing leadership [in Europe]" (Sidewire 2016).

A diplomat's task is to chart the multiplicities of assemblages to identify favourable alternatives (Conway 2020), and Darroch's remarks were seen as stifling these for the UK's 'inside-outside' state. Certainly for Brexit supporters his comments made him a potential target, especially after the referendum on UK membership of the EU was carried on 23 June by a 52:48 majority to leave. Just days after winning the Presidential election in November, President Elect Trump invited Nigel Farage (ex-leader of the UK Independence Party, UKIP) and other Brexiters to New York, having admired Farage's involvement in this referendum.

Trump tweeted afterwards that Farage would “make a great [British] Ambassador [to the US]” (Trump 2016a), indicative of nascent affective-material intensities building between the President’s ‘America First’ project and the hardline Brexit strategy Farage instigated and the UK Government had embarked on.

These remarks were cemented by a bizarre picture posted on Farage’s twitter feed of the euphoric ex-UKIP leader and the President Elect standing together in the gilded lobby of Trump Tower on 12 November, described by *Guardian* art critic Jonathan Jones (2016): “In the age of the selfie and the celebrity presidency, Farage has invented a new source of political authority. It dazzles and blinds, more than 10 days after it was taken, as it shines its power-drunk bully-light into every corner of the news. It is the picture that defines 2016... News sites whip...it out...like Farage’s personal Ultra Gold American Express Card (bonuses include lording it over HM government) after the president-elect attempted to appoint him by tweet as our man in Washington”. The Trump-Farage photo could be seen as a mobilization of plutocratic power through social media to destabilise the contemporary diplomatic order of TADA. On that same night, a diplomatic cable from Darroch to the FCO containing a preliminary assessment of UK diplomatic relations under a Trump Presidency was leaked to the *Times* newspaper, in which Darroch noted the incoming administration was “open to outside influence if pitched right” (Shipman 2016).

However these extraordinary events were met with a united response from Whitehall and Westminster assemblages that there was “no vacancy” at the British Embassy for Farage<sup>3</sup>. In effect, this transversal flow “ferrying [its] micro-black holes” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987

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<sup>3</sup> Confirmed in the House of Commons on 22 November 2016 by Boris Johnson, then UK Foreign Secretary: “there is no ambassadorial vacancy in Washington given our excellent ambassador” (Hansard 2016 734)

506) of material-affective agency was blocked by UK government and diplomatic assemblages both coding Trump's intervention as transgressive. But this attempted recoding<sup>4</sup> insinuated possibilities of wider change in the TADA that came to a head with a second, much more significant diplomatic leak. I turn to this next.

#### 'Leaks' as affective forces: the 2019 Washington e-letters

As already outlined, leaked diplomatic material has an affective force that can 'short out' circulations in assemblages by breaching codings of the diplomatic regime. This force arises from huge imbalance in energies carried by assemblage lines, with transversal energies overwhelming assemblage structure and coherence (intraassemblage lines) to trigger recomposition or dissolution (deterritorializations). Residual energies create "axes of escape" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987 173), multiplying affective potentials of new transversal assembling – notably creating new diplomatic publics of people-object-things. Leaks thus work as strong attractors between the inside and outside to stretch and twist assemblage fields.

The "Darroch affair" emerged from the anonymous leaking of confidential diplomatic e-letters written by Sir Kim to the FCO. These were published on 6 July 2019 by the *Mail on Sunday*, a UK newspaper<sup>5</sup>. The e-letters recorded his observations on events including attending a Republican party rally, the President's aborting an air strike against Iran, and Trump's delight during the UK state visit, which had taken place a month earlier.

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<sup>4</sup> That this was attempted recoding was acknowledged in the US in the reported remarks of Nicholas Burns, a former undersecretary of state for political affairs during the Bush administration: "I don't remember anything remotely like this ... *it's a complete break with essential diplomatic protocol* and a preposterous notion that you would publicly suggest one of the major political foes of the government should be appointed. It is rude to the British prime minister and puts her in a difficult position" (Wintour *et al.* 2016, emphasis added)

<sup>5</sup> A second batch of e-letters was published by the *Mail on Sunday* a week later, where Darroch described the Trump administration's decision to pull out of the EU-US Iran nuclear agreement as "diplomatic vandalism".

While only two leaked e-letters had diplomatic content, they were caustic. One offered Darroch's impressions of the Trump administration, highlighting its disregard of the diplomatic regime. "As seen from here, we really don't believe that this administration is going to become substantially more normal; less dysfunctional, less unpredictable, less faction-riven, less diplomatically clumsy and inept" (Oakeshott 2019). The second was even more incendiary, linking a personal-affective depiction of Trump to the possible future lines of flight of his administration: "For a man who has risen to the highest office on the planet, President Trump radiates insecurity... There is no filter [between his affective state and comments] ... We could also be at the beginning of a downward spiral, rather than just a rollercoaster; something could emerge that leads to disgrace and downfall" (Oakeshott 2019). Here Darroch codes the President as unpredictable and volatile – and so crucially on the diplomatic outside.

Ambassadorial dispatches are diplomacy's lifeblood, but their publication violated TADA's confidentiality codings. This affective shock was raised by ongoing ruptures in UK-US relations over handling Iran's nuclear programme, and the President's disdain for outgoing Prime Minister Theresa May's approach to Brexit negotiations. The leaker's identity prompted much media speculation, especially as the journalist with the scoop, Isabel Oakeshott, was closely linked with UKIP, the political force behind Brexit. Oakeshott's coverage also named one of the few people with access to the e-letters as Cabinet Secretary Sir Mark Sedwill – a figure suspected by Brexiters of trying to thwart leaving the EU.

The resulting affective energies couldn't be contained in the TADA, spilling over media and political assemblages. Separate enquiries were called by the UK Parliamentary Select Committee for Foreign Affairs, whose chair, Tom Tugendhat MP, claimed leaking the e-letters was "a form of treason" (Tugendhat 2019), and by the Metropolitan Police<sup>6</sup>. Affective forces ratcheted up even further because under article II, section 2 of the US Constitution, the focus of Darroch's e-letters, the President, is the country's 'chief diplomat' – literally the embodiment of US foreign policy.

Within TADA, the surge in affect (especially around Oval Office-10 Downing Street) was massive. Liam Fox, then International Trade Secretary, was dispatched to meet with White House officials on 8 July and commented beforehand "This is such a damaging, potentially damaging, event, that I hope the full force of our internal discipline, or even the law, will come down on whoever actually carried out this particular act. ...I will be apologising for the fact that either our civil service or elements of our political class have not lived up to the expectations that either we have or the United States has about their behaviour, which in this particular case has lapsed in a most extraordinary and unacceptable way" (Fox 2019). While the FCO noted "The British public expect our ambassadors to provide Ministers with an honest and unvarnished assessment of the politics in their country. We pay them to be candid" (House of Lords Hansard 2019), the Prime Minister offered Darroch only tepid support. Moreover her successor as PM, Boris Johnson, repeatedly refused to back him, opening a chasm in political affect between the FCO and Westminster and leading the then Foreign Office minister, Alan Duncan, to conclude Johnson had "effectively thrown him

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<sup>6</sup> Still ongoing at the time of writing

[Darroch] under a bus” (Landale 2019). Crucially in contrast with 2016, this showed entirely different codings of the leaks by UK political and diplomatic assemblages, and would result in Sir Kim’s resignation four days after the e-letters’ publication.

In the US, Trump’s initial response was muted. But on 8 July he tweeted “I do not know the Ambassador. ...We will no longer deal with him”, and on 9 July he suddenly vented “The wacky Ambassador that the UK foisted upon the United States is not someone we are thrilled with, a very stupid guy... . I don’t know the Ambassador but have been told he is a pompous fool” (Trump 2019a). This personal attack shows how the “hyperspatial” (McConnell 2019 47) of social media is an important means for resonating affect through networks of human and non-human entities, amplifying their power. But Trump’s tweet also served geopolitical purposes. By targeting his opinion of the Ambassador to his millions of followers, he vastly expanded the transversal lines radiating from the disclosures to create new diplomatic publics (Sharp 2020). And by attributing to Darroch the ‘unambassadorial’ qualities of eccentricity and stupidity, he implied the diplomatic regime was failing to regulate the TADA.

Trump’s outburst fatally compromised the Ambassador’s position. In his resignation letter of 10 July to Sir Simon McDonald, Permanent Secretary of the FCO, Darroch said the leaks had disordered beltway politics between the British Embassy and the White House: “The current situation is making it impossible for me to carry out my professional role as I would like. I am grateful to all those in the UK and the US who have offered their support during this difficult few days” (FCO 2019). Darroch intuited the real damage lay in human-technological agencies triggering an inchoate churn of virtual events. Exposing the ‘special’ relationship to

these uncertainties threatened UK foreign policy with its closest ally: unconscionable in the milieu of state diplomacy.

Crucial to buffering the leaks' affective charge was the balance between depth of intraassemblage lines in the TADA, and the breadth of transversal lines created by disclosure to new diplomatic publics. Trump's fulminating on twitter about Darroch and the gulf in positions between Whitehall and Westminster towards him showed the rhizomatic power of these transversal connections, a power enhanced by the disruptive role of Trump's 'America First' and Brexit geostrategies on TADA's codings. To piece together how Darroch's resignation emerged from the collision of lines of assembling, next I trace the event as it coursed through the TADA.

#### The Ambassador as nexus of assemblage lines

Ambassadors routinely act as a nexus for horizontal (intra-) and transversal (inter-) lines of flight, giving structure and coherence to assemblages by coding diplomatic meanings and material-affective relations. Importantly the coding also stabilises diplomatic bodies, objects and sites against the shock of forceful events by bringing 'within' and 'between' lines into convergence as lively diplomatic milieux.

Conversely where these lines will not converge, or can't be coded, this nexus position can channel transversal flows through diplomatic assemblages in destructive ways. This 'affective lensing' is amped up by the innately hierarchical and distributive capacities of striated diplomatic spaces. Historical encounters of the Ambassador's human body can play a significant role here, intensifying eventual forces to accelerate flows from transversal links



with other assemblages. Potentially this may open up intra- and interassemblage lines of recomposition to transform rather than stabilise 'larger' assemblages. I examine this aspect here in relation to Kim Darroch.

Codings of social background, education, life course and career experience are crucial in embodied geopolitics. Darroch's route to the FCO's most prestigious Ambassadorial posting was unconventional. His family moved from Kenya to the UK following his parent's divorce, and he grew up on a council estate before winning school and University scholarships. Joining the Foreign Office in 1977, his jobs included Head of the FCO's News Department, working as the lead FCO official on the Bosnia civil war, and a posting as the UK's Permanent Representative to the EU (UKREP) in Brussels, following a stint as PM Tony Blair's Europe Advisor. Darroch confirmed in a recent interview how this Advisor posting arose almost accidentally – a merging of intra and interassemblage lines of flight to actualise for him as new diplomatic milieu:

"About 15 years ago, I was the last of two to be the Foreign Office political director, and I didn't get the job. I was kind of angry at the time because I thought I was the better candidate. Three weeks later, the European advisor to the prime minister resigned suddenly and I was the only person on the block who could be Europe adviser to the PM. The guy who beat me for political director, we had lunch a few months later, and he said, "So I beat you for the political director job and the result is you move to Number 10 and get promoted above me. Just explain how that works[?]" (Bendall 2018).

It was as head of UKREP that he met the then Member of the European Parliament Nigel Farage, who described “one occasion when [Darroch] came into my office and compromised himself in a rather devastating way. During our conversation, I said to him: ‘You’re a professional civil servant, aren’t you supposed to be neutral [on UK membership of the EU]?’ He replied: ‘No. It’s our policy that the European Union is a good thing.’ I asked him to leave. I couldn’t see the point in even continuing to have the conversation” (Farage 2019)<sup>7</sup>. The lines of flight of Darroch’s UKREP posting and his meeting Farage show distributed bodies travel through multiple happenings, to bring together current and previous lived experiences that can suddenly charge fleshy bodies in the present with affective energy. Notably Farage’s recollection stresses antipathy between them arising from conflicting geopolitical worldviews.

As McCormack (2017, 11) reflects, “scenes of life are traversed and transformed by forces that cut transversally across scales, times, practices and bodies”. Backwards-forwards tracteries of this encounter with Farage, and Darroch’s own remarks on the EU referendum, must have resurfaced for the Ambassador as the 2019 leaks overwhelmed the British Embassy and spread across the TADA - particularly given Trump’s earlier self-identification on Twitter as “Mr Brexit” (Trump 2016b). As Ambassador, these affective energies were amplified and channelled along intraassemblage lines to the full range of diplomatic sites – from the Washington Beltway where Darroch now cut an influential figure hosting Embassy functions, to the heart of the FCO on King Charles Street in London. Testament to the

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<sup>7</sup> Andy Wigmore, Leave EU’s communications director during the 2016 EU referendum campaign, would subsequently tweet of this encounter: “Worth noting that Nigel Farage physically kicked little Kim out of his office in Brussels when Kim tried to bollock Nigel, who just grabbed him, gave him a massive wedgie and told him to jog on. Lol . . . Kim cried like a baby” (Sheridan 2019).

electrifying power of this channelling effect was that just four days after the *Mail* broke the story, FCO Permanent Secretary Sir Simon McDonald was giving evidence to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee on the leaks. Here in frank terms McDonald described how lines of assembling were stretching the Ambassador into a surface of tension:

“He had clearly had a very difficult night considering his position, but by the time we spoke he had made up his mind that he needed to resign. I think it was for two main reasons. The first was the pressure on his family, who have been living every minute with him, and he did not want to put them through possibly months more. It was his judgment that for as long as he remained in Washington, he would be a target, and his family with him. The second reason was the impact on the rest of the embassy in Washington and their ability to work. As you know, Mr Chairman, the Ambassador is the keystone of any embassy, and if he does not have access to the people he needs or she needs to have access to, the work of the whole mission suffers” (UK Parliament 2019).

McDonald captures how Darroch’s struggle with the media – innumerable transversal lines of flight – clashed with his diplomatic (intraassemblage) obligations. His anxiety arose from holding these alignments in embodied tension, striving to maintain stability in his family and professional life. McDonald also acknowledges the crucial position of Ambassador at the nexus of assemblage lines (“keystone”) – a coding bringing together the diplomatic inside (its regime of signs) and outside (multiplicities).

However, McDonald's use of the word "target" shows he thought the Ambassador's anxiety was also deliberately played up by the White House. Instrumental was revocation of the diplomatic given coding Sir Kim's post. In the classic text on diplomacy, Satow (2017) notes that Ambassadors need to host political leaders and senior diplomats to smooth international relations. But Darroch found himself struck off the White House guestlist for the state visit of the Emir of Qatar, and crushingly from a meeting between the UK's own Secretary of State for International Trade Liam Fox and Wilbur Ross, the US Trade Secretary (Booth et al. 2019). Trump's tweets were instrumental here in asserting "I don't know the ambassador" and that Washington "...will no longer deal with him", so effectively rescinding Darroch's diplomatic credentials. The Ambassador felt he should not attend a meeting between Fox and Ivanka Trump on 9 July "to avoid any embarrassment for the President's daughter" (Smith 2019). Here the embodied surface of tension created by gyring assemblage lines is only resolved by Darroch literally putting physical distance between himself and bodies politic of the White House.

Darroch was also targeted by outriders of the UK's 'inside-outside' state generating new diplomatic publics around the leaks. So Isabel Oakeshott's write-up in the *Mail* was greeted by Raheem Kassam, a UKIP official, tweeting "[the story is] by Isabel, who is one of us" (McLaughlin 2019). Brexit supporters across the UK media assemblage worked tirelessly to generate new audiences for the leaks, fanning their affective power. Farage for example commented in the *Daily Telegraph*: "Kim Darroch is totally unsuitable to remain as our man in the US. With a Boris Johnson premiership on the horizon, I would suggest Darroch's time in Washington will draw to a close very shortly" (Farage 2019). These comments are telling, bringing together the dispensability of a component with its line of flight, and, in flagging

the “horizon” as a line demarcating virtual and (soon to be) actualised events, the importance of times and timing as geopolitical resources (Clark and Jones 2012; Clark and Jones 2019).

As Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 505) point out, lines of flight of assemblages “always risk abandoning their creative potentialities and turning into...a line of destruction”. I examine next the consequences of Darroch’s resignation for the TADA’s nested diplomatic worlds.

### Assemblage lines: surfaces of tension and de- and recompositions

Affective energies released by the leaked e-letters outpaced affective processing by TADA’s constituent assemblages. A crumpling of diplomatic milieux followed in Whitehall and Westminster, the British Embassy, and the Washington Beltway, tipping each into chaotic recompositions. These milieux were conjoined and twisted into topological surfaces of tension by the historical trajectories of Darroch’s distributed body, giving rise to myriad ‘possibility spaces’ for deterritorialization (DeLanda 2006; Dittmer 2014). Darroch’s coding as Ambassador dissolved through this spillover of material-affective energies as much as through his ‘intentional’ resignation<sup>8</sup>.

From an assemblage perspective, the human body is distributed across small to large assemblages that can be vastly separated. Darroch’s anxieties suffused his ‘bodies-in-solidarity’, the FCO, very quickly. Faced with hostility from the President and the White House, Darroch’s resignation letter to Sir Simon materially transferred affect from US to UK

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<sup>8</sup> Without Darroch’s decision to resign, it is possible that this reconfiguration of diplomatic milieu would have occurred anyway though at a different pace, and on a different trajectory, given the workings of the ‘inside-outside’ state (I thank a referee for pointing this out).

event spaces (Massumi 2002), as was clear in the Permanent Secretary's reply to the Ambassador: "On behalf of the Diplomatic Service, I accept your resignation with deep personal regret. Over the last few difficult days you have behaved as you always have behaved over a long and distinguished career, with dignity, professionalism and class. The Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and whole of the public service have stood with you: you were the target of a malicious leak; you were simply doing your job" (FCO 2019).

McDonald's reply acknowledges the torsional effect of opposing assemblage lines on Darroch. But, aware of the danger of wider recomposition of the TADA, it is also written for political effect, by reiterating the norms of the diplomatic regime ("with dignity, professionalism and class", "...a malicious leak; you were simply doing your job"). In doing so, McDonald creates a "refrain" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 299) that seeks to rigidify recognised diplomatic identities and values around intraassemblage lines, to create an anchoring space for the diplomatic 'inside' – a redoubt for the body politic of the FCO. The Permanent Secretary then amplified this refrain – and showed how high the stakes were – by calling an extraordinary all-staff FCO meeting at King Charles Street at 4pm on 10 July to reassure concerned diplomats: "People are shaken by what has happened and there is a reason why I have asked to see all my colleagues... . The basis on which we have worked all our careers suddenly feels challenged" (UK Parliament 2019). Tweeting later that "More colleagues attended my all staff meeting to express solidarity with Kim Darroch than any other in my 4 yrs. as PUS [Parliamentary Under Secretary]" (McDonald 2019), his remarks accompanied a photo showing lines of concerned, attentive faces – a phalanx of FCO diplomats demonstrating support for their absent colleague through their physical

presence, and heightening the refrain further by showing their solidarity and commitment to the diplomatic regime.

McDonald's Select Committee evidence earlier that day performed this refrain to Members of Parliament. Responding to what he described as "the worst breach of trust in our service in my career" (UK Parliament 2019), over the hour-long evidence session he frequently leans in to answer questions, looks intently at his interlocutors, and uses animated gestures to emphasise his replies. McDonald is channelling diplomatic meaning-making here, affirming the FCO's norms of integrity, impartiality and confidentiality. By contrast, there was fury in King Charles Street directed at Prime Minister Johnson's denying Darroch support, effectively ousting a diplomat whom had displeased Trump. The depth of this affective rupture between Westminster and Whitehall was confirmed by Sir Alan Duncan's remark in a BBC interview that the UK Government – and Boris Johnson in particular – had shown Darroch "contemptible negligence" (Lendale 2019).

Recompositions took a different path in the US. The official residence of the British Ambassador at 3100 Massachusetts Avenue is widely regarded as Washington's most imposing Embassy building. Its extensive grounds and richly decorated rooms were designed to evoke an affective geography of Britishness which is reinforced by complex material-affective circulations of everyday diplomatic life. Around 10,000 people a year attend almost 800 everyday 'socials' here – working lunches, seminars, coffee mornings, trade fairs and cocktail parties – and White House staffers Kellyanne Conway and Sarah Sanders and the President's daughter, Ivanka Trump, all attended functions hosted by the Ambassador. After taking up post, Darroch, a keen tennis player, introduced his own signature event into the

Washington diplomatic calendar: a 'Wimbledon Breakfast' held during the tournament's final week. But in July 2019, this coincided with publication of the leaked e-letters, shattering this diplomatic milieu:

"It was like a tennis match with an empty umpire's chair. On Friday [12 July], the British Ambassador's residence in Washington hosted a Wimbledon Watch Party and English Breakfast, with two giant TV screens showing the men's semi-final. In the ballroom there were bacon and eggs, orange juice and Buck's Fizz and, of course, strawberries and cream. But there was no Ambassador. Kim Darroch had left for a planned holiday a day early, officials said, after a 'rough week' in which his leaked memos led to abuse from Donald Trump and his resignation, though the Ambassador does intend to return for an unspecified period. The Embassy considered cancelling the annual Wimbledon event but a mood of 'keep calm and carry on' prevailed, not least because of Darroch's love of tennis. The deputy ambassador, Michael Tatham, offered remarks, some of them lighthearted, from Darroch's usual position at a lectern under a framed Andy Warhol screenprint of the Queen. Unlike other events hosted by the grand 1920s residence, no White House officials were present" (Smith 2019).

This description conveys the distributed agency of objects that are generative of the Ambassadorial effect: one that seeks to evoke a sense of British solidity and reliability through a particular ensemble of material items (English foodstuffs in a ballroom setting), habits (Darroch's usual irreverent talk to assembled guests under the Warhol screenprint), and circulations (a televised major global sporting event redolent of the English summer broadcast live from the UK). Yet this calendar event, designed to project British soft power,



is upended through the Ambassador's absence. Affective forces surging across the TADA have literally pushed Darroch out of the picture to recast the worlding of the British Embassy. This absence intensifies the "in-between" (Stoller 2008) of unactualised lines of flight of the Embassy assemblage: notably, uncertainty over if/when Darroch will return, and the geopolitical implications of absent White House staff – a bellwether of poor bilateral relations.

The "Darroch affair" also spilled into Washington diplomatic life, testing the codings of different diplomatic cultures (Dittmer and McConnell 2016). Smith (2019) reported how "Fellow envoys [in Washington] say they have made similar observations about the Trump administration and deplore the lack of support from Boris Johnson for their UK counterpart". Recently retired French ambassador to the US, Gérard Araud, told the *New York Times* "It could have been any of us... . But fortunately I knew that nothing would remain secret, so I sent [diplomatic correspondence] in a most confidential manner" (Sagar 2019). Tellingly Patrick Gaspard, a former US ambassador to South Africa, noted how the personal feelings of the President was crucial in why intensities were ramped up by the White House: "There is so much hypersensitivity in [the Trump] administration around personal relations that it seems to trump mutual interests. ...This President takes personal pique and gives that priority. It all speaks to the hyper-personalised nature of this" (Smith 2019). Gaspard underlines here the Trump administration's fetishization of political affect, with diplomatic bodies surveilled for their alignment with the 'America First' project.

Darroch's resignation thus led to juddering deterritorializations in the FCO and Washington beltway politics, prompting a questioning of habits and dispositions (codings) foundational

to diplomatic meaning-making. These complex patterns of de- and reterritorialisations cannot be separated from the wider unsettling of TADA's codings, which I return to now.

### The 'inside-outside' state - digging deep, prising out?

McDonald (2019) noted in his Parliamentary testimony that Sir Kim's departure had no precedent in FCO history: "Nothing like this has ever happened before, there must be consequences. What they are in detail I can't tell you this afternoon" (UK Parliament 2019). Certainly Darroch's departure continues to reverberate across diplomatic milieux, as transversal connections around the event multiply. Some of these have actualised locally. In December 2019, the Washington Embassy's Brexit negotiator Alexandra Hall Hall resigned, citing her lack of trust in the direction of Johnson's government and her sense that she needed to inflate the opportunities of a post Brexit trade deal in her discussions with US congressmen (Mackintosh 2019).

Others remain open-ended and hard to discern. Velocities of attraction around the UK's 'inside-outside' state have increased, driving reactionary media and governing assemblages closer together, while reducing further the currency of UK Civil Service expertise. Affective dissonance between Westminster and Whitehall has also intensified. Tellingly, mooted changes in senior civil service posts were given affective power through leaks made by 'government sources' to pro-Government media outlets, emblematic of media-government tendencies of the 'inside-outside'. Media assemblages swarmed with rumours of a 'hit-list' of Civil Service Permanent Secretaries held by Number 10<sup>9</sup>. Johnson's adviser Dominic

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<sup>9</sup> The earlier resignations of two senior diplomats, Sir Ivan Rogers and Ollie Robbins in 2017 and 2019, shows how somatic control is being used to dismantle diplomatic capacities of expertise where this does not – or will not – align with the 'inside-outside' state.

Cummings was strongly associated with this reshaping of state striated space after opining: “Long-term leadership from the likes of O’Donnell and Heywood is why officials know that practically nobody is ever held accountable regardless of the scale of failure. Being in charge of massive screwups is no barrier to promotion. ... The senior civil service now operates like a protected caste to preserve its power and privileges regardless of who the ignorant plebs vote for” (Cummings 2019).

A wide shake-up of top jobs followed across the FCO and other civil service departments overseen by Number 10 senior advisers and Cabinet Office Ministers. Six of the UK’s most senior civil servants departed in a year, including Simon McDonald who stepped down once he had overseen the unenviable task of merging the FCO with the Department for International Development (DFID) as the new Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office, a union widely condemned for its disregard of globally leading expertise accumulated in DFID. In doing so the FCO’s diplomatic refrain was effectively silenced. These changes convey the aim of the ‘inside-outside’ state: to overcode UK striated space to mirror that of the US, as Cabinet Office Minister Michael Gove MP acknowledged in the House of Commons (Hansard 2020). It remains to be seen whether the depth of material-affective relations of the TADA – sedimented histories built up over the last seventy years – can withstand this deep digging and prising out of its established codings.

### Conclusions

This article considered how assemblage lines condition components to transform the totalities of which they are part. Given their innate trajectories, I have argued components have different tendencies in relation to the events that continually sweep across

assemblages. Specific components can therefore profoundly influence the rate of assemblage recomposition around specific events. I considered this aspect through the empirical case of Sir Kim Darroch, who as British Ambassador to US was at front and centre of the 2019 diplomatic leaks imbroglio. I conceptualised Darroch as an embodied component of the TADA with high 'structural complexity' via many vertical and transversal lines of assembling, whose historical trajectories accelerated rather than dampened recompositions around the leaks resulting in his distributed body occupying more and more possibility spaces across the TADA. Notably, Darroch's historical trajectories from his meeting with Nigel Farage in Brussels, and his on-the-record statement on the EU referendum, show how "materialisation of the past is generative of a range of potentials that can shape encounters in the present" (Dittmer and Waterton 2018, 706). These historical trajectories of Darroch's distributed body intensified affective energies in the TADA, with destructive consequences for its nested diplomatic milieux.

Examining the "Darroch affair" using the analytical optic of assemblage lines reveals the Ambassador's body as a dynamic topological figure combining distributed and fleshy components. These components were stretched by lines to accelerate affective-material flows across space and time. Where the force of events flowing through these lines exceeded intrassemblage processing, components became surfaces of tension, hosting "the working out of underlying processes situated between the virtual and the actual" (Cockayne et al. 2019, 6) to undermine the coherence of diplomatic milieux. In particular, multiple tensional surfaces create possibility spaces (Dittmer 2014) for de- and recompositions.

I have tracked how the surfaces of tension of Darroch's distributed body triggered chaotic de- and recompositions across the TADA - from the White House and British Embassy in Washington, via the twittersphere, to Parliamentary Select Committee rooms in London. This form of small assemblage-large assemblage interrelation is an aspect research has so far struggled to engage with. Assemblage lines thus contribute new insight in three areas. First is to demonstrate how lines delineate historical trajectories of components to create tendencies in the present. This illuminates the historicity of assemblage, namely "How a small assemblage enters and exits various relations at different times" by passing "through many surrounding events, some of which leave no trace while others may destroy it" (Harman 2015 129). Second is to provide a lens to explore how, through linear alignments of one sort or another, an interior component can contribute to creating possibility spaces in assemblages of which it is part; Deleuze and Guattari (1987 509) refer to these components as "vectors of deterritorialization, working...from within". Third is to show how assemblage lines striate diplomatic space vertically and horizontally, making its regime susceptible to transgressions and transversal connections. Assemblage lines thus give rise to trajectories of change and becomings.

Assemblage work on diplomacy already shows how historical events recontour the geopolitically possible (Dittmer 2015; cf. McLagen and McKee 2012). Yet the Darroch case illustrates historical encounters of the human body can also reciprocally influence the structure and coherence of assemblages – and ultimately the stability of entire diplomatic milieux. This is exemplified by Darroch not only occupying multiple assemblages simultaneously, but by being differentially placed ("a very stupid guy...a pompous fool" in the White House; "you are the best of us" in Whitehall) and positioned (Darroch's embodied

structural complexity as Ambassador) in relation to unfolding events. These geographies of assembling amplified the affective forcefulness of the e-letters leak to increase velocities of de- and recompositions across the TADA. I argue awareness of these dynamics can help us gauge how assemblage lines change diplomatic realities and subjectivities, and how they contribute to the (in)stabilities of assemblages.

This case also sheds light on the “dissonance machines” (Page and Dittmer 2016) of US and UK administrations that are jolting the TADA through imposing overcodings of pace, velocity and the need for (as yet unspecified) change. In the UK swaths of state striated space are being remade through the resulting ‘inside-outside’ alignment of material-affective forces, including territorial and legal codings. Imposing new lines of assembling are crucial to these overcoding attempts, showing transgressive spaces are not always politically progressive. Unquestionably the affective potentials of immanent worlds – Trump’s America First doctrine, and the UK’s plans for Brexit - are reaching through assemblage lines to marshal ‘real’ geopolitical relations. These yet-to-be-realised worlds testify to the distributed agential grip of desire, materials, things and territories on the TADA.

Analysing assemblage lines thus addresses claims that assemblage thinking reduces politics and political subjectivities to sets of interchangeable components, blind to the geometries of power (Harman 2015). I argue instead assemblage theory is uniquely well placed to track the development of the inside and the outside, with its sudden shocks and de- and recompositions. The importance of engaging with this analytical task is heightened by the reassembling of state striated space reported here.

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