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Trigonometric Diplomacy

"My only reply to such critics is that they have not the slightest idea of scientific methods.

"I built all this subtle diplomatic structure as a bridge is built: that is, by calculating its various elements, and not by trying to obtain direct information which it would have been impossible to obtain.

"The abstract operations of trigonometry lead to results more certain than physical measurements, when both operations are possible, but in the majority of cases trigonometry alone can be used. I have made diplomacy as it were by trigonometry.

"Such a method will without doubt seem incomprehensible to many minds."

> —Philippe Bunau-Varilla, Directeur Général de la Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interocéanique, 1903, defending his way of fostering the Panamanian revolution, after which the United States would buy out his bankrupt company.

—David McCullough, *The path between the seas: The creation of the Panama Canal, 1870–1914*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977, p. 359.

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