

THE ROLE OF DIPLOMACY IN FOREIGN POLICY

By

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Abstract

Diplomacy and foreign policy are central features of global politics. They capture our imagination and their conduct affects our lives through their impact on war, peace, the global economy, human rights, international law, global institutions and the norms that govern relationships between states. Foreign policy and diplomacy provide an opportunity to examine and critically evaluate issues of contemporary global politics with a particular emphasis on the political, economic and decisional dynamics underpinning foreign policy and diplomacy. This paper aimed at examining the various ways diplomacy has been viewed, the role it plays in foreign policy of nation-states and the various challenges it faces. This paper adopted doctrinal method where the relevant primary and secondary sources were utilised. It was found that diplomacy as one of the oldest instruments of foreign policy, is a tool with which the states address the other states and communicate with them in order to explain their national goals, policies, and views on current affairs, and try to influence their interlocutors' views and positions on issues that are important to them. It is observed that diplomacy and foreign policy are so much interconnected that when one mentions a given concept, the other automatically comes into play. Globalization has further enhanced this interconnectivity partly because of the increased number of players on the international arena. The paper concluded that despite the challenges faced by diplomatic efforts of states today, diplomacy tends to be an important key as far as international relation is concerned. Through diplomacy, universal and essential interests or needs of constituent countries in the global system are addressed. Lastly, it was recommended that Ministries of Foreign Affairs, diplomats and governments in general should New and more open state activities need to be advanced that respond to the ways in which emotionalized publics who wish to participate in governance express themselves.

Keywords: *Diplomacy, Foreign, Policy, Role.*

1. Introduction

After the treaty of Westphalia and the end of the First and Second World War, the international system has witnessed an increasing growth in the development of nation states. The end product of this development is thus, the creation of an interaction between these nation states. In addition, the establishment of United Nations and the process of decolonization that has liberated many states into sovereign entities have further provided the impetus to interrelationships among states. Such has resulted into the formation of 'foreign policies' with

the aim of determining and identifying the decisions, strategies, and ends of interaction of a state with another.¹

The purpose of diplomacy, throughout the ages and at different levels of societal evolution, whether at interpersonal, inter-communal, or at international level, has always been to promote national interest abroad. That endeavour has led to a steady development of international relationships aimed at fostering understanding and promoting tolerance, albeit with limited success.² Since then, new factors have emerged, including an ever increasing number of varied players in current complex international relations, coupled with the power of modern media and the speed with which news travel in our times.³ With these two significant developments, the very concept of state representation is being gradually transformed and the traditional role, which until now was assigned to diplomatic envoys, as sole representatives of the interests of a sending state in a receiving state or in an international forum, is being effectively eroded.⁴ It is important to note that many of these new players are beyond state control and not hesitant about making public what diplomatic envoys would rather carry confidentially, to the authorities of their respective states. These challenges call for deep reflection on how to handle diplomacy in this new environment - how to practice diplomacy in an era of transparency.

Diplomacy's role in foreign policy is hampered by multiple understandings of what diplomacy is and does.⁵ Diplomacy stands accepted as the mainstay and the core process of relations among nations. The process of establishment of relations among nations begins effectively by the establishment of diplomatic relations among nations. A new state becomes a full and active member of the family of nations only after it gets recognition by existing states. The common way in which this recognition is granted is the announcement of the decision to establish diplomatic relations. Thereafter diplomats are exchanged and relations among nations get underway.⁶

The foundations of diplomacy were established long before 1948 in times when states did not yet exist and cities pioneered as foreign policy entities. Diplomacy and foreign policy thus existed before the existence of states. The terms foreign policy and diplomacy have been used almost interchangeably. In international relations discourse the link between these two terms has traditionally been conceptualized as a rather simple objective versus tool relationship, in

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¹ B Ozkececi-Taner, *Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

² UNCTAD, *Key Trends in International Merchandise Trade* (2013).

³ G J M Abbink and Others, *Involvement of Ambassadors in Commercial Diplomacy* (Enschede/Zwolle: University of Twente/Windesheim University of Applied Sciences, 2014).

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵K Weisbrode, 'Diplomacy in Foreign Policy' Available on: <https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-410> accessed 27 June 2022.

⁶Dinesh, 'Diplomacy: Meaning, Nature, Functions and Role in Crisis Management' Available on: <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/international-politics/diplomacy-meaning-nature-functions-and-role-in-crisis-management/48491> accessed 27 June 2022.

which diplomacy represents merely a lesser tool of foreign policy in the world.⁷ These two concepts were shaped by major political transformations. They can affect the constitution and transformation of notions of political subjectivity, sovereignty, national identity, mediation and international order.

Diplomacy has become an essential and important issue for foreign policy. In the globalized world, the relationships between the states become deeper and that's why there is an increasing demand for diplomacy.⁸ Diplomacy has become an important fact in everyone's business. In the classical period, diplomacy was bilateral but in the contemporary period, diplomacy is multilateral. Different organizations are solving problems between the states. Cold war is an important part of the evolution of diplomacy. In the cold war period, new thinking was started to add in diplomacy, and diplomacy became an important part of foreign policy.

1.1 Concept of Diplomacy

Diplomacy is both “a category of practice and a category of analysis”,⁹ meaning that contemporary definitions of diplomacy are broad and differentiated along epistemological and methodological boundaries. According to Der Derian, the pursuit of a single, all-encompassing definition of diplomacy is futile given the nature of international relations:

If I were to pretend that a single definition could capture the essence of diplomacy, then there would be no purpose for an enquiry. In fact, it would negate an enquiry, for its very rationale is to question the existence of a defining essence. Moreover, the high level of ambiguity inherent in international relations can render the attempt for exactitude in definition a specious activity.¹⁰

Accordingly, the British historian and diplomat Sir Harold Nicolson notes that the “word ‘diplomacy’ is carelessly taken to denote several quite different things” leading to “confusion of thought” and substantial misunderstandings.¹¹ This conceptual confusion has been addressed through various typologies in the literature. De Magalhaes¹² sees diplomacy as commonly defined through four prisms: foreign policy, an instrument of foreign policy, international negotiations, and the activity of diplomats. Sharp¹³ defines diplomacy as a synonym for

⁷ A James, ‘Diplomacy and Foreign Policy’ [1993] (30) *Review of International Studies*, 343-360.

⁸ S Riordan, *The New Diplomacy* (Polity Press, United Kingdom, 2004) 54.

⁹ V Pouliot and J Cornut, ‘Practice Theory and the Study of Diplomacy: A Research Agenda’ [2015] (50)(3) *Cooperation and Conflict*, 297-315.

¹⁰ J Der Derian, ‘Mediating Estrangement: A Theory for Diplomacy’ [1987] (13)(1) *Review of International Studies*, 91-110.

¹¹ H Nicolson, *Diplomacy* (Georgetown: Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, 1988) 3.

¹² J C De Magalhaes, *The Pure Concept of Diplomacy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988).

¹³ P Sharp, ‘Herbert Butterfield, the English School and the Civilizing Virtues of Diplomacy’ [2003] (79)(4) *International Affairs*, 855-878.

statecraft, foreign policy, and international relations, as well as the making of foreign policy by practitioners.

Plischke presents perhaps the most comprehensive definition of this approach to diplomacy. It is:

...the political process by which political entities, generally states, conduct official relations with one another within an international environment. With the proliferation of the institutionalization of international affairs by other than classical diplomatic processes, and with the engagement in interrelations by political institutions other than states – such as international and supranational organizations, emergent political entities – diplomacy can no longer be said to be confined solely to the conduct of the international affairs or foreign relations of established national states.¹⁴

In the view of Voskopoulos,¹⁵ diplomacy is the art or practice of conducting international relations, as in negotiating alliances, treaties and agreements. It is also defined as an instrument of foreign policy used to achieve certain goals considered to be vital to the state. It is a peaceful means of achieving goals through established diplomatic routes through the use of certain accredited agents. Watson¹⁶ defined diplomacy as a negotiation of political entities which acknowledge each other's independence. He further argued that contemporary diplomacy had four primary tasks. These were information gathering abroad; the analysis of such information by foreign ministries at home; developing policy based on that information and communicating such a policy.¹⁷

Diplomacy is generally a complex and often challenging practice of fostering relationships around the world in order to resolve issues and advance interests. It thus involves meetings between political leaders, sending diplomatic messages and making public statements about the relationship between countries. States generally pursue diplomacy either unilaterally, bilaterally or multilaterally.

1.2 Foreign Policy

The modern world of “globalization”; the “widening, deepening and speeding up of global interconnectedness”¹⁸ has increased the interrelationships or interactions among states. Hence, there is unanimity among scholars on the necessity of a “foreign policy” for each state, since no

¹⁴ E Plischke, ‘Diplomacy: Search for its Meaning’ in E Plischke (ed), *Modern Diplomacy: The Art and the Artisans* (Washington, DC: The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1979).

¹⁵ G Voskopoulos, *Diplomacy and International Relations* (Sheffield University, South East European Research Center, 2010).

¹⁶ H A J Watson, *Diplomacy: The Dialogue between States* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1982).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ D Held and others, *Global Transformations, Politics, Economics and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

state will like to function in complete isolation. This made scholars like Feliks Gross, to say that even a decision to have no relations with a particular state is also a foreign policy.¹⁹ A state without a foreign policy has been compared to a ship in the deep sea without any knowledge of directions. Thus, foreign policy leads a state in fulfilling its national interests and acquiring rightful place among comity of nations.

The definition of the term “foreign policy” has been a subject of controversy. Sometimes, this controversy arises from different theoretical frameworks from which the subject is approached. It may relate to the whole importance attached to the state, in ordering or controlling international activities in the contemporary world.²⁰ Hermann²¹ for instance, defined foreign policy as “the discrete purposeful action that results from the political level decision of an individual or group of individuals. It is the observable artifact of a political level decision. It is not the decision, but a product of the decision.” By this, it can be seen that Hermann defines foreign policy as the behaviour of states.

Adesola²² sees foreign policy as the governmental activity which concerns relationship between the state and other actors, especially other states in the international system. Put differently, foreign policy could be seen as the totality of all actions, decisions, overtures, or interactions between states in the international system. Such could be directed or based on economics, politics, culture or creating understanding or co-operation.

According to Frankel,²³ “foreign policy consists of decisions and actions, which involves to some appreciable extent relations between one state and others”. By this, foreign policy involves set of actions that are made within state’s borders, intended towards forces existing outside the country’s borders.²⁴ It comprises the formulation and implementation of a set of ideas that govern the behaviour of states while interacting with other states to defend and enhance their national interests.

In the words of Padelford and Lincoln,²⁵ “A State’s Foreign Policy is totality of its dealings with the external environment. Foreign Policy is the overall result of the process by which a state translates its broadly conceived goals and interests into specific courses of action in order to achieve its objectives and preserve its interests”. Two functions of foreign policy can be extracted from Padelford and Lincoln’s definition; first, foreign policy is to attain its conceived goals and second, to pressurize its national interests.

Foreign policy is the policy of a sovereign state in its interaction with other states. Effective foreign policy rests upon a shared sense of national identity, of a nation-state’s place in the

¹⁹ F Gross, *Foreign Policy Analysis* (New York, philosophical library, 1945).

²⁰ O Ojo and S Amadu, *Concepts in International Relations* (Ile Ife: Classy Prints & Company, 2002).

²¹ C F Hermann, ‘Changes Courses: When Governments Choose to Redirect Foreign Policy’ [1990] (3) *International Studies Quarterly*, 3-21.

²² F Adesola, *International Relations: An Introductory text* (Ibadan: College Press and Publisher Ltd, 2004).

²³ J Frankel, *The Making of Foreign Policy* (London Oxford University Press, 1968).

²⁴ S B Dyson, ‘Personality and Foreign Policy: Tony Blair’s Iraq Decisions’ [2006] (2) *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 289-306.

²⁵ N J Padelford and G. A. Lincoln, *The Dynamics of International Politics* (Macmillan Company, New York, 1977).

world.²⁶ Foreign policy as defined by Watson²⁷ is the content of foreign relations, comprising the aspirations and aims a country wants to achieve in its relations with other states and international governmental organizations. A developmental foreign policy is pro-engagement; it is not isolationist. It is fundamentally concerned with addressing domestic, continental, and global disparities and inequalities.

A coherent foreign policy involves a body of doctrine which imposes a discipline on the wills, orders and operations suited to a purpose consistent with enabling the peaceful coexistence of nations. The foreign policy of a state also reflects the pattern of foreign relations of that state with others. It is also reflected by state actors, notably the head of state and the foreign minister, whose actions and public statements impact on the international political situations.

2. Role of Diplomacy in Foreign Policy

The interests of nation-states are articulated taking many factors into consideration. Such factors like economic needs and resources, geography, defence requirement and strategies, existing alliances with other states and many factors in foreign policy are taken into consideration. However, the success of foreign policy of any nation-state depends on the nature of diplomacy. It could be said that, while foreign policy is concerned with substance and contents of external relations across the national boundary, diplomacy is primarily concerned with the methodology for implementing the foreign policy objectives of a nation-state.²⁸

One of the oldest instruments of foreign policy, diplomacy is a tool with which the states address the other states and communicate with them in order to explain their national goals, policies, and views on current affairs, and try to influence their interlocutors' views and positions on issues that are important to them.²⁹ The two concepts are greatly intertwined. This is evident from the manner in which they relate to each other, and one cannot discuss any one concept without mentioning the other. Diplomacy is an instrument of foreign policy. Through this instrument, negotiations and peace treaties have been signed among states in order to enhance state-state relations. Governments of one country engage governments of another country. This is accomplished by diplomats in order to improve the foreign policy of a country. Increased globalization has caused public diplomacy to grow in importance in modern foreign policy.³⁰ Diplomacy is redefining power in world politics therefore changing the foreign policy of countries.³¹

²⁶ C Hill and W Wallace, 'Introduction-Actors and Actions' in C Hill (ed.) *The Actors in Europe's Foreign Policy* (London: Routledge, 1996).

²⁷ Watson (n 10)

²⁸ Introduction to Diplomacy. Available on: https://www.academia.edu/24111723/BJIS1102_Introduction_to_Diplomacy accessed 30 June 2022.

²⁹ M Aydin, 'Foreign Policy Instruments of States (Diplomacy, Propaganda, Economic Methods)' Available on: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337951212_Foreign_Policy_Instruments_of_States_Diplomacy_Propaganda_Economic_Methods accessed 28 June 2022.

³⁰ J Melissen, *Public diplomacy* (Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy, 2013) 436–452.

³¹ J Nye and W Owens, *Redefining Cultural Diplomacy: Cultural Security and Foreign Policy* (Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

Foreign policy enables the setting of the agenda of world politics and renewal of interest in foreign policy through diplomacy. For example, the events of 11th September 2001 focused attention on the centrality of decisions taken by states and other independent actors such as Bush's strategy to eliminate terrorism danger to the whole world.³² Diplomacy is a tool of foreign policy and war, alliances and international trade may all be manifestations of it. For example, Nigeria has long used its diplomatic relations with other nations and international organizations to formulate and implement her foreign policy. As binding agreements among nations, treaties remain a central tool among representatives of the world's nations to uphold shared interests and obligations. Specific treaties including those that created international organizations like NATO continue to be a mainstay of foreign policy.³³

Diplomacy plays an important part in shaping what happens in international relations. Diplomacy provides the spokes for one state's political interests to interface with those of another without resorting to military force. Diplomacy is used to manage the goals of foreign policy focusing on communication. Diplomacy attempts to manage the goals of foreign policy mostly by implementing goals but also by preparing foreign policy decisions. Diplomacy is negotiated when the interests of states cannot be fully reconciled, and explicit bargaining is required to reveal the area of agreement. On the other hand, even when the will or opportunity to negotiate is absent, and when it is not explicit, bargaining can converge upon and underscore common interests between states, avoid misunderstandings, highlight the potential for communication between adversaries, and define practical steps to strengthen the harmony of interests. Non-negotiated bargaining is critical for international norms of behaviour. Convergent interests are commonly understood as increasing the potential of interstate cooperation.

Generally, the two concepts are so much interconnected that when one mentions a given concept, the other automatically comes into play. Globalization has further enhanced this interconnectivity partly because of the increased number of players on the international arena and also partly because of the increased number of issues that have to be addressed globally.

3. Challenges in Diplomacy and Foreign Policy

In international relations, diplomacy is inevitably driven by changing events, if not exclusively so. The points of contact between states have increased dramatically. International trade, tourism, migration, development assistance, and cultural exchanges have linked countries together. The communications revolution, the impacts of modern technology, the emergence of new non-government influences (business, the professionals, civil society), the new risks (environmental dilapidation, resource scarcity), as well as those intractable afflictions (poverty) magnified by globalization are all set to undermine diplomatic services over the pursuit of relations and issues between countries. Diplomatic communication, traditionally based on

³² D Holmes, *Globalization and the City* (Sydney: Pearson Publishers, 2009).

³³ D Sampson, *United State Diplomatic Relations* (DUO, SCM Press, 1994).

“government-to-government” and “diplomat-to-diplomat” interactions, has expanded to include “government-to-people” contacts.³⁴

The goals of a country’s foreign policy are increasingly influenced by domestic and external forces, thus, the objectives of a country’s foreign policy undergo frequent changes. With the changing global political and economic landscape, the proliferation of media and communication technologies, the emergence of new actors in global affairs, and most of all, the complex confluence of these facets, the credibility and effectiveness of standard communication practices in diplomacy is under challenge. Managing the information flow in such contexts is the realm of diplomacy, particularly in the new world of globalization and communication. Diplomacy today struggles to reflect the diversity and pluralism of the globalized age. It is almost impossible to examine any problem in contemporary international relations effectively without considering the diplomatic challenges which it poses, the innovations in diplomatic practice which it calls forth, and the contribution which diplomacy can make to easing the problem in such a way as to contribute to a more peaceful, just, and orderly world.³⁵

A multiplicity of arenas (global, regional and local networks) and actors capable of acting on the international scene (international organizations, NGOs and businesses) have thus brought about a necessity for defining who can be engaged in diplomacy, how diplomacy should be conducted, and where representation should take place. Consequently, identifying nodes of influence and the quest for access have also become the most important challenges and most demanding tasks, considering the shifting centres of gravity in the international system.³⁶ In addition, as the concept of the nation-state’s sovereignty is changing and adapting to the realities of the new world order, the roles of representation and diplomats being defined through sovereignty are changing as well. The traditional image of diplomacy and diplomatic representation as mainly being linked to relations between governments is to a great extent becoming outdated. New stakeholders with new agendas have emerged on the international scene, which demands reconsideration of the fundamental rules and operational principles of diplomacy.³⁷

4. Continuing Value of Diplomacy

International politics have undergone a marked change over the course of the 20th century. The erosion of international understanding, the emergence of a bipolar system, and the addition of an unprecedented number of new nation-states are all phenomena which cannot be easily dealt with. They necessitate not the abandonment but the careful observance of several rules of

³⁴ H Ashari, ‘Diplomacy and Foreign Relations’ Available on: <https://www.parlimen.gov.my/images/webuser/artikel/ro/halisah/Diplomacy%20and%20Foreign%20Relations%20by%20Halisah%20Ashari.pdf> accessed 28 June 2022.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ M Manojlovic and C H Thorheim, ‘Crossroads of Diplomacy: New Challenges, New Solutions’ The Hague, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Clingendael Diplomacy Papers No. 13, 2007.

³⁷ Manojlovic and Thorheim (n 34)

traditional diplomacy. The universal international system developed out of the common values of the European *res publicachristiana* and on the basis of recognition of international law. The diplomatic method was spread throughout the world, expressing the *raison de systeme* and constituting an integral part of the minimal conditions securing the existence of international society.³⁸

Diplomacy bloomed during periods of pluralism, espousal of the principle of the equality of states, and consensus regarding the rules and practices governing international relations. The absence of diplomacy would represent a revolution in international society, inasmuch as it is the primary apparatus of maintaining stability and significant relations among nations. Diplomacy's fate is bound up with the acceptance of political norms and rules of behavior which make international society a meaningful reality. In an age of fundamental conflicts of interests and cultural cleavage between states, and under the omnipresent threat of nuclear weapons, diplomatic norms remain one of the few stable foundations of international society. If the relationship between ends and means appears irrational in the nuclear age, this serves to reinforce diplomacy's importance as the only alternative to total destruction.

5. Conclusion

Since the beginnings of modern nation-states, the ability to conduct diplomatic relations was considered one of the basic attributes of state sovereignty. Despite the diplomatic challenges faced by states today, diplomacy tends to be an important key as far as international relation is concerned. Through diplomacy, universal and essential interests or needs of constituent countries in the global system are addressed. It yields global representation, encourages political and cultural spread, helps in gathering relevant information from constituent states in the international system, manages crisis, provide consular service as well as other services and facilitate the observation of international law. These functions sustain the existence and maintenance of interdependency and peaceful correlations in the international system.

Globalization has subsequently added new chapters to diplomacy. Since the world has become smaller and the calls for multilateral diplomacy have become louder, multilateral diplomacy now stands in dire needs of improvement if it is to reflect effectively our interdependent globalized world. Since globalization is an international development, international cooperation is required. Global issues are diffuse and rest on the decisions and behaviour of millions, if not billions, of people. To facilitate technical cooperation, accelerate economic cooperation, fight hunger, promote development assistance, foster cultural relations, protect human rights, save the natural environment, and to avoid wars are some of the international problems that demand attention and need to be dealt with on a permanent basis. Diplomacy in its present configuration contributes to shaping the international community. Diplomacy will

³⁸ M Wight, 'Western Values in International Relations' in H Butterfield and M Wight, *Diplomatic Investigations* (London, 1966) 183; H Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (London, 1977); A James, 'Diplomacy and International Society' [1980] (6) *International Relations*, 936.

continue to contribute to establishing rules of international law. It does so by a large network of communication that is used by the players to protect the interest of their states.

Diplomacy is most importantly used to complete a specific agenda. Therefore, without diplomacy, much of the world's affairs would be abolished, international organizations would not exist, and above all the world would be at a constant state of war. It is for diplomacy that certain countries can exist in harmony. Although it has changed shape to accommodate new actors, concerns and technology, the basic element of diplomacy remains the same, namely the resolution of international conflicts in a peaceful manner by means of communication, negotiation and information-gathering.