

Research article

# PERSPECTIVES ON THE NORMS OF DIPLOMATIC CULTURE

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## Abstract

Diplomatic Culture with its own distinct institutions has been neglected on both the study and practice of International relations and diplomacy. It is argued that there are five norms of diplomatic culture; mainly the use of force only as a last resort, transparency, continuous dialogue, multilateralism and civility. If these norms are respected and accepted in all the worlds regions and international institutions and indeed by many non-state individuals and groups, there will be peace and cordial relation between states.

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## Introduction

There seems to be a resurgence of interest in diplomacy since the end of the cold war. The existence of such culture has been undervalued in both the study and the practice of International Relations. The intent here is to describe the existence of diplomacy and explore its significance in the study of diplomacy and international relations.

Diplomacy can be defined as the tactics and strategies aimed at achieving foreign policy objectives. The tactics may vary from carrot and sticks approach (I.e. Persuasion, use of threats and offer of rewards), to “friendship and confrontation”, other techniques include; negotiation or dialogue, mediation, reconciliation and the use of good office(s) such as the office of the United Nations (U.N.) Secretary – General, OAU/ AU Secretary-General. Foreign Policy Techniques also include visits at the level of Heads as top government officials, such as Foreign Affairs Ministers.

Diplomacy refers to the practical implementation of a state’s grand strategy. It is usually carried out by professional diplomats. Diplomacy is usually associated with general idea that states should use peaceful means rather than military force in dealing with each other. Accordingly when one thinks of diplomacy, one thinks of certain norms and values (the desirability of continuous dialogue through mutual recognition and representation) certain institutions (foreign ministers, embassies) certain processes (accreditation of a written code of diplomatic communication) a written code of diplomatic communication. There is one final definitional issue to consider. It begins with Brian Hocking’s (2004:148) definitions and of multinational diplomatic missions- both bilateral and of multinational diplomatic missions...

Rivers, H.(1979), described diplomacy “as the science and art of representing states and negotiating.” Horton Kaplan (1981:10), defines diplomacy as “the formulation of policy and strategy aiming at achieving national interest in the international field”. Indeed diplomacy is concerned with the management of relations between states and other actors.

The word diplomacy has been used by many scholars to connote or denote different meanings. It is sometimes used to mean foreign policy. Diplomacy is often thought of as being concerned with peaceful activities, although it may occur for example within a war or armed conflicts. For our purpose, the word diplomacy may be defined as the “means and method through which a nation-state conducts its business with the other actors in the international system”. It is therefore apparent from the above definition that diplomacy is not synonymous with foreign policy; it is also more than an art of negotiation.

According to Childs J. R. (1948:64), “Diplomacy is the substance of foreign relations”. Thus, diplomacy is the process by which foreign policy is carried out. Policy is made by many different persons and agencies but presumably on major matters in any state, whatever its forms of government.

Perhaps it is necessary to draw a distinction between foreign policy and diplomacy. Harold Nicolson is particularly insistent on calling attention to the distinction between diplomacy and foreign policy. In his interesting study, the Congress of Vienna, Nicolson wrote;

“It is useful, even when dealing with a remote historical Episode, to consider when diplomacy ends and foreign policy begins. (Nicolson H. 1977:62).

Foreign Policy, in the Westphalia territorial, sovereignty – based sense refers to the formulation of a state’s grand strategy or world view. Only a state can have a foreign policy, and foreign policy making tends to be in the hands of policy makers particularly the politicians. Perhaps it is necessary to emphasize that it was the British diplomat - Harold Nicolson,(1969:3-5), that made that distinction between diplomacy and foreign policy.

We however distinguish between personal-power diplomacy, which shows great variations within and across cultures, and state-power diplomacy which shows less variation because of the diplomatic culture that we content, is commonly subscribed to. The rise of resident embassies in Italy in the fifteen century and its spread throughout Europe in the sixteenth century gave bilateral diplomacy its signature institution (Bull, 2002:160). Of all the institutions of diplomacy, however, the bilateral resident embassies have especially come under derisive attack as an anachronism in an age of high-speed travel and communication technology (Wolfe, 1998:26).

Multilateral diplomacy, which means relations between three or more states of permanent or adhoc international conferences, is generally considered to have become formalized, at least as a great-power mechanism, after the congress of Vienna in 1815 (Hamilton an Langhorne, 1995:90-98),Berridge(2002: 146-151). However, it did not become widely accepted (even if still largely among only Europeans) until after the 1919 Paris Peace Conference.

The U.N. creation in 1945 established diplomacy of universal aspirations, but they did not become truly universal until after 1990, when the decolonization process began in the late 1940s was largely completed.

## **Culture**

Culture is the totality of learned, socially transmitted customs, knowledge, material objects and behaviour. It includes the ideas, value, customs and artifacts of a group of people (Schaefer, 2002). Culture is a pattern of human activities and the symbols that give these activities significance. It is what people eat, how they dress, beliefs they hold and activities they engage in. It is the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization thus distinguishing people from their neighbours. In Federal Republic of Nigeria (1988), culture comprises material, institutional, philosophical and creative aspects.

Despite the foregoing definition, culture is a slippery term, one that can be either trivial or momentous, (Eagleton 2003:48). The idea of culture has long attracted interest from disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, organizational theory, and literary criticism .Hofstede (1991:5), definition of culture as the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another. Based on the concept of habitus by Bourdieu; it implies that there is no natural order of things, but a process that is learned, directed, produced, and ordered in some way and tried by somebody (Giddens 2001:22).

All cultures reproduce themselves in complex ways, designating “not merely something to which one belongs but that one possesses.”(Said, 1983:6). And while some see cultures as highly resistant to change. Ninkovich, 1981:6) Eagleton, 2003:59), others treat them as semiotic and symbolic systems Geertz, 1973:63) and dynamic practices of meaning –making (Weeden, 2002: 714). Whatever, the pace of change, culture constitutes or represents identifiable and self-identifying evolving mindsets, beliefs, assumptions, values and world-views of very large categories, such as a “civilization” down to every small ones, such as family.

In between, there are national cultures containing institutions with organizational culture, which, borrowing from Hofstede, 1991:180), may be seen as the collective programming of the mind and that which distinguishes the

members of one nation or organization from another. In Katzenstein's landmark edited volume, the Culture of National Identity (1996:6), the author refers to the term culture as a broad label that denotes collective model of nation-state authority or identity carried by custom or law. Culture refers to both a set of evaluative standards (such as norms and values) and a set of cognitive standards (such as rulers and models that defines what social actors exist in a system, how they operate, and how they relate to one another.

This definition helps reinforce the notion that certain institutions, societies, states, or even larger collectivities, such as civilizations, can be talked about as having a distinctive culture. With all attention to culture, it is remarkable that there has been so little disciplinary interest in the idea of diplomatic culture- that is in the communicative and representative norms, rules and institutions that have evolved between states.

### **Perspectives on Diplomatic Culture**

Little has been written explicitly about diplomatic culture, but what is identifiable on the topic in the various literatures can be grouped in terms of specific ontological perspectives. Diplomatic culture exists but is not very significant to (the view held predominantly by traditional negotiation theorists), the existence of diplomatic culture.

### **Theoretical Concepts on Diplomatic Culture**

The first (and most explicit) perspective on the idea of diplomatic culture is the English schools international society concept of World order. The English embraces a foundation set of assumptions and practices about how states do and should relate to each other. The concept arose prominently from Hedley Bull's well known argument that "World Politics is better seen not as international system of interacting parts where order is more or less maintained by the balance of power, but as an international law, war, the great powers, and diplomacy all contribute to order. In addition to including diplomacy as a component of order, he said that by facilitating communication between political leaders negotiating agreements, gathering intelligence or information and minimizing friction in international relations. Thus, diplomacy fulfils the function of symbolizing the existence of the society of states (Bull 2002:166).

Bull (2002:304), defined diplomatic culture as "the common stock of ideas and values possessed by the official representatives of states in a range of diplomatic international settings" (such as the diplomatic corps), giving rise to a distinctive code of conduct involving protocol, privileges, and a clear sense of hierarchy with special rights and responsibilities for great powers, (Bull 2002:160).

Thus, for Bull, the diplomatic profession itself... is a custodian of the idea of international society with a stake in preserving and strengthening it. (Bull, 2002:176). In this perspective, a diplomatic culture has been formed in the process of building, or constituting an international society.

A highly significant feature of diplomatic culture emphasized by Bull and Watson (1984:32), in their expansion of international society thesis is that a putatively European or Western set of ideas and practices found

widespread acceptance in non-west. They also argue that postcolonial and even revolutionary states eventually adopted most diplomatic norms, rules and institutions of European international society after initially renouncing or rejecting them as colonial or reactionary remnants. In this view, non-western states accepted Westphalian, European diplomatic culture.

One important area where the expansion of international society thesis continues to have relevance is the role of the great and the hegemonic powers. In Huntington's famous civilizational theory of World order. Cultural communities are replacing cold war blocs and the fault lines between civilizations are becoming the central lines of conflict in global politics (Huntington, 1996:125).

It is not that Huntington envisages the World's major civilizations, all simultaneously at each other's throat in an apocalyptic war of civilization what he sees is a west versus the Rest dichotomy (a point that contrasts vividly with Bull and Watson's expansion of international society thesis. For instances, in Huntington's World order, culturally differentiated civilizations are irredeemably opposed, share almost no common interest, preserve exclusivist identities and values are therefore destined to clash violently. Huntington therefore overlooks diplomatic culture.

Huntington's thesis could be challenged if a prima facie case can be made that diplomatic culture has facilitated countries' diplomatic exchanges between disparate civilizations by providing a range of mutually acceptable channels for dialogue (Johnson and Aggestam 1999:151).

Huntington ignores a set of deeply in-grained cross-cultural diplomatic rules, laws, convention and norms that provide a medium for resolving disputes between states operating under the rubric of purportedly contesting civilizations. Huntington ignores the communicative and representational medium- the many instruments of diplomatic culture-that might help alleviate the very clash he fears. Some diplomatic historians claim that some norms become so deeply internalized over time that we do not appreciate their causative and constitutive effects appear to fit well here.

## **The Norms of Diplomatic Culture**

There are not least five inter-related diplomatic culture- the use of force only as a last resort, transparency, continuous dialogue, multilateralism and civility. We have chosen these norms for two main reasons. The first is that they represent the core self-identifying beliefs, or shared understandings of diplomats that are observable, even if far from observable. These particular norms had in varying degrees, become widely accepted, even internalized by international society. The second reason is that the United States and other powers occasionally transgressed the norms of diplomatic culture.

The use of force only as a last resort, the first transgression of diplomatic culture was the United States eagerness to use force rather than exhaust diplomatic negotiations. In the cold war, the U.S. was often criticized for a perceived proclivity to go to war – for example the Vienna, Panama, Grenada and Bosnia and the Invasion of Iraq in the face of widespread international mis-giving's and explicit appeals to exhaust all diplomatic means before using force. A good question at this point is where was the state Department – Diplomatic Cultures agent in all this?

Historically, denigration of diplomats has been deep rooted in American culture, (Hook, 2003:21). In this case of the transgression of diplomatic culture against the United State, the then Secretary of state (during the invasion of Iraq, Colin Powell and the state Department were marginalized in the decision making process by the neo conservative unilateralists in the White House and the Pentagon led by the Secretary of Defense. Donald Rumsfeld and his Deputy - Paul Wolfowitz New house, (2003:15).

### **Transparency**

The second norm of diplomatic culture that the United States transgressed is transparency. This norm which builds on the perceived primacy of negotiation over force, holds that negotiations are more likely to succeed if information is deemed to have been obtained overtly rather than covertly and policies and views are conveyed accurately to all parties in a frank and forth right manner.

The cold war thwarted the Wilsonian preference for norm of open diplomacy. Under conditions of ideological hostility, nuclear deterrence, and closed territorial borders, the United States shifted towards more clandestine forms of information gathering about the world.

### **Continuous Dialogue**

The third norm of diplomatic culture, continuous dialogue is the idea of engaging rather than isolating the enemy. This is the way by which new, revolutionary and recalcitrant states eventually become socialized by international society. War is thought to be less likely if diplomatic dialogue and communication are conducted continuously with such states for example through the bilateral exchange of diplomatic mission in respective capitals.

Historically, the United States has rejected this argument, for many years refusing to establish diplomatic relations with such states as the former Soviet Union after 1917, the People's Republic of China after 1949, Cuba under Castro and Vietnam after 1975. The same view applied to Libya under Qaddafi, Iran after the 1979 revolution and North Korea since its inception.

In other words, the United States developed its own rules for membership in international society. The United States' historical rejection of this "Talk-to-the enemy" norm is evident in the U.S.-Iraq relationship. Iraq suspended diplomatic relations in 1967 after the Middle East War and only re-established them under a 1984 agreement, at which point the U.S. embassy in Baghdad was reopened, only to be closed again in January, 1991, during the First Gulf War, Wilson(2004:77). In other words, beginning in 1967, there was no American Embassy in Baghdad for 29 of 36 years, including from 1991 to 2003.

This state of affairs was not entirely of the United States making, but the important point is that there was no U.S. diplomatic presence in Iraq leading up to the 2003 invasion, which allowed the pro-war faction in Washinton to present its case knowing that there was no embassy – nor the media, intelligence, business, and humanitarian presences that often accompany the establishment of diplomatic relations – to contradict it. In bureaucratic politics terms, an embassy would have at least provided the weaken state department with a constituency, so that at critical moments, such as his February 2003 security council speech, Colin Powel could have relied on his own department rather than on the CIA, which led to such dreadful results. The point we are making

here is that the utility of bilateral diplomatic representation and communication – a core diplomatic norm was scarcely considered in public debates. Its consideration might have helped with the Iraq situation, and it might also have cast light on how to deal with others.

### **Multilateralism**

The fourth norm that the United States transgressed or violated is multilateralism, or multilateral diplomacy. The United States has a history of resistance to this long-standing diplomatic norm, which is yet another of the norms whose twentieth century development owes much to an American President. With his proposal for the creation of the League of Nations at the end of the First World War, Woodrow Wilson was largely responsible for the advancement of the multilateral diplomacy norm.

Portentously, domestic resentment towards the league concept surfaced immediately, spurring Republican Senator - Henry Cabot Lodge's successful campaign to deny senate ratification of the League of Nations and therefore U.S. extensive violence and prison-abuse scandal (code named "operation desert storm") the BushAdministration toned down its rhetoric and returned to the U.N. to seek support.

### **Civility**

Diplomatic Civility or tact is the very essence of diplomacy in Satow's famous view. This norm asserts the declaration of independence as a decent respect for the opinions of mankind. The civility norm builds on two spheres – Continuous Dialogue and Multilateralism, which takes the form of bilateral and multilateral diplomatic representation. The civility norm presupposes that one is likely to observe common courtesies with those with whom one has personal contact, and vice versa.

In other words, Nigerian policy makers might not talk as tough about countries if those countries had resident Nigerian ambassadors, one of whose tasks is to convey and defend the words of their far-off government. Megaphone diplomacy is easier than face-to-face diplomacy and most diplomats believe that it is also both less honourable and less effective.

### **Conclusion**

Our goal has been to define issues and perspectives on diplomacy and Diplomatic Culture and the various tactics used by states in achieving foreign policy objectives. We have stressed that the tactics may vary from carrot and sticks approach like in the case of the United States beginning from the period of President Truman.

Other techniques that are vital in terms of diplomatic culture include negotiation or dialogue, mediation, reconciliation and the use of good offices such as the United Nations (U.N.) Secretary General and African Union (A.U.) Secretary General. A distinction between diplomacy and foreign policy has been highlighted. The theoretical concept of diplomatic culture has been discussed, the relevant aspects of Diplomatic Culture such as Transparency, Continuous Dialogue, Multilateralism and Civility has also been discussed and the United States has been used as an illustration.

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