



THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF DIPLOMATIC HISTORY

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ABSTRACT: *Diplomatic history is a subfield of history that focuses on the interactions and relationships between states and their representatives. It is concerned with the nature of diplomacy and the role it plays in shaping international relations. Diplomatic history also encompasses a wide range of areas including the study of treaties, alliances, war and peace, and the role of diplomacy in shaping the modern world. More so, the discipline looks at the influence of non-state actors, such as individuals, corporations, and NGOs, on the course of diplomatic history. In addition, the scope of diplomatic history is vast and covers a range of historical periods and regions. The field also studies the impact of culture, emotions, and identity on diplomatic interactions. However, the discipline is faced by some challenges and limitations. Some historians argue that diplomatic history is too focused on state actors and official sources, and that it fails to account for the experiences of ordinary people. This paper examines the nature and scope of diplomatic history. It explains the meaning of history, diplomacy and how the concept of diplomatic history evolved and the role of diplomacy in history. It also highlighted the impact of diplomacy on world events. The relationship between diplomatic history and other disciplines was also examined. The paper uses a historical research approach in its analysis.*

KEYWORDS: Nature, Scope, Diplomacy, History, War, Peace, Non-state.



INTRODUCTION

The great historian and philosopher, Karl Marx, has once in his magnificent work *Historical Materialism* observed that ‘the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle’ (1848, 37). In this theory, Marx argues that society is divided into different classes, and that the struggle between these classes is the driving force of history. He encapsulated that the ‘class struggle’ was between the bourgeoisie (the capitalists class) and the proletariat (the working class). In his view, the struggle was inevitable, and would eventually lead to the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a communist society. By this, Marx was explicitly saying that the essence of social interaction is to struggle for survival and that two or more individuals are interacting with one another and invariably involved into an economic relationship which in so many instances is carried out through exploitation, domination and enslavement in an attempt to have absolute control of the existing limited or scarce resources. Societies also engage in an economic or political struggle in order to define their status in the society through huge manipulation and total control of the mode/factors of production.

Diplomatic history which is a small fragment of global or world history focuses on the study of international relations, diplomatic practices and the role of diplomacy in shaping history. It equally examines how state actors interact with each other, and how these interactions shape international relations. The discipline also sheds light on the causes and consequences of war and peace, and the role of diplomacy in resolving conflicts. This paper attempts to study the nature and scope of diplomatic history which is a subfield of history.

Conceptual Definitions

For a better understanding of the nature and scope of diplomatic history, there is a great need to begin this study by conceptualizing some key concepts. These are history, diplomacy and diplomatic history.

History

History as an academic discipline within the arts and humanities or social sciences. Debated hugely by many scholars, it is concerned with the systematic study of the past, with a focus on human societies and cultures. It involves the use of evidence, such as oral sources, written documents, ethnographic materials, linguistics, geographical as well as botanical evidence, among others. These bodies of evidence were used to re-construct and analyze the past. History also involves the interpretation of evidence, and the construction of narratives about the past, present and the future.

However, one needs to take into cognizance that the most important factor leading to the development of knowledge in any field of study is agreement among its members about the subject content of that field. In other words, the experts in that particular field must come to an agreement on a fairly clear-out definition of what they are studying (Anifowose, 2001). Therefore, partly because of the complexity of the nature and scope of history, it sounds difficult to have a single definition. Even though this problem of having a single accepted definition is not only restricted to history. Little wonder therefore, Swai (1984,4) opined that ‘it is suicidal to accept that there is only one history and one truth...the universal history’. Carr (1961, 26) defines history ‘as an unending dialogue between the past and the present(30)t. Carr argued that the study of history was not a passive process of simply accepting facts,



but rather an active process of engaging with and interpreting the past. He also explained that history is shaped by the historian's own perspective and experiences, as well as the present-day context in which they are writing. Collingwood (1963,9) viewed history as 'an inquiry into the actions of human beings that have done in the past. Marwick (1970,15) defined history in two interwoven steps. One, that history involves the entire human past as it actually occurred. Two, it implies man's attempt to describe and interpret the past. Three, that history is the systematic study of the past. In his contribution to the meaning of history, Onoja (2003,3-4) conceptualized history in two stages: 'as a process and as a study'. As a process, he viewed history 'as the relationship between man and his environment, and the effects of the environment on man and man on his environment (3-4)'. While as a study, it connotes the study of the totality of changes that humanity has undergone. Going by different definitions provided, it is pertinent to assert that the scope of history encompasses the entire human activities. It is also of paramount importance to note that history is not a single, fixed narrative, but rather a constantly evolving and contested field.

Diplomacy

Diplomacy is another concept that received a host of inter-related definitions especially among diplomatic historians and political scientists. Diplomacy refers to the process by which countries or other actors communicate or negotiate with each other. It is often carried out by official representatives, such as ambassadors, and ministers, who represent their country's interests and try to build relationships with other countries.

However, as mentioned earlier, the concept of diplomacy has been variously defined by different scholars in different ways. Nye (2011, 17) defines diplomacy as 'the process of communication and negotiation between states or other international actors, designed to resolve conflict and promote cooperation. Similarly, Ernest (1984,256) conceptualized diplomacy as 'the management of relations between independent political elites. Satow (1922,64) viewed diplomacy as 'the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states. In addition, Kissinger (1994,74) sees diplomacy as the conduct of relations between nations by peaceful means. Bull (1977,94) argues that diplomacy is a central feature of the anarchical society, a term used to describe the international system. He lamented that diplomacy is necessary to maintain order in this system and to prevent it from collapsing into chaos. According to Palmer (2010), diplomacy seeks, by the use of reason, conciliation and the exchange of interests, to prevent major conflicts arising between sovereign states. He further continues to assert it is the agency through which foreign policy seeks to attain its purpose by agreement rather than by war. It is assumed therefore, when agreement becomes impossible, diplomacy, which is the instrument of peace, becomes inoperative; and foreign policy, the final sanction of which is war, alone becomes operative (Childs, 1948).

It is pertinent to state here that diplomacy is not limited to government-government interactions; however, it can also involve private organizations, non-state actors, and even individuals. It can be used to resolve conflicts, strengthen ties, and advance economic and cultural interests. It is also important to make a claim here that diplomacy is an ever-evolving practice, and the definitions and approaches will continue to change over time. And that the purpose of diplomacy is to strengthen the state, nation, or organization it serves in relation to others by advancing the interests in its charge. To this therefore, diplomatic activity



endeavors to maximize a group's advantages without the risk and expense of using force and preferably without causing resentment (Sally, 2017).

Diplomatic History

Diplomatic history is playing its own game independently as did by other areas of general history. Diplomatic history deals particularly with the history of international relations between nation states. Although, it can be different from international relations in that the former largely concerns itself with the foreign policy of a state and the latter specifically deals with the relations between two or more states. Diplomatic history tends to be more concerned with the history of diplomacy, but international relations concern more with current events and creating events and creating a model intended to shed explanatory light on international politics (Saho, 1999).

According to Schroder (1991,97), diplomatic history is the 'history of international relations and of the conduct of foreign affairs, together with the evolution of institutions that have been developed to deal with them'. Akira (1989,69) defined diplomatic history as the study of how the foreign policy of a state is formulated and implemented, and how the interaction between states affects their domestic politics and societies. Similarly, Flagg (1946,69) sees diplomatic history as 'the study of the foreign relations of the United States, including the foreign policies of the United States and of other nations in their relations with the United State, and the influence of these policies and elations upon the domestic history of the United States and of other nations'. Accordingly, Flagg believed that the study of diplomatic history was essential to understanding the past, and that it could provide valuable insights into the present and future.

Evolution and Scope of Diplomatic History

Diplomatic history is a relatively young academic discipline in many countries of the world. Diplomatic history gathered momentum in the late 19th century and hugely flourished in the 20th century. Being a sub-field of history, the course was first taught in England universities in the 19th century. However, the teaching of the discipline grew rapidly and spread to many European and African universities. The term diplomatic history as argued by Cervo (2001) is sometimes used not altogether correctly, as a synonym for the history of international relations. He continued to assert that the former is particularly associated with an academic tradition focused hugely on purely descriptive work and limited by constraints of the chancelleries' views, while the latter attempts to understand and to explain complexities of the evolution of international life through a wider angle. Early scholars of diplomatic history focused on the study of formal diplomatic relations between states, and the role of statesmen and diplomats in shaping those relations. Over time, the field expanded to include non-state actors, and to consider a wide range of issues, including economic, social, and cultural factors.

The practice of international history, which is of the history of relations between nation states, began in the 19th century with the publication of first of the great series, on international treaties and then of national diplomatic documents pioneered by the British officials' blue books and followed by the national publication on the origins of the Franco-Prussian war and on the war of 1914 to 1918. The first chairs of international history in Britain were found at London School of Economics (LSE) and Chatham House in reaction



against the development of nationalist historiography. Their holders, Sir Charles Webster and Professor Arnold Toynbee were prohibited in the cause of world peace from teaching history from a national viewpoint, a prohibition as resolutely ignored by the former as it was practiced by the latter (Walt, 1988).

International relations were initially isolated as an investigative object of the historical sciences study during the first half of the 19th century. The conception of this research area was associated with Leopold Von Ronke, considered by many to be the founder of scientific historiography. After Ronke, modern history of international relations has began since the late 1930s and has promoted a methodological revolution with significant results for the present discussion on international life. In a related development, French historiography introduced the role of *multiple causes* and the dynamics of state decision as the core of its social history of international relations. British historians invented the concept of *international society* and promoted a comparative history of international relations with a cultural flavor. Similarly, Italians deepened the study of the influence of *ideas* and *public opinion* upon international relations. North –American historians tied *history and theory* and stressed the new role of the United States in the world. Latin America has also significantly provided a humongous contribution to the understanding of development and possibilities of a positive insertion of the region in an interdependent world (Cervo, 2001). These contributions, among others, have dramatically transformed the old and nationally-oriented diplomatic history preponderant in the post-Ronke period, from the 1870s to the 1930s into a new and worldwide pattern of knowledge, more connected to the modernization of social sciences and to the challenges of providing sense to the dynamics of international life. The approach of the historians of international relations brought to the study of world politics the value of the empirical dimension, the importance of multiple causes, and relevance of the singular and the process rather than that of the event. This however, has provided a fruitful dialogue with the theory of international relations, particularly with political scientists.

However, many historians consider the German-American scholar, George F. Kennan, as the father of diplomatic history. Kennan was a leading scholar of international relations and a diplomat who served as the U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union. His seminal work, *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950*, published in 1951, established him as a leading authority on the history of U.S. foreign policy. The book was widely read and had a profound impact on the field of diplomatic history. The work helped to shape the study of U.S. foreign policy and to establish diplomatic history as a field of study. Other scholars too, credit Thucydides for laying the foundations for the modern study of diplomatic history. In his book titled *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides sought to explain the causes and consequences of the war through a detailed account of the diplomatic negotiations and events leading up to the conflict. He also pioneered the use of primary sources in historical writing, setting an important precedent for modern historians.

Consequent to the above, one may argue that diplomatic history is a subfield of politics in the Thucydidean and Ronkean tradition. Implicitly for the most part it rested in the classical realist paradigm (Andrew and William). Its governing concepts were rationality, power and the state. With this therefore, diplomatic historians engaged themselves in two major tasks. Firstly, to dig out how the governing elites, in unitary states, generally free of popular forces, assessed risk, did the capabilities-goals analysis and constructed foreign policy. Secondly, to understand the behavior of states and how they interacted with one another. The main concerns of diplomatic history were therefore essentially political and strategic. It comprises



war and its origin, peace and its restoration, crises, alliance relationship and the sanctity of treaties (Graham & Williams, 2009).

Diplomatic historians adopted an approach that rested on textual analysis of primary sources, manuscript and printed materials, preserved primarily in government archives.

Relationship of Diplomatic History to other Academic Disciplines

It is an undeniable view that no academic discipline is an ocean of itself. With this therefore, diplomatic history is gigantically enriched by a recognition of its cross-fertilization and interrelationship with various branches of learning. Diplomatic history which is seen as the study of interactions between states is a complex and multi-disciplinary field, which requires an understanding of history, political science, geography, psychology, and anthropology, among other branches of knowledge. Here, the paper is going to explore the relationship between diplomatic history and these disciplines, and discuss briefly how a multidisciplinary approach can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the course in question.

First, the relationship between diplomatic history and history is complex and multifaceted. Even though diplomatic history was born out of history, there is still a need to briefly look into their relationship. As it has been repeatedly mentioned in the paper that diplomatic history is often seen as a subfield of history, and it often relies on historical sources and methods to study diplomatic interactions. For instance, a diplomatic historian might use primary sources like government documents, letters, or diaries to reconstruct the events and decisions that led to the diplomatic agreement. On the one hand, diplomatic history can also inform and shape our understanding of broader historical events and trends. For example, a historian might employ a diplomatic perspective to better understand the causes and consequences of the French Revolution or the First World War. In these cases, the diplomatic history can provide insights into the international relations and political dynamics that influenced the course of these events. Ultimately, the relationship between diplomatic history and history is complex and interdependent, and the two fields often inform and enrich each other.

Secondly, diplomatic history and political science are also closely intertwined and of mutual influence and enrichment. It is of paramount importance to mention here that from its infancy stage, it is called *History of International Relations* before being changed to diplomatic history. And international relations as it is known today, is one of the major components or scope of political science. Diplomatic history often draws on political science theories and concepts to understand the motivations and decision-making processes of states and leaders. In turn, political science can use empirical evidence provided by diplomatic historians to test and develop theories about the nature of international relations. For example, a political scientist might study the origins of the Cold War using diplomatic sources, and then use those findings to build or refine a theory about the causes of the conflict. However, that is not the only way the two fields interact. Diplomatic history can also help to inform and shape contemporary political debates, and political scientists can use diplomatic history to gain insights into current happenings. In short, the relationship between diplomatic history and political science is mutual and multifaceted.

Thirdly, diplomatic history and sociology (the study of human society and social behavior that uses various methods to examine the social, political, and economic structures of society,



as well as the relationship and interaction between individuals and groups), are also intimately related, similar to that of political science. Sociology can provide diplomatic history with theories and concepts that can be used to understand the past, and diplomatic history can equally provide sociology with empirical data that can be used to generate, test and refine theories. For example, a sociologist might use the example of Peace of Westphalia to develop a theory about the relationship between diplomacy and social change. At the same time, diplomatic history can shed more light on how changes in social structures and institutions have shaped international relations.

Fourthly, in the case of anthropology, the relationship with diplomatic history is a bit different. While political science and sociology are primarily concerned with the interaction between states and societies, anthropology is primarily concerned with interaction between cultures and societies. That said, there is still a significant overlap between the two fields. Anthropologists can use diplomatic history to understand how different cultures have interacted with each other in the past, and how those interactions have shaped the development of each culture. For instance, an anthropologist may require the history of the Silk Road to understand the cultural interactions between China and the West.

Fifthly, the relationship between diplomatic history and Economics is also quite interesting. On one hand, the diplomatic historian can provide economists with valuable insights into the historical factors that have shaped the economic development of various societies. An economist might require important historical data and circumstances on how the international trade system has evolved over time, and how that evolution has affected the global economy. Equally important, the economists can use diplomatic history to test and refine economic theories. For example, an economist might use the history of trade wars to evaluate the effectiveness of protectionist policies. The Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930, for example, was a protectionist policy that was widely blamed for worsening the Great Depression. By critically studying the impact of this policy, economists can evaluate the potential costs and benefits of protectionism.

Sixthly, the diplomatic historians as well as the geographers might on so many occasions engaged in studies on human societies and their physical environment. One need not to argue that there is a strong relationship between diplomatic history and geography, as they are both fundamentally concerned with human society vis-à-vis their physical environment. In fact, many scholars are of the opinion that diplomacy is essentially a form of geopolitics, or the study of the way geography influences international relations. For example, a diplomatic historian may demand geographic knowledge to understand the historical interactions between countries like England and France, which were separated by the English Channel. Another classic example on how geographic factors have influenced diplomatic history is the impact of colonialism. The vastness of the Atlantic Ocean made it possible for European powers to establish colonies in the Americas without interference from rival powers in Europe. This allowed for the rapid expansion of European influence in the New World, with significant implications for the world as we know it today.

Seventhly, there is a lot of overlap between diplomatic history and psychology, as both fields are interested in understanding human behavior and motivation. In fact some scholars argue that diplomacy can be viewed as a form of psychological warfare, in which countries use various psychological techniques to influence the behavior of other countries. For example, countries might use propaganda or public diplomacy to shape the perceptions of other



countries and their citizens. Another example of how psychology and diplomatic history intersect is the concept of 'soft power'. Soft power refers to the ability of a country to influence the behavior of other countries through attraction and persuasion, rather than force or coercion. Countries can use various psychological techniques to increase their soft power, such as promoting their culture or values abroad. A classic example of this is the United States' use of Hollywood movies to promote American culture and values around the world. It is actually quite fascinating to see how the disciplines benefit from each other.

Eighthly, diplomatic history and philosophy are closely linked, as they both examine the nature of human existence and how people interact with each other. In particular, diplomatic history can be seen as a subset of political philosophy, which explores the nature of power and the relationship between the individual and the state. Many philosophers have written about the nature of diplomacy and international relations, including Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant. The philosopher Thomas Hobbes was one of the first to explore the concept of 'realpolitik', which emphasizes the importance of power and self-interest in international relations. He believes that in a 'state of nature', humans would be in a constant state of war with each other, and that diplomacy was a way to avoid this chaos and achieve stability. Similarly, Jean-Jacques explored the idea of a 'social contract', which suggests that people are willing to give up some of their freedoms in order to live in a peaceful society. The ideas of both Hobbes and Jean-Jacques had a significant impact on the way that diplomatic history has been studied and understood. Their works have been used to understand the nature of power, war, and peace, and have influenced the way that scholars have analyzed the actions of states and their leaders. Their works have also been influential in the development of international law and institutions, such as the United Nations.

Ninthly, knowledge of law can be very useful for diplomatic historians, since it can help them to understand the legal and political context of the events they are studying. For example, a knowledge of international law can help diplomatic historians to understand the treaties and agreements that were made between different countries. Likewise, knowledge of constitutional law can help diplomatic historians to understand the legal framework within which diplomatic decisions were made. Of course, not all diplomatic historians have legal backgrounds, but it can be a useful tool for understanding the events they are studying.

Finally, diplomatic history is a multidisciplinary field, and historians often draw on a range of different sources and methods in their work, including archival research, or oral history, and qualitative analysis.

Common Criticism

Being a subfield of political history, diplomatic history is subject to some common criticisms. One of such criticisms placed on the discipline is that it tends to focus too much on the actions of individual leaders and states, and not enough on the experiences of ordinary people. The discipline was also accused of being overly focused on events and treaties, without considering the broader social, cultural and economic context. Another criticism is that diplomatic history mostly focused on a western perspective, and not take into account the experiences and perspectives of other regions and cultures. The field is also state-centric, and does not give enough consideration to the role of non-state actors in diplomacy.



CONCLUSION

This study was able to look at the nature and scope of diplomatic history. It also looked at the concepts of history, diplomacy and the evolution of diplomatic history globally. The study was able to show that diplomatic history is a multidisciplinary field of study that focuses on the interaction between states, individuals, and other actors in the international arena. It considers a wide range of factors, including economics, culture, and power relations. The paper also examined the nexus between diplomatic history and other academic disciplines, such as history, political science, sociology, anthropology, geography, economics and political philosophy, among other fields in humanities and social sciences. While there are criticisms of the field, the multi-disciplinary approach of the field can provide a more comprehensive understanding of many issues related to interrelation between states, individuals, organizations and other non-state actors.

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