

# The Role of Diplomacy in Shaping the Strategic Future of the International System

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## Abstract

With the development of diplomacy as a means of interaction between sovereign states, a new frontier was opened which the world has adopted with enthusiasm. However, there remains lessons from significant epochs concerning war and its engagement which offer crucial insights into international relations. By studying the relationship between politics and war we are able to discern that the threat to use, or actual use of, organised violence has been the hallmark of politicians against each other with the singular aim of gaining some political mileage. Consequently, the waging of war is done at the behest of politics and to the singular fulfilment of those political ideals. This study delves into the multifaceted role of war, peace, and diplomacy in the strategic history of the international system. It explores how these elements have shaped the global order, influenced the behavior of nations, and impacted the quest for stability and cooperation. Through a comprehensive analysis, this research seeks to illuminate the complex interplay between conflict and diplomacy, aiming to provide insights that can inform contemporary international relations and policymaking.

**Keywords:** strategic history, war and peace, diplomacy, international system, ideology, geopolitics, negotiation, communication

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## 1. Introduction

A basic tenet in the study of modern international relations is that it can be understood by analysing strategic history. This is done by analysing the themes that explain matters that affect war and peace and contexts which expound on the variable conditions within which the balance between peace and war oscillates. The theme of historical continuity and discontinuity attempts to answer the question: what changes and what does not? War has an unchanging nature; however, its

character is one subject to modifications from time to time (Bertucci, Hayes & James, 2016). Therefore, while the structure of an army changes from time to time, discipline and training are eternal necessities.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

The role of war, peace, and diplomacy in the strategic history of the international system has been pivotal, marked by moments of conflict, cooperation, and transformation. However, this intricate relationship poses several pressing challenges. Firstly, the persistent threat of armed

conflicts: Despite efforts to prevent war, conflicts continue to emerge, threatening lives, economies, and international stability. Recent examples include the Syrian Civil War and the tensions on the Korean Peninsula. The fragility of peace: Sustaining peace remains a delicate endeavor, as unresolved conflicts, historical grievances, and power struggles often undermine peace agreements and lead to renewed violence. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict serves as a poignant illustration of this issue (Acharya, 2014). The limitations of diplomacy: Diplomatic efforts are not always successful in resolving disputes, and diplomatic channels can break down, leading to escalations of tensions, as seen in the Ukraine crisis. The need for a new strategic framework, the changing dynamics of the international system, including the rise of non-state actors, the influence of emerging powers, and the evolving nature of warfare, demand a reevaluation of traditional approaches to war, peace, and diplomacy.

### 3. Themes and Contexts of Strategic History

The relationship between war and warfare is, on the one hand, between a legal and social entity, one that comprises of the complete relationship between the belligerents, and, on the other, the actual waging of combat in its military dimension. In this case, the intent of war is to bend an enemy's will towards one's objectives; in case a peaceful strategy fails, one may resort to warfare. What makes the greatest impact is not how skilled one's army is, but rather one's capacity to bend the enemy's will.

When one looks at the relationship between politicians and soldiers, history teaches that the two seldom have a common approach to statehood. While both serve the state, political culture points to different values to those espoused by the military. For the success of state strategy, there is need to have a consensus between the two; an agreement of mind and an eschewing of interference with what clearly belongs to the opposite side to deliver.

The interdependence of war and society points to the unique mesh that is society and war. Not only are wars the product of society, but society is always negatively impacted by war (Bertucci, Hayes & James, 2016). The involvement of society in war is no longer limited to finances and manpower as was during WWII and public opinion, during and on war, is now a reality not witnessed by any of the other wars in history.

The relations between war and peace, and peace and war, point to a reciprocal relationship that when a state is dealing with the one, it must also contemplate how to later deal with the other. States must always consider the cost of war on peace, and the waves of order and disorder that will follow. Concomitantly, states must understand the significance of periods of peace for the upcoming wars (Breuning, 2017).

The understanding of war is directly related to understanding the contexts in which it occurred; partly because there's more sense in a narrative that consists of force and the context behind, and, partly because it is imperative when studying war to understand the context within which it occurred.

When analysing politics, one looks at what war is all about; the genesis of peace and war; the decisions that informed war (Breuning, 2017). Also under analysis is the interplay between the political leaders and the army, not as a fighting unit but as members of society. A society's values and beliefs may change and evolve over time; what remains constant is the sociocultural context within which policy for or against war is formulated.

When analysing war and peace in their economic contexts, it is prudent not to look at the profitability or financial ability of a state to wage war. What is central is the economic ramifications of war; the economic burden that has to be borne by successive generations for wars fought prior to their existence.

The influence of technology in wars, especially from 1800 has been very crucial. The dynamism that has characterised the advancement of technology vis a vis its application in human conflict has changed the face of warfare (Acharya, 2014). More often than not, technology has been made specifically for war(fare) before its later application and modification for use in civilian and peaceful times.

The military-strategic aspect of war is concerned with policy choices which may have a bearing to the consequences of war and peace. Hence countries are wont to engage in war if, according to their strategic estimates, a bold offensive favours them (Sutch & Elias, 2017). The geographical aspect of war encompasses not only the physical limits of a state, the lands adjacent and also far off that constitute potential conquest areas, but also the sea and air under

the control of a state. Geography also refers to the context within which a state is placed relative to its expansionist strategy.

Wars and warfare happen within a historical context. The people, the incidents they influenced, the repercussions of those incidents and how war and peace were shaped by those consequences all fall within a timeline; it is this timeline that forms history. There is therefore need to place the historical context to strategic actions.

#### **4. War and Peace: Controversies in World War I**

From being the most misunderstood episode of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the First World War is replete with controversies; of these, five stand out and shall be addressed herein. First, it is contended that the war erupted due to government loss of control of their military instrument (Breuning, 2017). This meant that the process of competitive mobilization (by the respective armies) was uncontrollable once it commenced. Due to the inherent rigidities in mobilization, which even today stands true, the difficulties experienced were more or less inevitable. What was, and is still, debatable and lends to scepticism, is why successive countries chose to engage in war, often in disregard to other options.

Second, it is argued that the war was futile. Based on the fundamental principle that war should be aimed at solving a critical problem and should be engaged as a last resort, the failure of WWI was seen in that it (almost inevitably) contributed to the eruption of the Second World War in 1939 (Sutch & Elias, 2017). Despite all the effort and costs, both financial and human, the First World War was fought in vain.

Thirdly, it was posited that the war was conducted by belligerents who had scant, if any experience at all, in military management of war in general and fighting in particular. Due to this incompetence, they were more or less leading the soldiers, and the general public, to the slaughter (Sutch & Elias, 2017). It is improbable that all of the countries in the war had their armies led by blundering fools. The apparent failings of the armies can be attributed to a number of factors, namely: technical inability to communicate effectively during the actual war engagement; poor tactical and operational mobility; high soldier-to-space ratio at the Western Front which was the only plausible arena if one was to have control of the sway of

victory; the initial ineptitude of the generals to wage modern warfare (Brown & Ainley, 2015).

Fourth, and congruent to the above point, where military professionals attempted at engaging in their vocation, they failed to employ the available military and strategic strategies of modern firepower (Breuning, 2017). It is evident that the lessons of the 1860s to the 1910s, painstakingly earned, were either ignored or miscalculated. One of the incontestable facts of the nineteenth century is the heavy influence of the Industrial Revolution. One consequence is that warfare changed; it was more difficult to continue using older tactics against newer and better weapons.

Fifth, there was a general impression on the political and military leaders that the next great war (in relation to the pre-1900 wars) would last shorter. There was a general expectation in the general public that the next great war would last months rather than years. However, evidence shows that the senior most officers in the German, British, and French armies held a contrary opinion. German military knew that their best chances of winning the war lay in a short, intense war; the allies understood that despite belligerence, Germany would be defeated in a long-drawn war, a factor they played to their advantage and consequent, victory.

#### **5. War and Peace: World War II in Europe (I): The Structure and Course of Total War**

One of the most outstanding features of World War II is the unprecedented number of casualties; more than 53 million people died. Other than the huge death toll, WWII is infamous for the Holocaust and other genocide-like deaths especially in China under the Japanese.

World War II was comprised of lesser wars which gave the effect of a long-drawn-out conflict. This can be traced from the first attack on Poland to the last Battle of Bulge: the systematic growth and quick decent of the Third Reich was reduced and (forever be) described, not by victory, but total vanquish.

The second phase of war commenced with the entry into the new year where Germany had under its control Denmark and Norway by April 1940; by June, France signed an armistice. So impressive was the Wehrmacht that it took them six weeks to deliver what Germany couldn't deliver in four years in World War I. Despite a

strong attack against Britain, Germany failed in making any inroads; this came to benefit the entry of the United States in the war as there was a mean of accessing western Europe and thence, the support of the allied command.

The 'real' war in WWII began in 1941 with Germany's invasion of Russia: despite its superlative definitions, the German army was woefully short in its intelligence and logistic capacities; two handicaps that would cost it the war in (and for) Russia. The third reason that Germany lost its offensive against Russia was an underestimation of how brutal the winters could be (Bertucci, Hayes & James, 2016).

The end was certainly nigh in 1944 as save for a miracle, which never came, Germany stood to lose. This was compounded by three incidents that changed the tide of the war: the defeat of the Luftwaffe; the Allied landing in Normandy; and the destruction of German forces by the Russian army. It was however the Battle of Bulge that completed the German narrative of poor operationality of its forces and also wanting in planning (Jonsson & Hall, 2015).

The dawn of 1945 also saw the dusk of the Third Reich; it was unable to replenish its supplies and troops to needed areas and generally suffered consecutive defeats. Hitler's suicide on 29<sup>th</sup> April and the subsequent surrender of Germany on the 8<sup>th</sup> sealed the end of the dream for world domination. What awaited the Allies was the previously unbelievably horrors of humanitarian crisis in the form of evidence of the Holocaust.

In order to understand The Holocaust, it is imperative that one has a working grasp of the ideology that informed, and sustained it. It is inarguable that Hitler has a visceral hatred of the Jewish people; this fed his intent to their persecution and physical eradication. It was fed by the view of Jews as a racial virus that had to be eliminated on public health grounds and because of their consideration as agents of a malignant and hostile international conspiracy.

## **6. War and Peace: The Cold War and Even Colder Borders**

The course of the Cold War can be understood by looking at five key pointers. First is that the conflict was based on ideology and geopolitics; the former identified and influenced the latter.

Second, Western ideology, being contrary to the Soviet, precipitated any and all antagonism perpetrated by the Soviets. Due to the

deep-seated differences, it is safe to say that even if USSR had another leader other than Joseph Stalin, the same policies would have been adopted. Thirdly, despite both the super powers desiring no confrontation, they genuinely feared an attack from the other. Their ideological and geopolitical differences quickly escalated to enmity and military threat.

Moreover, despite the fact that both sides were in a duel, it was the actions of their supporters that shaped the conflict. Though external to the USA-USSR conflict, allies acted independently and in pursuit of their nation's interests (Jonsson & Hall, 2015). This was however misconstrued by either of the main protagonists and their allies, as the actions of the main players.

Although termed as a 'cold' war, the USA-USSR conflict, was nonetheless a confrontation; with dangers that were hitherto unknown. The saving grace came in the fact that both parties, and their allies, opted for, and worked towards a non-war scenario. However, the dangers of utter and total devastation always lingered in the minds of the general public as the nuclear weapons each had created were, like all things man-made, subject to a myriad of accidents and unintended launches. It took the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis to bring to light how close the world had come to nuclear annihilation.

## **7. Diplomacy, and Foreign Policy**

The centrality of communication to diplomacy is akin to that of blood to the body; the latter cannot perform without the former. Diplomacy is often expressed along the lines of communication; viz, "the communication system of the international society." In ancient Greece, Hermes was the deity of language and diplomacy with the most prominent diplomatic emissaries considered his offspring.

Communication is regarded as the sending of coded messages, the decoding of such messages and retrieval of the meaning subsisting in such messages; as such a language is necessary. Throughout history, and despite the multivariant nature of human society, there has always developed a central language within which diplomacy would be engaged.

Central to diplomacy is the gathering and assessment of information; this includes but is not limited to the state of the economy of the host state, its foreign policy, the armed forces' morale, the health of its leader and the prognosis of upcoming elections (Jonsson &

Hall, 2015). This has been one of the enduring legacies of diplomacy since time immemorial.

Negotiation is synonymous with diplomacy; it is regarded as the acknowledgement of each other's independence. International negotiation is premised on several factors (Acharya, 2014). First, there is need for bargaining situations; instances where there is need for the entities to come to a consensus. Secondly, they more often than not involve third parties who come to not only bring the parties together but to also provide an unbiased viewpoint. Third, international negotiations are dependent on the domestic front acceding to what will be decided as the way out; actually, it is the instructions from the domestic end that are negotiated upon.

Technological development, in all its spheres, has enabled the setting up of diplomatic centres in host countries to be feasible within a relatively short time. In addition, communication between the sending state and its envoys suffered greatly as only rudimentary means of communications existed; this even after the introduction of the telegraph. It has taken the development of information technology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for communication not only to be fast, and in some instances, instantaneous, but to be discreet and not liable to by form of eavesdropping or intersection by others.

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