



# The Palgrave Handbook of Diplomatic Reform and Innovation

*Edited by* Paul Webster Hare  
Juan Luis Manfredi-Sánchez  
Kenneth Weisbrode

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# Studies in Diplomacy and International Relations

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# The Palgrave Handbook of Diplomatic Reform and Innovation

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Broken Chair is a symbol of both fragility and strength, precariousness and stability, brutality and dignity. Originally conceived by Handicap International-Humanity & Inclusion with the aim of urging States to ban anti-personnel mines (in 1997) and cluster munitions (in 2008), Broken Chair now embodies the fight against explosive weapons and the violence inflicted on populations during armed conflicts. Created by Daniel Berset, at the request of the organization, and installed in front of the United Nations, the monument is a challenge to the international community. It reminds it of its obligations to respect international humanitarian law and to protect civilians.

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# Contents

<b>Part I</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Diplomacy the Neglected Global Issue: Why Diplomacy Needs to Catch Up with the World</b>	<b>3</b>
	<i>Paul Webster Hare</i>	
<b>Part II</b>	<b>State of Diplomacy</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>The Closing of the Diplomatic Mind</b>	<b>23</b>
	<i>Kenneth Weisbrode</i>	
<b>3</b>	<b>A Diplomatic Taxonomy for the New World Disorder</b>	<b>41</b>
	<i>Chas W. Freeman Jr.</i>	
<b>4</b>	<b>Knowledge Diplomacy: A Conceptual Analysis</b>	<b>59</b>
	<i>Jane Knight</i>	
<b>5</b>	<b>Why Reforms Are Needed in Bilateral Diplomacy: A Global South Perspective</b>	<b>81</b>
	<i>Kishan S. Rana</i>	

<b>Part III</b>	<b>Politicization of Diplomacy</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Diplomats and Politicization</b> <i>Pauline Kerr</i>	<b>111</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Digital Diplomacy and International Society in the Age of Populism</b> <i>Onur Erpul</i>	<b>143</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Withering Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Evidence from China</b> <i>Qingmin Zhang and Lize Yang</i>	<b>167</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>South Africa and Its Foreign Alignment and Practice: From Hope to Dashed Expectations</b> <i>Anthony James Leon</i>	<b>193</b>
<b>Part IV</b>	<b>Reforming Institutions</b>	<b>211</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>From Great Expectations to Dwindling Status: Brazilian Diplomacy's Response to Post-Cold War Upheavals</b> <i>Rogério de Souza Farias and Antônio Carlos Lessa</i>	<b>213</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Crisis Prevention and Stabilization Made in Germany: Meeting the Demands of Modern Diplomacy?</b> <i>Sarah Bressan</i>	<b>235</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Integrated Statecraft and Australia's Diplomacy</b> <i>Tom Barber and Melissa Conley Tyler</i> 	<b>251</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>African Union Reform: Challenges and Opportunities</b> <i>Emmanuel Balogun and Anna Kapambwe Mwaba</i>	<b>277</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>What Motivates South Korea's Diplomatic Reform and Innovation?</b> <i>HwaJung Kim</i>	<b>295</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>The Transformations of French Diplomacy</b> <i>Maxime Lefebvre</i>	<b>315</b>

<b>Part V</b>	<b>Digital Revolution and Diplomatic Reform</b>	321
<b>16</b>	<b>Digital Diplomacy in the Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic: Lessons and Recommendations</b> <i>Corneliu Bjola and Michaela Coplen</i>	323
<b>17</b>	<b>Exploring the Usefulness of Artificial Intelligence for Diplomatic Negotiations: Two Case Studies</b> <i>Volker Stanzel</i>	343
<b>18</b>	<b>Beyond Meeting and Tweeting: The Next Challenges for Innovation in Diplomacy</b> <i>Tom Fletcher</i>	367
<b>19</b>	<b>Disinformation and Diplomacy</b> <i>Juan Luis Manfredi-Sánchez  and Zhao Alexandre Huang </i>	375
<b>20</b>	<b>Digitalizing South American MFAs: Reform and Resistance</b> <i>Jorge Heine and Daniel Aguirre </i>	397
<b>Part VI</b>	<b>Multilateral Diplomacy and Innovation</b>	417
<b>21</b>	<b>Toward a More Credible Multilateralism at the United Nations: A Few Practical Steps</b> <i>Bénédicte Frankinet</i>	419
<b>22</b>	<b>A New Logic of Multilateralism on Demand</b> <i>Akiko Fukushima</i>	435
<b>23</b>	<b>About Spheres of Influence</b> <i>Chas W. Freeman Jr.</i>	455
<b>24</b>	<b>Regional Diplomacy and Its Variations: Change and Innovation</b> <i>Rajiv Bhatia and Kishan S. Rana</i>	481
<b>25</b>	<b>Why Collective Diplomacy Needs to Embrace Innovation</b> <i>Martin Wählich</i>	505



<b>26</b>	<b>Innovating International Cooperation for Development: A New Model for Partnerships Between Developed and Middle-Income Countries</b>	<b>521</b>
	<i>José Antonio Zabalgaitia and Antonio Tenorio</i>	
<b>27</b>	<b>The UAE's Innovative Diplomacy: How the Abraham Accords Changed (or Did Not Change) Emirati Foreign Policy</b>	<b>543</b>
	<i>William Guéraiche</i>	
<b>28</b>	<b>Small States: From Intuitive to Smart Diplomacy</b>	<b>559</b>
	<i>Vesko Garčević</i>	
<b>29</b>	<b>Urban Diplomacy: How Cities Will Leverage Multilateralism</b>	<b>581</b>
	<i>Juan Luis Manfredi-Sánchez </i>	
<b>30</b>	<b>Reforming Global Health Diplomacy in the Wake of COVID-19</b>	<b>601</b>
	<i>Mark C. Storella</i>	
<b>31</b>	<b>The Reform of Humanitarian Diplomacy</b>	<b>629</b>
	<i>Gregory Simons and Anna A. Velikaya</i>	
<b>32</b>	<b>Goeconomic Diplomacy: Reforming the Instrumentalization of Economic Interdependencies and Power</b>	<b>649</b>
	<i>Kim B. Olsen</i>	
<b>33</b>	<b>Science Diplomacy with Diplomatic Relations to Facilitate Common-Interest Building</b>	<b>673</b>
	<i>Paul Arthur Berkman</i>	
<b>34</b>	<b>Climate Diplomacy for a 1.5 Degree World</b>	<b>691</b>
	<i>Olivia Rumble and Andrew Gilder</i>	
<b>35</b>	<b>Global Diplomacy and Multi-stakeholderism: Does the Promise of the 2030 Agenda Hold?</b>	<b>703</b>
	<i>Felicitas Fritzsche and Karin Bäckstrand</i>	
<b>36</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>731</b>
	<i>Paul Webster Hare</i>	
	<b>Index</b>	<b>737</b>

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# List of Figures

Fig. 7.1	Estimated marginal means of likes (Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, 9.2016–12.2020)	155
Fig. 7.2	Estimated marginal means of likes (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9.2016–12.2020)	155
Fig. 7.3	Estimated marginal means of likes (Turkish Embassy, Washington, D.C.), 9.2016–12.2020)	156
Fig. 7.4	Estimated marginal means of likes (Serdar Kılıç, Turkish Ambassador, Washington, D.C.), 9.2016–12.2020)	156
Fig. 7.5	Estimated marginal means of likes (Recep Tayyip Erdoğan)	157
Fig. 8.1	Statistical graph of the quantity of information blind spots by the spokesperson of the MFA (2002–19)	172
Fig. 8.2	Proportion graph of distribution of information blind spots by the spokesperson of the MFA (2002–19)	173
Fig. 16.1	Crisis communication approaches: adapt, improvise, and ignore	328
Fig. 16.2	Showcasing international collaboration	331
Fig. 16.3	Showcasing international collaboration	333
Fig. 16.4	Countering versus promoting disinformation	335
Fig. 16.5	Thinking outside the box	338
Fig. 20.1	Institutional Twitter followers in 2020 versus 2015. Source: The authors	411
Fig. 20.2	Follower growth of institutional accounts on Twitter. Source: The authors	411
Fig. 26.1	Middle-income countries' share of total ODA 2000–20. Source: OECD 2022	523
Fig. 26.2	Select middle-income countries' share of total ODA 2000–20. Source: OECD 2022	524
Fig. 26.3	Select middle-income countries' share of total ODA and of ODA to middle-income countries 2000–20. Source: OECD 2022	525

Fig. 26.4	Optimus4 helix cycle	537
Fig. 26.5	Partners. Four strategic lines and two cross-cutting areas. Source: Sistema de Naciones Unidas México 2020	538
Fig. 33.1	Balancing national interests and common interests on a planetary scale began during the twentieth century, illustrated with international environmental treaties to address sustainability questions at local-global levels. Adapted from Berkman (2002), including legal establishment of areas beyond national jurisdictions (yellow), international spaces (Kish 1973; Berkman et al. 2011; Berkman 2020a) to build common interests and minimize risks of conflict over jurisdictional boundaries across the Earth on a planetary scale (Berkman 2009)	674
Fig. 33.2	<b>a–d</b> Globally interconnected civilization time scales revealed by exponential changes with <b>(a)</b> climate and human-population size over decades to centuries in view of global events; <b>(b)</b> high-technology change over years to decades illustrated by “Moore’s Law” with transistors on a chip; <b>(c)</b> global pandemic over months to years with COVID-19 cases; and <b>(d)</b> social-media interactions over minutes to months, illustrated by 2014–15 tweets about “Black Lives Matter.” Adapted from Berkman (2020b), which has references to data sources with elaboration	677
Fig. 33.3	Spectrum of jurisdictions on Earth, illustrated by megacities with capacities of states at subnational levels, representing an inclusive framework for humankind to address impacts, issues, and resources in our globally interconnected civilization (Fig. 33.1) with diplomacy across diverse time scales (Fig. 33.2a–d). Adapted from Berkman et al. (2022a)	679
Fig. 33.4	Short- to long-term features of diplomatic relations, highlighting exponential change across an inflection point toward logistic (S-shaped, sigmoid) change, as described by numbers (N) changing per unit of time (t). Diplomatic relations are required before-through-after inflection points with scalability across embedded time scales in our globally interconnected civilization (Fig. 33.2a–d). Adapted from Berkman (2020b, 2020c)	681
Fig. 33.5	Informed decisions operate across a “continuum of urgencies,” illustrated for peoples, nations, and our world from security to sustainability time scales (Figs. 33.1, 33.2, 33.3, and 33.4). Negotiation strategies that contribute to the decision-making with diplomatic agents (Boxes 33.1 and 33.3) also exist short term in view of conflicts to resolve and long term in view of common interests to build—balancing societal, economic, and environmental considerations across generations. Adapted from	

	Vienna Dialogue Team (2017); Young et al. (2020); Berkman et al. (2022a)	683
Fig. 33.6	Pyramid of informed decision-making with science diplomacy to apply, train, and refine across a “continuum of urgencies” (Vienna Dialogue Team 2017), characterizing the scope of an informed decision (Fig. 33.5) as the apex goal of an holistic process that begins at the stage of questions to build common interests among allies and adversaries alike. Enhancing research capacities is a positive feedback that results from common-interest building. Adapted from Berkman et al. (2022a)	684

# List of Tables

Table 4.1	Conceptual framework for IHERI in a knowledge diplomacy approach	67
Table 4.2	PAU: application of key elements of knowledge diplomacy conceptual framework	74
Table 4.3	Differences between the role of IHERI in knowledge diplomacy and soft power approaches	75
Table 4.4	Proposed conceptual framework for IHERI in a soft power approach	76
Table 7.1	Breakdown of tweets by numbers ( <i>n</i> English tweets = 3976, Turkish tweets = 5089, total <i>n</i> = 9056)	161
Table 7.2	Estimated marginal means	162
Table 20.1	Platform use for digital diplomacy 2021	402
Table 20.2	Presidents during two waves of digital diplomacy	408
Table 26.1	Size of economies	527
Table 26.2	Inequality	529
Table 26.3	Public expenditure	531
Table 26.4	Education rankings	533
Table 26.5	Investment	534
Table 29.1	City diplomacy (Acuto et al. 2018)	588
Table 29.2	Urban diplomacy	589

# Part I

## Introduction





# 1

## Diplomacy the Neglected Global Issue: Why Diplomacy Needs to Catch Up with the World

Paul Webster Hare

### Introduction

This book seeks to demonstrate that diplomacy is a neglected global issue. The ways it is conducted need more attention because, as a public good, it is central to how the world solves problems and avoids conflict. Diplomacy seeks to smooth edges of disputes and promote agreements for the mutual interest of states. It does this, in Ernest Satow's classic definition, by "the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states and between governments and international organizations" (Satow 2009 [1917]).

The book was conceived before the COVID pandemic and the war in Ukraine. It began as a brainstorming session among mainly practitioners of diplomacy on what they saw as obstacles to making diplomacy more effective. It was not crisis-driven but by a recognition that collective diplomacy is seldom considered by states as a topic for reform.

The group agreed that diplomacy is not currently treated as a public good that needs nurturing. The reasons are not difficult to identify. There is no set of global lobbying organizations such as on climate and environmental issues. There has been no Third World War leading to a redesign of diplomatic institutions. There has been no sustainable partnership between global business

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interests and foundations for a collaboration between states and non-states on ideas for reform. Few of the major technology companies see the future of diplomacy as linked with their continued development and growth. It is true that the United Nations has from time to time urged a new look at topics such as Security Council reform. But it has not created sustained momentum to recraft the Charter of the United Nations which was written for a different era—the era of the immediate aftermath of the Second World War and before the Internet. And the last salient reason is that world leaders generally have little time or interest in refining an activity which has no domestic dividend and may be viewed as a wasteful diversion of resources away from what are seen as foreign policy priorities. For reform and innovation to be achieved there needs to be a procedural imperative.

Once a book project developed, the group of interlocutors decided to invite a wide-ranging international group of experts—scholars and practitioners, and some a bit of both—to focus on areas where diplomacy could reform and innovate its practice. Several authors have drawn on their personal experiences. The result is a mixed anthology of a reexamination of diplomatic principles and practice, with the focus being on avenues for changes in and improvement of policies. The purpose was to enhance the chances of making diplomacy more effective and reaffirm the mutual benefit to all states. The authors are citizens of some 30 different countries. We (the editors) did not intend the list of countries to be exclusive and hope the essays will stimulate discussion of and ideas on better diplomacy in many others. All the authors in the project agree that the practice of both bilateral and multilateral diplomacy needs to be readdressed. The intended audience of this book comprises those interested in studying diplomacy in international relations, how it affects the solutions that are achieved, and how its failures affect the evolution of the planet. More generally it is hoped that representatives of states will recognize that diplomatic procedures should be adjusted according to the circumstances of today. Many of the authors address how the practice of diplomacy needs to catch up with contemporary power distribution and technology.

One of the challenges of addressing the issue of diplomacy is to define what the activity is. It has increasingly been replaced as a term by such concepts of “governance” in which diplomacy is a constant component; and the theory of diplomacy has long been analyzed in an academic context. But it has been practiced for centuries longer. The authors of the chapters that follow address both the study and practice of the activity. As a former practitioner I think I am typical in not having thought much during my career about ways to reform the system. A practitioner works for one actor in the system whose interests are paramount. Yet the system of diplomacy is essentially a team

game where all actors must cooperate and follow the rules and norms if it is to function at all.

The current lack of states' attention to how diplomacy is conducted was not always so. Diplomacy has been addressed as a practical issue by agreeing legally binding conventions and in the rules and legal structure of global and regional institutions of international affairs. Collective diplomacy aims to prevent conflict through a process of dispute settlement. It attempts to create order out of a chaotic world. The chapters here were written in the context of the failings of the global pandemic response which were due to the methods diplomacy applied. The invasion of Ukraine was also a failure of diplomacy because conflict broke out. Some of the pinnacles of modern diplomacy were disparaged. Core articles of the UN Charter, agreed in 1945 and respecting sovereignty of independent states, were breached. Long-standing humanitarian and arms control achievements—such as the Hague Conventions, the creation of the International Committee of Cross, and the Geneva Conventions—have been flouted as war returned to Europe. And major conflicts within states continue to rage in the Middle East and Africa.

The current methods of conducting diplomacy did not happen by accident. They have been built by law and custom. Most are decades old and take no account of the existence of the Internet. The Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic and Consular Relations (VCDR and VCCR), from 1961 and 1963 respectively, remain of critical importance. They continue to be largely respected as was shown during Julian Assange's long sojourn in the embassy of Ecuador in London. But they again were drafted for another era and are obviously antiquated. The era of the 2020s has so far been preoccupied with other global issues than diplomacy such as health and climate. But the way states conduct diplomacy, how they treat other states with which they have diplomatic relations, how they interact to work on issues that no state can solve on its own—this activity is a global issue. Diplomacy is as much a public good as international air traffic control.

As well as arguing that the methods and institutions of diplomacy need more attention this project has sought to suggest some concrete initiatives which are feasible and could make diplomacy more effective. These are discussed further in the conclusions.

The study of the theory of diplomacy enriches how far the world might collectively address reform in the twenty-first century. One clear outcome of decades of academic discussion is that there is no statute-based definition nor a single paradigm through which to interpret the practice. Raymond Cohen (1998) called it “the engine-room” of International Relations but it means different things to different states. The relevance of diplomatic studies to any

quest for practical reform is that they may show that certain features of diplomacy evolve without state interventions. They may offer pointers to the way diplomacy will develop if the theories are based on empirical evidence.

For its part, theory may also determine how far diplomacy is likely to reform itself. If norms are fixed for diplomacy then one needs to explain how diplomacy has adapted such norms—for example, by states renouncing some sovereignty through the United Nations and in agreeing to renounce the possession of nuclear weapons. And the diplomatic skills that have evolved should impact how those involved are trained in the future.

A central question for academic study is how far diplomacy establishes methods of behavior in a section of society where diplomats operate. Those who have been termed the constructivist school believe that diplomats have created their own social reality (Bjola and Kornprobst 2018). How far do diplomats establish their own norms which may change over time? The concept perhaps explains how some institutions come to anticipate erosion and loss of effectiveness.

Another issue is the identity of diplomacy. The concept of self-identity, according to John Locke, is based on memory which if forgotten loses its identity. “Our consciousness being interrupted, and we losing sight of our past selves, doubts are raised whether we are the same thinking thing” (Locke 1689). Scholars now discuss how far the very rationale of diplomacy is being forgotten.

Scholars also identify the unique features of diplomats in their role as agents representing their governments. And their capacity to communicate and negotiate on behalf of governments. Their job is to inhabit a world where they represent national interests but also have a stake in creating relationships that are necessary for the promotion of those interests. As Paul Sharp wrote, they “are living separately and wanting to do so while having to conduct relations with others” (Sharp 1999). Equally they are no longer unique as many more actors have entered the field including supranational diplomatic entities like the European Union and African Union and powerful non-state actors such as global charities and businesses. Sharp notes that diplomacy “no longer is the master institution of international society” (ibid.).

Diplomacy is the way states represent themselves to others. Academic study therefore has confronted the issue of hierarchy of states. Is such a hierarchy essential to the functioning of diplomacy? John Searle has analyzed the factors that determine how status of various individuals gives them special status in society (Searle 2010). His research suggests that those who engage in diplomacy have been endowed with such status. But the success of diplomacy depends on how far diplomats recognize each other’s functions. Raymond

Cohen (1999) sees differences between cultures as a major factor in how diplomacy is conducted. His analysis impacts how every state will view the prospects of reform of diplomacy. States view the value of diplomatic relations differently and though they recognize reciprocal benefits, they attach different priorities to it. For example some may see it as fundamentally a networking operation where contacts are made as diversely as possible but there is little incentive to build consensus and peaceful solutions. In these cases national interests are in networking for its own sake.

Academic studies have in some instances highlighted the areas where reform might be pursued. These include the erosion of diplomatic norms and the struggles for diplomacy to find a new identity. And diplomats may be losing their unique status as communicators and negotiators. Technology has multiplied the capacity of others to seek to engage in the practice.

## Diplomacy Affects Not Only States

Diplomacy is a public good. It benefits all inhabitants of the planet. The Preamble to the United Nations Charter was written in the name of international publics:

WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom, AND FOR THESE ENDS to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples.

After years of the scourge of war diplomacy reorganized itself at the San Francisco conference that established the United Nations in 1945. It had the essential support of the victors of the Second World War. The same conference was observed by over 2000 international press and non-governmental representatives who viewed it as an issue going beyond just the states.

Diplomacy was everybody's business though the states would decide what would be agreed.

Winston Churchill was one of many strong supporters of the Charter though he was not directly involved in its creation. He saw it as essential for the diplomacy of the United States and the big powers to continue to support it. "We must make sure that its work is fruitful, that it is a reality and not a sham, that it is a force for action, and not merely a frothing of words, that it is a true temple of peace in which the shields of many nations can some day be hung up, and not merely a cockpit in a Tower of Babel" (Churchill 1946). From its early years the United Nations survived many challenges including a boycott by the USSR.

Rotary International was one of 42 organizations the U.S. Secretary of State Edward Stettinius invited to serve as consultants to its delegation at the San Francisco conference. Other Rotarians from other continents were members of their own nations' delegations. It is worth noting that Rotary International, alongside many other non-state charitable foundations, remains a major donor to the United Nations World Health Organization. The mood was reflected in the words of the Governor of California, Earl Warren, in welcoming the delegates. He did not use the word diplomacy but the aspiration was clear.

We recognize that our future is linked with a world future in which the term 'good neighbor' has become a global consideration. We have learned that understanding of one another's problems is the greatest assurance of peace. And that true understanding comes only as a product of free consultation. This conference is proof in itself of the new conception of neighborliness and unity which must be recognized in world affairs. (United Nations 1945)

What was agreed in the United Nations Charter was a set of guidelines and guardrails of state to state diplomacy. And the circumstances in which united action could be agreed in issues of security. It set the principle of one state one vote in the General Assembly. But its terms—including any changes to the text of the Charter—were locked under the veto power of the Permanent Five members. These states—"the Republic of China, France, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America"—remain the only states mentioned in the Charter. The seats of China and the USSR are now the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation. The Charter was signed on June 26, 1945, by 50 nations—now the membership is 195 which includes the Holy See and Palestine as observers. The vast majority of current UN