The Palgrave Handbook of Diplomatic Thought and Practice in the Digital Age

Edited by Francis Onditi
Katharina McLarren · Gilad Ben-Nun
Yannis A. Stivachtis · Pontian G. Okoth

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Foreword

Diplomacy forms an inseparable part of international relations (IR). The traditional core of IR concerns the mutual interaction of sovereign states in the context of the larger global system. At times, this interaction is altered by the disruptions induced by technological, societal changes as well personality differences, subsequently influencing the character of diplomacy. It is expected that over the years, the changes shape the theory and practice of diplomacy in the sense as it is with other social science disciplines. Unfortunately, however, in spite of its long ancestry and the evolution of how states relate to each other in the digital age, diplomacy largely remains tethered around two things; it still means a 'kaleidoscope' of things, including negotiations and meetings revolving around international conferences, treaties, state visits, summit meetings, and other international events between sovereign states; secondly, it stands for strategic political and policy actions taken in the context, interest and on the basis of interstate officialdom.

The status quo and diplomatic tradition tends to make the practice of diplomacy exclusive and overly formalistic and structured. Although it is also true that in the context of real politics, the influence of forceful political personalities and popular movements deeply influences these formalistic and structured practices. This handbook has grown out of this esoteric focus of diplomacy by state officials and other reductionist scholars of IR. However, matters of trade, environment and climate change interstate management, refugees, conflicts, or wars are not confined to state actors. Increasingly non-state actors are now more involved in trade, environment, climate change responses, peace and conflict dynamics than they have ever been. Moreover, different regional formations such as the African Union Peace and Security Council are actively shaping the security diplomatic architecture in the arena of peace and security for example.

The influence of personalities in politics and the attitudes of individual political leaders have historically not been at the center of our understanding of diplomatic thought and practice. Yet, through political ideology, rhetoric, and policy formulations, individual personalities appear to be crucial to the interaction

of states and the establishment of stable and astute foreign policy initiatives. In my experience as a diplomat, and in my reading of history, the impact and role of personality on diplomacy has been enormous. Hitherto studies on the links between the personality traits and foreign policy attitudes remain scarce. The personality-political behavior factor is not far behind the dispensation of diplomacy and international politics, with several recent landmark examples across the globe. The example of the difference between President Barack Obama and President Donald Trump is a classic example of such a consequence, where the diplomatic stance and methods of a nation change radically and the concrete outcome of policy changes as well because of a change in political leadership. The same could be said, for example, of President Jakaya Kikwete and his successor John Pombe Magufuli of Tanzania where the personality of a leader might upend years of diplomatic practice and behavior by a country. Although the fundamental principles and frameworks of diplomacy remain more or less the same, over time the impact of personality (mostly determined by the tenure of a particular leader in power) can be hugely consequential in shaping foreign policy dimensions, including, but not limited to, cooperative internationalism versus isolationism and globalization versus nationalism.

To address these normative and practical concerns editors of this handbook decided to assemble a group of scholars and practitioners who approached the issues from a diverse disciplinary perspective, including diplomacy, political psychology, international relations, gender and feminism, international development, law, history, and political science. It is a handbook for both practitioners and theorists. It has been compiled specifically with the purpose of helping to increase access to diplomatic resources and to improve the quality of managing diplomatic services and foreign affairs. But it is also a body of knowledge putting together thoughts and research from diplomatic reformists with personal viewpoint and perspectives which overall reflects the way former diplomats-turned-scholars recollect their memories of diplomatic practice; as people who have both experience and training in diplomacy.The handbook recognizes the fact that various peace and conflict situations require a unique attention and resolution. The needs of every state whether in conflict or cooperation are different and the relevant diplomatic processes vary, but there are some broad general principles that are exemplified throughout the handbook. One of these is the primacy of formalization of the informal diplomatic practices and how diplomats ought to change tact and strategies in engaging non-state actors and those outside the purview of statehood. At the same time, modern diplomacy has become very conscious of the importance of keeping issues of gender, youth, race, and historical injustices in clear view. The role of media and communication in diplomacy has also become singularly dynamic and important. There is a deep complementarity between these socio-economic issues and the dispensation of diplomacy. It is, therefore, important to give simultaneous recognition to the centrality of individual and group rights and to the force of social factors as well as media writ large on the extent and reach of diplomacy.

All these factors have a bearing on the future of diplomacy at a time when states and multilateral arrangements and institutions continue to undergo geopolitical and strategic realignments and socio-economic transformation. In the context of international peace and security for example, the deadlock in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as countries like China and Russia have taken a more emboldened stance and western democracies have consequently entrenched in their engagement of these two other powers has left the Council deadlocked and unable to make important decisions crucial to international peace and security.This state of affair raises a host of both empirical and normative questions regarding the effectiveness of UNSC and other multilateral institutions in overcoming contemporary global climate change, environment, trade, peace, and security challenges; how to collectively protect and advance human rights, how to deal with recalcitrant states; resolving challenges around cooperation in protecting global goods, and collective responsibility versus individual rights.

There are no obvious answers to these concerns. However, increasingly, we have seen regional entities such as the African Union influencing key decisions both at the regional level and at the UNSC. Article 53 gives the UNSC the power to utilize regional arrangements to carry out enforcement under its guidance for maintaining international peace and security. And where diplomacy is effective and cooperative we have witnessed significant success in global corporation, for example, with humanitarian challenges and terrorism, and in dealing with global emergencies and pandemics such as COVID-19. These, among other issues, are what this volume tries to explore and examine.The authors have endeavored to provide not only solutions to peace and security complexes, but also reconfigure theoretical formulations in the light of other such developments. This handbook is largely based on the work of eminent scholars on the subjects, and it will serve as a model for using both formal and informal diplomatic approaches in resolving some of the most challenging concerns of our time.

I believe both practitioners and researchers will find this volume useful for open deliberations and application in addressing and resolving unconventional and traditional challenges and crises in the coming years.

Former Principal Secretary Macharia Kamau
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kenya

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Diplomatic Thought and Practice

Francis Onditi

Foundations of Diplomacy

In commonplaces, diplomacy is a '*kaleidoscope*' of things. They include international conferences, state visits, summit meetings, parliamentary activities and other international events between sovereign states. This '*kaleidoscopy*' has also been reflected in the interaction among supranational and subnational entities, all of which define the classic object of diplomacy. In western Europe, the practice of diplomacy was initially confined to the royal families, in which, the prince would grant favors and documents to facilitate individuals representing the monarch to travel. This mundane practice of diplomacy has evolved. As noted by diplomatic historians (Helmers, 2016; Mowat, 1928), the practice of diplomacy has advanced to be associated with official agreements between states or institutions. After the Westphalian boom in the seventeenth century, the practice of diplomacy begun to follow a canon-*esoteric* focus on the state and diplomats (Murray et al., 2011).

The focus on state and its diplomats defined the identity of diplomacy, especially during the time of Abraham de Wicquefort (Keens-Soper, 1997). *Wicquefortian* diplomatic identity persisted into the eighteenth century and the early part of the Napoleonic diplomatic adventure in the nineteenth century. It is on this basis that diplomatic historians (Bruley, 2009; Frey & Frey, 1993) have illustrated how the French culture adopted the term *diplomate* as a framework to guide those who engaged in states' negotiation. During this time, although diplomats were not held in high esteem as military marshals,

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foreign embassies enjoyed inviolable rights and immunity, thus restricting diplomatic space to the privileged (*le conseil diplomatique*) (Davis, 2015). This restrictive approach, has, however, changed over time. Today, diplomacy is no longer the preserve of the state. Its practice and intellectualism have spiraled into the public. Colorful events, cultural exchanges and public engagements have become the defining stature of modern diplomacy (Melissen, 2011; Scott-Smith, 2018). As aptly noted by Hedling and Bremberg (2021), the intersection of diplomacy and internet of things has led to the emergence of new practices of 'digital diplomacy in 21st century'. These *changes* and *stability* continue to reconstruct and disrupt the international system.

How has this change-stability continuum impacted on the international system? Otto von Bismarck, one of the leading German diplomats of the nineteenth century, viewed diplomacy from a foreign policy lens, describing the former as the never-ending negotiation of reciprocal concessions. In what seems to be a Bismarckian extension, the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) have in the recent past emphasized the need to view diplomacy as a foreign policy tool for governments (Stanzel, 2018). Similarly, in the days of Sir Robert Vansittart (1903–1930), British foreign policy was defined through three key pillars of the state: the need to maintain balance of power; armed strength as a means to diplomacy and interest versus position (McKercher, 1995). These clichés reflect a recognition among leading scholars and practicing diplomats of the central role diplomacy plays in managing relationships between states and other institutions, but also the changing nature of diplomacy (Cohen, 1987, 2013; Sharp, 1999; Cooper et al., 2008; Sending et al., 2011).

Indeed, focusing on *diplomatic thought* and *practice (DTP)* contrasts the narrow view of diplomacy, such as identifying it with negotiation and dialogue or with conferences or with resolution of conflict or with state actors or with official agreements. Negotiating and dialoguing on behalf of state or supranational entities can, of course, be very essential elements for influencing behavior of foreign governments toward resolving conflicts amicably. Although *diplomatic thought* goes beyond conferencing, negotiation and dialogue, it encompasses other determinants such as geography, economy, security, military, sociology, psychology, law, religion or knowledge production to name a few examples. The accelerated tempo of societal and technological changes on the global scale has, perhaps, discouraged scholars from performing systematic analysis of these macro-issues that bear influence on the manner in which states relate to each other in a multipolar word. Moreover, the very multiplicity and diversity of thoughts pose intellectual problems to scholars and diplomats. As a result, relatively few scholars have systematically examined diplomatic studies from its diverse angles, that is, structure and practice. In this handbook, the term *diplomatic thought* and *practice* has been developed to entail conceptual and propositional structure (including attitudes, ideas, ideologies, values, skills, pedagogies and methods) and application of this structure to the implementation of foreign policy of states and international institutions, as well as teaching and research in the broader field of international relations and diplomacy.

In the traditional Bismarckian and Sir Vansittartian's state relations framework, the central theme of diplomacy is the state. However, exclusive attention to its officialdom tends to make the practice of diplomacy exclusive and formalistic. Diplomatic thought entails removing formality and officialdom, by expanding diplomatic space to accommodate variety of actors, some of whom do not etch etiquette. However, viewing diplomacy in terms of expanding intellectual space redirects attention to the ends that make diplomacy inclusive and accessible. Also, unconventional yet important actors such as development and humanitarian agencies, as well as insurgence groups, would be left out of the scope of diplomacy, if attention is narrowly focused on the state and intergovernmental organizations. The complexity in the global system has mainly been driven by what Sascha Lohmann (2017) described as the deployment of economic instruments as a new 'battlefield'. Social and technological changes have altered the structure of international relations, making it inevitable for scholars and diplomats to think new tactics of diplomacy.

The beginning of diplomatic thinking is often linked to western civilization, particularly the medieval European societies (Watkin, 2008; Queller, 1967; Mattingly, 1955), who associated diplomacy with spiritual relationship between heaven and earth. But some aspects of secular diplomacy and statehood existed among early societies with intertribal relations being bound by some elements of international law (Hurd, 2011; Schweizer & Black, 2006). As Sir Herbert Butterfield (1900–1979) rightly puts it, human relations have always thrived through societal interaction (cited in Schweizer & Black, 2006). In African societies, for instance, tribes negotiated marriages, trade, forgiveness and other cultural mutual events were presided over by messengers who were considered accredited, sacred and sacrosanct. They were accompanied by emblems as part of diplomatic symbolism. Although no sign of modern diplomacy has been documented in sub-Saharan Africa before ninth century, diplomatic historians have traced elements of diplomacy in Egypt dating to the fourteenth century (Schweizer & Black, 2006; Murray et al., 2011). This implies that diplomacy has been part of societies' attempt to live harmoniously and its thoughtfulness is as old as organized social, political, economic and cultural set up of human society. As different groups interacted, conflict was inevitable; however, they were resolved through negotiation and mediation.

Like many other intellectual inquiries, diplomatic thinking has also been traced among ancient Greek thinkers. However, diplomatic thought has been traced among other societies including Chinese dynasty, Arab world and Indian dynasty. The intellectual prowessness of Indian thinkers such as Kautilya toward geometries, peace, war, non-alignment, alliances showcase their contribution to diplomatic thought. Diplomatic thoughts of India and other parts of the world have, however, remained glossed. Yet their contribution to modern diplomacy pioneered diplomatic regulation of tribes, geopolitical matrix, conciliation, seduction, subversion, coercion and acquiring clandestinely gems and other valuables for their supreme political organizational leaders, akin to the Greek *proxenos*. The uniting factor among the Arabs, Persians, Turks and other

Central Asian peoples that was occasioned by the bloody conflict with Christian Byzantine was perhaps the defining epic of modern international relations. DTP differ in different societies, but they all agree on one thing: the only glue to intertribal and interreligious relations was the exchange of ideas and cultural norms. It is clear, therefore, that in every society, there have been continuities and discontinuities of diplomatic intellectualism that informed its practice. Thus, the core of this handbook is to demonstrate how north-south and east-west exchange continuous to pave the way for this global evolution of diplomacy.

This handbook introduces the notion of 'diplomatic thought and practice', as both a knowledge product and tool for engaging future studies in diplomacy. DTP is then concerned with individual diplomats, societies, concepts, territories and spatial structures at national, regional and supranational levels, including non-state actors. In the changing world, behavior of individuals or groups and not necessarily formal state organizational units may influence the mode of diplomacy of the state itself. There are three lingering theoretical explanations for the changes shifting diplomacy from overly state-focused to what we coin in this handbook, open diplomacy: realism (Gilpin, 1984; Mearsheimer, 2001; Morgenthau, 1948; Rose, 1998)—the development of nuclear weapons led to rapid decline in the deployment of armed forces. The armed forces turned out to be ineffective in dealing with unconventional threats posed by activities of insurgencies in failed states, cyber warfare, resurgence of transnational violent extremists and growth of organized criminals. Moralism (Levine, 2014; Blocq, 2006)—the actual use of armed forces—became morally shunned to being ultima ratio. Within the UN Charter, its force could only be used in self-defense or in defense of the mandate. Finally, sanctions (Maller, 2010; Drury, 2001)—the use of economic sanctions—allowed global powers to inflict equally effective cost on adversaries as a means to influencing their decision making. The cost of diplomatic sanctions ranges from loss of information, derailed intelligence, reduced interaction and diminished ability of concerned states to influence the target state. The result is usually foiled foreign policy. Maller (2010, p. 61) noted: 'Ironically, diplomatic sanctions may even undermine the effectiveness of other coercive policy tools, such as economic sanctions'. These theoretical and foreign policy perspectives develop an image of modern diplomacy and nature of actors that feature international relations stage.

It is, however, important to note that the intricate relationship between the disciplines of diplomacy and international relations has constructed an intellectual space that is not necessarily distinct from the convectional theories of IR. In any case, the continued involvement of non-state actors in conflict and warfare has led to increased interaction between states and non-state actors in effort to broker diplomatic solutions. What has become even more profound is that within this context of actors' proliferation and confusion, the process of negotiation, dialogue and mediation have been informalized to accommodate the demands of non-state actors. This transformation of the diplomatic

environment is coined in this handbook, 'informalization of diplomacy'. Formal diplomacy assumes a club-like institution permeated by norms of consensus, reciprocity, diplomatic discretion and diffuse reciprocity (Hayes-Renshaw & Wallace, 2006, p. 12). In what Brandsma et al. (2021, p. 10) calls 'institutionalization of trilogue', institutional dynamics can spur intra-institutional change. Emerging studies have affirmed this by observing that interaction of different entities (for instance, state and non-state actors) within an organizational set up could lead to internal tensions (Hagemann et al., 2019; Novak, 2013). This form of negative socialization can either lead to formalization or informalization of institutions (Manulak, 2019), depending on the velocity of influence from either side. The 'informalization of diplomacy' is driven by external forces, which in turn influences what we call, 'diplomacying' (activities, assets and processes of conducting diplomacy) by states in efforts to pursue their foreign policy objectives; what type of global trends should inform the current and future diplomatic thought and practice?

The Changing Tools and Types of Diplomacy in International Relations

In this section, we identify five historical and contemporary global dynamics which we argue should be reflected in any framework, mechanisms and tools for thinking and conducting diplomacy. In our view, these dynamics should inform future development in the field in terms of research, policy and curriculum. Before we delve into the dynamics, it is important we examine the notion of *change* and *stability*, both as concepts and lived experiences.

Tools of diplomacy are agreements or treaties that states sign in their efforts to facilitate cooperation between them; they include arbitration, détente, embargo, neutrality, shuttle diplomacy/flying diplomacy, secret diplomacy and, increasingly, faith-based diplomacy. These tools are a means through which states achieve their foreign policy objectives (Adesina, 2017). Therefore, as a major instrument of foreign policy, diplomacy is a mirror for understanding international system through which institutions are created or recreated, systems are ordered and norms are produced or reproduced. Given that these forces are constantly changing, tools are deployed to resolve conflicts emerging between states or develop strategies for compelling states to respect others' positions, interests or decisions. Diplomatic tools have implications on the practice of diplomacy. The interaction of diplomatic practice and information technology has given birth to the notion of digital diplomacy, as part of the practice of diplomacy. Digital diplomacy has been defined on the basis of internet, digital tools, digital media and technology and how these platforms and tools influence diplomacy (Hedling & Bremberg, 2021). Scholars have identified several trends in diplomacy attributed to digital transformation: emergence of new actors, who view diplomacy differently, hence proliferation of prefixes such as, 'cyber-diplomacy', 'net-diplomacy', 'e-diplomacy' and 'Twiplomacy'

(Hocking & Melissen, 2015). Digital diplomacy has also been perceived to be disruptive; diplomats are not sure of the risks of engaging with unknown individuals. Perhaps the most illustrative application of digital diplomacy was during the COVID-19 pandemic when states' representatives adopted online conferencing. This is what scholars have coined 'zoom diplomacy' (Naylor, 2020).

In regard to the practice of diplomacy, communication has deeper influence on both the process and outcome of diplomacy. Diplomatic missions around the world that have not succeeded as a result of ineffective communication are evident. The new diplomatic space is no longer defined by its actors but by its communication dynamics, hence, the necessity for diplomats to appreciate the dynamics of these new diplomatic sites. Mastery of digital tools, linguistic acumen, appreciation of the culture of the host state and the fragmentation of societies, meeting the needs of different publics, coupled with emotional intelligence is equal to effective and efficient communication that leads to success in diplomatic missions and shall define the personal profile of future diplomats. Likewise, the implementation of a country's foreign policy praxis is largely dependent on the application of various communication strategies. Hedling and Bremberg (2021) analysis of the practice of diplomacy included the concept of 'diplomatic agency' to explain how diplomacy determines direction of global politics—*who counts as the influential diplomatic actor?*

Talking of diplomatic influencers, Simons (2018, p. 157) highlighted the fact that many different groups, including NGOs, are potentially 'good relationship builders and may possess the necessary skills, networks and local knowledge that are superior to the Ministry of foreign affairs'. He noted that NGOs can be interlocutors for facilitating interactive communication, conducting advocacy and promoting public diplomacy through practice analysis tools. Practice analysis, as one approach to understanding the various components of diplomacy, including, public diplomacy, has gained traction as it taps from professional experience and skills of serving or retired diplomats. This approach has been developed in the International Relations and Studies literature in the millennium, drawing on the recent work of 'public diplomacy' (Manor, 2019), and earlier work of Joseph Nye (1990) on soft power (cultural attributes and values). Here public diplomacy actors are not confined to the state but also others such as religious non-governmental organizations (RNGOs) who represent a hybrid of religious beliefs and socio-political activism at various levels of the society. Berger (2004) contests that public mentality has relegated religion to the narrow realm of private life, yet, RNGOs can, and have, in the past influenced *change* in the international system, including playing critical role in the establishment of the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court. The informal actors and activism in diplomacy are often more intuitive and less systematic than the structured officialdom diplomacy conducted by state representatives. Wiseman (2015) advances the argument on how UN diplomatic practices should be reformed beyond the narrow context of formal diplomatic corps of member states to also encompass an informal

wider community of non-state actors. On the question of diplomatic informality, Wiseman recognizes the role students of diplomacy can play toward building an innovative body of knowledge through informal activities often ignored by established scholars and officialdom diplomats. Leijten's (2017) analysis of innovative/science diplomacy and exploration of the impact of knowledge-based economy on international politics and foreign policy praxis is perhaps an emblematic example of a more systematized approach opening up space for multidisciplinary skills in the management of foreign affairs and services, as espoused by various chapters in this handbook.

Informal diplomacy, often referred to as amateur diplomacy, utilizes private spaces and individuals to obtain information and exert influence on behalf of the state one represents (Mathews, 1963). Much of the focus of informal diplomacy has been non-official engagements with entities that are not directly representing the state—activists, private sectors, scholars, retired state officials, public intellectuals and opinion leaders (Berman & Johnson, 1977). The method encourages negotiators and private individuals to meet in an off-the-record and unofficial setting to make common ground where normal diplomatic negotiators cannot (Keohane & Nye, 1973). It also involves forming people-to-people connections, sharing expertise and building trust, all without the bureaucracy of official diplomatic channels, pre-determined talking points and the presence of the media (Jackson, 2020). It may entail a set of government-sanctioned but unofficial diplomatic activities that are intended to overcome limitations of formal diplomacy (Montville, 2006).

Informal diplomacy has also been defined as the employment of largely non-political means by states to achieve their foreign policy objectives (Chang & Tai, 1996). For countries with formal diplomatic relations with each other; investment funds and economic assistance may be offered by one state to another as inducements for the establishment of diplomatic relations. In some cases, an affluent state providing economic assistance to another state may strengthen the defense capacity of the recipient state in common defense against a third state. Also, a state conducting cultural exchange with another state may enhance the standing of the former in the eyes of the citizens of the latter. In situations such as the one described in this book as '*break-away territories*' or spaces controlled by insurgence groups, informal diplomacy becomes definitive action when such groups engage state diplomats. Here, non-state actors are considered not only as interest groups but also as active or passive players on the diplomatic scene who are also affected by the foreign policy of the concerned state. Informal diplomacy analysis, in the light of diplomatic thought and practice framework, provides a conceptualization which assists in the analysis of interests and influence with a specific focus on informal actors. In the broader DTP framework, the informal diplomacy analysis focuses on the interrelations of informal actors and state actors and their impact on foreign policy, within the broader security, economic, political and geographical context.

In the recent past, there have been incidences or the need for an informal diplomatic framework across the globe. For example, in the wake of COVID-19, equitable distribution of vaccines could help foster a favorable country image and likeability, as few areas of diplomatic goodwill connect more with the humanitarian nature of international citizenship and medical assistance than the conventional statecraft (Bier & Arceneaux, 2020). In this sense, 'vaccine diplomacy' becomes an appealing instrument of soft power. Joseph Nye's (2008, p. 94) idea of 'the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment is one example of informal diplomatic approach with a thoughtful perspective.' The India's capacity and willingness to share COVID-19 vaccines have boosted its diplomatic heft. India's informal diplomacy through the use of vaccines has extended well beyond the Asia Pacific region and is now making a deep impact in Africa (Pattanaik, 2018). New Delhi has delivered made-in-India vaccines to nearly 30 African countries and many have received them as gifts. Over the years, India has provided low cost generic drugs to several African nations to combat infectious diseases. The line between informal diplomacy and formal diplomatic engagements is blurred. The informal diplomatic approach deployed by India has bolstered Africa-India's trade relations from 5.3 billion US Dollars in 2001 to 62 billion US Dollars in 2018 (Pattanaik, 2021). India is also third largest export destination and the fifth largest investor for the continent.

Another notable example is the Chinese relation with the rest of the world in various forms, including the controversy surrounding the origin and spread of the virus responsible for COVID-19. From the time the virus was first reported in Wuhan, China, in late 2019, China has experienced a reputational dent, garnering international sympathy, as well as accusations of fanning the pandemic by silencing early reports. Beijing has continued to be dogged by international criticisms that trace the origins of the pandemic to a leak from a Wuhan lab. Thus, after a successful domestic COVID-19 mitigation, China launched a public diplomacy campaign in April 2020 to brand itself as a global health leader by sending masks, medical teams and test kits overseas (Lancaster & Rubin, 2020). Besides, international cooperation in the health sector has been a firm component of China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) strategy for over five years. The Chinese leadership has been promoting this aspect of the initiative ('health silk road') as essential to building a 'global community of common destiny' (Rudolf, 2021). Beijing's resurrection of the *Health Silk Road* signature to promote its health leadership and redeem its international image is a natural extension of its '*mask diplomacy*'. Beijing has been linking measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in aid recipient countries with the prospect of post-pandemic cooperation within the OBOR framework. This mix of both informal and statecraft approaches to diplomacy by Beijing survives on what has been termed as '*natural axis*' for Sino-Africa commercial and cultural relationship (Onditi & Nyadera, 2021, p. 418). Although China attempted to turn its health crisis into a geopolitical opportunity, its vaccine diplomacy raised more than a few eyebrows (Huang, 2021). China's nation

brand has consistently deteriorated, and the huge investments in public diplomacy have not resulted in a proportionate increase in its international image to help it overcome the structural weakness it faces in the global opinion market (Nye, 2015). In the latest Global Soft Power Index released on February 25, 2021, China fell three places from fifth place in 2020 to eighth in 2021 (Yin, 2014). The Chinese 'non-interference' and 'low-profile' tenets of its foreign policy seem to be waning as it deploys its armed forces abroad (Nantulya, 2020), to protect the ever-growing contractors, particularly in Africa where over 200,000 Chinese workers have relocated in support of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This is in addition to the over 10,000 Chinese companies operating on the continent (Nantulya, 2020).

The increasingly unstructured (informal) approach to diplomacy reflects the *changing* nature of context, and a resultant pragmatism. However, Montville (2006), writing about informality of diplomacy from the perspective of power asymmetry, cautions about the delicate nature of foreign policy and political power structures (Montville, 2006). For instance, in times of war, engaging rivaling groups informally can take too long to yield results, hence, has limited ability to influence change at the war stage of a conflict. Also the participants rarely have resources necessary for sustained leverage during negotiations and for the implementation of agreements. More so, informal diplomacy may not be effective in authoritarian regimes where leaders do not take advice from technocrats (Carter, 1995). Finally, due to their lack of political power, informal diplomatic actors are in most cases not accountable to the public for poor decisions.

Despite the limitations associated with informal diplomacy, this form of engagement can be relied upon when handling sensitive relationships between states or non-state actors. Informal diplomacy provides insulation to states that do not want to incur the costs of diplomatically engaging politically unpalatable opponents in a public manner, thus, is effective in facilitating formal international cooperation (Chen, 2021). Notably, the series of meetings that led to the Oslo Accords between Israel and Palestine began as a set of track two dialogues initiated by private citizens when official talks stalled (Agha et al., 2003). Informal diplomacy complements formal engagements because its low public visibility insulates states from unwanted domestic audience costs. It is also established that during third-party mediation to protracted conflicts, informal mediation have both independent and synergistic effects with track one (i.e., formal or official) efforts in increasing the likelihood of peaceful settlements (Bohmelt, 2010). Also, informal diplomatic meetings are low-commitment and not publicly noticeable, hence, they are effective diplomatic tools for exploring sensitive areas of international politics (Jones, 2015). The participants are also not inhibited by political or constitutional power; therefore, they can express their own viewpoints on issues that directly affect their communities and families.

The global diplomatic practices, tools and thoughts as well as the informality of diplomacy underscore the need for a renewed diplomatic framework that

spells out alternative mechanisms and tools to accommodate new actors in diplomacy and address unique challenges in the international system. What challenges and opportunities are presented to diplomats as they navigate the realities of informal diplomacy? Can digital diplomacy mitigate the challenges of diplomatic informality? How should new virtual realities interact with diplomats? How can emerging technologies be utilized to enhance efficiency in the management of foreign affairs and diplomatic services?

The United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, posits that changes in the tactics of diplomacy have been occasioned by deteriorating international security environment, unrestricted arms competition, increasing gray zone activities and the re-surgency of strategic tensions between the major powers (Rydell, 2020). The change and stability in international system is not limited to these global processes, rather, change is an evolutionary process, dependent on several factors, including interactive nature of states. The post-modern approaches to the analysis of *change* and *stability*, which is the core of this book, posits that global system is not necessarily discrete entity, rather, it is an on-going dynamic process. Although *change* and *stability* approaches and concepts have been articulated within international politics (Cohen, 1987), the use of the concepts change and stability in international relations and diplomacy is relatively a recent phenomenon (Sinha, 2018; Gunitsky, 2013). Change theorists (Gunitsky, 2013) postulate that change is both incremental and disruptive. Transformationalists (Gordeeva, 2016) have maintained that approaching study of international relations using *change-stability* continuum can be useful in examining drivers of change and stability in international processes—competition, cooperation and socialization of various norms. Internationalists (Sinha, 2018) observe that cooperation and competition are products of change as an outcome of globalization, occurring through creation and recreation of universal values. Within this context of change and stability, pragmatic approaches have evolved and utilized by states to resolve conflicts, namely, negotiation, dialogue and sometime kinetic diplomacy. Albeit, some critiques have cautioned against intensification of kinetic diplomacy as it has remained a paradox in southeast and central Asia (Chang & Jenne, 2020). In this view, diplomacy is characterized as 'engine room' within which the world power politics operates (Cohen, 1987). Although these frameworks and perspectives recognize the link between statecraft and the survival of states in the changing international system, the emerging shocks in the international order, the revolution of internet of things (IoTs), unilateralism vs multilateralism and the multiplicity of actors beyond the state have made it difficult to limit the scope of diplomacy to state relations. Even for discourses on international relations and system (Hall, 2002), literature falls short of adequately addressing three important issues: (a) conceptualization of change and stability, (b) defining the typologies of change and stability in the international system and (c) identification of diplomatic thoughts and practices impacted upon by these changes and stability. Still, efforts by Felix Grenier (2015) to explain development of international relations through the various reflexive perspectives (geo-epistemic,

historiographical and sociological) are limited to methodological typologies, leaving out interrelated, yet important phenomenon of *change* and *stability*. Reflexive studies on IR and diplomacy examines the IR agenda developed between 1980s and 1990s by the generation of post-positivist and critical scholars (Booth, 1991). What is the nature of these trends?

Multilateralism vs unilateralism proliferation of actors. How do you ensure the existing multilateral system, the UN, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), the Bretton Woods institutions and others work within the rapidly changing international environment? How should the key players in the global system address frustrations emerging from the nationalistic groups concerned about the slow reforms? Proliferation of actors including the need to negotiate with non-state actors is equally a pressing issue facing the world today. In post Bismarck's era, diplomacy is no longer the preserve of embassies, attaches and consular, non-state actors (including NGOs, humanitarian agencies, civil society organizations, religious groups and business community) are increasingly becoming indispensable part of modern diplomacy. The broader question therefore is how to ensure each actor counts when conducting negotiation, mediation, dialogue and other diplomatic engagements?

Internet of things and 4IR (Fourth industrial revolution). Systems scientists have posited that the fifth iteration of the industrial revolution will pave the way to a synergy between autonomous machines and humans. This interaction is likely to increase efficiency and provide opportunity to harness human potential capability in various work flows. Management of foreign affairs and services is one of the areas that could benefit from the internet of things by reintroducing AI (artificial intelligence) and Blockchain. Among the instruments of diplomacy, digitization is rapidly shaping the practice of diplomacy in various ways—shortening time for decision making, the big data analytics distilling large volume of information and the influence of social media on the image and conduct of diplomats. These opportunities also raise important questions on the future of diplomacy: How do you harness this human–machine interaction to increase efficiency of diplomatic service delivery? Does application of IoTs increase harmonious relationship between states, groups and institutions?

Growth of gray zone conflict and pandemics. Gray zone conflicts entail the activities by quasi-revisionist states that seek to alter the status quo of the international order through coercive military or political means just below a threshold that would elicit a conventional military response (Popp & Canna, 2016; Mazaar, 2015). Nations undertaking gray zone campaigns make strong efforts to justify their actions under international law. Notable examples include the Chinese legal claims in the South China Sea (SCS), where they recruit other countries to their point of view, even when the legal standing of their claims in the international community is tenuous. The global leading powers (US and China) have deployed kinetic diplomacy (diplomacy by armed forces) as a desperate measure in tackling the growing threats of gray zone (Toft, 2018). During President Trump Administration, the US appointed 149 special operation forces (SoFs) in 2018 from 138 during Obama administration in 2016.