

**Reordering diplomatic theory for the twenty-first century:
a tripartite approach**

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To the best of my knowledge and belief the thesis entitled: **Reordering diplomatic theory for the twenty-first century: A tripartite approach**, represents my own work and contains no material which has been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at this University or any other institution, except where due acknowledgement is made.

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Abstract

The central aim of this thesis is to deconstruct and reconstruct the dominant theoretical perceptions of diplomacy, by reworking radically existing theories of diplomacy. This thesis achieves reconceptualisation of diplomatic theory by critiquing the thoughts and ideas of theorists postulating on modern diplomacy. Consequently, this thesis is concerned (largely) with the theoretical terrain of diplomacy studies.

The purpose of this intended deconstruction and reconstruction is to introduce and construct three lucid types of diplomatic theory. These three types or categories introduced in this thesis are Traditional, Nascent and Innovative Diplomatic Theory. By categorising these three distinct types of theories, it is hoped that the diplomatic scholar will have a choice of lenses through which to interpret the complexities of the modern diplomatic environment. Ultimately, this thesis aims to strengthen Traditional Diplomatic Theory (TDT) and introduce/construct two alternate forms of diplomatic theory, Nascent Diplomatic Theory (NDT) and Innovative Diplomatic Theory (IDT).

To date, diplomatic theory as a specific topic has not been simply and rigorously explored. This thesis takes on this responsibility. No simple attempt has been made to establish what diplomatic theory actually *is* and if existing works on diplomatic theory remain relevant to the modern diplomacy. The notion of updating diplomatic theory, so that it remains applicable to the complex, modern diplomatic environment, is one central motivation of this thesis.

Two central arguments are prevalent throughout the thesis. Firstly, that diplomatic theory can be viewed as tripartite. This thesis argues that within the diplomatic studies literature three distinct forms of diplomatic theory can be evidenced. At first, these three

divergent theories appear to share an adversarial relationship, with each championing a vastly different impression of what constitutes the modern diplomatic environment. However, this thesis aims to consolidate, strengthen and reconcile each type of theory, with the purpose of confirming their complementary relationship. If a method of incorporating all three types of theories under the banner of diplomacy studies can be proposed then the diplomatic studies field will have a truly modern approach to diplomatic theory. This tripartite approach tells the whole modern diplomatic story, from both the state and non-state perspective. In addition, this approach accounts for the complexities of modern diplomacy, completes a frank stock-take of the diplomatic studies field and is aimed at ultimately strengthening diplomatic theory.

The second argument suggests that an innovative approach to theorising on diplomacy can yield substantial theoretical rewards. Tripartite diplomatic theory is one example of innovation. A second example is this thesis' assertion that there is a more compelling relationship to be realised between International Relations (IR) and diplomatic studies. This thesis demonstrates how an interdisciplinary approach can result in robust and enriched theories of diplomacy. The similarities between TDT and Realism, NDT and Idealism and IDT and Constructivism demonstrate the value of an interdisciplinary confluence. By broadening the field of enquiry to IR theory, this thesis argues for the coexistence of three alternate but complementary theories on diplomacy. Just as IR theory has room for several different types of theory so too does the discipline of diplomatic studies.

Preface

This thesis aims to deconstruct, strengthen and modernise diplomatic theory. To do so, means broadening the field of inquiry for diplomatic theory to incorporate non-state as well as state actors. Ultimately, this approach is aimed at enhancing understanding of the complex multi-actor nature of the modern diplomatic environment. Essentially, this approach suggests that ‘the concept of diplomacy can and must be reconstructed’.¹ Validating this approach means challenging dominant and enduring assumptions of existing diplomatic theory.

In order to distance itself from the dominant assumption of diplomatic theory – that diplomacy is a practice, primarily an exclusive activity between state actors – requires this thesis to introduce an innovative approach to theorising on diplomacy. In doing so this thesis does not intend to abandon ‘what we know’, instead it seeks to introduce a method that consolidates existing knowledge on diplomatic theory while incorporating alternate but equally valuable theories on diplomacy. This thesis argues that three different types of diplomatic theory can be evidenced within and constructed from the existing diplomatic studies literature. In all, three distinct categories of diplomatic theorists and theory are presented in chapters two, three and four: Traditional Diplomatic Theory; Nascent Diplomatic Theory; and Innovative Diplomatic Theory.

One reservation with categorising or branding various types of theorists is the danger of constraining scholars to a rigid classification. Hocking, for example, was wary of confining theorists to a ‘conceptual ghetto’.² However, imprisoning theorists is not the intention of this thesis. Categorising different opinions on diplomacy is intended to

¹ John Hoffman. (2003). Reconstructing Diplomacy. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 5 (4), p. 541.

² Correspondence with Brian Hocking. July 15th, 2005.

organise and distinguish various theories on diplomacy, which in turn allows an appraisal of strengths and weaknesses of these theories.

There are a number of benefits to placing, not confining, diplomatic theorists and theories into ‘rigid disciplinary pigeon holes’.³ For example, by constructing the three categories, different types of diplomatic theory can be better understood. Organising different types of theories is important in terms of clarity of academic focus within the diplomatic studies field. Of diplomatic theorists, ‘anyone of us who has attempted to give an honest answer to the question, “So what exactly is it that you do?”’ is unable to give a concise answer.⁴ Categorisation provides a concise and informative answer to this question by developing a better understanding of the respective produce of diplomatic theorists. In other words, this approach introduces order to the diplomatic studies field. With the diplomacy studies field enjoying a recent renaissance, the need to clarify respective theoretical focuses is greater than before.

Once respective diplomatic theories are categorised, each group can be appraised and their contribution to understanding the modern diplomatic environment recognised. Categorisation allows recognition of the merits, as well as the limitations, of each type of diplomatic theory. This approach can illustrate weaknesses in the diplomacy studies field, potential areas in need of further research – for example the much-needed analysis of non-state diplomatic actors - and research opportunities within the field.

³ John L. Gaddis. (1987). Expanding the Data Base: Historians, Political Scientists and the Enrichment of Security Studies. *International Security*, 12 (1), p. 5.

⁴ Paul Sharp. (1999). For Diplomacy: Representation and the Study of International Relations. *International Studies Review*, 1 (1), p. 35.

Thus, categorisation permits us to ascertain where the field currently lies on the ‘diplomatic continuum’.⁵ Essentially, this approach constitutes a stock take of the diplomatic studies field, an appraisal of what we know or think we know in relation to diplomatic theory. This appraisal of diplomatic theory is long overdue when compared to other disciplines. For example, IR theorists ‘have often shown an interest in evaluating the state of their discipline; its practitioners have produced a steady stream of research appraisals’.⁶ Since the end of the Cold War and the close of the millennium, this exercise has been apparent in the broader IR domain but has not been conducted with diplomacy studies in mind.⁷ In relation to diplomacy studies and diplomatic theory, this thesis shoulders that responsibility.

The stock take is timely too. For example, today IR theorists are re-examining ‘their basic assumptions about world politics and re-evaluating the usefulness of the mental maps they have relied on to make sense of its complexity’.⁸ To reduce further marginalisation of the diplomatic studies field, there is a need for diplomatic theorists to follow suit. Central to this revaluation of the diplomatic theorists ‘mental maps’ is questioning the relevance and adequacy of existing diplomatic theories to account for the complexity of the modern diplomatic environment.

⁵ *ibid*, p. 44.

⁶ Colin Elman and Miriam Elman. (2003). *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field*. Cambridge: MIT Press, p. 3. For examples of IR theorists appraising their discipline, see R. N. Lebow and T. Risse-Kappen. (1995). *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War*. New York: Columbia University Press; M. W. Doyle and G. J. Ikenberry. (1997). *New Thinking in International Relations Theory*. Boulder: Westview Press; D. B. Bobrow. (1999). *Prospects for International Relations: Conjectures About the Next Millennium*. Malden: Blackwell.

⁷ The 2000 International Studies Association annual convention illustrated such a trend. Entitled ‘Reflection, Integration, Cumulation: International Studies Past and Future’ it invited ‘self-critical, state-of-the-art reflection within epistemologies, perspectives and sub fields’ and suggested that without such reflection, ‘the promise of International Studies cannot be fulfilled’. The Diplomatic Studies field was not subjected to such an examination. See, www.isanet.org/archives/

⁸ Glenn P. Hastedt and Kay M. Knickrehm. (2003). *International Politics in a Changing World*. Boston: Pearson Education, p. 29.

Finally, the categorisation of different types of theorists within the diplomatic studies field has not been attempted so far. This thesis demonstrates the value of innovation and originality of approach to fixed methods of theorising on diplomacy; even if this thesis' approach promotes criticism, at least debate is encouraged, and argument is injected into a discipline dominated by restrictive state-centric approaches to diplomatic theory.⁹ This thesis argues that Debate, innovation and a frank appraisal of the diplomatic studies field are preferable to further marginalisation.

Innovation in diplomatic theory is particularly important. In order to understand the complex twenty-first century diplomatic environment it may be beneficial to distance, but not abandon, theory from the traditional, statist perspective on diplomacy. Today, state and non-state actors can be said to engage in diplomacy but we have little knowledge on the latter while theory abounds on the former. By the end of the next three chapters, the reader will be able to elucidate the central tenets of not only the most recognisable form of diplomatic theory (Traditional) but also two alternate and equally valuable forms of diplomatic theory (Nascent and Innovative).

Before categorisation can occur, it is important to contextualise this thesis. Chapter one identifies the explicit area of theoretical terrain this thesis will attempt to navigate. Precedence is first established, by relying on insights of diplomatic theorists who have noticed the paucity of diplomatic theory but have not directly addressed the problem. Following this discussion is a frank appraisal of existing diplomatic theories, which largely consist of traditional, statist approaches to postulating on diplomacy. These statist theories are somewhat limited in their application to the modern diplomatic

⁹ For a lively, if somewhat parochial, discussion on the notion of disciplinary insecurity/neurosis see, Kurth, James. (1998). Inside the Cave: The Banality of IR Studies. *National Interest*, 53, 29 – 40.

environment. The final section in this chapter highlights six themes, factors and forces prevalent in the modern diplomatic environment and the diplomatic studies literature. When these six themes, factors and forces are introduced, it becomes apparent that existing diplomatic theories are unable to account for the increasing complexity of modern diplomacy. The chapter finishes by arguing that in order to understand this complexity the diplomatic studies field needs more than one traditional, statist body of theory.

Chapter two introduces the most recognisable type of diplomatic theorist: the Traditionalist. Traditionalists are engaged in a similar enterprise: endorsing the centrality of the state and the diplomatic institution to their theory of diplomacy. This chapter builds a comprehensive profile of this type of diplomatic theorist from the canon of diplomacy studies. In doing so, the chapter extracts the historical origins of Traditional Diplomatic Theory (TDT), the type of diplomacy Traditionalists theorise upon, their central theoretical tenets, common assumptions and definitions of diplomacy.

Traditional diplomatic theory on six modern themes within the diplomatic studies literature is also presented in chapter two, allowing a comparison to be drawn between their theory and alternate emerging theories on diplomacy. In all of the three of the different categorical chapters (2, 3 & 4), these six themes are employed to highlight divergence of opinion among the three categories of theorists presented in this thesis. Moreover, by providing specific examples of each group's theories on diplomacy one may further distinguish the three respective categories of diplomatic theory. These six themes are prominent and consistent in modern diplomatic literature. They concern the

impact of changes and challenges upon the traditional diplomatic institution.¹⁰ The six themes are: 1) the withering state, and its traditional diplomatic institution; 2) the role of intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) in the modern diplomatic environment; 3) the impact of summit diplomacy; 4) the proliferation of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs); 5) the relationship between commerce and diplomacy; and 6) the affect of the information revolution on diplomacy. Each group of theorists has a different opinion on these six themes, allowing this thesis to distinguish between different groups of theorists.

Chapter three introduces, constructs and profiles a second body of distinct theory: Nascent Diplomatic Theory (NDT). Nascent theorists postulate on diplomacy by dismissing the importance of the state and the traditional diplomatic institution in the modern diplomatic environment. Instead, they focus on emerging non-state diplomatic actors, hence the moniker *nascent* diplomatic theorists. This chapter builds the profile of Nascent theorists by constructing an alternate body of diplomatic literature (to the canon of diplomacy studies). The purpose of chapter three is to extract the historical origins of Nascent theorists, the type of diplomacy they theorise upon, their central theoretical tenets, common assumption and definitions of diplomacy. Following this, Nascent theorist's opinion on six modern themes within the diplomatic studies literature is presented, which further illustrates the differences between this group of theorists and the dominant Traditionalists.

¹⁰ For similar usage of the term institution, and the reasons behind the employment of this term in place of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, see Christer Jonsson and Martin Hall. (2006). *Essence of Diplomacy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 39 – 42.

Certain theorists can fit into both TDT and NDT categories. Sharp, for example, in the article *Who needs diplomats?*¹¹ builds an argument that incorporates the traditional, statist theory of diplomacy alongside the value of theory on nascent diplomatic actors. How do we then classify Sharp, or Hocking (1999, 2000 and 2004) or Cooper (1997, 2000)? The answer is to introduce a third categorisation of theorists, which is the focus and purpose of the fourth chapter.

Chapter four introduces the distinct category of Innovative Diplomatic Theory (IDT). These theorists, the Innovators, theorise on both state and non-state actors, incorporating and evidencing a symbiosis between the two as central to their particular type of diplomatic theory. This approach – privileging both the state and the non-state – is novel, hence the ‘Innovative’ label. Innovators can be distinguished by their historical origins, the type of diplomacy they theorise upon, their central theoretical tenets, common assumptions and definitions of diplomacy. These characteristics are described at length in this chapter, alongside IDT on the six themes prevalent in modern diplomatic studies literature. Innovators offer an alternative interpretation of modern diplomacy from TDT and NDT.

Chapter five is concerned with tackling a consequence of categorisation; the need to reconcile these three divergent theories on diplomacy. If the notion of three different types of theories within diplomacy studies is accepted then the existence of three different and often-conflicting opinions on modern diplomacy must also be accepted. Chapter five continues by offering a tentative solution. This chapter argues that to produce a comprehensive body of theory on modern diplomacy, the reconciliation of the

¹¹ See, Paul Sharp. (1997). Who needs diplomats? The problem of diplomatic representation. *International Journal*, 52 (4), 609 – 634.

three diplomatic theories is paramount. This chapter suggests that the key to reconciling tripartite diplomatic theory lies with learning from another discipline that has encountered and overcome similar problems. The discipline employed is IR, where divergent theories are inherent to the field.

Chapter five is also concerned with exploring the relationship between TDT and Realism, NDT and Liberalism and IDT and Constructivism. The simple premise is that just as these three theories are central to IR, so to must TDT, NDT and IDT become central to diplomacy studies. In chapter five, the similarities between each diplomatic theory and IR theory are explored and found to be quite remarkable. IR theory is employed to not only reconcile the three divergent diplomatic theories but also to further strengthen each of the different types of diplomatic theory. Through reconciliation, this thesis is able to banish disagreement between the three types of diplomatic theory by arguing *all* three types of theory have validity. This thesis proposes that just as IR theory needs Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism to understand the modern IR system, then diplomatic theory needs TDT, NDT and IDT in order to understand the modern diplomatic environment. The presence, consolidation and reconciliation of all three different theories ultimately strengthens diplomacy studies and diplomatic theory in the modern era.

The final chapter of the thesis, chapter six, demonstrates how this tripartite approach – using TDT, NDT & IDT in eclectic fashion - to theorising on diplomacy can enrich analysis of the modern diplomatic environment. In other words, this chapter tests the applicability of tripartite diplomatic theorising against empirical evidence. After all,

‘theory tested against data is more powerful than theory alone’.¹² The central assumptions of each of the three diplomatic theories are juxtaposed with empirical evidence relating to the six realities of the modern diplomatic environment. The aim of chapter six is twofold: firstly to demonstrate the value of tripartite diplomatic theorising; and, secondly, to introduce a subsequent set of theoretical observations that better helps understanding the modern diplomatic environment.

¹² Bates in Rudra Sil. (2000) The Foundations of Eclecticism: The Epistemological Status of Agency, Culture, and Structure in Social Theory. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 12 (3), p. 375.