



The use of conference diplomacy in conflict prevention: A call for paradigm shift in the 21st century

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Abstract

The article purports, first, to review briefly the evolution of conference diplomacy from the age of the Congress of Vienna until the era of the United Nations. Building upon this historical evidence, it attempts then to analyze the conceptual underpinnings of research on conference of diplomacy in general as represented by United Nations (UN)-sponsored world conferences in particular. The bulk of the article is devoted to an analysis of the 'typical' unfolding of conference processes, moving through the four stages of initiation, preparation, negotiation for decision for decision-making, and implementation. Here, the article seeks to demonstrate the analytical usefulness, if not necessity, of distinguishing between two major conferences: action orientated and rule making conferences using relevant examples. Conference diplomacy is not just one of the most powerful multilateral instruments to peacefully address questions related to post-conflict balance of power. It is today also the major tool in addressing global problems, identifying innovative solutions, and engaging in groundbreaking strategies for the sake of millions of people. The Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda is a case in point. It is therefore an interesting exercise to have to take a fresh look at recent conference diplomacy in the light of the bicentenary of the 1815-2015 Congress of Vienna. The article on the second limb briefly looked at the different meanings of diplomacy, its nature, objectives, means of diplomacy, devices of diplomacy, a comparison and character between old and new diplomacy and types of diplomacy with a view to reinvigorate and reinvent conference diplomacy being an example of the new diplomacy. The article finally considered the need for paradigm shift from old diplomacy to the new diplomacy particularly 'Conference Diplomacy' to take cognizance of the 21st century and its contemporary developments in other to remain a veritable tool for the prevention of conflicts/crises within the international system or space.

Keywords: conference, diplomacy, conflict, conflict prevention, paradigm shift

Introduction

Diplomacy stands accepted as the mainstay and the core process of relations among nations. The process of establishment of relations among nations begins effectively by the establishment of diplomatic relations among nations. A new state becomes a full and active member of the family of nations only after it gets recognition by existing states. The common way in which this recognition is granted is the announcement of the decision to establish diplomatic relations. Thereafter diplomats are exchanged and relations among nations get underway. As such diplomacy is the means through which nations begin to develop their relations.

In fact, the Congress of Vienna lived up to its objective of creating a peaceful and stable order for generations. It took place in a highly fragile era of transition from the austere and rigid ancient regime to transparent modern mass society forged by democratization and inclusiveness. Even if the Congress failed to address the major achievements of the French Revolution and deep-rooted changes of the time, the catalytic consensus of Vienna has been rightly regarded as a balance-of-power system of the first order a precursor to the system we have today.

Importantly, the Congress of Vienna was the first conference of ambassadors. Much of what represents conference diplomacy today was established at the Congress and has functioned well since then. The choice of different levels of negotiations, the ranking of representatives, consultations in the margins of the official meetings, the search for feedback and the often stalling response from respective headquarters concerning their special issues, the

overall coordination of an interconnected complex agenda all these seem to us to belong to the present-day repertoire of Brussels, Geneva or New York. We deem these tools of promoting decision-making and dispute settlement to be self-evident and part of everyday diplomatic life, in order to further progress in one or another matter of interest to the international community. And, most importantly, the Congress of Vienna put conflict mediation, in a very broad sense, at the centre of diplomacy.

Representatives of all the European States were chaired by a statesman bound to the capricious claims of his crown, and yet of impressive neutrality and diplomatic ability when mediating between others. The Final Act, signed on 9 June 1815 a few days before the Battle of Waterloo, embarked countries on a series of international meetings that would come to be known as the "Concert of Europe." Let me, in a few words, illustrate how Klemens Wenzel Lothar Prince Metternich performed his sometimes contested role as chief negotiator; It was all about "legitimacy (Ramcharan, 2015) [7].

This had become the buzzword for just and lawful territorial claims, meaning, at that time, "restoration." It was a match between the Four Great Powers - Austria, Great Britain, Prussia and Russia who, for a last time, were able to preserve a stable environment in their domains. For the business of peace, security and development, the external engagement of the international community in crisis and conflict management, in peace-building and state-building, legitimate state structures remain the buzzword, albeit in a slightly different manner. Legitimate state structures today require inclusive constitutional processes for national

visions and identity, and they foster mechanisms for accountability, viewing people as rights-holders. The leading State building Guideline of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development emphasizes the state-citizen relationship as the core issue to be managed in post-conflict situations. The current global governance discourse is very much about legitimacy and the inclusion of new actors.

Austria has many times served as a “platform” for peace, democracy, human rights and mediation efforts. This is reflected in our status of neutrality after the Second World War, our geostrategic position between East and West, the presence of United Nations institutions in Vienna, and Austria’s approach to conflict transformation perhaps, inspired by the heritage of the Congress of Vienna. And it is implemented in Austria’s engagement for peace in the Western Balkans, its sustained leadership in international humanitarian action and its traditional participation in multilateral peace missions. Courageous pioneering by Austrian diplomats, peace mediators and scientists has added to official efforts. For those seized with the imperative of preventing deadly conflict, the “peace conference” has many assets as part of the diplomatic toolbox. It allows focused attention to the issue at hand, brings together all relevant actors - ideally in a neutral setting and by a trusted convener and fosters both momentum as well as a clear deadline for action.

What is diplomacy?

The term Diplomacy is used in a variety of ways. Sometimes it is described as “the art of telling lies on behalf of the nation”, or “as instrument for employing deceit and duplicity in international relations.” Like Stalin once observed: “A diplomat’s words must have no relation to action— otherwise what kind of diplomacy is it? Good words are a mask for concealment of bad deeds. Sincere diplomacy is no more possible than dry water or wooden iron.” Another statesman has also observed, “When a diplomat says yes, he means perhaps; when he says perhaps, it means no; and when he says no, he is not a diplomat” (Arthur, 2007) ^[1].

Such general characterizations of diplomacy have been quite popular but these do not reflect the true nature of diplomacy. No doubt, diplomacy at times attempts to cloak the real goals of national interests with several ideational principles or morality or rules of international behaviour, yet it cannot be described as the art of deceit and concealment. Diplomacy is, in fact, the art of negotiations and conduct of foreign relations. It is the key instrument for implementing the foreign policy of the nation.

Like every other concept in social sciences discourse, there is no one definition that captures all the ingredients inherent in defining diplomacy. In other words, no single definition is in itself exhaustive. This is because various scholars, stakeholders, political actors view diplomacy from different perspectives. Thus, according to Ernest Satow (cited in Hassan and Fatai, 2013, p.36), “Diplomacy is the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between governments of independent states.” “Diplomacy is the management of international relations by means of negotiations; the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys the business or art of the diplomats.” (Harold Nicholson, 1975 cited in Ojo & Sessay, p.141). Hans Morgenthau (cited in

Palmer and Perkins, 2004) posits that “Diplomacy is the promotion of the national interest by peaceful means. Similarly, Panikkar (cited in Palmer and Perkins, 2004) held that “Diplomacy is “the art of forwarding one’s interests in relation to other countries.” For Morton Kaplan (cited in Ojo and Sessay), he confuses diplomacy with the formulation of policy. He defines diplomacy for instance, “as the formulation of strategy aiming at achieving national interests in the international field, and carrying out of this strategy by diplomats” (1952, p.548). Furthermore, Padelford and Lincoln (1976) ^[6] opined that “Diplomacy is the process of representation and negotiation by which states customarily deal with one another in times of peace.”

On the basis of these definitions, it can be said that, Diplomacy is the mechanism for the promotion of national interest of the nation that it represents. It is done by means of negotiations and conduct of relations with other nations. Diplomacy is always guided and conditioned by the foreign policy of the nation that it represents.

Nature of diplomacy

1. **Diplomacy is not immoral:** Diplomacy is neither the art of deceit nor mere lies or propaganda, and nor even something immoral.
2. **Diplomacy is a means of international relations:** Diplomacy is a normal means of conducting relations. It consists of techniques and procedures for conducting relations among nations.
3. **Diplomacy is machinery for action:** In itself diplomacy is recognized as official machinery for the conduct of relations among nations.
4. **Diplomacy acts through settled procedures:** Diplomacy functions through a network of foreign offices, embassies, legations, consulates, and special missions all over the world. It always works according to definite and settled procedures and protocol.
5. **Bilateral as well as multilateral in form:** Diplomacy is commonly bilateral in character. However as a result of the growing importance of international conferences, international organisations, regional negotiations, it has now also developed a plural character. It is concerned with all issues and problems among nations.
6. **Diplomacy handles all types of matters:** Diplomacy may embrace a multitude of interests from the simplest issues to vital issues to that of war and peace.
7. **Breakdown of diplomacy always leads to crisis:** When diplomacy breaks down, the danger of war, or at least of a major crisis develops.
8. **Diplomacy operates both in times of peace as well as war:** Some writers hold that diplomacy operates only in times of peace and when war breaks out diplomacy comes to an end. However, this is not a correct view. Diplomacy continues to operate even when war breaks out. Of course, during war its nature undergoes a change; from peace diplomacy it takes the form of war diplomacy.

- 9. Diplomacy works in an environment characterized both by conflict and cooperation:** Diplomacy works in a situation involving both cooperation and conflict. A certain degree of cooperation among nations is essential for the working of diplomacy because in its absence, diplomatic relations cannot be maintained. Similarly when there is no conflict diplomacy becomes superfluous because there is no need for negotiations. Thus existence of cooperation as well as conflict is essential for the working of diplomacy.
- 10. Diplomacy always works for securing national interests of the nation it represents:** The purpose of diplomacy is to secure the goals of national interest as defined and specified by the foreign policy of the nation. Diplomacy always works for the nation it represents.
- 11. Diplomacy is backed by national power. Diplomacy is backed by national power:** A strong diplomacy means a diplomacy backed by a strong national power. Diplomacy uses persuasion and influence as the means for exercising power in international relations. It cannot use force and violence. However, it can issue warnings, give ultimatums, promise rewards and threaten punishment, but beyond this it cannot directly exercise force. "Diplomacy is the promotion of national interest by peaceful means."
- 12. Test of success of diplomacy:** Success in Diplomacy is measured in terms of the amount of success achieved towards the fulfillment of the goals of national interest in international relations.

All these characteristics highlight the nature of Diplomacy. One can describe Diplomacy as an instrument of national interest and a tool of foreign policy.

Objectives of diplomacy

Broadly speaking, Diplomacy seeks to secure two types of primary objectives for the nation it represents. These are:

1. Political Objectives, and
2. Non-political Objectives.

1. Political objectives of diplomacy

Diplomacy always works to secure the goals of national interest as defined by the foreign policy. It always works for increasing the influence of the state over other states. It uses persuasion, promises of rewards and other such means for this purpose. Through rational negotiations, it seeks to justify the objectives of the foreign policy of the nation. It seeks to promote friendship and cooperation with other nations.

2. Non-political objectives of diplomacy

The interdependence among nations is the most important and valuable fact of international living. Each nation depends upon others for economic and industrial links and trade. Diplomacy always seeks to promote the economic, commercial and cultural links of the nation with other nations. Diplomacy depends upon peaceful means, persuasive methods for promoting the interests of the nation and this is indeed an important non-political objective of Diplomacy.

Diplomatic methods of dispute settlement

The role of political influences and considerations in interstate disputes is obviously vital one, and many settlements can only be properly understood within the wider international political context. In addition, how a state proceeds in a dispute will be conditioned by political factors. If the dispute is perceived to be one affecting vital interests, for example, the state would be less willing to submit the matter to binding third party settlement than if it were a more technical issue, while the existence of regional mechanisms will often be of political significance.

Article 2(3) of the United Nations Charter provides that: "all members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered". Similarly, the 1970 Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States develops this principle and notes that: "states shall accordingly seek early and just settlement of their international disputes by negotiation, inquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements or other peaceful means of their choice" (Shaw, 2014, p.734) ^[8]. Therefore, the following are considered as diplomatic methods of dispute settlement which are not exhaustive in themselves, they are: Negotiation, Good Offices and Mediation, Inquiry and Conciliation.

The same methods of dispute settlement are stipulated in Article 33(1) of the UN Charter, although in the context of disputes the continuance of which are likely to endanger international peace and security. The 1970 Declaration, which is not so limited, asserts that in seeking an early and just settlement, the parties are to agree upon such peaceful means as they see appropriate to the circumstances and nature of the dispute (ibid).

There would appear, therefore, to be no inherent hierarchy with respect to the methods specified and no specific method required in any given situation. States have a free choice as to the mechanisms adopted for settling their disputes. This approach is also taken in a number of regional instruments, including the American Treaty on Pacific Settlement (the Pact of Bogota), 1948 of the Organization of American States, the European Convention for the Peaceful Settlement of Disputes, 1957 and the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1975. In addition, it is to be noted that the parties to a dispute have duty to continue to seek a settlement by other peaceful means agreed by them, in the event of the failure of one particular method. Should the means enumerated fail to resolve a dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, the parties under Article 37(1) of the Charter, 'shall refer it to the Security Council' (Shaw 2014, p.735) ^[8]

Means of diplomacy

For securing its objectives, Diplomacy depends upon three major means: persuasion, compromise and threat of use of force. Diplomacy has to depend upon several tactics or techniques. The chances of the success of diplomacy are directly related to the ability of using appropriate means through appropriate tactics. In the main diplomacy uses six technique, which have been defined by the Hostile? A selection of a method or means is done on the basis of the

time and circumstances of the situation. Any wrong decision in this respect can lead to a failure.

Six main devices of diplomacy

- 1. Persuasion:** Through logical reasoning, Diplomacy seeks to convince others of the justification of the goals which it is trying to uphold or promote.
- 2. Rewards:** Diplomacy can offer rewards for securing acceptance of desired view of a particular international dispute or issue or problem.
- 3. Promise of reward and concessions:** Diplomacy can promise matching rewards and concessions for securing a particular change or maintaining a particular view in the policies of other nations.
- 4. Threat of use of force:** Diplomacy cannot use force or violence in promoting the national interest. However, it can use threat of use of force ultimatums, symbolic boycotts, protest walkouts or even threat of war etc., for securing its objectives.
- 5. Non-violent punishment:** By depriving a promised reward or concession, Diplomacy can inflict non-violent punishment on other nations.
- 6. Use of pressure:** By using pressure tactics, Diplomacy can force other nations to accept the desired view or policy or decision or goals that it represents. Besides these, Diplomacy also uses propaganda, cultural links, exploitation of situations, creation of particular scenes and situations, rigidity or flexibility in negotiations etc. Kautilya, in his Arthashastra, suggests "Sam, Dam, Danda Bheda and Niti" as the tactics of Diplomacy.

Functions and role of diplomacy

In performing its tasks and securing its national objectives, Diplomacy has to undertake a number of functions.

Major functions

1. Ceremonial/Symbolic functions

The diplomats of a nation are the symbolic representatives of the state and they represent their state and government in all official ceremonies and functions as well as in non-official, social and cultural functions held in the place of their postings.

2. Representation

A diplomat formally represents his country in a foreign state. He is the normal agent of communication between his home office and that of the state to which he is accredited. His representation is legal and political. He can vote in the name of his government. Of course, in doing so he is totally bound by the directions of his home office and the foreign Policy of the nation.

3. Negotiations

To conduct negotiations with other states is a substantive function of diplomacy. Diplomats, observe Palmer and Perkins, are by definition negotiators. They are the channels of communication which handle the transmission of messages between the foreign ministries of the parent state and the host state. Along with the nature of the message, the

manner and style of delivering the message greatly influences the course of negotiations. It is mainly through negotiations that a diplomat seeks to secure agreements and compromises over various conflictual issues and problems among states.

The role of diplomacy in conducting negotiations has, however, declined in our times because of the emergence of multilateral diplomacy, personal diplomacy political diplomacy, summit diplomacy and the direct communication links among the world leaders and top statesmen. The diplomats today do not play as great a role in international negotiations as used to be previously played by them. Nevertheless, they continue to be the legal and formal channels of negotiations in international relations.

4. Reporting

Reporting involves the observation of the political, economic, military and social conditions of the host country and the accurate transmission of the findings of the diplomat to his home country. The political reporting involves a report about the assessment of the roles of various political parties in the politics of the host country. It seeks to assess the friendliness or hostility of the various political groupings towards the home state, and the power potential of each party or organisation.

Economic reporting involves sending of reports to the home office containing general information about the economic health and trade potential of the host country. Military reporting involves an assessment of the military might, intentions and capabilities, and the strategic importance of the host country.

The level of social and cultural conflicts among the people of the host country and the level of social harmony and cohesion are assessed for determining the level of stability of the host country. Thus reporting is an important and valuable function of diplomacy.

5. Protection of interests

Diplomacy is always at work for protecting and promoting the interests of the nation and its people living abroad. Protection of interests is the "bedrock of the practice of diplomacy." It works to secure compatibility out of incompatibility through accommodation, reconciliation and goodwill.

A diplomat always attempts to prevent or change practices which he feels are discriminatory to the interests of his country. It is his responsibility to protect the persons, property and interests of such citizens of his country as are living in the territory of the state to which he stands posted. Through all these functions, diplomacy plays an important role in international relations.

Change in the character of diplomacy: From old diplomacy to new diplomacy

In contemporary times the nature of Diplomacy has undergone a big change. From its traditional dress (Old Diplomacy) it has come to acquire several new features. This change has earned for it the name New Diplomacy.

Old Diplomacy

Diplomacy in its traditional form is known as Old Diplomacy and its main features have been:

1. European diplomacy

Old Diplomacy was primarily confined to Europe. Being an imperial continent which controlled and ruled the continents of Asia and Africa, Europe was the centre of all international activities. Old Diplomacy had its origin in Europe and continued, till 1914, to handle the relations among the European states.

2. Aristocratic

In Old Diplomacy, the conduct of foreign relations was considered to be the prerogatives of the kings or rulers and their trusted ambassadors. The diplomats used to be selected by the monarchs and were responsible to their 'lords'. Diplomacy was conducted by a class of professional diplomats and was characterized by an air of aristocracy, nobility and class consciousness. It was both formal and elitist in nature and approach.

3. Special emphasis upon virtues

The Old Diplomacy was aristocratic and hence regarded several well defined and accepted principles as cardinal principles or virtues of diplomats. Honesty, integrity, truthfulness, politeness, fairness, strict conformity to protocol, secrecy and total commitment to national interests were considered to be the essential qualities of diplomats. However in actual operation, the Old Diplomacy was characterized by 'honest lies,' integrity in appearance, qualified truthfulness, outward politeness, self-satisfying fairness and strict observance of protocol and secrecy.

4. Secrecy

Secrecy was considered to be the hallmark of Old Diplomacy. Complete secrecy in respect of the negotiations as well as about the outcome of these negotiations was considered to be a vitally important condition of old diplomacy. Diplomats communicated only with their counterparts in other countries. Secret negotiations leading to secret undertakings, agreements or treaties or alliances were considered to be the ideal ways of conducting relations for the preservation of peace and problem solving.

5. Freedom of action for the ambassadors

Within the broad limits of agreed policy, the diplomats handling diplomatic negotiations used to enjoy freedom of action. During the era of Old Diplomacy, the ambassadors enjoyed considerable freedom in matters of negotiations. Lack of speedy and continuous means of communications made it essential for the state to give wide powers to its diplomats.

The inability to maintain continuous speedy communications with the ambassadors made it essential for the ruler of the state to give freedom of action and full power to his ambassadors. Ambassadors always used their authority freely without much fear of the 'home office.'

Old Diplomacy continued to remain in operation till the middle of the 20th century. Thereafter, it had to change due to several big changes in the international system as well as because of the development of fast and comprehensive means of transport and communications. It now came to be a New Diplomacy.

New Diplomacy has the following salient features which have been totally different from the features of Old Diplomacy.

New diplomacy is global, old diplomacy was mainly european

The New Diplomacy is truly global in nature and scope. The rise of Asia, Africa and Latin America and the emergence of a large number of sovereign independent states changed the character of post-war international relations. From mostly European relations these came to be truly international relations involving all the sovereign states. Consequently, diplomacy had to abandon its European character and to become truly global in nature and approach.

New diplomacy is mostly multilateral, whereas old diplomacy was mostly bilateral

Multilateral negotiations in international conferences, institutionalized diplomacy at the United Nations and the emergence of direct personal contacts among the statesmen and leaders of various states, have all combined to give a new look and content to New Diplomacy. Old Diplomacy was mostly bilateral and limited; the New Diplomacy is mostly multilateral and global.

New diplomacy is less formal than old diplomacy

New Diplomacy is not as much formal and rigid in respect of rules or procedures as was the case with the Old Diplomacy. Presently, there exist quite informal and direct contacts among the leaders and diplomats of various states.

New diplomacy is mostly open and old diplomacy was mostly secret

In New Diplomacy the negotiations are open and the results are, invariably always, made public soon after the reaching of agreements or treaties or alliances or settlements. Diplomatic negotiations are given full coverage over the Radio, Press, Television and other means of mass-media. Old Diplomacy favoured secrecy as its governing principle.

Democratic nature of new diplomacy versus aristocratic nature of old diplomacy

The New Diplomacy is democratic, whereas Old Diplomacy was aristocratic in nature. In the era of the latter, a special elitist class of diplomats, who were professionals to the core, used to conduct diplomatic negotiations and relations. However, at present the increased influence of public opinion, political parties, pressure groups, world public opinion, the rise of a more democratic and less aristocratic class of civil servants, have all given a new dimension and look to diplomacy. Modern ambassadors and consuls are democratic in their outlook towards diplomacy. A degree of informality has come to characterize their functioning in international relations.

New diplomacy depends more on propaganda than old diplomacy

The use of propaganda/publicity as an important instrument of political warfare in international relations is accepted and used by New Diplomacy as a means for securing the goals of national interest that it represents. Old Diplomacy was mostly secret and hence avoided propaganda. It concentrated upon legal and formal communications as the means for conveying its wishes, desires and objectives.

The need for a paradigm shift

Having analytically compared between the Old Diplomacy and New Diplomacy with its characteristics, it is important

for us to further adumbrate the need for the paradigm shift from the former and the later (Conference Diplomacy anchored on multilateralism) particularly as it affects the contemporary international system. This is so because with the development of technology and globalization of the international economic system, conflicts/crises between two countries affect other countries within the same clime and other continent.

“Conference diplomacy” may strike us as a relatively recent innovation, coterminous with the development of modern multilateralism and the growing recognition of global interconnectedness. Yet as we mark the bicentennial of the Congress of Vienna, we are reminded of previous attempts to maintain order (if not to promote justice) by an “international community”. (Mazower, 2012, p.3) ^[4] Moreover, a lack of historical perspective would be reminiscent of Prince Klemens von Metternich’s right-hand man, Friedrich von Gentz, who in proclaiming that the 1815 Congress was “a phenomenon without precedent in the history of the world”, ignored the many peace conferences convened by the city-states of Renaissance Italy, and in the intervening centuries (Ramcharan, 2015) ^[7].

Three types of conference diplomacy

There are three types of conferences that contribute to conflict prevention. The first is the peace conference that either follows a major conflict, or is held to negotiate an end to one. Examples include the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, and the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, and more recently, the Geneva I Conference and the Geneva II Conference, which have sought to bring an end to the Syrian civil war. Such conferences can contribute to conflict prevention by providing a forum for negotiation over the terms of a conflict’s conclusion, as well as laying the ground for the development of sustainable peace.

Another type of conference focuses on promoting general peace throughout the world, or at least efforts to mitigate and regulate the occurrence of conflict. The First Hague Conference of 1899 and the Second Hague Conference of 1907 are emblematic of such initiatives. These conferences sought to contribute to conflict prevention by clarifying the *jus ad bellum* (and also the *jus in bello*), and promoting procedures for the peaceful arbitration of conflict. A modern analogy is found in the Rome Conference that presaged the establishment of the International Criminal Court, which has a mandate to investigate, charge and try those suspected of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes worldwide.

Lastly, conference diplomacy is conducted at the so-called “global conferences”, which took root in the 1960s and henceforth spread in quantity, although not necessarily in quality. (Groom, 2013) ^[2] Such conferences have a more indirect effect on conflict prevention. Even while pursuing specific aims in and of themselves, they serve an underlying or supplementary purpose of tackling the root causes of conflict, such as environmental degradation, poverty and cultural misunderstandings.

Development and practice of peace conferences

The roots of peace conferences can be traced to fifteenth century efforts to end the wars that had ravaged the Italian peninsula, and through subsequent centuries the mechanism was intermittently used to put an end to protracted and widespread war, as at Westphalia. It was not, however, until

the Congress of Vienna that conference diplomacy was employed self-consciously as a new instrument of international organization. The Congress and Concert of Europe that emerged from it was a prototypical example of a conference designed to manage the end of a war and to facilitate a general peace in its wake. Informed, as it was, by the political presumptions of its time, namely the salience of great power politics and the conspicuous rejection of universality or sovereign equality, its rationale was nevertheless informed by assumptions similar to those which lead modern conferences to be convened (Martha & Michelle, 2014) ^[3].

While other nineteenth century conferences followed the lead of Vienna, particularly the Congress of Berlin of 1878, which aimed to prevent conflict between the European powers, and in so doing partitioned the wider world without regard for self-determination of colonized territories, a trend towards greater inclusivity was in evidence at The Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907. Inspired by conferences in the Americas that were held after the first Congress of Panama organized in 1826 by Simon Bolivar, The Hague conferences featured procedural innovations, which included more inclusive membership (Martha and Michelle, 2014, pp. 361 - 373) ^[3]. During this period, there was a call among participants for an institutionalization of the process. The League of Nations, following the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, made a serious attempt to do so (Stephen, 2003, p.21) ^[9]. It made permanent diplomatic consultation to mediate conflict one of its primary goals and as such, informed by the practice of the preceding decades, took over much of the work of peace conferences and absorbed it into its model of parliamentary diplomacy. (Groom, 2013, pp. 266-267) ^[2]

The development of an international norm around conference diplomacy is illustrated by the presumption, following the failure of the League and the conclusion of the Second World War, that a new conference ought to be held with the aim of establishing a new organization to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”. With the United Nations, the world once again had a major global governance institution that could employ its organizational capacities to prevent conflict. The appeal of conferences outside institutional auspices continued, however, with a number of issues deemed inappropriate for consideration within the United Nations itself. Examples include the conferences on South-East Asia (Laos and Vietnam) throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and the talks on the Middle East (including the Geneva Conference on the Middle East, held in 1973) and Cyprus (London Conference on Cyprus, held in 1959). (Ramacharan, 2015) Yet, the use of peace conferences as such declined. Starting in the 1960s and 1970s, so-called global conferences became a more significant feature of the international landscape than conference diplomacy as previously construed. These conferences, often held in the stultifying atmosphere of the cold war, involved almost truly universal membership, dealt with conflict prevention only in an indirect manner, addressing the structural obstacles to sustainable peace.

During and after the end of the cold war, a major increase in intrastate conflict saw some new recourse to peace conferences. In the 1980s, the Contadora and Esquipulas peace process saw Latin American States acting jointly to end the Central American civil wars through a series of mediation and peace conference efforts. These sought to

build a lasting peace in the region, establishing a common security of sorts (Michael Stevens *et al.*, 2013, pp. 561-79)^[5]. The break-up of the former Yugoslavia engendered multiple conferences that aimed to end the conflict. Eventually, the Dayton conference held in 1995 succeeded in bringing the fighting to an end and laying the groundwork for Bosnia's post-war development. The 1990s and 2000s also saw a number of major peace conferences held for the Middle East: the Oslo conferences, the Madrid conferences and the Middle East Peace Summit held at Camp David are three prominent examples. These came close to establishing lasting peace between Israel and its neighbours, but were short-circuited by further outbreaks of conflict, illustrating the limitations of conferences in the contemporary context.

Conclusion

What lessons can be drawn from this brief overview of the practice of conference diplomacy? Certainly, whereas early conferences eschewed any notion of sovereign equality, there is now the presumption that "general peace conferences" must include representation from all relevant States (and often non-state actors as well). This practice developed in parallel with multilateralism itself, though the inclusive nature of the peace conferences at The Hague predated the founding of the League of Nations. Given the difficulties that a consensus-based approach had engendered in The Hague where 44 sovereign States were brought together to represent "the conscience of the civilized world" this development had not been inevitable.

At the same time, the conferences at The Hague indicated to diplomats, who offered the lesson to their successors, that there was a certain benefit in coming together in a setting apart from regular diplomatic channels to take a fresh look at well-known problems. In addition, while we think of the formation of international networks underpinned by personal ties as a modern-day preoccupation, the development of a shared spirit, which in general underwrote the aims of the conferences at The Hague (despite eventual setbacks), did in fact give rise to a network of diplomats that later cooperated in establishing the League of Nations. (Mazower, 2014)

On the other hand, when States aim to set the terms of a newly brokered peace, or attempt to conclude a still-simmering conflict, reflexive reliance on conference diplomacy, unless carefully managed, can prove counterproductive. Historians will long debate the failings of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, which suffered from the decision to hold a conference so soon after the conclusion of a major war, and with limited membership.

Less novel than in the days of Mettemich, a contemporary critique of conference diplomacy is that when focused primarily on ongoing conflicts—as in Syria, the convening of a conference demonstrates the pressure for leading States to "do something", rather than a considered diplomatic approach (Arthur, 2007)^[1].

Despite a change in its role and functions, Diplomacy still continues to be a valuable instrument of international relations. It continues to be an important element of both National Power and Foreign Policy. A change or decline in its role does not mean that Diplomacy stands rejected as an instrument of international relations.

Diplomacy in its new form, the new diplomacy, continues to be regarded as one of the most important means of securing national interest as well as for preserving peace against war.

So long as the need to eliminate, or at least to reduce the chances of war remains, Diplomacy as a mean for the conduct of relations is bound to be used by all the nations.

With its new dress, Diplomacy can be successfully used as a valuable instrument for the resolution of conflict and crisis management among nations. Diplomats have been trying to help the international community to overcome some of its problems and to secure a resolution of international disputes.

Recommendations

1. Conference diplomacy must take into account the nature of contemporary conflicts for its to be effective as an instrument of conflict prevention.
2. It should be pivotal to involve all parties in multilateral peace conferences if the aim is to serve as an effective tool for conflict prevention and create or implement sustainable peace.
3. Diplomats should be way of resulting to conferences which inevitably generate significant media attention, when a clear strategy is lacking.
4. Furthermore, conference diplomacy must be targeted to secure national interest as well as for preserving peace against war.
5. Finally, such influences must take cognizance both states and non-state actors as they are equally involved in conflict management and resolutions.

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