

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

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Submitted in total fulfillment of the requirements
of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 2006

(unpublished)

— new English Literature (3)

and unconventional, value state/non-state linkages, indeed practical opinion suggest that they are part of the rich tapestry of the modern IR system.⁸² The reluctance or inability to abandon this debate is one consequence of the disagreement inherent to each group of theorists.

This obsession with a sterile debate (one that is unlikely to be resolved) has meant that diplomatic theory is becoming increasingly removed from diplomatic practice. By avoiding the growing state/non-state linkages, theory *on* diplomacy is becoming more distant from the reality *of* diplomacy. Within diplomacy studies, the gap between theory and practice is widening. Gyngell and Wesley frame this divide eloquently and accurately:

the gap between academics and practitioners is large. They speak different languages. Empirical to their bootstraps, practitioners tend to regard theory as an artificial template imposed on an uncertain world. For their part, theorists consider practitioners dangerously limited by their failure to understand, or to have regard for the broader patterns shaping international events.⁸³

Most practitioners would agree with the division Gyngell and Wesley discuss. Interviews with several diplomats have revealed doubts of the value of diplomatic theory to practical diplomacy. For example, Ambassador Laverdure of Canada's DFAIT took a healthy swipe at diplomatic theorists:

⁸² This practical opinion will be presented in chapter six: Using TDT, NDT and IDT to better understand the modern diplomatic environment

⁸³ Alan Gyngell and Michael Wesley. (2003). *Making Australian Foreign Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. vii.

I get into so many arguments with Canadian Professors, and I keep threatening them that one day I'll take the stage and exact my revenge. In international affairs we need academics, professors and PhDs, but can't we get closer to one another? Because they [academics] write big books stating how the world should be run, it doesn't mean they understand the practice.⁸⁴

Similarly, Ian Kemish of Australia's DFAT alluded to the growing distance of diplomatic theory from practice:

we [DFAT] consider theory part of the foreign policy process, it is invaluable and important that we engage with the academic community but on a productive basis, not this one of distance that seems to endure at the moment....if theoreticians really want to accurately understand diplomacy then I suggest they step into my shoes for a few days.⁸⁵

This cynicism from practitioners was evident during several interviews; the value of academia to diplomacy was not as clear. However, when asked if she respected academic opinion on diplomacy, Lydia Morton, also from DFAT, replied:

absolutely, it's another opinion that we must consider and in many cases employ. Academics are an interest group and we must represent that opinion, otherwise we're not doing our jobs.⁸⁶

Morton's answer however was the exception, rather than the rule. Most diplomats are, naturally, very diplomatic in their answers. The majority were subtly disdainful of

⁸⁴ Ambassador Claude Laverdure, interview, Paris, France. May 9th, 2005. As of January 2006, Claude Laverdure is the Canadian Ambassador to France.

⁸⁵ Ian Kemish, interview, July 13th, 2004. As of January 2006, Ian Kemish is the Australian Ambassador to Germany.

⁸⁶ Lydia Morton, interview, July 13th, 2004. As of January 2006 Lydia Morton is First Assistant Secretary, International Organisations and Legal Division and concurrently, Ambassador for People Smuggling Issues, DFAT.

diplomatic theory, or had little idea even what diplomatic theory was. Ambassador Les Luck noted that ‘in reality diplomacy is very different from theory’, so what does that tell us about diplomatic theory?⁸⁷ The theoretical reality of diplomatic studies is that theory, consumed by competitive *either/or* debates, *is* somewhat distant to ‘real’ diplomacy:

not only do we know this intuitively, diplomats tell us that this is so. This [theoretical] blindness produces nothing more than a partial disclosure of what constitutes diplomatic practice.⁸⁸

It is unfair to level all the blame for the widening gap on the theoreticians. Several of the diplomats interviewed took unnecessary swipes at the academics, Ambassador Laverdure claimed: ‘I enjoy teasing professors, because I know that they’re probably the guys that failed the exam for the foreign services...How does the expression go? “if you can’t do, teach”’.⁸⁹ While such comment is hardly conducive to lessening the gap, it illustrates how divorced diplomatic theory has become from practice. Bridging the gap is no easy task. Both sides – academic and practitioner – ‘express alarm at the inability of the other to step out of a limited perspective’.⁹⁰ For the practitioners of diplomacy, the term ‘academic has a pejorative ring, and is used to mean irrelevant’.⁹¹ However, the simple acceptance that there should be a division between theory and practice is an

⁸⁷ Ambassador Les Luck, interview, July 13th, 2004. As of January 2006, Ambassador Luck is the Australian Ambassador for Counter Terrorism.

⁸⁸ Lee and Hudson, *The old and new significance of political economy in diplomacy*, p. 360.

⁸⁹ Ambassador Claude Laverdure, interview, May 9th, 2005.

⁹⁰ Pamela Aall. (2002) *Scholars as Peacemakers: The Contribution of Academic/Practitioners to Conflict Management. International Studies Perspectives*, 3, p. 145.

⁹¹ *ibid.*

example of accepting a fixed assumption where diplomacy is concerned.

To banish the gap altogether would be impossible, but we can lessen it by distancing diplomacy studies from narrow, competitive and partial theories on diplomacy and by engaging with state and non-state diplomats. This author believes that to solidify and strengthen diplomatic theory the diplomatic community can be engaged.⁹² The onus to reorient theory to practice is the responsibility of the diplomatic theorists. The practitioner need not worry on whether or not the gap is widening: he will continue to be a diplomat. The academics, however, should worry. Diplomatic theory, more than other IR subjects, is heavily reliant on a practical, clearly defined and visible profession. It is therefore important that theory should be closely related to practice.

The widening gap between theory and practice is but one consequence of the disagreement between different types of theorists. The three groups of theorists are so busy defending their respective theories that the problems described here are becoming unavoidable: the marginalisation of diplomacy studies; the isolation and competition leading to more disagreement between theorists; and the ongoing frailty of diplomatic theory.

Ultimately, a sound understanding of modern diplomacy will remain elusive if the notion of a one-piece jigsaw persists. The notion of one piece or one 'lens' through which to postulate on modern diplomacy is insufficient if modern diplomacy is to be truly understood. The reason this 'theoretical myopia' persists is related to the disagreement

⁹² Building theoretical bridges with the practitioners is not a difficult task. In the various rounds of interviews undertaken for this study *all* diplomatic institutions were more than keen to schedule rounds of interviews, ranging from Ambassadors to fledgling diplomats. This is a rich source of data, which in turn can be employed to enrich theoretical analysis. This source is a largely untapped pool of resources, which can be employed to enhance any of the three diplomatic theories.

and competition amongst the three groups of theorists, which encourages isolation.⁹³ Subsequently, if the three theories are not reconciled the above problems are likely to worsen. The isolation within diplomacy studies and from other IR disciplines is likely to increase. Reconciliation (finding room for all three theories) banishes these inherent problems, which allows a better understanding of the complex tapestry of modern diplomacy.

⁹³ Lee and Hudson, *The old and new significance of political economy in diplomacy*, p. 360

And IDT is appropriate not only due to its emphasis on symbiosis and balance but also because this theory pushes us to seek out practical and empirical evidence, which will help settle the debate whilst adding to the field's knowledge. These three specialised focuses, if recognized as such, will create a far broader and inclusive body of theory on diplomacy and the information (r)evolution than that which currently exists.

6.2 The lucidity of tripartite diplomatic theory

The aim of this study has been to deconstruct, modernise (reconstruct) and strengthen diplomatic theory. The views of two well-known authors, Wight and Der Derian, were employed as an initial departure point for this overdue task. By returning to their central points, the success of this study's intention to deconstruct, modernise and strengthen diplomatic theory can be gauged.

Wight's ideas on international theory were found to resonate with diplomatic theory. Essentially, Wight was concerned with addressing and alleviating the 'theoretical impoverishment' of international theory.¹⁵⁰ Central to his observations was the claim that 'international theory does not, at first sight, exist' due to its 'recalcitrance to being theorised about'.¹⁵¹ For Wight, international theory was an 'impression' or an assumption that international relations scholars had taken for granted; consistently they failed to question the origins, rigor or depth of the 'notion of international theory'.¹⁵²

Adopting a different topic but a similar ethos to Wight, Der Derian sought to tackle the 'intellectual poverty' of diplomatic theory head on. However, Der Derian's book, combining over 3,000 years of history alongside the philosophical alienation

¹⁵⁰ Wight, *Why is there no international theory?*, p. 20.

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp. 17 – 33.

¹⁵² *ibid.*, p. 26.

theory, was perhaps too ambitious. In other words, he took diplomatic theory too far, too quickly. Many of his observations on diplomacy and theory were compelling and useful in terms of germinating the approach behind this thesis. However, many of his observations were also 'largely repellent and intractable in form'.¹⁵³

This thesis sought to address these claims. Diplomatic theory does appear to be an impression or an assumption that the diplomatic studies field has taken for granted. In addition, the subject of diplomacy, with an emphasis on its practical nature, does appear to be resistant to theory. However, these claims are a 'first' impression.¹⁵⁴ This thesis believed that there was much potential behind the idea of extracting and postulating on the topic of diplomatic theory *sui generis*. By exploring diplomatic theory as an independent topic, and as a much deeper topic than the initial 'impression' or assumption suggests, the claims of Der Derian and Wight began to look increasingly frail.

Indeed, the thesis has shown that three different types of diplomatic theory exist and can be found within the field of diplomacy studies. In addition, the presence of three diplomatic theories demonstrates that diplomacy is not, as Der Derian and Wight lamented, 'resistant to theory',¹⁵⁵ or showed a 'recalcitrance to being theorised upon'.¹⁵⁶ Theoretical observations on diplomacy are rife within the diplomatic studies literature; an attempt to extract these observations, however, is not as common. This thesis sought to address and fill this gap.

In addition, to ultimately banish the notion of diplomatic theory as weak, non-existent and impoverished, and to ensure such claims would appear themselves frail in

¹⁵³ Wight, *Why is there no international theory?*, p. 20.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁵⁵ Der Derian, *Mediating Estrangement*, p. 92.

¹⁵⁶ Wight, *Why is there no international theory?*, p. 33.

the future, this thesis sought to reconstruct diplomatic theory in a simple and concise fashion. In the future, there should be no doubt when answering the question ‘what *is* diplomatic theory?’ The central tenets of the most dominant type of diplomatic theory, TDT, can now be presented alongside two alternate and individual types of diplomatic theory, NDT and IDT, in a simple and concise fashion. Table 1 presents the central tenets of each of the three theories. When the three theories are presented in this lucid and simple fashion, we can clearly see how they complement one another. Indeed, they seem to cover most aspects of, and influences on, the complex modern diplomatic environment.

Table 1. - The Three Diplomatic Theories

	TDT	NDT	IDT
Primary actor(s)	State	Non-state: NGOs, IGOs, MNCs (for example)	State & non-state
Associated Theory/ Philosophy	Realism, neo-realism, Machiavellian	Idealism, Liberalism, Interdependence, Kantian, Moralistic, Ethical	Constructivism, Interdependence, neither optimistic nor pessimistic
Environment	Bi-Lateral, anarchical, international, balance of power, non-interventionist	Multi-lateral, domestic, international, transparent/open, interventionist	Polylateral, Internationalised networks of state and non-state actors
Origins/ Emergence	Post 1648	Post 1918	Post 1989
Agenda	High – military, individual security, defence, trade and national interest	Low – humanitarian, aid, environment, collective security	High and Low; and to clarify the limitations of rival theoretical interpretations on diplomacy.
Theorists	De Callieres, Berridge, Satow, Nicolson, Rana, Kissenger (for example)	Jackson, Hoffman, Reychler, Langhorne (for example)	Sharp, Melissen, Lee, Cooper, Hocking, Kurbaliga (for example)
Associated Words	Mechanical, rigid, archaic, official, conventional, parochial, secret, bureaucratic, hierarchical, track one	Flexible, contemporary, unofficial, ethical, moralistic, utopian, transparent/open, self-righteous, track two	Symbiosis, balance, coexistence, duality, flexibility, modernity, innovation, originality
Foundations/ Driving factors	National Interest, sovereignty, balance of power, zero-sum competition (among state actors), security, international anarchy	World/International society, self-determination, public opinion, democracy, integration, interdependence, international organization	Advocacy of normative innovation through construction of new diplomatic 'images'; tracing assumptions within various theoretical traditions; discovering how and why they colour mental maps of diplomacy
Influences	Strong historical legacy, tendency to rely on history	No historical legacy, views contemporary IR system as a radical departure from the past	Contingent upon the theoretically constructed explanations about the basic drives of diplomatic actors

This thesis sought to present the 'basic assumptions' of various theorists' opinions on diplomacy and to 're-evaluate' the usefulness of 'the mental maps they have relied on to make sense of its complexity'.¹⁵⁷ The dominant mental map within diplomacy studies remains Traditionalist diplomatic theory; however adhering to this one perspective, it was argued, was insufficient when attempting to understand the complexity of the modern diplomatic environment. The introduction and development of the two other diplomatic theories, NDT and IDT, was intended to offer the diplomatic scholar two alternate but equally useful theoretical lenses with which to interpret the modern diplomatic environment.

By mirroring the IR discipline and the divergent theories inherent to their theoretical field, this thesis argued the case for the inclusion, by way of reconciliation, of the three diverse, and often divergent, diplomatic theories. With reconciliation of these divergent theories, a consequent formality is that the diplomatic scholar now has a choice of three 'lenses' which 'provide a map, or frame of reference, that makes the complex, puzzling world around us [more] intelligible'.¹⁵⁸ Similar to the way an optometrist uses a phoropter to incrementally overlay lenses of different strength to produce a clearer image, by combining the three diplomatic theories/lenses, and subsequently reinterpreting the six themes inherent to the modern diplomatic environment, our image of the modern diplomatic environment becomes sharper.

¹⁵⁷ Hastedt and Knickrehm, *International Politics in a Changing World*, p. 29.

¹⁵⁸ Kegley and Raymond, *The Global Future*, p. 24.

6.3 The necessity of Tripartite Diplomatic Theory

The introduction, construction and realisation of the three diplomatic theories is the first step to ensuring diplomacy studies has a strong and visible theoretical grounding. As hypothesised, the presence, identity and ongoing refinement of the three diplomatic theories is central to the overall rigour of the diplomatic studies field. Elman and Elman are two theorists who believes that the strength of 'any discipline can be measured by a cursory glance at the inherent body of theory'.¹⁵⁹ While a discipline's inherent body of theory is but one measure of its strength, it is an important measure. For diplomacy studies, a strong body of theory is important in terms of ensuring a promising and less marginalised future.

Furthermore, disparate theoretical views are useful for diplomacy studies. One reason behind introducing and constructing the three divergent diplomatic theories was the need to generate theoretical debate within the discipline. Waltz believes that divergent 'theory is at the heart of any mature [academic] discipline'.¹⁶⁰ A necessity for the majority of academic disciplines is the presence of a coherent and vibrant theoretical debate at its core, as IR has shown for example. Through debate theories are contested, which in turn ensures strength in conflicting theories. After all, diplomatic scholars would be unlikely to introduce a theory that is weak and completely untested. With the three theories now constructed and evidenced, vibrant debate – as to the applicability, shape and robustness of each theory - can begin in earnest. By introducing the three diplomatic theories, it is hoped that this thesis has taken the first step to encouraging debate within

¹⁵⁹ Elman and Elman, *Progress in International Relations Theory*, p. 2.

¹⁶⁰ Waltz, Foreword in Elman Colin and Miriam Fendius Elman, *Progress in International Relations Theory*. Massachusetts, MIT Press, p. ix.

the theoretical field. Theoretical debate can only add to the strength and depth of the diplomatic studies field.

That this thesis was able to evidence three different, and often divergent, theories on diplomacy suggests that the diplomatic studies field is broadening. The emergence and rise of NDT and IDT can be correlated to the inability of TDT to fully account for the complexities of the modern diplomatic environment. Quite simply, Nascent theorists and Innovators are seeking to fill a gap in the field: diplomatic theory on non-state actors. Alternate theoretical perspectives (to TDT) can be clearly evidenced within the diplomatic studies field, as this thesis demonstrated in chapters three and four. Growth in unconventional diplomatic theory is only recent, yet highly significant considering the field was dominated by TDT for almost three centuries (1716 – 1989). The presence and growth of alternate diplomatic theory, alongside the incumbent body of TDT, confirms that the diplomatic studies field is growing.

The source of the growth of diplomatic studies can be traced to an increase in complexity of the modern diplomatic environment. One feature of the practical diplomatic environment is its diversity, with both state and non-state actors, such as MNCs and NGOs, fully engaged in processes of diplomatic exchange. Langhorne refers to this increasing complexity and diversity as ‘an ever-thickening texture of international relations and diplomacy’.¹⁶¹ The complexity of the modern diplomatic environment has meant an increase in the number of theorists postulating on the shape and nature of modern diplomacy.

If diplomatic theory is to relate to the practical realm of diplomacy it has to broaden, just as the environment has broadened. For too long now we have assumed that

¹⁶¹ Langhorne, *Current Developments in Diplomacy*, p. 13.

'traditional or statist diplomacy' means 'diplomacy per se.'¹⁶² Since the end of the Cold War, non-state actors and unconventional environments for diplomacy, such as IGOs and summitry, are looking less ad-hoc and more permanent. Therefore, it is important that theory mirror this growth and development in 'unofficial diplomacy'.¹⁶³ Diplomatic theory, if it is to remain relevant to the modern diplomatic environment, must be geared towards both state and non-state diplomacy. Permeating the diplomatic studies field with a more modern attitude to theorising on diplomacy are approaches which have objectivity and innovation at their core. This emergence is a positive for the scope of the diplomatic studies field.

Increasing our familiarity and knowledge of unconventional actors and fora for diplomacy was a central intention throughout this thesis. The six themes inherent to the current diplomatic environment, the diplomatic studies field and this thesis in particular were employed for this reason: to highlight the lack of, and need for, knowledge on non-state diplomatic actors and environments. In addition, the six themes were employed to test the applicability and modernity of various diplomatic theories; to illustrate the difference, strengths and weaknesses in these theories; to argue the need for more than one 'lens' with which to interpret modern diplomacy; and to ensure that diplomatic theory remains relevant to modern diplomatic practice. With the three categories of Traditional, Nascent and Innovative Diplomatic Theory now substantiated we can begin to thicken the texture of diplomatic theory, and enhance its appropriateness for interpreting the modern diplomatic environment.

¹⁶² Hoffmann, *Reconstructing Diplomacy*, p. 540.

¹⁶³ Hocking, *Catalytic Diplomacy*, p. 21.

In light of the broadening of the field, and this thesis' contribution to diplomatic theory, the future looks promising for diplomatic studies. So much so that one theorist claims we are living in a 'time when diplomacy is in renaissance'.¹⁶⁴ However, this claim is perhaps too positive. Sharp counsels that it is first important to ask: 'does diplomacy matter, and can the study of it yield anything of importance for our understanding of what happens and what ought to happen in international relations?'¹⁶⁵ The response to this question is unequivocal. Diplomacy is a major and ubiquitous activity of our time, and therefore of importance to us all'.¹⁶⁶ The study of diplomacy, of how actors (state and non-state) interact, is central to any notion of international political stability and therefore merits ongoing, innovative and vigorous academic attention. Ensuring this occurs is the sole responsibility of the diplomatic studies field. There is much to learn of diplomacy. What this thesis has demonstrated is that we've only just scratched the surface.

¹⁶⁴ Rana, *Foreign Ministries: Change and Reform*, p. 9.

¹⁶⁵ Sharp, *Herbert Butterfield*, p. 855.

¹⁶⁶ Watson, *Diplomacy*, p. 13.