

DIPLOMACY IN EXPANSION. PROMOTING KNOWLEDGE THROUGH INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Abstract: *To say that today's international security environment has become highly complex is a truism. No one doubts this anymore, which is not to say that the efforts to argue such a reality have lost their relevance. On the contrary, the need and importance of scientific investigation are becoming critical as the international security environment becomes increasingly dynamic, generating cascading challenges. The speed of change, on the one hand, and the often claimed low level of unpredictability regarding the direction of developments taking place in society today, in any domain and at national and global levels alike, on the other hand, call for the identification and analysis, including the reassessment and reinterpretation, of opportunities and threats that are increasingly seen as existential, profound and global. Global issues that impact the security environment, which is referred to as 'international,' are being addressed by a wide range of actors, sometimes brought together in public-private dialogue networks, who can offer solutions based on their expertise and understanding of the field.*

This paper aims to question the role of international relations in promoting and supporting higher education as a distinct entity within an institutionalized effort to draw international academic knowledge into the mechanism of addressing pressing global issues impacting the international security environment. Thus, taking the internationalization of higher education as a starting point, some lines of action are proposed for the promotion of knowledge through a diplomatic approach aimed at enhancing its social aspect in direct relation with the transformations of the international system and the challenges to international security.

Keywords: global issues, higher education, knowledge, diplomacy

1. Introduction

Interdependence is a crucial feature of any system, including the international system. It provides the frameworks for interaction between actors and fosters transnational relations. In the context of globalization based on interdependence, the significant issues that structure our existence can only be resolved through cooperation developed transnationally but generating solutions that allow them to be tailored to local conditions. Problems cannot be solved without knowledge, including issues of international to global scope, and the source of

knowledge must be sought at the international higher education level. It is, therefore, very important to rethink diplomacy as a foreign policy instrument to broaden the range of activities it covers and diversify the potential cooperation partners that could form a knowledge network.

2. Delineation of the Theoretical Framework Necessary for the Analysis

2.1. The World Today: Multiple Actors and Global Issues

International relations cannot develop and be analyzed without ignoring the state

because the state can still be regarded as an indispensable component of world politics for the foreseeable future. This does not exclude the increasingly diverse threats to which the state is subject – from non-state actors claiming a more visible role in the system of international relations to the variety of problems which the state can no longer solve on its own or control.

Understanding these challenges is necessary if the state adapts to an increasingly interdependent and interconnected world, reassesses its position, and redefines its policies based on clear objectives in line with the changing international security environment. This aspect is also essential because the state has not been lately the only actor on the stage of world politics. The 21st century is not a particular case in this respect; the history of the modern international system highlights the situation in which “the states shared the stage with chartered companies, revolutionary and counterrevolutionary political parties, and national liberation movements” [1].

The defining element of the state is sovereignty, which in its internal manifestation is synonymous with the state's supremacy over its citizens living on national territory and in its external manifestation with independence, i.e., the absence of external control. The state is challenged in terms of sovereignty as a result of external conditioning, the superior power held by other types of actors, which gives them the ability to influence the state's decision, the reshaping of international relations and the dynamics of international structures such as public-private debate platforms and, not least, globalization.

The emergence of other actors is taking place within a system that continues to be “international” as the state remains the critical unit inside its functioning mechanism. However, problems are increasingly becoming “global”, and this feature is precisely what the non-state actors are sustaining when they try to deal

with the state in terms of equal partnership to identify, analyze, and find solutions. However, the decision-making process, and especially who are the actors called to regulate solutions, is a different matter which by no means can rule out international law.

2.2. Transforming Diplomacy: From Office in the Street, Managing International Relations

Traditionally, diplomacy has been seen as a bridge between state governments. Although we would be tempted to think that diplomacy has changed since Covid-19 (although the pandemic has only accelerated things and made them more obvious/visible, and not only in the diplomatic field), nevertheless this adaptation of diplomacy to the new context started a few decades ago, when it became clear that security (the supreme objective of any state) and the national interest (as a form of expression and focus of this objective) could no longer be expressed from an almost exclusively political (or its immediate extension, politico-military) perspective. Globalization has generated opportunities, built markets, and unlocked borders, but it has also led to the emergence of complex common problems whose solution requires a concentration of states' efforts in multilateral international bodies. Globalization has fostered the rise of non-state actors on the international scene, forcing states to make their diplomacy more dynamic by diversifying the means of cooperation and broadening the range of actors with the potential to work together to achieve national interests and solve international problems. Diplomacy today covers a range of issues that are the expression of states' concerns in a wide variety of areas: increasing the social role of women; bringing under its umbrella human rights, humanitarian aid, epidemics, climate imbalances, and migration issues; refining new areas (such as cyber); accepting the focus of interest on issues raised/promoted by non-state actors; developing services not only for individuals

bearing state citizenship but also for legal entities.

These new points of interest must be seen in conjunction with the evolution of the diplomatic environment, which, paradoxically, has been achieved by the “descent” of the diplomat into the street, i.e., into the public space where civil society organizations, universities, and research institutions, multinational corporations, the press, and potential tourists are to be found. Nowadays, diplomats need to develop the skills of a lawyer (persuasion), a communicator (eloquence), a lobbyist (networking), and a businessman (entrepreneurial flair). They require a double specialization: in the current field of diplomacy (knowledge of the national interest of the state they represent and of the objectives of the accredited state, international legislation, negotiation techniques, and rules of protocol), and in a specific field of activity in which they can act as a specialist. As the former British diplomat Shaun Riordan, an investigator of innovation in diplomacy [2], has said, “the traditional model of the generalist career diplomat, who can in principle operate in any working environment, is no longer valid” [3]. The diplomat no longer contributes strictly to foreign policy objectives but facilitates the expansion of the credentialing state's international relations.

Diplomacy implements the government's foreign policy and manages the state's international relations.

Diplomacy is set in motion within the broader sphere of international relations, with the foreign policy strand as an attribute of government decision-making being enriched by a complementary one built on stimulating the participation of sub-state and non-state actors in designing solutions with international impact. Among many aspects, some of which have already been mentioned, the new diplomacy also concerns the field of knowledge, understood as the domain of higher

education. We are, therefore, confronted with the so-called knowledge diplomacy, which, at its simplest, ensures the link between international relations and higher education. The concept has generated discussions on its content and identification elements, as well as the possibility of overlapping or convergence with scientific, educational, cultural, or public diplomacy. According to Professor Jane Knight of the Ontario Institute for the Studies of Education, the University of Toronto, a renowned scholar of higher education approached from the perspective of internationalization, knowledge diplomacy [4]:

- Involves, alongside higher education, research, and innovation, which are not necessarily carried out in universities but also in research centers on their own or affiliated with other types of institutions, public and private.
- Is “a two-way process”, the determination being mutual between the two components (knowledge and international relations).
- Aims to address “urgent global challenges”.
- Can lead to confusion in approach, with “the risk of being too narrow and discriminating or too broad and inclusive”. Operating on the basis of a cooperative network, “there are often different rationales and implications for the individual countries and actors involved [because] each country and actor has different needs and brings specific resources to the partnership”, which also differentiates the benefits obtained and the risk assumed.

2.3. Higher Education: An Issue of National Interest and an Emerging Theme in International Relations

Higher education is conditioned by the political factor in terms of regulation, which means that it cannot be separated from the state, which determines its role in society. From this perspective, higher education is under growing pressure to increase its societal relevance. This characteristic means adapting to a series of challenges,

which may be internal to the system itself (redefining the role of universities, reforming the services offered, attracting funding, level of quality and relevance of study programs, professionalism of the academic staff, proactive attitude), national (nature of the political regime, economic development, demographics, labor market, societal expectations, social mobility) and international (transformation of the international security environment in all its aspects given the multidimensional perspective on security and the phenomenon of globalization, which in turn generates challenges to be met and opportunities to be seized).

Above and beyond the general objective promoted by higher education institutions – the generation and distribution of knowledge through education, research, and innovation – there should be one of a strategic nature in the sense of contributing to the achievement of the national interest, including in the direction of the state's exercise of international influence. The correlation between the above issues and the complex global problems faced by society today could be further elaborated by calling for the internationalization of higher education or Europeanization for countries that meet the geographical criterion of the approach. Thus, since the Cold War, against the background of the ideological and nuclear confrontation between the Americans and the Soviets, the internationalization of American higher education was conceived through "the dominance of national security and foreign policy as the driving forces that fostered programs in a foreign language" [5]. Today, the internationalization of higher education has as its overall goal the enhancement of the quality of education and research [6], and is put into practice through instruments imprinted with an international/intercultural component and generally materializes through activities such as: mobility of students, teachers, and researchers; attendance scientific conferences to

promote research results obtained at individual level; involvement in international research projects won through competition; development of international relations at university level based on own initiatives, without state involvement; development and support of different types of short-term mobility, such as international teachers' and students' weeks, summer/winter schools for students or participation of teachers as speakers at international conferences; and possibly discovering solutions to common problems faced by partner universities.

Nevertheless, according to the conception of this paper, in order to support the resolution of real-world global problems through knowledge diplomacy, more than the internationalization of higher education is required. The activities listed above cannot be considered as components of knowledge diplomacy, being only items on the international agenda of a university and generating benefits strictly in favor of that institution. Just as globalization is more than internationalization, so too in higher education an elevated and more complex form of internationalization needs to be developed that takes into account that knowledge is borderless, which means that it must be grounded and realized through networks made up of public and private institutions, not exclusively from universities. Starting from the premise that universities "are the bedrock of knowledge diplomacy" [7], they should take on the role of project manager based on developing the quality as a primary promoter of the link between education and research, of the fact that they are the ones who train future specialists and through their study programs meet the society needs. To this end, the internationalization of higher education must be redefined, including regulating the participants, benefits, sources, and operating principles at the international level (such as knowledge sharing or transfer). The results of a 2019 research by The International Association of

Universities (IAU) “invite a discussion on rethinking internationalization” [8].

3. Model for Structuring Specific Knowledge Diplomacy Approach

As a multi-level process involving multiple state and non-state actors, knowledge diplomacy must have the potential to respond with real solutions to global challenges, address common vulnerabilities, and ultimately change public policies. This would mean entering a new era of international cooperation, which is necessary because of the emergence and manifestation of cross-border phenomena that have the potential to disrupt the development process and the security of individuals, which are the responsibility of national governments that are obliged to coordinate/ensure them as part of the social contract. Knowledge diplomacy would become a vital tool for improving social and economic issues, which are ultimately part of the national interest, with the ultimate goal of creating a society based on equity, commitment, and responsibility.

The role of knowledge diplomacy is to link higher education and research institutions, as well as academic and scientific representatives (individuals, thus alongside institutions) with each other by facilitating enrolment in transnational knowledge networks. As a consequence, a three-pronged network would be needed to put knowledge diplomacy into operation:

- The National Knowledge Network – i.e., the system structured in three categories: universities, research hubs and professors/researchers, the latter representing a knowledge force in their own right, not needing institutional affiliation (internationally recognized individuals who have demonstrated professional competence but also possess and promote intercultural competences, and who have lectured at major scientific congresses or have had visiting professor status at top universities in international rankings or have a rich list

of papers in high-impact scientific publications).

- The Intermediary Network – i.e., the structure to bring together diplomats to provide technical support for political decisions to support such architecture.
- The Transnational Knowledge Network – in other words, the pool of individuals and companies, by field of scientific interest, who have agreed to participate in such a construction which, in addition to linking scientists on concrete issues, could also act as a facilitator of cooperation on issues that politically fail to reach the necessary consensus. Globalization has made global issues national, just as many national issues are multiplying to become global. Challenges such as climate change, food and water security, migration, epidemics, refugees, and poverty reduction know no borders.

Through knowledge diplomacy, higher education and scientific research would contribute to harmonizing international relations and developing international cooperation, as well as mitigating common global challenges. However, more than this relationship is needed, as it should be complemented by cooperation that expresses the effort made in the sphere of international relations by the institution of diplomacy to improve the existence and functioning of universities. They have built up more or less complex internationalization networks regarding the number of partnerships and the range of activities carried out.

4. Conclusions

Knowledge through education and research is an asset that can become an essential component of international relations. So far, knowledge has been more visible in relation to its contribution to sustaining state power internationally. It is, after all, a question of strategic vision at the national level, but with beneficial consequences for international competitiveness.

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