
Defence Diplomacy: A Powerful Tool of Statecraft

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Abstract

Defence diplomacy, also known as military diplomacy, is the non-violent use of military forces, adapting public diplomacy, through activities like officer exchanges, combined training programmes, cultural exchanges, and ship visits, etc., to further a country's diplomatic ties and promoting its international agenda. Despite having existed in various forms for hundreds of years, this custom and its usage as an instrument of statecraft has received surprising little attention as a discipline for scholarly studies. Defence diplomacy in the last few decades have developed as a significant tool in the global political platform for statesmen to create better ties between allies and stand as a formidable opponent. This paper clarifies what defence diplomacy is, and what it means for modern international relations. In doing so, the paper seeks to resolve the academic oversight by critically examining the concept of defence diplomacy itself. In particular, this paper plans to address the conceptual ambiguity of the term "defence diplomacy" since its very first use by the British government in the 1990.¹ Breaking down the various existing approaches to defence diplomacy, its tools and execution in different cases studies, this paper identifies the concept as a variant of soft power which is used to integrate the strategic

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thinking of another state. By linking defence diplomacy to the concept of soft power, this paper will not only cover the practices used by the states today, but also illustrate the underlying strategic mechanism that makes defence diplomacy an effective and dynamic geopolitical tool in a global arena.

Introduction

With its rapidly changing, competitive and modern threats combined with budgetary constraints for almost all nations, the globalised atmosphere in which we live means coalition-building and greater international cooperation are essential to modern defence policy. Maximising global scope and impact today includes new alliances and collaborations with governments and worldwide audience. A strong multilateral defence policy, therefore, is a necessary response. Multilateralism in defence must cover all aspects of policy, from generating equipment programmes, keeping up with modern technology and contemporary warfare strategies to supporting multinational institutions, from capacity building in developing nations to even deeper and stronger bilateral partnerships. Public diplomacy can also contribute to this modern arsenal, hence the significance of soft power in military sector is generating a lot of attention.

Public Diplomacy is not new. Historically, it has been quite known for relationships between administrative representatives and military leaders of different nations and kingdoms to grow outside of the courtrooms and battle stations. The Roman Republic invited the sons of neighbouring kings to be educated in Rome, the Greek Ptolemaic dynasty constructed the Great Library of Alexandria.² Even Napoleon had planned to order an entire French Army to convert to Islam to help establish French rule in Egypt. Today in defence policy, public diplomacy and using soft power can be a key tool of support preventative strategies. “Defence diplomacy” is relatively a new term, created with a response to post-Cold War in mind, demanding the needs and necessities of alliances and amending broken ties of inter-state conflicts and civil wars of that time. Defence Diplomacy

was used to name new tasks and international functions accomplished by the armed forces and the leadership of the Ministries of National Defence. It does not however, mean any kind of traditional “military plus diplomacy,” where diplomacy is an appendix of some sort. The main goal of defence diplomacy is the co-formation and implementation of the state security policy, and its task to create stable, long-term international relations in the field of defence. Conceptualisation of the concept is a starting point for understanding its role as one of the most important instruments of foreign policy and the security of contemporary states.

Defence diplomacy has emerged as one of the most important tools of military statecraft amid this effort to move past the use of force. Typically used as an umbrella term, activities related to it are diverse, such as officer exchanges, ship visits, combined training missions, and joint military exercises, all these are denoted under practices of defence diplomacy. However, the flexibility with which the term was shown in use in global affairs underlies the importance of the central theory and its increasing salience. Every major world power, including the United States, China, France, and the United Kingdom, realising the limits of aggression to attain its goal in global affairs, has in turn embraced defence diplomacy as a central element of its military doctrine and a primary component of its global strategy. But in order to understand why Defence Diplomacy is so desirable in foreign policy, national security and geopolitics, we need to first understand what it is.

Defining the Concept of Defence Diplomacy

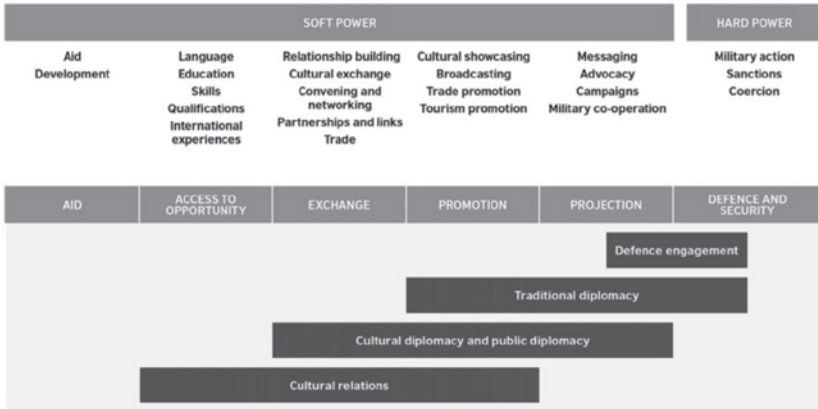
There is a lack of a universally recognised definition of Defence Diplomacy which means that, states try to adapt its content to the intentions and needs of their own security and foreign policy. In Poland, the term “defence diplomacy” appears in journalism,³ yet there is no specific reference to it in the documents related to foreign and security policy. Although the exact definition of defence diplomacy, sometimes labelled

military diplomacy by scholars like K. A. Muthanna,⁴ remains uncertain, it is generally considered the non-violent use of a state's defence apparatus to advance the strategic aims of a government through cooperation with other countries.

Defence diplomacy is one of the guiding mechanisms used to help the West face up against the current global security environment. It became an increasingly important part of the “whole government” strategy and, in the United Kingdom, defence diplomacy became one of the eight “defence missions” of the military.⁵ The Spanish Ministry of Defence's documents have given out one of the latest proposals for the definition of defence diplomacy, which describes it as “a diverse international activity based on dialogue and cooperation, implemented bilaterally by the defence ministry with allies, partners and other friendly countries to support the achievement of goals of defence policy and Spanish foreign policy.”⁶ While defining defence diplomacy is a difficult task, but with the progress of the discussions in the paper, more definitions will be presented to discuss the different dimensions and aspects of the concept.

Diplomacy and the Choices of Hard Power and Soft Power

When we talk about diplomacy, we think about hard power and soft power and the way they are utilised to create and maintain ties between states. The key functions of diplomacy, as codified in the Vienna Convention and practised since centuries, are in full effect on the art and science of effective representation, communication and negotiation. So, when discussing diplomacy and foreign policy, the concerns of soft power versus hard power arise, such as: Which method is better—deterrence or the carrots-and-sticks manoeuvre? Or imposing economic sanctions, forces, or by exchanging values, policies and establishing public diplomacy?

Figure 1: Diplomacy and Hard and Soft Power

Source: Adapted from Worne (2015).⁷

Typically, hard power used to be traditionally more sought after for diplomacy with regard to regional giants establishing dominance over small states in the neighbourhood. Hard power referred to the ability to change other states' position by force or by inducing military and economic power to coerce them into submission. It is tangible and easy to measure, the effects of which are visible and even predictable to a certain degree. However, the issue is that it is short-termed despite being direct with immediate effect. Besides, there is another option of economic power, where the force is provided through incentives. It can be of both a reward or a punishment, where a powerful state gives economic incentives in the form of trade, investments, joint ventures, etc., as a reward for a small state for cooperation, or puts economic sanctions and border control on it, if the small state does not comply.

On the other hand, soft power refers to the ability to shape the preferences of others through cultural exchanges and understanding, cooption, and influence based on context and necessity. This is different; the effects are intangible, hard to measure and unpredictable. Joseph Nye's concept of 'soft power' is more nuanced,⁸ famously coined in the late

1980s as “the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion’. Soft power adds to the international relations realm the much broader suit of activities and attributes, which totals to a nation’s ‘power of attraction.”

Traditional Diplomacy versus Defence Diplomacy

The spectrum of action of diplomacy extends from traditional diplomatic institutions to economic actors involved in international economic and commercial transactions. The complexity of means and instruments specific to the diplomatic art came naturally as a response to the world evolution.⁹ Globalisation, international relations, and the diminishing importance of national borders imposed new paradigms of traditional diplomacy. Originally, diplomacy was the preserve of official foreign institutions, which required a unique diplomatic protocol; but nowadays, it is practiced in all spheres of international economic relations.

In the common sense, diplomacy is the science of foreign relations or foreign affairs of states and in a narrower sense, the science or art of negotiations. Therefore, traditional diplomacy is defined in the literature as being the preserve of state institutions. Diplomats often fail to realise the potential of virtual embassies as diplomacy has traditionally relied on proximity for gathering information and fostering relationships.¹⁰ Curiously, one of the appeals of defence diplomacy is that it provides a less controversial means to work collaboratively on security issues than traditional diplomatic methods.¹¹ In an increasingly complex global security environment, it is military diplomacy that adds a new and very useful dimension to traditional diplomacy.

Roles, Functions and Goals of Defence Diplomacy

Research in defence studies and related literature shows that one field where the defence institutions’ conventional position has changed in post-Cold War is defence diplomacy, which provides a way to address security threats while

maintaining a low risk profile. The role of defence diplomacy depends on the condition of the conflict trajectory, whether it is latent or manifested. That is, defence diplomacy roles vary based on where on the conflict spectrum it is being used, such as: pre-conflict, during conflict or post-conflict. The roles, hence, are also subjected to change based on the nature of the conflict. Although these roles are primarily based on states that are already in conflict or might have grievances that could lead to conflict, roles of states in alliance can also be varied based on their current diplomatic relations.

Foreign and domestic policy goals are becoming accretive and irreversibly interdependent. What's happening in almost any corner of the globe affects us all. Hence, diplomacy influences these local and regional changes to impact globally. Many scholars revisited the strategy initially adopted by the United Kingdom and based their opinion about the defining feature of defence diplomacy on their goals.¹² These initiatives have sought to correct the difference in world views present in the British concept by defining general goals which can be used to achieve defence diplomacy. For instance, Tan and Singh describe defence diplomacy as “the collective application of pacific and/or cooperative initiatives by national defence establishments and military practitioners for confidence building, trust creation, conflict prevention, and/or conflict resolution.”¹³ While K. A. Muthanna based on an objective-centered approach, envisions defence diplomacy as constructing “sustainable cooperative relationships, thereby building trust and facilitating conflict prevention; introducing transparency into defence relations; building and reinforcing perceptions of common interests; changing the mind-set of partners; and introducing cooperation in other areas.”¹⁴ In view of this, the fundamental goal of diplomacy, whether military, defence or otherwise, is to pursue the national interest without using physical, or active force.

From previous pursuits of the current defence diplomacy seen globally, six basic functions of defence diplomacy can be identified:¹⁵ First, supporting the overall diplomatic objective of the state. Second,

collecting and analysing information related to armed forces and the security situation. Third, promoting cooperation, communication and mutual relations between armed forces. Fourth, organising and maintaining official defence relations. Fifth, supporting the export of arms and equipment. And sixth, representing the nation and armed forces at official ceremonies and similar events.

Defence diplomacy has a condition where it can only be effective when it's synchronised with other efforts of government power, such as trade, aid, political relations, culture and people-to-people contacts. In another sense, the message delivered through defence diplomacy can be stronger with the entirety of government position.

Areas of Defence Diplomacy

As previously discussed, most definitions of defence diplomacy do not cover all the areas that it is implemented on, and since most states define and utilise defence diplomacy based on their own agendas and limitations, the areas on which defence diplomacy is used in are diverse and difficult to put under a specific paradigm. Therefore, excessive utilitarianism, progress of liberal democracy and the emergence of new areas of cooperation and relation within defence diplomacy, implementation of tasks within regional organisations, a deep and complicated yet diverse security situation in different regions and their geo-locations, and cultural and regional considerations are just some of the problems that further complicate the development and reconciliation of the general and universally acknowledged definition of defence diplomacy.

The concept of military diplomacy, even though commonly termed instead of defence diplomacy, has to become part of a more ample and diverse concept. It needs to be under the discipline of defence diplomacy itself. In fact, as per the view of contemporary international relations, it is easier to say which areas of cooperation cannot be included in defence diplomacy, rather than calculating the areas precisely. Defence diplomacy

is in fact susceptible to adaptation and flexible to the conditions of action; stretching in many ways, along with the change and shift of the paradigm, range of impacts and necessary forms of contemporary international relations. It is focused precisely on minimising hostility and building and promoting trust between states. However, in contrast to traditional military diplomacy, it defines as many needs and opportunities as possible, supported by the progression of civilisation that ensure mutual exchange of information and interpersonal contacts achievable.

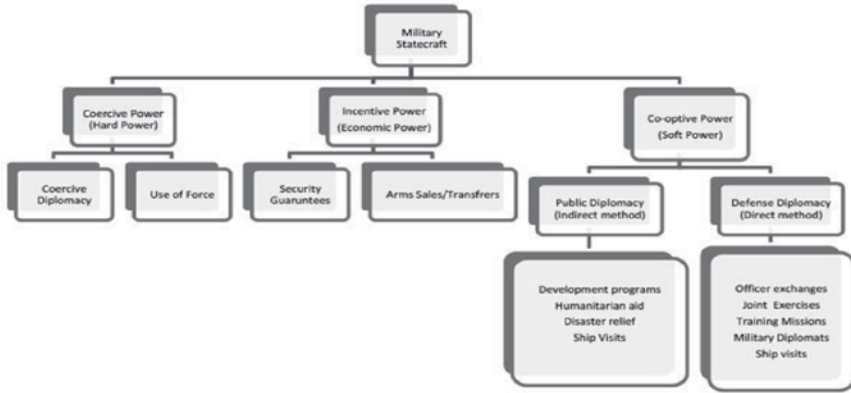
While many scholars have different takes on specifying areas of defence diplomacy, one covers primarily the major and common concerns. According to Lech Drab, the main areas of defence diplomacy are:¹⁶ bilateral and multilateral cooperation—established and maintained at a high level by both civilian and military representatives; education and military training; military exercises; military missions and operations; intelligence cooperation and exchange of information on the military-political situation and other events related to the issues of security and the state of the armed forces of other states; cooperation within international security organisations and alliances; activities related to arms control, disarmament and confidence-building measures; legal and legislative cooperation; cooperation in the field of defence industries; military assistance and support for the armed forces of other countries; and historical military cooperation and patriotic education.¹⁷

These are currently the main areas of defence diplomacy, implemented as part of bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Some of them, depending on the security standpoint and the development of the international situation, carry special importance in crisis situations, in military emergencies and operations and assistance in realising and transforming the consequences of disasters. Areas of cooperation within the framework of defence diplomacy are not a closed collection of course, new processes and initiatives are constantly emerging, in which the areas for the role and tasks of diplomats in uniform are constantly growing.

Instruments of Defence Diplomacy

Defence Diplomacy depends quite on the type of power preferred by the state, as noted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Instruments of Defence Diplomacy based on Options of Soft and Hard Power



Source: Adapted from Winger (2014).¹⁸

Apart from the armed forces, the most important instruments of defence diplomacy include:¹⁹ bilateral and multilateral contacts between the highest civilian and military representatives of defence ministries; appointing and maintaining defence attachés in other countries; developing and agreeing bilateral international agreements in the field of military cooperation; training and education of soldiers and civilian employees of the Ministry of Defence; transfer of expertise and consultancy in the field of democratic and civilian control over the armed forces; maintaining regular contacts between military personnel, military units and warships visiting ports; the location of military and civilian personnel in partner countries, both at defence ministries and in military units; deployment of training teams; supplying equipment, armaments and other military materials; and participation in bilateral and multilateral military exercises and training.²⁰

As it is evident, the instruments of defence diplomacy are numerous wherein, the fields of activity and instruments of which makes it difficult to talk about a universal defence model compatible with every state. Their specific conditions, administrative system, financial capabilities, economic structure, defence and scientific potential, the size of the armed forces, geopolitical location, security situation, agendas, participation in international security organisations, relations with neighbouring states and many other factors make each of them operate in priority sectors for themselves in their own terms, flexibly and rationally, using the available tools.

Defence Diplomacy as a Significant Tool for Implementing Foreign Policy

Defence Diplomacy is quite quickly becoming a vital aspect of foreign policy, as seen developing among the powerful states, such as the United States, China, United Kingdom, India, France, Spain and Russia. Depending on the state's agendas, powerful states use defence diplomacy to establish dominance among regional neighbours and dictate their foreign policies to clarify their terms and conditions in an alliance. To understand this better, one can revert back to the definition of defence diplomacy as given by scholars. To cite an example, in 2004, Cottey and Forster proposed a flexible, expanding definition of defence diplomacy by stating that it as "peaceful (non-confrontational) use of armed forces and related infrastructure (primarily defence ministries) as a foreign policy and security tool."²¹ This approach to the concern hence extends its scope of meaning, taking into consideration both the peaceful use of armed forces, the role of the Ministry of Defence, as well as the use of defence attachés to prevent conflicts.

Defence diplomacy plays a significant role in structuring and implementing security policy in most countries. For many states, it is a specialised instrument of foreign policy and takes a permanent place in

the system of cooperation between states and regional and international organisations. The activities of defence diplomacy, as an instrument of foreign policy and state security, contribute to the development of military cooperation and building appropriate relations between states. In this area, particularly, it activates the resources of the Ministry of National Defence, including the Armed Forces.

Why Choose Defence Diplomacy?

With every new century, a new security challenge is brought forth and the 21st century is no exception to this. What sets the 21st century apart from the 20th; is the multilevel, complex and dynamic aspect of the security challenges that nation-states face today. Changes in these obstacles have already expanded options for states to tackle them, increasingly challenging the effectiveness of traditional resources and tools, such as the defence forces.

An effective and functional defence system in the sense of the system, is one that fundamentally serves to strengthen and stabilise the position of the state on a global playing field. It is an instrument of its foreign policy and national security policy and an element of the counter-crisis system. It stabilises international relations, increases their sustainability and transparency, and thus, reduces the risk of an armed conflict. Military diplomacy such as these perform several basic functions, which include, as discussed before—gathering, screening and analysing of information and intelligence on the armed and security forces and the security situation in the host or receiving state.²² It also includes promoting of cooperation, creating media of communication and mutually beneficial relations between the armed forces of the guest/sending and the host/receiving state, as well as organisation of working visits of representatives of the defence authorities and support of business contracts in regards to arms and military equipment between the states; and most importantly, representation of the sending state and its armed forces in the receiving

state. So, the contemporary “diplomat in uniform” is not only a contractor of tasks,²³ but the essence of this uniformed diplomat’s contemporary mission is to expand the state’s knowledge of the international standing, as well as to contribute in the genesis of its national security policy. These roles, as the executive and the co-creator of policies, are not contradictory. However, the importance of the latter is also growing systematically. And this is why defence diplomacy is so vital for a state to not only ensure its stable and strong international position but also etch a structured and functional security policy.

Case Studies

The use of the Armed Forces to represent, promote and support state diplomacy goes centuries back, to the very origins of nations. At the beginning, this support was needed and intended to reinforce national interests by demonstrating a country’s military capabilities to impose its interests or agendas on the other. It was also an element to deter foreign intentions; whether political, economic or territorial. During the last century, however, the demonstration of force for deterrent purposes became more refined and profound as new instruments have been considered for ensuring a secured environment and protecting national interests wherever. These new instruments were used to reinforce a country’s military capabilities as well as of the allied and like-minded countries through the exchange of procedures, tactics, experiences, and armament. These implementations vary from country to country, as explained in the following cases.

Spain

Spain is a state with a defence diplomacy, that they depend on quite often to establish a better international relation with other states. The defence diplomacy of Spain is diversely formulated and catered based on many international activities. These international activities mainly

focus on preventing conflicts through ongoing interaction in the defence paradigm to enhance transparency, increase mutual confidence, find and define common interests with other states. It also encourages reforms in the security and defence sector, help to reinforce the security and defence capabilities of states and regional organisations to ensure the legitimate execution of their authority in an effective manner within their spheres of sovereignty and jurisdiction.

Based on their definition which the paper covered earlier, and within the general framework of contributing to Spain's actions abroad in order to achieve and maintain national strategic interests, the aims of defence Diplomacy in Spain are to maintain an ongoing dialogue with countries that are significant to Spain's foreign actions on bilateral and multilateral issues of mutual interest in the sphere of defence; support the efforts of other countries in the area of defence; consolidate their democratic structures and the rule of law as a means of contributing to the control and prevention of conflicts; support Spanish industry in its relations with countries of interest; to enhance technological and commercial capabilities, as well as provide an appropriate legal framework that regulates and supports development and evolution in the defence arena, bilateral relations and political dialogue.²⁴ In their Foreign Diplomacy Plan, it is mentioned that the actions of the Ministry of Defence in the international sphere must be in accordance with and limited to the general framework of Spanish foreign policy, applied in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation under the principle of unified external action by the State.

In a recent example, the Spanish government recently made an attempt to revamp and revise their defence policy with Latin America and Africa. For instance, Pedro Sánchez, the Prime Minister of Spain, and Margarita Robles, the Defence Minister of Spain, signed a new National Defence Directive, an updated record of the one signed back in 2012.²⁵ This shows Spain's interests in states with common cultural and linguistic grounds as well as states outside of any common saliences. Furthermore, it

also highlights Spain's interest in evolving and reforming their diplomatic engagements.

Bangladesh and India

Bangladesh and India, being regional neighbours, have a common history and share cultural saliences. With the advent of time, their diplomatic reactions have developed, securing each other a position as a significant ally in not just cases of economic and political but in the arena of defence as well. The context of defence diplomacy has become a topic of debates and discussion, especially based on the series of agreements and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the two countries during Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in April 2017. Some intellectuals and scholars of both the countries are sceptical about the agreements—exemplifying the ineffectual Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace, which is often referred to as a 'defence pact' signed in 1972 after the Independence of Bangladesh. While many find a sense of optimism for further future alliance with regional and international giants. The drivers of current efforts of defence diplomacy between the states to push mutually beneficial defence cooperation and development are many.

The defence diplomacy of Bangladesh and India has seen significant progress in the last few years. This is evident from the exchange of visits between leaders of the two nations, as well as the conduct of training programmes, joint exercises, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief such as HADR in 2017.²⁶ Before 2017, the defence cooperation between the two states did not have any formal mechanism, which automatically provoked questions regarding its sustainability. At present however, India and Bangladesh share an amicable relationship as they cooperate on different political, economic, social, scientific and technological areas. In 2014, the two countries came together to resolve of their maritime boundary dispute, and the following year they resolved their conflict over land.²⁷

During Sheikh Hasina's visit, the MOU signed covered many areas for defence cooperation, such as: creating a framework for defence cooperation, between India's Defence Services Staff College and Dhaka's Defence Services Command and Staff College to enhance cooperation in the field of strategic operational studies, and another between Dhaka's National Defence College and India's Defence College.²⁸ More MoUs were signed to extend a line of credit for the purchase of defence equipment and between the coastguards of the two states. The two states have also talked about cooperation with countering terrorism and organised crimes, for a peaceful Bay among many other.

Conclusion

Defence Diplomacy is a relatively new concept with its roots strongly tied to the needs of a new political language enacting the cooperation and relationship of states and international organisation since the end of the Cold War. Although widely used in political debate and science, it lacks a universally acknowledged definition. One of the ironies of a more integrated world is that there is a greater sense of their special cultural, social and political history among many. To be effective in a new security diplomatic strategy, local idiosyncrasies must be better understood in order to maintain the support of those we wish to aid. And for that, the world needs to understand and utilise the concepts and discover the paradigms of defence diplomacy better. In the past defence policy was often about divides, rivalries and competitions between states, and disputes between cultures. It is not that it's not relevant, but the difference today is that the divides can be overcome by unity—by the collaboration of governments and people around the world for the pursuit of shared priorities and benefits.

Contemporary defence diplomacy is historically influenced by art and literature, and the emerging foreign and security policy needs. It is defined as a way of undertaking negotiations that involves the use of certain means, methods and techniques that do not increase conflict

and are enforced under international law at the same time. The key role of defence diplomacy is to mould states' military relationships. Contemporary security diplomacy is undergoing a continuous adaptive evolution to changing operational conditions and its spectrum of significance is increasing. And to keep up with this continuous tide of evolution, we must study the concerns of defence diplomacy—making this new discourse part of a much studied discipline.

Notes

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