Theories of Diplomacy Midterm

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Question 1 (990 words)
Question 2 (999 words)

Question 1: Nicolson the Diplomat vs. Nicolson the Scholar

By all accounts, Harold Nicolson, the diplomat, was a decent enough professional in his own time but viewed with today's sensibilities it is much easier to be critical of his assumptions and attitudes. Yet Nicolson, the scholar, for all his anachronisms wrote about an ideal type in a way that has an enduring quality for the contemporary diplomat.

In assessing the statement above, it is necessary to wholly address all aspects of the statements to fully address the question. Given the subtleties and nuances both in the work of Harold Nicolson, and hidden in the statement above, it is important to methodically examine all aspects of the assertion. The aforementioned statement offers a solid framework to outline the life and career of the venerable arch-diplomatist Harold Nicolson; this essay will review both the diplomatic and scholarly careers of Harold Nicolson, and weigh if there is indeed a contradiction between the two. Furthermore, it will examine his work in regard to the statement above, provide historical context to his treatise on diplomacy and frame it within the canon of diplomatic literature.

"By all accounts, Harold Nicolson, the diplomat, was a decent enough professional in his own time…"

Harold Nicolson was practically born into the diplomatic profession, owing his provenance to a minor patrician family that was steeped in service to the British Empire in the diplomatic capacity. His own father, Sir Arthur Nicolson, had served as ambassador in Madrid and St. Petersburg before assuming the position of permanent under-secretary of the British Foreign Office.

After his schooling, Nicolson entered the diplomatic service in 1909 and went on to serve in Madrid and Constantinople before returning to the Foreign Office for much of the period of the "Great War." Attached to the British delegation at the 1918-19 Paris Peace Conference, Nicolson's service was marked with distinction. Yet during his next

posting as counselor to the Tehran legation, Nicolson's career as a diplomat ran aground. In September 1926, while acting as chargé d'affairs, Nicolson penned a dispatch to the Foreign Office that censured Britain's Persian policy, and encouraged its reconsideration post-haste. His forward remarks were met with reproach by the Foreign Office, and he was subsequently recalled the following year and received the unenviable reproach of a demotion. While the contents of the communiqué that stunted his career are currently unknown, his fealty to being a good diplomatist no matter the repercussions— as addressed in Nicolson subsequent scholarly works— likely earned him the ire of the Foreign Office; one can only suppose, but given his predilections for offering "the bitter truth," one can assume that his offence was related to candidly "speaking truth to power" that was considered unwelcome. In any case, the event served as the catalyst for the conclusion of Nicolson's career as a diplomat two years later.

In assessing whether Nicolson was indeed "a decent enough professional," the jury is somewhat out given the hasty and ignominious conclusion of his diplomatic career. T.G. Otte notes on Nicolson's tenure as a diplomat, "He always chafed under the constraints the diplomatic service placed upon its junior and middle-ranking members and under his own limited influence on policy decisions.[1]" However, whether Nicolson was a decent diplomatic professional is somewhat inconsequential given the rich treatise he provides us on the nature of diplomatic scholarship.

"Yet Nicolson, the scholar, for all his anachronisms wrote about an ideal type in a way that has an enduring quality for the contemporary diplomat."

[1] T.G. Otte, "Nicolson," in G.R. Berridge, Maurice Keens-Soper and T.G. Otte, Diplomatic Theory From Machiavelli to Kissinger, (Palgrave: New York 2001) p. 153

What was the British Foreign Office's loss was the academic field of diplomacy's gain, as Harold Nicolson the scholar analyzed the absolute, universal and timeless qualities necessary for the diplomatist and the field of diplomacy. In his seminal work, Diplomacy, Nicolson offers prescriptions, drawn from historical foundations, on the fundamental qualities required for a proper diplomatist's craft.

First, he jovially offers some anachronistic previously-held notions of what a good ambassador should entail; in doing so, Nicolson effectively insulates his own work from charges of anachronimity by highlighting that, regardless of the protean nature of certain desired traits, there are essential and ageless qualities that all good diplomatists must possess. He then outlines these seven virtuous qualities as: a) Truth, b) Accuracy, c) Calm, d) Patience, e) Good Temper, f) Modesty, and g) Loyalty. Nicolson systematically assesses why each and every one of these qualities is a requirement for a good diplomatist. He both delves into the canon of diplomatic literature, citing such luminaries as François de Calliéres and Jules Cambon, and offers historical examples that highlight the necessity of each quality.

In assessing Nicolson's work, it is vital to offer context for the piece in relation to its period. Diplomacy was published in 1939, in the wake of the first world war and on the heels of the second. Given the popular enmity towards "old diplomacy" that was borne out of the conception that it was diplomacy in its aristocratic and secretive nature that somehow caused the period of strife, and given the transformations taking place in the diplomatic field as "new diplomacy" was being considered by global civil society, Nicolson's work is an attempt to reclaim what constitutes good diplomatic practices and the work of real diplomatists from those who misconstrue or misunderstand the craft.

Otte notes, “Nicolson was anxious to restore the professional diplomatist’s good reputation. Far from possessing the loathsome qualities attributed to them in popular mythology, diplomacy required from its practitioners ‘a combination of certain qualities which are not always found in the ordinary politicians, nor even in the ordinary man.’[2]” His piece is as much rebuke of the likes of Machiavelli or Sir Henry Wotton ("An ambassador is an honest man who is sent to lie abroad for the good of his country"), as it is an attempt to set the record straight for those who misconceive the craft.

While some may bristle under today’s sensibilities of Nicolson’s comments on “the Oriental mind,” (although some diplomats serving in that region might occasionally agree, make use of the advice or offer similar thoughts couched in more *diplomatic* language), on the whole, Nicolson’s work is indeed an eternal blueprint for contemporary and future diplomatists. While Nicolson, the diplomat, may have had a checkered career, Nicolson, the scholar, provides the prescriptions necessary for the creation of a true diplomatist.

[2] ibid, 165, (CF Nicolson, Diplomacy, p. 105)

Question 2: The Wilson, Bolshevik Critique

Wilson's liberal critique of the old diplomacy faltered on Wilson's inability to win over his domestic base, but it laid the foundations for the eventual vindication of diplomacy, especially in its multilateral form. The Bolshevik critique has no merit whatsoever.

In the wake of the *Great War*, "diplomacy" became a scapegoat as the catalyst for the hostilities and discord that arose in Europe. Stemming from an America under the direction of President Woodrow Wilson, and the Soviet Union under Bolshevik leadership, a strident critique emerged over the discontents of "old diplomacy" and argued for the formation of a new variety of the craft. "Old diplomacy," with its reliance on the "balance of power" paradigm, was viewed as the catalyst for war by "encouraging an arms race, trade war, and colonial rivalries. War was no accidental failure; the entire system was culpable inasmuch as it was undemocratic and served the strong.[3]" This essay seeks to address the genesis of such critiques, especially in light of the two poles where new diplomacy arose, and assess the old/new diplomacy dichotomy in relation to the statement above.

"Wilson's liberal critique of the old diplomacy faltered on Wilson's inability to win over his domestic base but it laid the foundations for the eventual vindication of diplomacy, especially in its multilateral form."

In addressing the Wilsonian liberal critique of the old diplomacy, it is important to assess the origin of the critique itself. The Wilsonian critique had provenance in the 18th century outlook of many American intellectuals who were dubious of the balance of power system. Sofer notes,

[3] Sasson Sofer, "Old and new diplomacy: a debate revisited," in *Review of International Studies* (Great Britain 1988), vol 14, no 3, p.197

> "The *philosophes* denied that the maintenance of peace could be a direct result of the balance of power and refused to accept that it was a function of the whims and moods of the absolute monarch. Eighteenth century diplomacy was viewed as a conspiracy which must be replaced by open diplomacy resting on moral principles.[4]"

Moreover, intrinsically tied to the American liberal tradition, with its influence derived from philosophers John Locke and Thomas Paine, was a level of skepticism towards the role of diplomacy in international politics, and utopian projections for international society. Soffer continues,

> "Diplomacy was regarded as an immoral institution and identified with war and intrigue. A utopian perception of international society emerged, analogous to the ideal civil society. If all societies were democratic, a family of nations would evolve, along with a new world order which would guarantee peace, thus rendering diplomacy superfluous.[5]"

From this heady ideological birth, and into the chaotic landscape brought about by the first world war, Wilson projected the American school of liberal thought onto a global stage.

Despite Wilson's well-intentioned pursuits, his efforts ran aground on the shoals of two obdurate impediments: a) traditional support for the balance of power in his European allies, and b) traditional isolationism of Wilson's nation. On the first impediment, Wilson's pursuits to implement "new diplomacy" were checked by the traditional mores of his European partners at the peace accords who still favored the balance of power paradigm and methods associated with "old diplomacy.

On the second impediment, and burnishing the notion proffered in the mid-term question, Sofer states, "Though the liberal criticism of European diplomacy was consistent with the isolationist credo, the implementation of the new approach required

[4] ibid
[5] ibid

massive US intervention in world politics, contrary to the desire of the American public.[6]" Moreover, given the traditional apprehension of the American polity towards intervention, Wilson compounded his difficulties by distancing his delegation from Republican congressional leadership at home, whose support he would subsequently require. Also, by slavishly clinging to the League of Nations concept that gave traditional American isolationists pause, he undermined efforts.

However, it is clear that the seeds planted by Wilson would later bear fruit, especially in regard to the rise of multilateral diplomacy and the multilateral institutions following World War II. While Wilson would not live to see his ideas come to fruition, the rise of the United Nations and other multilateral institutions would (partially) vindicate his quest. Moreover, as opposed to limiting American power, as isolationists feared, some realist scholars would argue that the advent of multilateral institutions has been beneficial to American power. Martha Finnemore and Michael Barnett outline the notion that the UN and other multilateral institutions serve as a tool for furthering American interests by legitimating the international structure in American favor, managing the global financial system and burden sharing in regard to failed states, both financially and militarily[7].

"The Bolshevik critique has no merit whatsoever."

It is ultimately difficult to weigh the Bolshevik critique of "old diplomacy" and conceptions of the "new diplomacy" paradigm because the USSR's flirtations with the new model were short-lived. Bolshevik decrees in November 1917 stated that the new diplomatic model of "open diplomacy" would be adopted, and negotiations would be

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[6] ibid, p.198

[7] Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, "Political Approaches," in Thomas G. Weiss and Sam Dawes (eds), The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008), p.44

conducted ‘absolutely openly before the entire people’[8]. To this end, the Bolsheviks published a trove of secret documents of the former Czarist state and Allied Powers. Moreover, the Bolsheviks paid lip service to a number of liberal precepts of Wilsonian liberalism in an attempt to use the new diplomacy as a wedge against the Allies[9]. Meanwhile, Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Leon Trotsky eliminated diplomatic titles. Finally, the open level of negotiations of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, which took the Bolshevik Russia state out of the first world war, was cited as “the antithesis of secret diplomacy,” and augmented Soviet claims that its form of diplomacy “was unique in its openness, fairness, humanitarianism, and peaceful orientation.[10]”

This new brand of open diplomacy was fleeting in the Soviet Union. By March 1918, George Chicherin had succeeded Trotsky, and the Commissariat resumed more traditional practices of diplomacy, in diplomatic title and in deed. Under Chicherin, the Soviet state resumed many of the Czarist diplomatic heritage and traditions. Soffer cites that in light of security dilemmas faced by the Soviet state, it was quick to shunt new diplomacy aside and return to traditional diplomacy and balance of power strategy[11]. Given the quick declarations of the dawning of a new diplomatic age in Bolshevist diplomatic practice, followed by the speedy tack back by the Soviets to traditional practices, it’s hard to give any merit to the Bolshevik critique.

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[8] Sofer, op cit., p.200
[9] ibid, p.198
[10] CF ibid, p.200
[11] ibid, p.201

Refences Cited:

Question 1:

T.G. Otte, "Nicolson," in G.R. Berridge, Maurice Keens-Soper and T.G. Otte, Diplomatic Theory From Machiavelli to Kissinger, (Palgrave: New York 2001)

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Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, "Political Approaches," in Thomas G. Weiss and Sam Dawes (eds), The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008), p.44