DIPLOMATIC, INTERNATIONAL AND GLOBAL -WORLD HISTORY

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Summary

"History" has informed the study of international relations since the beginnings of the discipline in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The initial impulse for "Diplomatic" history came from historians who drew their inspiration from Thucydidean and Rankean approaches and studied statecraft in a "realist" mode. These early studies were based on a heavy dependence on primary sources and were given a huge impetus by studies of the causes and course of the First World War, and, to a much lesser extent, of the Second. "International" history, which developed in the period after about 1939, introduced debates about contending approaches to international relations as well as history itself while continuing to search out primary sources, as is still the case.

International historians in particular look at systemic as well as local causes for historical change. The Cold War was, and has continued to be, a time of great interest for the international historian and is now being widely re-assessed. The origins and course of the European Union have also proved a fertile territory to investigate, as have such concepts as the "New World Order".

In the last few decades "Global" or "World" history has emerged as an attempt to see a wider context for the Cold War and other phenomena and to stress other "voices" in world history that may be critical of the philosophies or actions of Western "civilization". The chapter shows how these three great traditions continue to co-exist and to compete with each other for notice in the wider world of international relations.

1. Diplomatic History

International Relations is not a discipline. It remains a field of enquiry concerned with the large questions of war and peace, order, morality and justice, and contains several sub-fields such as foreign policy analysis and international political economy. Its intellectual taproots lie in history, law, geography and political theory. History can claim to be both the central intelligence of the subject and, in Sir John Seeley's phrase, "the school of statesmanship". Diplomatic historians stood among the founders of international studies.

Diplomatic history is a sub-field of political history in the Thucydidean and Rankean tradition. Implicitly for the most part it rested in the classical realist paradigm. Its axiom was anarchy. Its governing concepts were rationality, power and the state. Diplomatic historians set themselves two tasks – first, to understand how governing elites, in unitary states, generally free of popular forces, assessed risk, did the capabilities-goals analysis and constructed foreign policy; and second, to understand the behavior of states and how they interacted with one another, i.e. statecraft. Great men ran the affairs of great powers and managed interstate conflict. Diplomatic history's issue areas were, therefore, essentially political and strategic, expressed in terms of security, national interest and great strategy. Its principal concerns were war and its origins, peace and its restoration, crises, alliance relationships and the sanctity of treaties. The sum of great power foreign policies constituted international relations, there being, therefore, no discrete international system. Governments dealt with other governments, and scarcely at all with oppositions, or alternative, aspirant governments.

Diplomatic historians employed a methodology that rested on textual analysis of primary sources, manuscript and printed, preserved primarily in government archives. When bolstered by the record of public debate, in speeches, parliaments and the press, the archives were taken to reveal elite reasoning and state behavior. Command of the archives, public and private, domestic and foreign, placing a premium on foreign language skills, identified the master craftsmen, Sir Charles Webster, William Langer and J.B. Duroselle, for example. Cumulation was determined more by the availability of primary sources, the opening of archives, often to serve political as much as scholarly purposes, than by puzzlement. Diplomatic historians wrote dense, analytical narratives chronologically, in a common vocabulary. They ranged over the historical record from classical times, and particularly from the Renaissance to what became their principal focus – the modern, industrialized, national security state. Historiography took on the familiar pattern of orthodoxy, revisionism and post-revisionism.

Diplomatic history gathered momentum in the late nineteenth century and flourished in the first half of the twentieth century. The First World War, total or not, but of unprecedented proportions and reach, required understanding -- of its origins, causes, eruption, prolongation and consequences. So did the questions surrounding the peacemaking of 1919-1923. The War Guilt clause of the Versailles Treaty, i.e. article 231, written to justify the collection of reparations from Germany, stimulated scholarship, only to render much of it seemingly sterile by turning diplomatic history into a quasi-judicial process and historians into apologists and axe-grinders, waging scholarly war over war guilt. Luigi Albertini's monumental volumes marked the virtual

end of the affair. The Nazi record, and that of imperial Japan, and the verdicts of Nuremberg and Tokyo, exempted the Second World War from a repetition. Orthodoxy, richly documented as the thirty-year rule became the norm, ruled. Revisionism in the 1960s such as that attempted by A.J.P. Taylor seemed eccentric, even perverse. The debate, such as it was, was short-lived. And diplomatic historians played an embarrassingly small role in the examination of the origins and course of the Cold War.

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Biographical Sketches

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