

CSS International Relations: diplomacy, its evolution and modern forms

Diplomacy is one of the oldest institutions of international life and a regular CSS International Relations topic. Examiners expect you to define it precisely, trace how it grew from occasional envoys into permanent resident missions, explain the legal framework set by the Vienna Convention of 1961, classify its modern forms, link it to IR theory and illustrate every point with Pakistani examples.

1. Meaning of diplomacy and who diplomats are

1.1 Definitions

The word comes from the Greek *diploma*, a folded document carried by an envoy as proof of authority. Over time "diplomacy" came to mean the conduct of relations between states through official agents. Learn at least two classic definitions and one modern one.

Sir Ernest Satow (*A Guide to Diplomatic Practice*, 1917): diplomacy is "the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states".

Harold Nicolson (*Diplomacy*, 1939), adopting the Oxford English Dictionary: diplomacy is "the management of international relations by negotiation; the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys".

Working definition for answers: diplomacy is the peaceful conduct of relations between states and other international actors, mainly through negotiation, communication and representation, in order to advance national interests without the use of force.

Note the distinction that examiners reward: **foreign policy** is the set of goals and decisions a state adopts towards the outside world, while **diplomacy** is the instrument and process by which that policy is carried out. Nicolson stressed this difference between "policy" (made by the government) and "negotiation" (carried out by diplomats).

1.2 Functions of diplomacy

Most writers group the functions under five headings:

- **Representation:** the diplomat speaks for the sending state, both formally (ceremonies, credentials) and substantively (explaining policy).
- **Negotiation:** bargaining to reach agreements, from trade deals to peace treaties. Nicolson called this the core of diplomacy.
- **Communication and reporting:** gathering information by lawful means and reporting home on political, economic and military conditions.
- **Protection:** safeguarding the interests of the sending state and its nationals abroad.
- **Promotion of friendly relations:** building trade, cultural, educational and scientific links.

1.3 Who are diplomats?



In the narrow legal sense a diplomat is an official accredited by one state to another. Under the Vienna Convention the **head of mission** belongs to one of three classes:

1. Ambassadors or nuncios (the papal equivalent) accredited to heads of state, and other heads of mission of equivalent rank.
2. Envoys, ministers and internuncios accredited to heads of state.
3. Chargés d'affaires accredited to ministers for foreign affairs.

Below the head of mission are the **diplomatic staff** (counsellors, secretaries, attachés, defence and commercial attachés), the administrative and technical staff, and the service staff. Within the Commonwealth, missions between member states are headed by **High Commissioners** rather than ambassadors, which is why Pakistan has a High Commission in London and New Delhi. **Consuls** are distinct: they deal with visas, passports, trade and the welfare of nationals, and are governed by the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations of 1963.

In a wider sense, heads of state and government, foreign ministers, special envoys, UN officials and even non-state actors now perform diplomatic roles.

2. Evolution of diplomacy

2.1 Ancient diplomacy

- **Ancient Near East:** the Amarna letters (14th century BCE) record correspondence between the Egyptian court and rulers such as those of Babylon, Mitanni and the Hittites. They show envoys, gifts, marriage alliances and a shared language of diplomacy (Akkadian).
- **Ancient India:** Kautilya's *Arthashastra* (traditionally dated to the Mauryan period, around the 4th century BCE) classified envoys by the authority they carried and set out the *mandala* theory, in which a neighbour is a likely enemy and the neighbour's neighbour a likely friend.
- **Ancient Greece:** city states used heralds, envoys and *proxenoi* (citizens of one city who looked after the interests of another city's citizens, an early form of consul).
- **Rome:** relied more on power than negotiation, but its *fetiales* handled treaties and declarations of war.
- **Byzantium:** the Byzantine Empire developed a skilled diplomatic service that used ceremony, gifts, intelligence gathering and playing rivals against each other to survive with limited military means.

2.2 Islamic diplomatic tradition

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) sent letters to contemporary rulers, including the Byzantine and Persian emperors, inviting them to Islam. The **Treaty of Hudaibiyyah** (628 CE) is studied as a model of patient negotiation in which short-term concessions produced long-term gains. Islamic law granted safe conduct (*aman*) to envoys, and later Muslim empires such as the Abbasids, the Ottomans and the Mughals maintained regular diplomatic contacts with other powers.

2.3 Rise of resident diplomacy in Renaissance Italy

The decisive change came in 15th century Italy. Rival city states such as Milan, Venice, Florence, Naples and the Papacy were close together and in constant competition, so they needed continuous information. They began to keep **permanent resident ambassadors** at each other's courts. The

Peace of Lodi (1454) and the balance it created among the Italian states encouraged the practice. The system then spread to France, Spain and the rest of Europe in the 16th century.

2.4 From Westphalia to the Congress of Vienna

- **Peace of Westphalia (1648):** confirmed the idea of sovereign states as the main actors and made multilateral peace conferences a recognised method.
- **The French system:** Cardinal Richelieu argued for "continuous negotiation" and set up a central foreign ministry. French became the language of diplomacy, and François de Callières wrote a famous manual on negotiation (1716).
- **Congress of Vienna (1815):** settled the ranks of diplomats (the Règlement of 1815, later supplemented at Aix-la-Chapelle in 1818), ending long quarrels over precedence. It also began the **Concert of Europe**, a system of great power conferences to manage crises.

2.5 "Old" and "new" diplomacy

The 19th century European system is called the **old diplomacy**: secret, conducted by aristocratic professionals, centred on Europe and based on the balance of power. The First World War discredited it, because secret alliances were blamed for the war. President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points (1918) called for "open covenants of peace, openly arrived at". The **new diplomacy** that followed featured:

- open, publicly reported negotiations and parliamentary scrutiny;
- multilateral institutions, first the League of Nations and after 1945 the United Nations;
- more direct involvement of political leaders, the press and public opinion;
- a global rather than European membership, especially after decolonisation.

Nicolson warned that negotiating fully in public makes compromise harder: covenants should be open, but reaching them often needs confidentiality.

2.6 Cold War and after

The Cold War added nuclear crisis diplomacy (the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 led to the Washington to Moscow "hotline" in 1963), arms control talks and the Non-Aligned Movement. After 1991 the agenda widened to trade, climate, human rights, terrorism and health, and NGOs, companies and cities joined in.

3. The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, 1961

3.1 Background

The rules of diplomacy were long based on custom. The International Law Commission prepared draft articles, and a UN conference in Vienna adopted the **Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations** on 18 April 1961. It entered into force in 1964 and has been ratified by almost every state, making it one of the most widely accepted treaties in the world. It largely codified existing customary law.

Functions of a diplomatic mission (Article 3), to learn: representing the sending state in the receiving state; protecting the interests of the sending state and its nationals within the limits of international law; negotiating with the government of the receiving state; ascertaining by all lawful means conditions and developments in the receiving state and reporting them to the sending

state; promoting friendly relations and developing economic, cultural and scientific relations.

3.2 Key provisions

Article	Provision
2	Diplomatic relations and permanent missions are established by mutual consent.
4	The receiving state must give its consent (<i>agrément</i>) to the proposed head of mission and need not give reasons for refusing.
9	The receiving state may at any time, without explaining its decision, declare a diplomat <i>persona non grata</i> ; the sending state must then recall the person.
14	Three classes of heads of mission (see section 1.3).
22	The premises of the mission are inviolable; agents of the receiving state may not enter without the consent of the head of mission, and the receiving state has a special duty to protect them.
24	The archives and documents of the mission are inviolable.
27	Freedom of communication; the diplomatic bag must not be opened or detained.
29	The person of a diplomatic agent is inviolable; no arrest or detention.
31	Immunity from the criminal jurisdiction of the receiving state, and from civil and administrative jurisdiction with limited exceptions.
32	Immunity may be waived, but only by the sending state, and the waiver must be express.
41	Diplomats must respect the laws of the receiving state and must not interfere in its internal affairs.

3.3 Rationale and criticism

The Convention's preamble says privileges are granted "not to benefit individuals but to ensure the efficient performance of the functions of diplomatic missions". This is the **functional necessity** theory, which has replaced older theories of "extraterritoriality" (the embassy treated as foreign soil) and "representative character" (the diplomat as the personal representative of the sovereign).

Criticisms include abuse of immunity (unpaid fines, smuggling in diplomatic bags, crimes by diplomats) and violations of the Convention, the best known being the seizure of the US embassy in Tehran in 1979, which the International Court of Justice held to be a breach of Iran's obligations. The receiving state's real remedy against abuse is to declare a diplomat *persona non grata* or to break relations.

Exam tip: when asked about the Vienna Convention, do not just list articles. Structure your answer as (1) background and codification of custom, (2) functions of missions, (3) privileges and immunities with article numbers, (4) the functional necessity rationale, (5) abuses and the remedies of the receiving state, (6) a Pakistan example, such as tit-for-tat expulsions of diplomats between Pakistan and India, which are carried out through Article 9.

4. Types of modern diplomacy

4.1 Bilateral diplomacy

Relations between two states, conducted mainly through resident embassies and direct contacts between ministries. It allows confidentiality and close tailoring to one relationship. Example: Pakistan and China's partnership.

4.2 Multilateral diplomacy

Diplomacy among three or more states, usually within an international organisation or conference. It gives small and middle powers a voice, builds coalitions and produces global rules, but negotiations are slow and outcomes often reflect the lowest common denominator. Examples: the UN General Assembly and Security Council, the OIC, SAARC, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and climate conferences (COPs).

4.3 Summit diplomacy

Direct meetings between heads of state or government. Winston Churchill popularised the term "summit" in 1950. Summits can break deadlocks and signal political will, but they are risky: failure is very public, leaders may lack technical detail, and preparation by professional diplomats is essential. Examples: the Tashkent summit (1966) and the Agra summit (2001) between India and Pakistan.

4.4 Public diplomacy

Public diplomacy is the effort of a government to communicate directly with foreign publics, rather than only with foreign governments, in order to inform and influence them and so create an environment favourable to its policies. The term is usually credited to Edmund Gullion (1965).

Its tools include exchanges, scholarships, broadcasting and diaspora engagement. It mobilises what Joseph Nye calls **soft power**: getting what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment.

4.5 Economic diplomacy

The use of diplomatic means to pursue economic goals (trade access, investment, aid, energy and remittances) and the use of economic tools (sanctions, aid, trade agreements) to pursue political goals. Commercial attachés and investment promotion are part of it. Examples: Pakistan's negotiations with the IMF, its trade preferences with the European Union under GSP+ (granted from 2014), and CPEC.

4.6 Track II diplomacy

Track II diplomacy is unofficial, informal interaction between non-official members of adversary groups or nations (such as retired officials, academics, journalists and business people) that aims to develop strategies, influence public opinion and prepare ideas that may help resolve conflict. The term was coined by Joseph Montville (1981). **Track I** is official government diplomacy; **Track 1.5** mixes officials acting in a private capacity with non-officials.

Track II lets parties test ideas without commitment and keeps channels open when official talks are frozen. Its weakness is that participants may lack influence over decisions. Example: Pakistan and India dialogues such as the Neemrana process, begun in the 1990s, which brought together former officials, military officers and academics.

4.7 Digital diplomacy

The use of the internet, social media and digital tools for diplomatic purposes: ministries and embassies post statements on X (formerly Twitter), run consular services online and hold virtual meetings (very common during the COVID-19 pandemic). Benefits: speed, direct reach to foreign publics and lower cost. Risks: disinformation, hasty public statements that harden positions, hacking and leaks (the WikiLeaks release of US diplomatic cables in 2010 is the classic example). A newer branch, **cyber diplomacy**, negotiates norms for state behaviour in cyberspace.

4.8 Other forms worth mentioning

Coercive diplomacy (threats or limited force to change an opponent's behaviour, Alexander George), **shuttle diplomacy** (Kissinger in the Middle East after 1973), **preventive diplomacy** (Boutros-Ghali's *An Agenda for Peace*, 1992) and issue-based forms such as climate, health and water diplomacy.

5. Diplomacy in IR theory

5.1 Realism

Realists see diplomacy as an instrument of national power in an anarchic system. Hans Morgenthau (*Politics among Nations*, 1948) called the quality of diplomacy the most important, though most unstable, element of national power, and the best means of preserving peace. He gave diplomacy four tasks:

1. determine its objectives in the light of the power actually and potentially available;
2. assess the objectives of other nations and the power available to them;
3. determine how far these different objectives are compatible;
4. employ the means suited to the pursuit of its objectives (persuasion, compromise and threat of force).

Among his rules for diplomacy: it must be divested of the crusading spirit; foreign policy objectives must be defined in terms of the national interest and supported with adequate power; diplomacy must look at the political scene from the point of view of other nations; and nations must be willing to compromise on issues that are not vital to them. Kissinger's balance of power diplomacy is the practical example.

5.2 Liberalism

Liberals see diplomacy as a means to cooperation, not just competition. They emphasise multilateral institutions, international law, interdependence and open diplomacy (Wilson). Neoliberal institutionalists such as Robert Keohane argue that institutions reduce the fear of cheating.

5.3 The English School

Hedley Bull (*The Anarchical Society*, 1977) treated diplomacy as one of the five institutions of international society, alongside the balance of power, international law, war and the role of the great powers. Diplomacy facilitates communication, negotiates agreements, gathers information, reduces friction and symbolises the existence of a society of states.

5.4 Constructivism and critical views

Constructivists see diplomacy as a social practice that creates shared norms and identities, so it shapes interests as well as transmitting them. Critical and feminist writers note that diplomatic

institutions have reflected the interests of powerful states and long excluded women.

Exam tip: a theory question rewards comparison: realism (tool of power), liberalism (tool of cooperation through institutions), English School (institution of international society), constructivism (practice that shapes norms). Then evaluate which explains a given case best.

6. Pakistan's diplomatic practice

6.1 Alliance diplomacy in the 1950s

Seeking security against India and economic aid, Pakistan joined the US-led SEATO (1954) and the Baghdad Pact (1955), later renamed CENTO. This bilateral and alliance diplomacy brought military and economic aid but limited Pakistan's independence and strained relations with the Soviet Union and parts of the Muslim world.

6.2 Mediation and multilateral agreements

- **Indus Waters Treaty (1960):** signed by Pakistan and India after World Bank mediation; a classic example of third-party facilitated water diplomacy.
- **Tashkent Declaration (1966):** after the 1965 war, Soviet mediation brought President Ayub Khan and Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri together.
- **Simla Agreement (1972):** bilateral summit diplomacy between Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Indira Gandhi after the 1971 war, committing both sides to settle differences bilaterally and peacefully.

6.3 Facilitating the US and China opening

Pakistan acted as a secret channel between Washington and Beijing. In July 1971 Henry Kissinger made his secret trip to Beijing via Islamabad, preparing President Nixon's visit to China in 1972. It is a textbook case of back-channel diplomacy.

6.4 Islamic and multilateral diplomacy

Pakistan hosted the second Islamic Summit of the OIC at Lahore in February 1974, at which Pakistan also recognised Bangladesh. It has been an active member of the UN, a leading contributor of troops to UN peacekeeping operations and a non-permanent member of the Security Council several times, most recently for the 2025 to 2026 term. It joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation as a full member in 2017.

6.5 Afghanistan and conflict diplomacy

Pakistan was a party to the Geneva Accords (1988), negotiated under UN auspices, which led to the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Later it facilitated contacts that led to the US and Taliban agreement signed at Doha in February 2020.

6.6 Economic, public and digital diplomacy today

CPEC (launched in 2015) is the centrepiece of economic diplomacy with China; Pakistan also negotiates regularly with the IMF and Gulf states, and uses diaspora engagement as an asset. The Kartarpur Corridor (opened 2019) is an example of religious and public diplomacy, and the Foreign Office uses weekly briefings and social media.

6.7 Evaluation

Strengths: skilful use of geography, close ties with China and the Gulf, active multilateralism.

Weaknesses: financial dependence, an India-centred agenda and limited investment in public diplomacy.

Quick check

1. Define diplomacy using two scholarly definitions and distinguish it from foreign policy.
2. Describe the five main functions of diplomacy, linking them to Article 3 of the Vienna Convention.
3. Explain why permanent resident diplomacy emerged in Renaissance Italy.
4. Compare the "old diplomacy" with the "new diplomacy" after the First World War. Was open diplomacy an improvement?
5. Explain the functional necessity theory of diplomatic immunity and evaluate the remedies available against abuse of immunity.
6. Distinguish between Track I, Track 1.5 and Track II diplomacy, and assess the usefulness of Track II in Pakistan and India relations.
7. Explain how public diplomacy is related to soft power, using a Pakistani example.
8. Evaluate the advantages and dangers of summit diplomacy.
9. Describe Morgenthau's four tasks of diplomacy and explain how a liberal would view diplomacy differently.
10. Evaluate Pakistan's role in the US and China rapprochement of 1971 to 1972 as an example of back-channel diplomacy.

1. Satow: "the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states". Nicolson: "the management of international relations by negotiation; the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys". Foreign policy is the substance (goals and decisions made by the government); diplomacy is the process and instrument (negotiation, representation, communication) used to achieve those goals. Example: Pakistan's policy of strengthening ties with China is foreign policy; the meetings, joint commissions and agreements that carry it out are diplomacy.

2. Representation (speaking for the sending state), negotiation (bargaining to reach agreements), communication and reporting (ascertaining conditions by lawful means and reporting home), protection (of the state's interests and its nationals), and promotion of friendly relations (economic, cultural and scientific ties). Article 3 lists these same functions: representing, protecting, negotiating, ascertaining and reporting, and promoting friendly relations. Conclude that the Convention codified what had long been customary practice.

3. Italian city states (Milan, Venice, Florence, Naples, the Papacy) were small, close together and in constant rivalry, so they needed continuous information and quick negotiation. Occasional special envoys were not enough. The balance among them after the Peace of Lodi (1454) made permanent observation of rivals essential. Resident ambassadors then spread across Europe in the 16th century and became the basis of the modern system.

4. Old diplomacy: secret, aristocratic, professional, Europe-centred, based on the balance of

power and secret alliances. New diplomacy: open covenants (Wilson's Fourteen Points, 1918), parliamentary and public scrutiny, multilateral institutions (League, then UN), involvement of leaders and media, global membership. Evaluation: openness improved accountability and legitimacy, and reduced the risk of secret commitments dragging states into war. However, as Nicolson argued, negotiation in public makes compromise harder because leaders fear losing face; the best practice is open results reached through confidential negotiation, which is how most modern diplomacy actually works.

5. Functional necessity: privileges exist "not to benefit individuals but to ensure the efficient performance of the functions of diplomatic missions". Diplomats must be free from arrest, harassment and interference to report and negotiate honestly. It replaced extraterritoriality and representative character theories. Remedies against abuse: request a waiver of immunity from the sending state (Article 32); declare the diplomat *persona non grata* without giving reasons (Article 9); reduce the size of the mission; break off relations; the sending state may also prosecute its own diplomat at home. Evaluation: remedies are political and limited, but reciprocity makes the system largely self-enforcing.

6. Track I: official talks between governments. Track 1.5: officials acting in a private capacity together with non-officials. Track II: unofficial dialogue among retired officials, academics, journalists and business leaders. Usefulness in Pakistan and India relations: dialogues such as Neemrana kept channels open during freezes in official talks, allowed ideas (confidence building measures, trade, visas) to be tested without commitment, and built personal trust. Limits: participants lack decision-making power, results depend on political will in both capitals, and terrorist attacks or domestic pressures can quickly undo progress. Conclude that Track II complements but cannot replace Track I.

7. Public diplomacy is government communication with foreign publics to create a favourable environment for its policies. Soft power (Nye) is the ability to attract rather than coerce; public diplomacy is the main way a state mobilises its soft power resources (culture, values, policies). Pakistani example: the Kartarpur Corridor (opened 2019) let Sikh pilgrims visit a sacred site, projecting an image of religious tolerance to audiences in India and the Sikh diaspora worldwide. Others: scholarships, cultural festivals and diaspora engagement.

8. Advantages: leaders can take decisions directly and break deadlocks; summits create political momentum and personal rapport; they attract public attention and legitimacy (Simla 1972 produced a lasting framework). Dangers: lack of preparation and technical detail; public failure is costly and can worsen relations (Agra 2001 ended without a joint declaration); leaders may make hasty concessions or misjudge each other; media pressure encourages posturing. Conclusion: summits work best when prepared by professional diplomats and used to finalise, not start, negotiations.

9. Morgenthau's tasks: determine objectives in light of available power; assess other nations' objectives and power; determine how far these objectives are compatible; use suitable means (persuasion, compromise, threat of force). Realist view: diplomacy serves the national interest defined as power and is the best way to preserve peace through balance and compromise. A liberal would see diplomacy as a means to build lasting cooperation through institutions, law and interdependence, would value multilateral and open diplomacy, and would argue that repeated negotiation within institutions can change state behaviour, not just manage conflicting interests.

10. Pakistan had good relations with both the US (an ally through SEATO and CENTO) and

China. President Yahya Khan passed messages between Nixon and Zhou Enlai, and in July 1971 Kissinger flew secretly from Islamabad to Beijing, preparing Nixon's 1972 visit. Strengths of the case: shows how trust, secrecy and geography let a smaller state play a role far above its size, and it strengthened Pakistan and China friendship. Limits: the US did not provide decisive support to Pakistan in the 1971 war, so the diplomatic service did not translate into security guarantees. Conclusion: an outstanding example of back-channel diplomacy, but one whose benefits to Pakistan were mainly long term (the China relationship) rather than immediate.