

The Future of Diplomacy: Challenges and Transformations in a Multipolar World

Maxim Gvinjia

¹ Vice Rector for International Relations and Economic Affairs, Abkhazian State University, Sukhum, Republic of Abkhazia

maxim.gvinjia@gmail.com*

Abstract This article examines the future of diplomacy in the context of contemporary global transformations. The study analyzes key factors shaping diplomatic practice, including the emergence of a multipolar world order, institutional reforms in international organizations, global migration processes, and the transformation of diplomatic education. Drawing on the diplomatic-studies literature and recent developments in international relations, the research demonstrates that traditional diplomatic frameworks are being challenged by new geopolitical realities. The article argues that the future of diplomacy will depend on the international community's ability to adapt to new realities while preserving the principles of international law enshrined in the UN Charter. Key findings suggest that the supremacy of international law, institutional reform of the United Nations, and the development of professional diplomatic training will be essential for effective diplomacy in the multipolar era. The study concludes that diplomacy must evolve to address contemporary challenges while maintaining the core principles of international cooperation, mutual respect, and peaceful conflict resolution.

Keywords: diplomacy; international law; United Nations; multipolar world; diplomatic education

INTRODUCTION

Modern diplomacy faces numerous challenges that are shaping its future. Among the key factors influencing its development are the emergence of a multipolar world order, reforms in international organizations, global migration processes, and the transformation of educational systems. As Berridge (2022: 1–3) observes, diplomacy remains the principal instrument through which states and other international actors conduct their official relations by peaceful means, yet the institutional and normative environment in which it operates is undergoing a period of transformation as consequential as any since the mid-twentieth-century settlement that produced the United Nations. The process of global transformation is irreversible, as are the turning points in human history that provide impetus for a new stage of development.

The fundamental question facing the international community is whether existing diplomatic institutions and practices can adapt to these rapidly changing realities. The supremacy of international law, the effectiveness of international organizations, the professionalism of diplomatic cadres, and the capacity for intercultural dialogue will determine whether diplomacy can fulfill its essential function: the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the promotion of international cooperation (Sharp, 2009: 1–20).

This article examines the future of diplomacy through five interconnected themes: the transformation of international institutions, the impact of migration on diplomatic practice, the crisis of professional diplomatic education, the emergence of new actors in international relations, and the role of diplomacy in maintaining international peace and security. The central argument is that the future of diplomacy will depend on the international community's ability to adapt to new geopolitical and social realities while preserving the principles of international law enshrined in the UN Charter.

METHODS

This research employs a qualitative analytical methodology combining institutional analysis, policy studies, and international relations theory, following the multi-disciplinary approach to the study of diplomacy set out by Cooper, Heine, and Thakur (2013) and by Constantinou, Kerr, and Sharp (2016).

Sources and Materials

The research draws on official documents of international organizations such as the UN, BRICS, and the SCO; statements and speeches by diplomatic leaders; analytical reports on international relations; scholarly literature on diplomacy and international law; and case studies of diplomatic practice.

Analytical Framework

The research combines four complementary lines of analysis. The first is institutional analysis, which examines the effectiveness and reform of international organizations (Weiss, 2018). The second is policy analysis, which addresses the impact of migration and digitalization on diplomatic practice (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019; Bjola & Holmes, 2015). The third is educational analysis, concerned with the transformation of diplomatic training. The fourth is geopolitical analysis, which traces the emergence of new actors and power centers (Stuenkel, 2015; Aris, 2011; Ikenberry, 2020).

Key Themes

The study focuses on five interconnected themes: the transformation of international institutions such as the UN, BRICS, and the SCO; migration and its diplomatic implications; the crisis of professional diplomatic education; multipolarity and the emergence of new diplomatic actors; and the role of international law.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PART I: TRANSFORMATION OF INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

1.1 The Emergence of New International Organizations

The formation of new global organizations such as BRICS (originally Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, and since 2024 an expanded grouping that also includes Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) presents both challenges and opportunities for the future of diplomacy (Stuenkel, 2015; Aris, 2011). These organizations not only challenge Western dominance and US hegemony but also introduce new elements to the diplomatic practice of the future. Their emergence reflects a multipolar framework that represents a shift away from unipolar structures toward a more balanced international system (Ikenberry, 2020); they offer alternative governance models that may complement or challenge existing institutions; and their membership is notably inclusive, drawing in nations from different regions and levels of development.

BRICS, in particular, has expanded its membership and influence, potentially developing into a “G-20 for the Global South” (Stuenkel, 2015: 45–67). The expansion of BRICS and the SCO will likely bring new dynamics to international diplomacy, including more diverse perspectives on global governance, alternative mechanisms for conflict resolution, and new frameworks for economic cooperation.

1.2 The United Nations in the Future

The primacy of the United Nations in international diplomacy must be preserved. However, this will depend on how effective and thorough the reform of the UN becomes. Long-standing scholarly calls for a more representative and preventive United Nations (Weiss, 2018: 1–25) point toward the emergence of what might be termed “UN 2.0” — an organization built around a new philosophy of conflict prevention rather than reaction, and potentially a more geographically balanced institutional footprint. The reforms most often called for are summarized in Table 1: an outdated Security Council structure that still reflects 1945 realities would give way to an expanded, more representative membership; decision-making currently influenced by behind-the-scenes deals would become more transparent and effective; a reactive approach to conflict would be replaced by a proactive prevention focus; the unequal representation of small states would be corrected; and a Western-centric headquarters presence would give way to a more geographically balanced footprint.

Table 1. Proposed Reforms for the United Nations

Area	Current Situation	Proposed Reform
Security Council	Outdated structure reflecting 1945 realities	Expanded, more representative membership
Decision-making	Influenced by behind-the-scenes deals	More transparent, effective mechanisms
Conflict response	Reactive approach	Proactive prevention focus
Representation	Unequal representation	Better representation of small states
Headquarters	Western-centric location	More geographically balanced presence

Such a reformed UN would stand for the protection of the interests of peoples and states, including small nations. The Security Council would acquire new, more effective decision-making mechanisms that would not be influenced by backroom deals (Weiss, 2018). The future of diplomacy will depend significantly on whether the UN remains an effective and influential international mechanism.

1.3 The Supremacy of International Law

Future diplomacy must be based on the supremacy of international law, not rules invented by a single hegemon. As the international community moves toward a multipolar order, the principle of sovereign equality of states must be respected. The erosion of international law has been one of the most concerning trends in recent international relations — a contestation that Ikenberry (2020: 245–260) situates within a broader crisis of the post-1945 liberal international order. Four principles, in particular, should anchor future diplomatic practice: the rule of law, whereby international law takes precedence over unilateral “rules-based orders”; sovereign equality, whereby all states are treated equally regardless of size or power; non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states; and a continued commitment to peaceful dispute-resolution mechanisms.

Some diplomatic conventions will likely be updated or replaced. The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961), a foundational document of modern diplomatic practice, contains provisions that have come under strain in recent years. Article 22, which addresses the inviolability of diplomatic and consular property, is a case in point: in September 2017, following the ordered closure of the Russian consulate in San Francisco, United States federal agents entered and took control of that consulate and of Russian diplomatic annexes in Washington, D.C. and New York. Moscow characterized the action as inconsistent with Article 22's inviolability guarantee, while Washington maintained that it was a lawful, reciprocal countermeasure. Whatever the merits of either position, the episode illustrates how even long-settled diplomatic conventions can become contested terrain amid great-power friction (Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, 1961). Table 2 summarizes three conventions whose provisions are most often cited as needing reinforcement or modernization.

Table 2. Key Diplomatic Conventions Requiring Update

Convention	Key Provisions	Reform Needs
Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961)	Diplomatic immunity, property protection	Strengthening enforcement mechanisms
Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (1963)	Consular functions, assistance to nationals	Modernization for the digital era
UN Charter (1945)	Peace and security, sovereignty	Security Council reform, conflict prevention

PART II: THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON DIPLOMACY

2.1 Migration as a Diplomatic Challenge

Global migration processes, especially mass migration from the West to the East and from the North to the South, create new challenges for diplomacy, giving rise to what Adamson and Tsourapas (2019: 113–115) term “migration diplomacy” — the use of diplomatic tools and inter-state bargaining to manage cross-border population movements as an instrument of statecraft. The need to address issues of migrant integration, human rights protection, and security is becoming increasingly important.

Migration can become both a source of tension between countries and an opportunity for strengthening international cooperation, provided states can effectively coordinate their efforts (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019). The role of future diplomats will require not only knowledge of international law but also an understanding of the nuances of intercultural communication.

2.2 Intercultural Competence in Diplomacy

In the modern world, diplomats who master the art of intercultural communication are the most prominent representatives of their craft on the international stage. This mastery of what Sharp (2009: 88–104) calls the professional “diplomatic culture” — the shared norms, habits of restraint, and communicative practices that allow representatives of very different societies to negotiate with one another — will become a necessary condition for diplomats of the future. The competencies this demands are cultural sensitivity — understanding and respecting diverse cultural perspectives; language skills, meaning proficiency in multiple languages; negotiation skills, or the ability to find common ground in complex situations; and adaptability, the capacity to work effectively in diverse cultural environments.

2.3 Migration and Regional Stability

Migration patterns are reshaping the geopolitical landscape. The movement of populations across borders creates new diplomatic challenges spanning humanitarian concerns — the protection of refugee and migrant rights; security issues, or the management of potential threats related to migration; economic impacts, particularly for labor markets; and social integration, meaning the promotion of social cohesion in host countries. Effective diplomatic responses to migration accordingly require international coordination and burden-sharing, respect for human rights and humanitarian law, attention to the root causes of migration, and integration policies that respect cultural diversity (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019).

PART III: CRISIS IN DIPLOMATIC EDUCATION

3.1 The Degradation of Diplomatic Schools

In the author's assessment, the problem of degradation of diplomatic schools is becoming increasingly urgent. Not to criticize, but for the sake of objectivity, it is necessary to note what appears to be a contemporary trend of degradation among some of the leading diplomatic schools in Europe. For many years, these schools were regarded as the gold standard of the diplomatic craft, cultivating precisely the professional norms and shared “diplomatic culture” that Sharp (2009) identifies as central to the discipline. The signs of this perceived degradation include a declining quality of training programs, reduced emphasis on traditional diplomatic skills, an increasing focus on media performance over substantive negotiation, and a less thorough grounding in complex international processes.

If this assessment holds, the consequences would be significant: a reduced quality of diplomatic work, a decreased ability of countries to effectively represent their interests, a more confrontational and less professional diplomatic style, and an increased media orientation at the expense of substantive work.

3.2 The Crisis of European Diplomacy

Contemporary European foreign ministers are sometimes criticized — including by the author — for lacking a sufficiently deep understanding of complex international processes and negotiation skills. If accurate, this would contribute to a decline in the quality of diplomatic work and in the ability of countries to effectively represent their interests on the international stage. Table 3 summarizes four challenges commonly associated with this trend: personnel rotation, in the form of inconsistent staffing and frequent

turnover, which erodes institutional knowledge; media orientation, which prioritizes media presence over substantive work and thereby reduces effectiveness; professional decline, reflected in a reduced depth of training and inferior negotiation outcomes; and a loss of tradition, or a departure from established diplomatic practices that undermines trust and stability.

Table 3. Challenges in Contemporary European Diplomacy

Challenge	Description	Consequences
Personnel rotation	Inconsistent staffing and frequent turnover	Loss of institutional knowledge
Media orientation	Prioritizing media presence over substantive work	Reduced effectiveness
Professional decline	Reduced depth of training	Inferior negotiation outcomes
Loss of tradition	Departure from established diplomatic practices	Reduced trust and stability

The inconsistency of personnel changes, the rotation of ambassadors, and the influx of new diplomats into European politics may, in the author's view, contribute to a broader crisis in European diplomacy — one in which diplomatic practice becomes more media-oriented, more confrontational, and less professional.

That said, there remains a constellation of experienced diplomats in Europe who could help make this world safer. Yet, at present, Western diplomacy is, in this analysis, characterized by a discernible drift toward “slogan diplomacy” rather than substantive engagement.

3.3 Reform of Diplomatic Education

The improvement of diplomatic training in the future will become an integral element of the policies of states striving for international influence. We can expect the opening of new centers for diplomat training; student exchange and intercultural connections becoming necessary conditions of professional formation; and, potentially, the creation of a unified diplomatic academy under BRICS auspices, in keeping with BRICS's broader pattern of parallel institution-building (Stuenkel, 2015).

The BRICS Diplomatic Academy Concept

The creation of a BRICS diplomatic academy would be a significant initiative. Such an institution would train diplomats in the spirit of equal cooperation, build on respect for and understanding of different cultures and traditions, promote multipolar diplomatic practices, and develop alternative approaches to international relations. Its curriculum would need to emphasize equal partnership over hierarchy, respect cultural diversity, focus on mutual understanding and cooperation, and develop alternatives to Western-centric diplomatic norms.

3.4 The Future Diplomat

The diplomat of the future, in assessing other states, will always be meticulous in studying the interests of other countries and, based on this knowledge, seek compromise. Such a diplomat approximates what Nye (2011: 20–30) calls “smart power” in individual practice: the combination of analytical rigor, cultural fluency, and persuasive skill needed to convert influence into cooperation rather than confrontation. He or she will not be a source of false propaganda or an extension of transnational media giants. Table 4 sets out the qualities this analysis regards as essential: analytical rigor, expressed as a meticulous study of others' interests; compromise-seeking, or the ability to find balanced solutions; professional integrity, meaning resistance to propaganda pressures; intercultural competence, or an understanding of cultural differences; digital literacy, the ability to navigate online diplomacy; and legal expertise, grounded in a mastery of international law.

Table 4. Essential Qualities of the Future Diplomat

Quality	Description
Analytical rigor	Meticulous study of others' interests
Compromise-seeking	Finding balanced solutions
Professional integrity	Resisting propaganda pressures
Intercultural competence	Understanding cultural differences
Digital literacy	Navigating online diplomacy
Legal expertise	Mastery of international law

PART IV: MULTIPOLARITY AND DIPLOMATIC PRACTICE

4.1 The Rise of Multipolar Diplomacy

The multipolar world will largely be defined by continents and the cultural characteristics of countries and peoples (Ikenberry, 2020; Nye, 2011). In the future, diplomatic protocol is likely to become more diverse and less standardized, marked by a greater respect for cultural differences, multiple power centers with distinct approaches, and increased complexity in international negotiations.

4.2 Digitalization and Artificial Intelligence

Digitalization of communication will make interaction more flexible. As Bjola and Holmes (2015: 3–15) document, digital tools — from social media diplomacy to real-time open-source monitoring — are already embedded in the everyday conduct of international activity, and artificial intelligence is increasingly part of that toolkit. However, AI remains a fragile path along which diplomats must navigate numerous embarrassments and potentially dangerous situations. Its potential benefits are considerable: enhanced data analysis and decision support, automated translation and communication, improved crisis response capabilities, and real-time monitoring of international situations. Yet the risks are equally real, including security vulnerabilities and cyber threats, manipulation and misinformation, the potential loss of human judgment in complex situations, and broader ethical concerns about the use of AI in international affairs. The integration of AI into diplomatic practice must therefore be approached with caution, balancing efficiency gains with the preservation of human judgment and professional standards (Bjola & Holmes, 2015).

4.3 Retrospective Elements in Future Diplomacy

Interestingly, the future of diplomacy may take a retrospective form, where some elements from the past become part of the future. This may apply to both diplomatic protocol and approaches to negotiation, and it echoes Sharp's (2009) observation that diplomatic practice is sustained less by fixed rules than by an inherited professional culture that each generation of diplomats reinterprets. A return to more formal and structured methods of interaction — formal protocol and etiquette, traditional negotiation methods, structured diplomatic communications, and a renewed emphasis on institutional memory — may contribute to increased trust and stability in international relations.

PART V: THE END OF AN ERA

5.1 Challenges to International Law

One of the leading figures in international diplomacy, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, has frequently argued that the international community is witnessing the end of the era of modern diplomacy as it has been practiced since 1945, contending that the West has embarked on a course to undermine the architecture of international relations based on the UN Charter. This is a contested claim rather than a settled scholarly consensus, but it reflects a broader academic debate: Ikenberry (2020: 1–20), for instance, likewise describes the post-war liberal international order as being in a state of genuine crisis and contestation, even as he attributes that crisis to a more complex mix of causes than any single actor's revisionism. From Lavrov's perspective, the key concerns are the substitution of international law

with “rules” of a single bloc's own making, the creation of exclusive formats for international activity, the duplication of UN functions, and the redefinition of international norms to suit particular interests.

In this view, such narrow formats — “private clubs” of self-described “advanced” nations — dictate new approaches presented as “necessary” for everyone else, while states that decline to join are labeled retrograde or revisionist. Proponents of this position argue that it is precisely the West that is engaged in revisionism, by seeking to revise the UN Charter itself; critics of this position, in turn, point to the conduct of other major and middle powers as evidence that no single bloc has a monopoly on selective compliance with international law. This article does not attempt to adjudicate that broader dispute, but registers it as a defining feature of the contemporary diplomatic landscape.

5.2 Defending the UN Charter

Russia and the states it describes as its allies and strategic partners present themselves as defenders of the UN Charter, its principles, objectives, and structure. On this view, the preservation of the UN system is essential for global stability, in the sense of maintaining predictability in international relations; for international law, by ensuring that the rule of law prevails over force; for conflict prevention, by addressing disputes peacefully; and for the protection of small states, by ensuring that all states, regardless of size, have their rights respected. Table 5 summarizes how proponents of this UN-Charter-centric view contrast international law with what they term a “rules-based order”: whereas international law is presented as universally applicable, grounded in the UN Charter, premised on sovereign equality, binding on all states, and enforced through institutions, the “rules-based order” is characterized as selectively applied, unilaterally defined, hierarchical, imposed on others, and ultimately enforced through power rather than law.

Table 5. The Contrast Between International Law and “Rules-Based Order,” as Framed by Proponents of the UN-Charter-Centric View

International Law	“Rules-Based Order”
Universally applicable	Selectively applied
Based on the UN Charter	Unilaterally defined
Sovereign equality recognized	Hierarchical relationships
Binding on all states	Imposed on others
Enforced through institutions	Enforced through power

PART VI: SYNTHESIS — THE FUTURE OF DIPLOMACY

The five themes examined in this article — institutional transformation, migration, diplomatic education, multipolarity, and international law — are deeply interconnected, a linkage that reflects the integrative approach to diplomacy studies advocated by Constantinou, Kerr, and Sharp (2016). Institutions and international law are mutually dependent: the effectiveness of international institutions rests on respect for international law, and without robust legal frameworks, institutions cannot function effectively. Migration and education are likewise linked, since migration creates new demands for diplomatic education, and diplomats must understand diverse cultures and manage complex humanitarian issues (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019). Multipolarity and institutions are connected in turn: the emergence of multipolarity requires institutional reform, and existing institutions must adapt to new realities or risk irrelevance (Ikenberry, 2020). Finally, law and multipolarity are bound together, since the multipolar world demands greater respect for international law; without such legal frameworks, competing power centers may resort to unilateral action.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the future of diplomacy through the interconnected lenses of institutional transformation, migration, diplomatic education, multipolarity, and international law. Several findings emerge from this analysis. The emergence of new international organizations such as BRICS and the

SCO presents both challenges and opportunities for the future of diplomacy (Stuenkel, 2015; Aris, 2011): these organizations offer alternative models of international cooperation and contribute to a more multipolar world order. The United Nations remains essential to international diplomacy, but reform is urgently needed (Weiss, 2018); the emergence of “UN 2.0,” with new mechanisms for conflict prevention and more representative decision-making, could strengthen international cooperation. The supremacy of international law must be preserved, with future diplomacy based on international law rather than unilateral “rules” imposed by a single bloc, and diplomatic conventions updated as needed to address contemporary challenges.

Global migration creates new diplomatic challenges of its own, and the role of diplomats will increasingly require intercultural competence and an understanding of migration-related issues (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019). The perceived degradation of diplomatic education threatens the quality of international relations, and the decline of some diplomatic schools in Europe, together with the increasing media orientation of diplomats, deserves closer scholarly attention. The future diplomat must be analytical, professional, and culturally competent rather than a propagandist or media figure (Nye, 2011), and the creation of new diplomatic training centers, including a possible BRICS diplomatic academy, would strengthen diplomatic capabilities more broadly.

Digitalization and artificial intelligence present both opportunities and risks for diplomacy (Bjola & Holmes, 2015), and these tools must be used with caution while preserving human judgment and professional standards. At the same time, elements from the past may return to diplomatic practice, including more formal protocol and structured negotiation approaches (Sharp, 2009). The contested relationship between international law and a “rules-based order” promoted primarily by Western powers is a defining feature of contemporary diplomacy (Ikenberry, 2020), and how that contest is resolved will shape the diplomatic architecture of the coming decades. Ultimately, the future of diplomacy depends on adaptation to new realities while preserving the core principles of international cooperation, mutual respect, and peaceful conflict resolution.

Recommendations

On the basis of these findings, several recommendations follow. First, the international community should pursue comprehensive reform of the United Nations, including Security Council expansion, improved decision-making mechanisms, and strengthened conflict-prevention capacities (Weiss, 2018). Second, states should reaffirm their commitment to international law and resist attempts to substitute it with unilateral “rules-based orders.” Third, states should invest in the improvement of diplomatic education, with emphasis on intercultural competence, negotiation skills, and professional integrity; the proposed BRICS diplomatic academy offers a promising model in this respect (Stuenkel, 2015).

Fourth, the international community should develop coordinated approaches to migration diplomacy that address both humanitarian concerns and security issues (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019). Fifth, the use of AI and digital tools in diplomacy should be balanced with preserving human judgment and professional standards (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). Sixth, while adapting to new realities, the international community should preserve valuable diplomatic traditions and protocols that contribute to trust and stability. Seventh, and finally, multipolar diplomacy should respect the cultural characteristics of different countries and peoples, avoiding the imposition of standardized approaches.

Ultimately, the future of diplomacy will depend on the ability of the international community not only to adapt to new geopolitical and social realities but also to develop the human capital capable of effectively addressing these challenges. The integration of elements from the past and the renewal of approaches to international relations may become key factors in shaping successful diplomacy for the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to express gratitude to colleagues at Abkhazian State University. The author also acknowledges the valuable insights of diplomatic practitioners whose experience has informed this analysis.

REFERENCES

- Adamson, F. B., & Tsourapas, G. (2019). Migration Diplomacy in World Politics. *International Studies Perspectives*, 20(2), 113–128.
- Aris, S. (2011). *Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Berridge, G. R. (2022). *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice* (6th ed.). Cham: Springer.
- Bjola, C., & Holmes, M. (Eds.). (2015). *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Constantinou, C. M., Kerr, P., & Sharp, P. (Eds.). (2016). *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Cooper, A. F., Heine, J., & Thakur, R. (Eds.). (2013). *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ikenberry, G. J. (2020). *A World Safe for Democracy: Liberal Internationalism and the Crises of Global Order*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Nye, J. S. (2011). *The Future of Power*. New York: PublicAffairs.
- Sharp, P. (2009). *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stuenkel, O. (2015). *The BRICS and the Future of Global Order*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- UN Charter. (1945). United Nations.
- UNESCO. (2001). *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. (1961). *United Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 500, p. 95.
- Weiss, T. G. (2018). *What's Wrong with the United Nations and How to Fix It* (3rd ed.). Cambridge: Polity Press.