

An Analysis of Diplomatic Severance and Its Impact on the Modern Inter-State Relations

By

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Abstract

This paper provides a vivid analysis of diplomatic severance and its impact on the modern inter-state relations. The anarchical nature of the international system is no longer a subject of academic debate among scholars of international relations given credence to the realist analytical perspective. The paper identified and explained some relevant examples and copious reasons that often account for diplomatic severance of states within the contemporary international political system. It contends that states in the pursuit of their foreign policies and national interests cannot afford to completely circumvent the severance of diplomatic relations from time to time. Reason being that the pursuit of a state's foreign policy objectives are sometimes cooperative, conflictual and competitive. Given its impact on the modern inter-state relations, the paper suggests that states due to political anarchism should always ensure that their national interests are pursued within the purview of obeying the tenets of international law and membership of international organizations to a great extent irrespective of their sovereignties for the minimization of imminent diplomatic rows and diplomatic severance for the continued maintenance of international peaceful coexistence and security and the interdependence of states.

Keywords: Diplomatic Severance Impact, Inter-State, Modern, Relations

Introduction

The International political system has witnessed a state of near anarchy since the early 19th century as nations struggle for political, economic, military and other

forms of powers (Umeh, 2013, p.79). This situation has even been aggravated by the entrance of new actors in international relations such as multinational companies, regional economic units, producers' cartels, religious bodies and other non-governmental organizations (Umeh, 2013, p.79). International relations is therefore an arena for the interactions of states, international organizations and other non-state actors like the Multinational Corporations as well as the involvement of states and non-state entities of uncertain sovereignty (Ojo & Amadu, 2002).

The anarchical nature of the international system cannot be overemphasized. According to Gilbert (2013a,p.13), the non-existence of a central authority for the maintenance of law and order, and the dispensation of justice gives credence to the notion that international relations occurs within an anarchical political system. Since anarchy in this context, does not in any way suggest chaos and lawlessness but the lack of a central authority hence the contemporary international system has intuitively remained anarchic given the consistent struggle for power among states (Ubani, 2018).

Nte (2015) explains that it is for this obvious reason that the realist school of thought in international relations would say that "the first priority of state leaders is the survival of their state and self-help is the principal action in an anarchical system...These three 'S' viz: state, survival and self-help constitute the realist triangle or core elements of realism" (p.1). War, according to the realist perspective, is a consequence and the decentralized distribution of power in international system (Nau, 2009; Ubani, 2018). Thus, the field of international relations and strategic studies is increasingly concerned with addressing the fundamental issues of war and peace, hence, the paradigm shift to neo-realism or structural realism and perhaps other evolving aspects or strands of realism (Ubani, 2018). This essentially underscores the imperativeness of modern diplomatic practice and conduct in international relations.

In the study of international relations cum international law, diplomacy is therefore the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states (Onuoha, 2008). By implication, diplomacy is the nerve centre of official negotiations of states especially in the

implementation of their respective foreign policies. Furthermore, Gilbert (2013a, p.67) noted that scholars generally regard 1648 as marking the birth of the contemporary international system based on sovereign states as the primary political actors. This gave legitimacy to the treaty of Westphalia of 1648 that created the modern state system in international relations. The treaty eventually brought to an end the 30 years religious war in Europe between 1618 and 1648, and this Eurocentric global development equally gave impetus to modern diplomacy in the contemporary political system (Ojo & Amadu, 2002; Mac-Ogonor, 2012; Gilbert & Thom-Otuya, 2005).

Similarly, in the words of Mac-Ogonor (2012, p.92), “the aftermath of the war was the abandonment of the unity symbolized by the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church in Europe, which led to the breakup of Europe into small sovereign states”. The birth of the Westphalian state system in European continent and by extension, the world at large, by the Westphalian Peace Treaty of 1648 legitimized diplomacy as a tool for the pursuit of the foreign policies of states. This was improved upon by the Vienna Congress of 1815 and that of 1961 Vienna Convention (Nte, 2016). The Vienna Convention on diplomatic relations of 1961 obviously marked beginning of modern diplomatic practice vis-à-vis the exchange of diplomats and diplomatic missions.

However, it is noteworthy to note that diplomacy as a legitimate instrument for the execution of the foreign policies of states can sometimes partially fail thereby leaving states with the option of resorting to war. As is obvious, evidence has often revealed that the failure of diplomacy is the direct consequence of the severance of diplomatic relations among states. A good case in point is the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war which began on the 24th of February 2022, and it is also one of such pointers that challenges our understanding of diplomatic severance of inter-state relations. The breaking of diplomatic relations among nations, often times becomes a precursor for the declaration of wars among such nations (Gitelson, 1974). This paper therefore seeks to provide an analysis of diplomatic severance and its impact on the modern inter-state relations in the context of international relations.

What then is Diplomatic Severance?

Before delving into the meaning of the concept of diplomatic severance, it would be imperative to first and foremost consider the meaning of the concept of diplomatic relations since there is the existence of a symbiotic relationship between the two concepts. Diplomatic relations can be considered to mean the mutual relationship that exists between or among nations in the conduct of their foreign policies (Mac-Ogonor, 2003, p. 83; Shaw 2005, p. 169). In the words of Nte (2016):

Diplomatic relations may be defined as a relationship between two countries in which they send diplomats to work in each other's country. Individual countries have the prerogative to establish diplomatic relations with other countries to strengthen the foreign relations conversely they are also at liberty to off diplomatic relations with other countries (p.211).

Thus, the severance of diplomatic relations of states implies a situation of diplomatic row as well as the discontinuing of all official channels of mutual interactions of diplomatically recognized states in the conduct of international diplomacy either bilaterally or multilaterally. According to Nte (2016):

Severance of diplomatic relations is the cessation of normal diplomatic relations between two states, entailing the recall of diplomatic representatives and the shutting down of diplomatic missions. Most often than not severance of diplomatic relations is always for a short period (p.212).

Article 63 of the Vienna Convention of 1961 on the diplomatic relationship of states considers the term to be the same with "breaking off of diplomatic relations". The report thus stated that:

Severance of diplomatic relations means their termination which effectively ends all direct official communications between the two governments. This can be by mutual consent, but will mostly be effected by a unilateral act of one of the governments; either as an

expression of political protest, as political sanction (e.g. against abuse of diplomatic privileges) or as a means to implement decision or recommendation of an international organization (eg a United Nations security council resolution in pursuant to article 41 of the UN charter) (International Law Commission Report as cited in Kobani, 2022, p.4).

While Umeh (2013) clearly noted that diplomatic severance is a break in diplomatic relations of countries. He exactly and comprehensively captured it in this way:

A break in diplomatic relations is the withdrawal of diplomats by a country with the expulsion of the diplomat of the other country. It is a way of showing displeasure with another government, a refusal to keep doing business as usual. Before this, there would have been diplomatic negotiation or bargaining conducted by the representatives of both governments involved; the issues involved and the level of authority of the representatives, which is so important in such situation. Factorization of option may occur and as such result in case scenario, failure of which lead to a fall back position, meaning deadlock is reached and this gives way to diplomatic adjournment to enable them re-strategise in order to reposition themselves for further negotiation or bargaining (p.116-117).

The International Law Commission Report (53rd session) further opined that severance of diplomatic relations can take the form of expressed notification and or the implied form of actual closure of a nation's diplomatic mission in that country. However, the commission warned that attempt should be made to distinguish "formal severance of diplomatic relations from less severed forms of diplomatic frictions" like the temporary recall of a nation's ambassador for consultation or cautions (ILC Report as cited in Kobani, 2022, p.5).

For Mac-Ogonor (2002), there seems not to be any much difference between formal severance of diplomatic relations between two states and the less formal

severance, since most often, severance of diplomatic relations is temporary. Toeing the same line of reasoning, Similarly, Nte (2016) affirmed that “more often than not, severance of diplomatic relations is always for a short period” (p.212). Gitelson (1974) also noted that the severance of diplomatic relations of states can be for a short period or can last for a long period of time. Therefore, there are several obvious cum relevant reasons and notable cases of diplomatic severance of states since the development of the modern states system. A few of them will suffice here for the scholarly justification of this study:

Reasons for Diplomatic Severance in Modern Inter-State Relations

Just like in domestic politics or any social relations of people, conflict is inevitable even in the diplomatic relationships of states since states are made up of human beings. Akpuru-Aja (2007) stated that the emphatic assumption of the human relations school of thought on conflict views it as natural, innate and inevitable in any social relations of people or interactions of nations. In addition, some conflict scholars contend that conflict is inescapable in social interactions (Gilbert, 2018, p.12). And so, in the diplomatic intercourse between nations, conflict is bound to occur. The inability of states, either in a bilateral or multilateral diplomacy to identify and prevent the early warnings of conflict situations and also proffer pragmatic diplomatic solutions to such conflicts has oftentimes resulted in a rupture of the diplomatic relations of states. The circumstantial outcome of this has been the termination of diplomatic relations of such states and may be subsequently lead to an outright declaration of wars, like it is currently in the case Russia and Ukraine. Several scholars of international relations and international politics from available academic literature are in common agreement that several reasons could account for the severance of states diplomatic relations (Akpuru-Aja, 2006; Onuoha, 2008; Gilbert, 2010; Gilbert, 2013b; Umeh, 2013, Nte, 2016). For example, Nte (2016, p.213-216) specifically identified the following 13 reasons for the severance of diplomatic relations of states:

1. Conflict or War
2. Arts of Aggression
3. Displeasure over alliance with aggressors
4. Violent action emanating from or affecting diplomats
5. Unguarded utterances from a Head of State
6. Retaliatory action with regard to negative treatment of diplomats or

citizens

- 7 Treaty Violations
8. Solidarity action
9. A way to punish countries for human rights abuses
10. A way to punish countries for failure to abide by international law
- 11 To correct a nation's undesirable behavior
- 12 To compel target country to make necessary compliance and regain recognition
- 13 Xenophobia and Molestation

Understanding Some Specific Cases and Relevant Examples of Diplomatic Severance of States in International Relations

Since the peace treaty of Westphalia in 1648 ending the thirty-year European War, states also known as countries, have remained the principal actors and the core basis of international relations (Gilbert, 2013a, p.73). Thus, several states in the contemporary international political system in conducting international diplomacy geared towards the pursuit of their foreign policies as well as the realization of their individual national interests have had several cogent reasons in severing their diplomatic relationships at one point or the other. With various scholarly verifiable sources, some of such examples of diplomatic severance of states will suffice here:

- i. In January 1961, the United States of America broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba due to deteriorating relations in the government of Fidel Castro. The 1952 Cuban Revolution led to the overthrow of Fulgencio Batista, an America-backed dictator. This also led to the nationalization of most of the investment of American state, consequent upon the declaration of Cuba as a communist state by aligning more closely with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). This was later restored after the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 between the United States and the Soviet Union had finally resolved the controversial issue (Nte, 2016; Umeh, 2013).
- ii. In 1973, Nigeria severed her diplomatic relationship with Israel due to Yom Kippur War, and decision for Nigeria to do that was taken at the multilateral level of the 1973 summit of the defunct of Organization of African Unity (OAU) (Nte, 2016). Similarly, Umeh (2013) reportedly noted

- that in 1973, Nigeria acted in tandem with the call on African states to sever diplomatic relations with Israel over her illegal occupation of Egyptian territory. However, Nigeria eventually restored her relations with Israel in September, 1992 (Nte, 2016). Similarly, due to the Nigerian Civil War between 1967 and 1970, Nigerian state broke diplomatic relations with her counterparts such as Gabon, Cote d'Ivoire, Zambia and Tanzania for granting diplomatic recognition to Biafra and this became restored after the war (Nte, 2016).
- iii. In 2010, Nigeria and Libya had a minor strain in their diplomatic relations due to the unguarded utterances of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, the then Libyan leader for advocating for the disintegration of Nigerian state. This necessitated the recall of Isa Aliyu Mohammed, then Nigeria's Ambassador to Libya for urgent negotiations on March 18, 2010, and diplomatic row lasted for a very short period of time (Kobani, 2022).
 - iv. In 2012, Nigeria and South Africa had a strained diplomatic relationship due to the expulsion of 125 Nigerian travelers to South Africa on flimsy reasons of invalid Yellow Fever Cards. As a result, the then Nigerian government under President Goodluck Jonathan invoked the principle of reciprocity by equally expelling 56 South African business people, and there was a peaceful resolution of this diplomatic row within the shortest possible time (Nte, 2016).
 - v. In 1845, Mexico severed her diplomatic relations with the United States of America owing to the annexation of Texas and the Mexican-American War, and this was restored after the peace that ended the war. Besides, in January 1964, the government of Panama broke diplomatic ties with America based on the Flag Pole incident in the Canal Zone and after three months the relations also got restored (Kobani,2022).
 - vi. In 1967, most Arab states severed diplomatic ties with the United States due to the Arab-Israeli War that lasted for 6 days (Mauritania, Sudan, Yemen, Syria, and Egypt). However, normal relations with Egypt became restored in 1974 (Nte, 2016).
 - vii. In 1995, the Nigerian state was suspended and ostracized from the multilateral international bodies like the Commonwealth of Nations as well as the United Nations, thereby making her a pariah state in the international community partly due to the killing of late environmentalist

Ken Saro-Wiwa and his Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) kinsmen (Ubani, 2021a; Ubani, 2021b; Gilbert, 2013a).

- viii. In 1984, the Nigerian government of General Muhammadu Buhari attempted to use diplomatic bag to abduct and extradite Alhaji Umaru Dikko who was the Minister of Transport in the administration of President Shehu Shagari (Nte, 2016). Since Umaru Dikko was a political refugee in London; this unsuccessful kidnap attempt by the Nigerian government led to a sort of diplomatic row and severance between her and Britain based on other concomitant diplomatic circumstances that ensued (Kobani, 2022).

The Impact of Diplomatic Severance on the Modern Inter-State Relations

The negative impact of diplomatic severance on the modern inter-state diplomacy has literally become a serious preoccupation of world leaders, statesmen and diplomats. This is because diplomatic rows which often culminate in an outright diplomatic breakoff grossly hinder the growing nature of interdependence of states characteristic of the contemporary international relations. According to Mansbach and Rafferty (2008, p.257), interdependence refers to as “a relationship in which two or more actors are sensitive and vulnerable to each other’s behavior and in which actions taken by one affects the other”. Therefore, states are bound to suffer huge losses in the event of diplomatic severance especially in the areas of politics, economy, communication, transport and education. For example, it should recalled that given the ravaging war between Russia and Ukraine in Europe since February 2022, some states such as the United States of America, Britain, Germany, and France have broken diplomatic ties with Russia due to her invasion on Ukraine (Kobani,2022). Today, Africa’s diplomatic stance with Russia and the West has become a political cum economic dilemma.

Evidently, this has negatively affected free flow of international trade and international policking among several European states and their allies. Infact, the Russian state under the leadership of Vladimir Putin announced its decision to stop the supply of gas to Europe since she is the major supplier of gas on the continent. This decision by Russia had severe implications on economic activities of its trading partners hence it also worsened the economic fortunes of the industries of these European countries. To further worsen the situation, Russia

equally maintained that any country that wants to buy gas from her must be ready to pay in ruble (her own currency) and not with American dollars. This, of course, portends a great danger to the dollarization of the world which perhaps will have a direct consequence on the American economy and also lead to a new world order.

Unfortunately, conflicts generally result in the severance of modern inter-state relations. As a result of this, states have had cause to withdraw their diplomats from other states. A prominent example of this situation can be better explained in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict or war in which their diplomats had been recalled. The war no doubt has seemingly affected their hitherto robust diplomatic ties as members of the defunct Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) that also share common geographical boundaries with each other. In other words, it would also be interesting to note that before the disintegration and collapse of the USSR in 1991, these two states belonged to one ideological bloc especially in the Cold War era hence they also have common socio-cultural affinity. This is one of the clear cases of *persona non grata*. That is the declaration of diplomats of both sending states and receiving states as undesirable elements in any given conflict situation. *Persona non grata* can also be given as reprisal or a way of expressing disenchantment towards a state thereby beginning a strain or break in diplomatic relations (Nte, 2016).

However, in 1984, Britain and Nigeria applied this principle of international diplomacy in the Umaru Dikko abduction saga, the then Minister of Transport in the administration of President Shehu Shagari. The former was the first to declare two diplomats *persona non grata* while the latter reciprocated accordingly and this eventually led to diplomatic severance between them. This obviously impacted disastrously on the totality of our diplomatic relations especially in the area of trade and commerce predicated on international political economy.

Conclusion

Although diplomatic severance negatively affects the politics of modern inter-state relations or international diplomacy, it is glaring that states dwell and interact in an anarchical political system hence conflict of interest will always arise; given the pursuit of their various foreign policy objectives at the

international arena. In a nutshell, given the fact that diplomatic severance of states cannot be totally avoided; states due to political anarchism should always ensure that their national interests are pursued within the purview of obeying the tenets of international law and membership of international organizations to a great extent irrespective of their sovereignties for the minimization of imminent diplomatic rows and diplomatic severance for the continued maintenance of international peaceful coexistence and security. The nature and power in external relations are determined by the laws of the particular state as well as by international law (Umeh, 2013). Therefore, the foreign policies and national interests of states have consistently remained sacrosanct and cannot be pursued and realized in a state of isolationism but rather on the interdependence of states.

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