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**History as a Discipline in an Emerging New World Order:
The Relevance of History and International Studies since 1945**

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Impact of History in International Relations since 1945

Presented by:

J.E.T. Babatola

Ph.D Research Scholar

Email: jadesola.babatola@eksu.edu.ng

Lecturer/Seminar Moderator:

Prof. Femi Omosini

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Impact of History in International Relations since 1945

By:

J.E.T. Babatola
Ph.D Research Scholar

Introduction

The paper is a review of history as a discipline in the study of major events and episodes within the vintage of theoretical advances in international relations since 1945. This is to help understand how issues and episodes captured in the discipline of history has assisted in time and space to justify the need and use of historical methods and approaches to understand the goals inherent in foreign policies of advanced countries and their impact on international relations. In borrowing from the lessons of history since the early 18th centuries, the fall of European Monarchies and the revolution witnessed across political landscape of western nations has shown that history can repeat itself more often if not learnt.

It behooves on practitioners in the study of international relations to adopt the study of history as a major source of developing and interpreting behaviours and actions suggested in their models and instruments of measurement to determine principles of international relations and its effects on world affairs. For instance, attempts to create spheres of influence without free will participation among states have definitely resulted to wars, whereas the adoption of collective security and peaceful co-existence have enabled many states to relate and negotiate their terms of relationship and interest in a manner that would reduce inequalities and threats foisted by their differences and limitations. This is what history has shown as a factor of developing modern diplomacy in the theatre of world politics and interstates relations.

The study of history has further shown that alliances and adversities that often resulted to wars among nations with particular reference to international wars (*World War I and World War II*) had specific import to be situated within the outcomes of states' interactions and power transitions while engendering the essence and limitations of their diplomacy and importance. It is therefore pertinent to assert that there are streamlined or specific issues, perspectives and approaches that constitute the basis of historical analysis in the study of behaviours and political activities among states and international actors since the late 19th centuries.

Agitations surrounding how, what and where International Relations should be treated as a separate discipline from History suffice; whether it is a coordinate (parallel) or scientific (advanced) study of world and diplomatic history; a branch of history or whether it is has no common ground for appreciation and collaboration, which at best shows that it draws its body of knowledge from political science or the social sciences, International Relations would always requires 'History' to form a body of knowledge. This is because history would be the first point of sourcing for information needed to examine activities and actions that provided basis for reactions and counteractions in inter-state relations.

Furthermore, history would continue to be the source on which experts in international relations can establish and provide the facts needed for processing inputs and deliverables required to understand the causal factors and formulate appropriate determinants. The theories which social sciences particularly Political Science would only provide a proper framework that are needed to build platforms of justification in understanding the discipline of international relations.¹

¹ Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* (Harmondsworth, NY, 1961), 11.

History as a discipline in defining world politics and diplomacy

An historical construct to itemize and study the mechanisms of world politics and diplomacy is enriched with the ideas and factors of history and the elements which such causation facilitated towards building state system and relationship structures, alliances and adversity, trust and suspicion, collaboration and competition, cooperation and rivalry among modern nations and other actors of international importance. A good classification of these elements that defines the course of history in world affairs lies invariably in those ingredients of world politics before and after the World War II as summarized below:

- a. Degree of definition and counteractions in the pursuit of economic interdependence among states and their actors fuelled by the principles of liberalism
- b. The role and influence of world capitalism in the face of changing economies and the contest of socialism for a radicalized economy and social change
- c. The need for the world to be a safer and saner haven where the law and collective security of the people can be guaranteed as an international society and
- d. The quest for power motivated by the need to access and control resources, balance continental, regional and state capacity to influence the world and create a sphere of interest or corridor of alliances as motivated by realism embedded in power politics.

The above historical notions are drawn from issues and perspectives that embodies long historical roots that shows that they are active elements or causal factors promoting the behavioral pattern and approaches of actors and states in politics and diplomacy of world affairs and invariably manifesting the direction and outcome of world history in the past century. Furthermore, each of the perspectives drawn above were part of the scope of historical inquiry and debates since the end of World War I in studying the causal factors motivating modern states and nations into going to wars and what can be done to minimize or prevent them from doing so towards redefining the nature of international relations.²

Each of the above stated perspectives which constitute the basis of discussing world politics and diplomacy as well as the principles fuelling foreign policies of states and the actors within it also validates the circumstance under which different set of core actors would undertake issues, make preferences or interact within the international system.³ Whereas, history continues to identify issues, inquire into how such issues can translate human actions into historical process and attain reasoned level of objective analysis, experts of international relations and other social scientists conceive and adopt theories to explain, test and predict issues through their further examination and hypothetical constructs that has no permanent solution despite its engrossed scientific interpretations.

The study of world history and international diplomacy as well as issues in foreign and policies and strategic studies has helped the study of international relations to describe the 'international system' and its constituents within the 'international society'. No doubt, history was the major discipline that identified the actors, their functions and roles, before the study of international relations could specifically define and distinguish them in behavioural and scientific terms. Hence, Hedley Bull noted that the study of international system is a process whereby the acts of two or more states who has adequate contacts with each other and sufficient impact on each other's decisions can cause them to behave as parts of a whole.

It is a fact that world political system allows modern states to behave 'strategically' by taking decisions on the basis of what they think other states will do. The characteristics of history therefore become often confined to outcomes of the relationship and experience of

² Ngaire Woods (ed), *Explaining International Relations Since 1945* Oxford University Press, UK, 1996 pg.9

³ Ibid

various states. Moreover, the 'international society' which is a group of states continue to share common interests and values convincing themselves to a set of common rules in their relationships with each other and sharing 'the working of common institutions' which indicates that international relations is a study of the world and its emerging political structures, and the adoption of amenable and formal theories for strategic interaction among the players.⁴

If International relations therefore is regarded as a study of a great number of 'facts' about the world, the study of these facts can only be relevant when it evolves within the framework that put them in place. This is why, E. H. Carr asserted that 'a fact is like a sack, it won't stand up till you've put something in it'. Whatever international relations extracts as the basis of its information in any discipline to define its models becomes a relevant portion of its existence and study since the source must first be a great source of reliance and dependability towards achieving its goals as a discipline.

Looking at the History as a discipline through the popularized works of the American social historian, Tailcot Parson, history is defined as a 'selective system of cognitive orientation to reality'. The selective process, cognitive orientation and realism that constitute the body of history make it orderly (predictive), objective (rational), and functional (scientific) in nature and approach, owing to the totality of its impacts in advancing knowledge. Hence, history can be considered as an organized process and one of the sources of disciplinary approaches and models for international relations whether it is a separate or coordinate discipline. This is owing to the fact that similarities occurs in the works and findings of history as a collection of historical records as a discipline with the body of knowledge that political science and international relations renders save for their conception of theories, models and approaches, which makes them nothing more scientific in specialization to history and its methodologies.

The study of history as a critical discipline of the humanities suffice in the knowledge and understanding of past events and in the study of human affairs and its environment through interactions and reactions to specific events and situations cannot be altered or wished away. This is heightened on the premise that history tends to be more approximate and organized in gathering, collating and classifying data for articulated reasoning of well known facts to form a body of knowledge in a fair view and objective inquiry. Hence, History as a discipline plays the role of reviewing past human activities and its implications for the present and future in the reconstruction and usefulness of human knowledge.

It has been said that Political scientists often tends to argue that they are precise in the scientific approach that they adopted, yet their impreciseness hangs on the nature of science they do. If they tend to assume that reductionism, systemic or quantitative approaches is what constitute good science, they fail to also understand that physical and biological sciences are less certain of such attributes. However, the record of each research work, field trip, laboratory observations and manipulation of ideas to build mechanical processes cannot be attained without historical documentation and review of experiments in an ordered, orderly and tested manner that leaves their findings to nothing less the history of details, observable process and reactions and findings.

Going by the details and process of reactions notwithstanding, a common result arising from a series of calculated or combined phases of interactions as a body of knowledge translates all scientific inquiry into historical analysis and methods, which in itself constitutes the crux of history as a discipline. Even though it is also assumed that Political Science is a study of behavioural science which sees itself as a separate discipline from the study of History and even more as the potential guide or operative ally relevant to the study of International Relations, due to its strict engendering of scientific approaches to the study of world affairs and politics, it

⁴ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (London, 1977), p. 13.

cannot totally substantiate its rigorous application of scientific principles to the body of knowledge since such claims have gained less admissibility or superiority where advanced appreciation of methodological issues consist of history as the operating value facts and reasoned objectives.

In effect, the scientific claims are less than the same, where it is assumed that all science operates within paradigms that cause preconceptions to interfere, fascinates and at times transfix practitioners in the field. When political scientists continue to concentrate their efforts on the need to study the Cold War critically without proffering specific solution or strategy to end it, historians had suggested what could lead to its end. Suffice, the Cold War ended on a footnote for historians, while political scientists were still in the habit of magnifying its platforms in world politics and its implications to world affairs.⁵

From the days of Isaac Newton, political science could not acknowledge that the science which they attribute as model, has not and did not stand still. Whereas, historians have shown that the views of Leopold von Ranke requiring that observations in history should be separated from the observer who is making any faulty (perspective) claims since relativity in history arose at the same time when the relativity in physics was established. It was asserted that the most influential historical relativist, Charles A. Beard, was well aware of Albert Einstein.⁶

The science of complexity shows that the problem of observation affecting reality extends throughout the physical world to the extent that the results generated at any instance can be limited or based on the instrument used for measurement. Measuring a coastline may depend on the measurements in miles, kilometres, metres, and feet, inches and centimeters, which can all produce different results. Hence, the same problem that is underlined as the bane of history also extends to the levels of molecules and atoms.⁷ Moreover, Werner Heisenberg physicists' discovery of uncertainty principle showed in his attempts to measure phenomena, when he discovered that phenomena can be actually altered; a fact that is of no particular surprise to historians, though it is been used as a means of questioning the veracity, validity or consistency of historical works and their implication in the outcome of history as a discipline.⁸

Going from the above, the use of Historical Methods of analysis in the study of history in itself shows how the study is well grounded by containing measures of scientific attributes that are exerted to ensure good observation, interaction and interactional processes for the characterization of facts and objective statements need to handle or interpret the scope and nature of past events and its implications for the present and future.

Furthermore, the attributes of historical inquiry are pronounced to the extent that they demand perseverance, caution and persistent conviction for a long time towards providing accumulated and sufficient evidence to underscore the relevance of any matter, their veracity and implications. If the old approaches tend to expose limited reflections of the historians and their perceptions, it does not remove the fact that historical methods did not advance over time to justify its utility and importance. Hence, it has been argued that there is no reason to think that the physical or social sciences have any less of an objectivity problem than do the historians.⁹

⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, "International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War", *International Security*, 17 (Winter, 1992/93), esp. 25-6.

⁶ Charles A. Beard, "Written History as an Act of Faith", *American Historical Review*, 39 (January 1934), 225.

⁷ James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York, 1987), 94-6.

⁸ Jack Cohen & Ian Stewart, *The Collapse of Chaos: Discovering Simplicity in a Complex World* (NY, 1994) p. 44

⁹ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity' Question and the American Historical Profession*, NY, 1988

A Historical Insight into Eastern Diplomacy at the end of World War II

In examining 'Sphere of Interest' as a notion of International Relations, it is often regarded as 'a region of the world in which a preponderant external actor (State A) is able to compel the local states to conform with State A's own preferences. Other outside powers may also have some leverage over the countries in state A's sphere of influence, but that leverage is moderately constrained and greatly eclipsed by the power that State A exerts'.¹⁰ Where the State exhibit a relationship of hegemony, the preponderant state manifests looser control over the subordinate state by allowing rules of international law to hold sway while using its armed force often to build and sustain the internal and external mechanisms needed to maintain a preferred relationship of a preponderant state and subordinate states that's suits it.

In a relationship of primacy, the preponderant state would not make any recourse to the threat and use of force in its dealings with the weaker states, but would rely on standard means of diplomatic engagements and economic influence. This is what occurred in the merging role of the Soviet State and its relationship with Eastern Europe from 1945 to 1985. There were evidence of a fastening cord between the preponderant state and a group of subordinate states which are identified from the degree of the most coercive to the least coercive relationship in a typology comprising three alternatives¹¹ namely:

- a. 'dominance',
- b. 'hegemony' and
- c. 'primacy',

A further examination of the typology of US-Eastern Europe relationship describes what a 'sphere of influence' infers what it constitutes where the USSR displayed a highly unequal power relationship with Eastern Europe from the notion of political sovereignty and practice of modern statehood in international diplomacy with the use of sphere-of-influence relationships. In such relationship of dominance, the preponderant state holds on tight with clutches of influence and pervasive control to the subordinate states without paying attention to the norms of public international law.

In the Post-war USSR-Eastern Europe relationship, there emerged a highly developed asymmetrical inter-state relations based on theories of economic imperialism until the early 1970s when the use of 'dependency theory', another neo-Marxist perspective was adopted.¹² It was therefore obvious in the study of USSR-Eastern Europe that an unequal power relationships arose due to the notion of 'spheres of influence' and the interactions among these 'preponderant and subordinate states' which are better understood when looking at their unequal power relations within the cross-regional comparisons of the states across the globe.¹³

The structure (typology) of USSR-Eastern Europe relationship was properly captured where a distinction between the ideological state and its preponderance over weaker states underscores its relevance in inter-states relationship. This was shown severally in the various ways USSR behaved as a preponderant state while exploiting its political, economic, and military leverage over the weaker Eastern European countries to gain influence and power. The dynamic nature of their relationship and its variables came from a fuse of different approaches

¹⁰ Anne Deighton in *Ngair Woods (ed), Explaining International Relations Since 1945* Oxford University Press, UK, 1996 pg. 82-83

¹¹ H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in WorldPolitics (New York, 1977), 213-219*

¹² S. J. Rosen and J.R. Kurth (eds.), *Theories of Economic Imperialism (Lexington, Mass.,1978)*.

¹³ H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in WorldPolitics (New York, 1977), 213-25*; E. Kaufman, *The Superpowers and their Spheres of Influence: TheUnited States and the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe and Latin America (London, 1976)*

of 'outright dominance' during the Stalin era in mid-1950s when 'hegemonic' and complex relationship dominated the sphere to the later years when Brezhnev Doctrine redefined Soviet attitudes to Eastern Europe after been developed for over the two decades.

The doctrine of Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev in maintain firmer grips of Soviet-Eastern Europe relationship presented the limits of permissible deviations in Soviet model of Communism. The outcome of those policies was the Soviet interventions in East Europe after 1968 crisis, 1970 and 1976 Poland crisis and the severe prolonged crisis of mid-1980 after the formation of Polish Solidarity Party (*a popular and independent trade union that rivaled Polish Communist Party to contest for political power as representatives of the working class, a fundamental challenge to USSR Communist system*).

Invariably, Soviet allowed Poland to adopt internal solutions to resolve the Polish crisis despite its military preparedness to deal with the State, due to its logistical and tactical importance to USSR within the Warsaw Pact. Much later, the sudden loosening of Soviet grips on Eastern Europe resulted to peaceful revolutions in East Germany and Czechoslovakia with the dismantling of the Berlin Wall; the popular fall of Todor Zhivkov in Bulgaria; and violent removal and execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu in Romania.

As the rigid Communist regimes collapsed across Eastern Europe, the USSR approved and supported reformist governments that emerged without considering it as a direct threat to the USSR. Even USSR condemned its past interference in Eastern Europe with particular reference to 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia.¹⁴ In all respects, the dissolution of Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe in the late 1990 was beneficial to its economy because the policy removed serious costs from USSR since it could not cope with the leverage in the Eastern Europe and had to abolish the Warsaw Pact in July 1991.

Prior to the change of policies and diversion from model building from the scope of lessons of history, the USSR in the past resisted, stifled and deterred political liberalization in Eastern Europe without giving any glimpse of hope to such occurrences until 1989 when it began to witness drastic economic, political, and social reforms including the shift in focus from Communism to Capitalist system.

Interestingly, when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power from mid-1988, the USSR-East European relationship changed because he approached their relationship with a radical difference from his predecessors who wanted to maintain Communism in Eastern Europe with the use of armed forces. Gorbachev avoided military intervention in Eastern Europe at all costs because his goals were to defuse tensions in the region that could result in violent anti-Soviet uprisings.

The Soviet Union peace initiative aided more internal crises across Eastern Europe which benefitted its internal stability rather than risk widespread confrontations and violence that would virtually compel USSR to send in troops to the subordinate states. The strategy to allow sweeping peaceful change across the region was to preclude Soviet Union from witnessing another large-scale outbreak of anti-Soviet violence which Khrushchev witnessed in 1956. Whereas, the lesson of history in 1956 USSR under Khrushchev altered Gorbachev decision in 1988 by allowing internal crisis to guide the change of policies and political institutions in Hungary and Poland, models and instruments of measurement in International Relations earlier devised could not sway or contain both the process of uprising and the results that the changes brought to international affairs.

¹⁴ Zayavlenie rukovoditelei Bolgarii, Vengrii, GDR, Pol'shi, i Sovetskogo Soyuz'a and 'Zayavlenie Sovetskogo pravitel'stva', Izvestiya (Moscow), 5Dec. 1989, p. 2.

Peradventure the collapse of iron curtain and USSR would makes the cold war era easier to study and understand, yet the notion of balance of power and the models derived from international relations leaves much in doubt with respect to the structures built to justify the looming and real contest in the equation of power among the superpowers. No doubt, it is interesting to note that while history had not judged any side or predicted that the structures may last, owing to the catastrophic consequences of any uncontrollable actions to be triggered from either side, the survival of both side was a model which international built the new international order upon without deeply considering either consequences or possibility of its collapse in a safe and sane world system.

A Historical Insight into Western Diplomacy at the end of World War II

United States adopted the theory of hegemonic stability known as theoretical refinement of its common observation in post-war international relations. It was a perspective centred on dominance or 'hegemony' of the world capitalist economy. United States used its unrivalled power and prestige to remodel the structure of international political and economic relations in a consistent manner that promoted liberalism and particular 'democratic' interests. The most important legacy of the United States was the Bretton Woods international monetary system and the GATT-based multilateral trade regime.

By the early 1970s, these monetary and trade regimes however faced the threats of growing economic conflict among the major industrial countries due to the US economic decline. To save the situation, a renewed attention for the adoption of an open and stable world economy where the existence of hegemony was a relative preponderance of power was reiterated by Charles Kindleberger as he puts it thus: 'for the world economy to be stabilized, there has to be a stabilizer, one stabilizer.'¹⁵ Kindleberger while reviewing the history of international monetary system in the inter-war period noted that it focused on the stability of the world economy. Hence, the dependent variable was systemic openness which should be sustained so that in potentially unstable system, the management functions of long-term flow of international liquidity and short-term emergency liquidity in a major international financial crisis can be averted so that consequences of hegemonic decline would not be felt in crisis situations. Hence, the post-war Western economic relations focused upon normative rather than material foundations of international economic order.

The theory of 'ideational consensus' centres upon the role played in ensuring regime establishment and cooperation among allies in the post-war economic order. British proposals for international monetary arrangements which started in 1941 took shape by 1942 in the so-called 'Keynes plan' for an international clearing union. This was a radical conception, aimed at collective management of international money by a world central bank. The International Monetary Negotiations and the reshaping of the post-war international monetary system began between the British and US governments during the war. These negotiations lead to the Bretton Woods agreement of 1944 that provides support for the theory of hegemonic stability in US diplomatic relations and hegemonic leadership in the West and the larger world.

The US Treasury's Morgenthau 'White Plan' was the basis of other negotiations as it proposed that International Monetary Fund (IMF) be constituted by members' on basis of their contributions of gold and foreign exchange. Countries were then allowed to borrow limited amounts from the Fund on a conditional basis to finance temporary balance of payment deficits. Britain was also able to insist that a greater degree of national sovereignty be exercised over exchange rate to avoid a repetition of the competitive devaluations. It was therefore impossible for the US to use its overwhelming power to simply to 'set the rules' of the international

¹⁵ Charles P. Kindleberger, *The World in Depression, 1929-39* (Berkeley, 1973), 292.

monetary system.¹⁶ This is why it can be further reiterated here that the level at which historical analysis may plunge into instruments for public policy analysis or knowledge value and translation is why the social sciences resort to hypothetical testing or experimentation for model building which makes history to gradually depart as a matter of differentiation between causal factors and theoretical appraisals.

Conclusion: History as a factor in the study of International Relations and Diplomacy

As long as men, states and human organization interact at political and other levels, whether in a state or international platforms, the capacity of historians to document their activities or to grasp and interpret their actions as it affect decision makers' beliefs and attitudes, domestic political pressures, and conceptions of national interest, is enough reason to place history is a more pronounced and relevant perspective. This is why it was noted that the USA and USSR disarmament negotiations under Reagan and Gorbachev were a process that did not only change their aspirations and perceptions but the role of interest groups, political institutions and public opinion in their countries.

The way and manner that a relationship or body of knowledge is handled will invariably have implications on its result or outcome.¹⁷ In effect, history has remained the common ground for observing human events and it is pertinent to observe that the use of history to measure human activities across the centuries. The application of historical methods and the use of instruments that pick up those activities and their influence of people leave less in doubt on the preoccupation of whether history is arts or science. History remains a body of knowledge that contribute substantially to the outcome of reasoned goals and structure which political science and international relations uses among others to advance knowledge.

This is why it is conceivable to state that critics of history as a science or uncoordinated and subjective body of knowledge must heed the theoretical assertions and warnings of scholars who stated admonished that 'if you don't know what it is, don't mess with it.'¹⁸ To situate history as a discipline regardless of any limitations or visibility of its scientific nature or expression as a body of arts, historian E. H. Carr noted that the importance which history brings to bears on body of knowledge and its relevance beyond classification or any reasoned rationalism in following words:

*'I was suitably impressed to learn that, appearances notwithstanding, the whale is not a fish. Nowadays these questions of classification move me less; and it does not worry me unduly when I am assured that history is not a science.'*¹⁹

¹⁶ Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to Lead* (New York, 1990), 39-40; Henry R. Nau, *The Myth of America's Decline* (NY, 1990), pt. II

¹⁷ Peter B. Evans, *Harold K. Jacobson, and Robert D. Putnam, Double-Edged Diplomacy: International Bargaining and Domestic Politics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993).

¹⁸ Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* (New York, 1961), p.70.

¹⁹ David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York, 1970), p. xii.

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