

HISTORICAL SCIENCES

THE ROLE OF ARCHIVES IN THE RESEARCH OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY

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Abstract

This article analyzes the role of archives in the study of international relations and diplomacy. It examines the importance of archival documents as primary sources for reconstructing foreign policy processes, identifying hidden decision-making mechanisms, and shaping the historical memory of states. Particular attention is paid to the methodological aspects of working with diplomatic collections, including the analysis of correspondence, memoranda, and agreements, as well as the challenges of interpreting multilingual documents and contextual differences in diplomatic discourse. The paper explores the concept of "archival diplomacy" as a form of international cooperation and a soft power tool that helps build trust between countries. The influence of digitalization on the transformation of the source base for international research and the development of global digital archives is noted. It is emphasized that archives are becoming not only guardians of the past but also active participants in shaping international dialogue, ensuring a balance between historical truth, ethics, and political interests. The conclusion is that the degree of openness of archives and their integration into the global research space serve as an indicator of a state's maturity, its scientific culture, and its readiness for an honest conversation about its own history.

Keywords: Archival diplomacy, source reliability, international relations, document declassification, digitalization of archives.

Introduction: Archives are unique laboratories of history, where diplomatic documents become witnesses of eras and tools for understanding the logic of international relations. No discipline on politics and diplomacy can claim to be complete without reference to archival sources, for they allow us to reconstruct the true fabric of events, devoid of ideological noise and political interpretations. Unlike newspaper articles and memoirs, archival materials capture the real state of international communications, the hidden intentions and compromises behind grand declarations and diplomatic gestures.

Today, the importance of archives is growing exponentially. In an era of information overload and digital acceleration, archives remain the guarantor of factual accuracy and the key to an objective understanding of the past. They are becoming not only a tool for historical research but also part of contemporary memory politics, influencing the perception of international events and the formation of national identities.

Diplomatic archives are a bridge between eras, between secrecy and transparency, between scholarly reconstruction and political interpretation. By studying them, researchers engage in a dialogue not only with the document but with time itself, and every act of declassification becomes a step toward a more honest and mature world history. This is why research into the role of archives in diplomacy is today acquiring not only academic but also civilizational significance.

• The Archive as a Foundation for International Research

Archives occupy a central place in the system of historical knowledge, particularly in the field of international relations and diplomacy. They represent more

than just collections of documents, but complex institutional structures that ensure the preservation of and access to primary sources that form the basis for an objective analysis of political processes [2, pp. 45–48].

An archive, in a broad sense, is a repository of documentary evidence of the activities of states, international organizations, and individuals involved in political and diplomatic life. In the humanities, an archive fulfills two key functions: cognitive—serving as a tool for understanding historical reality—and identification—participating in the formation of society's historical memory [3, pp. 28–32]. This makes archival sources an integral element of scholarly discourse on international relations, as they allow researchers to reconstruct the cause-and-effect relationships of diplomatic events [6, pp. 14–19].

Archival documents serve as primary sources for political history, as they reflect actual processes of decision-making, negotiations, treaty-making, and conflicts of interest between states. Unlike journalistic or memoir accounts, archival materials possess a greater degree of reliability and factual accuracy, making them indispensable in the study of international crises, diplomatic missions, or the evolution of foreign policy [1, pp. 102–106; 7, pp. 41–45].

Archival analysis is based on three principles: authenticity, reliability and interpretation.

- Authenticity implies verification of the origin of the document, establishing its author, date and place of creation [2, pp. 49–51].

- Authenticity is the assessment of content in terms of factual accuracy and the context of creation.

- Interpretation is an analytical reconstruction of events and diplomatic decisions based on identified sources [9, pp. 133–136].

Contemporary archival science combines traditional source studies methods with digital technologies: the use of electronic databases, scanned diplomatic dispatches, and digital repositories significantly expands the possibilities of international research [10, pp. 87–90]. As a result, archives are becoming not only a "memory of diplomacy" but also a tool for transnational scholarly interaction, shaping a global space of documentary knowledge.

• Archives in International Relations Research

Archives represent a key foundation for reconstructing diplomatic history and studying the evolution of international relations. National archival collections contain unique documents—diplomatic dispatches, negotiation protocols, notes, memoranda, and embassy reports—that allow researchers to trace how states' foreign policy strategies were shaped and the mechanisms that influenced international decision-making [6, pp. 53–57].

The national archives of Russia, Great Britain, France, and the United States play a special role in this process. The Russian State Archive of Foreign Policy (RGVA) accumulates documents from the 18th century onwards, reflecting the activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire, and then the USSR and modern Russia [1, pp. 92–95]. In Great Britain, the National Archives in Kew provides wide access to diplomatic papers of the Foreign Office, which make it possible to reconstruct London's policy during the period of colonial transformations and world wars [9, pp. 142–145]. The French diplomatic archive in La Courneuve serves as a key center for the study of colonial policy and Franco-European diplomacy [10, pp. 77–81]. The US National Archives of Remembrance (NARA) contains the State Department collections, covering global conflicts, agreements, and international missions of the 20th century [8, pp. 203–207].

Researchers' access to diplomatic collections is regulated by a number of mechanisms that combine the principles of openness and the protection of state secrets. Most countries employ a "thirty-year rule," according to which diplomatic documents become available after the established secrecy period has expired [7, pp. 115–118]. However, with growing interest in historical diplomacy and the development of international research programs, states are increasingly providing advance access to materials under bilateral agreements. For example, Russian-German and French-British archival projects are creating databases of joint diplomatic documents, facilitating comparative foreign policy research [4, pp. 212–216].

Digitalization processes have radically changed the source base for international research. Electronic archives, online platforms, and databases allow scholars to access diplomatic documents remotely, conduct thematic searches, and compare data from different countries [12, pp. 33–37]. Programs such as "Memory of the World" (UNESCO) and "Digital Diplomacy Archives" are creating the conditions for the formation of a unified international research space [11, pp. 101–104].

Thus, archives in the 21st century are no longer simply "repositories of the past." They are becoming

active participants in global academic communication, providing researchers with a tool for critically analyzing international processes, strengthening mutual understanding, and fostering a new culture of open knowledge.

• Archival diplomacy and international archival cooperation

The modern era is characterized by states' desire not only for political but also for informational and cultural interaction, which is reflected in the phenomenon of archival diplomacy. This term denotes a system of international cooperation in the preservation, exchange, and interpretation of documentary heritage that is significant for the history of international relations [4, pp. 118–122]. Archival diplomacy is becoming an important area of public diplomacy, as it promotes trust between countries through the joint study of the historical past and the overcoming of ideological barriers [10, pp. 52–55].

Joint archival projects and the exchange of funds between states serve as a unique bridge between politics and scholarship. International archival agreements enable the pooling of resources and the comprehensive study of events that shaped the global political system [8, pp. 225–230]. For example, projects to declassify Cold War-era diplomatic documents, supported by the UN and UNESCO, have become not only academic initiatives but also an act of international reconciliation, facilitating a rethinking of the confrontational history of the 20th century [12, pp. 41–44]. Such projects create joint digital archives, including diplomatic notes, protocols, and embassy reports, significantly facilitating the work of researchers and promoting the transparency of historical knowledge.

Archives play a special role as a tool of "soft power," influencing the formation of a state's image through scientific and cultural interaction [9, pp. 136–139]. The publication of documents previously inaccessible to the public strengthens a country's reputation as open and democratic and demonstrates a willingness to engage in international dialogue. For example, projects to publish diplomatic correspondence, joint research collections, and exhibitions in Russia, France, and Germany are becoming part of state cultural policy [5, pp. 94–98]. Archival diplomacy thus serves as a tool for strengthening international prestige and intellectual cooperation.

Some of the most successful examples are the Russian-German archival agreements that began in the 1990s. These included the exchange of copies of documents relating to World War II and post-war relations, as well as the creation of an interstate commission for the declassification of military and diplomatic archives [6, pp. 131–135]. Similar initiatives existed between France and Great Britain, where the joint work of archival services made it possible to systematize diplomatic sources from the period 1914–1945 and publish multi-volume editions of Documents Diplomatiques Français and British Foreign Policy Papers [1, pp. 89–92].

In recent years, archival cooperation between Azerbaijan and Turkey has noticeably intensified, aimed at systematizing documents related to the history

of the Caucasus, the Ottoman Empire, and the Turkic peoples. The State Archives of Azerbaijan, together with the Directorate of State Archives under the President of Turkey, is implementing the "Ortak Tarih Belgeleri" project, which aims to digitize and publish materials related to diplomatic relations between Baku and Ankara [3, pp. 74–78]. These initiatives not only deepen scholarly ties but also strengthen the cultural and historical unity of the Turkic world, transforming archival diplomacy into a tool for strategic partnership.

Thus, international archival cooperation today extends beyond purely scientific objectives. It is becoming an element of global cultural policy, where the preservation and dissemination of documentary heritage serves to strengthen trust between nations and foster a more sustainable architecture of international relations based on the principles of historical openness and dialogue [11, pp. 63–66].

• **Methodology of using archives in diplomatic research**

The methodological basis for working with archives in the study of international relations combines approaches from source studies, diplomatic history, and political analysis. The use of archival materials requires rigorous systematization, critical analysis, and comparison with other sources—the press, memoirs, meeting transcripts, and international legal acts [2, pp. 115–118].

Diplomatic correspondence, memoranda, and agreements are key sources for reconstructing political decisions and interstate communications. Their analysis is based on a content-discursive approach, which allows us to identify not only the factual content of a document, but also the hidden political motives, emotional contexts, and strategic intentions of the parties [5, pp. 84–88]. For example, a study of diplomatic correspondence between the USSR and the United States during the Cold War reveals not only official rhetoric but also the transformation of the language of international politics, making such documents unique material for studying the evolution of political thinking [8, pp. 239–243]. From a methodological perspective, a comparative analysis of sources is of particular importance—a comparison of different versions of diplomatic documents presented in the archives of different countries, which helps minimize ideological distortions [1, pp. 107–111].

Interpreting multilingual and intercultural documents presents particular challenges. Translations of diplomatic materials often reflect not only linguistic but also conceptual differences between political cultures [9, pp. 144–148]. The same expression in a diplomatic note, for example, may convey varying degrees of formality or threatening force depending on the linguistic and cultural context. Therefore, when working with multilingual archives, researchers must consider the background knowledge of the era, the specifics of international legal terminology, and the rhetorical strategies of diplomatic style [6, pp. 161–164]. In this regard, interdisciplinary methods—philological, semantic, and contextual analysis—are particularly important, allowing for the nuances of diplomatic discourse to be revealed.

In recent years, the field of digital humanities has been actively developing, transforming traditional archival research methodology. The creation of electronic databases, digital repositories, and automated document retrieval systems makes it possible not only to preserve but also to semantically analyze vast amounts of diplomatic information [11, pp. 72–75]. International projects such as the UN Digital Library, European Diplomatic Archives, and Memory of the World (UNESCO) provide researchers with access to thousands of scanned agreements, dispatches, and government reports, thereby facilitating the globalization of archival knowledge [12, pp. 53–57]. The use of artificial intelligence technologies for automatic text recognition and metadata also opens new horizons for the analysis of diplomatic acts, making it possible to identify thematic connections and the dynamics of international processes over time [10, pp. 91–95].

Thus, the methodology of working with archives in diplomatic research is evolving toward a synthesis of humanities and digital approaches. Whereas previously researchers were limited by physical access to sources, they now become participants in a global network of documentary knowledge, where archives function as intellectual nodes of the international scholarly space, ensuring transparency, reliability, and the integration of historical information into the context of contemporary political analysis [3, pp. 125–128].

• **Ethical and political aspects of archival openness**

Contemporary archival policy is shaped by the intersection of science, ethics, and politics. In the context of global transparency and digitalization, a new dilemma arises: how to reconcile the principle of free access to information with the need to protect national interests and diplomatic secrecy. The question of archival openness is becoming not only an administrative one but also a moral and political one, as it affects society's understanding of the past and the mechanisms for building international trust [5, pp. 156–160].

One of the most important areas of archival ethics is the process of declassifying diplomatic documents. In most countries, it is regulated by the so-called "thirty-year rule"—a time limit after which documents are released into public use [7, pp. 201–205]. However, actual practices vary depending on the political culture and the degree of democracy in a society. In Western European countries, declassification is systemic and is accompanied by an expert assessment of the impact of document publication on national security [1, pp. 113–116]. At the same time, in a number of post-Soviet states, this process remains partially closed, which leads to limited research opportunities and the formation of a fragmented understanding of diplomatic history [9, pp. 149–152]. The ethical principle of archival transparency requires that the state not only preserve but also explain the context of the publication or classification of certain materials, thereby strengthening trust between the government, society, and the scientific community [11, pp. 78–81].

A major problem is the politicization of access to archives. Historically, archives have repeatedly become a tool of propaganda—for example, the selective

publication of diplomatic documents was used to justify foreign policy moves or discredit opponents [4, pp. 224–228]. The politicization of archives leads to the formation of “managed memory,” where a document loses its neutrality and becomes a means of ideological influence [2, pp. 122–126]. In international relations, such a practice can exacerbate conflicts and foster distrust of historical interpretations. Therefore, modern international organizations, including UNESCO and the Council of Europe, are demanding the depoliticization of archival access and mandatory scientific expertise before the publication of sensitive documents [12, pp. 63–67]. In this context, an archive becomes not only a repository of facts but also an arena for the struggle over the interpretation of the past, where scientific ethics acquires decisive significance.

Archives also serve as a catalyst for shaping state historical policy, determining which events and documents will be included in collective memory and which will remain on the periphery of historical consciousness [3, pp. 131–135]. States increasingly use archives to strengthen national identity and legitimize political decisions. For example, the publication of diplomatic documents on World War II in Russia, Germany, and Poland is accompanied not only by scholarly commentary but also by a symbolic emphasis on national contributions to victory or suffering [6, pp. 173–177]. In Azerbaijan and Turkey, archives are becoming a tool for restoring historical justice in relation to events related to colonialism and the international recognition of genocide [10, pp. 97–100]. In this sense, archival policy is part of an ideological dialogue between the past and the present, where each document takes on a double life: scholarly and political.

Thus, the ethical and political aspects of archival openness directly influence the nature of international interaction and the degree of trust between states. The balance between society's right to knowledge and the state's responsibility to preserve confidentiality remains fragile, but it is precisely this balance that makes archives a space not only for memory but also for dialogue—a place where history continues to be shaped through documentation. Archival openness becomes a criterion for the maturity of democracy and scientific culture, as well as an important indicator of a state's readiness to engage in honest conversations about its own past [8, pp. 245–249].

Conclusion

Archives are more than just repositories of paper and the dust of time. They are living organisms of historical memory, pulsating with the logic of international relations, the hidden motives of diplomacy, and the echoes of decisions that changed the destinies of nations. Their significance extends far beyond scholarly interest—archives become a space where the past enters into dialogue with the present, and truth gradually takes shape, freed from political interpretations.

The modern era makes the archive not only a mirror of history but also an instrument of global responsibility. Through open collections, collaborative projects,

and digital repositories, humanity is learning to see not an enemy but a partner, not a confrontation but a shared past requiring understanding. In this sense, archival diplomacy is becoming a bridge between nations, where the document serves not as a weapon but as an argument for trust.

Ethical openness, respect for sources, and international cooperation are shaping a new philosophy of archival work—a philosophy of transparency, mutual understanding, and historical integrity. States that recognize the power of archives are not afraid to make difficult chapters of their history public, because only knowledge and recognition of the past enable them to build a just future.

An archive is the silence in which history speaks. And who hears this voice and how it is heard determines whether it becomes a reminder of conflict or a testament to the maturity of a civilization.

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