

Ed. Hafize Zehra Kavak, *Understanding Humanitarian Diplomacy: Principles and Practice*, London & New York: Routledge Press, 2025, 308 p.


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Today, the international system and its transforming dynamics, especially the increasing influence of non-state actors, the complex nature of armed conflicts, and the rising importance of normative principles, have brought about radical changes in understanding diplomacy, a transformation that can be better understood within the framework of complex interdependence, which emphasizes multiple channels of interaction and the growing role of non-state actors in world politics (Keohane & Nye, 1977). Within this evolving context, humanitarian diplomacy has not only gone beyond the conventional understanding of state-centric diplomacy but also prioritizes human security. At the conceptual level, humanitarian diplomacy can be understood, drawing on Minear and Smith (2007), as the set of diplomatic initiatives through which humanitarian actors negotiate access, deliver assistance, protect civilians, and advocate for international norms. In this context, humanitarian diplomacy, beyond being an aid mechanism, is also a normative action shaped by human rights, international law, and moral responsibilities. Nevertheless, humanitarian diplomacy is still in the process of full-fledged definition, both in theory and practice, making it a dynamic field of scholarly inquiry. Therefore, an in-depth examination of humanitarian diplomacy is currently in need of more interdisciplinary analyses than ever before.

In this context, *Understanding Humanitarian Diplomacy: Principles and Practice*, published in 2025 by Hafize Zehra Kavak, offers a valuable and timely exploration of the evolving concept of humanitarian diplomacy, bridging theoretical insights

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with practical applications. Kavak is a senior specialist at the Turkish Red Crescent Academy and has extensively worked on humanitarian aid and diplomacy. Her doctoral research, which focuses on the humanitarian diplomacy activities of Turkish NGOs, reflects her strong academic engagement with the field. In addition to her scholarly contributions, she has been actively involved in various humanitarian projects both in Türkiye and internationally. This combined academic and practical background is also reflected in the structure of the book. The book consists of 16 chapters, each dealing with a different aspect, beginning with conceptual discussions and moving on to applications in the field through actor-focused case studies, providing the reader with a broad perspective. In this analysis, the main contributions of each chapter will be discussed, and the thematic continuity and connections among the chapters will be revealed.

To begin with, in the first chapter, “*Humanitarianism, Philanthropy, and Humanitarian Diplomacy*,” Mehmet Akif Kireşçi provides a robust conceptual framework to understand humanitarian diplomacy in depth analyzing the epistemological foundations of “human,” “humanism,” and “humanitarianism.” Investigating the historical evolution of these terms, Kireşçi underlines that humanitarian diplomacy is not merely a practical term but also a multi-layered phenomenon with ethical, philosophical, and ideological dimensions (Kireşçi, 2025: 11-13). In the second chapter, “The Relationship between Classic and Humanitarian Diplomacy,” Orhan Battır (2025), while conveying the key turning points in the historical evolution of humanitarian diplomacy, compares traditional and humanitarian diplomacy in terms of its actors, objectives, and approaches. According to Battır, despite their differences, these two types of diplomacy are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are processes that complement and support each other. Thus, both authors present the conceptual foundations of humanitarian diplomacy and its relationship with traditional diplomacy from a holistic perspective. Built on this framework, throughout the third chapter, Kaan Saner explores the normative and ethical foundations of humanitarian diplomacy in depth. Drawing on international humanitarian law and human rights law, Saner (2025) emphasizes that the core principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence provide both ethical legitimacy and legal grounds for humanitarian diplomacy.

Following such ethical and legal groundwork, Hakan Ünay and Murat Çemrek jump into the practical field, discussing the changing nature of humanitarian diplomacy referring to globalization through the Turkish example. The authors emphasize that globalization has created radical transformations not only in the economic, political, and cultural fields but also in diplomatic practices (Ünay and Çemrek, 2025: 69). Thus, humanitarian diplomacy functions as an intervention in crises and a reconciliatory tool to alleviate the roots of crises. After revealing Türkiye’s

practical reflections of humanitarian diplomacy shaped by global dynamics, in the fifth chapter, Segâh Tekin focuses on the humanitarian diplomacy importance of within the context of complex and protracted crises. Tekin emphasizes that such crises require immediate intervention and long-term social and structural solutions and highlights disruptions in access to basic services such as health, education, infrastructure, and food while suggesting five basic strategic steps for humanitarian diplomacy effectiveness respectively: long-term planning, development assistance, inter-institutional cooperation, partnership with local actors, and delivering aid to people in real need (Tekin, 2025: 89-97).

Unlike the earlier chapters, throughout the sixth chapter, Halil Kürşad Aslan and Selen Turp conceptualize humanitarian diplomacy as a dynamic and multi-actor ecosystem. To understand this ecosystem, the authors focus on fundamental concepts such as complexity, interdependence, competition, and cooperation while analyzing the roles and perspectives of humanitarian diplomats, interlocutors, and beneficiaries. Drawing attention to the humanitarian assistance system's changing nature facing the crisis intensity rise, this section particularly emphasizes the increasing influence of non-state actors and network structures in this ecosystem. Thus, humanitarian diplomacy is considered not only an ethical and strategic activity but also a system operating within a complex network of relations (Aslan and Turp, 2025: 128). Thereafter, Tore Svenning focuses on one of the key actors in this ecosystem, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Svenning stresses that the ICRC is not only an aid delivery body but also an actor developing dialogue and diplomatic groundwork in crisis zones. Moreover, he shows in detail how the ICRC's relations with non-state actors play a decisive role in crisis management and the strategic importance of on-the-ground practices and interactions among parties in the field (Svenning, 2025: 135)

Then, the eighth and ninth chapters provide conceptual depth dealing with the qualifications that an influential humanitarian diplomat should hold. While the chapter titled "What Makes a Good Humanitarian Diplomat" underlines how personal attitudes, behaviors, and skills of the diplomat are decisive in succeeding in humanitarian diplomacy by addressing credibility in diplomatic relations shaped on the axis of trust and mistrust (Slim, 2025: 151). The next chapter, "Harnessing the Power of Culture in Humanitarian Diplomacy," written by Cihat Battaloğlu and Fadi Farasin, highlights the humanitarian diplomats' ability to adapt to the cultural context they operate in by arguing that cultural awareness enhances diplomats' effectiveness in dialogue, information gathering, and negotiation processes (Battaloğlu and Farasin, 2025: 169-187). These two chapters demonstrate that both personal skills and cultural sensitivity are essential complementary elements in humanitarian diplomacy.

Expanding this framework, Aygün Karakaş, in chapter ten, focuses on the private sector's role in humanitarian diplomacy. Karakaş evaluates the business world as a strategic partner with its capacity to form public opinion and participate in negotiation processes through its field experience. Emphasizing the private sector's multidimensional support to humanitarian diplomacy, the author reveals that economic actors could also be effective stakeholders (Karakaş, 2025: 189). After discussing institutional partnerships, Clare Dalton, in the eleventh chapter, evaluates the increasing impact of digital technologies on humanitarian diplomacy, discussing potential and concomitant challenges. She argues that digitalization offers significant opportunities, including enhancing the visibility of humanitarian aid, enabling rapid access to information, and increasing global interaction, while also posing risks such as cybersecurity threats, misinformation, and digital propaganda (Dalton, 2025: 204). Thus, digital diplomacy emerges as a complex tool offering both opportunities and challenges in the humanitarian field. Then, Kaan Namlı highlights the need to ensure not only the humanitarian aid delivery to target areas but also the safety of humanitarian aid workers. Thus, he argues that humanitarian diplomacy should be shaped to ensure the security of both aid and aid workers (Namlı, 2025: 214).

While the previous sections address theoretical and practical aspects of humanitarian diplomacy, the chapter titled "Towards the Formation of the Conceptual Framework of Humanitarian Diplomacy..." written by Hafize Zehra Kavak (2025), presents a critical perspective. Kavak includes an interview with veteran diplomat Christopher Lamb to understand the formation of humanitarian diplomacy's conceptual infrastructure. Lamb's experiences, especially in light of the IFRC's practices, provide an in-depth perspective for conceptualization and drawing its boundaries. Moreover, İzzet Şahin's contributions in chapter fourteen ground these concepts in practice, examining the IHH's humanitarian diplomacy efforts, particularly in Syria and Libya. While demonstrating negotiation processes, key actors, and field outcomes, Şahin (2025) illustrates how the theoretical elements outlined by Lamb and Kavak are operationalized in real-world humanitarian contexts, thus reinforcing the practical relevance of the conceptual framework.

On the other hand, the fifteenth chapter, written by Michael David Clark, evaluates the concept of humanitarian diplomacy based on the findings of his doctoral research. This chapter argues that humanitarian diplomacy is a crucial tool for enhancing the effectiveness of humanitarian action. Clark emphasizes the necessity for every aid worker to possess diplomatic competencies to succeed in the relief process and briefly summarizes this integrated approach: "To be a humanitarian is to be a diplomat" (Clark, 2025: 262). Returning from the individual level to the institutional one, the final chapter examines the Turkish Red Crescent's extensive

humanitarian diplomacy activities. This section details negotiations, collaborations, advocacy, and mediation efforts on various issues such as family reunification, prisoner exchange, facilitating communication among prisoners of war and their families, establishing humanitarian corridors, delivering aid, providing legal and social support, and protecting and rescuing civilians.

To conclude, while the field is still gaining wider recognition at academic and institutional levels, this work stands out as one of the most comprehensive treatments. While the book examines the conceptual framework, ethical and legal foundations, and historical background in detail concerning globalization, long-term crises, and multi-actor collaborations. Case studies focusing on states' roles, NGOs, and individual actors reveal the diversity in practice. Evaluations made on institutions such as the Turkish Red Crescent and the IHH concretize the institutional aspect of the process, while the individual qualities that humanitarian diplomats should have are also detailed. The inclusion of current themes such as artificial intelligence and digitalization in the book makes the study compatible with contemporary developments. Thus, the work not only analyzes the current situation but also suggests new areas of research and discussions for the future of humanitarian diplomacy. As such, the book is a rich resource for those who want to grasp the multi-layered nature of this field, both at an academic and practical level.

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