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Silence as a political strategy in international diplomacy

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Abstract. The purpose of the study was to determine the functional purpose, mechanisms, and consequences of diplomatic silence in international crises. The work employed typologisation to classify the functions of silence, case study analysis to examine diplomatic cases, comparative analysis to compare models of silence, as well as discursive and political-communicative analysis to interpret political consequences. The analysis allowed for the consideration of diplomatic silence as an independent form of political communication. A classification of the main functions was formulated, which included deterrence, signalling, crisis management, protection of the negotiation process, demonstration of position, and creation of strategic uncertainty. The comparison of relations between China and the United States of America and between China and Taiwan revealed a distinction between the crisis-regulatory and status-symbolic models of the use of silence. The study of Russia's war with Ukraine showed that the restriction of public information was used to enhance operational security and preserve uncertainty regarding the intentions and capabilities of the parties. The analysis of sanction conflicts around Russia and Iran demonstrated the use of silence as an instrument of strategic insurance aimed at minimizing political risks. The examination of India's diplomatic behaviour demonstrated the use of silence for balancing between competing centres of power without losing foreign policy flexibility. The advantages of silence are manifested through reducing the risk of escalation, maintaining negotiation channels, and protecting sensitive information, while the main threats remain the misinterpretation of intentions, the growth of distrust, and the accumulation of informational uncertainty. The results can be used by diplomatic agencies and specialists in international relations to assess the feasibility of using silence in crisis communications, negotiation processes, and the development of foreign policy strategies

Keywords: demonstration of position; protection of the negotiation process; crisis communication; signalling; deterrence

INTRODUCTION

For the problematic of international relations at the beginning of the 21st century, a rethinking of the role of communication in the processes of foreign policy decision-making has become characteristic. The growth of conflict in the international environment, the intensification of rivalry among leading states, the spread of hybrid forms of

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confrontation, and the acceleration of digital communications have changed the conditions for the functioning of diplomacy. Silence has ceased to be perceived exclusively as an absence of communication and is now considered as a tool for managing international uncertainty, a mechanism for preserving negotiation opportunities, a means of avoiding premature commitments, and a form of political influence. Under such conditions, diplomatic silence has acquired functions traditionally associated with open diplomatic actions, which actualises the need for its conceptual understanding as a separate phenomenon of international politics.

In the scholarly literature, a direction of research has gradually formed, devoted to the analysis of silence. Strategic ambiguity in US foreign policy regarding the possibility of using weapons (including chemical weapons) in Ukraine is examined by M. Bentley (2024). Deliberate uncertainty, he finds, enabled Washington to avoid rigid commitments and retain crisis-response flexibility. The reorientation of US policy toward China under Donald Trump is traced by E. Ashbee & S. Hurst (2021), who show that strategic competition hardened into a lasting foreign policy orientation, outlasting the administration that promoted it. The researchers established that the concept of strategic competition became entrenched as a long-term foreign policy orientation even after the change of administration.

The problem of state silence in the international legal dimension was thoroughly examined by D. Azaria (2025). The author systematised various forms of diplomatic silence and established that silence has a polyfunctional character, as it can create legal consequences and influence the behaviour of international actors. The concept of deliberative complicity, formulated by J.L.A. Donohue (2024), holds that refusing to speak out in situations of injustice can constitute moral participation in negative processes. Silence, within this logic, ceases to be neutral and acquires a normative weight. O. Tan & A.C. Tan (2025) addressed strategic uncertainty in international relations, showing that escalation between the USA, China, and Taiwan stems not only from power imbalances but also from competing national identities and domestic narratives. Symbolic and communicative factors can matter as much as military or economic resources – and identity politics shapes foreign policy strategies. The long-term silencing of the Herero and Nama genocide in German political discourse is taken up by P. Augsten *et al.* (2022). The authors established that silence performed the function of discursive exclusion and supported dominant historical narratives. The proposed typology of silencing regimes made it possible to explain the mechanisms through which political communities postpone the recognition of complex historical events.

The problematic of quiet diplomacy was developed in the work of N. Fitria (2023). The author established that the combination of informal negotiations, mediation, and interfaith dialogue contributed to reducing the level of tension between the parties to the conflict. The study demonstrated the effectiveness of restrained diplomatic behaviour under conditions of complex humanitarian crises, where open confrontation could worsen the prospects for settlement. Of interest was the work of M. Ilyas *et al.* (2026), devoted to the reactions of Afghan civil society after the Taliban's return to power. The authors established the dominance of strategic silence among representatives of civil organisations. The obtained results demonstrated that silence performs the function of an adaptive survival strategy under conditions of political risks, control, and security threats. The issues of knowledge production and the politics of silence in the academic environment were raised by O. Burlyuk & V. Musliu (2023). The authors questioned the established hierarchies of expertise in studies of Russia's war with Ukraine and concluded that academic silence is capable of performing a critical function and becoming a form of resistance to dominant practices of knowledge production.

Despite the existence of a number of works, the comparative functioning of diplomatic silence as a universal instrument of international interaction in different types of interstate relations, conflicts, and negotiation processes remained insufficiently studied. The purpose of this study was to systematically conceptualise diplomatic silence in international relations in terms of its functions, mechanisms, and political consequences. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were defined: to establish the main theoretical approaches to the interpretation of diplomatic silence in political science and international relations; to carry out a comparative analysis of the use of silence in different international-political cases and to determine its functional models; to clarify the advantages, risks, and conditions for the effective use of diplomatic silence in crisis and conflict situations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The article combined a conceptual analysis of diplomatic silence with a study of international crises using discursive analysis, political-communicative analysis, and the comparative method. The chronological scope covered the period from the beginning of the 21st century to 2026, while the main body was focused on the events of 2020-2026, when the role of informational control, digital diplomacy, and crisis communications in international politics intensified. For the analysis of the conceptual foundations of silence as a political action, the method of theoretical generalisation was applied. The processing of sources was carried out through content analysis of scientific publications, comparison of conceptual approaches, and subsequent integration of the obtained findings into a single analytical model. To construct a generalised classification of the functions of diplomatic silence, the method of typologisation was used. Its application made it possible to structure the main directions of the use of silence in international diplomacy and to form a system of criteria that became the basis of the first comparative matrix. The analysis included the following criteria: the function of silence, the mechanism of implementation, the conditions for effective application, and political consequences. The formation of the criteria

was carried out on the basis of a comparison of the theoretical provisions set forth in the works of S. Dingli (2015), E. Schweiger (2022), and B.K. Yoder & W. Spaniel (2022). The analysis also drew on the contributions of A. Martini (2023) and O. Snytko (2023). For the analysis of tactical, strategic, and protest silence, the method of case study analysis was used. The selection of cases was carried out according to the principle of maximum analytical representativeness. The study included examples that demonstrated different functional models of the use of silence. India's reaction to the escalation of the conflict between Israel and Iran in 2026, Israel's policy of nuclear ambivalence, and the crisis in Niger after the military coup of 2023.

The study of the role of silence in relations between China, the USA, and Taiwan was based on comparative political analysis. The choice of these cases was explained by the fact that they represent two different models of international interaction. Relations between China and the USA are characterised by competition between great powers with global consequences for international security. Relations between China and Taiwan combine territorial conflict, issues of statehood, and the problem of international recognition. For the collection of materials, analytical reports from the Council on Foreign Relations (2025), studies by Y. Huang *et al.* (2023), and M. Zhao & H. Yang (2024) were used. Additional sources included works by L. Wu (2025), M. Turpin (2026), and informational materials from Focus Taiwan (14 PLA aircraft…, 2024). The comparison was carried out according to the following criteria: the main purpose of using silence, the nature of international relations, the mechanism of silence, the level of strategic uncertainty, an example of application, the relationship with the military factor, the main risk, and the significance for the international order. The interpretation of the results was based on identifying functional differences between the crisis-regulatory and status-symbolic models of diplomatic silence.

The analysis of the use of silence in crisis diplomacy and international conflicts was carried out using the comparative-historical method and the method of political case study analysis. The sample included cases of the Russian-Ukrainian war (Ghincea, 2025) and sanction confrontation around Russia (Xu & Zhao, 2025). US-Iranian sanction conflicts (Al Awsat, 2025) and India's diplomatic behaviour after the beginning of the full-scale war in Ukraine (Verma, 2024) were also examined. The analysis further covered disputes between Turkey and Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean (Koukakis, 2025), as well as the negotiation confrontation between Hungary and the European Commission (Koranyi, 2025). The choice of these cases was explained by their belonging to different types of international crises: military, sanction, diplomatic, regional, and negotiation. This approach made it possible to assess the universality of the mechanisms of diplomatic silence under different political conditions. The research materials also included publications by Z. Zhu (2025), as well as official materials from the U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian (The Cuban missile…, n.d.) regarding the Cuban Missile Crisis. The interpretation of the obtained results was carried out within the framework of constructivist approaches to international relations, with an emphasis on how norms, identities, and strategic interaction shape the use of diplomatic silence. The analysis was aimed not at establishing cause-and-effect relationships in the statistical sense, but at identifying patterns in the use of silence as an instrument of political influence.

RESULTS

Silence as a tool of political communication and diplomatic interaction

In studies of international relations, silence is considered not as an absence of communication, but as a separate form of political action. This approach was formed under the influence of constructivist and discursive theories, which interpret international politics as a system of interaction not only through expressed statements but also through deliberately hidden or unspoken positions. In this understanding, silence performs the role of a specific political message, the content of which is determined by context, the distribution of power, and the nature of relations between the subjects of the international system. Silence is a constant element of international politics and influences the decision-making process no less than public diplomatic communication (Dingli, 2015). The rethinking of silence resulted from a departure from the traditional idea of diplomacy as a continuous process of exchanging messages. Silence cannot be interpreted exclusively as an absence of voice or reaction. It constitutes a part of the global political environment within which actors form expectations, interpret the intentions of opponents, and determine the boundaries of acceptable behaviour (Cornago, 2018). Political significance is acquired not only by what is officially proclaimed but also by what states refrain from publicly stating.

The phenomenon of silence is closely connected with the category of power. In international relations, the ability to refrain from reacting to the actions of other participants constitutes a manifestation of political resource. Strong states can afford a pause in response to diplomatic challenges, while weaker actors are compelled to demonstrate an active reaction to maintain their own international subjectivity. The capacity to determine which issues gain international salience and which remain outside the agenda is itself an instrument of hierarchy reproduction (Martini, 2023). In diplomatic practice, silence also performs a deterrent function. A refusal to react immediately enables states to avoid escalation and preserve room for further negotiations. This mechanism becomes evident in crisis situations, where any public statement risks deepening confrontation. The restriction of information flows and deliberate limitation of official comments can contribute to stabilising the conflict environment (Snytko, 2023).

Another dimension is the creation of strategic uncertainty. Incomplete or delayed communication complicates the forecasting of a state's actions and forces the other side

to consider a wider range of possible scenarios. In the theory of international security, such uncertainty is capable of performing a deterrent function, since a potential opponent does not have sufficient information for an accurate calculation of their own risks (Yoder & Spaniel, 2022). The absence of comments after a certain international event is perceived as a manifestation of disagreement, distancing, or unwillingness to legitimise the actions of the other side. The significance lies not in the absence of the statement itself, but in its correlation with the expected behaviour of the diplomatic actor (Dingli, 2015). Another function is the demonstration of position. In many cases, the absence of a reaction means a refusal to recognise the legitimacy of certain actions or the status of another subject of international relations. Silence turns into a symbolic act that fixes political distance without direct confrontation. A similar mechanism makes it possible to avoid diplomatic costs that arise in the case of an official protest or public condemnation (Schweiger, 2022).

The development of digital diplomacy and the acceleration of information flows have not diminished the role of silence. On the contrary, under conditions of constant communication activity, the absence of a reaction becomes more noticeable than ever. If in traditional diplomacy silence could remain unnoticed, then in the media environment of the 21st century, it turns into an independent political signal. For this reason, silence is considered as a form of strategic management of international interaction, which allows combining deterrence, uncertainty, signalling, and demonstration of political position within a single diplomatic toolkit. The functions of silence in international diplomacy are reflected in Table 1.

Table 1. The main functions of silence in international diplomacy and their political consequences

Silence function	Implementation mechanism	Conditions for effective application	Political consequences
Containment	Temporary abstention from official statements, public assessments, or ultimatums during a crisis	High risk of escalation, availability of alternative channels of diplomatic communication	Reducing confrontational rhetoric, preserving opportunities for negotiations, preventing the political crisis from turning into a violent confrontation
Formation of strategic uncertainty	Limiting information about the state's intentions, possible solutions, or response parameters	Situations of competition between states where predictability of behaviour reduces the effectiveness of deterrence	Making it more difficult to predict the state's actions, increasing the strategic costs of a potential opponent, and strengthening the deterrent effect
Signalling	Demonstrative lack of response to diplomatic appeals, international initiatives, or actions of another actor	The existence of established diplomatic norms that require an official response	Sending political signals without direct confrontation, showing dissatisfaction, or reconsidering the nature of the interaction
Position demonstration	Refusal to comment on certain decisions, international events, or the status of individual entities	The need to avoid formal recognition, approval or legitimisation of certain actions	Emphasizing political distancing, fixing the boundaries of diplomatic acceptability, forming symbolic markers of foreign policy
Crisis management	Controlling the volume and intensity of public communication during times of international tension	High information sensitivity of the conflict and the risk of misinterpretation of statements	Reducing the information burden on the decision-making process, creating time for consultations and coordination of positions
Protection of the negotiation process	Non-disclosure of the content of consultations, interim agreements or negotiation proposals	Multilateral negotiations and conflicts with a high level of political sensitivity	Maintaining trust between the participants in the negotiations, increasing the flexibility of diplomatic bargaining, reducing external political pressure
Symbolic display of status	Selective ignoring of political statements or actions of other actors of the international system	The presence of asymmetry of political influence between the parties	Consolidation of the status hierarchy, strengthening the symbolic authority of the state, demonstration of political self-sufficiency
A tool of political pressure	Deliberately delaying a response to diplomatic requests, proposals or initiatives	A negotiation process in which one party has a more advantageous position	Creating psychological and political pressure on the counterparty, encouraging concessions without the use of sanctions or military means

Source: compiled by the authors based on S. Dingli (2015), E. Schweiger (2022), B.K. Yoder & W. Spaniel (2022), A. Martini (2023), O. Snytko (2023)

The political significance of silence extends far beyond the boundaries of communicative passivity. In international relations, it functions as an instrument of symbolic power, through which states influence the perception of events, determine the boundaries of legitimacy, and shape the agenda of international politics. Control over information implies not only the production of messages but also the management of their absence. That is precisely why silence acquires the characteristics of a political resource capable of changing the behaviour of other actors without the use of coercion or open diplomatic pressure.

The theoretical foundation of this approach is connected with the concept of symbolic power by P. Bourdieu (1991), according to which domination is ensured through control over meanings and public recognition of certain interpretations of reality. In international politics, a similar mechanism manifests itself through the ability of states to determine which issues deserve a reaction and which remain

outside official discourse. The selective absence of reaction by international actors creates a hierarchy of problems and influences the priorities of international security (Martini, 2023). The symbolic power of silence manifests itself through its ability to shape the perception of legitimacy. If a state does not comment on the actions of another actor, such behaviour can be interpreted as neutrality, hidden consent, or a refusal to recognise the political weight of the corresponding event. The meaning is determined not by the very fact of the absence of a statement, but by the correlation between expected and actual behaviour.

Studies of strategic communication in international politics show that control over information and selective disclosure of positions have become one of the instruments of diplomacy under conditions of growing geopolitical uncertainty (Riemer, 2021). In the practice of international relations, tactical silence is applied. Its main purpose is to gain additional time for assessing the situation, coordinating positions, and developing an agreed solution. This type of silence has a short-term character and is used primarily at the initial stages of crises. The political value of such a pause lies in the ability to avoid premature statements, which may subsequently limit diplomatic actions (Köremezli, 2021). An example was India's reaction during the war in Iran in 2026. New Delhi chose strategic silence, which analysts characterise as calculated, measured quietness – a conscious choice in favour of preserving strategic autonomy in conditions where India's partners (the USA, Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Iran) found themselves on different sides of the conflict (Acharya, 2026). The political result was that silence allowed India to avoid premature commitments, preserve space for diplomatic maneuver, and simultaneously conduct negotiations with different centres of power – strategic partnership with the USA, defence cooperation with Israel, energy agreements with the UAE, and attracting capital from Saudi Arabia, while not losing ties with Iran through the Chabahar port and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) transport corridor. In the absence of such a pause, the likelihood of contradictory statements or premature decisions that could have limited India's diplomatic actions and weakened its position as an independent player in the geopolitical environment of Western Asia would have increased.

Tactical silence is associated with short-term crisis management. Strategic silence pursues different goals. Its application is oriented toward the long-term formation of a political environment in which uncertainty itself becomes an element of deterrence (Dadabaev & Sonoda, 2026). In this case, silence turns into an instrument of influence on the calculations of potential opponents. An example is Israel's policy of nuclear ambivalence. Since the late 1960s, Israeli governments have adhered to the principle of the absence of official confirmation or denial of the possession of nuclear weapons. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), in its annual reviews, estimates Israel's arsenal at approximately 90 nuclear warheads, but the official position of the state remains unchanged (Kristensen & Korda, 2022). The political effect lies in the creation of asymmetric uncertainty. Potential opponents are forced to take into account the possibility of the existence of a deterrent potential even in the absence of formal recognition. Under such conditions, silence performs a function traditionally provided by open military-political declarations. A different logic is demonstrated by protest silence. Its content lies not in concealing intentions and not in gaining time for decision-making, but in conveying a political signal through refusal of communication. The mechanism of influence is based on symbolic distancing. The absence of a reaction begins to be perceived as an independent political message (Kaura-aho, 2021a). An illustrative example was observed after the military coup in Niger in July 2023 (Arieff, 2025). Some African states refrained from official statements regarding the legitimacy of the new authorities during the first weeks of the crisis. Such behaviour did not mean neutrality. It reflected an unwillingness to support the actions of the military, while simultaneously avoiding open conflict with the new regime or its regional allies. This position allowed some states to preserve communication channels with all parties to the conflict, although at the same time it weakened the collective diplomatic pressure on the organisers of the coup. The comparison of the three types of silence demonstrates differences not only in the time horizon of application but also in the nature of political influence. Tactical silence ensures the manageability of crisis processes. Strategic silence forms long-term uncertainty as an element of deterrence. Protest silence performs the function of symbolic pressure and political distancing. A common feature of all forms is the ability to influence the international environment without the formal use of diplomatic rhetoric.

Communicative silence – understood as the deliberate restriction of contacts between political elites – represents a distinct instrument of diplomatic signaling (Schweiger & Tomiak, 2022). One illustrative practice, observed in China's foreign policy behaviour, is the tactic of suspending or delaying diplomatic exchanges, which functions as a signal of discontent or a recalibration of bilateral relations (Wu, 2025). The absence of contact, in this framework, ceases to be a passive state and becomes an active foreign policy tool. The choice of a particular form of silence is shaped by a combination of contextual factors. The nature of the international crisis appears to be primary among them: the higher the risk of escalation, the more likely states are to adopt restrained communicative strategies. The balance of power between the parties also conditions the meaning and effectiveness of silence. In asymmetric relationships, the silence of the stronger actor tends to be perceived as a demonstration of superiority or an instrument of pressure, whereas the weaker party may lack the same interpretive weight. Domestic political considerations further complicate the decision to speak or remain silent. Governments delay or withhold statements when confronted with internal divisions or the absence of a consolidated position.

Such postponement helps avoid premature commitments and reduces the risk of domestic political costs, while preserving the appearance of a unified foreign policy line.

The evolution of diplomatic silence demonstrates a change in its functional significance. In traditional diplomacy, silence was primarily associated with the secrecy of negotiations, confidentiality, and the principle of limited access to information. Most diplomatic contacts took place outside the public space. For this reason, the absence of statements did not become an independent subject of international attention. The situation changed with the rapid development of global media and digital communications. Diplomatic activity came under the constant scrutiny of journalists, expert centres, and social networks. According to the Digital News Report 2025 by the Reuters Institute, over half of users in many countries regularly receive international news through digital platforms, which increases the speed of dissemination of political information and public expectations regarding states' reactions to international events. In the United States, for the first time, the share of the population that receives news through social media and video platforms (54%) exceeded television (50%) and websites and applications (48%) (Newman *et al.*, 2025). Under such conditions, silence ceased to be an inconspicuous element of diplomacy. The absence of a reaction itself becomes an informational event. Political actors are forced to take into account not only the content of their statements but also the consequences of their absence. A new type of diplomatic interaction is being formed, within which silence simultaneously performs symbolic, communicative, and strategic functions. Its significance is determined not by a lack of information, but by the ability to influence the interpretation of international reality, the distribution of political attention, and the process of making foreign policy decisions.

Using the strategy of silence in crisis diplomacy and international conflicts

In crisis situations, international communication performs a dual function. It can contribute to de-escalation or, conversely, intensify conflict potential. For this reason, silence acquires the significance of a separate instrument of crisis management. Its use is associated with the restriction of informational signals that are capable of causing an undesirable reaction from the other side. Diplomatic practice demonstrates that restraint in statements becomes not a manifestation of weakness, but a mechanism for controlling the dynamics of conflict. A greater risk of escalation arises under conditions of informational uncertainty and misinterpretation of the opponent's intentions. An excessive number of public messages increases the likelihood of erroneous interpretation of political intentions, especially between states that are in a state of strategic rivalry (Mandel, 2019). Under such conditions, the restriction of communication sometimes turns out to be more effective than active informational interaction. Such practice has become widespread among leading states after the growing role of social networks, where even one statement by a senior official can influence financial markets, military-political decisions, or public opinion.

This trend is clearly visible in relations between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China. As of 2025, it is this bilateral interaction that is considered the central line of strategic competition in the international system (Shahida *et al.,* 2026). Under such conditions, any public statement is capable of transforming into a diplomatic signal with long-term consequences. For this reason, both sides use silence as an instrument for deterring risks. An example was the crisis surrounding the Chinese aerial platform detected over US territory in early 2023 (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025). After the incident, official contacts between the military structures of the two states were limited. The Chinese leadership refrained from detailed comments regarding the further resumption of military dialogue for a long time. The American administration also avoided sharp public statements after the initial phase of the crisis. As a result, the parties returned to negotiations during the summit in San Francisco in November 2023. Such a period of communicative restraint is considered an attempt to reduce the risk of uncontrolled escalation between nuclear states (Huang *et al.*, 2023).

The mechanism of silence in relations between great powers differs from its use in regional conflicts. The main goal is not to conceal a position, but to preserve strategic stability. The concept of "managed uncertainty" involves refraining from public formulations that could force the other side to an immediate reaction. Such a model is applied to issues where there is a risk of military clash or the destruction of diplomatic channels. In the scholarly literature, this phenomenon is defined as strategic ambiguity – a practice in which a state deliberately maintains flexible or contradictory positions in order to maximise autonomy and preserve leverage between competing powers, while avoiding rigid commitments that could provoke undesirable escalation (Abrenica *et al.,* 2024). Similar logic can be traced in the Taiwan issue. The Taiwan Strait remains one of the most conflict-generating regions in the world (Chen, 2025). According to the Taiwan Ministry of National Defence, during 2024 alone, hundreds of cases of People's Liberation Army of China (PLA) aircraft entering Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone were recorded. For example, in April 2024, 14 PLA aircraft were detected within 24 hours, six of which crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait (14 PLA aircraft…, 2024). Each such incident is potentially capable of provoking a political crisis. Despite the high tension, the parties apply a strategy of selective silence. Some military maneuvers or political statements remain without an official response. For example, the meeting of US and Chinese leaders in Busan in October 2025, where the Taiwan issue, which is usually central to bilateral negotiations, was completely bypassed in official statements (Zhu, 2025). Such behaviour is explained by the desire not to create additional reasons for escalation. The instrument

of silence in Sino-Taiwanese relations performs another function. It helps to maintain political ambiguity regarding future actions. It was strategic uncertainty that remained one of the factors deterring a forceful scenario around the island. Excessive specification of positions can reduce space for diplomatic maneuver and increasing the risks of erroneous decisions during crisis situations. The comparison of these examples is reflected in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of the role of silence in China-US and China-Taiwan diplomatic relations

Comparison criterion	China-USA	China-Taiwan
The main purpose of using silence	Management of strategic competition and prevention of direct confrontation between the leading states of the world	Controlling the political status quo and preventing the formalisation of positions that could change the balance in the Taiwan Strait
The nature of international relations	Competitive coexistence with a high level of economic interdependence and global consequences of any escalation	Asymmetric conflict around issues of sovereignty, statehood and territoriality
The mechanism of silence	Postponement of official comments, suspension of military contacts, use of closed communication channels	Selective ignoring of political statements, refusal to respond to individual symbolic or diplomatic actions of the opposing side
Level of strategic uncertainty	High. Silence is used to conceal future political or security decisions	Medium. Silence is used to avoid official recognition or denial of Taiwan's political status
Application example	After the incident with the Chinese balloon in February 2023, China and the United States effectively reduced official military communication. The dialogue was resumed only in late 2023 after a series of non-public contacts between representatives of both states	After the presidential elections in Taiwan in January 2024, official Beijing refrained from direct political contacts with the new Lai Qingde administration, focusing on military and diplomatic signals without recognising the political legitimacy of the new course
Relationship with the military factor	Silence is accompanied by maintaining informal or closed channels of communication to prevent military incidents	Silence is combined with a demonstration of military presence around the Taiwan Strait as an alternative way of transmitting signals
Main risk	Misinterpreting lack of communication as a sign of preparation for tougher action	Increasing political isolation and accumulation of mutual distrust between the parties
Role for the international order	Affects global security, the world economy, and the functioning of international institutions	Affects the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific region and the balance of power in East Asia

Source: compiled by the authors based on Y. Huang *et al.* (2023), M. Zhao & H. Yang (2024), L. Wu (2025), Council on Foreign Relations (2025), M. Turpin (2026)

The comparison of the two diplomatic directions demonstrated the different functional nature of silence depending on the structure of international relations. In the interaction between China and the United States, silence performs primarily a crisis-regulatory function. Its application is aimed at managing risks between states that possess global political, economic, and military resources. In relations between China and Taiwan, the status-symbolic function of silence dominates. The absence of an official reaction or contacts is used as an instrument for controlling legitimacy and political recognition. If in the China-US case silence helps to maintain strategic stability under conditions of rivalry, then in the China-Taiwan case it contributes to preserving uncertainty regarding the future political status of the island.

Armed conflicts change the nature of diplomatic communication. Under conditions of high uncertainty, any official statement can influence not only political decisions but also military planning, the behaviour of allies, financial markets, and the information environment. For this reason, silence is used as an instrument for managing strategic uncertainty. Its function lies not in concealing information as such, but in limiting the opponent's access to data that could be used to predict the state's future actions. Such practice became noticeable after the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Ukrainian leadership and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) partners regularly refrained from commenting on the details of military assistance, weapons supply routes, and specific stages of the preparation of counteroffensive operations. A similar approach was applied during the transfer of long-range Storm Shadow missiles, Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS), and other types of precision-guided weapons (Holland & Ali, 2024). Information was made public after the actual use of the systems or after the completion of critical stages of their deployment. The political effect was the preservation of the element of surprise and the complication of Russian planning (Ghincea, 2025).

The mechanism of silence also acquires significance under conditions of sanction confrontation. Economic restrictions have long gone beyond the boundaries of financial policy and have become part of geopolitical competition. Under such conditions, states try to control not only the economic consequences of sanctions but also the interpretation of these consequences by the international audience. China's position after the imposition of large-scale Western sanctions against Russia is indicative (Xu & Zhao, 2025). The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs consistently criticised unilateral sanction mechanisms but avoided public assessments of their actual effectiveness regarding the Russian economy. Such caution allowed Beijing to maintain economic cooperation with Moscow, while simultaneously

not taking on political responsibility for predicting the results of the West's sanction policy. In this case, silence performed the function of strategic insurance. Under any scenario of events, China retained the ability to adapt its own position without losing diplomatic reputation. Similar practice was observed in Iran after the reinstatement of US sanctions (Al Awsat, 2025). Official Tehran avoided specific predictions regarding the long-term consequences of the sanction regime, concentrating on political statements about its illegitimacy. Such behaviour allowed avoiding the public fixation of economic expectations that could be disproven by the further development of events.

The use of silence under conditions of armed conflicts and sanction pressure is associated with a change in the very understanding of political influence. Traditional diplomacy considered active presence in the international information space as a sign of strength. The digitalisation of politics has changed this logic. The surplus of information increased the value of controlled absence of information. Political advantage is gained by actors capable of independently determining the moment and format of communication (Honryo & Yano, 2021). An illustrative example is India after the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war. In the votes of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, New Delhi did not openly support Russia but systematically refrained from harsh political assessments of Moscow's actions. In parallel, India increased its purchases of Russian oil, maintained military-technical cooperation with Russia, and continued to develop strategic partnership with the United States. Such silence was not a manifestation of foreign policy uncertainty. It performed the function of balancing between several centres of power. The result was the strengthening of India's international autonomy and the expansion of its negotiation opportunities in relations with both the West and the states of the Global South (Verma, 2024).

The transformation of the international order also manifests itself in the fact that silence is used as an instrument for shaping political status. Its influence depends on the state's place in the international hierarchy and on its ability to impose its own agenda on others (Morse & Coggins, 2024). Great powers are capable of transforming the absence of a reaction into a separate diplomatic signal. Smaller countries usually do not have a similar resource, since their silence does not become a subject of international attention. Such a pattern was observed during disputes over maritime borders in the Eastern Mediterranean. In 2020-2021, Turkey repeatedly left without an official response certain diplomatic statement by Greece regarding disputed zones of maritime jurisdiction (Koukakis, 2025). The political significance lay not in the ignoring itself, but in the demonstration of the ability to determine the order of communication. The absence of a reaction created an asymmetry of statuses, in which one side demanded a response, while the other reserved the right to decide whether the issue deserved an official comment. A similar mechanism can be traced within relations between supranational structures and individual states. Hungary in 2022-2023 repeatedly delayed responses to the demands of the European Commission regarding reforms related to the unblocking of funding from the European Union (EU) funds (Koranyi, 2025). The political effect was the creation of a negotiation resource. The absence of a quick response allowed Budapest to raise the price of future compromises and use the time factor as an instrument of political bargaining. In this case, silence did not reflect weakness or a lack of information. It acted as an element of a rational strategy aimed at changing the balance of negotiation positions.

The effectiveness of silence in crises depends on the contextual sensitivity of the international environment. In highly conflictual situations, excessive communication creates the risk of an "information spiral", when each statement provokes a counterstatement and increases the overall level of tension. The analysis of crisis episodes of the Cold War shows that the restriction of public rhetoric during the Cuban Missile Crisis facilitated the transition to closed negotiation channels, which reduced the likelihood of a direct military clash between nuclear states. In particular, Kennedy ignored Khrushchev's public letter with the demand to remove missiles from Turkey, instead, a private proposal was conveyed through Robert Kennedy and Ambassador Dobrynin, which made it possible to avoid a public defeat for either side and reach a compromise (The Cuban missile..., n.d.). Therefore, strategic uncertainty in foreign policy can perform a stabilizing function in relations between states, but excessive use of such practice increases the risk of structural instability of the international system. The advantages and risks of diplomatic silence in crisis situations are reflected in Table 3.

Table 3. Comparative analysis of the benefits and risks of diplomatic silence in crisis situations

The aspect of using silence	Advantages	Risks	Empirical confirmation
Managing military escalation	Reduces the likelihood of impulsive political decisions and public confrontation; creates time to assess the situation	May be perceived as indecisiveness or lack of readiness to respond	During the Russian-Ukrainian war, some information about military operations and arms supplies was not disclosed for operational security reasons
Protection of the negotiation process	Allows parties to negotiate without external political pressure and media influence	Lack of transparency breeds distrust and information speculation	Negotiations on the Iranian nuclear program in Vienna were accompanied by limited disclosure of the content of the consultations
Maintaining diplomatic channels	Provides the opportunity to maintain informal contacts even in conditions of public confrontation	Prolonged silence may hide the lack of real progress in negotiations	Geneva international discussions on Georgia have been ongoing for many years despite the lack of public agreements

Table 3. Continued

The aspect of using silence	Advantages	Risks	Empirical confirmation
Mediation diplomacy	Facilitates the role of a neutral mediator between conflicting parties	Raises doubts about the mediator's true position	Turkey has maintained limited public rhetoric on certain aspects of the war in Ukraine, maintaining contacts with both sides
Strategic uncertainty	Makes it more difficult to predict the state's actions and increases the deterrent effect	The risk of misinterpreting the opponent's intentions and making erroneous decisions increases	This practice is regularly used in security-related crises in the Black Sea and Middle East regions
Information space management	Prevents the spread of sensitive information and reduces informational pressure on diplomatic decisions	The information vacuum is quickly filled with disinformation and unofficial versions of events	During the war in Ukraine, international organisations repeatedly documented the use of information gaps to spread disinformation
Avoiding premature political commitments	Allows states to adapt their position to changing international situations	Reduces predictability of foreign policy for partners and allies	The response of individual states to the crises in Niger and Sudan was characterised by a long waiting period before official statements
International reputation control	Provides an opportunity to avoid politically disadvantageous statements until complete information is obtained	Silence can be interpreted as indifference or hidden support for one of the parties to the conflict	Similar discussions arose around the reaction of a number of countries of the Global South to the Russian-Ukrainian war after 2022

Source: compiled by authors based on S. Maetz (2014), T. Tevdoradze (2022), M.M.G. Casquinho (2024), R. Verma (2024), M. Ghincea (2025), T. Dadabaev & S. Sonoda (2026), G. Ulas (2026)

The comparison of crisis cases demonstrated that the effectiveness of diplomatic silence is determined by the nature of the political goal pursued by the state or international mediator. In situations where the priority is the protection of the negotiation process or the preservation of operational security, silence provides a tangible practical result. It is precisely this logic that can be traced during the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear program, humanitarian consultations surrounding the war between Israel and Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement), as well as in matters of military support for Ukraine. A different effect is observed in protracted territorial conflicts. In the Georgian and Kosovar cases, silence contributed to maintaining dialogue, but at the same time became a factor in the conservation of unresolved contradictions. The strategy demonstrates effectiveness when silence is combined with closed diplomatic channels and active mediation activities. If the absence of a public position is not accompanied by real negotiation mechanisms, it turns from an instrument of crisis management into a factor of growing uncertainty and distrust. Therefore, the criterion for evaluating diplomatic silence is not the level of communication as such, but its ability to ensure a specific political result within the framework of crisis settlement. The final analysis showed that silence does not have an unambiguous function of stabilisation or destabilisation. Its effectiveness depends on the combination of context, the level of international tension, and the structure of relations between actors. In crisis situations, it is capable of reducing the risk of escalation; however, in the long term, it creates additional interpretive risks and transforms the balance of political power in the international system.

DISCUSSION

The conducted research confirmed that silence in international diplomacy is not reducible to the absence of communication, but functions as an independent political mechanism for influencing the behaviour of other actors in the international system. The obtained results revealed that diplomatic silence performs the functions of deterrence, signalling, the formation of strategic uncertainty, the protection of the negotiation process, and crisis management. Such an interpretation is generally consistent with the conclusions of K. Kaura-aho (2021b), who examined silence as an active form of political communication capable of transforming public discourses and influencing the structure of power relations. The conducted analysis of international crises demonstrated a similar logic of the functioning of silence. Informational restraint regarding the supply of Western weapons to Ukraine did not reflect passivity or a deficit of information. It ensured the preservation of the element of surprise and limited the possibilities for predicting actions on the part of the opponent. In contrast to K. Kaura-aho's approach, which concentrated primarily on the domestic political and discursive dimensions of silence, the conducted research demonstrated its practical effectiveness in the sphere of international security, where the absence of public information directly affects the military-political calculations of the parties to the conflict.

The conclusions of the conducted research also correlate with the concept of O. Hoffjann (2026), who proposed a distinction between strategic silence and strategic non-talking. The analysis of diplomatic cases showed that some forms of international silence indeed remained almost imperceptible to external observers and were not accompanied by the expectation of an official reaction. A similar situation was observed during Israel's application of strategic uncertainty regarding its own nuclear potential. The political effect was created not through a demonstrative refusal to comment, but through the long-term absence of an official statement on the status of the nuclear

program. At the same time, the conducted research showed that under conditions of digital diplomacy, the more prominent forms of silence began to play a greater role, when the international audience expects a state's reaction but does not receive it. For this reason, the author's concept received additional confirmation, although empirical examples demonstrated the growing political role of precisely the visible forms of diplomatic silence.

The results of the analysis of the diplomatic behaviour of India, China, and a number of Global South states revealed much in common with the conclusions of M.C. Mkhize (2024), devoted to the quiet diplomacy of the Republic of South Africa. The study showed that silence is used as an instrument for preserving strategic autonomy between competing centres of power. The analysis of India's position after the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war demonstrated a similar model of behaviour. New Delhi refrained from harsh political assessments, maintaining cooperation with various international partners. This practice corresponds to the logic of balancing described by the author regarding the Republic of South Africa (RSA). At the same time, the conducted research revealed a broader scope of the application of silence. If the South African case was primarily associated with the maintenance of diplomatic dialogue, then the examples of India, China, and Turkey demonstrated the use of silence as a resource for geopolitical manoeuvring, which went beyond the boundaries of classical quiet diplomacy.

The obtained results also correlate with the conceptual provisions of L. Lonardo (2023), who proposed distinguishing between inaction as a conscious choice and inaction as a consequence of the inability to act. The comparative analysis of international crises showed that diplomatic silence cannot be automatically interpreted as a manifestation of weakness or institutional incapacity. In the cases of China, India, Israel, and Turkey, the absence of a reaction was rational in nature and pursued specific political goals. The analysis made it possible to separate situations where silence performed the function of a strategic instrument from cases where it could be a consequence of domestic political contradictions or limited possibilities of foreign policy response. This result supports the author's logic and expands it through many diplomatic cases related to security crises, sanction confrontation, and geopolitical competition. The conducted research demonstrated proximity to the theoretical conclusions of M. Freeden (2022), who examined silence as a component of political thinking and a mechanism for the formation of legitimacy. The analysis of diplomatic practice showed that silence affects not only information flows but also the symbolic dimension of international politics. Examples of states' reactions to the coup in Niger, China's positioning regarding Taiwan, and the practice of non-recognition of certain political decisions through the absence of official comments demonstrated the use of silence to define the boundaries of legitimacy. The results demonstrated that an unspoken position could shape political interpretations no less than official statements. This conclusion correlates with the scholar's approach, although the conducted analysis showed its applied significance specifically for diplomatic interaction between states.

The comparison of the results with the study by G.S.A. İnce (2025) revealed a high level of conceptual consistency. The author demonstrated that silence in international relations does not mean neutrality but acts as a form of protecting national interests and an instrument for managing reputational risks. The analysis of the behaviour of India, China, the RSA, and several African states confirmed this pattern. The absence of a reaction does not reflect indifference to international events. On the contrary, it allows maintaining diplomatic flexibility and minimizing political costs. Certain discrepancies concerned the assessment of the consequences of silence. The author emphasised ethical contradictions. The conducted research also recorded a similar risk. The analysis of crisis situations demonstrated that silence can simultaneously reduce the risk of escalation and create conditions for ambiguous moral interpretations of international behaviour. The concept of public expectations proposed by T. Jung (2021) received convincing confirmation during the analysis of diplomatic cases. The study demonstrated that the political effect of silence depends not on the very fact of the absence of a statement, but on its correlation with the expected model of the actor's behaviour. This pattern was clearly manifested in the China-Taiwan and China-US cases. The absence of a reaction to certain events acquired significance precisely because international observers expected an official comment. As a result, silence was transformed into a separate diplomatic signal. The conclusions of T. Jung correlate with the conducted research, since both approaches proceed from the fact that the meaning of silence is determined by the system of political expectations, and not by the very fact of a communicative pause.

The study by A. Pang *et al.* (2022) examined strategic silence primarily in the anti-crisis communication of organisations. The obtained results revealed a number of similarities despite the difference in the objects of analysis. In international diplomacy, a dependence was also observed between the information vacuum and the risk of uncontrolled dissemination of alternative interpretations of events. The analysis of crisis situations showed that prolonged silence can create conditions for disinformation, political speculation, and erroneous interpretation of states' intentions. At the same time, the conducted research demonstrated that in international conflicts, silence does not always have negative consequences. In cases of operational security or the negotiation process, the absence of information increases the effectiveness of diplomatic actions. For this reason, the results of the scholars were only partially confirmed. The diplomatic environment turned out to be more complex than organisational crisis communication, since the effect of silence depended on the nature of the international situation.

The theoretical model of S.W. Gray (2023), which interpreted silence as a separate form of political expression,

also found empirical confirmation. The conducted analysis showed that silence functions as an instrument for transmitting political signals even in the absence of a verbal message. This pattern was identified during the examination of protest silence after the coup in Niger, the selective non-recognition of political decisions, and diplomatic practices of status distancing. The results made it possible to expand the author's approach, since specific mechanisms of the influence of silence on international security, negotiation processes, and the structure of geopolitical relations were established. If the author concentrated primarily on the conceptual dimension of political expression, the conducted research demonstrated the functioning of such mechanisms in real international conflicts. The comparison of the results with the totality of the reviewed works made it possible to identify several stable patterns. The majority of researchers examined silence as an active political practice, which coincided with the results of the conducted analysis. Discrepancies concerned mainly the scale of influence and the scope of application. Some works concentrated on the discursive, symbolic, or ethical dimensions of silence. The conducted analysis made it possible to show that the political effectiveness of silence is determined not by the very fact of the absence of statements, but by its integration into a broader diplomatic strategy. The analysis of international conflicts, sanction confrontation, security crises, and diplomatic balancing demonstrated that silence was used to manage risks, control legitimacy, form strategic uncertainty, and maintain negotiation positions. It is precisely this multifunctionality that explains the high level of consistency of the obtained results with the theoretical approaches to the study of political silence and its role in international relations.

CONCLUSIONS

The study confirmed that silence in international diplomacy acts not as a passive state, but as an active-constructive strategy that performs a number of functions within the framework of political interaction between states. Theoretical analysis made it possible to systematise these functions: deterrence, formation of strategic uncertainty, signalling, demonstration of position, crisis management, and protection of the negotiation process. Varieties of silence were identified – tactical, strategic, and protest – each of which has its own time horizon, mechanism of influence, and political consequences. A comparative analysis of relations between China and the US, on the one hand, and China and Taiwan, on the other, revealed a fundamental difference in the functional load of silence: in the first case, it performs a crisis-regulatory function, while in the second, a status-symbolic one. Empirical cases of the Russian-Ukrainian war demonstrated the use of silence as an instrument of operational security and management of strategic uncertainty, while the sanction confrontation around Russia and Iran showed its role as a mechanism of strategic insurance. Special attention was paid to the analysis of India's diplomatic behaviour, which through silence implemented balancing between several centres of power, as well as to the cases of Turkey and Hungary, where the delay of responses or selective ignoring of diplomatic statements was used to create a negotiation resource and demonstrate status asymmetry.

The generalisation of the obtained results made it possible to identify both the advantages of diplomatic silence (reduction of the risk of escalation, protection of the negotiation process, preservation of diplomatic channels) and its risks (informational uncertainty, misinterpretation of intentions, increase of distrust). The digitalisation of diplomacy has strengthened the political weight of silence, since under conditions of constant communication activity, the absence of a reaction becomes a noticeable independent signal. It was determined that the effectiveness of silence depends on the context of the international situation, the status position of the state in the global hierarchy, and the structure of relations between actors, while its effectiveness increases under the condition of combination with closed channels and active mediation activities. The limitation of the study is its focus on the analysis of individual crisis episodes, which does not cover all possible configurations of the use of silence in different regional and cultural contexts. Further research should be directed towards a quantitative analysis of the correlation between types of silence and specific political results in different types of international systems.

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