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Introduction

Diplomacy is the term given to the official channels of communication employed by the members of a system of states.¹ In the modern world system these are to be found chiefly in a network of diplomats and consuls who enjoy the protection of special legal rules and are permanently resident abroad, some at the seats of international organizations. This network first came into being in the Italian peninsula in the second half of the fifteenth century and reached its full expression in Europe in the two and a half centuries that followed the Congress of Münster and Osnabrück (1644–8). From the end of the First World War until well after the end of the Second, the diplomacy of this system was subjected to unprecedented criticism: it was said to be the handmaiden of war, or imperialism – or both. Nevertheless, it withstood its detractors and, at the height of the Cold War, was strengthened by the successful codification of the customary international law governing its procedures.²

Diplomacy turns chiefly on regular and regularized negotiation,³ and its advent was a moment of profound historical importance. For so long as power continues to be dispersed among a plurality of states, negotiation will remain essential to the difference between peace and war. It is only negotiation, in other words, that can produce the advantages obtainable from the cooperative pursuit of common interests; and it is only this activity that can prevent violence from being employed to settle remaining arguments over conflicting ones. When war breaks out nevertheless, it is also negotiation that remains indispensable if the worst excesses of fighting are to be limited and if, in addition, a mutually tolerable peace is eventually to be achieved. In orchestrating and moderating the dialogue between states, diplomacy thus serves as a bulwark against international chaos; in this way it may be understood as

a more fragile counterpart, operating within a system based upon states, to the domestic order or 'political system' of the state itself.

Although diplomacy thus conceived is the theme of this collection of essays, something further needs to be said about 'diplomatic theory'. As with other forms of theorizing, including the political theory of the state, diplomatic theory is reflective in character, permanently indebted to historical reasoning, and unfailingly ethical in inspiration. The moral element is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than by the question: must diplomats always keep their promises to foreign governments? However, even the claim of Martin Wight that diplomacy is 'the master-institution of international relations'⁴ is an argument not solely – or even chiefly – about its varying impact on everyday international events, but about its value and the consequent wisdom of upholding it.

Diplomatic theory appeared at the same time as diplomacy began to assume its distinctively modern form in the late fifteenth century, though it is not surprising that at this stage it was weak and stunted in growth. In the course of analysing many treatises on the ambassador produced in the period from the late fifteenth until the early sixteenth century, Behrens⁵ observed repeated emphasis on the following lines of questioning: What is an ambassador? What class of person and manner of entourage should be sent on different kinds of mission to princes of varying standing? Is a hierarchy of official classes of diplomat desirable and, if so, what form should it take? On what grounds are the privileges and immunities of diplomats justified? For what purposes do embassies exist? By what principles should an ambassador regulate his conduct; in particular, must he always be honest?⁶ Above all, were the newly emerging resident embassies a good thing or not?⁷ Though the answers to these questions were seldom extensively considered and often lacking cogency, we can at least see that the questions themselves were good ones. Most have remained points of departure for diplomatic theory until the present time.

In those days most of the writing on diplomacy was the work of either diplomats such as Ermolao Barbaro, jurists like Alberico Gentili, or some typified by Grotius who were both. As a result, and also in obedience to the fashionable 'mirror of princes' tradition, until the late seventeenth century discussion of diplomacy tended to revolve around 'the perfect ambassador' and his complex legal standing at a foreign court. In the aftermath of the Congress of Münster and Osnabrück however, when it became clear that the rulers of Europe had a common interest in regulating their frequently bellicose 'foreign' relations, diplomatic theory acquired a more explicit *political* flavour. This occurred when attention

came to centre on the part played by the combined and continuous activities of numerous embassies representing the constituent parts of the loose association of 'Europe'. This is particularly evident in Wicquefort's encyclopaedic analysis, which adds to the usual account of the 'law of nations' relating to diplomatic immunity a refreshing emphasis on the regime of work daily engaged in by ambassadors and other envoys. The new angle of interest was however given most trenchant expression in the more succinct and accessible treatment provided by Callières. It is Callières, writing at the time of the Congress of Ryswick (1697), who first and most tellingly explains diplomacy by reference to the business of a multiplicity of states, and who is persuaded of its indispensable usefulness – amounting to necessity – to the European states-system.

As with Wicquefort and Callières, the other seven accounts of diplomacy have been chosen for the understanding they bring to some of the enduring questions raised by this distinctive activity. Separately and in combination, the consideration of these 'classic texts' is rewarding for both philosophical and historical reasons. However, the authors collected together in this book have also been chosen to illustrate the evolution of diplomatic theory. It is for that reason that each century since the Renaissance has its representative. We have additionally kept in mind the limited use of producing interpretative essays on texts no longer easily obtainable. Hence all of the main titles to which the following chapters refer are currently in print or available in a well-stocked university library. Where not originally written in English, all are currently available in translation.

Some of the questions which preoccupied those who reflected on diplomacy in the early modern period have already been mentioned. It remains to ponder for a moment longer the main themes emerging from this account of diplomatic theory which have persisted until the present day. Perhaps the most dominant one centres on the recognition that even the most powerful states are unable to achieve or maintain their ends solely or securely by force. As a result, diplomacy is seen as a valuable 'means' or 'instrument' of foreign policy. Indeed, it is frequently noted that a diplomatic service that is well resourced and above all well staffed can give a state a significant increment of power and influence. Machiavelli, though acutely aware that 'pure diplomacy' was not enough, expresses this point of view in his admiration for the money spent on express messengers by the Duke Valentino. Richelieu considered diplomacy of such vital importance in furthering the interests of France that he thought it should be 'continuous'. Kissinger

was similarly so persuaded of the productiveness of diplomacy that although National Security Advisor and then Secretary of State as well, he never hesitated to keep to himself the kernel and detail of important negotiations.

Once accepted, the claim that well conducted diplomacy confers important advantages leads on to related themes. Among these is the argument that finds in diplomacy no 'true end or purpose' such as the pursuit of peace, though this had been an important element in mediaeval thought.⁸ The embodiment of an entirely neutral instrument, diplomats must support the foreign policy of their state no matter what its content. If an envoy is instructed to negotiate an aggressive alliance, so be it. A second theme is found in the claim that negotiation should wait for 'the right season', a precept suggested by Guicciardini almost five centuries before it was rediscovered and glossed by peace research institutes in Scandinavia and elsewhere. Like others, he also stressed the need to conduct negotiations in secrecy, on pain of forfeiting the trust and ability to compromise without which they are stifled. Thirdly, diplomats need not keep their promises to foreign governments if this does not serve the interests of their own state. However, as Machiavelli made shockingly plain, the ability to break one's word goes hand in glove with the advantages of preserving a reputation for trustworthiness. Fourthly, and with the caveat that Grotius himself stood out against this view, opinion came to accept the merits of continuous diplomacy; of permanent rather than sporadic negotiations conducted with wartime enemies as well as peacetime friends. And lastly, while lobbying, gleaning information and negotiating agreements are staple functions of the ambassador, his representational tasks are of more than trivial ceremonial importance. To re-present a state in the company of one's host and protector is to give dignified expression to the independence claimed by those in whose sovereign name he acts.

Alongside the foregoing, it is necessary to keep in mind that continuing strain of thought which takes for granted the necessity *for* diplomacy and dwells instead on the requirements *of* diplomacy. Among those who served in what Nicolson called the 'French system' of diplomacy, one can detect a lingering fascination with the attributes of the 'ideal diplomatist'. Added to this, and following in the wake of Callières, is a burgeoning interest in the need for diplomacy to be better organized and made more professional. This is accompanied by entrenchment of the view (already noticeable in Grotius) that the privileges and immunities which international law ascribes to its practitioners are justified by

the impossibility of conducting effective diplomacy without their safeguard.⁹

There is lastly a need at least to acknowledge the important theme in diplomatic theory which treats diplomacy as an independent – or at least distinctive and at times additionally separate – influence in foreign affairs. A corollary of the theme of professionalization, this is the claim detectable in Callières, through Satow to Nicolson, though somewhat lost sight of in Kissinger,¹⁰ that diplomacy is not simply lobbying, bargaining and eavesdropping. Instead, it is accomplishing these tasks *in such a way* that the moderating and thereby civilizing effect of diplomacy on the general conduct of states is maximized. Honest dealing must therefore be maintained even though this may bring no immediate or tangible gains. The maintenance of peace – though not at any price – must be a high priority. Protocol must be studied and carefully followed, not merely to prevent arguments over status and correct procedure from distracting attention from more serious matters, but so that it can help cushion and mollify relations between states. In short, this is the claim that diplomacy is a civilizing as well as a civilized activity.

Even though differences of standpoint among the contributors to this book will be apparent, the chapters are broadly similar in composition. Each begins with a biographical sketch of the author in question and includes a summary of his diplomatic experience. Mention is next made of his most important writings, some of which are then singled out for more thorough examination. We shall be amply rewarded if the effect of these essays is to lead those interested in diplomacy and its theoretical formulation to renewed interest in the authors concerned.

Notes

1. That is, a dispensation in which the members retain sovereignty but act – with more or less enthusiasm – as if they are part of one body.
2. The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961) and the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (1963).
3. Until Edmund Burke invented the term ‘diplomacy’ in the late eighteenth century, ‘negotiation’ was the word normally employed to describe the work of ambassadors.
4. Martin Wight, *Power Politics*, ed. by Hedley Bull and Carsten Holbraad (Leicester, 1978), p. 113.
5. B. Behrens, ‘Treatises on the ambassador written in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries’, *English Historical Review*, vol. 51, 1936, pp. 616–27.
6. See also Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (Harmondsworth, 1965), p. 209ff.

6 *Diplomatic Theory from Machiavelli to Kissinger*

7. Mattingly notes this, too, pointing out that some writers believed that residents were responsible for the moral debasement of diplomacy, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, p. 210.
8. Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, p. 103.
9. This later came to be known as the functional theory of diplomatic privileges and immunities.
10. Despite his own concern with the role of diplomacy in a revolutionary international environment.

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