

Diplomacy and diplomats

Diplomacy is the management of relations with the outside world, and it is as old as time. Since the first clan made contact with the second, there have been individuals whose appointed function has been to mediate between people. The first diplomats were heralds assigned to plead a group's cause to others. The main qualification for the job was a loud voice. Later, the realization appears to have set in that effective advocacy also required an ability to observe foreign conditions and understand their impact on one's own plans.

But diplomacy as a profession is of quite recent origin. It was only in the Middle Ages, among the Italian city states, that the first permanent representatives were appointed; and it was only at the Congress of Vienna (the R glement of March 19, 1815) that rules of diplomatic procedure began to be agreed upon. These rules, later codified in various international conventions, were a pragmatic response to the need for some generally accepted procedures for how states should conduct business with each other. They provided for such things as not shooting the messenger, i.e. the protection and immunity from local jurisdiction of foreign representatives doing their state's business on the territory of another (⁴). As Churchill observed: "The reason for having diplomatic relations is not to confer a compliment, but to secure a convenience."

Since the Middle Ages, the classic subject matter of diplomats has been the security of the state - protecting borders and deterring threats from neighbours. After the Reformation, Europe retreated from the idea of a universal state (Christendom, the Holy Roman Empire), accepted "raison d' tat" as sufficient cause for a state to take action, and embarked on the long hunt for security through a "balance of power" among states. Only in the 20th century was there a return to the concept of common international interests, embodied in assorted conventions and institutions endeavoring to establish universal standards of behaviour and the means to enforce them (⁵).

By that time, the diplomatic agenda also included a second set of issues, as the growth of international trade, investment and financial flows began to have a significant impact on the economies of individual states. For much of the 20th century, the management of these issues was largely confined to negotiating bilateral arrangements with trading partners. But as the scope for autonomous action narrowed and the locus of economic decision-making shifted increasingly to multilateral institutions, governments had to become much more engaged internationally to protect national economic interests.

⁴ The term "diplomat" evolved from the "diploma" or pass (*laissez-passer*) which attested to the individual's right to proceed unmolested to and from the receiving state.

⁵ *Diplomacy*, Henry Kissinger, Simon & Schuster, 1994