“Everybody’s Business”: A Brief History of Diplomacy

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(Fill this section out if/when your proposal is accepted)
Session: Fall 2018 - Session II
Dates: Wednesdays, October 31st - December 5th
Time: 1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Location: Room 124, Leeds House Building

Lecture series description:
Diplomacy, the peaceful conduct of relations amongst states, their leaders and accredited agents, is very old. Even the most ancient and less advanced societies required reliable means of communicating and dealing with their neighbors. With the emergence of states, the exigencies of dialogue between communities, rulers, states and international organizations continue to place a high premium on the work of those skilled in mediation, negotiation and representation. If diplomacy is old, it is also very important. More than forty years ago, a former diplomat remarked: “In a world where war is everybody’s tragedy and everybody’s nightmare, diplomacy is everybody’s business.”

Schedule of topics:
Week 1
The Old World
Near East
Ancient Greece
Byzantium
China and India
Diplomatic practice – as we understand the concept – began in ancient Near East from around the mid-third millennium BC. Letters from Early Mesopotamia and Amarna Letters from Egypt tell diplomatic stories about competition and control over trade routes, strategic military cooperation and counter-alliances. The purpose of Byzantine diplomacy was to gain time, the Empire was eternal, its staying power made it seem relatively endless. European diplomatic practice is traced to Classical Greece. Indeed,

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diplomacy takes its name from the diploma (folded letter) of the Greeks. However, for several centuries after the fall of Rome, the diplomatic relations of the West were relatively infrequent.

Week 2

Renaissance Diplomacy

Renaissance

Resident Ambassador

Immunities

Ceremony

A large increase in the quantity of diplomatic exchange and a significant addition to the machinery of diplomacy began in northern Italy during the fifteenth century and spread to the rest of northern and western Europe in the following hundred years. The gradual growth of the sovereign state greatly increased the number of entities which needed to relate to each other diplomatically. The conditions of the fifteenth century demanded that rulers should have information about their neighbors, they needed informed, involved representatives on the spot. The principal duty of the resident ambassador was to convey news to increasingly efficient chanceries at home.

Week 3

The “Old Diplomacy”

Evolution of Theory

Foreign Ministries

The Congress of Vienna

The Golden Age

The practices of fifteenth-century Italy gradually spread to the rest of Europe and the transition took place both in space and time, by the eighteenth century, most of the machinery of modern diplomacy was in place. During the 100 years which followed the Napoleonic Wars in Europe evolved a system of international intercourse which was unique. The Congress of Vienna of 1814-1815 provided an opportunity for the revision of established practices. And from then until the outbreak of the First World War five or six great powers dominated the affairs. The result was an orderliness in the conduct of international politics, the golden age of the career diplomat.
Week 4

The “New Diplomacy”

World War I

Publicity and Peacemaking

Conference Diplomacy

The League of Nations

Individual diplomats and their profession were blamed for their failure to halt the drift towards war. In 1918 many were converted to the view that if war were to be avoided in the future there would have to be fundamental changes in the way in which nations dealt with each other. Old practices would have to be abandoned and be replaced by the “new diplomacy.” The Paris Peace Conference of 1919-1920, with President Wilson present, did constitute a break with the traditions. For the first time permanent institution was created to maintain peace and collective security, the League of Nations. Yet, as in 1914 so in 1939 diplomacy failed to secure peace in the world.

Week 5

Great-Power Directorate?

Postwar System of Security

The United Nations

Multilateralism

New-State Diplomacy

If the new diplomacy had in practice proved no more successful than the old in averting war, the League of Nations was not dismissed as a worthless experiment. The United Nations (UN) bore an institutional resemblance to the League, but it was equipped with the means to enforce its will. All UN members were obliged by the Charter to accept the Security Council’s decisions. Its role as an instrument of collective security was, however, limited by the Cold War. Still, the United Nations offers a framework for modern multilateral diplomacy and sets standards of international conduct in a culturally and ideologically diverse world.
Week 6

With a Newtonian Politics in an Einsteinian World?

Diplomacy Diffused

Technological Transformations

Trade, Finance and Diplomacy

Order and Disorder

The relative simplicity and manageability of the classical system of diplomacy at times seem far removed from the complexities of our own day. Powerful historical forces transformed the classical Euro-centric system of diplomacy into a complex and heterogeneous system of truly global scale. At the same time, many of today’s challenges are not new. The significance of shared values and self-imposed restraints in the threat and use of force are among the most difficult challenges. Diplomats realize that they have to find some way to avoid anarchy by regulating the level of their rivalry before it could destroy them and us.

Recommended readings for continued learning:


Harold Nicolson, Diplomacy (1939).


David Reynolds, Six Meetings That Shaped the Twentieth Century (2007).
Other interesting resources:


U.S. Department of State - https://www.state.gov/

France - Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères (MEAE) - https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/


Germany - Federal Foreign Office - https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en

Biography:

Dr. Marcel Jesenský is a specialist on the United Nations, international relations, diplomacy and European history. He holds a Ph.D. in History (University of Ottawa). His book *The Slovak-Polish border, 1918-1947* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) chronicles the legacy of the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. He is teaching at the University of Ottawa and Carleton University, and his current research focuses on the Presidency of the United Nations General Assembly.