

Ruptures and Resumptions. Crises of Diplomatic Practice in the 20th Century

Veranstalter: Julia Eichenberg / Markus Payk, Department of History, Humboldt University Berlin

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Bericht von: Simeon Marty, Humboldt University Berlin

In March 2018, a sudden deterioration of British-Russian diplomatic relations following the Skripal case produced headline after headline. The British government expelled 23 Russian diplomats. Russia followed suit by expelling 23 British diplomats and shutting down the British Council, a programme promoting British culture and the English language. In support of the UK, other states (the US in particular, but also the Ukraine and EU countries) decided to follow the British example and expel Russian diplomats based in their own countries. Russia summoned the British ambassador to demand a downsizing of British diplomatic staff in Russia to the size of diplomatic missions still left in the UK.

From the outside, this spiral of retaliations seemed hard to follow. What does it mean to summon an ambassador and what consequences does it have? How do political crises translate into diplomatic practices? What is the scale of possible escalation? And: What are the origins of these practices?

The workshop 'Ruptures and Resumptions. Crises of Diplomatic Practice in the 20th Century' examined the diplomatic practice of handling crises in history, its legal framework and its agents. It engaged with topics ranging from legal conflicts of exiled monarchs with the Hapsburg monarchy to the negotiations for nuclear disarmament between the Cold War superpowers USA and Russia in order to investigate ruptures and resumptions in diplomatic contexts.

MARKUS PAYK (Berlin) opened the workshop by suggesting several themes and questions to frame the discussion. Drawing on the conference title, he noted that while diplomacy usually refers to the formalised contacts between governments, in extraordinary circumstances, diplomatic practice must navigate through unknown waters outside of es-

tablished rituals. Highlighting the processes of diplomatic crisis management, analysing what happens in moments of ruptures and how relationships are restored after such incidents allows us to better understand diplomacy.

On the first panel dubbed „embassies“, ALASTAIR KOCHO-WILLIAMS (Aberystwyth) presented an analysis of the Anglo-Soviet relations in the 1920s that pointed out how threats and menace were employed to maintain diplomatic relations. The Soviet Union's main diplomatic aim of the 1920s, he argued, was to secure recognition from foreign powers. This in turn was supposed to enable it to develop economically by opening and maintaining channels for international trade. The Soviet Union successfully used the threat of supporting anticolonialism in India in what Kocho-Williams called the „Great Game Reloaded“ to pressure the United Kingdom into diplomatic and trade relations, while secretly supporting anticolonial propaganda to keep the threat alive.

Subsequently, MARION ABELLEA (Strasbourg) examined four attacks on British Embassies in the Middle East between the 1930s and the 1970s. She conceptualised embassy buildings as a stage for diplomatic crises and identified a pattern of crisis management following these ruptures: An increasingly professionalised chain of destruction of official documents during an attack; the introduction of resumption procedures such as fixing physical damage and reopening embassies, paired with punitive diplomatic measures such as economic sanctions and assuring sentences for embassy attackers through pressuring local politics. Finally, protection of British embassies was structurally increased as result of attacks on embassies, with the security measures around embassies increasing throughout the 20th century because of attacks.

„Diplomatic entrepreneurs“ was the topic of the second panel. With the case study of the exiled House of Hannover in the mid-to-late 19th century Hapsburg monarchy, TORSTEN RIOTTE (Frankfurt a.M.) traced the creation of the legal term „monarch in exile“. A grey area of diplomacy, the Austrian government established multi-layered diplomatic practices with the exiled royals to support

them in what he termed „dynastic survival.“ Exiled monarchs, he argued, were diplomatic entrepreneurs in keeping up their status in the European „société des princes“ through formal contacts with other governments and exerting their agency through influencing the law in the Hapsburg monarchy to create the legal status of „monarch in exile“ which allowed treatment more similar to acting sovereigns rather than private people.

PETER JACKSON's (Glasgow) paper examined a twofold argument that structural ruptures in diplomatic practices are heavily linked with the make-up of the professional staff in foreign offices, which usually does not change world-views easily. Therefore, generational change in foreign ministries is pivotal in shaping the long-term evolution of policy-making by state institutions. Jackson underlined this point by referring to the example of the attempts to „republicanise“ the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs before 1900 by opening up the position of diplomats to non-aristocrats. Only the 1907 reforms saw the emergence of a new generation of increasingly professional officials who were better equipped than the old generation of diplomats to adapt to the challenges of peace-making and stabilisation in the post-1918 era.

The third and fourth panels examined the role of diplomatic practices in negotiating crises and handling ruptures and resumptions. ROGELIA PASTOR-CASTRO (Strathclyde) opened this section with a paper exploring how the diplomatic staff at the British embassy in France navigated through the fall of France in 1941. While moving the embassy from Paris to the French Atlantic coast before eventually evacuating it, British diplomats kept up political and military discussion with the Free French government over the future of the French fleet while at the same time navigated the humanitarian aspect of the crisis by enabling personal passages to Great Britain.

ARVID SCHORS (Freiburg) examined the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) between the United States and the Soviet Union, which marked the first negotiations on the control of nuclear weapons. Whereas the outcome of those negotiations were often portrayed as disappointing, he showed that not

the formal results, but the negotiations themselves were decisive, as they crossed the ideological barriers of the Cold War and enabled experts, diplomats and top politicians of the superpowers to gradually build trust and understand each other's position after many years of blockade. The most fruitful result of the negotiations therefore were the newly opened diplomatic channels which themselves decreased the likeliness of a nuclear confrontation.

ALEXANDER FRESE (Berlin) pointed out a rather different kind of crisis: In interwar Moscow, the revolutionist government violated basic vectors of diplomatic sociability as they suspected international diplomats, often from their mother countries' upper class, to be enemies of the revolution and met them with deep distrust. The resulting lack of communication between international diplomats and the Russian government in Moscow, Frese argued, can already be seen as an early stage of the cold war, as diplomatic contact was already reduced to a minimum.

Before chairing the vivid final discussion, JULIA EICHENBERG (Berlin) tied together the central themes of the workshop, summarising that the presented case studies had shown how in acute crises, the agency of the individual is expanded through the absence of prescribed plans. In contrast to peace-time diplomacy dominated by formalised procedures, a state of emergency opens up room for single actors to develop and enact creative solutions. The final discussion engaged, amongst other topics, with potential bias in the study of diplomatic crises: The deformation professionnelle of diplomats is that they want to keep channels of communication open at all times. Rupture is therefore a problem for them, because it might cause them to lose their job. Historians should be more aware of this in order to not fall into the trap of normative assumptions. However, a learning curve can also be identified: diplomats and governments learned how to handle crises better and rules for diplomacy were established throughout the 19th and 20th century. The participants agreed that space and control over it is important in this field, as embassies are symbolic space specifically constructed as embodiment of diplomacy. It became clear

that a study of diplomatic crises opens diplomatic history up for more than only the study of bilateral relations, since local populations, emotions of diplomats and the governments behind them influenced diplomats and their professional work, providing further potential research questions in the field.

Julia Eichenberg / Marcus Payk (Berlin):
Closing remarks

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Conference Overview:

Julia Eichenberg / Marcus Payk (Berlin):
Opening remarks

Panel 1: Embassies

Chair: Robert Kindler (Berlin)

Alastair Kocho-Williams (Aberystwith):
Rules of the Great Game Reloaded: the Soviet manipulation of diplomacy with Great Britain in the 1920s

Marion Aballéa (Strasbourg): „Be sure that such a crime will not go unpunished“. British embassies under attack in the Middle East, 1930-1970's

Panel 2: Diplomatic Entrepreneurs

Chair: Julia Eichenberg (Berlin)

Torsten Rlotte (Frankfurt a.M.): Diplomacy as cultural practice? The house of Hanover and its exile in the Hapsburg monarchy

Peter Jackson (Glasgow): Philippe Berthelot's reforms of 1907

Panel 3: Diplomatic Practices I: Negotiating Crisis

Chair: Florian Kühnel (Göttingen)

Rogelia Pastor-Castro (Strathclyde): The British Embassy in Paris: Franco-British Relations and the Second World War

Arvid Schors (Freiburg): Ambivalences of Superpower Détente. The SALT Negotiations, 1969-1979

Panel 4: Diplomatic Practices II: Handling Ruptures and Resumptions

Chair: Marcus Payk (Berlin)

Alexander Frese (Berlin): A Crisis in Everyday Communication? Diplomatic Sociability in Interwar Moscow