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978-0-521-83916-7 - Twentieth-Century Diplomacy: A Case Study of British Practice, 1963-1976

John W. Young

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## 2 Introduction

and military failure created by the Vietnam War, suggesting that the country could once again master the international environment.

This book is about what can be learnt from studying the diplomatic practice of one country in a given time period and is designed to throw light on two main questions. First, how was diplomacy organised in order to put into effect the country's foreign policy? To this end it looks at the reform of the British Diplomatic Service and Foreign Office as well as the use of such institutions as ambassadors, envoys, summits and state visits. Second, a subject that must be at the centre of any historical study, how did diplomatic practice change over time to make it more effective? It will become clear that, even in a comparatively short period, practice did indeed change in important ways, especially with an expansion of the roles played by professional diplomats, a growing frequency of multi-lateral summits and innovations in the way states communicated. Thus, in contrast to most works of international history, which dwell on particular political strategies, geographical issues or conflicts, the questions here revolve around how diplomacy was actually *conducted*, focusing on the United Kingdom under the administrations of Alec Douglas-Home, Harold Wilson and Edward Heath in the years 1963-76. It is a book about the means of diplomacy rather than the ends. It is not, therefore, a traditional study of foreign policy in the sense of studying crises, conflicts and particular international relationships.<sup>3</sup> It is not an analysis of a particular set of decisions on a given area of policy.<sup>4</sup> Neither is it a study of

<sup>3</sup> A number of works have already been published on British international policy in the years 1963-76. These include studies of policy towards particular countries, regions and conflicts: Jonathan Colman, *A 'Special Relationship'? Harold Wilson, Lyndon B. Johnson and Anglo-American relations 'at the summit', 1964-68* (Manchester University Press, 2004); David Easter, *Britain and the Confrontation with Indonesia, 1960-66* (London: Tauris, 2004); Ilaria Favretto, 'The Wilson Governments and the Italian Centre-Left Coalitions: Between 'Socialist' diplomacy and realpolitik, 1964-70', *European History Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 3 (2006), 421-44; Geraint Hughes, 'British Policy towards Eastern Europe and the Impact of the Prague Spring, 1964-68', *Cold War History*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2004), 115-39; Matthew Jones, *Conflict and Confrontation in South East Asia, 1961-1965* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Robert McNamara, *Britain, Nasser and the Balance of Power in the Middle East, 1952-67* (London: Cass, 2003); Spencer Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates, 1955-67* (London: Routledge, 2005); Sylvia Ellis, *Britain, America and the Vietnam War* (Westport: Praeger, 2004); and John W. Young, 'Britain and LBJ's War', *Cold War History*, vol. 2, no. 3 (2002), 63-92.

<sup>4</sup> Such as the studies in this period of the withdrawal from East of Suez or entry to the European Community: Saki Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Matthew Jones, 'A Decision Delayed: Britain's withdrawal from Southeast Asia reconsidered, 1961-68', *English Historical Review*, vol. 117, no. 472 (2002), 569-95; Anne Deighton, 'The Second British Application for Membership of the EEC', in Wilfried Loth, ed., *Crises and Compromises: The European project, 1963-69* (Brussels: Bruylant, 2001); Oliver Daddow, ed., *Harold Wilson and European Integration: Britain's second application to join the EEC* (London: Cass, 2003); Helen Parr, *Britain's*

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the way foreign policy is made in Britain,<sup>5</sup> the machinery of government in this area, or of diplomacy as a career.<sup>6</sup> All these elements are relevant to an understanding of the context in which British diplomatic practice was put into effect, and for this reason they will be discussed in chapter 2. But they are not the central subject matter.

### Defining diplomacy

In an everyday sense, diplomacy may simply be defined as ‘tact, skill or cunning in dealing with people’.<sup>7</sup> Such attributes are certainly of value to professional diplomats, but the definition is too vague to provide a guide for academic study. In the United States ‘diplomacy’ is also frequently used as a synonym for ‘world affairs’ or ‘foreign policy’. This is the sense in which it is used in Henry Kissinger’s study, *Diplomacy*, which is really a history of international relations since the Congress of Vienna.<sup>8</sup> But the value of this usage is diluted by the very fact that it confuses diplomacy with something much broader. Another former US secretary of state, George Shultz, gets nearer to the mark when he writes that ‘diplomacy is the method – some might say the art – by which relations between nations are managed. It is the manner, as distinct from the content, of foreign policy’.<sup>9</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it more fully as ‘the management of international relations by negotiation; the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys; the business of art of the diplomatist; skill . . . in the conduct of international intercourse and negotiations’. Surprisingly, it was only first

*Policy towards the European Community: Harold Wilson and Britain’s world role, 1964–1967* (London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> The 1960s and 1970s were something of a golden age for such studies in Britain: David Vital, *The Making of British Foreign Policy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968); Karl Kaiser and Roger Morgan, eds., *Britain and West Germany: Changing societies and the future of foreign policy* (Oxford University Press, 1971); Roy Jones, *The Changing Structure of British Foreign Policy* (London: Longman, 1974); William Wallace, *The Foreign Policy Process in Britain* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1975); and James Barber, *Who Makes British Foreign Policy?* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1976).

<sup>6</sup> On the specialist ministries and the diplomatic career, see: Joe Garner, *The Commonwealth Office, 1925–68* (London: Heinemann, 1978); Geoffrey Moorhouse, *The Diplomats: The Foreign Office today* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977); D. C. M. Platt, *The Cinderella Service: British consuls since 1825* (London: Longman, 1971). Later studies include Simon Jenkins and Anne Sloman, *With Respect Ambassador: An inquiry into the Foreign Office* (London: BBC Books, 1985); John Dickie, *Inside the Foreign Office* (London: Chapmans, 1992); and Ruth Dudley Edwards, *True Brits: Inside the Foreign Office* (London: BBC Books, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> *Collins Concise Dictionary* (Collins, 1990), 353.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> George Shultz, ‘Diplomacy in the Information Age’, research paper (US Institute of Peace, Washington, 2003), 1.

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used in this sense by Burke as late as 1796.<sup>10</sup> It is this sense which will be used to guide the analysis here.

Harold Nicolson, in his seminal work *Diplomacy* of 1939, also recommended the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition, though he used the term ‘diplomatic practice’ to differentiate his focus on the methods and structure of diplomacy, from foreign policy in general. Geoffrey Berridge, one of the leading contemporary experts, makes the definition in a rather different way: ‘diplomacy consists of communication between officials designed to promote foreign policy either by formal agreement or tacit adjustment’.<sup>11</sup> This has the advantage of differentiating it from the use of force, propaganda and law in the international sphere. It also leads on, as does the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition, to the study of the *methods* of communication in the international sphere. These include the use of foreign ministries and diplomatic services, the employment of ambassadors and envoys, and the official contacts between governments either bilaterally or multilaterally, including via international organisations. The levels involved can range from the lowest official in a diplomatic post up to the head of state. Before Burke, diplomacy was usually referred to as ‘negotiation’ and, while today this gives too narrow an idea of what diplomacy involves, there is no doubt that the promotion of international negotiations is part of the diplomat’s role. International negotiation is itself part of a process, a relationship between different entities. In the modern world the entities are generally states, but the term also includes international organisations and protagonists in civil wars. Negotiation is most likely to be successful when relationships have been carefully nurtured, which takes us back to the role of ambassadors and envoys, summits and state visits in promoting contacts and understanding.

### The study of diplomatic practice

The study of diplomatic practice has been growing in Europe and North America in recent decades, with a few journals now dedicated to it.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Burke adapted the word from the French *diplomatie*, but even this was only used from 1791 according to Paul Robert, *Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française* (Paris: Société du Nouveau Littre, 1968).

<sup>11</sup> Harold Nicolson, *Diplomacy* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1939), 15–16; G. R. Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and practice* (second edition, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 1. See also G. R. Berridge and Alan James, *A Dictionary of Diplomacy* (first edition Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 62–3.

<sup>12</sup> *Diplomacy and Statecraft* (Routledge) has been published since 1990 and it was joined in 2006 by the *Hague Journal of Diplomacy* (Nijhoff). There are also relevant articles in the *Negotiation Journal* (Harvard).

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Much of the focus has been on contemporary developments, such as the increasing role of non-governmental organisations in international discourse and the growth of 'public diplomacy', whereby international actors seek to influence the press and popular opinion. There are several works on the changing role of foreign ministries, diplomatic services and ambassadors since the Cold War.<sup>13</sup> Yet diplomacy still forms only a small part of the study of international relations, where the focus tends to be either on the nature of international relationships and general explanations of its interactions, or on the processes of foreign policy-making.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, it is sometimes seen as highly significant. Hans Morgenthau, for example, as a key writer of the 'Realist' school, emphasised the importance of states and power in the international system; but the closing chapter of his seminal work, *Politics among Nations*, was dedicated to diplomacy. Here there was a message of hope, in that 'the ultimate ideal of international life – that is, to transcend itself in a supranational society – must await its realisation from the techniques of persuasion, negotiation and pressure, which are the traditional instruments of diplomacy'.<sup>15</sup> Where Morgenthau believed that an international 'society' had yet to be created, others have argued that transnational elements like trade, domestic factors and moral concerns have already created such a society. Here the significance of diplomacy is obvious. Members of the 'English School' effectively adopt a 'constructivist' approach to this question, accepting that states are the primary actors in the international field, but arguing that these 'construct' their interests from interacting socially with one another: 'A state does not know how to act because it is a state; it acquires its identity through interaction with other states.'<sup>16</sup> Viewed in this light, diplomacy, like the balance of power and international law, is a primary institution of

<sup>13</sup> On the post-Cold War period, see, for example: Andrea Cascone, *Comparing Diplomatic Services: Structures, networks and resources of the ministries of foreign affairs of EU and G8 member states* (Malta: DiploFoundation, 2002); Andrew Cooper, ed., *Niche Diplomacy: Middle powers after the Cold War* (London: Macmillan, 1999); Richard Langhorne, *Who are the Diplomats Now?* (London: HMSO, 1994); Jan Melissen, *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft power in international relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007); and Kishan Rana, *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Ambassador: Plenipotentiary to chief executive* (Malta: DiploFoundation, 2004). There are also such specialist works as Raymond Cohen's two books, *The Theatre of Power: The art of diplomatic signalling* (London: Longman, 1987) and *Negotiating across Cultures* (Washington DC: Institute of Peace, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> This is not a theoretical work, so theory is touched on here only briefly. For a fuller discussion of the place of diplomacy in theoretical approaches, see Mai'a K. Davis Cross, *The European Diplomatic Corps* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 13–22.

<sup>15</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1967), 548.

<sup>16</sup> The argument is developed in Robert Wolfe, 'Still Lying Abroad? On the institution of the resident ambassador', *Diplomatic Studies Programme Discussion Papers*, no. 33 (University of Leicester: Centre for the Study of Diplomacy, 1998), 6–16, quote from 10.

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international society, a significant factor in the way states interact but also a way in which they are 'socialised'. Embassies are set up in other countries because this reflects the fact that a state is part of international society and is recognised by others as such; their very existence helps to reproduce the international system or society.<sup>17</sup>

Turning to historians, the literature dedicated to diplomatic method is again quite limited in volume. In addition to a few general histories of diplomatic practice that go back to the ancient world,<sup>18</sup> there are some studies of particular eras,<sup>19</sup> various works on international organisations or multilateral negotiations,<sup>20</sup> and a small number of thematic books that combine political, scientific and historical methods to look at certain elements of diplomatic practice.<sup>21</sup> More numerous are biographies of diplomats<sup>22</sup> and accounts of international negotiations and summit

See also Iver Neumann, 'The English School on Diplomacy', *Discussion Papers in Diplomacy*, no. 79 (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> For key writings of the English School on diplomacy, see: Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), chapter 7; Karl Schweizer and Paul Sharp, eds., *The International Thought of Herbert Butterfield* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), chapters 19–21; and Martin Wight, *Power Politics* (London: Penguin, 1979) – especially p. 113, where Wight says: 'The diplomatic system is the master-institution of international relations.' The importance of diplomacy to the creation of international society is not confined to the English School, however; see, for example, K. J. Holsti, *International Politics: A framework for analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), chapter 8.

<sup>18</sup> Harold Nicolson, *The Evolution of Diplomatic Method* (London: Constable, 1954); Keith Hamilton and Richard Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy: Its evolution, theory and administration* (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>19</sup> For example: Donald Queller, *The Office of Ambassador in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967); Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955); M. S. Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450–1919* (London: Longman, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> On Britain and multilateral negotiations in the 1960s, for example, see: Donna Lee, *Middle Powers and Commercial Diplomacy: British influence at the Kennedy trade round* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); David W. McIntyre, 'Britain and the Creation of the Commonwealth Secretariat', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2000), 135–58.

<sup>21</sup> These include: G. R. Berridge, *Talking to the Enemy: How states without diplomatic relations communicate* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994); David Dunn, ed., *Diplomacy at the Highest Level: The evolution of international summitry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996); and M. J. Peterson *Recognition of Governments: Legal doctrine and state practice, 1815–1995* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997). A broader analysis of diplomacy, drawing on historical examples and sympathetic to the English School, is Christer Jönsson and Martin Hall, *Essence of Diplomacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Among the best biographies of professional diplomats of the twentieth century are: Martin Gilbert, *Sir Horace Rumbold: Portrait of a diplomat* (London: Heinemann, 1991); Brian McKercher, *Esme Howard: A diplomatic biography* (Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Norman Rose, *Vansittart: Study of a diplomat* (London: Heinemann, 1978). There are also works on particular ambassadorships, such as Gaynor Johnson, *The Paris Embassy of Lord d'Abernon* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002) and Michael Hopkins, *The Ambassadorship of Oliver Franks in Washington* (London: Frank Cass, 2003).



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meetings.<sup>23</sup> However, these works tend to provide a detailed, historical account of their subjects and the attention paid to diplomatic practice is actually minimal; they also tend to highlight a few high-profile personalities or conferences, rather than giving an appreciation of the richness of the field. This paucity of work is not surprising, since most international historians concentrate their attention on the foreign policy of particular governments or on particular wars and crises, alliance relationships or regional problems.

That is not to say that the study of international history is in any way narrow. It has expanded over recent generations, away from old-style 'diplomatic history', which tended to limit itself to dry exchanges between diplomats, or 'what one clerk said to another clerk', as one critic put it.<sup>24</sup> It now embraces such broad background factors to decision-making as economics, changing technology, belief systems and mind-sets, the psychology of key figures, bureaucratic structures and cultural influences. Many of these factors have their source in the *domestic* experience of states rather than in the international arena, although international historians have also explored the links between foreign policy and such areas as defence, propaganda and intelligence. Indeed 'the history of international relations', as the subject area is increasingly known, has tended to become an amalgam of historical approaches and themes. Yet, in both traditional diplomatic history and its more 'international' form, an interest in diplomatic *practice* has been rare.<sup>25</sup> There are a number of books about diplomatic practice in the medieval period,<sup>26</sup> but in the modern era it is almost as if diplomatic practice is

Additionally, there are numerous biographies of non-professional diplomats, such as foreign ministers and prime ministers.

<sup>23</sup> For example: Telford Taylor, *Munich: The price of peace* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1979); Keith Eubank, *The Summit Conferences 1919-60* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966); Margaret Macmillan, *The Peacemakers: The Paris conference of 1919* (London: John Murray, 2001); Alan Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement: Peace-making in Paris, 1919* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991).

<sup>24</sup> G. M. Young, *Victorian England: Portrait of an age* (Oxford University Press, 1936), 103. But for a defence of diplomacy, see Schweizer and Sharp, eds., *Butterfield*, chapter 2; and Jeremy Black and Karl Schweizer, 'The Value of Diplomatic History: A case study in the historical thought of Herbert Butterfield', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, vol. 17, no. 3 (2006), 617-31.

<sup>25</sup> A good overview of the field is Patrick Finney, ed., *Palgrave Advances in International History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), although this only touches on diplomatic method in the essay by Thomas Otte, 'Diplomacy and Decision-making', 46-7. Also helpful is David Reynolds, 'International History, the Cultural Turn and the Diplomatic Twitch', *Cultural and Social History*, vol. 3 (2006), 75-91.

<sup>26</sup> English medieval practice is especially well served. For example: Pierre Chaplais, *English Diplomatic Practice in the Middle Ages* (London: Hambledon & London, 2003); G. P. Cuttino, *English Diplomatic Administration, 1259-1339* (Oxford University Press, 1971); Joseph Huffman, *The Social Politics of Medieval Diplomacy: Anglo-German*

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‘the missing dimension’ of what – ironically – used to be called diplomatic history.<sup>27</sup>

However, changes in diplomatic practice have clearly affected the way international relations are conducted, as a brief mention of some key twentieth-century developments will show. In 1900 there were already several international organisations, but they tended to focus on technical issues such as postal services, the telegraph or air navigation. There were multilateral conferences, like those in The Hague concerned with disarmament, but leading ministers seldom attended them. The last great, multilateral, ministerial conference of the European powers had been back in 1878 in Berlin. Even bilateral conferences, where a minister from one country visited another for official discussions, were rare. ‘The almost invariable practice’, wrote Maurice Hankey, long-serving secretary to the British Cabinet, ‘was to deal through intermediaries – skilled, tactful and experienced intermediaries, but not those persons on whom the ultimate responsibility rested.’<sup>28</sup> The main ‘intermediaries’ were the permanent ambassadors posted by the great powers to each other’s capitals. The drawbacks of this system were exposed in the July 1914 crisis, when diplomats were overwhelmed by the pace of events, and during the First World War it proved necessary to hold regular meetings with allied countries at various levels in order to concert policy. The British and French premiers first met in July 1915, and Lloyd George, who became prime minister in December 1916, was a keen advocate of ‘conference diplomacy’. The end of the war, of course, saw the creation of a permanent, global organisation, the League of Nations, whose assemblies were frequently attended by foreign ministers. The League was central to ideas that the balance of power politics of pre-1914 could be replaced by a ‘new diplomacy’ based on collective security.

More frequent summits and more numerous international organisations: these developments in diplomatic practice soon became central to the way international discourse was conducted. It would be difficult to imagine a discussion of Chamberlain’s appeasement policy without the series of summits he attended with Hitler in 1938, culminating at Munich, or a discussion of British imperial decline without reference to the Commonwealth. After the war, Britain was one of five members of

*relations, 1066–1307* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); and Karsten Ploger, *England and the Avignon Popes: The practice of diplomacy in late medieval Europe* (Oxford: Legenda, 2005), the last an exemplary case study.

<sup>27</sup> The term used to be reserved for the history of intelligence: Christopher Andrew and David Dilks, eds., *The Missing Dimension: Governments and intelligence communities in the twentieth century* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984).

<sup>28</sup> Lord Hankey, *Diplomacy by Conference* (London: Ernest Benn, 1946), 12.



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the United Nations Security Council, a member of NATO and, eventually, a member of the European Community, all of which had a profound effect on its foreign policy. The growth of summitry and multilateral negotiations in turn affected the role of ambassadors, who also found their position threatened by the increasing use of non-professional 'special envoys', and the creation of embassies in 'disguised' form.

### Structure

The current book focuses on such changes as those discussed above in diplomatic practice. It takes a different approach from most existing studies of this subject, one that is narrow in a chronological sense and in its focus on just one country, but broad in the aspects of diplomatic practice that it embraces. Rather than looking at one-off, prominent examples of diplomats, summits or state visits, it adopts a 'bottom-up' approach that tries to give a fuller appreciation of their number, frequency and types. The period surveyed is not long, but neither is it too short to get an idea of changes in diplomatic practice. The book does not claim to be an exhaustive study of British diplomatic practice in the period; it has little to say, for example, on the work of junior diplomats, issues of protocol, the role of the Diplomatic Corps in London or how public diplomacy was conducted. Many areas which it does cover might easily have been expanded into books in their own right. But it does provide an analysis of the most important developments, including the reform of the Diplomatic Service, the use of a growing number of non-professional 'special envoys', the significance of summitry and the impact of multilateral negotiations. It also considers two little-discussed subjects, diplomatic relations and state visits, to show why they deserve attention and how they evolved during the period.

Following the first, introductory, chapter, chapter 2 provides essential background material, including an overview of the international issues facing Britain, an outline of the bureaucratic machine in the overseas arena, an introduction to the key characters involved and a general look at the work of career diplomats. Chapter 3 looks at the debate during the period 1963–76 about the purpose of Britain's overseas services and considers the merger of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Colonial Offices into a single Foreign and Commonwealth Office. After this the focus becomes more specific: chapter 4 investigates the role of resident ambassadors in light of challenges to their traditional functions thanks to improvements in global communication, news reporting and the work of international organisations. It looks at various ambassadors in a range of

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posts in the period 1963–76 to gain an understanding of how their role changed, what functions they continued to fulfil and how valuable they continued to be. The next three chapters consider various challenges to the position of the resident ambassador. Chapter 5 investigates the role of ‘special’ envoys, using a broad definition, and includes a discussion of the foreign secretary’s contribution to diplomacy. Chapter 6 begins a discussion of summits, conferences held at the level of heads of government, emphasising just how popular, even mundane, bilateral meetings between leaders had become. Chapter 7, while making general points about multilateral negotiations, focuses on meetings at leaders’ level and draws out an important shift in British experience from an emphasis on Commonwealth summits to those involving the European Community. However, the next chapter serves as a reminder that the head of state continued to have a diplomatic role: in fact, important reforms to state visits were introduced under Wilson and Heath, who recognised the need to ‘compete’ with other countries by using the monarchy to impress high-profile visitors to Britain. Finally, chapter 9 deals with one of the most interesting developments in diplomatic practice in the 1960s, the tendency of states to break off relations for purely symbolic reasons. Britain was central to this phenomenon, because several African states broke off relations with London over the issue of Rhodesia in 1965; but the British government was also among the first to maintain contacts via a kind of ‘disguised embassy’ known as the ‘interests section’, a development that showed the continuing flexibility of diplomatic practice and its innovation in the face of any challenge. The conclusion to the book emphasises this flexibility as well as the continuing significance of diplomatic practice to the study of international history.