
Although there have long been formal, protective arrangements to safeguard diplomats and embassies abroad – notably norms and guarantees codified in multilateral treaties (such as the 1969 UN Convention on Special Missions) changing world conditions – the spread of terrorism especially has rendered these measures increasingly inadequate. Deplorable events – for instance, the 1983 and 1984 bombings of the U.S. embassy in Beirut – offer forceful illustrations of the growing vulnerability facing diplomatic personnel in high-risk conflict zones that are incapable or unwilling to offer effective security provisions. This entails serious implications for the effective functioning of international politics, at all levels, and ultimately may “contribute to the reshaping of diplomacy both as a practice and as an institution” (2).

The present volume offers the first, systematic analysis of this theme via a series of soundly researched, theoretically grounded essays centered on three related research questions: 1) How do states worldwide understand and implement diplomatic security? 2) What were the motivations and precipitants underlying the evolution of diplomatic security policies over time? Addressed here are such variables as threat perception, emulation, diplomatic and security cultures involved in shaping diplomatic, protective arrangements, and broader foreign policy designs (4). And 3) to what extent have protective/security procedures (on the scale examined) proven to be effective in thwarting attacks, mitigating their impact, and capable of swift responses to ever changing threat scenarios, without impairing regular diplomatic operations and objectives?

The editors open with an intellectually scene-setting introduction, outlining the book’s empirical research matrix and methodology, placing the chapters in their historiographical context, explaining how they complement and reinforce each other, and briefly highlighting the keys they address. Chapter 1, by Patrick Cullen, examines and provides new perspectives on the evolution of United States’ security structure from its inception, the creation of the State Department’s first security office in 1917, to the present day. Due emphasis is given to the U.S.’ expanding security needs, accompanying the massive expansion of national power worldwide and the ever-shifting nature and impact of external challenges faced over the years. The varied modalities, policy adaptations and security facilities deployed to meet American security requirements on a global scale are also examined in detail. Protective measures, we learn, reflect the character of American diplomacy itself, changing as the
range of actors and operations involved in the diplomatic sphere have grown. Embassies have become logistical hubs “of co-ordinated multi-agency efforts to further US foreign policy across a very wide spectrum of activities (economic, law enforcement, environmental, commercial, financial, agricultural, developmental, legal) that extend well beyond the traditional state-to-state diplomatic engagement conducted by the professional diplomatic corps of Foreign Service Officers” (12). Risk management procedures, more than in earlier generations, also reveal the symbiotic interface between diplomatic security and the changing international environment: as such, certain measures are not intrinsic or abiding features of the profession but pragmatic responses to concrete threats arising, and varying, over time – a reality common to all the nations examined in this volume.

Hence the comparable security policies devised by China, as explored by Jingdon Yuan in Chapter 2, a meticulously researched and documented contribution which shows that owing to its relatively recent great power status, China has suffered relatively few attacks on its foreign missions. As a result, China has been rather slow to mobilize intensive protective arrangements for its personnel abroad. The nation’s expanding global presence and concomitant security risks, has seen China become more proactive in providing improved protection, especially in sensitive, high-risk areas such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria – thus emulating the Western example. Efforts along these lines, as is well demonstrated, include major legal, institutional, legislative and material initiatives as well as closer co-operation with host governments, involving intelligence sharing and para-military training of security personnel.

Diplomatic security in the United Kingdom is the theme of Chapter 3, written by Christopher Kinsey, defense policy expert and consultant to NATO. Drawing on a unique array of primary and secondary materials, he presents a nuanced analysis of Britain’s security program within the context of its prominent international role from WWI to the Cold War era. This is followed by a critical appraisal of more recent security measures in response to the magnification of threats to diplomatic security in both intensity and scale during the post-Cold War years. Examples cited range from the 2003 bombing of the UK consulate in Istanbul, expanding political violence in both Iraq and Afghanistan, problems in Latin America, and present-day revolutionary terrorism, currently “the vehicle for state-sponsored terrorism, with Iran, Libya, and Syria using this high value, low risk strategy to target Western interests” (61). The data cited clearly shows that UK diplomatic security, already before but especially after the Cold War, comprised risk assessments extending to all British operations around the world, not merely embassy related issues. Particularly notable is the increased propensity to outsource armed security, bringing the UK model
more into line with the U.S. Department of State practice. The focus shifts to French diplomatic security in Chapter 4, a judicious blend of narrative and analysis that in novel fashion unravels the uneasy links between expanding French security concerns globally and an organizational culture that still tends to reflect the traditional, essentially passive, deprecation of safety matters as incompatible with the aggrandized self-image (the so-called politics of “grandeur”) projected by the Quai d’Orsay and its affiliates. Although the chapter remains somewhat ambiguous about the truly distinctive elements of French statecraft, it provides suggestive insights into the elusive complexities behind the institutional growth patterns of key security structures, their reactive interface with wider global realities, and the enduring presence of cultural/historical sub-currents.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7, examining the evolution of German, Russian, and Italian security policies, effectively confirm how these reflect each nation’s organizational culture, diplomatic traditions, economic priorities, and legal conventions all variously impacted by the exigencies of globalization. Worldwide terrorist activity, in particular, has disclosed the inadequacy of conventional security routines and protocols based on the proto-typical nation-state as territorial container of modern social life. These dynamics have forced most governments to progressively re-assess their security operations, and update them as necessary, but also to explore new forms of international collaboration, largely overlooked in the scholarly literature.

Another mainstream development, noted in the above chapters, has been the growing reliance on military police and special crisis units, whether state affiliated or privatized, to protect diplomats and vulnerable premises abroad. In Russia especially, an authoritarian if not at times, paranoid political climate has fostered a security culture that is reactive in nature, shrouded in secrecy and strongly influenced by military norms and perspectives. The inherent flaws of this system have frequently weakened the effectiveness of attempted policy measures as has the haphazard reliance on Upravlenie K – a special division of the SVR (Foreign Intelligence Service) responsible for coordinating intelligence reports with security provisions in response to changing levels of threat. Overall, Chapter 6 concludes, Russia’s strategy has been slow to evolve: “Some of the measures taken, such as the training of spetsnaz (special operation units) and the drafting of the interstate agreements required for their lawful deployment abroad take time, resources and host countries’ consent” (124) while others are ad hoc responses to major incidents, in turn influenced by local realities and the dictates of Russian foreign policy overall. As for Italy, security measures have varied according to circumstances, most currently conflicting, political pressures: on the one hand (akin to other sample nations)
an enhanced range of conflict zones needing protection countered by intense domestic debates over the growing costs involved at a time of chronic recessions. Still, as chapter 7 concludes "... for a country with the fourth largest diplomatic network in the world, which since the end of the Cold War has sought to conduct a pro-active foreign policy and has not refrained from deploying diplomatic personnel in fragile and conflict-ridden areas, the need to allocate resources to its diplomatic security appears more pressing than ever" (140).

Chapter 8, by Barak Ben Zur, is especially authoritative, given the author's "insider" status as former director of the research division in Israel's Security Agency (ISA) responsible for both conducting counter-terrorist operations inside Israel and defending official sites, senior personnel, and delegations abroad. Diplomatic missions, he emphasizes, represent only a small portion of civilian targets vulnerable as extensions of the wider conflict between Israel and its global foes (including Palestine and Iranian terrorist cells), thus prompting the Israeli state to centralize and coordinate its response strategy under the aegis of the ISA (Israeli Security Agency) as the leading defense organization with its director reporting directly to the Prime Minister. Consequently, "while Israeli diplomatic premises and officials abroad remain very sensitive targets, their overall vulnerability is likely to have decreased over the last few years" (159).

Solidly researched and gracefully written, the closing chapters and conclusion, reemphasize how pressing foreign policy goals, varying across countries and over time, have shaped the dynamics and scope of security initiatives worldwide and provide useful, policy relevant conclusions concerning the optimum pre-conditions for sounder response patterns to continuously shifting challenges and needs. This section also illuminates the broader theoretical and pragmatic implications of security provisions for the study of diplomacy and international politics alike; noting that such provisions, in highly dangerous settings especially, may actually hamper routine diplomatic transactions – affecting both the latitude of agents in the field and a host nation's perception of a mission and its sending state. Paradoxically, "...there is an inverse correlation between effective diplomatic security and effective diplomacy: measures that can successfully protect diplomats from attacks are also likely to encroach upon their ability to conduct their work, inevitably disrupting the very activities they should enable" (240–41). Here, the authors offer policy recommendations for reducing risks to more manageable levels, most notably greater dialogue and collaboration across all the sending states operating within a particular host country – though again, often such cooperation is hindered by mutual distrust and competition (for instance, between the USA, China, and
Russia), thus enhancing diplomacy’s traditional role as a creatively persuasive art.

Required reading for all diplomacy and security experts, this enlightening volume is also highly recommended to serious research students in the field and is even accessible to general readers. A most fascinating and timely study.

Karl W. Schweizer
Federated Department of History, NJIT/Rutgers, Newark, New Jersey, USA
karl.schweizer@njit.edu