

The Ambassador Between Light and Shade: The Emergence of Secrecy as the Norm for International Negotiation

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Abstract

To what extent did secrecy emerge as the uncontested norm for international negotiations after the Renaissance? This article introduces six key negotiation practitioners from 17th century Europe, including some of the earliest writers on negotiation: Hotman, Mazarini, Wicquefort, Rousseau de Chamoy, Callières, and Pecquet. An analysis of their writings demonstrates that if an ambassador had to appear in the bright light of the royal court, he became constantly preoccupied by secrecy. He needed to find ways to protect his own secrets from third parties and uncover the secrets of others. These concerns from earlier times helped to establish secrecy as the paradigm for modern negotiation.

Keywords

Secrecy, ambassador, negotiation, Hotman, Mazarini, Wicquefort, Rousseau de Chamoy, Callières, Pecquet

Secrecy is the weapon of negotiation.
François de CALLIÈRES (1716: 185)¹

Wisdom of the past is every bit as valid today as it was in the times of de Callières.
SIR ERNEST SATOW (1917: 450)

Satow's observation underlines just how much contemporary diplomatic methods, from the turn of the 20th century to the First World War, resembles those that had been described by de Callières during the reign of Louis XIV two centuries

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¹) For the sake of simplicity, all French quotes have been translated into English; page numbers are those of the French edition mentioned in the references.

earlier. While keeping in mind the dynamics that naturally shape international negotiation, Satow recognized the static nature of the ambassador's job (Berridge et al. 2001: 125–150). He has been joined in this opinion by some diplomatic historians: “The diplomats of 1919, many of the methods they used and the ways in which they were instructed and controlled, even many of the policies they attempted to carry out, would have been clearly recognizable to their predecessors in the age of Metternich or even Louis XIV” (Anderson 1993: 148). The practice of international negotiation is certainly anchored in history and it is worth our effort to understand its origins.

During the period of time we are analyzing in this article (until the very end of the 18th century when Edmund Burke invented the word *diplomacy*), *negotiation* was used to describe the activities of ambassadors (Berridge et al. 2001: 5). This was valid both in English and French; in French, *diplomatie* appeared only in 1790 (Rey 1998). Until then, *negotiation* indeed had been equated with *diplomacy*; that is, according to Satow, “the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states, extending sometimes also to their relations with vassal states or, more briefly still, the conduct of business between states by peaceful means” (Satow 1917: 3). As a result, and given the historical approach of this article, we purposefully use *negotiation* in this extensive meaning, embracing negotiation *per se*, but also information gathering, official representation, and communication within the European system of states.

Satow himself could have waded even further into the past than de Callières, who was a good example of a long line of negotiators that practiced the lessons they had learned from a new mode of international negotiation invented during the Italian Renaissance and that eventually took hold throughout Europe: the ambassador in permanent residence. Following the example previously set by Bernard de Rosier in *Ambaxiatorum brevilogus* (1436), and the example found in *De legato* by Ottavio Maggi (1596), numerous texts written by ambassadors have helped analyze the uses of diplomacy. These texts describe a dual mission. On one hand, an ambassador should act as a representative for his Prince; this function compels him to appear in the bright light of the royal court and to brilliantly showcase the status and dignity of his Prince. Yet, at the same time, the ambassador has to negotiate the business affairs entrusted to him by the Prince; this function requires absolute discretion and relies on maintaining secrecy. One ambassador, Rousseau de Chamoy, confirmed the coexistence of these two functions: the ambassador was “selected by a Prince to approach another sovereign state in his name, in order to *negotiate the matters entrusted to him*, and to *be his representative*” (1697: 6). Wicquefort underlined a certain ambivalence: an ambassador was “*a messenger of peace* on one hand and like *an honorable spy* on the other” (1681: 6).

Although these two functions are united in the person of an ambassador, each reflects a distinct character: one suggests working outwardly and in the light of day, while the other suggests working in the shadows and in secrecy. Tension is created between the obligation to appear in public and the necessity to use utmost discretion. At a time when the role of ambassador was becoming widespread, the functionary found himself torn between two worlds: the light of royal court, where visiting dignitaries gauged one another's value, and the darkened chambers where business was negotiated. Each of these environments reflected the need for distinct qualities and behaviors that were all equally useful to an ambassador. He had to know how to serve both functions at different stages (for a modern view on this, see Friedman 1994).

The analysis that arises from the articulation between shadow and light in the role of an ambassador rests on a deeper examination of the works of six key witnesses of the *Grand siècle* that ended with the Treaty of Utrecht. The function of *representative*, which placed an ambassador squarely in the light, will be examined before that of the *negotiator's role*, in which the ambassador sensed the usefulness of secrecy. The fragility of secrecy, preserving secrecy, as well as the means of penetrating the secrecy of others will be examined based on the reflections of ambassadors of the time. Although examples will be given, we do not analyze any specific negotiations and we do not explore contemporary advantages or disadvantages of secrecy in negotiation (on this, see Gilboa 2000 and Colson 2007). Rather, this article merely seeks to describe the significance of secrecy in diplomatic negotiations in the wake of the Renaissance until Utrecht.

Six Witnesses for the *Grand Siècle*

The 17th century – or more precisely the *Grand siècle* that would end with Utrecht – saw a profusion of works published about international negotiation (or, rather, European negotiation): both traditional accounts of foreign missions and writings fuelled by the emergence of the ambassadorial figure (Behrens 1936). Grabar lists no less than 176 works of this type, published between 1625 and 1700, 100 of which were in Latin (Grabar 1918). If this volume attests to the interest in the field, it is not, however, any gauge of quality. For Mattingly, most of these works can be reduced to trivial platitudes (1965: 8). The majority fail to seize on the specificity of the new kind of diplomacy emerging at the time, with its deep sense of the balance of power in Europe and the responsibilities that balance placed on the shoulders of the ambassador.

Nevertheless, some of these works constitute exceptional material to aid in the understanding of the concrete modalities of negotiation at that time. In this vein, in order to more concretely analyze the emergence of secrecy, we have decided to

focus – without ignoring the validity of other writers – on the works of six negotiators: Hotman, Mazarini, Wicquefort, Rousseau de Chamoy, de Callières, and Pecquet.

From a methodological viewpoint, this selection satisfies a chronological necessity. It seemed important to select authors who covered the *Grand siècle* era: from the beginning of the 17th century – a time when permanent embassies were being established – until the days following the death of Louis XIV, when Europe, exhausted by war and turning toward the Enlightenment, began to dream of a *paix perpétuelle* (Saint-Pierre 1713). This period incorporates the defining diplomatic moment of the era: the Peace of Westphalia.

This selection also helps to unite the most significant writings of the period, especially considering their substantive contributions, a task facilitated by the critical acclaim bestowed on them by great practitioners – Satow (1917) and Nicholson (1939) in Britain, and Plantey (1994) in France – and also by researchers attentive to the historical approach of their work – notably Berridge, Keens-Soper, and Lempereur. As important as they were, these works have not been extensively reprinted for one, two, or even four centuries. Thus, producing an original analysis of these unjustly forgotten texts constitutes yet another reason to choose them. Three of the authors are French, one Swiss (from Lausanne), one Italian who settled in France, and one Dutch. This distribution can be justified by the fact that during the *Grand siècle*, the absolute monarchy of Louis XIV dominated political affairs in Europe. French culture was shining forth and French was the language of diplomacy (Anderson 1993: 100–101). Wicquefort, a Dutchman, wrote his monumental work directly in French. According to Keens-Soper, “by that time French diplomatic method had become the model for all Europe, and to the extent that between them Wicquefort and de Callières formulated its outlook, their treatises represent the diplomatic theory of the *ancien régime*.” The emergence of a distinctly French perspective of diplomacy served as the model for the rest of Europe (Berridge et al. 2001: 93).

In chronological order, first in line is Jean Hotman de Villiers (1552–1632). A precursor in the analysis of the resident ambassador, he nevertheless did not measure the political significance of the latter. Professor at Oxford for a time, he became advisor to the Count of Leicester and subsequently advisor to the King of Navarre. He would eventually lead diplomatic missions for Henri IV. In 1603, he published *De la Charge et dignité de l'ambassadeur*. The work relies heavily on examples taken from antiquity, but it is the first among writings of the period to treat the subject of the ambassador in its own right and to have been published directly in French instead of Latin.

Mazarini (1602–1661), architect of the Treaty of Muenster that led to the Peace of Westphalia and in turn to the Treaty of the Pyrénées in 1659, left a posthumous *Bréviaire des politiciens* (1684) that could only be attributed to him. The work opens and closes with “two great principles [...] : feign and conceal.” Probably inspired by concrete practices – either those of Mazarini himself or those of

any number of court figures of his age – it describes a mode of action blended with a certain manner or behavior, both governed by the omnipresent concern for secrecy: how to guard it and how to penetrate it.

The life of Abraham de Wicquefort (1606–1682) spanned the 17th century, during which he had the opportunity to observe the heart of diplomacy in action (Keens-Soper 1996) – Westphalia. *L'Ambassadeur et ses fonctions* was published in 1680–81, the “most densely recounted profile of the ambassador ever composed” according to Keens-Soper (Berridge et al. 2001: 89). Wicquefort would be the first to attempt to describe the functions and qualities of an ambassador, not from an ideal perspective but from real world examples. He employed analysis – precise, prodigious, and erudite – of the multiple diplomatic treatises, dispatches, instructions and letters he had seen, rather than antiquated examples, to support his arguments.

Less is known about Louis Rousseau de Chamoy, apart from the fact that he was a French ambassador appointed by Louis XIV and that he led missions to Germany. In 1697, he published *L'Idée du parfait ambassadeur*.

François de Callières (1645–1717) was employed by Louis XIV to carry out diplomatic missions (Schweizer 1995), notably the Congress at Ryswick that put an end to the Nine Years' War. Beneath the skin of the practitioner beat the heart of a theoretician, as seen in *De la Manière de négocier avec les souverains*, published in 1716. His innovation was the distance he took from his ambassadorial function to question the political meaning of diplomatic activity within the European system (Keens-Soper 1973, Lempereur 2002). The work met with instant success and enjoyed a positive reputation throughout Europe for the rest of the 18th century. Three great diplomats have sung its praises: Satow, who in 1917 would qualify it as a “mine of political wisdom” (1917: x); A. F. White, who deemed it so important that he translated an abridged version; and Harold Nicholson, who considered it “the best manual of diplomatic method ever written” (1954: 62).

Along the lines of de Callières, Antoine Pecquet (1704–1762) published *Discours sur l'Art de négocier* in 1737, with the intention of sharing a similar conviction: negotiation is essential to the grandeur of any nation (Colson 2008). Pecquet began his administrative career as a delegate in the Foreign Affairs Ministry, where he was *Secrétaire du Conseil* for a time. Pecquet's concern was to build a general theory that could be applied to diplomatic negotiation in particular, especially that of foreign resident ambassadors.

By drawing from these works, the following sections seek to clarify the place and role of secrecy in the office of ambassador.

The Ambassador-Representative, or the Necessity of Appearing in the Light

Let us concern ourselves first with the function of representation and the need for it to take place in the light of day. The ambassador was the representative of his

sovereign, a tangible expression of the sovereign's glory and power. He must be illustrious by definition. The status conferred on an ambassador is essential to this function of representative, hence the importance accorded to protocol, precedence, recognition, rank, rituals, placement during public ceremonies, and the order of signatures on official documents.

Wicquefort emphasized: "An ambassador does not always negotiate" (1681: 3), underlining that the rest of the time he is a representative. This is why, highlighted Wicquefort, "He has to be an actor of sorts [...]. During ceremony, he cannot break ranks without causing offense: even at dinner, where he portrays an example of the grandeur and magnificence of his Prince, he acts as a representative to some degree." Three decades later, de Callières would confirm that an "ambassador resembles an actor to some extent, playing lead roles under the scrutiny of the public" (1716: 79).

The function of representative was a determining factor in the choice of ambassador. Appearing in the light presupposes certain qualities quite distinct from those required for the use of secrecy. Like others before him, Rousseau de Chamoy established a list of the qualities necessary for an ambassador, among them three well-ranked assets that directly served the representative function. First came riches – "the magnificence of his table and his entourage." Then, birth – "it is useful for an Ambassador to be of noble birth and name" (Rousseau de Chamoy 1697: 23). Finally, physical attributes: "Beauty is imposing, [...] It is not at all difficult for one to grant moral fortitude to a man who is well-presented and who conducts himself nobly." These qualities are clearly useful for a representative, who by nature is turned toward appearance and light. They may have justified the choice of an ambassador and would have served him well in the execution of this primary function.

But this presence in public, for the benefit and dignity of his master, could be disadvantageous to the secondary function of the ambassador, as negotiator. Hotman deplored: "with such eminent status his actions cannot be hidden" (1603: 68). A century later, prestige had the same inconvenience for Pecquet of exposure to third parties: "The inconvenience of prominent positions is that men are seen sooner or later exactly as they are and can conceal virtually none of their weaknesses from the public. They are too closely scrutinized" (Pecquet 1737: 28). Wicquefort's similar conviction came from personal experience (Wicquefort 1681: 31): he believed that second-rank ministers could more easily hold discreet negotiations and intrigues, because they were not in the spotlight (Berridge et al. 2001: 103). De Callières concurred:

The status of an ambassador carries with it much embarrassment because of the pomp surrounding ambassadors, the ceremonies to be attended, the rank to be observed, [...] the public audiences, and all the formalities that constantly expose them to the public eye, forcing them to be too closely studied (de Callières 1716: 200).

To escape this scrutiny that bound him, the ambassador had to concern himself constantly with secrecy, learning as much about preserving his own as penetrating that of others. A rule for the diplomatic art was written.

The Ambassador-Negotiator, or the Preoccupation with Shadow and Secrecy

The reasons why secrecy was a negotiators' key concern are twofold. First, negotiation relates to the political status of the Prince. After the Renaissance, with monarchs asserting their absolute power across Europe, relations between sovereign states were concentrated in the hands of a select few: Princes, protected by the emerging *raison d'Etat*, and for whom foreign policy constituted a *res privata* (Meinecke 1925, Zarka 1994). In this monarchical order, secrecy was a wholly legitimate practice that protected the Prince's private affairs from the eyes of third parties – including his very own people. Secrecy, organized to the advantage of the Prince and legitimated by his status, constituted the routine paradigm of political activity and therefore of *negotiation* as a political instrument in the conduct of international affairs.

To illustrate this point, the following passage allows us to qualify the status of diplomatic information, thereby legitimizing the use of secrecy: “The knowledge acquired by a minister during his mission does not belong to him: *it is the property of his master* [...] and the minister *must always conceal it from the public as a sanctuary where all is sacred*” (Pecquet 1737: 89). The secret information with which the ambassador was entrusted had singular value in that his Prince was the sole recipient: “This secret entrusted to us is not ours; it is a deposition that must be continually regarded as sacred. It is something we can use *solely with permission from the master*” (Pecquet 1737: 35). The practice of secrecy is further validated inasmuch as all information pertaining to the negotiation is akin to private and thus, the personal, property of the Prince: the persona of the sovereign merged with that of the State. The notion of *publicité* or public scrutiny – and *a fortiori* of transparency – was absent from the negotiating arena. Shadow became the natural realm of negotiation.

Second, other reasons relate to a set of concerns for operational efficiency. “Secrecy is the weapon of negotiation;” this conviction of de Callières was shared by all the negotiators we have studied. Their vocabulary attests to it: in these works, *secret* (as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb) is among the most recurring term used. In the second section of Wicquefort's work, the substantive *secrètement* appears 46 times, compared with *négociation* (138 times) or *réputation* (32 times). In *De la Manière de négocier*, de Callières uses the word *secret* in its noun form 28 times, and 12 times in adjective or adverb form, while the key term of the work, *passion*, appears 32 times. Finally, in Pecquet's work, where *négociation* appears 41 times and *négocier* 12 times, *secret* is mentioned no less than 28 times. Compare

this to the term *réputation*, an aspect accorded the highest regard by Pecquet, which appears only 14 times – half as frequently.

From Hotman to Pecquet, no witness contested secrecy or doubted that it constituted the closest ally of an ambassador-negotiator vis-à-vis third parties. Pecquet dedicated an entire section to secrecy, entitled “On the extent to which secrecy is necessary in the successful conduct of affairs.” Like any political activity, a negotiation could be put into peril if third parties caught wind of it: “Whosoever lacks in secrecy will destroy his work as he builds it” (Pecquet 1737: 35). Before him, de Callières had similarly argued this point: secrecy is indispensable because “it is easy to foil the greatest of enterprises if they are discovered at their inception” (1716: 69). Hotman had already revealed that he who distances himself from the secrecy rule does so to his own detriment: “He who knows how to speak wisely also knows when not to speak” (1603: 72). A breach of secrecy is not only damaging to the negotiation, but also to the ambassador who did not know how to prevent it: “One can take advantage of a secret revealed, and congratulate oneself; but one despises the man who too lightly reveals it, and one hates the man who reveals it through infidelity or for personal gain” (Pecquet 1737: 37).

Hence, the negotiator gained by concealing his actions from third parties. Mazarini warned, “Even if perfectly justifiable, reveal nothing of your political projects” (1684: 55), an idea even more valid if these projects are not justified. For Pecquet, “there are affairs that one cannot and should never reveal to the public” (1737: 31). From de Callières’s viewpoint, this same imperative justified “so-called secret treaties, as execution and publication are suspended for a time. There are also public treaties with secret articles attached” (1716: 175).

Intense and mutual, the concern for secrecy was moreover an abiding one, naturally sustained for the duration of an ambassador’s mission and even much longer after his return. Regarding the procedure of diplomatic missions, Wicquefort cited multiple examples where an ambassador or his delegation demanded to hold talks with the Prince *en particulier*, or *en secret* (1681: 33 sq.): the secret meetings of President Jeannin, the secret mission to Italy by the Cardinal of Ossat to discuss the absolution of Henri IV, the secret order given to Father Joseph, advisor and confidant to Richelieu, to conclude the treaty of Ratisbonne, or “the secret treaty” of 1606 between Spain and the Archdukes of Hapsburg arranging the succession of the Empire. De Callières also shared this perspective: “most great affairs were concluded by ministers sent in secret” (1716: 200–201). He evoked the role of secrecy played in the three most important negotiations of his time: the treaties of Meunster, the Pyrénées (Mazarini 1745), and Ryswick – “the peace of Ryswick was treated and resolved through secret negotiations before being concluded in Holland in 1697.”

Secrecy was imperative not only for a message but also for the trustee himself: for Pecquet, “Princes sometimes have sufficient reasons of the state to hide not only their secrets but also those who carry them” (1737: 35). In this vein, the

Prince could have been led to make an exception to the rule that states he must only be represented by *des gens de condition*: “Another matter entirely is the secret commission of a strictly business nature. In this case, only experience and talent are needed; an unknown man draws little curious attention and can hide his steps much more efficiently” (Pecquet 1737: 82–83). This obligation of secrecy did not end with the mission: “It is lacking in secrecy to let it be known afterward that one was the trustee.” In fact, the concern for secrecy endured with the return of the ambassador, when the latter was required to render an account to his Prince.

Accordingly, secrecy had to be protected by all means.

Keeping Secrets from Third Parties

The paradigm of secrecy within which negotiation evolved created multiple consequences. It carried with it certain obligations for the negotiator himself, leading him away from the spotlight that his primary function of representative obliged him to occupy. Secrecy also weighed heavily on the entourage of the ambassador, without whom the ambassador could not fulfill his duty. This service was placed squarely within a principal-agent relationship that demanded a regular flow of information in both directions: a question therefore arose as to the written form itself as vector for this information, and how to maintain confidentiality.

The Personal Responsibility of the Ambassador

The absolute preservation of secrecy was a responsibility that rested squarely on the shoulders of the ambassador-negotiator. In *Bréviaire des politiciens*, Mazarini described the principal methods of secrecy preservation from third parties: reveal nothing, conceal everything, and disguise the rest. These recommendations were quite valid for the negotiator: “Do not reveal in any way the secrets with which you are entrusted [by your master], you will lose his esteem;” or “Keep what you know to yourself and feign ignorance;” or even: “Ensure that no one ever knows your real opinion of any matter, nor to what extent you are informed, nor what your wishes, occupations, and preoccupations are” (1684: 36, 65, 124).

Pecquet was more measured. From his perspective, preserving secrecy required tact: “There is a balance between observing secrecy scrupulously and an overdrawn reserve, which leads to useless and out of place intrigue.” An exaggerated secretiveness had only negative effects. One therefore needed to “find the right balance” – *le juste milieu*. This is difficult for the novice, but all in all, it is preferable for him to abide strictly by the rule of secrecy (1737: 36).

Maintaining secrecy demanded from the negotiator an entirely new set of *personal qualities* – as a focal point of interest in every single writing of the time, this topic deserves some analysis here. Secrecy had to simply become second nature for the ambassador: “The habit of being secretive is thus a necessary quality for a

minister. I say habit because one does not become capable of secrecy all at once, one only learns to remain silent about greater subjects when one has learned to contain oneself regarding the lesser ones” (Pecquet 1737: 35). From a moral standpoint, continued Pecquet, “The crucial nature of secrecy carries with it the importance of great moral purity. Sobriety and continence are two added virtues necessary to a negotiator.” He paid homage to temperance, thereby confirming the earliest recommendation of Hotman, who recalled the tactic of “Bonosus [Roman emperor in 280], who regularly inebriated foreign ambassadors to learn their secrets [...]. The truth is that wine and secrecy are incompatible” (Hotman 1603: 70). Certain character and personality traits became harmful from a covert point of view. Clearly “men whose lives are dominated by the pleasures of wine or women are almost incapable of keeping a secret: one kind is a slave to his mistress, the other, having drunk, cannot restrain himself from mindless chatter,” warned Mazarini (1684: 22). Even basic human drives deserved a second look. While the negotiator needed to be wary of anger and the “effects of disproportionate vivacity,” other traits were actually considered to be a threat to secrecy: indiscretion, vanity, appearances, levity, and self-interest (Pecquet 1737: 36).

Consequently, the ability to guard secrecy constituted a decisive factor in the choice of an ambassador. For de Callières, “The nature of the matter at hand must be at the forefront of any consideration of which subject to employ. If the matter is secret, a skilled and unglamorous individual is much more likely to make a success of it” (1716: 199–200).

Withdrawing from the Light

This preoccupation with secrecy weighed on the behavior of the ambassador even while he was acting as a representative. Here, Mazarini was extreme: to the question of when to appear in public, he replied “as infrequently as possible” (1684: 39). Thus, cultivation of relationships within the royal court was to be performed within the constraints of the secrecy paradigm. A negotiator was called upon to be wary of public audiences that prevented secrecy from third parties: “At his initial audience, as it is usually a matter of ceremony when all members of the Court are present, he will only speak in the broadest terms of the purpose for his ambassadorship.” Indeed if the matter justified it, a secret meeting could even precede a first public audience: “He often sees the Prince and his Ministers incognito, before his official reception, when either circumstances demand or his entourage is not yet prepared” (Rousseau de Chamoy 1697: 38).

If this reticence regarding public audience was not enough, Rousseau de Chamoy underscored the interest in temporarily disassociating the function of negotiating from the ambassador. His belief, shared by Wicquefort and de Callières as seen above, was that if the ambassadors are “treated and received with more pomp and ceremony,” the same is not true of “second-rank ministers:” plen-

ipotentiaries, envoys, residents, agents, embassy secretaries, and consuls. These second-rank officers, even if they were also “public officials,” were freer in their movements as they were less keenly observed (Rousseau de Chamoy 1697: 7). De Callières recommended still more clearly: “When matters are to be negotiated, a man is required, not an idol,” (a personality whose glory or status draws the attention of third parties) “unless he is accompanied by a skilled colleague who knows the secret of the negotiation and how to conduct it, while the great and ignorant man takes care to appear through generous banquets and magnificent entourage” (1716: 96). Here, the tension between these two functions of an ambassador becomes clear – through the opposing attractions to shadow and light.

If even second-rank ministers could not enjoy the desired level of discretion, one could always resort to the services of a secret agent (Hotman 1603: 47–48). Rousseau de Chamoy underlined: “Princes still employ, for their foreign affairs, individuals of no discernable character, most often unknown, as in the case of monks, merchants, travelers, and even prisoner officers” (1697: 10). A kind of parallel diplomacy arose, able to prepare the terrain and the participants before passing the baton to official diplomacy. Indeed, de Callières felt that “religious men are sometimes suitable carriers of important and secret messages, due to the facility with which they may gain audience with princes or ministers under other pretexts” (1716: 189).

Secrecy and the Entourage

The personal qualities of an ambassador and his ability to withdraw from the light at the right moment were not in themselves sufficient for preserving secrecy, if adequate precaution regarding those close to him was not taken. This included secretaries, man/maidservants, companions and acquaintances. Similarly, confirmed Pecquet: “The greatest ministers have always held the maxim to never have a confidant where avoidable, and to increase their number as little as possible” (1737: 35).

This was true primarily for the choice of a secretary. The secretary was not only a scribe, or a “confidant”: he was primarily a “discreet person, who knows how to keep a secret” (Rey 1998: 3435). For Rousseau de Chamoy, the ambassador

should have only one person in whom he confides his secret affairs; and, if there are any others, they should only hear about lesser affairs, to ease the latter’s mind. This way secrecy itself is more assuredly preserved, and if a secret is revealed [the ambassador] shall know who to hold responsible (1687: 32–33).

Immersion in secrecy also compelled the ambassador to limit the use of interpreters: ambassadors needed to learn foreign languages “in order to not be exposed to the infidelity or ignorance of an interpreter, and to be saved from the embarrassment of having them present during audiences with princes and privy to important secrets” (de Callières 1716: 105).

The imperative of secrecy even arose regarding the ambassador's spouse. Although it would not survive today's requirements for political correctness, for Rousseau de Chamoy, "the weak and fickle nature attributed to most women, their penchant for talking too much, [and] the luxury and expense that follow in their wake may all contribute to the belief that ambassadors would be better off leaving them in their own country." However, he did recognize, "if there are indiscreet women, there are also careful ones, capable of secrecy, and it is up to the ambassador to understand the genius of his own spouse, only revealing as much as he thinks she is capable of concealing" (1697: 34).

Instructions and Dispatches: To the Letter

The position of ambassador is part of a principal-agent relationship which is at the core of most negotiation situations (Pratt and Zeckhauser 1985). The Prince communicated his instructions to his ambassador, who in return provided an account of the thrust of his mission: letters and dispatches were exchanged as long as the commission was active. From the middle of the 16th century, it seemed clear to most European powers that ambassadors needed to write to their constituent every two to three days (Anderson 1993: 20–21). In this necessary back-and-forth of information, the written word became a central issue for secrecy and its preservation (Hamilton and Langhorne 1995: 75–76). Instructions, letters and dispatches, considering their content, clearly had to be kept secret: "These writings must be kept secret and are meant only for he who is entrusted with it," insisted de Callières (1716: 145).

Yet, extreme material constraints were placed on these exchanges of information. Resident ambassadorships and the multiplication of activities made recourse to specially-appointed messengers possible on an occasional basis, but reserved only for the most strategic information (Anderson 1993: 21–22). For everything else, handwritten letters remained the most essential method of communication. These letters traveled via mail service and were accorded great importance by the States: under Louis XIV, Foreign Minister Torcy personally supervised *les Postes*. The system relied on a tacit reciprocal agreement between nations, reinforced by the Postal Convention passed in 1674 (Stern 1997: 41): the latter posits, in principle, the inviolability of correspondence and the free passage of mail, with each state undertaking the right passage of letters as quickly as possible, without disturbing their confidentiality.

Even during times of peace these principles were not respected, at least as far as confidentiality is concerned: each great European power would attempt to read the correspondence of its rivals by creating *cabinets noirs*, e.g. the *Secret Office* as of 1653 in England, or the *Geheime Kabinets-Kanzlei* of the Vienna Hapsburgs (Hamilton and Langhorne 1995: 122 sq.). Postal managers were corrupted and turned into spies. Diplomatic letters were spotted, unsealed, read or deciphered,

recopied and subsequently resealed and sent to the addressee (Stern 1997: 42). Bély gives the example of the city of Celle (Zell), a postal hub for the Northern countries: mail from France was so regularly opened and deciphered there by a *cabinet noir* that London was more rapidly informed about decisions made in Versailles than French ambassadors in Nordic countries (1990: 140).

To keep their written instructions secret, ambassadors and their constituents would increase their countermeasures. These included three distinct tactics. The first consisted of protecting the message through its medium: an anonymous-looking envelope helped enormously to protect the secrecy of a diplomatic letter. In fact, any influx of missives would paralyze the *cabinets noirs*, as systematic letter-opening became impossible. The trick was to mask the true addressee of the letter by sending it to a harmless correspondent. For example, French ambassadors in Holland and England would address their bulletins to “M. Le Brun, banker, rue Bourtibourg, Paris” (Bély 1990: 157). The second tactic employed steganography: hiding the message itself (Stern 1997: 21 sq.) by resorting to the use of secret inks that could be revealed by a chemical reactant known to the recipient alone. The third tactic was cryptography: making the message incomprehensible to third parties so that hiding it was no longer an issue. This was the domain of the code or cipher, a crucial tool for a negotiator. A cipher allows the sender to encode the text, and the recipient to decode it while preventing third parties from understanding. “As secrecy is the weapon of negotiation, the art of writing with unknown characters has been invented,” highlighted de Callières (1716: 185). The ability to encode and decode text was fascinating to the contemporaries. For Wicquefort, “The cipher is [...] a kind of magic” (1681: 104). Cryptographs would pass on their skills from father to son, creating dynasties of ‘secrecy specialists’ that would accompany the royal courts of Europe: the Rosignols served Louis XIII and Louis XIV, the Wallises served the English kings, and the Argenti served the Popes of Italy.

As sophisticated as it may have been, a code did have its drawbacks, primarily its vulnerability to betrayal. Mazarini recommended the personal choice of code language or writing the message personally. In addition, encoding and decoding a message using correspondence tables or mathematical formulas was time-consuming. It was not a rare occurrence for a negotiation to be suspended because decoding of a dispatch had not been finished. Breaking the code of an adversary could take a long time, so much so that the message would have lost its usefulness once it was finally obtained.

Faced with these obstacles, an ultimate ploy consisted in developing deliberately false instructions: “At times, it is possible for two kinds of instructions to be created: one we call *ostensible*, i.e. to be shown, and the other *secret*, containing the real intentions of the Prince” (de Callières 1716: 145). The most secret instructions would remain in oral form only: “There are many occasions in which, because of excessive caution, key orders are only given verbally” (Pecquet 1737: 52). Even

in congress, ambassadors hesitated to use the written word for fear that third parties would find out. In Utrecht in 1713, Louis XIV forbade his minister plenipotentiaries to negotiate using pre-written memoranda: “Anything written before, should it become public, allows for criticism that contributes more to alienation than to conciliation of the parties concerned. Thus avoid, wherever possible, a written response” (Bély 1990: 437). An ambassador was frequently forced to combat the interest of spies in his dealings, and become a spy himself – albeit “honorable” – or have recourse to agents who were spies.

Penetrating the Secrecy of Others

An ambassador had not only to protect his own secrets, but he must also penetrate the secrecy of others using various means. This imperative rendered the ambassador himself an *espion honorable*, according to Wicquefort’s formula: “One of the main functions of an ambassador is that of the *spy*” (1681: 6). De Callières confirmed it: “The two primary goals of a negotiator are to conduct his master’s business, and to discover the business of others” (1716: 170).

If the ambassador could not personally obtain the necessary information, he could give himself the means to do so by calling on the services of a specialist. Spies fulfilled ambassadors’ and envoys’ insatiable desire for information, especially considering that the latter could not permit themselves to use the means and actions of the former. “What happens regularly during negotiations is what happens at times of war: well-chosen spies contribute more than any other factor to the success of any great undertaking” (de Callières 1716: 81). Whether they became spies due to religious fervor, in a Europe divided between Catholics and Protestants, or due to political conviction, or whether they were fuelled by greed and ambition, spies were indispensable ancillaries. Rousseau de Chamoy was quite direct, lamenting that it was not a more frequent practice.

Spies were inescapable figures of the *Grand siècle*. Even if spies attempted to penetrate the secrecy of others, their existence in no way disputed the paradigm of secrecy itself: in fact, given his clandestine nature, the spy’s very existence was born of secrecy. He was the purveyor of the secret information he had appropriated from one Prince in order to benefit another Prince. But at no time did he seek to make this information public: that kind of transparency would remove any market value from the information he held. The spy, therefore, had a vested interest in keeping and even reinforcing the secrecy paradigm. For this reason, we cannot fully agree with the second half of the classic definition of a spy suggested by Dewerpe: “The spy is he who discovers secrets: in this he acts as *the agent of revelation*” (1994: 11). On the contrary, with certain exceptions, the spy did not reveal anything in daylight, nor did he share it publicly. He allowed his silent master to benefit from a secret he discovered, yet this secret still conserved its

confidential nature. What's more, the spy contributed directly to reinforcing the secrecy paradigm: such was the fear of espionage that each party multiplied the precautions he took to preserve his secrets, which in turn encouraged the recourse to agents used to discover them.

Conclusion

Even at that time, the institution of secrecy would fuel an argument that contained in itself the premises of its contestation. The domination of secrecy was nuanced according to the type of institutional regime, corroborating the classic *distinguo* between a principality and a republic as established by Machiavelli and Guicciardini. Wicquefort was the first diplomat to concretely note: "In the kingdoms and states where the sovereign shares, in any way, the knowledge or disposition of political matters with a prime minister, his Cabinet, or even with the senate, the ambassador must also report to those parties or individuals who share the prime authority" (1681: 186). This was the case in England, where, after the 1688 revolution, the Constitution accorded more weight to the Parliament; the negotiators at Utrecht had to take these multiple constituencies into account, as it was susceptible to sudden reversals (Bély 1990: 518–523). This was even clearer in the *États populaires*, as noted by Wicquefort in the Republic of Venice or in Holland.

Precisely because secrecy was thus a function of institutional regime, its paradigm is called into question in the age that opened after Utrecht. The end of the exhausting reign of Louis XIV empowered critics of the war-prone absolute monarchy. At the time of Utrecht, Saint-Pierre's *Projet pour rendre la paix perpétuelle en Europe* was published. These reflections on how to avoid war and guarantee peace did not omit a critical analysis of the principal means by which they could be obtained: negotiation. All this took place in a larger, powerful movement of thought, the Enlightenment, which held a new imperative within itself: that of the *public* nature of political affairs and the necessary exposure to public scrutiny. Kant would see in this idea of publicity a source of legitimacy for politics itself (Kant 1795), while Bentham would see it as a determining factor to gauge the efficacy of political action (Bentham and Bowring 1838–1843). And so began the slow and tenacious movement against secrecy that continues to surround diplomatic negotiation even today (Colson 2004; 2007).

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