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‘There is no significant difference between the theories of negotiation of Guicciardini and Richelieu’. Discuss.

<https://www.e-ir.info/2008/01/28/%e2%80%98there-is-no-significant-difference-between-the-theories-of-negotiation-of-guicciardini-and-richelieu%e2%80%99-discuss/>

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Nearly half a century separate Cardinal Richelieu and Francesco Guicciardini but the parallels between the two men betray the similarities in their understanding of power politics and theories of negotiation. Richelieu may have operated outside the Renaissance and Guicciardini from its Florentine apex, but both were influenced by the developing political theories of early modern Europe and the realist *raison d'état* of Machiavelli; Guicciardini counted Machiavelli as a friend, and Richelieu was his intellectual descendent – the first politician to prosecute state national interest above notions of medieval universal Christian morality. ‘Richelieu’s *Testament Politique* is the clear and authentic voice of the diplomatic system of early modern Europe’[1] and Guicciardini’s *Ricordi* are ‘of singular importance’[2] because they allow one an insight into the prevailing and emerging political theory during Italy’s sixteenth century transformation.

Francesco Guicciardini (1483-1540) was a Florentine historian, diplomat and statesman considered by many to be the father of modern history because his great historical studies[3] relied upon documentary sources[4]. The *Ricordi*, maxims for behaviour and the methods of diplomacy are drawn from Guicciardini’s observations of the liabilities of contemporary political figures and his partisan rejection of the suppositions on which the Florentine republican regime had been founded[5]. Guicciardini’s *Ricordi* includes some ‘general reflections on diplomacy and on conduct relevant to diplomacy’[6] however does not offer us a ‘comprehensive theory of diplomacy’ often fails to include ‘the reasoning behind his conclusions’[7]. Berridge puts forth some justification for the lapidary, asserting that the superficial treatment of diplomacy was ‘partly as a result of the fact that Guicciardini’s own formal ambassadorial experience was a minor part of his career’[8]. Another considerable difficulty in examining the negotiating theory of Guicciardini is that he has aroused less interest outside Italy than his contemporary, Machiavelli[9].

Born forty years after Guicciardini’s death, Armand Jean du Plessis de Richelieu, Cardinal-Duc de Richelieu (1585-1642) was a French statesman and cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church whose behaviour was decidedly

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Machiavellian. He was 'the most important single figure in the building of French absolutism'[10]. Richelieu established an early reputation as a competent ecclesiastical administrator as Bishop of Luçon from 1607, impressing the Pope with his 'intelligence and demeanour'[11]. Moreover, Richelieu was the first French bishop to implement the institutional reforms prescribed by the Council of Trent – an early indication of his willingness to engage in meaningful reform. After exile to Avignon, the 'ever-recurring conflict'[12] between Louis XIII and his mother necessitated recalling Richelieu to act as mediator. The negotiations were successful[13] and Richelieu's credentials as a skilful negotiator were established and his reputation with the King gradually increased; he received the cardinalate in 1622 and 'having finally completely subdued the last of the King's suspicions'[14] became prime minister in 1624. *Testament Politique* was written as a handbook for Louis XIII should Richelieu's death precede that of his master. Covering a broad range of topics, the second part – political strategies and tactics – are what concerns scholars of diplomacy. Richelieu pursued national interest – *raison d'état* – throughout the Thirty Years War, establishing France as the pre-eminent European power.

To Guicciardini the 'good-will of all men'[15] can be a positive asset in negotiation. Thus, if it is possible to agree 'by generalities'[16] to a request from an actor this is occasionally preferable to refusing point-blank. Richelieu's notion of continuous negotiation supports this assertion, because granting a state of little importance diplomatic relations with France is an honour at France's expense with no immediate prospect of return. Guicciardini remarks that the actor to whom one 'generally' promised may later not need help or that 'circumstances shall arise which will afford you abundant excuse for withholding it'[17]. Furthermore, with diplomatic skill, persuasion and a 'smooth answer' it is possible 'to leave a person contented, who, had you denied him at the first, would have been displeased with you'[18].

Negotiation often necessitates secrets; according to Guicciardini it is wise to 'hide the displeasure that you feel against others'[19]. More generally, Richelieu advocates that 'sometimes it is best to speak and act boldly'[20] but nonetheless recognises in some instances it is better to suffer 'the inappropriateness of imprudent remarks [*with*] both forbearance and good appearance'[21]. Guicciardini agrees, advising that 'so long as it brings you no loss or discredit'[22] or 'shame or harm'[23] it is good practice to remain civil because circumstances change; the adversary of one negotiation could be the ally of another. This would be familiar to Richelieu, who argued that relationships could 'remain long dormant before producing any effect'[24]. Further, Guicciardini observes that he had 'frequently been obliged to seek assistance from persons against whom I felt great bitterness [*but*] not being aware of my dislike, [*they*] have served me with the utmost alacrity'[25].

Guicciardini's warns of a reliance on incentives or patronage as a means to guarantee support. He cautions that

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goodwill brought about by concessions is fleeting and cannot be relied upon as a means to secure support, 'there is nothing so fleeting as the memory of benefits received'[26]. Moreover, Guicciardini warns that concessions may not be the determinate factor in achieving a settlement, especially if one party believes that the concessions granted to them were already theirs by right. Rather, it is a realist conception of continuing indebtedness or fear of tangible threats that will ensure cooperation and compliance. For example, because Cold War client states were reliant on the patronage of one of the superpowers to guarantee their security, development and access to markets, they were obligated to comply with strategic demands from their patron.

Negotiated settlements are the result of concessions and compromise. It is rare even for a powerful state to achieve all its aims in a single negotiation. This is particularly so in an international society where the national interests of many states compete for incredibly high-stakes. Guicciardini laments that it is the 'nature of things in this world *to have* somewhere imperfection or blemish'[27] therefore to strive for the perfect settlement is futile and dangerous[28]. 'It is a mistake to spend much time over-refining' because consistently arguing over detail with an unwillingness to compromise will result in 'opportunities *escaping* you'[29]. Moreover, to be 'perplexed by every trifling difficulty'[30] hinders negotiations generally. Similarly, Richelieu warns against employing a negotiator whose nature is 'so finely drawn and delicately organised *as to* become overly subtle about everything'[31]. Consequently, Guicciardini advocates a realistic approach and an awareness that compromise from one's aims will often be required to ensure a settlement, even one generally in your favour; one must 'reckon the least evil *[concessions]* as a good'[32]. Richelieu takes a slightly different approach to concessions and compromise, recognising that it is 'necessary to be content with little' but only 'in the hope of getting more later'[33]. In opposition to Guicciardini, the cardinal proposes that one should 'negotiate painstakingly' but only press for one's interests 'when they are ready for it'[34]. Thus, while Guicciardini implies that one should be willing to accept concessions generally, Richelieu implies that one will be compelled to accept concessions temporarily and should ceaselessly pursue the national interest in future negotiations. However, in pursuing the national interest Richelieu makes it known that one is 'not to be discouraged by a bad turn of events' because it is 'difficult to fight often and always win'[35]. Thus, Richelieu agrees with Guicciardini's observation that it is necessary to accept some concessions or imperfections in a settlement.

Guicciardini makes it clear that he has 'ever been of a most open nature'[36] but negotiation is not an exercise in ethics, rather power politics and shrewd manoeuvring. He argues that the best hope of success is not to reveal the extent of one's concessions – the 'ultimate point to which you would be willing to go'[37] – but to distance oneself from them and be 'drawn towards them only step by step and reluctantly'[38]. In so-doing, there is a greater likelihood of a more favourable settlement than was expected. Thus, Guicciardini advocates a transactional, deliberative and incremental approach to concession-making rather than proponents of the 'all-or-nothing' approach

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of Henry Kissinger. The historical context of Guicciardini's experience and contemporaneous politics can enlighten his rationale for this approach; as a representative of the city-state of Florence and of a Holy See whose power and influence varied, Guicciardini was not always negotiating from a stronger position. While an incremental approach to concessions can favour any party, it accentuates the negotiation assets of those in a weaker or equal position to their adversary.

The importance of timing is one of Guicciardini's recurring themes, for he at once calls for procrastination and, adversely, for 'despatch both in resolving and executing'[39]. Guicciardini recognises the difficulty in applying one single rule in the timing of negotiations because different situations will call upon the negotiator to alter their behaviour. Thus, he warns that when a 'coveted opportunity offers'[40] one must at once act upon it because 'opportunity knocks at your door just once'[41]. If an anticipated opportunity passes-by without exploiting it, Guicciardini warns that one 'may afterwards look for it in vain'[42]. The nature of the right season, the single best time to engage in negotiation that is of such importance to Guicciardini, is inextricably linked to his assertion that action must be taken the moment this opportunity arises. In looking for the missed opportunity the danger exists to misconstrue a moment as ripe and make it impossible for future settlement.

However, if one is 'surrounded by difficulties and embarrassments'[43] despatch is the last action that Guicciardini would counsel. One 'must procrastinate and gain what time you can' in the hope that the situation will alter to make it easier to 'extricate yourself from your troubles'[44] or, by waiting, become enlightened[45] to the problem. Richelieu is of the same mind, proposing that negotiations should be carried out 'even if it does no other good on some occasions than gain time'[46]. Moreover, Richelieu agrees with Guicciardini that procrastination can be 'commendable and useful to states' because it allows one time to 'divert a storm'[47].

Negotiations are fraught with dangers and prospects for achieving one's interests can vary, therefore considerable discussion is given to whether a prince should take his representative into his confidence, if he should 'make known to [*ambassadors*] their secret mind and the ends their negotiations are meant to serve' or if it is 'better only to impart what they would have the foreign prince persuaded of'[48]. Guicciardini gives arguments in favour of both. In favour of deception he suggests that only if 'were ignorant of them' would the representative 'speak or act with the same boldness, firmness, or efficacy'[49] as if the demands were as far as his prince would go. If taken into the prince's confidence, Guicciardini suggests there is the danger that he 'may let his master's designs be seen through'[50]. Nevertheless, Guicciardini himself favours opening 'his mind to them fully'[51], as does Richelieu, because only then will a representative be able to respond creatively to the individual demands of a specific negotiation.

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Indeed, Richelieu states that one must act in each instance 'according to the particular circumstances and with means appropriate for those with whom one is negotiating'[52]. According to Cohen, modern diplomatists and scholars 'recognised the power of cultural norms to influence negotiations and their outcomes'[53]. Richelieu had reached that conclusion four hundred years earlier, writing that 'different nations have different characters'[54]. Similarly, Richelieu, Guicciardini and Kissinger are all in agreement that it is easier to negotiate with states governed by 'princes' than it is republican or democratic governments because it is difficult to gain information from them and 'they proceed slowly and one ordinarily does not get from them at first attempt what is sought'[55].

However, Guicciardini believes an ambassador should only be taken into the prince's confidence if he is 'discreet and honest... well affected towards him, and [has] no motive to look elsewhere'[56]. Richelieu ardently agrees that a representative must be of the highest calibre, that 'it is absolutely necessary to be discerning in the choice of ambassadors'[57]. Guicciardini and Richelieu's ambassadors are personal representatives of the prince and their conduct can 'compromise the reputation of princes as well as the fortunes of states'[58]. The appointment itself as an ambassador is not enough, argue both, to ensure that the representative act in the state's best interest, rather, Richelieu cites irresponsibility, corruption, and ambition in an ambassador as vices which could lead them into the making of a bad treaty rather than none at all[59]. Thus, not only must an ambassador be intelligent and trustworthy enough to be told of the prince's designs to avoid making a treaty unacceptable to his master, but must be 'held within bounds prescribed for them in terms of fear and the threat of utter condemnation'[60] and, in the *Ricordi*, must be conscious of his continuing reliance upon the state or minister to advance his career, improve his prospects or – in the extreme – to safeguard his life.

Of the importance of reality versus perception, Guicciardini is akin to his friend Machiavelli and later proponents of *realpolitik*. As an enlightened Christian he extols the virtues of 'frank sincerity' and the vice of deception which 'is detested and condemned'[61]. Richelieu also remarks that 'one is always suspicious of men who employ cunning'[62]. Yet, Guicciardini argues that deception is 'by far the more useful'[63] because complete sincerity gives advantage to one's opponent. Richelieu superficially disagrees, arguing that 'those who give the impression of lacking frankness and sincerity rarely advance their cause'[64]. But Richelieu's disagreement is not as strong as one might suspect; he condemns a reputation for deception rather than undetected deception, advocating that 'whatever is useful is never to be despised'[65]. Moreover, he declares that it is 'absolutely necessary' to employ negotiators who can employ 'artfulness and subtlety'[66] (arguably deceit) with words, ostensibly to detect and be immune from deception against them. Nevertheless, Guicciardini recognises the value of being 'open and straightforward'[67] in every area of negotiation that does not compromise one's interests. By being open and sincere on matters that one can afford to be the increase in one's popularity[68] and reputation are multiplied manifold. Deception should be

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reserved for 'matters of the gravest importance'[69] because regular deception on issues of little value will have a negative impact on one's ability to negotiate. For, even when one is being sincere, if the actor has a reputation for deception the opposition is unlikely to trust them, making negotiations difficult. Consequently, Guicciardini advises that fostering a reputation for sincerity by regularly being open about small issues makes it easier to deceive one's opponent[70] on the important issues because they will perceive you as trustworthy – 'from his reputation for plain dealing his artifice will blind men more'[71].

Just as deception is a useful negotiating tool, Richelieu recognises that a negotiator must 'deal with each person according to the bent of his mind' because major problems are 'proper for presentation to men of power and genius'[72]. Notwithstanding his caution against deception, Guicciardini warns that even a man with a poor reputation will 'sometimes succeed' in accomplishing his ends because he will never fail 'in finding dupes'[73] or 'those that simply do not know what is happening'[74]. Richelieu makes a similar claim, that 'mediocre minds are influenced by small points' and 'are incapable of grasping the significance of what is proposed to them'[75]. Guicciardini claims that simplicity or greed can cloud an ability to reason when 'whatsoever they desire'[76] is brought before them. Moreover, when employing deception Guicciardini advocates to 'always deny boldly what you would not have known, and affirm what you would have believed'[77], that the more implausible a lie, the more fervently should it be proclaimed. Strongly protesting the reliability of an inaccuracy – even if evidence to the contrary is obvious – suggests that one can 'perplex and puzzle the brains of him who hears you'[78]. Thus, one cannot let one's guard down and assume that the other actor's deception will be identified by all parties, nor that the declarations or concessions offered are components of an elaborate deception or straightforward simplicity. Moreover, an individual with a reputation for deception may not always deceive, or may use their negative reputation to their advantage.

'It is not enough to give things their beginning, direction or impulse; we must also follow them up'[79] states Guicciardini. Berridge commends him for 'not overlooking the importance of following up a deal which has been formally concluded'[80]. Richelieu punished ambassadors who negotiated a treaty unacceptable to France, stating that 'Kings should be very careful with regard to the treaties they conclude', however, once committed, 'they should observe them religiously'[81]. In recognising the 'negligence, the ineptitude, and the wickedness of men'[82], Guicciardini identifies how the parties to a settlement formally concluded may endeavour (through laxity or design) to circumvent what they have agreed to carry out. Similarly, Richelieu recognises 'that many statesman advise'[83] avoiding one's treaty obligations. Guicciardini's advocating of the necessity of following-up settlements presages the efforts made in contemporary diplomacy to construct formal bodies and institutions to ensure the articles of an agreement are carried out. Moreover, Richelieu maintains that 'the loss of honour [*by failing to uphold a treaty*] is

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worse than the loss of life itself'. Taking his advice further, Richelieu argues that a prince should sooner jeopardise his interests and those of the state rather than break his word and lose his reputation, 'the greatest instrument of sovereigns'[84].

'An alliance with a powerful person is never safe' remarked Phaedrus. Guicciardini concurs, supporting the Castilian proverb that 'in such alliances the weakest always fares worst'[85]. In an assertion of realist theory, Guicciardini observes that 'men do not govern themselves by considerations of what is right or fit, but all seeking their own advantage'. Richelieu is guarded about alliances ('leagues') but from a perspective of strength. The cardinal 'would never advise a great prince to embark voluntarily on the founding of a league' unless his power is so great as to carry out its purpose 'should his allies decide to desert him'[86]. Guicciardini warns of the danger of a strong state to the weak, Richelieu warns that the smaller state can hurt the stronger; smaller states are more likely to abandon an alliance and suffer a loss of prestige in return for more tangible benefits, while a strong prince is committed by fear of 'the loss of prestige that would come from a violation of one's word'[87] if the action for which the alliance was formed was not carried out. Nonetheless, Guicciardini believes that the weaker party must identify and avoid attempts of stronger parties to coerce their way to a settlement at the expense of the weaker actor. History can provide countless examples of Guicciardini's 'everyday reality'[88] of stronger states in an alliance exploiting the weaker parties when their support is no longer required[89]. Moreover, during the Cold War it was often satellite states that suffered the most from their patrons' animosity; indeed, for many less influential states the Cold War was decidedly hot. Richelieu, in prefiguring these rational strategic assessments, agrees with Guicciardini's observation; it is intelligent to see neighbouring states 'in the position of serving as the outposts preventing the close approach to our walls' and states must 'omit nothing which can fortify them thoroughly against any eventualities'[90].

Guicciardini's opinion on the right time to intervene has the caveat that there is a wrong time to engage in negotiations. That if 'attempted prematurely' before 'their season and maturity'[91] the negotiations will fail on this attempt and ensure failure in the future. Richelieu emphatically disagrees, declaring that 'negotiations are innocuous remedies which never do harm'[92]. Guicciardini's notion of the right season is important to diplomatic theory because, recognises Berridge, it 'provides striking evidence that modern negotiation theory holds no monopoly on insights into the doctrine of the "ripe moment"'[93].

Why a negotiation attempt should fail if undertaken in an inauspicious moment is easy to comprehend. There are a multitude of factors that can preclude the success of a negotiation[94]. One or more actors in a conflict may believe themselves to be at an advantage and seek to prosecute the conflict to its conclusion. Similarly, a party might believe that if it procrastinates the climate will alter to its favour. Richelieu remarks that he frequently saw the 'nature of

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affairs change completely'[95] – this can particularly be the case with protracted existential conflicts when one actor is stronger than the other and able to wait out international opinion, such as that between Israel and the Palestinians.

As with many of his maxims, Guicciardini remains silent on how he reached the conclusion that the pursuit of a settlement outside of its right season would be detrimental to future prospects. Berridge draws upon modern scholarship to propose many reasons why it could be so, but crucially argues that it need not always be the case – a position supported by other critics of the 'ripe moment'[96]. Thus, there is no reason why engaging in negotiations before the right season may make a settlement impossible. In contrast, Richelieu argues that 'it is absolutely necessary to the well-being of the state to negotiate ceaselessly'[97] and that one should not engage only in sporadic negotiations because 'states receive so much benefit from uninterrupted foreign negotiations'[98]. Richelieu was the first prominent figure to insist on the continuous negotiation among states because his experience in the service of France 'so convinced [*him*] of its validity that... it is absolutely necessary'[99].

Continuous negotiation, having a diplomatic representative present in many of the states in the world were of importance to Richelieu because he believed negotiating everywhere would increase the power, reputation and prestige of Louis XIII and France. Diplomatic activity allowed Richelieu to keep 'abreast of world events'[100]. The cardinal recognised that continuous negotiation and power politics were interconnected; being represented throughout the known world would increase the practical power of the French king, and thus France would receive greater respect and be judged 'as having greater authority'[101] in the most important courts; 'above all at Rome'[102]. Thus, to Richelieu it was of the greatest importance to be respected in Rome, because it would provide a 'great advantage to our interests'[103] everywhere.

Berridge contends that if negotiation attempts are deliberately low-key and begin with modest goals such as agreeing on procedure, building trust and agreeing on board principles[104] then negotiations will progress and could foster the emergence of a ripe moment. Richelieu agrees, arguing that ceaseless negotiation must be 'conducted with prudence'[105]. Continuous engagement in a conflict – such as the United Nations' in Cyprus – is a form of negotiation that ignores the concept of a ripe moment and yet has made notable progress. Rather than waiting for the right time (occasionally an excuse for passivity), pursuing negotiations can bring about the right season or make it easier to identify when the ripe moment emerges. For, as Richelieu comments, 'he who negotiates continuously will finally find the right instant to attain his ends'[106]. Moreover, as Berridge recognises, 'diagnosing "ripe moments" is not exactly a scientific exercise'[107].

Negotiation and diplomacy cannot be quantified by mathematical formulae, and an assessment of the differences

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between the negotiating theories of Guicciardini and Richelieu is no less difficult. Nevertheless, it is apparent that both theoreticians broadly agree on the stratagem and tactics to be employed in negotiations: the primacy of national interest in negotiations; the necessity of selecting the right negotiator with favourable personal characteristics and loyalty; the usefulness of deception and its dangers; the difficulty of reaching a perfect settlement and the requirement to accept concessions; the problems of alliances for small and powerful states; and the obligation to follow-up on an agreement. Moreover, both agree that fostering considerable prestige and a reputation as a successful negotiator and powerful statesman are of immeasurable benefit to diplomatic relations.

However, while Richelieu and Guicciardini agree that there is a right moment for a negotiation, they differ considerably in which conditions negotiations should be attempted or whether negotiating outside the ripe moment can have a detrimental impact on future success. Guicciardini argues that negotiation should only be undertaken at the ripe moment and that attempts outside of this will have a negative impact. Richelieu disagrees because his understanding of continuous diplomatic representation implies the existence of continuous, low-profile negotiation (similar to modern prenegotiation) where one can pursue national interest even as one looks for the most propitious moment to press negotiations to a settlement. Nevertheless, there are considerable commonalities in the negotiating theories, and both agree that it is best to seek a settlement when the moment is ripe. Thus, there would appear to be a single significant difference in their negotiating styles. However, Richelieu and Guicciardini, influential statesman during the tumultuous development of the system of international relations that prevails to this day, are heavily entrenched in the diplomatic system of early modern Europe and the ascendancy of absolutism and *raison d'état*.

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- [20] *ibid.*, p. 117
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(C133)

[24] Berridge, *Diplomatic Classics*, p. 117

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[30] *ibid.*, p. 54 (C213)

[31] *ibid.*, p. 118

[32] *ibid.*, p. 53 (C126)

[33] *ibid.*, p. 117

[34] *ibid.*

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[36] *ibid.*, p. 53 (C132)

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[47] *ibid.*

[48] Guicciardini, *Ricordi*, p. 40 (C2)

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[50] *ibid.*

[51] *ibid.*

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[68] Guicciardini, *Ricordi*, p. 67 (C104)

[69] Berridge, *Diplomatic Classics*, p. 52 (C104)

[70] Guicciardini, *Ricordi*, p. 67 (C104)

[71] Berridge, *Diplomatic Classics*, p. 52 (C104)

[72] *ibid.*, p. 117

[73] *ibid.*, p. 52 (C105)

[74] Guicciardini, *Ricordi*, p. 68 (C105)

[75] Berridge, *Diplomatic Classics*, p. 117

'There is no significant difference between the theories of negotiation of Guicciardini and Richelieu'

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[76] *ibid.*, p. 52 (C105)

[77] *ibid.*

[78] *ibid.*

[79] *ibid.*, p. 53 (C192)

[80] Berridge, *Diplomatic Theory*, p. 41

[81] Berridge, *Diplomatic Classics*, p. 120

[82] Guicciardini, *Ricordi*, p. 90 (C192)

[83] Berridge, *Diplomatic Classics*, p. 120

[84] *ibid.*

[85] *ibid.*, p. 53 (C144)

[86] *ibid.*, p. 119

[87] *ibid.*

[88] Guicciardini, *Ricordi*, p. 79 (C144)

[89] The Anglo-French treatment of the Arabs following the First World War and the Allies' neglect of Poland after the Second World War are but two examples.

[90] Berridge, *Diplomatic Classics*, p. 117

[91] *ibid.*, p. 52 (C78)

[92] *ibid.*, p. 116

[93] *ibid.*, p. 48

[94] Berridge, *Diplomatic Theory*, p. 39

[95] Berridge, *Diplomatic Classics*, p. 116

[96] Berridge, *Diplomatic Theory*, p. 40

[97] Berridge, *Diplomatic Classics*, p. 116

[98] *ibid.*

[99] *ibid.*

[100] *ibid.*

[101] *ibid.*

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[102] *ibid.*

[103] *ibid.*, p. 117

[104] Berridge, *Diplomatic Theory*, p. 40

[105] Berridge, *Diplomatic Classics*, p. 116

[106] *ibid.*

[107] Berridge, *Diplomatic Theory from Machiavelli to Kissinger*, p. 40

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Date writtten: Dec 2007

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