Gilbert Monod de Froideville & Mark Verheul

AN EXPERT'S GUIDE TO

INTERNATIONAL PROTOCOL

BEST PRACTICES IN
DIPLOMATIC AND CORPORATE RELATIONS

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An Expert's Guide to International Protocol

Best Practices in Diplomatic and Corporate Relations

Gilbert Monod de Froideville and Mark Verheul

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Table of Contents

1. International protocol

Introduction

Why write a book on international protocol at a time when people often speak negatively about protocol, etiquette, and codes of conduct? The writers of this book are very aware of these tendencies but hope that this book will clarify the use of protocol, its development, and the particularities of the role it plays in the international world, where it reveals a respect for the traditions and cultures of others.

Protocol is no longer just the catch-all term for the written and unwritten rules of diplomatic and social discourse between heads of state, heads of government, and authorities as laid out by the Treaties of Vienna (1814–1815 and 1961–1963). Today international protocol concerns itself as well with conduct between industrial partners and the cultural and sport sector.

Conduct is not only based on existing international practices and rules of respect, but also with the goal of accurately profiling countries, organisations and businesses, securing important business contracts, and meeting the right people. It can therefore be said that protocol is a tool for maintaining good relationships.

The application of international protocol focuses on three aspects. First, it is intended to minimise tedious discussions on who must sit where, in what order and in what manner flags are displayed, or in what order people must walk, stand, or greet guests. Second, it is a means of avoiding unnecessarily disturbing diplomatic relations, and third, it is intended to cultivate a climate in which everyone feels comfortable and which lends itself well to positive decision-making.

In short, we can say that protocol is the catch-all term for establishing proper conduct in order to avoid conflicts and arguments. However, maintaining functionality always prevails over carrying out the correct protocol. Nonetheless, protocol is often confused with etiquette, and it is necessary to outline the differences between the two.

Protocol vs Etiquette

What is the essential difference between protocol and etiquette? Etiquette can be defined as the rules of politeness between people, i.e. social manners.

This would include examples like opening doors for people, proper ways of greeting, pulling a chair out for a woman, and so on, while protocol tends to focus much more on the status of a person, a country, an organisation, or a business rather than societal status. In Chapter 2, we will explore extensively the nature of status, the order of precedence, which in French is called *préséance*.

Etiquette and its History

Etiquette, which encompasses the rules of politeness and good manners, is as old as humanity itself, and it changes with the times. As such, these rules are influenced by the prevailing culture in a country. Therefore, in one country, one greets with the nose, in another cheek on cheek, and in other countries by shaking each other's hands or with an appropriately low bow or a curtsy.

The oldest found document on moral conventions is the *Prisse Papyrus*, dating back to the Twelfth Dynasty Egyptian Middle Kingdom, discovered in 1856 by the French archaeologist and writer Émile Prisse d'Avennes in Thebes and now held in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris. It was written as a practical handbook for the son of a vizier, a high-ranking functionary and (sometimes religious) government advisor for a ruler such as a pharaoh. This papyrus document contains the last two pages of the *Instructions of Kagemni*, who served under the Fourth Dynasty King Snefru, and is a compilation of moral conventions and exhortations on the practice of virtue. The conclusion of this text is followed by the only surviving copy of the *Instructions of Ptahhotep*, an Egyptian philosopher and pharaoh from the Fifth Dynasty (2414–2375 BC).

When people live together in large concentrations, unwritten rules and social conventions emerge naturally. Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy (1419–1467), was the first monarch to write codes of conduct for his royal household, on cards, in order to maintain clarity for his personal staff.

In 1529, the Dutch scholar, theologian, and philosopher Desiderius Erasmus (1469–1536) wrote a handbook on the behaviour of children. This was in fact the first book containing rules on politeness and courtesy specifically for children. This book proved to be so popular that it was translated into several languages, and it is still possible to acquire a copy today – but it is necessary to note that the rules laid out in this book no longer apply. The rules of etiquette, of course, change with the times and are constantly subject to such change.

At this point, however, the word 'etiquette' had not yet become synonymous with good manners. During the Dutch Golden Age, which fell in the seventeenth century, the upper classes and nobility created social rules in order to distinguish themselves from the lower and middle classes. These rules were called *curalia:* the practice of *comitas* and *suavitas*, of politeness and courtesy. This encompassed the titles and forms of address used before a king or queen, how ambassadors should address one another in formal situations, which in fact form the basis of the titles and forms of address that we now use with each other. In the Netherlands, for example, a complex system of rules still governs how to write to one another, but it bears remembering that every generation tends to abandon elements of this complex system for the sake of simplicity.

An important component of etiquette – table manners – was introduced later. It was very important to lay the table in a manner that was 'closed', meaning that the spoon was laid with the convex side up, and the fork with the teeth facing onto the table, so that the value and quality of the silver were clearly shown by silver content (by an engraving of a standing, walking or laying lion) or the family crest on the silverware. This style of laying a table is still sometimes used today. When invited to dinner, people would often bring their own silverware in a decorated box in order to show the other guests their own personal wealth or nobility through the value of their personal silverware.

However, this all begs the question of when the word 'etiquette' was actually introduced and what it meant. The French initially used this word to refer to an engraving on a wooden stick, then to a small plaque on a gift or object, and later, under the French King Louis XIV (1638–1715), the Sun King, the rules and signs of conduct and politeness.

It was this king who made all of the miscellaneous life rules and court etiquette or court protocol clear and visible at his court in Versailles through the placement of signs with advice and notices on how to behave at the court. The story goes that he thought of this idea together with his gardener who had become irritated by the bad behaviour of courtiers. Rubbish was thrown on the ground and people would jump over the grass and through the bushes. Through the placement of various signs, the rules on how to behave quickly gave the word *étiquette* a new meaning – namely that of the rules and signs of conduct and politeness. Many books and the records of court attendees of the period bear witness to this fact. We should note that the size of the court, and the degree to which these life rules were orchestrated, made them necessary and the rules were enforced on over 2,000 people. At every moment of the day, dozens of servants and courtiers

swarmed around the king. His only refuge was the *Petit Trianon*. Even the architecture and arrangement of the royal palace of Versailles was intended to show the king clearly, as he would be seen at the opera or the royal chapel. Not all quarters of the palace were equally accessible to all courtiers; some quarters were restricted to only the highest-ranked nobles. The rules concerning the waking of the king have also been written about in detail. To be given this role was a great honour. Every morning, the king was awakened by the grand chamberlain, with the words '*Sire, voilà l'heure',* which was the start of the *petit lever*. The highest honour was to be chosen to offer a piece of clothing to the king. Each day, the king would be medically inspected by the chief royal physician who would be attended by supporters of the royal family and those who had access to the *Grande Entrée*. Afterwards, the king was dressed in the presence of several courtiers, the *Grand Lever*. The same protocol was common practice when going to bed, the *Coucher*. It was also courtly etiquette that the king gave rooms to his favourite courtiers and guests. He then attached nameplates to their doors. These varied depending on the level of prestige of the individual – just 'Cazard' or 'Monsieur Cazard' or the highest honour 'pour Monsieur Jean Cazard', for example. Another form of etiquette was the allocation of a *tabouret*, a low cushioned stool without a back or arms where one might be seated in the presence of the king. This right was often reserved for grandchildren, foreign princesses, and high-ranking nobles. Other courtiers including the cardinals, as well as men and women of high esteem, had to stand. The higher one's prestige, the better one's chair.

With the spread of French culture through the world, the meaning of 'etiquette' began to take on the definition we use today. In the last two centuries, many books on etiquette have appeared, and they are continuously adjusted to the societal conventions of the time. Etiquette was, and continues to be, indispensable in a society where social conventions and respect for one another remain of great importance.

Protocol and its History

As indicated earlier, international protocol is focused on respect and an acknowledgement of status and hierarchy.

Previously, it was the power of a country that defined the position it took in the diplomatic world. Chapter 2 goes into greater detail about this. However, we now concern ourselves with the emergence of the definition of protocol. When was protocol first spoken about, and was it then something

entirely new, or had forms of respect for the status of people, countries, institutes, organisations, and industries long been considered?

Before the word protocol emerged, there were indeed everyday forms of hierarchy, which can be observed in old frescoes or wall paintings in Ancient Egypt, Asia, and in Ancient Rome, where entire processions were often depicted. Here, a focus on hierarchy is clearly visible, such as an acute attention to detail when determining who stood where and in what order. Ancient tribes had rules of respect for status such as those concerning the tribe leader.

The definition of protocol has its origin in the Greek word *protókollon*, a portmanteau of the Greek words *protos*, meaning first, and *kolla*, meaning glue. The term was used in Late Greek to indicate a leaf or tag attached to a rolled papyrus manuscript and containing notes as to contents (later it indicated the first page that was glued on top of a notarial document), and also to describe the seal on a document. Throughout history, protocol has had many definitions. These include:

- An original outline or report whereby a treaty is prepared.
- An agreement between states.
- Minutes of an international agreement, which acquires the powers of a treaty from the signatures of the participants. For example, the 9 protocols of London, the first of which was in 1814 and the last in 2000.
- The first copy of an agreement or of a similar document before it is ratified.
- A set of standard procedures for the regulation of data transmission in computer science.
- The plan for the process of a medical treatment or for a scientific experiment.
- A code for proper behaviour, such as safety protocol and academic protocol.
- An aspect of diplomatic etiquette in the form of official correspondence between ministries responsible for foreign relations.
- The forms of ceremonies and etiquette such as those practiced by heads of state and diplomats.

International protocol as we know it now focuses on respect and the creation of a good and comfortable diplomatic and business climate, as well as the minimisation of conflict and disagreement. Many of these international agreements are unwritten and based on reciprocity and a good management of relationships.

On an official visit such as a state visit, respect for the host country's protocol is essential. At the time of Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, her

husband Prince Claus emphasised time and again that the organisers of the many official visits of the royal family abroad should not attempt to enforce their own protocol, as this would imply a lack of respect for the valid standard protocol in place in the host country. This could jeopardise diplomatic relations. It goes without saying that one must respect the rules of the host country. Every country has its own local protocol which is often based on the indigenous culture. In some countries, it is customary that the most important guests are seated at a high table facing the other guests while in other countries, the head table is placed adjacent to several other round tables. Protocol at an official audience of two heads of state also differs between countries. In some countries, the two delegations sit on either side of the heads of state in a U-formation. This protocol is widely used in Asia, the Middle East, and in Eastern Europe but less often in the West. In many countries these meetings are limited to just the two heads of state. While historically it had been customary to hold a return dinner, this practice has since been changed, partly on the initiative of the Netherlands, into a return cultural event, such as a dance performance or a concert. Doing so enables countries to exhibit their own cultures. This practice appeals to many heads of state, and it has today been adopted by many other nations.

Due to the busy schedules of heads of state these days, the length of a state visit is often limited to one or two days. Historically, state visits could last up to three days.

Furthermore, each country has its own protocol concerning the minor details of speeches and state dinners. These details vary from speeches at the beginning of dinner to saving the speeches until after the main course. Protocol also varies on when and whether to play national anthems. In some countries, such as the United Kingdom, the 'loyal toast' is customary. This occurs simultaneously with a traditional ceremony. Official protocol states that the 'loyal toast' must be performed following the official introduction of honoured guests and opening remarks or the completion of all courses of the meal, that it be the first toast given, and that a glass of any beverage other than a cocktail be used. In practice, it is always the first toast of the evening.

In carrying out the toast in the United Kingdom, the event's host will rise and request the audience's attention. Once accomplished and the guests are standing, the host raises his or her glass and recites the toast –'The Queen' – without any other words or music. The audience then responds to the toast by repeating 'The Queen' or in Canada, '*La Reine*' followed by taking a sip. After this, *God Save the Queen* is played, and the guests sit down again when it is finished.

In Sweden, the toast is a formal ritual, and one does not drink until the host has personally invited every guest for a toast. They look into each other's eyes and say '*skål*.'

It is important that one lets the guests and elders toast in order of hierarchy and age. When toasting, it is also important that eye contact is made and everyone nods before the glasses are lowered, and that men wait for women to put their glasses back on the table.

There are also many differences and contrasts in the area of gifts. In Western culture, it is not customary to give extremely expensive gifts. It is instead the gesture that counts. In the Middle East, however, hospitality and respect are communicated through the extravagance of the gift. At dinner, too, hospitality is communicated by an overabundance of food, something that is unfamiliar in Western culture. Another noteworthy difference is that official dinners must not last too long.

When speaking of international protocol in government relations, it is important to consider the precedence that exists between heads of state, ambassadors, authorities, and countries, but it is also of relevance to describe the nuances in arrival and departure ceremonies at official visits. These include gun salutes at official welcome ceremonies, styles of greeting, the order in which flags are displayed, exchange of gifts and honours/decorations, order of procession, laying of wreaths, and the presentation of credentials.

In a world where the global economy is ingrained in every aspect of life, international protocol is also given an extremely important place in industry as an instrument for the management of relationships based on respect, good communication, cooperation, hospitality, and the maintenance and understanding of the correct manner to conduct oneself in international business with foreign cultures.

Not only the increase in international relations and the growing role of business at home and abroad have played a role, but in particular a declining economic situation, where competition and strategic networks require attention, make protocol important. In an uncertain global economic situation, strong international communication and cooperative networks have become increasingly important, thereby increasing the need for good diplomatic relations.

These noteworthy changes have meant that the form of protocol has had to change to fit the needs of our time, which are increasingly focused on ensuring that good business is done in an environment that depends on a correct knowledge of how to deal with cultural differences.

Protocol and cultural differences

It is today much more common to travel abroad far from our own borders to other, distinct cultures. Being a guest in a foreign country means first having respect for the manner in which guests are treated in the host country. This of course varies between all countries and cultures, and in many countries it is essential to build a good relationship before business can be done.

During meetings or while doing business with foreigners, one should be aware that they might be conducting business in an environment with different values and norms from those in their culture. It is tempting to think that a single Asian culture, Middle Eastern culture, South American culture, African culture, and European culture exists, but this assumption would prove to be very wrong. In these regions, one finds several differences between countries, often based on religions or local traditions dating back hundreds if not thousands of years.

The importance of showing respect for one another's culture cannot be overstated. A lack of knowledge inhibits proper communication, which is essential when dealing with other cultures, both within our own society and outside it. Not showing interest or acknowledging cultural differences in another country can sometimes do more harm than good, causing the loss of important international agreements or orders.

In the world of protocol and etiquette, we see that differences in culture have an enormous influence on the manner in which business is conducted, and how we interact with one another in international organisations and the international community.

In the world's many cultures, protocol and etiquette often take on their own form under the influence of local values and norms. This is why doing business in Switzerland and Germany is very concrete. Business is conducted clearly and transparently, and the context of discussions does not play any kind of role in understanding. However, in other regions such as in the Arab world and parts of Asia, context plays a very significant role, little is explained 100% clearly, and meetings are often not transparent.

In the Middle East, guests at a dinner will never be seated with their backs to the head of state, and one must never show the soles of their feet to their conversation partner as this is a grave insult. In addition, the use of the left hand is limited in most situations.

Body language too differs from place to place. Every day we use our head, our hands, and our arms to express ourselves. A simple nod of the head can give the wrong impression – in some Asian countries, a nod of

the head can mean 'I'm listening', and it does not automatically mean 'I agree.' In China, facial expressions are kept to a minimum in order to avoid endless misunderstandings, and gesticulations are considered bad form. The host always begins the conversation, and others must listen. Then there is a moment of silence for reflection, and only then may the others respond. The 'OK' hand sign, with the thumb and the forefinger, also has many meanings in different countries, and in some it can be an obscene insult. In the Netherlands, for example, it is customary to stick one's thumb up to indicate happiness with something. In Central Europe, as it is here, it is also used to indicate needing a lift by the side of the road. However, it is important to be careful as in many Mediterranean countries, Russia, the Middle East, and parts of Africa and Australia, the same gesture can be seen as an obscene insult. In large parts of Europe and North America, one sticks one's fist in the palm of the other hand to express anger. In a tense situation, this can inadvertently cause problems. In Africa, this gesture means agreement with something. In many Western countries, the 'V' sign is a symbol meaning peace. In Greece, it means 'go to hell.' In the United Kingdom and Australia, the same gesture, but turned around with the back of the hand shown, can cause problems. In these countries, doing so is seen as much worse than just showing the middle finger. In East Asian countries, the same gesture is used to accompany a smile in photos and videos.

An official gift-giving ceremony between heads of state is often based on international protocol and reciprocity, and it is important to think about whether gifts are appropriate for the countries receiving them. No bottles of wine in the Middle East, for example. In China, it is not acceptable to give a letter opener as a gift or a clock to an older person. In some countries white and yellow flowers should not be given as gifts, as these are connected to death. An elegant fountain pen however is a nice gift.

While doing business in the Russian Federation, it is customary to invite colleagues for a casual dinner, but showing up for such a dinner empty-handed is completely unacceptable. Wine, good whisky, chocolates, exotic fruit, and pastries are all good ideas for a gift. A bottle of vodka can be seen as something of an insult, just like a bottle of wine in France. Ordinarily, women receive flowers as gifts from their guests, but it is important to avoid giving yellow flowers in the Russian Federation as this means the end of a relationship. Flowers in an even number are only meant for deaths and should therefore also be avoided.

Chapter 6 will look more closely at gifts.

The manner of greeting also varies from country to country. In the Middle East, local men often greet one another by touching the person,

and depending on how well they know one another, they might do this up to three times. In the United Arab Emirates, local men greet one another by touching their noses together. In the Mediterranean countries, France among them, hands are frequently shaken and the giving of kisses is a whole ritual that varies from region to region from one to five kisses, as can be seen in Corsica.

Personal space and distance between people also varies between cultures. For example in Latin American and Middle Eastern countries, people stand closer to one another while in the United States and United Kingdom, it's customary to stand much farther apart. In one culture, looking someone in the eye while speaking to them is natural and usual, while in others it might be unthinkable.

Lastly, protocol follows the customary rules in international diplomatic intercourse concerning hierarchy, rank, and ceremony. It is therefore essential for international relations to use the protocol that is codified through international law and common international use. This governs interactions between the many official representatives of the world's countries.

Agreements are being made regularly through international treaties and reciprocity in the area of international protocol. We must continue to see them as instruments to help us build good, healthy relationships, reduce conflicts, and keep diplomacy running smoothly. First and foremost we should not lose sight of the effectiveness of international protocol. Creating a seating arrangement that is completely impractical while being correct in terms of protocol adds nothing and instead does damage to the effectiveness of an event that is intended to strengthen underlying relationships. Chapter 3 looks more closely at seating arrangements.

A subject that is deeply interwoven in protocol is diplomacy. Certainly diplomacy, beside protocol and etiquette, plays an unmistakably important role – what do we wish to achieve? And how do we wish to achieve it?

What is diplomacy? In general, we can say that diplomacy is the art of conducting negotiations between parties in order to reach a decision agreeable to everyone. In other words, it is a tactful manner by which to strike a deal. Often, international diplomacy is referred to as the conduct of international relations carried out by professional diplomats on matters such as peace, war, the economy, and culture. Winston Churchill said: 'Diplomacy is the art of telling people to go to hell in such a manner that they ask for directions.'

Experience has taught us that the correct use of international protocol has an impact on diplomatic relations. It is the means by which accidental

insults and arguments about precedence and interpersonal relationships can be avoided, and as mentioned previously, it should not disturb diplomacy.

This is why countries must mutually respect international protocol and apply it as correctly as possible.

Every head of state or government representative expects to be received in a way that follows protocol correctly. Flags that are not displayed in the correct order, the use of the wrong flag, the playing of the wrong national anthem, or leaving the official welcome to a low-ranking functionary can all be interpreted as an insulting action with the intention of sending a message. It is therefore possible to say that international protocol is a powerful instrument in our international society.