

Anne Charlotte Scherer

**The role of diplomacy in
Swedish foreign policy under
Gustav II Adolph from 1617 to 1630**

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*“To negotiate with the enemy under the helmet”. The central role of diplomacy
in Swedish foreign policy under Gustav II Adolph from 1617 to 1630*

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Table of contents

Acknowledgements	5
I. Introduction	11
<i>Definition of the topic</i>	11
<i>Geographical and temporal delimitations</i>	14
<i>Method</i>	15
<i>Source material</i>	16
<i>Literature</i>	22
<i>Outline of the thesis</i>	28
II. Diplomacy and diplomatic theory in early modern times	31
1. Defining diplomacy	31
2. Early modern theoretical concepts of diplomacy	36
Machiavelli	37
Grotius	43
Conclusion	50
III. Foreign policy decisions under Gustav II Adolph	51
1. The structures of Swedish foreign politics	51
2. Decision-making process and distribution of political power	60
The <i>konungaförsäkran</i> of 1611	61
Gustav II Adolph	64
The king and his chancellor	67
The <i>riksråd</i>	70
The <i>riksdag</i>	76

3. Decisions in Swedish foreign policy, 1617-1630	78
Military conflict settlement	80
Peaceful conflict settlement	82
Alliances	84
Economics	86
Conclusion	87
IV. The organisation of Swedish diplomacy	88
1. The management of diplomacy	88
2. The administration of the diplomatic service	92
3. Sweden's diplomatic relations	102
4. The Swedish diplomatic service	106
Correspondence	107
Diplomatic missions	112
Diplomats	126
Formalities	133
Conclusion	140
V. The use of diplomacy under Gustav II Adolph	143
1. Information policy	143
2. The selection of diplomats	151
3. The implementation of foreign policy decisions	162
4. Strategies in the use of diplomatic means	166
Negotiations at a <i>congressus</i>	166
Temporary missions	172
Daily diplomacy	177
5. Other instruments of foreign policy in relation to diplomacy	179
Military means	179

Economic means	183
Propaganda	188
Conclusion	193
VI. Conclusion: The central role of diplomacy	195
Sources	199
Unprinted	199
Printed	200
Literature	205
Abbreviations	219
Deutsche Zusammenfassung	221

I. Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, diplomacy has become more and more relevant to international politics than in the preceding decades. After the First World War, the importance of diplomacy had been widely disputed, and in the wake of this development, diplomatic history had lost its standing as an important field of history. Subsequently, there has not been much research regarding diplomatic history and diplomatic theory. The end of the Cold War, however, transformed international politics and resulted in a renewed interest in diplomacy. In the last two decades, historians and political theorists have begun to address the lack of definition and scope of diplomacy, and diplomatic history has again emerged as a field of interest.¹ It has long been unaffected by the new methods and techniques which the historical sciences have acquired in the last century, but it is quickly catching up.² This thesis seeks to contribute to the revitalisation of this traditional field of historical research with regard to Swedish diplomatic history.

Definition of the topic

The phrase “to negotiate with the enemy under the helmet” used in the title of this thesis is a direct quote from the written advice which the Swedish Council of the Realm gave to his king, Gustav II Adolph (1594–1632), in 1626.³ The council emphasised the importance of showing military strength when it came to negotiations. This combination of diplo-

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- 1 Stéphane Péquignot, “Europäische Diplomatie im Spätmittelalter. Ein historiographischer Überblick,” *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 29, no. 1 (2012): 67-68, 70-73; Jeremy Black and Karl Schweizer, “The Value of Diplomatic History: A Case Study in the Historical Thought of Herbert Butterfield,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 17 (2006): 617-619 and 622; Richard Langhorne, “On Diplomacy,” *Political Studies Review* 6 (2008): 54-55.
 - 2 Karl W. Schweizer and Matt J. Schumann, “The Revitalization of Diplomatic History: Renewed Reflections,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 19 (2008): 149-150.
 - 3 E. W. Bergman, “Register öfver Rådslag i konung Gustaf II Adolfs tid 1612-1632,” *Meddelanden från Svenska Riksarkivet* 2, no. 9 (1884): 277.

macy and military action indicates the function of diplomacy in Swedish foreign policy as a means to further political goals. Although Gustav Adolph's reign is known above all for its many wars the importance of diplomacy has hitherto been overlooked.

This thesis focuses on diplomacy as a means of foreign policy and its use in Swedish politics under Gustav II Adolph. It is, at heart, a study of diplomatic history which aims at delineating structures behind the use of diplomacy in the context of foreign policy. The leading argument of this thesis is that the role of diplomacy was crucial to the conduct of Swedish foreign policy. Although this applies to Swedish diplomacy under Gustav Adolph in particular, it should also provide the reader with information about the nature of diplomacy in general. Though historical examples are in themselves unique, nevertheless they can show an underlying pattern. As a means of foreign policy, diplomacy interacts with war or economics, and thereby reveals the extent of its scope and its limitations. Furthermore, diplomacy answers to current needs and so is always subject to ongoing developments. In accordance with its nature, diplomacy plays an important part in the decision-making process and in the implementation of decisions in foreign policy. Ultimately, the effectiveness of diplomacy depends on the abilities of the policy makers and the quality of the diplomatic service they have to rely on. These aspects of diplomacy and their implications constitute an essential part of this study.

The thesis analyses Swedish diplomacy at the beginning of the seventeenth century. This period of early modern history witnessed the formation of sovereign states in Europe and the establishment of a formal system of diplomatic contacts. It is generally perceived that this development concluded at the time of the peace of Westphalia in 1648.⁴ Consequently, at the time of Gustav Adolph's reign, modern European diplomatic practice had not yet been consolidated and institutionalised. In the different European countries, it developed at different speeds, and this was by no means always a linear process. This period, in general,

4 Jeremy Black, "Diplomatic History. A New Appraisal," in *Routledge Handbook of Diplomacy and Statecraft*, ed. B. J. C. McKercher (London: Routledge, 2012), 7-8.

has not received as much attention from historians as later periods when the so-called classic diplomacy was fully established.⁵ There has, however, been extensive research on the diplomacy of Western European countries such as Spain or England, but the diplomacy of Northern Europe has been largely marginalised.⁶

In many ways, Swedish diplomacy changed considerably during Gustav Adolph's reign. When Gustav Adolph inherited the Swedish throne, there virtually did not exist any diplomatic structures. It was, therefore, up to the young king and his councillors to cope with this situation. The value of diplomacy in foreign policy greatly depends on how much emphasis a government puts on this means of foreign policy. Consequently, to study the importance of diplomacy means, first, to study the establishment of diplomatic structures and, second, to study how they were employed. The organisation and administration of diplomacy is inextricably linked to its intended use in foreign policy. This raises the question: did the Swedish Government use diplomatic means just as it saw fit at any given moment, or did it systematically establish a system of diplomatic contacts? Moreover, did a clear concept of diplomacy exist, or did the government react spontaneously with whatever diplomatic means they could procure at that moment?

The first part of this study, therefore, analyses the organisation of Swedish diplomacy under Gustav Adolph, which includes Sweden's diplomatic relations, the different kinds of diplomatic means, the diplomats, and the formal technicalities of diplomacy.

The second part of the study covers the use of the diplomatic structures with regard to the intentions of the Swedish Government. This analysis covers the range and uses of diplomatic means and the relationship between diplomacy and other means of foreign policy, such as war or economics.

5 Johan Watkins, "Toward a New Diplomatic History of Medieval and Early Modern Europe," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38, no. 2 (2008): 1-2.

6 Ibid., 3-4.

The study intends to show how Swedish diplomacy under Gustav Adolph was organised with regard to its use in foreign policy. Under his reign diplomacy was of great importance and a thorough concept of diplomacy and its uses developed to a diplomatic organisation and practice which performed smoothly on the level of European power politics.

Geographical and temporal delimitations

In the context of the scope of this thesis, the Swedish kingdom at the beginning of the seventeenth century displays the ideal conditions for a study of early modern diplomacy.

Sweden lies geographically on the periphery of Europe and, until the reign of Gustav Adolph, it was politically of minor importance, too. Sweden's period as a great power began with his reign and put an end to Denmark's dominant position in Northern Europe. In the first decade of the seventeenth century, Swedish diplomacy was not organised to any degree, and could very much be characterised as combining medieval diplomatic structures with the ad hoc use of new diplomatic methods. The Swedish diplomatic system at the end of the Thirty Years' War, however, arose entirely from the efforts made under Gustav Adolph. The organisation of Sweden's government and administration under his reign affected diplomacy as well. Diplomacy served only one purpose: to support and implement Sweden's foreign policy; in this regard, it fulfilled first and foremost the role of a means of foreign policy without being burdened by older structures. Hence, the analysis provides not only a further understanding regarding the establishment of early modern diplomacy, but also with respect to strategies in foreign policy on the set-up and the use of diplomacy.

The period which this study covers is limited to the years between Gustav Adolph's coronation in 1617 and Sweden's entry into the Thirty Years' War in 1630. This delimitation has two reasons: first, it follows the development of a diplomacy which greatly relied on the acknowledged sovereignty of the king. The coronation provided Gustav Adolph with the right to his throne not only with regard to his own subjects, but more importantly, it strengthened his position as far as the claims of the Polish king were concerned. Gustav Adolph's father had been perceived as a

usurper, which had resulted in difficulties concerning his diplomatic relations with other sovereigns.⁷ Gustav Adolph's coronation in 1617 established him as sovereign king of Sweden, a fact which was accepted by the other European powers. Sweden's involvement in the Thirty Years' War, on the other hand, marks the beginning of a new period in Swedish diplomacy and, at the same time, concludes the process of establishing a diplomatic organisation.⁸

The second reason why this period has been chosen is the method of the analysis. The study examines diplomacy as a means of foreign policy and, in this connection, the decision-making process plays an important role. The time from 1617 to 1630 was a period of close cooperation between the king and the aristocratic Council of the Realm with regard to foreign policy. They discussed important matters of foreign policy and usually came to an agreement. This way of reaching decisions in foreign policy was firmly established in 1617 and ended in 1630, when the king left Sweden for the war in Germany. He would generally return to Sweden in the winter months in order to discuss and plan the political goals and strategies for the next year. Since June 1630, however, the decision-making process concerning important matters in foreign policy no longer included the Council of the Realm. With regard to the analysis, this separation between the king, who stayed in the field in Germany, and the council at home marks the end of this study.

Method

At the centre of this thesis is diplomacy as a means of conducting foreign policy. This, however, does not imply that diplomacy only implements decisions in foreign policy. Owing to the most important function of diplomacy – the gathering of information – it also provides the knowledge that is essential to make these decisions. The starting point of an

7 Wilhelm Tham, *Den svenska utrikespolitikens historia: 1560-1648*, vol. 1.2 of *Den svenska utrikespolitikens historia*, ed. Nils Ahnlund and Wilhelm Tham (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1960), 85-89.

8 Carl-Fredrik Palmstierna, "Utrikesförvaltningens historia 1611-1648," in *Den svenska utrikesförvaltningens historia*, ed. Sven Tunberg (Uppsala, 1935), 67.

analysis regarding diplomatic structures should, therefore, be the decisions in foreign policy and the decision-making process.

Under Gustav Adolph's reign, the decisions in foreign policy were made by the king in cooperation with his council. The result was usually in the form of a written advice from the council to the king or a written decision of the king and the council. In the relevant period, sixteen important decisions in foreign policy are extant and they are relatively evenly distributed over time. With the focus on these particular decisions, the analysis can cover the period in question and take the chronological aspect into consideration. Although the thesis concentrates on the implementation of the decisions, the contributing factor of diplomacy to decision-making is taken into account as well. The questions regarding the role of diplomacy concern the use of diplomatic means, the strategies in the use of diplomacy, the functions of diplomats and the relationship between diplomacy and other means of foreign policy. Thus, the analysis of the decisions and their implementation illustrates the structure regarding the use of diplomacy under Gustav Adolph and demonstrates the importance of diplomacy as a means of foreign policy.

Source material

The method of analysis requires two categories of documents. These are, first, documents pertaining to the decision-making process and, second, documents concerning diplomacy.

All documents regarding the Swedish king and the Swedish Government are currently held at the National Archives (*Riksarkivet*) in Stockholm. This archive was originally the so-called *kungliga kansliets arkiv*, the archive of the royal chancery. It was established under the reign of Gustav Vasa and found its permanent place of residence at the royal castle in Stockholm, as laid down in the chancery ordinance (*kansliordningen*) of 1618. Almost two third of the documents relating to the time before 1654, however, were destroyed during the great fire at the castle in 1697.⁹ The work at the chancery generated various kinds of documents in connec-

9 Lars-Arne Norborg, *Källor till Sveriges historia* (Lund: Gleerups, 1968), 11-13.

tion with the different tasks of the chancery's secretaries. The king's letters were first written as a rough draft (*koncept*) and after the king approved the draft the letter was issued in a fair copy (*utskrift*). The *utskrift* was sent to the addressee and the *koncept* remained at the chancery. In so-called *diarier* (correspondence registers) all incoming and outgoing writings were recorded with a summary of their contents. The drafts were copied into the so-called *riksregistraturet* which contains the letters and instructions issued by the Swedish Government – above all the king – and, therefore, holds his outgoing correspondence.¹⁰

The *riksregistraturet* represents a major source of Swedish history at the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is often used by historians because most of it has survived the fire in 1697. For purposes of this study, the *riksregistraturet* is the main source. It is divided into a Swedish section which consists of documents written in Swedish and a German and Latin section, the so-called *tyskt och latinskt registratur*. The latter contains the documents written in German and Latin, and is especially valuable regarding diplomacy. The Swedish section is almost completely preserved whereas the German and Latin section lost many volumes in 1697.¹¹ Some parts of them can still be reconstructed with the help of the *titularregister*, a register of letters which was written in the seventeenth century.¹² With regard to the *riksregistraturet* as a source for historians there are several problems that need to be addressed. It was common practice at the chancery to accumulate the drafts until such time that they could be copied into the *riksregistraturet*. This could sometimes take decades, although the situation probably improved after 1618. The consequences of this practice were that documents could be misdated because drafts were often without date. Furthermore, after some time, it became hard to distinguish between drafts which were rejected and

10 Ibid., 123.

11 Ibid., 125. The *riksregistraturet* consists of 818 volumes which cover the period from 1523 to 1718. It has the reference code SE/RA/1112.1.

12 Norborg, *Källor*, 125. The *titularregister till riksregistraturet* consists of 16 volumes which cover the period from 1522 to 1690. It has the reference code SE/RA/1112.2 and is digitally accessible online.

drafts which were sent. The *riksregistraturet*, therefore, contains empty spaces where the outstanding drafts were never inserted and the dates of documents in the *riksregistraturet* are often unreliable.¹³ The whole *riksregistraturet* remains unprinted, although it has completely been scanned and made digitally accessible in recent years.¹⁴

An important participant in Swedish foreign and domestic politics was the above mentioned Council of the Realm, the *riksråd*. It consisted of influential nobles who represented the small Swedish aristocracy and gave advice to the king. The communication between king and *riksråd* took place in writing. The council's answers to the king's propositions were called the *rådslag* (counsel). Many of the *rådslag* are preserved, although the discussions at the council have first been recorded under Gustav Adolph's reign.¹⁵ The first minutes (*riksrådets protokoll*) date from 1617 and 1621 to 1622, but since 1626 the minutes of the discussions at the *riksråd* are regularly taken by the secretaries of the royal chancery. The procedure regarding the minutes went as follows: the first draft (*memorialprotokoll*) contained the notes of the secretaries during the meeting which was neatly written out afterwards, in the so-called *konceptprotokoll*. Often several secretaries recorded the proceedings at the same time in order to avoid mistakes and their *konceptprotokoll* provided the basis for the final document, the *renskrivna protokollet*.¹⁶ This practice presents the historians with several problems because the final document could contain inaccuracies and changes compared with the *konceptprotokoll*. Moreover, the *renskrivna protokollet* was usually not checked later. The minutes of the seventeenth century, however, held a higher degree of accuracy than in later centuries, even with regard to intentional alterations. Nevertheless, the minutes raise other questions concerning the proceedings themselves, especially the procedure of pro and contra discussions at the *riksråd*. This kind of discussion does not allow drawing

13 Norborg, *Källor*, 125-126.

14 See the official website of the *Riksarkivet*, <http://sok.riksarkivet.se/svar-digitala-forskarsalen>.

15 Norborg, *Källor*, 156-157.

16 Ibid., 157.

conclusions regarding the actual opinion of individual council members and it remains difficult to decide if these discussions were staged.¹⁷ While the proceedings have been printed,¹⁸ the *rådslag* remain in the most part unprinted except for some from the later years of Gustav Adolph's reign, which refer to the decision about the Sweden's entry into the Thirty Years' War.¹⁹ There exists, however, a summary register of the *rådslag* under Gustav Adolph's reign, which E. W. Bergman has compiled and published in the series *Meddelanden från Svenska Riksarkivet*.²⁰

The Swedish Diet, the *riksdag*, has generated a number of documents which have for the most part not survived as originals. These so-called *riksdagsakterna* consist of the royal propositions, the minutes of the estates' discussions, the answers of the estates, the final decisions of the *riksdag*, the estates' grievances (*besvär*) and documents concerning certain committees like the committee diet (*utskottsriksdag*) or the committee meeting (*utskottsmöte*).²¹ The *riksdag* was usually not involved in the decision-making process regarding foreign policy and, therefore, its documents are only of limited use to this study. The *riksdagsakterna* remain mostly unprinted and are kept at the Riksarkivet under the title *Riksdagsacta*.²² Only the *riksdagsakterna* from 1611 to 1617 have been published thus far in their entirety by Nils Ahnlund in two volumes of *Svenska riksdagsakter jämte andra handlingar som höra till statsförfattningens historia*.²³

17 Ibid., 157-158, 165, 167.

18 Nils Axel Kullberg, ed., *Svenska riksrådets protokoll*, vol. 1-2, Handlingar rörande Sveriges historia (Stockholm, 1878 and 1880).

19 See Nils Ahnlund, "Öfverläggningarna i riksrådet april 1629," *Historisk Tidskrift* 35 (1915): 94-96; Nils Ahnlund, "Öfverläggningarna i riksrådet om tyska kriget 1628-1630," *Historisk Tidskrift* 34 (1914): 120-121; Rudolf Mauritz Klinckowström, ed., *Arkiv till upplysning om svenska krigens och krigsinrättningarnes historia*, vol. 1 (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1854), 20-24, 55-60.

20 Bergman, "Register öfver Rådslag", 249-294.

21 Norborg, *Källor*, 161-162

22 The *Riksdagsacta* consist of 359 volumes which cover the period from 1525 to 1860. It has the reference code SE/RA/61301.

23 Nils Ahnlund, ed., *Svenska riksdagsakter jämte andra handlingar som höra till statsförfattningens historia*, ser. 1: Tidevarvet 1521-1718, part 2: Tiden från 1611,

The older edition of Anders Anton von Stiernman, *Alla Riksdagar och Möstens Besluth*, which contains all resolutions of the *riksdag* and various additional documents can to a certain degree compensate for that.²⁴

Thus, the main sources regarding the decision-making process in foreign policy are the *riksregistraturet*, the *rådslag*, the minutes of the *riksråd* and papers of the king and his chancellor. Gustav Adolph's papers remain mainly unprinted except for the documents which have been published in Carl Gustaf Styffe's *Konung Gustaf II Adolfs skrifter* and Carl Hallendorff's *Tal och skrifter av konung Gustav II Adolf*.²⁵ The papers of Axel Oxenstierna, however, have been printed in two series under the title *Rikskansleren Axel Oxenstiernas skrifter och brefoexling*.²⁶ They belong to the private collection *Oxenstiernska samlingen* which is now kept at the *Riksarkivet*. The printed collection contains not only the chancellor's correspondence, but also Gustav Adolph's letters to Oxenstierna.²⁷ It consists of a first series, which includes all letters of Oxenstierna in chronological order, and of a second series, which deals with the correspondence to Oxenstierna. The letters have not been completely edited yet, but the volumes of Oxenstierna's letters covering the period in question have already been printed.

Diplomatic documents that are relevant to this study concern primarily diplomatic structures and the implementation of decisions. The main

vol. 1: 1611-1616 (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1931) and vol. 2.1: 1617 (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1943).

24 Stiernman, ed., *Alla Riksdagar och Möstens Besluth Samt Arfföreningar, Regements-Former, Försäkringar och Bewillningar ... med the för hwart och ett Stånd utfärdade allmenna Resolutioner*, vol. 1 (Stockholm: Kongl. tryckeriet, 1728).

25 Gustav II Adolph, *Konung Gustaf II Adolfs skrifter*, ed. Carl Gustaf Styffe (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1861); Carl Hallendorff, ed., *Tal och skrifter av konung Gustav II Adolf* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1915).

26 *Rikskansleren Axel Oxenstiernas skrifter och brefoexling*, 29 vols. (Stockholm, 1888-2012).

27 Gustav II Adolph, *K. Gustaf II Adolfs bref och instruktioner*, ed. Per Sondén, vol. 1 of *Rikskansleren Axel Oxenstiernas skrifter och brefoexling*, ser. 2 (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets historie och antikvitets akademien, 1888).

interest lies in the king's correspondence with other sovereigns and his diplomats, the council's or the chancellor's correspondence with other foreign officials and their diplomats, and the instructions for diplomats. The thesis focuses on the aims and strategies regarding the use of diplomacy and, so, concentrates mainly on the first stages of diplomatic action after a decision has been made. Diplomacy adapts to a changing environment which, inevitably, modifies the initial approach to a certain degree. In order to keep the intended use of diplomacy in focus it is, therefore, necessary to limit the analysis to the first stages of diplomatic action.

Consequently, the official documents in the *riksregistraturet* as well as the letters of king and chancellor are the principal sources with regard to diplomacy. The *Riksarkivet* also holds most of the original documents pertaining to diplomacy. These documents belong to a special collection, the *Diplomatica*, which includes not only the original documents, but all documents in connection with diplomatic missions from and to Sweden.²⁸ Since the *riksregistraturet* covers the main part of the documents that are essential for this study, the *Diplomatica* is only of supplementary use.

The letters to the king which survived as originals are kept at the *Riksarkivet* under the heading *Skrivelser till konungen* and like the *riksregistraturet* they have recently been made digitally accessible.²⁹ Furthermore, a list of all letters to Gustav Adolph has been published by Per Sondén in the series *Meddelanden från Svenska Riksarkivet*.³⁰ The letters to the chancellor are mostly printed in the above mentioned second series of *Rik-*

28 Norborg, *Källor*, 128. The *Diplomatica* collection consists of 19 series with Latin titles that reach from the *Diplomatica Danica* to the *Diplomatica Turcica*. See Sören Tommos, *The Diplomatica Collection in the Swedish National Archives*, *Skrifter utgivna av svenska Riksarkivet* (Stockholm: LiberFörlag/Allmänna förl., 1980), 9-11.

29 Norborg, *Källor*, 124-125. The *Skrivelser till Gustav II Adolf* consist of 35 volumes and have the reference code SE/RA/1133/1133.07.

30 Per Sondén, "Förteckning öfver bref till konung Gustaf II Adolf i riksarkivet," *Meddelanden från Svenska Riksarkivet*, 16 (1892): 21-77.

skansleren Axel Oxenstiernas skrifter och brefvexling. The most recent volumes in the second series contain the letters of diplomats in Swedish services and were published in 2007 and 2012.³¹ Among them are the letters of Jacob Spens and Jan Rutgers, who have served as correspondents and diplomats for the Swedish Government in England and the Netherlands, and played an important part in Swedish diplomacy under Gustav Adolph. Another important diplomat was Ludwig Camerarius, whose letters to Oxenstierna are printed in Schybergson's *Sveriges och Hollands diplomatiska förbindelser 1621–1630*.³²

The letters and reports of the diplomats are an important source concerning the practice of Swedish diplomacy, but they need also be studied with caution. Aside from avoiding the serious mistake of making no distinction between the actual content and the use of conventional phrases it need to be kept in mind that the writer often used tactics to achieve his own ends. This means he adapted to the situation and to the addressee of his letter, used arguments to his advantage or tried to justify his actions and views.³³ To a certain degree this is typical for all diplomatic communication and should always be taken into consideration when dealing with diplomatic documents.

Literature

The literature about European diplomacy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries mainly focuses on the diplomatic practice of Western Europe, with Garrett Mattingly's work *Renaissance diplomacy* being the

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- 31 Jacob Spens and Jan Rutgers, *Brev från Jacob Spens och Jan Rutgers*, ed. Arne Jönsson, vol. 13 of *Rikskanslern Axel Oxenstiernas skrifter och brevväxling*, ser. 2 (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets historie och antikvitets akademien, 2007); Johan Adler Salvius, *Brev från Johan Adler Salvius*, ed. Per-Gunnar Ottosson and Helmut Backhaus, vol. 14 of *Rikskanslern Axel Oxenstiernas skrifter och brevväxling*, ser. 2 (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets historie och antikvitets akademien, 2012).
- 32 M. G. Schybergson, *Sveriges och Hollands diplomatiska förbindelser 1621-1630, belysta genom aktstycken ur svenska riksarkivet*, *Bidrag till kännedom av Finlands natur och folk* (Helsinki, 1881), 103-520.
- 33 Norborg, *Källor*, 217-218.