

APR17-2016-020228

Abstract for an Invited Paper
for the APR17 Meeting of
the American Physical Society

Physics and Diplomacy: A True Story

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Physics has played a prominent role in U.S. diplomacy since the development of nuclear weapons during World War II. The discipline expanded its reach during the Atoms for Peace initiative of president Eisenhower and continued through the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Physics maintains a prominent role in the diplomatic dialogue through efforts in the nuclear non-proliferation arena and in major international science collaborations such as in experiments at CERN, ITER and the International Space Station.

Physics has also served as the template for the much broader impact of science on diplomacy. For example, climate change, energy efficiency and ocean science have all benefitted from the path blazed by physicists.

But how effective have physicists been in steering clear of political dynamics while trying to infuse scientific facts into policy debates? This talk will consider this through the eyes of a physicist who has spent many years providing advice to policy makers, both inside and outside of government.