

Former US Ambassador visits York

Former US Ambassador Carey Cavanaugh visited the University on Tuesday to give a lecture on the peace mediation, negotiation and diplomacy

By [Ed Smith](#)

Friday 23 February 2018



Ed Smith pictured with Professor Cavanaugh
Image: Ed Smith

Carey Cavanaugh the former US Ambassador and Special Negotiator responsible for conflicts arising in Eurasia, delivered a pertinent and encompassing talk on Tuesday 20 February 2018. Cavanaugh, now a tenured professor at the University of Kentucky and Director of the Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Commerce, delivered a lecture on the necessity of diplomacy in any volatile environment and its reliance on the art of communication is a valuable skill that is now being lost to the whims of aggression and fickleness.

Cavanaugh first established how mediation and conflict resolution were both a subset of the overarching phrase, diplomacy and making diplomacy bespoke to each situation is essential. However, although both come under diplomacy, conflict resolution is likely to win you a Nobel Peace Prize, as the international community value preventing the loss of any life much more than negotiating or mediating a disarmament treaty.

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The reason behind his emphasis upon this point was to reiterate a point that diplomacy typically ends in failure. He noted that the Camp David Accords between Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin, has not resolved the discussion over Israel and the tension or conflict within the region. Yet the summit was able to damage control to a great degree. Despite both leaders ultimately being shamed, it generated both a short term solution to a long problem and the reciprocal, by stabilising the problem, creating an environment of communication and found solutions.

Carey went into extensive detail over the telephone diplomacy that ultimately diffused the growing tension and possible war between Turkey and Greece over the islets [Imia and Kardak](#). The case study was extremely interesting and it was unpacked by Cavanaugh at great depth. The ultimate solution, after the telephone diplomacy of Richard Holbrooke, was reverting back to the status quo ante, despite several proposals including testing the genetics of the goats that resided on the rocks.

Cavanaugh used the case study to emphasise both his point on how communication is a key skill in the art of diplomacy and that the broad aim of a conflict is to have a major resolution but time usually is not right, as success in mediation is dependent on locked or unlocked doors. He used this expansive point to emphasise the need to negotiate with terrorists.

The labelling of terrorism and terrorists, Cavanaugh explained, is a dangerous concept in the international arena especially, which has exponentialised since the 9/11 terror attacks as even talking to terrorists is seen as committing a crime. As he explained that talking to terrorists is usually not an issue in a small scale domestic arena, as talking to and negotiating with bank robbers is essential to diffusing the situation. Dealing with the bad guys does not necessarily make you weak but is an essential tool as it forces people to understand the massive repercussions for minor actions.

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The lecture then turned to a question and answer period. A question arose whether the rise of Russia and China since the early 1990s will serve to impact the image of the US as global chief negotiator and if the US is biased. Cavanaugh first addressed the latter question. As he explained through his continuing theme of making mediating and negotiating bespoke to diplomacy.

For example he explained that for Clinton's Camp David Summit in 2000 with Israeli and Palestinian leaders, Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat, each member in the US diplomacy contingency were all Jewish. The reasoning behind this was that it was the best way to ensure the deal that would hopefully be reached to Israeli-Palestinian conflict, was accepted by Congress and the American Jewish Community, and the easiest way to do this, was building into the process and thus making the diplomacy bespoke.

Cavanaugh then turned to the former question and responded that Russia exerting itself on the world stage and China is beginning to realise the necessity for mediation will potentially lead to a more even environment on the world diplomatic arena.

Cavanaugh reiterated how making each diplomatic process bespoke to the process, whether that is making Russia a lead negotiator or the US having a more logistical role that doesn't take the driving seat has the potential, but is unlikely during the Trump presidency at least, because of his brash attitude and arrogance.

The talk and other responses by Mr Cavanaugh were thought provoking and highly knowledgeable and we look forward to hosting him again in the not too distant future.



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