

Weekly Standing Assignment 5: Diplomacy

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The authors, as indicated from the title of the chapter, are interested in the ways that negative peace between conflicting parties can be realised via diplomacy. As someone once said, nobody has to negotiate with their friends, and this fact evidences why diplomatic processes can appear absurd or quixotic to observers. Third parties employing their good offices are often instrumental to enabling communication and resolving disputes, though not always successfully in the long-term.

Track II diplomacy, as it is known, involves informal negotiating between lower officials or even unofficial actors who speak on behalf of their country. These talks may not necessarily be secret, but usually they are informal in nature.

They differentiate between “positional” and “integrative” bargaining, writing that positional strategies are often not conducive to successful compromise. By contrast, integrative strategies, which they describe as “principled negotiation,” seeks to transcend the immediate dispute and address the interests of the parties at odds. By considering *why* parties are in conflict, a resolution can be reached which accommodates the different needs of both, which may not be incompatible after all. An example not discussed by the text would be the Shanghai Communiqué between the US and the PRC: by identifying the Taiwan Question as intractable and setting it aside, the two nations were able to find common ground in other areas and build confidential diplomatic rapport.

Key to building confidence between conflicting parties is information sharing. Useful information can run the gamut from independent verification of commitments to awareness of the opposite parties high-priority issues. In conflicts which appear intractable, triangulating the issue by “bridging” the issue can circumvent the logjam.

As general advice, the authors emphasise empathy and allowing one’s opponents a “way out” that saves face. Negotiating in good faith also has its limitations, since that presumes that states (and by extension, their diplomats) have perfect information of their own capabilities and plans; the authors mention the ambush at Pearl Harbour, which caught Japanese diplomats as much by surprise as their American counterparts.