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On Strategy and Tactics

Negotiations are not about winning or losing, they are about where you are and what the next step is (Ryzov 2019; Zartman and Rubin 2000). Strategy will provide a template from which to work and plan that next step (Wheeler 2013; Cassan and de Bailliencourt 2019). Preparations of strategy in negotiations often center around the topic or issue at hand. In doing so, negotiators overlook the grand strategies of the actors at the table, and sometimes even their own. These grand strategies influence perceptions and why actors want something, rather than what they want. Therefore, in preparing for negotiations it is important

> *"to know and comprehend the mentality, concerns and aspirations of 'the other.'" (Baños 2019: 276)*

To understand the moves and strategies in a particular negotiation it is vital to understand the grand strategy governing the way an actor analyzes and perceives a political situation, especially when it is one of conflict. Parties can have different reasons to be at the table. For example, Russia's presence at the Minsk negotiations over the Donbas and Luhansk regions probably had little to do with reaching a peaceful solution and a return to stability. The Kremlin's interest was, and is, to keep parts of Ukraine unstable to prevent NATO and EU membership considerations, which coincides with a broader desire to prevent NATO and EU expansion in its near abroad.

Perceptions are influenced by sets of beliefs and rationalities that differ between parties. These sets of beliefs and rationalities influence not only the observations of the flow of political events, but also the norms, standards, and guidelines by which the actor makes decisions (George 1969). Grand strategy, according to Gaddis (2018), is the combination of matching finite resources with infinite goals and acting accordingly to the context when it changes. Strategy requires an overview of the whole, which in turn reveals the significance of its respective parts, having a clear direction and destination while using the resources and tactics to steer clear of the obstacles.

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Power, in negotiations,

> *"can be increased by understanding and exploiting the context in which the negotiation is taking place." (Zartman and Rubin 2000: 265)*

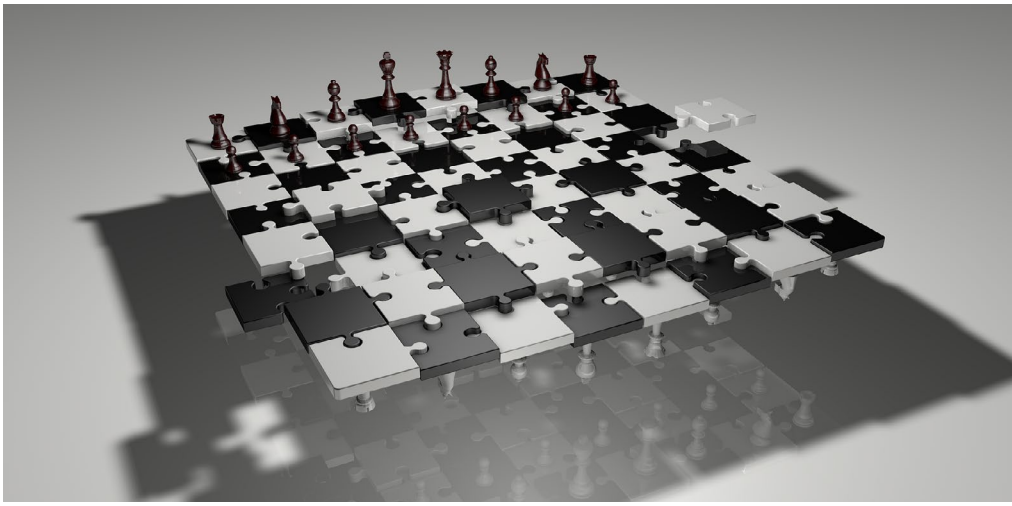
But it is equally important to analyze the nature and sources of power itself in any situation, even more so how actors perceive their own power and that of the other parties at the table. Additionally, it is crucial to understand

> *"the perceived capacity of one side to produce an intended effect on another through a move that may involve the use of resources." (Zartman and Rubin 2000: 14)*

Meerts (2015) differentiates three types of power within negotiation: First, there is the power of conduct, which is marginal and originates from the negotiator (Meerts 2015: 28). This social power centers on the relations between parties and on the influence of people in determining the process and, with that, the outcome. Second, there is structural power – the power of the state, which remains constant across different situations. Consisting of hard power (exemplified by military force, economic strength, population size, geography, and so on) and soft power (in terms of culture, foreign policy, and so on), it comprises the total resources held by an actor. Third, there

is comparative power – the ability to translate structural power to the context of the negotiations. These are the resources that can be directed toward a particular conflict or concern (Zartman and Rubin 2000: 10).

The set of beliefs and rationalities that influence an actor's perception is determined by a wide array of elements. The first step is to analyze and understand the culture of the different parties as well as their historical behavior and relationship. For instance, when the Dutch negotiate with Suriname, each must be aware of their shared history, the colonial influence, current political discussions, reputations, and relations. The second step is to determine how the actor perceives the world. Walker (1990) reasons such a world view can be either in conflict temporarily interrupted by peace or at peace temporarily interrupted by conflict. More important is to identify what the actor believes to be the source of the conflict, whether this be miscommunication/misunderstanding, war-oriented state actors miscalculating their own abilities and those of others, or the failure of the international system to effectively govern. The third step is concerned with analyzing how the parties perceive the flow of events. Are the process and outcome set in stone, or is the actor able to exert influence (and if so, how much)? Are they optimistic about achieving their goals? And, finally, does the actor believe in chance, or are events and choices interconnected within a greater plan? The fourth and last step analyzes the way goals are set. An actor can set multiple goals with a variety of sub-objectives, each with a different level of achievability and payoff, or set multiple goals and aim for maximum payoff. How goals are pursued also needs to be considered, as well as which resources are used and how risks of political action are calculated, controlled, and accepted (George 1969).



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Within negotiations, Kilmann and Thomas (1977), followed up by Galdwin and Walter (1980), developed a model specifically on behavioral strategies. Determining which is applicable to the actor and the context depends, according to this model, on certain behavior: the level of assertiveness and cooperation. The level of assertiveness is influenced by the stakes in the outcome, which is a nod to how important the outcome is to a party or actor and at what price an outcome is agreeable (Galdwin and Walter 1980; Kilmann and Thomas 1977; Meerts 2015; Saner 2012), in addition to being affected by the relative power of the parties – in other words, the power that each brings to the table and the relevance it has to the issue at hand. High or low relative power will influence the choice of behavioral strategy. Those with high relative power will have to consider if, when, and how to use it (Galdwin and Walter 1980; Kilmann and Thomas 1977; Meerts 2015; Saner 2012). Those with low relative power will need to find a way to translate the lack of resources into desires. Scoring high on both will result in assertive behavior, while scoring low creates unassertiveness.

"A stronger party would have no need to negotiate since it could simply take what it wants. Yet weak parties not only take on stronger ones in negotiation, they often emerge with sizeable – even better than expected – results." (Zartman and Rubin 2000: 3)

The level of cooperation, in turn, is determined by two factors, one being interest interdependence: "the more the interests of the parties coincide, the more they will want to cooperate" (Saner 2012: 118); by the same token,

the less their interests coincide, the less willingness there will be (Galdwin and Walter 1980; Kilmann and Thomas 1977; Meerts 2015; Saner 2012). The strength of this factor also depends on whether the parties acknowledge and understand their own interdependencies – i.e., if I wish to achieve my goals I might need to help (the) other(s) to achieve theirs. The other factor in the level of cooperation is the quality and value of the relationship. The importance of the personal relationship is often taken for granted, but we act differently towards friends, people we respect or trust. The personal relationship influences the likability factor and how willing parties are to make compromises (Galdwin and Walter 1980; Kilmann and Thomas 1977; Meerts 2015; Saner 2012). But it is also about the value the parties place on the relationship. For instance, within the European Union the shadow of the future plays an important role. Members know they will have to deal with each other time and again. This incentivizes them to compromise on issues less important right now, expecting others to do so on issues important to them in the future. On the other hand, Russia puts less value on relationships. Actors in international political negotiation will always have to deal with the Kremlin. It has a voice and vote in high-stakes negotiations because of its veto on the UN Security Council, along with its resources and influence. When interests are interdependent and the actors both acknowledge this and value the relationship, cooperative behavior will likely result; independent interests or a lack of acknowledgement/value of interdependency, however, will lead to uncooperative behavior.

Different combinations make for different behavioral strategies:

1. being assertive but uncooperative will make for a competitive behavioral strategy,
2. lack of assertiveness and cooperation creates avoidance,
3. cooperative behavior combined with unassertiveness will inspire an accommodative behavioral strategy, and
4. being assertive and cooperative makes for a collaborative behavioral strategy;
5. however, in the middle of it all is a compromising behavioral strategy (Galdwin and Walter 1980; Kilmann and Thomas 1977; Meerts 2015; Saner 2012).

One behavioral strategy is not by default better than another – the one best applied depends on the context and goals. Even more so, over time a behavioral strategy can shift due to changing circumstances. For instance, a new government might take a new and different approach to its foreign policy, which might raise the stakes in the outcome. As a result, this actor that may have initially pursued an avoidant or accommodative behavioral strategy might now shift towards a competitive or collaborative one. Within negotiations, actors can shift from being accommodative to avoiding to competitive, and so on, depending on the flow of events.

A solid strategy provides an overview of all the different routes that can be taken and of which behavioral strategy best fits which context; tactics underpin such a strategy. Tactics give negotiators practical tools to avoid or overcome obstacles along the way and to switch from one route to another when necessary. Certain tactics fit certain strategies better than others. At the same time,

> *"a poorly prepared tactic can play havoc with even the best strategy and spoil the cooperative climate of a negotiation." (Saner 2012: 137)*

There are many tactics available; below I illustrate a few to demonstrate their relation to behavioral strategies.

One influential tactic is control over the agenda. Whoever controls the agenda has significant influence over the negotiations by determining the order of the topics discussed. Will the most pressing issue be dealt with first or left to the end, using time pressure to get a deal close to the preferred outcome? Controlling the agenda also enables the negotiator to prevent others from blocking certain routes by adjusting the discussion time or the process where necessary. In a competitive behavioral strategy, the negotiator is more likely to dictate the agenda and set it to their advantage without consulting others. On the accommodative and collaborative side, negotiators are more likely to set the agenda together and adjust accordingly to the process.

Another tactic concerns time. For instance, delaying can shift the context and the situation in one's favor. The value of resources relevant to the negotiations can change over time, making it worthwhile to wait for bet-

ter times, thereby changing the power balance (Zartman and Rubin 2000). But it can also work against a party, diminishing the advantage over the current context. Time can also improve or diminish the quality of the relationship. Those pursuing a competitive behavioral strategy will want to dominate the process and time frame or cut negotiations short, while those in an avoidant or collaborative mode might want to play for time until the situation is ripe to negotiate.

Location, as a tactic, is often underplayed or forgotten. However, where the meetings take place, with whom, and where everyone sits at the table can all have a significant impact. Are you invited to stay at the most luxurious hotel, meet with the ministers in the grandest room of the ministry? Or are you meeting with a junior member of staff or an intern in a backroom of a conference center? Do you sit next to your negotiating partners or across from each other? Such decisions reflect the respect and importance that actors place on the negotiations and the others at the table.

A final tactic to mention is flattery and charm. The Dutch, for example, are considered to be down-to-earth and straightforward. But they are also vulnerable to flattery and charm (Meerts 2012). Take them out dining in a nice restaurant, pay them compliments about their behavior and there is a good chance they will be willing to make compromises for you. Flattery and charm influence personal relationships, increasing the chances of moving the other parties from being competitive or avoidant towards being collaborative and accommodative.

Negotiation strategy often centers around, alongside the interests and perceptions of the parties, the issue at hand. However, in international political negotiation it is more often the rule than the exception that affairs beyond the negotiation table influence the behavioral and grand strategy of the parties. We must therefore analyze the nature and sources of power as well as how they relate to the specific context. Furthermore, it is important to understand not only the set of beliefs and perceptions that influence the way parties observe the flow of political events, but also the norms, standards, and guidelines by which they make decisions. All of this intersects to determine the behavioral strategies and tactics in the specific negotiations. Taken together, this information will enable negotiators to create a general template to help them determine where they are and what the next step is.

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