

NEGOTIATION IN CURRENT INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

There is growing criticism of post-war multilateral forums by certain powers because they give preference to bilateral negotiations where the balance of power is in their favour and where they can avoid international norms by imposing a relationship where the strong dominates the weak

1 CONFLICT AND NEGOTIATION

There is not anything new or surprising about the brutality of international relations but over the past few years there has been notable revival of this behaviour in relationships between nations. When dealing with this kind of situation the major stake is to find anchor points and to build personal relationships to create trust/confidence to help manage the abrasiveness and reduce the consequences (commercial war, sanctions, low-intensity conflicts etc.) The engagement needs to be verified using mechanisms, if possible: citing President Reagan's favourite saying "Trust but verify" that he himself borrowed from a Russian in a charming irony of history (*'doveriay no proveriay'*). This is obviously the case in the traditional *hard security* field (disarmament, arms control, presence of troops, etc) but also in the fight against global warming, or in trying to prevent the phenomenon of the stowaways and to guarantee the credibility of international agreements in this field.

2 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN NEGOTIATORS

The personal relationships between leaders often helps make substantial progress in negotiations that appear blocked even when this is not enough to finalise the agreements. We have seen a major comeback of the personal dimension in international relations and negotiations these past few years with several Head of State personally taking charge of their country's diplomacy. In some cases, they have outrageously overes-

timated their capacity to obtain an agreement in line with their country's interests. On another level, the EU Council privileged meetings for member state diplomats, in Brussels, to deal with major legislative stakes, instead of using video conferences, even during the worst of the Covid pandemic. In this case, the added value of the negotiators' physical presence was clear as opposed to meetings with less important stakes.

3 THE NEED TO TAKE PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS INTO ACCOUNT

The necessity of creating personal relationships of trust between negotiators, and sometimes even between leaders, is also related to the necessity of preserving the negotiator's ego and those behind him, the Entity, State, or community he/she represents. Several "frozen conflicts" around the planet are related to one or both of the parties feeling humiliated. History is full of examples where agreements made in these circumstances have had tragic consequences. The importance of saving the opposing party's face in a critical negotiation not only demonstrates goodwill in resolution of the conflict but also encourages your partner to conclude the agreement by helping him "sell it" to his decision-makers, peers, and his public image/opinion. It will also help make room for future relations with this partner, this element is almost more important when there is a dependant relationship or if there is strong geographic proximity ("Every state creates its politics according to its geography" – Napoleon).

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