
Art of the Power Deal: The Four Negotiation Roles of Donald J. Trump

Eugene B. Kogan

In this article, I mine President Donald Trump's considerable writing and speaking record to synthesize the key elements of his deal-making approach to help make better sense of his rhetoric and actions on the world's diplomatic stage. My argument is that Trump's coercive negotiation style is best understood through the prism of his four public roles: observer, performer, controller, and disrupter. In this article, I analyze how these roles translate into his negotiating behavior. Spotting and exploiting vulnerability is his trade; leverage and bravado are his tools. After assessing the opposing side, Trump uses leverage to threaten his counterparts' weaknesses, while using bravado to play up the advantages of reaching an agreement on his terms. This way, he presents a drastic structured choice to his opponents, leaving them the least maneuvering space. In the final section of the paper, I illustrate how the four-role framework helps explain Trump's decisions in the nuclear negotiations with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. I also consider opportunities for further research.

Key words: negotiation, Donald Trump, leverage, bargaining, power, diplomacy, deal-making, coercive negotiation, Kim Jong Un, U.S.-North Korea negotiations, negotiation as performance, structured choice

Eugene B. Kogan is research director of Harvard University's American Secretaries of State Project in Cambridge, Massachusetts. His e-mail address is eugene_kogan@hks.harvard.edu

Introduction

This article distills President Donald Trump's approach to negotiation – drawing mainly on his own written and public pronouncements.¹ In preparing this article, I reviewed ten books that Trump co-authored as well as four books about him. In addition, I have watched more than seventy of his public appearances from 1980 to the present and have been monitoring his Twitter feed since April 2018.

Other authors have focused on selected elements of Trump's deal-making approach (Malhotra and Moore 2016; Irwin 2017; Allen 2018; Hendrix 2018),² and I build on these efforts to more comprehensively flesh out his negotiation worldview. A debate about his prowess as a negotiator has already begun, with some arguing in favor of his effectiveness (Ross 2006; McRoberts 2015; Falkenberg and Wilks 2016; Napolitano 2018; Solloway 2018), and others assessing his bargaining skills to be highly overrated (Bordone 2016; Malhotra and Moore 2016; Caminiti 2017; Irwin 2017; Kruse 2018; Latz 2018). I acknowledge these disagreements, but do not take sides. About one point, there is little contention, and it provides the impetus for this case analysis: Trump's negotiating behavior is having a significant impact on the United States and international security. Thus, a comprehensive synthesis of Trump's thinking on this subject can be helpful to policymakers, scholars, and citizens.

In this article, I argue that Trump is a coercive negotiator: spotting and exploiting vulnerability is his trade; leverage and bravado are his tools. He first assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the opposing side; he then employs all levers of power to threaten those vulnerabilities, while using bravado to play up the advantages of making an agreement on his terms. This way, he presents a stark structured choice to his interlocutors, leaving them the least maneuvering space.

In the following pages, I identify Trump's four overarching behavior patterns (I refer to them as "roles"): observer, performer, controller, and disrupter – and examine how they interact to shape his deal-making style. I then use the ongoing nuclear negotiations with North Korea to illustrate how these roles manifest themselves, and conclude by outlining an agenda for further research.

Four Dominant Roles

From a detailed review of Trump's writings and public pronouncements before, during, and after the 2016 presidential campaign, I have identified four dominant roles that Trump has taken on in his business and now political careers. Taken together, the following four categories

provide an explanatory and predictive framework for analyzing Trump's often-unscripted pronouncements and behavior.

First, Trump is an *observer*: he begins a negotiation with an assessment of his counterparts' strengths and vulnerabilities. Second, he is a *performer*: he is perennially aware of – and seeks – media attention in order to use publicity to maximize his leverage in a negotiation. Third, he is a *controller*: his top-down leadership style aims for bureaucracy-free efficiency. Finally, he is a *disrupter*: gut-driven, action-oriented, and risk-tolerant, he draws strength from adversity.

Trump as Observer

Scholars have long emphasized the importance of preparation before one negotiates (e.g., Fisher, Ury, and Patton 1991), with some calling it “the cornerstone of successful negotiation” (Mnookin, Peppet, and Tulumello 2000: 28). Scholars have also suggested that “joint fact-finding” among the negotiating parties can facilitate a consensual conflict resolution process (Susskind 2014). But using observation to facilitate a mutual gains approach is not what Donald Trump has in mind when he prepares for a negotiation. Speaking on a television talk show in 2009, he emphatically told the audience that one key to a successful negotiation is “to be able to size up your opponent” (Trump 2009b).

This advice reflects Trump's belief that he is a keen interpersonal observer, unusually effective in assessing the power resources of his counterparts (Ferguson 2018). He prepares for a negotiation by learning as much as possible about the other side's strengths and vulnerabilities. “Know thy adversary” may be a well-accepted bargaining principle (e.g., Raiffa 1982), but Trump's emphasis on this aspect of negotiation preparation is notable: “You've got to know what the other side wants and where they're coming from,” he wrote in *Why We Want You to Be Rich* (Trump and Kiyosaki 2011: 148). And, Trump advised his earlier television audience regarding potential negotiation interlocutors, “when they're on the other side of the table, that's what they are – they are an *opponent*” (Trump 2009b, emphasis added). Competition is central to Trump's conception of the negotiation process.

Negotiation scholars recognize the strategic value of empathy – the ability to put oneself into other people's shoes to make them feel as if you understand (without necessarily agreeing with) their point of view (e.g., Mnookin, Peppet, and Tulumello 2000). At first glance, Trump appears to concur: “Frequently, people are so involved in trying to get what they want,” he wrote in *Trump 101*, “that they ignore other people's needs and objectives and don't successfully connect” (Trump 2006: 50).

Understanding one's counterpart's fundamental "interests" as opposed to their publicly stated "positions" in order to negotiate a deal based on achievement of mutual gains (Fisher, Ury, and Patton 1991; Mnookin, Peppet, and Tulumello 2000) is critical to cooperative negotiation approaches (e.g., integrative, interest-based, principled, mutual-gains). But Trump's orientation is distinctly more coercive: "Learn your adversary's strengths and weaknesses: Find out who your adversaries are, what resources they have, who is backing them, how much they want, why they want it, how much they will settle for, and how much they will pay or insist on receiving" (Trump 2006: 62). Trump does not empathize with his opponents; he sizes them up.

Trump as Performer

As much as Trump watches others, he is aware of being watched: "life is a performance art," he wrote *Think Like a Champion*. "Understand that as a performer, you have a responsibility to your audience to perform to the best of your ability" (Trump 2009a: 159). Indeed, as he walked down the stairs of the U.S. Capitol on Inauguration Day, January 20, 2017, President-elect Trump paused to look directly into the camera, prompting television commentator George Stephanopoulos to exclaim: "He smiles for the camera! He is always aware ... [that] the cameras are every step of the way" (ABC News 2017).

As performer, Trump has exaggerated commonly used negotiation approaches to maximize his dominance over his counterparts. For example, the importance of knowing one's alternatives has received significant attention in the negotiation literature (e.g., Fisher, Ury, and Patton 1991), and Trump, during the 2016 presidential campaign, likewise advocated having a viable "walk-away" option (Trump 2016c). But Trump the performer has taken it a few steps further, advising negotiators to feign disinterest to determine just how desperate the other party is to strike a deal. "To speed up negotiations, be indifferent. That way you'll find out if the other side is eager to proceed," he wrote (Trump 2008: 168).

In *The Art of the Deal* he described how he employed this tactic when making the case to the New Jersey licensing commission that he should be granted a casino license. He wrote: "Much as I wanted to build a great casino on the great site I'd assembled, I said, I had a very successful real estate business in New York and I was more than willing to walk away from Atlantic City if the regulatory process proved to be too difficult or too time-consuming" (Trump 1987: 207).

In addition to flaunting his ability and willingness to "walk away," Trump the performer also anchors high – i.e., makes the first move and asks for a maximum possible value to get the most out of the

negotiation. “My style of deal-making is quite simple and straightforward. I aim very high, and then I just keep pushing and pushing and pushing to get what I’m after. Sometimes I settle for less than I sought, but in most cases I still end up with what I want” (Trump 1987: 45). For example, “I went in and asked for the world – for an unprecedented tax abatement – on the assumption that even if I got cut back, the break might still be sufficient,” Trump wrote, describing one of his negotiations with the New York City government (Trump 1987: 131).

Trump as Controller

Trump the controller seeks to be in charge of both decision making and information. Indeed, he explained in *The Art of the Deal*, “One of the keys to thinking big is total focus. I think of it almost as a controlled neurosis, which is a quality I’ve noticed in many highly successful entrepreneurs. They’re obsessive, they’re driven, they’re single-minded and sometimes they’re almost maniacal, but it’s all channeled into their work” (Trump 1987: 48).

Top-down decision making gives Trump the feeling of power: “As soon as you take responsibility for all that you touch, the power is in your hands to make it extraordinary. For me, having that sense of control has been a catalyst for success” (Trump and Kiyosaki 2011: 26). His penchant for efficient, top-down decision making is illustrated in this passage from *The Art of the Deal*: “With so many regulators and regulations to satisfy, we [Trump Organization] had one major advantage: the fact that we are not a bureaucracy. In most large public corporations, getting an answer to a question requires going through seven layers of executives, most of whom are superfluous in the first place. In our organization, anyone with a question could bring it directly to me and get an answer immediately. That’s precisely why I’ve been able to act so much faster than my competitors on so many deals” (Trump 1987: 209). “Leadership is not a group effort,” Trump the controller wrote, offering a pithy summary of his management philosophy, “If you’re in charge, then be in charge” (Trump 2006: 101).

Trump as Disrupter

Trump’s fighting style has received considerable attention: “That’s just my makeup,” he explained in *The Art of the Deal*. “I fight when I feel I’m getting screwed, even if it’s costly and difficult and highly risky” (Trump 1987: 236). “I love fighting ... battles,” Trump said recently (McGraw 2018).

Trump the disrupter is instinct-driven. “Listen to your gut, no matter how good something sounds on paper” (Trump 1987: 28). He repeated this advice ten years later. “The chosen few,” he wrote, “can just go with their gut” (Trump 1997: 193). Trump the disrupter is also

action-oriented: “If you’re going to achieve anything, you have to take action” (Trump University Undated).

Most importantly, Trump the disrupter manages ambiguity³ – seeking to minimize it for himself and maximize it for others. He doesn’t like surprises: “Anticipating and preparing for problems will save you time and resources and stop surprises that could cost you a ton,” he advised in *Trump 101* (Trump 2006: 19; also see Cook and Dawsey 2017).

But ambiguity has been an enduring part of Trump’s negotiation toolkit from his early days as a businessman to the present day as occupant of the Oval Office. Before running for president he wrote, “never let anyone know exactly where you’re coming from. Knowledge is power, so keep as much of it to yourself as possible” (Trump and Kiyosaki 2011: 148). “I want to be unpredictable,” Trump told the audience at one of his presidential campaign rallies (Trump 2016a). Indeed, he stressed in a campaign foreign policy speech that “we must *as a nation* be more unpredictable” (Trump 2016c, emphasis added). For example, in a pre-presidential television interview, he refused to rule out the use of nuclear weapons – not for any strategic reasons, but because this would violate one of his core negotiation precepts: “You don’t want [to] say ‘take everything off the table’ because you’re a bad negotiator if you say that. ... Look, nuclear should be off the table, but would there be a time when it could be used? Possibly. ... I would never take any of my cards off the table” (Trump 2016b). Finally, upon becoming president, Trump said in a television interview: “I just don’t want people to know what my thinking is” (Trump 2017). “Unpredictability has become the new normal,” wrote one academic commentator, summing up the Trump approach to international affairs (Roberts 2018; also see Jamieson and Taussig 2017).

Donald Trump’s Negotiation Approach

An analysis of Trump’s negotiation behavior reveals how he embodies each of these four roles. His first preference is to negotiate with those who have few or no options, giving him both immediate maximum leverage (controller) as well as the opportunity to draw a sharp contrast between the other party’s eagerness to negotiate and his magnanimity in doing so given his many purportedly superior options (performer). If his counterparts do have options, he uses threats to denigrate the value of these alternatives, thus presenting them with a structured choice: either accept his offer (which, as performer, he promotes with his typical bravado), or face his unpredictable ire (disrupter). Accepting Trump’s offer often puts the other parties in his debt, and he can be expected to threaten retribution if they do not reciprocate (disrupter).

Choose Counterparts Who Have Few or No Options

“I love losers,” Trump reportedly told a business expo conference audience, “because they make me feel so good [about myself]” (Johnston 2016: 22). Trump the controller sees options as key to his leverage over an opponent, and negotiating with “losers” confers maximum advantage. Leverage, after all, is his principal tool: “don’t make deals without it,” he advises in *The Art of the Deal* (Trump 1987: 209). (See also Richard Shell’s review essay in this issue. Shell also finds leverage to be Trump’s primary negotiation tool.) At the same time, Trump cultivates his own alternatives: “Don’t be afraid to pursue multiple options,” he advises in one of his books. “If one thing doesn’t work out, you’ve got back-up options” (Trump 2008: 68; also see Trump 1997). The fewer options the other parties have, the more leverage Trump the controller enjoys.

As a negotiator who considers leverage as his principal tool, Trump the controller also prefers bilateral negotiations to multilateral ones. “Reality is not bilateral,” political scientist Richard Neustadt observed (1970: 5), but that is the reality that Trump the controller seeks to present to his counterparts in order to most effectively shape their behavior. As Jeswald Salacuse (2000: 260) observed, “it is generally in the interest of the strong to maintain the bilateral framework to keep itself and its weaker adversary enclosed in a dyadic mold.” (The importance of the bilateral negotiation framework will become clearer when I discuss Trump’s structured choice tactic later in this essay.)

Negotiations with counterparts who have limited alternatives offer Trump the performer a captive audience to which he can advertise the advantages of making a deal on his terms. For example, *The Art of the Deal* describes Trump’s efforts to negotiate zoning rights for his Upper West Side project in the 1970s and 1980s. “The city was on the verge of bankruptcy,” Trump the disrupter observed, focusing in on his counterpart’s key vulnerability. He then shifted into his performer role: “but what I saw was a superb location” (Trump 1987: 120). And, writing in *The Art of the Deal*, Trump described the virtues of the location of the Commodore Hotel, his first major deal in New York City: “Unless the city literally died, millions of affluent people were going to keep passing by this location every day” (Trump 1987: 120–121).⁴

Negotiations with counterparts who have few or no options – and are, thus, eager to negotiate – also give Trump the performer opportunities to showcase his indifference and his concomitant willingness to walk away from the deal. “I’d heard they wanted one very badly,” he writes in *The Art of the Deal* about the Hyatt owners’ desire to build a hotel in New York (Trump 1987: 126). As a result, he concludes in another book, “it was only the depressed state of New York and the

country in general that allowed me to get what I wanted – the best deal possible” (Trump 1997: 164).

Denigrate Counterpart’s Best Alternative

Trump relentlessly seeks to enhance his own leverage by weakening his counterpart’s “best alternative to a negotiated agreement” (BATNA) (Fisher, Ury, and Patton 1991). When he is not in a position to negotiate with a “loser,” Trump will use both disruption and performance to make his interlocutor feel like one. “I’m the first to admit that I am very competitive and that I’ll do nearly anything within legal bounds to win,” he wrote in *The Art of the Deal*. Indeed, he continued, “Sometimes, part of making a deal is denigrating your competition” (Trump 1987: 108). For example, recalling how he sought to persuade New York politicians to build a convention center on his site, Trump wrote that he “told anyone who would listen how great my site was, and how horrible the alternatives were” (Trump 1987: 111–112).

Use Generosity as Leverage

Trump also uses generosity, particularly compliments, to enhance his leverage. “I know that no matter how tough somebody is, he or she will always remember support you’ve given or a favor you might have done in the past,” he wrote in one of his books (Trump 1997: 39).

To succeed in negotiations, Trump explains in *The Art of the Deal*, “you have to convince the other guy it’s in his interest to make the deal” (Trump 1987: 53–54). One way in which Trump the performer accomplishes this is what may be termed the “uninvited gift” technique, essentially saying “I’m treating you in a special way, so you owe me.” For example, one reporter described a conversation with Trump regarding estimates of his wealth: “Trump ... had compiled his own unaudited appraisal, one he was willing to share along with the amusing caveat ‘I’ve never shown this to a reporter before’” (Singer 1997). Trump’s seemingly accidental aside was likely purposefully placed to make the listener feel privileged and indebted for such an exclusive tidbit, an instance of spontaneous generosity that would later call for “loyalty.”

If debts are not repaid – that is, if “loyalty” is not shown – Trump the disrupter will seek “retribution,” as he told television talk show host Jay Leno (Trump and Leno 1999). As he recounted to a journalist: “there were people that I really helped in business, when things were very good, in the 1980s, and when my company was going good – and they did not lift a finger to help me when I needed it, and there were a couple of them that could’ve very easily helped me. Now, I have the opportunity to do a number on those people, and ... I am having a lot of fun with the opportunity” (Trump 1998).

Deal with the Boss

Trump's preference for centralized leadership informs his negotiation approach: "If you're going to make a deal of any significance," he wrote in *The Art of the Deal*, "you have to go to the top" (Trump 1987: 127). Trump the controller seeks to lead the negotiation and resents being hobbled by the "behind-the-table" dynamics: "When you have people snipping [sic] at your heels during a negotiation," he wrote on Twitter, "it will only take longer to make a deal, and the deal will never be as good as it could have been with unity" (Trump 2018f).

Be Prepared to Fight

Trump the disrupter maintains dominance by threatening to fight if, as he puts it ambiguously, he is treated "unfairly." Trump said at the 2012 National Achievers Congress: "One of the things you should do in terms of success: If somebody hits you, you've got to hit 'em back five times harder than they ever thought possible. You've got to get even ... this is so important ... because if they do that [attack] to you, you have to leave a telltale sign that they just can't take advantage of you. It's not so much for the person [who attacked you], which does make you feel good. ... But other people watch and you know they say, 'Well, let's leave Trump alone,' or ... 'Doris, let's leave her alone. They fight too hard'" (Corn 2016).⁵

Present the Other Party with a Structured Choice

The structured choice tactic is central to Trump's coercive negotiation approach. In his use, the method has the following logic: choose my proposal, which I have promoted with bravado or, being less desperate for the deal than you are, I will walk away, ominously suggesting that significant adverse consequences could follow. "Leverage," Trump notes in *The Art of the Deal*, "often requires imagination, and salesmanship" (Trump 1987: 53–54). The structured choice approach is powerful because Trump essentially narrows down the other party's choice set to only two options: one with a clear incentive and the other with an unpredictable (potentially, devastating) threat.

Consider, for example, President Trump's television interview comment about the U.S. relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin: "Getting along with President Putin ... is a positive, not a negative. Now, ... if that doesn't work out, I'll be the worst enemy he's ever had. ... I'll be his worst nightmare. But I don't think it will be that way. I actually think we'll have a good relationship" (CNBC 2018a). As presidential candidate, he made a similar comment about House of Representatives Speaker Paul Ryan: "I'm sure I'm going to get along great with him ... and if I don't, he's going to have to pay a big price" (Steinhauer 2016).

Scholars have discussed the structured choice tactic in the context of nuclear negotiations with Iran and North Korea (Litwak 2008; see also Sebenius 2014), and this concept draws on the theme of threats, incentives, and application of power in coercive diplomacy (e.g., Schelling 1956; Art 2003a, 2003b). Furthermore, Trump's use of threats and intimidation fits squarely in the area of "hard bargaining" tactics (Mnookin, Peppet, and Tulumello 2000; see also Fisher, Ury, and Patton 1991). In the context of labor negotiations, scholars have also written about the "unrestrained forcing strategy," whose elements could include, for example, a strike, a lockout, or a firing of union organizers (Walton, Cutcher-Gershenfeld, and McKersie 1994).

Howard Stevenson and Mihnea Moldoveanu's work on predictability helps explain the power of structured choice. "People will go mad," they wrote (1995: 141), "if punishment and reward are doled out randomly and if they cannot know in advance whether a given outcome will be a win or a loss." "When the future is unknown, an action feels like a choice between lotteries," Stevenson points out (1998: 236). Therefore, he explained, "power comes from making life predictable for other people" (Stevenson 1994). As people seek to reduce "ambiguity and uncertainty ... when choosing between alternative courses of action with unknown consequences," Stevenson argued, they are likely to "choose a course of action with fewer possible outcomes over a course of action with more possible outcomes; and ... a course of action for which the possible outcomes are fully defined, over a course of action for which the outcomes are not fully defined" (Stevenson 1998: 263). Trump's use of the structured choice tactic takes advantage of this propensity to avoid ambiguity.

Trump's structured choice is powerful for two reasons. First, it narrows down the other party's choice set to only two options – seemingly making his or her decision easier. Second, it juxtaposes the clarity of one choice, the one Trump promotes with bravado and a nuanced sense of the interlocutor's vulnerabilities, with the ambiguity of the alternative, the one Trump threatens to employ if the deal is not reached on his terms. In sum, Trump's structured choice is a drastic one that presents one option as vastly superior to the other, thus shaping the other party's decision space, especially if he or she does not have a viable alternative.

Trump and Nuclear Negotiations with North Korea

Some of the most consequential negotiations that Donald Trump has undertaken as president have been the nuclear negotiations between the United States and North Korea. I argue here that the four Trump roles that I have identified above – observer, performer, controller, and disrupter – have been on display throughout this diplomatic process.

Because these negotiations are ongoing and largely secret, this section offers only preliminary observations.

Trump the observer was impatient to meet one-on-one with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un because he presumably believed that this was the only way he could truly assess the North Korean dictator's strengths and vulnerabilities. Indeed, in the aftermath of the Singapore summit with Kim on June 12, 2018, Trump defended the decision to meet his North Korean counterpart: "more importantly than the document [joint communique signed at the summit], I have a good relationship with Kim Jong Un. That's a very important thing" (Trump 2018e).

Trump the observer's belief in the need to get a firsthand understanding of the North Korean situation goes back decades. Consider, for example, the response he gave in 1999 to a journalist's question about North Korea (NBC News 1999):

If a man walks up to you in the street ... and puts a gun to your head and says "give me your money," wouldn't you rather know where he is coming from before he had the gun in his hand? And these people [North Korea] – in three or four years ... they're going to have those [nuclear] weapons pointed all over the world, and specifically at the United States. ... we have a country out there, North Korea, which is sort of wacko, which is ... not a bunch of dummies, and ... they are developing nuclear weapons. And they're not doing it because they are having fun doing it; they're doing it for a reason. And wouldn't it be good to sit down, and really negotiate something?

Trump the controller sympathizes with authoritarian efficiency (BBC News 2016, 2017; Liptak 2018). His meeting with Kim Jong Un – and the manner in which he accepted Kim's invitation to the Singapore summit without extensively consulting with his principal aides (Baker and Sang-Hun 2018) suggests that the controller role was predominant. After all, meeting Kim was the only way for Trump to receive a public denuclearization commitment from North Korea's supreme authority.

Trump's penchant for control has likewise led him away from the multilateral nonproliferation six-party talks established during George W. Bush's administration. Instead, he told a television interviewer, "I like bilateral [negotiations], because if you have a problem, you terminate. When you're in with many countries ... you don't have that same option" (CNBC 2018b). In another television interview, Trump said: "When you get into the mosh pit ... with all these countries together, you can't get out of the deal. And you take the lowest denominator" (Fox News 2017).⁶

Trump first agreed to meet Kim on March 8, 2018, and, with bravado typical of Trump the performer, claimed that he would size up Kim in the first several seconds, and would be willing to walk away from the negotiation: “I think I’ll know pretty quickly whether or not ... something positive will happen. And if I think it won’t happen, I’m not going to waste my time” (Associated Press 2018). Indeed, during a White House press conference on May 22, Trump the performer followed his own script in showing indifference about the upcoming Singapore summit. “If it does [take place], that will be great. It will be a great thing for North Korea. And if it doesn’t, that’s okay too. Whatever it is, it is” (Trump 2018b).

Two days later, Trump the performer engaged in a carefully-choreographed “walking away” from the summit. Thus, the cancellation letter, dated May 24 (Trump 2018c), underscored that North Korea needed the meeting more than the United States, stating that the summit was “requested by North Korea,” and stressing that “the world, and North Korea in particular, has lost a great opportunity for lasting peace and great prosperity and wealth.”

Trump then conditioned the resumption of dialogue on improvement in North Korea’s behavior, first accusing the North Korean side of “tremendous anger and open hostility,” while leaving the diplomatic door ajar with “if you change your mind ... please do not hesitate to call me or write” (Trump 2018c). To dramatize the “walk away” move, Trump had Secretary of State Mike Pompeo read the summit cancellation letter aloud during the opening of a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on May 24 (*Time* 2018).

When the Singapore summit finally took place on June 12, Trump the performer staged a prime-time handshake with Kim, maximizing media exposure (BBC News 2018). During that meeting, Trump showed Kim a short promotional film, produced by the National Security Council, to sell the North Korean leader on the idea of peace (Morris 2018). With Trump’s emblematic bravado, the movie began by showcasing the spectacular gains that North Korea would make if it were to accept American denuclearization proposals. In an early scene, a professional basketball player masterfully landed a ball in the net – possibly Trump the observer’s targeted appeal to Kim, who is known to be a basketball aficionado.⁷

Then, the movie offered North Korea a structured choice. What would Kim choose, the narrator asked, “To show vision and leadership? Or not?” Abruptly, the screen switched from glamorous visions of North Korea’s post-nuclear future to a nuclear explosion and horrifying devastation. “There can only be two results,” the narrator intoned, underscoring that the choice North Korea faces is, indeed, a binary one, “one of

moving back, or one of moving forward. ... It comes down to a choice. ... A great life, or isolation? Which path will he [‘this leader,’ apparently referring to Kim] choose?” (Morrin 2018).

Likely foreshadowing the structured choice he would present to Kim at the summit, Trump the disrupter stated at a pre-summit press conference: “I think that he [Kim Jong Un] will be extremely happy if something works out. And if it doesn’t work out, honestly, he can’t be happy” (Trump 2018b). To make the choice clear in the run-up to the summit, Trump the disrupter issued both direct and ambiguous threats to diminish the attractiveness of Kim’s existing option, which was to press ahead with nuclear weapons development and deployment. Deterrent threats included the famous message that Pyongyang’s aggression would be “met with fire and fury and frankly power, the likes of which this world has never seen before” (DeYoung and Wagner 2018). Likewise, Trump’s letter to Kim, cancelling the Singapore summit, was unambiguous: “You talk about your nuclear capabilities, but ours are so massive and powerful that I pray to God they will never have to be used” (Trump 2018c). In the tradition of coercive diplomacy (Schelling 1966), Trump the disrupter also threatened the escalation of economic punishment: “We have many, many sanctions to go, but I don’t want to use them unless it’s necessary” (Trump 2018d).

Displaying multilateral diplomatic deftness, Trump worked to persuade China to withdraw support from North Korea. For example, he signaled that Kim could not rely on China’s help if North Korea failed to reach agreement with the United States: “President XI [Jinping] told me he appreciates that the U.S. is working to solve the [North Korea] problem diplomatically rather than going with the ominous alternative,” Trump tweeted (Trump 2018a).

As of this writing, the U.S.–North Korean negotiations have stalled, and Trump the performer called off Secretary Pompeo’s August 2018 trip to Pyongyang, again demonstrating his willingness to walk away from a negotiation. Furthermore, former Secretary of Defense James Mattis signaled that the United States was keeping its options open on whether to reschedule the major U.S.–South Korea military exercises that Trump had suspended as an incentive to Pyongyang during the Singapore summit (Lubold and Youssef 2018). This is likely Trump the disrupter signaling to North Korea that U.S. coercive actions were conditional on its nuclear behavior.

Conclusion

In this case analysis, I have sought to distill Donald Trump’s coercive negotiation approach. Trump negotiates by spotting and exploiting his counterparts’ vulnerabilities and then using leverage and bravado to

shape their choices. Trump's coercive negotiation approach can be best understood through the prism of his four roles: observer, performer, controller, and disrupter. These behavior patterns help explain the key elements of Trump's negotiation style: choose counterparts who have few or no options, denigrate the attractiveness of the counterparts' alternatives, use generosity as leverage, negotiate with the boss, be prepared to fight, and present opponents with drastic structured choice's.

Because Trump is a performer, I acknowledge that one should approach cautiously the analytical value of his public pronouncements as guides to his decision making. I also recognize that decades-old writings about his business negotiations (in *The Art of the Deal* and elsewhere) may have limited explanatory power with regard to his negotiation behavior as president. He has been broadly consistent in his pronouncements since the 1980s, however, and I have contextualized these earlier views within his more recent statements.

With regard to Trump the negotiator, I suggest three areas for further research and discussion. First, does Trump really think only about negotiations "at the table," or is his penchant for ambiguity and secrecy obscuring genuine negotiation prowess – especially when dealing with recalcitrant counterparts, such as the North Koreans? He shows basic awareness of "behind-the-table" dynamics – insofar as he sees these as restrictions on his freedom of action as a controller, leading negotiations. Apart from seeking to maximize his leverage by transforming multilateral negotiations into bilateral ones, however, he expresses little interest in negotiations "away from the table": identifying and using the linkages among various negotiations to achieve the most advantageous outcome "at the table" – a negotiation approach for which Henry Kissinger is so well-known (Sebenius, Burns, and Mnookin 2018; also see Lax and Sebenius 2006).

The second question involves Trump's impact on negotiation teaching: with the emphasis on mutual-gains ("win-win") negotiation training in the majority of training programs, should the Trump example encourage more emphasis on understanding and responding to hard bargaining tactics? Richard Shell, in an article in this issue, suggests that, yes, indeed it should (see also Schneider and Manwaring in this issue).

Finally, Trump's impact on diplomacy is a subject that should inspire extensive research and debate (see also Babbitt; Druckman; Wanis St. John; and Zartman in this issue). Tactically, the ambiguity that Trump practices may be an attractive tool to maximize one's at-the-table leverage, but strategically it has drawbacks with both adversaries and allies. For effective deterrence, adversaries need to know the "red lines" that must not be crossed. (It is possible, of course, that Trump articulates such "non-negotiables" during one-on-one meetings with foreign

leaders.) Allies, on the other hand, need reassurance. Coercing allies with threats of abandonment, such as Trump's threats to leave the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, risks corroding the confidence that undergirds the U.S. alliance system (Kogan 2014).

"I'm different than other presidents," Trump said in a television interview. "I'm a deal-maker. I've made deals all my life" (CNBC 2018a). Given Trump's self-identification as a negotiator and the importance of American diplomacy for international security, my aim in this essay is, to quote Graham Allison, to "take [Trump] seriously and not literally" (Allison 2018). This comprehensive synthesis of the forty-fifth president's thinking on negotiation hopefully will be helpful to policymakers, citizens, and scholars.

NOTES

The author thanks Márton Kis-Dörnyei for invaluable research assistance throughout the writing and research process. Mia Haas-Goldberg and Justin Nitirouth also provided research support for which he is grateful. The author also expresses deep appreciation to Joel Cutcher-Gershenfeld, Nancy Waters, Howard Stevenson, Nancy Koehn, Mark Moore, Aurel Braun, Mari Fitzduff, and Arjun Kapur for helpful comments, and to the students at Brandeis University's Heller School of Social Policy and Management, Paris School of International Affairs, and Executive Academy in Vienna for the opportunity to present earlier versions of ideas that are contained in this article.

1. During the 2016 presidential campaign questions arose about the true authorship of *The Art of the Deal*. Trump's co-author, Tony Schwartz, has asserted (Mayer 2016) that he, not Trump, really wrote the book. Even if this is true, the book is in Trump's voice. Consider the following example: "Writing in Trump's voice, he [Schwartz] explained to the reader, 'I play to people's fantasies. ... People want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular. I call it truthful hyperbole. It's an innocent form of exaggeration – and it's a very effective form of promotion.' Schwartz now disavows the passage. ... Trump, he [Schwartz] said, loved the phrase" (Mayer 2016).

2. Deepak Malhotra and Don Moore zero in on Trump's bravado (Malhotra and Moore 2016), while Neil Irwin writes about Trump's anchoring tactic (Irwin 2017). Both behaviors are emblematic of Trump the performer. Danielle Allen analyzes Trump's preference for "pure bilateralism" (Allen 2018) – typical of Trump the controller. Finally, Jerry Hendrix has written about Trump's use of ambiguity (Hendrix 2018) – a key part of Trump the disrupter's negotiation toolbox.

3. I use the following definition of "ambiguity": "situations where available information is scanty or obviously unreliable or highly conflicting; or where expressed expectations of different individuals differ widely; or where expressed confidence in estimates tends to be low" (Ellsberg 1961: 660–661).

4. The Commodore Hotel was later renamed the Grand Hyatt.

5. Trump's approach loosely resembles what Henry Kissinger calls "offensive deterrence": "the use of a preemptive strategy not so much to defeat the adversary militarily as to deal him a psychological blow to cause him to desist" (Kissinger 2011: 217).

6. Trump's aversion to multilateral interactions is longstanding. "I have great respect for what the Japanese have done with their economy, but for my money they are often very difficult to do business with. For starters, they come in to see you in groups of six or eight or even twelve, and so you've got to convince all of them to make any given deal. You may succeed with one or two or three, but it's far harder to convince all twelve" (Trump 1987: 185–186).

7. Indeed, during one of his visits to Pyongyang, American basketball star Dennis Rodman presented a copy of *The Art of the Deal* to a senior North Korean official (McElroy 2018).

REFERENCES

- ABC News. 2017. The inauguration of Donald J. Trump, 2017 presidential inauguration coverage (video). January 20. Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQCMUxKr2sA (1.04.13–1.04.35).
- Allen, D. 2018. Trump's foreign policy is perfectly coherent. *Washington Post*, July 23. Available from www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trumps-foreign-policy-is-perfectly-coherent/2018/07/23/43dce312-8a0c-11e8-a345-a1bf7847b375_story.html?utm_term=.4b53124dc9ad.
- Allison, G. 2018. Beyond (D)reason? Graham Allison, professor at the John F. Kennedy School of Govt at Harvard (video). *Russia Today*, July 19. Available from www.rt.com/shows/worlds-apart-oksana-boyko/433685-us-russia-relations-trump/.
- Art, R. J. 2003a. Introduction. In *The United States and coercive diplomacy*, edited by R. J. Art, and P. M. Cronin. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.
- . 2003b. What do we know? In *The United States and coercive diplomacy*, edited by R. J. Art and P. M. Cronin. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.
- Associated Press. 2018. Trump: I'll know outcome of Kim summit "within the first minute." *Haaretz*, June 9. Available from 9www.haaretz.com/us-news/trump-i-ll-know-outcome-of-kim-summit-within-the-first-minute-1.6158518.
- Babbitt, E. 2019. Will the Trump Administration change international diplomacy? *Negotiation Journal* 35(1) xxx-xxx.
- Baker, P., and C. Sang-Hun. 2018. With snap "yes" in Oval Office, Trump gambles on North Korea. *New York Times*, March 10. Available from www.nytimes.com/2018/03/10/world/asia/trump-north-korea.html
- BBC News. 2016. Trump says Putin "a leader far more than our president." September 8. Available from www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2016-37303057.
- . 2017. Trump: N Korea's Kim Jong Un a "smart cookie" (video). Available from www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-39763413/trump-n-korea-s-kim-jong-un-a-smart-cookie (0.29–0.32).
- . 2018. Trump Kim summit: Handshake moment explained in pictures. Available from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-44447807>.
- Bordone, R. C. 2016. Trump's losing negotiation strategy. Harvard Negotiation and Mediation Clinical Program (blog posting): February 9. Available from hnmcp.blog/trumps-losing-negotiation-strategy/.
- Caminiti, S. 2017. What Trump doesn't know about the art of negotiation. *CNBC*, June 7. Available from www.cnn.com/2017/06/07/what-trump-doesnt-know-about-the-art-of-negotiation.html.
- CNBC. 2018a. POTUS Trump's Interview with Joe Kernan, July 21. Available from www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dsoaw5QnuAU.
- . 2018b. President Donald Trump's full interview at the World Economic Forum, Davos. CNBC (video), January 26. Available from www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjZG5P_Q7B0.
- Cook, N., and J. Dawsey. 2017. He is stubborn and doesn't realize how bad this is getting. *Politico*, August 16. Available from www.politico.com/story/2017/08/16/trump-charlottesville-temper-chaos-241721.
- Corn, D. 2016. Donald Trump is completely obsessed with revenge. *Mother Jones*, October 19. Available from www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/10/donald-trump-obsessed-with-revenge/.
- DeYoung, K., and J. Wagner. 2018. Trump threatens "fire and fury" in response to North Korean threats. *Washington Post*, August 7. Available from www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-tweets-news-report-citing-anonymous-sources-on-n-korea-movements/2017/08/08/47a9b9c0-7c48-11e7-83c7-5bd546f0fd7e_story.html?utm_term=.332674564a93.
- Druckman, D. 2019. Unilateral diplomacy: Trump and the sovereign state. *Negotiation Journal* 35(1), 101–106.

-
- Ellsberg, D. 1961. Risk, ambiguity, and the savage axioms. *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 75(4): 643–669.
- Falkenberg, L., and L. Wilks. 2016. Effective negotiating lessons from Donald Trump. October 3. Available from haskayne.ucalgary.ca/the-executive-connection/effective-negotiating-lessons-donald-trump.
- Ferguson, N. 2018. The China I see is losing Trump's trade war. September 23. Available from www.niallferguson.com/journalism/finance-economics/the-china-i-see-is-losing-trumps-trade-war.
- Fisher, R., W. Ury, and B. Patton. 1991. *Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Fox News. 2017. Donald Trump Sean Hannity FOX interview (Video). Available from www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqWa66SEVHw (21.30–21.48).
- Hendrix, J. 2018. Trump and his strategy of ambiguity. *National Review*, January 8. Available from www.nationalreview.com/2018/01/donald-trump-strategic-ambiguity-uncertainty-diplomacy-military-options/.
- Irwin, N. 2017. Art of the bluff: The limits of Trump's negotiation strategy. *New York Times*, April 27. Available from www.nytimes.com/2017/04/27/upshot/art-of-the-bluff-the-limits-of-trumps-negotiation-strategy.html.
- Jamieson, K. H., and D. Taussig. 2017. Disruption, demonization, deliverance, and norm destruction: The rhetorical signature of Donald. J. Trump. *Political Science Quarterly* 132(4): 619–650.
- Johnston, D. C. 2016. *The making of Donald Trump*. New York: Melville House.
- Kissinger, H. A. 2011. *On China*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Kogan, E. B. 2014. *Coercing allies: Why friends abandon nuclear plans*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Brandeis University.
- Kruse, M. 2018. He pretty much gave in to whatever they asked for. *Politico Magazine*, June 1. Available from www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/06/01/donald-trump-deals-negotiation-art-of-deal-218584.
- Latz, M. E. 2018. *The real Trump deal: An eye-opening look at how he really negotiates*. Phoenix, AZ: Brisance Books.
- Lax, D., and J. K. Sebenius. 2006. *3D Negotiation: Powerful tools to change the game in your most important deals*. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing.
- Liptak, K. 2018. Trump on China's Xi consolidating power: "Maybe we'll give that a shot some day." *CNN*, March 4. Available from www.edition.cnn.com/2018/03/03/politics/trump-maralago-remarks/index.html.
- Litwak, R. S. 2008. Living with ambiguity: Nuclear deals with Iran and North Korea. *Survival* 50(1): 91–118.
- Lubold, G., and N. A. Youssef. 2018. U.S. considers future of military exercises as North Korea talks stall. *Wall Street Journal*, August 28. Available from www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-considers-future-of-military-exercises-as-north-korea-talks-stall-1535490061.
- Malhotra, D. and D. Moore. 2016. Trump says he's a great negotiator, but the evidence says otherwise. *Fortune*, July 12. Available from www.fortune.com/2016/07/19/donald-trump-negotiating-the-art-of-the-deal/.
- Manwaring, M. 2019. From hot-potato questions to teachable moments: Using analysis and meta-evaluation to address trump in the negotiation classroom. *Negotiation Journal* 35(1), 211–214.
- Mayer, J. 2016. Donald Trump's ghostwriter tells all. *The New Yorker*, July 25. Available from www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/07/25/donald-trumps-ghostwriter-tells-all.
- McElroy, D. 2018. North Korea meets America's fire and fury with art of the deal. *The National*, June 12. Available from www.thenational.ae/world/north-korea-meets-america-s-fire-and-fury-with-art-of-the-deal-1.739526.
- McGraw, M. 2018. "I love fighting these battles" Trump tells NRA after slamming special counsel investigation. *ABC News*, May 4. Available from abcnews.go.com/Politics/gun-rights-siege-long-president-trump-nra/story?xml:id=54934836.
- McRoberts, S. 2015. Donald Trump has mastered these 5 psychological tactics to get ahead. *Entrepreneur*, September 10. Available from www.entrepreneur.com/article/250379.
- Mnookin, R. H., S. R. Peppet, and A. S. Tulumello. 2000. *Beyond winning: Negotiating to create value in deals and disputes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Morrin, S. 2018. Will he shake the hand of peace? Here's the video President Trump showed to Kim Jong Un. *Time*, June 12. Available from www.time.com/5309671/donald-trump-video-kim-jong-un/.
- Napolitano, A. 2018. Judge Andrew Napolitano: Trump knows more about dealing with bad guys than Congress, hysterical media combined. *Fox News*, July 19. Available from www.foxnews.com/opinion/2018/07/19/judge-andrew-napolitano-trump-knows-more-about-dealing-with-bad-guys-than-congress-hysterical-media-combined.html.
- NBC News. 1999. Flashback: Donald Trump says he'd "negotiate like crazy" with North Korea (video). *Meet the Press*, October 24. Available from www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQUaQo2j42Y.
- Neustadt, R. E. 1970. *Alliance politics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Raiffa, H. 1982. *The art and science of negotiation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Roberts, P. 2018. The view from the Asia-Pacific: Loose nukes and loose cannons. In *Chaos in the liberal order. The Trump presidency and international politics in the twenty-first century*, edited by R. Jervis, F. J. Gavin, J. Rovner, and D. N. Labrosse. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Ross, G. H. 2006. *Trump-style negotiation: Powerful strategies and tactics for mastering every deal*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.
- Salacuse, J. 2000. Lessons for practice. In *Power and negotiation*, edited by W. I. Zartman and J. Z. Rubin. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Schelling, T. C. 1956. An essay on bargaining. *The American Economic Review* 46: 281–306.
- Schelling, T. C. 1966. *Arms and influence*. New York: Praeger.
- Schneider, A. K. 2019. Negotiating from the bully pulpit: Teaching Trump, tactics, and turmoil. *Negotiation Journal* 35(1): 215–218.
- Sebenius, J. S. 2014. Stepping stone, stopping point, or slippery slope? Negotiating the next Iran deal. *Harvard Business School Working Paper, No. 14-061*, January 2014 (Revised March 2014).
- Sebenius, J. S., R. N. Burns, and R. H. Mnookin. 2018. *Kissinger the negotiator: Lessons from deal-making at the highest level*. New York: Harper.
- Shell, G. R. 2019. Transactional Man: Teaching negotiation strategy in the age of Trump. *Negotiation Journal* 35(1): 31–46.
- Singer, M. 1997. Trump solo. *The New Yorker*, May 19, 1997. Available from www.newyorker.com/magazine/1997/05/19/trump-solo.
- Solloway, C. D. Jr. 2018. Trump's approach to Kim Jong Un follows "negotiation playbook". *The Baltimore Sun*, May 2. Available from www.baltimoresun.com/news/opinion/oped/bs-ed-op-0503-kim-trump-20180502-story.html.
- Steinhauer, J. 2016. Paul Ryan faces Tea Party forces that he helped unleash. *The New York Times*, March 2. Available from www.nytimes.com/2016/03/03/us/politics/paul-ryan-faces-tea-party-forces-that-he-helped-unleash.html.
- Stevenson, H. H. 1998. *Do lunch or be lunch: The power of predictability in creating your future*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Stevenson, H. H. 1994. Power: Harvard expert reveals how to win. *Success* 41(5): 36–38.
- . and M. C. Moldoveanu. 1995. The Power of predictability. *Harvard Business Review*. Available from hbr.org/1995/07/the-power-of-predictability.
- Susskind, L. 2014. *Good for you great for me: Finding the trading zone and winning at win-win negotiation*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Time* 2018. Secretary of state Mike Pompeo reads letter written by President Trump to Kim Jong Un. Available from www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9YRIG6Lpcl.
- Trump, D. J. 1987. *The art of the deal*. With T. Schwartz. New York: Random House.
- . 1997. *The art of the comeback*. With K. Bohner. New York: Times Books.
- . 1998. BBC News *HARDtalk*: Donald Trump (video): Date not available. Available from www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4CqF4hjCGI.
- . 2006. *Trump 101: The way to success*. With M. McIver. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons Inc.
- . 2008. *Trump: Never give up: How I turned my biggest challenges into success*. With M. McIver. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons Inc.
- . 2009a. *Think like a champion*. With M. McIver. New York: Vanguard Press.

-
- Trump, D. J. 2009b. CNBC: *The billionaire inside*, June 14. Available from www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gehz4EpramA&index=4&list=PLK5Yua4NSGlBzRoXejjAekOYB7nGiCzx&pbjreload=10.
- . 2016a. Full speech: Donald Trump rally in Myrtle Beach, February 19. Available from www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBVviPzLPx8.
- . 2016b. Donald Trump town hall with Chris Matthews. *MSNBC*, April 4. Available from www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNArvSHz8qg (16.22–17.31).
- . 2016c. Transcript: Donald Trump's foreign policy speech. *The New York Times*, April 28. Available from www.nytimes.com/2016/04/28/us/politics/transcript-trump-foreign-policy.html.
- . 2017. President Trump: An interview. *CBS News Face the Nation*. Available from www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YLKFyIRM9o.
- . 2018a. (@realDonaldTrump). "Chinese President XI JINPING and I spoke at length..." Twitter, March 10. Available from twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/972506194978983937.
- . 2018b. Remarks by President Trump and President Moon of the Republic of Korea before bilateral meeting. May 22. Available from www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-president-moon-republic-korea-bilateral-meeting-2/.
- . 2018c. Letter to Kim Jong Un. May 24. Available from www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/letter-chairman-kim-jong-un/.
- . 2018d. Remarks by President Trump and Prime Minister Abe of Japan in joint press conference. June 7. Available from www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-prime-minister-abe-japan-joint-press-conference-2/.
- . 2018e. Remarks by President Trump in press gaggle. June 15. Available from www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-press-gaggle/.
- . 2018f. (@realDonaldTrump). Tweet: When you have people snipping at your heels. Twitter: July 25. Available from twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1022076157884342272.
- Trump, D. J., and R. Kiyosaki. 2011. *Why we want you to be rich*. Scottsdale, AZ: Rich Press.
- Trump, D. J., and J. Leno. 1999. Donald Trump on Jay Leno. December 7. Available from www.youtube.com/watch?v=MGLNb0JE8uc (6.39–7.04).
- Trump University. Undated. Commercials featuring Donald Trump (Video). Available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgPxjDjAKyG> (8.16–8.27).
- Walton, R. E., J. E. Cutcher-Gershenfeld, and R. B. McKersie. 1994. *Strategic negotiation: A theory of change in labor-management relations*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Wanis St. John. 2019. Fumbling abdication: Make America diplomatic again. *Negotiation Journal* 35(1), 107–110.
- Zartman, W. I. 2019. International diplomacy after Trump, with antecedents. *Negotiation Journal* 35(1), 111–116.