
Book Review

Landmark Negotiations from Around the World

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Emmanuel Vivet (ed). *Landmark Negotiations from Around the World: Lessons for Modern Diplomacy*. Intersentia, 2019. 376 pages. \$47.00 (paperback), ISBN: 978-1-78068-851-0.

In the summer of 1979, an interesting and comically tragic episode hampered and delayed U.S. president Jimmy Carter from pressing ahead with congressional approval of the SALT II nuclear weapons treaty with the Soviet Union. In this case history, or the lack thereof, interfered in the negotiations. In the spring of that year, the U.S. intelligence community notified the Carter administration that there was a combat brigade of Soviet troops in Cuba. This issue began to work its way through the American national security apparatus and was the subject of a handful of senior-level policy meetings in the summer. Meanwhile, news of what would become known as the “Soviet brigade” began circulating on Capitol Hill, where it was eventually brought to light for political purposes.

The brigade issue continued to play itself out—to a great degree in the public eye—throughout the summer and into early fall. In August, Senator Frank Church of Idaho went public with the information and demanded that the brigade leave and that the Carter administration drop the SALT II treaty. The Carter administration was trying to move the treaty through the Senate, to no avail at this point. The notion that the Soviets had now installed a combat brigade in Cuba, renegeing on commitments in 1962 during the Cuban Missile Crisis, quashed any hopes Carter and his advisors had for a quick ratification of the SALT II treaty.

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In a televised address on October 1, 1979, Carter announced that he received a letter from Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev stating that “the unit served as a ‘military training center’ and that the Soviet government had no intention of changing its mission.” Carter also “announced various measures for increasing the American political and military presence in the Caribbean.” (Neustadt and May 1986: 95) By then the damage had been done. The delay in Senate deliberation over the SALT II treaty may very well have cost the administration its ratification. When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in December, SALT II was dead.

The folly of this episode, though, is that it should never have happened. As the Carter administration and the U.S. intelligence community began delving deeper into the issue in the late summer and early fall, it became apparent that this was not some new, dangerous insertion of Soviet combat troops into Cuba, but an element that had been there since 1962. No one knew the history and from the beginning of the debacle no one thought to ask simple questions, such as: When did these troops arrive? How long have they been there? As Cyrus Vance, secretary of state at the time, noted in his memoirs:

The more resources the intelligence community devoted to the brigade matter, the farther back in time information about it went—eventually all the way to 1962. Appallingly, awareness of the Soviet ground force units had faded from the institutional memories of the intelligence agencies.... By late September it was evident that the unit in question had almost certainly been in Cuba continuously since 1962. (Neustadt and May 1986: 95)

The Soviets, in fact, thought the whole episode was some sort of Carter administration ploy. They could not fathom that the administration was serious and that it did not know the history behind the issue.

The crisis that ensued in 1962 and saw the arrival of Soviet troops and nuclear warheads into Cuba also saw the use of history play a large role in negotiation and policy decisions. When one reads studies of the Cuban Missile Crisis or transcripts from the meetings of President Kennedy's ExComm, the key players' discussions of history stand out. Analogies to Pearl Harbor, Munich, and the Korean War are all used at one point or another throughout the crisis. It has also been noted in many works on the crisis (although oddly not in the chapter covering the crisis in *Landmark Negotiations*) that Kennedy had just finished reading Barbara Tuchman's *Guns of August* in the summer months leading up to it. Tuchman's classic work vividly describes how European leaders in 1914 allowed a seemingly tangential issue to spiral into four years of horrific bloodshed (Tuchman 1962). This history was no doubt on Kennedy's mind during October 1962.

These two stories highlight a number of important points for international relations scholars, diplomats, and policymakers. First, history matters. In the case of the Carter administration and the Soviet Brigade, it is as simple as knowing the history of a given person, country, institution, or issue. Had the relevant individuals and institutions known the history from the beginning, the troops would never have become a problem in the first place. SALT II may still have failed, but the Soviet Brigade would not have become a bludgeon for Congress to use in order to delay discussions of the treaty. In the case of the Kennedy team, historical analogies, whether used correctly or not, were in abundance. As Yuen Foong Khong aptly demonstrated in *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965*, policymakers use analogical reasoning in the decision-making process whether or not they, or we, want them to. Humans are literally hard-wired to do so (Khong 1992).

Second, these examples remind us that while we study negotiations, critical moments, and issues in history, we also need to pay attention to how history was used in those moments. We can study the SALT II negotiations to gain insights into how to conduct negotiations in the present, but after recalling the tumult the Soviet Brigade caused in the summer of 1979, we will also walk away understanding even more deeply why studying history is such a critical endeavor.

The importance of history, and especially history's importance to diplomacy, is the reason d'être of *Landmark Negotiations from Around the World: Lessons for Modern Diplomacy*, edited by Emmanuel Vivet. From the perspective of a diplomatic historian and an applied historian, this work is a welcome piece of scholarship that complements the growing literature on history and international affairs. Vivet and others leave no doubt of their belief in the importance of historical knowledge in international affairs. They especially bemoan the growing chasm in recent decades between diplomacy, diplomatic training, and history. They are not wrong in many respects. While the scholarship in this realm has expanded (which I will discuss in more detail later), it does not seem to have found its way into diplomatic training curricula and is still rather scattershot within international affairs. Well-known international affairs scholars such as Stephen Walt have bemoaned the fact that history is not taught at America's leading international affairs schools (Walt 2018).

As Pierre Vimont notes in the book's forward, in the opening line in fact, "at first sight, diplomacy and history should be considered a matter of fact" (v). As has been noted, this is not the case today. Vivet and well over two dozen other academics, practitioners, and negotiation instructors do yeomen's work throughout the book's nearly 400 pages to illustrate why diplomacy and history should be taken together. In

short, Vivet points out that “negotiation studies essentially draw from neighboring disciplines, and with this book we hope to further the idea that history is one of the disciplines that has something to offer (xiv).” In his introductory chapter I. William Zartman, arguably the negotiation field’s most well-known scholar, goes into more detail to explain history’s utility for the diplomatic world, highlighting that it can “enlighten the future” (2). Zartman describes how practitioners can use history “for the larger lessons it conveys, or for the way others’ larger lessons help in understanding it—inductively or deductively in a sense” (2). He points out that one can also use history to draw counterfactuals to try and understand what *could have* happened. As most historians will warn though, a degree of caution must be used when playing with counterfactuals, as they must consist of *actual* possibilities (Gavin 2007/2008).

In *Landmark Negotiations from Around the World*, Vivet and others tackle the task of marrying history and diplomacy with gusto. The authors explore thirty separate historical case studies in order to highlight the myriad ways that history dispenses wisdom for current and future diplomatic practitioners. They are mostly successful in this endeavor. The questions that Vivet and the contributors ask throughout the book demonstrate the usefulness of history to negotiations and current affairs more generally. These questions are worth noting and include: “How can an improbable success be explained...? Is there a list of ingredients to achieve a resounding success...? How can failures be explained...? What makes reluctant parties eventually agree to come to the negotiating table...? Or, more simply, why didn’t they think of negotiating at all...? How far can the negotiators’ skill take them, and when must they admit that the conditions for success had not been met?” (xiii). Even the most ardent critic of history’s usefulness for current affairs would be hard-pressed to explain how answering these general questions of past negotiations can’t be useful to today’s negotiators.

Methodologically, “each chapter contains both a summary account of a noteworthy case from the past (a bilateral or multilateral negotiation, an important treaty, a famous mediation, etc.) and a critical analysis of the events to see how they illustrate negotiation theories” (xiii). With this basis for each case in mind, Vivet then breaks the book down into a number of sections, each consisting of a handful of cases that illustrate the topic, or type of negotiation, under discussion. The main topics/issues covered fall under the following headings: how negotiations begin; bilateral negotiations; multilateral negotiations; emotions and beliefs; Middle East negotiations; and finally, international mediations. One could nitpick almost any particular way different types of negotiations are broken down, but this organization and coverage work well.

Without question, one of the standout features of this work is the use of little known, understudied, and/or overlooked case studies. The book is full of riveting cases that look at issues and negotiations that are little remembered today, but nonetheless offer a multitude of lessons for negotiators. These include chapters on the Treaty of Dijon (1513), the business practices of the Phoenicians, Christopher Columbus' bilateral negotiations with European monarchs, a unique look at negotiations over the American Constitution, and the 1659 Treaty of the Pyrenees.

The chapter on the Treaty of Dijon, for instance, provides fascinating and useful information on negotiating without a mandate. In this case the governor of Burgundy, Louis II de La Tremoille, faced a stronger force of mostly Swiss soldiers laying siege to the city of Dijon. Louis, without the consent of French King Louis XII, succeeded in negotiating a treaty with the Swiss and their contingent that enabled him to maintain control of Dijon and saw the Swiss retreat. The terms that Louis II agreed to might have been too much for his king to sanction in the long run, but his city was saved, even if he was in disfavor with the king.

Laurent Vissier examines this case in light of the principal-agent relationship, noting some meaningful comparisons to negotiations today. He writes:

[T]he problem is that while overly narrow mandates leave almost no room for creativity or power to invent useful solutions, overly broad mandates create unpleasant uncertainty about the results to be achieved. Every agent must therefore conduct two negotiations: one with the opposing party; and another, less visible but just as important, negotiation with their principal, in order to clarify the objectives and limits of what may be discussed. (30)

Add to this the fact that Louis II was a considerable distance from the king, with enemy forces bearing down on him, and this case highlights the dilemmas and possible successful pathways when navigating these types of negotiations.

Another enlightening and useful case, in the "Multilateral Negotiations" section, deals with the negotiations over the United States Constitution. Carrie Menkel-Meadow focuses on the logistics and "process" behind the Constitutional Convention to highlight how important these seemingly background issues can be when confronting a difficult negotiation. As she notes, "With 55 different delegates, representing 13 different states, and ultimately factions that sometimes crossed state lines and made regional or economic coalitions, it was essential to structure what we would now call *process rules*—both rules for speaking

(*ground rules*) and *rules for decisions* (majority, super-majority or unanimity)” (154–55).

Recognizing that some sort of process was needed, delegates in 1787 spent more than two days negotiating “their process and rules for speaking and deliberation” (155). As Menkel-Meadow describes:

They began by making *role and committee assignments*, what we would now call *task groups* in complex negotiations, that eventually led to specialized committees working on particular topics for negotiation and later drafting. The delegates then explicitly discussed *procedural rules* (most were experienced politicians) and voted on those rules, all before they turned to the substantive debates and discussions that constituted the bulk of the four months of deliberations. (155)

The delegates set ground rules for process leadership, confidentiality, speaking, attendance, committees and task groups, and other major concerns. With raucous debates to come, it was imperative for America’s founding fathers to enact process rules as a first step before turning their attention to creating a constitution. The questions that they faced are timeless.

The cases that Vivet pulls together to discuss issues of emotions, beliefs, and values are also exceedingly important and their lessons most assuredly transferable to today. Emotions and differing beliefs and values, while they may have changed over the centuries, remain major issues in negotiations. The chapter dealing with Britain’s diplomatic mission to China in 1793, although discussing events that are fairly well known, is a worthwhile read in light of the growing geopolitical tensions between the United States and China.

Likewise, issues of honor and principles between the French and Spanish in the mid-seventeenth century can still inform us today. In a chapter on the 1659 Treaty of the Pyrenees, Vivet describes how “the cousin of the king of France and first in line” for the throne, Louis II “(known as the Grande Condé),” “had made the mistake of allying himself with Spain against France” (233). Obviously, the French would want to punish him accordingly, but the Spanish were reluctant to turn him over due to a sense of honor to their ally. This led to a stalemate in the entire negotiations. “Between keeping one’s word (for the Spanish) and punishing an insubordinate rebel (for the French), they could not reach agreement. It was a question of principle for both sides” (234–235).

Vivet’s edited volume is a useful and important piece of scholarship in the fields of negotiation and diplomatic training, as well as applied history. There are a few negatives to discuss as well, though. First and foremost, there are far too many translation and grammatical errors in

the work, which draws the reader away from what is really important in multiple areas. Also, the sourcing style throughout the work is not uniform—some chapters have footnotes, others have MLA style.

On a much more substantive note, the level of discussion in regards to theory is hit-or-miss throughout the disparate chapters. Some, for instance, go into detail discussing theory and how it connects to the history under review. Others, though, do not do the same, making linkages to theory less straightforward. A bit more systematic discussion of theory and how it relates to each chapter would have gone a long way to making this book accessible and useful for a much broader audience. As it is written, it is really only suitable in its entirety for graduate level or post-graduate school readers. Single chapters could be used here or there in lower-level classes to highlight certain theories, but overall, the connection between theory and practice is not as forthcoming across the board as one would assume. This is by no means meant as a death blow to the book's use, it is only to say that it is meant for a narrower audience, which, in a way, is what its authors intended. Likewise, the level of historical writing is a bit underwhelming at times, as some chapters are scant on nuance, context, and sourcing.

Unfortunately, the book also has a complete lack of connection to the emerging group of applied historians in the field of diplomatic history, international affairs, and grand strategy that has emerged in recent years. From the Applied History Project at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, to the Kissinger Center for International Affairs at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, to the Lepage Center for History in the Public Interest at Villanova University, to Yale University's grand strategy program, and to the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at Georgetown University's case study library, to name just a few programs for such study (not to mention the dozens of individual scholars in the field), learning from history to prepare for the future is alive and well.¹ The book's main argument—laid out in its foreword and introduction—is that the teaching of history is desperately needed to train future diplomats and negotiators, and the following pages are an attempt to rectify the lack of works that use history to shine light on the present. This is an applaudable endeavor, but the complete lack of acknowledgment from the book's editor and contributors of the growing field of applied history is unfortunate.

The lack of acknowledgment from the authors—a group largely consisting of business and professional negotiators—of the growing field of applied history among diplomatic historians and international historians speaks to a key component of this overall problem. More systematic engagement between these groups would help to cure this

ailment. In the meantime, Vivet and others have a wealth of materials to read through to help them on their quest to better inculcate history into negotiation and diplomatic training. This book adds to these resources in a positive way. It has its faults in parts, but as someone who teaches an undergraduate class on history's influence on foreign affairs to aspiring diplomats, I know I will use portions of this book to highlight history's utility.

NOTE

1. Here is a sampling of some key scholarship in this field: Margaret MacMillan, *Dangerous Games: The Uses and Abuses of History* (New York: Random House, 2009); Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers* (New York: Free Press, 1986); Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); Paul A. Cohen, *History and Popular Memory: The Power of Story in Moments of Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Howard W. French, *Everything Under the Heavens: How the Past Helps Shape China's Push for Global Power* (New York: Penguin, 2018); Jennifer Lind, *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010); Hal Brands and Jeremi Suri, eds., *The Power of the Past: History and Statecraft* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2016); Marvin Kalb and Deborah Kalb, *Haunting Legacy: Vietnam and the American Presidency From Ford to Obama* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2012); Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017); Eliot A. Cohen, "The Historical Mind and Military Strategy," *Orbis* 49(4): 575–588 (2005); William Inboden, "Statecraft, Decision-Making, and the Varieties of Historical Experience: A Taxonomy," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37(2): 291–318 (2014); Francis J. Gavin, "History and Policy," *International Journal* 63(1): 162–177 (2007/2008); Hal Brands and Charles Edel, "The Real Origins of the U.S.–China Cold War," *Foreign Policy* 2019; Mel Leffler, "China isn't the Soviet Union, Confusing the Two is Dangerous," *The Atlantic*, Dec. 2019; Graham T. Allison, "The Cuban Missile Crisis at 50: Lessons for U.S. Foreign Policy Today," *Foreign Affairs* 91(4): 11–16 (2012), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/cuba/2012-07-01/cuban-missile-crisis-50>; Francis J. Gavin and James B. Steinberg, "Mind the Gap: Why Policymakers and Scholars Ignore Each Other, and What Should Be Done About It," *Carnegie Reporter* 6: 4 (2012); Graham Allison and Niall Ferguson, "Why the U.S. President Needs a Council of Historians," *The Atlantic*, September 2016.

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