

**Jerrold L. Schecter.** *Russian Negotiating Behaviour*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998. ix + 229 pp. \$14.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-878379-78-8.



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Books on negotiation can be generally divided into two classes. The first could be styled the 'cookbook' approach, typified by comparatively simplistic texts which provide a set of procedures that allegedly lead to the successful conclusion of negotiations. The second classification includes books exploring various contextual elements of negotiations such as history, political and economic drivers and cultural differences. Schecter's book belongs to this latter group but, in comparison to similar publications, takes the context more into the negotiating process itself, identifying some important considerations at both strategic and tactical levels.

The author approaches the subject of Russian negotiating behaviour from a wide experience of journalism and government service. The book is aimed at people who will be involved in negotiations in both business and diplomatic settings. The author sets out to examine some important differences relating to legislative issues, consensus, compromise, timing and other factors. Furthermore, it aims to provide U.S. negotiators with an appreciation of what they can and cannot ex-

pect from their Russian counterparts in a background of new institutions and the current chaotic and unpredictable transformational economy.

In the introduction, the author sets out the rationale for the book. He discusses the importance of understanding differences between Russian and US approaches to negotiation, setting out selected elements of the background to Russian negotiating behaviour. These elements are discussed in more detail in ensuing chapters. The author draws on evidence from a number of constituencies, as well as his own experience, to generate some important questions and to build a framework for their evaluation.

We are reminded that the processes of obtaining evidence of Russian approaches to negotiation undertaken in the book would have been impossible before 1989. Indeed, much of the evidence that had been previously accumulated was via negotiations of a diplomatic nature in a very different relationship with Russia than exists today. This different environment had to be experienced to be fully understood. Not only were there two very different ideological and economic systems

but also the bureaucratic processes involved in visiting the country and the rules appertaining to travel and contact with the Russian people were legion, to be disregarded at one's peril. Consequently, it is tempting to think that, in Russia's transformation to a market economy, everything has changed. The author reminds us that the legacy of the last fifty or so years since the revolution in 1917 remains an important factor. In addition, the influence of Russian pre-Soviet history is still important in understanding Russian behaviour and their approach to the negotiating process.

In his first chapter, Schechter examines this legacy of Soviet and pre-Soviet history, arguing that history, geography and culture have affected Russian perceptions of the outside world and of their own nation. Whilst some viewpoints may be changing in these transformational times, the suspicion of Russians towards foreigners is still a major factor, met in developing business relationships, for example. The younger generation of Russians, while perhaps exhibiting a more flexible attitude towards the outside world, is still subject to some deeply-rooted cultural elements. The impact of Russian ideology on behaviour is also discussed.

The author goes on to assess the impact of economic transformation in the context of political and institutional change. The early days of transformation tended to foster unrealistic views of industrial and commercial change on the part of many Russians, in that there was expectation that the country would be a natural target for foreign direct investment (FDI) and Russian firms would prosper in the new-found freedoms of the market economy. As the author argues, failures in transforming business and the economy generally have only served to crystallise Russian suspicions of foreigners and further encourage a sense of vulnerability.

The discussion of legacy is returned to in considering the impact of the Bolshevik code on the whole negotiating process. The author emphasises

the need for foreign negotiators to develop a strategy which includes a sense of what has to be achieved and, as importantly, what cannot be conceded—in short, careful planning of the whole process. This should be carried out well in advance of the actual negotiations. As the author points out, the way Russians perceive negotiation and their apparently aggressive approach to the pressures exerted in the middle stages of the process should be closely considered. There are some, though not many, similarities with US negotiating procedures and getting to agreement is a complex process.

Tactics often used by Russian negotiators are then assessed in some detail. Setting out the requirements of the US side and determination of the precise needs of the Russian side requires consideration if stalemate is to be avoided. For all its explicit content, hidden agendas must be considered, as Russian negotiation has its subtle side. The crucial issues are the importance of engagement rather than of standing-off, and an understanding of Russian sensitivities, whilst maintaining a position of strength and resolve.

Business negotiations are examined in some detail in chapter 5, identifying significant differences in diplomatic and business styles. The author argues that institutional effects on negotiation are more patchy in the business area but there remains a legacy effect that is still strong. The business environment remains chaotic and, even if an acceptable outcome to negotiations is achieved, problems may be encountered in enforcing contracts. Issues of corruption may also have to be dealt with. The discussion is broadened out to include the former Soviet Union (FSU) republics and here the author is perhaps on more uncertain ground, not least because of the sheer diversity of the republics themselves. While much of the Soviet legacy remains, other cultural effects become important in negotiation. Prospective business-people and others would be well-advised to seek local knowledge in addition to the general

themes outlined in this chapter. Some general issues are addressed, security and other business realities being explored comprehensively.

Finally, Schecter looks to the future in considering the increase in entrepreneurial activity and the need for legislative and economic reforms to provide a solid footing for business transformation. Unfortunately, a developed and comparatively stable business economy seems a long way off.

The book concludes with an effective discussion of the problems that have beset the Russian economy, problems such as capital flight and the black economy being discussed before assessing future trends. The economic indicators for Russia are not favourable, yet some successful business ventures have been implemented. Most apposite, the author employs the theme of continuity and transition, harking back to historical effects on thinking and behaviour but also with a view to the future. This is important, for Russian attitudes are deep-seated but elements of change are apparent. Managing the transformation from a discredited system to another which brings with it threats and uncertainty is bound to influence the way people seek pay-offs from negotiations without undue compromise. Finally, the author provides some general rules for western negotiators.

The text is well supported by notes (contained in a separate section), together with a comprehensive bibliography and index. Schecter's book is a very effective overview of the subject. He rather emphasises large business in discussing negotiations and perhaps too many examples are drawn from the oil industry, which might be inappropriate to medium-sized firms negotiating in other industrial or service sectors. The discussion of negotiations in FSU republics is rather generic and care should be taken to acquire an appreciation of cultural differences in these areas. Finally, while there is much in this book for anyone contemplating negotiations in Russia, it does take a predominantly US perspective (identified at many points within the text) and negotiators of other nationali-

ties may find that certain aspects of US negotiations are not well developed in comparing Russian practice. For all that, this is an important publication, clearly written and cogently argued, and deserves a wide audience.

In his foreward to the book, Richard H Solomon suggests 'For anyone planning to travel to Russia for business - be it the business of finance and industry or politics and diplomacy - this book deserves to be among one of the first things packed.' It should be packed in the briefcase, not the suitcase--it is worth reminding oneself of the conditions ahead, of the sheer differences that will be experienced?. And not just read for the first time on the flight but closely studied and the implications considered before the flight is even booked!

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