

# H-Net Reviews

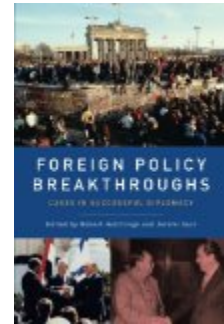
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Robert Hutchings, Jeremi Suri, eds. *Foreign Policy Breakthroughs: Cases in Successful Diplomacy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 304 pp. \$99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-022611-4; \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-022612-1.

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It is often the case that reviewing an edited volume is made challenging by the unevenness of the chapters. Too often individual chapters, each authored by a different scholar with a different background and approach, exist more as standalone pieces of scholarship than constitutive parts of a whole, siloed from one another and typically exhibit significant variation in scope and quality. This is not the case with *Foreign Policy Breakthroughs: Cases in Successful Diplomacy*, where the theoretical chapters and case studies hang together nicely, speaking to each other throughout the volume. The result is a very rich case-oriented study of diplomacy that provides an excellent model for how multi-author edited volumes can be structured to facilitate cross-chapter dialogue.

The main argument of the book is straightforward: while diplomacy is becoming increasingly important in the twenty-first century, both scholars and practitioners are often ill-equipped to analyze diplomacy on the one hand and practice it on the other. As Robert Hutchings and Jeremi Suri argue in the introductory chapter, “Scholars and practitioners have produced a substantial body of literature on international economics and military strategy, but they have not done the same for diplomacy and statecraft, for which the literature is less systematically developed” (p. 3). For students and scholars, “diplomacy hardly exists as a serious field of inquiry or as an academic course of study,” while for diplomats, formal diplomacy education often consists of little more than “foreign language and area studies training” (p. 4). This book serves as an attempt to remedy this shortfall by “‘reinventing diplomacy’ as a subject of serious study by students, scholars, and practicing diplomats alike” (p.

5).

The introductory chapter situates diplomacy historically, with significant attention paid to the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Paris Peace Conference in 1919, and the post-World War II period, up through the modern era with the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU). These latter two developments constitute excellent examples of what W. Averell Harriman termed “real diplomacy” (p. 12): the ability to use influence and restraint, while building consensus, in order to further one’s own goals. This definition provides the basis for the book’s main theoretical move and contribution: “successful diplomacy” occurs when “political leaders set objectives for their diplomats (or other foreign policy officials); if those objectives are achieved, the diplomacy can be judged successful, quite apart from the ultimate consequences of the actions undertaken” (p. 14). While the volume does not posit a new theory of diplomacy, per se, it does seek to provide the conditions under which diplomacy can be deemed successful, setting up the rich empirics that follow. Each subsequent case study chapter seeks to examine whether, and to what extent, successful diplomacy occurred by matching objectives, to the extent that they are known, with what was achieved.

While it is out of the scope of this review to examine each case study in detail, a couple of chapters stand out. Stephen R. Porter’s chapter, “Humanitarian Diplomacy after World War II,” focuses on the creation of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). Porter makes the critical point that the contextual constraints placed on an institution must be taken

into account when assessing the success of the diplomacy used to create that institution. In the case of the UNRRA, “a more positive overall verdict emerges when framing our criteria for success with a realistic assessment of what was possible given the profound challenges faced by the historical actors at the time” (p. 26). This would become a recurring theme throughout the cases: successful diplomacy can only be judged relative to the structural, contextual, and situational constraints felt by the actors and institutions involved.

These constraints are perhaps most evident in Galia Golan’s take on the Camp David Accords of 1978. In this case, the contextual environment both enables and restrains diplomacy. Anwar “Sadat’s dramatic gesture” of visiting Jerusalem and related moves, for example, “clearly broke down deeply ingrained psychological barriers—as they were intended to do”—though Golan is correct to point out some of the skepticism that surrounded Sadat’s trip. Jimmy Carter’s “personal diplomacy” in the lead-up to the summit clearly acted as an enabling factor as well (p. 121). And, perhaps counter-intuitively, the 1973 Ramadan War (or Yom Kippur War) arguably led to Egypt being able to “negotiate with Israel as equals” (p. 122). These events helped bring leadership to the negotiating table, but what explains their success in achieving objectives? Golan credits a variety of processes and individuals, though she acknowledges that “American mediation was critical” in overcoming the “large degree of mistrust” between Sadat and Menachem Begin (p. 142).[1] In particular, “Carter’s personal involvement,” including “the use of side letters, alternative and sometimes ambiguous formulations, and quiet commitments all designed to accommodate both sides,” was crucial (p. 142). In the end, though, were each protagonist’s objectives met? The answer, as Golan admits, is a bit murky. “Some said, and still say, that Sadat gave in too much, primarily in connection with the absence of conditional linkage of the peace agreement to the autonomy plan.” At the same time, “many Israelis would argue that Begin gave up all of Sinai, military bases, settlements, Sharm el-Sheikh—down to the last grain of sand captured in 1967—and in so doing set a precedent for future agreements as well” (p. 143). Moreover, there is the problem of the sensitive status of Jerusalem. Although the topic did feature prominently in the summit’s early negotiations, in the final agreement framework it does not. If the aim of Camp David “was to resolve the many issues already hotly contested between the two countries” (p. 135), does a lack of agreement on Jerusalem constitute a success or failure of diplomacy, and for whom?

While this is a relatively minor quibble, it does raise a challenge for diplomacy analysts moving forward: can we know if something counts as successful diplomacy if the objectives were not clear from the start? Put simply, if successful diplomacy is defined by achieving objectives, these objectives should be identified prior to the diplomatic interaction. And, as we know, objectives are often difficult to deduce. It may be that, in some instances, the goals have not been clearly laid out (in a way accessible to the analyst), existing only in the minds of leaders, or that they emerge from the interaction itself. If diplomacy is fundamentally about social interaction, then what emerges from that interaction may be as relevant as what existed prior to it. These processes are most evident in Paula R. Newberg’s chapter, “Displaced Diplomacies,” which investigates the various forms of diplomacy that occurred within the “assistance community” toward Afghanistan, including “donors, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and UN bodies” (p. 226). As Newberg points out, the Taliban’s liminal status complicated the “diplomacy of assistance.” The Taliban was “neither a government, nor exclusively a fighting force, nor a member of the international community,” yet assistance organizations were forced to deal with them (p. 238). The Strategic Framework, a UN initiative, was created to “facilitate the kind of engagement that could sustain relationships until policy could be crafted coherently. (In this sense, both the Taliban and the assistance community were in self-imposed holding patterns).” Thus, the objectives were necessarily relatively diffuse and subject to change based on interaction with Afghans: “the community took over the job of speaking for disenfranchised Afghans who had few ways to speak for themselves” (p. 248). Cases like these are difficult to analyze under strict categories of success or failure precisely because objectives might be hard to pinpoint at any given moment and are subject to change based on fluid dynamics on the ground.

In the end, this excellent volume contributes to a thriving renaissance in the study of diplomacy.[2] By including several well-written and compelling case studies on varied substantive topics, Hutchings and Suri have provided us with a book that should be of interest to anyone who studies diplomacy or seeks to better understand the force of diplomacy in modern international politics.

#### Notes

[1]. There is significant debate as to whether Carter was able to overcome the mistrust felt between Sadat and Begin, with some evidence suggesting that Carter’s main

role was engendering understanding between Sadat and Begin, rather than building any form of trust. See Marcus Holmes and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "The Psychological Logic of Peace Summits: How Empathy Shapes Outcomes of Diplomatic Negotiations," *International Studies Quarterly*, forthcoming.

[2]. In particular, this volume joins several other recent monographs examining the role of diplomacy in the international system that may be of interest. These include Vincent Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Ole Ja-

cob Sending, Vincent Pouliot, and Iver B. Neumann, *Diplomacy and the Making of World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Todd H. Hall, *Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Keren Yarhi-Milo, *Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); Brian Rathbun, *Diplomacy's Value: Creating Security in 1920s Europe and the Contemporary Middle East* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014); and Paul Sharp, *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

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