

USING THE P5+1 TALKS WITH IRAN AND ITS AFTERMATH TO TEACH NEGOTIATIONS

Edward G. Wertheim
Northeastern University
e.wertheim@neu.edu

ABSTRACT

The 2015 P5+1 agreement with Iran about their nuclear program and its ongoing subsequent negotiations provides a rich resource for teachers of negotiations. With readily available resources describing the challenges of the original negotiation and with the negotiation currently being carried out (in part) in public, various aspects of multi-party negotiations can be explored while at the same time allowing students to understand an important current event and gain skills in analyzing an ongoing negotiation.

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the P5+1 countries concluded an agreement with Iran that basically froze the Iranian nuclear program for ten years. The controversial agreement (supported by then President Obama) was labeled as “catastrophic” and “the worst deal ever” by President Trump. It has been widely reported in the press (as of October 11, 2017) that President Donald Trump will refuse to certify to Congress that the Iran nuclear deal (2015) is in the “country’s best security interest.” While this stops short of immediately reimposing sanctions on Iran and abrogating the agreement, this is ostensibly an attempt to get US allies and Iran back to negotiating table leading either to a “better” deal, or a reimposing of sanctions. Most analysts conclude that neither outcome is likely. (NYTimes, October 11, 2017)

“The goal is to allow the president to demonstrate contempt for the agreement and broadcast a new level of toughness toward the Iranian regime — without triggering the international chaos several of his advisers warn would follow from a total withdrawal from the 2015 deal.” (Politico, October 10, 2017).

This ongoing negotiation provides a rich opportunity for teachers of negotiation to explore the complex process of negotiating a multi-party agreement. Added to the usual complexity of such an international agreement, there is the situation of a US President who is highly critical of an agreement that was negotiated under a previous administration as well as a Supreme Leader of Iran who has been highly critical of the agreement from the beginning.

There are a multitude of challenges facing the negotiators both leading up to the agreement and following it. The negotiators who finalized the 2015 agreement had to deal with major dissent within their own “side.” Secretary Kerry and his staff faced a very skeptical Republican Party, Congress, major segments of the Press, as well as stiff resistance from US ally, Israel. The Iranian delegation faced similar pressures. And this negotiation took place against the backdrop of forty years or more of a very strained relationship and distrust. And, of course, the technical aspects of both the agreement and the subsequent verification would be daunting even without all of these complicating factors. Finally, the continuing “post-negotiation negotiation” is in large part in the hands of a President who has a very clear preference for bilateral negotiations and a disdain for multi-party negotiations.

For teachers of negotiation, we are fortunate to have a number of public resources that provide in-depth insight into this ongoing negotiation. Specifically, the lead negotiator for the US, Wendy Sherman, has given a number of talks (available on YouTube) where she gives extensive detail about the talks. In addition, we have President Trump, whose preference is to negotiate, at least in part, in public.

PRESENTATION

This presentation will focus on how to use publicly available resources to teach both about negotiation and a critical current event. Specifically, we will use two segments of the Wendy Sherman Harvard Lecture, to discuss:

- Critical Challenges of Multi-party Negotiations;
- How to use this negotiation and the video clips to teach about negotiations; and
- How to relate complex multi-national negotiations to students’ likely future experiences

Much is likely to happen between this submission (October 2017) and the presentation in Seattle (March 2018) and, of course, ongoing events will be integrated into the talk as appropriate.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Explore how a highly public and controversial multi-party negotiation can be used to teach students about aspects of negotiations that are applicable to our own negotiations;
- Identify factors which make this negotiation and multi-party negotiations in general so difficult;
- Explore the pros and cons of multi-party vs. bilateral negotiations;
- Help students gain insights into a complex international conflict and negotiations and to see parallels between these negotiations and what will occur in students' likely future experiences; and
- Encourage students to look at current events through the lens of concepts covered in the negotiation course.

CONCLUSION

Students in their careers, are likely to face work organizations that revolve heavily around project teams. They will need to be skilled in managing teams of specialists and negotiate effectively with multiple parties who have the leverage to say “no.” Complex international multi-party negotiations such as the P5+1 Iranian Nuclear Negotiations provide a rich opportunity to explore critical aspects of these dynamic situations. By using this ongoing negotiation, educators can both teach about an important aspect of negotiations, as well as help students critique important current events through the lens of negotiation concepts.

REFERENCES

- Harvard Kennedy School, Interview with Wendy Sherman (2015), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LF-Oiu99Gn8>
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Sanger, D.(2015). “Obama’s Leap of Faith,” *New York Times*, July 14, 2015.