

## Diplomacy

How do adversaries communicate? How do diplomatic encounters shape international orders and determine whether states go to war? Diplomacy, from alliance politics to nuclear brinkmanship, almost always operates through a few forms of signaling: choosing the scope of demands on another state, risking a breach in relations, encouraging a protégé, staking one's reputation, or making a diplomatic approach all convey specific sorts of information. Through rich history and analyses of diplomatic network data from the Confidential Print of the British Empire, Trager demonstrates the lasting effects diplomatic encounters have on international affairs. The Concert of Europe, the perceptions of existential threat that formed before the World Wars, the reduction in Cold War tensions known as *détente*, and the institutional structure of the current world order were all products of inferences about intentions drawn from the statements of individuals represented as the will of states. *Diplomacy* explains how closed-door conversations create stable orders and violent wars.

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## *Communication and the Origins of International Order*

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*For My Father*

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## Preface

The aim of this book is to show how a few inferential logics explain most of what diplomats and leaders learn from their conversations. In ever denser networks of diplomatic exchange, across diverse contexts in the international system, time and again, fundamentally similar dynamics recur. The conclusions that state representatives reach shape decisions for war and how they understand the international order of the day.

The earliest elements of the argument evolved out of thinking about the trepidation with which diplomats and state leaders make demands. Often, their principal concern is not that their threats will not be believed, but what will happen when they are. This is common to alliance politics and nuclear brinkmanship, to attempts to deter and attempts to compel. It is important because the reasons some demands are not made, and others are not made lightly, are also the reasons they are meaningful at all. The fact that a leader does not hold back, in spite of reasons to do so, shows just how important an issue is.

“Obviously,” US President John F. Kennedy told his advisors during the Cuban Missile Crisis, “you can’t sort of announce that in four days from now you’re going to take [the missiles] out.”<sup>1</sup> Why—what prevented this threat of attack in four days from being made? Was it that the threat might not be credible? No. Such a threat could not be made lightly because of the escalatory dynamic that could result when the Soviets took the threat seriously, because “they may announce within three days that they’re going to have [nuclear] warheads on them.” Kennedy worried about what the Soviets would do in response precisely because they *would* find the threat credible. This was a form of brinkmanship,

<sup>1</sup> May and Zelikow (2002, p. 44).

but it could be carried on through private meetings and telegraph messages, and the danger was not of an accidental slide into conflict, but of what the sides would do intentionally in response to new information from their adversaries.

At a far removed time and place and in a different international context, German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck was loath to make even the subtlest diplomatic threat to Russia, even over an issue he considered essential to German security. Was his concern that his signal would not be believed or would be misinterpreted? Once again, his worry was instead how the Russians would react to the real information that the German stance would convey. Perhaps Russia would alter its benevolent attitude toward Germany. Perhaps she would ally with Germany's enemies, what Bismarck called his "nightmare of coalitions."<sup>2</sup>

The dawning appreciation that seemingly different fears about the consequences of credible threats would lead to essentially similar dynamics was the genesis of the project. Eventually, this led to what became the fourth chapter in this volume, which analyzes how the willingness of a leader to make a demand in spite of the diversity of dangers that result allows these closed door threats to convey information. The other theoretical chapters emerged similarly, from an identification of historical patterns and an engagement with theories of signaling.

This book could not exist in anything like its current form without the work of a great many scholars. These include the international relations theorists James Fearon, Robert Jervis, and Thomas Schelling. Their ideas are threaded through the whole of this book. I am grateful to have encountered their lively, provocative, and deeply insightful work. For comments, advice, and especially encouragement, I am profoundly grateful to two intellectual counselors, Bob Jervis and Helen Milner. My colleagues at UCLA have also given me invaluable advice on many occasions. I wish to thank, in particular, Michael Chwe, Jim DeNardo, Debbie Larson, Jeff Lewis, Barry O'Neill, Tom Schwartz, Art Stein, and Marc Trachtenberg. Marc read and commented on the entire manuscript and suggested the British *Confidential Print* as a good source of data on diplomatic inferences. James Alt, Stephen Ansolabehere, Jeremy Cato, Maria Fanis, Jim Fearon, Erik Gartzke, Matthew Gottfried, Arman Grigorian, Mike Horowitz, Andy Kydd, Dov Levin, Jack Levy, John Londregan, James Morrow, Chad Nelson, Bob Pape, Kris Ramsay, Sebastian Rosato, Anne Sartori, Branislav Slantchev, James Snyder, and Dessie Zagorcheva all read and commented on work that became portions of the manuscript. I also wish to thank the two superb anonymous reviewers of the book

<sup>2</sup> Rupp (1941, p. 230).

manuscript, and the many anonymous reviewers of the articles that became portions of Chapters 3 through 6. These reviewers dramatically influenced the direction and presentation of the work. This project is the product of our community of scholars.

The book also involved a large-scale data collection effort that began when, unasked, one student offered to put her extraordinary talents towards the dataset's creation. Christina Brown helped to build and then to manage the large team of researchers we assembled in those early days. In the final years of the project, Marko Perko III took over the task of leading the team of researchers. Without his insights and dedication, the full dataset might never have been finished. The superb students who worked on the project, at different times between 2007 and 2014, are: Adam Boche, Christina Brown, Jae Ellescas, Sabiha Khan, Elizabeth Lopez, Gisue Mehdi, Meena Menon, Henry Murry, Danielle Ohlemacher, Leah Osborne, Laura Patch, Sean Patel, Marko Perko III, Bridgette Pighin, Nathan Piller, Rachel Sandoval, Tania Shakoori, Arsenios Skaperdas, Suzy Smith, Greg Swartz, Paul Wallot, and Golnaz Zandieh. I am indebted to these many contributors for their generous, dedicated, and sometimes inspired work; they do not share blame for any faults in what we produced.

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