

BY I. WILLIAM ZARTMAN

## NEGOTIATION ACCORDING TO DONALD TRUMP, 'MASTER OF THE DEAL'

Donald Trump, the US President-elect, has written (or co-authored) an instructive work on negotiation, *The Art of the Deal*. Much of the work consists of accounts of the deals he has made. They read much like the *Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini*, with zeros instead of sword flourishes and shining towers in the place of chased silver vessels. In the book, the co-author obviously marvels at his own skills. But the first chapter is a handy little guidebook to negotiating and may give insight into the modus operandi of the incoming president.

Trump's guidelines are sound, if summery, inspired by Norman Vincent Peale's *Power of Positive Thinking*. A negotiator should think big and seek to protect his interests by achieving the best outcome possible (the best deal). To begin with, he should begin by diagnosing the details and possibilities of both clients and competition: "know the market." He should make his interest in an agreement known, to widen the market.

Once in the negotiations, the negotiator should make use of all his sources of leverage; he should maximize options and keep his alternatives (BATNA or security points) alive and up-to-date. He should also seek to prevent losses and externalities and contain the costs of the project; in Trump's formula, "protect the downside and the upside will take care of itself." In the bargaining, he should fight back, improving his offer and undercutting the competitors, notably the opponent's BATNA. He should be prepared to walk away, but should never give up. In the end, once the

deal is sealed, the negotiator must be sure to deliver on his commitments. And he should have fun in the process.

Reading into these maxims, one can deduce that Trump is a hard bargainer, with a sense of the negotiations as a competition against opponents and also as an effort at maximum achievement at lowest cost, playing alternatives and even withdrawal (to come back another day) as the dynamics of the negotiation. If he regards the US as his company, he will be a committed and engaged pursuer of outcomes and agreements that serves its interests, as he sees them. His goal is an agreement or outcome on his terms, and he appears to hold a businessman's Realist notion of bargaining as a distributional rather than integrative encounter. Each agreement stands on its own and adds to the collection, rather than fitting in a grand diplomatic strategy.

It is difficult to identify a clear notion about how he will handle the decline in American world leadership, and to establish whether that decline is the result of his predecessor's proclivities or of an objective context. Ironically, he shares with his predecessor a greater interest in domestic issues than in foreign affairs, although from different points of view. There is a timeworn American tradition of staying out of the world's squabbles and insufficiencies until they become infectious, then roll up the sleeves and jump in to set things aright; this is a mixture of isolationism and internationalism that may well return, even though we should have learned that it is not the best strategy. Multipolarity is a structure, leadership is a policy that

operates within the structure, just as deals are discreet encounters but strategy is an orientation of the ensemble. President Trump has not yet tied the points together. The three immediate priorities – Supreme Court nomination, repeal of the health care enlargement, and extension of the wall – and the two additional items of early attention – removal of restrictions on energy production and re-examination of free trade agreements – are all domestic policy except the latter, where hard bargaining can be expected.

Trump asserts that he can talk to Putin, especially about Syria, a needed initiative since the Obama/Clinton reset button failed so badly. It has often been discussed that an arrangement by which the US pulls off its support for the New Syrian Army and friends and the demand for regime change, and focuses on eradication of Da'esh would restore good relations with Russia. This is a cop-out and an illusion, since there are plenty of other issues of friction with Russia that remain.<sup>1</sup> It is not yet clear how President Trump views "corporate interests" in this situation. In the same area, Trump is uncommitted in the Palestine-Israel conflict, not pro-Israel but unlikely to lead a pro-Palestinian crusade. If he decides to engage in a search for a settlement, he will come down heavily behind an agreement, but this does not seem to be a priority until the moment is judged ripe. Moving the US Embassy to Israel to West Jerusalem could well be seized as an opportunity to set up an American Embassy in West Jerusalem accompanied by recognition of a Palestinian state, a



move that could help ripen the conflict for negotiation. Trump can slow down on deliveries on the Iran agreement and will certainly not get very far in urging Iran to slow down its supports of its allies in the Mashreq, but he may try to use threats and “leverage” to sharpen confrontation with Iran. It is doubtful that he would push it to war. The subject of Atlantic cooperation has been misinterpreted. Trump’s stand is not to question the need for Western allies but to insist on a more equitable distribution of costs for Euro-American defense, a demand that has been aired for more than two decades. European can pout or play, but the choice will be theirs, not Trump’s, who has announced the rules for cooperative defense. He has also announced disinterest in

overseas military involvement (while at the same time building a larger and more modern defense establishment) but the lines and limits of this policy are not yet clear.

Similarly, the structure of relations with China and with the outpost strategy of defense cooperation with Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Philippines (despite Duterte) and Vietnam that geopolitics imposes on the US also remain unclear (and maybe also in Trump’s mind), beyond the idea of more equitable defense burdens. One might suppose that if he engaged in a diplomatic confrontation over the South China Sea, he would come down heavily for an agreement but there is no indication how Trump would get along with the Asian approach to negotiation. There is also no indication of a policy toward the Global South, beyond the issue of illegal immigration with Latin

America. The US under Trump will be more critical supporting some UN activities such as the Human Rights Council and may be more cantankerous in the Security Council.

Trump’s negotiating guidelines leave little space for incentives, win-winning, reciprocity, or other elements that make diplomacy bilateral. International reactions for world leaders have shown a wary hopefulness (except for the German Foreign Minister). Foreign countries will have an important role in helping the new president define his view of world relations. There is a real opportunity to use his own terms of interest, rather than seizing the fears and caricatures propagated by the press on both sides of the Atlantic to date.

<sup>1</sup> “See the current PIN project on Negotiating Security and Status in Eurasia, directed by Mikhail Troitskiy and Fen Osler Hampson.