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Diplomatic negotiation : essence and evolution

Meerts, P.W.

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Author: Meerts, Paul Willem

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CHAPTER IV

Entrapment in Negotiation

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CHAPTER IV: ENTRAPMENT IN NEGOTIATION

Entrapment in international negotiations is a form of escalation (Faure, 2003: 190) whereby parties involved in an interactive, non-violent decision-making process with others with whom they have both common and conflicting interests find themselves unable to escape from the costs and investments that they have already made. Brockner and Rubin define entrapment as a decision-making process in which individuals strengthen their commitment to a previously chosen, although failing, course of action to justify or recover their prior investments (Brockner and Rubin, 1985: 5). This chapter addresses entrapment in international negotiations, and focuses on the behaviour of states when they attempt to reconcile divergent interests in situations in which common ground is scarce and control is difficult. As a form of escalation, entrapment can be a transitive (that is, initiated) or intransitive (that is, phenomenal) process, although these two types are dealt with together as they are not always easy to keep apart in practice, and they share similar characteristics.

Entrapment in the context of international negotiations is one of the most fascinating and destructive of negotiation processes. A party that is entrapped (or that entraps itself) is in an unenviable position. For individuals who find themselves entrapped, the consequences can be serious in the sense that they lose out on a deal that they had hoped to achieve. For organizations or countries, the effects can be disastrous. Whole international systems can become entrapped, and the consequences of such a situation often run out of control. An example of this is the global situation during the period of US–Soviet confrontation from 1950 to 1990. The ‘Cold War’ is simply a short-hand way of describing the entrapment of the two superpowers at the time, which were caught in a ‘Balance of Terror’ (Schelling, 1963: 239). Nuclear power led the protagonists into the trap, and because of the global nature of the force involved, the whole world was caught in that trap. Albeit on a regional rather than a global scale, the same kinds of mechanism can be seen in the nuclear and conventional arms races between countries such as India and Pakistan.

Entrapment does not only occur in polarized situations. It happens in the European Union as well: ‘once Member States have committed themselves to a particular set of norms and/or policy course, they are likely to find themselves entrapped, constrained to take further actions that do not reflect their original intentions and/or current preferences’ (Frank Schimmelfennig, as cited in Thomas, 2009: 343–344). Daniel Thomas adds to this that ‘entrapment is most likely to occur when several conditions are met’, namely when actors are determined about the course to follow, if policy commitments have already been made, if external conditions are in line with those policy commitments, and where there is strong pressure to comply and public attention is significant (Thomas, 2009: 344–245). In other words, entrapment is a process that limits the freedom to act. It can occur

in any negotiation process, although – as will be seen hereafter – more conditions than those mentioned here will enhance the risk of being entrapped.

The essence of entrapment is that even though one or more of the parties may not like the agreement towards which they seem to be moving, they find it extremely difficult to extricate themselves from the process. Entrapment occurs when the shape of the negotiation process is like a gorge that has a wide entrance, but that slowly but surely becomes narrower and narrower. One or more of the parties are left with increasingly less room for manoeuvre, so that at a certain point they can no longer turn back and are forced to work towards an agreement that they are finding less and less attractive. Even when they can still turn back, entrapped parties are often compelled to continue, just like gamblers who are very much aware that they are losing but want to recover some of the losses that they have already suffered. When individuals or groups find themselves in this situation, an appropriate response is pity. However, when it happens to countries or the international system itself, alarm bells should really start to ring. Leaders can guide a nation into entrapment situations without citizens being aware of it: 'The apathy of the masses and their need for guidance has its counterpart in the leaders' natural greed for power' (Michels, 1966: 205).

Entrapment is thus a special form of escalation, in which the process itself has an enormous impact on the party's perception of the 'best alternative to a negotiated agreement' (BATNA) (Fisher, Ury and Patton, 1991). The alternatives are at the same time increasingly better and increasingly worse. This chapter first offers an analysis of the characteristics of entrapment (choice, uncertainty, investment and repetition), and then considers the various levels at which it occurs (personal, interpersonal, national and international). It then turns to examining the major factors involved (planning, information, communication and control), and to presenting and analyzing a case study that is suitable for teaching negotiators about entrapment, and will draw appropriate lessons from it. A final section summarizes the main findings and briefly discusses entrapment as a strategic mode.

Characteristics

Choice

Entrapment is the result of choices made: not just one or two, but many of them; small, step-by-step decisions that result in a step-by-step loss of room for manoeuvre. In principle, a party that enters negotiations has complete freedom of choice. (In practice, however, this is not always true, and in any event, complete freedom of choice is probably an illusion.) Although there may be different degrees of freedom of choice at the start of the entrapment processes, some freedom – or at least the *perception* of a certain degree of freedom – is a prerequisite for any negotiations. Brute force cannot be regarded as a type of international negotiation; rather, it should be seen as an alternative to negotiation. In negotiations, the parties decide on matters jointly, although power is rarely evenly balanced.

A dreadful example of entrapment was the treatment of the Jews by the Nazis during the holocaust. The Nazis often tried to make Jews responsible for the deportation of other Jews. To persuade them to cooperate, the Nazis tried to hide their true intentions until the

Jews had been entrapped sufficiently that they could no longer escape from the process. The Nazis divided Jewish communities into several groups to whom they gave different guarantees of protection. Many of those with the highest degree of protection were willing to cooperate in the selection and transportation of their fellow Jews in order to save the other echelons. At the same time, these collaborators, who were often well intentioned, found themselves in an increasingly difficult position as a result of their collaboration. The deeper they became involved in the process, the more difficult it became for them to extricate themselves. They believed that negotiation with the Nazis over the fate of some of their kinsmen would save the lives of many others by buying time. However, to paraphrase the German clergyman Martin Niemöller, first they came and took the communists, but I didn't protest because I wasn't a communist. Then they came and took the trade unionists, but I didn't protest because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came and took the Jews, but I didn't protest because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came and they took me ... and there was nobody left to protest against that.

The behaviour of these collaborators ensured that the process of the Holocaust could proceed smoothly, with minimum effort on the part of the Nazis and with minimum loss of time. This meant that the Nazis did not need to use too many resources. Although they probably would have been able to force the Jews into the death camps without using entrapment techniques, such a move would have reduced their capacity to wage war on their military enemies. The Jews – and prisoners of war – were also forced to work for the Germans and thus support their captors against their potential protectors, the Allies. The Germans tended to use these tactics more in Western Europe (where the situation was more transparent and the population less anti-Jewish) than in Central and Eastern Europe, where mass killings were often committed. However, as we shall see, entrapment tactics were used even in Central and Eastern Europe, as in the city of Vilnius, for example (Szur, 1997).

Choosing to embark on a process weakens one's ability to exit that process. However, this particular loss of control may be more than compensated for because participation in the process could give you greater control over some matters within the process that would otherwise have been beyond your reach. This means that there are two kinds of choice: namely, those related to the process; and those related to the situation. To enter into an alliance with others entails sharing control over the process and the structures that direct this process. Creating greater situational control within the main process and within the structures may be a better choice than trying to keep what in theory is absolute control, but may actually turn out to be control over nothing. What is decisive is the substance of control: for what purpose does a state desire control and freedom of choice? If the result is reduced control over a more substantial economy, a state may decide to cede absolute control in exchange for less control over a better situation. Leaders can decide to force their people into a situation by destroying their alternatives, and so deliberately limit choice: for example, 'He [the general] puts his troops in a position where they have no choice but to fight and stay alive' (Chung, 1991: 12). However, it is important to consider to what extent this situation is actually an improvement. One cannot be certain that entrapment is not just around the corner, which brings up the question of uncertainty.

Uncertainty

Uncertainty is a hallmark of any negotiation. Negotiators have a natural tendency to keep their hands as free as possible, and thereby to create uncertainty. In the simulation game 'Crisis in Yugoslavia', participants 'tried to prevent attacks by keeping their positions veiled as long as this seemed possible' (Meerts, 1989: 346). Negotiators start off with a lack of knowledge, not only of the other party, but often of their own situation as well. Their instructions are often fuzzy, being the result of a bargaining process within the bureaucracy. Some diplomats are quite outspoken about this. 'I never', wrote Lord Malmesbury, 'received an instruction that was worth reading' (Nicolson, 1998: 81). Negotiators need time before and during the actual negotiations to gather as much information as possible, not only about the subject matter, but also about the negotiators with whom they have to deal: their skills, style, character and culture, as well as the political system and bureaucracy that they represent, and so on. Culture has a decisive effect on the question of exploring for information. In some cultures, people shy away from a lengthy process of ambiguous reconnaissance, and negotiators want to tackle the business 'straightaway'. In other cultures, the exploration phase is considered essential for a proper evaluation of the negotiation situation.

But however much exploration occurs before the process starts, and however much time is spent on exploration before the actual bargaining phase, one will not have all the information needed until the entire negotiation process has occurred. The negotiation process is not a neutral instrument. It has an impact on itself, because complete information can only be obtained in a step-by-step sequence. As information is released in small bits, this influences the direction of the process as a whole. In other words, to obtain all the information required takes time, but time can be dangerous. Time can be manipulated, for example, by setting deadlines and thereby forcing the negotiators into taking decisions. Without deadlines, international negotiations have a tendency to go on forever. This is because certain countries want to make progress on certain problems, but they know that the other states will not accept certain proposals unless several months or years of negotiations have been invested in them, and so they procrastinate. So much progress would not have been made in the European Union, for example, without the deadline of the change of the rotating Presidency every six months. It is, of course, possible to exclude uncertainty about one's intentions, as in the 'chicken game' (Garnett, 1975: 127). However, this might have disastrous consequences.

Conversely, deadlines can be moved or not set. If the situation changes in favour of one of the parties, that party may use time to change the balance of power, in which case time works in their favour. Without having to make any additional demands, one of the parties may manoeuvre itself into a stronger position, and entrap the other side by using time as its weapon. Time, often overlooked by the other party, is one of the most effective tools in an entrapment strategy. It adds to uncertainty, which makes it one of the elements on which negotiators need to focus if they want to avoid (or create) a trap. Negotiators need time to be sure about certain points in the negotiations. However, time may also create uncertainty: the context may change and the direction in which it is changing may be unpredictable.

Uncertainty about the nature of the relationship between the negotiators on the two sides can also be used as a tool in entrapment, because the relationship can be

manipulated. By creating the impression that you and your opponent have an excellent relationship, it is possible to suggest the existence of a degree of trust that is not really there. Trust is therefore an element of uncertainty that should be added to the role of time management. Negotiators need to examine the negotiation situation closely in order to decide whether the other party can be trusted. If one of the parties benefits from breaking the relationship, additional measures need to be taken. A good relationship is no longer enough and guarantees need to be sought. So-called prisoner's dilemma games are an excellent tool for training negotiators to deal with the matter of trust (Siebe, 1991: 181–185; and Hayes, 1991, 365–366).

The more insecure the situation, the more trust is needed and the more difficult it is to build up trust. If emotions enter into the proceedings (and trust is, after all, closely related to emotion), negative influences may be expected. Positive emotions can reduce uncertainty and can therefore lower the chances that a process of entrapment will arise. However, positive emotions can also lead to entrapment. If they are absent (that is, if trust is low and the relationship is not good), negotiators need to take care not to be trapped. They may move slowly and seem indecisive, like Fabius the Procrastinator, who avoided joining battle with Hannibal. However, if positive emotions are present, entrapment may result for two reasons:

- First, because one side may trust the other without there being good reason to do so;
- Second, because if negotiators within the same team like each other, they may not be sufficiently critical of each other's behaviour, which leads to 'group think'.

An example of the second was the entrapment of the Dutch during negotiations in 1991 on the Maastricht Treaty (Blair, 1999). Negotiators within the Dutch Foreign Ministry's team failed to react to negative signals because they were convinced that their own strategy was right and no one within the group dared to criticize the others. Positive emotions may thus be dangerous.

The Roman Senate was not happy with Fabius's procrastination and replaced him with two consuls who stormed forward and were – quite literally – trapped at Cannae. Hannibal did not really do anything. He just started off with a certain formation, and the Romans, through their own push and power, simply entrapped themselves. In this case, it was not so much uncertainty that led to entrapment, but the false sense of security that arose because the Romans underestimated their enemy, or overestimated their own strength. More powerful countries often overestimate themselves, which can lead to their entrapment by the weaker party. Uncertainty may give rise to caution, while certainty may lead to recklessness and to entrapment. Uncertainty can function as a warning signal and is therefore a factor that can help cautious negotiators to avoid entrapment.

Investment

To avoid entrapment, it is therefore important to keep control of the investments. To lose track of these may easily lead to entrapment. A party that is losing control of its investments may try to regain control with new investments that escalate the investment process. If these investments are also lost, entrapment becomes more difficult to avoid. To abandon this situation may mean losing invested concessions, and since such a loss may be unacceptable on the home front, more investments may have to be made to try to

recoup those that have been lost. Huge losses can be sustained during such a process of entrapment, but the gradual nature of the process means the magnitude of such losses may not become apparent until the mid-game phase, by which time too much has been invested to make turning back an option. On the other hand, further investments may lead to even greater losses and further entrapment. In this dilemma, a higher authority needs to step in to take responsibility for cutting losses. In other words, a General de Gaulle-type character is needed to call a halt to the spiral of entrapment, but he or she should be aware not to become part and parcel of the entrapment process. If this happens, the intervention of the *Deus ex machina* – or unexpected intervention of a new event – might create an even more dangerous situation.

Investment in the negotiations may take either material or emotional forms. Negotiators are tied to the success or failure of the negotiations: their position, their status, and their face are involved. Depending on their cultural backgrounds, this investment of the self can be serious to a greater or lesser degree. In many cases, emotional investment is a more serious matter than material investment. This is because material investment can be viewed with a certain distance, a certain objectivity. Losses are never pleasant, but they may be compensated by gains elsewhere. The more senior the officials are, and the greater overview and power they possess, the more likely they are to be in a good position to compensate for the loss of A by the gain B. If B is more important than A, this combination of losses and gains may even be part of a deliberate strategy of gambits. Decisions may be taken on a purely business-like basis, even to the extent of ruthlessly sacrificing negotiations in one sector to give negotiations in another sector a chance of being successful.

However, such a chess game cannot be played easily if emotional investments are at stake. People are not flexible in matters such as face and status. 'People responsible for a losing course of action will invest further than those not responsible for prior losses. [...] People can become so committed to a position that they will pay more for a monetary reward than it is worth' (Staw and Hoang, 1995: 474). It is not easy to 'separate the people from the problem', and it is often not desirable to cut the links between the two (Fisher, Ury and Patton, 1991). Negotiators are human beings, and like most human beings they prefer to win, not lose. This is again very much a cultural matter. To prevent loss of face and faith, negotiators are often inclined to invest at a stage at which investment is no longer wise. This self-propelling nature of the immaterial side of investment may be of greater importance in explaining the dynamics of entrapment processes than the material side. The emotional side of investment is more difficult to handle than the material side. To keep control of the situation, the negotiators themselves need to be brought under control. The way to do this is to send in a person of higher level, if available and willing. High-ranking officials are often unwilling to step into an entrapment situation, as they are blamed if things go wrong. Moreover, the higher they are in the hierarchy, the deeper they fall. High-ranking people are also in a position to shy away from involvement, as they are not easily commanded by others.

Much depends, therefore, on the negotiator's position in the hierarchy of his or her organization. If the negotiator has a very senior – or even the most senior – position, entrapment is an imminent danger. Who is going to turn the minister around? Who dares to contradict the dictator if it means endangering one's life? The higher the rank

of the negotiator directly involved in an entrapped situation, the greater the danger that entrapment will escalate. High-ranking politicians who make mistakes will find it difficult to acknowledge a mistake out of fear of losing face. They might try to justify themselves in order to protect their reputation, which may lead to giving precedence to their personal emotional interest over the interest of their country – the phenomenon of entrapping themselves through ‘egotiation’, as analyzed in chapter IX. Their advisors and assistants might want to correct their superior, but it is doubtful how he or she will respond, as being corrected by underlings might imply loss of face as well. The politician’s staff would thus not always be happy and willing to correct their leader, as this might have a negative impact on their own career. To keep their superior on track is one of their most difficult and thankless tasks. They might decide to allow the self-justification to stand as it is and abstain from correcting their minister. One reason for this self-justification is the tendency to ‘associate persistence [...] with strong leadership’ (Staw and Ross, 1987: 70):

[R]egardless of any need to justify, individuals may also learn that consistency in action is a more desirable leadership strategy than experimentation. Such an implicit theory of leadership would mean that many individuals would choose to remain committed to a dubious course of action simply because the opportunity to receive a positive evaluation by others would be greater in the case of consistency than with experimentation (Staw and Ross, 1980: 259).

Repetition

Entrapment is made up of a series of incidents. This makes it relatively invisible, and also relatively stable. One of the parties (or sometimes both) is devoured, little by little. The first move in entrapment is often made by the party that will be trapped, and the entrapment occurs through the assertiveness of that party. This is one of the most interesting and characteristic features of the entrapment processes: victims are often trapped by their own actions. The party that uses the circumstances in which entrapment becomes possible often plays a somewhat passive role – rather like a quicksand or gin trap that is already there. Victims become increasingly ensnared as a result of their own actions and emotions in an intransitive escalation. Each move forward by the victim serves to make the trap more effective. Neither the trap nor the trapper need to do much to add to this.

Entrapment may be seen as an escalator moving downward, not upward. In this sense, entrapment may be seen as the counterpart of escalation. It shares the step-by-step nature of a development in which tension mounts with each successive step up. The crisis steadily evolves until an almost inevitable finale. It is a balanced evolution that leads to revolutionary consequences. The differences between this and escalation are, however, the step-by-step growth of an imbalance in power, and the step-by-step fixation of the situation. Entrapment could be defined as a stable process of escalation in which one (or more) of the parties systematically loses out as a result of their own actions. The growing imbalance of power is channelled into an environment that creates a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, a kind of predestined situation. As in escalation, exit options begin to disappear, but normally only for one of the two parties; and step-by-step investments are increasingly made, but more by one party than the other. It is possible, however, for both parties to be entrapped, with the same mediation working on each.

A prisoner's dilemma exercise (Meerts 2014, 47-48) has been used to train people to understand entrapment. This has been used extensively to confront players with issues such as trust, insecurity, implementation, win-win, win-lose, and lose-lose situations, and emotional, rational and irrational behaviour. By using real names of countries and realistic situations (such as Iran and Azerbaijan negotiating an oil deal, or Mongolia and China negotiating a cashmere wool deal), cultural elements can be brought into play as well. Depending on how the game develops, it can illustrate either one-sided or mutual entrapment. As trust diminishes and emotions rise, an entrapment context is created, to which one or both negotiation teams may fall victim. They will win much less than they could, and the third party will gain from this lack of cooperation. Again, we see the typical hallmark of entrapment: the third party, doing nothing, not present, and unable to act or exert power, may win because of the counterproductive actions of the negotiating partners.

In this exercise, two negotiation teams decide on the price of oil or other product deliveries to a third country. In the first round, the delegations decide on a price without being able to negotiate on it. In a second, third, or fourth (etc.) round, parties may bargain about the price to be set for the round under consideration. The game master can introduce variation by calling for negotiation in only even-numbered rounds, inserting a mediator, adding additional negotiators to the actual talks, calling for an international conference of all parties, or doubling or tripling the stakes. In a normal game, the parties discuss their strategy and tactics and formulate a mandate for one of the team members who is sent to meet the envoy of the opposing side. The two negotiate a price, but they need to 'sell' their results to their own delegation. The delegation then either decides to stick to the agreement or to renege on it. Only after they have taken their final decision at the end of each round do the teams hear the results.

This creates, of course, the typical insecurity of the prisoner's dilemma, or a price war (Saner 2005, 93-100). Teams are inclined to start in an avoidance manner by setting the lowest price on which they cannot be undercut. In a subsequent round, they try to negotiate trust and to raise the price for the absent third party. If both raise their prices, the third party suffers. If one of the two decides on a lower price than its counterpart in the negotiation, that party undercuts the market of the other side and therefore makes a good profit. The third party, by choosing the cheapest product, therefore provides that product's party with a relative gain, while the opponent who set too high a price makes a relative loss. The losing side normally retaliates by lowering its price at the next step and both often end up charging the lowest price possible. They are in a mutually entrapped situation, which is beneficial for the consumer country. The producers can only escape from the trap by investing in their mutual relationship – that is, by risking a gambit, by conceding in the next round, and thereby compensating the side that made a relative loss in one of the earlier rounds. In most cases, the teams end up with a relative joint loss. In some cases they regain trust and end up well. In exceptional cases, by keeping their promises from beginning to end, they do not become trapped in the downward spiral of mistrust.

These oil-price exercises are a fine illustration of the impact of successive rounds on tendencies towards entrapment. The repetitive character of the rounds raises the tension, but the repetition is also a resource. It creates opportunities for doing better and restoring

trust, as time is available. Depending on the skills and styles of the negotiators, their communication with each other and with their own party is decisive in overcoming the tendencies towards entrapment. The game therefore also demonstrates how effective negotiation can offer the option to restore trust and escape entrapment. Handling the emotional side is an essential factor here. More than the actual relative losses, emotions are the difficult factors in the game. People feel betrayed: they are angry and want revenge. They end up in an entrapped lose–lose situation. They could escape, but they are often unwilling to take the risk. They prefer to punish the other side, and thereby punish themselves as well. They know that a good settlement would be good for both sides, but they no longer want the other side to benefit. They are prepared to lose providing that the other side loses as well. Although they normally start out with full confidence in the other party, the structure of the game often leads them into distrust and entrapment that they cannot reverse and overcome (Winham and Bovis, 1978; Griessmair and Koeszegi, 2009).

Levels

Intrapersonal

Given that human beings react not only to their environment, but at least as much to their inner world, entrapment cannot be seen solely as a contextual development. To adapt Marx, to a large extent, the underlying structure determines the super structure. The psyche of the negotiator is as important to understanding the mechanics of entrapment processes as the factors analyzed in the section on characteristics. The inner world of the negotiator can be viewed from many angles, but here we limit them to the question of how to deal with the psychological dimension of one's own behaviour and the actions of the other side in the context of the entrapment process in international negotiations.

In psychoanalysis, we need to examine the negotiator's past to understand part of his or her reactions during the process of entrapment. As this process develops and stress builds up, personal characteristics start to play an increasingly important role. Matters and feelings that lurk in the shadows will appear as higher levels of stress force them out into the open. When these become explicit, they affect the entrapment process as an important semi-autonomous factor. Furthermore, negotiators themselves spend a lot of energy trying to understand the other party, and thereby forget about their own psychological processes. If the negotiators are part of the crisis they are bargaining about, there is a serious risk that they will be carried away by their own experiences and traumas. They become ensnared in their own and their opponents' psychological frames, and thus complicate and exacerbate the entrapment process as it proceeds.

As it is impossible to dig into the psyche of the other negotiator, it is absolutely essential to at least investigate the background of one's opponent and the culture and political history of his or her country, while at the same time being aware of one's own culture and experiences, and their impact on one's own behaviour. Thus, for example, it is difficult to judge the negotiation behaviour of Armenians in negotiations with the Turks if one is unaware of the genocide that took place in the early twentieth century. How could we judge Israel's negotiation behaviour in talks with Palestinians if we were to overlook the *Shoah* (Holocaust) and the probability that old enmities and sufferings would affect negotiations with others who might also be seen as enemies? This shadow of the

past, the projection of old images on fresh situations, is quite a common phenomenon in international relations, not only in the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East, but also in Western Europe between, say, the French and the Germans, the Irish and the British, and so on. Negotiators have to live with these 'facts of life', and, since they cannot be stamped out, teach themselves how to deal with them.

To observe the behaviour of the opponent is the second tool that negotiators use to understand better the motivation and psychological needs of those on the other side of the table. Non-verbal behaviour, especially non-verbal leaks, unveils the real intentions of the negotiator. However, for a non-expert it is extremely difficult to read non-verbal behaviour well (Goodfield, 1999). Behavioural analysis is not sufficient alone and has to be supplemented by the background knowledge mentioned in the preceding paragraph. One may combine both by making good use of the corridors. In the informal talks that take place, such as in plenary sessions, both verbal and non-verbal signals should be registered. However, informal talks may disclose more about the personality of the other negotiator, while in plenary sessions we are probably limited to observations of more superficial signals. To probe deeper in informal talks, it is often necessary to open oneself up to an extent that could be dangerous during the rest of the negotiations, as it could give the other side material that could be used for blackmail purposes. On the other hand, trust can only be established by opening oneself up, at least to a degree. This is one of the more difficult dilemmas in negotiation processes in general, and in entrapment in particular. Openness can work both ways. There are many dreadful examples of negotiators doing things to cover up mistakes that, when discovered by the other party, trigger serious entrapment processes.

All negotiators view reality through their own spectacles: these are necessary if one is to get to grips with reality, but they also shape and colour the situation that one observes. 'The moment we want to say *who* somebody is, our vocabulary leads us astray in saying *what* somebody is [...] with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us' (Arendt, 1958: 181). The greater the gap between oneself and the other negotiator, the greater the risk of serious distortion and the greater the risk of miscommunication. Being misled by one's own and the other negotiator's misperceptions creates an ideal breeding ground for entrapment. This leads to the conclusion that one must check negotiators' understanding of their own mandate *and* the negotiation process. They will also need to check their own perceptions, especially in processes that are prone to entrapment, since misperceptions are one of the main sources of entrapment and one of the most difficult to eliminate.

Interpersonal

The chemistry between negotiators is one of the factors that determines the failure or success of a negotiation. If the personal chemistry is not good, entrapment processes are unlikely to occur as a result of the psychological dimension of the process. Negotiators who have negative feelings towards their opponents are very careful not to become trapped: negotiators are unlikely to be trapped if they feel they cannot trust the other party. The paradox of entrapment is that the negotiators need to build trust for the trap to work, and since entrapment is not just a question of creating a one-time trap situation, trust needs to be implemented in such a way that the other side only starts to mistrust the opponent when it is already too late to withdraw. However, since entrapment also

very much depends on the situation and the way in which that situation arises, outright deception may not be necessary. In addition, the action is mainly undertaken by the entrapped party, not the entrapper, yet it is vital that the entrapped side takes the view that the only way to escape the trap is to move forward, not to withdraw. It is here that the entrapper needs to create certain carrots and sticks with which to entice or goad the other party into the trap.

The relationship between the two parties is therefore an important factor. It might be argued that if the negotiators know each other well, entrapment would be unlikely to occur. After all, ambiguity is an important element in entrapment. However, it could also be argued that negotiators who do not know each other well view the other side's actions in a more distant and rational way. They may therefore notice the entrapment signals quite early in the process. Those who are emotionally close to the other party, by contrast, may overlook the signals of entrapment, since their feelings prevail over their reason. Indeed, many entrapment situations occur if there is emotional closeness between the parties. Emotional closeness blurs personal views, which have already been shaped by past experiences. It is extremely difficult to change one's focus from what one is accustomed to or expects, and to see things differently.

Here we have another paradox in entrapment negotiation. To avoid being entrapped, one has to try to understand the other party. It is therefore necessary to keep an eye on the psychological make-up both of the other party and of oneself. However, one should not become engrossed in this, as it distorts one's clarity of vision, which can equally lead to entrapment. Emotional closeness should therefore be avoided, as it is one of the elements in entrapment processes. The closer people work together, the more likely they are to become emotionally attached and the more likely they are to become entrapped. Hence 'President Carter ultimately lost faith in the reports of his 'man-on-the-spot' in Tehran, William Sullivan. But [...] Carter continued to rely on some of Sullivan's reports for some time [...] and [...] did not dispense with a resident ambassador but sent out a second one' (Berridge, 1995: 42). Another example is provided by the Dutch Foreign Ministry during the Dutch Presidency of the EU (van den Bos, 2008), when a group of diplomats who worked on a draft treaty for the Maastricht meeting knew each other well and held the same views about the desired content of the treaty. They turned a deaf ear to warnings from the Dutch Permanent Representation in Brussels that the Germans would not agree. This 'groupthink' led to entrapment. Diplomats are in general quite open to signals from the outside world. They have developed a sixth sense about potential traps in international relations. Civil servants, however, are often not very sensitive to the entrapments of international politics. As civil servants are becoming more important as international negotiators and are even taking over the hegemony of the diplomat within the EU (Meerts, 1999), entrapment processes may become more frequent and more successful in the sphere of international relations. In general, negotiators should be open to one another, but in some cases it can be useful to avoid being influenced by the people at the other side of the table. The famous Dutch captain of industry, Frits Philips, 'admonished his negotiators not to listen too well to their opponents because by listening they would run the risk of being convinced' (LePoole, 1991: 34). At the same time, however, negotiators should be close enough to their opponents to detect certain signals that can be used to avoid entrapment.

National

Systemic factors are also at work. If a society is very individualistic, entrapment in negotiation may be less likely, whereas if a society is more collectivist, entrapment may occur more often. Geert Hofstede defines individualism as a situation in which people look after themselves and their immediate family only (Hofstede, 1980). Collectivism is seen as a situation in which people belong to in-groups (families, clans, or organizations), which look after the groups in exchange for loyalty. In a collectivist political system, civil servants see their ministry as a network of alliances, whereas in an individualistic political system, the ministry may be seen as a machine. In an individualistic system, people may be less vulnerable to entrapment, as they are less dependent on relationships. In Asian countries, which often score high on collectivism, entrapment may therefore occur more frequently than in Europe. However, to claim that entrapment is encountered less frequently in wealthier countries than in poorer countries would certainly be going too far.

Interpersonal communication depends partly on the systemic environment, and that environment differs depending on the society or the ministry in which one lives or works. Individuals, however, exercise their own judgment as well, and they can go against undercurrents in the system within which they operate. People's characters also influence their interpersonal relationships in an entrapment situation, their norms, their values, their life experiences, and, of course, their living conditions. Hofstede also introduced the distinction between competitive and cooperative societies, although he used different terms (Hofstede, 1980): in competitive societies, the dominant values are achievement and success; in cooperative societies, the dominant values are caring for others and quality of life. To entrap another party is a competitive, or distributive, activity. We may therefore expect entrapment to happen more often in societies in which negotiators take a competitive stand. In line with this, we may expect entrapment to be more frequent in distributive (that is, win-lose) negotiations than in integrative processes.

International

Entrapment processes occur abundantly in negotiations between states and within international organizations such as the UN, the African Union, the EU, or the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Entrapment processes in international politics often start with serious misjudgements of the intentions of countries that are perceived as enemies (Rivera, 1968: 71). The United States became entrapped in Vietnam, just as the Soviet Union became entrapped in Afghanistan. '[The US was] caught in an intervention which cannot be brought to a successful ending [... while being] reluctant to admit defeat' (Frankel, 1969: 232). The consequences of entrapment at the international level are more serious than those at the national, interpersonal or intrapersonal levels, but are they more likely to occur? Entrapment may be a greater danger at the international level because the consequences may easily become out of control. There is no international authority strong enough to exert the same degree of control as states can. However, precisely because of this lack of control, which can be seen as a sign of less intimate relationships, entrapment may occur less often than at other levels. If it is true that entrapment is more likely if parties are closer to each other, the lower of the four levels (the personal level) may show a higher frequency of entrapment than the higher levels (the national and international

levels). Also, if the higher the level and the more serious the consequences to be faced, parties may (or at least should) be more vigilant against it.

The consequences of entrapment in international negotiations can be very far-reaching:

Caught up in the investment that has already been made in some course of action, foreign policy decision-makers may find themselves unable to bring to bear the kind of rational, dispassionate analysis that is necessary to make wise decisions in the throes of international crisis (Rubin, 1991: 224).

Since entrapment may occur less frequently at the international level than at other levels, negotiators may be less prepared to deal with it. However, the effect is such that diplomats and other negotiators need to be trained to be aware of the phenomenon. If the parties decide not to be restrained, international cooperation and control will break down. An example may be found in the decision of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to attack Serbia to gain control of Kosovo. Since the UN Security Council was unwilling to agree to such a step, NATO either had to settle to do nothing or decide to circumvent the UN. NATO decided to take unilateral action and as a consequence it became entrapped in the Kosovo situation. It was only through the use of excessive force that the organization managed to destroy the trap (and Serbia in the process).

In international negotiations, as in other negotiations, it is often the more powerful party that becomes entrapped through its own actions. Entrapment is a tool of the weaker party and a trap for the strong. Guerrilla warfare is based on the same principle. The weaker side tries to bog down the stronger party by avoiding direct confrontation, luring the stronger party into its web. Numerous examples of this kind of entrapment can be found in warfare, such as the weaker Flemish foot soldiers who lured the heavy French cavalry into the swamps during the Battle of the Golden Spurs in 1302, or the Mongol horsemen who avoided direct confrontation with the heavily armoured European knights during the Mongol invasion of Europe in the thirteenth century, but attacked them first with arrows until they were so weakened that the lightly armed Mongol horsemen could easily defeat them. Weaker parties look for the weak spots of their more powerful opponents and then exploit those weaknesses to entrap them. The problem of entrapment at an international level is not only the seriousness of the consequences, but also the difficulty of repairing the damage done. Once a party has been entrapped, no other mechanisms are available to make good the damage, so when more powerful countries entrap smaller ones, there is a risk that the smaller countries may not survive.

In multilateral international negotiations an additional problem is that of coalition-building. Seeking allies does help weaker parties to survive in entrapment situations, but it creates more entanglement at the same time, which makes it more difficult to free oneself from the spider's web: '[I]f you are representing some group or constituency, it may be hard for you to explain sunk costs; once engaged in the negotiations, you may be forced to stay longer than you want' (Raiffa, 1982: 89). At the same time, one's coalition might become more dependable on the other caucus 'if the no-agreement alternatives of one coalition improve, the zone of possible agreement [...] correspondingly shrinks' (Lax and Sebenius, 1994: 182). To steer away from such a situation is more difficult if a whole group

of countries is involved, with all their face-losing fears. To step out of the coalition might be seen as treason. Such defection is not easily accepted by the more powerful member(s) of the group, which will use the resources they have to stop the smaller country that tries to withdraw and thereby weaken the allied forces. 'If an organization has the ability to exact a high price for exit, it thereby acquires a powerful defence against one of the member's most potent weapons: the threat of exit' (Hirschmann, 1972: 96).

Factors

Planning

If there is one way in which a party can save itself from becoming entrapped, it is by carefully planning the negotiation in which entrapment may arise. Overall planning, including strategy, is probably the best tool by which to avoid entrapment. Overall planning not only reveals potential traps, but also indicates potential linkages and opportunities for package deals. One of the characteristics of the entrapment process is over-commitment to certain issues, which creates blind spots. This problem can be alleviated by incorporating other issues: the broader the net, the less likely entrapment is. The greater the number of issues that are brought into play, the greater the number of escape routes that are available. What are the options in creating a strategy? Looking at the Thomas–Kilman (Thomas and Kilman, 1974) model of determinants of conflict behaviour, we can distinguish five main strategies: competition; accommodation; avoidance; compromise; and collaboration (Saner, 1997: 111). In general, parties that employ the first two strategies are more likely to become entrapped than parties that use the last two. Since parties may move from one strategy to another as the context changes, the Thomas–Kilman model actually provides for sixteen potential strategic paths.

Competition is an effective strategy for a situation in which the stakes are high and the competitive party has a power advantage over the opponent. At the same time, the interdependence of interests and the quality of the relationship may be relatively limited. A competitive strategy may lead to entrapment because the weaker party can use the assertiveness of the stronger party to entrap it in a situation in which the best option is to go on, moving deeper into swamps that are not yet apparent. In my training groups, negotiators often score quite low on competitive behaviour, unless they have experienced warlike situations from which they have learned that competitive behaviour leads to the resolution of conflicts in ways that, for them at least, are effective. Israelis and Croats, for example, score high on competition in the Thomas–Kilman self-assessment exercise. Men tend to score higher on competition as a natural mode of conflict resolution than women, but there are exceptions. Women who have to fight for their posts as diplomats may score high on competition as an intuitive mode of conflict management. In an Omani group, the highest score on competition was achieved by the only woman diplomat.

Accommodation, the converse of competition, may also lead to entrapment. A party that continuously appeases the other side quickly finds itself trapped through salami tactics applied by the other side. That party will be eaten bit by bit, slice by slice. While each slice is digestible, the final result will be disastrous, as the opponent will have gained much more than originally foreseen. By focusing on short-term problems, the long-term effects remained out of sight.

In distributive international negotiation processes, the competitive side generally wins and the accommodating side generally loses. In this win-lose situation, compromise may provide a middle-of-the-road solution. In any event, strategies along the win-lose dimension run the risk of creating opportunities for entrapment. Accommodation, like competition, is one of the strategies that score low in self-assessment exercises. Negotiators dislike making concessions; they prefer other modes of conflict resolution. Accommodation generally scores higher with women than with men. In some countries, accommodation hardly exists as a mode of negotiation: negotiators would rather fail to reach agreement than reach an agreement that benefits the other side as well as their own. The win-lose axis is very much the emotional dimension in the model. Negative feelings towards the other party may lead to competitive (or avoidance) strategies, while positive feelings may lead to accommodative (and collaborative) approaches. EU negotiators score relatively high on accommodation.

Avoidance can be seen as the start of a collaborative strategy. The avoidance-compromise-collaboration axis could be described as the win-win dimension, provided the parties are moving from avoidance towards collaboration and not from avoidance to competition or accommodation. Avoidance can be seen as the most effective of the anti-entrapment strategies. However, since action is obviously needed to create a negotiated settlement, avoidance is also one of the more powerful anti-negotiation strategies. Avoidance is only effective for a while. For example, in recent conflicts, as long as the Western allies had air superiority, both Saddam Hussein of Iraq and Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia confronted them with an avoidance strategy, preferring to avoid confrontation with a stronger enemy than to be defeated in open battle. In that sense, avoidance may be the most effective strategy for the entrapping party to adopt, to lure its opponent into the trap by withdrawal. In the Thomas-Kilmann exercise used during workshops (Meerts, 2014: 12-14), men score quite highly on avoidance as a preferred mode to deal with problems. In addition, we see that people who have suffered in conflicts also often choose avoidance as their main intuitive strategy, as a way to wait for better times and not meanwhile to waste resources. Palestinian intellectuals, for instance, score highly on avoidance as a preferred mode of behaviour in conflict situations.

Collaboration or cooperation is the hallmark of integrative bargaining, under the motto 'we either sink or swim together'. By integrating values, this approach leads to a negotiation result whereby each side wins more than it loses. Collaboration that is genuine may be a good strategy with which to counter entrapment. If collaboration is competition in disguise, however, entrapment is just around the corner. As compromise is halfway between avoidance and collaboration, it may be an ill-balanced strategy. It is not as effective a tool against entrapment as avoidance or solid collaboration. It leaves open the danger that parties will fall back into competition or accommodation. In the oil-pricing exercise described above, compromise is a dangerous halfway house on the path from avoidance to collaboration. If one of the parties is lured into competitive behaviour, a relapse into avoidance, and thus to lose-lose situations, is imminent. Normally, both men and women score high on compromise as their natural inclination to deal with conflicts. Consequently, by definition, they are not prone to entrapment, but a change in circumstances may signal that entrapment is luring. Women often score quite high on

collaboration, and it is often their second highest score (in contrast, men's second highest score is avoidance).

Information

An important anti-entrapment tool is information. Staying well informed helps negotiators to avoid entrapment; being ill informed increases one's risk of entrapment. As more information trickles in, the entrapped party notices that the trap is tightening, and that the swamps (if they have spotted them at all) are actually much more extensive than they thought. The pathways through the swamps may be narrower than expected, and more information is needed. However, in the negotiation processes, complete information is not available. The parties need to enter the process to obtain more information, but in doing so they need to realize that entrapment is one of the factors with which they have to reckon. In international negotiations, it is even more difficult to collect trustworthy information. It is therefore absolutely vital in negotiations with other states to be as well informed as possible. As intercultural and other factors add to the fog, reliable information is a prerequisite for avoiding entrapment. Besides having good security services, embassies can be very useful in helping negotiation teams prepare by providing them with in-depth and (hopefully) reliable data. However, it is as important to use the available information wisely and in an appropriate manner. As the 'rogue trader' who brought down Barings Bank in early 1995, Nick Leeson, wrote: 'The odd thing was that although people were aware that the numbers were big, they weren't as frightened by them as they had been by the small numbers' (Leeson, 1996: 177).

Information, and especially misinformation, can also be used to create entrapment situations. As long as the Russian people remained ignorant of how the war in Chechnya was proceeding, the danger of Russia's President Vladimir Putin becoming entrapped was relatively slight. In contrast, the United States' government was entrapped by news coverage of the Vietnam War, between North Vietnam and the Vietcong on the one hand, and US domestic public opinion on the other. And in the Second World War, the Germans used misinformation to trap members of the Dutch resistance in what became known as the '*England Spiel*' (England Game). Information about possible coalition partners in a negotiation, about alternatives, about the strengths and weaknesses of the other party, and about the road ahead, is vital to create or avoid entrapment. The Germans entrapped their Jewish victims by giving them false information about the concentration camps. Pretence is an important element in entrapment, so to be well informed is often an effective antidote. However, this antidote works only if the information is credible and if it is accepted by the negotiation party. If the negotiation party doubts the accuracy of the information, then entrapment will again be imminent. Why, for instance, did Stalin not heed the warnings he was given that the Germans were on the verge of attacking the Soviet Union?

Communication

This brings us to communication as a strategic device with which to create or avoid entrapment. Entrapment may occur through lack of communication, but in general communication is a neutral tool that can be used either to create or avoid entrapment. The crucial factor, of course, concerns the reliability and quality of the communication.

The entrapping party can communicate a willingness to negotiate an agreement that is favourable to both parties. By concealing matters that may lead to entrapment and by stressing issues and options that may look attractive to the other side, the entrapper can try to create a trap. From the point of view of honesty, this can be seen as untrustworthy behaviour. In diplomacy, however, such communication is more often the rule than the exception. Diplomatic negotiators are inclined to tell the truth, but not the whole truth, and by not mentioning certain matters, they construct a partial image of the real situation. They know this about each other and are therefore cautious in their communication. Diplomats communicate by sending the signals needed to allow the negotiations to progress while still keeping their options open as much as possible. This forces diplomatic negotiators to know the 'language' of diplomacy, to know the 'codes', and to be able to decode them.

This caution shown by diplomats in communicating with others is often a major source of irritation to people from other professions in which communication is more direct. As a result, misunderstandings may occur in negotiations with non-diplomats. Military officers, in particular, are often outraged at the 'fuzziness' of diplomatic communication. Civil servants, too, are less inclined or able to use diplomatic smokescreens. Diplomatic ambiguity may lead to entrapment, but diplomats know how to handle it and their patient approach often produces dependable outcomes. A civil servant who is more forthcoming and seemingly more assertive, on the other hand, may form a prime target for entrapment. Viewed in this light, diplomats – with their special mode of communication – are well armed against entrapment, whereas other international negotiators may be more prone to walk right into the swamps, with disastrous consequences. Since non-diplomats increasingly play a major role in international discussions, especially within the EU (Meerts, 1999), entrapment may occur more frequently in future negotiations.

By keeping lines of communication open, by creating a good understanding and a positive atmosphere between the parties, and by using communication as a tool to improve transparency, it may be possible to keep entrapment at bay. After all, entrapment only flourishes when mists shroud what is going on. Transparency lifts the mists to reveal the swamps ahead and can thus save one of the parties from becoming entrapped. As diplomats are (or should be) communicators *par excellence*, they should be able to avoid entrapment or to use it as a defence weapon against non-diplomatic international negotiators. Indeed, entrapment is often a tool that they need, as diplomats have to rely on words to achieve their goals, unable as they are to use force. Diplomats can certainly ask others to use weapons of force, but they themselves must rely on their verbal and non-verbal behaviour. Communication is at the heart of their profession, and since they have fewer means at their disposal than other professions, they need to resort to those strategies that are available to the weak, of which entrapment is one. This implies that diplomats are also entrappers *par excellence*. If this is true, and if diplomats are, indeed, likely to be less dominant in international negotiations in the future, we may see a decline in the frequency with which entrapment occurs in that context.

Control

Entrapment is a process whereby one party gains control at the expense of the other. To create entrapment, a party must therefore aim continuously to gain more control over the other side (that is, to change the balance of power in its own favour). Of course, entrapment

also creates its own shift of power, in a mixture of transitive and intransitive effects. Once the process has started, this shift of power becomes visible. While one side tightens its grip on the other (or watches it embroil itself in a situation in which its options diminish), the other side senses a loss of control. In entrapment, this shift in control from one side to the other is not a zero-sum game. The party that gains the upper hand certainly acquires greater control, but an essential part of entrapment is that this increase of power is not blatant. The entrapped party loses a great deal of control because of the situation that it encounters. In other words, the context itself becomes a controlling device. However, this device is only partially in the hands of the entrapper: the entrapper can only control the situation up to a point, and does not have full control. The situation itself plays a kind of autonomous role in the loss of control by the party being entrapped, which is only partly managed by the entrapper, who sometimes is not managing it at all. If this was not the case, it would be impossible to explain cases of double entrapment, in which both negotiating parties become trapped and no third party can be held responsible (see, for example, the oil-pricing dilemma described above).

To avoid entrapment, it is therefore necessary to keep control of the situation, and to keep control, it is necessary to have an overall strategy, to be well informed and to create transparency through effective communication. But this is not enough. It is easier to exercise control if one is well organized. Internal organization is almost a prerequisite for external control. Thorough decision-making, minimum goal-setting, threat reduction, and accountability for decision processes and outcome (Simonson and Staw, 1992: 421) are internal control mechanisms that dampen the risk of entrapment. To keep control, one needs to have alternative escape routes in place and to use them if necessary. Control can be kept up to date by participating in good coalitions. However, such bandwagons also have negative effects on control and may enhance entrapment instead of stopping it, as discussed above on entrapment at the international level. If you are weak, ally yourself with those who are stronger. Surely, this is one of the central tenets of the EU – or NATO, for that matter: have skilled negotiators to exercise control and to use it effectively. To have control over the situation is, indeed, a necessary prerequisite to avoid entrapment, but power as such is not enough. Power itself can lead to entrapment if you try to control the outcome of the negotiations; power used to control the environment of the negotiations can lead to entrapment avoidance.

Case Study

Roy Lewicki wrote a very illustrative case on entrapment, 'The Pacific Oil Company', which effectively conveys the idea to both skilled and unskilled negotiators (Lewicki, 1993: 659–687). Pacific Oil (in reality, Gulf Oil, for these negotiations apparently actually took place) supplies Reliant with a chemical that Reliant uses to manufacture plastics. Some time ago, the parties agreed a contract at a price favourable to Pacific. However, the contract has to be renewed in two years' time, and conditions are changing from a seller's market to a buyer's market. This change in the environment persuades the people at Pacific's Paris office to decide to aim for early renegotiations. Although Pacific's head office in New York seems to like the idea, they issue no explicit mandate to the Paris office to reopen negotiations, one reason being that Pacific's management structure is unclear.

Meanwhile Reliant has a pyramidal organizational structure. In the confrontation to come, this difference in structures favours Reliant: a more transparent command structure always gives a party a clear advantage in conflict situations.

Lesson One: *To avoid entrapment, make sure that you have received a clear mandate from those who have the legitimate power to issue it and make sure that internal information flows and communication are transparent and effective.*

Since Pacific was (and always had been) more powerful, the company's Paris negotiators entered the renewal negotiations full of self-confidence. They prepared the negotiations carefully, and believed that the talks would be short and deal with only one issue, the question of price. They had always been able to convince the other party to accept the price they preferred. As a result, they failed to consider the possibility that things might be different this time. In planning for only one issue, and being blind to the need to create an overall strategy that covered all the elements that could arise during the negotiations, they overestimated themselves and underestimated their opponents. The whole process became fuzzy, opportunities for package deals went unnoticed, and unnecessary concessions were made. Furthermore, time could not be managed, as no deadlines were set. And as time worked in favour of Reliant, Reliant's delaying tactics had disastrous consequences for Pacific.

Lesson Two: *To avoid entrapment, make sure you have a realistic perception of the strength of the other party, develop an overall strategy, and set deadlines.*

Right from the start of the negotiations, Pacific was eaten up bit by bit as a result of Reliant's 'salami tactics' (Van Houtem, 2010: 114–116). The Pacific people thought that they had a good relationship with Reliant, but failed to realize the significance of the fact that the Reliant team did not contain people they knew from previous negotiations with the company. These new negotiators felt no loyalty towards the Pacific team on account of any earlier relationship, and no emotional attachment to Pacific that might hold them back in their entrapment strategy and tactics. On the contrary, their attitude towards Pacific was actually rather hostile. This situation often occurs when a weaker party feels that it is being obliged to accommodate a stronger party. It is interesting to note that in such cases the dominant party does not share such negative emotions, having no reason to do so. As a result, it often fails to notice the hostile attitude of its opponents and the consequences that this may have for the negotiations. When this hostile attitude eventually becomes apparent, it often comes as a surprise to the stronger and more successful party and leads to cognitive dissonance.

Another relationship issue that played a part in the Pacific–Reliant negotiations was the distorted communications between Pacific's head office in New York and the branch office in Paris. New York had not really been following the negotiations and was surprised by the bad turn that they took. By the time the bosses became aware of it, it was too late to do anything: things had gone too far. The head office may have had a good reason for not monitoring the negotiations closely: they had more important things to worry about and they wanted to keep their hands clean. However, this meant that they shied away from taking responsibility. Paris, for its part, was happy enough not to have to deal with 'unnecessary' intervention by people 'who don't know the situation' in the field: a typical embassy–foreign ministry relationship. The problem was made worse because the Paris

people were old colleagues and worked very well together. As a result of this excellent relationship, they did not criticize each other, which led to unrealistic 'groupthink'.

Lesson Three: *To avoid entrapment, make sure that you check your assumptions about relationships, and create good, clear, workable relationships, but avoid becoming too close, and avoid the possibility of emotional blackmail.*

Before the start of the negotiations, Pacific's Paris team had received reasonably optimistic information from the head office in New York about how the market was developing, despite the shift from shortage to abundance of the product they were selling to Reliant. They were also told about Pacific's plans to build its own factory for making plastics. This alternative to a deal with Reliant – with Pacific supplying chemicals to its own future factory – gave the negotiation team a powerful counterweight to the shift in market conditions. However, without consulting the Paris team, Pacific's head office decided to drop the idea of building its own chemical factory, and made this information public straightaway. This meant that, at a stroke, they deprived the Paris negotiation team of an important means of control. This sort of thing is not uncommon – the lack of consultation, the unthinking publication of information, and general ignorance at head office about what is going on at the branches. In the overall balance of interests, one set of negotiations is often only part of a greater whole. Higher levels may decide to sacrifice those negotiations because there are more pressing priorities. They may not bother to inform or consult the team involved – they are seen as merely minor executive players. Unless those negotiations fit in with their line of thinking, they tend to overlook them. Being unimportant, they can be discarded. Moreover, if they consult a minor player, they are afraid that this may be interpreted as weakness on their part as a macho decision-maker.

However, as insignificant as these negotiations may have been to the managers in New York, they were nonetheless very important to the negotiators in Paris. The New York people were not emotionally attached to the negotiations with Reliant. Their interest was purely material. Of course, investments had been made and, of course, they would lose something, but they had to set priorities and the Reliant negotiations were not an overriding priority. The Paris people, however, had invested their credibility, their face, their energy and their self-image in these negotiations. For them, these negotiations were their only priority. This meant that they were unable to exit the negotiations and had to bet more money to try to recover their losses. They were emotionally trapped and could not turn back. Pacific's headquarters was trapped in material terms, but had enough resources to pull out. In the end, Pacific's boss flew to Paris and used the 'take it or leave it' tactic on Reliant and Reliant signed the contract. Why? Because it was now so valuable to Reliant that by not signing the contract it had more to lose than to win. It no longer had any 'best alternative to the negotiated agreement'. The power relationship had shifted again.

Lesson Four: *To escape from entrapment, make sure that you are well represented in the power centre of your organization, and take care that those in power see your priority as their priority.*

To summarize, the Pacific negotiators became entrapped because they had no overall and integrated planning, incomplete information, clogged internal and external communication, and no control, as they had no power over the negotiation process itself or over top-level decision-making. They were therefore unable to select the most

attractive options. The situation became more uncertain as the process unfolded. The investments mounted and, as long as the final stage could not be reached, the returns were virtually nil. Meanwhile, Reliant's 'salami tactics' resulted in delays and a lengthy series of concessions. These repeated concessions tended to hide the extent of the losses and make them more acceptable. The rule of thumb, 'whenever you offer a concession, ask for one in return', had not been applied. Emotional factors made it difficult to withdraw, interpersonal relationships broke down or lost their function, and even national differences may have made matters worse because of communication problems among Americans, French and Germans. Finally, the international dimension of the negotiations made matters even more difficult to control. The entrapment worked, in the sense that one of the parties gained more out of the negotiations than the other. The process could only be stopped by an actor who was not closely involved in the negotiations, who intervened when the potential agreement had become too valuable for the winning party to lose it. Alternatively, this could have been a decision-maker who had been opposed to the action of his predecessor and who came to power in a democratic or an undemocratic way, be it a new civil president or a military junta.

In Conclusion

Entrapment is a decision-making process whereby individuals escalate their commitment to a previously chosen, although failing, course of action to justify or recover previous investments. Entrapment is an intransitive process, a process that happens beyond the will of the entrapped, and as such is difficult to see in its early stages of development. Unfortunately, by the time that entrapment has begun to become apparent, it is often too late to escape from it. This is one of the dangers that countries most fear when they have to decide on peacekeeping or peace-enforcing matters. Gross violations of human rights, refugee flows and media coverage can draw nations, individually or in groups, into entrapment processes (Hippel, 2000: 98–100).

The 'do something' effect can entrap people, organizations, countries or groups of countries (Both, 1995; Kamp, 1998; Cha, 2000; Blandy, 2009; Buergin, 2010; Morin, 2010). To avoid entrapment, negotiators should have a clear understanding of their own aims and the aims of the other party. To escape from entrapment, a party must regain control over the dynamics that operated beyond its control. Through careful and overall planning, sufficient information, transparent communication and control over the inner and outer environment, it is possible to contain the impetus towards entrapment. In other words, to avoid intransitive entrapment calls for careful and forceful negotiation tactics, with internal support and external control built up as much as possible, and information and communication keeping the actors up to date. Sometimes, too, these actors need to be changed: 'New senior executives are likely to provide a fresh perspective' (Staw, Barsade and Koput, 1997: 140). Exit options are vital to counter entrapment processes (Ross and Staw, 1993: 726–728).

Entrapment can also be used in a transitive way, as a deliberate strategy on the part of one negotiating party over the other. Entrapment is a powerful option that is open to the world's less powerful countries. Just as in judo, such countries can try to use the more

powerful nations' strength and assertiveness so that those nations become entrapped through their own actions. To use entrapment as a transitive strategy, a country should plan carefully to create as many smokescreens as possible, while laying bait down at the same time. It is not enough just to have a carrot to lure the opponents into a process in which a number of traps are carefully hidden along the way. One should also have a stick available to narrow down the other side's options.

As the process unfolds, the opponents' choices need to be limited, insecurity generated, and concessions forced – and this will need to be done repeatedly. The other side needs to be driven forward in such a way that, psychologically, it sees the route ahead as the most effective way of satisfying its needs. Feelings of guilt may be very useful in forcing the other side not to leave the charted course. In the interpersonal sphere, the suggestion of a trusting relationship should be created. Care should be taken to arouse no suspicions. National characteristics should also be studied and used. For example, the impatience of the other side can be very powerful in luring it into an entrapment situation; also, honour and fear of losing face are very effective mechanisms. Information should be distorted; communication should look more open than it actually is. All of these mechanisms serve to strengthen control over the other party's crises. Although entrapment can, of course, be used by powerful countries, it is predominantly a strategy used by the smaller countries to compensate for their lack of power.

Yet entrapment within or outside negotiations does not always have to be negative. Entrapment can also have a positive side – and not only for the party that introduces it into the process. Lack of central control (or lack of push) at the international level can easily lead to procrastination, and indecisiveness can easily lead to disaster (although the opposite is also true). In situations that require action, but where countries are unwilling to act because the costs will be too high, entrapment could very well be the answer, as it forces them to act. Natural disasters are a classic example. Investment in combating global warming may not be opportune for any individual country, but the collective community of states will be entrapped in the long run if it does not take appropriate measures in time.

In the case of the Syrian civil war in the second decade of the twenty-first century, we are confronted with an intransitive process: the outside world avoiding entrapment. As a consequence of this 'unentrapment' the war has dragged on, for there is no exit strategy at hand as long as one of the parties does not feel itself to be in a hurting stalemate. Exit strategies in Iraq and Afghanistan were made possible by changes in the American leadership. US President Obama could develop 'unentrapment' by turning the process around. Instead of going deeper and deeper into the conflict, he 'disentrapped' by pulling out little by little: a so-called 'reverse salami tactic'. This exit strategy turned the process upside down by repeating the step-by-step process leading to entrapment in the reverse direction. The smoother the process, the less damage is done to the context and parties. Patience and time are of the essence. It is like unscrewing a screw: to remove the screw one has to stop turning it to the right; the screw must now be turned to the left, but carefully, otherwise it could break, with all the negative consequences that the political, military and diplomatic community strive to avoid.