

But to conclude from this that culture does not matter is misleading in three senses. First, the acceptance by almost all players of the need for a smoothly operating diplomatic culture (witness the reaction when it breaks down, as when Iran held American embassy officials hostage, or when during the Cold War Romania refused to permit a UN official who was a Romanian national to leave the country), attests to its importance. Culture need not be exclusively a *negative* factor that impedes security-building or multilateral agreements, and it may be important to recognize when the lack of a shared diplomatic culture may be creating obstacles to dialogue that could be relatively easily resolved. Second, the existence of a shared diplomatic culture may in fact allow other, deeper, cross-cultural disagreements to be more clearly expressed. Large-scale, carefully orchestrated, diplomatically correct United Nations conferences (the Beijing conference on women, for example, or the Cairo conference on population, or the Vienna conference on human rights) became forums in which, for example, Asian resistance to "Western" norms of human rights, or Islamic resistance to expansive notions of the role of women in public life, or Catholic opposition to birth control, could be more freely articulated, and perhaps understood.

Third, and most importantly, while the participants in diplomacy are members of this diplomatic culture, they *at the same time* carry other cultural identities, must assume other roles, and answer to other masters. The existence of a shared but thin or weak global diplomatic culture does not prevent contrasting cultural styles (of negotiation, for example) from creating an obstacle to progress or agreement. American and Soviet negotiators usually observed proper diplomatic form, but this did not prevent the Soviet participants from following certain culturally influenced patterns (risk avoidance, preoccupation with authority, assertions of control) that shaped the progress of arms control negotiations.²⁰ Similarly, American and Japanese trade negotiators not only follow certain cultural practices, but are acutely conscious of the public presentation of these "back home" and of the limits to what they can be seen to be agreeing to, even in cases where they have a shared interest in an outcome. Even on a small-scale level this can be consequential: as Gabriel Ben-Dor points out below, when the Israeli Prime Minister Begin called the Egyptian Foreign Minister "a young man," he intended this a compliment, but it was instead perceived as a mortal insult that did not ease the building of trust in the peace process.

Likewise, agreement among diplomats over the meaning of a particular term, practice, or broader understanding need not "translate" into passive acceptance of this by the domestic political audience (who may be ignorant of it entirely). Telling examples for a different issue area appeared in the discussions of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. Despite the enthusiasm of some Western proponents, key concepts did not "translate" well at all in the conference results:

The Arabic translation of "family leave" describes spouses leaving each other after a birth and the Russian text suggests that the whole family is going on vacation. In Russian, "reproductive health" means health that reproduces itself again and again...Female empowerment, perhaps the key concept of the conference, has no meaning to the Chinese

²⁰ These three characteristics come from Raymond Smith, *Negotiating with the Soviets* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 5-6. See also, more generally, Daniel Druckman, A.A. Benton, F. Ali, and J.S. Bagur, "Cultural Differences in Bargaining Behavior: India, Argentina and the United States," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 3 (September 1975), 413-452.