Simulating Negotiations in a Three-Way Civil War

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This article examines a role play scenario in which students actively learn about the challenges of negotiation by taking on the roles of different factions and international mediators in a three-way civil war. Students gain a greater appreciation for the complexities of negotiations both in terms of outcomes and process, and they may begin to develop skills that can be used throughout their lives even if they do not become professional negotiators.

Keywords simulation, role play, negotiation, mediation, conflict resolution

Introduction

Students acquire a broad range of skills in college, some of which are more useful after graduation than others. One skill that can be of great benefit to students in whatever career that they choose to pursue is the ability to skillfully negotiate. In our everyday lives we negotiate with creditors, with realtors, with management, with clients, and our degree of skill directly impacts our daily lives. We have to learn to recognize what demands are being made and what the limits are and to be creative enough to come up with compromises that advance everyone’s interests if possible. In addition, in the wider world, professional diplomats are trying to negotiate peace settlements that impact all of us in a less direct way, but still affect our lives through the foreign policies of our country. It is important to be informed citizens and recognize what is possible and what might not be possible to undertake internationally.

In a traditional classroom setting in which the professor simply lectures to the students, it is next to impossible for students to gain a clear understanding of the subtleties of negotiation, let alone any practical skill. When students engage in an active learning role-play exercise, many of the challenges and nuances of negotiation suddenly become real to them. This article presents a role-play scenario in which students are challenged to reach a settlement in a fictional three-way civil war, with students taking on the roles of the three factions as well as a third party mediator. I begin with a brief review of the literature on simulating negotiations. I then discuss my learning objectives and preparations for and the running of the exercise in class. Finally, I examine the responses of the students following the exercise regarding the lessons they have learned from the experience.

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Literature on Simulating Negotiations

Simulations have been used for a number of years in the classroom to teach negotiation skills. They have ranged from multilateral trade scenarios and negotiations between developing countries and multinational corporations, to bilateral talks regarding security issues. Simulations are often used to train diplomats and international negotiators, but they are also used by Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and in business management training. Training programs on negotiation are a “growth industry” in diplomatic circles as well as in business schools (Winham 2002, 468; Faria 1987). “The perceived need for training in negotiation has escalated at all levels of society in recent years, and simulation is often seen as one of the most effective means of carrying out this training” (Winham 2002, 468). Paul W. Meerts (2002, 455) notes that “Negotiation is one field where [active learning] techniques can be applied with considerable success. These techniques follow the pattern of learning by doing to help students understand processes that cannot be mastered by traditional methods, such as listening to lectures and reading literature alone.” Gilbert R. Winham (2002, 468) adds that “as a form of human behavior, negotiation requires both applied and intellectual skills, and as a methodology, simulation is uniquely capable of providing training for both these requirements.”

Cunningham (1984) notes that simulations can be used for experimentation and education. When they are used for education, the emphasis shifts from finding solutions to procedural problems to transferring knowledge, particularly developing the ability to use information that students have gained. The development of analytical and processing skills is also emphasized by others (Foster, Lachman, and Mason, 1980, 238). In addition, G. D. Brewer (1984) notes that different skills such as imagination and creativity are also developed by negotiation simulations. Given the growing recognition of the value of negotiation simulations, in the classroom setting and in professional training, it is useful to develop a wide range of simulation exercises to accommodate different learning objectives and to take into account the constantly changing international environment. It is my hope that this exercise will contribute to the growing body of simulations designed for the college classroom and might be used by a wide range of courses on international relations addressing issues of conflict, peacebuilding, mediation, and intervention.

Incorporating a Role-Play Exercise into the Classroom

The extensive literature on negotiation training reveals that simulations can be useful for the novice as well as the seasoned diplomat (e.g. Mastenbroek 2002). The exercise discussed in this paper is designed for those whom Meerts (2002) labels as “Type I” students. Students in this category have no negotiation experience but want to get some insight into the process and outcomes of negotiation. Meerts emphasizes that for this group exposure to lectures and literature on negotiation and international relations are important prior to engaging in the simulation. My negotiation simulation was originally designed for a class titled “Causes of War and Peace” and follows the recommendations outlined by Meerts and others regarding preexercise preparations. The first half of the course examines different levels of analysis that seek to explain the outbreak of war. The second half explores the wide range of conditions and tasks that help facilitate peace settlements. When addressing conflict resolution issues in class, emphasis is placed on acknowledging the grievances of parties in a conflict, considering a variety of possible power sharing arrangements, and
recognizing the different roles that the international community can play to facilitate settlement. Because the course covers a broad range of material beyond just peace negotiations, the students do not receive instruction on specific negotiation techniques. They are, however, exposed to readings regarding the different roles that a mediator can play. In the textbook, Christopher Mitchell (2003, chap 7) examines 14 roles that mediators may take on during Pre-Negotiation, Negotiation, and Post-Agreement Phases of conflict resolution.1 Some of these roles include: Serving as a Reassurer, Convenor, Guarantor, Legitimazer, and Verifier. Midway through the second half of the course, after studying a number of failed and successful peace agreements, the students engage in the negotiation simulation. By engaging in simulated negotiations with a mediator and three other parties, students learn firsthand the importance of the roles that Mitchell identifies.

Whereas some more elaborate active learning exercises may last the entire semester, this exercise is designed to last only three 50 minute class periods and requires no advanced preparation on the part of the students other than reading the regular course assignments. Two of the classes are devoted to the negotiating sessions, the last one is reserved for a full debriefing of the students.2 Because the exercise does not require extensive preparation and does not take up an extensive part of the semester, I have not made it a graded component. Students have looked forward to the simulation and have been in full attendance on the days that it was run. There are several structural and size constraints worth noting. The exercise is set up for four to eight students to participate in each negotiating group and has been used in a class as large as 30 (with four different groups). The negotiations proceed most effectively if students are able to circle their desks. In classes with more than two negotiating groups, it may be necessary to secure separate negotiating spaces (it gets too noisy to hear in one room). The more negotiating groups that there are the less debriefing time each individual group gets (this is discussed in more detail below).

Designing the Role-Playing Exercise3

This simulation is designed to advance students’ understanding of both the negotiation process and the potential substantive outcomes from negotiations. My learning objectives for the simulation are as follows:

In terms of process, students should recognize and understand that:

1. there are a variety of roles that mediators can play in the negotiations,
2. the receptiveness of the parties to the mediator may vary,
3. the negotiation process is dynamic and changing, and
4. there is no “right way” to conduct negotiations that guarantees a settlement.

In terms of outcomes, students should:

1. become aware that there are a wide range of solutions to any given conflict and that there is no single “correct” formula for a peaceful settlement,
2. recognize that there are also demands made on the international community in order to achieve peace, and
3. recognize that each party has valid claims and demands that need to be acknowledged/respected.

In order for students to gain a greater appreciation for the complexities of negotiating and to develop their own diplomatic skills, the simulation is of a
three-way war within the fictional country of Zodora. Although the situation is fictional, I endeavored in the design to make the conditions as realistic as possible. Winham (2002, 466) notes that if the simulation is unrealistic, it will have little value either as a teaching tool or as a means for generating theory. I agree with Winham’s assessment that in order “to be interesting to participants, a negotiation simulation should attempt to capture the more profound elements that often divide parties in a negotiation” (2002, 469).

In the simulation, the country of Zodora has three ethnic groups: The Achoa, Balboa, and Kikuyu peoples. The two largest groups, the Achoa and Balboans, are closely related to each other and share many common cultural links. They are divided, however, over the issue of political power. When the imperial colonists left Zodora, they placed the Balboan people in charge. The Balboan people have historically run the country with the support of the United States government because of their strong anticommunist stance. Their strong political position has given them many opportunities to enrich their own ethnic group. The Achoa, although they are the most numerous, have had little political representation and are often the victims of government persecution. The third ethnic group, the Kikuyus, have fewer cultural similarities to the Achoa or Balboans and thus do not feel strong ties to either of these groups, nor do they identify themselves as “Zodorans.” They live in a resource rich area of the country and have separatist aspirations. The three groups live in largely homogenous, separate regions of the country, with the Balboans predominantly located in and around the state capital. The demographics and resources in the country are as follows: Balboans (35% of population; 70% of federal budget), Achoans (45% of population; 20% of federal budget), Kikuyu (20% of population; 10% of federal budget).

The students are given this background information (Appendix A) and are informed that the conflict first began when the Kikuyu people decided to assert their autonomy and withhold their resources from the rest of the country in order to enrich their own region. The Balboan-led government sent in military troops to restore the flow of resources to the rest of the country and the Kikuyu resisted. As the conflict escalated, the Achoa people initially chose to support the Balboan government and to provide additional troops and supplies. In exchange for this help, they demanded a greater share of political power in the government. When greater power sharing did not materialize, they turned against the Balboan military forces, sabotaging their efforts against the Kikuyu region. In addition to this information on the conflict, each student is given specific information on the role that they are to play including their negotiating stance, attitude toward the international mediators, and an updated situation of the conflict.

The students are assigned roles as either Achoa, Balboans, Kikuyus, or as third party mediators. They are put in groups of four or eight (one or two for each role) and instructed to consider their own faction’s interests and priorities and to try to reach a settlement with the other factions to end the fighting. I suggest that they begin with a simple cease fire or they may move directly to negotiating a comprehensive peace settlement. They also have the opportunity to make requests of the international community to try to achieve an optimal outcome for their people.

**Negotiating a Settlement**

In the class prior to the simulation, students are given their Role-Playing Assignments (see Appendix B) and told to take on the character of their actor to the best of their
ability in the upcoming negotiation session. Each of the four groups has some specific
guidelines to follow, as well as more general ones that shape their negotiating stance.
(Students are instructed not to share the specific guidelines with each other. The
different actors’ positions become evident as the negotiations proceed.) Since each
group has some specific issues on which they are willing to negotiate and others that
they are not, the dynamics for an agreement are very flexible and there is room for a
lot of creativity on the part of the students.

**Kikuyu Negotiation Stance**

The Kikuyu note that the rich natural resources of their region have been exploited
by the central government (controlled by Balboans) for many years. Despite
repeated efforts to see some of the revenues returned to their region, the central
government has been unresponsive to such requests (government expenditures in
the Kikuyu region are approximately 10% of the total federal budget). The lack
of revenue has led to an inability to provide even basic services for much of the popu-
lation, including funding for primary schools, rural health care clinics, safe drinking
water, and agricultural assistance. In addition to these economic grievances, the
Kikuyu people have also been denied basic civil and political rights. Many have been
denied the opportunity to register and vote in national elections, some have even
faced physical abuse when attempting to run for office. The Kikuyu know that
the Achoa have similar grievances against the central government but do not have
many close ties to them. The Kikuyu believe the best solution to their economic
and political difficulties is to gain independence from Zodora, but they might
consider other arrangements if certain rights can be guaranteed in the future. With
regard to the international mediator, the Kikuyu negotiator welcomes the inter-
national attention that the presence of foreign mediators brings to the conflict. They
believe the principle of self-determination and their justifiable grievances will put
the international community on their side and that they will help the Kikuyu oppose
the unjust policies of the Balboans.

**Achoa Negotiation Stance**

The students representing the Achoa faction are informed that they have cultural
ties to the Balboans, but that they have been systematically excluded from politics
and economic development projects since decolonization 40 years ago despite a
number of Balboan promises for greater inclusion. Although the Achoan people
represent about 45% of the total Zodoran population (35% Balboan/20% Kikuyu),
the Achoan region receives only 20% of the total government expenditures on such
basic services as funding for primary schools, rural health care clinics, safe drinking
water, and agricultural assistance. In addition to these economic grievances, the
Achoan people have also been denied basic civil and political rights. Many have been
denied the opportunity to register and vote in national elections, some have even
faced physical abuse when attempting to run for office. (As the dialogue between
the parties begins, the Achoa and Kikuyu representatives come to recognize that
they have similar grievances against the central government, but they do not have
many close ties to each other. It is up to each delegation to determine whether they
want to build new bridges and cooperate or not.) The Achoan representative is
advised to pursue a solution to the Achoan economic and political difficulties by
achieving greater political freedom and equality within the Zodoran government. The Achoa are uncertain about granting Kikuyu independence because of the resources/revenues that would be lost if it seceded. The Achoa might be willing to compromise on the issue of independence if it would serve the interest of the Achoan people. They are generally supportive of the intervention efforts by the international community. The Achoa believe that as a majority of the Zodoran population they have justifiable grievances and they expect support from the mediators for their position.

**Balboan Negotiation Stance**

When Zodora received its independence from the colonial powers, the Balboan people were trained in government service and entrusted with the well-being of the country. Successive Balboan presidents have overseen the economic growth and development of the country and worked hard to promote Zodora’s position in the international community. Many of the most educated Zodorans that run the political system and economy in the country are Balboan. The military is also staffed at the top by highly trained Balboan leaders. The Balboans do not believe the accusations of the Kikuyus and Achoa against the Balboan government are justified. They have managed the country well and have not cheated any region out of its share of revenues. The Balboans believe the most stable and strong political system is one in which only one party participates, so they have discouraged political competition in order to promote national solidarity. The Balboan representative is reluctant to agree to any calls for power sharing and shifting of revenues to other regions and is opposed to Kikuyu independence. However, the government is under considerable pressure from the Balboan population to bring the war to a close even if it means making some compromises. The Balboan representative is distrustful of the motives of the international community. The representative reluctantly cooperates to hold negotiations but continues to stress the importance of Zodora’s sovereignty and notes that the current instability is a domestic problem, not an international concern.

**International Mediator Negotiation Stance**

The international mediators are from a Western country that is viewed as largely neutral to the conflict. They have the moral backing of the United States as well as many other European countries that want to end the violence and establish a stable democratic government as quickly as possible. The mediation team has the difficult task of trying to restore order in Zodora. Ideally they would like to get the parties to take steps toward a “self enforcing peace” by addressing the underlying sources of conflict. However, they recognize that they may be only able to negotiate a cease-fire agreement between the combatants. The mediators are instructed that as foreign diplomats they can offer certain incentives or disincentives to the parties to gain their cooperation. They are encouraged to be creative, but realistic. The resources and political support that the mediators have from most developed countries around the world might not continue if extensive demands are made in terms of military support. They should look for a diplomatic solution, drawing on limited military resources to help implement it.
Interactive Dynamics in the Negotiations

Negotiation simulations can be either static or dynamic exercises (Winham 2002). In the first instance, all of the information is given at the outset. In the second option, additional information is provided midway through the negotiations that require the parties to adapt to changing circumstances. My exercise is designed as a dynamic one. On the first day of the exercise, I let the students work out their own group dynamics and simply listen to them. The factions are deliberately structured so that the Achoa are the “fence sitters.” They could easily move to greater support for the Kikuyu based on shared grievances or choose to move more fully to support the Balboan government given certain promises. The students discover that personal dynamics play a role here. In some groups it doesn’t matter what the Balboan government promises to win the backing of the Achoa, they won’t take their promises in good faith. In other cases they are willing to be bought off despite past grievances. On the second day I present each group with a Situation Update (Appendix C) that is specifically designed based on the previous day’s talks. If one of the groups was particularly stubborn, the update may indicate that that group has faced a setback. The students find this both exciting and frustrating because the negotiating dynamics change. For example, if the Kikuyu representative has been particularly resistant to any settlement proposals or efforts at compromise, the group might receive the following update:

In a recent series of offensive raids on Kikuyu villages, the Balboan military has succeeded in capturing the Kikuyu rebel leader and some of his top commanders. The Kikuyu guerilla attacks have been notably less organized and effective and the general Kikuyu population appears to be demoralized.

If the Balboan faction has been the most resistant to progress in the negotiations, the parties might receive this update:

Although the Balboan military has continued to place an optimistic spin on the conditions of the conflict and the likelihood of Balboan victory, the Balboan government is under increasing popular pressure to cut its losses. Recent polls indicate that 55% of the population would be willing to grant autonomy to the Kikuyu region, 20% would be willing to give the Kikuyu independence. Only 35%, however, would be willing to rewrite the Zodoran constitution to guarantee more equal representation for the Achoa.

Updates might also include additional issues that must be addressed in actual conflict resolution efforts, such as violations of human rights. In the human rights update below, students frequently debate the degree of seriousness of the violations based on the estimates of how many people have been killed. By providing quantitative numbers, they grapple with finding a concrete measurement to shape their responses and proposals.

The Balboan military has often been thwarted by the guerilla tactics of the Kikuyu rebel forces and has been increasingly taking out their
frustrations on the civilian population. There are increasing reports of human rights abuses, and the international NGO Amnesty International has just uncovered evidence of a mass grave in a Kikuyu village recently occupied by the Balboan military. The Balboan government emphatically denies any misconduct by their military forces and accuses the international community of fabricating lies about human rights abuses.

The Achoa region has not been immune from the increasing violence on civilian populations. Each act of sabotage against the Balboan military forces in Achoa has resulted in a harsh retaliatory strike against the nearby villages. Estimates range as high as 220 women, children, and elderly Achoans dead.

Conflicts rarely occur solely within one country. They are often affected by the actions of their neighbors. Some of these potential dynamics are incorporated with this update:

Although the states bordering Zodora initially attempted to remain neutral in the conflict, two neighboring states have recently gotten actively involved. The country of Zania, bordering the Kikuyu region, has been helping the Kikuyu trade their natural resources for weapons. This has resulted in the Kikuyu being better armed. The Balboans see this cross border trading as an illegal siphoning of Zodora’s resources and potential revenue.

The neighboring state of Tuku (bordering the Balboan region) has also gotten involved. The Tukus have committed 1,000 troops to the Balboan military command in fulfillment of the mutual security treaty that exists between Zodora and Tuku. The treaty was signed between the two countries in order to maintain regional stability and to maintain the power of the national governments.

As noted, some of these updates are designed to shift the balance of power and hopefully push the parties beyond a deadlock and toward compromise. Despite the complex negotiating environments, there are several factors that I deliberately exclude in hopes of providing the students some opportunity to reach a negotiated settlement. The three Zodoran regions have largely geographically homogenous populations (unlike many of the former Yugoslav republics), and there is no element of long standing ethnic hatred. The grievances to be negotiated are substantive political, economic, and security concerns. Each of these design elements are incorporated to help the parties focus on particular grievances with negotiable solutions. The challenge is in the negotiating dynamics and the details.

Reflecting on Students’ Experiences with Negotiations/Debriefing

On the last day of the exercise, all of the groups come back together again as a class to hear about the different settlements that were successfully (or not so successfully) negotiated. When multiple negotiation groups take part in the exercise, it provides an opportunity for structured comparisons between the groups with an attempt to explain the different outcomes. It is striking, however, that although outcomes are rarely the same, common themes and challenges are often evident. The debriefing
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focuses the students’ attention on two different aspects: the negotiated outcomes and the negotiation process.

**Negotiated Outcomes**

The students begin by discussing whether they were able to reach a cease-fire or a more comprehensive settlement. In most groups a cease-fire was achieved, but little further progress was made toward a final settlement. A few groups were unable to even reach a cease-fire agreement. It is important for the students not to view this as a failure, however. Writing on the challenges of drafting resolutions in the Model United Nations context, Daniel McIntosh (2001) portrays the effort alone as a lesson in how difficult it is to address complex issues and reach the compromises necessary for writing and passing a resolution. I likewise emphasize that the effort of negotiating is a lesson in itself. The focus of the negotiations in the exercise was often on security guarantees, although some groups chose to address political and economic conditions as well. It is clear that the students were more comfortable with the security aspects than the broader political and economic conditions that are sources of contention in civil wars. Further discussion reveals that the groups came up with a wide variety of proposed solutions. These solutions included: giving the Kikuyu autonomy, creating a coalition government, writing a new constitution with guaranteed minority rights, reforming the military, bringing in international observers/guarantors, reallocating financial resources, and punishing (former) leaders for war crimes. The debriefing is particularly useful in helping students recognize some of the other options that were not even considered in their own group. They offer remarks to each other such as “if we had done that then we could have reached a settlement!” This emphasizes the point that external sources can provide important fresh ideas and new options that disputants may not have considered. The mediators in each group also note that a variety of demands were made on the international community ranging from sending financial aid to providing peacekeeping forces. One explanation for the different outcomes negotiated by each group is thus explained by the different perspectives of individuals participating. Each group member came to the table with ideas about what ought to be contained in a negotiated settlement. Their simulated negotiating backgrounds were ambiguous enough to allow each party to pick from a number of options that they had read about prior to the simulation. A second factor that explains different outcomes in each group is that they all receive different Situation Updates on the second day, altering the power relations between the groups. Inter-personal dynamics also played a role in producing different outcomes (discussed below).

When each faction was asked if they thought the demands they were making were reasonable, none of them thought that their own faction’s demands were unreasonable. It was only the other sides’ demands that went too far. (This reveals the degree to which the students were able to take on their assigned roles and stick to them.) The students were asked to consider that if the demands were reasonable, why was an agreement so difficult? Student responses revealed that although there was agreement on the “facts” of the dispute (at least on the issue of federal budget allocations and population size), but that the interpretation of these facts varied considerably. Each party had a different justification for the current distribution or redistribution of budget revenues. The Baloons claimed better stewardship. The Achoans clamoured for redistribution based on numerical superiority. The Kikuyu claimed ownership and demanded greater control over their own resources. Thus
even when the facts were established, agreement was still difficult to reach based on different interpretations of these facts. On other disputed issues, such as lack of political rights and human rights abuses, there was not even agreement on the “facts” of the matter. Additional factors that impeded a settlement were evident in discussion of the negotiation process itself.

**Negotiation Process**

During the briefing, questions were posed to both the factions and the mediators to get different perspectives on the process itself. Each side was asked about the attitudes within the group. The factions were asked about the role of the mediator. How active was the mediator in trying to find a solution? Was this effective or problematic? Could you have reached a settlement without the mediator? The answers varied. In some groups the factions agreed that the mediator played a key role in helping facilitate their negotiations. The Achoa and Kikuyu were generally more supportive of the mediator as their scripted negotiation stance suggested. Even the Balboans, however, often conceded that the mediator was an important actor. In some instances, however, all three factions essentially turned against the mediator and reported that the mediator had gotten in the way and had not listened to their demands. These different responses illustrate to the students the reality of international mediation, that mediators are not always well received but can sometimes play crucial roles.

The mediators were also given a chance to comment on the group dynamics. They were asked about how cooperative the parties were with their intervention efforts. Were the mediators predisposed to support one faction over another? Again, responses varied. Some mediators reported a positive experience with the factions deliberately turning to them for a proposed solution and expressing willingness to compromise to some degree. Others faced very entrenched, uncooperative faction leaders who thought the mediator was biased against them. The mediators who were perceived as largely neutral had greater success in gaining cooperation from the factions. Some mediators noted, however, that they had tried to be neutral, but they were never perceived that way by the factions and so they ultimately ended up favoring the more cooperative faction over the others. These different experiences highlight the challenge of achieving “neutrality.” One mediator noted that he did not try to be neutral. He opposed the policies of the Balboans from the start and sought to bring about a just settlement to the Achoan and Kikuyu grievances.

Because the Achoa were given a pivotal position in the negotiations, they were asked whether they eventually sided with the Kikuyu or the Balboans, and why they made that choice. The negotiated outcomes varied based on with whom the Achoa chose to align themselves. When the Achoa chose to side with the Kikuyu, autonomy or even secession was a likely outcome (one group even created a new country of Kikachao). When they sided with the Balboans, the Kikuyu were often forced to make considerable concessions. Choices were made based on personal factors: “the Balboan negotiator was too arrogant,” or “He wasn’t willing to listen.” These interpersonal dynamics revealed the importance of individual interactions in the negotiations. If the individual Achoan negotiator was distrustful of the Balboan negotiator, this strongly impacted the negotiated agreement.

Given the extended nature of the negotiations over two class periods, I asked if the mediators strategized a bit before going into the second class session. Most of
them did. Some, who had taken more of an observer role during the first session and listened to the factions argue, decided to be more active in pushing them to reach some agreement. Others brought various (dis)incentives to bear on the problem by imposing embargos or by offering aid packages to entice the parties to cooperate.

Discussions eventually came back around to the substance of the negotiated outcome when mediators discussed the attitude of the factions in terms of making concessions. Some noted that the parties felt that everyone had to “lose” something, while others tried to argue that peace was in everyone’s best interest. Although each of the groups came up with different negotiated settlements based on the different personalities involved, there were some common themes that were articulated in terms of challenges to reaching a settlement. One difficulty that the groups faced was finding common ground among competing interests. Each side believed their contradictory claims were reasonable and justified. A second challenge was simply getting the sides to listen to each other. The groups also found it difficult to determine what issues to give priority to (political structure, economic concerns, or humanitarian issues), and to try to focus on long term solutions rather than short term interests. The changing conditions on the ground (shifts in the balance of power between the factions) added a final common challenge for the groups.

Reflections on the Debriefing

The full class debriefing session allows students to hear the experiences of other groups, as well as the reflections of their own group members on the exercise. It is important to allow the students adequate time to articulate their thoughts and to respond to each other. The instructor can facilitate the discussion and should draw some conclusions at the end, but the instructor should encourage students to dialogue with each other. In large classes this is more difficult because not everyone has a chance to speak. One way to accommodate this is to require a postexercise reflection paper. This promotes individual reflection by all of the students after they have had a chance to step back from the simulation. Such individual reflection might also take the form of a journal entry after each day’s session. These daily entries might better capture the tensions and frustrations experienced during each session that may be forgotten at the end of the exercise if a settlement is reached.

Assessing Student Learning

Assessing student learning is always a challenge. In addition to conducting the debriefing session with students, I conducted a pre- and postsimulation survey in order to determine how well my learning objectives were met (see Appendix E). Three of the four learning objectives relating to the negotiation process were directly addressed through questions in the debriefing session. The debriefing discussion revealed that acceptance of the mediator did vary from group to group (and between factions as well). Mediators felt that they had tried to be fair and successfully bring about an agreement, but they had been received with varying degrees of support by the different groups. Some groups were more appreciative of the efforts of their mediator than others. The debriefing also indicated that the students were very aware of the dynamic and changing conditions in the negotiation process. All of the participants remarked on the impact of the Situation Update and how it strongly affected their negotiations. Question #2 on the survey addressed the objective
of recognizing that there are a variety of roles that mediators can play in the negotiations. Responses in the presimulation survey were generally brief lists of what roles mediators play: provide incentives and threats, force a stalemate, serve as mediators, get dialogue going, lead talks, provide information, and separate parties. The postsimulation answers were similar but slightly more sophisticated explanations of how these tasks are carried and the challenges that mediators face in carrying them out: serve as authorities/legitimizers, serve as guarantors, increase trust between the parties, seek compromises, use leverage and international aid as incentives, ensure minorities rights, and enforce agreements. The last learning objective for negotiation process is for students to recognize that there is no “right way” to conduct negotiations that guarantees a settlement. No student specifically articulated this idea in the surveys or the debriefing (although I emphasized this point at the conclusion of the debriefing).

The learning objectives relating to the negotiation outcomes were also measured through the debriefing questions and the survey. Question #3 on the survey asked about what options were available to protect minority rights. The presimulation survey answers included a wide range of options: autonomy, secession, genocide, federalism, UN intervention, and guarantee of political rights. The postsimulation answers were quite similar, but individual student answers became much stronger. One student responded “change in powersharing” on the first survey and listed eight different options on the second survey. These answers indicate that students did indeed become aware that there are a wide range of solutions to any given conflict and that there is no single “correct” formula for a peaceful settlement. In the debriefing, students recognized that there are also demands made on the international community in order to achieve peace. Mediators acknowledged this by noting requests for aid and security guarantees. Question #1 on the survey also indicated that students grew increasingly aware of the challenges that the international community faces in promoting conflict resolution. Presimulation survey answers focused on a list of major tasks such as getting the parties to the table, achieving a ceasefire, and disarmament. Postsimulation answers included some of the more specific challenges the parties had wrestled within the exercise: determining resource allocation, gaining permission for peacekeeping forces to intervene, trying to maintain neutrality, earning the trust of the parties, and dealing with spoilers. The final learning objective for the negotiation outcomes was for students to recognize that each party has valid claims and demands that need to be acknowledged/respected. It is not clear that students were able to step back from their roles, even in the debriefing, to fully recognize this. It appeared that many of them felt that their factions positions were justified and that the others were not.

Question #5 on the survey asked the larger question about whether students had learned any negotiation skills or not. I recognize that this is only one exercise and a brief one at that, but the responses were positive. Students believed that they had gained some small level of skill. Requiring a reflection paper rather than the pre- and post-simulation survey might be a better way to assess this objective in the future.

Given the challenges that the students faced in the negotiation sessions and the insights gained from the debriefing discussions, students came to recognize that there is no “right way” to negotiate that guarantees an agreement, nor is there a single formula for a peaceful settlement. Even when the international community plays a critical role, it is ultimately up to the disputants to end the fighting. Students learned
that war is more complex than they often realized. It is not just about people hating each other and shooting each other. Economic and political conditions are crucial factors in conflict situations. Negotiations are rarely about one issue with one or two solutions. There is a wide range of problems and a myriad of potential solutions. If you can see the different sides of the conflict and generate a variety of options, you have a greater likelihood of successful negotiations.

Students gained a greater appreciation of the different outcomes that are possible in conflict situations, and by taking on the role of different factions and mediators, they experienced the process of negotiation. These dynamics cannot be fully appreciated simply by hearing about them in a lecture, but the simulation can be a formative experience that shapes students future understanding of conflict situations. The abstract becomes more concrete.

Conclusions

Some of the same skills that professional diplomatic training centers try to teach to their participants are also introduced in this basic exercise. Meerts (2002, 461) notes some of the lessons learned by participants at the Netherlands Institute of International Affairs (Clingendael) include handling complexity without being overwhelmed, recognizing the challenge of negotiating with one’s allies as well as enemies, keeping their eyes open for common ground, and discovering that even the weakest player has power. As students engage in this simulation of a three-way civil war and peace negotiations they develop their own negotiation skills. They gain a greater appreciation for the subtleties and complexities of the art of international mediation. They learn to listen, strategize, to advocate their own position, and to work toward compromise for an optimal outcome. Although students will not become experts from this single experience, and they are unlikely to become international diplomats, all of them will use these negotiation skills in their daily lives and professions in the future.

Notes

1. The textbook used for the peacebuilding part of the course is John Darby and Roger MacGinty, eds., Contemporary Peacemaking. (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, NY: 2003).
2. If time permits, this exercise could easily be extended to four or five class days. Students rarely achieve a substantive agreement with just two days to work on it.
3. For additional information on how to design role-play scenarios, see Shaw 2004.
4. The author notes that mediation and negotiation are not synonymous. The simulation has a designated mediator, thus making it a formal mediation exercise that involves negotiation with all of the parties.
5. All documents needed to conduct this simulation are found in the Appendices.
6. Although this is a small N study with only 12 students participating in the course when the pre and post-simulation survey was administered, there are still useful responses to be gleaned from the assessments.

References


**Appendix A—Background Information**

The end of the Cold War removed the stabilizing forces that had been in place in the country of Zodora since its independence in 1960. As the two world superpowers (United States and Soviet Union) showed a decreasing interest in the country, the three ethnic groups began to assert their own political agendas concerning the future of Zodora. The two largest groups, the Achoa and Balboans, were closely related to each other and shared many common cultural links. They were divided, however, over the issue of political power. When the imperial colonists had left Zodora, they placed the Balboan people in charge. The Balboan people ran the country with the support of the United States government because of their strong anticommunist stance. Their strong political position gave them many opportunities to enrich their own ethnic group. The Achoa, although they were the most numerous, had little political representation and were often the victims of government persecution. The third ethnic group, the Kikuyus, have fewer cultural similarities to the Achoa or Balboans and thus do not feel strong ties to either of these groups, nor do they identify themselves as “Zodorans.” They live in a resource-rich area of the country and have separatist aspirations. The three groups live in largely homogenous, separate regions of the country, with the Balboans predominantly located in and around the state capital.

The conflict began when the Kikuyu people decided to assert their autonomy and withhold their resources from the rest of the country in order to enrich their own region. The Balboan-led government sent in military troops to restore the flow of resources to the rest of the country and the Kikuyu resists. As the conflict escalated, the Achoa people initially chose to support the Balboan government and to provide additional troops and supplies. In exchange for this help, they demanded a greater share of political power in the government. When greater power sharing did not materialize, they turned against the Balboan military forces, sabotaging their efforts against the Kikuyu region.

This three-way civil war led to a complete break down in social services (which had been minimal to begin with), increased refugee flows, and accusations of war crimes
and other human rights violations. The intransigence of the three factions resulted in little motivation for the parties to negotiate or reach any kind of settlement. The international community grew increasingly alarmed as the violence escalated and decided to send in a multilateral peacekeeping force to restore some semblance of order and to bring about a settlement.

The demographics and resources in the country are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Population</th>
<th>% of fed budget received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balboans</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achoans</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kikuyu</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendix B—Role Playing Assignments**

**Kikuyu Faction**

*Role*

You are a Kikuyu community leader who is seeking to protect his/her people and secure a better future for them. Your people are fighting the Achoa and Balboans to achieve greater regional autonomy, if not outright independence. You have few cultural or ethnic ties to the other two factions and blame the decolonization process for the arbitrary boundaries that included your region in the territory of Zodora. (The Kikuyu represent approximately 20% of the total Zodoran population).

*Negotiating Issues/Stance*

The rich natural resources of your region have been exploited by the central government (controlled by Balboans) for many years. Despite repeated efforts to see some of the revenues returned to your region, the central government has been unresponsive to such requests (government expenditures in the Kikuyu region are approximately 10% of the total). The lack of revenue has led to an inability to provide even basic services for much of the population, including funding for primary schools, rural health care clinics, safe drinking water, and agricultural assistance. In addition to these economic grievances, your people have also been denied basic civil and political rights. Many have been denied the opportunity to register and vote in national elections, some have even faced physical abuse when attempting to run for office. [The Achoa have similar grievances against the central government, but you do not have many close ties to these people and this region.]

**You believe the best solution to your economic and political difficulties is to gain independence from Zodora, however, you might consider other arrangements if certain rights can be guaranteed in the future.**

*Attitude Toward International Mediators*

You welcome the international attention that the presence of foreign mediators brings to the conflict. You believe the principle of self-determination and your justifiable grievances will put the international community on your side and that they will help you against the unjust policies of the Balboans.
Current Situation

The Balboan military has superior numbers and armaments but has not been able to counter the guerrilla tactics used effectively by the Kikuyus. The Balboan commanders recognize the considerable loses they have taken but believe they can still win the battle against the Kikuyu (and subdue the Achoa once the struggle for secession is put down). Several recent battles have taken place within villages and towns in the Kikuyu region as the Balboan forces have attempted to rout out the elusive Kikuyu forces, but the Kikuyu show little willingness to stop fighting. The Achoa continue to harass Balboan forces but have avoided prolonged engagements. The Achoa have also taken advantage of the chaotic environment to conduct raids into Kikuyu territory.

Consider your own faction’s interests and priorities. Try to reach a settlement with the other factions to end the fighting. You may begin with a simple cease-fire, or move directly to negotiating a comprehensive peace settlement. You may make requests of the international community to try to achieve an optimal outcome for your people.

Achoa Faction

Role

You are a member of the Achoa faction that is fighting the Kikuyu and, more recently, the Balboans to prevent Kikuyu secession and Balboan dominance.

Negotiating Issues | Stance

You have cultural ties to the Balboans but have been systematically excluded from politics and economic development projects since decolonization 40 years ago despite a number of Balboan promises for greater inclusion. Although your people represent about 45% of the total Zodoran population (35% Balboan/20% Kikuyu), your region receives only 20% of the total government expenditures on such basic services as funding for primary schools, rural health care clinics, safe drinking water, and agricultural assistance. In addition to these economic grievances, your people have also been denied basic civil and political rights. Many have been denied the opportunity to register and vote in national elections, some have even faced physical abuse when attempting to run for office. [The Kikuyu have similar grievances against the central government, but you do not have many close ties to these people and this region.]

** You believe the best solution to your economic and political difficulties is to gain greater political freedom and equality within the Zodoran government. You are uncertain about granting Kikuyu independence because of the resources/revenues that would be lost if it seceded. You might be willing to compromise on the issue of independence, however, if it could serve the interest of your people.

Attitude Toward International Mediators

You are generally supportive of the intervention efforts by the international community. You believe that as a majority of the Zodoran population you have justifiable grievances and you expect support from the mediators for your position.
Current Situation

The Balboan military has superior numbers and armaments, but it has not been able to counter the guerrilla tactics used effectively by the Kikuyus. The Balboan commanders recognize the considerable loses they have taken but believe they can still win the battle against the Kikuyu (and subdue the Achoa once the struggle for secession is put down). Several recent battles have taken place within villages and towns in the Kikuyu region as the Balboan forces have attempted to rout out the elusive Kikuyu forces, but the Kikuyu show little willingness to stop fighting. The Achoa continue to harass Balboan forces, but they have avoided prolonged engagements. The Achoa are the most war weary of the factions, facing shortages of basic supplies and services, but they have little trust for the Balboans since they failed to share political power after agreeing to early in the conflict. The Achoa have also taken advantage of the chaotic environment to conduct raids into Kikuyu territory.

Consider your own faction’s interests and priorities. Try to reach a settlement with the other factions to end the fighting. You may begin with a simple cease-fire, or move directly to negotiating a comprehensive peace settlement. You may make requests of the international community to try to achieve an optimal outcome for your people.

Balboan Faction

Role

You are a member of the Balboan government that is fighting the Achoa and Kikuyu uprisings in Zodora.

Negotiating Issues / Stance

When Zodora received its independence from the colonial powers, the Balboan people were trained in government service and entrusted with the well-being of the country. Successive Balboan presidents have overseen the economic growth and development of the country and worked hard to promote Zodora’s position in the international community. Many of the best educated Zodorans that run the political system and economy in the country are Balboan. The military is also staffed at the top by highly trained Balboan leaders.

You do not believe the accusations of the Kikuyus and Achoa against the Balboan government are justified. You have managed the country well and have not cheated any region out of its share of revenues. You believe the most stable and strong political system is one in which only one party participates, so you have discouraged political competition in order to promote national solidarity.

**You are reluctant to agree to any calls for power sharing and shifting of revenues to other regions, and you are opposed to Kikuyu independence. However, you are under considerable pressure from the Balboan population to bring the war to a close even if it means making some compromises.

Attitude Toward International Mediators

You are distrustful of the motives of the international community. You are reluctantly cooperating to hold negotiations, but continue to stress the importance of Zodora’s sovereignty and note that the current instability is a domestic problem, not an international concern.
Current Situation
The Balboan military has superior numbers and armaments, but has not been able to counter the guerrilla tactics used effectively by the Kikuyus. The Balboan commanders recognize the considerable loses they have taken but believe they can still win the battle against the Kikuyu (and subdue the Achoa once the struggle for secession is put down). Several recent battles have taken place within villages and towns in the Kikuyu region as the Balboan forces have attempted to rout out the elusive Kikuyu forces, but the Kikuyu show little willingness to stop fighting. The Achoa continue to harass Balboan forces, but they have avoided prolonged engagements. The Achoa have also taken advantage of the chaotic environment to conduct raids into Kikuyu territory.

Consider your own faction’s interests and priorities. Try to reach a settlement with the other factions to end the fighting. You may begin with a simple cease-fire, or move directly to negotiating a comprehensive peace settlement. You may make requests of the international community to try to achieve an optimal outcome for your people.

Diplomatic Mission

Role
You are a member of a diplomatic team attempting to resolve the conflict in Zodora. Your chief negotiator is from a Western country that is viewed as largely neutral to the conflict. The diplomats have the moral backing of the United States as well as many other European countries that want to end the violence and establish a stable democratic government as quickly as possible.

Negotiating Guidelines
Your mediation team has the difficult task of trying to restore order in Zodora. Ideally you would like to get the parties to take steps toward a “self enforcing peace” by addressing the underlying sources of conflict. However, you may be only able to negotiate a cease-fire agreement between the combatants.

**As foreign diplomats you can offer certain incentives OR disincentives to the parties to gain their cooperation. **Be creative, but realistic here. You have the resources and political support of most developed countries around the world, but remember that this support might not continue if extensive demands are made in terms of military support. (In other words, you should look for a diplomatic solution, but you may be able to draw on limited military resources to help implement it.)

Mission Mandate
To Be Determined—You may determine how expansive you want the mission to become and what you are willing to do based on the requests of the different factions.

Current Situation
The Balboan military has inflicted considerable damage on the Kikuyu military forces, but the Kikuyu show little willingness to end the conflict. The Kikuyu have
adopted guerrilla tactics and have occasionally attacked Balboan villages on the border. There have been reports of atrocities during these attacks. The Achoa are the most weary of the consequences of the civil war, facing shortages of basic supplies and services, but they have little trust for the Balboans since they failed to share political power after agreeing to early in the conflict.

Begin by establishing the positions of each of the factions and seek further negotiating points to determine under what conditions the sides will agree to end the conflict.

Try to get the parties to negotiate specific details of a settlement: structure of government, division of territory and/or resources, protection of rights, etc.

Appendix C—Situation Updates

As the negotiations have proceeded with the three factions, the situation on the ground has shifted, altering the dynamics of the negotiation process.

Scenario A

Although the states bordering Zodora initially attempted to remain neutral in the conflict, two neighboring states have recently gotten actively involved. The country of Zania, bordering the Kikuyu region, has been helping the Kikuyu trade their natural resources for weapons. This has resulted in the Kikuyu being better armed. The Balboans see this cross border trading as an illegal syphoning of Zodora’s resources and potential revenue.

The neighboring state of Tuku (bordering the Balboan region) has also gotten involved. The Tukus have committed 1,000 troops to the Balboan military command in fulfillment of the mutual security treaty that exists between Zodora and Tuku. The treaty was signed between the two countries in order to maintain regional stability and to maintain the power of the national governments.

The Achoa have had no indication that the Balboans are willing to adopt any power sharing arrangement. They have, however, formed a relatively cooperative relationship with nearby Kikuyu villages, with both sides trading items necessary for survival in the conflict.

Scenario B

Although there is a tentative cease-fire in place in Zodora with international peacekeepers on the ground and in regular communication with the Zodoran government, the dynamics of the negotiation process are continually affected by changing popular opinion.

Although the Balboan military has continued to place an optimistic spin on the conditions of the conflict and the likelihood of Balboan victory, the Balboan government is under increasing popular pressure to cut its losses. There have been increasing protests about the high number of casualties and several food riots in the markets. Recent polls indicate that 55% of the population would be willing to grant autonomy to the Kikuyu region, 20% would be willing to give the Kikuyu independence. Only 35%, however, would be willing to rewrite the Zodoran constitution to guarantee more equal representation for the Achoa.
Scenario C

In a recent series of offensive raids on Kikuyu villages, the Balboan military has succeeded in capturing the Kikuyu rebel leader and some of his top commanders. The Kikuyu guerilla attacks have been notably less organized and effective, and the general Kikuyu population appears to be demoralized.

Given its recent successes in the Kikuyu region, the Balboan military has been repositioning its forces toward the Achoan region to put an end to the uprising there.

Scenario D

The Balboan military has often been thwarted by the guerilla tactics of the Kikuyu and has been increasingly taking out their frustrations on the civilian population. There are increasing reports of human rights abuses, and the international NGO Amnesty International has just uncovered evidence of a mass grave in a Kikuyu village recently occupied by the Balboan military. The Balboan government emphatically denies any misconduct by their military forces and accuses the international community of fabricating lies about human rights abuses.

The Achoa region has not been immune from the increasing violence on civilian populations. Each act of sabotage against the Balboan military forces in Achoa has resulted in a harsh retaliatory strike against the nearby villages. Estimates of casualties range as high as 500 dead women, children, and elderly Achoans.

Appendix D—General Directions for the Instructor

- Determine lecture/reading materials to correspond with role-play scenario.
- Provide Background Information and Role Assignments one class period in advance.
- Give the following instructions to the students:

  You will be taking on the role of one of three factions involved in a civil war or of the international mediators that have intervened to try to bring peace and stability to the country of “Zodora.”

  Read the description of your position carefully and try to take on your role as fully as possible.

  Be creative in your demands, proposals, and actions. You can make up material as long as it does not directly contradict the guidelines of your role.

- It is helpful to sketch out the relations between the three parties on the board:

  Balboans
  - waging active military campaign against the Kikuyu
  - engaged in deterrent actions against Achoa to prevent attacks

  Kikuyu
  - using guerrilla tactics against Balboans
  - defending against Achoa raids

  Achoa
  - engaged in sabotage against Balboans
  - conducting raids into Kikuyu territory
Simulating Negotiations

- Provide selected Situation Updates on the second day
- Conduct DeBriefing Session

Appendix E—Pre- and Post Simulation Survey

1. What challenges do you think that third party mediators face when trying to get combatants in a conflict to reach a settlement?
2. What actions do you think third party mediators take when trying to get combatants in a conflict to reach a settlement? What role do they play in the negotiation process?
3. If a minority region wants to secede from a country because it believes it has not received just treatment in terms of political representation and distribution of federal economic resources, what different options are available to the parties to discuss? (How might such grievances be resolved?)
4. Why do you think that some conflicts have lasted for such an extended time? (Such as the conflict in Sudan or between Israel and Palestine?)
5. Do you think that you gained any negotiating skills from the Civil War Negotiation simulation? Explain. [Asked on the Postsimulation Survey only]