

Time to Agree: Time Pressure and 'Deadline Diplomacy' in Peace Negotiations

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Almost no negotiation takes place under no time pressure. In any negotiation process diplomatic momentum is assured by political or military events, mediation initiatives, or the impact of international events.

No time pressure

Once a conflict is in a mutually hurting stalemate and some diplomatic contacts are already ongoing, there is no need to supplement the (low) time pressure deriving from the normal deadlines of these negotiations; indeed, in these conditions low time pressure can facilitate the signing of one or more pre-negotiation agreements among rebel factions

Examples of such pre-negotiation agreements are the Bougainville peace process and the inter-rebel agreement that preceded the 2004 Peace Agreement in Casamance (Senegal)

Low time pressure

The presence of strict deadlines affects negotiation processes differently depending on their level of complexity, and it is associated with durable negotiation outcomes only when applied by mediators to simple negotiations - i.e. negotiations focused on relatively simple issues or taking place in relatively simple decision-making processes with minor inter-cultural gaps. In this sense, the comparative evidence from post-Cold War peace negotiations confirms one of the main intuition of social psychologists - namely, that only in simple negotiating milieus can the positive impact of time pressure in encouraging pragmatic behaviour outweigh its negative cognitive impact on information processing

Simple negotiations include negotiations on boundary disputes, in summit diplomacy, time pressure can break circumscribed deadlocks like the deadlock on the Brcko corridor at the Dayton negotiations (1995)

High time pressure

The presence of high time pressure can have particularly negative consequences on complex negotiations, including negotiations where the delegations are fragmented and have to agree on many issues in complex inter-cultural milieus. In these conditions, if strict deadlines are not employed to break circumscribed deadlocks but to force an agreement on the parties (i.e. in the absence of a mutually hurting stalemate and when no clear agenda is set for the talks), the parties might find it difficult to process complex or ambiguous information effectively or to deal with complex interpersonal dynamics in the emotional upheaval that typically accompanies strict deadlines. Therefore, negotiations are increasingly likely to end with no agreements or with rushed and generic agreements that won't last

High time pressure can damage negotiations as it is not fit to solve "a one-hundred year conflict... in a matter of months" (Carnevale)

such as the Camp David 2000 summit

Comparative section: 68 episodes of negotiation in territorial conflicts (1990-2005)
Case studies: Bougainville and Casamance peace processes; Dayton and Camp David 2000 Summits