

Introduction

The Context

A BOOK ON GERMAN DIPLOMACY, and particularly on the cultural foundations of German negotiating behavior, may strike at least some potential readers as odd.

After all, such a concept as “German negotiating behavior,” like the broader term “German diplomacy,” seemed like an oxymoron for half of the twentieth century. The slash of the German war machine across Europe, the silent glide of the U-boats under the world’s oceans, and Adolf Hitler’s high-pitched rantings left the chilling impression that Germans preferred to attack and brutalize others rather than to deal diplomatically with them. For many years, Germany used war instead of diplomacy to promote its interests.

It must seem even stranger to offer a text on the cultural foundations of German negotiating behavior. After all, Germany’s culture seemed to consist of bombs and bombast, hardly the stuff of calm and productive discourse.

Yet German negotiating behavior produced remarkable results for West Germany from 1949 to 1990, although Germany was divided and could not support its diplomacy by military force like many other states. And it has continued to produce results for Germany as a whole since unification. West Germany and now Germany have pursued a pattern of successful diplomacy based on cultural foundations that most

Americans and others did not and still do not know. The Germans have used a unique style that deserves a close look.

During the Cold War, West German diplomacy brought the Federal Republic of Germany into the center of several important Western organizations, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Community, which has since become the European Union. But it also opened contacts to others, including the Soviet Union.

Since the end of the Cold War and since German unification in 1990, Berlin's diplomacy has surrounded the united German state with a circle of relationships that have given German citizens genuine security for the first time in a millennium. Germany regained the full attributes of sovereignty in long negotiations with its former occupiers.

Germany now lies at the center of the wider Europe, of the entire transatlantic community, and even of Eurasia. When a U.S. president wants something to happen in Western Europe, Kosovo, or Afghanistan, he often turns to a German chancellor to support the process. And he mostly gets a positive reply, as do European states that turn to Germany for help.

The German economy has also done its share. German business and labor have helped turn Europe into a prosperous continent. Germany conducts financial as well as political diplomacy, not only within the European Union but across a much wider spectrum. Germany helped to institutionalize international financial consultation, now reflected in the Group of Eight. German firms from Daimler-Benz to Deutsche Telekom have conducted mergers and acquisitions all over Europe and in the United States. And German business has developed a negotiating style of its own.

Germans see diplomacy differently than Americans or, for that matter, than other Europeans. They need diplomacy more than any other state. They cannot use force. Nor can they retreat into "splendid isolation," as London once did, or into pure "isolationism," as Washington often did. Diplomacy offers the only route to German survival and success.

This is, therefore, a good time to review how the German government conducts its diplomacy and what we should expect in German business negotiating behavior. American diplomats and business leaders need to pay attention to differences in negotiating styles, even among allies.

Germany is not a world power, but it is the linchpin of the European landmass. Any organization that plans to function in that area needs to think about how Germans approach and make a deal.



The notion that there is such a thing as a culture of diplomacy and that different countries have identifiably different negotiating styles remains very real to diplomats and business leaders who have served—or who must serve—in negotiating situations. They know from experience, from many talks and many meetings, that they can expect different kinds of behavior from negotiators of different nationalities. They also know that they must speak differently with such negotiators.

A number of scholars have also written about these differences. Clyde Kluckhohn concluded, and Raymond Cohen agreed, that “historically derived and selected . . . ideas and especially their attached values” become part of the “programming of the human system,” of the “software” that generates action.¹ Professors Richard Porter and Larry Samovar have stressed the importance of culture as “the deposit of knowledge [and] experiences . . . acquired by a large group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.”² Others, including Professors Kevin Avruch, Hans Binnendijk, and Jeswald Salacuse, have written books and articles to illustrate how different countries negotiate differently.³

Books that the United States Institute of Peace has already published on Russian, North Korean, and Chinese negotiating behavior show that each of the three states has its own distinct negotiating style.⁴ And American business leaders are beginning to recognize that an understanding of cultural differences can make the difference between success and failure in a negotiation.⁵ The author has come to similar conclusions from his own experience of negotiating with persons from many different countries and cultures.

Appreciation of different negotiating cultures represents only a first step, especially with respect to Germany, for Germany has taken the most jagged course of any modern state. Any author who tries to write on German culture runs many risks, the greatest of which is that the very concept of

German culture can still provoke bitter arguments even within Germany. It is a controversial enterprise, but all the more important because there is as much of a culturally derived element to German diplomatic behavior as there is to any other state's. Diplomats and business leaders must recognize that if they are to deal successfully with Germans.

German history, the single most important influence on the culture of German diplomacy, presents a particular challenge. The "burden of German history" has become a codeword for the effects of the Nazi era from 1933 to 1945, and particularly for Adolf Hitler's murder of millions of Jews and others as well as for the destruction that the Nazis wreaked upon a continent and upon Germany itself. Most Americans know more about the dozen years of Hitler than they know about any other part of two thousand years of European history. But although the Nazi years remain an important part of the German legacy, especially as a negative example, they actually do not have as deep an influence on the culture of German diplomacy as some earlier and longer periods. This book will explore and explain that.

German diplomacy itself has an uneven record. Germany has had some distinguished diplomats, such as Prince Otto von Bismarck, the "Iron Chancellor" who crafted the first united Germany in 1871 and whose massive figure dominates the painting on the jacket of Henry Kissinger's *Diplomacy*. Despite Bismarck's mistakes, students of diplomatic history admire his achievements even as they might admire those of Prince Talleyrand, Lord Palmerston, Thomas Jefferson, or Dean Acheson. And his years form part of German culture and must be understood by Americans dealing with German diplomats of today. But Bismarck does not represent the full sweep of German diplomacy, for either good or bad, and he will not play a determining role in what is to follow.

To complicate matters further, German foreign policy is still in a process of transition. Historically, Germany has not yet settled into any stable mode. It is a young democracy and even a relatively young nation-state. It is still trying to find its way, with some of its recent and current policies representing tentative initial steps.

Yet although Germany may still be formulating the specific elements of a foreign policy, it has already shown a remarkably consistent diplomatic style. There is a distinctly German pattern of negotiating behavior that has developed over the centuries and has been clearly manifest in the actions

of German diplomats. By the same token, German business and economic negotiations also follow strikingly similar patterns. This book will describe all those patterns and suggest how best to respond to them.



To put all this into context and offer guidance for those who will negotiate with Germans, the book will deal with different aspects of German diplomatic behavior in separate chapters.

- Chapter 1 will dwell mainly on German history because that history plays such a pivotal role in the evolution of German diplomatic culture. But the chapter will also review the crucial impact of geography, philosophy, and economics in that evolution.
- Chapters 2 and 3 will go into more detail about the actual process of a negotiation with Germany. They will show what an American or other negotiator may expect from the beginning to the end of a negotiation, first analyzing various phases and then describing specific German tactical behavior patterns. The two chapters will use examples drawn from West German and united German diplomacy since West Germany's founding in 1949. Chapter 3 will discuss, among other things, German negotiating behavior on European Union political matters. The chapters rely extensively on interviews with persons who have negotiated with Germans and who will describe procedures in detail.
- Chapters 4 and 5 will describe German negotiating behavior in economic matters. Chapter 4 will describe German business negotiating behavior, and chapter 5 will describe how official German institutions conduct economic negotiations. The latter will also discuss, among other topics, German negotiating behavior on European Union economic matters. The negotiating style of German managers and bankers resembles that of German politicians and diplomats in some ways but not in others. The German economy has its own history and culture, justifying separate study.
- Chapter 6 will look into the future, showing how German diplomacy is likely to evolve.

- Chapter 7 will offer advice for those who expect to negotiate with Germans. It will suggest steps to take before and during any such negotiations, whether on political or economic matters.



Readers should understand that this book, although it concentrates on formal negotiations, is intended to be useful to anybody planning to consult or deal with Germans in any way. Normally, Germans behave in a very structured way when they are engaged in a formal negotiation. In such a negotiation, which might deal with highly important matters such as a new treaty, a new relationship, or a new business arrangement, they are very precise and they proceed in a very painstaking manner. Much of chapters 2 and 3 will reflect that, as will the chapters on business and economic negotiations.

But the principles that govern German behavior in a negotiation also apply in consultations and other forms of contact. When Germans are engaged in less formal contacts, they can move much more quickly. Americans and others who have been involved in consultations with Germans have found the experience much easier than formal negotiations. But Germans still follow the same principles, albeit if in a more relaxed manner.

The guidance offered in chapter 7 focuses on how to prepare specifically for negotiations with Germans. But even those people who do not expect formal negotiations should read chapter 7 with care, for many of the practices that Germans show in negotiations reappear in their consultations and other contacts. One should be ready to handle either process if one wishes to be successful.



As indicated in the preface, this book is intended not only for Americans but for anybody who expects to negotiate with Germans. Nonetheless, Americans should still give the observations in the book particular attention. Germans are, in many ways, closer to Americans than they are to citizens of other nations. There are more Americans of German descent than of English, Scandinavian, French, Irish, Italian, Spanish, or Mexican descent.

Germany and the United States have been allies for five decades, with millions of American soldiers having served in Germany during that time span. Many aspects of German culture fit with American culture. German music dominates the programs of American orchestras. American music dominates the airwaves in Germany.

On the surface, therefore, German diplomats and business leaders seem to resemble Americans. They also seem to resemble other Europeans. Many speak excellent English as well as continental European languages. They eat similar food and drink similar wines and beers. They wear the same clothing styles. One might assume that they think like Americans or like other Europeans.

But Germans are neither like Americans nor like other Europeans. They have a dramatically different history. They reside in different geographic surroundings. They read different philosophers. They see a different world across their borders. They confront different problems and see them from a different perspective. Germans may use the same words as Americans or others, but the words do not mean the same thing and they are not spoken in the same cultural context.

Americans and Europeans also need to divorce their thinking from individual personalities. Although this book on occasion describes the foreign policies of several West German and German chancellors since 1949 to focus attention on particular aspects of German diplomacy, those specific chancellors and those policies did not and do not themselves determine German negotiating behavior.

German negotiating behavior arises out of German geography, history, philosophy, and economics. It does not change from chancellor to chancellor, from foreign minister to foreign minister, or from business manager to business manager.

Each German chancellor, foreign minister, and business executive will, of course, have his or her own ideas and approaches, and each will use different colors on the palette of international negotiating behavior. But the German style will not change materially from one government to another or even over decades and perhaps generations yet to come.

The validity of this book does not, therefore, depend on any particular personality or set of personalities. Each may bring his or her own predilections to foreign policy and diplomacy. But the broad course of German

negotiating behavior rolls on, impelled by forces that go beyond any single individual.

Negotiating with Germans can be a trying and costly experience for those who have not thought about it well in advance. One can easily make the kinds of mistakes from which it can be very hard to recover. But such negotiations contain no unfathomable mysteries. A clear understanding of what to expect can usually lead to good results.