

Summary

In early November 1991, the United States Institute of Peace organized and conducted a four-day simulation of a diplomatic dialogue between two neighboring countries that had never had direct, official, bilateral talks. The policy exercise was designed to simulate the direct negotiations between Syrians and Israelis that would in fact be taking place shortly thereafter as a part of the Middle East peace process.

This essay presents a detailed description of that exercise, which was designed not for research or training purposes but as an experimental policy exercise with direct implications for peace-making and conflict resolution in the Middle East, particularly the linking of theory with practice. The description of the simulation itself is presented within the context of a broader discussion of simulations and their potential utility both for diplomats and for the field of conflict resolution.

The intensive simulation exercise was followed by a wrap-up roundtable discussion of Israeli-Syrian relationships and prospects for the overall Middle East peace negotiations. The participants proved to be very knowledgeable about the issues and the policies of their putative governments as well as about political and public attitudes and probable reactions to various events. All participants played their roles realistically. Simulated Israeli and Syrian

delegations presented tough initial positions and faithfully adhered to their respective government's fundamental objectives in later sessions. This situation generated a dynamic that, during the initial phases, closely paralleled what reportedly occurred at roughly the same time (November 3-6) in Madrid at the actual opening plenary session as well as in subsequent sessions of the real Israeli-Syrian bilateral working group, which met in Washington between January and May 1992. Insights drawn from the simulation were provided informally to government officials responsible for the actual negotiations and were said to have been quite helpful.