

*Draft chapter for forthcoming Alva Myrdal Center report on nuclear negotiations*

## **Chairs in Multilateral Negotiations: Roles, Strategies and Impact**

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## Introduction

Addressing problems of interdependence in world politics requires states to come together to deliberate, coordinate, and decide on principles of general conduct. These interactions typically take the form of multilateral negotiations, where multiple actors with diverse interests bargain to arrive at collective agreements. Most contemporary regimes, spanning policy areas such as environment, trade, migration, and arms control, have resulted from state interaction in multilateral negotiation processes. In some areas, these regimes are highly effective, in others they are moribund, in yet others they remain to be attempted.

Debating candidate explanations for variation in the outcomes of multilateral bargaining, scholarship has considered the relative merit of structural factors, such as power asymmetries (e.g., Martin 1992), domestic politics (e.g., Putnam 1988), or strategic constraints (e.g., Voeten 2005), but an increasing attention is paid to questions of process: the manner in which multilateral negotiations are structured, organized, and run. While it is recognized that process variables have little explanatory power in cases where outcomes are overdetermined – say, if state interests are completely contradictory or wholly harmonious – they are viewed as having the potential to shift outcomes in negotiations where interests are partly aligned and partly contradictory, as they often are in reality.<sup>1</sup>

One key process variable is chairmanship. At the center of multilateral negotiation processes, whether they take place in ad hoc conferences or within intergovernmental organizations, is the chair, the state or supranational representative that holds the formal authority to lead and direct the negotiations as per the relevant procedural rules.<sup>2</sup> While some are skeptical about the proposition that chairs can exert significant influence over international bargaining outcomes (e.g., Moravcsik 1999), there is accumulating evidence that they matter, in general, and that they have occasionally been instrumental to unlocking international agreement. For example, several studies of the negotiations that paved the way for the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change identifies the entrepreneurial leadership undertaken by the French presidency of COP 21 as a key determinant of what many consider a substantive step forward in climate governance (e.g., Dimitrov 2016; Jepsen et al. 2021). Similarly, scholars have identified inept chairmanship as an explanation for negotiation failure, pointing to the role of U.S. chair in the breakdown of the 1999 Seattle trade talks or the missteps of the Danish presidency during the 2009 climate negotiations in Copenhagen (Odell 2005; Albin and Young 2012; Monheim 2016).

What do we know about chairmanship in multilateral negotiations? This paper reviews some key works in the literature on chairs in multilateral negotiations, summarizing available evidence regarding their roles, strategies, and impacts. It is based on evidence from a variety of policy domains, including negotiations on environmental, trade, and security issues, and incorporates analyses of both formal organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), and informal ones, such as the G-20. The overarching ambition is to identify key insights from this

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<sup>1</sup> For broader perspectives on multilateral negotiations, see Hampson and Hart 1999, Ruggie 1992, Zartman 1994, and Touval 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Chairmanship may be denoted by different terms, with “chairman”, “chairperson”, “presidency”, “meeting president”, “conference president”, “presiding officer” among the most common.

literature, including practical policy guidance, and discuss their implications for multilateral negotiations in the nuclear domain, with a focus on research priorities.

The scope of the review is limited in two ways. Thematically, it focuses on multilateral chairmanships, incorporating only the most relevant parts of the literature on international bureaucracies and other supranational institutions (e.g., Hawkins et al. 2006; Bauer and Ege 2016; Eckhard and Ege 2016). Procedurally, it remains focused on the negotiation stage, paying less attention to the preceding stage of pre-negotiation or the subsequent stage of implementation, although several of the things said about chairs here should be applicable in these stages as well.

Based on the reviewed literature, I draw three broad conclusions. First, theoretically, while the legacy of an earlier literature on leadership in multilateral bargaining continues to resonate (Young 1991; Underdal 1994; Sjöstedt 1998), the systematic literature on chairmanship is often anchored in rational choice institutionalism, providing a functionalist explanation for why chairs exist and the roles they play in promoting bargaining efficiency (e.g., Tallberg 2010; Blavoukos and Bourantonis 2011). The literature is increasingly incorporating a wider range of theoretical approaches, as witnessed by the growing behavioral literature examining practices in negotiations (e.g., Monheim 2016, Walker and Biederkopf 2020) and a widening consideration of procedural justice (e.g., Wagner and Druckman 2012).

Second, empirically, the literature is dominated by qualitative case studies, some focused on providing rich case narratives (e.g., Depledge 2007) and others using comparative techniques to seek to isolate the impact of variation in a variable of interest (e.g., Tallberg 2010; Blavoukos and Bourantonis 2011; Monheim 2016). Some parts of the literature rely on small-N quantitative analyses (e.g., Albin and Druckman 2014) but there exist no large-N quantitative investigations of chairmanship outside of the literature on rotating presidencies in the EU (e.g., Thomson 2008; Warntjen 2013).

Third, there is growing evidence on the types of chairmanship behaviors, strategies and interventions that can facilitate agreement or, as has happened in some of the reviewed cases, invite the breakdown of negotiations. Next to the core sources of chairmanship influence – information, trust, and relationships – a dominant theme in the literature is the emphasis on procedural and distributional equity. Scholarship largely agrees that chairs are more likely to facilitate agreements that are efficient and durable if they cultivate trust, remain inclusive, and maintain a listening attitude vis-à-vis negotiation parties regardless of their power or status.

This review informs priorities for how research on chairmanships can help make nuclear negotiations more effective, further discussed in the conclusion. To begin with, the research program on chairmanships would benefit from further theoretical broadening, moving beyond the present dominance of rationalist frameworks, and empirical deepening, via greater application of quantitative and design-based inference. Next, while many of the general insights are valid also for the nuclear domain, there is a significant need for studies targeting chairmanships in nuclear negotiations more directly. Finally, a more mature research program on chairmanships should be able to assist in the task of identifying process innovations that may be imported to improve the effectiveness of nuclear negotiations.

## Roles: Why do chairs exist?

The institution of chairmanship represents a delegation of authority from a group of principals, typically the member states of an international organization, to an agent, typically an individual member state or a supranational entity. Why do negotiating parties bestow formal authority on a state or supranational representative to oversee their bargaining interactions, rather than retain this authority for themselves? The functionalist explanation is that chairs represent a response to specific practical needs of the actors involved in multilateral interaction. In this view, the institution of chairmanship exists because it helps improve the efficiency of the bargaining process by providing solutions to problems of *complexity* and *uncertainty* (Tallberg 2010; Zartman 1994; Hampson and Hart 1999; Albin and Young 2012).<sup>3</sup>

It is difficult to exaggerate the problem of complexity in multilateral negotiations, especially in contemporary settings. The premise is daunting: bring together up to two hundred states, with vastly divergent capabilities, interests, and cultures, and an even higher number of individual delegates, with varying personalities, agendas, and temperaments, and ask them to find agreement on multiple, often controversial, issues. Aligning with Olson's (1965: 35) theoretical argument that "the larger the group, the farther it will fall short of providing an optimal amount of a collective good," empirical research has shown that multiplicity of actors, issues, and preferences constitute a barrier to joint agreement. The higher the number of participants, the higher the transaction costs involved in bargaining, making it less likely to lead to agreement, let alone efficient agreement (Axelrod and Keohane 1985; Oye 1985; Zawahri and Mitchell 2011).

The second key bargaining problem is uncertainty, the inability of parties to identify a jointly acceptable solution due to private information (Lax and Sebenius 1986; Hampson and Hart 1999; Agranov and Tergiman 2014). Uncertainty characterizes any negotiation, especially if there exist incentives to misrepresent one's bottom line to gain a strategic advantage, which is the case unless parties face a problem of pure coordination (cf. Krasner 1991). Compared with bilateral negotiations, however, uncertainty is aggravated in the multilateral setting because of the multiplicity of actors, issues, and interests, making it difficult for most participants to acquire a clear understanding of the playing field – and maintain it during organically developing negotiations. The problem of uncertainty is further aggravated by the two-level nature of most multilateral negotiations, where state representatives act as the diplomatic agents of state principals. Odell (2021: 301) stresses how negotiators far from home and with sometimes vague or flexible instructions from capital, "have at best an imprecise feel for what might be negotiable" and can therefore hesitate not only about the bottom lines of others, but also about their own.

By awarding chairmanships certain functions of agenda management, either formally or by convention, the risk of bargaining failure due to complexity and uncertainty can be diminished (Young 1991; Tallberg 2010). This type of delegation can be done in different ways and the exact configuration of chairmanships varies across multilateral contexts. In some institutions, such as the African Union, G7, or ASEAN, chairmanship is delegated to a rotating

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<sup>3</sup> Efficiency is typically understood as Pareto efficiency, where the negotiated "deal" cannot be improved for one actor without making at least one actor worse off.

member state presidency. In others, such as NATO, WTO or the OECD, the function has been delegated to a supranational entity, typically an international secretariat with a secretary general or similar office. Yet other institutional arrangements exist. As is explored in the literature on institutional design of international organizations and multilateral conferences, the precise institutional arrangement may reflect functional needs, power relations, or historical and social conventions (e.g., Koremenos et al. 2001; Hawkins et al. 2006; Tallberg 2010).

### **Strategies: In what ways can chairs shape a negotiation process?**

To reduce complexity and uncertainty, chairs can engage in a number of strategies. This section provides an overview of strategies discussed in the reviewed literature, exemplifying how they are used and how they may facilitate agreement, or fail to do so. It groups the strategies into three main categories, process management, the provision of expertise, and brokerage, where the former is predominantly a response to the problem of complexity whereas the latter two relate most directly to the problem of uncertainty.

The first general function of chairs is *process management*, the overall structuring of the interactions that make up a multilateral negotiation. This involves designing and communicating the agenda, the preparation of meeting rooms, and the organization of general meeting support. As Depledge (2007: 55) describes, “[process management] is needed to ensure that the right people are in the right place at the right time discussing a common agenda in a common language with shared documentation and information.” The primary purpose of process management (sometimes discussed as agenda management) is thus to reduce complexity by providing coordination and sequencing of a negotiation.

An example of agenda management is described in Downie and Crump’s (2017) analysis of the 2014 Australian presidency of the G-20, the informal intergovernmental grouping for deliberation on issues regarding the global economy. According to Downie and Crump, “Australia felt a strong demand from member states to deliver an efficient negotiation process and address the ballooning number of issues and meetings . . . [and] declared early in its presidency that it was determined ‘to pare back the agenda’ . . . to prevent ‘1000 flowers from blooming’” (684). This illustrates how agenda management can be used to narrow down the issues of discussion to a more defined subset, thereby coordinating the expectations of the negotiating parties and improving the chances that they make progress on this subset.

Another aspect of process management is the planning of how the negotiations are structured or distributed in space. Whether negotiations are carried out in a plenary session, with all states present in one place, or in parallel tracks, with smaller groups of states focusing on technical and specific issues is one choice involved in such planning (e.g., Lang 1994). While it may typically be used to distribute the workload in an efficient manner, the structuring of negotiations may also be used instrumentally to increase the chances of attaining agreement. Hampson and Hart (1999: 20), drawing on insights from multilateral negotiations in trade and arms control, discuss how chairs can “structur[e] the negotiation in such a way that it is amenable to logrolling and identification of bargaining solutions that satisfy the major interests of the parties”.

In other words, the chair can use process management to facilitate interactions that are predictive of more efficient bargaining. A variety of such process engineering strategies is discussed in the literature. One example is the usage of “Indabas,” a traditional Zulu form of conflict resolution focused on open deliberation. The “Indaba” format was introduced by the South African presidency of the climate negotiations at the Durban COP in 2011 and has found application in many subsequent climate COPs (Pickering 2019). As UN climate official Kinley (2021: 84) explains, in the “Indaba” format “ministers could express their view directly to one another and directly to the president [chair], thus providing valuable intelligence on positions and red lines in the negotiations.” Research suggests that such settings may induce a shift from distributive bargaining, where actors struggle for relative gains in a zero-sum-style negotiation, to integrative bargaining, where they seek to maximize joint benefits via constructive compromise (Monheim 2016; see also Ulbert and Risse 2005).

Process management can also be used to sidestep potential barriers emerging from political blockages or symbolic politics. It has been reported that chairs occasionally seek to plan meetings at a higher level of political seniority to avoid the clashes that may occur if an exchange took place at a more junior level, or vice versa, depending on the personalities involved. For example, when the issue of Russia inheriting the permanent seat of the Soviet Union in the UN Security Council was negotiated in January 1992, the UK, which held the rotating Council presidency at the time, organized a meeting at the highest political level, with Heads of State or Government rather than the conventional ambassadors’ level, which signaled the desired outcome and allowed for a quick resolution (see Blavoukos and Bourantonis 2011).

The second main function of chairs is the provision of *expertise* to diminish uncertainty (Hampson and Hart 1999; Depledge 2007). This involves the provision of information relating to both the substantive content of negotiated issues (content expertise) and to aspects of the conduct of the negotiations (process expertise). The former comprises of technical and legal expertise, for example consequences of different climate change scenarios, guidance in how to interpret existing treaty provisions, or assistance with identifying the legal implications of candidate text formulations suggested in a negotiation process. This role is typically played by a supranational entity, such as the WTO Secretariat in trade negotiations or the UNFCCC secretariat in climate negotiations, but the role is often coordinated with the state actor that fulfils the role of meeting chair or president.

For example, Randin and Borrie (2004: 81) describe how, during the negotiations of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, “individuals were well versed with the subject matter under consideration [but] in some cases they lacked the experience and knowledge to negotiate an international legal instrument.” This uncertainty constituted a barrier to negotiation progress, but interventions from the chair, supported by WHO civil servants, allowed the process to be brought forward and to an agreement.

The third key function of multilateral chairs is *brokerage*, whereby a chair seeks to resolve disagreements more directly. Brokerage may take place via different related interventions. One is the provision of substantive input, such as the introduction of draft compromise, ideas, or “formulas” that point forward to a possible agreement or “landing zone” (Hampson and Hart 1999; Winham 1979; Zartman 1994; Odell 2005, 2009; Tallberg 2010). Another is mediation-style interventions, in which the chair plays a role closely resembling how many models of conflict mediation envisions that a third party facilitates agreement by

providing information and proposals (e.g., Gilady and Russett 2002; Kydd 2003; Svensson 2007). Given the central position of the chairmanship, it typically has a better understanding of the informational landscape – what parties want and what they can accept – than most of the other participants. As Odell (2021: 301) describes, by virtue of their consultations with state parties, chairs can collect private information and “thus becoming better informed than any party.” Chairs that consult widely and actively will be particularly well-situated to play this role. Odell points to the example of the French presidency of COP 21. Even long before the conference negotiations began in earnest, French representatives “crisscrossed the world, listening and providing technical support to governments that needed it,” and providing them with information advantage that they could draw on in facilitating the Paris Agreement (Odell 2021: 302).

### **Impact: What determines variation in influence?**

Not all chairs are equally positioned to manage a process, provide expertise, or broker agreements in multilateral negotiations. The literature has identified several factors that shape the room of maneuver in which chairs operate, setting the boundary conditions for when and how they can be influential in shaping the direction, content, and outcome of a process. The below discusses these factors, grouping them into five baskets: the distribution of interests, institutional context, trust and legitimacy, access to information, and political support.

The most important factor, arguably, is the *distribution of interests*, i.e., what the involved parties want. If there is no underlying zone of possible agreement – a set of outcomes that are mutually acceptable to the parties, even if it may be opaque or unknown to them – a conventional chair cannot do much to facilitate a positive outcome. That is, if state parties have dramatically opposed preferences on an issue, it does not matter how active or skilled the chairmanship is; there will simply not be an agreement. Likewise, if preferences are harmonious, without any discrepancy, the chair will not need to undertake any significant intervention beyond the most basic coordination. It is the in-between cases, where interests are partly aligned and there exist a bargaining range, albeit possibly not apparent to the parties, that chairs have the potential to influence – positively and negatively – the course and outcome of a multilateral negotiation process.

The distribution of state interests is largely external to the negotiation. While interests may change during a negotiation, as an effect of persuasion or learning, they are typically viewed as exogenously given, theoretically, and something which chairs have little practical influence over. Another similarly external factor is the *institutional context*, i.e., the rules and procedures that set the formal constraints on a chair’s activities. As argued by Tallberg (2010) and Blavoukos and Bourantonis (2011), some institutional arrangements are more conducive to entrepreneurial chairmanship, with implications for chairs’ ability to shape proceedings. Typically, the broader and vaguer the chair’s mandate, the greater its ability to exert influence. Downie and Crump (2017) point to the G-20 as a context where the chair’s mandate is broad and vaguely defined, leading to the possible empowerment of activist chairs. Conversely, chairs subjected to clearly defined mandates with strict control mechanisms are likely to have less

ability to engage in entrepreneurial process management and substantive interventions. Sjöstedt (1998: 135) mentions the example of negotiations in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the trade regime that preceded the WTO, where chair was “constrained, indeed controlled, by negotiating parties” and “their political room of maneuver was very narrow.”

Next to the formal design of the chair’s mandate, another facet of the institutional context discussed in the literature are the rules that govern decision-making. The primary point of investigation is whether chairs are more empowered in processes that rely on decision-making by consensus than in voting-based systems. Here, findings and arguments diverge. Tallberg (2010: 246) argues that “[w]here unanimity or consensus is prescribed, negotiation chairs must take the interests of all parties into consideration and will find it relatively more difficult to steer negotiations toward their ideal point.” In contrast, both Odell (2009) and Buzan (2001) have emphasized that the chairs are more important, and plausibly more influential, in consensus-based processes, since they typically require more substantive, mediation-like interventions. Monheim (2016: 13) concurs, arguing that “consensus-based decision-making . . . enhances the role of negotiation management.” It is possible that part of this disagreement is attributable to focusing on different dependent variables – the chair’s private interests versus the participants’ collective interests – but it suggests that the impact of decision rules remains scientifically disputed.

A third, and less disputed, factor concerns *trust and legitimacy*. Particularly pronounced in the practice-based research (Depledge 2005, 2007; Walker and Biederkopf 2020; Monheim 2016), insights regarding trust and legitimacy in negotiations generally draw on sociological theories of behavior and the central role of norms and standards of appropriate conduct in shaping behavior. Depledge (2007) discusses this in terms of the “authority” that flow from the chair’s formal mandate which awards them a “hierarchical position,” especially in cases where the chair is elected by the parties. At the same time as authority stems from the formal mandate, the chair’s conduct during the negotiations shapes how this authority is perceived. Behavior consistent with the mandate and the expectation it evokes can strengthen the chair’s authority, while inconsistent behavior can weaken it. As Depledge (2007: 56) explains, “authority – successfully steeped in impartiality and deference – allows Chairpersons to exert leadership in proactively managing the negotiation process.” This corresponds to insights on the role of procedural justice in multilateral negotiations. Drawing on social psychology and management studies, scholars have highlighted how principles of “fair play” and procedural equity increases the chances that multilateral processes will converge on an agreement (Hollander-Blumoff and Tyler 2008; Albin and Young 2012; Albin and Druckman 2014; Tomlinson 2015).

While procedural justice may help build trust, it has also been shown that trusted chairs can sometimes set aside procedural rules to promote progress. Chairs that are trusted by the negotiators can rely on a wider repertoire of strategic interventions, including informal tools, than chairs lacking such trust, who will be more tightly leashed to the formal mandate. Walker and Biedenkopf (2020: 44) exemplifies the former with the French presidency of COP21, writing that “[t]hanks to the trust that parties granted them, the French chairs in 2015 were able to implement methods such as closed-door meetings during the final stages of the negotiations and were permitted to table their own compromise proposals.” This can be contrasted with the

Danish presidency of COP15 in Copenhagen six years earlier, where “similar attempts . . . were vehemently rejected due to a lack of trust” (see also Monheim 2016, who compares the missteps of the Danish presidency with the more successful Mexican presidency of the 2010 negotiations).

Fourth, both the core functions of the chair discussed above are facilitated by the chair’s *access to information*. This relates both to technical information, such as the relevant procedural rules, and the substantive politics of the process, including the preferences and bottom lines of the participating negotiators. A chair who is well-versed in procedural detail or who can help resolve technical disagreements (say, for example, relating to trade rules) is more likely to be able to bring parties toward agreement in a constructive manner (e.g., Sjøstedt 1998, Odell 2005, Depledge 2007). A chair who has a good understanding of the negotiation playing field and understands what different parties want, has a greater chance at identifying and proposing compromise solutions.

While the latter is generally dependent on the chair’s diplomatic acumen, its ability to collect and process information on the relevant bargaining parameters, chairs can often rely on international secretariats for technical expertise, both relating to procedural rules and the subject under negotiation. For example, in the negotiations of UN peacekeeping budgets, the state representative chairing the negotiations typically invites officials from the UN Secretariat to provide the negotiation member states with information on required levels for troops, police and civilian staff (Dijkstra 2015). For this reason, chairs that can develop constructive relationships to international secretariats are more likely to be influential in negotiations. Conversely, this provides international secretariats with a channel of influence, which they can use shape the direction of negotiations (Oksamytna and Lundgren 2021). Depledge (2007: 62) discusses this phenomenon as a “co-dependency” existing between chairs and international secretariats: “the Chairperson often relies on the secretariat to provide the intellectual resources needed for him/her to exercise effective leadership, while the secretariat depends on an able Chairperson to provide the veil of legitimacy needed for it to input productively into the negotiation process.”

A particular type of informational resource is the “intellectual capital” that underlies “intellectual leadership,” as discussed by Young (1991). This is less concerned with expertise on technical matters, nor with the bargaining landscape, but with a long-term vision. As Young (1991: 28) explains, in international negotiation, the intellectual leader “relinquishes on the power of ideas to shape the thinking of the principals in processes of institutional bargaining”. Young exemplifies this with the role of British economic thought, especially as advanced by John Maynard Keynes, in the formation of the post-war monetary regime.

A final factor conditioning the extent of a chair’s influence is *political support* (or political capital). The discussion of this typically goes beyond the formal role of the chair, incorporating instead the informal influences that chairs and other negotiation leaders can exercise by virtue of their origin in, or connections to, powerful states (Young 1991, Underdal 1994; Sjøstedt 1998). In their study of chairmanship at the UN, EU, and WTO, Blavoukos and Bourantonis (2011: 660) argue that external support may come in the form of “additional contributions to the chair’s resources, exerting pressure to or influencing negotiating partners to accept a specific bargaining outcome, deter challenges of the chair’s authority, and ensure

his/her institutional viability,” which are all likely to promote the chair’s influence.<sup>4</sup> Blavoukos and Bourantonis (2011) exemplify this by pointing to several examples, including how the two superpowers, U.S. and Soviet Union, as co-chairs of the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Committee (ENDC) in the 1960s managed to redefine the agenda from disarmament to arms control and in several other ways use their political strength as well as their formal control of the process to achieve outcomes that mirrored their preferences.

## **Chairmanship for public or private gain**

The literature thus suggests that, conditional on a permissive structural context, chairs that operate within a less constrained formal mandate, enjoy greater trust, are well-informed both technically and politically, and have access to more extensive political backing are more likely to exert influence in multilateral negotiations.

Whether chairs also facilitate outcomes that are distributionally fair – with symmetry in the distribution of gains and losses across the involved parties – is a different question. Procedural fairness aside, most of the aforementioned chairmanship variables can be leveraged in support of outcomes that are biased in favor of a particular subset of participants or even the chair itself. For example, the chair’s agenda management allows it to deprioritize or completely remove items it does not want to discuss, or otherwise shape the agenda to favor particular interests. One empirical example of such “biased chairmanship” emerges in Ismail’s (2009) analysis of the WTO market access negotiations in 2007-2008. In that process, the top-down, exclusive, and consciously independent agenda management of the chair resulted in an outcome biased against developing countries, triggering backlash against the process. Another example is described by Odell (2005) in his analysis of the 1999 WTO negotiations. The U.S. chair not only failed to consult adequately with the negotiation parties, a major reason behind the breakdown of negotiations, the U.S. representative “even acted personally as the chief US negotiator, claiming value from others while also occupying the post of the conference’s top mediator” (Odell 2005).

The problem of biased chairs is recognized in the literature. As Downie and Crump (2017) argue, the chair’s resources can “be used to maximize the chair’s preferences”. Similarly, Tallberg (2010) argues that chairs can use their informational advantage to not only facilitate agreement but to influence the orientation of an agreement in favor of their own policy preferences. For example, it has been shown that rotating EU presidencies have some ability to promote their own policy preferences (Tallberg 2006, 2010; Thomson 2008). This may be less of a concern in the EU, where rotation of presidencies allows for logrolling to emerge, evening out the over-time distribution gains and losses. In other institutional settings, where there is no institutionalized rotation of chairmanship, or conferences occur too rarely, there may be less opportunities for such “diffuse reciprocity” to emerge (cf. Keohane 1986).

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<sup>4</sup> There are interesting parallels to the “muscular mediation” literature, which similarly focuses on how power resources, in particular coercion, can be used to shape a mediation process. See, e.g., Svensson (2007b) and Kuperman (2022).

The risks of biased chairmanship would appear to be particularly large in one-shot negotiations to establish new and durable institutional regimes. In other settings, there should exist possibilities of creating institutional control mechanisms (cf. Tallberg 2010) or, assuming that negotiations are repeated over time, we should expect the emergence of social sanctions mechanisms against overly biased chairmanship. In most of the studied negotiation settings, such social sanctioning mechanisms appears to already exist, reflected in strong – and possibly strengthening – expectations regarding procedural fairness, impartiality, and transparency.

## **Discussion: Chairmanship in multilateral nuclear negotiations**

This chapter has reviewed the literature on chairmanships in multilateral negotiations, with a focus on roles, strategies, and impact. In broad terms, this literature is characterized by three features. First, theoretically, it is dominated by studies anchored in the rationalist bargaining tradition, viewing chairmanships as functional solutions that help diminish problems of complexity and uncertainty. Second, empirically, the literature is dominated by case studies, with very few examples of quantitative or other comparative scholarship. Third, in terms of findings, while there are few undisputed results, studies are converging on a list of factors that shape the ability of chairmanships to influence the course and outcome of negotiations.

The review undertaken here suggests some key priorities for how research on chairmanships can help make nuclear negotiations more effective: advance the general research program on chairmanships, deepen the study of chairmanships in nuclear negotiations, and help identify process innovations that can be imported from other policy areas. I will discuss each in turn.

First, to advance the wider research program on chairmanships in multilateral processes, scholars should consider how to pursue theoretical and empirical development. As for theory, while rationalist bargaining models has shown their value and provide connections to a variety of literatures, greater theoretical diversity would benefit our understanding of chairmanships. This is illustrated by the promising examples of scholarship based on political psychology and practice, which have expanded in recent years. As for methodology, the study of chairmanships – just like the study of multilateral negotiations more widely – would stand to benefit considerably by moving beyond case studies and finding ways to leverage the strengths of quantitative or design-based analytical approaches. Quantitative research on negotiations in the EU illustrates that this is both possible and scientifically useful, pointing to methodological tools, such as the application of systematic preference attainment models to gauge bargaining influence (e.g., Thomson et al. 2012), which can be imported into research on multilateral negotiations more generally.

A second priority is to deepen research on chairmanships in multilateral nuclear negotiations, specifically. As has been clear from the above review, most of what we know about multilateral chairmanships emerges from studies of negotiations in other policy domains. Indeed, there is very little academic research on multilateral nuclear negotiations and the author knows of no study that focuses explicitly on chairmanships in this context. Most of the existent knowledge is therefore derived from secondary observations in studies of nuclear negotiations

or nuclear policy (e.g., Johnson 1997, 2010; Müller 2010; Potter 2005, 2016; Shirobokova 2018). It is of course reasonable to assume that general insights about multilateral chairmanships apply also to the nuclear domain. Just like in other policy fields, chairs of nuclear negotiations are likely to engage in process management, the provision of expertise, and the brokering of disagreements. And their ability to do so is likely affected by the five main determinants – structural interests, institutional context, trust and legitimacy, access to information, and political support – that affect chairmanship in climate, trade, and other fields. At the same time, while our baseline expectation regarding chairmanship in the nuclear domain can rest on the insights generated in broader scholarship, we would want to scope out the validity and applicability of these general insights and investigate which theoretical modifications may be necessary to best capture this particular policy domain.

In such research, it seems motivated to focus initially in deepening our understanding of how the determinants of chairmanship influence are configured in nuclear negotiations, such as during NPT Preparatory Committees and Review Conferences. What are the key features of the institutional context, including design of the NPT conference presidency mandates, decision-rules, and other delegation arrangements? To which extent have past NPT chairmanships been able to build trust and are there issues of legitimacy that underpin how these negotiations are pursued? Do chairs in the NPT have access to sufficient and relevant information to play an effective role? Is their performance supported or undercut by links to powerful countries? Each of the five determinants suggest possible avenues of future theoretical and empirical research.

Case-based analyses of past NPT negotiations suggest insights that align with the general variables. For example, on the question of the chair's informational resources, Potter (2016: 172) points out that the NPT process lacks a “permanent and adequately funded secretariat,” identifying this as one of its key institutional shortcomings. Similarly, Potter has argued that the process appointment of NPT senior officials, such as negotiation chairs, is slow, politicized, and “antiquated”. Such a process undercuts the ability of chairs and conference presidents to engage in preparatory dialogues to collect information and build legitimacy, which have shown to be predictors of success in other multilateral negotiations.

Relatedly, a third way in which research on chairmanships can assist in making nuclear negotiations more effective is by identifying best practices and lessons learned from other policy domains. Process innovations that have shown promise in other fields can be imported and implemented in nuclear negotiations. Not all process innovations relate to chairmanship *per se*, but it is typically contingent on the chair, as master of the process, to introduce and test innovations, as long as they are consistent with the formal mandate. This has been the case with process innovations in climate negotiations, such as the aforementioned Indaba format, introduced by the South African chair. If research can be helpful in identifying procedural and institutional barriers to effective negotiations, it should be possible to start identifying process innovations that have allowed similar barriers to be diminished or circumvented.

We should not harbor naïve hopes that process engineering, including altering chairmanship variables, can “fix” nuclear negotiations. Negotiations are primarily determined by the political interests of the involved parties. But it would be unfortunate if agreements that are possible are made impossible because of a badly designed process or weak chairmanship performance. In any negotiation, the aspiration must be to design a process that is as conducive

to higher negotiation efficiency, fairness and legitimacy as is practically possible. To that end, ensuring that chairs can play their role – by providing process management, expertise, and brokerage – to the benefit of a wide range of actors is an outcome worth supporting, both in research and via policy.

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