Case Analysis

Crisis Negotiations Between Unequals: Lessons from a Classic Dialogue

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"The name of this game is poker, not chess" writes William McCarthy (1985, 64) when describing the role of power in negotiations. In both poker and negotiation, the dynamics of power asymmetry must be understood by both players — the one with the straight flush and the one with two pairs. The assumption that success in negotiations is simply a matter of "power" has often proven costly; one-sided settlements do not follow necessarily from power disparity itself. Negotiators need a clearer understanding of the dangers and opportunities, or the lack thereof, that power presents at the negotiating table.

Few events better illustrate the detriments of impractical power negotiations than an exchange of views from ancient Greece that is known as the *Melian Dialogue*. Set in 416 B.C., at the height of the Peloponnesian War, the dialogue is Thucydides' account of the dispute between Athens and the isle of Melos over the latter's refusal to succumb to the Athenian empire.

Sixteen years into the war, at a time when expansionist Athens thought itself invincible, its leaders decided that they could no longer tolerate Melos' independence. Ten years earlier, Athens had tried unsuccessfully to coerce Melos into an alliance; this time, Athens resolved to make the island a tributary colony. Melos, after blossoming in independence for over 700 years, stood determined to maintain that status (de Ste. Croix 1972, 20). Despite this obvious conflict of interest, both parties agreed to send representatives to discuss the matter.

However, the discussion turned into two monologues, or as modern-day negotiation theorist I. William Zartman (1985, 124) might call it, "a dialogue of the deaf." While the Melians tried to present their case on abstract principles of justice, the Athenians simply insisted on discussing power and expediency. The intransigent

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positional bargaining characteristic of both sides allowed neither for tradeoffs nor for common ground, and inevitably led to disaster: the destruction of Melos.

When viewed through the lens of contemporary negotiation theory and practice, these events, some twenty-four centuries distant, yield as many questions as answers. How could the Athenians and Melians have used their power more wisely? In what ways did the pressure of crisis negotiations impede a more satisfactory outcome? How did the strategies of the participants affect the end result? Did microlevel psychological factors play a determining role in the failure to reach a negotiated resolution? Discovering the answers to these questions may provide clues to the missed opportunities of two millennia ago, lessons that may prove helpful in the present.

The Peloponnesian War

The Peloponnesian War was the "greatest upheaval that had come to the Greeks, to some portion of the barbarians, one might even say to the greater part of mankind" (Thucydides, Kagen Translation 1969, Book I [1]). The war was not fought by individual Greek states but by two great coalitions, the Peloponnesian League (also known as the Lacedæmonian or Spartan alliance) and the Athenian empire. As suggested by Thucydides, the war's cause stemmed from Athens' growing economic and political power, coupled with its expansionist ambitions. As leader of the Delian league, Athens exacted tribute from more than 150 states. Fear of Athenian aggression and irritation with its diplomatic behavior led to the coalition against Athens (de Ste. Croix 1972, 89-205).

The war started in 431 B.C. and lasted twenty-seven years until 404 B.C.Essentially, it was a struggle of land against sea. Sparta's army was best used to occupy Athenian territory and then exact submission. The Athenians could not match their enemies on land but possessed the better navy. The period until 421 B.C. was characterized by a strategic deadlock, bringing peace for a time in 421 B.C., but not a lasting one.

The Athenians, however, decided to carry the war further afield, resulting in the disastrous failed Sicilian expedition of 415-413 B.C. Hoping to achieve final and unquestioned supremacy in the Greek world, Athens had set out to seize Syracuse, the rich Sicilian city and most important Corinthian colony. Instead of wounding the enemy, Athens suffered a death blow: half its army and most of its fleet were lost. A period of political upheaval and disunion then began at home. Sparta, aware of its enemy's vulnerability, decided to seize the opportunity and rend the Athenian coalition asunder. The military and naval victories that followed severely undermined Athenian morale, leading to the surrender of the Athenian fleet, and finally, blockade of the city and starvation. In 404 B.C., a defeated Athens made peace and its fortifications were razed (Harding 1973, 52-174).

The Melian Question

The dialogue between the envoys of Athens and the Melian commissioners took place more than a decade before Athens' defeat, occurring in the midst of the Peloponnesian War, at a time when Athens was at the height of its power. The setting was Melos, an island in the Cyclades about a hundred miles south of Athens.

Though pressured by Athens to become an ally in 426 B.C., the Melians did not belong to the Delian League. The estimated 2,000-3,000 Dorian inhabitants of Melos managed to remain independent and leaned, if anything, toward Sparta with which they historically had strong ties. The Melians not only refused to become a subject ally of Athens; they also declined to pay tribute. Athens nevertheless included Melos on its tribute list, certain that the island would eventually surrender. It did not.

After ten additional years of patience, the Athenians sent in 416 B.C. a landing force to Melos under the command of Cleomedes and Tisias. An armed force consisting of thirty-eight ships, 320 archers, and 21 hundred heavy infantry speaks a clear language to an island only several acres in extent. Before opening hostilities, the generals gave Melos a last chance to succumb freely, by sending envoys to negotiate. The armed presence pressured the Melians to the negotiating table. The ensuing negotiations later became known as the *Melian Dialogue* (see Appendix A).[1]

As Thucydides was not present during the negotiations, the dialogue constitutes a dramatic reproduction of what may have taken place between the two parties. The dialogue consisted of twenty-seven short exchanges between the three to four Athenian envoys and a dozen members of the Melian council. It is highly condensed, dialectic in form, and, according to some scholars, characteristic of discussions at that time because "rhetoric and dialectic had trained men think along these lines" (Harding 1973, 124). Other scholars argue that the whole incident is contrived and carefully put into words by Thucydides (Hornblower 1987, 52).[2] However, in order to evaluate the process at hand, it must be assumed that Thucydides' account is accurate.

Negotiate. . .Or Else

Mutually desired negotiations have higher success rates than those that are imposed upon one of the parties. Negotiations that begin with ". . . either you negotiate, or else" offer little chance of a settlement beneficial to both sides. Using coercion to force negotiation is problematic because, as Rubin (1991, 10) points out, "it encourages further conflict escalation, as each side tries to 'motivate' the other side by upping the ante." The *Melian Dialogue* is no exception. While the Athenians' pressure technique helped to get the Melians to the negotiating table, it created a bitter climate, not conducive to productive negotiating. The last thing the invasion created was "an open mind" on the part of the defensive Melians. In fact, the invasion reinforced the negative image Melos had of Athens — a city-state led by power-hungry, reckless, self-serving expansionists who showed little concern for the autonomy of an island people.

The military presence also proved to the Melians that the Athenians had come not to negotiate, but to judge (Thucydides, Crawley Translation 1982, Book V [86]). While threats can be useful tools in negotiations, they did not prove to be so in the dialogue between the Melians and Athenians. Feeling cornered, the Melians began the dialogue with antipathy toward their partner (or rather, opponent). This remains an understandable psychological phenomenon; researchers have shown that "threats often lead to increased suspicion and dislike" by the threatened for the threatener (Pruitt and Rubin 1986, 56). Furthermore, given a high threat perception, bargainers tend to be more fearful and defensive of their opponents (Spector 1978, 65). Hence, from a purely psychological standpoint, we conclude that the invasion was a counterproductive tactic for the Athenians. Their action set the psychological dynamic for the negotiations before the dialogue had even begun.

In addition, the military presence of the Athenians created a climate of crisis :gotiations. While the Athenians may have wished to create this atmosphere to in the attention of the Melians, crisis negotiations come with a cost. The elians realized the stakes were high, time was short, and their options were nited, all of which are elements in escalating a crisis into war (see Ury and noke 1985). The Athenians, though setting this crisis into play, were not able maintain control of the situation.

The Melians viewed their choices as either war or slavery (Thucydides, Craw- Translation 1982, Book V [86]). The immediacy of the Athenian threat also :prived the Melians of time to prepare for the negotiations — a crucial ele- ent.[3] Between the invasion and the dialogue, no time existed to consult, brain- orm, and draft proposals. The crisis atmosphere created by the Athenians did t allow for stages in a prenegotiation process for the Melians — conflict diag- sis, formula creation and detail implementation (see Pruitt 1984, Saunders 85). Had the Athenians approached the Melians in a less confrontational man- r, and at least shown an intention to listen, perhaps the Melians would have en willing to consider some alternate options.

he Perils of Power

why did the Athenians create this climate of coercion? Clearly, they were try- g to create a "ripeness" in the dispute over Melos' status, in order to bring the elians to the bargaining table. While they succeeded in creating a "stage in the nflict in which all parties [were] ready to take the conflict seriously, and ere] willing to do whatever [was] necessary to bring the conflict to a close" ubin 1991, 10), they may have inadvertently "overripened" the conflict. The ood of the negotiations was spoiled by the creation of a crisis by the Atheni- s, who used coercive means to bring the conflict to a head.

Another explanation for the creation of the crisis may lie in Athens' belief in e sophistic doctrine that "might makes right." The Athenians regarded power their entitlement by natural law, as the following passage illustrates:

> Of the gods we believe, and of men we know, that by a necessary law of their nature they rule wherever they can. And it is not as if we were the first to make this law, or to act upon it when made: we found it existing before us, and shall leave it to exist for ever after us; all we do is to make use of it, knowing that you and everybody else, having the same power as we have, would do the same as we do (Thucydides, Crawley Translation 1982, Book V [105]).

The Athenians regarded power and strength as virtues, and the virtuous, in eir mind, had a right to get what they could. For the stronger to carry off the operty of the weaker was simply just. Therefore, they had no qualms about tting a very hostile "face" on the issue, and in fact encouraged it, as is shown the remarks of one of the Athenian envoys:

> [said to Melians] . . . for your hostility cannot so much hurt us as your friendship will be an argument to our subjects of our weakness, and your enmity of our power (Thucydides, Crawley Translation 1982, Book V [95]).

The mightier Athens became, the more it seemed to need to prove its power itself and others. This point brings to light some potentially significant psy- ological considerations. Athens' offensive military action may have been an act based on insecurity and paranoia, leading the Athenians into a crisis of their own making. While the Athenians had greater control over the time constraints of this crisis, they cornered themselves into a position of having to take Melos either by pressure or force so that they would maintain appearances among their other colonies. This suggests that Athens saw itself coerced into acting the way it did in Melos. It was thus not only the aggressor but also the victim, a victim of its own power.

It would be reductionist, however, to explain Athens' behavior entirely in these terms. For Athens, the Melian question was more than just a matter of pride. It was also economic and strategic, and therefore a practical matter. Melos had both a location and an economy that seemed desirable to Athens. The location was strategically important because of its proximity to the Peloponnese, the enemy's homestead. Athens needed an island ally close to enemy territory, allowing for surprise attacks and maneuvers. With regards to economics, Melos offered additional jobs and another source of income in the form of tribute payments. This was especially critical because inflation had eroded the value of Athens' tribute receipts while government expenditures had risen.

Based on these factors, it seems logical that Athens chose to exercise its power to conquer Melos. By invading the island, it sent a message that Athenian forces stood ready to attack if need be. The envoys of Athens apparently hoped this threat would be an effective bargaining technique. On the surface, when ignoring all exterior variables, these expectations might have seemed reasonable. As Deutsch (1978, 155) observes, deterrence against the relatively defenseless does make sense:

> A severe threat against an adversary who cannot inflict the same level of damage in retaliation threatens great costs at small cost to the threatener. The more intense the threat, the more successful it is supposed to be, according to the theory, against a weaker but still rational opponent.

This theory did not hold in the case of Melos, however, as Athens overplayed its power, creating a negotiations environment of hostility and resentment before talks even began.

But then, "true" negotiating was not the Athenians' interest. In their mind, the only issue that needed to be settled was whether the isle of Melos could be had for free, by way of Melian concession, or at a price, with a military attack. Their negotiation tactics, both words and actions, suggest that they preferred, and tried to get, the former, but were willing, if only reluctantly, to pay the latter. This is consistent with Schelling's observation (1960, 12-94) that if a threat were simply in the threatener's interest, the person would not threaten, but act. The threat testifies to the threatener's dislike for the cost associated with the threatened act.

So what was the cost of war to Athens? Did a peaceful resolution promise greater benefits? Clearly, attacking Melos meant that many of its inhabitants would be killed, which would adversely affect the island's economy and its subsequent status as a tributary colony. Also, being forced to attack would set a bad precedent — hostilities would draw attention on Melos' refusal to succumb. Other states that wanted independence but did not feel strong enough to stand up to Athens (for example, Thera), might embrace the idea that there was hope after all. Athens' envoys expressed this concern during the meeting:

> . . . it is rather islanders like yourselves, outside our empire, and subjects smarting under the yoke, who would be the most likely to take a rash step and lead themselves and us into obvious danger (Thucydides, Crawley Translation 1982, Book V [99]).

Thus, the Athenians were interested in settling the conflict through pressure. If other states learned of this, they would see that Athens was able to receive from Melos what it wanted — not because Athens took the island, but because it was given voluntarily out of respect for the empire's awesome power. Athens believed that for states to submit voluntarily to her was not only a rational but, according to the envoys, an honorable thing to do. The immensity of this miscalculation cannot be overestimated.

The invasion did one more thing that proved the most detrimental of all: it burned Athens' bridges. Being the superpower that it was, Athens could not afford to make so forceful a step, and commit that many resources without getting its way. And since no doubt remained about Athens' intentions, there could be no doubt about the outcome: Athens *had* to get Melos, no matter the cost. These sort of commitment tactics entail considerable risk; they place the fate of the party "in the hand of another who may or may not be ready to make the concessions necessary to avoid disaster" (Pruitt and Rubin 1986, 59). Seen from this perspective, the invasion pressured Athens just as much as Melos and thus turned into a liability for both.

The Setting for Stalemate

Almost as important as "when" and "under what circumstances" the dialogue took place, is "where" it was held. After the invasion, the place was a given: Melos. However, the exact setting still needed to be determined. The Melians insisted that the negotiations be held privately, with just their magistrates and chief citizens meeting the Athenian envoys. Though agreeing, the Athenians suggested that the only reason for this insistence was that the Melians feared the arguments of the Athenian envoys would be both persuasive and incontrovertible, leading the public astray (Thucydides, Crawley Translation 1982, Book V [85]).

It is speculated that the Melian representatives were indeed afraid of Athens' persuasiveness. This implies that the Melian population was not as unshakably committed to the idea of independence as its representatives and, consequently, might have applied pressure on the council to give in to Athenian demands. It seems obvious that the council members would have more to lose from Melos' transformation into a tributary colony than the average Melian. Several historians embrace this theory (e.g., Harding 1973, 124). Another explanation for the magistrates' choice of locale could simply be that they anticipated more rational negotiations there than would have been possible in the midst of agitated spectators.

As soon as the negotiation session began, the Athenian envoys forcefully took control of the meeting by establishing its groundrules. The key rules were: (1) to look at the existing facts only; (2) to discuss the safety of the city; (3) not to speculate about the future; (4) not to engage in long speeches; and (5) for each side to deal separately with each point (Thucydides, Crawley Translation 1982, Book V [85]).

The Athenians thus determined the procedural dynamics of the actual negotiations. This fact, coupled with their coercive method of bringing the Melians to the negotiating table, was yet another undercutting of Melian power, weakening and cornering them further still. Rendering the Melians unable to determine the discussion's format, these rules were aimed at one thing only: to limit as much as possible the Melians' maneuvering space. The restrictions on the scope and flow of the discussion impeded the Melians' ability to form a coherent strategy. Instead of challenging the envoys with questions about the legitimacy of their invasion and demands, the Melian commissioners were forced to be defensive and react to arguments made by the Athenian envoys. Again, this limited the practice of effective negotiating.

All events and strategies leading up to the dialogue direct us to the same conclusion: neither party saw the ensuing discussions as an opportunity to work out their differences. Rather, they entered the dialogue as a zero-sum game in which there could be only one winner.

Dialogue or Monologues?

If a book called *Getting to No* were ever to be written, the *Melian Dialogue* could be enclosed as a case study. In their discussion, the Athenians and Melians engaged in hard positional bargaining, making no effort to break away from their adversarial relationship. From the beginning, it was clear that neither party was ready to make concessions. The strategic approach of both parties was in direct opposition to the ideas promoted by Fisher and Ury (1981, 40-55) concerning bargaining over interests rather than positions. The Athenians threatened the Melians with their military might, saying that if they did not comply with the Athenian demands, they would be destroyed. The Melians, apparently believing they had nothing to gain and everything to lose, refused to give in. Instead, they argued that if hostilities did break out, their kinsmen, the Lacedæmonians, would come to their rescue:

> . . . that what we want in power will be made up by the alliance of the Lacedæmonians, who are bound, if only for very shame, to come to the aid of their kindred. Our confidence, therefore, after all is not so utterly irrational (Thucydides, Crawley Translation 1982, Book V [104]).

Much of the dialogue focuses on these positional stances and coercive threatening postures — elements generally not associated with negotiated outcomes. This positional dynamic was partly due to the nature of the contention — a disagreement over rights. The Athenians, trumpeting the merits of "might makes right," were diametrically opposed to the Melian position of sovereignty and self-rule. While the Melians do attempt to address the interests of the Athenians at various points in the dialogue, these exchanges were short-lived . The central fixation always returned to the dispute over these natural laws (see Thucydides, Crawley Translation 1982, Book V [86, 88, 89, 96, 97, 104, 105, 111, 112])

The strategic choice to use contentious behavior — pressure tactics, excessive demands, commitments to unalterable positions, persuasive arguments, and threats (all of which occurred between the Melians and Athenians) — has proven an inefficient and unwise negotiations course (Pruitt 1991, 29). Theorists and researchers have concluded that contending, or positional bargaining, often leads to unsatisfactory conclusions, especially when both parties contend throughout the negotiations (see Deutsch 1973 and Pruitt and Carnevale 1982). As occurred in this case, a dangerous escalative process is often likely.

However, this is not to say that both parties were contentious throughout the proceedings. The Melians, in fact, did attempt two noteworthy collaborative

approaches. At the beginning of the dialogue, the Melians attempted to negotiate on the basis of objective criteria, independent of the positions of either side:

> . . . you should not destroy what is our common protection, the privilege of being allowed in danger to invoke what is fair and right, and even to profit by arguments not strictly valid if they can be made to persuade (Thucydides, Crawley Translation 1982, Book V [90]).

This effort to determine fair and objective criteria was not received with enthusiasm by the Athenians, who stated that they were willing to accept the future risk of suffering the fate of the "vanquished."

With this path closed, the Melians then tried to address the interests of the Athenians. However, their strategy was not the problem solving or interest-based bargaining advocated by modern theorists; instead, they worked to develop persuasive arguments aimed at convincing the Athenians that concessions were in their own best interest. In essence, most of these statements were arguments pertaining to how coercing or destroying Melos would not only entail Melian hatred but, worse still, spark negative sentiments throughout the empire:

> . . .How can you avoid making enemies of all existing neutrals who shall look at our case and conclude from it that one day or another you will attack them? And what is this but to make greater the enemies that you have already, and to force others to become so who would otherwise never have though of it? (Thucydides, Crawley Translation 1982, Book V [90]).

By way of such arguments, the commissioners tried to persuade the envoys that the conflict was not to be seen in isolation, but in context. As leader of the empire, Athens could not be indifferent to the reactions of her tributary allies and other states within her hegemony. These warnings fell on deaf ears, serving only to escalate the conflict.

Both of these strategic maneuvers were failed attempts by the Melians to undermine the Athenians' power position. While the Athenians had obvious negotiating power — they were able to force the Melians to the bargaining table and establish the groundrules — they had far less power than might first be assumed. Negotiating power should not be confused with physical force. Fisher (1991, 129) writes, "the pain that we threaten to inflict if the other side does not decide as we like is simply one factor among many . . . making threats is a particularly expensive and dangerous way of trying to exert influence." This does not mean that the negotiation between the Melians and Athenians was symmetric. Clearly, the Athenians had resources that the Melians lacked; however, based on the Athenians' inability to affect the Melians' final decision, they obviously did not exercise that economic and military power as wisely as they could have.

Two key elements created the power imbalance between the Athenians and the Melians: their alternatives to a negotiated agreement and their negative commitments. The Athenians' alternative to a negotiated agreement stood ready off the shores of Melos — a military prepared to take what negotiations could not provide. The Melians, on the other hand, had the *hope* of the Lacedæmonians' intervention.

Classic deterrence theory suggests that intense threats, such as those posed by Athens, are not effective when an adversary has firm allies who can retaliate on the same level of frightfulness (Deutsch 1978, 155). However, the Athenians did not believe the Lacedæmonians would come to the rescue of Melos (Thucydides, Crawley Translation 1982, Book V [105, 107, 109, 113]). History proved the Athenians correct; the Lacedæmonians never arrived. This Melian miscalculation is not surprising; experimental evidence suggests that "negotiators tend to have inconsistently optimistic perceptions of their own alternatives" (Lax and Sebenius 1985, 167). Modern scholars recommend that negotiators should anticipate such systematic bias.

As for the power generated from negative commitments, it was the Athenians who chose to make an irrevocable commitment to the seizing of Melos. While the act of this negative commitment also exerts negotiating influence, this influence comes at a heavy cost; the diminished health of the negotiating relationship, the loss of the negotiation's legitimacy, and a reduction in the power gained by a strong BATNA ("Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement" [see Fisher 1991, 134-38]). The hand of the Melians was actually strengthened by this irrevocable commitment on the part of the Athenians; the decision-making process of the Athenians became transparent, and the final outcome rested on the Melians' choice. Once again, the Athenians managed to reduce the negotiating power they might have garnered; though, even with these mistakes, the power inequality did benefit the Athenian side.

So what could the Melians have done to counter the Athenians' power superiority? Lockhart (1979, 97) speaks of "resourcefulness" and "creative ingenuity" as two methods for a weaker state to counter the power asymmetry it faces. Rubin and Salacuse (1990, 24-34) expand on the possibilities for weaker states in international negotiations. Many of the approaches they propose were attempted by the Melians: they made appeals to the principles of the Athenians; they made appeals to their history of neutrality in the Peloponnesian War; they made appeals to the potential future ramifications of the Athenians' actions on their national interest; and they even attempted to link themselves with the enemy's enemy. None of these techniques proved successful.

The dialogue turned into a series of monologues, with each side using contending strategies to satisfy its positional concerns. Instead of "creating value," they decided only to "claim value"; instead of being inventive and cooperative enough to devise an agreement that yielded gain to each party's interests, they chose to view the negotiations as hard, tough bargaining in which one side must win at the expense of the other (Lax and Sebenius 1986, 167-68). With the hope the Melians would find more prudent counsel, the Athenians withdrew from the conference and waited for the Melians to inform them of their final decision. The Melians did not need much time to think. During the discussion, their arguments had fallen on deaf ears; now their spirit of cooperation was gone:

> Our resolution, Athenians, is the same as it was at first. We will not in a moment deprive of freedom a city that has been inhabited these seven hundred years; but we put our trust in the fortune by which the gods have preserved it until now, and in the help of men, that is, of the Lacedæmonians; and so we will try and save ourselves (Thucydides, Crawley Translation 1982, Book V [112]).

It was in this conflict spiral that the dialogue ended.

After the Monologues

In the aftermath of this dismal negotiation, the Athenians resorted to force, fulfilling the irrevocable commitment that set the tone for much of the conference.

Though the Melians were able to resist for a while, without the aid of the Lacedæmonians, Athens' military might was too great. After a siege that lasted from the summer of 416 B.C. to that winter, the Melians surrendered to the Athenians, who killed all men of military age and sold the women and children for slaves. Subsequently, the Athenians sent out five hundred colonists and inhabited the island themselves. The final Athenian warning had come to pass:

> Well, you alone, as it seems to us, judging from these resolutions, regard what is future as more certain than what is before your eyes, and what is out of sight, in your eagerness, as already coming to pass; and as you have staked most on, and trusted most in, the Lacedæmonians, your fortune, and your hopes, so will you be most completely deceived (Thucydides, Crawley Translation 1982, Book V [113]).

It is difficult to think of how the conflict between the Athenians and Melians could have ended more tragically. Whatever could go wrong, did. While the Athenians had taken Melos, they did it in the way they least wished. Why did it come to this? Could it have been prevented?

The reasons for the unsatisfactory outcome, as stated earlier, are clear: the coercive methods of the Athenians "overripened" the conflict; the crisis they created escalated beyond their control; Athens' irrevocable commitment to taking Melos limited everyone's options, forcing positional, contentious bargaining; neither side used its power as wisely as it could have.

And the questions remain: What opportunities were missed? What actions, if altered, could have allowed for the creation of value rather than the claiming of it?

Missed Opportunities

Zartman (1984, 7) writes, "negotiations to prevent wars are, after all, a paradox because they use conflict to force conciliation." He suggests that a series of steps must occur to resolve this type of situation. First, each party must ascertain what they and the other party are ultimately interested in gaining. This allows each side to understand the central components of the dispute and to dispel any misperceptions.

With this idea in mind, the stakes can be rearranged to meet the primary concerns of each side. In the case of the *Melian Dialogue*, this would have been possible only if Athens refrained from making its irrevocable commitment to taking Melos, and instead, entered the negotiations ready to discuss interests.

Second, Zartman posits, one of the parties must demonstrate that the conflict track is too costly, and that there is another conciliatory track that is open which leads to a reasonable degree of satisfaction of the interest goals. In this case, if Athens would have been willing to modify its goals based on its true interests, a value-creating solution may have been possible. The Melians wanted self-rule, while the Athenians were interested in preserving the appearance of might, as well as gaining military access to the Peloponnese and tribute for their coffers. Though there appear to be contradictions between these two positions, the interests may not have been mutually exclusive. The Melians may have been willing to sacrifice the tenuous loyalty to the Lacedæmonians in order to maintain their sovereignty.

Without the irrevocable commitment on the part of the Athenians, the maintenance of image would not have been so large a concern. The amount of the tribute might have been negotiated. Though this may be a somewhat idealistic version of the potential of bargaining from interest, it demonstrates that with the alteration of some of the dynamics, a negotiated solution may have been possible.

Two other possibilities exist as well: when dealing with a more powerful party scholars suggest the use of third parties as intermediaries and the formation of coalitions. (Rubin and Salacuse 1990, 31). If the disputants were motivated to bring in a skilled mediator, and that mediator had the opportunity to become involved, successful negotiations may have been possible. While these are some big "ifs," the use of intervention as a means to reach a negotiated solution is well established in diplomacy. Though no neutral party appears to have been present, the use of a close ally of the Athenians may have sufficed. The actions of a skilled mediator may have proven helpful in lessening the escalation toward crisis and turning the discussion towards problem solving rather than contending.

The formation of coalitions was another overlooked opportunity. An island that was situated so close to the Peloponnese should have been weary of expansionist Athens and therefore taken stronger steps to forge alliances. The Athenians were concerned about the security of the states from which they exacted tribute. If Melos could have forged coalitions with these tributary states their negotiating power, and thus the chance of a negotiated settlement, might have been much improved. The Melians' kinship with the Lacedæmonians provided another, even greater opportunity. The Lacedæmonians represented a powerful alliance of states that did not exact tributary payments.

All of these opportunities constituted avenues that the Athenians and Melians left unexplored.

Conclusion

Clearly, the *Melian Dialogue* demonstrates how not to use power. The Athenians, who had economic and military might, exercised their power recklessly at the negotiating table. They used coercive techniques, irrevocable commitments, and hard positional bargaining throughout the negotiations. This lack of wisdom created a dynamic that caught both Athens and Melos in a spiral of crisis negotiations, ending in conflict and destruction. Had the Athenians considered that too much power can sometimes be a liability, they may have treaded more lightly.

The Melians, on the other hand, overestimated their best alternative to a negotiated agreement, assuming that the Lacedæmonians would intervene on their behalf. This miscalculation, coupled with Melos' failure to grasp the irrevocability of the Athenian commitment, explains why they chose to engage in hard positional bargaining. Melos should have recognized that the Athenians, by creating a climate of crisis, were unable to go home empty-handed. This provided the Melians with significant negotiating power which they did not use wisely, as the final outcome demonstrates.

The belief that physical strength translates to negotiating power was proven faulty. Like an untempered poker player dealt a straight flush, the Athenians overplayed their hand. By pushing too hard and not understanding the subtleties of negotiation, they did not reach the desired outcome. The Melians who drew a better hand than they originally held, underplayed their position. In the final analysis, the Athenians won the gamble for Melos; however, their winnings were limited by the way both sides played their hands.

NOTES

1. For the sake of convenience, and in order to fully concentrate on the analysis of the process, the dialogue is enclosed in its entirety as Appendix A.

2. They point out that his negative depiction of the Athenians in the dialogue is not based on reality but is, instead, a result of his disillusion with his native city. Thucydides had been exiled from Athens after allegedly failing as a general in command.

While these concerns are relevant from a historical perspective, they are of little significance in this analysis.

3. Though not noted by Thucydides, the Athenians may have tried repeatedly to urge the Melians to the negotiating table.

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