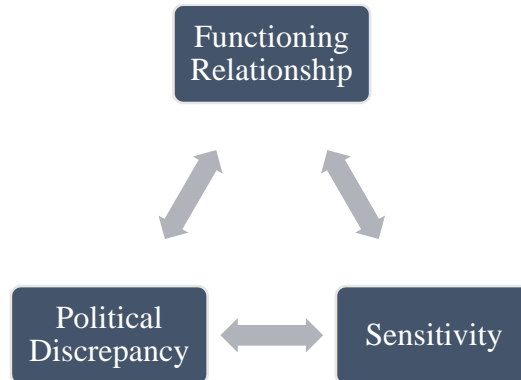


# International Relations Trilemma

by Sandra Wolf & Janick Palki



It was a Twitter post by Donald Trump that made us think about this topic. In this post the president of the United States threatened the Iran. He wrote that “if Iran attacks an American Base, or any American, we will be sending some of that brand new beautiful [military] equipment their way ... and without hesitation.”. In this trilemma, we decided on “Functioning Relationship”, “Sensitivity” and “Political Discrepancy” as the three parts. However, it is always a matter of definition and interpretation. But we assume that it is clear that in this situation, the US and Iran do not have a well-functioning relationship. Interestingly, only three days after Trump’s threat, Iran attacked US-troops that were based in Iraq. Now Trump faces a dilemma - making his threat become reality or tolerating the counter attack of Iran? As you can see, relationships depend heavily on the sensitivity. Sensitivity means, how strict you assess the actions of the other party. Which actions these are can also be interpreted in different ways. It can be physical – like the Iranian attack – but for example the detection of lies can also have a massive impact on the relationship. So according to the quote of Chernobyl, what the cost of lies are, it can be interpreted that in a sensitive relationship, the cost of lies could be the sacrifice of the functioning relationship.

Now, coming to the trilemma, we take a look at the first scenario. If two countries have a good and functioning relationship – this can mean that they just live peacefully side by side, but can also mean that the two countries trade a lot and are good tradepartners – and they are very sensitive with the actions of the counterparty, then there is no real room for political discrepancy. This means that both countries are not allowed to have different opinions or views on important topics.

Secondly, in the next scenario the functioning relationship needs to be sacrificed. Imagine the case, that party A reacts very sensitive to the actions of Party B. This means, that for a good relationship, no heavy conflicts are allowed. However, if there are political discrepancies, then there is no base for a functioning relationship. So when party A takes actions, that are not in line with party B's views, and B is very sensitive, then a functioning relationship cannot exist for these two parties.

Thirdly, the last scenario. If two countries want to establish a functioning relationship but they have different political opinions, they need to sacrifice their sensitivity. This means, that they need to be more tolerant to the actions of the counterparty.

Regarding the relationship between the US and Iran, it is obvious that they do not have a good or functioning relationship at the moment. They have strong interest conflicts. As you can see from the post of Donald Trump, he threatened Iran, that when they damage any American, they would feel the whole military equipment. This message shows that the situation between the both countries is very deadlocked and sensitive. So for now they sacrifice a functioning relationship in order to regulate their own objectives. It will be interesting to see how this conflict will further develop. After the attack of the Iran on US-troops in the US - after Trumps threat – Trump can either make his threat come true, so being a man of his word, or he can tolerate the attack. The latter option would mean that his reaction is less sensitive. As a result, the probability for a better relationship could increase according to this trilemma.

However, regarding Trump and his offensive approaches we believe that he will stick to the first option. This means that in the near future the conflict will probably develop and the damage that this conflict causes will further increase as well.

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