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## Keep Friends Close, but Colleagues Closer: Efficiency in the Establishment of Peace Operations



Heidi Hardt

*The speed with which international organizations establish peace operations impacts prospects for sustainable peace. This article explains why some organizations take longer than others to answer calls for intervention. It identifies the role of informal relations in a literature that has long favored formality and challenges realist assumptions that intergovernmental decisionmaking depends strictly on national interests. Based on personal interviews with fifty ambassadors at four regional organizations, the article shows that differences in response rates largely depend on the strength of interpersonal relations among decisionmakers. Despite having superior funding, the European Union remains the slowest organization to react because of its highly formalistic culture. Informal bonds of trust help account for the speed with which organizations are able to respond to crises. **KEYWORDS:** international organization, peace operations, European Union, African Union, rapid reaction.*

IN THE REALM OF MULTILATERAL CRISIS RESPONSE, DELAYS IN DECISIONMAKING can have deadly consequences. The longer that it takes for an international organization to agree on action can lead to the protraction of violence on the ground and damaged credibility for its member states. In this article, I offer an unconventional answer to the question of why some international organizations manage to respond to crises more quickly than others. The impact of speed constitutes one of several critical influences on the effectiveness of peace operations, but it has yet to be investigated. Empirical data in my study reveal that organizations with the means to rapidly respond, like the European Union (EU), do not do so when compared to others. I argue that this variation in speed is due in large part to differences among the overall interpersonal relations of decisionmakers within an organization. Those organizations where decisionmakers experience high degrees of positive social interaction and subscribe to informal social networks require less time to reach consensus. Closer informal relations facilitate trust and quicker information sharing. For example, an EU ambassador explains, “When you need to do business, it is much easier to talk to the person once you’ve talked about Formula 1 and football.”<sup>1</sup> This increased interpersonal trust widens the bargaining range but weakens the influence of national interests, in turn limiting the sway of nations’ capitals at

the expense of intergovernmental consensus. My interviews with fifty ambassadors on peace and security decisionmaking committees and with staff at four regional organizations offer evidence demonstrating the impact of interpersonal relations and corresponding informal decisionmaking on efficiency in the establishment of peace operations. These organizations include the African Union (AU), EU, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and Organization of American States (OAS). Interviews took place in the embassies and organization headquarters in four cities: Addis Ababa (AU), Brussels (EU), Vienna (OSCE), and Washington, DC (OAS). In this article, I present original empirical evidence on speed, engage and challenge current explanations, and present the central argument. I then examine empirical cases for each of the four organizations and offer conclusions.

### **Efficiency in Crisis Response**

Scholars of conflict management have yet to come to a consensus on a definition for efficiency, but this has not deterred them from making the case for its importance in influencing the success or failure of peace operations. I interpret *efficiency* in the strictest sense of the word, defining it as speed of decisionmaking toward a negotiated, unanimous agreement for action. Why does efficiency matter for interventions aimed at fostering international peace and security? Chronic delays in responding to international crises threaten the legitimacy and feasibility of cultivating sustainable peace. Ongoing internal conflicts affect regional and global security through spillover—be it through immigration, refugees, or organized crime. As months pass between the demand for an intervention and the supply of personnel on the ground, civilians continue to be subjected to violence, conflict, and political instability. Speed of response remains a significant determinant of effectiveness of peace operations on the ground. Empirical work by Michael Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis<sup>2</sup> and more recently by Virginia Page Fortna<sup>3</sup> show that overall peace operations positively affect a region's prospects for long-term stability and growth, yet to my knowledge none has investigated the decisionmaking process. The literature on international organization response duration has been limited to authors' calls for the development of rapid response capabilities,<sup>4</sup> a recommendation in the Brahimi Report,<sup>5</sup> and a recent study on bureaucracy.<sup>6</sup>

My creation of an original dataset on response rates in the post-Cold War era offers the puzzling picture of a slow but affluent EU in contrast to faster but less wealthy regional organizations such as the AU, OAS, and OSCE. Table 1 shows the average speed of response rates by four regional organizations for all seventy interventions from 1991 to 2009. I excluded fact-finding missions so the sample included civilian, military, and civilian-military interventions. I chose to do so because the organizations had engaged in all of the latter types of operation so there was variation across



**Table 1 Mean Response Rates in the Establishment of Peace Operations (in months)**

AU	EU	OAS	OSCE
3.84	6.17	4.28	4.49

*Note:* AU = African Union; EU = European Union; OAS = Organization of American States; OSCE = Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

organizations. Having compiled data from leading peace operations databases,<sup>7</sup> international news sources, and organization websites, I measured the duration between the date an operation was demanded, in the form of a UN Security Council resolution or a host country's official request and the date an operation began on the ground.

In contrast to the EU's six-month delay in establishing personnel and or troops on the ground, the African Union took just under four months and the OAS and OSCE just over four months on average. The mean of EU response rates differed from the others' mean rate at a significance level of .08. This contrasts the assumption in the literature of the EU as a *de facto* role model for crisis management because the findings reflect the organization's relatively limited ability to rapidly respond.<sup>8</sup>

### Perspectives on Speed in Decisionmaking

In the realm of international negotiations, realist scholars assert that only national interests can dictate ambassadors' actions through instructions from capitals, but the impact of personal interests remains unacknowledged. National interest trumps all in the hour of crisis as matters of high politics take on a magnitude distinct from low politics. Applying this realist logic, we could expect that interpersonal dynamics should be the first thing to be put aside when discussions turn to decisions with life-or-death consequences. Diplomats should assume a duty to their countries in debating an intervention. Even liberal realist scholars like Andrew Moravcsik, who view national agendas as varying rather than fixed, view the actions of ambassadors as motivated by shifting domestic pressures not interpersonal ones. Yet only human relations can determine who to trust as ambassadors engage in negotiations.<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Waltz writes that "the study of society cannot be separated from the study of government, or the study of man from either."<sup>10</sup> I argue that closer interpersonal relations diminish the importance of national interests in an ambassador's decisionmaking process and expand an ambassador's bargaining space in his or her effort to join peers in consensus seeking. National agendas set the parameters of negotiating, but these shift as trust among individuals comes into play.

In contrast, the fields of sociology and business academia have long recognized personal politics as an important role in negotiations, but have yet



to apply this to crisis management.<sup>11</sup> Business academia authors Paul Ingram and Xi Zou observe that scholars in their field have produced evidence that informal networks help workers and organizations to be more effective.<sup>12</sup> The pathway for increasing effectiveness in businesses is the same as in international organizations: more communication increases trust, which facilitates information sharing. While Ingram and Zou cite an array of authors who offer a warning against blending emotion and business, the evidence in my study confirms the advantages of doing so. The world of diplomacy has long thrived on camaraderie built around social gatherings and after work drinks. This holds true even when negotiating responses to violent crises.

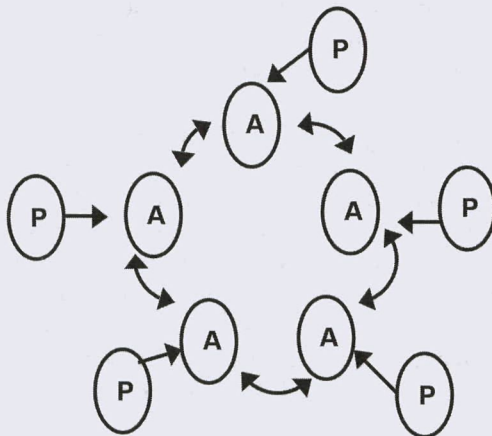
My argument for the role of interpersonal relations supports a sociological institutionalist explanation in which an intersubjective understanding among actors influences their decisionmaking.<sup>13</sup> Preexisting trust eases negotiators' ability to overcome "dysfunctionalities inherent in their interaction."<sup>14</sup> This logic of applying research on interpersonal relations to crisis decisionmaking builds on Jeffrey Checkel's framework of socialization "defined as a process of inducting actors into the norms and rules of a given community."<sup>15</sup> A history of interaction leads to trust and, in some cases, friendship. This shared history then allows ambassadors to have a wider scope in negotiation because of increased access to information and an absence of negative emotional feelings.<sup>16</sup> Friendships have the fluidity of surpassing rather than replacing political alliances and geographic alliances. Scholars such as Frédéric Mérand<sup>17</sup> and Mai'a Cross<sup>18</sup> demonstrate the impact of these interpersonal relations among decisionmakers in the context of the EU. The argument put forward here bridges this research with crisis decisionmaking by showing that such connections not only aid in consensus building, but economize time in extremely time-sensitive situations.

The relevance of individual connections for negotiating is already reflected at the global level. A senior member of the UN Secretary-General's staff calls informal, private consultation "the *real* Security Council—the place where ideas are put to the test, and where compromise is applied in solving international conflicts."<sup>19</sup> Representatives of the permanent members of the Security Council have also hosted a biweekly dinner to speak openly and in smaller groups about the issues. Even a half-century ago, interpersonal relations played a critical role at the Security Council. James Hyde writes, "The cocktail party, luncheon or dinner are occasions when information is exchanged, key people assemble to work on a draft, or 'trial balloons' are sent up. . . . They are where much of the work of an international conference is done."<sup>20</sup>

According to rational choice institutionalists, formal rules that govern the actions of ambassadors are fixed like "scripts that constrain behavior" and informal modes of operating have developed in reaction to these rules.<sup>21</sup> Here, *exogenous constraints* refer to the codified rules such as those that govern the frequency of official meetings, requisite consultations with other deci-

sionmaking bodies, and rotations of leadership. For example, the EU's requisite high frequency of meetings has deterred ambassadors from seeking out social engagements. However, principal-agent theory from the rationalist literature cannot explain variation in speed of response because information asymmetries exist across all organizations. The theory instead can help explain how interpersonal relationships affect ambassadors' decisionmaking with respect to their capitals. In Robert Putnam's two-level game, state capitals absorb domestic preferences in policymaking, but interactions at the international level involve a balance of more than domestic and international interests because personal interests play a role as well. Principal-agent theory examines scenarios in which an agent takes actions that the principal cannot observe and an optimal outcome depends on an optimal amount of risk sharing between the two, but does not account for interactions among agents.<sup>22</sup> Principals represent the governments of member states and agents represent their corresponding ambassadors at the organization's peace and security committee. Information asymmetry characterizes the relationship between principals and the agents that they oversee. Terry Moe writes that this "control cannot be perfect, because the informational advantage gives bureaucrats the power to engage in some measure of noncompliant behavior."<sup>23</sup> Specifically, ambassadors have an advantage in terms of their expertise, given their experience on the job and their "private information." For example, ambassadors receive early warning alerts from the respective secretariat about political situations in the region, the status of peace operations, and the viability of various responses to crisis. Capitals have only the information that their ambassadors pass back to them and the outside information that they receive about specific crises. (See Figure 1.)

**Figure 1** Adapting Principal-Agent Theory to International Negotiations





The evidence that I found in this survey of ambassadors indicates that the principal has surprisingly much less control than previously assumed by realists who expect agents' actions to be defined by national interests. However, the agent—through socialization with other agents—is incentivized to make decisions based on the most credible information possible because of trust in the expertise and knowledge of colleagues and friends. The cost for principals to monitor agents is high so the result often consists of the agent's actions diverting from the principal's expectations.

Nonetheless, this impact of interpersonal relations among agents remains absent from debates on principal-agent theory in intergovernmental contexts. Here, we see that relations among agents can equally tear away control from the principals. This occurs as ambassadors share more information and become increasingly more expert than their delegating authorities.<sup>24</sup> Ambassadors motivated by personal interests in turn serve a key interest of the organization—to enhance peace and security. (All four of the organizations referenced the objective of enhancing peace and security in their respective charters and conventions.) Greater agency can therefore increase the overall efficiency of the decisionmaking process.<sup>25</sup>

### **Interpersonal Relations: A New Explanation for Speed**

In order to test the argument that different modes of interpersonal relations explained different response rates, I found face-to-face interviews to be the best method for accessing information about decisionmaking that takes place in closed-door meetings and in private get-togethers among ambassadors.<sup>26</sup> Ambassadors were the individuals most active in negotiations on the establishment of an operation, but organizations offered no public meeting notes or open sessions. I asked ambassadors to respond to survey questions that were both quantitative (e.g., frequency of informal communication) and qualitative (e.g., routines, practices, and relations), and told them only that the interview would concern decisionmaking to minimize bias. From qualitative data, I mapped out decisionmaking and where trust was concentrated. From quantitative data, I identified patterns and modes of interaction.<sup>27</sup> Frequency of informal communications served as a metric for measuring the strength of interpersonal relations. I did not interview heads of state because they were not in as frequent communication on these types of issue and because securing a significant number of interviews was beyond the limitations of this study.

Analyses of the evidence from the fifty interviews point to two key findings that challenge previous understandings of how international organizations make decisions in the peace and security realm. First, interpersonal relations through friendships and networks among decisionmakers can help speed up decisionmaking, even in reacting to crises. Ambassadors reported that, about half of the time, their first phone call following a crisis was not to the capital



but to a fellow ambassador they could trust; that is, a friend. As one ambassador explains, "It's easier if you have a better personal relation. It is much easier to approach the guy and ask, 'Listen what do you think about it because we have a problem here. . . . Can you just talk to your people back home?'"<sup>28</sup> This contrasts state-based assumptions about how international negotiations reflect aggregate state interests and conflicts with realist and neorealist interpretations of the role of ambassadors as purely state-driven actors.

Reflecting survey responses by ambassadors, Table 2 shows that representatives at three of the four organizations (AU, OAS, and OSCE) have benefited from closer interpersonal relations in their respective peace and security decisionmaking committees, whereas EU representatives have experienced fewer informal interactions. I measured interpersonal trust in an organization in terms of both the frequency of informal communication and the discursive content of their discussions of their own interpersonal dynamics in the decisionmaking process. The frequency with which ambassadors communicated outside of formal meetings provides insight into the differences in how socialized the groups of decisionmakers were. This measure captured all of an ambassador's general communications with other acting ambassadors in the respective committee—from working lunches to weekend soccer matches to weekly dinners with members of the same subregion. Table 2 reveals that AU ambassadors interacted the most frequently outside of formal meetings whereas the EU ambassadors did so the least frequently. This supports the discursive anecdotes shared by ambassadors across organizations that EU interpersonal relations were overall more formal in contrast to those of the other organizations where relations were described as fraternal and familial.

Second, findings indicate that frequent formal meetings and structures may inadvertently make the process of peace operations decisionmaking less efficient. Scholars previously assumed that the introduction of such formal structures would facilitate interaction and, by default, consensus building. Rather, a requisite high frequency of such meetings restricts the time decisionmakers have to socially interact and, thus, carry out diplomacy in privacy. Despite a requirement of attending official meetings twice a week, ambassadors at the EU Political and Security Committee meet on

**Table 2** Frequency of Communication Among Ambassadors  
(per week, outside of formal meetings)

	AU	EU	OAS	OSCE
Mean	6.60	5.38	6.20	6.22
Median	7.00	5.00	7.00	7.00
Mode	7.00	5.00	7.00	7.00

*Note:* AU = African Union; EU = European Union; OAS = Organization of American States; OSCE = Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

average every other day. In contrast, ambassadors to the AU, OAS, and OSCE enjoyed ample time to socialize and, therefore, build trust in one another for the purposes of exchanging private information.

Ultimately, these decisionmakers shaped their positions in reaction both to instructions from their capitals and to the information, opinions, and advice gained through professional relations. In the interviews, ambassadors indicated that two key factors influence their most critical decisions: informal communication and informal networks. Trust, developed over time with certain colleagues, facilitates more frequent and valuable information transactions. I found that friendships had more of an impact than collegial relationships on consensus building. About 91 percent of ambassadors interviewed asserted that their friendships with other ambassadors significantly mattered in their decisionmaking, particularly in times of crisis. Additionally, 85 percent reported that their most important negotiations happened not in formal meetings, but informally in either bilateral or subregional talks. This informal work was done through bilateral and multilateral face-to-face meetings in delegations as much as it was done over shared lunches and tennis matches.

Stronger interpersonal relations in a given committee reflects a socialization effect wherein the term *socialization* is taken literally to mean enhanced social interaction, as opposed to the common normative interpretation in the sociology literature. The impact of the informal level in international organizations remains understudied. Scholars have instead privileged formalized sets of rules by devoting disproportionate attention to them—either intentionally or because of logistical limitations—and suggested that formalized organizations such as the EU are more effective than those that are less formalized.<sup>29</sup> Informal communications, which manifest themselves in the form of interpersonal relations, and informal networks shape the ways in which ambassadors negotiate on peace operations.<sup>30</sup> Differences in how organizations have internalized these factors help to explain variation in regional organization performance.

### *Personal Versus National Interest*

Surprisingly, evidence from my interviews and field research demonstrated that ambassadors' personal relations did not correlate with their member states' political alliances. Rational choice institutionalists would expect states (here, ambassadors) to seek out and employ all possible venues for maximizing national interest. From this perspective, when ambassadors engage in friendships, they do so rationally for political reasons and, in particular, to persuade others to support their national interest. However, this was not the case in this study. Ambassadors of regional hegemonic states (e.g., Nigeria and Brazil) at the AU and OAS, respectively, shared weekends and coffee with ambassadors of smaller, less powerful states. Specifically, according to these interviews, the biggest players in each organization included: Nigeria



and South Africa<sup>31</sup> at the AU; Britain, France, and Germany at the EU;<sup>32</sup> the US, Russian, and EU presidency at the OSCE;<sup>33</sup> and the United States, Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico at the OAS.<sup>34</sup> Although each member state has an equal vote and all retain the right to veto, it is understood that smaller states will side with certain larger states in the formal meeting room. What is unusual is that these larger states and smaller states establish positive personal relations, even when it is not in their mutual political interest to do so. The repeat game promotes incentives for cooperation, but also poses a loyalty problem. On one hand ambassadors intend to follow their capitals' instructions, but on the other they are motivated by prestige and peer pressure to honor trust among colleagues and be flexible in negotiating.

Equally important is the effect of the absence of positive personal relations. Ambassadors of two<sup>35</sup> of the EU's "Big Three" states (France, Germany, and the United Kingdom) rarely met informally because of a personal, mutual dislike for one another despite the incomparable strength of their countries' bilateral relationship. Staff complained that they were left to themselves to carry out almost all bilateral negotiations and that this substantially slowed down dealings between the delegations. Irrespective of an individual state's national interest, socialization benefited the interest of the regional organization through the facilitation of consensus building toward solutions for international peace and security.

Lloyd Shapley and Martin Shubik's study of distributed power in a committee system defines "the power of an individual member as depending on the chance he [or she] has in being critical to the success of a winning coalition."<sup>36</sup> Yet if big player states' relative capacity and military capability truly served as indicators of their probability to succeed in furthering a particular political agenda, then there would be no need to informally consult with smaller member states because their clout would be sufficient in itself to convince them to fall in line. Evidence in the field of conflict management points to the contrary.

#### *Informal Alliances: Good Friends Share Secrets*

Ambassadors gather in informal contexts along the lines of shared identities. As with the development of any interpersonal relation, these friendships tended to be created from a multitude of motivations from shared culture, shared language, shared worldview, shared gender to even shared affinity for a sport. Examples include the OSCE Serbian ambassador's close friendship with the Dutch ambassador because of a regular ladies luncheon and the OSCE Slovenian ambassador's informal relationship with the Russian ambassador because of shared knowledge of language. Some ambassadors reported feeling obligated to make an attempt at friendships with ambassadors with whom they shared a strong, historical link, but this was not reflected as a key variable when friendships were measured within committees.



In all cases reported, friendships reduced information asymmetries by facilitating information sharing through the enhancement of overall knowledge, development of intelligence, and establishment of what the negotiating boundaries were for one another. Ambassadors described having friendships with an average of five other ambassadors in a given committee, whereas one ambassador expressed not having any friendships in the committee. As one ambassador put it, "sometimes you feel comfortable with certain representatives. When it comes to informal discussions, sometimes you feel more comfortable discussing certain issues."<sup>37</sup> I defined a *friend* as one who an ambassador trusted and spent time with outside of meetings. Ambassadors across organizations elaborated on this to say that friends were those who they could call late in the evening for clarification, information swapping, or simply to chat.<sup>38</sup> The motivation to share more information tended to reflect more of an emotional state-of-being rather than a fixed incentive. That is, ambassadors shared more when they simply felt comfortable enough in the personal relationship to do so. As in everyday life, time spent socializing cultivates interpersonal trust. One ambassador summarizes the role of personal politics in efficiency in crisis decisionmaking as: "I very often think it has nothing to do with the hard lines that have been set by the national positions but it's the personality of the person that makes it easier or harder."<sup>39</sup>

The literature has consistently reduced decisionmaker motivations to furthering national interest. Scholarly references to human emotion or feelings in studies of international cooperation have been discarded as warm and fuzzy concepts holding no real bearing on state decisionmaking. On the contrary, trust is the currency that humans use to cooperate. With trust, ambassadors were able to share sensitive information that they would not otherwise share. The nature of information could include intelligence learned at an informal meeting of NATO member delegations to the OSCE or a country's true reservation limit on a particular agreement. This can have direct consequences on whether or not states decide to agree on a peace operation.

### *Informal Networks: For Socializing . . . and Negotiating*

Beyond bilateral informal communications and even friendships, ambassadors had institutionalized informal regular meetings through social networks, and these meetings served as forums where critical, private negotiations to take place. With respect to pursuing their objectives as diplomats, ambassadors viewed informal forums as a means for removing the threat of their positions being "on record." Instead, the forums allowed ambassadors to be open about their actual reservation limits and their room for maneuver. Informal forums also exist for a social purpose: they make people happier. According to scholarship in economics, "joining a group that meets just once a month produces the same increase in happiness as doubling your income."<sup>40</sup>

In his work on informal agreements, Charles Lipson describes how networks are an ad hoc means to an end, with “no intention (and no realistic possibility) of extending them to wider issues, other actors, longer time periods, or more formal obligations.”<sup>41</sup> Yet these informal networks seem to have done exactly the opposite by surviving diplomatic rotations. Without formal obligations, subgroups of peace and security committees regularly spent leisure time together, discussing politics over tennis, coffee, and the like. They were only ad hoc by creation. Rather, my interviews with ambassadors indicated that the groups were relatively stable, despite periodic rotations by ambassadors to other posts. As aforementioned, such groups formed based on a shared sense of communal identity (e.g., language, gender, region, and sport). Each ambassador wore many hats representing each of the different identities he or she adopted. The networks that an ambassador chose to engage reflects which hat had been chosen. These determine how ambassadors personally identified with a group within the group. This subgroup shaped negotiations because it determined with whom an ambassador spoke privately.

At the most basic level, *networks* are defined as “a set of interconnected nodes.”<sup>42</sup> *Nodes* can be understood here to mean individual member state ambassadors whereas *connections or links* represent interpersonal relationships. In other words, networks constrain and enable behavior.<sup>43</sup> Ambassadors’ weekly group dinners and informal meetings of like-minded states did just this. They strengthened existing single links between nodes and created new ties as new ambassadors rotated in. Trust acted as the mechanism for allowing interpersonal relationship linkages to develop.

To understand the sustainability of these social networks, it is helpful to draw a comparison of an ambassador’s respective social network to the system described by Ian Hurd in his seminal book *After Anarchy*. Hurd writes that, in a system based primarily on self-interest, actors’ loyalty to the system depends on the system eliciting from them a series of benefits while they continuously reconsider the payoffs of staying in the system. “Such a system can be stable while the payoff structure is in equilibrium.” Second, Hurd writes that “long-term relationships between self-interested agents are difficult to maintain because actors do not value the relation itself, only the benefits accruing from it.”<sup>44</sup> Even if we assume that ambassadors are purely self-interested, it would still behoove them to remain in their respective social networks because payoffs are independent from the political shifts at the peace and security committees. In other words, if a crisis or change in government occurs that forces member states to reevaluate their political positions, this would not interfere with social payoffs that ambassadors receive on the individual level from social dinners. Adapting Hurd’s last statement above, ambassadors at regional organizations did place value on the personal



relationships they shared with fellow ambassadors, and this value was in addition to value they put on the intangible benefits they received—including greater access to information and ample opportunities to socialize and gossip.

These social networks also inherently reflect power through their connections. A state's power depends not only on its respective capabilities, but on its structural position in the network with other agents.<sup>45</sup> This suggests that states with less capacity can compensate for their lower status by influencing decisionmaking on peace operations by becoming the most well-connected members of the organization.

### **Trust as Facilitator**

Trust was the primary causal mechanism for determining the strength of personal relations among ambassadors and facilitating information sharing. Decisionmakers at each of these four regional organizations took advantage of opportunities to negotiate outside of formal contexts, and it was through these interactions that trust developed. Such interpersonal trust was ultimately responsible for cementing the relationships that facilitated quicker negotiations. Rather than limiting conversations to the time before weekly or biweekly meetings, ambassadors creatively responded to existing formal procedures to establish different standardized means and modes for socializing and negotiating. With respect to developing such friendships outside of work, former US ambassador Edward Djerejian explains that creating such personal bonds was a technique for establishing "pre-emptive trust." In this way, when a crisis occurred, an ambassador could lean on those fellow ambassadors for credible information. He explained, "If you don't build relations between other ambassadors, you're going to be stymied."<sup>46</sup> Business scholars Rajesh Kumar and Verner Worm have shown that preexisting relationships represents one of the ways that negotiators succeed in overcoming "expectational inconsistencies inherent in the intercultural negotiation process."<sup>47</sup> This is because "prior interactions may have engendered trust or distrust among the negotiators."

### *The Cloak of Privacy in Diplomacy*

Privacy represents a secondary causal mechanism for facilitating interpersonal relations. The development of interpersonal trust not only depends on a time investment in socializing, but on an environment of privacy. In informal negotiations, diplomatic privacy provides an environment of openness among ambassadors and this openness allows for an agreement to be found more rapidly. Whereas *privacy* in these informal negotiations refers to discussions held outside of formal meetings and thus away from fellow ambassadors, the majority of scholarly literature on diplomatic privacy focuses on whether



negotiations take place away from the public domain. In November 2010, the WikiLeaks publication of almost 2,000 secret US diplomatic cables reawakened this centuries-long debate over the costs and benefits of transparency in diplomacy. David Stasavage refers to this as open- and closed-door bargaining.<sup>48</sup> Proponents have emphasized that transparency holds governments accountable to the public for their national positions and actions whereas those supporting privacy emphasize the benefits for efficiency of decisionmaking. In spite of Woodrow Wilson's call for "open covenants of peace, openly arrived at," formal meetings on peace and security at regional organizations are still conducted in closed-door sessions, just as are the meetings of the UN Security Council.<sup>49</sup> The AU, EU, and OSCE meetings are not open to the public, and the OAS meetings are open or closed depending on if the chair or any of the thirty-five representatives requests the meeting to be closed.<sup>50</sup>

Both forms of transparency—openness to the public through open-door meetings and openness to the committee on peace and security—impede speed of decisionmaking because, under the circumstances of public oversight, (1) ambassadors are less willing to compromise and (2) they are less willing to propose creative but risky solutions to political problems. There are two important parallels that can be drawn from the literature on diplomatic transparency and applied to the case of informal negotiations.

First, ambassadors who enjoy privacy in their communications among themselves have more flexibility in their bargaining position. Describing negotiations at the European Council of Ministers, Stasavage reflects this as "the idea that open negotiations might make national representatives less likely to move away from their initial positions, triggering a greater incidence of bargaining breakdowns."<sup>51</sup> Second, under the condition of private negotiations, ambassadors are less concerned with prestige and thus are less likely to "posture." Because almost all formal peace and security committee meetings take place behind closed doors,<sup>52</sup> ambassadors do not feel pressure to commit to uncompromising positions as they would if negotiating under the public eye. This avoids direct conflict in the official session. Engaging in informal negotiations outside of formal meetings represents the next level of privacy. In informal networks or small groupings, ambassadors find less pressure to posture in front of their peers and to present themselves as fixed on certain national interests. Instead, they rely on interpersonal trust to share their instructions from capitals and even abandon them on certain points where need be. This complements the findings from my interviews with regional organization ambassadors, in which the ambassadors stressed the importance of maintaining prestige in the eyes of fellow committee members. By limiting discussions to only a few ambassadors, this pressure was alleviated. The following examination of the four organizations illustrates the impact of these bonds of interpersonal relations in practice on efficiency of decisionmaking.

*The European Union*

As noted above, the EU Political and Security Committee exhibits a more formalistic institutional culture when compared to the committees of other similar regional organizations. Robert Keohane reminds us that "institutions should both constrain states, through the operation of rules, and provide them with opportunities to cooperate."<sup>53</sup> The high frequency of formal committee meetings constrains ambassadors' time and their desire for engaging in the socializing and critical negotiations that take place therein. "They meet so often," said one diplomat, "they want to see new faces when they go out in the evenings. That's the reality."<sup>54</sup> Meetings occur on average every other day and the minimum requirement is two times per week, as shown in Table 3. In contrast, other organizations hold formal meetings much less frequently. Additionally, the EU committee reflected formality with respect to the perceptions of ambassadors about their own work environment. They referred to one another as "colleagues," "not friends," and cited the "respect" they had for one another, which contrasted with environments composed of familial and fraternal bonds at the other organizations that I examined.

In situations where political tensions are high, interpersonal relations can facilitate a breakthrough depending on whether they are positive or negative. With respect to the EU Political and Security Committee several ambassadors confidently stated that, until the blocking behavior by Cyprus is solved, the EU will systematically no longer cooperate with NATO on peace operations, making moot the Berlin Plus agreements.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, the Political and Security Committee ambassadors equally expressed having cool interpersonal relations with the Cypriot ambassador. This hampered attempts to carry out negotiations informally. Cyprus refuses to engage in NATO cooperation so long as Turkey is a NATO member and the conflict over Cypriot territory

**Table 3 Organizational Characteristics of Peace and Security Decisionmaking Committees**

	Size	Institution	Agenda-setting Powers	Expertise and Support	Formal Meetings
AU	53	Peace and Security Council	Presidency and Commission	Commission	2x/month
EU	27	Political and Security Committee	EU presidency	European Council secretariat	2x/week
OAS	35	Permanent Council	Permanent Council chairmanship	Secretariat	2x/month
OSCE	56	Permanent Council	Permanent Council chairmanship	Secretariat	1x/week

*Note:* AU = African Union; EU = European Union; OAS = Organization of American States; OSCE = Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.



remains unresolved. Yet a recent example involving negotiations on the EU Mission Atalanta illustrates how one key friendship facilitated a compromise despite the collegial, rather than friendly, atmosphere. Negotiations on establishing the antipiracy mission were stopped because Cyprus refused to allow for any EU cooperation with NATO despite discussion on using NATO helicopters and equipment. Such blockages cost precious time. The motion was tabled until a solution was found among EU states to rely solely on EU assets, but maintain lines of communication. Cyprus felt compelled to maintain its hardline position but, thanks to a rare friendship with a representative of one of the Eastern European member states, the two representatives were able to work out a solution that ensured that the mission would proceed.

Echoed by ambassadors at other organizations, the majority of EU ambassadors described having a familiarity with the other ambassadors' worldviews and their stances on broad issues. One identifies the typical geopolitical interests of many of the member states that play out at the Political and Security Committee: "Germany doesn't like missions in Africa. France is always pressing for missions in Africa in Congo. Greece is very interested in missions on Balkans, which is not the case for Lithuania. It depends where you're situated on the map. Big countries are always protagonists; there are minor actors in concrete areas. Greece is active in the Western Balkans and less perhaps in the Caucasus while it's not the case in Afghanistan, but [Greece is] active in Somalia."<sup>56</sup> They also "know which are the red lines for [each] delegation," says one ambassador.<sup>57</sup> "We know more or less which are the biases of each country," says another. "There are sensitive issues that we know that we cannot do a direct approach."<sup>58</sup> Informal communications and the further solidifying of personal relations are even more necessary for sensitive issues, yet the EU proved lacking in these.

### *The African Union*

In contrast to the formalistic nature of EU decisionmaking, the AU, OAS, and OSCE carry out critical decisionmaking in informal settings and exhibit strong positive interpersonal relations. Due to the high degree of social interaction, smaller states like Gabon through networking can exert as much influence as Nigeria, Africa's regional hegemon, on the search for consensus. With closer relationships, one AU ambassador explains, "You tend to be more expressive and that certainly helps us all understand better the situation that we are dealing with."<sup>59</sup> The AU Peace and Security Council typically meets along subregional lines outside of regular meetings in one of the member states' embassies. One ambassador remarks, "The first criteria of informal contact is the subregion. It's the region. It's not the language, it's first the region."<sup>60</sup> A formal requirement for the Peace and Security Council to represent all five of the African subregions (North, South, East, West, and Central) corresponds with the informal ties that have developed at the subregional



level. As in the OAS, there are also subsidiary subregional organizations that exist, such as the Rio Group and the Latin American Association of Integration (ALADI), and these help determine which states identify with which subregion.<sup>61</sup> Yet these are typically economic organizations and up to three of such organizations may fit in one geographic subregion, as is the case in West Africa with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade (EGAT); and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA).<sup>62</sup> Therefore, it is the AU Peace and Security Council ambassadors who are responsible for summarizing and truly representing the views of the respective subregion. Ambassadors elected to represent the North African member states meet informally at a different ambassador's embassy prior to each AU meeting of the Peace and Security Council. "North Africa has its group. They harmonize their point of view."<sup>63</sup>

Friendships enabled communication to pervade typical subregional social networks, connected ambassadors from different backgrounds and geography, and increased the number of channels of communication, thereby enhancing the institution's overall efficiency. An AU ambassador explains this phenomenon: "I am from the West African region. I naturally have closer relationships with the ambassadors from the West but I also have close relationships with other ambassadors. I do not limit myself to contact with my brothers of the West. They are my brothers but also my friends. Sometimes your friends become even closer than your brother. It's necessary to be open."<sup>64</sup>

More specifically, across organizations, ambassadors agree that friendships matter "in an informal way."<sup>65</sup> They repeatedly offered anecdotes of how, whenever necessary, they called their ambassador friends at a late hour and inquired privately about the sessions and the issues. Friendships allowed ambassadors opportunities to clear up confusion in the formal sessions and warn each other when others had not understood the position presented. "It means that this kind of informal body-to-body talking gives the opportunity to say perhaps I should go back and do some more explanation or perhaps I should go back to my capital."<sup>66</sup>

### *The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe*

As mentioned above, the OSCE also is more informally institutionalized than the other organizations in this study. OSCE ambassadors informally met weekly in respective groupings by their NATO, EU, and GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova) membership, providing an opportunity for intelligence sharing and trust building. Socialization has a different impact depending on just how social a given committee is. At the OSCE such frequent social interactions are standard and solutions are found, as at the AU and OAS, through informal meetings and communications. One OSCE ambassador reports that after deciding to keep count, she recorded having 150 lunches and dinners with other ambassadors in one year. This comes to an average of 3 per week.<sup>67</sup>

An OSCE charge<sup>68</sup> reiterates this need for interpersonal trust to be established a priori by recounting how he guided his staff in a crisis: "We said early on as the crisis developed you got to reach out to the mission, start calling up people and getting to know them and establish a much more robust relationship than you might have. If Albania or Moldova blew up at that moment, you better start thinking about who you need to know at the mission so if the demand comes, you've got people now who not only know what the US mission is but they know who Joe Schmoe is and will pay attention."<sup>69</sup>

Rather than flat decisionmaking, negotiations in these more informal organizations empirically appear to have occurred in layers of networks of trust. For example, the process of OSCE ambassadors informally organizing and carrying out weekly meetings among like-minded states has been institutionalized over time to become part of the *modus operandi* of the organization. Multiple weekly, informal meetings of various groups of states constitute these layers of networks.

As mentioned earlier, gender constituted one commonality that motivated OSCE ambassadors to assemble their own informal network in the form of what they call a monthly ladies luncheon. Female ambassadors continue to be a minority in the realm of diplomacy. By late 2011, women constituted 7 percent of the AU Peace and Security Council; 26 percent of the EU Political and Security Committee; 23 percent of the OAS Permanent Council; and 25 percent of the OSCE Permanent Council. One of the OSCE female ambassadors describes the ladies luncheon as "a very constructive exchange of views" where ambassadors were "pragmatic and solution-oriented" in their discussion and even negotiated over relevant security issues that were facing the OSCE. She remarks that she has had the most contact with her fellow female ambassadors: "I can say they are my friends. I can call them at anytime and ask them something and get information."<sup>70</sup> Friendships reinforce the critical asset of trust in negotiations and facilitate quicker back-door deals.

While ambassadorial friendships tend to develop haphazardly through common interests or culture, they can be powerful conduits for ambassadors to access information to which they would not have otherwise been privy. In one example at the OSCE, several non-EU state ambassadors lamented the difficulties of negotiating at the OSCE because all EU states are required to adopt a common position. Since EU members make up 48 percent of the OSCE membership, this means that non-EU members have to find ways of negotiating with the EU states as a block. One way is to befriend the EU state members who will likely be most influential in shaping the common EU position. The Serbian ambassador to the OSCE describes how she became close friends with an EU member state delegation to the OSCE through a ladies luncheon that takes place every two weeks. This in itself was surprising. It remains to be said that, at the time, their governments' bilateral relations were far from warm because of lingering controversies over the mass murder at



Srebrenica and the fruitless efforts by Dutch UN peacekeepers to stop it. In addition to emphasizing how much she enjoyed the other's company on a personal level, the non-EU ambassador was able to gain insider information on upcoming EU positions and to learn some of the information shared only among EU members. This helped her to be better informed on formulating her own position as well as on how to negotiate with the EU members themselves. Numerous similar cases of unlikely friendships existed at other regional organizations, which indicates further that personal friendships matter to formulating negotiated outcomes even when debating issues related to peace and security.

### *The Organization of American States*

As at the OAS, ambassadors of smaller states gain through social interaction access to larger states that they would not have in a more formalistic environment. Although not exactly popularity contests, social networks provide smaller states leverage through socialization. At the OAS, five of the ten ambassadors interviewed mentioned their positive and personal informal relationship with the Canadian ambassador, which suggests that Canada has strengthened its social power and in turn its negotiating power at the Permanent Council. The US ambassador to the OAS equally cited three ambassadors as close friends, but that they failed to offer strong political leverage to the United States at the time. Ambassadors at the OAS described a fraternal sense of community and in interviews referred to one another as "brothers" and "sisters."

Member state ambassadors also organically socialize with ambassadors from neighboring states that often share a common geopolitical history and sometimes even linguistic commonalities. Individuals migrate toward familiar territory. At the OAS, embracing cultural familiarity has been institutionalized as a standard part of the decisionmaking procedure. During the breaks that take place in Permanent Council meetings, ambassadors congregate in their respective subregions for informal talks. This is referred to as "an informal mechanism of sub-regional groups."<sup>71</sup> They provide their subregional input in the process and eventually a common agreement is found among these subregional positions when the Permanent Council meeting resumes. At the OAS, approximately 70 percent to 75 percent of these negotiations take place in such informal groupings outside of the formal Permanent Council meetings. An OAS ambassador observes, "It is very difficult to negotiate a sensitive document in the plenary because people are not going to be able to speak freely, first of all because everything is on the record."<sup>72</sup>

A March 2008 interstate dispute represents a case in which preexisting bonds of trust among OAS ambassadors succeeded in securing a consensus in crisis response. The Colombian army's raid of a rebel base in Ecuador triggered these deliberations at the Permanent Council. On one hand, the Colom-

bian government accused the Ecuadorian government of aiding the activities of the rebels by taking on actions with “the characteristics of hostage trafficking.”<sup>73</sup> Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa publicly declared, “My government has a zero-tolerance policy towards the FARC; zero tolerance for any armed irregular group in our territory.”<sup>74</sup> As accusations of a breach of sovereignty arose, diplomats met bilaterally and at the subregional level to informally garner support for a resolution. Yet despite these challenges, the Colombian and Ecuadorian governments strongly expressed their interest in committing to a diplomatic solution at the initial emergency meeting of the Permanent Council. To secure a consensus, all players—ambassadors, foreign ministers, and staff—at the OAS employed informal negotiations across levels of hierarchy and at headquarters as well as consulting with those on the ground through the already present OAS mission to Colombia. Within four days, the OAS Permanent Council reached a consensus among all member states, including Colombia and Ecuador, to send a commission to investigate. In just thirteen days, the commission sent back an assessment to the council. This rapid response indicates that no matter how cantankerous rhetoric becomes between two states, strong and preexisting interpersonal relations between those state representatives and mediating state representatives can overcome harsh words.

## Conclusion

In summary, the evidence that I presented in this article indicates that informal dynamics work like those of other international organizations in that interpersonal relations matter. The fact that regional organizations (including the AU, EU, OAS, and OSCE) engage in hard security matters does not hinder in any way the interpersonal relations that drive negotiations. What is surprising is that the severity of the negotiations (e.g., life or death decisions from the inception of a peace operation) seems to have had no impact on these informal relations. Rather, interpersonal trust is the first factor to which ambassadors default. They communicate informally even more frequently when confronting crises, and more communication helps speed things up in seeking a deal. Ambassadors at the regional organizations involved in international peace and security also continue to socialize bilaterally and in networks, as they do in international organizations in other domains of economics and trade. Conversely, this positive impact on efficiency is not exhibited by the EU due to its predominantly formalized culture. The collegial atmosphere and high frequency of EU formal meetings prevented ambassadors from establishing the same degree of trust as at other regional organizations.

Several policy implications can be drawn from my findings on how regional organizations establish peace operations. These focus on informing



decisionmakers on how to organize so as to maximize the efficiency of their negotiations. First, organizations may best be served by directing more attention to nurturing preexisting informal linkages among decisionmakers by reducing the frequency of required formal meetings so as to encourage more positive interpersonal relations to develop. Second, elite decisionmakers in regional organizations need to collectively acknowledge the importance of speed for long-term effectiveness in the establishment of peace operations through actions rather than words. Third, the efficiency of decisionmaking on peace operations could be equally improved by the institutionalization of lessons learned in each regional organization. Currently, no formal mechanism exists as such to capture these organizations' institutional memory.

Ultimately, interpersonal friendships matter to the efficient establishment of peace operations. Scholars need to recognize that the decisionmaking taking place in regional organizations, and likely all international organizations, that intervenes abroad in the name of peace cannot be simplistically modeled as an aggregate of national interests. Rather the institutions in these organizations comprise webs of social networks linked by informal communication and cemented by trust. These networks and personal alliances color how ambassadors relate to one another and determine with whom they negotiate and with whom they do not. They also determine an ambassador's first point of contact immediately after a crisis. These interpersonal factors are largely responsible for how efficiently the process of establishing a peace operation can take place. Whereas the consequences of success in finding an agreement quickly can translate into conflict prevention, the consequences of failure to find consensus rapidly can mean the continuation of unabated violence on the ground. 🌐

## Notes

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