*The Costs of Conversation: Obstacles to Peace Talks in Wartime*

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After a war breaks out, what factors influence the belligerents’ decisions about whether to talk to their enemy, and when may their position on wartime diplomacy change? How do we get from only fighting to also talking?

In “The Costs of Conversation,” Oriana Skylar Mastro argues that states are primarily concerned with the strategic costs of conversation, and these costs need to be low before combatants are willing to engage in direct talks with their enemy. Specifically, Mastro writes, leaders look to two factors when determining the strategic costs of talking to the enemy: first, will the enemy interpret openness to diplomacy as a sign of weakness? And second, if it does, how will the enemy change its military strategy in response? Only once a country is confident such a move will not convey weakness, and the enemy will not escalate or intensify the war in response, will it be willing to come to the negotiating table.

Through four primary case studies — North Vietnamese diplomatic decisions during the Vietnam War, those of China in the Korean War and Sino-Indian War, and Indian diplomatic decision-making in the latter conflict — “The Costs of Conversation”demonstrates that the nature of the strategic costs of conversation best explains the timing and nature of countries’ approach to wartime talks, and therefore when peace talks begin.

The findings have practical implications for defense planners and military strategists. In particular, it provides insights for best practices in war termination and diplomacy relevant to future contingencies involving China.

**Praise for “The Costs of Conversation”**

“Mastro forwards a new theory of when states agree to negotiate peace. She demonstrates the power of that theory through painstaking research on several conflicts in Asia. This impressive book thereby makes contributions to international relations theory, Asian studies, and diplomatic history.”

— Thomas J. Christensen, professor of international and public affairs, Columbia University

“When belligerents are winning, they’re not interested in talking; when they’re losing, they’re scared of it. So how do peace negotiations ever begin? In this ground-breaking study, Oriana Skylar Mastro explores the crucial question of when warring parties will talk to each other — and when they won’t. Packed with deep original research on major Asian conflicts, ‘The Costs of Conversation’is crucial reading for anyone interested in how wars end.”

— Gideon Rose, editor, Foreign Affairs; author, “How Wars End: Why We Always Fight the Last Battle” (Simon & Schuster, 2010)

“‘The Costs of Conversation’ tackles a theoretically and practically important question: What are the obstacles to peace talks in wartime? Analyzing three conflicts along China’s periphery in the 1950s and 1960s, Oriana Skylar Mastro finds that talk in war is not necessarily cheap. Clearly written with crisp findings, this volume will remain on international relations and foreign policy reading lists for many years.”

— David M. Lampton, Oksenberg-Rohlen Fellow, Asia Pacific Research Center, Stanford University

“Oriana Mastro’s ‘The Costs of Conversation’ is an important new contribution towards our understanding of wartime diplomacy and war termination. The book is one of the first attempts to unpack the strategic dimensions of a belligerent’s decision whether or not to engage in wartime diplomatic talks. An important read for students, scholars, and policy-makers.”

— Dan Reiter, Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of Political Science, Emory University; author, “How Wars End” (Princeton University Press, 2009)