

LEADERSHIP THROUGH FRIENDSHIP: THE DANGERS AND ADVANTAGES OF STATE LEADERS ESTABLISHING CLOSE PERSONAL RELATIONS

YURI VAN HOEF 

While the role of friendship between states has burgeoned in the last decade (Koschut & Oelsner, 2014; Prior & Van Hoef, 2018), only recently have scholars started to make sense of friendship between state leaders. The current article briefly conceptualizes friendship, and then illustrates the strengths and advantages of leaders establishing friendships with concrete examples from both the Special Relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom, and Franco-German Cooperation in the European Union, in the second part.

There is a rich philosophical tradition of making sense of friendship, dating back to Aristotle and Plato. Schmitt (2007) defined politics itself as distinguishing between friend and enemy. It has become common, from Cicero onwards, to combine utility and pleasure-friendship and set them off against the higher, ideal, form of virtue-friendship. The delusion of the concept of friend is problematic for several reasons. Scholarship suggests that we can handle a maximum of around 150 acquaintances, with an inner group of about 15–20 close friends (Sutcliffe, Dunbar, Binder, & Arrow, 2012). It is, therefore, more useful to term these other

friendly relations “partnerships,” for their quid-pro-quo nature is more akin to a business-like partnership (Van Hoef, 2014).

Friendship becomes less elusive when identifying five key components: (a) affect; (b) a grand project; (c) altruistic reciprocity; (d) moral obligations; and (e) equality. In its affect, friendship is different from the affect for a lover, as famously put by C. S. Lewis: “lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; Friends, side by side, absorbed in some common interest” (Lewis, 1960, p. 91). What friends are looking at together are “their world-building efforts” (Berenskoetter, 2014, p. 67): their grand project. Acts within a friendship can be divided between altruistic reciprocity and moral obligations. Altruistic reciprocity means that acts are made for the sake of the friendship alone, while moral obligations are active appeals for assistance. Finally, if there is no equality between the friends, there is a different social relationship: for instance, like that between client and patron.

Churchill and Roosevelt’s friendship was: highly affective (a) based on the grand project of beating

Nazi-Germany (b); both offered continuous mutual support (c and d), Roosevelt's untimely death in 1945 left the question open whether the United Kingdom would still be an equal partner (e) after the end of the war (Van Hoef, 2018). While a prerequisite for friendship, equality is also the most obstructive element for elite actors. For instance, Barack Obama has been critiqued for consistently welcoming U.S. allies with the same speeches (Friedman, 2011), which hints at inequality in the relationship.

Friendship brings dangers and advantages. The joint project, upon which the friendship is based, strengthens both the bond and the project. The Special Relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States is predicated upon the personal friendships between prime ministers and presidents. This is illustrated by the thawing of the Special Relationship under successors. Thatcher, Reagan's "principal cheerleader" (Thatcher, 2011, p. 157), could not establish a friendship with his successor George Bush (Bush & Scowcroft, 1998; Thatcher, 2002), whose Secretary of State, James Baker, saw Thatcher "as a tiresome woman offering advice that was neither wanted nor heeded" (Reitan, 2003, p. 84). In contrast, the pragmatic John Major quickly established a warm friendship with Bush. Again, the friendship was not continued by their successors: Bill Clinton resented John Major for supporting Bush in the 1992 elections (Taylor, 2006). The Special Relationship would only be rekindled under their successors, Tony Blair and George W. Bush.

Leaders must carefully balance the interests of their friends against those outside the friendship, lest outsiders resent the close relationship. The challenge of this balance is very apparent in the relationship between France and Germany. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and Helmut Schmidt established a strong friendship, yet their project of reconciliation and Europeanization dominated the other European leaders to such an extent that the other state leaders resisted Franco-German leadership (Formesyn, 1984). Their successors, François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl, established an equally strong friendship, but walked a much more careful line.

The othering effect of friendship is the major blind spot of leadership through friendship: A second is the

potential danger of moral obligations. Here too, examples from the leaders mentioned earlier prove illustrative. Kohl found Mitterrand a great ally for their political project of further Europeanization. When, in 1989, it became apparent that German Reunification was a possibility, Kohl was vexed by his friend's opposition. In the end, Kohl swayed Mitterrand to support unification, a move arguably against the interests of France (Kohl, 2005). Reagan came down on the side of the United Kingdom during the Falklands War out of friendship for Thatcher (Thatcher, 2011; Treharne, 2015).

Studying the friendships of state leaders illustrates the powerful possibilities these relationships hold for elite actors. It also shows the high risk and high reward potential of friendship: the danger of alienating key allies, and the advantages, and dangers, of moral obligations being called in, which deeply affect not only the actors themselves, but the states they represent as well.

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- Dr. Yuri van Hoef is a Lecturer in the History of International Relations at Utrecht University, who is specialized in the role of emotions in politics, specifically regarding friendship between state leaders in contemporary history. He obtained his PhD at the School of Politics and International Studies at the University of Leeds and, previously, held a lectureship in International Relations at the University of Groningen. Recent publications include, with Andrea Oelsner, "Friendship and Positive Peace: Conceptualising Friendship in Politics and International Relations" in Politics and Governance (2018), with Felix Berenskötter, "Friendship and Foreign Policy" in the Oxford Encyclopedia of Foreign Policy Analysis (2018, Oxford University Press) and "Interpreting Affect Between State Leaders: Assessing the Political Friendship Between Winston S. Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt" in Maéva Clément and Eric Sangar's Researching Emotions in International Relations (2018, Palgrave Macmillan). Communications can be directed to y.vanhoef@uu.nl.*