

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The founding elements of international relations, or as Thomas Gomart would suggest “the basic form of the diplomatic game”, is bilateral relations.¹ The role of bilateral relations in promoting national interest and structuring international negotiation has a tremendous impact on the process of international relations. Although there may be other tools such as foreign affairs ministries, embassies, and consulates, bilateral diplomacy is still the best tool for pursuing a state’s interest. It is also essential for a state to engage in international negotiation. Countries will first find their mutual interest and build it to the next level through bilateral relations. Bilateral relations are often assumed as a strategic interaction, a struggle for power in which actors are motivated by self-interest instead of a desire to be inclusive. However, the challenge in bilateral relations remains exist, where to achieve mutual interest through cooperation, both parties cannot neglect sovereignty and freedom of action.² Bilateral relations are complex, there are various potential relations based on institutional elements, from one relationship that could be considered a friendship or special relationship, there are also so-called conflictual relations.

Consequently, today’s international affairs is more volatile and unpredictable than before with new actors, issues, and interconnections in

¹ Alice Pannier. “Bilateral Relations.” *Global Diplomacy*, (2019): 19–33. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28786-3_2.

² Guillaume Devin. “Paroles de Diplomates.” *Presses de Sciences Po eBooks*, April (April 2013): 77–104. <https://doi.org/10.3917/scpo.placi.2013.01.0077>.

international affairs.³ Thus, diplomacy has become multidisciplinary, dynamic, and operational at many level with a goal to build mutually beneficial relationship with foreign countries and become the problem-solving and dispute management when bilateral relations deteriorate. For the majority of history, diplomacy was focused on bilateral relations or negotiations between two countries. However, diplomacy expanded in the 20th century, resulting in the United Nations (UN) being an international organization that promotes cooperation and resolves conflict among nations, which plays a significant role in diplomacy.⁴

The term diplomacy itself used rather loosely, some countries defined it as solely their foreign policy or foreign relations. As a hegemonic state, the United States (US) is also trying to apply the best methods of diplomacy to have proper bilateral relations with other countries. The history of US diplomacy itself can be traced back to the colonial period, which began in 1750.⁵ At the time, the US was primarily concerned with the European balance of power and the colonists' appropriation of Native American land.⁶ However, as time passed, the conflict and forms of diplomacy evolved. Individuals can now be used as diplomatic leverage by states. This is referred to as hostage diplomacy.

Every state leaders have their own way of practicing diplomacy. It also applies to the US, particularly in between the US's latest two presidents, Donald

³ Kishan Rana. "Bilateral Diplomacy." *The Encyclopedia of Diplomacy*, (May 2018): 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118885154.dipl0023>.

⁴ Rana. "Bilateral Diplomacy." *The Encyclopedia of Diplomacy*, (May 2018): 1–11.

⁵ Department of State. The Office of Electronic Information, Bureau of Public Affairs. (April 2007). <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/cp/index.htm>.

⁶ Department of State. The Office of Electronic Information, Bureau of Public Affairs. (April 2007).

Trump and Joseph Biden. Biden's direction of leadership is the opposite from Trump's, including their practice on diplomacy. "America is Back" is Joseph Biden's (Biden) favourite campaign tagline compared with Donald Trump's (Trump) "America First".⁷ The meaning of Biden's tagline is believed to be repairing the damage left by his predecessor after four years in office. Trump's "America First" has left Biden with a huge homework, starting from repairing the relations between the US with its allies, re-joining countless treaties that were abandoned by Trump, and basically resetting US's foreign policy.⁸

Biden's first move was to re-join the Paris Climate Agreement, cancelled the withdrawal from World Health Organization, and re-join the United Nations Human Rights Council.⁹ It is clear that Biden has a completely different vision for the US from Trump. One of them is regarding the human rights issue, where under the leadership of Trump, the issue would be best described as a disaster. Empowerment of white supremacists, rising hatred towards racial and religious minorities, and especially discrimination towards the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people are just few of the human rights issues emerged under Trump's leadership. Left with a tremendous burden, Biden has sought to fix the human rights issues in the US. He started by highlighting the importance of

⁷ The Editors. "U.S. Foreign Policy under Biden." World Politics Review. Available from <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/biden-us-foreign-policy/>; Internet; accessed June 12, 2023.

⁸ Steven Levingston. "Joe Biden: Foreign Affairs | Miller Center." Millercenter.org. Available from <https://millercenter.org/president/biden/foreign-affairs>; Internet; accessed June 12, 2023.

⁹ Alex Ward. "Progressives Say Biden's Foreign Policy Is the Same as Trump's. They're Wrong." Available from <https://www.vox.com/2021/4/1/22358140/biden-foreign-policy-same-trump>; Internet; accessed June 12, 2023.

reproductive freedom, the rights of LGBTQI+ people, taking racial and religious discrimination into account, and various other measures.¹⁰

Biden's "America is Back" also focuses on the necessity to "rebuild and reinvent" partnerships and alliances to meet global challenges which are consistent with the Democratic party's principle.¹¹ The Democratic Party's foreign policy platform believes that the US's alliances exist to expand its influence, extend its reach, reduce its burden, and advance its interests and priorities. In accordance with the principle mentioned above, Biden introduced his foreign policy team plan and priorities, one of them being elevating diplomacy with the purpose of restoring international partnerships. This attempt can be proven through the successful case of two prisoner swaps within two years of his administration. The first case was the release of Trevor Reed, a Marine veteran from Texas sentenced to nine years by the Russian prison in 2020 under the conviction of assaulting two police officers in Moscow after a drunken party while visiting his girlfriend. Reed finally back to the US after being detained for 985 days in Russia.¹²

This first case of prisoner swap has opened up a chance for Biden's approach to hostage diplomacy. Although the swap might not be favoured to everyone's liking including the public that says it is the same as incentivizing the kidnapping of Americans, the Biden administration acknowledges that this is also one of the

¹⁰ Kenneth Roth. "Biden's Challenge: Redeeming a US Role for Human Rights." Human Rights Watch. Available from <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/bidens-challenge>; Internet; accessed June 12, 2023.

¹¹ Rizky Ihsan. "Joe Biden's Foreign Policy: What to Expect from the New United States President." *Jurnal Ilmiah Hubungan Internasional* 18, no. 1 (June 2022): 88–98. <https://doi.org/10.26593/jihi.v18i1.4514.88-98>.

¹² Conor Finnegan and Libby Cathey. "Timeline of Trevor Reed's Detention in Russia and Release." ABC News. Available from <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/timeline-trevor-reeds-detention-russia-release/story?id=84343467>; Internet; accessed June 12, 2023.

tools that they can use to bring home wrongfully detained Americans overseas.¹³ Especially people are highlighting the terms of exchanging one American home, in Reed's case, the US needs to release a convicted Russian drug dealer and a pilot, Konstantin Yaroshenko, whether is it really apple-to-apple. Questions regarding the negotiation process of the swap are speculating by the public. In the middle of those dynamics, the second case emerged on February 17, 2022, when a Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) star Brittney Griner was detained in Russia when she tried to fly back to the US after completing her job as a professional player in Russia. Griner was playing for the Russian basketball team called the UMMC Ekaterinburg, where she has been playing since 2014. Griner was caught in the Sheremetyevo Alexander S. Pushkin International Airport having a vape cartridge in her luggage that contained oil that is derived from cannabis. Brittney Griner is a WNBA player with an outstanding record. She is a WNBA champion, won two gold medals in the Olympics, and has other outstanding achievements that made her influential in the US.

Griner was detained on February 17, 2022, but there is no official news regarding the detain until March 5, 2022. This is because of the invasion of Russia towards Ukraine and the US sanctions towards Russia that complicate the case even more. It took ten months to bring Griner home, and it ended up with them exchanging her with a notorious Russian arms dealer, Viktor Bout. Griner's fame brings so much attention to the case, including the public that relates this case to

¹³ Brian Bennet. "Prisoner Swap for Griner Was Biden's Second Such Exchange." Time. Available from <https://time.com/6239928/griner-biden-prisoner-swap-whelan/#:~:text=In%20July%2C%20the%20Biden%20administration>; Internet; accessed June 12, 2023.

her status as a Black American and her sexual orientation. Unlike Reed, Griner only spends nearly ten months in the Russian prison before returning to the US. The negotiation process of getting Griner back to the US was not easy, as it was described as “painstaking, extraordinary” negotiation between the US and Russia.¹⁴ Initially, Russia does not even want to engage with the offer given by the US which was to swap Griner and Paul Whelan for Bout, two for one.¹⁵ However, Russia does not give the US an option, but rather a chance to take it or leave it. It is either Griner for Bout or the swap will not happen. The public is questioning and criticizing the decision to not bring Whelan home, who has been detained in Russia for almost five years. Recognizing the successful negotiation between Russia and the US to bring Griner home, this research would like to analyze the Biden’s administration ways of doing hostage diplomacy using the negotiation process of the released Brittney Griner as the case.

1.2. Research Question

Recognizing the success of the negotiation process in the release of Griner, this research would focus on the factors behind the release and the negotiation process under Biden’s administration and the impact of Biden’s approach to hostage diplomacy on the negotiation process. This research would limit its scope to only

¹⁴ Joey Garrison, Kim Hjelmgaard, and Maureen Groppe. “Prisoner Swap Negotiations with Russia over Brittney Griner Were ‘Painstaking, Extraordinary.’” USA TODAY. Available from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2022/12/08/behind-prisoner-talks-led-brittney-griners-russia-release/10858229002>; Internet; accessed June 12, 2023.

¹⁵ Barbara Plett Usher. “How the Brittney Griner Prisoner Swap with Russia Was Done.” *BBC News*. Available from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-63908670>; Internet; accessed June 12, 2023.

analyze within the time frame from 2021 to 2023, in accordance with Biden's tenure as president along with the detainment of Griner itself. Thus, based on the previously described background, this research intends to answer the following research questions:

1. How has the hostage diplomacy of the US going under Biden's administration?
2. What are the domestic factor that becomes the push factors of Griner's release?

1.3. Research Objective

Following the formulated research question, the research objectives are as follows:

1. To analyze the Biden's administrations ways of doing hostage diplomacy.
2. To analyse the domestic factors that contribute and acted as the push factor for Griner's release.

1.4. Research Significance

This research expects to highlight the connection between Biden's administration's approach towards hostage diplomacy with the process of negotiation, using the study case of successful prisoner swaps between the US and Russia. Acknowledging that there are various cases regarding citizens of countries detained overseas, this research also introduces the concept of hostage diplomacy

to the readers and hopefully it can be used as a reference for other policymakers that are dealing with the same issue. Finally, this research aims to provide the readers with useful information that can be used as an accurate resource for subsequent research on similar topics.

1.5. Research Structure

There are five chapters in this research. The issue of this research and its urgency are introduced in the first chapter, Introduction. the purpose, significance, and research question are also established in order to direct the conversation in the ensuing chapters.

The second chapter will include both the literature review and theory and concept, which form the basis of this study. The three categories that make up the Literature Review offer a basic overview of the subject, namely The US's Ways of Diplomacy, Understanding American Society, and The Importance of Hostage Diplomacy. Additionally, one IR theory and four concepts that will aid in the analysis of the research's findings and, ultimately, the research questions will be answered in the second chapter.

The third chapter explains about the methods of this research. The research approach, research method, data collection techniques, and data analysis techniques will be discussed in this research. To better comprehend the flow and reliability of the research, these components are crucial when approaching the analysis portion of the study.

The fourth chapter consists of analysis which is the most important part of this research, the analysis is supported by the gathered of evidence found during the writing of this research to answer the research questions comprehensively.

The fifth chapter conclude the finding of the research, the elements from the background, theoretical framework, and analysis will be summed up in this chapter. Recommendation for further research regarding this topic also included in this chapter that could help studies that want to explore the same area in the future.

