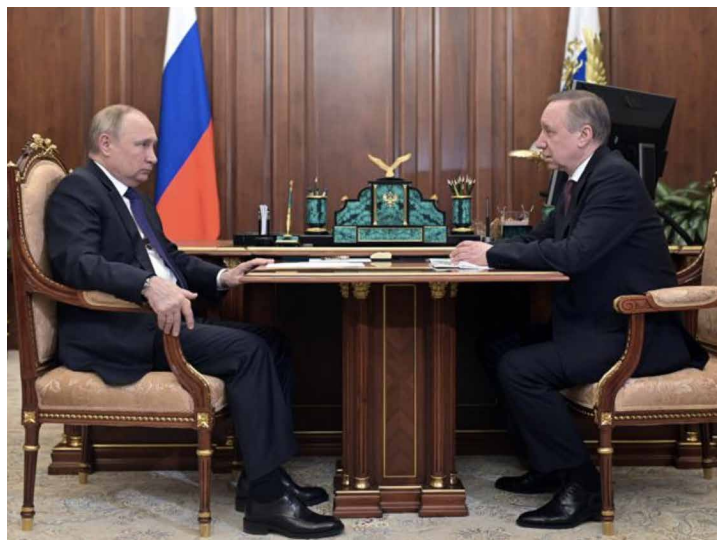


THE INTERVIEW

"Putin must not be humiliated, only the Pope can attempt a real mediation"

by Rita Querzè 11 Mar 2022



Michael Tsur is an international trading expert. Born in Jerusalem, 58, lawyer, married, four daughters, founded the Mediation & Conflict Resolution Institute in Jerusalem in 1996. He teaches in several prestigious universities (Columbia, Jerusalem University, Harvard). But above all Tsur is often called to put into practice what he explains in class. He is part of a team that the Israeli army gathers whenever hostage-taking occurs (the Israel Defense Forces Hostage Negotiation Team). In 2002 he was one of the negotiators who managed the siege of the Basilica of the Nativity. The Israeli defense forces occupied Bethlehem and attempted to capture some wanted Palestinian militants, dozens of whom took refuge in the basilica. After 39 days an agreement was reached with the militants who were taken to Israel and then exiled to Europe and the Gaza Strip.

How important is the role of the negotiator? What kind of personality and characteristics must it have for the negotiation to bring results?



Michael Tsur

«The negotiator is the one who is able to create constructive communication. The negotiator must not try to persuade. Nor try to prove that he is on the right side. The best negotiator must be a curious person because he must be interested in understanding who his interlocutor is and from which world and experiences he comes. The negotiator knows how to ask questions, and asking questions is an art. He must not create resistance and a defensive attitude, on the contrary he must try to reduce this disposition. He must also be aware that he is the object of a form of prejudice by the counterparty who will have obtained information about him ».

How do you react to "no"? If it had been you instead of the one who called for a 24-hour ceasefire to evacuate civilians and had a no in response, how would you have reacted?

"I would have asked, 'Is there anything that can be said or done here that can change your answer?' The answer may also be "no" in this case. Then you have to record the answer and ask if this "no" means "never". If it will remain immutable over time. There is something behind this no that must be understood. Also in this case we can answer with a question: "What do you need this for? So why are you here negotiating if your only answer is no? Why are we both here? ". If the answer is still a "no" all that remains is to ask: "Was I wrong to trust you? Are you here to negotiate or just to make fun of me? ". We must not be discouraged and we must keep in mind that as long as your interlocutor is at the table it is not over: there is still the possibility that the no becomes yes ».

Does a negotiation that takes place while guns continue firing have any chance of success? What is the point, then, to negotiate on non-neutral grounds like Belarus?

«Choosing a neutral location is essential. As for the failure to stop hostilities during the confrontation, several explanations can be found. The tension could be so high that a ceasefire is not possible. But you also need to ask yourself if the negotiation is not a form of distraction, that is, if your counterpart is really there to negotiate. We must take into account that everything happens under the eyes of the world and the first objective could be just that, to show the world that we are willing to negotiate ».

Ways out to unblock the situation?

"One way out could be to seek the help of a third party, a mediator."

Zelesky proposed a direct face to face with Putin ...

«I am a staunch supporter of direct communication between the parties. But the risk here is that there will be a confrontation that only serves to humiliate one another. too many emotions are involved. A face to face would be dangerous. It could make sense, eventually, after the delegations have reached an understanding, to ratify the agreement. »

You are talking about a third party, a mediator. Many have already tried to play this role. Erdogan but also Macron. What did you think when you saw the image of Macron and Putin 6 meters away?

«Putin is very attentive to the representation of himself. There are images of him that represent his strength and courage. It is evident that he wanted to show the distance and in some way humiliate his interlocutor him. It is a symbolic image and Putin uses symbols a lot ».

If not Macron and even Erdogan, who else?

«You see, it must be taken into account that Putin has great experience in the management of power and a very determined and persistent personality in his ways of seeing. I don't think there are other heads of state who can have any convincing power about Putin. He certainly could be gratified by their attention. The risk is that he will accept a confrontation only as an end in itself, not to find a solution ».

Dad?

“It would be an interesting hypothesis. When religion is involved the scenario changes. I don't know how much influence it may have on an interlocutor like Putin, but certainly the spiritual and religious dimension of the interlocutor changes the scenario, puts him on a different level ».

What advice could you give to those who will find themselves conducting such a complex negotiation tomorrow?

«Putin must be respected and taken very seriously. He is a political leader of great experience and intelligence, he has a precise plan and strong determination. Far be it from me to try to analyze his personality, but one can easily guess that he is a person who intends to leave a mark in the history of his country. If you humiliated or mocked him he could respond very harshly. We always remember that the second world war also came due to the humiliations imposed by the peace treaties of the first. Which levers to use in the negotiation is all to be understood, the only certainty is that we need to create a way out that gives Putin himself the possibility of not being defeated in front of his people ".

Can speaking the same language in a negotiation be helpful?

"Yes of course. It would be very important. Under stress, the best language to express yourself in is your mother tongue. Furthermore, the translation often leads to misunderstandings ».

Do you see the immediate possibility that a negotiation could unblock the situation?

“The impression is that Russia wants to go ahead with the occupation before seriously sitting down at a table. However, this should not discourage those aiming at negotiation. There is a saying in my country: “When men make plans, God laughs”. It is true that this operation is planned in detail but it is impossible to predict all aspects of such a complex operation. Putin could be forced to review his plans and sit down at a table ».