

Star Wars and Conflict Resolution Sample Proposal

Working title: Of Banthas and BATNAs

According to Star Wars Combine, the Bantha “is one of the most adaptive and abundant creatures recognizable throughout the galaxy.” Likewise, the concept of BATNA (best alternative to a negotiated agreement) appears throughout conflict studies as a resilient and often rather flexible constraint on negotiation behavior and conflict management. The BATNA, like a Bantha, is a beast of burden. It bears the weight of performing roles of power, risk analysis, and persuasion. Finally, together, the two produce the most common spelling mistake made by conflict resolution students.

Generally speaking, your BATNA provides the outer boundaries and overall context for negotiation. If you cannot come to an agreement with the other side that is superior to your walkaway alternative—in other words, if the proposed deal is not better than your BATNA—then you should walk away. In fact, many would argue that the only rational response in such a situation is to go with your BATNA.

How does this conventional wisdom around BATNAs and negotiation hold up in the films? This chapter will compare three different negotiations, with special focus on imagining what the characters believe their best alternatives might be. The three scenes are as follows:

- When Obi-Wan and Luke negotiate with Han Solo for passage to Alderaan (*A New Hope*)
- When Boba Fett negotiates with Darth Vader over Han’s fate (*The Empire Strikes Back*)
- When Poe Dameron negotiates with Vice Admiral Holdo over the best course of action (*The Last Jedi*)

By playing out the characters’ internal cost-benefit analysis as they consider the proffered deals, we can see how the concept of BATNA operates to push negotiators toward or away from deals. Weak BATNAs act as deal incentives, whereas strong BATNAs create leverage that can help negotiators improve upon proposals.

The chapter will also introduce the lesser-known concepts of WATNA (worst alternative to a negotiated agreement) and MLATNA (most likely alternative to a negotiated agreement), using the close readings of the scenes to explain how all three concepts shape settlements and other negotiated agreements.