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# **ACTION EVALUATION IN THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION<sup>1</sup>**

**Marc Howard Ross**

## *Abstract*

Questions of evaluation are important to conveners, participants and funders of conflict resolution initiatives. Yet good evaluation is tied to a number of complicated questions concerning what constitutes success and failure in projects that may be multi-dimensional or only part of an effort to settle a larger conflict. Rothman has offered Action Evaluation as a methodology that seeks to incorporate goal setting and evaluation into project designs. He argues that this will improve a project by monitoring the changing nature of goals through the life of a conflict resolution intervention, and action evaluation's self-conscious attention to goal setting offers a mechanism for developing and committing an intervention to specific internal and external standards of evaluation. This article examines Action Evaluation as a theory of practice, considering its conceptual strengths and examining specific issues of its implementation.

## **Introduction**

How are conveners, participants and funders to decide if a conflict resolution initiative has been successful? The question is not easy to answer, especially in situations where a project suggests that its impact will be indirect and not necessarily visible in the short run. To date various inadequate solutions to this question of evaluation of conflict resolution initiatives have been proposed.<sup>2</sup> Action evaluation offers a different approach to evaluation as it seeks to incorporate goal setting and evaluation into project designs, to recognize the changing nature of goals through the life of an intervention and to use a self-conscious attention to goals as a mechanism for developing and committing an intervention to both internal and external standards of evaluation (Rothman, 1997).<sup>3</sup>

My own interest in action evaluation comes from a concern with understanding the diverse goals of conflict resolution interventions in ethnic conflict (Ross and Rothman, 1999), and in puzzling over the question of how social science theory and methods can be more closely tied to practice. My approach to examining theories of practice in conflict resolution is to take seriously practitioners' underlying, often unstated, assumptions about conflict and steps they take to deal with it. These beliefs, I have argued, are often central to understanding why the parties to a conflict act as they do, and why specific conflict management interventions are organized as they are (Ross, forthcoming). Making the core assumptions of practitioners explicit allows us to spell out their theories of practice to better understand actors' motivation, to evaluate the extent to which their core beliefs are consistent with theory and evidence and to refine both theory and practice to the benefit of each.



I use this approach to examine the theory and practice of action evaluation asking what its core assumptions are and trying to make explicit how it seeks to achieve the specific effects it wants. Rothman proposes action evaluation as a method for improving practice and potentially contributing to a clearer understanding of the theory underlying conflict resolution as well. “This methodology is intended to help project organizers, facilitators, participants, and funders interactively define their shared goals, as their project evolves and effectively monitor and assess them” (Rothman, 1999b 2).

In this article, I first discuss the concept of theory of practice; next, I examine action evaluation; then, I consider how action evaluation has been used in specific conflict resolution projects, and lastly, I suggest areas where the theory of action evaluation requires further development, additional theoretical specification, and empirical analysis.

### **Theories of Practice**

All practice is grounded in beliefs about the nature of social and psychological reality. These beliefs, which help us understand why and how practitioners’ activities produce their intended effects, are often more implicit than explicit. Making them explicit permits us to identify the core assumptions of specific theories of practice, to articulate indicators that could help us evaluate if given theories are correct, and to revise practice when core assumptions are imprecise or unwarranted.

Any theory of the practice makes important assumptions about the following: the nature of conflict with an emphasis on the specific domains or “problem areas” to which it pays particular attention, the specific effects good practice is expected to have on participants in interventions, the possible impact a practice can have on the course of a conflict beyond those it has directly on the participants in an intervention, images of what a successful settlement of conflict looks like, and hypotheses about the mechanisms by which the project achieves its impact (Ross, forthcoming). Elsewhere I have examined six different theories of practice in ethnic conflict resolution, community relations, principled negotiation, human needs, psychoanalytically rooted identity, intercultural miscommunications, and conflict transformation, in an effort to spell out the very different activities and contrasting ideas about success which are consistent with each of these theories (Ross, forthcoming). That analysis showed that while alternative theories rarely directly contradict each other, they do emphasize quite different processes and sequences of activities. For example, where community relations focuses on local institution building and empowerment, human needs theory stresses the identification of the parties’ non-negotiable, underlying needs and consideration of how the needs of each party are often not incompatible with those of the others.

Central to my argument is that underlying all theories of practices are judgments about what success and failure in conflict resolution entails. What does it mean to settle, resolve, or manage an ethnic conflict successfully?<sup>4</sup> An examination of different theories suggests significant variation in the criteria of success which each does (or could) articulate and emphasize. Equally important, particular approaches to conflict resolution differ in how they envision what Kelman (1995) calls the “transfer process,” the linkage between how the effects of conflict resolution are extended from those

relatively small number of people who participate directly in conflict resolution activities and changes in the larger conflict between ethnic communities.

Different notions of what is success follow from different theories of practice. For example, although each of the six theories of practice I mention above can be said to share the goal of resolving ethnic conflict, there are significant differences between them in what exactly this means (Ross, forthcoming). For example, community relations work seeks to improve communication and intergroup understanding, promote tolerant acceptance of diversity, and encourage building structures that safeguard the rights of all. Principled negotiation tries to bring about positive sum (win-win) agreements between the parties. Human needs theory emphasizes that the recognition of how each party in a conflict has some similar needs and is a prerequisite to joint action. Psychoanalytically informed identity theory tries to build analytic empathy<sup>5</sup> between the parties, to encourage a sense that agreement between the parties is possible and to lower the parties fears so they are more able to explore alternatives to continuing confrontation. Intercultural (mis)communication theory's goal is to enhance effective communication by increasing the parties' knowledge of each other and by weakening negative stereotypes. Conflict transformation theory attempts to change relationships among the parties through moral empowerment, justice, forgiveness, reconciliation, and recognition.

The capacity to process information from one's environment as a basis for choosing specific actions is a central feature of human behavior. To process new information from the environment as a first step towards undertaking action requires the existence of some sort of model of the world, what many social psychologists and cultural anthropologists call a schema, which is used to interpret what the new information means and its consequences for action (D'Andrade, 1992). The schemas social psychologists describe contain assumptions about how the world one lives in works, about the motives of different social actors, and about the consequences of action on others. All social actors possess such schemas or theories about the world. Schemas differ from each other, however, in how explicit and elaborate they are.<sup>6</sup>

At the core of theories of practice are the principles that guide action. Making these principles explicit is important because it allows the different stakeholders in a project to discuss them and to consider how they are tied to a project's goals. Action evaluation recognizes that self-consciousness about a project's core assumptions and about stakeholders goals is not automatic. Rather, it argues that specific procedures are often needed to increase self-awareness, active reflection and choice making to guide projects as they evolve and as they try to decide when, and how, they have been successful. As a result action evaluation contains its own theory of practice at the core of which is integrating careful goal articulation and monitoring into practice more generally, will facilitate project design, promote effective evaluation, and improve the validity and reliability of ethnic conflict resolution efforts.

### **Action Evaluation**

Rothman (1997) presents action evaluation as a method for integrating evaluation into the practice of conflict resolution training and interventions. His starting point is the belief that current conflict resolution efforts are poorly served by standard pre and post training evaluation in which participants are asked the extent to which broad general goals articulated at the outset of a project, such as an intensive training, have

been achieved, or where conveners develop a post-hoc imprecise design to decide what is the impact of their project. Instead, action evaluation encourages an active and continual focus on goal definition and achievement throughout an intervention. Through self-conscious engagement with project goals and their evolution, participants can become much more explicit about what, why, and how they are seeking particular goals and in the process they become far more committed to their achievement. Furthermore, Rothman (1999b: 2) hypothesizes that such self-conscious engagement is also likely to raise the chance for success.

Many conflict resolution interventions, Rothman suggests, are motivated by the moral importance of the conflicts they seek to resolve rather than explicit project goals which drive the specific daily activities of the interveners. As a result, it is often difficult to know the extent to which a project's activities affected either the participants with whom they work or the larger conflict in which the intervention is embedded. A parallel problem is that too many projects engage in activities that are not clearly connected to a project's goals, often because the goals are formulated too vaguely for projects to link activities and goals effectively.

Action evaluation incorporates goal setting, monitoring and evaluation into a conflict resolution initiative rather than seeing these as distinct activities to be conducted independently and at different points in time. It seeks to make explicit the goals and motivations of all stakeholders, to analyze how these evolve over time, and to encourage the stakeholders to use the goals which have been identified as a step towards identifying explicit, contextually defined, criteria of success by which a project might be judged.

Action evaluation is a goal driven process in several senses. First, it seeks to make explicit the wide range of goals that inform an intervention. It does this by asking the relevant actors in an intervention to identify their goals, to say why they care about them (what motivations are driving them), and to identify how they think the goals can be most effectively met. Goal statements are collected at various stages from a project's organizers and the participants in the intervention. In addition Rothman (personal communication) seeks to engage funders as active and explicit partners in the goal setting process to help develop more realistic and partnering attitudes among funders and to shape future funding policy.

Second, through the work of a project member, the action evaluator, and an individual particularly charged with the responsibility for collecting and analyzing the project's goals, the goals are then summarized and presented back to the stakeholders in a project. This is done in several stages and at several levels of aggregation to establish a project's baseline goals, to identify the shared, divergent and unique goals within and between the conveners, participants and donors, and then to map the goal evolution. By making the participants self-conscious about their project's goals, action evaluation seeks to promote a reflection about, and shared commitment to, the project itself.

Third, action evaluation seeks to use the process of tracking and monitoring goals as a way toward developing contextualized standards (or criteria) of success, which can be employed for internal and external evaluation. The internal standards are needed if a project is to be self-correcting as it reacts to both changes in the conditions of a conflict, and as it learns which of its goals (i.e. those which all stakeholding groups have set) have or have not been successfully achieved. External standards are those that outside evaluators and others can use to determine the extent to which a project has

established and met meaningful goals in terms of the larger conflict in which it is embedded.

*Core assumptions of action evaluation.* Underlying action evaluation are several crucial assumptions that are consistent with a great deal of social science theory and evidence which offer strong support for the method.

*The participation hypothesis.* A basic and well-supported proposition underlying action evaluation is the idea that people will be more committed to goals that they articulate and establish themselves. Dubbed the participation hypothesis, Verba (1961: 206-43) and many others find a great deal of evidence for the proposition that active involvement in a process builds commitment. The participation hypothesis suggests initial commitment can first be built by eliciting goals from participants and that additional commitment occurs when participants are asked to join together to reflect upon project goals. One reason is because people become invested psychologically when they spend time on an activity. Another is that participation builds a new social identity that is sustained, at least in part, by working toward common goals. Lederach's (1995; 1997) concept of elicitive conflict resolution has participants define a situation and design their own contextually relevant action program; it clearly builds on the participation hypothesis' emphasis on participants' motivations and commitments.

Action evaluation's impact, and the participation mechanism, also finds support in the Hawthorn effect; that is, the fact that participants at all levels are asked questions and involved in the process of program design builds support for the program and increases commitment to its goals. While some view this effect as an example of the problems of doing field research, the action researcher sees this finding as an opportunity to direct an outcome in a favorable direction (Argyris et al, 1985). From this point of view, it is not the specific goals which participants identify which becomes crucial in the process as much as the involvement in the process that increases their engagement in the process and their desire to achieve successful outcomes.

As part of action evaluation's attention to participation in goal setting and evaluation is its implicit attention to strengthening cognitive and affective links among participants through their involvement in goal identification and achievement. The method, as Rothman has developed it to date, stresses the Action Evaluator as the core person collecting and analyzing the goals of different participants. However, it should also be pointed out that action evaluation also promotes discussion and negotiation about goals among conveners, participants, and funders and pays particular attention to having each group consider similarities and differences among their members with its attention to shared, unique and opposing goals as part of their self-reflection and mutual engagement.

*Goal setting as an iterative, incremental process.* Action evaluation is rooted in the premise that goal setting and evaluation are iterative processes that reflects both participants' changing concerns, understandings, and the shifting contexts in which conflicts are situated. As a result, action evaluation explicitly rejects the notion that it is desirable for initiatives to fully articulate project goals at the outset and to fail to modify them over time. Rather, it is based on the belief that incremental (and sometime large scale) changes in goals should be incorporated into project designs.

Effective feedback, of course, is crucial to any interactive process of goal modification and action evaluation provides at least two different kinds of feedback to participants. One asks the Action Evaluator to summarize and analyze the participants', conveners', and funders' goals which are presented for discussion to each group at

various points in time. In addition, the method also asks the Action Evaluator to track goals, changes, and continuities over time and to feed these back to participants as well. The objective here is to make participants more self-consciously aware of how their thinking and that of other participants has shifted as a mechanism for building commitment to the achievement of a project's evolved goals.

The emphasis on iterative, incremental processes in action evaluation builds upon the analysis of effective organizational decision-making which Lindbloom (1959) and March and Simon (1958) provided more than a generation ago. They argued that problem identification and the development of solutions occurs in a context of imperfect information and changing priorities and understandings. In such settings, good decisions, what they call satisficing rather than optimizing ones, are those which result from continuing responses to changes and feedback, not large scale, one-time actions. Certainly March and Simon's ideas about limited rationality apply to most conflict situations, and therefore action evaluations iterative, incremental approach is likely to do better than broad top-down procedures which are not subject to regular self-monitoring feedback and adjustment.

*The social construction of goals.* Action evaluation emphasizes that project goals need to be both specific and contextually relevant. As a result, an implicit objective of the method is to make participants seriously reflect on and discuss their goals, so they will be less likely to accept vague, general goals such as bringing peace to a long-time troubled region. Instead a central part of the action evaluator's task is to help the different stakeholders articulate more specific goals and to be aware of their reasons for holding them. The process of self-conscious reflection seeks to get people to articulate detailed, meaningful objectives through an iterative process involving goal setting, discussion, and action across stakeholding groups.

Because action evaluation obliges participants to discuss their goals, and the motivations underlying them, and to suggest how they think their the goals can be most effectively met, action evaluation pushes all stakeholders to consider the relationship between their goals and a project's capacity and its specific activities. As a result, the formation and explicit articulation of objectives is understood to occur in a social context and is promoted through the active engagement of the Action Evaluator. This process recognizes not only the social nature of goal construction, but also that it is a process that can be nurtured and encouraged when interventions wish to pay attention to it.

The social nature of goals is linked to action evaluation's emphasis on an active process of goal setting and analysis. While different groups of stakeholders may not always be comfortable articulating and examining their goals, action evaluation implicitly suggests that the social dynamic engendered through the process creates its own social context that can foster group identification and commitment. What is left somewhat ambiguous in Rothman's formulation is the extent to which the emerging social ties among stakeholders are simply functional, working relations and the degree to which they are to be affective as well.

*Theory and practice are interrelated, not separate, phenomena.* Rothman cites John Maynard Keynes' famous remark that there is nothing so practical as a good theory to emphasize the importance of strongly linking theory and practice. Action evaluation is founded on the belief that reflexive practice must take theory seriously and that good theory must find strong support in practice. The linkage between the two is actively sought in action evaluation by forcing practitioners to articulate their core

assumptions while recognizing that this is not always easy to do. In fact, a key role of the Action Evaluator is to help those involved in a project to do this where they are not fully comfortable with the process, and to translate the specific, operational statements of practitioners into more theoretical terms.

### **The Practice Of Action Evaluation**

Much of Rothman's inspiration for action evaluation comes from the long tradition of action research, which he traces from Kurt Lewin to Chris Argyris. Rothman argues just as good theory and practice each improve the other, well-done evaluation is necessary to improve practice. To link practice and evaluation, he has tried to develop a strategy which forces conflict resolution interventions to pay more explicit attention to the analysis of project goals. As discussed in the previous section, Rothman's approach assumes that a self-conscious focus on goals will (1) help clarify them for stakeholders, (2) move stakeholders to a consensus on appropriate, contextually defined goals for an intervention, and (3) assist in the definition of standards to evaluate the extent to which a project has or has not been successful.

Each project's Action Evaluator plays a key role in collecting and analyzing goals, but the process also requires that other members of a project see the value in what can be a somewhat tedious and time-consuming process. In addition, his approach requires that participants are willing and able to articulate their goals and trust the process will meet their needs and interests. But this doesn't occur all at once.

[Rather] this is an ideal towards which action-evaluation strives and if it is successful develops over time. The Action Evaluator is the first repository of this confidence that is then widened to include conveners, participants, and perhaps, funders. A long and probably never completely successful process of transfer is clearly better than non-efforts made for inclusion and buy-in. At least all voices are heard" (Rothman, personal communication).

Perhaps the best way to understand how action evaluation works is to examine it in the context of a few of the more than a dozen projects in which Rothman and his associates have used it to date. While I will describe action evaluation in several different interventions, my discussion of its use is limited by the fact that in no case yet did an intervention use action evaluation for a long enough period to track important changes in goals over time; nor has one yet proceeded to the point where the process produced clear standards for evaluating the project's success as Rothman hopes the method will do when it is carried out over a longer period of time.

Communication/Decisions/Results (CDR) Associates' work with the Stara Zagora Multi-Ethnic Commission in Bulgaria illustrates some important dynamics of action evaluation and how its use is tied to a specific context. CDR's project in Bulgaria sought to build cross-ethnic cooperation between the Bulgarian majority and several minority groups including the Roma and Turks. As part of its work, through a partnership with the Foundation on Negotiation and Conflict Resolution in Sofia and the Open Education Centre, CDR helped establish multi-ethnic commissions that seek to address local, and especially, minority problems in several Bulgarian towns. Action evaluation began with interviews with four stakeholder groups: sponsors, supervisors,

conveners, and participants (Ghais, n.d.: 2). Ghais' analysis of the data from these interviews showed important differences in emphasis within and between the stakeholder groups.

The participants saw the Commission as a potentially important way to help the underprivileged minorities in Bulgaria. Ghais points out the participants' commitment to joint problem solving and a sense of optimism among them that the Commission can make a real difference in the lives of people in the community. The interviews with participants made a number of explicit references to minorities' social and economic problems that they wanted to see addressed, perhaps in coordination with local government and non-governmental organizations (NGO's).

The conveners, while also expressing an interest in helping needy minorities, placed more emphasis on improving *interethnic* relations through increasing tolerance, conflict resolution, social integration, and even the use of the Commission as a model for interethnic cooperation in Bulgaria. The supervisors while sharing the goals of enhancing intergroup understanding and the development of effective models, also wanted to enhance their own experiences and knowledge about the cultures of Bulgaria's minorities and their own conflict resolution skills. Finally, the sponsors emphasized the Commission project as part of Bulgaria's transition to democracy and as a way of creating a culture of democracy and dialogue.

In analyzing differences in specific goals across groups, Ghais (n.d.: 7) points out:

The four groups fall along a spectrum in terms of their goals for the Stara Zagora Commission. At one end of the spectrum, the participants seem most concerned with helping minorities through charitable work: helping them find jobs, improving education and health care. (The conveners share these goals but also hold others.) At the other end of the spectrum the sponsors see the project as part of building a culture of dialogue and democracy. This spectrum of goals can also be seen as going from tangible, results-oriented goals (providing relief for the problems of the poor) to more intangible, esoteric goals (instilling a culture of dialogue).

In her role as Action Evaluator, Ghais found that in response to the question of how they might accomplish their goals, there was agreement across all four groups concerning their desire to institutionalize and strengthen the Commission and to bring people from different ethnic groups together. Furthermore, none of the goals of any of the groups are incompatible with those others identified. At the same time, there are clearly differences in priorities and she concludes that, "Which of these activities are given priority depends on which understanding of the nature of the Commission prevails. If the goal is to bring about intergroup harmony in Bulgaria, a particular goal such as helping children stay in school is less important than the intergroup collaboration in achieving any goal" (Ghais, n.d.: 7).

In this project, the Action Evaluator prepared an analysis of the different stakeholders goals which the supervisors and conveners then reflected on with the aim of reaching agreement on the direction of the Stara Zagora Commission's activities and which was then to be discussed with the participants. The aim of such analysis and discussion is to raise awareness concerning differences in emphasis as well as areas of agreement while moving stakeholders toward consensus and clearer shared

understanding of where a project should be headed. The practice of action evaluation views baseline data such as these as important because they help stakeholders understand both their own and others' goals after the Action Evaluator (and possibly others on the project) analyze the data and present it back to the stakeholders in a useful form. Exactly what form goals should be presented to stakeholders will vary across projects and cultural contexts. They might be presented in a written document or orally; it can begin with separate meetings for each stakeholder group but can easily move toward sessions with more than one and joint exploration of both their similarities and differences as well as the future direction of a project.

Examining several other projects it is clear that the baseline data the Action Evaluator collected are important in revealing very different emphases among stakeholders, and the systematic analysis of stakeholder goals forced the project to consider how they might be incorporated into the project's work rather than simply smoothed over. For example, in the Zichron Forum project in Israel while many of the founders were intellectuals most interested in fostering a dialogue between religious and secular Jews, the primary concerns of many of the participants were with social welfare issues. As the differences between the groups surfaced, there was a great deal of rancor as each tried to assert the priority of its goals. Finally, the action evaluation process led the participants to recognize that the different goals were not necessarily contradictory and to recognize it was possible to attend to both sets of goals. Similarly, the Action Evaluation data in the CIC Project in Yellow Springs Ohio, a forum to address issues of the town's development, revealed a sharp split between people favoring social and cultural improvement of the community and those emphasizing economic development. The process which identified differences at first made participants uncomfortable because of the different directions each orientation would move the project. However, when the Action Evaluation project also encouraged the stakeholders to work with, and address, their differences, rather than pretending they didn't exist, the participants were more comfortable.

To date no project has yet employed action evaluation from initiation to conclusion of its work. The spirit of action evaluation, however, encourages us to reflect on the practice as it develops, rather than waiting for the completion of one or more applications before reacting to it. Clearly, a core strength of action evaluation is its capacity to build empowerment through the encouragement of stakeholder awareness of their own and others' goals and motives. Used effectively, we might expect action evaluation to help projects evolve and persevere where many might otherwise expect them the end. At the same time, at the early stage of the development of this practice, there are still issues needing further attention, a question to which I now turn.

### **Issues Needing Further Attention in Action Evaluation**

There are a number of theoretical and practical issues that require further attention as action evaluation develops. The seven issues I raise ask both how interveners can integrate action evaluation into their work and suggest avenues for additional research and theory development that would demonstrate why and how action evaluation can improve conflict resolution interventions.

*The role of the Action Evaluator.* In several of the projects in which Rothman has piloted, the Action Evaluator has felt frustrated and was not certain that the conveners



or participants were committed to the method and its procedures. In some cases, this was because action evaluation takes time, something that is not always readily available. In other cases there were concerns about confidentiality and fears that direct questions about goals might produce more problems than returns. Another issue is that sometimes the designated action evaluator was not a full member of the project team and their work was too easily seen as being at cross-purposes with the initiative. Some project conveners in some cultural and political contexts are uncomfortable with the direct questions action evaluation poses to participants and believe they may even anger and alienate some participants. More generally the concern of some is that action evaluation's step-by-step process is inconsistent with how many non-western cultures approach problem solving.

All of this means the role of the Action Evaluator needs to be more carefully thought out and perhaps Rothman needs to consider a range of ways in which the role can be filled. At the same time, whatever decision is reached about the Action Evaluator's role in any project, there needs to be a widespread project commitment to action evaluation for it to be successful. Without support conveners or participants who want to undermine the process can easily do so.

*Making goals explicit and monitoring changing goals increases the likelihood they will be achieved.* At the core of action evaluation is the hypothesis that making goals explicit and monitoring changes in stakeholder goals increases the chances that the goals will be met and that an intervention will be successful. While Rothman is probably right that increasingly self-awareness of goals is linked to commitment to their achievement, action evaluation needs to be more explicit about why this is the case, to identify situations in which this proposition is particularly likely to hold and to consider others in which it is likely to be more problematic.

There are several different possible underlying dynamics at work here. As is suggested above, each could have somewhat different implications for practice. First, it may be that focusing on stakeholder goals is an effective mechanism to increase commitment to a project, as participants feel empowered because they are asked about their priorities. Second, it may be the case that clarification of goals and their prioritization makes people more focused in their project activities and this increases their effectiveness as participants' data and input are used to design (and redesign) initiatives. Third, it may be that identification of, and attention to, specific goals heightens stakeholder's motivation. Fourth, it is plausible to suggest that eliciting goals and discussing them heightens the social and emotional connections within and between different stakeholders that provides a cadre of persons prepared to work for the resolution of the larger conflict. While each of these mechanisms are plausible and not necessarily at odds with each other, collecting evidence on the extent to which each is operating and the strength of their effects is necessary to support claims about how and why action evaluation is effective.

*Action evaluation may be far more appropriate in certain kinds of conflicts than others.* It is worth considering the conditions under which the conflict resolution mechanisms at the core of action evaluation are most likely to come into play and where goal identification and analysis are most likely to move a conflict closer to resolution. (The reverse is to consider situations when they are likely to be particularly ineffective.) Asking this question reminds us of possible limits to conflict resolution more generally, and how in some intransigent conflicts explicit attention to disagreement about goals can sometimes harden differences among the parties. As a

result, there may be differences across conflicts in the extent to which action evaluation can be effective, and identifying some of action evaluation's limits may be particularly useful as interveners decide whether it is appropriate in the conflict on which they are working.<sup>7</sup> It is easy, for example, to imagine bitter, intractable conflicts where the parties are not yet ready to share their goals with opponents in any kind of frank and open process which action evaluation requires.

*Participants in an intervention can effectively develop criteria of success to evaluate the extent to which the larger conflict is or is not moving toward resolution.* One of the most interesting ideas action evaluation develops is the process of goal-setting among stakeholders in an intervention can lead to the development of meaningful standards for evaluation contextually for individual projects and then across projects. What is not spelled out however is how it occurs. One potential problem is that not all people involved in an intervention necessarily are comfortable thinking in operational terms and can easily identify specific indicators of success. Getting people to be sufficiently operational may not be so easy in some contexts, and many conveners will probably feel tension because of the time and energy it requires and the stress it produces on some participants.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, while particular stakeholders may develop clear operational goals, there is not necessarily any assurance that there will be agreement across stakeholders or between different groups of participants about what the goals should be or how they might be measured. While Rothman suggests that negotiations among the stakeholders are necessary to achieve agreement on goals, it may be the case that problems are an indicator of the larger conflict and not something that stakeholders can easily negotiate. When presented with such a dilemma, conveners will have to make decisions about how much time and effort to devote to this process and when avoidance of explicit differences among participants is the best short-run strategy. There may then be strong differences between how conveners think it is best to proceed and the what the action evaluation process asks them to do.

*Forcing participants to establish a common set of goals may result in a tendency to accept the least common denominator, related to only those few goals that are not controversial and relatively easy to achieve.* One possible outcome to a difficult situation is that participants will only agree on those few, general goals that are either not problematic and/or relatively easy to achieve. While this meets action evaluation's demand that specific goals be articulated, it may undermine the overall value of an intervention. In addition, a too-narrow demand for agreement on specific goals may create real tension between the Action Evaluator and other members of the project in ways that turn many participants against the action evaluation process.

The problem here is that action evaluation, the process of articulating and monitoring goals can have a great deal of tension associated with it, and there needs to be more explicit attention paid to how to deal with situations where action evaluation's procedures are an important source of stress. The Action Evaluator and other conveners may come to believe that alternative, more indirect, approaches to goal articulation and monitoring are needed, and yet action evaluation as Rothman spells it out does not make clear how this might be achieved.<sup>9</sup>

*Action evaluation generates many goal statements, yet it not yet clear what is the best way in which these are to be analyzed and how their analysis best ties into conflict resolution goals.* Collecting goal statements from different stakeholders in an initiative is one thing; deciding how to makes sense of and use these statements is another.

Before developing action evaluation, Rothman (1999a) reports an intervention in the Cyprus conflict in which he sorted over two hundred goal statements into ten groups on the basis of their similarity in content. He expresses the hope that such categorization and sharing the groups of goals with participants will help them see connections among goals and can help interveners understand general goals for the field. However, it is not yet clear what the connection is between goal classification and action.

Action evaluation needs to explore additional ways to analyze and use the goals stakeholders identify. One avenue to develop involves goal prioritization. At the simplest level, this is about rankings and distinguishing among goals that are ranked highly and those that are not. A further step might be to identify particular goals stakeholders see as critical or essential from their perspective and to emphasize their importance in any analysis or group discussion of goals, especially in situations where they may be at odds with other's high priority goals. At present degrees of agreement across goals are calculated, but a measure of intensity could also be developed to get at prioritization.

Another possible dimension for goal analysis would distinguish among process goals involving the participants in the intervention and substantive outcome goals. The latter could be divided between outcome goals which primarily involve the intervention participants and those which concern the wider conflict; an example of the first might be that participants in a workshop develop a keener appreciation of the other side's perception of what is at stake in the conflict, while the latter could be that confrontations and violent incidents between groups in a town diminish over the next year.

*Action evaluation is ultimately a form of third party intervention and as such must be evaluated as other forms of intervention are.*<sup>10</sup> Emphasizing goal articulation, their explicit recondition and efforts to build consensus around project goals, their prioritization, and criteria of success, does not obviate the need to ask whether this is the 'best way' of intervening in any given conflict. Action evaluation emphasizes goal articulation and the definition of success, but in fact has little to say about how success should be measured or how measures of success it develops might differ from those that other methodologies generate. In fact, it is important to recognize that the internal generation of goals can, at times, be self-serving and collusion among different active participants may result in avoiding difficult problems.

### Conclusion

This paper has attempted to describe the key elements and core assumptions of the practice of action evaluation. I have argued the approach makes four crucial assumptions consistent with a great deal of social science theory and evidence: the impact of participation on attitudes and behaviors, goal setting as an iterative and incremental process, the social construction of goals, and the interrelationship between theory and practice. These assumptions are important in helping us understand why Rothman advocates action evaluation as a way of building stakeholder awareness of, and commitment to, goals in conflict resolution projects.

Action evaluation is a strategy for making stakeholders in conflict resolution projects pay explicit attention to their own and others' goals and motives. The underlying hypothesis is that self-reflection assists stakeholders in clarifying what it is they want a project to accomplish, showing how their own goals fit with those of other

participants, and discovering new, evolving goals as projects proceed. Through such a process people come to prioritize their own goals and build commitment to others in a project. Finally, the explicit nature of project goals can come to serve as the basis for standards for evaluation that allow both project participants and those outside a project to decide ways in which it has or has not been successful.

Evaluation from this perspective is far different than the alienating process in which outsiders use externally derived standards to decide when a project is a success or failure. Instead, it is far more interactive and gives project participants ownership of (and responsibility for) the criteria of success by which a project will be judged.

Agreement among stakeholders, however, is not something that one can reasonably expect to be achieved quickly or easily. In fact the importance action evaluation places on the role of the Action Evaluator recognizes that questions of what constitutes success and possible areas of disagreement are often matters which stakeholders seek to avoid, as they can be sources of discomfort and rancor. The Action Evaluator wants to use differences in goals and priorities among goals to foster reflection, choice making, and exploration of new alternatives. Through such a process conflict resolution projects can be clearer about what is most important and stakeholders can develop criteria by which success and failure can be meaningfully evaluated.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Support for this research was generously provided by Jay Rothman's Project on Action Evaluation with support from the Pew Charitable Trusts.
- <sup>2</sup> My focus here is not on the various evaluation instruments projects have designed or on the different methods of outside evaluation that have been used. It is worth noting however that often projects design instruments which are viewed by funders and others as self-serving when they do little more than garner participants' attitudes towards the intervention, and frequently conveners feel that external evaluation is unfair when it imposes evaluation standards on a project which are not those the project thought it was working towards.
- <sup>3</sup> Internal standards involve direct effects on project participants, while external standards are those that concern a project's impact on the larger conflict in which it is embedded. For example, a project might have the goal of increasing contact and discussion between members of two hostile ethnic communities. This internal goal is distinct from the external goal of lowering tension between the two communities from which the participants in the project come (Ross and Rothman, 1999).
- <sup>4</sup> Here I do not consider differences between conflict resolution, conflict management, and conflict settlement, although I recognize that different theorists and practitioners often strongly prefer to use one or another.
- <sup>5</sup> By analytic empathy I mean the capacity to understand, but not necessarily sympathize with, an opponent's position.
- <sup>6</sup> Anthropologists interested in schemas distinguish between folk and social-scientific theories in two ways (D'Andrade, 1992). Folk theories are those of local actors in

particular situations and are more likely (but not necessarily) to be implicit. In contrast, social-scientific theories are the explicit, more general, theories social scientists use to explain social action in more than one context. Where by definition folk theories utilize actors' own concepts and frames of reference, social-scientific theories are more likely to employ concepts that many actors do not recognize or use themselves. This is not surprising since social scientists attempt to develop general theories that can be used across contexts and folk theories are contextually specific. However what both folk and social-scientific theories have in common is that each are generalizations about the world and are efforts to make sense of it. The distinction between the two kinds of theories is one of degree, not kind, and my concern here is to emphasize that both offer guidance for action and that underlying conflict resolution practice are important assumptions about why and how certain actions matter. While it is certainly the case that many will argue that good practice needs to consider both folk and social science theory, here I draw attention to epistemological and methodological differences between them that often make it difficult to integrate the two. For a discussion of the same two perspectives in conflict resolution, see Lederach's (1995: 37-72) discussion of prescriptive and elicitive approaches to training. Despite differences in terminology and explicitness both folk and social scientific theories are generalizations about the world relevant for understanding action. Both folk and social scientific theories can be articulated and help us understand what people think can or cannot be done to manage them constructively. However, we should also recognize that while both inform action, because they are very different forms of knowledge, they can affect behavior in very different ways.

- <sup>7</sup> Rothman (personal communication) adds while this last point emphasizes action evaluation's role in highlighting and clarifying differences, much of his initial data show the presence of different (but not necessarily) incompatible goals, and more important, active goal articulation can move a process towards consensus and common ground where one did not exist before.
- <sup>8</sup> Sometimes, for example, explicit goal setting may overly emphasize cognitive processes when the core of a project is to produce changes at the affective level.
- <sup>9</sup> Rothman reports that different methods for gathering and evaluating goals are currently being compiled in a handbook under preparation. Furthermore, he notes that the collection procedures range from formal interviews to more ethnographic methods in which participant goals are inferred from statements in meetings and their behaviors.
- <sup>10</sup> I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer of this article for encouraging me to emphasize this important point.

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# **IN THE EYE OF THE STORM: HUMANITARIAN NGOs, COMPLEX EMERGENCIES, AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

Janice Gross Stein

## *Abstract*

The challenges faced by non-governmental organizations seeking to mitigate violence within the context of “complex humanitarian emergencies” create new dilemmas and require new strategies. These emergencies arise from violence inflicted by one group against another within the confines of a state, from the capture of state institutions by one group, or by the collapse of these institutions and the failure of governance. They develop within a context of disengagement by the major powers and the privatization of emergency assistance.

I first analyze the dimensions of complex humanitarian emergencies, define the dilemmas humanitarian NGOs face and their implications for conflict resolution, and examine the changing international context to establish the scope of disengagement and privatization. I then assess the troubling evidence that humanitarian NGOs have contributed inadvertently to the escalation of violence rather than to conflict resolution. I explore three possible strategies, some of them counterintuitive, which could contribute to the mitigation of the violence and to conflict resolution.

## **The Growth of International Non-Government Organizations**

In the examination of the prevention, management, and resolution of violent conflict, the role of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) traditionally has received little more than a footnote. Analysis of the major powers, regional organizations, and the United Nations dominated the discussion. In the last decade, however, particularly since the end of the Cold War, non-governmental organizations have become more prominent -- and more controversial -- especially in the complex humanitarian emergencies that arise from local conflict. They are more important for two reasons: the number and importance of NGOs has multiplied exponentially and the spectrum of conflict, which is the focus of international attention, has broadened.

At least three important changes have occurred in the profile of international non-governmental organizations. First, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of international NGOs working in the south, at the same time as governments in the north have privatized their assistance programs (Smith and Lipsky, 1993; Gordenker and Weiss, 1996). The major powers have increased their funding to NGOs even as they reduced their spending on bilateral assistance programs. From 1980 to 1993, the number of NGOs in the north focused on development almost doubled. This growth is a direct outcome of the restructuring of the state and welfare systems by northern donors during the 1980s. In some countries, official development assistance has

effectively been privatized.

International institutions have also vastly increased the proportion of their funding that they channel through NGOs. The European Commission, for example, raised its funding for NGOs from zero to 40 percent, with a corresponding reduction in bilateral emergency aid from 95 to 6 percent between 1976 and 1990. Even in a short period of three years, between 1988/89 and 1991/92, the proportion of development assistance channeled through NGOs by the Department for International Development (DFID) in Britain increased by 28 per cent. The growing importance of NGOs as international actors is a function both of the privatization of assistance and the withdrawal of states and international organizations from the field. Increasingly, it is NGO personnel who are providing relief and assistance to the victims of conflict in the space vacated by states and international institutions. This assistance has become embedded, however, in the larger context of violent conflict, at times, with unanticipated consequences.

Not only have the numbers of NGOs increased, but also new kinds of NGOs have developed. A decade ago, it was largely non-governmental organizations with religious affiliations that focused on mediation and conflict resolution. Now, secular NGOs, specializing in conflict prevention and resolution, and operating independently of states and the United Nations, are active in the field. International Alert and the International Crisis Group, two of the best known among these new non-governmental organizations, have played an especially important role. Although the resources of these NGOs who specialize in conflict resolution are minuscule compared to the NGOs who provide humanitarian relief, their political impact is often out of proportion to their size. Engaged in such activities as negotiating hostage release, supporting local NGOs committed to peace building and conflict resolution, advising parties to the conflict, and helping to facilitate political negotiations, the conflict resolution NGOs are an important part of the international political landscape. At times they complement and at times they compete with the traditional diplomatic efforts of the United Nations, regional organizations, or individual states.

It is not only the newer non-governmental organizations that are committed to conflict prevention and resolution. Increasingly, the large, traditional development and relief NGOs have adopted components of the conflict resolution agenda in their emergency programming. Action Aid, for example, has explicitly designed programs for internally displaced persons around principles of reconciliation. This represents a significant departure for most of the large NGOs, and one which is likely to represent a growing trend in their activity, as political backing and funding for this conflict resolution activities increases. Conflict prevention and resolution are now squarely on the NGO agenda.

The focus of this paper is not on the new NGOs who specialize in conflict prevention and resolution. As important and innovative as they are, it is too early to assess their impact systematically (Voutira and Brown, 1995). Rather, I focus on the role of the large NGOs, committed to humanitarian assistance and relief, in the context of a “complex humanitarian emergency” that grows out of violent conflict.

An examination of the role of the largest relief organizations in complex humanitarian emergencies illuminates some of the central dilemmas of conflict resolution. These NGOs, with long-standing commitment to a humanitarian ethic, now find themselves in the eye of the storm. They are the target of sustained criticism that their relief exacerbates and fuels conflict. Examination of this debate goes far beyond the role of humanitarian NGOs. It illuminates attributes of violent conflict in the post-Cold War system, the complexity of contemporary humanitarian emergencies that grow out of violent conflict, and, most importantly, the security vacuum which is creating these acute dilemmas for NGOs and impeding effective conflict resolution.

I define a complex humanitarian emergency as a multi-dimensional humanitarian crisis that is created by interlinked political, military, and social factors, most often arising from violent internal wars that in turn frequently are the result of state failures. It almost always involves some combination of mass population movements, severe food insecurity, macro-economic collapse, and acute human rights violations up to and including genocidal projects.

State failure can refer to a lack of capacity on the part of state institutions to secure territory, enforce authority, or maintain a monopoly on coercive violence. The state cannot secure the basic rights of citizens, fails to provide fundamental protection, and becomes unable to fulfill essential international legal responsibilities. As the authority and capacity of the state weakens, it may invite attack from disaffected segments of the population who can mobilize the resources. In response, a weakening state may attack its own population in an effort to reassert authority, or the state may collapse or implode. Collapse is a severe reduction in capacity, authority, security, identity, institutions, and, at times, territory, so that institutions effectively cease to function. It can be understood as the most severe form of state failure. The Somali bombing of sections of northern Somalia is an example of the former, while the flight of Siyaad Barre from Somalia is an example of failure through collapse.

Alternatively, segments of the population can capture even a relatively strong state for parochial purposes and use the instruments of the state to attack segments of the population. The militant Hutu militias, motivated by their strong opposition to a negotiated power-sharing agreement, itself the result of a major international effort at conflict resolution, captured the state in Rwanda in April 1994 and launched a genocidal massacre of Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

Before examining the theoretical and policy controversies that are swirling around the role of NGOs, I briefly describe the cases and the evidence that is used to evaluate the competing claims current in the literature.

### **Evidence and Case Selection**

The study draws on three principal case studies as well as from ongoing tracking of other complex humanitarian operations in Africa. Somalia, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone are three of the best known cases where political violence led to a large-scale humanitarian disaster that required a multi-dimensional response. They are the principal case studies (Jones and Stein, 1999; Jones, Stein, and Bryans, 1999). Liberia

and Burundi share some of these characteristics, and have been the location of important humanitarian programs; Eastern Zaire was the site of multi-faceted response to a complex emergency, and the focus of some of the most vociferous debates about policy responses. These three cases have been tracked, as important checks on evidence drawn from the principal cases.

The cases were chosen at different points along the crisis time line: Sierra Leone, at the time a case of incipient state failure; Rwanda/Zaire, an on-going crisis; and Somalia, a post-emergency, in the aftermath of large-scale intervention. This variation in time line permits some consideration of competing theoretical propositions against different bodies of evidence. Restriction of the cases to Africa was deliberate. Once the Cold War ended, the attention Africa received from the major powers dropped precipitously. As the major powers withdrew, and economic failure and violence increased, and, in some cases, states collapsed, development and humanitarian non-governmental organizations significantly increased their presence.

### **The Dilemma in Context**

In the last several years, humanitarian NGOs have increasingly found themselves trapped in an acute dilemma. This dilemma is best exemplified in the work that was done with Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire, in the aftermath of the genocide and the victory of the Rwanda Patriotic Front in 1994. Agencies charged with running refugee camps, using the most tested and progressive methods of camp management, nevertheless found themselves by the autumn employing mass murders and war criminals as local staff. The perpetrators of the genocide had re-imposed authority over hundreds of thousands of refugees under the supervision of the United Nations and humanitarian NGOs, and were organizing to use the camps as a springboard to attack the government of Rwanda. Humanitarian assets were being used to fuel rather than resolve conflict. A more perverse outcome from the perspective of humanitarian NGOs is difficult to imagine.

The perversion cannot be explained exclusively or even largely by flawed NGO practices. Certainly, practices were flawed at times and could be improved, but, in this case, better practices would not have prevented the militias from organizing the camps. The roots of the unanticipated and negative consequences of assistance are found, paradoxically, first in the humanitarian ethic, which informs the work of many of the large NGOs, and then in the attributes of contemporary civil war, the global security vacuum, and the changing political economy of international assistance.

*The humanitarian ethic.* Humanitarian work is rooted in a charitable ethic, the imperative to come to the assistance of those in dire need. The essence of humanitarianism is its neutrality and its universality, its refusal to choose one distress over another (Kouchner, 1993; Hendrikson, 1998; Delmas, 1997:201.). Not only those NGOs who deliver relief assistance, but those working to facilitate development and conflict resolution seek to promote human welfare among distressed populations. Humanitarian NGOs believe that intervention to prevent people from dying or starving in large numbers is inherently good; equally, it is morally reprehensible to do nothing when people are displaced and their lives are at risk. The imperative is to action, to

save lives. This categorical imperative creates the political legitimacy for action in humanitarian emergencies.

*Civil wars and complex humanitarian emergencies.* Humanitarian action is occurring, however, in a context very different from the natural earthquakes and disasters that are familiar terrain to NGO personnel. Increasingly, NGOs are struggling to provide relief and assistance under conditions of civil war, often brutal civil war. In the insurgencies and counter-insurgencies characteristic of modern civil wars, human populations are the principal targets and shields. They are not the unanticipated consequences of military strategy, as they are in major conventional battles, but rather the targets of military strategies. The aim of much contemporary military strategy in civil wars is make the civilian population hostage, and, if possible, to prevent or undo the effects of emergency relief and the protection of civilians.

In the internecine struggle for dominance in Somalia and Sierra Leone, and even more so in the openly genocidal landscapes of Rwanda and Burundi, strategies of insurgency and counter-insurgency warfare sought political control over civilian populations, inflicted costs on those populations, at times forced their movements *en masse* and, in some cases, systematically killed large numbers for political or military ends. Civilian casualties are not counted as “collateral damage” but as measures of strategic gain. In Somalia and Sierra Leone, militias and army units alike looted communities, destroyed available resources, engaged in scorched earth tactics against the local infrastructure, and attacked civilian populations. All over Central Africa in the 1990s, insurgency campaigns were fought behind the shields of population groups.

The human costs the non-governmental agencies address are not incidental to the conflict; rather, they are its essential currency. Civilians, and those humanitarian NGOs who would protect them, become the objects of military action. They and their resources stand not apart from, but directly on the battlefield. Becoming part of the battle challenges all the fundamental precepts of humanitarian action.

*Disengagement by the major powers and the consequent security vacuum.* This NGO dilemma of engagement is made far more acute by the repeated unwillingness or incapacity of the major powers to act through the UN Security Council or other appropriate instruments, to provide security first for endangered civilians and then for NGO personnel who are in the field offering protection. Somalia was the exception at one stage of its emergency, but so negative were the experiences of the UN and particularly the US “military humanitarian” mission in Somalia, and so limited the strategic goals in comparison to the apparent costs, that Somalia set a “Mogadishu line” of active engagement which the US and other Western forces were thereafter unwilling to cross in the African context. The non-governmental sector found itself working in a political/security vacuum created by the decline of interest on the part of the major powers. It is the absence of an adequate security envelope, I will argue, which creates many of the observed negative externalities of assistance and relief, and retards the prospects of conflict resolution.

Even less demanding levels of support are dropping. The substantial increase in what the humanitarian community calls the “internally displaced” is telling: In 1991, UNHCR was responsible for 17 million refugees; by 1995, numbers had risen to 27.4 million. This increase, moreover, masks a qualitative change: the number of refugees

who cross international borders and are granted asylum in another state has been declining in the last decade. The increase in UNHCR numbers are internally displaced and war-affected populations within their home countries and people outside their home countries who have not been granted asylum (UNHCR, 1995:20; Duffield, 1998: 143). The increase reflects an increasing inability for populations in distress to seek asylum across borders and become officially recognized refugees with access to the political and humanitarian rights of refugees. The growth in the numbers of internally displaced person reflects the growing tendency for the international community to disengage politically and economically from these conflicts, to attempt to contain their effects, and to ensure that the costs are internalized within the affected communities. This strategy of containment privileges relief at the expense of the protection of the basic rights of displaced populations (Duffield, 1998).

*The political economy of international assistance.* As the major powers become more unwilling to engage directly or through the United Nations, they are channeling ever larger shares of their assistance to Africa through NGOs. In 1996, more aid to Africa was channeled through NGOs than through official development assistance programs. Of course, Western government aid agencies are still the principal source of those resources, but in complex emergencies in particular, NGOs are increasingly the principal conduit of assistance and so face an ever larger share of the dilemmas humanitarianism generates in complex emergencies. The major powers expect -- unrealistically -- that the community of NGOs can fill the security vacuum left by inaction on the part of states (Lautze, Jones, and Duffield, 1998).

In this context, NGOs have become a critical resource. For several of the worst months of the Somali famine in 1991, for example, a handful of NGOs and the ICRC were the only international presence in the country providing relief and assistance. In Sierra Leone, NGOs provided relief in parts of the country declared off limits by the UN. In Rwanda/Zaire, the flood of refugees in the autumn of 1994 was met by NGOs, working without an official UN presence. In Burundi, where military activity kept the UN out of important regions of the country, NGOs were again at the front-line in the delivery of humanitarian relief assistance.

The root causes of the complex emergencies grow from the interlinked failures of development and the weaknesses of the state and the withering of its capacity, or the capture of the state apparatus by organized fragments of the population. In the violence that develops, social control over elements of the population is a key strategic objective of internal war, with civilians as a principal target, rather than a by-product of other military activity. Many of these internal wars fought for control over resources become cyclical and self-perpetuating, as violence generates profit for those who use it most effectively -- which often means most brutally.

This interaction among a humanitarian ethic with an imperative to action, the withdrawal of major powers and international institutions from Africa, the ferocity of civil wars and the complexity of the humanitarian emergencies they create, and the new political economy of international assistance together generate acute contradictions for humanitarian NGOs on the front lines of conflict. Analysis of these contradictions demonstrates the fissures in the structure of international security and the challenges to conflict prevention and resolution.

### **The Critics: Humanitarianism as an Obstacle to Conflict Resolution.**

Drawing on the experience of humanitarian intervention in complex emergencies in Africa in the last several years, critics have concluded that the relief effort at best does not contribute to, and at worst, can jeopardize conflict resolution. At least seven threads of criticism can be identified; some speak to the central dilemma of humanitarian NGOs that I have identified, while others are tangential. I begin with the most technical -- and least serious -- and progress to the most trenchant and troubling.

*1. Humanitarian NGOs are often inefficient and unprofessional.* There is a significant body of critics of the operations and accountability of NGOs. The multi-donor evaluation of the Rwandan crisis could not, for example, locate a third of the 170 NGOs registered, and some \$120 million of funding went unaccounted for (World Disasters Report, 1997: 12). The issue of accountability, which includes not only finance but adequate independent monitoring of performance and program evaluation, grows out of the rapid proliferation of NGOs as states began to privatize their assistance policies. The problem is serious but essentially technical. There has been reluctance by some NGOs to submit to independent evaluation, largely because independent assessments can uncover major failures (Prendergast, 1995). In the last few years, however, greater emphasis has been put on developing best practices and on monitoring of programs and performance. Especially in the context of a complex emergency, monitoring that is oriented toward support of internal evaluation and development is more likely to be acceptable and effective than external audit.

Evaluations have also stressed the need for better coordination among NGOs, better coordination among donor governments and between donors and NGOs, more responsible and restrained use of the news media by NGOs, and stronger coordination by a lead agency within the United Nations when a complex emergency erupts (Bennett, 1996; Minear, Scott, and Weiss, 1996; Lautze, Jones, and Duffield, 1998). In Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire in 1994, it is estimated that as many as 80,000 people may have died due to poor standards of health provision (Borton, Brussett and Hallam, 1996). In Somalia, it is estimated that as many as 240,000 lives were lost due to delayed action by the international community. Furthermore, while the international response focused on food aid, perhaps 70 percent of deaths could have been averted through public health programs (Sommer, 1994: 97).

NGOs have recognized the need for greater coordination amongst themselves and with donors and international institutions and have taken several steps to establish coordinating mechanisms. In Rwanda, for example, the NGOs established a Coordinating Committee in 1995, partly as a result of the large numbers of NGOs working in Rwanda and partly because of the tense relationship with the new government. The Coordinating Committee evaluated the broad range of NGO programming in collaboration with the government and established an executive committee that met regularly to discuss issues of joint concern. In Burundi, the NGOs established their own forum for coordination. NGOs met regularly with heads of UN agencies to discuss joint problems and share information and, in Rwanda, were regularly represented at UN security meetings.



**Voice.** It is almost universally acknowledged that NGOs need deeper knowledge of the society, its culture, history, and language. In Somalia and Rwanda, for example, few NGOs had long-standing experience in the country, were fluent in the local language, appreciated social and cultural norms, and were experienced in working at the grass roots (Shiras, 1996). Of the large number of expatriate NGO staff in Rwanda in 1994, only a handful were conversant in Kinyarwanda. Knowledge of local parties, their networks, their purposes and strategies is critical, I will argue, to minimizing some of the negative consequences of relief assistance which fuel rather than resolve conflict. In addition to their loyalty, as expressed through humanitarian ethics, NGOs must find far better ways of giving voice to the people they wish to help.

Finally, humanitarians need better skills in conflict resolution. In Somalia, traditional systems of authority, which did not depend on violence, and were capable of attempting the resolution of the conflict, continued to exist even after the violence erupted. A peace- building initiative sponsored by an NGO at the local level was successful because it drew upon these customary Somali conflict management practices (Menkhous, 1997). The relief effort, in contrast, helped to cripple the traditional systems because it did not channel assistance through them but strengthened those that relied on violence (Natsios, 1997: 85-86). NGO personnel needed far greater knowledge of the local systems of conflict management and the importance of elders as authoritative voices in society.

2. *Humanitarian assistance from outside interferes with the accountability of African leaders to their populations. It reduces warring parties' responsibility for their constituencies.* This criticism is an expanded, generic version of the previous argument about technical accountability and competence. Critics allege that political accountability, through contractual arrangements, are the critical constraint on government violence against civilians and on government-induced famine. Thirty party humanitarian assistance interferes with the formation of social and political contracts within Africa.

This criticism has been leveled most tellingly in the context of the analysis of famines. It is not natural disasters or economic collapse that create starvation and mass migration; alone, they are insufficient. Rather, famine is the result of systematic violence, deployed for political purposes, and designed to destroy the coping mechanisms and survival strategies of peasants (Sen, 1981; De Mars, 1996). Two issues arise from this analysis of the political economy of famine in a context of violence (Duffield, 1991; Keen, 1994).

First, the argument has been made that relief assistance does not address the causes of famine, and may indeed exacerbate its severity, by making political leaders less accountable to their constituencies (de Waal, 1989). When assistance is distributed in rural areas, governments in central areas are able to avoid the political responsibility incumbent on any government, to feed their own populations (Prendergast, 1996, 1997). In Sudan, for example, relief made the authorities less accountable to their civilian populations.

Critics find it easier to diagnose the politically motivated violence of famine than to suggest strategies that can alleviate the hunger that is its consequence. They suggest that rural areas must be empowered politically so that they can forge ties with a center

that becomes accountable (de Waal, 1989). Logically elegant, such a strategy ignores the context of acute insecurity created by the predatory violence that is so critical to the diagnosis.

Analysis of the political and economic purposes of those who prey on their own civilian population does not suggest that the perpetrators are likely candidates for accountable governments. The authoritarian quality of many governments, the absence of institutions that can meaningfully hold leaders accountable, and the high levels of corruption make contractual constraints unlikely as a near-term solution to complex emergencies and violent conflict. Acknowledging these obstacles, the optimistic analysts estimate that it will take at least a decade for political contracts to form; others are even more pessimistic (Duffield, 1997). These pessimistic estimates suggest that at best, empowerment and accountability will be painfully slow processes that are unlikely to proceed in smooth, linear patterns. Political contracts cannot provide a near-term solution to violent conflict and humanitarian emergencies. Until they do, if they do, the complex emergency continues and the third party and the local humanitarian dilemmas intensify. Yet, humanitarians must contribute to the seeding of this accountability if the vulnerable populations they seek to help are ever to be given voice.

3. *Humanitarian aid is a substitute for international political action.* There is a growing international indifference to humanitarian crises. Governments have privatized their assistance policies and adopted strategies of containment rather than address the underlying causes of complex humanitarian emergencies. They are increasingly resistant to accepting refugees and unwilling to grant asylum as mandated by the international refugee regime, even as they are less inclined to intervene politically or militarily to protect populations at risk. There is a corresponding decline in the public's response to the appeals of NGOs for funds. It is in this context that NGOs are being substituted for effective action by the major powers and exploited as a cover for their absence (Hendrickson, 1998).

Humanitarian relief has also been compromised by the unsustainable and conditional consent it has accepted to access populations at risk. NGOs have experienced enormous difficulty in gaining access to vulnerable populations. These difficulties are deliberately created by warring parties who, in the context of a complex humanitarian emergency, exploit the vulnerability of civilian populations for political or military purposes. NGOs find themselves constantly renegotiating access and facing new designations of previously consented space as off limits. The warring parties in turn frequently use negotiated access agreements to build international credibility. At the extreme, this leads to the perverse outcome that the more killing is done, the more NGOs respond with additional resources. With no good choices, NGOs consent tacitly to unilateral changes in access and so empower belligerents who impose conditions that clearly violate international humanitarian law.

4. *Relief has negative consequences for development.* Critics of classical humanitarian relief alleged that it had negative consequences for development, that it removed initiative and responsibility from local parties, empowered expatriates rather than community leaders, and undermined the local economy (de Waal, 1989). In response to these criticisms, some NGOs have shifted their emphasis to a new

paradigm of “developmentalist” models of relief, usually called the “relief-to-development-and-democracy (RDD) continuum.” To avoid creating a culture of dependency and to move a population toward peace as quickly as possible, relief and development should and can occur simultaneously, even while violence is ongoing (Buchanan-Smith and Maxwell, 1994).

“Developmentalist” strategies posit a quick end to the complex emergency and a return to stability where peaceful development is possible. The fundamental elements of the strategy are local partnerships based on capacity building and the empowerment of local communities as the choosers and managers of development policies. The purpose is to create alternative livelihoods for those associated with war and a criminalized economy. The approach is multi-functional and loosely structured and, on the continuum, the boundary between relief and development blurs and, indeed, virtually disappears (Duffield, 1996; Buchanan-Smith and Maxwell, 1994).

The concepts of local partnerships and community empowerment are key elements of a successful strategy of development, and of a process of conflict resolution that moves forward at a sustainable pace over time. Vulnerable communities must be given voice if predators are to be constrained in any way and a sustainable process of conflict resolution is to begin. Ironically, however, the emphasis on more “participatory” emergency relief led more or less directly to the non-governmental sector’s greatest crisis of conscience and credibility. In Eastern Zaire where aid agencies were setting up camps for the influx of thousands from Rwanda, they employed the latest techniques of camp management involving, among other things “refugee self-management.” The goal is to use indigenous leadership within refugee populations to help them, as much as possible, run their own affairs. In this case, however, the leadership cadres were precisely those who had engineered the genocide and then the forced mass migration. The resulting dilemma stretched over many months, with no obvious solution.

This new “developmentalist” model also ignores, indeed virtually wishes away, the scope of the violence and the extent of the emergency that make an early return to stability extremely unlikely. In some cases -- the Sudan, Liberia, and Somalia -- the emergency has continued for a decade or more. In other cases -- Rwanda and Sudan -- the premature declaration of an end to the emergency to fit with the new agenda is belied by the continuing, indeed, escalating violence within the country.

In Rwanda, the governing expectation for planning in 1996 was gradual but progressive rehabilitation and development. There were positive trends: the return of the refugees, the restoration of some basic government services, and limited economic improvement. By December 1997, however, 50% of Rwanda was again considered “insecure,” and the number of internally displaced was increasing rather than diminishing (Macrae and Bradbury, 1998). The emergency had not ended, it had ebbed briefly before intensifying again. The expectation of stability proved wildly unrealistic in the context of intensifying violence. Similarly, in Sudan, despite ongoing hostilities, an end to the emergency was declared. The government subsequently permitted NGOs to register only for development and rehabilitation, despite the growing numbers of people in desperate need of emergency relief (Lautze and Hammock, 1996: 27). The premature end to the emergency served the political purposes of a regime that was

oppressing vulnerable populations.

The relief-to-development-to-democracy approach also creates pressure to reclassify emergencies so that the multi-functional approach can begin to work. Premature re-labeling has led to the normalizing of emergencies and the raising of thresholds of civilian violence before an emergency can be declared (Duffield, 1998). More generically, developmentalist approaches to relief seriously underestimate the difficulty of implementing development programs in the context of the acute violence and extreme insecurity that are characteristic of protracted humanitarian emergencies. They do so in part because they ignore the politics of those who benefit from the prolonged emergency.

Finally, there is little systematic evidence to sustain the argument that relief generally displaces development and creates dependency (Carlsson, Koehlin, and Ekbohm, 194:203). It may well do so under certain conditions, but we do not know enough to differentiate the conditions under which relief does block development. Given the limited amount of relief that is provided and the relatively short duration of most, though not all, large relief operations, it seems unlikely that relief would appear an attractive option in comparison to alternative coping strategies usually available to subsistence populations. It is more likely that acute violence disrupts these coping strategies and vulnerable populations have no choice but relief assistance. We need to investigate rather than assert the relationship between relief and development.

5. *Humanitarian aid emphasizes reconstruction at the expense of justice.* Even when there is attention to reconstruction, it is largely focused on restoring services and rebuilding economies, not on the political accountability that is central to a reformed political system. Humanitarian relief, in part because of its commitment to impartiality and neutrality, avoids dealing with the political ambitions and past actions of predators (Duffield, 1998; Keen, 1994, 1996). This criticism of NGOs who deliver relief assistance, which is apt on its terms, applies equally, however, to the development and conflict resolution NGOs when they work in complex humanitarian emergencies. Reconstruction of any kind assumes a benign rather than a predator state or militia who systematically targets civilian populations for economic or political ends. Yet, often it is precisely those who created the massive disruption originally who are subsequently invited to participate, first in reconstruction, then in development, and, finally, in conflict resolution. All three can compromise the pursuit of justice.

6. *Humanitarian relief fuels war and conflict through asset transfer.* The evidence is overwhelming that, in recent complex humanitarian emergencies, the assistance and relief that NGOs have provided to populations deliberately put at risk, have, at the same time, become the fuel for continued and renewed warfare (Duffield, 1993). In Somalia, for example, food was extraordinarily scarce as a result of drought and civil conflict and, consequently, its absolute value rose to unprecedented levels. Its high price, in the context of economic collapse, mass unemployment, and a dramatic drop in family income, increased the relative value of food. Food brought into Somalia through the relief effort was plundered by merchants, by organized gangs of young men profiteering from the black market, and by militia leaders who used the wealth the food bought to buy weapons and the loyalty of followers (Natsios, 1997). In Rwanda and Sierra Leone, as well as in Somalia, assistance has been “taxed,” or stolen to fuel

processes of conflict escalation rather than promote conflict resolution.

Resources channeled into Somalia by UN agencies and NGOs became part of a complex economy of warfare between rival militias and rival clans. Theft of those resources by militias was common. Equally significant was the ability of militias, in the absence of a security envelope for the local population and for NGO personnel, to use force and the threat of force to compel NGOs to hire some of the same forces to guard relief supplies and convoys who were the source of the humanitarian crisis (Clarke and Herbst, 1997; Prendergast, 1997). In so doing, NGOs legitimated those who were preying on local populations (Anderson, 1996). In Sierra Leone and Liberia, conflict analysts and medical NGOs learned that they could plan by following the pattern of UN food deliveries: when food was distributed to a village or displaced persons camp, the militias would quickly attack to steal the relief supplies, killing dozens of villagers as they did so.

UN and NGO resources in eastern Zaire were subject to political control and taxation by the forces that perpetrated the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Less by theft and diversion than by controlling distribution of relief supplies and the flow of information, Rwanda's *genocidaires* turned UN-managed and NGO-operated refugee camps into political and resource bases for continued and renewed genocidal warfare, both within Zaire and in western Rwanda (Duffield, 1994). When the post-1994 Rwandan regime sought to break the *genocidaires'* control of the camps, civilian refugees became moving shields between two armies. Relief supplies and the NGO presence were used to lure starving refugees out of hiding in the forests of Zaire, and these refugees were then slaughtered by the tens of thousands. At the extreme, NGOs were transformed from sources of protection into resources for destruction.

The diversion of humanitarian assets by warring parties, at the same time as they are targeting warring parties, is the most serious challenge NGOs face. It is the most dramatic example of the perversion of the humanitarian agenda and it is a serious obstacle to the resolution of conflict. To the extent that humanitarian NGOs are inadvertently fueling the cycle of violence which is making populations vulnerable, they and those that they seek to help are trapped in a vicious process. Yet to abandon populations at risk to the predators is an almost unthinkable choice.

Critics disagree radically on the appropriate solutions. Some urge that relief assistance be radically restructured or even eliminated. There is agreement among the radical critics that conflict can be resolved only through a long process of creating a vibrant civil society that can demand good governance, but there is considerable difference about how civil society can best be promoted. Some urge the virtual exclusion of third party humanitarians, so that governments and populations have no alternative but to create contracts, while, at the other extreme, some urge a high level of partnering between "progressive" northern and southern NGOs, to force governments to be accountable (Prendergast, 1996). Aid would be made conditional on good governance and respect for human rights.

I have already examined the real and serious obstacles to the development of binding contractual relationships as a near-term solution to violence. In the fragmented politics of those marginalized by the global economy, some claim that even evolutionary processes toward political accountability are delusional (Duffield, 1997).

Since society is fragmented, politicized, and incorporated into black or gray predatory economies, the model of a civil society separate from a centralized state does not fit; there simply is no civil society to strengthen. One pessimistic analyst of post-modern violence concludes that “War and famine do not stand out from normal social relations; they are simply a deepening of exploitative processes”(Keen, 1994:12). The same kind of contextual challenges would confront those northern NGOs who partnered with their southern counterparts in order to force local militias and predators to be accountable (Fowler, 1998).

The larger critique -- that relief fuels war -- is valid and important, but it does not develop either criticism or solution within an appropriate context. Withdrawal of the humanitarian presence, I argue, should be only the last in a staged series of options, and even then, it has negative consequences because those that are watching and reporting to the outside world will no longer be there, even as a mild deterrent. It is also important to note that not only relief but many other economic activities fuel and sustain war as well. The importance of relief is likely to vary by context: in eastern Zaire, relief assistance was a critical resource to militia leaders, while, in other cases, the drug trade and smuggling were far more important generators of resources to predators. No study systematically investigates the proportionality of effects on war, yet only careful empirical analysis can resolve the question of the proportional impact of humanitarian aid on war.

### **Minimizing the Negative Consequences of Aid in War**

There are no easy or obvious solutions to the fundamental dilemmas humanitarian NGOs face as they seek both to help populations preyed upon by governments or militias, and to help resolve the conflict so that vulnerable populations will no longer be targets of systematic violence. Indeed, analysis of the structure and context of complex humanitarian emergencies offers little grounds for optimism about a quick end to violence. Accumulated experience in attempting to manage these emergencies and resolve the internal conflicts of the last decade is no more encouraging. For humanitarians, the dilemmas are likely to persist and intensify. We need look no further than the recent experience in Kosovo in August 1998, where civilian populations were yet again systematically targeted, humanitarians were again denied access even after consent was given, and hunger was deliberately created by the burning of crops and the destruction of farming implements.

Two conclusions are clear from the analysis. First, complex humanitarian emergencies of the kind we have seen in this last decade in Africa are likely to continue and not only in Africa, well into the future. Second, NGOs committed to humanitarian values will continue to engage on behalf of vulnerable populations. Disengagement is not an option for humanitarian NGOs, even if it is for states. If anything, given the privatization of assistance and the retreat of the United Nations hobbled by budget deficits, NGOs will play an even larger role than they have in the past (Carnegie Commission, 1997: 105-127). The central challenge, then, from the perspective of conflict resolution, is to find ways of minimizing the negative externalities of assistance as aid flows to the most vulnerable populations. NGOs are looking for ways

to prevent the transfer of assets to the warring parties, so that their work does not fuel the cycle of war. It is vital that humanitarians learn from past experience, and that they constantly evaluate their practices to assess whether alternatives exist which would minimize the negative consequences of their work in the context of a complex humanitarian emergency. In the last five years, there has been considerable progress in exploring alternative ways of reducing these negative externalities. I consider only a few of a large number of proposals and programs that have been put in place in the last several years.

Paying explicit attention to the diversion of food aid to warring parties, NGOs have begun to distinguish types of food aid by their market value. They ask how “lootable” their assistance is. In Somalia, for example, rice was extraordinarily attractive to looters while sorghum evoked little interest. When, for example, a food convoy organized by CARE was attacked along the Jubba River in Somalia, the thieves left without stealing when they discovered that the trucks contained sorghum (Natsios, 1997:87). Blended foods, generally less tasty, are less attractive, and foods that can be stored for extended periods of time can be hidden from predators. The ICRC, for example, moved to cooked food to reduce the interest of looters. Careful monitoring, important on its own as NGOs seek to become transparent and accountable, was remarkably successful in Rwanda and Angola in reducing diversion. Similarly, seeds can be selected so that they are less attractive to looters: those that are easily stored, that match local habits of consumption, and that displaced populations can take with them as they move to different locales are less likely to be diverted.

In Somalia, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), a department of USAID, tried an innovative strategy of “monetizing” the food that was delivered. Insofar as food had become a medium of exchange, flooding the country with food would depreciate its attractiveness and diminish the incentive for looting (Natsios, 1997: 86-93). Selling cereals as well as cooking oil to merchants would permit people to buy food with their limited incomes as the price of food declined. The monetization strategy was also designed to force onto the markets all the food hoarded by organized criminals and warlords. Monetization did affect market prices by 1993 and produced enough currency to fund significant rehabilitation and reconstruction. It did not succeed, however, in reducing diversion; the drop in food prices drove the warlords to “tax” at higher levels. Only after the military intervention, did monetization accelerate and break the hold of the warlords.

NGOs are also trying to increase the ratio of non-food to food aid within the constraints imposed by a complex emergency. There is much greater emphasis on supporting sustainable livelihoods - distribution of fishing nets where fish are available, vaccination programs against measles, a perennial killer of children in complex emergencies, and portable educational materials so that schools can continue even as populations are forced to move. None of these are easily “lootable” material that can fuel a war economy.

NGOs have also recognized how the economic side-effects of their operations can contribute to a war economy. Collaboration among NGOs, difficult as it is, to standardize physical costs can drastically reduce the negative externalities of assistance. In Baidoa, for example, all agencies collaborated to reduce the costs of

vehicles. In Rwanda, Save the Children (UK) organized some NGOs to standardize prices of housing and transport. In Goma, UNHCR and the NGOs cooperated to put a ceiling on labor costs; salaries were immediately reduced by 50% (Prendergast, 1995:20).

Proposals have also been developed to share information, to coordinate and plan better, to improve institutional memory, and increase area expertise so that NGO personnel can learn quickly about local politics and structures. Since the genocide and mass exodus from Rwanda in 1994, some NGOs have consciously begun to develop their capacity to collect information about and analyze political and security developments that might have an important impact on diversion of aid and, more generally, on operations. MSF has an ongoing global country watch; Action Aid has created an office called Emergency Response and Information Collection (ERIC) for the Great Lakes Region; and many NGOs feed into and from the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs' Integrated Regional Information Network for the Great Lakes and for West Africa. UNICEF has created a global Rapid Response Team and CARE is examining how it can preposition experienced staff in areas where populations seem particularly at risk (Prendergast, 1995). NGOs recognize that they need good operational knowledge of differentiation along identity and class lines if they are to succeed in minimizing the diversion of aid to warring parties.

In response to criticism that they have violated humanitarian space, NGOs have worked together to define more carefully the responsibilities of emergency aid and to refine the ethics of humanitarian action. International humanitarian agencies have adopted standards of performance and codes of conduct: the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief; the elaboration of a set of technical standards in the field of water and food aid delivery by the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR); the development of principles and best practices for the recruitment and management of relief workers by People in Aid in the United Kingdom; and the development by the SCHR of a "claimants" charter defining beneficiary rights.

NGOs have also worked to improved their assessment of needs within a broader model which includes black as well as official economies, an analysis of the local coping strategies of populations at risk, and an assessment of their capacities as well as their needs. A broader analytic lens helps NGOs to focus on supporting herds, or replacing implements, so that vulnerable populations can survive in the face of predators. In Somalia, for example, NGOs have begun only recently to assess local coping mechanisms and capacities. NGOs are looking at emergency assistance that simultaneously supports and sustains local community structures. Here too, they are monitoring to ascertain whether aid is reaching the intended targets. Meeting local needs and at the same time sustaining community structures and building capacity is a long term, trial-and-error process as NGO personnel learn local structures on the ground. When they can do so, the distinction between relief and development begins to blur.



### A Political Humanitarianism

These strategies, alone or together, can reduce the scope and severity but never completely eliminate the transfer of assets to warriors and other negative externalities of aid. Analysis of these cases suggests that the more complex the conflict, the more chaotic the security markets, and the more traumatized the social order, the more important an adequate security envelope for effective delivery of humanitarian assistance (Natsios, 1997:93). For humanitarians working in complex emergencies, acute dilemmas will occur as long as the United Nations is unable to provide security as a public good and the major powers continue to disengage and privatize assistance as a substitute for political action. There is no evidence that either trend is likely to change in the near future; on the contrary, both are likely to intensify. If they do, the range of choices for humanitarian NGOs will frequently be narrow, and, at the extreme, there will be no "good" choices to be made.

In the camps in eastern Zaire in 1994 and 1995, for example, there was considerable resource transfer, misappropriation, taxation and theft by militias. Here, the *genocidaires* unquestionably drew their main political support from the physical presence of the humanitarian effort; the humanitarian presence provided an economic base from which they and most important, their key strategic resource -- Rwandan civilians -- could live. The critical and agonizing issue for NGOs was whether to stay and fuel the capacity of the *genocidaires* to make war, or leave and abandon the civilian population that the militia had targeted and exploited. The choice was cruel and stark, a political and ethical dilemma beyond the reach of any technical solution available then or now. NGO personnel may not be able to choose to do no harm, if by doing nothing, they abandon civilian populations at risk and violate their humanitarian ethics (Anderson, 1996). In the face of those who are determined to do harm to civilians, NGOs may well be forced to choose the option that does the least harm. In an effort to reduce reliance upon militias, for example, NGOs have experimented with market-based and commercial channels in Somalia. This approach does reduce diversion as well as the number of armed security men employed by agencies, but it can empower merchants who finance the warlords (Prendergast, 1995:9). To make the choice that does the least harm, humanitarian NGOs must situate their work in its larger political context.

*Humanitarians must acknowledge and analyze the explicitly political nature of their work -- relief delivery, refugee protection, election monitoring, and conflict resolution -- in the context of a complex emergency.* NGOs traditionally have argued and still argue that only strict adherence to principles of neutrality and consent of the parties can insulate relief assistance from political and military agendas (Keen and Wilson, 1994). Neutrality, it is argued, contributes to the amelioration of violence and conflict resolution by effectively inducing UN agencies and governments to provide assistance, by deterring violence by their presence on the ground and their access to the media, and by their capacity to mediate among the warring parties (Berry, 1997). I, and others, allege that the context of relief assistance has changed so radically that apolitical neutrality is no longer an option. Neutrality is appropriate in a neutral environment, but the environments of complex emergencies are generally predatory

rather than neutral. If the political purposes of those who target civilian populations are ignored, NGOs will miss the inherently political nature of the relief they deliver to those targeted populations and miscalculate the politics of protecting those they seek to help.

*NGOs should urge the Secretary General to provide security from private markets when public security for humanitarian operations is unavailable.* This analysis suggests that the more complex the conflict, the more chaotic the security markets. Yet, the more traumatized the social order, the more important an adequate security envelope for effective delivery of humanitarian assistance (Natsios, 1997:93). Complex emergencies feed on themselves, enfeebling and even wiping away legitimate security resources, spreading chaos and violence, and generating the need for even greater security resources from outside. The cycle can only be broken if security is again supplied as a public good, ideally by the major powers acting through international institutions, or by members of regional organizations acting collectively. This analysis suggests, however, that the prospects of repairing the shredded security envelope in which humanitarian NGOs currently operate are not promising.

The major powers that are critical to authorization of a UN force are likely to consider most of the humanitarian emergencies as "discretionary" and, consequently, be unwilling to commit forces, directly or through the United Nations, to a crisis that humanitarians consider urgent. The falling budget for UN peacekeeping speaks loudly. Given the demographic and social forces that reinforce the aversion to casualties in post-industrial states, this caution can only become more pronounced over time. The "Mogadishu line" has become, at the close of the decade, a military and political firebreak that, other than in exceptional circumstances, major powers outside the region seem increasingly unwilling to cross.

The Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Sergio Vieira de Mello, observing the general lack of willingness of members of the United Nations to provide security forces for humanitarian operations, noted that states are not at all "averse to letting humanitarian staff go where they dare not send their...invariably better equipped, better trained and better protected [troops]." He proposed the creation of "regional humanitarian security teams" trained and equipped to support humanitarian personnel at short notice; teams would be drawn from "selected troops from a variety of nations in the region concerned" (DHA News, 1997: 5, 7-8). This proposal is consistent with the so-called "regional" or "sub-regional" approach to conflict resolution, where the responsibility for peacekeeping and security rests with the countries closest to the problem. In the wake of the terrible failure first to prevent and then to stop the genocide in Rwanda, the United States, Britain, and France supported the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI), a project to help train and equip a standby, rapid reaction peacekeeping force; this has yet to be put to the test. By far the most extensive trial of regional peacekeeping has been the eight-year long deployment of a multi-national force or "monitoring group" (ECOMOG) first in Liberia and more recently in Sierra Leone, by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The record of ECOMOG has been mixed, but no more so than UN and NATO forces deployed elsewhere (Smith and Weiss, 1997; Griffen, 1999; Rowe, 1998; Scott, Minear, and Weiss, 1995).

African peacekeeping and peace-enforcing efforts have been effective in providing a security envelope where they have been deployed, but the overall pattern is nevertheless not encouraging. Forces have been infrequently deployed and the choices as to where and when to intervene have been essentially arbitrary. There is also growing concern at the United Nations about compliance with international standards in regional operations that the UN authorizes. The Secretary-General recently urged the Security Council to confirm that regional organizations have the capacity to carry out operations consistent with international norms and standards, and to put in place mechanisms to monitor regional peacekeeping forces operating under the authority of the UN (Secretary-General, 1999).

When security is scarce as a public good, the security of NGO personnel in the field is, as I have noted, not surprisingly increasingly at risk. There are, however, very limited arrangements currently in place through the United Nations to promote their security, even when they are contracted to the UN. Within the UN, the United Nations Security Coordinator (UNSECOORD) coordinates, plans, and implements safety programs and acts as the nexus for interagency cooperation on security issues, exclusive of peacekeeping forces. These arrangements are restricted to personnel engaged in operations specifically authorized by the Security Council or the General Assembly (Secretary-General, 1999: 10). In a memorandum of understanding circulated in early 1997, NGOs who are implementing partners of agencies within the UN may request to be included in UN security arrangements; to do so, they must agree to pay their share of the costs and abide by UN security guidelines. These arrangements are restricted to expatriate staff of NGOs that are implementing partners and to those employees directly engaged in fulfilling the contract; they do not include local staff, or even all expatriate staff, much less extend to vulnerable populations. It is not surprising that NGOs objected to the loss of autonomy, the inequities, and the cost. Here donors could be helpful: they could emphasize as a priority and fund security costs as part of their envelopes for humanitarian assistance and they could also press for a long overdue review of the role of UNSECOORD. Even were more inclusive agreements to be negotiated with the United Nations, they would not address the fundamental challenge of the deep insecurity of the vulnerable populations humanitarians seek to help.

When security is not being provided as a public good, as it frequently is not in a complex humanitarian emergency, NGOs should reluctantly consider urging the Secretary General to draw on private resources to provide security. The absence of international public security forces, and the lack of effective and legitimate alternatives, empowered the militias of Somalia, Eastern Zaire, Sierra Leone and Liberia to terrible effect. It is only when security is absent that humanitarian assistance prolongs rather than mitigates violence. Under these circumstances and only under these circumstances, the UN might consider hiring paid, volunteer, professionally-trained security personnel, employed without regard to national origin and beholden to its employer rather than to any single government, to secure the deliveries of emergency assistance. The concept was seriously considered in Rwanda in late 1994. In the fall of 1994, the UN received a proposal from a British company to provide training and support to Zaire's army in order to wrest control of the camps from the militias. The

idea received support from one permanent member of the Security Council, but other members rejected the idea on the basis of cost and principle.

The primary purpose of private security guards would not be to protect NGO personnel, but to avoid the need to hire local providers from among belligerents to protect convoys of relief assistance. In eastern Zaire, for example, after months of inaction, two battalions of Zairian troops were hired to maintain security in Rwandan camps under UNHCR authority. The presence of the troops significantly improved law and order in the camps and diminished the authority of the militias among the refugees (Prendergast, 1995). Even then, the Zairian troops were not impartial in the broader conflict within Rwanda nor were they mandated to deal with the central issue of separating refugees from militia leaders. At the very least, private security personnel from outside the region would not fuel the local war economy nor sustain those who prey on local populations.

This kind of proposal will not be well received within the humanitarian community and many would consider it infeasible. For both practical and normative reasons, NGOs undoubtedly would prefer to avoid such a solution. There are already indications, however, that the hiring of security guards from the private sector is acceptable under specified conditions in the humanitarian community. The ICRC prohibits the hiring of local armed escorts for relief convoys, but acknowledges that the hiring of guards to combat crime and provide security for personnel may be necessary if there is no other option. When armed guards are necessary, the ICRC recommends that they be hired from “an established security firm or the police rather than the army” (ICRC, 1995, 1997). A report recently submitted to the European Commission proposed that donors could field security units to protect humanitarian work, either from national resources or “through funding specialist third parties” (European Commission, 1999). It is worth considering whether the hiring of security guards from specialized third parties is an appropriate strategy not only to combat crime but also to mitigate the violence that flows inadvertently from current policies. Private providers of security working under the authority of the United Nations may be the least harmful response both to the privatization of assistance and to the absence of security as a public good.

*Conditionality and Exit.* Finally, and only as a desperate last resort, NGOs must be prepared to consider seriously the option of withdrawal when assistance intended for humanitarian purposes is being diverted into renewed cycles of conflict. Withdrawal during an emergency flies in the face of the most fundamental humanitarian commitment and impulse to protect lives at risk: NGOs cannot justify the loss of access and witness. Yet, only if humanitarian actors are willing to suspend delivery and withdraw presence when their assistance is forming part of a cycle of violence, can they regain sufficient leverage to retain or recapture control over delivery and management of relief supplies, and to re-convert presence into protection. When other options are exhausted, NGOs must be willing to take the necessary organizational steps to ensure that they are not part of the problems they are committed to alleviate. Strategic withdrawal can also send crucial signals to future would-be perpetrators of violence hoping to use relief resources for their own purposes.

To argue that NGOs must consider withdrawing if assets are being diverted to fuel

a war economy raises operational, strategic, and ethical questions. Can NGOs withdraw in the midst of an emergency? In the past, humanitarians have withdrawn largely when their staff were harmed or at risk -- the ICRC from Burundi and Chechnya, Caritas from Burundi -- or when necessary infrastructure was destroyed -- CARE from Mogadishu, and almost all NGOs from Liberia in 1996.

Withdrawal as a strategic choice is rare, but humanitarian NGOs have very occasionally made this choice. In eastern Zaire in November 1994, fifteen NGOs withdrew from Mugunga camp in the Goma region in the face of attempts by militias to assert political control over the camps. The decision was made in response to untenable security conditions and unacceptable ethical compromises, but also to increase pressure on the international community to respond to the security dilemma. At the same time, in a controversial decision, ECHO decided to stop all funding for NGOs serving the internally displaced camps within Rwanda, hoping to create a "push" for people to return to their homes. The impact of the withdrawal is unclear, since agencies with independent funding, that considered continued assistance as a humanitarian imperative, remained in the camps.

If humanitarian NGOs are to consider withdrawal as a strategy to influence warring parties and reluctant major powers, they need the capacity to assess the severity of the negative consequences of their aid, and a set of diagnostics that they can collectively use to judge that they may be doing more harm than good.

It is possible to identify a set of diagnostics, but with the caveat that there is significant variation within complex humanitarian emergencies and the diagnostics will be sensitive to the difference in context. The likelihood of negative externalities of assistance depends in part on the degree of coherence among militias and their capacity to organize effectively; when it is very high, as it was in Rwanda, diversion is more likely than when coherence is low, as it was in Sierra Leone. Diversion also depends in part on the popular support that militias enjoy and the political control they exercise; when it is high, as it was in Rwanda, diversion is more likely than if control is limited as it was in Sierra Leone.

*The taxation of relief.* The political taxation of relief is an obvious indicator that aid is being diverted. Initially, diversion can be difficult to assess since theft and hijacking can be high, but not part of a pattern of systematic political diversion. The better informed NGO personnel are about local political and military organizations, about ethnic and religious fault lines, and about local social, economic, and political structures, the more easily they will be able to distinguish simple theft from systematic diversion. Systematic political diversion, which is not reduced by the strategies we considered earlier, should trigger consideration of a coordinated withdrawal.

*Failure by local authorities to cooperate in registration.* A second warning light is the unwillingness of local authorities to cooperate with the UN and NGOs to register recipients of relief assistance, especially in refugee or displaced persons' camps, and to make lists of registrants available. The failure to cooperate in registration suggests that local authorities are seeking to supplant or subvert existing distribution mechanisms in order to divert relief assistance. If local authorities are willing to use force to monopolize control over registration process, there is a very high likelihood that aid will subsequently become a resource for violent conflict.

*Obstruction of access.* Negotiation of access to populations at risk often provides predatory governments and militias with the opportunity to impose inequitable political conditions that privilege some vulnerable populations at the expense of others. Especially when access is obstructed after consent has been obtained, relief is being used as an instrument to assert control over local populations for political purposes. The government of Mobutu Sese Seko, for example, repeatedly denied access to large groups of refugees and displaced persons. Access is central to protection, support, and witness.

When NGOs recognize that their assistance is doing more harm than good, that saving lives in the short term may increase deaths over the longer term, consideration of strategic withdrawal hinges in part, but only in part, on their contractual obligations. The large NGOs, with the capacity to deliver significant amounts of assistance quickly, are almost all dependent on one of six or seven UN agencies or an agency within their home government for an implementing contract. Contracts can consequently be a constraint or an inducement to making relief conditional. UN agencies typically insist on non-negotiable rates, payment schedules and penalty clauses. Schedules and penalty clauses can work against a decision to make assistance conditional, insofar as the NGO violates the contract either by politically motivated withdrawal or by allowing waiting time for compellant strategies to work. Instead of an obstacle, agency contracts could create incentives for conditional relief. Contracts could include incentives to assist in the monitoring and reporting on abuse of vulnerable populations, and require regular reporting of agreed upon indicators of diversion of assistance. They could also reduce the penalties that are an obstacle to withdrawal, provided that withdrawal occurs within defined parameters and in accordance with agreed upon principles.

A far more important constraint on strategic withdrawal is the difficulty of collective action. A unilateral withdrawal by one NGO, no matter how large, is unlikely to be effective in constraining the behavior of predators. Even the collective withdrawal from Mugunga had only limited impact; the NGOs who withdrew continued to provide relief in other camps and the flow of resources into Mugunga continued. At least two conditions are necessary if a strategic withdrawal by NGOs is to have any impact.

First, there must be coordination among the principal NGOs who are providing assistance to act in concert. This kind of decision will not be easily reached; many NGOs continue to believe that withdrawal violates the fundamental humanitarian ethic, that it is tantamount to abandoning the most vulnerable, that it will provoke looting and violence, and that the politics of withdrawal compromise humanitarian neutrality and impartiality. The most serious criticism leveled at a strategy of political withdrawal is that it is ineffective. In the aftermath of the cessation of humanitarian aid to Rwandan refugees, violence and war increased, and several hundred thousand people died; the Great Lakes region was less violent with international humanitarian assistance than it became when that aid was withdrawn. This intense debate among humanitarians may limit the possibilities of coordination to arrangements between those who leave and those who stay, so that there can be both public statement and quiet assistance. Within the limits of the possible, consulting recipients of assistance -- rather than the predatory leadership -- as to whether agencies should remain silent or protest against abuses even if they lose their access, would empower local populations, enhance accountability, and

make it easier for NGOs to reach a collective decision.

Second, a withdrawal should be accompanied by a clearly stated set of conditions for return -- an end to diversion of relief, unobstructed access to vulnerable populations, and/or cooperation in registration of refugees or displaced persons. There are cases where conditionality has succeeded. In response to looting of cars in Eastern Equatoria, four NGOs and agencies collaborated to make continuing assistance conditional on safety on the roads, as an essential component of the larger principle of unfettered secure access. The SPLA were concerned enough about the consequences of a cessation of aid that they made certain that the raiding of vehicles stopped. A consortium of NGOs working in southern Sudan insisted on independent access and monitoring as conditions of continued assistance. Only if withdrawal is coordinated and strategic, if the conditions NGOs set can be met by the targets, can concerted withdrawal have any impact whatsoever on the behavior of a predatory government or militia.

### **In the Eye of the Storm**

Humanitarian NGOs have become important participants as assistance has been privatized and great powers interests and commitments have waned. They remain loyal and committed to humanitarian ethics, to the promotion of the welfare of those most at risk and most vulnerable. To do their work effectively, NGOs now recognize that those they seek to help must have voice, and it is their voice that, wherever possible, must be heard and taken most seriously.

Finally, in large part because of the failure of the wider international community to provide security as a public good, humanitarians increasingly find themselves in a cruel dilemma. In complex humanitarian emergencies, where security is absent, some of the assistance NGOs provide has gone to those who prey on the vulnerable and has fueled the cycle of violence. Far from contributing to conflict resolution, they have inadvertently contributed to conflict escalation.

The political strategies that I have outlined, alone or in combination, can alleviate some of these negative consequences, under some circumstances. They are, however, no panacea. At the extreme, the humanitarian imperative compels exit, not presence. As controversial, and as unwelcome as these recommendations are, they must be taken seriously if humanitarian space is to be preserved. Humanitarians must consider the politics of their presence in complex emergencies seriously and, in so doing, will inevitably come to consider the politics of their absence.

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# A TWO-LEVEL ANALYSIS OF ISRAEL'S STRATEGY TOWARD PEACE DURING THE 1990S

Shlomo Mizrahi, Abraham Mehrez, Arye Naor

## *Abstract*

This paper suggests a two-level game analysis of Israel's strategy toward peace during the 1990s. The paper shows how various paradoxes in Israeli society create domestic obstacles and internal opposition that weaken Israel's bargaining position toward neighboring countries. Treating domestic parameters in these countries as a given, we argue that Israeli leaders can hardly use this weakness to manipulate information in the bargaining process, because neighboring countries can observe Israel's internal processes. Therefore, attempts by Israeli leaders to create the impression that they are willing to adopt a conflictual approach towards neighboring polities, especially the Palestinians, without actually creating the necessary internal conditions for such a policy, may finally lead to a sub-optimal equilibrium for Israel – in terms of territory and deterrent ability – since it will have to compromise under difficult conditions. Several practical implications as to the preferred bargaining process under these conditions follow.

## **Introduction**

During his service as Secretary of State in the 1970s, Henry Kissinger once stated that Israel did not have a foreign policy, it had only domestic policy. By that he meant that Israel's foreign policy is primarily the result of internal conditions and constraints. Yet since this claim was made, students of Israel's foreign and strategic policy, especially within the discipline of international relations, have not dealt with this issue systematically. Most studies focus on the balance of power between Israel and the neighboring countries as measured by armed forces, territory and security budget (Karsh and Mahler, 1994). Kissinger's observation seems more correct than ever in the 1990s, however, in light of events since the signing of the Oslo Agreement.

This observation was reaffirmed recently, in May 2000, when Israel unilaterally withdrew from Lebanon. The withdrawal followed strong internal pressures that were interpreted by many as a significant decline in the willingness of the Israeli public to pay the price of conflict. Indeed, Sheik Nassralla, the leader of the Southern Lebanese guerrilla organization Hizbullah, called on the Palestinians to observe how weak Israel had become despite its military strength.

This paper analyzes the impact of internal socio-political and economic processes in Israel on its strategic position in the Middle East, and especially its peace strategy during the 1990s. We assume that Israel is facing a bloc of hostile countries composed of players such as Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, and parts of Palestinian society. The interests

of these players may differ in certain aspects, and they do not necessarily coordinate their strategy towards Israel. We assume, however, that their basic calculations concerning Israel are similar, and therefore concentrate on domestic variables that influence Israel's strategic choices while treating domestic parameters in the hostile bloc as a given.

The paper uses the general concept of "nested games," where players' interests and actions in one game are influenced by their involvement in others (Tsebelis, 1990; Colomer, 1995). Specifically, the paper applies the idea of a two-level game, as developed for analyzing international relations and foreign policy (Schelling, 1960; Putnam, 1988; Iida, 1993; Evans, Jacobson and Putnam, 1993; Schneider and Cederman, 1994; Mo, 1995; Schultz, 1998). Two-level game literature has introduced solid micro foundations to the theory of international bargaining. Most importantly, this research tradition has shown that the amount of uncertainty in the international system is not a given but can be manipulated both for the better and for the worse. This ambiguous potential is the essence of a two-level dilemma in world politics in which domestic politics affects international behavior both positively and negatively, and *vice versa* – clearly, international conditions also affect domestic politics, which again affects foreign policy. To avoid a cyclical argument, we concentrate on explaining foreign policy based on internal conditions. The opposite direction of this mutual dependency between foreign and domestic policy will be discussed only when necessary.

A major debate in the literature is whether domestic obstacles weaken or strengthen the state's bargaining position in international negotiations. Putnam (1988) has shown how negotiators might claim successfully that domestic opposition prevents them from concurring in an international agreement. Iida (1993) questions this argument and relies on sequential bargaining to analyze how domestic constraints impact the negotiations between two states, given various assumptions regarding information. One basic result is that a country's bargaining leverage does not necessarily increase when its domestic constraints become more severe. When there is complete information about domestic constraints, the constrained negotiator has a bargaining advantage only if the constraints are severe. When there is asymmetric international information, the constrained negotiator will benefit only if the foreign negotiator strongly believes that the home negotiator is severely constrained. Finally, Iida (1993) shows that when there is incomplete domestic information (on the side of the home negotiator), the constrained negotiator has a bargaining advantage if the probability of successful ratification increases with the share that this side receives. This opens up the possibility for misinterpretation, which may lead to efficiency loss. On the other hand, Schultz (1998) shows that as there is more domestic competition in a state (e.g., in democratic regimes), the *ex ante* probability of war decreases, since a strategic opposition party helps reveal information about the state's preferences. In this paper, we argue that the Schultz model is more accurate than the Iida model for analyzing the interaction between Israel and the neighboring countries. Given Israel's democratic regime, neighboring countries can easily obtain information about Israel's internal processes.

Empirical studies also question Putnam's argument. According to Evans et al

(1993: 409), leaders “did try to strategically misinterpret their own politics, but not as often as expected, and with much less success.” In Moravcsik’s view (1993: 159), bluffing is rare because governments might be able to predict the actions of an eventual cheater: “...among modern information-rich democracies, it is extremely difficult for negotiators to mask their true domestic win-set, even in a sensitive area of national security like weapons procurement.” In other words, as the clarity of a state’s domestic obstacles increases, the ability of the state’s leaders to manipulate this information in the bargaining process declines. Such clarity is more likely in democracies, but in many cases it also exists in non-democratic systems.

With regard to Israel’s strategic choices and foreign policy in the Middle East during the 1990s, this paper shows how domestic obstacles and internal opposition weaken Israel’s bargaining position towards the hostile bloc it faces. We also argue that using this weakness to manipulate information is unlikely to be advantageous, because of the characteristics of two-level interaction, as mentioned above.

During the 1990s Israel faced several challenges – especially the Gulf War in 1991 and the armament of states like Syria and Iran – which threatened to upset the balance of power between it and several neighboring countries that comprise a hostile bloc. Those events, as well as the Palestinian uprising (“Intifada”) since 1987, led Israeli leaders to devise a peace policy that found expression in the Oslo Agreement signed in September 1993 (Peres and Naor, 1993). However, due to internal opposition within both Israeli and Palestinian societies, the peace process, which brought great hope to the region, gradually slowed down. Moslem and Jewish fundamentalists committed terrorist attacks on civilian populations. The Israeli Prime Minister who made peace, Yitzhak Rabin, was murdered at a political rally by a Jewish extremist, and Palestinian suicide bombers took the lives of many Israelis. Thus, the public mood was more open to the right-wing campaign that brought Benjamin Netanyahu to power in 1996. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (*IISS*), “The air of optimism generated by the famous Rabin-Arafat handshake on the lawn of the White House in September 1993, dissipated long ago... official Israeli statements refer to the process as going through a critical stage. The Secretary-General of the Palestinian Cabinet, Ahmed Abdel Rahman, has gone much further. In March 1998, he announced the death of the peace process.” (*IISS*, 1998: 144).

The shift in Israel’s approach to the peace process cannot be attributed solely to the fact that a right-wing government governed Israel from May 1996 to May 1999. We argue, rather, that it is not only ideological considerations that explain the slow-down of the peace process but also several paradoxes within Israeli society. Since the Palestinians, as well as other Arab countries, observe these processes, Israeli leaders are hardly able to use domestic obstacles to manipulate information in the bargaining process, as might be theorized according to Schelling (1960: 22) and Putnam (1988). Therefore, a precondition for an Israeli leader to halt the peace process for any reason and take a conflictual approach toward the hostile bloc is to shape the preferences of Israeli society. This includes convincing the different population segments that Israel is playing a non-cooperative game with its neighbors – especially the Palestinians – and creating a willingness to tolerate the high cost of violent conflict. We show, however, that the deepening polarization of Israeli society in various dimensions makes it very

hard to create such beliefs. Therefore, attempts by Israeli leaders to create the impression that they are willing to adopt a conflictual approach towards the hostile bloc, without actually creating the necessary internal conditions for such policy, may finally lead to a sub-optimal equilibrium for Israel – in terms of territory and deterrence ability – since it will have to compromise under difficult conditions. Once Israeli leaders understand these limitations, it is highly probable that they will form a peace strategy that takes into account the different interests and sensitivities of the neighboring states. Further, the analysis suggests that a consensus in Israeli society may be achieved if there is a sequential bargaining process on crucial issues, with decisions on each issue being taken one at a time, followed by implementation and evaluation of outcomes.

The paper is organized as follows. The following section uses games in presenting the development of power relations and equilibria in the Middle East until the 1990s. The next section discusses domestic conditions that influence Israel's strategic choices, as well as its peace policy. Subsequently, we model and explain the possible impact of those domestic conditions on Israel's strategy toward the peace process with the Palestinians.

### **The Development of Power Relations in the Middle East**

The main characteristic of the relations between Israel and neighboring countries has been that these countries did not recognize Israel's right to exist as an independent state. Until 1977 this was the position of all Arab countries; since then several states – Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinians, and some Persian Gulf states – have joined the peace process to some extent. Hostile countries, however, such as Syria, Libya, Iran, and Iraq, still do not recognize Israel's right to exist. As for the Israeli side, it has recognized all Arab states, other than the Palestinians' right to an independent state. Moreover, until 1967 the conflict was not about "the occupied territories" but concerned, rather, most of the area of Israel as one large occupied territory. The minimal demand was for Israel to give up territories it occupied in the 1948 Independence War and to allow the return of Palestinian refugees. The maximal demand, of course, was the abolition of Israel as an independent state. As a result, the Israeli national security conception has been defensive at the strategic level and offensive at the operative level (Horowitz, 1975). The defensive approach at the strategic level has relied on conventional and non-conventional deterrence, motivating a reciprocal arms race between Israel and its neighbors (Aronson, 1984).

Given the existential nature of the conflict until the early 1970s, the power relations between the Arab countries and Israel during that period can be best described as a zero-sum game. First, we will illustrate this argument by specifying the preferences of Israel and its neighbors, excluding the Palestinians, until the mid-1970s. Then we will explain how, since the mid-1970s, the game between Israel and some neighboring countries has been transformed into a symmetrical prisoners' dilemma (see also: Brams, 1994: 85-7, 101-2). Finally, we suggest a game for analyzing the power relations between Israel and the Palestinians.

In the first stage, the players – Israel (I) and a given neighboring country (N) – are

modeled as unitary players, i.e., they are assumed to be homogeneous societies. In this game each side has two strategies. Israel can cooperate (C) with the neighboring country by signing a peace treaty which satisfies the neighboring country's territorial (or other) demands to some extent, or not cooperate (D), meaning that it does not give up any territory but has to invest in building deterrent ability. The neighboring country can cooperate (C) with Israel by recognizing its legitimacy to exist and signing a peace treaty, or not cooperate (D), meaning that it does not recognize Israel and has to invest in the arms race. The combination of these strategies creates four possible outcomes:

- C-C: Both sides cooperate.
- D-C: Israel does not cooperate while the neighboring country cooperates.
- C-D: Israel cooperates while the neighboring country does not cooperate.
- D-D: Neither side cooperates.

The players' preferences for these outcomes are as follows: Israel mostly prefers D-C, because then it benefits from the neighboring country's cooperation without giving up any territory ( $\alpha$ ). Israel's least preferred outcome is C-D, because then it gives up territory without benefiting ( $\delta$ ). It pays a price both in terms of territory and by further investment in building deterrent ability. Israel prefers mutual cooperation ( $\beta$ ), C-C, to mutual defection ( $\gamma$ ), D-D, because then it can attain peace for its citizens and reduce the cost of an arms buildup. The underlying assumption is that Israel recognizes the benefits of peace even at the cost of territorial compromise. As will be shown later, if this is not the case for both sides, the conflict is even deeper than that described by a zero-sum game or by the prisoners' dilemma. Israel's order of preferences is:

$$\alpha = (D,C) > \beta = (C,C) > \gamma = (D,D) > \delta = (C,D)$$

The neighboring country has calculations similar to those of Israel for D-C and C-D. Yet, as explained, until the mid-1970s the neighboring countries did not recognize Israel's legitimacy to exist and therefore preferred mutual defection to mutual cooperation. That is, the neighboring country in this game did not believe it could attain any benefits from mutual cooperation while it could benefit from escalating the conflict. It follows that the neighboring country prefers D-D to C-C; thus, its order of preference is:

$$\alpha = (C,D) > \beta = (D,D) > \gamma = (C,C) > \delta = (D,C)$$

Figure 1: A Zero-Sum Game between Israel and a Hostile Neighboring Country

		Hostile Bloc	
		C	D
Israel	C	$\beta, \gamma$	$\delta, \alpha$
	D	$\alpha, \delta$	$\gamma, \beta$

The players' order of preference is presented in a game matrix in Figure 1 where



$\alpha > \beta > \gamma > \delta$ . This is a zero-sum game where one player's win is the other's loss. Technically, if the order is presented in terms of numbers, e.g., 1,2,3,4, the sum in each cell is the same. In this game, both players have a dominant strategy of non-cooperation (D) leading to the unique Nash equilibrium  $(\gamma, \beta)$ . This means that in a situation of conflict the neighboring country is better off than Israel since it does not recognize any benefits from cooperation.

It follows that any change in the equilibrium outcome, which existed until the mid-1970s, required a preference change by the neighboring country. The change came about due to certain changes in attitude after the Yom Kippur war of October 1973 (Stein, 1985). This and other processes we will not discuss here changed the attitudes of some neighboring countries about cooperation (Mansur, 1985). They began recognizing the advantages of mutual cooperation, meaning that the zero-sum game presented in Figure 1 was transformed into the symmetrical prisoners' dilemma presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: A Symmetric Prisoners' Dilemma between Israel and a Neighboring Country

		Neighboring Country	
		C	D
Israel	C	$\beta, \beta$	$\delta, \alpha$
	D	$\alpha, \delta$	$\gamma, \gamma$

In this game, neither Israel nor the neighboring country is motivated to begin cooperating on its own. Therefore, both sides stay with their dominant strategy of non-cooperation and the equilibrium remains very stable. It is commonly argued that the players can reach a Pareto-optimal outcome  $(\beta, \beta)$  when a third party intervenes and creates incentives for (or forces) cooperation.

Third party intervention is usually discussed in the literature with respect to intrastate, often ethnic, conflicts (Licklider, 1993; Gurr, 1993; Gottlieb, 1993). Walter (1997), for example, studied 41 civil wars between 1940 and 1990, and showed the importance of third-party intervention in finding successful negotiated solutions. She argues that negotiated settlements do not fail because bargains cannot be struck but, rather, because it is almost impossible for the combatants themselves to arrange credible guarantees on the terms of the settlement. Regan (1996) also studied all intrastate conflicts since 1944, showing that it is the characteristics of the intervention strategy rather than the characteristics of the conflict that largely determine the success of the intervention. Thus, third-party intervention is required both to create incentives for cooperation and to guarantee the terms of compromise.

Indeed, under the new circumstances created by the 1973 war, the intervention of a third party became possible and American mediation led to the first peace treaty in the Middle East – between Israel and Egypt. In that peace process both incentives and guarantees were needed.

To complete the analysis of the historical conditions, we now suggest a game to

describe the power relations between Israel and the Palestinians until the early 1990s. As explained, in that period neither Israel nor the Palestinians recognized the other's right to form an independent state. Therefore, the essence of the conflict was existential, meaning that neither side recognized the advantages of mutual cooperation. The order of preferences that corresponds to this situation is that of the neighboring country in Figure 1. If neither side recognizes the advantages of mutual cooperation, the D-D outcome is preferred to the C-C one.

*Figure 3: The Power Relations between Israel and the Palestinians when Both Sides Do Not Recognize the Advantages of Mutual Cooperation*

		Palestinians	
		C	D
Israel	C	$\gamma, \gamma$	$\delta, \alpha$
	D	$\alpha, \delta$	$\beta, \beta$

Figure 3 shows that, under the above-mentioned condition, not only is there a dominant strategy of non-cooperation for both sides but also the Nash equilibrium is Pareto-optimal ( $\beta, \beta$ ). In other words, both sides believe they win something in a D-D situation while they would only lose in a C-C situation. This means that even if there is a third party who wants to force an agreement, it will have to invest a lot of resources, because the cost of mutual cooperation is higher than the cost of mutual non-cooperation. In comparison, in the prisoners' dilemma the choice of D-D is due to Nash equilibrium calculations leading to a situation of mutually hurting stalemate situation (Zartman, 1991). In such a case, a third party's intervention can evidently help the sides achieve cooperation.

This equilibrium analysis does not refer to domestic variables because until the mid-1970s Israeli society and political culture were uni-dimensional on the security issue (Arian, 1985; Barzilai, 1996; Sened, 1996). Internal conflicts were covered by the belief that it was necessary to defend the country, as long as the Labor party governed Israel, from 1948 to 1977. This homogeneous political culture began to change in 1977 when the Likud party formed a coalition for the first time. This electoral change expressed and triggered the polarization of Israeli society in several aspects. As a result, Israel's strategic choices and calculations in its relations with neighboring countries have been transformed.

### **Internal Processes Influencing Israel's Strategy toward Peace in the Late 1990s**

The socio-political and economic processes during 1977-1998 highlight five dimensions that influence Israel's power and strategic choices in the international scene: The socio-economic dimension, the ethnic-religious dimension, the geographical dimension in terms of center-periphery relations, the security dimension in light of the Arab-Israel conflict, and the dimension of arms buildup, both conventional and non-

conventional. In this section, we describe the polarization in each dimension and the mutual dependence between them. According to opinion polls, 30% of the Jewish-Israeli population regard the increased internal tension among various segments of the people as the most important problem on Israel's public agenda, and 31% so regard the slowdown in the economy, while only 19% regard the stalemate in the peace process as the most important problem facing Israel (Ya'ar and Hermann, 1998). Since the polarization in the various dimensions merge with each other, any Israeli government potentially faces significant domestic difficulties in building a consensus around a foreign policy.

*The Socio-Economic Dimension:* Traditionally the Israeli economy has been characterized as highly centralized due to the socialist political culture (Horowitz and Lissak, 1989). The 1990s, however, have been characterized by privatization processes, with various social and economic consequences. These processes include market liberalization, deregulation, transfer of control and management to stockholders, and attempts by international companies to enter the Israeli market (*Office for Economic Planning's Report*, 1994). Another aspect of these processes is the creation of flexibility and mobilization in the labor force, thus intensifying socio-economic inequality. Further, due to security problems during the Palestinian uprising ("Intifada"), the Israeli economy became dependent on cheap imported labor to replace cheap Palestinian workers. The large number of imported workers from Africa, South-East Asia and Eastern Europe created significant social, demographic and moral problems due to their very low wages, inequality and lack of basic social and labor rights (Kondor, 1997). This labor policy, which was encouraged by the government, also created significant difficulties for the Palestinian economy, which was highly dependent on the Israeli economy (Roy, 1995).

The growing socio-economic gaps together with rising unemployment became one of the main issues dividing Israeli society, creating a potential for conflict. Further, when the polarization of this dimension merges with polarization in other dimensions, the potential for conflict intensifies. This leads us to the second dimension listed above.

*The Ethnic-Religious Dimension:* Israeli society is made up of Jewish immigrants from many countries. From the 1920s to the 1940s, these immigrants came mainly from Europe, thus creating a predominantly Western-oriented culture (Horowitz and Lissak, 1989). During the 1950s, after the establishment of the State of Israel, there was large-scale immigration from Arab and Muslim states, thus changing the proportion between the Western-oriented population segment, usually termed "Ashkenazi" and the Eastern-oriented population segment, usually termed "Sephardi." The arrival of Sephardim in a predominantly Western-oriented culture created many difficulties for them in becoming established (Horowitz and Lissak, 1989:117). Over the long term, this ethnic division merged with the socio-economic polarization: The lower classes were mostly composed of Sephardim, and this intensified their feelings of discrimination and deprivation.

Furthermore, many Sephardim were religiously observant, and thus the orthodox-secular polarization in Israeli society also merged with the previous two (Liebman, 1997; Horowitz and Lissak, 1989). On the other hand, national-religious Ashkenazim also share the popular feeling of traditional Sephardim against the individualism that

characterizes the willingness to negotiate with the Palestinians and to recognize the PLO. In the previous decade, Israel (together with Portugal) had been excluded from Western individualism, on the grounds of its collectivist culture (Hofstede, 1983; Huntington, 1996: 71). As Liebman (1997: 102-103) notes, in the current era of growing individualist ethos, religious Zionists are the sector most committed to the values of Israel's civil religion. The religious import of their political and cultural approach gives it a sense of holiness that separates religiously orthodox people from the rest of society. The merging of polarization in the two dimensions discussed so far (i.e., the socio-economic and the ethnic-religious dimensions) intensifies the conflicts between these population segments. It also presents great difficulty in terms of mobilizing the entire society for a given cause, because the bonds that maintained a certain national consensus until 1977 no longer exist. The polarization in other dimensions further intensifies the problem.

*The Geographical Dimension of Center-Periphery Relations:* Interestingly enough, polarization in the geographical dimension also fits the other aspects discussed thus far. Many new immigrants to Israel during the 1950s were sent to the periphery, especially to development towns in the south and north of Israel, while the political, economic and geographical centers (i.e., Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem) were dominated by the upper and middle classes (Arian, 1985; Horowitz and Lissak, 1989; Lipshitz, 1996; Waterman, 1996). As a result, the periphery is dominated by traditional and religious, lower-class Sephardim. It follows that the geographical division of Israeli society also fits the other aspects of polarization and inferiority, as well as their political consequences.

*The Security Dimension relative to the Arab-Israeli Conflict:* This dimension has been dominant in Israeli society for most of the century (Arian, 1985; Arian and Shamir, 1990; Barzilai, 1996; Sened, 1996). The question of territorial compromise in exchange for peace has been at the center of political debate since the beginning of Zionism. Other questions, such as Israeli-Jewish identity, usually merged into this dimension. In this respect, until 1977 there was a national consensus on the policy adopted by the Labor-led government (Arian and Shamir, 1990). However, the socio-political and economic processes discussed so far also influenced this dimension. Since the early 1980s – especially since the 1982 Israeli-Palestinian war in Lebanon – the polarization between right and left in Israeli society intensified (Arian and Shamir, 1990; 1994; Horowitz and Lissak, 1989).

To a large extent this polarization fits the divisions in the other dimensions – lower-class voters, the Sephardim, voters in the periphery, and religious voters traditionally support right-wing parties (Yuchtman-Yaar and Hermann, 1998; Shamir and Arian, 1999). Shamir and Arian (1999) present a logistic regression based on a longitudinal analysis of electoral cleavages from 1969 to 1996, and an analysis of the 1996 election. They show that religious, Sephardim, less educated, and lower status workers voted for the right-wing Likud and religious parties, whereas the left (Labor and Meretz) has had a disproportionate share of secular, upper class Ashkenazi voters. Since voting patterns significantly correlate with the preferences concerning the peace process, this cross-sectional characterization fits the polarization in the security dimension. This argument is also supported by an ongoing monthly opinion poll done

by Yaar and Hermann (1993-2000), beginning in August 1993. These polls, also called the peace index, basically examine the public's attitudes toward the peace process given ongoing events and the divisions in Israeli society. As explained earlier, the range of alternatives in Israel's policy toward neighboring countries is ultimately reduced to a dichotomous choice: A person is either for or against giving up territory in exchange for peace. This distinction is the basis for the poll questions. The participants sampled are representative of the Jewish population of Israel. According to this continuing opinion poll, the religious population in general, and the Ultra-Orthodox in particular, has assumed the role of the radical right-wing symbol for everything touching on the peace process (Ya'ar and Hermann, 1997a). Among the Ultra-Orthodox only 20.5% support or greatly support the process; among those defining themselves as Religious 43% support the process. On the other hand, 82% of traditionalist and 78% of secular groups declared their support for the process (Ya'ar and Hermann, 1997b).

Thus, low-class voters, Sephardim, peripheral voters and religious voters traditionally support right-wing parties. Although some of these voters do not completely accept the right-wing attitude to the Arab-Israeli conflict, they vote for right-wing parties based on their calculations and preferences in the other dimensions (Arian and Shamir, 1990; 1994). As a result, Israeli society faces the paradox that a small majority of the population favors the peace process, but this is not clearly expressed in the political division of power.

Table 1 shows there is long-standing support for the peace process, but Netanyahu still won the May 1996 election even though he challenged the peace policy of his predecessors, Rabin and Peres. It was only in the May 1999 election that the left-wing candidate, Barak, took over from Netanyahu, and that supporters of the peace process received nearly 50% of the seats in the parliament. Thus, since May 1999 the near-50% support for the peace process has been expressed in the political division of power.

Table 1 also shows certain changes in the support for the peace process over the months. Although these changes are not statistically significant, they are usually attributed to events and developments in the peace process. For example, violent attacks by the Palestinians in the territories or by Hizbullah in Lebanon are clearly followed by declining support for the peace process. Thus, the two-level dynamic also works in the opposite direction. Not only do internal processes influence foreign policy but international events and developments also influence internal beliefs and processes. It is often argued, for example, that the slowdown in the peace process during 1994-95 can be attributed to the murderous car bombs exploded by extreme Palestinians, which killed many Israelis.

It follows that the deep polarization in the socio-economic, ethnic-religious and geographical dimensions project strongly onto the security dimension, thus creating great domestic difficulty for any peace policy. Furthermore, the deep polarization between different social segments creates domestic difficulties for any foreign policy, because Israel's leaders cannot create a consensus for a militarist policy either. As expressed through their behavior during the Gulf War and the long-standing conflict in Lebanon and the occupied territories, many of Israel's citizens are no longer willing to

pay the high price of a non-consensual war (Barzilai, 1996; Ya'ar and Hermann, 1998). This approach also affects the fifth dimension mentioned above – arms buildup, both conventional and non-conventional.

*Table 1: The Level of Support in the Peace Process with the Palestinians among the Jewish-Israeli Population – August 1993-April 2000*

Time	In favor (percent)	Time	In favor (percent)
August 1993	53	June 1997	50.2
June 1994	51	September 1997	45.9
December 1994	47.4	December 1997	49.4
March 1995	48.5	March 1998	50.9
September 1995	45.3	September 1998	47.2
December 1995	55.8	December 1998	52.2
March 1996	50.5	April 1999	56.8
June 1996	48.4	August 1999	47.8
September 1996	50	November 1999	51.7
December 1996	54.5	April 2000	47.9
March 1997	48	August 2000	45.3

Source: Yaar and Hermann (1993-2000)

*The Dimension of Non-conventional Deterrence:* For many years Israel maintained a policy of obscuring its nuclear capability, by stating it would not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East (Aronson, 1992). Nevertheless, it became common belief that Israel had an impressive nuclear endowment. Based on his impressions from Egyptian leaders, Peres attributed Egypt's decision to make peace with Israel to that capability, in part (Peres and Naor, 1993: 4-5). It did not, however, prevent Egypt from launching a limited war against Israel four years earlier. According to some accounts, in 1973 Israel already had nuclear arms, which could be deployed from aircraft and missiles (Hersh, 1991: 215-6; Paul, 1995). Israeli deterrent calculations were based on the possession of superior conventional and nuclear capability, and the Israeli leadership implicitly declared this capability to be its ultimate deterrent against an Arab attack: Before the October 1973 war, leaders such

as Defense Minister Moshe Dayan hinted at the Israeli nuclear deterrent and made ambiguous nuclear threats (Evron, 1990; Bar-Joseph, 1982; Feldman, 1982; Freedman, 1975). Dayan reportedly believed that the Arab states would not initiate a war before the early 1980s, and until then Israel's nuclear capability likely would act as a deterrent against conventional attack. From 1967 to 1973, the Arab leaders and the media talked unceasingly of Israeli nuclear capability and the implications of it (Van Creveld, 1993: 108-110; Evron, 1973: 19-31). The Egyptians were also presumed to have received intelligence information on Israel's nuclear weapons and strategy from Soviet spies who had penetrated the state's defense and intelligence establishments (Hersh, 1991: 219).

However, non-conventional deterrence capability did not deter Egypt and Syria from starting a conventional war in October 1973. Stein (1985) suggests that Egyptian internal politics were much more important than Israel's conventional or non-conventional strength. Paul (1995), on the other hand, attributes this and other similar cases to the concept of "nuclear taboo," the notion that nuclear weapons are characterized by their non-use. As Schelling (1994: 110) argues, the main reason for the uniqueness of nuclear weapons is the perception that they are unique and that once introduced into combat, they cannot be "contained, restrained, confined, or limited." Given this "nuclear taboo," Israel's nuclear ability cannot guarantee that a limited war will not break out. Therefore, the influence of Israeli society's deep polarizations on its willingness to enter into a conventional war is a central parameter in analyzing the Arab-Israeli conflict.

These polarizations, which cannot be hidden from neighboring countries, is a source of weakness for Israel's position in the region. Israel's leaders can indeed claim, as they often have, that they cannot proceed with the peace process due to internal opposition. But neighboring countries can also observe the strong opposition to a non-consensual war. Domestic obstacles, therefore, can hardly be used to manipulate information in the bargaining process. We now discuss the effect of these obstacles on the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

### **Israel's Strategic Choices Relative to the Peace Process with the Palestinians in the Late 1990s**

In this section, we analyze Israel's strategic choices with regard to the peace process with the Palestinians in the late 1990s. Given the two-level game approach, we first explain the preferences of the two sides as they have been shaped until the late 1990s. Based on these preferences, we outline the basic strategic choices open to Israeli leaders. We then expand the analysis to explain the bargaining mechanism preferred for Israel.

Applying the two-level game to the Palestinians, their position was influenced by international events such as the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent loss of superpower support by Syria and other Arab states, as well as the Palestinians' own loss of support from the Gulf States following the 1991 war with Iraq. These events created the basic conditions for the Palestinians to move toward a cooperative strategy as expressed by the signing of the Oslo Agreement (Zartman, 1997).

Yet, since the signing of the Oslo Agreement, dissatisfaction with the Israeli-Palestinian peace process has grown significantly among the Palestinian population (IISS, 1998: 146-148). As expressed in the Palestinians' own observations, the economic situation in their autonomous regions deteriorated (Roy, 1995) and the Israeli government's new policy since May 1996 has left the impression that their demands will not be met soon enough. As one military officer said, "When people are hungry, policy disintegrates" (Limor, 1998). As a result, they hardly trust Israel's promises and commitments. This change in attitude, which mainly took place during 1996-1998, means that the Palestinians' order of preference in the prisoners' dilemma is as presented in Figure 2. They recognize the advantages of cooperation but believe they are playing a non-cooperative game with Israel, meaning that they prefer conflict (D-D) to the option of being the sole compromiser (D-C).

Because of the internal polarization discussed earlier, however, Israel has a different order of preference in its game with the Palestinians. This polarization means that Israeli society is divided in respect to the peace process. A significant right-wing segment of society actually views the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in terms of the prisoners' dilemma described in Figure 2. Among them is a small "farther right" group of Israelis who, in line with the Figure 3 game, genuinely prefer mutual conflict with the Arabs to mutual cooperation. On the other hand, supporters of the peace process are more inclined toward cooperation with the Palestinians and clearly are not willing to pay the price of what they regard "a non-consensual war". This means that their order of preference is similar to that in the Chicken game, where conflict is the worst outcome (Taylor, 1987). In a symmetrical Chicken game, there are two equilibria in pure strategies: A player will cooperate if he/she believes the other will not cooperate, but will not cooperate if he/she believes the other will.

It follows that, given domestic conditions, Israeli leaders can adopt neither a conflictual approach toward the Palestinians nor a coherent peace strategy. All they can know with certainty is that a majority of the population supports some version of compromise, and that to those in favor of the peace process a violent conflict with the Palestinians constitutes the highest cost and therefore may also deepen the polarization, towards a total disintegration of Israeli society. On the other hand, right-wing parties and their supporters are split. Since most of them understand that the Oslo Agreement is irreversible (Sprinzak, 1998), they are willing to make some compromises, meaning that mutual cooperation is preferred to mutual defection. Thus, for them as well a violent conflict is ordered low in their preferences, while a reasonable compromise in their view can be accepted. This approach is expressed, for example, in the relatively low mass mobilization against compromises made by Netanyahu and Barak. In addition, in the May 1999 elections right-wing parties which strongly opposed any compromise in the peace process lost many seats in the parliament, and they now constitute only 7-10% of the seats. Overall, the hard core of strong opposition to the peace process is composed of religious settlers numbering about 50 thousand people. Although they constitute a strong interest group, they have gradually understood their power is limited. Furthermore, following the assassination of Itzhak Rabin in 1995 their modes of protest have modified significantly, and the intensity of their protest activities has declined (Yuchtman-Yaar and Hermann, 1998a). This opposition may also use



party tactical/electoral/coalition calculations to bring about the government's disintegration following a given move in the peace process. But these are stages in the adaptation of public attitudes to peace and of the division of political power in the parliament. Based on these indications, we argue that a clear majority of Israeli public and politicians recognize the need for compromises in negotiating with the Palestinians. This means that the long-term potential for societal disintegration as a result of concessions is lower than the disintegration potential as a result of conflict.

Thus, it is almost impossible to create a consensus for a conflictual strategy toward the Palestinians, while a reasonable consensus can be achieved over certain concessions. Therefore, the option of violent conflict is the worst possible outcome for Israeli leaders in their relations with the Palestinians. As explained in the previous section, the polarization in all dimensions converges; as a result politicians and observers have difficulty isolating the attitudes and motivations in each dimension separately. Yet, both Israeli and Palestinian leaders clearly observe the unwillingness of the Israeli public to pay the high price of violent conflict. They can both interpret the preference ordering of Israeli leaders as being similar to that of the Chicken game. Hence, due to domestic obstacles, Israeli leaders' order of preference in their game with the Palestinians can be represented as follows:

$$\alpha = (D,C) > \beta = (C,C) > \gamma = (C,D) > \delta = (D,D)$$

The combination of the players' order of preference leads to an asymmetric game as presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Asymmetric Power Relations between Israel and the Palestinians

		Palestinians	
		C	D
Israeli Leaders	C	$\beta, \beta$	$\gamma, \alpha$
	D	$\alpha, \delta$	$\delta, \gamma$

In this game, the Palestinians have a dominant strategy of non-cooperation. Israeli leaders, on the other hand, have an order of preference in the Chicken game, meaning they will cooperate if the Palestinians do not cooperate but will not cooperate if the Palestinians do. If Israeli leaders recognize the Palestinians' order of preference, they can expect them to choose non-cooperation. Then the best possible strategy for Israeli leaders is cooperation, leading to a unique Nash equilibrium with pure strategies  $(\gamma, \alpha)$ .

This equilibrium outcome expresses the asymmetry between Israeli and Palestinian societies in terms of their willingness to tolerate the costs of a violent conflict. Since Israeli society is less willing than Palestinian society to bear such costs, it can be expected to achieve sub-optimal results as long as the non-cooperative game continues and the Palestinians are willing to enter into a violent conflict. Furthermore, this analysis implies that possible attempts by Israeli leaders to express an order of preference in the prisoners' dilemma rather than recognizing the weaknesses of Israeli society may indeed lead to violent conflict, in which Israel will have no choice but to compromise under difficult conditions. Given the asymmetric game presented in Figure

4, the straightforward option for Israeli leaders is to influence the Palestinians' order of preference in such a way that violent conflict will become the worst outcome for them as well. This means increasing the potential losses from a violent conflict by increasing its costs, as well as increasing the benefits from cooperation – i.e., accelerating the peace process rather than slowing it down. Alternatively, Israeli leaders may try to create a broad consensus in Israeli society with respect to the preferred strategy, whether a peaceful or conflictual one, toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Moreover, since the Palestinian and Israeli communities are highly integrated, Israeli leaders can hardly use domestic obstacles to manipulate information in the bargaining process. They can claim, as they often have, that due to these obstacles they cannot proceed with the peace process, but the Palestinians can also see their difficulties in creating a consensus for a militarist policy. Therefore any attempt to manipulate information and create the impression that Israel has an order of preference in the prisoners' dilemma is not likely to succeed. Rather, it may trap Israeli leaders in their own manipulation, thus creating a cognitive dissonance. On the other hand, Palestinian negotiators successfully use internal opposition to argue that they cannot make significant concessions. Yet if, as a result, Palestinian-Israeli relations deteriorate to a violent conflict, Israeli leaders will have to compromise under difficult conditions as expected by the asymmetric game presented in Figure 4.

A more complex analysis of the game in Figure 4, however, enables us to draw practical conclusions about the preferred bargaining mechanism for Israel, as well as possible ways to influence the attitudes of the Israeli public through this mechanism.

The game in Figure 4 describes the core of the strategic dilemma that Israel is facing. Although the bargaining in the peace process is very complex, with many decision points on specific issues and many issues on the table, ultimately it can be reduced to several final decisions that will have to be made on key issues: The size and location of territories to be under Palestinian rule, the Jerusalem problem, the refugees problem, division of water resources, border controls, and military limitations on the Palestinian state. We argue that given the conditions existing in the late 1990s, at each of these crucial decision points Israel is likely to face the strategic dilemma described in Figure 4. In other words, no matter how long the bargaining continues and whatever tactical moves the sides make, at the final point of decision the Palestinians are likely to adopt a conflictual approach in order to force Israel to make concessions. As long as this game continues, Israel is likely to make these concessions.

Furthermore, given the Israel public's unwillingness to pay the price of conflict, dividing the peace process into many points of decision on small matters, such as the release of three or a dozen Palestinian prisoners, creates a situation in which the public sees a violent conflict over such points as unnecessary and therefore non-consensual conflict. Israeli leaders therefore make the concessions. Thus, by creating many decision points over small points, Israeli leaders actually create a situation where the asymmetric game presented in Figure 4 is played again and again but its outcome does not lead the Israeli public to change preferences. The concessions at each point seem too minor to justify a conflict and thus even when the game is repeated many times, the outcomes at one stage do not change the conditions for the next round. This cumulative effect led Israeli Prime Minister Barak, for example, to move from a willingness to give

the Palestinians 40% of the West Bank to a willingness to give 80-90%. This means that breaking the peace process issues into many decision points, both in terms of sub-issues and in terms of time, creates a situation in which there is no difference between the meta-game and the one-stage game. Thus, Figure 4 can describe them both.

It directly follows that Israel has strong interest in immediately reaching the final decision points over the crucial issues in a sequential bargaining process. That is, the best strategy for Israeli leaders is to push for a time-constrained bargaining process seeking agreement on each crucial point individually rather than looking for a package deal covering all the issues. Then, if concessions on an isolated crucial point are followed by a conflictual approach by the Palestinians, the Israeli public can be expected to see a possible conflict over the next crucial issue as a consensual one. The model thus concludes that the bargaining mechanism should be composed of time constrained discussions on a key issue, implementation of the agreement on it, evaluation of the outcomes by both sides, followed then by another time constrained discussion on a key issue, implementation, evaluation, and so on. In this way, both the Palestinians and Israelis will have indications about the other's intentions on the basis of specific actions, rather than subjective interpretations and beliefs.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper we have shown the impact of domestic processes on Israel's strategy toward peace during the 1990s. Such processes intensify the polarization between different segments in Israeli society and limit the possibility that its leaders can create a consensus for any policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict – especially a consensus for violent conflict with the Palestinians. Since the Palestinians, as well as other Arab countries, observe these processes, Israeli leaders can hardly use domestic obstacles to manipulate information in the bargaining process.

Although the empirical setting analyzed in this paper is very complex, we believe that a theoretical game approach can help make the players' choices very clear. Furthermore, by using games we are bounded by certain assumptions and terminology that make the analysis clear and well founded. For example, changes in bargaining position can be attributed to many factors. By specifying the players, their choices and the mutual dependence between them using simple, precise language, we can point out explanatory variables. In this respect, the two-level game analysis clearly helps explain the complex world of international relations. We believe it is very hard to generalize through formal models any hypothesis regarding the impact of a two-level interaction. Rather, we demonstrated how internal polarization may create an order of preferences in the Chicken game. Further research should proceed through a comparison of detailed case studies.

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# **CREATIVE MARGINALITY: EXPLORING THE LINKS BETWEEN CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND SOCIAL WORK**

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## *Abstract*

The concept of creative marginality refers to the process through which researchers in academic fields move away from the mainstream and toward the margins of their fields and look toward the margins of other fields that may overlap with and fill in gaps in their fields. This interaction, occurring outside of disciplinary boundaries, promotes intellectual cross-fertilization, and it is often the site of innovation. This article examines the links and interactions between the academic disciplines and practices of social work and conflict resolution. The article describes the different theoretical frames and practical approaches of both social work and conflict resolution, and discusses the ways in which these are parallel in both fields.

Theorists and practitioners in social work and conflict resolution are engaged in debate around three key concepts related to self-determination, empowerment, and professional ethics. The newer and emerging frames of both fields are situated at parallel positions on the continuum of approaches to these key concepts, in their respective professions. These frames favor elicitive rather than prescriptive approaches and increased client or party self-determination, a focus on transformation and empowerment rather than on problem-solving alone, and a stance of engagement and advocacy towards intervention, rather than neutrality and impartiality. The authors argue that increased interchange between the two fields has the potential to contribute to the development of innovative approaches to transforming social conflicts and promoting positive social change.

## **Introduction**

Conflict is ubiquitous. It has been a major concern of every social science discipline, from political science to psychology, from economics to communications. Conflict and its resolution has also been a central feature of many professions, including law and diplomacy, management and social work. Working with conflict is often at the core of what social workers do. In fact, social workers are increasingly practicing conflict resolution as a profession (e.g. family and community mediation) or as an integral part of their social work practice.

In turn, the relatively new discipline of conflict resolution has drawn on every social science discipline, including political science, economics, sociology,

anthropology, and psychology. Conflict resolution practitioners have adopted approaches and techniques from many professions, including education, counseling and social work.

The link between social work and conflict resolution is an unequivocal one with numerous shared theories and methods underlying the practices of both fields. Both fields place an emphasis on people's interests, needs, values and identity. Both require collaborative processes. Much of the work in both fields involves addressing issues that affect children and families, communities, organizations, and the environment. Yet both fields, perhaps too readily, have tended to appropriate the vocabularies and techniques of the other, without thoroughly grasping the assumptions and concepts underpinning them. And despite the overlap, there has been little concentrated effort to include conflict resolution theory and practice as a fundamental component of social work education. Neither have conflict resolution academics nor practitioners made a conscious effort to identify the contributions that social work has made and can make to the field of conflict resolution.

Nevertheless, there are parallel theoretical currents that have implications for the practice of both fields. One is the problem-solving approach, which is currently the basis of social work practice, particularly in the context of managed care. The problem-solving approach is also the basis of the predominant conflict management practice which is "interest-based bargaining" (Fisher and Ury, 1981).

Another is the transformative approach, the goals of which include personal change, changed relationships, and the empowerment of individuals or groups. This approach is characterized by a focus on collaborative processes and an emphasis on self-determination. The goal of transformative approaches is empowerment (Rothman, 1997 and Bush and Folger, 1994).

Still another is the nested approach, which acknowledges - and sometimes attempts to address - the multiple layers of the system in which individuals are embedded (Dugan, 1996). Theorists and practitioners in both fields are struggling to define the roles of their fields in relation to the larger structural or systemic issues that are often the source of the problems that their practices are attempting to solve. This is sometimes played out in decisions about the appropriate systemic level at which to carry out interventions.

Both fields are impacted by the contradictions and tensions between the problem solving, transformative, and structural or systemic approaches. It is in grappling with these tensions, at the cutting edges of these fields, that a partnership between them holds the most promise. In both the academic and professional arenas, there is much to be gained from cross-fertilization between social work and conflict resolution.

### **Creative Marginality**

The concept of creative marginality was developed by Dogan and Pahre (1990), who suggest that each academic field develops its own theoretical knowledge base built on an accumulation of innovations (what they term "patrimony"), which grounds the research in that field. As disciplines grow and become dense with theorists, there is an overcrowding in the academic field with many scholars studying the same patrimony

and asking the same questions. Such density is not characterized by innovation.

Density simultaneously creates a propensity for researchers to fragment into sub fields. Specialization subsequently produces gaps between sub fields. As some scholars move away from the mainstream and toward the margins of the field, they begin to look toward the margins of other fields that may overlap and fill in those gaps. This interaction outside of disciplinary boundaries provides the grounds for intellectual cross-fertilization, and it is often the site at which innovation occurs. "Not only are the margins less densely populated, providing more room to grow, but successful combinations of material from two sub fields typically allows greater scope for creativity. In fact, the greatest accumulation of incremental advances takes place at the intersection of fields" (Dogan and Pahre, 1990).

This process has occurred in most fields of inquiry from anthropology to zoology. For example, the field of developmental psychology, in attempting to fill in the gap between psychological development and biological development, has become an important field in its own right (Dogan and Pahre, 1990). The cross-fertilization of theories and practices between the fields of conflict resolution and social work promises not only the possibility of innovation at the site at which their margins overlap, but also the possibility of producing a hybrid sub field. In anticipation of this innovation, it is important to explore how conflict resolution can inform the theory and practice of social work and how social work can inform the theory and practice of conflict resolution.

### **Intervention in Conflict Resolution and Social Work: Mediation as a Crossroad**

There are numerous examples that illustrate the synthesis between social work and conflict resolution in the practices of both fields. This is most pronounced in the arena of mediation. There are many people practicing mediation today and they come from a wide range of experience and training, including lawyers, conflict resolution professionals and community volunteers. Social workers are increasingly including mediation in their "toolbox" of interventions. These include divorce and custody mediation, mediating intercultural conflicts, mediating community conflicts, crime victim-offender mediation, Equal Employment Opportunity disputes, and health care conflicts (between health care providers, patients, and insurance companies). Of these, divorce and custody mediation is perhaps the most widely practiced type of mediation by social workers.

Social workers began providing divorce mediation services in the United States in the 1960's, and within two decades were providing almost half of the mediation services in the private sector, and almost three quarters of the services in the public sector (Pearson, Ring and Milne, 1983). The divorce mediator facilitates negotiations between spouses attempting to reach a divorce settlement. Unlike the traditional divorce litigation process, a key characteristic of divorce mediation is the emphasis on ensuring that both parties' issues are voiced and acknowledged, leading to recognition and acceptance of mutual responsibility for the relationship's outcome (Haynes, 1978).

Mediation is compatible with social work practice because its goal is to help

parties solve their own problems and to empower people in conflict. Mediation builds on social work skills, such as problem analysis, communication, and systems intervention. However, mediation is not just another application of core social work skills. It draws on many other professional disciplines as well, including sociology, political science, law and organizational development (Mayer, 1995).

While conflict resolution is not psychotherapy, and mediation is not a therapeutic technique, it is a technique that may have considerable therapeutic benefit. Kelly (1983) points out that there are similarities in the goals, techniques and outcomes of psychotherapy and mediation, in the context of divorce mediation; however he insists that the two must be seen as distinct professions.

It is important to recognize that the effect of a successfully completed mediation on one or both clients can be similar to the effect hoped for in therapy. For example, the divorce mediation process is often highly therapeutic for one or both parties since it can lead to an observable reduction in the anxiety, depression, and anger that can be generated by divorce. Similarly, mediators sometimes note increased acceptance of the divorce, increased confidence in one's ability to cope, heightened self-reliance, and improved communications between divorcing spouses. However positive these changes may be, they are not usually the primary goal of mediation, but rather the effect of the process. In fact, mediation can produce a divorce settlement satisfactory to both parties without any accompanying psychological change (Kelly, 1983).

Problem-solving mediation may employ some of the same techniques as therapy but the mediator is focused on how to reach an agreement by which the parties will abide in the future. Its goal is not to examine past pain or negative patterns of interaction. "Mediation has long been distinguished from therapy by its settlement goals, task focus, and highly structured format. The psychological and emotional benefits accrued from mediation have usually been considered secondary goals or by-products of a cooperative process" (Gold, 1997).

The role of the problem-solving mediator is more directive than that of the therapist; the mediator may structure the process, suggest options, educate, organize information and assist the parties to develop proposals. Assessment is limited since mediation does not generally probe deeply into past history. Intervention may include social work techniques as well as aspects of law, conflict management, and negotiation and bargaining strategies and tactics (Kruk, 1997).

However, as both conflict resolution and social work move away from interest-based problem-solving goals, and towards needs- and identity-based empowerment and transformative goals, their borders become increasingly blurred. Current mediation practice can be seen as falling along a continuum from "structured to therapeutic, neutralist to interventionist, directive to nondirective" (Kruk, 1997, p. 11) depending on the mediator, the parties, and the nature of the conflict. Some conflicts, such as those involving child custody, require more intervention on the part of the mediator.

If the goal of mediation is to facilitate the process of divorce in a way that can ensure continued and effective nurturing and sustenance of a child, then mediation must be integrated into a wider spectrum of educational, psychological, legal, and community services for the divorcing family. As Wallerstein (1986) writes, "Family

mediation has outgrown its origins and emerged as a social intervention that takes us to a new threshold in conflict resolution. A dignified and dignifying method of decision making, it affirms that the process by which people arrive at a decision is related to the efficacy of that decision. This is perhaps the single most revolutionary idea regarding mediation that we must grasp".

Social work and human service scholars have promoted several therapeutic approaches to mediation. Irving and Benjamin (1987) present a four-stage therapeutic family mediation approach, as an alternative to structured negotiation in family mediation. Kruk's (1997) therapeutic-interventionist approach is suggested for facilitating parenting plans after a divorce. In this approach, the mediator takes on an advocacy role for the children's needs. Johnston and Campbell's (1988) tri-level model of high conflict mediation proposes that mediation and counseling may sometimes be provided by the same professional. In these models, "the primary focus of mediation is the underlying emotional issues and relational processes blocking agreement, and the goal of mediation is not only settlement of the dispute, but restructured relationships, enhanced communication and problem-solving skills, and increased cooperation or at least reduction of conflict between and among the parties" (Kruk, 1997). These forms of mediation, which are informed by a social work/human services perspective, incorporate elements of therapy into mediation practice.

As conflict resolution practitioners increasingly utilize techniques that expand the borders of their field beyond mediation, and as social workers increasingly employ practices that expand the borders of their field beyond psychotherapy, the boundaries between the two professions become even more blurred. For example, a relatively recent innovation in which both conflict professionals and social workers are involved is the victim-offender reconciliation program (VORP), which is based on the concept of restorative justice (Severson and Bankston, 1995). The aim of a VORP is to provide an alternative to the judicial process that will enable a crime victim and an offender to work together towards a settlement that promotes reconciliation between them (Umbreit, 1993). The offender (generally having been convicted of burglary or theft) is normally referred to a mediator by the court. The mediator arranges a joint meeting between the victim and the offender, at which the victim communicates their feelings about the crime and their sense of victimization. The offender is given the opportunity to explain the circumstances that led to the committing of the crime. Both parties then work together to arrive at a mutually acceptable settlement, which could be monetary compensation, community service, or some other form of restitution (Umbreit, 1993). In a VORP, social workers and conflict resolution practitioners, may be involved not only as mediators, but also as trainers, organizers and program developers (Umbreit, 1993).

It is important to note that although mediation is perhaps the most widely known and practiced conflict resolution intervention, new approaches are being developed. These approaches include: focusing on conflict prevention, providing procedural, substantive, or decision making assistance to parties, peacebuilding and reconciliation, and dispute system design (Mayer, 2000). These new approaches aim to address the limitations of mediation and continue to contribute to the growth of the field of conflict resolution.

### **From the Center to the Margins of Conflict Resolution: Resources, Interests, Identities, and Structures**

Conflict theory can be organized in terms of "frames," signifying that each of these perspectives provides a lens to the world of conflict. Frames set phenomena within a conceptual and cognitive context that delineates their components and imposes upon them a particular organization and meaning (Bateson, 1972; Schon and Rein, 1994). Frames focus the attention of both theorists and practitioners on particular aspects of the conflict situation, shape the definition of the problem, and guide conflict intervention (Bolman and Deal, 1984; Friedman and Lipshitz, 1994). Frames may also be limiting and lead to selective perception (Dearborn and Simon, 1958). For the purpose of this paper, the dominant and emerging (and still somewhat peripheral) frames in the field of conflict resolution, will be categorized into four major "frames", which will be referred to as the resource frame, the interests frame, the identity frame, and the structural frame.

#### **The resource frame**

The "resource" frame views conflict as "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals" (Coser, 1967). This definition reflects the current predominant Western approach to conflict (Hocker and Wilmot, 1995). From the perspective of the resource frame, human existence is seen as a competitive process in which conflict may be contained or ameliorated but never eliminated.

According to the resource frame, conflict is the natural outcome of competition among individuals and groups over material goods, economic resources, and political power. The natural tendency towards aggression must be contained by the creation of coercive or legal frameworks, and by a "social contract" which can forge a functioning society based on the alignment of individual and group interests. The resource frame draws on the perspective of sociologists such as Parsons (1960), who regard "equilibrium" or stability as an indication of a healthy society.

Within the resource frame, the alternatives to violence for settling conflicts are either mechanisms for social control or bargaining and negotiation processes. The resource frame focuses on each side gaining control of the bargaining or negotiation situation in order to "maximize" its desired outcome. Compromise is viewed as an acceptable outcome when total domination is viewed as unnecessary or impossible to win or to sustain. From the perspective of the resource frame, reaching an agreement in which resources have been redistributed to the satisfaction of all sides means that the conflict has been resolved.

A criticism of the resource frame is that it leads to interventions that emphasize short-term, material solutions that leave the underlying causes of the conflict untouched. As a result, intractable conflicts, whose sources are structural, tend to recur with added intensity. Each time a conflict recurs it may become increasingly entrenched and the cost of its resolution may become higher and higher. Moreover, to

the extent that the underlying causes remain unaddressed, the resource based framing may leave deeper problems ignored until they explode as a full-blown crisis.

### **The interests frame**

To date, an “interests” frame of conflict has dominated the field of conflict management. It was popularized by Fisher and Ury, in their book *Getting to Yes* (1981), and by others in the fields of international diplomacy, law, environmental mediation, and community relations (Carrbonneau, 1989; Goldberg, Green and Sander, 1985; Raifa, 1982 Rubin and Brown, 1975; Susskind and Cruikshank, 1987). These approaches reject the view of conflict as a zero-sum competition over scarce resources and power, even though conflicts may appear to hinge upon incompatible demands for power, territory or material resources.

Fisher and Ury (1981) suggest that such demands, or bargaining positions, are simply concrete expressions of underlying interests, which they define as "needs, desires, concerns, and fears". The interests approach maintains that parties to a conflict often become fixated on their bargaining positions and lose sight of their genuine interests. Rather than haggling over ways to divide limited resources, parties explore ways in which their interests can be linked through "integrative" bargaining rather than domination or compromise (Follett, 1942).

The interests frame, with its more optimistic view of conflict, is strongly reflected in intervention theories that focus on "managing" conflict (Blake, Shepard, and Mouton, 1964; Likert and Likert, 1976; Thomas, 1976; Tjosvold, 1991; Walton, 1987; Walton and McKersie, 1966). Conflict management implies that certain levels of conflict are necessary and functional. Unlike the resource frame, which sees conflict intervention as primarily a negotiation process, conflict management reflects the interests frame's emphasis on problem solving and developing good relationships (Rahim, 1986; Thomas, 1976; Walton, 1987). Conflict management shares the resource frame's emphasis on bargaining strategies and tactics, but with a strong emphasis on replacing competitive strategies with cooperative or collaborative ones and on producing "win/win" outcomes (Axelrod, 1984; Deutsch, 1973, 1994; Walton, 1987).

Smith (1987) pointed out that some interventionists associated with the interests frame see themselves as agents of social change. However, by focusing primarily on agreements and fostering improved working relationships, they may actually reinforce the status quo of the system even though they espouse system change. Because of its emphasis on controlling conflict and promoting collaborative strategies, conflict management lends itself to "single loop learning," which focuses on changing individual and group behavior while leaving the underlying goals, values and norms unchanged. As a result, the interests frame may be of limited help, or even be counterproductive, in producing "double-loop learning," which involves critical inquiry into, and changes in, underlying goals, values, and norms (Argyris and Schon, 1996). As with the resource frame, the interests frame's focus on solutions may leave the sources of the conflict undiscussed and undiscussible. Even when it appears to be successful, conflict management can lead to an illusion of resolution. If the underlying problems are not fully addressed, the deeper conflicts will continue to resurface again



and again (around different issues, perhaps) leading to greater distrust, cynicism, and hopelessness.

### **The identity frame**

The "identity" frame of conflict is a newer frame that has been incorporated into the field of conflict resolution. This frame also sees conflict as stemming from needs, desires, concerns, and fears. However, it suggests that intractable conflicts are really about the articulation and confrontation of individual and collective identities (Rothman, 1997). These conflicts may be expressed and negotiated in terms of resources or interests, but they really involve people's individual and collective goals, sense of meaning, and definitions of self. According to the identity frame, conflicts are rooted in threats to or frustration of fundamental human needs, such as those for dignity, recognition, safety, control, purpose, and efficacy (Burton, 1990 and Azar, 1990).

The identity frame differs from the other two frames by rejecting the notion that conflicts are problems to be resolved or even managed. While acknowledging the destructive potential of conflict, this frame maintains that conflict offers opportunities for growth, adaptation, and learning (Bush and Folger, 1994; Lederach, 1995; Rupesinghe, 1995). This approach, also known as the "interactive problem-solving approach," views conflict as a result of threatened or frustrated needs which must be surfaced, fully analyzed and addressed, before any kind of bargaining or negotiation can succeed (Azar, 1990; Burton, 1990; Kelman, 1982; Fisher, 1996; Rothman, 1992).

Gurevitch (1989) suggests that true dialogue and learning occurs when disputants learn how to "not understand" each other instead of continually imposing their own mental models on the other. This studied unknowing involves fundamentally questioning the way in which individuals and groups have constructed the reality which they share (akin to the process of double loop learning). On the one hand, it can lead to mutually defined perceptions of reality. On the other hand, it can increase the possibility that both sides gain deeper insight about themselves. From this perspective, the desired outcome of conflict is not just resolution, but also growth, moral development, and fundamental changes in perception.

The identity frame focuses on the process of engaging conflict rather than simply reaching a particular settlement. Conflict engagement means creating "reflexive dialogue" in which parties speak about their needs and interests in the presence of their adversaries (Rothman, 1997). It also aims explicitly at change both within individual parties and between parties. Having first expressed themselves and heard each other in this way, parties are encouraged to collaborate in setting new goals and restructuring their relationship on the basis of changes in, and more positive definitions of, themselves.

Rather than focusing on resolving conflicting interests, the identity-frame provides a way of thinking about conflict as an opportunity for double-loop learning, or inquiry into and clarification of deeper issues involving fundamental goals, values, needs, standards, and assumptions (Argyris and Schon, 1996). Unlike the resource or interests

frames of conflict, the identity frame does not focus on bargaining or negotiation as a means of intervening in or resolving conflict. From the perspective of the identity frame, the goal of intervention is not just reaching agreements or resolution. Rather it entails engaging conflict as an opportunity for challenging the status quo. From the identity frame perspective, conflict promotes what Argyris and Schon (1978) have called "good dialectic." Agreements emerge not through changing strategies from competition to cooperation but as the result of inquiry and fundamental changes in thinking. By asking parties in a conflict to consider the meaning behind their needs and interests, the identity frame offers an approach to conflict and conflict engagement that can be empowering and transformative.

### **The structural frame**

An emerging frame in the field of conflict resolution is the structural frame. This frame has its roots in the work of Johan Galtung (1969) and the field of peace studies. Galtung (1969) developed the concept of "structural violence" as the situation of political, economic, and social injustice in which gross inequities exist between different groups' decision-making power over the distribution of resources (Galtung, 1969).

Maire Dugan (1996), another peace researcher, developed the "nested theory" to delineate how a given interpersonal, familial, or organizational conflict is symptomatic of over-arching societal systems and structures. On the one hand, traditional conflict resolution practice addresses an immediate crisis, and may even help to repair or renew the relationship between conflicting parties; however, it does not redress the inequalities of the system that is at the root of the conflict. On the other hand, peace research focuses on the structural and systemic level, but does not resolve the conflict at hand, or mend the relationship. Dugan suggests an intermediate level, which she calls the sub-system, as the arena in which practitioners can simultaneously address the conflict at hand, the relationship, and the larger system.

Conflict theorists employing the structural frame propose that changes in both relationships and structures or systems are necessary for genuine conflict transformation to occur. Jeong (1999) writes, "Efforts to resolve conflict need to be assessed in terms of an outcome as well as a process. Subsequently, conflict resolution has to be geared toward finding solutions to the structural causes of problems that are responsible for contentious relationships.... Negotiation for peaceful relationships would not be effective without confronting the structural origins of problems".

Richard Rubenstein (1999) points out that interveners are regularly successful in their efforts to assist parties in restructuring systems or patterned relationships in organizations and families. "To the extent that the family functions as an independent social unit, this task may be accomplished without great difficulty by skillful third parties" (Rubenstein, 1999). But families, organizations, schools, and other social units, are not independent units. Rubenstein (1999) continues, "....their embeddedness in modern social structures makes it increasingly difficult for them to play traditional roles as institutional alternatives to the macro-system. As a result, one increasingly finds family conflicts linked with broader structural conflicts. Their termination may

therefore be dependent upon conflict resolution at a more encompassing and problematical level".

Traditional conflict resolution practice, because it brings the parties to settlement without addressing the underlying causes of the conflict, may result in temporary peace. However, the failure to restructure in significant and fundamental ways, almost guarantees that conflict will recur (Rubenstein, 1999).

### **From the Center to the Margins of Social Work: Psychotherapies, Strengths and Ecosystems**

Social work theories, too, can be organized in terms of "frames," or perspectives that provide a lens to social problems. The social work profession, already a century old, is clearly much older than the profession of conflict resolution. Nevertheless, there is considerable overlap between many of the assumptions, concepts and approaches of the newest and emerging approaches of conflict resolution and social work.

#### **The psychotherapy frame**

Social work is rooted in the nineteenth-century concept of casework, which focused on a diagnosis and treatment model of social work practice (James, 1987). For the past seventy years, social work has been dominated by the assumption that individualized psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and humanistic psychology are appropriate means for dealing with social problems (Specht, 1994). "We have these perceptions of social treatments because, as Americans, our belief in the individual's capacity for change is strong, and our faith in the power of the group and the community is weak, evidence to the contrary notwithstanding." (Specht, 1994.)

In this frame, social work is primarily a problem-solving approach, as both the individual and society strive for self-fulfillment (Compton and Galaway, 1994). What distinguishes different theories and practices of social work often depends on the answer to the question: With whom does responsibility for change rest? Is it the social worker or the client? James (1987) suggests that there is a continuum along which the different theories and practices of social work answer that question.

The psychosocial approach to casework (Woods and Hollis, 1990) emphasizes the importance of assessment and diagnosis and the social worker's efforts to determine the client's needs. Perlman's (1970) problem-solving model places more emphasis on the client's ownership of the problem, but still suggests "the problem-to-be-worked may become that of helping the client move from his interpretation of the problem to that of the caseworker". Ruth Smalley's functional approach (1970) works from a psychology of growth, with the center of change in the client.

Crisis intervention assumes that the client's normal problem-solving mechanisms may not be functioning effectively and that the social worker may have to take an active role in owning and defining the client's problem. Behavior modification, based on learning theory, allows the client to retain ownership of the problem, while the social worker takes on the role of expert. Task-centered casework, which is particularly

applicable for short-term treatment, encourages social workers to assist clients in achieving specific and limited goals of their choice. The social worker assists the client to list and rank order problems and to develop means to work on them, at which point, the social worker's role is to monitor the client's progress (James, 1987).

More recently, feminist-informed, culturally sensitive, and humanistic approaches to social work back away from the social worker as expert and focus on client-directed definitions of problems. On the margins of social work today are even more subjective approaches, such as narrative, constructivist, and post-modern theories, which posit that reality is not objectively determined, but is subjectively constructed and contextualized. These theories refocus the emphasis of social work practice on process rather than outcome, with the stress on shaping inquiry into the clients' definitions of their problems, rather than on diagnosis. Ironically, this trend is emerging as managed health care demands an increasing focus on problem solving with measurable outcomes.

### **The strengths frame**

The strengths frame has developed in part as a response to the pathology frame. "Some of the impetus for the development of a strengths/resilience-based practice comes from our society's unabashed fascination with pathology, problems, moral and interpersonal aberrations, violence, and victimization. Add to that the unstinting effort to medicalize and pathologize almost every human behavior pattern, habit, and trait, and you have a heady mix of diagnoses, labels, and identities at the ready - all advertising our abnormalities, disorders, weaknesses, fallibilities, and victimization." (Saleebey, 1999.)

The strengths frame suggests a more balanced view of the power of individuals to overcome problems and produce change. This frame is characterized by "words such as empowerment, membership, competence, potential, responsibility, growth, assets, and visions" (Saleebey, 1999), which contrast with the vocabulary of the medical and psychotherapeutic approaches.

The role of the intervener includes facilitating clients to recognize and build upon their assets, strengths, and resources in their environment, to recognize their options and alternatives, and to design strategies that support and strengthen ethnic backgrounds. Intervener roles also include educating clients and assisting them to increase their own skills, encouraging clients to believe in their ability to change, and encouraging clients to assume an optimistic perspective about life's possibilities (Saleebey, 1999).

Problems, viewed by theorists and practitioners operating from the strengths frame, are opportunities for growth and change. Individuals are viewed as having unlimited capabilities for growth and change, and environments are viewed as being full of assets and resources. Proponents of the strengths frame have criticized the problem-solving approach in social work because the concentration on problems moves the focus away from client strengths. Compton and Galaway counter that, "While problems in the person-situation interaction are the basis for the initial engagement between client and worker, the ensuing formulation and implementation of solutions calls upon client strengths, strengths in the environment, and worker strengths."

(Saleebey, 1999.)

### **The ecosystem frame**

The ecosystem frame emphasizes the relationships or interactions between individuals and their social environments. It assumes that these interactions are reciprocal, and that individuals and environments are continually shaping each other (Germain and Gitterman, 1980). This dual emphasis on the individual and the environment is an important characteristic of this social work frame and distinguishes it from the psychotherapy frame and the psychotherapeutic professions.

The ecosystem frame also attempts to counter the disease or pathology orientation of the psychotherapeutic approaches to social work. Rather, this frame focuses on the role performance of individuals and the environmental supports that are available to them. "According to this approach, individuals experience problems when there is a poor fit between their needs and wants, and the resources made available by their environment - in particular, the community" (Compton and Galaway, 1999).

Because people and their environments are treated as a single concept, the ecosystem frame requires that interventions be addressed together, and that approaches to practice integrate the treatment and reform traditions of social work. Social work interventions occur at the interface between the individual and the environment, or at the problems generated by the "person-in-situation" interaction. Practice entails three objectives: facilitating interaction between individuals and their social environment, assisting individuals to increase their problem-solving skills and their competence, and influencing social and environmental policy (Compton and Galaway, 1999).

This frame's answer to a long-standing question within the social work profession about whether to focus on individual change or environmental change is that the profession should focus not on one or the other, but on the interaction between the individual and the environment. Consequently, the practice of social workers employing this approach integrates both clinical and social interventions. Because interactions between individuals and their environments are contextual, social workers must have skills to promote both individual and/or social change depending on the circumstances.

Another long-standing question within the field of social work relates to whether the profession should focus on rehabilitation or whether it should focus on prevention. Again, the ecosystems frame suggests an answer. "Prevention is seen as requiring social change, while rehabilitation is perceived as helping individuals to cope with immediate situations. In reality, all social work is both preventive and rehabilitative." (Compton and Galaway, 1999.)

### **Overlapping Concepts in Conflict Resolution and Social Work**

Conflict resolution and social work are engaged in similar controversies related to three concepts that the two fields hold in common: self-determination, empowerment, and professional ethics. Concepts, according to Dogan and Pahre (1990), are developed and given a specific meaning by a discipline, and play an important role in bridging

between disciplines. "Because scholars are socialized into a specific discipline, most of us labor under various kinds of conceptual blinders, which vary from one discipline to the next. By putting on the conceptual blinders of another discipline in order to examine one's own, or by looking at a discipline from outside, without these blinders, one has a greater opportunity to innovate." (Dogan and Pahre, 1990.)

Each of these concepts encompasses a continuum of approaches to intervention: prescriptive versus elicitive intervention, problem solving versus transformation goals, and third party neutrality/impartiality versus advocacy of intervener roles. "Not only are the theory and skill sets of mediation [and conflict resolution more generally] and generalist social work practice highly compatible, but each embraces a set of core values to which practitioners are expected to adhere, including client self-determination, empowerment, and professional competence." (Kruk, 1997.)

### **Self-determination: Prescriptive versus Elicitive Intervention**

Mayer (1995) suggests a continuum of intervener and client participation in the resolution of conflict and highlights four points along that continuum: unassisted procedures, nonbinding assistance, binding assistance and designing a dispute system. The unassisted procedures can include negotiation, conciliation, rapport building, information exchange, and collaborative problem solving and decision making. Social workers can act as coaches or teachers for clients who may be conducting their own negotiations; and in non-binding assistance procedures, social workers can act as intermediaries. Generally, social workers do not act as formal arbitrators; however, in the case of child custody evaluation, social workers' decisions may be authorized as binding by the court. The most common type of conflict resolution techniques used by social workers, and increasingly conflict resolution professionals working in the newer identity-frames, are the unassisted, facilitative, or non-binding procedures.

The debate between prescriptive versus elicitive intervention centers around the degree of authority exercised by the intervener. The more traditional frames and approaches of both fields assume a more prescriptive intervener role. In these approaches, the social worker or conflict resolution practitioner is the "expert" and is likely to prescribe or have substantial influence over the direction of the intervention and the parameters of possible solutions to the problems.

The newer approaches of both social work and conflict resolution emphasize increased client self-determination. Both seek to foster maximum client control over intervention processes and ownership of the problems. The approaches of the newer frames are more elicitive and demand the active participation of the clients in defining problems and developing alternative solutions. The role of the intervener is that of facilitator or guide, who works collaboratively with clients through these processes.

The field of conflict resolution practice incorporates an ever-growing number of applied practices, including mediation, facilitation, and arbitration. Mediation, however, is the best known and most widely practiced. There are a variety of mediation practitioners, including peer mediators in schools, volunteer mediators in community centers, court-appointed mediators and divorce and family mediators. One characteristic that differentiates types of mediation is the degree of the parties' decision

making power involved at each step of the process, beginning with whether participation by the parties is voluntary or involuntary.

A mediator who views conflict and conflict resolution through the identity frame, and who views the goals of mediation as transformation, will generally be more likely to promote the parties' self-determination in defining the problem and proposing solutions. These mediators generally employ the same elicitive techniques that social workers do, including attending and focusing, questioning, reframing, partializing, summarizing, and reflecting (Kruk, 1997). James (1987) outlines other skills that are important in mediation: identifying and defining issues, encouraging parties to share their perceptions of these issues, exploring options available to the parties, managing conflict between the parties, and helping them negotiate towards their own solutions. "Such processes and skills underline the emphasis upon client control of the proceedings and the outcome, and their continued 'ownership' of the conflict." (James, 1987.).

### **Empowerment: Problem-Solving versus Transformation**

Power can be viewed as oppressive and destructive, when viewed as the ability of one person to influence the decisions and behaviors of another. Yet power can also be seen as positive, for example, as in the ability to get things done (Yanoov, 1996).

The problem social workers must face in conflict resolution situations is how to promote the constructive application of power and how to ensure that disempowered parties gain access to available legitimate sources of power. It is not so much that a balance of power must be achieved, because such a balance is an elusive goal that an intervener usually cannot attain. Instead, it is important that the parties to a conflict be helped to obtain access to information, advocates, resources, and support systems, so they can be effective in mobilizing and bringing to bear the legitimate sources of power that are available to them (Mayer, 1995).

"At the community level, many of the social problems which concern community workers can be analyzed as the product of actual imbalances of power" (Yanoov, 1996). Viewed in these terms it is not difficult to understand why many community conflicts, in which problem-solving interventions alone are employed, are recurring. For example, if conflicts between communities are framed as legal problems, then solutions will be sought through law enforcement efforts. Unless a transformation in people's attitudes and behaviors and relationships occurs, the underlying causes of the conflict may persist or worsen. However, viewing the conflict through the identity frame to identify underlying causes, and utilizing transformative intervention approaches, may produce empowerment and changes in the balance of power. In such a situation, conflict can be embraced as an opportunity for power redistribution in the community.

For example, gender-based power imbalances are the driving force behind a feminist approach to conflict resolution. The feminist-informed goal of mediation might be twofold: both a fair and equitable settlement of the dispute and empowerment of the disadvantaged party (usually the woman). This approach to mediation is highly interventionist, since it views mediator neutrality as dangerous to the disadvantaged

party. The mediator will likely intervene in both process and outcome to assure the empowerment of the disadvantaged party (Kruk, 1997).

A central controversy in the field of conflict resolution, between problem-solving and transformative approaches, revolves around the issue of empowerment. Bush and Folger (1994) suggest that empowerment, rather than problem-solving, should be the goal of mediation. "At the simplest level, problem-solving mediation defines the objective as improving the parties' situation from what it was before. The transformative approach instead defines the objective as improving the parties themselves from what they were before....transformative mediation is successful when the parties experience growth in both dimensions of moral development....developing both the capacity for strength of self and the capacity for relating to others. These are the objectives of empowerment and recognition" (Bush and Folger, 1994.)

### **Professional Ethics: Third Party Neutrality/Impartiality versus Advocacy/Engagement**

Social workers and conflict resolution practitioners bring to their professions specific skills and competencies, many of which are parallel. Communication skills and problem-solving skills are among them. Neutrality can be considered a professional skill, but its value is being questioned increasingly in both fields.

A principal debate in the field of conflict resolution concerns whether or not the intervener should remain neutral and impartial or engage in the conflict resolution process. In traditional resource-based and interest-based bargaining, the intervener is likely to adopt a stance of neutrality and impartiality. However identity-based interveners are more likely to adopt a stance of engagement. Increasingly, the concepts of neutrality and impartiality have come to be considered by proponents of transformative approaches as unrealistic, if not impossible, and as undesirable, if not dangerous (Bush and Folger, 1994).

This line of thinking posits that no practitioner can be neutral or impartial, because all interveners bring their own assumptions, beliefs, values, and expectations, that consciously or unconsciously, frame the very questions that they ask. The intervention, through the interaction between the intervener and the conflicting parties, creates a particular reality that is based on their combined beliefs and preconceived notions about conflict and conflict resolution. Thus the intervention itself, contributes to shaping the conflict and its outcome. "There is no such thing as the "parties' conflict" when third parties are involved. Conflicts are inevitably changed as they are processed, and mediators are an inevitable part of that change." (Bush and Folger, 1994.)

One way to frame the concepts of neutrality and impartiality may be as "disciplined bias," in which the intervener becomes self-conscious about his/her own beliefs and expectations and engages in self-conscious practice (Soros, 1987). Another way to frame these concepts may be as "reflection in action", developed by Donald Schon in *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983). Schon suggests that practitioners may improve their practice by focusing on how their roles and actions might influence the course of events.

A step beyond reflection, which concentrates on the role of the practitioner, is



reflexivity (Rothman, 1997), which focuses on the complex interplay between practitioner, client and context. Reflexivity suggests a process by which instinctive and unexamined reactions to external stimulus are delayed and analyzed prior to responding (Steier, 1991). This process of slowing down and analyzing the values and priorities inherent in the interaction process, while it is happening, is an interactive process which constantly considers self, other, and context, and encourages parties in conflict to examine their own underlying assumptions and priorities in their interactions. This is important, not only to the parties in conflict, but to the intervener as well.

Peile (1993) suggests ways in which social workers might avoid deterministic outcomes and promote creativity. He encourages social workers to view their own and clients' behavior as creative, and to encourage clients to view themselves in a creative relationship with their environment. The client and the social worker should relate to each other in ways that recognize each other's creative potential. The social worker should explicitly model this process by working through new ideas out loud, and by using different methods of seeking solutions, both verbal and nonverbal. He further suggests that social workers avoid rushing, and allow time for handling frustration and tension. The social worker may join with the client in collaborative reflection, and affirm and strengthen the creative initiative shown by the client, including action, reflection and experimentation (Peile, 1993).

The ethics of professional practice necessitate that social workers be keenly aware of their values and how they convey them through professional language and behavior. Manning (1997) suggests that social workers need to be aware of ethical issues, determine what is morally necessary, and transform their moral beliefs and values into action. "Social workers who have the 'courage to be as oneself' and to engage in the public debate about contemporary social transformations, integrate social work values into the public dialogue, and ultimately shape culture. Moral citizenship - awareness, thinking, feeling, and action - provides a framework for this transformational practice." (Manning, 1997.)

### **Conclusion**

There are clearly many shared theoretical and applied approaches between the fields of social work and conflict resolution, and much to be gained from a sustained dialogue between both theorists and practitioners in the two fields. Such a dialogue has the potential to significantly enhance the practice of both professions, especially in relation to those practices, such as mediation and psychotherapy, in which the borders between the two are blurred.

Practitioners in social work and conflict resolution are engaged in debate around three key concepts related to self-determination, empowerment, and professional ethics. The newer and emerging frames of both fields are situated at parallel positions on the continuum of approaches to these key concepts, in their respective professions. These frames favor elicitive rather than prescriptive approaches and increased client self-determination, a focus on transformation and empowerment rather than on problem-solving alone, and a stance of engagement and advocacy towards intervention, rather than neutrality and impartiality.

The issues at the margins of each discipline require serious intellectual consideration, particularly in terms of their implications for practice. For example, the debates in the field of social work, relating to individual change versus environmental change, and prevention versus rehabilitation, mirror similar debates in the field of conflict resolution. Increased interchange between the two fields has the potential to contribute to the development of innovative approaches to transforming social conflicts and promoting positive social change. Such innovation is to be found in the intersection of the margins of the two fields, especially in the emerging structural frame of conflict resolution and the ecosystems frame of social work.

The newer and emerging frames of both fields are concerned with the problems and conflicts that result from the structures and systems in which they occur. At the margins of both, a new goal is increasingly becoming explicit, which is to find ways to simultaneously address the immediate problems or conflicts and change those structures and systems. Intellectual collaboration at these margins can lead to enhanced exploration of how these fields can extend the empowerment of individuals and groups, and the transformation of relationships, to the transformation of the over-arching systems and structures in which those individuals and groups are embedded. This, clearly, would be a major contribution to the social sciences.

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