Group Processes in the Resolution of International Conflicts

Experiences From the Israeli–Palestinian Case

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For over 20 years, politically influential Israelis and Palestinians have met in private, unofficial, academically based, problem-solving workshops designed to enable the parties to explore each other's perspective, generate joint ideas for mutually satisfactory solutions to their conflict, and transfer insights and ideas derived from their interaction into the policy process. Most of the work takes place in small groups, but the focus is on promoting change in the larger system. This article discusses 5 ways in which the workshop group serves as a vehicle for change at the macrolevel. It does so by functioning as a microcosm of the larger system, as a laboratory for producing inputs into the larger system, as a setting for direct interaction, as a coalition across conflict lines, and as a nucleus for a new relationship.

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict has long been cited as a typical case of a protracted, intractable conflict. The origins of the conflict go back to the birth of modern political Zionism at the end of the 19th century. Violence first erupted in the 1920s, and, in various forms and with varying degrees of intensity, it has pervaded the relationship between the two peoples since that time. The psychological core of the conflict has been its perception by the two sides as a zero-sum conflict around national identity and national existence, which has led over the years to mutual denial of the other's identity and systematic efforts to delegitimize the other (Kelman, 1978, 1987). Under the circumstances, the parties had been reluctant for a long time to go to the negotiation table and, indeed, to offer each other the assurances and enticements that would make negotiations safe and promising in their eyes.

Nevertheless, in response to a strong initiative from the U.S. administration, Israelis and Palestinians finally entered into a process of direct negotiations, starting with the Madrid Conference in the fall of 1991. The mere fact that the parties were negotiating represented a significant departure in the history of the conflict, but the official talks themselves, which continued in Washington, DC, for nearly two years, did not develop their own momentum and seemed to arrive at an impasse (cf. Kelman, 1992a). In the meantime, however, secret talks between representatives of Israel's Labor Party-led government (elected in June 1992) and the Palestine Liberation Organization, held in Oslo in 1993, produced a dramatic agreement that was signed by the parties on the White House lawn in September 1993. The Oslo accord took the form of an exchange of letters of mutual recognition between the official representatives of the two peoples, followed by a Declaration of Principles (DOP) that stipulated the establishment of a Palestinian authority in Gaza and Jericho as the first step in Palestinian self-rule. Despite the shortcomings of the DOP and despite the fact that the most difficult political issues were left to be resolved in the final-status negotiations, which were scheduled to begin in May 1996, the Oslo accord represents a fundamental breakthrough in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. That breakthrough derives, in my view, from the mutual recognition of the other's nationhood and each side's commitment to negotiate and make peace with the body that symbolizes and legitimates that nationhood.

It would be foolhardy to insist that the peace process set into motion by the Oslo accords is irreversible. At this

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Photo by Laura Wolf.

writing (October 1996), the indications are that, under the current Likud-led government in Israel, the process will be slowed down but neither reversed nor entirely halted. On the other hand, slowing down the process can seriously undermine the achievement of a final peace agreement. As we have already seen, it may provoke acts of violence and counterviolence, creating an atmosphere unconducive to negotiations, and it may create new facts on the ground—such as the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank—leaving no room for an agreement on the basis of territorial compromise. Although I remain optimistic about the ultimate success of the Israeli–Palestinian peace process, I am less prepared now than three years ago to predict that a peace agreement will be signed by the end of the century. But even if the current phase of the peace process were to fail, the Oslo accord has fundamentally changed the character of the conflict. What is irreversible is the fact that the unthinkable has not only been thought, but it has been acted on—the fact that the two parties have recognized each other's national identity and have, in their negotiations and interactions, acknowledged each other's legitimacy. In this sense, the Oslo accord is a breakthrough that is at least as significant as Anwar Sadat's trip to Jerusalem, which led to the Egyptian–Israeli peace agreement.

What are the forces that led to this breakthrough? On a long-term basis, the Six-Day War of 1967 created a new geopolitical and strategic situation in the Middle East, which led to the gradually evolving recognition on all sides that a historic compromise of the Palestine problem in the form of some version of a two-state solution would best serve their national interests (cf. Kelman, 1988). The powerful political obstacles to such a solution were finally overcome by short-term strategic and micropolitical considerations that can be traced to the Gulf War and the end of the Cold War. The combination of these long-term and short-term developments made negotiations necessary from the point of view of both Israeli and Palestinian interests. But a significant factor contributing to the breakthrough was the conclusion, on both sides, that negotiations were not only necessary but also possible—that they could yield an acceptable agreement without jeopardizing their national existence. This sense of possibility evolved out of interactions between the two sides that produced the individuals, the ideas, and the political atmosphere required for productive negotiations.

A variety of unofficial contacts between the two sides played a significant role in creating this sense of possibility and the climate conducive to negotiations. It is in this context that the third-party efforts in which my colleagues and I have been engaged since the early 1970s contributed to the evolving peace process (Kelman, 1995). Our work illustrates the potential contributions of social psychology and the scholar–practitioner model (Kelman 1992b) to the interdisciplinary, multifaceted task of analyzing and resolving protracted international and ethnic conflicts.

This article focuses on the ways in which the microprocess of the small-group meetings that my colleagues and I organize can serve as a vehicle for change at the macrolevel. To set the stage for this discussion, the article briefly (a) places our work in the context of the emerging field of conflict resolution, (b) describes our particular approach to conflict resolution at the international level, and (c) discusses our efforts to contribute to the Israeli–Palestinian peace process.

The Conflict Resolution Field

In the past two decades or so, the world has witnessed the development and proliferation of a variety of new approaches to conflict resolution, which together constitute a new field of theory and practice (see Kelman, 1993b). The precise boundaries of this emerging field are difficult to draw, and practitioners differ in their view of what should be included and what should be excluded.

Practitioners of conflict resolution work at different levels—ranging from the interpersonal to the international. They operate in different domains, such as the court system, public policy, labor–management relations, interethnic relations, or international diplomacy. They derive their ideas from a variety of sources, such as law, psychotherapy, management theories, group dynamics, peace research, decision theory, the study of conflict resolution in traditional societies, and theoretical models from the entire range of social science disciplines. Despite the diversity in level, domain, and intellectual origins that characterizes the work in this field, there are certain common insights and approaches to practice that run through all of its manifestations. Thus, with different degrees of emphasis, they all call for a nonadversarial framework for conflict resolution, an analytic approach, a problem-solving orientation, direct participation by the parties in conflict in jointly shaping a solution, and facilitation by a third party trained in the process of conflict resolution.

Interaction among scholar–practitioners working at different levels and in different domains is instructive and enriching and contributes significantly to the refinement of theory and technique. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that the application of general principles requires sensitivity to the unique features of the context in which they are applied. Thus, in my own work over the years on international and intercommunal conflict, I have called attention to the need for knowledge about and experience with the particular features and issues of conflict at these levels and to the danger of direct transfer of experiences from the interpersonal and interorganizational levels to the international arena.

Interactive Problem Solving

The unofficial third-party approach to international and ethnic conflict resolution that my colleagues and I have been developing and applying derives from the pioneering efforts of Burton (1969, 1979, 1984). I have used the term *interactive problem solving* to describe the approach, which finds its fullest expression in problem-solving workshops (Kelman, 1972, 1979, 1986, 1991, 1992b, 1996; Kelman & Cohen, 1986). Within this framework, I have done some work on the Cyprus conflict, and, through the work of my students, associates, and colleagues, I have maintained an active interest in a number of other protracted identity group conflicts around the world, such as the conflicts in Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, Rwanda–Burundi, the former Yugoslavia, and the former Soviet Union. The primary regional focus of my action research program, however, has been on the Middle East. In particular, since the early 1970s, my colleagues and I have conducted an intensive program of problem-solving workshops and related activities on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Problem-solving workshops are intensive meetings between politically involved but entirely unofficial representatives of conflicting parties—for example, Israelis and Palestinians or Greek and Turkish Cypriots (see Kelman, 1993a). Workshop participants are often politically influential members of their communities. Thus, in our Israeli–Palestinian work, participants have included parliamentarians; leading figures in political parties or movements; former military officers or government officials; journalists or editors specializing in the Middle East; and academic scholars who are major analysts of the conflict for their societies and some of whom have served in advisory, official, or diplomatic positions.[1] The workshops take place under academic auspices and are facilitated by a panel of social scientists who are knowledgeable about international conflict, group process, and the Middle East region.

The discussions are completely private and confidential. There is no audience, no publicity, and no record, and one of the central ground rules specifies that statements made in the course of a workshop cannot be cited with attribution outside of the workshop setting. These and other features of the workshop are designed to enable and encourage workshop participants to engage in a type of communication that is usually not available to parties involved in an intense conflict relationship. The third party creates an atmosphere, establishes norms, and makes occasional interventions, all conducive to free and open discussion, in which the parties address each other rather than third parties or their own constituencies and in which they listen to each other in order to understand their differing perspectives. They are encouraged to deal with the conflict analytically rather than polemically—to explore the ways in which their interaction helps to exacerbate and perpetuate the conflict, rather than to assign blame to the other side while justifying their own. This analytic discussion helps the parties penetrate each other's perspective and understand each other's concerns, needs, fears, priorities, and constraints.

Once both sets of concerns are on the table and have been understood and acknowledged, the parties are encouraged to engage in a process of joint problem solving. They are asked to work together in developing new ideas for resolving the conflict in ways that would satisfy the fundamental needs and allay the existential fears of both parties. They are then asked to explore the political and psychological constraints that stand in the way of such integrative, win–win solutions and that, in fact, have prevented the parties from moving to (or staying at) the negotiating table. Again, they are asked to engage in a process of joint problem solving, designed to generate ideas for "getting from here to there." A central feature of this process is the identification of steps of mutual reassurance—in the form of acknowledgments, symbolic gestures, or confidence-building measures—that would help reduce the parties' fears of engaging in negotiations in which the outcome is uncertain and risky. Problem-solving workshops also contribute to mutual reassurance by helping the parties develop—again, through collaborative effort—a non-threatening, deescalatory language and a shared vision of a desirable future.

Workshops have a dual purpose. First, they are designed to produce changes in the workshop participants themselves—changes in the form of more differentiated images of the enemy (see Kelman, 1987), a better understanding of the other's perspective and of their own priorities, greater insight into the dynamics of the conflict, and new ideas for resolving the conflict and for overcoming the barriers to a negotiated solution. These changes at the level of individual participants are a vehicle for promoting change at the policy level. Thus, the second purpose of workshops is to maximize the likelihood that the new insights, ideas, and proposals developed in the course of the interaction are fed back into the political debate and the decision-making process in each community. One of the central tasks of the third party is to structure the workshop in such a way that new insights and ideas are likely both to be generated and to be transferred effectively to the policy process.

The composition of the workshop is crucial in this context: Great care must be taken to select participants who, on the one hand, have the interest and capacity to engage in the kind of learning process that workshops provide and, on the other hand, have the positions and credibility in their own communities that enable them to influence the thinking of political leaders, political constituencies, or the general public. It should be noted that the third party's role, although essential to the success of problem-solving workshops, is strictly a facilitative role. The critical work of generating ideas and infusing them into the political process must be done by the participants themselves. A basic assumption of our approach is that solutions emerging out of the interaction between the conflicting parties are most likely to be responsive to their needs and to engender their commitment.[2]

Contributions to the Israeli–Palestinian Peace Process

Most of the Israeli–Palestinian work that my colleagues and I carried out over the years took place during the prenegotiation phase of the conflict. The primary purpose was to help create a political atmosphere that would encourage the parties to move to the negotiating table. Moreover, until 1990, the workshops that we organized were all one-time events. Although some Israelis and Palestinians, as individuals, participated in several such events, each workshop was self-contained. Because of financial, logistical, and political constraints, we were not able to bring the same group of participants together for more than one occasion.

In 1990, however, we took a major step forward in our work by organizing, for the first time, a continuing workshop (see Rouhana & Kelman, 1994). A group of highly influential Israelis and Palestinians committed themselves initially to a series of three workshop meetings over the course of a year. The first meeting took place in November 1990 and, at the end of the third meeting (in August 1991), the participants decided to continue the process.

In the meantime, external events instigated a second major new development in our work. With the convening of the Madrid Conference in the fall of 1991 and the opening of an official Israeli–Palestinian peace process, our own work moved from the prenegotiation to the negotiation phase of the conflict. We had no doubt—and the participants in the continuing workshop agreed—that there was still a great need for maintaining an unofficial process alongside of the official one. However, with the onset of official negotiations, the purpose and focus of our work had to change (Rouhana & Kelman, 1994). When negotiations are in progress, workshops can contribute to overcoming obstacles to staying at the table and negotiating productively, to creating a momentum for the negotiations, to addressing long-term issues that are not yet on the negotiating table, and to beginning the process of peace-building that must accompany and follow the process of peacemaking.

As Nadim Rouhana and I began to formulate, along with the Israeli and Palestinian participants, the functions of the continuing workshop in the new phase of the peace process, we confronted another new development, which created both opportunities and complications. Our unofficial process was steadily moving closer to the official process. When the official negotiating teams were established, four of the six Palestinian members of the continuing workshop were appointed to key positions on them. With the Labor Party's victory in the Israeli elections in 1992, several of our Israeli participants gained increasing access to the top decision makers. (In fact, eventually, one was appointed to the cabinet and another to a major diplomatic post.) These developments clearly enhanced the political relevance of the continuing workshop, but the overlap between the official and unofficial processes also created some ambiguities and role conflicts.

The meetings of the continuing workshop after the start of the official negotiations focused on the obstacles confronting the peace process at the negotiating table and on the ground but also addressed the question of the functions and composition of the continuing workshop in the new political environment. Altogether, this continuing workshop met over a three-year period. Its final session took place in August 1993, ending just a day or so before the news of the Israeli–Palestinian breakthrough that was achieved in Oslo began to emerge.

In the wake of the Oslo accord, signed in September 1993, there has been general recognition of the role that unofficial efforts have played, directly or indirectly, in laying the groundwork for the Israeli–Palestinian breakthrough. In this context, various observers—within and outside of the Middle East—have acknowledged the contributions of the activities in which my colleagues and I have been engaged over the years. In my own assessment, there are three ways in which our work, along with that of many others, has contributed (Kelman, 1995).

1. Workshops have helped to develop cadres prepared to carry out productive negotiations. Over the years, dozens of Israelis and dozens of Palestinians, many of them political influentials or preinfluentials, have participated in our workshops and related activities, including the continuing workshop in the early 1990s. Many of these individuals were involved in the discussions and negotiations that led up to the Oslo accord. Many have continued to be involved in the peace process, and some have served in the Israeli cabinet, Knesset, and foreign ministry and in leading positions in the various Palestinian political agencies.

2. The sharing of information and the formulation of new ideas in the course of our workshops have provided important substantive inputs into the negotiations. Through the public and private communications of workshop participants—and to some degree also through the

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[2] For a more detailed discussion of the workshop ground rules, the nature of the interaction between participants, and the role of the third party, see Kelman (1979), Kelman (1992b), and Rouhana and Kelman (1994).

communications of members of the third party—some of the insights and ideas on which productive negotiations could be built were injected into the two political cultures. These included shared assumptions, mutual sensitivities, and new conceptions of the process and outcome of negotiations, all of which were developed in the course of workshop interactions.

3. Workshops have fostered a political atmosphere that has made the parties open to a new relationship. Our workshops, along with various other Israeli–Palestinian meetings and projects, have done so by encouraging the development of more differentiated images of the enemy, of a deescalatory language and a new political discourse that is attentive to the other party's concerns and constraints, of a working trust that is based on the conviction that both parties have a genuine interest in a peaceful solution, and of a sense of possibility regarding the ultimate achievement of a mutually satisfactory outcome.

The Oslo agreement, of course, represented only the beginning of what has already been and will almost certainly continue to be a long and difficult process, confronting obstacles and periodic setbacks. Therefore, unofficial efforts alongside the official negotiations continue to be needed. Accordingly, when we decided to close the continuing workshop in the late fall of 1993, we immediately initiated a new project, which built on the experience and achievements of the preceding work. This new project has taken the form of a joint working group on Israeli–Palestinian relations, which held its first meeting in May 1994. The initial emphasis of the group has been on systematic exploration of the difficult political issues—including Israeli settlements, Palestinian refugees, Jerusalem, and the precise nature of Palestinian self-determination—that have been deferred to the final-status negotiations. For the first time in our work, we hope to produce and disseminate one or more joint concept papers, which will frame these issues in terms of the future relationship between the two societies that is envisaged as the long-term outcome of the final agreement.

The Role of Group Processes in Conflict Resolution

Having presented a brief description of our microlevel approach and its contribution to conflict resolution at the macrolevel, I now want to highlight the role that interaction within the small group plays in the larger process.

Most of our work takes place in the context of small groups, composed of three to six representatives of the two sides and two to four third-party facilitators. The focus of all of our efforts is on promoting change in the larger system, but direct interaction in the small-group setting can produce important inputs into the political thinking, the political debate, and the decision-making processes within the two societies and into the formal negotiations between them. Thus, changes at the individual level resulting from interaction in the small group become vehicles for change at the system level.

In the following sections, I discuss five ways in which the workshop group serves as a vehicle for change in the larger system. It does so by functioning as a microcosm of the larger system, as a laboratory for producing inputs into the larger system, as a setting for direct interaction, as a coalition across conflict lines, and as a nucleus for a new relationship. These five functions of the group are not meant to represent different theories or even different dimensions of group process. They are merely different ways of looking at the role of group processes in our intervention model. By looking at the group process from these different angles, I hope to provide a fuller and more nuanced picture of how our microprocess contributes to change at the macrolevel.

The Group as a Microcosm

The group assembled for a workshop can be viewed as a microcosm of the larger system. It is a microcosm not in the sense of a small-scale *model* that reproduces all of the forces of the larger system but in the sense of an *arena* in which the forces of the larger system may manifest themselves. We make no attempt to reproduce the larger system in our workshops. In fact, we try to create an environment that differs significantly from the one in which the conflicting parties normally interact—an environment governed by a different set of norms, in which participants are both free and obligated to speak openly, listen attentively, and treat each other as equals. Nor do we try to represent the entire political spectrum in our workshops. We look for participants who are part of the mainstream in their communities and close to the political center but who are interested in exploring the possibilities of a negotiated, mutually satisfactory solution to the conflict.

The group is a microcosm of the larger system because, despite their relative moderation, the participants share the fundamental concerns, fears, memories, and aspirations of their respective communities. As they interact with each other around the issues in conflict, they reflect their own community's perspectives, priorities, and limits of what is negotiable, not only in what they say but also in how they say it and how they act toward each other. As a result, some of the dynamics of the larger conflict are acted out in the interactions within the workshop group. Participants' interactions in the group context often reflect the nature of the relationship between their communities—their mutual distrust, their special sensitivities and vulnerabilities, their differences in power and minority–majority status—and demonstrate the self-perpetuating character of interactions among conflicting societies.

The advantage of the workshop is that it creates an atmosphere, a set of norms, and a working trust among the participants that enable them to observe and analyze these conflict dynamics at or very near the moment they occur. Such analyses are facilitated by third-party interventions in the form of process observations, which suggest possible ways in which interactions between the parties "here and now" may reflect the dynamics of the conflict between their communities (Kelman, 1979). The

insights that such observations can generate are comparable to the "corrective emotional experiences" that play an important role in individual and, particularly, group psychotherapy (Alexander & French, 1946, pp. 66–68; Frank & Ascher, 1951), although our interventions are always at the intergroup rather than the interpersonal level. That is, interactions between workshop participants are relevant to our purposes only insofar as they can tell us something about the dynamics of the interaction between their communities.

In summary, the character of the workshop group as a microcosm of the larger system makes it a valuable learning experience: It provides opportunities for the participants to gain important insights into the dynamics of the conflict. I turn next to the role of the group in transmitting what is learned into the larger system.

The Group as a Laboratory

The workshop group can also be conceived as a laboratory for producing inputs into the larger system. The metaphor of the laboratory is particularly appropriate because it captures the two roles that workshops play in the macroprocess. A workshop is a specially constructed space in which the parties can engage in a process of exploration, observation, and analysis and in which they can create new products to be fed into the political debate and decision making in the two societies.

Providing a space for exploring issues in the conflict, mutual concerns, and ideas for conflict resolution is one of the key contributions of problem-solving workshops. The opportunity for joint informal exploration—playing with ideas, trying out different scenarios, obtaining a sense of the range of possible actions and of the limits for each party, and discovering potential trade-offs—enhances the productivity of negotiations and the quality of the outcome. Such opportunities, however, are not readily available in official negotiations, in which the participants operate in representative roles, are instructed and closely monitored by their governments, are concerned about the reactions of various constituencies and third parties, and are in the business of producing binding agreements. Problem-solving workshops, by virtue of their nonbinding character, are ideally suited to fill this gap in the larger diplomatic process. The setting, the atmosphere, the ground rules, the governing norms, the agenda, and the interventions of the third party all help to make the workshop group a unique laboratory for the process of open, noncommittal exploration that does not often occur elsewhere in the system, neither in the official negotiations nor in the spontaneous interactions between the conflicting parties.

The process of exploration and joint thinking yields new products, which can be exported into the political process within and between the two communities. This is the second sense in which the laboratory metaphor captures the function of workshops. Indeed the group constitutes a workshop in the literal sense of that term: It is a specially constructed space for shaping products that are then brought back into the two communities. The

sharing of perspectives, the conflict analysis, and the joint thinking encouraged in workshops enable the participants to come up with a variety of products in the form of new information, new insights, and new ideas that can advance the negotiation process: differentiated images of the other, which suggest that there is someone to talk to on the other side and something to talk about; understanding of the needs, fears, priorities, and constraints on the other side and, indeed, on one's own side; insight into the escalatory and self-perpetuating dynamics of the conflict relationship; awareness of change and the readiness for change on the other side; ideas for mutual reassurance and other ways of improving the atmosphere for negotiation; ideas for the overall shape of a mutually satisfactory solution; and ideas for redefining the conflict and reframing issues so as to make them more amenable to resolution. These products must then be exported into the political arena. It is essential, therefore, that the individuals selected as workshop participants have not only an interest in mutual exploration and learning, and skills for generating ideas and creative problem solving, but also the capacity and opportunity to utilize what they learn and to inject the workshop products into their respective communities in ways that make a political difference.

In sum, I have described the workshop group as a special space—a laboratory—in which a significant part of the work of peacemaking can be carried out. The unique contribution of the workshop to this larger process is that it provides a carefully designed environment in which constructive social interaction between the parties can take place. Let me, therefore, turn to the third image of the workshop: the group as a setting for direct interaction.

The Group as a Setting for Direct Interaction

Although international conflict and conflict resolution are societal and intersocietal processes, which cannot be reduced to the level of individual behavior, there are certain processes central to conflict resolution—such as empathy or taking the perspective of the other (which is at the heart of social interaction), learning and insight, and creative problem solving—that, of necessity, take place at the level of individuals and interactions between individuals. These psychological processes are by no means the whole of conflict resolution, but they must occur somewhere in the system if there is to be movement toward a mutually satisfactory and stable peace. Problem-solving workshops provide a setting for these processes to occur by bringing together representatives of the conflicting parties for direct interaction under conditions of confidentiality and equality and under an alternative set of norms in contrast to the norms that usually govern interactions between conflicting parties.

The context, norms, ground rules, agenda, procedures, and third-party interventions in workshops are all designed to encourage (and permit) a special kind of interaction, marked by an emphasis on addressing each other (rather than one's constituencies, third parties, or the record) and on listening to each other, an analytical

focus, adherence to a "no-fault" principle, and a problem-solving orientation. This kind of interaction allows the parties to explore each other's concerns, penetrate each other's perspective, and take cognizance of each other's constraints (Kelman, 1992b). As a result, they are able to offer each other the reassurances needed for productive negotiation and mutual accommodation and to come up with solutions responsive to both sides' needs and fears.

The nature of the interaction fostered in problem-solving workshops has some continuities with a therapeutic model (Kelman, 1991). Workshop features that reflect such a model are the analytical character of the discourse, the use of here-and-now experiences as a basis for learning about the dynamics of the conflict, and the encouragement of mutual acknowledgments that have both a reassuring and a healing effect. Unlike therapy groups, however, workshops focus not on individuals and their interpersonal relations but on how their interaction may illuminate the dynamics of the conflict between their communities.

An underlying assumption of the workshop process is that products of social interaction have an emergent quality (Kelman, 1992b). In the course of direct interaction, the parties are able to observe firsthand their differing reactions to the same events and the different perspectives these reflect, the differences between the way they perceive themselves and the way the other perceives them, and the impact that their statements and actions have on each other. Out of these observations, they can jointly shape new insights and ideas that could not have been predicted from what they initially brought to the interaction. Certain kinds of solutions to the conflict can emerge only from the confrontation of assumptions, concerns, and identities during face-to-face communication.

The emergence of ideas for solution to the conflict out of the interaction between the parties (in contrast, e.g., to ideas proposed by third parties) has several advantages. Such ideas are more likely to be responsive to the fundamental needs and fears of both parties; the parties are more likely to feel committed to the solutions they produce themselves; and the process of producing these ideas in itself contributes to building a new relationship between the parties, initially between the pronegotiation elements on the two sides and ultimately between the two societies as wholes. Let me turn then to the function of the workshop group in building relationships of both kinds.

The Group as a Coalition Across Conflict Lines

The workshop group can be conceived as a coalition across conflict lines—as part of a process of building a coalition between those elements on each side that are interested in a negotiated solution (Kelman, 1993a). This does not mean that workshop participants are all committed doves. Often, they are individuals who, out of pragmatic considerations, have concluded that a negotiated agreement is in the best interest of their own community. Workshops, then, can be seen as attempts to strengthen

the hands of the pronegotiation elements on each side in their political struggle within their own communities and to increase the likelihood that the pronegotiation elements on the two sides will support and reinforce each other in pursuing their common interest in a negotiated solution.

Because the coalition formed by a workshop group (and by the entire array of joint efforts by the pronegotiation forces on the two sides) cuts across a very basic conflict line, it is almost by definition an uneasy coalition. It must function in the face of the powerful bonds that coalition members have to the very groups that the coalition tries to transcend. The coalition may well be perceived as threatening the national community that is so important to the identity, the long-term interests, and the political effectiveness of each coalition partner. As a result, the coalition work is complicated by participants' concern about their self-images as loyal members of their group; by their concern about their credibility at home and, hence, their long-term political effectiveness; by significant divergences in the perspectives of the two sets of coalition partners; and by the fact that even committed proponents of negotiation share the memories, concerns, fears, and sensitivities of their identity group.

Participants' bonds to their national communities create inevitable barriers to coalition work, which require systematic attention if problem-solving workshops are to achieve their goals. Thus, mutual distrust is an endemic condition that complicates coalition work. Even among individuals who have worked together for some time and have achieved a considerable level of working trust, old fears and suspicions that have deep historical roots are easily rearoused by events on the ground or by words and actions of a participant on the other side. Coalition work, therefore, requires a continuing process of mutual testing and reestablishment of working trust. A second impediment to coalition work is alienating language— the use of words or a manner of speaking that the other side finds irritating, patronizing, insulting, threatening, or otherwise oblivious to its sensitivities. One of the valuable outcomes of workshops is growing sensitivity to the meaning of particular words to the other side. Nevertheless, alienating language does crop up, both because participants speak from the perspectives and out of the experiences of their own communities and because the pragmatic terms in which peace is justified to one's domestic audiences (and perhaps to one's self) may appear dehumanizing or delegitimizing to the other side. Examples are the Israeli emphasis on the Palestinian "demographic threat" and the Palestinian emphasis on Israel's superior power as reasons for seeking a compromise. Finally, fluctuations in the political and psychological climate may affect one or the other party, creating a lack of synchronism in the readiness for coalition work between the two sides.

The uneasy quality of a coalition across conflict lines is an inevitable reality, insofar as coalition members are bona fide representatives of their national groups— as they must be if the coalition is to achieve its goal of promoting a negotiated agreement. This reality creates

barriers to coalition work, and it is part of the task of the third party to help overcome them. But it is not only difficult to overcome these barriers, it may in fact be counterproductive to overcome them entirely. It is important for the coalition to remain uneasy in order to enhance the value of what participants learn in the course of workshops and of what they can achieve upon reentry into their home communities.

Experimental research by Rothbart and associates (Rothbart & John, 1985; Rothbart & Lewis, 1988) suggests that direct contact between members of conflicting groups may have a paradoxical effect on intergroup stereotypes. If it becomes apparent, in the course of direct interaction with representatives of the other group, that they do not fit one's stereotype of the group, there is a tendency to differentiate these particular individuals from their group: to perceive them as nonmembers. Since they are excluded from the category, the stereotype about the category itself can remain intact. This process of differentiating and excluding individual members of the other group from their category could well take place in workshops in which a high degree of trust develops between the parties. Therefore, it is essential for the participants to reconfirm their belongingness to their national categories—thus keeping the coalition uneasy—if they are to demonstrate the possibility of peace not just between exceptional individuals from the two sides but between the two enemy camps.

An even more important reason why a coalition across conflict lines must, of necessity, remain uneasy relates to what is often called the *reentry problem* (see, e.g., Kelman, 1972; Walton, 1970). If a workshop group

became overly cohesive, it would undermine the whole purpose of the enterprise: to have an impact on the political decisions within the two communities. Workshop participants who become closely identified with their counterparts on the other side may become alienated from their own co-nationals, lose credibility, and hence forfeit their political effectiveness and their ability to promote a new consensus within their own communities. One of the challenges for problem-solving workshops, therefore, is to create an atmosphere in which participants can begin to humanize and trust each other and to develop an effective collaborative relationship, without losing sight of their separate group identities and the conflict between their communities. (Kelman, 1992b, p. 82)

The Group as a Nucleus for a New Relationship

Our work is based on the proposition that in conflicts such as that between Palestinians and Israelis—conflicts about national identity and national existence between two peoples destined to live together in the same small space—conflict resolution must aim toward the ultimate establishment of a new cooperative and mutually enhancing relationship and must involve a process that paves the way to such a relationship. Nothing less will work in the long run, and, even in the short run, only a process embodying the principle of reciprocity that is at the center of a new relationship is likely to succeed. Perhaps the greatest strength of problem-solving workshops is their

potential contribution to transforming the relationship between the conflicting parties.

Interaction in the workshop group both promotes and models a new relationship between the parties. It is based on the principles of equality and reciprocity. The participants are encouraged to penetrate each other's perspective and to gain an understanding of the other's needs, fears, and constraints. They try to shape solutions that are responsive to the fundamental concerns of both sides. They search for ways of providing mutual reassurance. Such ideas often emerge from acknowledgments that participants make to each other in the course of their interaction: acknowledgments of the other's humanity, national identity, view of history, authentic links to the land, legitimate grievances, and commitment to peace.

Out of these interactions, participants develop increasing degrees of empathy, of sensitivity and responsiveness to the other's concerns, and of working trust, which are essential ingredients of the new relationship to which conflict resolution efforts aspire. The working trust and responsiveness both develop out of the collaborative work in which the group is engaged and, in turn, help to enhance the effectiveness of that work. Thus, workshop participants can transmit to their respective communities not only ideas toward transformation of the relationship between the communities but also the results of their own experience: They can testify that a cooperative, mutually enhancing relationship is possible and can point to some of the conditions that promote such a relationship.

The joint working group on Israeli–Palestinian relations, which my colleague Nadim Rouhana and I are currently cochairing, is explicitly based on the conception of the group as the nucleus of a new relationship between the two societies. The main purpose of the working group is to focus on the peace-building processes that must follow successful peacemaking and to explore the nature of the long-term relationship envisaged in the aftermath of the final political agreement. At this point, as I mentioned earlier, we are addressing the difficult political issues—settlements, refugees, Jerusalem, Palestinian self-determination—that have been deferred to the final-status negotiations, in the light of the future relationship between the societies. That is, we try to assess different options for resolving these issues from the point of view of their congruence with a long-term relationship that is based on peaceful coexistence, cooperation, and mutual benefit.

Furthermore, we see the working group itself as a model and perhaps even as the seed of an institutional mechanism that a new relationship calls for. In our view, a mutually beneficial relationship between two units that are as closely linked and as interdependent as the Israeli and Palestinian communities requires the development of a civil society across the political borders. A useful institutional mechanism for such a civil society would be an unofficial joint forum for exploring issues in the relationship between the two communities within a problem-solving framework. It is not entirely unrealistic to

hope that our current working group may evolve into or at least serve as a model for such an institution. This scenario thus provides an illustration of the way in which a group like our Israeli–Palestinian working group can serve not only as a means for promoting a new relationship between the parties but also as a model and manifestation of that new relationship. ,

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