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Transforming the Relationship Between Former Enemies: A Social-Psychological Analysis

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In this chapter, I examine the process of reconciliation within the framework of interactive problem solving, an approach to conflict resolution anchored in social-psychological principles.[1] Interactive problem solving is a form of unofficial diplomacy, derived from the work of John Burton and epitomized by the microprocess of problem-solving workshops.[2] These workshops are unofficial, private, confidential meetings between politically influential members of conflicting parties, designed to develop new insights into their conflict and new ideas for resolving it, which can then be infused into the political process within each community. My work in this genre has focused primarily on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,[3] but the approach can be—and has been—applied to other protracted conflicts between identity groups.

The concept of interactive problem solving can also be used as a metaphor for the macroprocess of negotiation and peacemaking, for both descriptive and prescriptive purposes.[4] What happens—or ought to happen—in negotiation can be captured by the three words that make up the term. First, negotiation treats the conflict as a problem shared by the parties—in essence, a problem in their relationship: the relationship has become wholly competitive and mutually destructive, such that each party's pursuit of its own needs and interests undermines or threatens the needs and interests of the other. Second, negotiation explores ways of solving this problem, not by eliminating all conflict and potential conflict between the parties, but by addressing the underlying causes of the conflict and reversing the escalatory dynamics of the conflict relationship. And, third, negotiation is an interactive process, capable of producing ideas for solution of the problem that are responsive to the parties' fundamental concerns and

to which they are committed. This process itself contributes to building a new relationship between the parties.

Transforming the Relationship as the Goal of Negotiation

Within an interactive problem-solving framework, the ultimate goal of negotiation is to transform the relationship between the parties. Negotiations are designed not merely to produce a minimally acceptable political agreement, but to provide the basis for a stable, long-term peace and a cooperative, mutually enhancing relationship that contributes to the welfare and development of both societies.

Transforming the relationship becomes increasingly important the more intense and destructive the conflict is and the more interdependent the parties are. The ethnic conflicts that have dominated the world scene in the 1990s—such as the conflicts within and between the states of the former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union, or in Rwanda and Burundi, or in Northern Ireland, or between Israelis and Palestinians—are high on both of these dimensions. They are protracted conflicts, marked by a recent history of massive violence, at times involving genocide and other gross violations of human rights, and they raise profound concerns in the embattled communities about national and personal survival. In such conflicts, there is no substitute for an agreement that addresses the parties' grievances and existential fears and transforms the relationship between them, since they must continue to live together in the same limited space.

Conflicts among parties that are less interdependent may not require an equally thoroughgoing transformation of their relationship. Still, the degree of global and certainly regional interdependence among states in such domains as security, economic affairs, natural resources, environment, health, and migration requires an approach to conflict resolution that addresses the long-term relationship between the parties. The desired relationship is not one devoid of conflict, but one in which mechanisms of communication and problem solving are readily available so that conflicts can be resolved before escalating and becoming mutually destructive.

If the ultimate goal of negotiation is to transform (or restore) the relationship between the parties, what kind of outcome must the negotiations seek? The sine qua non, in my view, of a solution that can provide the foundation of a new relationship is that it addresses the fundamental needs and fears of both parties. Conflict is caused and escalated to a considerable degree by unfulfilled needs—not only material needs, but also such psychological needs as security, identity, recognition, autonomy, and a sense of justice. Parties in conflict, in pursuit of their own security and identity and related needs and interests, undermine and threaten the security and

identity of the other. To resolve the conflict and begin to build a new relationship requires an agreement that satisfies the fundamental needs of both parties and reassures them that their fundamental fears are no longer warranted. In the Israeli-Palestinian case, for example, an agreement that meets these criteria must be based on mutual recognition of the other's national identity and on arrangements that assure each side's political independence, security, and survival.

The microprocess of interactive problem solving in workshop settings is specifically geared to exploring the overall shape of a solution that would meet such criteria. It is helped by the fact that such psychological needs as identity and security—in contrast to more material interests like territory and resources—are not inherently zero sum in nature.[5] Although identity and security are often perceived in zero-sum terms in intense, protracted conflicts, it is often the case that each party's own security and identity are actually enhanced by agreements that meet the other's needs in these domains. Only integrative solutions of this kind enable the parties to move from a relationship in which each sees the other as blocking the fulfillment of its own needs to one in which they actively work toward promoting the fulfillment of both sets of needs.

An outcome that addresses the fundamental needs and fears of both parties will almost certainly be imperfect from each party's point of view. Neither party is likely to feel that all of its interests have been fully met or that the agreement has given it everything it justly deserves. Insofar as the agreement entails division of territory and apportionment of resources claimed by both sides, or curtailment of rights claimed by one side or the other (such as the right of return of refugees, the right to settle in the other's territory, and the right to exercise full sovereignty in military or foreign affairs), it will inevitably require a compromise shaped in heavy distributive bargaining. And the outcome of such bargaining is likely to reflect the conditions on the ground and the relative power of the two parties. Granting the inevitability of compromise, however, it is essential that the negotiated agreement not require either party to sacrifice its fundamental needs—the needs that it considers nonnegotiable—or to jeopardize its national existence.

Does the outcome described here meet the criteria for a just solution to the conflict? One of the hallmarks of the practice of interactive problem solving at the microlevel is the nonadversarial character of the approach. Without implying moral equivalence in the positions and actions of the two parties, interaction proceeds on the basis of the "no-fault" principle. No attempt is made to establish who is right and who is wrong in terms of legal or historical criteria (although participants are not discouraged from discussing their perceptions of legal and historical rights as part of the process of sharing their differing perspectives with each other). The presumption

is that such a process will not yield ideas for a mutually satisfactory resolution of the conflict. While eschewing a juridical and historical approach to determining a just solution, interactive problem solving is not oblivious to the issue of justice. The search for a solution that addresses the fundamental needs and fears of both parties can be viewed as the operationalization of the quest for justice in this approach. To the extent that the solution is responsive to these needs and fears, it does justice to each party.

From an interactive problem-solving perspective, there is another way in which considerations of justice enter into negotiations. To provide a basis for changing the relationship between the two societies, an agreement must have wide support within each population so that a national consensus in favor of the new relationship can evolve.[6] Public support depends heavily on the perception that the negotiated agreement is just and fair. Insofar as the agreement addresses fundamental needs and fears, it is likely to be perceived as just. Indeed, in a protracted and bitter conflict, people's sense of justice—the feeling that at least minimal justice has been achieved—is itself one of the fundamental needs that the agreement must satisfy. Perception of justice also depends, however, on people's conviction that the process whereby the agreement was achieved was fair: that their side's concerns were seriously considered; that the other side did not take advantage of their leaders' weak bargaining position in order to impose an unacceptable agreement; that third parties did not interfere in the negotiations to their disadvantage. In other words, procedural justice interacts with substantive justice in people's satisfaction with the negotiated outcome. People judge the fairness of the process on the basis of both what they know about the process itself and what they infer from the outcome.

Two important criteria in assessing fairness are equality and reciprocity. In the microprocess of problem-solving workshops, these are two principles governing the interaction between the parties. Within the workshop context, the parties are equal in the sense that both parties' needs and fears are addressed and given equal weight in the deliberations, regardless of whatever asymmetries of power or of moral standing may characterize their relationship at the macrolevel. Similarly, both in the discussions and in formulations of possible solutions, there is an emphasis on reciprocity in the sense that each party is urged to give to the other what it demands for itself—whether it is reassurance about its security, acknowledgment of its identity, or understanding of its political constraints.

At the macrolevel, the negotiated agreement—though it is bound to be characterized by inequalities in outcome (in the Israeli-Palestinian case, for example, in the size of the territory or of the military force granted to the two parties)—can and ought to reflect a process incorporating the principles of equality and reciprocity. Equality is conveyed by indications that the needs and fears of both parties have been given serious and thoughtful

consideration. Reciprocity—perhaps the most powerful foundation of a new relationship—is conveyed most clearly by the terms of the agreement itself: each party extends to the other the same kind of recognition, respect, and reassurance that it receives from the other.

Conditions for Transforming the Relationship

I have argued that negotiation of a protracted conflict must aim toward transforming the relationship between the parties if it is to yield an agreement conducive to a stable and durable peace that allows the former enemies to coexist and cooperate to the benefit of their respective societies. Peace manifests itself not only in the diplomatic agreements and strategic arrangements signed by governments, but also in the relationships established between societies and peoples. Moreover, peace goes beyond ending belligerency to creating a new state of affairs that can be defined in positive terms. A positive peace in the relationship between nations or communities with a long history of conflict and war has four essential components:

1. Mutual acceptance and reconciliation
2. A sense of security and dignity for each nation or community
3. A pattern of cooperative interaction between the nations or communities
4. Institutionalization of a dynamic process of problem solving

Transforming the relationship between former enemies toward such a peace is of necessity a gradual process, one that is not confined to the peace treaty hammered out at the negotiating table. What happens at the negotiating table and the nature of the agreement that emerges from the negotiations have significant effects on the future relationship, as discussed in the preceding section of this chapter: transformation of the relationship is more likely if the agreement addresses both sides' fundamental needs and fears; if it is perceived as just; and if it emerges from a process that is perceived as fair and consistent with the principles of equality and reciprocity. But negotiations are most likely to produce such an outcome if the process of building a new relationship begins at the prenegotiation stage and continues in unofficial interactions—at the elite and grassroots levels—alongside of the official negotiations. Moreover, the nature of the new relationship that evolves after the signing of a peace agreement depends on the way the agreement is implemented, on the way it is communicated to the two populations, and on subsequent activities in the public and private sectors. The period on which the present volume focuses—that is, the period following the signing of an incomplete agreement that does

not yet establish a firm peace—is particularly crucial for the transformation of the relationship. What happens at that stage may well determine whether the conditions for building a new relationship consistent with peaceful coexistence are put in place.

Some of the conditions for transforming the relationship between former enemies can be identified by examining each of the four components of a positive peace that were distinguished above.

Mutual acceptance and reconciliation. To establish a state of peace between communities that have been engaged in a protracted, bitter, destructive conflict over many years presupposes a process of reconciliation, whereby the former belligerents come to accept each other not only diplomatically, but also psychologically. What are some of the conditions required for mutual acceptance and reconciliation between former enemies in a protracted identity conflict?

First, the peace agreement itself must entail a solution that satisfies the fundamental needs and fulfills the national aspirations of both parties, rather than one that is experienced as defeat and subjugation by one of the parties. A humiliating defeat is never a good basis for reconciliation, but in conflicts that are clearly interstate in character—such as that between France and Germany or between the United States and Japan during World War II—reconciliation could be achieved in the wake of a total defeat. By contrast, in protracted identity conflicts—such as those in Israel/Palestine, Bosnia, and Northern Ireland, in which both sides' national existence is at stake and in which they must find a way to live together in the same small space—it seems virtually impossible to build reconciliation on the defeat of one of the parties. Total defeat in such conflicts is tantamount to destruction of the losers' national community and deprives them of the hope to give political expression to their national identity. The resulting demoralization and resentment are not likely to leave an opening for reconciliation. An agreement conducive to reconciliation must leave each party with the sense that its basic needs have been met and that it owns a share of the contested land in which it can express its national identity.

Second, reconciliation requires the parties' mutual acceptance of each other's national identity. The history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been particularly marked by systematic attempts on each side to deny the other's identity. The parties have tended to view their dispute as a zero-sum conflict with respect to national identity and national existence.[7] In other protracted conflicts as well, the parties seek to delegitimize each other and to redefine significant elements of the other's identity in ways that suit their own narratives and strengthen their own claims. Mutual acceptance of each other's national identity therefore requires a process of negotiating identity, based on separating out the different components of

the images of self and other. The objective is to come up with language and actions that would allow each party to acknowledge the other's identity in ways that are meaningful to the other without thereby negating their own narrative and threatening their own identity.[8] Acceptance of the other's identity means acknowledging the authenticity of the other's self-image—for example, acknowledging the other as a nation with historical links to the land. To gain such acceptance from the other, each party may have to give up those elements of its identity that negate the other—such as the view of itself as the sole owner of the land. Negotiating identity along such lines may, in some respects, be easier than negotiating over land or water, because identity is socially constructed and can therefore be deconstructed into its component elements and reconstructed in ways that do not threaten the other.

The third prerequisite of reconciliation is basic human acceptance of the other and respect for the other's life, welfare, and dignity. Protracted identity conflicts are characterized by dehumanization of the other, withdrawal of empathy from the other, and exclusion of the other from one's own moral community. Clearly, reconciliation presupposes the rejection of extreme acts of dehumanization, including indiscriminate killing (whether by planting bombs or dropping them), torture, rape, expulsion, and other forms of ethnic cleansing. Beyond the rejection of such extreme forms of denying the other's humanity, reconciliation requires the development and propagation of new attitudes, marked by inclusion, empathy, and respect. These attitudes must be expressed in symbolic gestures and public statements that acknowledge the other's suffering, victimization, and shared humanity and that convey commitment to the other's security, well-being, and human rights. One of the casualties of protracted conflict is the ability to see the other as a victim and empathize with their suffering, since each side is possessed by its own grievances and sense of victimization. Reconciliation becomes possible when the two sides—without evading their own responsibility—come to recognize that they are both victims of their conflict.

Sense of security and dignity for each nation or community. A transformed relationship between former enemies that can be characterized as positive peace must provide a sense of security and dignity to both communities. I deliberately join these two desiderata together because there is often a state of tension between them. Security for one side may be ensured at the expense of dignity for the other. Moreover, within each community, security arrangements may conflict with a life of dignity. The challenge is to achieve each of these goals without sacrificing the other.

The sense of security depends on the kinds of security arrangements that are put into place, such as demilitarized zones, early warning systems,

international observation posts, or joint patrols. But there are also some perhaps less obvious psychological conditions for ensuring that security arrangements are consistent with the dignity of both sides.

First, security arrangements must be based on recognition that security is a matter of mutual concern. It is in the nature of intense, protracted conflicts that each side feels threatened by the other, even where there is considerable disparity in the two sides' military capabilities. Although the fears may at times seem exaggerated, they have a realistic basis in the history of violence that characterizes such conflicts. Whether or not the other side's fears are (or appear to be) warranted, each side must recognize that these fears exist and must respect the other's security concerns. President Anwar Sadat's acknowledgment of the depth of Israel's security concerns when he visited Jerusalem in 1977 had a powerful impact on the Israeli public, who had felt dehumanized by Arab dismissal of Israeli fears. Today, Palestinians feel dehumanized by Israeli policies that give primacy to Israeli security without regard to the security, well-being, and dignity of Palestinians. Security is inconsistent with dignity if either side ignores or dismisses the other's security concerns or claims a monopoly on security needs.

Second, careful distinction must be made between genuine security requirements and the use of security as a cover or justification for other policies or practices, such as expansion, control, or punishment. Arrangements that are designed to meet specific security purposes can be worked out between the parties and accepted much more readily if they are clearly defined and separated from other considerations. It is interesting in this connection that the Israeli Labor government and the Palestinian National Authority were quite successful, by and large, in establishing cooperation between their respective security forces. Such cooperation, when addressed to specific, joint security concerns, can become a vehicle for building trust and transforming the relationship between the two sides. However, when the term "security" is used broadly and loosely—as it has been used, for example, by Israeli authorities, to justify the confiscation of Palestinian lands or imposition of collective punishment—it becomes a competitive commodity that erodes the peace-building effort.

Third, to be consistent with the dignity of both sides, security arrangements must be based on the recognition that security ultimately depends on mutual trust. Military and strategic capacities may contribute to security by deterring attack and ensuring each party that it is able to defend itself if deterrence fails. They cannot, however, substitute for the development of trust, which provides assurance that the other has no intention to mount an attack and no interest in doing so. The search for military and strategic advantage may have the paradoxical effect of damaging long-run security by undermining trust and, in fact, setting an escalatory process into motion. Positive peace requires an active effort to search for security arrangements

that help to build trust, rather than destroy it. Such efforts are exemplified by cooperative security arrangements and by confidence-building measures designed to promote a de-escalatory process—along the lines, perhaps, of C. E. Osgood's GRIT (Graduated and Reciprocated Initiatives in Tension Reduction) strategy.[9]

In sum, insofar as security is sought in a context of reciprocity and mutual respect, it can enhance dignity, rather than detract from it. An overarching condition for such congruence between security and dignity is mutual reassurance through actions, gestures, and acknowledgments that address the existential fears of each party and persuade each that the other is genuinely committed to peace. Belief in the sincerity of the other's commitment to peaceful coexistence, based on its own interests, is an essential condition for the development of the working trust on which a sense of long-term security must ultimately rest.

Pattern of cooperative interaction. A third component of positive peace in the relationship between former enemies is the development of a pattern of cooperative interaction between the two nations or communities. Promotion of functional relations between the parties can in no way be viewed as a substitute for the political and diplomatic processes required for achieving peace. However, in the wake of a political agreement—particularly one that has not yet solidified—cooperative activities in the economic sphere, as well as in such domains as public health, environmental protection, communication, education, science, and culture, can make significant contributions. By establishing crosscutting ties, common interests, and personal relations, they can help stabilize and cement a new peaceful relationship and create commitments, habits, and expectations consistent with maintaining and perpetuating peaceful coexistence.

What are some of the conditions that cooperative activities must meet if they are to contribute effectively to a transformation of the relationship between the two communities?

First, the emphasis must be on interactions that have a genuine functional value in meeting the real, interdependent needs of the two societies. The political and symbolic value of cooperation among former enemies should not be minimized, but activities that are selected purely on that basis are not likely to be rewarding to the participants and sustained over time. The political and symbolic impact is greatest when it emerges as a by-product of activities that are inherently meaningful. It is the inherent value of cooperative projects to both of the parties that creates the crosscutting ties and the mutual trust that help transform their relationship.

Second, the interaction must be based on a dynamic conception of each other's society, rather than essentialist (or dispositional) assumptions that view the other as fixed by its culture, national character, religion, or

ideology. Cooperative activities are conducive to a new relationship if they reflect a mutual effort to understand the other society's evolving needs and an appreciation of the other's changing character in response to changing realities—including the evolving peace. Interactions based on stereotyped conceptions of the other are likely to confirm old attitudes and inhibit the development of a new relationship. Moreover, they are unlikely to foster the mutual responsiveness to the other's needs and appreciation of the other's reality on which a new relationship must be built.

Third, the interaction must be based on an awareness of the sensitivities and anxieties that the other brings to the relationship and a commitment to cooperation on the basis of equality and reciprocity. Cooperative ventures are particularly problematic when the parties are characterized by asymmetries in power and level of development. The sensitivities that arise in any asymmetric relationship are exacerbated by a history of conflict. The less powerful party is especially inclined to be afraid of domination and exploitation by the more powerful one, to react to signs of arrogance and paternalism on the other's part, and to be sensitive to any implications that it is being treated as inferior. The more powerful party is confronted with the often contradictory requirement of providing assistance without establishing a pattern of dominance, dependency, and interference in the affairs of the other society. There is inevitably an element of ambivalence in the relationship: the less powerful party expects and feels entitled to assistance but, at the same time, resents it and experiences it as a threat to self-esteem. In developing cooperative activities, therefore, both parties must work to make sure that the cooperation builds toward a relationship based on equality and reciprocity. This requires genuine respect— on the part of both parties—for the other's perspective and experience, as well as genuine interest in what the other has to contribute. A one-sided relationship, in which one party does all the giving and the other all the taking, is not conducive to positive peace. More generally, the way in which the interaction is conducted and the kinds of attitudes that are conveyed in the course of it—attitudes of respect for the other's integrity, sensitivity to their concerns, and responsiveness to their needs—significantly affect the potential of cooperative activities for transforming the relationship between the parties.

Efforts to establish cooperative ventures between former enemies that meet these conditions confront major obstacles, as the Israeli-Palestinian case clearly illustrates. The history of a relationship between occupier and occupied creates structural impediments to cooperation on a basis of equality and reciprocity. In the economic sphere, for example, access to jobs in Israel is vital to the Palestinian economy, yet the reliance on these jobs reinforces the dependence of the Palestinian economy on the Israeli economy that resulted from the occupation. These difficulties demonstrate why functional relations cannot be meaningfully pursued apart from the

political process. In the context of political movement, however, cooperative ventures can gradually overcome the structural obstacles as long as the participants have genuine mutual respect for each other.

Institutionalization of a dynamic process of problem solving. Interactive problem solving, briefly described at the beginning of this chapter, is an approach to the resolution of protracted identity conflicts. Variants of this approach may also play a significant role in the peace-building process after an agreement has been concluded, as both a vehicle for transforming the relationship between the parties and a component of the new relationship. The institutionalization of an ongoing mechanism for conflict resolution through joint problem solving can be seen as a building block of a new civil society formed across the old conflict lines and as an indicator of positive peace.

The assumption here is that peace is not just a state of affairs created by a diplomatic agreement and by the political and legal structures that it puts into place. Rather, peace is a dynamic process; and a significant part of that process calls for institutionalized mechanisms to resolve the problems that are bound to arise in the relationship between any two nations, particularly nations emerging from a history of protracted conflict. An ongoing process of conflict resolution through joint problem solving is especially vital in the wake of a weak, incomplete agreement. The mechanisms for engaging in such a process can be seen as a type of insurance policy against the inevitable setbacks in the implementation and completion of the agreement. They can help the parties anticipate such setbacks and deal with them when they arise. Availability of this resource makes it easier for the parties to regain the sense of possibility when the peace process is on the verge of breaking down and to reestablish the relationship when it has been ruptured.

The institutionalization of a process of problem solving must meet several conditions if it is to contribute effectively to transforming the relationship between the former enemies and help lay the basis for positive peace.

First, the process must be based on a dynamic view of the relationship between the parties. It must take account of the occurrence of change within each society and in the relationship between them, of the possibilities for future change, of the capacity of each party to encourage change in the other through its own positive actions, and of the ways in which new situations create their own dynamics for further change. As long as the parties fail to recognize the dynamic character of their relationship, the problems that are bound to crop up along the way are likely to rearouse the images and habits rooted in their long-standing conflict. As a result, they would miss opportunities for discovering creative and mutually beneficial solutions to these problems. Above all, a dynamic view of the relationship

alerts the parties to ways of influencing the other by being responsive to the other's needs.

Second, a central feature of the ongoing problem-solving process must be a readiness to engage in exploratory communication. Conflict resolution is hampered when each party enters into it with a strong commitment to a specific outcome, which narrows the range of possible accommodations that they are likely to consider. This effect is magnified when the parties make public pronouncements or take unilateral actions that make it difficult for them to retreat from their demands. What is needed, instead, is a commitment to a process that keeps the options open, allows the parties to explore each other's concerns and priorities, and enables them to reframe the issues. This kind of communication broadens the range of mutual accommodations that can be considered in negotiating a suitable solution. Institutionalizing a dynamic process of problem solving requires a venue in which exploratory communication can take place before the parties bind themselves into rigid positions.

Third, the conflict-resolution mechanisms to be institutionalized must follow a nonadversarial model. They must approach conflicts within a no-fault framework, treating them as shared problems that require cooperative efforts in order to arrive at mutually satisfactory solutions. The aim of negotiation in this approach is to find integrative solutions in which both parties win, rather than strictly distributive solutions in which one party's gain represents the other party's loss.

This last condition for institutionalizing a dynamic process of problem solving in the wake of a political agreement refers specifically to negotiating style, but it reflects the general attitude toward each other that former enemies must evolve as their relationship is transformed. It brings us back full circle to the first condition for mutual acceptance and reconciliation as a component of positive peace: the peace agreement itself must entail a solution that satisfies the fundamental needs and fulfills the national aspirations of both parties, rather than one that is experienced as defeat and subjugation by one of the parties. The negotiation of a final agreement inevitably requires distributive bargaining over specific issues, trade-offs between issues, and painful compromises. But the overall agreement must be based on certain basic principles shared by both sides. Only an outcome that both sides see as fair and just and that leaves them better off than they were before can pave the way to reconciliation.

Notes

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