Grasping the Nettle

Analyzing Cases of Intractable Conflict

Chester A. Crocker,
Fen Osler Hampson,
and Pamela Aall

UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE PRESS
Washington, D.C.
Nature, Dynamics, and Phases of Intractability

Louis Kriesberg

ALL LARGE-SCALE SOCIAL CONFLICTS change over time, and some become intractable with recurrent violent escalations. Nevertheless, even intractable conflicts often have periods of subdued conflict and over time become transformed and tractable or otherwise terminated. As conflicts become more intractable and then become less so, they go through many phases. This chapter argues that particular strategies, pursued by diverse actors, tend to be suitable for controlling intractable conflicts in different phases.

Although conflict intractability is multidimensional and varies over time, the concept incorporates certain core elements (Kriesberg, Northrup, and Thorson 1989; Putnam and Wondolleck 2002). Essentially, intractable conflicts persist for a long time in a way that is objectionable to at least some partisans or interveners and despite their efforts to end or transform what they view as objectionable. In this chapter, I focus on conflicts between large-scale adversaries such as countries or entities identified in ethnic, religious, language, or other communal terms. Furthermore, most attention is on conflicts that entail direct physical violence or the threat of such violence.

This chapter is divided into three sections. First, I discuss the complex and dynamic nature of conflicts in general and then focus on conflicts that become more intractable, mapping out the major phases through which they generally move. Second, I examine the factors that shape the degree and character of intractability as conflicts move from one phase to
another. This provides the analytic background for discerning appropriate moderating strategies at different phases. Finally, I discuss policies that antagonists and intermediaries may pursue to prevent a conflict from becoming intractable, to interrupt its increasing intractability, to transform the conflict into a more tractable one, and to consolidate a more peaceful relationship.

**Nature of Conflicts and Intractability**

Since intractability is a quality of particular social conflicts, clarity about the definition of social conflicts and the major ways they differ is needed. I adopt a broad meaning of social conflict here: it is a relationship in which at least one party manifests the belief that it has incompatible goals with another (Kriesberg 2003). So defined, many conflicts are not destructive but are conducted in accord with rules the adversaries regard as legitimate. This is true in most domestic conflicts, waged within the context of political and judicial institutions. Furthermore, such conflicts are widely viewed as serving the interests of the adversaries and the welfare of the society as a whole. Thus, citizens in democratic societies generally regard the regulated adversarial political and judicial systems of their countries as essential to their democracy.

**Defining Intractable Conflicts**

Intractability, like social conflict itself, is variously defined. For some observers, it is viewed as an analytic concept, but partisans and intermediaries may use the term to characterize a conflict and so try to affect its future course. In this chapter, the concept is treated analytically and three dimensions are stressed. First, intractable conflicts are protracted conflicts, persisting for a long time. Second, they are waged in ways that the adversaries or interested observers regard as destructive. Third, partisans and intermediaries attempt, but fail, to end or transform them. As viewed here, conflicts are more or less intractable, not wholly intractable.

Even duration can change and become shorter as well as longer and is not determined by a calendar. Some fights may be regarded as protracted if they persist for a year, when the issues in contention are usually resolved in a matter of days or weeks. Social expectations are important in judging a conflict's persistence. Analytically, however, it is useful to set
some parameters, and for large-scale social conflicts, persistence beyond
one social generation is appropriate. That indicates that the parties in the
conflict are likely to have learned and internalized reasons to continue
their fight with each other.

Conflicts certainly vary in their duration, but measurements of
duration depend on the identification of the parties on each side of the
conflict and their continuity. The identities and the duration therefore
can change. Leaders of one side in a fight may evoke old battles with the
adversary and try to characterize a new fight as part of a long-standing,
perhaps decades- or centuries-old intractable conflict. The breakup of
Yugoslavia was a scene for such conflicts among some Serbs, Croats, and
Bosnian Muslims. As the conflict de-escalates or becomes transformed,
the fight may come to be regarded as between nationalist political leaders
and the supporters they mobilized, not the peoples they claimed to repre-
sent. The conflict then is only years long.

Characterizing a particular conflict as highly intractable may be dis-
puted, since the characterization depends on the time perspective that is
used as well as the qualities of the conflict that are stressed in defining
intractability. A conflict’s intractability depends upon who the adversaries
are deemed to be, since a conflict may be intractable for some members of
one or more sides but not for others.

As defined here, not all prolonged conflicts are highly intractable.
Thus, conflicts between workers and managers and between people of the
right and of the left may seem interminable, but in many circumstances
the conflicts are well managed and therefore not regarded as intractable.
When the persisting conflicts are or threaten to be conducted with ex-
tensive violence or otherwise destructive behavior, observers and partisans
are prone to regard them as intractable. Conflicts certainly vary in their
degree of intensity, in the imposition of injuries, and in the expressions of
hatred and hostility.

In addition, if conflicts are long and destructive, efforts to end or
transform them are likely to be made; but their failure contributes to the
conflicts’ being regarded as intractable. The de-escalating efforts may be
undertaken by partisans of one or more sides in the conflict or by outside
intermediaries. The magnitude of the efforts, in terms of parties engaged,
the resources used, and the frequency of peacemaking attempts made, char-
acterizes variations in this dimension.
These three dimensions jointly define intractability. None alone suffices. A conflict, manifested in economic or political strife, may endure for generations but at such a comfortable level of rivalry that it is not viewed as intractable. Or a conflict may explode in a terribly destructive outburst, which is swiftly and clearly terminated, perhaps by the destruction or dissolution of one of the parties. Finally, a conflict may be subjected to many attempts at its resolution but be regarded as below the level of severity or longevity necessary to be characterized as highly intractable.

These dimensions are not independent of one another. In many ways high levels in one dimension tend to produce high levels in other dimensions. Thus, a destructively conducted struggle tends to be prolonged and the target of many failed peacemaking efforts. Similarly, as a conflict goes on, it is likely to be waged increasingly destructively and with more unsuccessful efforts to end it. Finally, failed efforts at peacemaking often result in hardened antagonistic positions, thus increasing the difficulties in reaching a mutually acceptable accommodation. Despite all this, as I discuss later, transitions do occur and processes of de-escalation and transformation result in highly intractable conflicts becoming much less intractable.

**Phases of Intractability**

Intractable conflicts often fluctuate in magnitude during their course; indeed, they generally consist of a series of relatively intense conflict episodes linked by dormancy or low-intensity fighting. Nevertheless, major phases of intractable conflicts can be analytically distinguished, and distinguishing those shifts will facilitate explaining how conflicts become intractable, how they remain so, and how they are transformed so that they are conducted constructively or otherwise are terminated.

Six phases are particularly significant: (1) the eruption of conflict episodes with high potentiality of generating intractability, (2) escalation marked by destructive qualities, (3) failed peacemaking efforts, (4) institutionalization of destructive conflict, (5) de-escalation leading to transformation, and (6) termination and recovery from the intractable conflict. These six phases are only loosely sequential, since some may be occurring simultaneously for different actors, and regressions to an earlier phase often occur.

The character of a conflict changes as it becomes more or less intractable. The changing character may be seen in variations in the core
components of every conflict. I stress four components of social conflicts: the identities or conceptions the adversaries have of themselves and of their adversaries, the grievances they hold against each other, the goals they set to change the other to reduce their grievance, and the means they use to achieve their goals. Some conceptions of self and others, certain grievances, various goals, and particular conflict methods are especially conducive to a conflict becoming and remaining intractable. Changes in each of these components contribute to the transition of a conflict from one phase of intractability to another.

First, how members of each side in a conflict view their collective self is shaped by their conception of other collectivities and by how those others view them. Thus, during the Cold War many Americans regarded being anticommunist as an important component of being American. In general, members of one or more sides often rank themselves as superior to the other side’s members. Most extremely, one side may view another group as subhuman or as evil and therefore an appropriate target for destruction (Coy and Woehrle 2000; Northrup 1989); such conceptions foster highly destructive intractable conflicts (Thompson 1990). They may be aroused by and contribute to great spikes in genocidal actions and cycles of retaliation, as has been the case between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda.

Second, although members of one or more sides in every conflict have grievances, some kinds are likely to contribute to a conflict’s intractability. This is the case when members of one side feel grossly wronged by the oppressiveness and injustices imposed by the other side or feel that their very existence is threatened. Changes in the level and character of the grievances felt by members of either side affect the movement from one phase to another of a conflict’s intractability.

Third, members of one side may formulate goals that the opposing side’s members regard as particularly damaging and costly, and that do not appear to be subject to compromise. Intractability increases as the goals are formulated in zero-sum terms, so that what is sought is at the expense of the other side; shared interests and objectives are minimized.

Finally, members of one or both sides may believe that the other side will yield only to force, and they have the capacity to inflict extreme violence that will coerce members of the opposing side to yield. When used, these methods tend to be reciprocated and thus contribute to the conflict’s destructiveness and persistence.
**Eruption Phase.** We can now examine the important qualities of the core components of conflicts at six major phases of intractable conflicts. I begin with the occurrence of a contentious episode that may intensify and prolong a conflict. The episode may be a confrontation that erupts in the context of a campaign that is part of a protracted but dormant or low-level conflict. Thus, in Northern Ireland, the Catholic minority undertook a nonviolent civil rights campaign in 1968; the police of the Protestant-controlled government broke up nonviolent demonstrations, which were also attacked by Protestant vigilantes. The dormant Irish Republican Army began to organize to defend the Catholic community. Subsequently, the struggle between Catholics seeking to join the Republic of Ireland and Protestants wanting Northern Ireland to remain united with Great Britain was renewed violently.

Such episodes tend to raise the salience of identities that contribute to intractability. Threats to collective existence may be evoked and old traumas aroused, as was the case in Northern Ireland. Identities emphasizing victimization by another group frequently play crucial roles in the prolongation of destructive social conflicts. Past traumas often leave legacies of fear and hatred that can be aroused by political and intellectual figures (Volkan 1988). For example, Serb nationalism was aroused by accounts of past atrocities and defeats by Croats and Muslims and contributed to the violent breakup of Yugoslavia (Glenny 1992).

Long-standing grievances may be reshaped by new expectations and threats, as happened in Northern Ireland by the reframing of a civil rights struggle into a nationalist struggle over separation versus union. Prolonged oppression and injustice become starkly visible and unacceptable by new and brutal encounters with them. On the other hand, the privileged strata are likely to fear the loss of privilege and of their way of life as threats arise that their advantages will be taken from them.

Modest reformist goals may come to appear inadequate in the face of the revelations made visible by the new encounters with the dominant groups. The goals are then reformulated so that the adversaries are required to make more radical changes. The conflict increasingly is seen by the opponents to be zero sum, so that whatever one side gains is at the expense of the other. Consequently, the conflict will tend to erupt in a way that contributes to its intractability.
The methods used in the struggle and beliefs about their effectiveness also are part of the conflict's character and may contribute to its intractability. A conflict's intensification often seems to justify more radical methods, as the old methods seem inadequate. In South Africa in the 1950s, the struggle against apartheid used nonviolent means; one campaign included large demonstrations against laws requiring blacks to carry pass books. In March 1960 at a demonstration in Sharpeville, police fired on an unarmed crowd of protestors, killing sixty-nine Africans and wounding many more. Nonviolent resistance grew, the government banned the Pan African Congress and the African National Congress, and some form of armed struggle seemed necessary to Nelson Mandela and other African leaders (Mandela 1994). Preparations for armed resistance began, and Mandela and many of his colleagues were arrested, tried, and found guilty; he and many others were imprisoned for life in 1964. An intense and often violent struggle of suppression and resistance then continued for more than two decades, in a severe intractable conflict.

**Escalation Phase.** Once a conflict is in the phase of escalation, identities, grievances, goals, and methods often change in ways that perpetuate the conflict in increasingly destructive fashion (Kriesberg 2003). Thus, each side's collective identity is shaped in opposition to the enemy. Furthermore, group loyalty is often characterized as demonstrating antagonism toward the enemy. Additionally, good qualities are increasingly attributed to one's own group, while bad qualities are increasingly attributed to the enemy, with some groups sometimes going so far as to demonize the enemy.

The fighting itself generates new grievances among members of each side as the adversaries inflict injuries and pain on each other. In addition, old dissatisfactions and injustices are aroused, and responsibility for them is ascribed to the current enemy. Of course, many agents—political leaders, intellectuals, and religious leaders—play crucial roles in formulating grievances and identifying the injustices suffered and those responsible for them.

Goals tend to become firmer as a conflict escalates, since making concessions seems more difficult after sacrificing much in waging the struggle (Brockner and Rubin 1985). Goals also sometimes expand to include
harming the adversary for the sake of retribution. Furthermore, old unsettled issues are often revived, further increasing the goals in contention.

Methods of fighting may lose their practical connection with the goals of each side as anger, hate, and revenge-seeking result in atrocities that further inflame the fight. This in many ways happened with the breakdown in Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations and the second intifada that erupted in September 2000 (Khalidi 2002).

**Failed-Peacemaking-Efforts Phase.** Efforts to interrupt and transform intractable conflicts are likely as the conflict persists. They may take various forms—including vague exploratory overtures, broad peace proposals, and unilateral conciliatory gestures—and may be communicated either publicly through announcements or privately through deniable intermediaries. The initiators’ intention may be to test the readiness of the other side to de-escalate the conflict or to convince the other side that de-escalation and a settlement are possible.

Peace moves, however, are often made with the expectation that the adversary will reject them. They are actually made to mobilize constituency support or to demonstrate to allies and observers that the other side is the obstacle to a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Assessing the real intentions of the initiator is difficult in the midst of a prolonged destructive conflict. Indeed, the intentions are likely to be mixed and depend in part on the response of the other side. Some negotiations, indirect or direct, may begin to uncover the realistic possibilities of reaching an acceptable agreement. This is usually a necessary but difficult course as both sides proceed with care and mistrust. Consequently, peace overtures and negotiations often fail in intractable conflicts, and new destructive escalations ensue.

For example, shortly after Anwar el-Sadat succeeded Gamal Abdel Nasser as president of Egypt in 1970, he began to reduce reliance on the Soviet Union and sought to improve relations with the United States. In February 1971 he proposed that Israel withdraw from a portion of the occupied Sinai and that Egypt reopen the Suez Canal for shipping. The U.S. officials tried to broker such an interim agreement, but despite some negotiations, no agreement on the terms of the settlement was reached. Sadat believed that he had made great concessions, but the U.S. government failed to induce the Israeli government to change positions suffi-
sufficiently to reach a settlement. "Frustrated and humiliated, Sadat decided to abandon the interim-settlement idea" (Quandt 1992, 128–129). In October 1973 Egypt and Syria made war on Israel.

Persons or groups who are not members of the leadership of either camp or who do not represent the leadership also may undertake peace initiatives. They may exert pressure on their own leadership to de-escalate or to end the fighting and to reach a negotiated settlement. This may embolden the adversary camp, however, to hold out for a better result as dissent increases within the opposing side. To minimize this risk, some non-official groups in both adversarial camps may try to join forces and gain more credibility and effectiveness. For example, in 1976 Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan led in organizing Women for Peace and very quickly tens of thousands of Catholics and Protestants were participating in marches against the violence in Northern Ireland; but soon the organization membership declined.

External actors also may intervene to interrupt what appears to be an increasingly intractable conflict. This may take the form of imposing arms embargoes or economic sanctions, or of conducting quiet or forceful mediation of imposed cease-fires. Appropriate, well-timed interventions can be helpful, but interventions often fail to end or transform intractable conflicts. Some interventions freeze the conflict while ending violent efforts to change the status quo, as happened with the major UN peacekeeping deployment in Cyprus in 1974.

The repeated failure of one adversary to impose an ending, the failure of parties to negotiate an ending after trying to do so, and the failure of external intervention to stop or transform the intractable confirm the conflict's intractability. Failures often discourage new attempts and constitute a burden of mistrust to be overcome. Consequently, the struggle continues, even at a reduced level and even with no overt physical injurious conduct. Sometimes, the conflict persists with a low level of violence and occasional outbreaks of large-scale violence, as in the case of the Indian-Pakistani struggle about controlling Kashmir.

The failure to sustain agreements that were reached is a severe setback to the transformation of an intractable conflict. Supporters of an agreement who believe that the other side violated it feel deceived, even betrayed, and are less trusting about any future accord. Such failures in Sri Lanka, Sudan, and many other places attest to this experience. The
consequences of the failures of the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority to adhere to the agreements they made after the signing of the Declaration of Principles in September 1993 and the subsequent explosion of violence profoundly embittered nearly everyone associated with the peace process (Kriesberg 2002).

The failures affect each side's identity and the characterization of the enemy: members of each side tend to view themselves as virtuous and the enemy as duplicitous. New grievances are sometimes added to the old ones. Goals are also formulated to avoid such failures in the future. For some people the response is to emphasize even more coercive methods for imposing adherence to any future agreement.

**Institutionalization Phase.** Once a conflict is under way, many processes contribute to its institutionalization and self-perpetuation. As a conflict persists, many members of each side increasingly view members of the other side as enemies with many bad qualities, as cruel and untrustworthy. Such socialization contributes to a conflict's further intractability. Mutual fear increases and people on each side are concerned about their vulnerability if they should yield. One group may hear the call for justice by another group as a cry for revenge.

In addition to internalizing attitudes and beliefs about each other, people on each side develop guiding rules about how to wage their struggle. The rules make certain means of struggle legitimate, and as the authorities and others waging the struggle seem to support the rules and even punish dissenters, the rules increasingly constrain conduct. Alternative courses of action become ever more difficult to undertake.

Furthermore, as the fight persists, some people on each side develop vested interests in continuing the struggle. Some people gain prestige, income, and power by participating as warriors in the fight, and they may lack alternative careers promising equal gains. Others may profit by engaging in a variety of illegal activities associated with the struggle. The nature of their identities, their grievances, and their goals are changed in ways that make a mutual accommodation more difficult to reach. The ongoing methods of struggle may seem suitable for their new goals, and the fight with the enemy is tenaciously pursued in the same old manner.

**De-escalation and Transformation Phase.** Many intractable conflicts gradually wind down, becoming less destructive, and are transformed in some
degree so that they begin to be regarded as tractable. An intractable conflict may persist in relatively dormant antagonism and be regarded as managed, as happened for some interludes during the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States. A well-managed conflict may be the prelude to a fundamental transformation of the conflict.

Collective identities often change concomitantly with the de-escalation of a conflict and contribute to its further transformation. For example, the meaning of being South African changed as the wrongness of apartheid was widely recognized, even by the whites of South Africa. Adversaries may come to emphasize shared identities, sometimes in response to threats from a common enemy.

Conflict de-escalation and transformation are often associated with reduced grievances, at least for members of one side. This occurs as relations between the adversaries change in the course of the struggle. Thus, some rights that one party sought may be at least partially won, and that party's goals are then accordingly softened.

Goals also change as they become seen as unattainable or as requiring unacceptable burdens and are recast so that they might be achieved with reasonable means. They may even be reformulated so as to provide mutual benefits for the opposing sides. For example, Frederik Willem de Klerk, as president of South Africa, led in modifying the goals of the National Party, of Afrikaners, and of whites in general.

The methods that adversaries believe they can use effectively in a conflict do not constantly become more destructive as a conflict persists. Those methods sometimes become too costly or ineffective after a while. Supporters cease to be supportive at some point, when norms are violated or costs become too burdensome. The methods may come to be seen as counterproductive for the goals sought, particularly if alternative methods promising more constructive outcomes seem feasible.

**Termination and Recovery Phase.** An intractable conflict can end in various ways, including one or both sides becoming internally transformed so that the conflict largely is resolved, the adversaries forging mutually agreed-upon settlements, or one side destroying or permanently suppressing the other. However arrived at, for a conflict ending to endure, and not simply be a period of dormancy until the intractable conflict erupts into renewed destructiveness, the adversaries must recover from past disasters and build satisfying relationships with each other.
Once an intractable conflict ends, the basic components of the conflict become different. Greatly changed or new collective identities become dominant. Thus, with the overthrow of Jim Crow laws in the American South and at the insistence of peoples with diverse cultural backgrounds, the multicultural character of American identity was heightened. Thus, too, the transformation of Franco-German enmity after World War II was aided by the increased salience of the European identity.

Grievances underlying the conflict are often reduced for one side, but for a conflict’s intractability to be enduringly overcome, new grievances for the other side must be minimized. Thus, after World War II the United States and Western European governments tried to avoid the kinds of grievances among Germans that arose after World War I, which were attributed to the harsh terms of the Versailles treaty.

Goals, too, become different as intractable conflicts end. Thus, neither side’s goals would include the destruction of its adversary; this might reflect a break between a few leaders of one side and their now transformed constituency. The members of a communal or ideological organization may repudiate the organization leaders upon their defeat, and the victorious other side accepts the genuineness of the repudiation.

Significantly, the methods of struggle also change as an intractable conflict comes to an end. Often a political process is established, providing legitimate, regulated procedures for settling disputes; the conflict then ceases to be regarded as destructive and hence intractable. Groups that had been excluded from effective participation in making decisions of central concern to them may gain access to effective engagement in such decision making.

**General Observations.** The sequences of these phases may very well differ for groups on each side of the conflict. Moderates, hard-liners, spoilers, and various other factions within each camp tend to be in different phases of intractability at any given time. Therefore, shifts in the relative size and influence of these factions will produce changes in the conflict’s course.

**Factors Shaping Phases of Intractability**

Understanding the many factors that affect the emergence, persistence, and transformation of intractable conflicts is essential in developing
effective policies that limit and end them. Partisans on each side usually blame members of the other side for the destructive course of their conflict; it is the adversaries' character, ideology, or leadership that is responsible. Outside observers more often see fault on both sides, with the way the adversaries relate to each other shaping a conflict's trajectory. Possible interveners may stress the role of outside actors who exacerbate a local fight. Academic analysts tend to emphasize long-term structural features of each side and the larger sociopolitical environment within which the adversaries contend with each other.

This section discusses three sets of factors: internal, relational, and external. For each set, I consider both structural factors, which are usually regarded as relatively impersonal forces constraining human conduct, and also agency factors, which are embodied by persons who choose to take specific actions and so have agency (Giddens 1979). Given the interest in policy in this volume, I give less attention to structural factors than to ones involving agency. However, the two kinds of factors are not wholly distinct from each other. What is structural and what is a matter of agency depends in part on the time perspective taken and the power of the agent being considered. What appears to be structural for an individual with few resources may appear subject to control by large powerful actors over time.

Finally, various factors are more or less important at different phases of intractable conflicts. As Roy Licklider notes in this volume, the starting factors are not necessarily the same as the factors that sustain an intractable conflict. In discussing each set of factors in this section, I give attention to their effects on the adversaries' identities, grievances, goals, and conflict methods as they shape the trajectory of a conflict's intractability.

**Internal Factors**

Structural factors of each conflict party set parameters within which individuals and groups may have agency in affecting the course of a conflict. These structural factors include, for example, the level of economic development, capacities for different ways of fighting, cultural patterns, and decision-making institutions. These factors influence self-conceptions and identities, how grievances are experienced and interpreted, what goals are formulated, and the methods used to attain them.

There is much literature about characteristics of societies that make them prone to engage in wars, and by extension these characteristics
would increase the probability of waging intractable conflicts. These publications refer, for example, to the form of government, the prominence of a military-industrial complex, the lack of socialization and education promoting peacefulness, and the prevalence of aggressive personalities (Ross 1993).

I turn next to internal factors that entail a greater element of agency. The structure of the decision-making process can affect intractability, with a broader and more diverse participation providing more options and reducing the likelihood of a group persisting in conduct that perpetuates or escalates a difficult conflict. Sometimes high officials, such as presidents, seek to engage persons with different views in order to learn from the disagreements and better understand different options.

How leaders deal with rivals and opponents within their own camp has great implications for a conflict's intractability. In some cases, they are disregarded, and sometimes they are even suppressed. If the course of action is wholly dominated by the hard-liners, the conflict is likely to remain intractable. For example, this has been a problem in transforming the conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka, which erupted and escalated soon after Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) gained independence in 1948. After terrible acts of violence and devastation, major steps toward peacemaking were finally taken in 2002, with mediation help from the Norwegian government.

Official leaders are very important actors affecting the course of a conflict, but officials are not the only leaders, even when they claim to represent the collectivity as a whole. There are oppositional leaders and leaders at various levels of the collectivity and in different realms of activity. The leaders help define who is on each side of a fight and influence the sense of grievance. They also significantly contribute to formulating goals and beliefs about which methods their constituents can effectively use to gain their goals. Hence, if a conflict has become impacted with one set of leaders, a change of leadership opens new possibilities for transformation, as exemplified by Mikhail Gorbachev's selection as leader of the Soviet Union in 1985 and Frederik Willem de Klerk's election to the presidency of South Africa in 1989.

Other internal factors include social movement organizations, such as those within peace movements. In addition, many groups have vested interests in the conflict continuing at a highly antagonistic level, but there
are also groups with vested interests in reducing the destructiveness of the conflict. For example, some people may be profiting from war or even sanctions, but others may see lost opportunities for profit as a result of the disruptions caused by the conflict's destructiveness. The shifting balance between such groups and their changing relations with the political leadership powerfully affect the course of a conflict.

**Relational Factors**

The paths of large-scale conflicts are profoundly shaped by the structure of the relations between the opposing collectivities and by how various agents interpret those structures. The structural character of the relationships importantly includes differences in population size, economic resources, coercive capabilities, and cultural patterns of conduct. It also includes the nature and degree of integration between adversaries in economic, social, and cultural domains.

Anticipated changes in the relative size of various communal groups within a society profoundly affect the course of a conflict among the communal groups. Thus, many white South Africans anticipating a decline in numbers relative to nonwhites thought they should reach an accommodation with blacks sooner rather than later. The nature of the effect, however, is not determined solely by the phenomenon but is also shaped by the interpretation of it. In the 1990s some Israeli Jews, anticipating an increasing proportion of Arab Palestinians in the area of the former British-mandated Palestine, strove for an independent Palestinian state to be established alongside Israel close to the 1967 armistice lines, to keep Israel both Jewish and democratic. However, other Israeli Jews thought that Israel should avert the growing threat Palestinians would pose by increasing the territory fully controlled by Israel and maintaining some control even in Palestinian territories.

Differences in economic resources, coercive power capabilities, organizational skills, and other resources affecting relative power have great impact on the terms of the accommodations that are reached. However, the degree that values and beliefs are shared and the degree that economic and social life are integrated profoundly affect whether a stable accommodation is reached and the extent to which it is mutually acceptable. Crosscutting identities (religious or ethnic) and interests (class or occupational) also tend to limit the destructiveness of a conflict. Thus, in the
United States during the civil rights struggle, many blacks and whites were affected by their shared Christian identity.

People shape and interpret their structural conditions and are shaped by them, and therefore agency and structure are not wholly independent of each other. Thus, when some people strive to change relationship structures, even those persons believing the structures to be proper and natural, God-given, and unchangeable often are compelled to see that the relationship structures were socially constructed and can be changed. Indeed, persons in each adversarial group act in ways that affect the interpretations made by persons on the opposing side. Leaders often act intentionally to influence people in the other camp, trying to intimidate them or to convince them not to feel threatened. Their actions, however, are very often directed at their own constituency, rallying the constituents to support their leadership; but those actions also may powerfully affect people in the other camp, resulting in misunderstandings and unintended interpretations.

A few persons from each camp may have direct communications with each other and the opportunity to explore contentious matters in detail. Such exchanges may take place with or without a mediator, facilitator, or other intermediary, and they take a variety of forms. They vary in duration and continuity, and they occur between officials of various ranks or between nonofficials with varying standing within their own camps. They can provide vehicles for reframing and de-escalating intractable conflicts.

Many other kinds of noncontentious interactions follow agreements for limited areas of cooperation, which tend to occur when an intractable conflict is in the process of transformation. These include confidence-building measures such as establishing procedures for informing each other about military exercises. They also include establishing organizations to coordinate activities regarding matters of common interest. Such arrangements can reduce the chances of conflicts escalating destructively or advance and solidify a conflict’s transformation and resolution. For example, several of the countries along the Nile River have been engaged in severe protracted conflicts with one another. Nevertheless, in 1992 the Council of Ministers of Water Affairs of the Nile Basin States undertook an initiative to foster development and cooperation in the basin (see http://www.nilebasin.org). The ten riparian states are Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. In 1999 these countries created the Nile Basin
Initiative to foster collaboration activities in matters such as crafting credible proposals for development projects that require sizable international financing (Murray 2002). Working together on various relatively technical matters has resulted in a network of relations among relevant government officials and experts in countries in the basin.

Finally, one particular aspect of the relations between adversaries in an intractable conflict, which has deservedly attracted much attention, must be noted here. Conflicts persist, even with mutual losses, when leaders of each of the opposing sides believe that yielding to the other is worse for them and their side than persisting with the prospect of the other side yielding. The conflict, therefore, is likely to de-escalate and reach some kind of end when the parties believe they are in an enduring stalemate that is hurting and believe that a better option for both sides is possible. This is discussed in I. William Zartman’s chapter in this book.

External Factors and Actors
A conflict’s trajectory is affected by a multitude of external factors, of varying scope and impact. I discuss both structural and agency factors as part of that social context.

A major structural factor is the set of other conflicts that are superimposed or impinge upon any particular conflict. Thus, the Cold War had immense effect on many other conflicts, often exacerbating their intractability. During the Cold War, many regional conflicts were sustained by military and other kinds of support each side received from the Soviet Union and its allies or from the United States and its allies. Each side in a local fight could believe that it would not be defeated, given the support it was getting.

The U.S. war on terrorism that began after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States affects the intractability of local conflicts around the world. In some instances, it seems to have dampened particular local conflicts, contributing to their transformation by reducing reliance on methods of struggle that might be branded as terrorist. For example, the almost universal condemnation of the suicidal mass murders contributed to a measure of progress in ending the Northern Ireland conflict by helping push the IRA holdouts to start decommissioning arms and comply with previously signed agreements. In another case, the government of Pakistan acted relatively strongly, for a time, to control militant Islamic groups that
escalation of the intractable Indian-Pakistani conflict. The widespread rejection of terrorism after September 11, 2001, also contributed to the cease-fire in Sri Lanka and the beginning of direct negotiations between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan government (Waldman 2002).

The war on terrorism, however, can also contribute to the intensification and prolongation of conflicts. One side in a conflict may escalate its efforts to suppress groups it can claim to be terrorists and therefore illegitimate. Thus, the Israeli government believed that it could act forcefully, without external constraints, against Palestinian groups that had committed terrorist acts. In another case, the Indian government believed that in the context of the war on terrorism it could be more insistent about the Pakistan government’s handling of militant Islamic groups engaging in the fight against Indian authority in Kashmir.

This discussion also indicates that global norms can constrain how conflicts are waged and that affects the intractability of conflicts. The increasing strength of norms about genocide and human rights makes that evident. Such global norms spurred the intervention, belated as it may have been, in the wars in the former Yugoslavia.

Many other external structural factors might be discussed, but I mention only a few. They include a multitude of social institutions constituting the global economic market affecting trade, investment, and migration; the technological capabilities underlying communication, travel, and production; and the nonsocial environment of global climate, water and mineral resources, pollution, and land quality.

How these structural factors have an impact upon the intractability of a conflict depends in good measure on the way they are perceived and used by various persons and organizations. For example, the superimposition of some conflicts on others and the additional ways conflicts are interlocked makes possible changes in the salience of each conflict. Conflict interveners as well as partisans of a struggle often strive to assert that one conflict should be given higher priority than another. They thus try to reframe the conflict, to either escalate or de-escalate it.

External interveners can undertake many other actions that perpetuate a conflict’s intractability or reduce it and transform it. They may provide or withhold military or other materials that one or more sides in a conflict would use to wage their struggle. That kind of assistance may
help to create a hurting stalemate. The interveners may also help generate new options that offer acceptable escapes from the destructive stalemate in which the opposing sides are stuck. These include economic assistance for reconstruction, personal sanctuary for some leaders, or even resettlement of peoples.

Intervention may also be forceful, either to assist one side or to impose a cessation of violent struggle by the adversaries. These interventions may be combined and even be the prelude to mediation, as was the case in regard to the conflict in Bosnia (Holbrooke 1998).

Interveners engage in a broad range of mediating activities. At the relatively muscular end of the range, the mediators propose solutions and strive to construct a deal based on each side’s concerns and then work to win the adversaries’ acceptance of the proposed settlement. At the relatively facilitative and nonforceful end of the range, the mediators pass on communications between the adversaries as they explore possible de-escalating moves; they may also simply provide a safe and neutral setting in which adversaries can meet and talk with each other.

The parties carrying out these diverse kinds of interventions include a wide variety of governmental and nongovernmental actors, with varying capabilities of conducting the activities identified earlier. Among the governmental actors are the states of the world, including the globally powerful United States. Many other governments singly or in ad hoc combinations also carry out various significant interventions. Governments have also formed a variety of international organizations (IGOs), which themselves are international actors. These IGOs include the United Nations and its specialized agencies and a multitude of regional as well as global organizations.

Increasingly, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) play major intervention roles, often helping to moderate or transform intractable conflicts, but also sometimes exacerbating and perpetuating them. They include multinational corporations, churches, ethnic organizations linking people in several countries, humanitarian service organizations, and human rights and other activist organizations.

Countering Intractability at Various Phases

This analysis should make it clear that conflicts are not inherently intractable. Furthermore, the many factors affecting the intractability of
conflicts reveal the multitude of ways for conflict partisans and outsiders to act that help prevent, limit, or transform intractable conflicts. No one approach is good for all purposes; certain policies are effective in some circumstances but not in others.

Efforts to mitigate and transform an intractable conflict obviously are not always successful; indeed, they are risky and sometimes counterproductive. Therefore, attention needs to be given to those negative possibilities. Sometimes that leads to tentativeness in making the effort, and that itself may contribute to the effort's failure. Certainly, good judgment is required in executing any of the policies discussed here. Thus, mapping out many options can only suggest the most effective possible options and combinations of options that may be taken by different actors in different sequences. Much knowledge of the particularities of the case, wisdom, and good fortune are also needed to maximize the desired effects of any policy choice.

In this section, I discuss possible policies by members of each side who have primary responsibility for their conflict's course, as well as by interveners. I also discuss policies at each phase of conflict intractability, with the exception of the failed-intervention phase, since I examine intervention in relation to each of the other phases.

**Preventive Policies**

Some policies to counter intractable conflicts may be pursued before the eruption of major contentious actions that move adversaries toward intractability. Policies may also be conducted that help prevent a sharp escalation of a relatively low-intensity intractable conflict.

**Partisan Policies.** Members of each of the opposing sides in a conflict can do much to prevent it from becoming intractable. One fundamental approach especially relevant for domestic conflicts is to foster democratic institutions. Democracy, insofar as it provides a significant degree of political equality and of individual and group freedom, in itself tends to reduce many grievances. Moreover, it generally provides legitimate mechanisms to channel the inevitable conflicts of social relations so that they do not destructively escalate and become intractable.

Another general approach is to foster common identities and interests, sometimes by developing superordinate goals whose attainment would
solve shared problems. Economic backwardness and environmental degra-
dation could be such problems, as illustrated by the Nile Basin Initiative.
Often, the broader identity or the superordinate goal is directed against a
common enemy, as adversaries put aside their disagreements to confront an
immediate grave threat. For example, the antagonism between the Soviet
Union on one side and the United States, Great Britain, and France on the
other was put aside to defeat Nazi Germany after it attacked the Soviet
Union in 1941. Thus, too, national identity may be promoted while class,
political, regional, or ethnic identities are subordinated to it, as leaders
strive to rally support against an external enemy. Indeed, government lead-
ers may undertake or escalate an external conflict as a way to sustain sup-
port for themselves.

Some efforts to promote a shared identity, however, may be experi-
enced by subordinated groups as a form of domination imposed by the
ruling ethnic or political group. That occurs if the identity is characterized
in narrow terms giving primacy to one language, religion, or ethnicity.
The insistence on ethno-nationalism or religious nationalism, as occurred
in Sri Lanka, can generate an intractable conflict. Much depends, then,
on the content of the identity that is being promoted.

Other preventive policies may help to manage particular contentious
issues when they arise. Policies introduced early in response to emerging
demands for greater political or economic rights may effectively prevent
an intractable conflict from developing. This seems to have worked in
Malaysia, where the Malays and the indigenous peoples, known as Bumi-
putra, tended to be poor, less educated, and more engaged in traditional
occupations compared with the non-Bumiputra minorities, such as the
Chinese (Mauzy 1993; Gurr 2000). In May 1969, large-scale ethnic riots
erupted in Malaysia, which resulted in negotiations in which the leaders
of the major ethnic communities instituted preferential ethnic policies of
affirmative action.

Such efforts also have risks. The policies may raise expectations of
the previously disadvantaged people that are not satisfied. Furthermore,
having gained some concessions, they may believe that they can success-
fully obtain more from their adversary. On the other hand, some members
of the side that has made concessions may come to feel that they are pay-
ing too high a price for the concessions, and a backlash results.
Intermediary Policies. Officials of governments or of IGOs can provide economic, social, and political assistance that is extremely helpful in averting the development of intractable conflicts. Thus, Max van der Stoel, the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) high commissioner on national minorities (HCNM), has contributed to many activities that helped reduce tensions and construct institutions that would provide solutions to potentially grave conflicts relating to minority groups (van der Stoel 1999). These include establishing round tables, councils, and other venues within which dialogue is conducted between majority and minority representatives. They also include helping to develop standards for minority participation in public life and recommendations about linguistic and educational rights for minorities. Such activities can help fashion agreements in particular circumstances, as they have in negotiating the Treaty between the Republic of Hungary and the Republic of Romania on Understanding, Co-operation and Good Neighborliness, concluded in 1996.

Governments may provide training, consultations, and other services to improve the capabilities of governments and their agencies in other countries. Thus, military, police, and other security forces may be trained to act in nonprovocative ways in managing crowds and demonstrations. Provision of weapons and some kinds of training, however, may lend support to diffuse repressive policies that escalate and perpetuate conflicts.

Nongovernmental organizations also can pursue a variety of policies that help prevent a conflict from becoming intractable (Aall 2001). At the local and national levels, NGOs provide networks of relationships that help prevent outbreaks of violence from escalating into large-scale riots. Transnational organizations provide a venue for the exchange of information between people in countries whose governments are in an adversarial relationship. Such information may avert or limit the escalation of intractable conflicts.

NGOs may also engage in activities that directly serve to prevent or limit conflict intractability (Moser-Puangsuwan and Weber 2000). Some provide training in nonviolent action and in conflict resolution methods, and others obtain information and publicize the early signs of gross human rights violations that may instigate conflict escalations. Still others provide protection to dissenters by accompanying them in settings that otherwise
would be extremely dangerous for them, as exemplified by the work of Peace Brigades International (Mahony and Eguren 1997).

**Interrupting Intractability Processes**

Even when actions are taken that tend to send a conflict down the road to intractability, the movement may be interrupted. The processes making for intractability are not irreversible. I will discuss some of the ways adversaries and intermediaries may stop and even turn back a conflict’s course of increasing intractability.

**Partisan Policies.** Both sides in a conflict usually enter into a confrontation with the expectation that it will be short-lived. They may act in ways they think will bring them a quick victory or at least a negotiated agreement that yields them much of what they seek. But often they are mistaken, and the course of action they choose results in a series of interactions that generate a protracted destructive struggle. Some policies can be pursued that may avoid such destructive interactions or at least interrupt them as they begin and before they badly deteriorate.

The use of violence often provokes reprisals of violence that enhance a conflict’s intractability. Each side can act, however, to minimize that tendency, even if some violence is committed. This was the case even after the startling armed uprising of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), in Chiapas, Mexico, on January 1, 1994 (Ronfeldt et al. 1998). The Mexican government’s immediate response was to militarily suppress the uprising. After shots were exchanged with the troops, the Zapatistas disappeared into the jungle and the army pursued them. However, on January 12, the president of Mexico, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, declared a unilateral cease-fire and called on the EZLN to put down its arms and negotiate. Peace talks began on February 21.

The Zapatistas framed their use of violence so that negotiations were possible, and the Mexican government took that route. Aspects of the social and political context and of the EZLN strategy contributed to this surprising development. For several years, the number of various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) had rapidly increased in Mexico as well as globally. Through their worldwide electronic links, news of the events in Chiapas spread quickly within and beyond Mexico. The network
facilitated the rapid mobilization of Zapatista supporters, many of whom came in solidarity to Chiapas, in opposition to the attempted military suppression of the EZLN.

The message of the Zapatistas was expressed with attractive reasonableness. One of the leading figures in communicating the message, Subcomandante Marcos, analyzed the terrible conditions of indigenous peoples and ways of correcting them, writing in a style that delighted and enlightened Mexico City intellectuals. The messages were electronically disseminated through the global networks of NGOs and widely published. The Mexican government decided it was unable to pursue a war to destroy the EZLN.

A dominant party, however, may prolong negotiations and expect that the forces that compelled them to enter into talks will dissipate. Indeed, the negotiations between the Mexican government and the EZLN made little progress. By February 1995 the situation had deteriorated following the Mexican army’s occupation of territory tacitly accorded to the EZLN. Only after the national Congress intervened did serious negotiations occur, resulting in the Accord of San Andrés, signed in February 1996. The accord included an agreement to constitutionally recognize the indigenous peoples’ rights to self-determination and autonomy. But afterward, the government rejected the proposal. Then, after seventy-one years of rule, the ruling party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), was defeated in elections.

The new president of Mexico, Vicente Fox of the National Action Party (PAN), upon assuming office in December 2000, asked the Mexican Congress to act on the accord. In March 2001 the EZLN marched to Mexico City and its representatives addressed the Congress. In April Congress passed an Indigenous Rights Law, but it incorporated only a portion of the accord’s provisions; consequently, the Zapatistas and their supporters opposed the law. The conflict goes on, but largely within the political system and legal constraints.

Dilemmas abound in formulating policies to interrupt the movement toward growing intractability (Kriesberg 2003). Policies resorting to coercion and violence, seeking to intimidate the opposition, sometimes appear effective, at least in the short run. However, such methods usually fail and are often counterproductive. Attempted by relatively small and weak parties, perhaps out of desperation and romanticized visions of
armed struggle, they provoke reactions that are likely to isolate them and make it easier for the dominant groups to overwhelm and destroy them (Gamson 1990). Similarly, general repression by authorities can generate greater opposition and resistance. Coercion that is precise and limited and that is placed in a context that allows for alternative ways of finding a mutual accommodation has a better chance of stopping increasing conflict intractability.

Policies embodying concessions also have risks. Concessions may be effective in placating some members of the opposing sides, which is sufficient to blunt further demands and recourse to intimidating coercion so that the conflict is managed within acceptable methods. However, the members of the side receiving the concessions may view them as signs of weakness and as resulting from their forceful actions; the concessions may then serve to whet their appetite for even greater concessions. The concessions won also can serve as resources to gain further concessions.

To minimize these risks of making concessions, the appropriate context should be provided. Direct and indirect negotiations can be useful in developing shared understandings about the propriety of the concessions and the trade-offs related to them. These may include back-channel official conversations as well as track-two discussions.

**Intermediary Policies.** Since intractability often depends on the external support of one or more sides in a conflict, withdrawing support can interrupt the conflict’s escalation and even perpetuation. This is the rationale for arms embargoes for a region or against one of the contending parties. In recent decades increasing use has been made of various kinds of sanctions, including very targeted sanctions, but with only limited success (Cortright and Lopez 2002).

Governmental and nongovernmental organizations can also interrupt escalations by making their dreadful human consequences visible (Moser-Puangswan and Weber 2000). The mass media can shine a spotlight that arouses attention and sometimes intervention, which may contribute to direct coercive intervention, as was the case in Bosnia and Kosovo. In addition, transnational nongovernmental organizations acting in solidarity with beleaguered groups are sometimes able to interrupt a conflict’s escalatory movement into intractability, as the previous discussion of Chiapas, Mexico, illustrates.
Undermining Institutionalization

Undercutting the institutionalization of an intractable conflict certainly is important in preventing its prolongation. Many possible factors and processes on each side can contribute to undermining such institutionalization.

Partisan Policies. Groups on each side often arise to oppose the institutionalization process, and they are sometimes branded as dissidents and traitors. To be effective, some of these groups point out the self-serving character of the leaders of the fight against the external enemy; furthermore, they may expose some who are personally profiting from the costly struggle.

As a struggle becomes protracted, some people are likely to doubt that persisting in it is worthwhile. People may resist by withdrawing from the struggle; for example, in long wars some people avoid conscription and some soldiers desert. Criticism of the continuing engagement in the conflict may become openly expressed, and opposition leaders may emerge who provide legitimacy for supporting another policy (DeBenedetti and Chatfield 1990). Peace movement organizations may arise, and demonstrations grow.

Such peace movement developments can interrupt escalation and hasten the conflict's termination as the idea of an acceptable settlement changes. However, as noted earlier, they can also be counterproductive. They may hearten the other side's resolve and raise their expectations of ultimate victory and so prolong the conflict. Assessing the consequences of these policies depends greatly on the terms of settlement that the assessor regards as practical and as morally just.

Intermediary Policies. External parties can contribute in many ways to undermining the processes entrenching intractability, although this matter has received relatively little attention. External intervention can help provide options for people in one or the other camp that would enable them to live reasonably well rather than depend upon being a warrior or otherwise engaged in the struggle. Such an intervention may be a safe asylum for some leaders or funds to help former fighters procure land for farming. An infusion of investments can help create jobs that promise security and a decent living standard.

External actors can also provide information about the costs of the conflict's perpetuation and escalation. The costs to family and community
will seem even greater if they are seen as unnecessary or ineffective and if possible solutions based on the experience of others can be envisioned. Furthermore, educational programs, dissemination of information, and arranging meetings between people from the adversarial camps can undermine the polarization that accompanies the institutionalization of conflicts.

Interveners can provide information and consultations about constitutional arrangements that provide basic political rights, demobilization safeguards, and economic growth successfully achieved elsewhere. They may also assist in or promise future judicial proceedings and so inhibit the commission of atrocities and also offer survivors some measure of justice. To complicate these matters, admittedly, the expectation of future sanctions imposed on perpetrators of gross human rights violations may stiffen the resolve of alleged perpetrators to fight on.

Transforming Policies
Moving toward the transformation of an intractable conflict entails appropriate changes in identities, grievances, goals, and means of struggle by members of at least one party to an intractable conflict. Policies effectively fostering such changes must be pursued by the adversary parties as well as by intermediaries.

Partisan Policies. Changes in leadership often precede transforming policies. Sometimes new leaders are selected to undertake changes, and even when they are not, they may be able to look at matters more freshly and be less bound by what was done by the previous leaders. Furthermore, leaders of the opposing side may feel freer to test the possibility that the new leaders will be responsive to new initiatives.

At any time, conciliatory gestures or exploratory overtures may be made that contribute to de-escalating the conflict (C. Mitchell 2000; Kriesberg 1992). Such overtures are often made carefully so as to avoid seeming weak and inviting raised demands. One way to move cautiously is to use unofficial channels or to use intermediaries.

Unofficial, or track-two, channels are important in giving greater depth to the transformational movement (Davies and Kaufman 2002). Such contacts also provide opportunities for relations to develop and knowledge to be acquired that modify the conceptions held about the other side and collective self-identities. They may also reframe relations so that grievances and goals are less zero sum.
A series of agreements is usually needed to make the transition out of an intractable conflict into an enduring relationship that does not fall back into destructive conflict. The early agreements may take the form of confidence-building measures. They may be followed by agreements about how to deal with disagreements and contentious issues. Whatever the agreement, compliance to it is important if further transforming steps are to be taken.

**Intermediary Policies.** Mediation is one of the major ways for external parties to help transform seemingly intractable conflicts. It played a vital role in the 1990s transformation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The U.S. government acted as the powerful mediator in bringing about the 1991 regional peace conference in Madrid. The Norwegian government played an important facilitating role in the PLO-Israeli negotiations near Oslo, producing the Declaration of Principles in 1993 (Kriesberg 2001).

Some mediators perform largely facilitative tasks, but these can be critical when done skillfully by someone with relevant authority and links to persons with resources. Thus, former U.S. senator George Mitchell provided many mediating services that contributed greatly to reaching the crucial Good Friday Agreement of April 1998, between the various parties struggling over the status of Northern Ireland (G. Mitchell 2000; Holland 1999). In 1995 he chaired an international committee to make recommendations on the issue of decommissioning (disarming underground organizations). In September 1997 Mitchell chaired peace negotiations with an extraordinarily wide range of groups represented. Besides chairing the sessions, he acted as a go-between for parties that would not talk to each other directly; he helped provide norms for the discussion, creating a safe space for negotiations, and he helped establish rules to reach decisions by significant consensus. In addition, he had access to President Clinton, who at times spoke directly to the parties.

Intermediaries can also be important in ensuring compliance to whatever agreements are reached. They can provide monitoring services and resources to compensate for losses and impose negative sanctions if noncompliance begins to occur. Furthermore, they can contribute to the reconstruction and construction of the economic, political, and social infrastructure needed to build enduring constructive relations. The failure of intermediaries to remain engaged after initial peace agreements are
reached contributes to the failure of such agreements to be sustained (Hampson 1996).

**Consolidating Transformation**
Recent history makes evident that agreements presumably ending previously intractable conflicts often unravel, with the conflict erupting destructively again. The task of building relations and institutions that avoid such regressions is challenging and requires continuing attention (Kacowicz et al. 2000). In this chapter, however, I only make some brief observations about consolidating the transformation of intractable conflicts and recovering from them.

**Partisan Policies.** A growing variety of peacebuilding policies are being employed within and between societies after periods of large-scale violence. They include the establishment of institutions, with equitable engagement by persons from different sides in the conflict, to plan and to carry out cooperative activities. They also include educational programs fostering shared identities and norms of tolerance and mutual respect.

Considerable attention is currently given to the important role that reconciliation can play in the fundamental transformation of intractable conflicts. Reconciliation is a multidimensional phenomenon, including many aspects of justice, truth, respect, and security (Lederach 1997). It is not a single event or condition, since different degrees of the various dimensions of reconciliation are attained and change over time.

**Intermediary Policies.** Intermediaries can conduct a wide variety of policies that contribute to consolidating peace and helping people recover from the physical, social, and moral traumas of the intractable conflict. External actors often work directly with the former adversaries to support their peacebuilding efforts. External governments, IGOs, and NGOs provide useful intellectual, financial, and other resources to help build and sustain effective institutions and programs that help build peaceful relations.

For example, the United States Institute of Peace gathers information about reconciliation efforts in various countries and consults with governments and nongovernmental organizations regarding procedures to uncover the truth about the past and promote future justice (Kritz 1995; see also http://www.usip.org). UNESCO provides another kind of example.
It was established as the United Nations agency charged with erecting the structures of peace in the minds of human beings (Boulding 2000, 248). In 1994 it launched a Culture of Peace Program to work at the local as well as national level to introduce concepts of conflict resolution and peacebuilding to citizens in every sector of society (see http://www3.unesco.org/ycp).

External actors also can help provide a context that supports and does not undermine the progress toward stable peace between former enemies. This includes managing related conflicts to minimize the damaging effects of refugee flows, economic disruption, and the diffusion of arms and armed fighters.

Conclusion

Conflicts receive most attention from policymakers, scholars, and the general public when the antagonists enter into a self-perpetuating, increasingly destructive struggle. That is the period, however, when peacemaking efforts by partisans or by interveners are most difficult to make effectively. Members of each side tend to be rallying against the hated enemy, and reversing the momentum is particularly difficult. Constructing a possibly effective move requires attention to what might be appropriate for the circumstances. No single tool fits all problems, and timing is important in applying every tactic (Kriesberg and Thorson 1991). Even a good peace proposal, if presented too early, may be rejected and then be unavailable at a more opportune time (Eliasson 2002).

In this chapter, I have also examined earlier and later phases of intractable conflicts; these are more susceptible to policies that would turn the conflict into more constructive paths. I discussed various strategies and tactics that partisans and interveners can undertake to help prevent conflicts from becoming intractable. These and other specific policies can also be employed to interrupt a conflict’s escalation and institutionalization.

When both sides in a conflict or even one side begins to believe that it cannot impose its will on the other, explorations of possible alternatives to pursuing the struggle have some potential to begin a de-escalating and transforming move. Once an intractable conflict has begun to be transformed and terminating accommodations have been reached, a great many possible actions can be employed to consolidate the peace. As in the other
phases, these actions can be conducted by partisans on each side of the conflict, by both official and nonofficial persons and groups. Intermediaries are also diverse, including agencies of national governments, representatives of regional and global international governmental organizations, and transnational and national nongovernmental organizations. The policies appropriate for this phase that were noted here are suggestive of the great variety of possible policies that may be pursued.

Clearly, many factors and processes contribute to increasing and also to reducing a conflict’s intractability. Knowing about them helps provide insights about policies to manage and transform intractable conflicts. That knowledge also should help formulate and conduct effective policies. Also, knowing about many possible options helps in creating ones that are likely to be appropriate.

I have also noted here how various policies may fail to be effective and may even be counterproductive. Meaning well does not ensure doing well. Furthermore, simply ending a conflict may not be the correct objective in the eyes of many people. Considerations of justice and morality regarding the terms of the accommodation reached are also important.

Note

I wish to thank several people for their comments, questions, and nudges about earlier drafts of this paper. They are Pamela Aall, Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, Christopher Mitchell, and John Murray.

References


