

Introduction

Although intergroup conflicts are an inseparable part of intergroup relations, intractable conflicts that are viciously violent and prolonged constitute a special threat to the societies involved and often to the international community. Among the populations of the participating countries, they cause tremendous suffering, which can sometimes spill beyond their borders. Such conflicts can affect other societies and often play a significant role in the policies and actions of the world's organizations and states. Some have been terminated through peaceful resolution (such as in South Africa or in Guatemala); others still endure with intermittent or regular violent confrontations. Intractable conflicts continue, for example, in Sri Lanka, Chechnya, Kashmir, and the Middle East. These conflicts, which may last decades and even centuries, involve disputes over real issues, including territory, natural resources, power, self-determination, statehood, and religious dogmas. Such basic issues have to be addressed in conflict resolution. Almost all conflicts, however, are accompanied by intense socio-psychological forces, which make them especially difficult to resolve. The present book focuses exactly on these difficult conflicts, elucidating their socio-psychological foundations and dynamics. The Guatemalan and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can serve as examples in our discussion; the former was eventually resolved peacefully, while the latter still goes on.

For many years Guatemala was ruled by dictators, and only in 1945 was a president elected democratically. The new president and his successor carried out reforms, including an agrarian land reform plan. But the succeeding president was overthrown in a coup orchestrated by the United States in 1954, with the support of the Guatemalan armed forces and members of the political and economic elite, who viewed these reforms as negating their interest. A period of repression begun by the new leaders especially harmed leftist political parties, along with labor organizations and peasant groups.

The repression, together with socio-economic discrimination and racism, led to feelings of threat and deprivation, especially by Guatemala's indigenous peoples, such as the Maya. Although the dark-skinned native Guatemalans constituted more than half of the national populace, they were almost landless. At the same time, the upper classes, white-skinned descendants of European immigrants to Guatemala, controlled most of the land. The grave conditions led to formulation of goals for societal change. As these goals were rejected by the ruling establishment, the wish to achieve them led to a decision to use violent struggle.

Over the next three and a half decades, the U.S.-trained and U.S.-equipped Guatemalan Army battled the guerrillas in bloody counterinsurgency campaigns, often operating in cooperation with paramilitary groups organized into Civil Self-Defense Patrols or Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil (PACs). Some paramilitary groups acted as death squads in both rural and urban areas, terrorizing those associated with leftist or opposition activities. Despite the repression, guerrilla groups, organized loosely under the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), continued to operate in parts of the country. The violence caused severe losses and suffering, especially among civilians, but neither side could win the conflict. Eventually, leaders of the rival groups understood that the conflict had to be resolved peacefully and began a process of democratization and negotiation to end the violence. Despite violent objection by spoiler groups, the democratic transition continued as succeeding elected governments pursued peace talks with guerrilla groups. Backed by the international community and under UN mediation, these talks culminated on 29 December 1996 with the signing of peace accords that officially put an end to 36 years of civil war, which claimed more than 200,000 killed and more than 40,000 disappeared citizens, mostly among the Maya indigenous people.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which constitutes the core of the Israeli-Arab conflict, began at the beginning of the 20th century as a communal conflict between Jews and Palestinians living in British-ruled Palestine and centered on the contested territory by two national movements: the Palestinian national movement and the Jewish national movement (Zionism), which strived to bring back Jews to their ancient homeland. For many decades, the two movements have clashed recurrently over the same land, the right of self-determination, statehood, and justice. This conflict has been violent almost from its beginning. At first, economic boycotts, demonstrations, strikes, and occasional violence erupted, which reached a climax in the Arab rebellion of 1936–1939, primarily against the British rule but also against Jewish waves of immigration. Following the UN decision in 1947 to divide the land between

Jews and Palestinians, rejected by the latter as unjust, a full-scale war broke out, which claimed many thousands of lives, including civilians, and hundreds of thousands of Palestinians became refugees. Through the years, both sides (on the interstate level) fought at least four additional wars – 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982 – and in between them engaged in other violent activities. With the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the 1967 war, the conflict moved again to the Jewish-Palestinian focus. Between 1987 and 1991, Palestinians in the areas occupied by Israel in 1967 waged an uprising (Intifada). Although some intractable features are still present, the nature of the Israel-Arab conflict changed with the visit of the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat in Jerusalem in 1977. The peace treaty with Egypt in 1979, the Madrid conference in 1991, agreements between Israelis and Palestinians in 1993 and 1994, and the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan in 1994 – all signed by leaders who changed their views – are watersheds in the peace process, which have greatly affected Arab-Jewish relations. But the Israeli-Palestinian conflict reescalated in September 2000, when Palestinians began their second Intifada, called the Al-Aqsa Intifada. The attempts to resolve it peacefully failed, the negotiations stopped, and the conflict continues.

These brief examples of two intractable conflicts imply that socio-psychological factors play a major role in their eruption, escalation, and maintenance and also in peacemaking, resolution, and reconciliation. Human beings begin the conflicts, carry them out, and then decide to terminate them. Although leaders often make the decisions, society members are an inherent part of these conflicts, as they have to be mobilized for participation and then for the conflict's peaceful settlement. Leaders and their followers thus form a socio-psychological repertoire composed of beliefs, attitudes, values, motivations, emotions, and patterns of behaviors that lead to conflicts and their escalation, and both must change in order to deescalate and terminate the conflicts before pursuing a peacebuilding process.

The formation and modification of the socio-psychological repertoire is a dynamic process that has to be unveiled in the analysis of intractable conflicts. To illuminate these socio-psychological foundations and dynamics in all the phases of the intractable conflict and its resolution, specific questions that stand at the heart of the perspective provided by social and political psychology must be addressed: What is the nature of intractable conflicts, and why do they last for a long time? What are the socio-psychological conditions and processes that lead to the outbreak of intractable conflicts? What are the socio-psychological dynamics that underlie the development of intractable conflict once it breaks out? What makes the conflict a societal (collective)

phenomenon? How and why does a conflict escalate and evolve to be intractable? What kind of socio-psychological repertoire evolves in intractable conflict, and why and how does it evolve? How does this repertoire become institutionalized? What are the functions of the socio-psychological infrastructure? What is culture of conflict, and how does it evolve? What kinds of conditions influence the evolution of the culture of conflict? What are the mechanisms and processes that maintain it? What are the consequences of the culture of conflict? How does the socio-psychological infrastructure function during the conflict? Why is it so difficult to resolve intractable conflicts peacefully, and how do socio-psychological barriers that prevent their resolution function? What are the socio-psychological conditions and processes that deescalate intractable conflict and move it toward its peaceful resolution? How can the culture of conflict be changed? What is the peacemaking process? How is peaceful resolution of an intractable conflict achieved, and what is its essence? What is the nature of stable and lasting peace? How can it be achieved? What are the features of reconciliation, and why is needed? What is a culture of peace? What are the processes and conditions that facilitate the building of a stable and lasting peace? The present book attempts to respond to all these questions.

But, before embarking on the detailed responses to these questions, the Introduction first describes the nature of conflicts in general and especially their psychological implications. Then, because more than a few of the intractable intergroup conflicts are interethnic, ethnicity will be considered. Finally, the Introduction presents the socio-psychological perspective with the basic concepts that are used throughout the book and describes different types of intractable conflicts.

DEFINITION OF A CONFLICT

Conflicts are an inherent part of human life. They occur on every level of human interaction, on interpersonal and intergroup levels, in every type of relationship. They take place between friends and allies and, of course, between competitors and rivals. It is hard to think about a relationship without conflict because there always might be a perceived contradiction of goals or interests between individuals and groups, as the definitions of a conflict suggest. In fact, although the study of conflict is one of the central areas of behavioral sciences and much has been written about it, surprisingly there is agreement among the various students of conflict about the definition. Looking on some of the contributions, we find the following definitions.

[A conflict is] any situation in which two or more social entities or “parties” (however defined or structured) perceive that they possess mutually incompatible goals. (Mitchell, 1981, p. 17)

Conflict means perceived divergence of interest, or a belief that the parties’ current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously. (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986, p. 4)

[Conflict is a] social situation in which there are perceived incompatibilities in goals or values between two (or more) parties, attempts by the parties to control one another, and antagonistic feelings toward each other. (Fisher, 2000, p. 168)

[Conflict is] the experience of incompatible activities (goals, claims, beliefs, values, wishes, actions, feelings, etc.). (Coleman, 2003, p. 6)

A social conflict exists when two or more persons or groups manifest the belief that they have incompatible objectives. (Kriesberg, 2007, p. 2)

The common thread in all these definitions is the emphasis on the contradiction of goals and interests among two or more parties. Thus, a party (an individual or a group), having a goal or goals, thinks that the other party (an individual or a group) prevents or constitutes an obstacle to its achievement. In this situation, the two striving parties cannot achieve their goals because an achievement of a goal by one party precludes this possibility by the other party. For example, if one party aspires to have an independent state on a territory that another party considers to be part of its own homeland, both goals cannot be achieved, as they are in contradiction, and a conflict emerges. This example is based on real conflicts such as between Israeli Jews and Palestinians or between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo.

I define a conflict as *a situation in which two or more parties perceive their goals, intentions, and actions as being mutually incompatible and act in accordance to this perception*. This definition differentiates between situations of conflictive perception and conflictive behavior that may follow. That is, it suggests that perception of a situation as a conflict does not lead necessarily to a confrontational behavior. A party or parties may perceive a contradiction of goals and decide not to act in accordance with this perception. In such a situation, a conflict may be detected but will not erupt for the time being or will never erupt, but if it does, this will be decided by the involved party or parties. Conflict, as a situation with observable consequences, should be considered only when the perception of the situation is followed by behaviors that reflect this perception (Mack & Snyder, 1957).

In discussing the definition, I begin with the elaboration of goals, which refer to cognitive representations of aspirations. The present conception of the term “goal” is based on goal system theory, advanced by Kruglanski and his

colleagues (Kruglanski, 1996; Kruglanski & Kopetz, 2009; Kruglanski, Shah, Fishbach, Friedman, Chun, & Sleeth-Keppler, 2002). They propose to define a goal as a subjectively desirable state of affairs that the individual or group members intend to attain through action. This approach thus views goals as cognitive constructs that are deemed valid and believable. As such, they require appropriate evidence as to their “worthiness” for adoption as objectives. Goals can be personal or collective. In the first case, they reflect personal needs and aspirations. In the latter case, they arise when members of a collective view the goal as either reflecting collective needs (e.g., collective autonomy, religious freedom, or needed collective resources) or reflecting personal needs that are shared by other individuals because of their membership in a collective (e.g., equal treatment). In any event, collective goals do not have to be adopted because of personal needs but can be formed on the basis of mere social identity and identification with the needs of the collective.

The notion that individuals intend to attain a goal implies that it is perceived as both desirable and attainable. Attainability refers to the perceived means that individuals can use in order to achieve their goal. Potentially there are several alternatives to achieve the same goal, and any one of them could potentially be used to advance progress toward several different goals. Eventually, goal attainment is viewed as a positive event warranting a positive affect, and a failure to attain a goal is perceived as a negative event warranting negative affect (Kruglanski & Kopetz, 2009).

In the case of a conflict, group members believe that their group has goals to achieve and that the attainment of these goals is blocked by another group. Both groups may want the same goal (e.g., the same resources), or they may collide over different goals (e.g., different political systems, or a division of resources or values). A goal desired by one group may be under the control of another group, or both groups may not have it and need to strive for it. Goals differ in their generality, tangibility, and importance, or in their remoteness from basic human needs or in the extent they are shared by group members.

Nevertheless, it is clear that when the goals are collective (shared by at least a segment of group members), the conflicts are on a group level and then involve group members. Also, it must be stated that not all the goals that lead to a conflict are expressed explicitly. Some of them may be latent: they are not spelled out openly but exist only in the background and play a role in the emergence of a conflict. Sometimes the latent goals are more important than the explicit goals. For example, American leaders never explicitly stated that one of the reasons to begin the war with Iraq was a desire to control the oil reserves (Klare, 2005).

Some of the goals that appear to be conflictive are not necessarily negative, and thus it should be noted that conflicts are not always negative human phenomena. First, social scientists recognize that conflicts also play a functional role for human beings on individual and collective levels (see, e.g., Coser, 1956). For example, groups achieve solidarity and cohesiveness, as well as clear marking of their boundaries in conflict situations. Of crucial importance is that much of the progress in civilization was achieved through conflicts. In many cases when a new idea appears that contradicts well-established beliefs, it is met with objection and rejection. In this situation, individuals and groups may believe that they are in conflict with those people who propagate these new ideas. But some of these ideas bring useful and valid knowledge, morality, democracy, or other humane values. We can think, for example, about conflicts that erupted in relation to abolishing slavery or colonialism. Without conflicts, it is hard to see how a progress could be achieved on our planet. The fundamental point thus in understanding the dynamics of conflicts is not their eruption but the way they are handled; for example, some conflicts are managed in a destructive way and involve violence, so that a heavy price may be paid, even for positive progress.

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE DEFINITION

Of special significance is the psychological perspective that is included in all the presented definitions of conflict. The definitions refer to the perception of contradiction and not to an “objective” state of contradiction. The contradiction has to be perceived in order for the conflict to occur. Thus, the definitions recognize that at least some aspects of a conflict involve psychological processes. Conflicts always begin in our heads. The perception that attainment of a goal by one party precludes the achievement of a goal by another party is a subjective evaluation with which individuals may differ. One of the parties may not even identify a certain situation as a conflict, or may see it as less significant than the other party. In such a situation, the nature of the developed relations between the parties depends more on the party that perceives itself to be in conflict. If this party behaves in a way that leads the other party to recognize the situation as being conflictive, the possibility that the conflict will emerge increases. For example, when Israeli leaders decided to sell parts for unmanned aerial vehicles to China in 2005, they did not think that the United States would see this act as a conflict of interest. But when they realized the U.S. perception, they ended the conflict by quickly canceling the deal with China.

Identification of a Situation as a Conflict

It is possible though, at least theoretically, that one party will not disclose its perception of viewing a situation as a conflict, at least at the beginning. Then, it may take some time until the other party perceives the situation as being conflictive because this perception also depends on the expressed rhetoric and actions of the former party. Even when both parties perceive the situation as being conflictive and act accordingly, they may still differ in the extent to which they perceive their goals as being contradictory and thus differ in the level of experienced conflict. In addition, these differences apply not only between groups but also within a group. Very rarely is there is a uniform view of the level contradiction, the goals to be achieved, or the means to achieve them. Group members as individuals and as members of different subgroups may differ in their opinions, such that a collective may have disagreements and internal conflicts that exceed the intergroup conflict. For example, Catholics in Northern Ireland had a number of views on how to approach and carry out the conflict with Great Britain at the end of the 1960s (Mulholland, 2002). In many cases, formal leaders decide how to view conflict situations and then take a course of action.

While so-called contradicted goals are often real and play a role in the conflict, how the goals are viewed by each of the parties is most important. When the contradicted goals are perceived as central and even existential, then the conflict is of great significance and usually of great intensity. But when the goals are perceived as peripheral, then the conflict is of low importance and low strength. In addition to the ascribed importance to the goals, parties construct justifications and explanations for the goals (called their epistemic basis in Chapter 2). Obviously, rival parties differ in the rationale they use in justifying their goals.

The parties also have to identify the extent of goal contradiction. This dimension indicates how the parties perceive their own goals and the goals of the other party from which they derive the level of contradiction. According to this analysis, the most serious conflicts take place when the parties' most central goals are perceived to be in total contradiction with the goals of another party. This is the case of the Hutu and Tutsi, two ethnic groups in Rwanda that clash recurrently over control of the same resources and power. Both groups view the goals of such control as important, and both view the contradiction as being unbridgeable.

The preceding analysis indicates that an essential condition for the outbreak of a conflict is identification of a situation as a conflict. This identification implies that a given situation is categorized in the cognitive system (i.e.,

knowledge) of a person, or society member, as a conflict. The presented view is based on an assumption that individuals acquire and hold a general cognitive schema¹ that allows them to identify a particular situation as a conflict (see Bar-Tal, Kruglanski, & Klar, 1989). This schema refers to the incompatibility of goals between parties and indicates what a conflict is. It is acquired by the individuals as a result of their experiences and learning in the particular social setting (e.g., family, neighborhood, school). Once a person acquires a general (prototypic) conflict schema, he or she is able to identify a particular situation as a conflict.

A series of studies by Orr (1995) specifically investigated these premises. First, she found that individuals have cues according to which they identify a situation as a conflict and that they differ in the cues that they use in this identification. Second, in another study she found that priming for conflict with words connoting confrontation significantly increases the identification of an ambiguous situation as a conflict. In a third study, she demonstrated that situational factors may increase or decrease individuals' tendency to identify ambivalent situations as a conflict. Thus, cognitive loads may increase this tendency, while the requirement to avoid mistakes decreases it. In addition, it was found that individuals with strong need for closure tended to identify ambivalent situations as a conflict more than individuals with low need for closure.

In this line, a later study by Golec and Federico (2004) of American foreign policy officials and Polish political activists provides additional support for the presented conception in real-life situations. It shows that officials and activists with a hostile conflict schema in comparison to those with a nonhostile schema sharpened the perception of conflicts (i.e., tended to identify more situations as a conflict) and chose to deal with them in hawkish ways (i.e., to take harsher measures). People differ in their tendency to detect conflicts. While some people (including leaders) are "sharpeners" and tend to view many situations as conflictive, other people are moderators and view fewer situations as being conflictive. Also, while some people (including political leaders) may regard conflict as highly undesirable and try to solve it constructively with mechanisms of peaceful settlement or even avoid it by appeasement, other leaders may view it as positive challenge that requires meeting it with force and firm containment. Obviously, the general cognitive schema is not stable but changes along with the life of the individual as a result of his or her experiences and learning. Thus, with their experiences some people may tend to become sharpeners, whereas others may become moderators. Also, people may

¹ A schema is a cognitive structure that represents organized knowledge about a given concept, situation, or type of stimulus (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

approach conflicts differently depending on their spheres. They, for example, may be sharpeners in national spheres but moderators in economic domains.

Identification of a conflict situation involves and implies different affective states that may range from hatred, frustration, and anger to challenge and joy and also different behavioral implications from flight or appeasement to fight. In addition, the implications may depend on the particular context in which the situation of conflict was identified. These implications, as well as an identification of a conflict situation, are different in various cultures. Cultures differ with regard to the schema indicating conflicts, as well as with the decisions on how to act upon their identification of the situation as a conflict, how to manage a conflict, and then also how to resolve it. Thus, cultural differences in interpretation of a conflict situation may lead to misunderstandings and even disagreements and conflicts. Some cultures may identify a wider range of situations as a conflict than other ones. In addition, cultures may differ in their conflict identification and reaction in different domains of personal and collective life. Also, some cultures may tend to act on a wider scope of identified disagreements and with great intensity, whereas other cultures may be more accommodating and compromising. Finally, some cultures may tend to use more violent ways of action in a conflict situation than other cultures (see, e.g., Avruch, 1998; Avtgis & Rancer, 2010; Eller, 1999).

But although members of a culture may acquire relatively similar general schemata of a conflict, there are still individual differences because of the particular socialization and experiences that each person experiences. These observations have significance for both interpersonal and intergroup conflicts. Even in international, or interethnic, or intersocietal relations, there are individuals who identify situations as conflicts and later reevaluate them. In these cases, individuals who are leaders make these judgments and decisions, and it is not surprising that their personalities, political views, values, and culture influence the way they determine how conflicts are approached and managed (see, e.g., Hamburg, George, & Ballentine, 1999). But in contrast to interpersonal conflicts, decisions made on an intergroup level sometimes have profound implications because they often concern myriad human lives. In these cases, individuals can lead their groups into conflicts, violence, wars, and genocide as well as to peacemaking and reconciliation.

In addition, it is suggested that the identification of a situation as a conflict depends on the clarity of the situation. This factor refers to how well the situation signals a conflict, as situations may differ in their level of ambiguity. Some situations are clear and unequivocal, for example, an attack by a state, as happened on June 21, 1941, when Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union. These situations are prototypic and are easily identified. Other situations might be more ambiguous and unclear because no salient