

# EXPERIENCES FROM 30 YEARS OF ACTION RESEARCH ON THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

by Herbert C. Kelman

The focus of this paper is on *interactive problem solving*, an unofficial, academically-based, third-party approach to the resolution of international and inter-communal conflicts. The methods of interactive problem solving are applicable to a wide variety of conflicts and have indeed been applied in a number of protracted conflicts between identity groups around the world, including Cyprus, Sri Lanka, Bosnia, and Northern Ireland. My own focus, however, for some thirty years, has been on the Arab-Israeli conflict and especially on the Israeli-Palestinian component of that conflict.

## 1 Background

My approach to conflict resolution derives from the pioneering work of John Burton, who is now retired in Australia (see Burton, 1969, 1979, 1984). Burton was a senior diplomat in the Australian foreign ministry when he decided to go into academia. He taught international relations at the University College of London, where he established the Centre for the Analysis of Conflict. When I first met him, in the summer of 1966, he had developed and begun to explore a form of unofficial diplomacy, for which he initially used the term „controlled communication.“ The method involved bringing together high-level representatives of parties in conflict in an academic setting, for confidential, unofficial, analytical communication under the guidance of a panel of political and social scientists.

When Burton told me about his work, I immediately became intrigued with it and excited about it. I saw his method as a way of putting into practice the theoretical ideas about social-psychological dimensions of international relations

that I had been thinking and writing about for some years. I had come into the field of international relations by way of social psychology. I chose social psychology as my field of endeavor because I saw it as potentially relevant to the issues of war and peace, of social justice, and of social change that were important to me. Although I have worked in a number of different areas, I took an active interest in problems of international conflict, particularly from a psychological perspective, from the very beginning of my professional career. In the early 1950s, I was heavily involved in the development of the peace research movement and later the founding of the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (which is now in its 43<sup>rd</sup> year of publication). I did research on international educational and cultural exchange, and on nationalism and the relationship of individuals to the nation state. In particular, I was interested in drawing together the contributions of social-psychological concepts and findings to the study of international relations and in identifying those points in a general theory of international relations in which social-psychological analysis is especially relevant. That interest culminated in the publication of an edited volume, entitled *International Behavior: A Social-Psychological Analysis* (Kelman, 1965).

These biographical notes provide a perspective on my enthusiastic response to Burton's approach. From my parochial point of view, his form of practice was using distinctly social-psychological methods and suggested the next logical step in my own exploration of social-psychological contributions to international affairs. When Burton invited me to participate as a member of the third part in an exercise on the Cyprus conflict that he was planning, I readily accepted. The fact that the exercise was to deal with the Cyprus conflict was an added bonus, since I had visited Cyprus three years earlier (in connection with another research project), had been charmed by the island, and was saddened by the ethnic conflict that was dividing its population. The Cyprus exercise took place in London, at Burton's Centre for the Analysis of Conflict, in November 1966. It provided my first direct experience with what we later (following Leonard Doob, 1970, and Richard Walton, 1970) came to call „problem-solving workshops.“

## 2 The Middle East Connection

I began thinking about the possibility of applying Burton's model in the Middle East just a few months after my experience in London – at the time of the

Arab-Israeli war in June of 1967. My special interest in the Arab-Israeli conflict also has its biographical roots. I am a Jew, born in Vienna, who experienced the Anschluss as a child, lived for a year under Nazi rule, managed to flee with my family to Belgium where we stayed for a year as penniless refugees, and finally succeeded to leave for the United States just a few weeks before the Nazi invasion of Belgium. My membership in the Zionist youth movement sustained me during those years and helped me keep my self-esteem intact in the face of the Nazi onslaught. In light of these early experiences, the survival and security of Israel have been of profound personal concern to me. At the same time, my personal experience of homelessness, statelessness, refugee status, oppression, and arbitrary treatment has helped me to empathize with the situation of the Palestinian people. My search for ways of promoting the peaceful coexistence of the two peoples who claim the same land goes back to the mid-1940s, the years before the establishment of the State of Israel. Commitment to peace and justice in the Middle East is also consistent with my active involvement, starting in those years, in the American anti-war and civil-rights movements.

When the 1967 war broke out, I got in touch with John Burton to raise the possibility of organizing a meeting of influential Arabs and Israelis. We drafted a proposal and made some efforts to raise funds and line up participants. The latter turned out to be especially difficult and we eventually gave up on the project. I learned an important lesson: It became clear to me that one needed to do a great deal of preparatory work – particularly to become familiar with the communities involved and establish personal contacts – before one could identify the appropriate participants and persuade them to take part in such an enterprise.

In the next few years, I was involved in many other activities, but I did not abandon the idea. I continued to think and talk about it. On a visit to Israel, I discussed it with various relevant people – and got mixed reactions. I wrote my first paper on problem-solving workshops (Kelman, 1972). In 1971, Stephen Cohen and I organized an Israeli-Palestinian „pilot workshop“ in the context of a graduate seminar on international conflict that we were co-teaching. This first workshop on the Middle East conflict (which was originally planned as a three-party meeting, but the Egyptian participants whom we had lined up withdrew before the actual meeting took place) was a very rich learning experience (Cohen, Kelman, Miller, & Smith, 1977). Nevertheless, I was too deeply involved in other projects to give this work my full attention.

It was only in October 1973, at the time of the next big war in the Middle East, that I decided to make resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict the primary focus

of my professional work. Starting in 1974, I made systematic efforts to educate myself. I had acquired a thorough Jewish and Hebrew education early in my life, and had visited Israel several times, but my acquaintance with the Arab world was limited. I started reading about the Arab Middle East, followed Middle East politics carefully, attended numerous lectures and conferences, and in 1975 began traveling in the Arab world. My only regret is that I did not find or make the time to learn Arabic 25 years ago; of course, I did not realize at the time how large a portion of my life I was about to dedicate to the work in the Middle East.

Over the years, I became increasingly immersed in the Middle East, as well as in Middle East-related activities at my own university and neighboring institutions. Most important, in 1978 I took over as chair of the Middle East Seminar at the Harvard Center for International Affairs. This deep immersion in Middle East work became so central in my life that it would have been impossible to pursue the work if my wife had not fully shared my interest in it and commitment to it. My Middle East involvement has reached the point where some people think of me as a Middle East specialist rather than the social and political psychologist that I really am. I like to tell people that I can pinpoint the exact moment when I became a Middle East specialist. It happened in October 1981, after the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. I appeared on television to take part in a discussion of the impact of the assassination on the peace process. At one point, while I was talking, I glanced at the TV monitor. There I saw my face, and the caption beneath it read „Herbert Kelman, Middle East Expert, Harvard University.“ From that moment on, I knew that I was a Middle East expert.

The fact, of course, is that I come to this work not as a regional specialist, but as a generalist. My application and elaboration of John Burton's model is anchored in social-psychological principles. The Program on International Conflict Analysis and Resolution (PICAR), which I direct at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard, is dedicated to developing the practice of interactive problem solving and the theory behind it within a scholar-practitioner model: Our practice is informed by relevant theories and empirical research and the practice, in turn, is an unusual source of rich observations that contribute to theory building and refinement of the practice. The scholar-practitioner model, in effect, enacts a form of action research, in which our direct involvement in an action program enables us to observe intense interaction between parties in conflict that would not normally be accessible to research. The general approach to conflict resolution represented by interactive problem solving has been applied

and tested by PICAR members in a number of different conflicts between identity groups. The comparative perspective is essential to the continuing development and refinement of our theory and practice.

Although I have personally participated in work on several other conflicts – notably Cyprus, Northern Ireland, and the Cuba-U.S. relationship – I have concentrated on the Arab-Israeli conflict, and particularly its Israeli-Palestinian component, for several reasons. First, it is a conflict that has special personal meaning to me for the reasons I have already indicated. Second, the nature of the approach – at least in my style of work – is all-engrossing. It requires the kind of immersion that I have described; and it is difficult to immerse oneself to that extent in more than one conflict at a time. Third, I feel strongly that the very important contributions of the generalist who approaches each case with a generic framework and a comparative perspective, must always be tempered by the knowledge and sensitivities of the area specialist. A third party in our work can gain credibility in the eyes of the parties and work effectively with them only to the extent that it has a long-standing interest in the region, is familiar with the history and the specific issues in the conflict, and is sensitive to the nuances and special implications of the words that are spoken. Thus, even though the third party's credibility and effectiveness in our scheme rests primarily on its skills in conflict resolution, it is important that, as a team, it be knowledgeable, not only about international conflict and group process, but also about the particular conflict at issue and the region in which it takes place.

To be sure, a high level of involvement in a particular region also has certain potential drawbacks. I have to be careful, for example, to avoid overgeneralizing from the case with which I am familiar to other cases and to ethnic conflict as a whole – both in the analysis of the dynamics of conflict and in the development of methods of intervention. This is why it is important to stay in touch with other conflicts and maintain a comparative perspective. Furthermore, third parties who are heavily involved in the conflict on which they are working are likely to develop their own ideas for resolving it and may be tempted to push their own ideas, which would be antagonistic to the facilitative role of the third party that our model of intervention calls for. These are perils to be aware of, along with the special advantages of a third party with regional expertise.

A special issue that arises in our work is the ethnic identity of the third party – an issue that I have had to face from the beginning, as a Jew working on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In many respects, my Jewish identity has enhanced my credibility on both sides. It reassures the parties that I am doing this work out of genuine personal concern, rather than for some ulterior motives, and that

I am a third party who is committed and cares about the issues, rather than „disinterested“ in the sense of standing above the fray. At the same time, my ethnic identity may raise questions about bias on the Palestinian side and loyalty on the Israeli side. I have tried to deal with some of these issues by working with an ethnically balanced team. The third party in my work has always included at least one Arab member. For the last dozen years or more, I have worked closely with Nadim Rouhana, a social and political psychologist who is a Palestinian from Israel; he and I have co-chaired an Israeli-Palestinian Continuing Workshop that we ran between 1990-1993 (see Rouhana & Kelman, 1994), and the Joint Working Group on Israeli-Palestinian Relations, that we began in 1994 and that is still meeting (see Kelman, 1998). Having a balanced team strengthens our credibility: We claim and try to be, not a „neutral“ third party, but an even-handed one – and ethnic balance on our team is an important indicator of our even-handedness. But beyond the image conveyed by a balanced team, I have found it extremely valuable in enhancing the third party’s sensitivity to the concerns of both sides and ready grasp of each party’s reactions to new events or to the nuances of what is being said (and felt) around the table.

### 3 The Microprocess and the Macroprocess

What makes interactive problem solving quintessentially social-psychological in its orientation is its goal of promoting change in individuals – through face-to-face interaction in small groups – as a vehicle for change in larger social systems: in national policy, in the conflict system at large. The core of the work of interactive problem solving is a particular *microprocess*, best exemplified by problem-solving workshops, to which I have already referred, and whose purposes, procedures, and contributions, particularly as we have applied them in the Israeli-Palestinian case, will be described more fully in the next section. But this microprocess is intended to produce changes in the *macroprocess*, in the larger process of conflict resolution, including the official negotiations – in what is now commonly called the peace process (Kelman, 1997).

The microprocess relates to the macroprocess in two ways. First and foremost, it provides inputs into the larger process. The challenge here is to identify the appropriate points of entry: those points in the larger process where contributions from problem-solving workshops, and from a social-psychological analysis, can be particularly useful. Second, the microprocess can serve as a metaphor for

what happens – or at least in my view, ought to happen – at the macrolevel (Kelman, 1996). Let me elaborate a bit on interactive problem solving as a metaphor for the larger process of conflict resolution before turning specifically to a description of the microprocess of problem-solving workshops.

The three components of the term interactive problem solving – problem, solution, and interactive – suggest what, I propose, happens or ought to happen in the larger process. First, the conflict needs to be treated as a *problem* that is shared by the parties. Essentially, it is a problem in the relationship between the parties, which has become completely competitive, to the point of mutual destructiveness. Conflict itself is a normal and potentially constructive aspect of relations within and between groups, organizations, and societies, as long as both competitive and cooperative elements are maintained and balanced in the relationship. But in deep-rooted ethnic conflicts of the kind with which we are concerned, the relationship has come to a point where each party, in pursuit of its own needs and interests, threatens and undermines the needs and interests of the other party and seeks to destroy the other.

Recognizing that the conflict represents a problem in the relationship between the parties, the conflict resolution process needs to search for a *solution* to the problem. A proper solution is one that addresses the underlying causes of the conflict, which means essentially the unfulfilled or threatened needs of both parties, particularly their needs for security, identity, autonomy, justice, and recognition. A solution that addresses these needs ultimately leads to a transformation of the relationship between the parties.

Finally, the term *interactive* refers to the proposition that the task of solving the problem represented by the conflict is best achieved through direct interaction, in which the parties are able to share their differing perspectives and learn how to influence each other by way of responsiveness to the other's needs and concerns. The essence of social interaction involves taking the perspective of the other, which enables us to be responsive to the other's concerns. Such responsiveness is the way in which people normally influence each other in social relations. In conflict relationships, this process of influencing one another through mutual responsiveness is seriously undermined. The problem-solving required for conflict resolution can occur most effectively in an interactive context in which the ability to exert mutual influence through responsiveness has been restored.

This view of the macroprocess of conflict resolution suggests some of the key components of the process, which must take place somewhere in the larger system. Table 1 lists four such components.

TABLE 1

*Components of the Conflict Resolution Process:*

1. Identification and analysis of the problem
2. Joint shaping of idea for solution
3. Influencing the other side
4. Creating a supportive political environment

The first is identification and analysis of the problem: The parties must identify each side's fundamental needs and fears as seen within each party's own perspective. Moreover, the parties have to become sensitized to the dynamics of conflict, to those interaction processes that are conducive to the escalation and perpetuation of the conflict.

The second component of the macroprocess of conflict resolution is the joint shaping of ideas for solution of the conflict. This calls for opportunities for the parties to explore options, to reframe the issues in ways that make them more conducive to negotiation and conflict resolution, and to generate creative ideas. Such a process of „pre-negotiation,“ at all stages of conflict resolution, increases the likelihood that formal negotiations themselves will be maximally effective. The way the issues are framed has a major impact on the parties' ability to achieve a negotiated agreement and on the quality of that agreement from the point of view of producing a lasting peace.

The third component listed in Table 1 is influencing the other side. The essential requirement here is to shift from the heavy reliance on the use and threat of force, which now characterizes the international system, to the use of positive incentives, including incentives in the form of mutual reassurance and mutual enticement. For parties engaged in an existential conflict, such as that between



Israelis and Palestinians, negotiations always loom as dangerous and threatening. The parties are afraid they might be induced to yield too much and to place themselves on a slippery slope, ultimately losing everything, including their national identity and national existence. Therefore, mutual reassurance that it is safe to enter into negotiations and mutual enticement through the promise of attractive gains are key elements of the mutual influence required for conflict resolution. To this end, as I have already mentioned, each party has to learn how to influence the other by being responsive to the other's needs and fears. Only influence through responsiveness is conducive to a stable change in the relationship.

The fourth component of the macroprocess of conflict resolution is creating a supportive political environment for negotiations. One of the important features of a supportive environment is the sense of mutual reassurance, which depends on each side's conviction that the other is sincere in its commitment to negotiating a peaceful solution. Another important element of a supportive environment is the sense of possibility – the sense that, even though negotiations may be difficult and risky, it is possible to find a mutually satisfactory solution. This sense of possibility contributes to creating self-fulfilling prophecies in a positive direction, to counteract the negative self-fulfilling prophecies that result from the mutual distrust and pervasive pessimism about finding a way out that normally characterize protracted conflicts. A supportive political environment is marked by a shift in the dominant political discourse from power politics to mutual accommodation.

I am proposing that the processes that I have outlined have to take place somewhere in the larger system if conflict resolution is to become possible. They do not have to take place everywhere and at all times. But somewhere in the system, there have to be efforts to identify and analyze the problem, to engage in joint shaping of ideas for a mutually acceptable solution, to influence the other through mutual reassurance and other positive incentives, and to create a supportive political environment. Problem-solving workshops and related activities in the spirit of interactive problem solving seek to provide special opportunities for these kinds of processes to occur.

## 4 Problem-solving Workshops

Problem-solving workshops represent a microprocess that is specifically designed to insert into the macroprocess – in a modest but systematic way – the components of conflict resolution described in the preceding section. One can think of problem-solving workshops as workshops in the literal sense of the term, like a carpenter's or an artisan's workshop: a specially constructed space, in which the parties can engage in a process of exploration, observation, and analysis, and in which they can create new products for export, as it were. The products in this case take the form of new ideas and insights that can then be fed into the political debate and the decision-making process within the two societies.

Workshops are not negotiating sessions. They are not intended to substitute for negotiations or to bypass negotiations in any way. Negotiations can be carried out only by officials who are authorized to conclude binding agreements, and workshops, by definition, are unofficial and non-binding. But it is precisely this non-binding character of workshops that represents their unique strength. They provide an opportunity for the kind of exploratory interaction that is very difficult to achieve in the context of official negotiations.

Even though workshops are not negotiations and are not meant to be negotiations, they are directly linked to the negotiations. I view them as an integral part of the larger negotiation process, relevant at all stages of that process. They are relevant at the pre-negotiation stage, where they contribute to helping the parties move toward the negotiation table. They are also relevant alongside of negotiations, at the para-negotiation stage: Negotiations of intense, protracted conflicts – as we have observed in the Israeli-Palestinian and many other cases – are often marked by setbacks, stalemates, and loss of momentum. Problem-solving workshops can contribute at that stage to creating momentum and reviving the sense of possibility. Furthermore, workshops can deal with issues that are not yet on the table, providing an opportunity for the parties to pre-negotiate some of these issues so that, by the time they get to the table, they can be framed in ways that are conducive to successful negotiation. Finally, workshops can be useful at the post-negotiation stage, where they can contribute to resolving the problems of implementation of negotiated agreements, as well as to the post-conflict process of peace building and reconciliation and to transforming the relationship between the former enemies.

Our Israeli-Palestinian workshops until 1991 were all obviously in the pre-negotiation phase, since there were no negotiations in progress. Moreover, until 1990, all of our workshops were one-time, self-contained events, usually consisting of separate pre-workshop sessions (of 4-5 hours) for each party and two-and-a-half days (often over a weekend) of joint meetings. Some of the individual participants in these workshops took part in more than one such event, but the group as a whole met only for this one occasion. It was not until 1990 that we organized our first continuing workshop, to which I have already alluded: a group of influential Israelis and Palestinians who participated in a series of meetings over a three-year period. We were unable to mount such a continuing workshop before 1990 for political, financial, and logistical reasons.

To give some indication of what happens at workshops and of the principles that govern them, I shall describe a typical one-time workshop between Israelis and Palestinians. There are, understandably, important differences between one-time and continuing workshops. There is also considerable variation among one-time workshops, depending on the nature of the participants, the occasion for convening them, the specific purposes, the setting, and other considerations. But, despite such variations, there is a set of key principles that apply throughout and that can be gleaned from the description of an ideal-type one-time workshop.

The typical workshop participants are politically involved and, in many cases, politically influential members of their communities. However, with occasional exceptions, they have not been current officials. Influential participants have included parliamentarians, leading figures in political parties or movements, former military officers or government officials, and journalists or editors specializing in the Middle East. Many of the participants have been academics who are important analysts of the conflict for their society – who not only publish scholarly monographs but also write for the newspapers and appear on radio and television – and some of whom have served in advisory, official, or diplomatic positions and are likely to do so again in the future. We look for participants who are part of the mainstream of their societies and close to the center of the political spectrum. But they have to be interested in exploring the possibilities of a negotiated solution and willing to sit with members of the other society as equals.

The number of participants has varied; our workshops generally include three to six members of each party, as well as a third party of two to four members. On a number of occasions, we have arranged meetings between just two high-level participants – one Israeli and one Palestinian – who preferred to meet in

complete privacy rather than in a group setting. The group setting, of course, has great advantages because it reveals some of the internal dynamics – including the intragroup conflicts – within each society, which are an important dimension of intergroup conflict. But the occasional one-on-one meetings have been valuable in their own way, particularly in view of the stature of their participants.

The modal number of third-party members has been three, but here too there has been variation. I have done a series of workshops in conjunction with my graduate seminar on international conflict, in which the members of the class are able to take part by serving as apprentice members of the third party. In all other respects, these workshops have followed the usual workshop design. Even though we have sometimes had a third party of 25 members in these workshops, we have been able to organize them in a way that both preserve the integrity of the process and gives the student the opportunity to gain first-hand experience with the model. It should be noted that only five of the students, on an alternating basis, sit around the table at any one time. The others observe the proceedings from an adjoining room with a one-way mirror – of course, with the full knowledge of the participants. It is understood that, at all times, the students are members of the third party, subject to the discipline of the third party, rather than mere observers.

The academic setting is an important feature of our approach. It has the advantage of providing an unofficial, private, non-binding context, with its own set of norms to support a type of interaction that departs from the norms that generally govern interactions between conflicting parties. Conflict norms require the parties to be militant, unyielding, and dismissive of the other's claims, interests, fears, and rights. To engage in a different kind of interaction, which enables each party to enter into the other's perspective and to work with the other in the search for mutual benefits, requires a countervailing set of norms. The academic setting is not the only setting that can provide such countervailing norms; a religious setting, for example, could do so in its own way. In our work, however, we have found that the university setting is well suited to performing this function. The norms of this setting both free and require participants to interact in a different way. The fact that the discussions are non-committal – „just academic“ – makes it relatively safe to deviate from the conflict norms. The fact that the third party „owns“ the setting gives us some authority to prescribe the nature of the interaction.

The third party in our model plays a strictly facilitative role. We do not propose solutions, nor do we participate in the substantive discussions. Our task is to

create the conditions that allow ideas for resolving the conflict to emerge out of the interaction between the parties themselves. The role of the third party is important. We select and brief the participants, set and enforce the ground rules, and propose the main lines of the agenda. We serve as a repository of trust for parties who, by definition, do not trust each other: They feel safe to come to the workshop because they trust the third party and are confident that it will make sure that confidentiality is maintained and their interests are protected. Finally, the third party moderates the discussion and makes a variety of interventions: content observations, which often take the form of summarizing, highlighting, asking for clarification, or pointing to similarities and differences between the parties; process observations, which suggest how interactions within the group may reflect the dynamics of the conflict between the two societies; and occasional theoretical observations, which offer concepts that might be useful in clarifying the issues under discussion.

The ground rules governing the workshop, which are presented to participants several times – at the point of recruitment, in the pre-workshop sessions, and at the beginning of the workshop itself – are listed in Table 2.

TABLE 2

*Workshop Ground Rules:*

1. Privacy and confidentiality
2. Focus on each other (not constituencies, audience, third parties)
3. Analytic (non-polemical) discussion
4. Problem-solving (non-adversarial mode)
5. No expectation of agreement
6. Equality in setting
7. Facilitative role of third party

The first ground rule, privacy and confidentiality, is at the heart of the workshop process. It stipulates that whatever is said in the course of a workshop cannot be cited for attribution outside of the workshop setting by any participants, including the third party. To support this ground rule, the typical workshop has no audience, no publicity, and no record. To ensure privacy, we have no observers in our workshops; the only way our students are able to observe the process is by being integrated into the third party and accepting the discipline of the third party. To ensure confidentiality, we do not tape workshop seminars. Tape recordings would provide a potentially rich source of data for discourse analysis and other type of research, but I have followed the principle – based on my definition of action research – that the action requirements must prevail over the research requirements. I have not, therefore, been willing to take any steps in the interest of research that might interfere with the process required by our practice.

Confidentiality and non-attribution are essential for protecting the interests of the participants. In the earlier years of our work, meetings between Israelis and Palestinians were controversial in the two communities. The very fact that they were taking part in such a meeting entailed political and, at times, legal or even physical risks for participants. Now that Israeli-Palestinian meetings have become almost routine, most (though not all) people are not concerned if their participation becomes known. Privacy and confidentiality – particularly the principle of non-attribution – remain essential, however, for protection of the process. This ground rule makes it possible for the participants to engage in the kind of interaction that problem-solving workshops require. Confidentiality gives them the freedom and safety to think, listen, talk, and play with ideas, without having to worry that they will be held accountable outside for what they say in the workshop.

Ground rules 2-4 in Table 2 spell out the nature of the interaction that the workshop process is designed to encourage and that the principle of privacy and confidentiality is designed to protect. We ask participants to focus on each other in the course of the workshop: to listen to each other, with the aim of understanding the other's perspective; and to address each other, with the aim of making their own perspective understood. Workshops are radically different, in this respect, from debates, in which participants listen only for tactical purposes, and in which they address the audience, their own constituencies, and third parties, rather than the other party, and in which they often speak for the record. This is why we avoid having an audience or a record and adhere strictly to the principle of confidentiality.

Focusing on each other enables and encourages the parties to engage in an analytic discussion. The purpose of the exchange is not to engage in the usual polemics that characterize conflict interactions. Rather, it is to gain an understanding of each other's needs, fears, concerns, priorities, and constraints. A second purpose is to develop insight into the dynamics of the conflict, particularly into the ways in which the conflict-driven interactions between the parties tend to exacerbate, escalate, and perpetuate their conflict. An analytic discussion is not intended to exclude the expression of emotions. In a genuine discussion between parties engaged in a bitter conflict, one cannot avoid the occasional expressions of anger, distrust, anxiety, disappointment, impatience, or outrage. Indeed, sharing these emotions is an important part of learning about one another's perspective. Expressions of emotions should, therefore, be used in the course of workshops as raw material for enhancing the participants' analytic understanding of the concerns of the two sides and the dynamics of the conflict.

Analytic discussion helps the parties move to a problem-solving mode of interaction, in contrast to the adversarial mode that usually characterizes conflict interactions. In line with a „no-fault” principle, the participants are asked to treat the conflict as a shared problem, requiring joint efforts to find a mutually satisfactory solution, rather than try to determine who is right and who is wrong on the basis of historical or legal argumentation. We are not asking participants to abandon their ideas about the justice of their cause, nor are we suggesting that both sides are equally right or equally wrong. We are merely proposing that a problem-solving approach is more likely to be productive than an attempt to allocate blame.

The fifth ground rule, listed in Table 2, is that in a workshop – unlike a negotiating session – there is no expectation to reach an agreement. (Our current Joint Working Group, mentioned earlier, is an exception in this respect.) Of course, we are interested in finding common ground; this is a central purpose of any conflict resolution effort. But we try to be clear that the amount of agreement achieved in the workshop discussion is not a measure of the success of the enterprise. If the participants come away with a better understanding of the other side's perspective, of their own priorities, and of the dynamics of the conflict, the workshop will have fulfilled its purpose, even if they do not produce an outline of a peace treaty.

The sixth ground rule states that, within the workshop setting, the two parties are equals. Clearly, there are important asymmetries between them in the real world – asymmetries in power, in moral position, in reputation. These play important roles in conflict and, clearly, must be taken into account in the workshop

discussions. But the two parties are equals in the workshop setting in the sense that each party has the same right to serious consideration of its needs, fears, and concerns. Within the rules of the workshop, the Israeli participants cannot dismiss the Palestinian concerns on the grounds that the Palestinians are the weaker party and are therefore in a poor bargaining position; nor can the Palestinian participants dismiss the Israeli concerns on the grounds that the Israelis are the oppressors and are, therefore, not entitled to sympathy. Each side has the right to be heard in the workshop and each side's needs and fears must be given equal attention in the search for a mutually satisfactory solution.

The final ground rule in Table 2 concerns the facilitative role of the third party, which has already been discussed. Briefly, the third party does not take part in the substantive discussion; it does not give advice or offer its own proposals, nor does it take sides, evaluate the ideas presented, or arbitrate between different interpretations of historical facts and international law. Within its facilitative role, however, it sets the ground rules and monitors adherence to them; it helps to keep the discussion moving in constructive directions, tries to stimulate movement, and intervenes as relevant with questions, observations, and even challenges.

One of the tasks of the third party is to set the agenda for the discussion. In the typical one-time workshop, the agenda is relatively open and unstructured, as far as the substantive issues under discussion are concerned. The way in which these issues are approached, however, and the order of discussion are structured so as to facilitate the kind of discourse that the ground rules seek to encourage. The workshop begins with personal introductions around the table; a review of the purposes, procedures, and ground rules of the gathering; and an opportunity for the participants to ask questions about these. We then proceed with a five-part agenda, outlined in Table 3.



TABLE 3

*Workshop Agenda*

1. Information exchange
2. Needs analysis
3. Joint thinking regarding solutions
4. Discussion of constraints
5. Joint thinking regarding overcoming constraints

The first discussion session is devoted to an exchange of information between the two sides, which serves primarily to break the ice and to set the tone for the kind of discourse that we hope to generate. Each party is asked to talk about the situation on the ground and the current mood in its own community, about the issues in the conflict as seen in that community, about the spectrum of views on the conflict and its solution, and about their own position within that spectrum. This exchange provides a shared base of information and sets a precedent for the two sides to deal with each other as mutual resources, rather than solely as combatants.

The core agenda of the workshop begins with a needs analysis, in which each side is asked to talk about its fundamental needs and fears – those fears that would have to be satisfied and those fears that would have to be allayed if a solution is to be acceptable in its society. Participants are asked to listen attentively and not to debate or argue about what the other side says, although they are invited to ask for elaboration and clarification. The purpose of this phase of the proceedings is to help each side understand the basic concerns of the other side from the other's perspective. We check the level of understanding by asking each side to summarize the other's needs, as they have heard them. Each side then has the opportunity to correct or amplify the summary that has been presented by the other side. Once the two sides have come to grasp each other's perspective and understand each other's needs as well as seems possible at this point, we move on to the next phase of the agenda: joint thinking about solutions to the conflict.

There is a clear logic to the order of the phases of this agenda. We discourage the participants from proposing solutions until they have identified the problem, which stems from the parties' unfulfilled and threatened needs. We want the participants to generate ideas for solutions that are anchored in the problem – that address the parties' felt needs. What we ask the parties to do in phase 3 of the agenda is to generate – through a process of joint thinking (or interactive problem solving) – ideas for the overall shape of a solution to the conflict, or to particular issues within the conflict, that are responsive to the fundamental needs and fears of both parties, as presented in the preceding phase of the workshop. The participants are given the difficult assignment of thinking of solutions that respond, not only to their own side's needs and fears (as they would in a bargaining situation), but simultaneously to the needs and fears of *both* sides.

Once the parties have achieved some common ground in generating ideas for solutions that would address the fundamental needs and fears of both sides, we turn to a discussion of the political and psychological constraints within their societies that stand in the way of such solutions. Discussion of constraints is an extremely important part of the learning that takes place in workshops, because parties involved in an intense conflict find it difficult to understand the constraints of the other, or even to recognize that the other – like themselves – has constraints. However, we try to discourage discussion of constraints until the parties have gone through the phase of joint thinking, because a premature focus on constraints is likely to inhibit the creative process of generating new ideas. We try to see whether the particular individuals around the table can come up with new ideas for resolving the conflict. Once they have generated such ideas, we explore the constraints that make it difficult for these new ideas to gain acceptance in their societies.

Finally, to the extent that time permits, we ask the participants to engage in another round of joint thinking, this time about ways of overcoming the constraints against integrative, win-win solutions to the conflict. In this phase of the workshop, participants try to generate ideas for steps that they personally, their organizations, or their governments can take – separately or jointly – in order to overcome the constraints that have been identified. Such ideas may focus, in particular, on steps of mutual reassurance – in the form of acknowledgments, symbolic gestures, or confidence-building measures – that would make the parties more willing and able to take the risks required for innovative solutions to the conflict.

The ground rules and agenda that I have described are designed to help achieve the dual purpose of workshops, to which I have alluded at the beginning of this

section. The first purpose is to produce change in the particular individuals who are sitting around the workshop table – to enable them to gain new insight into the conflict and acquire new ideas for resolving the conflict and overcoming the barriers to a negotiated solution. But these changes at the level of the individual participants are not ends in themselves, but vehicles for promoting change at the policy level. To this end, the second purpose of workshops is to maximize the likelihood that the new insights and ideas developed by workshop participants will be fed back into the political debate and decision-making procedures in their respective societies.

What is interesting, both theoretically and practically, is that these two purposes may be and often are contradictory to each other. The requirements for maximizing change in the workshop itself may be contrary to the requirements for maximizing the transfer of that change into the political process. The best example of these dialectics is the selection of participants. To maximize transfer into the political process, we would look for participants who are officials, as close as possible to the decision-making process and thus in a position to apply immediately what they have learned. But to maximize change, we would look for participants who are removed from the decision-making process and therefore less constrained in their interactions and freer to play with ideas and explore hypothetical possibilities. To balance these contradictory requirements, we look for participants who are not officials, but politically influential. They are thus more free to engage in the process, but at the same time, their positions within their societies are such that any new ideas that they develop can have an impact on the thinking of decision makers and the society at large.

Another example of the dialectics of workshops is the degree of cohesiveness that we try to engender in the group of participants. An adequate level of group cohesiveness is important to the effective interaction among the participants. But if the workshop group becomes too cohesive – if the Israeli and Palestinian participants form too close a coalition across the conflict lines – they may lose credibility and political effectiveness in their own communities (Kelman, 1993). To balance these two contradictory requirements, we aim for the development of working trust – of trust in the participants on the other side based not so much on interpersonal closeness, but on the conviction that they are sincerely committed, out of their own interests, to the search for a peaceful solution.

## 5 Recent Activities

The description, in the preceding section, of the typical one-time, self-contained workshop provides the broad outlines of the methodology of interactive problem solving. In our Israeli-Palestinian work during the 1990s, we have taken this methodology into several new directions. In the fall of 1990, Nadim Rouhana and I convened a continuing workshop with a group of high-level, politically influential Israelis and Palestinians, who initially agreed to meet three times over the course of the coming year (Rouhana & Kelman, 1994). The first two meetings took place in the shadow of the Gulf crisis and the Gulf war, which seriously undermined the trust between the Israelis and Palestinians that had been slowly developing during the late 1980s. Much of the work of the parties at these meetings was devoted to repairing their relationship and to persuading each other that there was still a negotiating partner for them on the other side. By the time of the third meeting, in August 1991, the parties were ready to engage in a constructive effort of joint thinking and to formulate mutually acceptable approaches to some of the difficult issues in the conflict. At the end of this meeting, the participants committed themselves to continuing the workshop.

Shortly after this third meeting, the political situation changed dramatically with the initiation of official Arab-Israeli negotiations. For the first time, our work moved from the pre-negotiation to the para-negotiation phase. One immediate consequence of the new situation was the fact that four of the six Palestinian members of the continuing workshop were appointed to the official negotiating teams. By the summer of 1992, a Labor Party government took over in Israel and several of the Israeli members of the continuing workshop became increasingly influential in the policy process within their own society. The political relevance of the continuing workshop was enhanced by these developments, since a sizable number of participants were now actively engaged in the negotiating process. The overlapping roles, however, also created some ambiguities and role conflicts. Much of the time during two plenary sessions of the continuing workshop – in the summers of 1992 and 1993 – as well as in subgroup meetings before and after the plenaries was spent in discussing the advantages and disadvantages of this overlap, as well as the general question of the functions of our group at a time when official negotiations were in progress. Along with the questions of the composition and functions of the group, the discussions focused on substantive matters, including the issues relating to the interim arrangements that the official negotiations in Washington had not been able to

resolve. Participants found these discussions useful and instructive, but there was some sentiment that the time had come to focus more systematically on specific issues and perhaps to work on joint written products.

The events that unfolded shortly after the continuing workshop meeting in the summer of 1993 reinforced this sentiment: Within days of that meeting, the breakthrough in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations achieved in the Oslo accord was announced and on September 13 the agreement was signed in Washington. On September 22, we were able to arrange a consultation in Jerusalem with a majority of the members of the continuing workshop. At this meeting and in subsequent consultations, there was general agreement that our work needed to continue because we had a special contribution to make in this new phase of the peace process, but that the structure and functions of our efforts would have to change in light of the new political situation.

Accordingly, we agreed to close the continuing workshop and to develop a new project, building on the experience of the continuing workshop, but adapting the purposes and procedures to the new political requirements. Nadim Rouhana and I proceeded to organize a Joint Working Group on Israeli-Palestinian Relations, which held its first meeting in the Spring of 1994. Some of the participants in the continuing workshop were recruited to the new group and were joined by new members, all highly influential within their respective political communities. The explicit purpose of the Working Group has been to focus on the final-status issues in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations: the difficult issues – such as the problem of Palestinian refugees and their right of return, the future of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, and the status of Jerusalem – that the Oslo accord deliberately deferred to the final phase of negotiations, designed to take place after a five-year interim period. From the beginning, the idea has been to explore these issues within the context of the desired future relationship between the two societies. In other words, we asked the participants to think of ways of resolving these final-status issues that would be consistent with the kind of future, long-term relationship that they envisioned for their two societies. This required going beyond the balance of power and search for solutions that would address the fundamental needs of both parties and, therefore, be conducive to a lasting peace, a new relationship, and ultimately reconciliation.

For the first time in our work, the Working Group was deliberately designed to create joint products, in the form of concept papers that would eventually be made public. The concept papers were not intended to be blueprints or draft agreements on a given issue, but efforts – based on needs analysis and joint thinking – to identify the nature of the problem, to offer a general approach to

dealing with it, to explore different options to resolution, and to frame the issues in a way that makes them more amenable to negotiation. Although there have been a number of papers on the final-status issues written from the perspective of one or the other of the parties, or from the perspective of a third party, the Working Group has been one of the relatively few efforts to explore the issues collaboratively and produce jointly written documents.

The Working Group has operated on the principle of confidentiality and non-attribution up to the point when the members are ready to go public with a joint paper. The understanding that there would eventually be a joint product with which the members would be publicly identified has made the Working Group different from our previous work and challenged our standard methodology. Understandably, participants are more constrained in drafting a text for public consumption than in discussions that are completely private and non-binding. The discussions under these circumstances have often taken on the character of a bargaining process, albeit within an overall context of a joint effort to generate ideas for solution that address both sets of needs and are likely to work for the long term.

Although we were aware of the challenges from the start, the work of the group has taken longer and proven more difficult than we anticipated. The group – with some changes in membership – has continued to work since the Spring of 1994. It has held over a dozen plenary meetings, as well as a number of subgroup meetings, and has produced numerous drafts of four documents. Two of these have now been published: a set of „General Principles for the Final Israeli-Palestinian Agreement“ (Joint Working Group, 1998) and a paper on „The Palestinian Refugee Problem and the Right of Return“ (Alpher & Shikaki, 1998). The third paper, on „The Future Israeli-Palestinian Relationship“ is now ready for publication. The fourth paper, on „Approaches to Resolving the Issue of Jewish Settlements in the West Bank and Gaza,“ is close to completion. Though the process of producing these papers has taken longer than we had hoped, so has the process of official negotiations. The papers will, therefore, be available as the final-status negotiations move into high gear. We hope they will be useful to policy makers and negotiators by suggesting approaches to resolution, identifying a range of options, and constructively framing the issues for negotiation.

## 6 Conclusion

I believe that our workshops and related activities over the past 30 years or so have made a modest, but not insignificant contribution to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. They have done so in three ways: They have helped to develop *cadres* of individuals prepared to carry out productive negotiations; they have provided important *substantive inputs* into the negotiations, derived from the sharing of information by the parties and the joint formulation of new ideas that eventually penetrated their political cultures; and they have fostered a *political atmosphere*, marked by the sense of possibility, that has made the parties open to a new relationship (Kelman, 1995).

Interactive problem solving can potentially make such contributions to peacemaking in the Middle East and elsewhere by providing a microprocess that can generate new insights into the conflict and new ideas for advancing negotiations and shaping mutually satisfactory solutions, and that can infuse these insights and ideas into the political debate and the decision-making process in the two communities. Interactive problem solving also contributes to the development of new approaches to conceptualizing and conducting the macroprocess of conflict resolution and international relations more generally, based on a view of conflict resolution as an attempt to transform the relationship between the conflicting parties, a shift in emphasis in political discourse from power politics to joint problem solving, and a shift in emphasis in the influence processes employed in international relations from deterrence and coercion to mutual reassurance.

## References

- Alpher, J., & Shikaki K., with the participation of the additional members of the Joint Working Group on Israeli-Palestinian Relations (1998). The Palestinian refugee problem and the right of return. *Weatherhead Center for International Affairs Working Paper No. 98-7*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University. (Reprinted in *Middle East Policy*, February 1999, 6 (3), 167-189).
- Burton, J.W. (1969). *Conflict and communication: The use of controlled communication in international relations*. London: Macmillan.
- Burton, J.W. (1979). *Deviance, terrorism and war: The process of solving unsolved social and political problems*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Burton, J.W. (1984). *Global conflict: The domestic sources of international crisis*. Brighton, England: Wheatsheaf.
- Cohen, S.P., Kelman, H.C., Miller, F.D., & Smith, B.L. (1977). Evolving intergroup techniques for conflict resolution: An Israeli-Palestinian pilot workshop. *Journal of Social Issues*, 33 (1), 165-189.
- Doob, L.W. (Ed.) (1970). *Resolving conflict in Africa: The Fermeda Workshop*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Joint Working Group on Israeli-Palestinian Relations (1998). The Palestinian refugee problem and the right of return. *PICAR Working Paper*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University. (Reprinted in *Middle East Journal*, Winter 1999, 53 (1), 170-175).
- Kelman, H.C. (Ed.) (1965). *International behavior: A social-psychological analysis*. New York: Holt.
- Kelman, H.C. (1972). The problem-solving workshop in conflict resolution. In R.L. Merritt (Ed.), *Communication in international politics* (pp. 168-204). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Kelman, H.C. (1993). Coalitions across conflict lines: The interplay of conflicts within and between the Israeli and Palestinian communities. In S. Worchel & J. Simpson (Eds.), *Conflict between people and groups* (pp. 236-258). Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
- Kelman, H.C. (1995). Contributions of an unofficial conflict resolution effort to the Israeli-Palestinian breakthrough. *Negotiation Journal*, 11, 19-27.



Kelman, H.C. (1996). Negotiation as interactive problem solving. *International Negotiation: A Journal of Theory and Practice*, 1 (1), 99-123.

Kelman, H.C. (1997). Group processes in the resolution of international conflicts: Experiences from the Israeli-Palestinian case. *American Psychologist*, 52, 212-220.

Kelman, H.C. (1998). Social-psychological contributions to peacemaking and peace building in the Middle East. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 47 (1), 5-28.

Rouhana, N.N., & Kelman, H.C. (1994). Promoting joint thinking in international conflicts: An Israeli-Palestinian continuing workshop. *Journal of Social Issues*, 50 (1), 157-178.

Walton, R.E. (1970). A problem-solving workshop on border conflicts in Eastern Africa. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 6, 453-489.