

14 Coalitions Across Conflict Lines: The Interplay of Conflicts Within and Between the Israeli and Palestinian Communities

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For some years now, my colleagues and I have been evolving an unofficial third-party approach to the resolution of intense, protracted conflicts between identity groups at the international and intercommunal levels. Within that category, I have worked extensively on the Arab-Israeli conflict, with primary emphasis on the Israeli-Palestinian component of that conflict. I have also done work over the years on the conflict between the Greek and Turkish communities in Cyprus and have followed other protracted identity conflicts around the world.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTERGROUP AND INTRAGROUP CONFLICT

A typical feature of the conflicts that we have explored is that the *intergroup* conflict tends to be exacerbated and perpetuated by *intragroup* conflicts: by internal conflicts within each of the two contending parties. Even when there is growing interest on both sides in finding a way out of the conflict, movement toward negotiations is hampered by conflicts between the "doves" and the "hawks"—or the "moderates" and "extremists"—within each community. These terms are imprecise, but I use them as shorthand to refer to the elements favoring and the elements opposing a negotiated solution on each side. The distinction between pro-negotiation and anti-negotiation elements itself must be qualified by the observation that we are not dealing entirely with fixed groups: The composition of the pro-negotiation and anti-negotiation forces in each community fluctuates and shifts over time.

Both the doves on the two sides and the hawks on the two sides have common interests. The two sets of doves share a fundamental interest in promoting negotiations, whereas the two sets of hawks share an interest in blocking negotiations. Doves and hawks differ, however, in the ease with which they can pursue their respective common interests.

The hawks require no coordination: They help each other by simply doing what comes naturally. Thus, by engaging in provocative actions or making threatening statements, the hawks on each side support the argument of their opposite numbers that the enemy is implacable, that negotiations are dangerous and bound to be fruitless, and that the only option is to be tough and uncompromising. As a result, for example, Israeli annexationists are strengthened whenever an extremist Palestinian group commits an act of terrorism; Palestinian rejectionists, in turn, are strengthened whenever Israeli settlers appropriate more land or intimidate the local population in the occupied territories. In short, the opponents of negotiation on the two sides form what can be described as an "implicit coalition."

On the other hand, the pro-negotiation elements on the two sides find it much more difficult to pursue their common interests. Because of the psychological and political constraints under which they labor, they are likely to undermine each other's efforts to promote negotiations. They are often ambiguous in their statements of readiness to negotiate, mostly out of domestic concerns—out of fear of alienating some of their compatriots, who might consider them too soft toward the enemy and too willing to abandon the national cause. Even when they advocate negotiation, they may do so in language that the other side finds offensive or threatening. Thus, for example, Israeli doves often stress the need for Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories because of the "demographic threat" to the Jewish state—the concern that annexation of the territories would eventually give Israel a Palestinian-Arab majority. Moderate Palestinians, on their part, make it clear that they are prepared to recognize Israel because its military superiority leaves them no other option—not because they concede the legitimacy of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. Statements of this kind reflect the ambivalence that even the pro-negotiation elements on the two sides often feel toward the adversary: Many favor compromise out of pragmatic considerations, rather than out of acceptance of the other's national identity and national rights. A more important reason, perhaps, for the doves' preference for pragmatic arguments is their desire to maintain credibility within their own communities. They often bend over backward to persuade their constituencies that their pro-negotiation position is based on the interests of their own group rather than sympathy for the other side.

The pro-negotiation forces on each side badly need the support and cooperation of their counterparts on the other side. But, in their choice of language and actions, they are usually more sensitive to the reactions of their

domestic constituencies than to the reactions of the other side. They tend to be preoccupied with how their words will sound, and how their actions will look, at home, and with the immediate political consequences of what they say and do. But these words and actions, chosen primarily for domestic consumption, may create resentment and reinforce distrust on the other side. Thus, in contrast to the hawks, when the doves on the two sides do what comes naturally, they work at cross-purposes: They tend to communicate to the other side less moderation and willingness to negotiate than they actually represent, and thus to undermine each other's argument that there is someone to talk to on the other side and something to talk about. If the two sets of doves are to be effective, therefore, in pursuing their common interest in promoting negotiations, their efforts need to be coordinated. Our approach to conflict resolution is in part designed to contribute to such coordination.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AS COALITION BUILDING

The unofficial third-party approach to conflict resolution that my colleagues and I have been developing and applying derives from the pioneering efforts of John Burton (1969, 1979, 1984). I have used the term *interactive problem solving* to describe the approach, which finds its fullest expression in problem-solving workshops (Kelman, 1972, 1979, 1986, 1991, 1992; Kelman & Cohen, 1986).

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

The discussions are completely private and confidential. There is no audience, no publicity, and no record, and one of the central ground rules specifies that statements made in the course of a workshop cannot be cited with attribution outside of the workshop setting. These and other features of the workshop are designed to enable and encourage workshop participants to engage in a type of communication that is usually not available to parties involved in an intense conflict relationship. The third party creates an atmosphere, establishes norms, and makes occasional interventions, all conducive to free and open discussion, in which the parties address each other, rather

than third parties or their own constituencies, and in which they listen to each other in order to understand their differing perspectives. They are encouraged to deal with the conflict analytically rather than polemically—to explore the ways in which their interaction helps to exacerbate and perpetuate the conflict, rather than to assign blame to the other side while justifying their own. This analytic discussion helps the parties penetrate each other's perspective and understand each other's concerns, needs, fears, priorities, and constraints.

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

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

The composition of the workshop is crucial in this context: Great care must be taken to select participants who, on the one hand, have the interest and capacity to engage in the kind of learning process that workshops provide and, on the other hand, have the positions and credibility within their own communities that enable them to influence the thinking of political leaders, political constituencies, or the general public. It should be noted that the third party's role, though essential to the success of problem-solving workshops, is strictly a facilitative role. The critical work of generating ideas and infusing

them into the political process must be done by the participants themselves. A basic assumption of our approach is that solutions emerging out of the interaction between the conflicting parties are most likely to be responsive to their needs and to engender their commitment.

It is probably clear from this brief description of our work that the Israelis and Palestinians that we have been recruiting for our workshops belong to the pro-negotiation elements within their respective communities. They are not necessarily committed ideological doves. Indeed, we seek out participants who are within the mainstream of their societies and as close as possible to the political center, in order to maximize their domestic credibility and their potential political impact. Their interest in a negotiated solution may be based on pragmatic considerations; they may be suspicious of the other side's motives; and they may be skeptical about the possibility that an acceptable agreement can actually be achieved. Still, they must have a genuine interest in ending the conflict by negotiating an acceptable compromise agreement. Otherwise, they would not choose to participate in a workshop whose express purpose it is to bring together representatives of the two sides, on an equal basis, in order to explore ways of overcoming the barriers to negotiation.

From the point of view of the intragroup conflict within each community, workshops can thus be conceived as attempts to strengthen the hands of the pro-negotiation elements on each side in their internal struggle. They are designed to increase the likelihood that politically active and influential Israelis and Palestinians who have an interest in promoting negotiations will support each other in their respective efforts and perhaps find ways of working together in a coordinated fashion in pursuit of their common interests.

If interactive problem solving is conceived in these terms, our workshops and related activities can, in effect, be described as attempts to build a coalition across the conflict lines: a coalition between a subset of Israelis and a subset of Palestinians who are interested in opening a path toward negotiation. A working relationship between these elements would conform to the description of coalitions as "temporary alliances among some subset of the involved parties" (Stevenson, Pearce, & Porter, 1985, 258). It is consistent with these authors' definition of a coalition as "an interacting group of individuals, deliberately constructed, independent of the formal structure, lacking its own internal formal structure, consisting of mutually perceived membership, issue oriented, focused on a goal or goals external to the coalition, and requiring concerted member action" (261). All of these criteria, as elaborated by Stevenson et al. (261–62), potentially apply to the group of Israelis and Palestinians gathered in a problem-solving workshop, or to the Israeli and Palestinian participants in a series of workshops conducted over a period of time.

BUILDING AN UNEASY COALITION

A distinctive feature of the coalition formed by problem-solving workshops—stemming from the fact that it cuts across a very basic conflict line—is that it constitutes, almost by definition, an uneasy coalition. Members may share important interests, goals, and even values. In fact, they may at times be more comfortable with each other than with the hawks on their own side. Yet they share with their own hawks—that is, with the very people against whom the coalition is directed—a very powerful community.

The community shared by the pro-negotiation elements with the anti-negotiation elements on their own side—by the doves with their own hawks—is, first of all, a community of *identity*, in which a central part of their self-definition is anchored. Personal identity is characteristically linked to national identity, and this link becomes even stronger when the national group is involved in an intense, protracted conflict relationship. Second, the community shared by the doves with their own hawks is a community of *long-term interest*, since their own fate is inevitably bound up with the fate of the entire community. The peace, stability, security, prosperity, and integrity of the national community have a significant impact on the personal well-being of all members, however they may feel about the current policies of their political leadership. Finally, the community shared by the doves with their own hawks is a *political* community, since this is the arena in which they must make their impact: If the pro-negotiation forces hope to exert influence on national policy, they must address themselves to the concerns, priorities, and sensitivities within that community.

Thus, a coalition across the conflict line will always be an uneasy coalition, because it can be seen as breaking up, or threatening to break up, the national community that is so important to the identity, the long-term interests, and the political effectiveness of each coalition partner. The relationship of the coalition members to their own national community (including the hawks on their own side) complicates the coalition work in problem-solving workshops in a number of ways:

1. It creates a concern among participants about their *self-images* as they engage in collaborative work with members of the enemy community. They need to see themselves at all times as loyal members of their own group and to avoid any moves that might make them feel like traitors. They do not want to see themselves as colluding with the enemy against their own compatriots or as somehow crossing the line to the other side. Thus, maintaining the line between self and enemy is a continuing concern in this type of coalition work.
2. The relationship to their own national community creates a concern among participants about their *credibility* at home and hence their future

political effectiveness. Though they may have no personal doubts about their loyalty to their group, they must avoid all appearances of crossing the line and colluding with the enemy. They have to be cautious at all times about statements or actions that might earn them the label *traitors*.

3. The relationship of participants to their own national community results in significant *divergences in the perspectives* of the two sets of coalition partners, since even the doves share the assumptive frameworks of their national communities. Thus, for example, Israeli doves are generally enthusiastic about the Camp David accords and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, because they have brought Israel peace at least with one of its neighbors and strengthened the Israeli peace camp. By contrast, even moderate Palestinians tend to see Camp David and its aftermath as a disaster, because it produced a bilateral Egyptian-Israeli agreement at the expense of the Palestinian cause. I was struck with this divergence at a joint appearance of an Israeli and a Palestinian who are among the most forthcoming representatives of their respective communities and among the earliest proponents of a two-state solution. Both have shown great sensitivity to the needs of the other side; both have been criticized on their own sides for excessive moderation; and both advocate the same political formula for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And yet, in their attitudes toward the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement, they shared the divergent perspectives of their respective national communities.
4. The relationship of coalition members to their own national communities burdens their interaction in problem-solving workshops, since even committed proponents of negotiation share the *memories, concerns, fears, and sensitivities of their identity group*. When these are touched off in the course of the discussions, participants may display the anger, suspicion, and intransigence that are usually associated with their more hawkish compatriots. To paraphrase the words of an Israeli participant in one of our workshops: There is a little Menachem Begin inside each Israeli and a little George Habash inside each Palestinian. Even doves harbor “little hawks” that can be aroused by the experience of threat, frustration, or humiliation.

In sum, a coalition that cuts across conflict lines is by its nature an uneasy coalition, because of the powerful bonds of coalition members to the very groups that the coalition tries to transcend. The participants' concerns about felt and perceived loyalty to their own group and the divergences in their assumptions and histories—all of which stem from their bonds to their national communities—create inevitable barriers to the formation of a coalition across conflict lines and to the development of effective ways of working together. Practitioners of interactive problem solving must give systematic

attention to these barriers and try to overcome them in order to achieve the goals of problem-solving workshops.

BARRIERS TO COALITION WORK

Some of the conditions that particularly hamper coalition work are mutual distrust, alienating language, and fluctuations in the political and psychological climate.

Mutual Distrust

In an intense, protracted conflict, such as that between the Israeli and Palestinian communities, profound mutual distrust is an endemic condition. The conflict is widely viewed, within each community, as a zero-sum conflict over national identity and national existence (Kelman, 1987). Historical memories and current experiences serve to reinforce the prevalent assumption that the enemy's ultimate goal is the liquidation of one's own group as a national community. The rhetoric and action of the parties are replete with efforts to deny the other's national identity, legitimacy, and even humanity. The doves on each side usually share their national communities' underlying fear of the enemy's ultimate intentions.

Workshop participants are generally individuals who have come to the conclusion that the enemy has changed or is ready to change out of pragmatic considerations: that the enemy now sees its original goals as unattainable and is therefore potentially amenable to a compromise solution. Such a view is based on a differentiation between the "dreams" and the "operational programs" (Kelman, 1978, 180-81)—or the "grand design" and the "policy" (Harkabi, 1988)—of the other side. But even those who have come to make this distinction and to accept the possibility and reality of change tend to remain apprehensive and cautious about the reliability of the changes and about the enemy's true intentions: Have they really abandoned their maximalist goals, or are they merely engaging in political maneuvers? Are their changes strategic or merely tactical? Will the moderate elements be able to neutralize the extremists on their own side and mobilize public support for a compromise solution? Will they revert to a policy based on their original dreams—to a policy of liquidation of our community—if the balance of power changes and new opportunities present themselves? Are we jeopardizing our own community, or at least opening ourselves up to the accusation of doing so, by giving credence to the enemy's professions of moderation and change?

In view of these concerns, workshop participants invariably engage in a process of testing each other's sincerity and authenticity. In a variety of ways, they try to establish whether the members of the other party recognize their

basic rights and needs, whether they are genuine in their commitment to a peaceful solution, and whether they represent significant tendencies within their own communities. This testing process is a necessary and important part of the workshop interaction. It is the basis for developing a *working trust* between the two sides—a trust sufficient to allow them to proceed with the coalition work of joint analysis, interactive problem solving, and planning implementation. This working trust can be established when both sides are persuaded that they have a common interest in finding a mutually satisfactory solution, that the ideas emerging out of their interactions have some political future in the two communities, and that the representatives of the other side can exert some influence on the political debate and its outcome. Most of our workshops have been successful in achieving this working trust—probably because of the selection and self-selection of participants, the atmosphere we manage to create, and the norms that govern the interaction. In the process of mutual testing, participants have generally been persuaded that their counterparts are sincere in their interest in finding a peaceful solution and that they belong to the political mainstream of their community.¹

The working trust among Israelis and Palestinians established in workshops and other coalition-building efforts remains tenuous, and the process of mutual testing is never complete. As the interaction proceeds within any given workshop, old suspicions may be rearoused when participants from the other side fail to live up to the (perhaps unrealistic) expectations that have been created earlier. They may demonstrate insensitivity to the adversary's concerns, or incomplete understanding of the other's situation and acceptance of the other's rights, or adherence to a set of assumptions markedly different from one's own. At times, they may deliberately make provocative statements in order to remind themselves and others that they have not switched sides in the conflict. Such experiences again bring up the question whether the others' commitment to peace is genuine and whether they can really be trusted, and a new series of tests of sincerity may be introduced.

In continuing workshops, in which the same group of participants gather for a series of meetings spread out over a period of time, mutual distrust may be rearoused by events that occur in the interim between meetings. Renewed suspicions may be generated by reports of the actions or pronouncements of one of the participants or a group of participants, which are perceived as reversals by participants on the other side. Furthermore, renewed distrust may be engendered by events on the ground that bring old fears to the fore and reinforce earlier assumptions about the other side's intentions. Such real-world developments that affect the general relationship between the two parties may complicate the larger process of coalition building, if we conceive of the coalition as including not only the participants in a particular workshop or series of workshops, but the entire array of pro-negotiation elements in the two communities that have been communicating

with each other over time through a range of workshops, conferences, and other forms of dialogue.

The potential effect of rearousal of old fears and suspicions on coalition work was well illustrated by recent events in the Israeli-Palestinian relationship. During the last few years, particularly since the end of 1988, a growing number of meetings had taken place between Israelis and Palestinians to discuss directly the issues in the conflict and attempt to find common ground. These meetings varied considerably; some were public and some private, and they took place in different parts of the world and in different settings. Apart from our own problem-solving workshops and similar efforts, they included a variety of conferences sponsored by political, academic, religious, and peace organizations. Not all of these meetings were well conceived and successful, but overall they contributed significantly to building a coalition across the conflict line among individuals and groups searching for a mutually satisfactory solution to the conflict. This coalition has been seriously jeopardized by the deterioration in the overall relationship between the Israeli and Palestinian communities since the spring of 1990. After the collapse of the peace initiative at that time, many factors contributed to an almost classical conflict spiral, marked by rearousal of old fears, emergence of mirror images, and escalation of hostility.

Palestinians' fears were fed, for example, by the prospects of a massive immigration of Soviet Jews to Israel and by Prime Minister Shamir's pronouncement that the large immigration required a large Israel. For Palestinians, these events brought back memories of 1948 and reinforced the fear that Israel would permanently annex whatever territory was left for a potential Palestinian state, expelling large numbers of Palestinians in the process. Israelis, in turn, took the Palestinians' hostile reaction to the Soviet immigration, accompanied by the old rhetoric about Zionist expansionism, as evidence that Palestinians still did not accept Israel's *raison d'être* as a Jewish state and had not abandoned their original project of destroying Israel. Thus, for Israelis too, old memories of Arab hostility to Jewish immigration and the fears associated with them were rearoused.

Subsequently, Israeli fears were reinforced by Palestinian support for Iraq during the Gulf crisis that began in August 1990 and during the Gulf war itself. Many Israelis, including some members of the peace camp, concluded that Palestinians were not genuinely committed to the two-state solution and that their professed readiness to enter into serious negotiations could not be trusted. Palestinians, on their part, were appalled by the reaction of Israelis—especially of their erstwhile coalition partners from the Israeli peace camp. They felt that these Israelis showed a lack of appreciation of the limited nature of Palestinian support for Iraq, a lack of understanding of the forces that accounted for this support (including popular frustration with the failure of the Palestinian peace initiative and the political constraints of the leadership), and

a lack of sympathy for Palestinian suffering (such as the economic and psychological consequences of the extended curfew during the war). They too concluded that the other side was not serious about negotiations.

The arousal of old fears, the introduction of old rhetoric, and the return to earlier levels of mutual distrust within the two communities clearly had an effect on the evolving coalition between the pro-negotiation forces on the two sides. This effect was evident in the four workshops that we conducted between November 1990 and June 1991. It became necessary to repair the collaborative relationship that had started to evolve and to renew the working trust required for coalition work. The evidence from our own workshops and from some other projects suggests that these efforts are meeting with some success. For example, in a continuing workshop, which met for the first time in November 1990, the Israeli and Palestinian participants brought to the meeting the widespread doubts within their own communities about the existence of a viable negotiating partner on the other side. But by the time the meeting was over—and not without a considerable amount of hard work—they were persuaded that such a partner was still available and that serious negotiations were possible and worth the effort. At the second meeting of the group, which was held in June 1991—with the Gulf war intervening between the two meetings—further repair work needed to be done, but the group emerged ready to engage in collaborative problem solving.

These examples illustrate the extent to which mutual distrust—historically rooted and readily reconfirmed in protracted conflict relationships—complicates coalition building and coalition work by requiring a continuing process of mutual testing and reestablishment of working trust.

Alienating Language

A second impediment to coalition work is the parties' tendency to employ words or a manner of speaking that the other side finds irritating, patronizing, insulting, threatening, or otherwise oblivious to its sensitivities. The repeated use of such language, of course, contributes to mutual distrust. One of the valuable outcomes of problem-solving workshops is to sensitize participants to the different meanings of particular words to the two sides and to make them aware of language that sends up red flags for the other. Insofar as this learning is transferred to the political process in each community, it helps in the development of a deescalatory language and thus contributes to creating a political environment more conducive to negotiation. Within the workshop proper, the development of a mutually acceptable language facilitates communication and joint problem solving.

It is not surprising that workshop participants, despite their interest in negotiating a compromise solution, tend to use language that alienates the other side. They are members of their own national communities, sharing the

assumptions, attitudes, and experiences that shape the way they speak to and about the adversary. Patronizing language, for example, derives from the nature of the power relationship between the parties; delegitimizing language is part of the rhetoric of the struggle in which the parties are engaged. Ironically, however, some of the alienating language that crops up in the communications of pro-negotiation elements on both sides, inside or outside the workshop setting, is directly linked to their very reason for adopting a pro-negotiation stance and/or their attempt to justify such a stance to themselves and others. I have already alluded to this phenomenon at the beginning of the chapter, in explaining why the pro-negotiation elements on the two sides often work at cross-purposes. Let me elaborate the point here.

Participants on both sides join the coalition primarily for their own pragmatic reasons: because they have concluded that a compromise solution is in the best interest of their own community. To be sure, there are committed doves who support, as a matter of principle, a solution that would enable the two peoples to share the land they both claim and to exercise their right to national self-determination within that land. Within the Israeli peace camp, for example, there are a number of organizations that articulate that view. But the mainstream within the peace camp—such as the Peace Now movement in Israel—bases its stance on pragmatic reasons. Even those mainstream elements, on either side, who are genuinely concerned about the rights and needs of the other, are very careful in their public statements to justify their support for a negotiated compromise in terms of self-interest. It should be recalled that we deliberately try to recruit for our workshops mainstream Israelis and Palestinians who are as close as possible to the political center. Thus, workshop participants are likely to stress pragmatic considerations in their support for negotiations.

The pragmatic focus of coalitions across conflict lines is not in itself a disadvantage. After all, it is the convergence of interests between the two conflicting parties that provides the best opportunity for resolving a protracted conflict and that makes it possible to create this kind of coalition. Yet, the heavy emphasis on self-interest introduces strains on coalition work, because some of the language that coalition members use to justify compromise to their own community may be experienced as demeaning or threatening by members of the other community.

One of the arguments frequently used by Israeli peace proponents has been the demographic danger to which I have already referred. Incorporating the occupied territories into Israel, according to this argument, would greatly increase the Palestinian-Arab population in the country, bringing it close to 40 percent immediately and—in view of the higher birthrate among Palestinians—producing an Arab majority in the not too distant future.² Under these circumstances, Israel would have to choose between extending full citizenship to the Palestinian population and thus undermining the Jewish character of the

state, or denying them citizen rights and thus undermining the democratic character of the state. This has been a strong argument when addressed to Israeli audiences, but Palestinians find it demeaning and even racist to be described as a “demographic threat.” Palestinians also tend to be resentful when Israeli doves call for an end to the occupation because it is bad for the “soul of Israel.” To their ears, this argument represents a misplaced emphasis in showing greater concern for the souls of the victimizers than for the bodies of the victims. More generally, in proposing withdrawal from the occupied territories and compromise with the Palestinians, Israelis sometimes insist that they are not taking this position out of concern for the Palestinians, but out of concern for the welfare of Israel. Thus, in trying to avoid alienating their own constituencies, they use language that alienates the Palestinians, to whom such statements convey the message that even Israeli doves are indifferent to their welfare.

Palestinian moderates, in turn, alienate their Israeli counterparts when they use language that justifies their readiness for compromise strictly on pragmatic grounds. They often make a point of explaining that they accept a two-state solution, not because they consider it just, but because they have no other choice. Thus, they are responding to Israel's power, but not acknowledging its legitimacy. Israelis are not surprised by this stance, but they still find the language threatening. For them, it carries the clear implication that if the Palestinians had sufficient power, they would not accept a Palestinian state alongside of Israel but would pursue their original goal of liquidating the Jewish state. Even if they accept the sincere commitment of their Palestinian interlocutors to a two-state solution under the present circumstances, they are concerned about what would happen if there were a change in the balance of power: Can they rely on the stability and permanence of an agreement that leaves Israel's legitimacy in doubt?

In short, the pragmatic considerations that bring the parties into the coalition—and that, indeed, represent the greatest hope for peaceful resolution of the conflict—have side effects that complicate coalition work. They cause the parties to use language—often for domestic consumption, but also reflective of their own attitudes—that the other side finds dehumanizing or delegitimizing. Such language creates obstacles to constructive interaction among workshop participants, which third-party facilitators must seek to overcome, with the active collaboration of the participants themselves.

Fluctuations in the Political and Psychological Climate

Workshop participants are, of necessity, always responsive to political developments in their own communities. They pursue and evaluate their coalition work in the context of the official activities, the public moods, and the internal debates within their respective bodies politic. They tend to be

particularly cautious at times of fluidity within their community, when the political leadership is engaged in a new diplomatic initiative or when the general public is caught up in a collective response to major new events. Under such circumstances, coalition members try to avoid actions that contradict, or appear to contradict, the strategies pursued by the leadership or the dominant mood of the public; that might undermine their own positions in the domestic political maneuvering; or that might convey the wrong message to the other side (by giving the impression, for example, of a split in the ranks of the moderate camp in their community).

Participants' sensitivity to the fluctuations in their own community's political and psychological climate has consequences for the reliability of their coalition work. Even those who are, in principle, committed to joint efforts with the other side in the search for a mutually satisfactory solution may at times be reluctant to engage in these efforts because of domestic considerations of the moment. Thus, they may prefer to stay away from a workshop or similar meeting at a particularly sensitive time. Or, if they do participate, they may be less forthcoming than they usually are.

The effect of domestic considerations of the moment on workshop proceedings was illustrated by two Israeli-Palestinian workshops that we conducted in the spring of 1987—about half a year before the onset of the *intifada*, the Palestinian uprising, in the occupied territories. The Palestinians in these workshops seemed interested in developing ideas for concrete actions or statements that both parties could support. The Israelis did not respond with an outright no to these overtures, but they repeatedly sidestepped them. As a matter of fact, even in the privacy of the workshop itself, the Israeli participants were clearly reluctant to endorse the concept of a Palestinian state or of negotiations with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). This reluctance surprised me, because I knew that at least some of the Israeli participants had been quite open to these positions in the past. And yet, the same pattern was repeated in both workshops, which took place within three weeks of each other.

In retrospect, I came to understand this pattern in terms of events on the ground during that period. Shimon Peres, leader of the Israeli Labor party and then foreign minister, was engaged in active discussions with King Hussein of Jordan, which for a while appeared to be on the verge of success. These discussions revived the so-called Jordanian option in the Israeli political debate: the attempt to resolve the conflict over the occupied territories through an agreement with the Jordanian government rather than the Palestinian leadership. As it turned out, the effort failed, and a few months later the Jordanian option became entirely irrelevant with the onset of the Palestinian *intifada*. While the Peres-Hussein explorations were in progress, however, the pro-negotiation elements in Israel—particularly those associated with the Labor party, as the majority of the participants in the two 1987 workshops

were—did not want to undermine them (or appear to be undermining them) by actively pursuing a "Palestinian option." Some were probably hoping that Peres would succeed, because they were themselves more comfortable with Jordan than with the PLO as the primary negotiating partner. Others may have been convinced that Peres's effort would ultimately fail and that Israel would have to deal with the Palestinian leadership directly, but they did not want to be accused of pursuing a line that contradicted an apparently promising and attractive initiative. Either way, the Israeli participants were reluctant to push their coalition work with Palestinians forward at that time, although they were anxious to maintain the relationship with their Palestinian counterparts.

In a workshop that took place in the spring of 1988, several months after the onset of the *intifada*, the pattern was reversed. This time, the Israelis called for concerted efforts and asked the Palestinians to help them persuade the Israeli public that the Palestinian commitment to the two-state option as a permanent arrangement was genuine and that a solution to the conflict consistent with Israeli security concerns was possible. But the Palestinians were reluctant to engage in active coalition work with Israelis at that point. They were reacting to the mood of the Palestinian public during that phase of the *intifada*—a mood of defiance, coupled with anger at the Israeli authorities for their violent repression of the uprising and at the Israeli people for condoning the repression. Under the circumstances, the Palestinian participants were not inclined to cooperate with their Israeli partners, particularly since they felt that the Israeli peace camp had not been sufficiently responsive to the plight of the Palestinians in the occupied territories. They felt that it was not appropriate for Israelis to ask them for help at a time when Israelis should be helping Palestinians. Interestingly, as the workshop proceeded, and after Israeli participants acknowledged the injustice that had been done to Palestinians, the two teams did engage in joint thinking about how they could help each other promote their common interests.

In the spring of 1989, fluctuations in the climate produced another reversal of sorts. By that time, Palestinians were quite interested in working with Israelis in order to reassure them about the sincerity of Palestinian peace initiatives. On the Israeli side, however, we found some reluctance, probably related to the fact that the Israeli unity (Likud-Labor) government of that time was pursuing its own initiative: an election proposal known as the "Rabin-Shamir plan." I invited several members of the Knesset (the Israeli Parliament), representing the Labor party, to a semi-public symposium that included two PLO representatives. Though they expressed great interest, they decided—apparently as a group—to decline the invitation, because they did not want to appear to be pursuing an alternative channel to the election proposal that had been initiated by Yitzhak Rabin, the defense minister and a top leader of their own party.³ In a workshop that took place a few weeks earlier, some Israeli participants, mostly academics, expressed the view that the Rabin-Shamir

election proposal was the maximum that the Israeli political system could produce at that time, and that a Palestinian initiative was needed before there could be any further movement on the Israeli side. Thus, they expressed a sense of futility regarding their own potential contribution. In effect, they were saying that there was nothing for them to do at that time to promote the coalition effort.

In sum, as these examples illustrate, the coalitions that we try to build across conflict lines are very much subject to fluctuations in the political climate and the general mood in each community. These may hamper the effective functioning of the coalition and may create a lack of synchronism in the readiness for coalition work between the two sides. This is part of the reality of this kind of coalition work, with which the third-party facilitators must be prepared to contend.

WHY THE COALITION MUST REMAIN UNEASY

Barriers to the formation and effective functioning of a coalition across conflict lines, such as mutual distrust, alienating language, and fluctuations in the political and psychological climate, directly reflect the dynamics of the larger conflict. Insofar as coalition members are bona fide representatives of their national groups—as they must be if the coalition is to achieve its goal of promoting negotiations—these barriers will inevitably restrain the work of the coalition, and it is part of the task of third-party facilitators to help overcome them.

But the barriers confronting the work of coalitions across conflict lines raise an additional complication: Not only is it difficult to overcome these barriers so that coalition work can proceed, but it may in fact be counterproductive to overcome them entirely. It may be important for the coalition to remain uneasy in order to enhance the value of what participants learn during workshops themselves and of what they can achieve upon reentry into their home communities.

Workshop Learning

Experimental research by Myron Rothbart and associates (Rothbart & John, 1985; Rothbart & Lewis, 1988) suggests that direct contact between members of conflicting groups may have a paradoxical effect on intergroup stereotypes. If it becomes apparent, in the course of direct interaction with representatives of the other group, that they do not fit one's stereotype of the group, there is a tendency to differentiate these particular individuals from their group: to perceive them as nonmembers. Since they are excluded from the category, the stereotype about the category itself can remain intact.

This process of differentiating and excluding individual members of the other group from their category could well take place in workshops in which a high degree of trust develops between the parties. Such an outcome would clearly be counterproductive, since it would forestall learning about the possibilities for negotiation and peace with the other *group*, which is of course what ultimately matters. To be persuaded that one could make peace with the particular individuals participating in the workshop would be irrelevant unless these particular individuals were seen as representative of their group or of some significant segment of the group. Thus, it is important in workshops to avoid the tendency to categorize members of the enemy camp who show a readiness for peace as not really part of their group, and thus to maintain the image of the enemy as implacable. Fortunately, the workshop setting and process are well suited to recognizing, analyzing, and counteracting such tendencies. The parties themselves are alert, within the workshop setting, to the general issue of how well participants reflect their larger communities; and the third party is always ready to call attention to the relationship between what is said or done in the workshop and what is happening outside.

An Israeli-Palestinian workshop that we conducted several years ago provides a good illustration of the way in which the tendency to recategorize individuals who contradict the stereotyped image of their group may manifest itself in the workshop setting, as well as the way in which it can be counteracted. In this workshop, as in virtually all others, participants engaged in a process of testing each other's sincerity. On this occasion, they all passed the test: The participants were convinced that their counterparts on the other side were genuinely committed to a peaceful solution and that their intentions could be trusted. This trust, however, did not extend beyond the particular individuals in the room, since the Israelis tended to see the Palestinian participants as non-PLO and the Palestinians tended to see the Israeli participants as non-Zionist. As the workshop proceeded, they began to make some important discoveries about each other. The Palestinians insisted on making it very clear that they identified closely with the PLO. The Israelis, at a later point, made it very clear that they were dedicated Zionists. Thus, the Israelis had to confront the fact that the Palestinians whom they had come to trust, at least to the extent of accepting the sincerity of their commitment to peace, were PLO loyalists; and the Palestinians had to confront the fact that the Israelis whom they had come to trust were loyal Zionists.

These discoveries made it necessary for the participants to revise their image of the PLO and the Zionist movement, respectively—changing it from the view of a movement whose only purpose is to destroy one's own group to that of a movement that has some positive goals as well and with whom it may be possible, therefore, to negotiate a mutually satisfactory solution. This is an extremely important learning experience, because it opens up the possibility of peace with one's enemies as they are—peace between nationalist, PLO-

affiliated, Palestinians and Zionist Israelis—without assuming that peace becomes possible only if these enemies undergo conversion and abandon their national ideology (Kelman, 1987). It is part of the task of the third party to help make this connection, as we did in our interventions during the workshop cited here.

If this learning is to occur, it is essential for the parties to reconfirm their belongingness to their national categories; to make it clear that they are not just exceptions, but part of the mainstream of their respective communities. Rothbart and John (1985) make this point when they stress that intergroup contact is most likely to lead to attitude change if the in-group/out-group distinction remains salient, so that the disconfirming information becomes associated with the group label (pp. 101–2). This brings me back to the argument that it would be counterproductive, in coalitions across intense conflict lines, to overcome the barriers to coalition work entirely—that it is important for the coalition to remain uneasy. If the coalition became so tight and comfortable that it overshadowed the conflicting communities to which the coalition members belong, workshops would actually become less capable of achieving one of their important goals: to demonstrate the possibility of peace between the two enemy camps.

The Reentry Problem

A second and major reason why coalitions across conflict lines must remain uneasy relates to what is often called the “reentry problem” (see, for example, Kelman, 1972, and Walton, 1970). If workshops are to achieve their larger purpose, participants must be able to feed the ideas and insights they develop in the course of workshops into the political debate and the decision-making process in their home communities. Their ability to do so depends on how they are perceived when they return home. If the coalition becomes so cohesive and comfortable that the participants forget the line that divides them, their effectiveness upon reentry is likely to be diminished.

In the short run, the coalition must remain uneasy if coalition members are to maintain their credibility and hence their political effectiveness within their own groups. If they become excessively involved and identified with the coalition, they may experience a severe reentry problem, feeling alienated from and rejected by their own community. Under such circumstances, they would be hampered in the successful performance of the role of change agent within that community. Thus, part of the dialectics of the interactive problem-solving process (cf. Kelman, 1979; Kelman & Cohen, 1986) derives from the competing requirements of, on the one hand, facilitating the development of a productive coalition across conflict lines but, on the other hand, in doing so, not encouraging a coalition so tight and cohesive that members’ political effectiveness at home is compromised.

In the long run, the coalition across conflict lines must remain uneasy because a stable peace and coexistence between the conflicting national groups require a *national consensus within each group* in favor of the new relationship. It is not enough, therefore, for the pro-negotiation forces to prevail over the anti-negotiation forces in their own community. They have to do so in a way that promotes the formation of a new consensus within each nation. The coalition between subsets of the two parties must therefore be viewed as a strictly temporary phenomenon. Its ultimate success depends on its ability to create a situation in which each party *as a whole* can enter into a peaceful, cooperative relationship with its former enemy. To this end, it is important that the coalition members do not become so strongly bonded to each other that they jeopardize their relationship with their own national communities.

In sum, a coalition across international conflict lines is one in which it is neither possible nor desirable to promote maximal cohesiveness. Such coalitions confront the paradox of having to work at maintaining the bonds that tie members to the very groups within their own societies that the coalition is designed to oppose.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I want to describe briefly the current direction of my work, which reflects the concept of building a coalition across conflict lines and also illustrates some of the complexities in building such a coalition.

Until recently, the workshops and related opportunities for interaction across conflict lines that my colleagues and I have organized over the years were all self-contained events. This is not to say that there has been a lack of continuity in these earlier efforts. A number of individuals have participated in two or more of our workshops. “Alumni” of the workshops also continue to be involved in a variety of other efforts at Israeli-Palestinian communication and collaboration, in which they draw on their earlier interactions. Moreover, our workshops have had a cumulative effect in that they have contributed to the development of a cadre of individuals within the Israeli and Palestinian intellectual and political elites who have had direct experience in communicating with their counterparts on the other side—an experience that has been mostly positive and always instructive. Through these experiences, certain new insights, sensitivities, ideas for conflict resolution, and significant items of information (including a more differentiated knowledge about the relevant actors on the other side) have entered into the political debate and have helped to create a political environment more conducive to negotiation. In all of these ways it can be said that workshop participants have been part of a loose coalition of pro-negotiation elements on the two sides that has had some

impact on the political process. Because of logistical and financial constraints, however, I had never attempted to organize a "continuing workshop," in which the same group of participants would meet regularly over an extended period of time. Moreover, the political situation had not been entirely congenial to systematic longer-term efforts.

With the onset of the *intifada*, the dramatic changes in the official positions of the Palestinian movement, and the proliferation of Israeli-Palestinian meetings, I decided that it had become both possible and urgently necessary to organize such a continuing workshop. There are several unique contributions that a continuing workshop can make to the larger political process, compared to the contributions of the one-time events that we organized in the past or to most of the Israeli-Palestinian conferences organized by a variety of third parties around the world in recent years. These contributions can best be conceived as elements of a systematic process of coalition building.

1. A continuing workshop represents a *sustained* effort to address concrete issues, making it possible to push the process of conflict analysis and interactive problem solving farther and to apply it more systematically than in previous workshops.
2. The longer time period and the continuing nature of the project make it possible to go beyond the sharing of perspectives—which is in itself a significant achievement of our previous workshops—to the *joint production of creative ideas*.
3. The periodic reconvening of a continuing workshop allows for an iterative and cumulative process, based on *feedback and correction*. The participants have an opportunity to take the ideas developed in the course of a workshop back to their own communities, to gather reactions, and to return to the next meeting with proposals for strengthening, expanding, or modifying the original ideas. It is also possible for participants, within or across parties, to meet or otherwise communicate with each other between workshop sessions in order to work out some of the ideas more fully and bring the results of their efforts back to the next session.
4. Finally, a continuing workshop provides far better opportunities than a singular event to address systematically the question of *how to disseminate ideas and proposals* developed at the workshop most effectively and appropriately.

Thus, as we move toward the development of continuing workshops, our efforts manifest the process of coalition building and coalition work in more explicit and concrete ways. In doing so, we are maximizing the potential contribution of interactive problem solving to conflict resolution and providing a better test of the utility of this approach. As it happens, our first

continuing workshop has been convened at a time of serious deterioration in the Israeli-Palestinian relationship, as described toward the end of the section on mutual distrust. We may also have an opportunity, therefore, to make a significant contribution to defusing the dangerously critical situation presented by the current state of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As I began, in the winter of 1989-90, to formulate my proposal for a continuing workshop, I received some instructive reminders of the complexities of forming a coalition across conflict lines. In my initial statement of the idea, I ran afoul of my own admonitions about the need to preserve the uneasy character of the coalition. In my own enthusiasm, I described the continuing workshop as a joint Israeli-Palestinian working group and emphasized the generation of joint products in the form of written documents to be published over the names of both the Israeli and Palestinian participants. When I discussed the idea with several knowledgeable and politically sophisticated Palestinians, they expressed some reservations that I should have anticipated on the basis of my own analysis. They felt that the proposed "joint working group" sounded too much like a separate entity transcending the two conflicting parties; to participate in such a venture might alienate Palestinians from their own community and undermine their credibility. They were also concerned that written products might create an appearance of prenegotiation documents, setting out the parties' starting positions; such documents, they felt, should be produced by the parties themselves rather than by a joint group whose members, in any event, have not been authorized to negotiate. They did not question the value of *joint thinking* by both sides, which could transform the development of each side's negotiating positions; what they wanted to avoid was any action that might appear to be preempting their political leadership.

My guess is that Israelis would have expressed similar reservations about my original formulation of the continuing workshop. They might have differed in their emphasis, since they are in a different political situation than the Palestinians. However, they would also have been concerned about alienating themselves from their own community, and undermining their credibility and political effectiveness, by in effect joining with the enemy to make proposals to their own leadership. As it turned out, I did not test the Israeli reaction, because I immediately recognized the validity of the reservations expressed by the Palestinians. I realized that I was trying to push the coalition process too far and too fast for the comfort of the two parties, particularly since I was hoping to recruit participants close to the center of the political spectrum in each community. I therefore revised my proposal along two lines: I described the continuing workshop not so much as a joint working group, but as a forum for joint thinking and exploration of ideas, provided by the third party; and I deemphasized the development of joint written products—not ruling them out, but making it clear that there was no expectation that such

products would emerge at all and, if they did, it would be only by unanimous agreement of all participants and only within the limits and at the pace that they agreed upon.

Our efforts to organize a continuing workshop, after reformulating the proposal along these more modest lines, finally bore fruit.⁴ My colleague, Nadim Rouhana of Boston College, has collaborated closely with me in organizing and conducting the workshop. Two highly experienced practitioners of conflict resolution, Harold Saunders of the Kettering Foundation and C. R. Mitchell of George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, have joined us as members of the third-party panel. We succeeded in recruiting six Israeli and six Palestinian participants—four men and two women on each side—who committed themselves to a series of three workshop meetings during the year of 1990-91. The participants are high-ranking and respected individuals in their respective societies, whose activities and positions enable them to influence public discourse and political decisions by passing on the insights and ideas gained in the workshop to political leaders and the public at large. They represent significant segments of each society and its political spectrum. All, however, are within the mainstream and fairly close to the political center of their respective communities.

Despite the deterioration of the situation in the Middle East and of the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians, and despite some serious obstacles that arose in the last minute, the first meeting of the workshop convened in November 1990. The second meeting was held in June 1991, after the deepening of the crisis in Israeli-Palestinian relations as a result of the Gulf war. The third meeting is about to take place, as of the time of this writing (August 1991). At this meeting, the group will decide how to disseminate the ideas generated over the course of this continuing workshop, and whether and how it wishes to continue its collaborative work.

As our work moves in the direction of continuing workshops, the metaphor of a coalition across conflict lines becomes increasingly appropriate. It serves as a useful conceptual handle for describing our program, for sharpening the goals of our efforts, and for making decisions about recruitment of participants and about workshop structure and process. Analysis of the special character of this kind of coalition—as one that is inevitably, and must remain, an uneasy coalition—helps to identify and deal with problems in coalition building and obstacles to the coalition work itself. The concept of coalition across conflict lines and the model of the continuing workshop demonstrate, in my view, the potentially fruitful interaction between social-psychological analysis and intervention practice.

NOTES

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1. Participants are not always persuaded, however, that their counterparts on the other side represent the majority of their community or a powerful bloc within that community with the capacity to "deliver" on a compromise solution. In fact, the parties tend to differ in their claims of representativeness. Palestinian participants, in recent years, have presented themselves as part of the majority of their community. Israelis, on the other hand, have described themselves as representing a minority or at most half of the population, although many have argued that under the right circumstances their views could potentially become the majority position. These self-presentations conform with the available evidence. Readiness for a compromise in the form of a two-state solution has become the mainstream position among Palestinians, both inside the occupied territories and in the diaspora. The Israeli mainstream, however, is divided over the issue of territorial compromise and Palestinian self-determination.

2. With the prospect of a large-scale immigration of Soviet Jews to Israel, this argument has lost some of its force. If the Jewish population increased through immigration, as anticipated, the initial proportion of Arabs resulting from annexation of the occupied territories would be lower (perhaps one-third of the total population), and it would take longer for Arabs to become a majority in the country. The basic outlines of the issue, however, would remain unchanged.

3. Other Israeli political figures did participate, however, including one non-Labor member of the Knesset and two leading Labor party figures (members of the party's central committee) who were not in the Knesset. The symposium itself, and follow-ups to it, were quite constructive.

4. I am very grateful to the Nathan Cummings Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the Rockefeller Family and Associates for funding the three meetings of the continuing workshop in 1990-91, as well as the necessary preparatory and follow-up work. I am also grateful to the Rockefeller Foundation for providing us the splendid facilities of its Bellagio Study and Conference Center for the third meeting of the workshop, in August 1991.