This study offers a conceptual framework for the analysis of concrete conflicts and also the violence that can result from conflicts. A conflict situation is the background setting in a particular time and place in which the important parties, issues, and possible outcomes are embedded. A party is an individual, entity, organization, or agency of some sort that has a distinct set of preferences relating to the possible outcomes of a situation. Preferences are indications of the choices a party would make among the possible outcomes of a situation. Parties generally have some capacities, which are resources or powers they can use to assure that their preferences are fulfilled. Conflict is an incompatibility of preferences in a situation with several different possible outcomes. There are two basic kinds of conflict: dilemmas, or internal conflicts, are cases in which one party has difficulty making a choice; and disputes, or social conflicts, occur where there are two (or more) parties, and their preferences are incompatible. Thus the basic architecture of social conflicts is made up of a few basic elements: in a situation there are different parties with certain capacities to pursue their preferences with regard to a variety of issues, and their preferences are incompatible. Violence means doing harm to others in the pursuit of one's own preferences. Peace is the absence of violence, negative peace is the absence of physical violence, and positive peace is the absence of all kinds of violence—physical, economic, political, and cultural. It can be useful for conflicting parties to analyze their conflict themselves. With systematic conflict analysis through interactive procedures, the representation of the conflict is not introduced by outsiders but is built up, step by step, by the conflicting parties. Repeated reconstruction of conflict descriptions carried out jointly by the parties can be an important tool of conflict resolution.
and explanation do not have sharp boundaries distinguishing them; together they constitute *analysis*.

There are many different kinds of techniques for responding to conflict, such as mediation, negotiation, conciliation, arbitration, and so on, and a well-developed literature exists on these approaches. This study does not review all those techniques but focuses instead on the contribution that might be made by systematic analysis of conflict situations, regardless of who it is that carries out that analysis. It is assumed that the purpose of analysis is to help decide what should be done in concrete conflict situations. This study examines the sort of analysis that usefully precedes the formulation of remedies; it does not get into the formulation of remedies as such.

## DESCRIBING CONFLICT

### DEFINITIONS

How can specific conflicts be described in a systematic and orderly way? The core definitions are as follows.

Every conflict occurs in a particular empirical situation, context, or setting. The *situation* is that which *constitutes the background setting in a particular time and place in which the critically important parties, issues, and possible outcomes are embedded*. The range of possible outcomes in a situation, the options, may be expanded and improved through good conflict management work. The situation description, however, generally refers to the initial “given” situation, before any work is done to restructure it.

In describing even the most difficult conflicts, there will be a great deal on which all observers agree. The basic parameters of time, place, parties, and so forth are recognized in much the same way by all observers. For example, the fact of overfishing in the Gulf of Thailand and the history leading up to it, its overall general description, are essentially the same for all observers. Of course, different observers will see things somewhat differently and emphasize different aspects of a situation, but the basics are generally
the same for all. A good description of a conflict situation is one that would be accepted by all parties to the conflict.

What is problematic about the situation, however, differs from different points of view. Overfishing in the Gulf of Thailand is problematic in different ways for Thai fishers, for the government of Thailand, and for fishers of other countries. Finer distinctions can be made as well: the problems are different among different kinds of fishers, among different agencies of government, and among different private organizations. Opportunities, like problems, also are different from different perspectives.

A party is an individual, entity, organization, or agency of some sort that has (or can be understood as having) a distinct set of preferences relating to the possible outcomes of a situation. Nonhuman entities—nations, endangered species, trees, ships, Gaia—may sometimes be considered parties.¹ In Hawaii, the volcano goddess Pele is sometimes described as a party to the conflict over geothermal development on the Big Island.

Some parties might be silent. If parties cannot speak for themselves, they can have advocates or surrogates who claim to know the parties’ preferences and speak in their behalf. Thus the Audubon Society will speak in behalf of the spotted owl, or an appointed lawyer might speak in behalf of a child in a legal proceeding. Of course, there is always the possibility that such spokespersons’ statements might be colored by their own preferences as well.

Advocates or surrogates should be distinguished from a party’s agents. An agent is someone who receives a mandate from and acts directly in behalf of the principal party. He/she/it is an instrument and extension of that party. For example, a front-line soldier might be an agent for a national government. Questions often arise regarding the extent to which the agent carries responsibility for decisions made by the principal party.²

The parties’ interests are statements of their concerns in the situation. Several different kinds of interests might be important. For example, some Thai fishers are concerned with conservation of stocks for future production, whereas others are more interested in short-term production. There also is a problem of minimizing
violence between Thai and foreign fishers. Environmentalists express concern about the ecological health of the gulf.

Preferences are indications of the choices a party would make among the possible outcomes of a situation. Each party cares about the possible arrangement of things (such as the location of a border between nations or what there is to be for lunch) and would rather have some arrangements over others. Generally, each party could say which of the possible outcomes of a situation he/she/it would choose to be the case, which would be second most desirable, which third, and so on. Where the party has imperfect knowledge or understanding of a situation, or where there are dilemmas, preferences might not be clear, and the party might need to do some research, reflection, or other work to clarify preferences. So long as possible outcomes and preferences among them are not yet clearly identified, it may be more sensible to speak of the party’s interests in the issues. Preferences are concrete expressions of interests. Preferences might derive from wants, needs, goals, objectives, interests, ideologies, positions, or other sorts of values. There might be many different kinds of reasons why a party has particular preferences. But once the analyst knows what the parties’ preferences are, it might not be important to know where they came from.

Parties generally have some capacities, which are resources or powers they can use to assure that their preferences are fulfilled.

Conflict is an incompatibility of preferences in a situation with several different possible outcomes.

There are two basic kinds of conflict: dilemmas and disputes. A dilemma is a case in which one party has difficulty making a choice. A child asked to choose between a vanilla and a chocolate ice cream cone might face a dilemma. A Ministry of Development might be uncertain as to whether a given piece of shoreline should be used for fisheries or tourism. The difficulty in choosing might be because clear preferences have not yet been formed or because there are different, incompatible preferences contending with one another. A dispute occurs where there are two (or more) parties, and their preferences are incompatible. This might be the case if there are two children and only one ice cream cone. In other words, a dilemma is an internal conflict within a single party, whereas a
dispute is a conflict between different parties. In people, dilemmas are psychological conflicts and disputes are social conflicts.

What is seen as a dilemma when analyzed from one perspective might be a dispute when viewed from another angle. A nation might have difficulty deciding whether to drop its tariffs on, say, imported textiles. But when viewed from within the nation, that difficulty might be seen to arise from the conflict between quite distinct parties, each of which knows its own preferences very well. The major parties might be those who benefit from the tariff, such as domestic textile makers, and those who would benefit from its being dropped, such as clothing manufacturers. The uncertainty occurs when the government tries to aggregate the clear but incompatible interests of the separate parties.

The idea that disputes are based on distinct parties facing each other with incompatible preferences, like all abstractions, simplifies the matter. That can be very useful. But analyzing the Hawaiian homelands issue, for example, by saying that the major parties are the native Hawaiians, the federal government, and the state government is not very useful. It oversimplifies the matter. More careful differentiations are needed, identifying particular government agencies, distinguishing among diverse groups of Hawaiians, and also taking account of other nongovernmental groups or classes (e.g., non-Hawaiian homeowners) with an interest in the issue. In the real world, some parties are composed of other smaller parties, some overlap one another, and some have ill-defined boundaries. The analyst is required not to make every feasible distinction but to make those distinctions that matter, those that are useful for the purposes of the current analysis.

Often, a critical factor impeding resolution of a conflict is the conflict among factions within each major party. The Middle East conflict, for example, has been enormously difficult largely because of the divisions within the Israeli side and within the Palestinian/Arab side. Analysis thus requires understanding of the conflicts within as well as the conflicts between.

Hereafter, the term conflict will be understood as equivalent to dispute. The orientation here is more to social and political questions than to psychological questions.
An issue is a topic that a conflict is about. There can be ice cream issues, boundary issues, money issues, and many other kinds of substantive topics or themes of conflicts. A simple conflict has only one issue, one dimension. When Art proposes to buy Bob’s car, there is only one major issue: price. But in a labor-management negotiation there might be many different issues: wages, health benefits, grievance procedures, and so on. There are a number of different possible outcomes on each issue, designated as possible issue outcomes.

A conflict outcome consists of any distinct set of possible issue outcomes. Each possible conflict outcome corresponds to one of the many possible final contracts that can be imagined. If there are two issues, one of which has four possible outcomes and the other of which has three possible outcomes, there will be twelve possible conflict outcomes, twelve possible contracts—unless some new possibilities are generated. In any realistic complex conflict, the number of technically possible conflict outcomes will be enormously large. In practice, however, there will be a much smaller number of serious candidates for the final conflict outcome.

Violence is sometimes viewed as a rapid application of physical energy that disrupts established patterns and structures. Your fist applied rapidly to my nose would be violent. By this definition, the eruption of a volcano or a storm that rips up a meadow also could be described as violent. Falling down the stairs would be a violent event. For my purposes, however, it will be more useful to define violence as doing harm to others in the pursuit of one’s own preferences.

My focus is on social violence as distinguished from the violence that can occur in nature even in the absence of human agents. Also, given my emphasis on disputes rather than dilemmas, I am not dealing with self-inflicted violence. My concern hereafter is with social violence that is rooted in social conflict. All social violence has conflict underlying it. But often there is conflict with no visible manifestation of violence resulting from it. That is, conflict can, but does not necessarily, result in violence.

Peace is the absence of violence. Although peace in the absolute sense might not be achievable, peace can be viewed as a meaningful
objective: working toward peace means working for the reduction of violence. *Negative peace is the absence of physical violence. Positive peace is the absence of all kinds of violence—physical, economic, political, and cultural* (see the section on Structural Violence below).

Peace is defined here as the absence of violence, not as the absence of conflict. (R. J. Rummel suggests that the absence of conflict might be labeled harmony.) Well-managed conflict can be socially constructive.⁵

Some peace researchers say that positive peace requires not only the absence of all kinds of violence but also the presence of justice, and justice requires the positive presence of something. What that is might be specified in terms of Rawls’s or some other social philosopher’s definition of justice, but peace researchers generally are not clear on what that something should be.⁶

*Security means freedom from fear of violence.* It is important to recognize that different people in different segments of society have different insecurities. National security policies generally focus on the insecurities of national leaders.

To summarize, the basic architecture of conflicts is made up of a few basic elements: in a *situation* there are different *parties* with certain *capacities* to pursue their *preferences* with regard to a variety of *issues*, and their preferences are incompatible.

**VARIETIES OF RELATIONSHIPS**

Whereas a *conflict relationship* is one in which the parties have incompatible preferences, a *cooperative relationship* is one in which the parties can obtain more highly preferred outcomes if they act together. Examples would include marriages, investor-entrepreneur linkages, and employer-employee relationships. In a cooperative situation, the interests of the parties are not only compatible but also complementary in the sense that there is some benefit to be obtained from working together. Cooperation requires complementarity, not similarity, in the interests of the parties. An economic community, for example, is not likely to work if all member nations are interested in producing and exporting the same sort of products.
Many relationships involve a mixture of conflict and cooperation. For example, both employers and employees generally benefit from working together, but there are tensions between them regarding the distribution of benefits between them. Virtually all bargaining relationships have both conflict and cooperative elements in them: both parties benefit if they come to an agreement, but there is a struggle over the question of what specific agreement should be obtained.

Sometimes, a relationship between parties is marked by neither conflict nor cooperation. They then coexist in complete indifference to one another. That is, they might have interests that are wholly compatible, with nothing to be gained through active cooperation and no reason to quarrel.

In some cases the relationship between two parties is one of dominance or exploitation. In such relationships, there may be every appearance of cooperation, but one party draws far more benefit from the interrelationship than the other.

There is also the possibility of collusion, in which two parties cooperate but draw their advantages at the expense of a third party. For example, when a fisherman stops selling his catch to the local village and instead sells it to a foreign buyer he is cooperating with the foreign buyer, but in the process is depriving the local village of its traditional supply. Collusion is not visible if one considers only two parties at a time.

My concern in this study is the analysis and management of conflict. It would also be possible to explore the bases of cooperation. What are the conditions that allow entrepreneurs to work together? How could organizations concerned with, say, the preservation of endangered species join forces? What does it take to get the nations of the world to collaborate? How might third parties “mediate cooperation,” facilitating joint efforts among previously unconnected parties? Knowledge of the conditions for cooperation is quite thin. Indeed, the questions have hardly been asked.

VARIETIES OF CONFLICT

There are many different kinds and thus many different ways of categorizing conflicts. Conflicts might be distinguished according
to the number of parties involved. Of course, in highly complex situations (the Middle East, for example), the question is not how many parties "are" involved but how many does the analyst want to distinguish for his or her particular purposes?

Conflicts might also be distinguished according to the types of parties involved: interpersonal, international, ethnic, and so forth. Some conflicts are between parties of different types. For example, human rights issues generally refer to conflicts between the individual and the state, or more precisely, between individuals and the governing elite.

Conflicts can also be sorted out according to the types of issues involved: land, environment, money, and so on. They might be distinguished as either direct or structural. Direct conflict is "eye-ball to eye-ball," whereas structural conflict is indirect, working through the social system. Conflicts also can be categorized by the nature of the violence associated with them.

**VARIETIES OF VIOLENCE**

Violence, harming others in the pursuit of one's own interests, can take different forms and can be categorized in different ways. For example, acts of violence might be distinguished according to the types of perpetrators and victims (e.g., child abuse, racism, international violence). People can hurt others by using many different kinds of capacities (means, powers, forces, instruments). Broadly, violence refers to insults to basic human interests in survival, sustenance and well-being, freedom, and a sense of meaning. Thus there are four basic kinds of violence:

1. There is the direct *physical* violence that injures and kills people, as in wars, torture, and certain kinds of crimes. Physical violence involves direct injury to the human body.

2. There is *economic* violence of the sort that leads to deprivation, malnutrition, and disease (as in exploitation). Economic violence is based on the use of material incentives, usually money, but sometimes other sorts of goods, such as food.

3. There is the *political* violence that violates by repression, depriving people of their freedom and their human rights in general. Thus political violence is based on deprivation of nonmaterial goods.
4. There is the cultural violence of alienation that reduces the meaning, value, and quality of life. Cultural violence refers to manipulation of the meaning framework within which individuals and communities live. For example, a prevailing view that certain classes of people are less worthy and thus deserve less pay and other amenities would be a manifestation of cultural violence.

Using these four categories enables one to speak of work toward secure peace, economic peace, political peace, and cultural peace. Violence is described here as physical, economic, political, and cultural in reference to the means used, rather than to the perpetrator’s ends or objectives. Thus warfare is described as physical because it is based on inflicting physical injury to the human body. Although its means are physical, warfare can be used to pursue economic, political, and cultural ends.

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

We can say that physical violence is direct violence, whereas economic, political, and cultural violence are forms of structural or indirect violence. Structural violence is harm imposed by some people on others indirectly, through the social system, as they pursue their own preferences. For example, if many rich people begin moving into a community, they might drive up housing costs, harming some of the people who had already lived there. A guerrilla in El Salvador explained the concept to an American volunteer physician this way:

You gringos are always worried about violence done with machine guns and machetes. But there is another kind of violence that you must be aware of, too.

I used to work on the hacienda... My job was to take care of the dueño’s dogs. I gave them meat and bowls of milk, food that I couldn’t give my own family. When the dogs were sick, I took them to the veterinarian in Suchitot or San Salvador. When my children were sick, the dueño gave me his sympathy, but not medicine, as they died.

To watch your children die of sickness and hunger while you can do nothing is a violence to the spirit. We have suffered that silently for too many years. Why aren’t you gringos concerned about that kind of violence?
The violence here is not simply that in the relationship between the speaker and his dueño. It is also in the larger social context in which the speaker has so few alternatives that he must submit to whatever treatment the dueño offers.

Structural violence is accomplished by political repression, through which people with power gain benefits for themselves at the expense of others who have less political power. The existence of political repression and the resulting structural violence is what distinguishes negative peace from positive peace. Martin Luther King, Jr. was clear about the difference:

"Sir," I said, "you have never had real peace in Montgomery. You have had a sort of negative peace in which the Negro too often accepted his state of subordination. But that is not true peace. True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice. The tension we see in Montgomery today is the necessary tension that comes when the oppressed rise up and start to move forward toward a permanent, positive peace."

I went on to speculate that this was what Jesus meant when he said: "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." Certainly Jesus did not mean that he came to bring a physical sword. He seems to have been saying in substance: "I have not come to bring this old negative peace with its deadening passivity. I have come to lash out against such a peace. Whenever I come, a conflict is precipitated between the old and the new. Whenever I come, a division sets in between justice and injustice. I have come to bring a positive peace which is the presence of justice, love, yea, even the Kingdom of God."

The racial peace which had existed in Montgomery was not a Christian peace. It was a pagan peace and it had been bought at too great a price.9

With direct violence there is a specific event, an identifiable victim, and an identifiable perpetrator. In contrast, structural violence is not visible in specific events. Its effects are most clearly observable at the societal level, as systematic shortfalls in the quality of life of certain groups of people. In direct violence there is physical damage to the human body occurring in a distinct time-bound event, and individual victims and perpetrators can be identified. In structural violence, however, people suffer harm indirectly, often through a slow and steady process, with no clearly
identifiable perpetrators. Structural violence cannot be photographed; it is known only by its patterned effects. Most victims of homelessness or chronic malnutrition, for example, are victims of structural violence.

In the framework adopted here, the common thread in all forms of violence is the fulfillment of one party’s purposes at the expense of others. Violence entails the use of power. The connections might be direct and immediate, as when a mugger punches a pedestrian for his wallet, or it might be structural, as when government leaders decide to purchase armaments rather than vaccines.

Some analysts reserve the term violence only for direct physical violence. The view advocated here, however, is that defining violence broadly (as doing harm to others in the pursuit of one’s own preferences) creates space for drawing the distinction between direct and structural violence, for comparing them, and for exploring their interrelationships. At the conceptual level, there is no reason to suggest that one type of inflicting harm is more important than another. The question of which is more important in practice is an empirical question, one whose answer depends on the criteria used.

Different observers adopt the narrow or the broad definition of violence depending on which they find most useful. This is not a neutral semantic issue, however. The narrower definition seems to be preferred by the more conservative Right, whereas the broader definition is preferred by the liberal Left. The broader definition provides a more open window for taking account of the concerns of disadvantaged sectors of society that are most likely to be harmed by structural violence.

MAGNITUDE

One important characteristic of any sort of conflict or violence is its magnitude. There are no standard measures, but certain indicators are used in many circumstances, such as numbers of lives lost. In some cases, it might be more appropriate to count numbers of cases, such as numbers of incidents of torture, or numbers of divorces. Duration or geographical scope also might be important
measures. Most indicators do not assess the underlying conflict; they only measure the magnitude and character of the ensuing violence.

It is useful to develop standard measures so that comparisons can be made more readily. Consider Anatol Rapoport’s assertion that “the events of the past decades have left no doubt that war is by far the most important form of conflict among human beings.” What does this mean? And is it true? Is he talking about war as a type of conflict, or about war in the aggregate? Certainly, wars are more important than, say, riots, in the sense that individual wars have much more impact than individual riots. Certainly, war is a more important type of event than riots. But whereas the typical war is larger than the typical riot, there might come a time when wars in the aggregate are less important than riots in the aggregate. Wars are certainly important if measured by the magnitude of the press coverage they get. So is terrorism. But if instead of press coverage we focus on numbers killed, we would see that terrorism is really quite unimportant. Of course, terrorism can be important because of its potential political impact—but we do not have any good way of assessing that.

Rapoport may have meant that wars are important because they kill lots of people. Of course, future wars could be far more lethal than past wars. But Rapoport referred specifically to the past. Thus he might be suggesting that historically wars in the aggregate have killed far more people than other sorts of conflict in the aggregate. Is that true? The answer depends on how conflict is defined. Recent research shows that mass killings by governments have produced far more casualties than warfare. Children’s deaths, most resulting from structural violence, are even more massive than either warfare or governmental killings. On the average, warfare kills about 400,000 people worldwide each year, but more than 12 million children die each year before their fifth birthday, many from malnutrition and disease. If the data are accepted, and if it is accepted that these are phenomena of conflict and violence comparable with warfare, then we would have to conclude that Rapoport was mistaken. In terms of numbers of deaths, warfare has not been the most important form of conflict.
EXCESS DEATHS

How can the magnitude of structural violence be measured? As indicated earlier, structural violence is indirect, in contrast to the sort of direct violence suffered by those caught in revolutions and international wars. It is due not so much to specific actions of individual persons as to the social structure in which individuals are embedded. Johan Galtung’s formulation of structural violence suggests an approach to measurement:

The basic idea is that there is such a concept as “premature death.” This we know, because we know that with some changes in social structure, in general and health structure in particular, life expectancy can be improved considerably. More particularly, it may be possible to give to the whole population the life expectancy of the class enjoying appropriate health standards, that is, the “upper classes.” The level enjoyed by them would be an indicator of the potential possibility to “stay alive” in that society; for all but the upper classes that would be above the actual possibility to stay alive. The difference, when avoidable, is structural violence.14

In epidemiological studies, the relative seriousness of different diseases is sometimes gauged by the degree to which they shorten people’s lives. The aggregate number of lost life years is measured as years of potential life lost, or YPLL.15 The idea of structural violence goes further in that it recognizes that premature death does not strike people randomly but systematically affects certain groups of people much more than others. Children, the poor, and certain ethnic groups regularly suffer especially high losses of potential life years.

A measure related to the YPLL is the number of excess deaths:

“Excess deaths” expresses the difference between the number of deaths actually observed in a minority group and the number of deaths that would have occurred in that group if it experienced the same death rates for each age and sex as the White population.16

To illustrate use of this concept, consider that during the period 1979-81 blacks and other minorities in the United States averaged 58,942 deaths each year in excess of what would be expected based on death rates for whites. These deaths each year are more than the United States suffered in terms of military casualties in the entire
Vietnam war! Of these 58,942 excess deaths, 6,178 (about 10.5 percent) were deaths of infants. In 1983, 11,060 black babies died before their first birthdays. If around 6,000 of these can be designated as “excess deaths,” it can be argued that more than half of the 11,060 black babies died because they were black. Similar analyses can show the degrees to which other groups suffer excessive injuries or illness or other sorts of harm.

Excess deaths, injury, and illness suffered by specific groups are, at least to a degree, self-inflicted through cultural practices, lifestyles, substance abuse, crime, poor diets, and so on. To some extent, such harm also might be due to the nature of their relationships with other groups. Usually, blaming all the troubles of minority groups wholly on themselves or wholly on specific others or on “society” is simplistic. Thus when a group shows, say, lower than average life expectancies, that in itself is not a sufficient basis for asserting that structural violence has taken place. Other kinds of information, especially about relationships among groups, must be brought to bear before that inference is warranted.

Most measures of violence, such as excess deaths, assess the harm that has been suffered but say nothing about the source of that harm. Measuring the harm suffered only shows that certain groups are worse off than others in very distinctive patterns. They show that there is something that needs to be explained; they are not the explanations.

UNCOVERING CONCRETE CONFLICTS

The magnitude measures just discussed are measures of violence; they do not get at the underlying conflict directly. Violence is a visible manifestation of conflict; conflict is under the surface. I have argued that the basic architecture of conflict is made up of situations involving parties, issues, preferences, and capacities. How can we know, how do we get to “see” the particular character and dimensions of any specific conflict? As John Burton put the question:

How can each side in a major dispute determine the motivations and intentions of the other during negotiations of all kinds and in
interpretations of actions and statements? In even shorter form, what is the process whereby these unobservable, attributable data can be discovered? 19

Situations and parties are generally easy to identify. Capacities can be difficult to assess. The major challenge is to find some sensible way of identifying the issues and the parties’ preferences in relation to those issues. How can we uncover the parties’ perceptions of their options and their preferences among those options? There is a gap on this point in the literature on conflict resolution. Often, essays begin by supposing you are dealing with this or that particular kind of conflict but do not say how you can know whether you are in fact dealing with that sort of conflict. How do you find out what the issues and the preferences are? There might be no newspaper accounts, or if there are, those accounts might be ambiguous.

The basic descriptive information should come from the people involved. The information can be obtained by reviewing public statements that have been made and by talking to people and asking questions about what is going on. If the primary conflicting parties are not accessible, sometimes interviews can be undertaken with knowledgeable surrogates, experts who appear to know the preferences of the major parties. 20

The analyst’s skill is in knowing what sort of questions to ask and how to work with the answers in a useful way. To get really clear about the procedures that need to be followed to uncover a specific conflict, the analyst could assume that an aide is to be sent out to obtain information. What exactly should the aide do? What is he or she to ask? Of whom? And how should the information that is obtained be organized?

It is important to talk to several different people on different sides of the conflict to get a variety of perspectives and to cross-check individuals’ accounts of the situation. Different people will see the situation differently. However, we should not exaggerate the extent to which people in conflict, with very different value positions, are likely to distort the facts of the situation. I once explored the extent to which the observers’ own values affected their characterization of the foreign policies of countries involved in the Middle East
conflict. To my surprise, in that study pro-Israel and anti-Israel groups agreed 98.7 percent of the time in their descriptions of the foreign policies of the Middle East countries. It could be that conflicting parties actually know much more about one another, and more accurately, than nonconflicting parties normally do.

Even though there might be consensus on the basic facts of a situation, they will mean different things to different people. We use simple labels to identify conflict situations—the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, geothermal development, driftnet fishing—but these are different things to different people. Thus it is always useful to draw on the views of several different parties, whether participants or observers.

Most information will come from statements, but some inferences about preferences can be drawn from direct observation of behavior. If a child is seen to repeatedly choose chocolate ice cream over vanilla, it is reasonable to say that the child prefers chocolate. If a country persistently behaves in a warlike manner, its protestations about its interests in peace generally can be dismissed.

Information about preferences is most easily obtained from public or private statements and can sometimes be deduced from observations of the party’s behavior. Beyond those two sources there is a third. At times we can say what a party’s preferences are likely to be on the basis of their position in the world. We can guess an individual’s political views somewhat better if we know, say, that he has a great deal of money invested with arms manufacturing companies, or that he is a welfare client, than we would if we knew nothing at all about the individual. Most—though certainly not all—homeless people want homes. We can guess that a tree in a parched meadow would “like” to have more water.

There are many different bits of knowledge, many different factors that might “predict” or “explain” a party’s preferences. Once the analyst has reasonably confident knowledge of these preferences, it might not be important to know where they came from. At the outset, it is more important to have a clear description of the preferences than to explain why they are the way they are. Of course, knowing the sources of preferences is important if you want to try to change them.
To summarize, to describe a conflict (as distinguished from explaining or resolving it), the analyst needs to identify:

1. The parties.
2. The issues.
3. Different possible outcomes on each of the issues.
4. The preferences (positions, interests) of the parties on the issues.
5. The points at which the preferences of the parties are incompatible.

The concluding account of the incompatibility would be of the form “One party wants X and the other party wants Y, and it appears that X and Y cannot both be the case at the same time.” For example, the final selling price of a car cannot be both high and low, so on the issue of price the buyer and seller cannot both have their most preferred outcomes. Of course, the sense of what outcomes are possible might expand as the conflict management process goes on.

**EXPLAINING CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE**

The more academic approaches to explanation usually deal in generalizations: why do fights occur, not why did *this* fight occur? In working with concrete cases the generalizations might not be very helpful. There is an old story about a downed pilot stumbling away from the wreckage of his plane. Asked why the plane crashed, he replies, “Gravity.” That explanation is surely true, but it is not useful. In trying to manage concrete conflict, the more useful explanations are likely to be those that are specific to the particular situation.

In ordinary nonacademic discourse, much of our explaining of behavior is based on the imputation of plausible motives. If you ask “Why did John cross the street?” and I say “To get a drink of water,” that would probably satisfy you. When explaining why people do the (violent or other) things they do, for the purposes of conflict management it is generally more important to understand how the conflicting parties’ behavior is shaped by their perceptions and their reasoning in the situation than it is to know how their behavior might be influenced by societal forces largely outside their control.
People do things because it serves their purposes, bringing about outcomes they prefer. The analyst's task, then, is to identify those preferences.

**USING VIOLENCE**

One good but much neglected explanation for direct physical violence is that people find it useful. Violence helps people to achieve outcomes they prefer. It does not always work, but it works often enough to keep it around. This is a strategic kind of explanation, based on the observation that violence can serve its perpetrator's interests.

Some violence is irrational in that it is not expected to bring about desired outcomes for the perpetrator, apart from the perverse satisfaction that might be obtained from seeing the harm done. Self-inflicted violence—alcoholism, suicide, drug abuse—is an unproductive kind of response to internal or social conflict. The rage of violence on others that occurs, say, in crimes of passion, serves some needs of the perpetrator, but it is not instrumental in terms of bringing about preferred outcomes. The dividing line between instrumental and irrational violence might not be precisely clear, but it is useful to distinguish between them and to plainly recognize that both exist.

Some calculated, instrumental violence is designed to overpower or physically eliminate the victim rather than influencing the victim's behavior. There is a difference between pointing a gun and demanding that someone hand over his wallet and knocking the victim out and taking the wallet from his pocket. Only in the first case does the victim get to make a decision. The most prominent use of violence is to affect the choices and thus the behavior of others rather than to simply overpower or eliminate others.

In analyzing the dynamics of threats one should also examine their dual or mirror image promises. Whereas a threat is a conditional statement (expressed or implied) saying "if you do not do what I want you to do, I will harm you," a promise is a conditional statement saying "if you do what I want you to do, I will reward you." One point of asymmetry between threats and promises is that
whereas threats are not carried out when they are successful, promises are carried out when they are successful. Thus, if one expects to be consistently successful, it might be cheaper to pull threats rather than promises out of the toolbox. Another point of asymmetry is that threats always make the recipient worse off, deteriorating the quality of the alternatives he or she faces, whereas promises always make the recipient better off, improving the options. Thus if inflicting harm is intrinsically bad, there is an intrinsic moral superiority to using promises rather than threats.

The logic of threats and promises is straightforward, but practice is more complex. There are issues regarding credibility, ambiguity, effectiveness, sustainability, long-term relationships, and so on. These fascinating variations on the theme are not explored here.

**BARGAINING**

The preceding section discussed a unilateral influence process. More typically, there are two or more parties trying to influence one another. A bargaining situation can be defined as one in which there are two or more parties, a number of different possible agreement outcomes, and the parties' capacities are such that a given agreement outcome can be obtained only if both parties agree on the same one. The difficulty arises because neither party, acting alone, can make his or her most preferred possible outcome become the actual outcome. Thus each party is motivated to try to influence the other's choices.

Apart from the possible agreement outcomes, there is also a distinct no-agreement outcome, the outcome that would be obtained if the parties failed to converge on one of the possible agreement outcomes.

One's bargaining power depends on the quality of one's alternatives, especially the quality of the no-agreement outcome. The no-agreement outcome is the only one that can be obtained through unilateral action. Each party has bargaining power in the situation by virtue of his or her capacity to walk away, forcing the no-agreement outcome to be obtained. In this way, each party can threaten to deprive the other of the benefit that would come with reaching some
agreement rather than none at all. There is also an implicit promise to the effect that if you come to a satisfactory agreement allowing me to get some benefit, you too will get some benefit.

In the unilateral influence process, one party issues threats or promises to another. In the bargaining process, that sort of pressure goes both ways. There is the implicit threat (of withdrawal) and promise (of coming to some mutually beneficial agreement) built into the situation. In addition, each party, attempting to influence the other, might voice additional threats and promises and so alter the structure of the situation. If they are successful, threats and promises can restructure the situation, making some outcomes (those that are attractive to the perpetrator) relatively more attractive to the receiver of the threats or promises.

ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION

The nice thing about bargaining situations is that if there is an agreement, both parties are better off than they would have been if they failed to agree. That is one reason why so many people are ideologically committed to the free market system. Nevertheless, a social system based on free exchange can be highly exploitative. A free market will concentrate wealth and power for some while impoverishing others. The explanation is straightforward.

The elementary transaction of the market system is the bargain, the negotiated exchange. One's bargaining strength depends on the quality of one's alternatives. Some people (or companies or countries) are stronger than others because they have better options.

Those who have greater bargaining strength tend to gain more from each transaction than do those who have lesser bargaining strength. Thus, over repeated transactions, stronger parties systematically enlarge their advantages over weaker parties. Bargainers do not move to an equilibrium at which the benefits are equally distributed but instead move apart, with the gap between them steadily widening. Asymmetrical exchange feeds on itself, making the situation more and more asymmetrical.

Both parties benefit in the exchange process but unequally. The rich get richer and the poor get richer, too—but more slowly. We
know that in voluntary transactions both parties must get some benefit, for any party that did not benefit could refuse to trade.

In the short term, everyone benefits from free exchange, no matter how uneven those benefits might be. In the long term, the story might be different. When the exchange process is accompanied by inflation, the real gains to both parties are diminished. The gains to the poorer, weaker party, being smaller, might, as a result, actually become negative. This is especially likely because inflation rates are much higher for poor nations than they are for rich ones. Thus with the combination of trade plus inflation it is likely that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The apparent gains from trade for the poor are likely to be wiped out by inflation.

Poverty is endlessly re-created. It is a product of an ongoing process, not a static condition. If it were not, then surely, given all the development programs that have been undertaken, it would have been eradicated by now. Poverty is not re-created simply by population growth. The important forces are economic but also political, social, and cultural. Those with low bargaining power are destined to remain marginalized because those with whom they interrelate have greater bargaining power.

An exploitative relationship can be defined as one in which the stronger party regularly gets more out of the relationship than the weaker one. Its long-term effect is that rather than converging toward some common middle zone the gap between the strong and the weak grows steadily wider as a result of their interaction. If we accept this plausible definition, we would have to conclude that ordinary bargaining, and thus also the free market system, are generally unfair and exploitative. The free market systematically creates wealth, but it also systematically creates poverty. To preserve such a system for its many positive qualities, then, fairness requires systematic compensatory mechanisms, such as progressive taxation and guaranteed minimum incomes.

In the free market system, operating normally with everyone engaging in transactions voluntarily, there is economic violence inflicted on those at the bottom end of the widening gap. The market system imposes a form of structural violence, one for which there
is no distinct agent; impoverishment, along with enrichment, arises out of the dynamics of the system itself.

**JOINT ANALYSIS AS A MANAGEMENT TOOL**

I have discussed ways in which an analyst could uncover a conflict and make it more visible. The account of the conflict that is prepared can be helpful to third parties assisting in the management of the conflict. The analyst’s account also might be helpful to the parties themselves, especially if the conflict situation is so messy that the parties do not have a clear view of it.

Rather than work with a description of the conflict prepared by an outsider, it might be more useful for the conflicting parties to analyze the conflict themselves. They might want to bring the issues out into the open. In dealing with the Middle East conflict, for example, one of the major functions of the initial speeches at the Madrid negotiations in October 1991 was to set the agenda and stake out initial positions—and thus to make the character of the conflict clearer. The conflicting parties needed to sharpen up the questions before pressing ahead to find answers.

When conflicting parties confront one another, there might be all sorts of accusation, charges, viciousness, and recriminations of every kind. Peacemakers say that conflicting parties should pursue the path of reconciliation, not recrimination. But recrimination can be an important stage of conflict management, a step on the path to reconciliation. Clear, sharp, explicit statements of grievances can help the parties to know one another’s concerns and can have distinct therapeutic value for the complaining parties. It can be important for the parties to go through not only a fact-finding but also an emotion-finding stage in conflict analysis so that the work of resolution can be conducted on firm grounds.

In aided interactive conflict management procedures, it can prove useful to arrange an early phase in which the parties to the conflict systematically articulate the problems they are to address. In Cussing and Cruikshank’s *Assisted Negotiation* process, for
example, there is a prenegotiation phase in which the parties are asked to describe their interests and undertake joint fact finding. In the process of controlled communication (now described as the problem-solving workshop or procedure) developed by John Burton, representatives of the conflicting parties engage in controlled discussion under the guidance of a panel of people who are experts in the process rather than in the specifics of the particular conflict. The participants are guided through an exercise in which they model the conflict. With systematic conflict analysis through interactive procedures, the representation of the conflict is not introduced by outsiders but is built up, step by step, by the conflicting parties themselves. That representation, always subject to revision, then becomes the basis for their subsequent discussion.

In some organized interactive conflict resolution schemes, it appears that the conflict analysis or problem articulation phase is glossed over. A clear distinction ought to be drawn between that phase of a group process used to reach a shared description of the problem and other phases designed to develop remedies to the problem. In difficult situations, describing the conflict generally should be the first step in attempts at resolving the conflict. After all, one would not expect a doctor to diagnose and treat an illness until a specific set of symptoms was presented. In judicial proceedings, too, there is an initial fact-finding stage in which the parties try to decide what is the basic situation, where are the areas of agreement, and what exactly are the main points of disagreement.

I have discussed procedures an analyst could use for describing a conflict. Orderly conflict analysis undertaken jointly by the conflicting parties can itself be an effective means of conflict resolution. Anthony de Reuck, discussing the controlled communication/problem-solving workshop, uses Gregory Bateson’s concept of frame or context:

Cooperation between people for productive purposes has as a minimum prerequisite a state of affairs in which all participants share a common definition of their joint situation. . . . The differentiation of these circumstances and the disentanglement of roles within roles are carried out by means of “frames”—frames of reference or even frames of mind, one might say. Action and
communications are understood only by reading the content of each in the light of its context (or frame).\textsuperscript{24}

With no common frame of reference, communication is virtually impossible. Thus repeated construction, deconstruction, and re-construction of conflict descriptions, carried out jointly by the parties, can be an important tool of conflict resolution. Before asking parties to a difficult conflict to come to an agreement, it might prove useful to ask them to come to a clear disagreement.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Christopher D. Stone, \textit{Should Trees Have Standing: Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects} (Los Altos, CA: Kaufmann, 1974), and his more recent \textit{Earth and Other Ethics: The Case for Moral Pluralism} (New York: Harper & Row, 1987). Justice William O. Douglas was a prominent advocate of the view that objects in nature should have standing in legal proceedings. He argued that there are grounds for protecting the environment apart from its instrumental value for human beings.


3. The position taken here is that all conflicts involve specific issues. For Anatol Rapoport, however, “A debate always revolves around issues. In contrast, there are no issues either in a fight or in a game aside from the objective of ‘winning.’” Anatol Rapoport, \textit{The Origins of Violence: Approaches to the Study of Conflict} (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 511. Parlor games or athletic contests might be mainly about winning, but fights usually are about something outside the fight itself.


6. On the need for research into the contents and conditions of positive peace, see Rapoport, \textit{The Origins of Violence}, 507-9.

7. One good example of literature in the field is Barbara Gray, \textit{Collaborating} (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1989).


11. According to R. J. Rummel, “independent of war and other kinds of conflict—governments probably have murdered 119,400,000 people. . . .” By comparison, the battle-
killed in all foreign and domestic wars in this century total 35,700,000." R. J. Rummel, *Lethal Politics: Soviet Genocide and Mass Murder since 1917* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1990), xi. Rummel’s more recent estimates bring the number of people killed by governments outside of war to over 170 million in this century.


21. Ibid., 107.

