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Armed Conflicts and Peace Agreements

2.1 The Concept of Conflict

A strong statement is that conflicts *are* solvable. This is not necessarily an idealistic or optimistic position. As this book will show, it is a realistic proposition. Most actors in conflicts will find themselves in need of negotiations at one time or another. Even if a conflict results in war and destruction, there may have been other options and alternative paths for the conflict. There are frequent statements on the inevitability of conflict, violence and war. Indeed, finding solutions may often be difficult. This difficulty not only arises out of political constraints but can also be due to a lack of insight or imagination. There are also views that violence and war are desirable or even necessary. Unbearable conditions or impossible threats may make such opinions understandable. Too often, however, the results of war negate the very hope for a better future that may initially have motivated the war. Few wars follow the paths anticipated by the actors. Short wars may avoid such pitfalls, but who is to guarantee that a war will be short? Many wars have started from this premise, however. Afterwards, it will be asked: were all avenues used to find a peaceful solution prior to the initiation of war? Only after this can be convincingly proven do the arguments of inevitability and desirability approach validity. Thus, the determined search for a solution is not only a moral question, it is also a rational one. This is the sole way in which a free society will be prepared to accept the strains of war. Indeed, if conflicts are exposed to such early challenges, solutions may actually be found, even in unexpected situations. Thus, conflicts are solvable and there are many and varied experiences of such solutions.

If conflicts *are* solvable, is it also true that conflicts – sooner or later – *will* be solved? Clearly, once a conflict has developed into a war, the options are fewer. At that moment, the primary actors will pursue victory rather than a joint solution. The victory of one side over the other is, then, a possible outcome, even to the point of the other's capitulation, dissolution and disappearance as an actor. The record shows that this is what happens in some conflicts, but by no means all. Conflicts will come to an end at some point. Whether that ending is a solution, a victory or a stalemate has to be scrutinized. To this should be added the question of whether or not the conflict is likely to be armed and violent again.

Victory is the outcome preferred by most actors in a war. If achieved, it may solve parts of an issue, but often not the entire problem at hand. The victory of the allied countries over Nazi Germany is a case in point. After the failure of the agreement reached in Munich in 1938, it was no longer possible for the Western powers to consider negotiations with Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime. The end of the Second World War meant the implementation of the demand for unconditional surrender and the elimination of the Nazis as an actor. This was as clear-cut a victory as can be. It did not, however, mean the end of Germany. The issue of Germany's position in the international system still had to be settled. Conflict among the victors arose over this question. It became one of the core issues in the Cold War. A solution developed as new leaders emerged in West Germany. They were democratically inclined, conscientiously building on pre-1933 democratic traditions and new ideas from the Western powers. A reintegration of Germany into the international system took place, ultimately even allowing for its reunification in 1990, but only 45 years after the end of the Second World War. Also, it was only possible with a new Germany, willing to admit its responsibility for the past and able to accommodate to the present. If the Second World War had been a question solely of Germany's role in the international system, there was a route through peaceful dialogue and development. A solution within a democratic framework among democratic countries was found. It could have been found before the Nazis took power. For any country, in other words, there are always alternatives to a war strategy for achieving goals. Regimes, however, may deliberately narrow their options and construct situations where the choice becomes defeat or victory. Nazi Germany chose such a path.

Conflict precedes conflict resolution. There is already considerable analysis of the origin and the pursuit of conflict. Machiavelli and Clausewitz are important writers in one Western tradition of conflict analysis. Adam Smith and Karl Marx offered competition and class analysis as other tools for understanding. In classical Chinese discourse, Sun Tzu is a central writer, as is Kautilya in India or Ibn Khaldun in the Arab world. Military strategic thinking has become universally shared and there is often, among military officers, a surprising degree of common understanding across battle lines. Also, the analysis of societal contradiction has such cross-cultural traits, Smith and Marx being influential in different quarters across the globe. The same, however, is not true of conflict resolution thinking. It is a novel topic. It is less developed and less coherent. Thus, it is important to introduce the ideas of modern thinkers. It is also necessary to relate them to trends in social science thinking.

'Conflict' has many meanings in everyday life. To some it refers to *behaviour* or *action*. There is conflict when a trade union goes on strike or an employer locks out its employees. It is also conflict when two states are at war with one another and where battlefield events determine their relations. The actions constitute the conflict. If this were all, however, it would mean that a conflict would end once this behaviour ended. Few would agree to this. A cease-fire is not the end of a conflict. Even verbal statements, non-violent actions, the mobilization of petitions, demonstrations, boycotts and sanctions may only indicate

that there is an interlude in the conflict. Actions may resume at some later stage. There may still be dissatisfaction. Obviously, conflict is more than the behaviour of the parties alone.

A closer look indicates that the parties in an industrial dispute will not cease their actions until there is some movement on the issues that sparked the dispute. The word 'issue' here refers to the incompatible positions taken by the parties that motivate their actions. This, then, is a deeper understanding of what a conflict is. It is a severe disagreement between at least two sides, where their demands cannot be met by the same resources at the same time. This is an *incompatibility*. Positions are incompatible. There is some form of scarcity. If there is an abundance of resources, the demands from the various sides may easily be met. The incompatibility can be solved. If there are limited resources, however, problems will arise. The easy solutions are no longer available and more ingenious ways have to be found. How this can be done will be discussed later. For the time being, it is sufficient to note that when the parties adjust their demands so that there is no longer scarcity, the conflict disappears. The incompatible demands have been handled. Incompatibility appears to be a key to the existence of conflict. If there are no actions, although it is possible for an outsider to point to incompatibilities, there is only a latent conflict. Manifest conflict requires both action and incompatibility.

This is still not enough to get an initial understanding of the concept of conflict. We need to include the actors as well. Many would say that trade unions are created by employees to deal with an existing incompatibility from a stronger position, which may result in conflict. This is why they have a membership. Members expect to be protected even to the point where a manifest conflict becomes a distinct possibility. This means that there is a tension built into the relationship between the employer and the employees. 'Conflict' does exist, even if no actions are taken or demands formulated. Conflict is internal to the system. Similar descriptions also can be found for the interstate system. It is argued that sovereign states are inevitably locked into conflict with one another. States are continuously preparing to defend themselves from possible attack in order to protect their own survival. Such preparations only confirm to others that there are real dangers, thus they do the same. These are the dynamics of the well-known security dilemma (Herz, 1950; Waltz, 1959, 1979). This perspective suggests that the existence of one state is a danger to any other state. As long as there is unpredictability in the system, there will be fear and, thus, conflict. For our purposes, it means that *actors* or *parties* are fundamental to the existence of conflict. If the actors are formed and they make the analysis that what they need for survival conflicts with the needs of others, then there is conflict built into the system. The history of the actors, the actors' understanding of their own role and their resources are important elements in conflict analysis. From this we can conclude that conflict consists of three components:

- incompatibility
- action
- actors.

Combining them, we arrive at a complete definition of a conflict as:

> a social situation in which a minimum of two actors (parties) strive to acquire at the same moment in time an available set of scarce resources.

This definition brings together essential elements from a number of commonly used definitions. It includes the actors or 'parties' in the definition, which, as we have just seen, is basic. In many definitions the actor is left as a separate item, but, as the preceding arguments have made clear, this element is integral to the analysis and the definition.

The word 'strive' in the defining sentence requires a comment. It is a vague term, but the point is that, when the parties are acting, they are doing something (however minimal) to acquire the resources. 'Strive' may even include warfare. It covers a wide range of activities.

An additional phrase needs a comment. It is said that the parties are striving to acquire the resources 'at the same moment in time'. This is sometimes overlooked in definitions and may, again, be self-evident. If one actor is satisfied with having its demands met a year from now, other actors may be able to meet their goals today. There is no conflict today. Perhaps the first actor will worry about the future – 'Will there be anything left?' – but, if the party believes it has guarantees that there will, the incompatibility is gone. It is clearly a different matter when the demands of each party for resources arise at the same moment in time. It is conventional wisdom that only one person can be prime minister at a time and that only one country can have formal jurisdiction over a particular piece of territory at a time. These resources are regarded as indivisible, for the time being. If this is what the parties believe, then this is their reality. In real life, there are solutions even to such problems – for instance, the creation of posts as first and second prime minister (as in Cambodia in the 1990s) or finding forms of shared rule of a territory. Such solutions emerge only if the parties perceive an incompatibility to be divisible. Time, as we notice every day, is scarce but still has this quality of divisibility – something that our calendars make clear. Schedules may dissolve incompatibilities.

The notion of an 'available set of scarce resources' should not be taken to include only economic matters. The term 'resources' covers all kinds of positions that are of interest to an actor. To be a prime minister, control a particular piece of territory, be able to propagate a particular idea in the media – all these things can be covered by the notion of 'available resources'. This definition demands that something is desired which is scarce, be it positions of power, attractive land or access to the airwaves. Such resources can sometimes be estimated in terms of money, square metres or other measures, but often they are intangible. For instance, demands for recognition, acceptance of responsibility for destructive actions or psychological retribution exemplify intangible values. Though intangible, they are still highly important. They may involve admissions that have implications for an actor's standing nationally or internationally, but only indirectly relate to material resources. Thus, there are incompatibilities relating to matters of justice, moral norms and guilt.

Hopefully, with the 'conflict' concept clarified, we can move on to the most difficult of all conflicts: wars. They are different from all other conflicts in that they are irreversible actions. Wars involve the taking of territory, eviction of inhabitants, deaths of soldiers and civilians, destruction of property, resources and the environment, as well as the disruption of people's mental, physical, economic and cultural development. War is among the most destructive phenomena that one human group can inflict on another. In the same category of extreme conflict we can also locate systematic repression, sexual and domestic violence, totalitarianism and genocide. These are actions initiated by human beings. They are matters that can be ended and remedied by humans, but not undone. They become strong and conscious elements in the histories of peoples, groups and individuals. Let us first look more closely at the exact meaning of war and then proceed to study recent trends in armed conflict and war.

2.2 Identifying Armed Conflict

Three projects

A commonly asked question is: have conflict and war become more frequent and are they more destructive today than they used to be? It is a question about quantity, where it is assumed that conflicts are easily comparable. The question is asked to reach an understanding of where the world is headed, as a whole, for a particular region or for a particular phenomenon (for instance, arms production). It is often a question about the future, not only about history. At the same time, there are those who resent having 'their' conflict compared to other situations. Each conflict is unique and has its own characteristics. There are qualities that make them different. The question of frequency makes little sense to those who are parties in conflict. Why should they worry about that, it is bad enough with one conflict, they would say.

Both perspectives are valid. The projects that exist within the peace research community all aim to understand why conflicts occur or how they can be terminated. Their answers to the question of frequency of wars are actually by-products of other ambitions. The question is important nevertheless and contributes to the development of deeper answers. If there are general patterns recurring over a large number of different conflicts, it suggests something that can possibly explain why wars begin. By implication, it may yield ideas for improving the situation. Certain factors can be singled out for closer analysis. Questions of frequency interest the media and the public for other reasons. Today, it is frequently asked if there is a difference between the post-Cold War years and the Cold War period, or before/after September 11, 2001. Changes in the international system or in domestic policies associated with the ending of the Cold War may explain our present predicament. There are many other candidates for possible causation, however, and the impact of each may be difficult to disentangle from the others. In the analysis, many factors are mentioned, such as bipolarity, the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons, changed roles

of international organizations, democratization, the spread of free market mechanisms, changes in media access, concern for human rights, growth of nongovernmental organizations and so on. Comparisons across time can illustrate a number of effects, but do not necessarily prove them. To be scientific evidence, cases and periods have to be selected with rigour and there have to be many observations. For the purpose of this book, it is important to have a general idea of the frequency and severity of armed conflicts in the world. It helps to set the topics of conflict resolution in perspective. Thus, let us review some ongoing efforts.

Armed conflict patterns are mapped continuously by several projects. First, this book uses the work of the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, based at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, in Sweden. Data are published by the department in the annual publication *States in Armed Conflict*. Information is also available through the yearbooks of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), for major armed conflicts; the *Journal of Peace Research* (*JPR*), from the International Peace Research Institute (PRIO), Oslo, for all armed conflicts, backdated to 1946; the *Human Security Report*, from the University of British Columbia; and, most fully, by accessing the Uppsala Conflict Database (at www.pcr.uu.se/database/index.php).

Second, there is the project on wars and armed conflict by the Causes of War program at the University of Hamburg (AKUF, from its name in German), mapping the global record of local wars since 1945. This is also published in annual reports and books (Gantzel and Schwinghammer, 2000).

The third enduring project is Correlates of War (known as COW), originating at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, carrying information on wars since 1816. This information is normally available via databases, but sometimes also in printed publications. It has found wide usage in research projects and the findings have been systematized (Geller and Singer, 1998; Vasquez, 2000). There are additional important projects that aim to highlight the present dilemmas of war and violence. Among these is the Minorities at Risk project at the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, focusing on a subset of conflicts: those involving ethnic minorities around the world. It contains data on minority groups that have been involved in some form of conflict since 1945. From this has also developed a biannual report on peace and conflict (Gurr, 1993, 2000a; Marshall, 1999; Marshall and Gurr, 2005).

Crisis behaviour between states can also be used to discuss questions of frequency (Brecher, 1993). A number of researchers have their own systematic collections of conflict-related information that are reported in international journals (Bercovitch, 1996; Carment, 1993; Carment and James, 1995; Gibler, 1999a, 1999b; Goldstein, 1992; Holsti, 1991; Levy, 1983; Licklider, 1995; Luard, 1986; Morton and Starr, 2001; Tillema, 1989). For an update, see the conflict project directory by Kristine Eck at the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (2005, available online at: www.pcr.uu.se/publications/UCDP–pub/UCDP–paper1.pdf). The annual *Human Security Report* makes use of the sources mentioned above and others.

The first three projects stand out, however, as the most consistent at specifically addressing armed conflicts in all categories, whether between or within