

C H A P T E R

Most conflicts feature complex interactions of different forces. Each requires the crafting of well-designed structures that are purposely oriented to the needs of the specific situation.

*Analysis is a necessary prelude to problem-solving. This chapter focuses on the process of analysing a conflict in all its aspects – from looking at how conflicts in general are expressed (macro-level) to examining how a particular conflict can be understood by examining its component parts (micro-level).*

- 2.1–2.5 *Observations about the nature and analysis of deep-rooted conflict*
- 2.6 *Process of analysing a specific conflict*
- 2.7 *Factors for analysis in order to draw out all necessary information*
- 2.8 *Analytic tools for constructing a framework for that information*
- 2.9 *Conclusion*

Box 2

Analysing a Conflict: Three Approaches (p. 40)

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## Analysing Deep-Rooted Conflict

### 2.1 Introduction

**T**hroughout this handbook, our approach is based on an assumption that democratic governance is key to developing sustainable settlements. But the relationship of many deep-rooted conflicts to democracy is complex, and indeed democracy can encourage or even aggravate civil conflicts. The political mobilization of people for electoral or other purposes is frequently achieved by narrow identity appeals (as demonstrated, again and again, in Sri Lanka, India, Fiji, the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere). In that sense mass politics, associated with the rise of modern democratic states, has given a particularly sharp edge to identity. Ethnic animosities can often lie dormant until groups perceive themselves to be competing in a “zero-sum” game for resources, rights or territory. Issues of identity often provide a convenient cloak for other issues that concern the distribution of these resources.

Most conflicts feature complex interactions of different forces. Some are sustained by the separation of hostile groups, so that antagonisms are reinforced by ignorance and suspicion fueled by a lack of contact between contending parties. The traditional approach of the international community in such situations has been the imposition of “peace-keeping forces” between the groups – such as those stationed in Cyprus, Bosnia or Lebanon – a useful but blunt and surface-oriented instrument which often does not address the underlying needs of the groups in question. In other cases, the problem is not separation but proximity and day-to-day interaction that breeds mutual antagonisms – such as in relations between Malays, Chinese and Indians in Malaysia or between indigenous and Indo-Fijians in Fiji. All of these cases represent relatively familiar types of deep-rooted internal conflicts, and all of them require different approaches and different types of political institutions to manage disputes and build a sustainable peace. Further, each requires the crafting of well-designed structures that are purposely oriented to the needs of the specific situation. It is therefore surprising that sometimes a “one size fits all” conflict management package is still prescribed by even the most informed of practitioners.

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conflicts.*

*Conflict is one of the most powerfully positive factors for change in a society. Without conflict, we would have stagnation.*

## 2.2 Conflict as Both Positive and Negative

Cultural or ethnic claims and identities are not always negative. Identity itself can act as both a constructive force and a destabilizing one. Nationalist movements involved in the construction of new states during the struggle for independence, for example, are often based on dynamic combinations of both identity and nationalism. The emotional and cultural bonds thus forged have proved to be a major factor in ensuring the legitimacy and support of many potentially fragile new states.

Similarly, basic identity-related factors such as religious and ethnic affiliations, for example, are often of fundamental importance to the psychic and moral well-being of communities. Cultural identity is a vital and enriching part of human life; and cultural diversity can be as energizing as it can be threatening. Many of today's functioning multicultural societies – such as Canada, Australia and the United States – have built their success on being a melting pot of many different cultures and religions. Elsewhere, divided communities with distinct religious or cultural traditions, as in Belgium, Mauritius, Trinidad and Tobago, and so on, have nonetheless been able to maintain competitive but cordial relations between different groups.

While such differences can lend themselves to political manipulation by *ethnic entrepreneurs*, who seek to mobilize and capitalize on ethnic differences for their personal or political gain, this exploitation is likely to be successful only in specific circumstances – such as where a community perceives reasons to fear the policies or activities of other communities, or experiences its economic or social position as clearly inferior to that of other groups with little prospect of amelioration, or where its abiding experience is one of disempowerment and vulnerability. Sometimes such manipulation results in a genuine galvanization of the community into an energizing force for positive and necessary social change; sometimes it fails to move beyond a surface reaction to intimidation and violence. Just as denial of identity-related claims can be a way to harass other groups, assertions of them – such as civil rights campaigns – can be a useful device to secure more justice and equity. Ethnic mobilization is a doubled-edged sword.

In the same way, conflict itself is not necessarily a negative process. Indeed, conflict is one of the most powerfully positive factors for change in a society. Conflict tells us that something is wrong; conflict is the generator of change and improvement.

### 2.3 Patterns of Deep-Rooted Conflict

Without conflict, we would have stagnation. The nature of competitive representative democracy, for example, involves a certain degree of conflict between opposing forces, ideologies and parties. This is healthy because this conflict takes place within a forum of bounded behaviour – there are “rules of the game” that need to be observed. This handbook is based on the assumption that even very intense conflicts are capable of being managed, given the right combination of procedures and institutions, in a way that is both peaceful and sustainable. But we do not pretend that it is easy, or even likely. We simply argue that it is possible. This is especially the case in the immediate post-conflict period, where negotiations between conflicting groups are beginning to take place. It is precisely in this interim period, where new patterns of interaction are possible, when parties are most amenable to the consideration of novel alternatives and different solutions, that the best hope for making sustainable settlements lies.

#### 2.3 Patterns of Deep-Rooted Conflict

Three main areas of dispute often appear to dovetail with identity-related issues. The first are broadly *economic factors*. Economic slumps are often accompanied by an upsurge in inter-ethnic conflict. The post-communist movement from a controlled economy to a free market in Eastern Europe and parts of Asia and Africa in recent years has created a host of social problems that provide fertile breeding ground for sectarian sentiment. Similarly, the racist anti-immigration movements which have arisen in a number of western countries over the past decade have their root causes in increasing economic insecurity for many of the established population, particularly those at the lower end of the socio-economic ladder. In other areas, there are deliberate policies that discriminate economically for or against certain groups. These include the “affirmative action” policies for certain castes in India, or for *bumiputra* (literally “sons of the soil”, i.e., Malays) in Malaysia, which have created resentment among those who feel such policies threaten their place in the economic system. Elsewhere, deliberate economic discrimination against what are seen as a privileged group, such as the Tamils in Sri Lanka, has been evident.

A second group of conflicts revolve around questions of *culture*. A classic issue is the question of minority language rights or religious freedoms. The conflict over language rights in the Baltic states between the local and Russian-speaking populations

*Three main areas of dispute often appear to dovetail with identity-related issues: economic insecurity, cultural conflicts and territorial disputes.*

described in Chapter 4 is a good example of this. Often, such conflicts are manifested via a demand for some form of group autonomy, such as culturally specific schooling for minorities, freedom to establish communal places of worship, or application of traditional or religious law. Many multi-ethnic countries have faced this issue in recent times, as demands for cultural autonomy increase and “assimilationist” policies are increasingly regarded with suspicion. More unusual variants of this issue have occurred in demands for culturally specific forms of law by threatened indigenous groups trying to maintain their own cultural integrity (e.g., punishments of criminal offences by traditional forms such as “banishment” or even spearing in some aboriginal cultures).

The third broad area of conflicts concerns disputes over *territory*. Territorial disputes are likely to mesh with ethnic ones when ethnic groups are territorially concentrated. In such cases, the manifestation of self-determination is often secession from the existing state altogether. Secession requires the dismemberment of the existing state, and for this reason has often been strongly opposed both by dominant members of an existing state and by the international community. If a state is to stay together under such circumstances, it requires the use of innovative institutional arrangements that deliver forms of devolution of power, federalism or autonomy. In Spain and Canada, for example, “asymmetric” federal arrangements for the Basque and Quebecois regions respectively have been used to try and dampen calls for secession, while federalism has been promoted as an institution of conflict management in countries as diverse as India, Malaysia, Germany, Nigeria, South Africa, and Switzerland.

## **2.4 National and International Factors in Deep-Rooted Conflict**

Many of the world’s most bitter deep-rooted internal conflicts have a significant international dimension. The fact that the boundaries of a state, particularly in post-colonial societies, rarely match the boundaries of a “nation” – an identity group – means that it is rare for domestic conflicts to stay entirely within the boundaries of the state. The Sri Lankan conflict has been fueled by the proximity and involvement of India; the Northern Ireland conflict by the competing claims of Britain and the Irish Republic and the involvement of Irish Americans; the Cyprus conflict is intertwined with the dispute between Turkey and

## 2.4 National and International Factors in Deep-Rooted Conflict

Greece, and so on. Understanding these international dimensions is key to any analysis of the conflict itself.

Tension between “settler” and “indigenous” groups is present in almost all states in which such terms are meaningful. Indian settlers in Fiji; Chinese and Indians in Malaysia; Russians in the Baltics and Central Asian Republics: all are examples of groups who are seen as being less than fully legitimate members of a multi-ethnic state by their indigenous counterparts. The legacy of colonialism thus plays a role in many of the current eruptions of identity-related conflict.

### 2.4.1 Decolonization

The process of decolonization after World War Two left a vast range of disputed territories and arbitrary boundaries in the developing world, leading inevitably to conflict over the adjustment of boundaries and over the legitimacy of states formed during colonization. Post-colonial polities suddenly found themselves in the position of sovereign states, but often with too diverse an ethnic mix to build easily the shared values and identities that might make a functioning nation. More often, their populations consisted of more than one nation, or parts of several. Given the potent impact of the decolonization process upon ethnic antagonisms, it is no surprise to find that “ethno-political” conflicts have been steadily increasing since the “winds of change” in the early 1960s led to independence for former colonial states in Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

One example among many is the legacy left in Western Sahara by the departing Spanish in 1975: an artificial frontier between Morocco and “Spanish Sahara” which became the subject of a long dispute between the Moroccan state and the Polisario Front, the army of the Saharawi people. Put simply, their sense of themselves as a community – their ethnic identity – contradicted the arbitrary maplines drawn by the colonizer, and they set about correcting the map as soon as they were free to do so. A difference of identity, combined with a dispute over territory, resulted in violent conflict, which remains unresolved today. Similarly, as Britain left the Indian subcontinent in 1947, bitter fighting erupted between identity groups organized along religious lines. The result was the partitioning of the area between India and Pakistan. But, as so often, simple partition has failed to satisfy the underlying root-causes of the conflict: in Kashmir and elsewhere, fighting continues as peoples contest their identity and disagree over self-determination *versus* territorial integrity.

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### *2.4.2 End of the Cold War*

The end of the Cold War further intensified these conflicts over boundaries. The Soviet Union disintegrated into multiple states. Its influence, which had served to glue together imperfect nation-states within its realm, dissipated and permitted the rise of ethnic frustrations and tensions which expressed themselves in bitter conflicts over Yugoslavia, Georgia, Chechnya and elsewhere. The dissolution of the Soviet Union also left large populations of Russian speakers in a number of new republics in the Baltics, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, many of whom became a focus for the long-standing grievances of the indigenous populations. Discrimination and conflict between Russians and local populations became a potent issue in a number of these states, with language and citizenship rights an area of particular concern.

### *2.4.3 The state in crisis*

Additionally, the state itself has been facing a crisis for some time. The deep contradictions or anachronisms of the nation-state have led it now to face a crisis of legitimization. To retain its legitimate position of power, a state must inspire some sense of shared identity among all its diverse population, as some have argued is the case in India. It must also ensure the participation of all groups in the affairs of the state as well as equity in the sharing of its resources. Identity groups tend to demand self-determination, or assert their rights to be treated equally with all citizens, precisely when a state is not fulfilling these objectives. Democratic states suffer these problems just as others do: democracy is no guarantee of a conflict-free existence. But democratic societies tend to have built-in institutional mechanisms and the requisite flexibility to manage this kind of conflict by non-violent means.

But what turns such ethnically based dissatisfaction into actual violent conflict? Unscrupulous leaders have realized the value of mobilizing dissent along the powerful fault-lines of race, religion, language and so on. The ideas of human and civil rights, of self-expression and self-determination, have flourished in the hearts of many people, permeating societies and making oppression more difficult and its resistance more energized. Indeed, self-determination can often be used by dissidents to express their case and mobilize their resources along ethnic divisions. Certainly, increased international media attention can raise the temperature of dispute, as it can help to sustain rigid positions within a conflict.

## 2.5 Difficulties in Managing Identity-Related Conflicts

With intra-state conflict, most often the state itself is a disputing party, even a major source of violence. This makes internal processes for conflict regulation difficult, since state organs may be delegitimized by their involvement in the conflict. Often governments will be much more powerful than the rebels they face: such asymmetry of power can mitigate the chances of bringing the sides together, and can encourage both sides to strengthen themselves as far as possible by violence or its threat, prior to entering negotiations. A referee is difficult to find within the state who will hold the respect of both sides. The type of inclusive, power sharing and devolutionary mechanisms examined in detail in Chapter 4 are thus particularly necessary to building a sustainable settlement.

## 2.5 Difficulties in Managing Identity-Related Conflicts

### 2.5.1 Indivisibility

A central problem in trying to manage or transform identity-related disputes is the “indivisibility” of such conflicts: they are often not amenable to split-the-difference, cake-cutting solutions based on compromise. Conflicts based upon historical identities, religious beliefs, language or symbolic territory are particularly difficult: it is hard to compromise over a question as basic as the nature of the one true God, for example, or whether a particular sacred site is to be the property of one group or another (e.g., the conflict between some Moslems and Hindus in India over the Ayodhya mosque). Moreover, the very nature of identity-related appeals, what one scholar calls the “relentless drumbeat of ethnic propaganda”, itself tends to distort the usual modes of political discussion.

### 2.5.2 Escalation

A second problem is the cyclical nature of many deep-rooted conflicts. Mobilization of groups by one side of a conflict typically leads to a corresponding counter-mobilization by their opponents. Escalation of a conflict on one side almost guarantees a countervailing reaction on the other. The actions of one group are responded to by their opponents: violence begets violence, and the conflict steadily escalates in a series of tit-for-tat exchanges, as in Burundi. The originally divisive issues get augmented, often even replaced, by new and more intense issues arising out of this intensification process. Such issues are amenable to manipulation by leaders and politicians, who may use them to mobilize communities on ethnic or other fault-lines. It

*Two recurrent problems make it extraordinarily difficult to manage identity-related disputes: their indivisibility and their tendency towards escalation.*

is extremely hard to break these cyclical patterns and de-escalate back to the original issues.

### ***2.5.3 Leadership***

Managing deep-rooted conflicts requires far-sighted leadership. Just as many conflicts are exacerbated by ethnic entrepreneurs who fan the flames of group animosities, so to bring conflicts to a sustainable settlement requires leaders who are prepared to do just that – lead. To do this, they must often be ahead of the sentiments of a large portion of their followers in counselling for peace, and they must have the authority to carry their supporters with them through difficult times. This is especially difficult when the leaders at the negotiating table are often the very same ones who provoked or maintained the conflicts in the first place. It also requires leaders to put the long-term interests of their nation in achieving a durable settlement before the short-term gains that could be achieved by prolonging the conflict. This handbook carries a number of instances of such behaviour, with the examples of South African leaders Nelson Mandela and F. W. de Klerk particularly apposite. This is not to suggest that leaders will do other than make rational decisions about their own group's core interests when negotiating a settlement. All the negotiating techniques outlined in Chapter 3 are based upon this assumption, as are the designs of the democratic institutions in Chapter 4.

Our attention now turns from the macro-level to the micro-level, from looking at how conflicts in general are expressed, to examining how a particular conflict can be understood by examining its component parts. Successful analysis of a specific conflict in terms of its generic structure enables us to diagnose appropriate methods to successfully negotiate a lasting settlement.

## **2.6 Analysing Conflict**

Before an outcome to conflict can be considered, before even a process to reach that outcome can be designed, we need to have a clear view of the conflict. That sounds like stating the obvious. Actors in a conflict are intimately acquainted with their particular conflict, from possibly a lifetime of involvement in it. They have consciously struggled with it, and with attempts to end it, for prolonged periods of time.

This in-depth knowledge of the conflict is vital. But, for completely understandable reasons, combatants in prolonged and

## 2.6 Analysing Conflict

deep-rooted conflict have a particular view of the causes, dynamics and effects of their conflict. For very good protective reasons, they have a partisan view of things. This is as it should be: their job has been to be partisan, to represent, support, direct and sustain their community and their struggle.

But we are assuming with this handbook that the conflict phase is reaching a hiatus. Negotiations are at least looming, if not actually in process. To move straight from struggle into dialogue, with the same aims and attitudes intact, will almost guarantee failure. Completely partisan approaches will produce completely competitive talks, with each side still as committed to winning the peace as they were to winning the war. Such negotiations are simply war by other means. But peace, by definition, is not winnable in the same terms as war. To make negotiations work, we must supplement competition with co-operation. Negotiation, by its very nature, implies movement: it is a process in which people, their attitudes and their positions move and change. Negotiation is not merely a matter of convincing the opposition that your position is right: it demands a degree of co-operation with that opposition to move creatively from stalemate towards a new position.

To engender that co-operation, in oneself or in others, is not easy, nor automatic. It requires, as a first step, a wider view of the conflict than the strictly partisan one that served during the war. It is a basic requirement of conflict management to try to better understand each other's motivations. Not to agree with each other's viewpoint, not to give up any cherished beliefs about the causes and blame involved in the conflict, but simply to approach an understanding of the opposite viewpoints, without necessarily in any way endorsing them.

This requires adopting new models for thinking by the actors: looking at their subject matter through new lenses. Conflict analysis here is not about learning something new (although that might happen). It is about understanding the same thing in different and deeper ways. This section offers some lenses to facilitate such understanding. One lens concerns how we actually go about the analytic process itself. Quite irrespective of the content of the conflict and the subsequent analysis, this model argues that our attitude and approach in coming to analysis itself significantly affects the results. In brief, there are three ways for actors to analyse their conflict: the *adversarial* way (blaming everything on the other side); the *reflexive* way (looking inward to reflect on one's own sides position in the conflict); and the *integrative* way

*Conflict analysis is not about learning something new. It is about understanding the same thing in different and deeper ways.*

(looking both at one's own side and at the need to also understand the views of the opposition).

The latter approach (integrative) is really one that proposes that there be movement away from the entrenched attitudes and positions of the parties towards a situation where the real needs and interests of the parties are focused on. There needs to be an acceptance by the parties that there should be movement from what is known as "positional-based" negotiation to "interest-based" negotiation. In reality, however, the ebb and flow of negotiations tends to take the parties through a number of phases, attitudes and positions that will impact on their tactics. Depending on the nature and maturity of the parties, they will generally include a range of elements from all three approaches in their negotiation strategy.

### Box 2

#### ANALYSING A CONFLICT: THREE APPROACHES

There are three ways for actors to analyse their conflict. Typically, the ebb and flow of negotiations will include a range of elements from all three approaches.

- **Adversarial.** Viewing the conflict as "us vs. them", either win or lose, all or nothing.
- **Reflective.** Looking inward and reflecting on the hurt and pain the conflict has caused and considering the best way to achieve real goals.
- **Integrative.** Looking both at one's own side and the need to understand the views of the opponents.

Entering negotiations, as Chapter 3 will emphasize, involves swallowing the bitter pill of co-operating with what used to be the enemy. In preparation for this, assembling a broad analysis of the conflict is a crucial first step. If one is truly committed to negotiation as a way of solving the problem, then a step away from adversarial approaches is a necessary starting point. The closer one can get to an integrative analysis, the better the prognosis for those negotiations.

One of the results of the integrative approach is that it encourages creative negotiation. Parties are more likely to build on each other's proposals than be preoccupied with advancing their own. A full analytic understanding of the conflict is both a prerequisite for going into the process of negotiation – negotia-

## 2.7 Factors for Analysis

tors need to know their subject matter – and a valuable resource to keep in mind during negotiation. First, it is important to grasp and analyse all the relevant factors that go to make up the conflict and give it its shape.

### 2.7 Factors for Analysis

In this section, our aim is not to solve the conflict, merely to draw out all the elements that must be part of the subsequent solution. Outlined below are some of the questions that need to be asked and answered. Consideration of these various elements will better equip negotiators to devise appropriate strategies to manage the conflict.

#### ACTORS

**Who are the various *actors*, internal and external, in the conflict?**

- What are the *identity groups* involved? How do they define themselves, and what are the core features that make up their identity?
- Who are the real *leaders* of these groups? Are they politicians, soldiers, religious leaders, intellectuals, etc.? What pressures are they subject to from followers and opponents?
- How do these identity groups *mobilize*? How do they pursue their needs as communities (i.e., political parties, paramilitary groups, armies, etc.)? What *alliances* have they forged? What interests do they serve (external, regional, global)? What pressures are they subject to?
- What *factions* exist within parties?
- Are there *spoilers* (groups opposed to the peace process)? How great a threat do they represent? What resources exist to deal with them?
- Are there *single-issue groups* (those who represent a strong opinion on a particular aspect of the conflict)? Are there actors who remain internal geographically, but are removed from, or opposed to, the conflict (e.g., peace groups, business interests, etc.)?
- Who are the *external actors* (governments, states, regional blocs, etc.)? Which *outside interests* and groups affect the conflict?

*The first step in analysis is acquiring all the raw data, making sure everything relevant is included, the better to see the scope and shape of the problem.*

**ISSUES**

**What *issues* are involved in the conflict?**

- What issues arise over the *distribution* of economic, social and political resources?
- What is the conflict about in *political terms*?
- Is there *discrimination* at work in the distribution process?

**UNDERLYING FACTORS**

**What are the *needs* of the parties? What are their *fears*?**

- What *drives* each of the parties and why? (For example, do they really want secession, or is it an expression of a deeper need for security?)
- What do they *fear* under the present situation? What are the fears each group currently has of the other groups?

**SCOPE**

**What is the *extent* of the conflict's effect, both within and outside the conflict area?**

- What is the *scope* of the conflict in its effects on the population? Which sections suffer most, and why? Are some sections of the country relatively untouched, and why?
- What are the implications of the conflict for other states? For regional or global alliances?
- Who is affected by the conflict's continuance, and who might be affected by its settlement?

**PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS AT SETTLEMENT**

**What is the *history* of the conflict regarding attempts to resolve it?**

- What structures were previously tried? Why did they fail? Do the flaws relate to who authored the settlement, or with how it was implemented, or what it contained?
- Can *patterns* be identified among previous attempts at settlement?

## 2.7 Factors for Analysis

### PHASES AND INTENSITY

**Is it possible to identify *phases* of the conflict?**

- Does the conflict have distinct *phases*, for example in relation to experiments in particular forms of governance, patterns of violence, or outside influences?
- Did the *intensity* of the violence shift over time?

### BALANCE OF POWER

**What is the nature and extent of the *balance of power* between the parties?**

- Who is *stronger*? Who has more support? (The perception of the parties of their own power and their own estimation of the “balance” between them is critical.)
- Has this balance changed over time, or has it remained constant?
- Is the dominant position of one party *sustainable*?
- Is it possible that one party may win outright victory in the near future?

### CAPACITY AND RESOURCES

**What are the current *capacities and resources* of the parties?**

- Have the resources shifted for each side over time? Will they change in the near future? Are they internal sources or external?
- What is the *financial situation* of the differing parties?
- What resources will they need to conduct effective negotiations?

### STATE OF THE RELATIONSHIP

**What is the nature of the *relationship* between the adversaries?**

- What is the nature of the relationship between leaders?
- What are the *mutual images* of one another that the parties hold?
- Where do they get information about each other? How accurate is their information?
- What *communication channels* are available between the groups?
- What, if any, degree of trust exists?

## 2.8 Analytic Lenses

What follows is designed to help put some structure, some organization on the raw data generated by the questions of the previous section. Most of the ideas presented here originated from academic research. The aim is to extract some of the better academic thinking on conflict analysis, and to present it in a useful and practical manner.

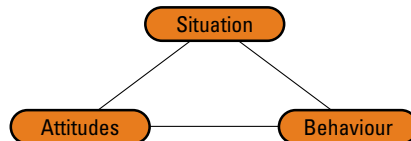
As soon as one analyses anything, one simplifies. This is an occupational hazard and necessary element of the analytic process. As long as one recognizes the limitations this implies, then analysis can still be a very useful tool for gaining perspective, for organizing information, for reaching a coherent understanding of the conflict. Simplicity is sometimes a strength, even with the most complex subject matter.

What is offered here are a few simple analytic tools – sometimes called models or theories by their originators. But they are not panaceas: if a model seems inappropriate to the subject matter, one should know when to drop it in favour of another. Again, no one model will explain everything; one chooses models as they work and replaces them when they don't.

Moreover, conflict has a constantly shifting dynamic. Many of the factors outlined in the previous section may change in themselves and alter in their relative importance over time; wholly new factors may arrive and previously important factors disappear. So the analysis process is never completely over. There is a need to go back to it and reassess it regularly. Likewise, the analysis must be projected into the future, to see which current factors will persist, and which will shift with time, over the short, medium and long term.

### 2.8.1 The conflict triangle

One of the simplest ways to look at conflict is to imagine it as a triangle, with three points:



It thus has three elements, any one of which can generate conflict:

**Situation.** The situation refers to the objective positions that can cause conflict. For instance, if political power resides in the

*One of the simplest ways to look at a conflict is to imagine it as a triangle with three points – situation, attitudes and behaviour – any one of which can generate conflict.*

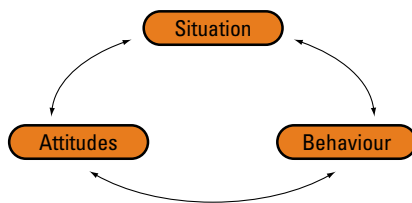
## 2.8 Analytic Lenses

hands of one section of a population, to the exclusion of the other; or if one group has exclusive access to all the natural resources in an area; or if a country is partitioned in such a way as to privilege one group over another. Eventually, the groups involved find that the situation has brought them into conflict.

**Behaviour.** Behaviour relates to the actions of people. One group acts in an aggressive manner towards another: killing their members, or oppressing them, or discriminating against them. Perhaps the second group retaliates. Eventually the behaviours of both spiral into war. Thus the behaviour of those involved, action and reaction alike, generates a context of conflict.

**Attitudes.** Here, we speak of the attitudes and perceptions of groups, particularly their images of, and attitudes towards, each other. A belief that another group is less valuable than our group, or that they are plotting our destruction, or that their own beliefs offend our moral code, or that they generally are a danger to us, will generate conflict between them and us.

These three elements, then, can each be the root of conflict: the situation people find themselves in, the behaviour they demonstrate, or the beliefs and perceptions they hold about each other. Conflict can begin at any of these points on the triangle. Once conflict begins from one point, however, it quickly spreads to the others. Indeed the three points become mutually reinforcing elements in the conflict. We can then more accurately portray them as interconnected, and reinforcing in both directions:



Wherever the conflict originates in the triangle, it begins to circulate in both directions. Aggressive behaviour will reinforce negative attitudes; negative attitudes will make the situation worse; a worsened situation will stimulate more defensive or aggressive behaviour. And likewise, aggressive behaviour will make the situation worse, a worsened situation will reinforce negative attitudes, and negative attitudes will be expressed in more aggressive behaviour. (Despite the danger of overloading such a basic concept as our triangle, this model can then be reversed to show that a reduction in aggressive behaviour, or an easing of

negative attitudes, or an improvement in the material situation will logically lead to a reduction in tension and conflict.)

This is a very simple tool. Its purpose is less to do with tracing the origins of a conflict – in prolonged conflict, the cyclical interaction around the triangle in both directions may very quickly muddy any possibility of pinning down a single source. More pertinent is the simple lesson that these three elements add together to form conflict, and that their interaction and interdependence fuel the dynamic of its growth and intensity. Using the triangle as a basic framework may help to separate the complex elements of conflict and to see a little more clearly where the pieces fit.

### *2.8.2 Stages of escalation*

Conflicts tend to escalate and de-escalate over time, bursting out into violence, retreating into latent periods, and so on. It is a vital piece of information, in analysing a conflict, to know where in the escalatory spiral the conflict currently stands, and in which direction it may be heading. Another tool offers a way of doing this. This model says that there are four basic stages that a conflict moves between, listed in rising order of escalation: Discussion, Polarization, Segregation and Destruction.

**Discussion stage.** Parties are disagreeing, but still close enough to work together. Communication hopefully consists of direct debate and discussion between parties. Mutual perceptions are both accurate and reasonably benign. The relationship is one with a modicum of trust and respect. The issues being emphasized in the dispute are substantive, objective ones. The possible outcome is assumed to be one that can please both sides: a win-win solution. The preferred method for managing the conflict is through co-operation to reach a joint solution. For instance, Canadian-Quebecois tensions over linguistic and cultural rights are deep, abiding and complex. But, by and large, the argument is waged within the parameters of low-escalation discussion.

**Polarization stage.** The parties have started to put distance between them, to withdraw and turn away from each other. Because of that distance, communication is now more indirect and reliant on interpretation (or, increasingly, misinterpretation). Mutual perceptions of each other are hardening into rigid stereotypes, especially since these are no longer challenged by the evidence of direct interaction with each other. The relationship has deteriorated from one of respect to a cooler one where each sees the other as still important but increasingly unreliable. The

## 2.8 Analytic Lenses

emphasized issues have moved away from the objective elements to the more psychological concerns about the relationship. The possible outcome is no longer one where everyone wins, but one where each must compromise to win some things and lose others. The preferred method of managing the conflict has moved from co-operative decision-making to competitive negotiation. The Soviet-US relationship during periods of Cold War detente fits the polarization stage fairly closely.

**Segregation stage.** The parties have moved away completely from each other. Communication is now restricted to the issuing of threats. Mutual perceptions have hardened into a picture of us-as-good and them-as-evil. The relationship is now one of mistrust and disrespect. The issues now being emphasized in the dispute are the core needs and values of each group: thus the stakes have been rapidly raised in this stage. The outcome is now perceived as a zero-sum calculation: a simple win-or-lose situation. And the preferred means of managing the situation has become one of defensive competition, where each protects its own interests above all, while trying to outwit or outsmart the other side. To a degree, the tense stand-off in early 1998 between Iraq and the US over UN weapons inspections reflected an instance of escalation up to the polarization stage, but one which then de-escalated without tipping over into the outright violence of destruction.

**Destruction stage.** This is one of all-out antagonism. Communication now merely consists of direct violence or complete silence. In order to justify violence, perceptions of the other side have become abusive descriptions of them as non-human, psychopaths, and so on. The relationship is seen as being in a completely hopeless state. The only issue being emphasized now is the ultimate survival of one's own side in the face of the other's aggression. Perceived possible outcomes now are all lose-lose: the situation is so bad that both sides will bear a heavy cost. The chosen method of managing the conflict at this stage is simply that of trying to destroy the opposition: we are in a state of war. The world sadly abounds with examples of conflicts manifestly in the destruction phase.

## 2.9 Conclusion

Conflict analysis is not easy. At the very beginning of it, adopting the integrative analytic approach is itself a challenge. It is a difficult process, requiring time and effort to unpack the complexities and multiplicities of this kind of conflict. Indeed, it can seem extremely daunting. But it must be borne in mind that, more often than not, what we are in fact looking at is complexity rather than impossibility.

Analysis is complete when we have become aware of all the elements and factors – the actors, the issues, the relationships, and so on – which will need to be taken into account in order to develop a process for managing the conflict peacefully. From the analysis, in other words, we can then move to a consideration of all the ingredients which must be part of (a) a workable process for reaching agreement among all those involved, and (b) a viable outcome which covers all the elements, needs and interests identified. We move on now to the first of these – process design – in the next chapter.

*Analysis is complete when we have become aware of all the elements and factors – the actors, the issues, the relationships, and so on – which will need to be taken into account in order to develop a process for managing the conflict peacefully.*

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# Case Study

SOUTH AFRICA





## Case Study: South Africa

### SOUTH AFRICA

#### *Introduction*

Conflict was evidenced early in South Africa's recorded history, both between and within racial groupings. Migrations by black and white groupings took place under Zulu and British expansionism, and black tribes engaged in a series of skirmishes and battles with Boers (Afrikaners) and British settlers throughout the 1800s. Tensions between the British and the Boers culminated in The Boer War (1899–1902). The discovery of diamonds (1867) and gold (1886) opened the economy and added to the competition over resources and power.

In 1910, the Boer republics (Transvaal and Orange Free State) and the British colonies (Natal and the Cape) were unified, a tenuous white unity achieved at the expense of black suffrage. The exclusion of blacks however sparked the formation of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1912, and the beginnings of a long struggle for political participation.

During the 1930s several investigative commissions questioned the sustainability of economic growth in a system founded on racial discrimination. A degree of liberalization resulted in relaxation of the pass laws, an erosion of the job colour bar, moves towards a closure in the racial wage gap, and some extensions of labour rights. But this stalled after 1945. The National Party (NP), elected in 1948 on a wave of Afrikaner nationalism, enforced a hardline policy of formal racial separatism: *apartheid*. African, Asian and coloured resistance strengthened. In 1957, Africanists opposed to non-racialism split from the ANC to establish the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), pursuing a more militant line of resistance. The shooting of pass-law demonstrators in Sharpeville by police sparked strikes and riots nationally, an international outcry and a flight of capital from the country. The government hardened its stance, banning the ANC and the PAC, which went underground and shifted their strategies from passive resistance to violence against the state.

But social and economic realities eroded the apartheid dream. Rapid economic growth during the 1960s produced a shortage of workers and demanded more rather than fewer black urban dwellers. Manufacturing required a literate, technically capable workforce. Economic development requirements ran counter to population, labour and education policies. Economic growth stalled as security and military expenditure rose sharply during the 1970s to cope with internal unrest, increasingly costly border protections, and investment in the Angolan conflict.

Heavy-handed and violent repression of demonstrations sparked widespread unrest and resistance which escalated through the late 1970s. On 12 September 1977, Steve Biko, the Black Consciousness leader, was assaulted and died violently in police detention. By the mid-1980s a massive groundswell of resistance was in evidence, led by student and worker activists. South Africa's isolation increased across

a broad front of sporting, economic and cultural activities. Multinational companies started to repatriate earnings rather than reinvest and major capital flight became evident.

In the face of internal and international pressure, the government embarked on a confused route of repression and reform, coercion and liberalization. A fast-growing and increasingly militant labour movement escalated strike action. Guerrilla attacks and consumer, rent and school boycotts proliferated. A government initiative to introduce a tricameral parliamentary system excluding blacks but incorporating Asian and coloured populations was rejected with massive demonstrations, but nonetheless forced through by the government.

### *The Conflict Management Process*

High levels of militance both energize progress in political transition and put it at risk. Not uncommonly, countries in transition utilize short-term pacting arrangements at military, political, and social-economic levels to stabilize the change process even as they struggle over its final outcome. In effect, pacts represent mutual guarantees on the part of powerholders to temporarily restrain their capacity for inflicting damage on each other in their own and others interests, and to foster progress in the transition. They represent the moment of interaction at which all major stakeholders realize that they are at risk – there is no returning to the previous system and power needs to be carefully used in order to secure their future. Neither retreat nor outright confrontation is feasible for either party.

The South African case reflects such a “*pact-building process*” – firstly it to open the door to negotiations, and then it to manage the negotiation process itself. This produced a network of stabilizing forums and institutions through which negotiations could occur and conflict could be better regulated. These arrangements were fragile. Progress was continually threatened by suspicions of treachery, by violence and by breakdowns in the negotiation process itself. When this occurred, the scale of violence, and the threat of chaos were such as to oblige parties back to the table.

President de Klerk’s opening speech to parliament in February 1990 opened the door to a complex transition process in which stakeholders had to convince themselves and each other of their shared commitment to a jointly negotiated future. De Klerk removed bans on political parties, and signaled new freedoms in political activity. The leader of the ANC, Nelson Mandela, was released from prison, immediately making statements to reassure and cohere his constituency.

Key leadership figures of the ANC were flown into the country to work in a joint committee with government representatives on an indemnity arrangement, but deep suspicions continued to shroud dealings. The ANC group feared that it was being “tricked” into the country under false pretences and would be arrested; the government team feared that amnesty arrangements would be used as a smoke-screen to cover ongoing infiltration and a major revolutionary onslaught. Both sides

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hedged and kept contingency plans in place.

Nevertheless the process was sustained and a three-day meeting ended in the Groote Schuur Minute, which facilitated the release of political prisoners and the return of exiles, and amended security legislation. This was followed by the Pretoria Minute in which Mandela announced the suspension of the armed struggle. Conservative elements on both sides feared that too much had been conceded. Previously banned liberation groups had the problem of transforming themselves into legal actors in a country still under the control of the Nationalist Party Government. The government faced problems in moving from an approach of vilifying the ANC as “communist terrorists”, to one which acknowledged it and other political groupings as legitimate political players. Partly to contain these problems, the ANC and the NP entered a deal – the DF Malan Accord in February 1991 – in which the government accepted that Umkhonto We Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC during the struggle, would not be disbanded before transition to a democratic government.

The government wanted a new constitution to be negotiated by a convention comprising all political groupings. The ANC held that it should be carried out by “legitimate representatives” of all the people. The NP recognized that in the ANC scenario it would be reduced to the part of small player. The ANC recognized that in the NP scenario it would be participating with players whose constituencies were either very small or nonexistent (as illegitimate products of the apartheid system) and its own influence would be reduced. This impasse was broken through a compromise in which the “either-or” scenario was transformed into an “order of events”. An all-party convention would negotiate the route to a constituent assembly and an interim constitution, leading to the election of the assembly by universal franchise. The assembly would then negotiate the final constitution, but on the foundation of binding principles laid down in the interim constitution on the question of majorities required for decision-making purposes. The Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) convened late in 1991 to initiate discussions.

It was quickly recognized that building a viable democracy would require institutions and forums for consensus building at all levels within a fractured society. These assumed the major task of institutionalizing the transition, and of managing associated tensions in a manner which would support and indeed carry the political process. Their very existence was confirmation in many ways that change was irreversible. Management of the process was not simply in the hands of the regime. Steadily it moved into a period of joint control through peace accords, economic pacts, local government forums and a transitional executive council which laid the foundation for the advent of majority rule.

In 1992, after lengthy behind-the-scenes discussions and in the context of progress on the political front, the trade union movement entered the National Economic Forum (NEF) with the government of the day and business. Its purpose was to seek consensus over economic policy, especially during the transition period. In this

forum, organized labour rather than political opposition groups held sway and sought to entrench their influence over economic and social policy-making. In making these moves the trade unions made the decision to retain an identity separate from that of government and to participate in the change process on its own terms, even as it supported opposition political parties. This strategic move laid the base for a later post-election social corporatism.

Pacting extended to areas of government as well. In 1992, representatives of central, provincial and local government established a Local Government Negotiating Forum to devise a viable and democratic future local government system. A National Education and Training Forum was founded to seek agreement on restructuring the education system to meet the country's development needs. All these forums embedded democratic values and processes of negotiation in the wider society and supported the unfolding political process.

Of central concern was the role and legitimacy of police and security forces. How could they be entrusted as custodians of transition to a new democracy – and what were the alternatives? Several important steps were taken to address this dilemma. A Police Board comprising representatives from political parties, civil society, government and the police was established in 1991 to review police policy and structure and recommend changes for a police service into the future. A National Peace Accord was achieved as a non-aggression pact between key stakeholders involved in the transition process. A detailed written agreement brokered by the churches, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and big business, the Accord sought primarily to end political violence in the country, making provision for codes of conduct for political parties and organizations, a code of conduct for police and the security forces, guidelines for the reconstruction and development of communities, and mechanisms to implement its provisions. It committed parties to a multi-party democracy and to respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms underpinning a democracy, and provided for a system of peace committees at all levels of society to monitor adherence to the Accord and resolve disputes using mediation and arbitration. The Police Board was entrenched as a measure of civilian control over policing activities.

The effectiveness of the Accord has been questioned. High levels of violence continued, particularly in Kwazulu-Natal and the East Rand. If the Accord failed to stop violence, it at least reduced it, and certainly through its conflict resolution mechanisms in the regions, it saved many lives. It contributed to the building of grass-roots peace structures, brought hope and participation in the transition process to many people otherwise alienated from the larger political exchange, and defused many volatile, and potentially fatal, political confrontations. Most importantly however, it represented a joint commitment on the part of all the stakeholders to values and standards which were difficult to walk away from or openly reject.

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### *The Political Negotiation Process*

CODESA's beginnings were unsteady. The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) leader Chief Buthelezi personally boycotted the process. De Klerk and Mandela opened with a heated exchange, accusing each other of bad faith. And so it continued. The ANC wanted a short "phase one" leading to elections and democratic government. The NP, recognizing that its major influence lay in the front rather than the back end of negotiations, wanted a more detailed and protracted process. Increasingly, opposition groups suspected the NP of deliberate stalling tactics, and uneasiness developed as to whether the process was in fact irreversible. De Klerk called a referendum amongst whites in March 1992, and achieved a resounding two-thirds majority for continuing negotiations. But when he returned to the bargaining table, it was with a tougher, rather than a softer line.

Negotiations bogged down on the issue of which matters were "basic principles" to be enshrined as constraints in the final constitution. The NP in effect wanted as much binding agreement as possible up front. The ANC wanted as much latitude as possible retained for a later, more "legitimate" process following elections. The major deadlock was over percentages required for a majority to change the constitution. The ANC demanded two thirds as the international norm; the NP wanted 75 percent. Deadlock continued, and in June 1992, in the township of Boipatong, armed IFP supporters massacred 38 people in their homes. Serious allegations were made that security forces had assisted in the massacre, and there were signs of a police cover-up. De Klerk's visit to the township to placate residents deteriorated into violence, further angering the populace and pushing the ANC to a more militant public position. CODESA collapsed with the ANC withdrawing from the process.

Following the breakdown of CODESA, the ANC, responding to a rising level of grass-roots militance, embarked on a campaign of mass action. Tensions between the IFP and the ANC sparked massive violence in Kwazulu-Natal and the East Rand. Police and security forces were accused of either assisting IFP forces or simply standing by. ANC suspicions of a "third force" were voiced, reflecting a strong view that there were deliberate efforts to sabotage the negotiation process and the ANC's mobilization campaign.

The ANC responded with a formalized "rolling mass action" campaign of strikes, stayaways and boycotts. They turned their attention to the homelands and on 7 March organized a march on Bisho, the Ciskei capital. Ciskei troops opened fire, killing 28 people.

Tragically it was the rise in political deaths, culminating in the Bisho killings, which sobered relations, facilitating the return to prominence of softliners and a reconvening of talks. It obliged the leadership on all sides to face the realities of fail-

ing to achieve a political accord. Mandela and de Klerk reduced preconditions for a resumption of negotiations, and talks restarted.

The political violence continued right up to the election period, with the white right playing an increasing role as it sensed the negotiations moving to a close. The threat of rightwing action was ever-present in the process, given the unresolved question of who was really in charge of the country at the time – the government was in place but a Transitional Executive Council (TEC) had established mechanisms to ensure that in effect it governed by consent in the lead-up to elections.

The peace process was conceived in two phases – an interim constitution leading into elections, after which a final constitution would be negotiated. The *interim constitution* provided the foundations for a constitutional democracy, guaranteeing universal suffrage and fundamental democratic rights to be guarded by a constitutional court. The final constitution was to be approved by the *Constitutional Assembly* (national assembly and the senate), and checked by the constitutional court against constitutional principles before being adopted.

The interim constitution provided wide-ranging protection of human and civil rights. It provided for a parliament comprising a *National Assembly*, with 400 members elected by proportional representation; a *Senate* comprising 10 senators for each of nine provinces, also elected by proportional representation, and a *National Executive* headed by a president elected by a majority in the national assembly. The president could appoint two deputies and a cabinet. All parties achieving more than a five per cent vote had a right to be part of the cabinet, and cabinet posts were allocated in proportion to national assembly seats.

*Provincial governments* were to have their own legislatures elected on the basis of proportional representation, making decisions by simple majority vote. They could pass laws for their provinces, but they could not exceed powers granted by the constitution. Should national and provincial laws clash, the provincial one was to prevail. *Local governments* were to be autonomous according to conferred powers. A *Council of Traditional Leaders* at national level, and *Houses of Traditional Leaders* at provincial level, would advise parliament on traditional and customary law. By agreement the interim constitution was to come into effect on the day of the elections of the national and provincial parliaments.

### **Founding Elections**

During the transition process, the existing government remained in office but acted in consultation with the Transitional Executive Council (TEC) drawn from the parties involved in the negotiating process. An *Independent Electoral Commission* (IEC) was appointed to conduct the country's first democratic elections in April 1994. Its first meeting was held on 20 December 1993 and the actual work of setting up systems of delivery at grass-roots level was only started two months before the elections. Constraints included not only an unreasonably short timeframe, and the

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absence of a voters roll, but the absence of infrastructure in large areas of the country, a lack of trained personnel, few existing administrative structures, and inadequate demographic data. Over the four days of the April 1994 elections, 8,493 ordinary voting stations supplemented with 950 mobile, 1,047 special, and 187 foreign voting stations were in operation in South Africa, and in 78 other countries. A third of the voting stations had no electricity or regular telephone service. It was a difficult process with shortages of materials, logistical problems, sabotage of the counting process, and systems failures. The IEC were acutely aware that failure to deliver a free and fair election might lose South Africa's democracy at the very moment of its delivery. Efficient and credible internal and external (United Nations, European Union, etc.) monitoring was important, as was the creative capacity of the IEC to respond to last minute crises in administration and counting processes.

### *Consolidating Democracy*

South Africa has taken important steps to embed its democracy in political and civil life. A final constitution confirming the spirit of the interim constitution has been negotiated. A number of state institutions exist to strengthen and protect the new democracy, including: a Public Protector; a Human Rights Commission; a Commission to Promote and Protect Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities; a Commission for Gender Equality; an Auditor General; and an Electoral Commission. The public service is being transformed to more fully represent and serve the country's population; new labour legislation adhering to international standards has been introduced and a National Economic, Development and Labour Council has been established to seek consensus on social and economic policy.

An important initiative has been the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC offered a means of surfacing the atrocities of the apartheid system in a manner directed at reconciling a deeply divided nation rather than simply exacting revenge or seeking retribution. It has given people at all levels and on all sides the opportunity to declare their part in the conflict, to shed light on disappearances, murders, tortures and lesser human rights transgressions, and importantly to express regret and seek forgiveness and amnesty.

### *Lessons for Managing Transitions to Democracy*

Building and sustaining a democracy in the context of deep-rooted conflict with limited violence is a tough task. The South African experience described here offers some lessons including the importance of:

- A precipitating crisis in the authoritarian system (internal and external pressures);
- A recognition of power realities by leadership (joint acknowledgement that negotiated change offers the best option to all parties);
- An extensive period of pre-negotiation;
- A significant gesture on the part of the government to break the deadlock of

- preconditions (the extension of meaningful political freedoms/suspension of armed struggle);
- Integrity of leadership and willingness to take risks for peaceful over violent change;
  - Reframing deadlocks into common problems (e.g., changing “either-or” into sequence options);
  - Pacting on multiple fronts to stabilize the change process and manage conflict relations;
  - Embedding democratic participation (civil society participation beyond the political elites);
  - The negotiation of a constitution which provides sufficient security for a governing regime to cede power through elections;
  - Properly resourced electoral processes;
  - Effective institutions for consolidating a new democracy and reconciling interests, moving from a past of deep and often violent division.

Although the tendency is to dissect constitutions and bargaining structures for lessons in managing transitions to democracy, perhaps the really important lessons lie less in these areas of analysis, and more in the attitudinal elements of key stakeholders, the quality of leadership and the skills they reveal in managing processes of negotiation and problem-solving both with adversaries and within constituencies. South Africa was indeed fortunate in these areas. The protracted process which facilitated the development of trade unions, the emergence of struggle structures and leaders with developed bargaining skills before political change was entertained may not have motivated early reform initiatives but, in the end, served the country well in the search for a viable democracy.