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# 1 Toward More Constructive Conflicts

HEATED DEBATES ABOUT American foreign policies arise from widespread dissatisfaction with the results of U.S. governmental involvements in foreign conflicts. Officials who pursued policies that did not work out well defend their decisions, while political opponents deride them and propose quite different policies. This is evident in the partisan arguments about the neoconservative policies implemented during George W. Bush's presidency, and the quite different policies adopted in Barack Obama's presidency. Similar debates, sometimes with much less partisanship, go back to the early years of the Cold War.

Actual American engagements in foreign conflicts, however, have varied on a case-by-case basis in the strategies chosen and in the degree of their success. Moreover, Americans who are not governmental officials also engage in foreign conflicts, and their actions should not be ignored. The variability in strategies and in results provides the evidence used in this work to assess the possible effectiveness of different strategies. My assessments are made from the constructive conflict perspective, synthesizing ideas and practices from the conflict resolution and peace studies fields. This enables me to suggest alternative strategies to those that had been tried and proved to be unsuccessful.

The world military, economic, cultural, and political preeminence of the United States since the end of World War II has enabled U.S. government leaders to shape many aspects of the world system. They have led, for example, in greatly influencing the formation and workings of the international governmental organizations

dealing with economic activity. American governmental and nongovernmental actions have hugely influenced technological innovations, political ideals, popular culture, and much more.

Despite this dominance, it is striking that on many occasions U.S. involvement in specific foreign conflicts has been unsuccessful and sometimes counterproductive. In the case of many other foreign conflicts, however, the intended benefits of engagement were attained to a significant degree. Three kinds of engagements in foreign conflicts are examined in this book. First, Americans may fight in conflicts in which they view their country as opposing a significant adversary such that deadly violence occurs or is threatened. Second, Americans may intervene in conflicts abroad in which two or more large-scale coercive adversaries are in contention, and the intervention is not simply in support of one side in opposition to an opponent, as when the intervention is for humanitarian considerations. In actuality, such interventions may be viewed as partisan by the contending sides, and indeed to some degree often are supportive of one of the adversaries.<sup>1</sup> Third, some Americans may provide mediation services in foreign conflicts between adversaries who have resorted to violence or seem likely to do so. These three kinds of involvement are not always clearly distinct; rather, a particular American involvement often blends two or three kinds of actions, and the primacy of one or another changes over time.

American officials and private citizens have used a wide variety of methods of engagement in foreign conflicts. In principle, this should make it possible to assess the effectiveness of different methods and approaches in achieving desired constructive results. In practice, every step in making such assessments poses challenging problems. I will try to confront the problems carefully and openly.

To focus and delimit this analysis, I draw heavily from the constructive conflict approach, which is outlined in this chapter. This approach is based on empirical research and the analyses of conflict resolution applications. It offers a comprehensive perspective for all kinds of conflicts at all stages of their manifestation, including emergence, escalation, de-escalation, settlement, and peacebuilding. Furthermore, based on that approach, I make suggestions of possible alternative policies that would be more constructive than those used in foreign conflict engagements that did not go well.

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## Aims of the Book

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I do not dwell on military operations in this book, but recognize their possible constructive roles in various contexts. There is a large body of literature on military force applications and I hope that my analysis here will help make better alternatives

more visible and enhance the constructiveness of all kinds of engagements in foreign conflicts. Military personnel recognize that they are sometimes tasked by civilians to undertake assignments for which they are not well suited. It is useful to expand the repertoire of policies beyond doing nothing or using military force.

Certainly, U.S. involvement in foreign conflicts has frequently entailed the use of U.S. military force, or at least the threatened use of military violence.<sup>2</sup> America fought in high-casualty wars in Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq, none of which could be regarded as highly successful. The United States often has borne extremely large costs to win small benefits in fighting enemies, in intervening on humanitarian grounds in wars, or even in mediating international conflicts. This is also remarkable given the generally high regard Americans and American society are held in the world.

This is even more puzzling when the trends of declining deadly violence in the world are considered. There is substantial evidence that rates of violent deaths among humans have been trending downward from prehistoric times, despite increasing capabilities for killing people.<sup>3</sup> More recent periods clearly have had declines in rates of violent deaths, notably since the end of the Cold War. International wars have become rare; domestic wars have decreased and occur at a low, fluctuating rate; and deaths in wars have also declined.<sup>4</sup> Despite these realities, U.S. engagements in armed conflicts have increased since the end of the Cold War.<sup>5</sup>

Accounting for relatively effective involvements is important and useful, but so is accounting for ineffective and destructive engagements. Admittedly, judging whether a particular American involvement was a success or a failure is frequently controversial, and varies with the time frame of the assessment and the point of view of the person making the assessment.

Assessments of what went well and what went poorly are made in this book in order to derive ideas useful for engaging more constructively in future conflicts. Such retrospective and speculative analyses, however, are difficult and certainly disputable. Analyses of past policies usually focus on describing what happened and sometimes venturing explanations for those events. Such analyses usually tend to suggest that whatever happened was inevitable, given the circumstances at the time. Considering alternative options that might have been feasible in the past can foster fresh thinking about future choices.

In assessing specific American participations in foreign conflicts, it should be kept in mind that strategies are never wholly failures or successes, wholly destructive or constructive. Every particular set of actions has both beneficial and adverse consequences, in different proportions, for different parties in a conflict. The intention here is to understand how particular strategies under specific circumstances had significant broad and enduring beneficial consequences, and could reasonably be

regarded as such for the persons who chose the strategies. Furthermore, constructive and destructive are comparative terms. I often am explicit about designating a particular action as constructive or destructive compared to a particular alternative, but sometimes that is implicit, for the sake of brevity.

In this book, I examine American involvements in foreign conflicts that have been relatively effective and beneficial and others that were not. I do not attempt to examine all aspects of American foreign policies, which pertain to a wide array of matters, including foreign trade, humanitarian assistance, engagement in the United Nations (UN), and bilateral relations with allies. The focus is on three kinds of American relationships to large-scale foreign conflicts in which deadly violence is or threatens to be extensive. As identified earlier, the three kinds of relationships are as an adversary confronting another adversary, as an intervener in an ongoing conflict abroad, and as a mediator in a foreign conflict.

I analyze a variety of such American involvements and assess whether taking a constructive conflict approach would have yielded better consequences than using more traditional coercive approaches.<sup>6</sup> Actual policies that were relatively ineffective or counterproductive are occasionally compared to plausible positive policies that might have yielded more beneficial results. The result of such assessments should provide the grounds to determine whether more efforts to develop and employ the constructive conflict approach would be beneficial for the American people.

The constructive conflict approach derives from the ideas and practices of the developing conflict resolution field and from the field of peace studies. It is not presented as a comprehensive theory of social conflicts, but as a perspective in analyzing and conducting conflicts.<sup>7</sup> It is distinctive in emphasizing how to wage struggles well and bring about generally desired outcomes.

In the course of this book, I will trace the approach's evolution and growth from its emergence in the 1950s—how work in the constituent fields of peace studies and conflict resolution contributed to the official and non-official American participation in foreign conflicts, as well as the way the fields were affected by the experience of Americans in foreign conflicts. Learning from that interaction will enhance our understanding of each. Of course the way conflicts are waged and the fields of conflict resolution and peace studies are not purely American phenomena, and some attention will be given to ideas and practices from elsewhere.<sup>8</sup>

This treatment should help readers reflect on past American international involvements and infer lessons useful for current and future international policies. Even familiar events are seen in a new way when looked at from different points of view. The interpretations people make of their past actions help guide their future conduct. Unfortunately, mistaken interpretations are poor guides and contribute to

failed and counterproductive strategies.<sup>9</sup> This is particularly true in foreign conflicts, since people generally have only indirect experience and limited knowledge of those complicated events occurring over long periods of time. The consequences of the ways the U.S. government as well as private American citizens have engaged in such conflicts are examined. The consequences relate not only to effects on external actors in the conflicts, but also to internal impacts upon American society.

Throughout the book, the diversity of Americans and the impact this diversity has on their views of American participations in foreign conflicts are considered. This diversity derives from more than the ideological differences between the Right and the Left. In addition, interests and perspectives vary by regions of the country, by religious and ethnic communities, by class and occupational positions, by generations, and by genders. Special attention is given to different actions and perspectives between American officials and American private citizens. I shall try to keep this diversity in mind and avoid assuming a false unity and uniformity of views and actions manifested by U.S. government leaders and various groups of private American citizens.

## The Constructive Conflict Approach

The constructive conflict approach is a realistic perspective to understanding the dynamics of all social conflicts, and thereby provides ways to improve the benefits and efficacy of Americans' participation in foreign conflicts. This approach is an increasingly influential alternative to conventional adversarial thinking. Elements of this approach are becoming increasingly adopted in some social arenas, or at least particular terms from it have become frequently used, such as "win-win," "conflict transformation," "stakeholders," "mediation," and "dialogue." In order to assess the potential advantages and disadvantages of applying this approach, it must be set forth clearly.

The concept of peace, as used here, should be defined at the outset. It is commonly understood in two meanings: negative peace and positive peace.<sup>10</sup> Negative peace refers to the absence of direct physical violence, of wars. Positive peace includes the absence of structural violence, the institutionalized inequities in basic living standards. It is also sometimes extended to include harmonious relations. My usage is close to negative peace, with the addition that relations are not unilaterally and coercively imposed by one group upon another within the same social system.

The evolving constructive conflict approach has emerged from the conflict resolution and the peace studies fields. Since the end of World War II, and especially since the 1970s, research, experience, and theorizing about how conflicts can be

waged and resolved so they are broadly beneficial rather than mutually destructive have greatly increased.<sup>11</sup> An overview of the perspective is presented in this chapter, and later chapters analyze, illustrate, and apply the various beliefs and practices more fully so that their adequacy can be better judged by the reader.

Early work in conflict resolution and peace research focused on why wars broke out, why they persisted, and why peace agreements failed to endure. Knowing why bad things happened was assumed to suggest how good things could occur (by avoiding doing what preceded the destructive escalations). This has some obvious limitations. Later research and theorizing have focused on what actions and circumstances actually have averted destructive escalations, stopped the perpetuation of destructive conduct, produced a relatively good conflict transformation, or resulted in an enduring and relatively equitable relationship among the former adversaries. A comprehensive approach to accounting for such transitions that integrates many factors and processes is still evolving.

These conflict resolution ideas have steadily evolved from the early years of the conflict resolution field in the 1950s, when it became identified as an area for research, theory-building, training, and practice. Much of the research and theory-building was based on studying the actual practice of peacemaking and peacebuilding by officials and by private citizens. That kind of work was a central part of the field of peace studies, which preceded the emergence of contemporary conflict resolution. For both, at the beginning, research methods included single or multiple case studies of decision-making in crises, effective international mediation, nonviolent conflict escalations, peacemaking negotiations, and peacebuilding.<sup>12</sup> They also included quantitative analysis of arms races, international mediation, international conflict negotiations, and building peaceful international relations (IR).<sup>13</sup>

In addition, two other research methods were used to study basic ideas and practices in the fields of peace studies and conflict resolution. One method entailed interpersonal and small group experiments related to negotiation styles and outcomes, maximizing mutual gains, and the formation of superordinate goals.<sup>14</sup> The other major research method was the analysis of interactive problem solving workshops by scholar/practitioners. In these workshops participants come from countries or other entities that are in conflict and engage in analyses of the conflict and explorations of possible ways to overcome contentious issues. The sessions are guided and facilitated by conveners of the workshops, often academics.<sup>15</sup>

The fields of peace studies and conflict resolution and many related fields of study continue to evolve in interaction with each other.<sup>16</sup> As these fields have grown in scope and empirical grounding, the lessons learned have been taught and have spread into the public arena. As workers in these fields learn, teach, and apply what they have learned, these ideas continue to be tested and refined.

Those ideas have evolved in tandem with the episodes of American participation in foreign conflicts that are examined in this book. The interactions between those involvements and the fields of conflict resolution and peace studies during the last several decades are central in this work.

## Realities of the Constructive Conflict Approach

The fundamental idea of the constructive conflict approach is that conflicts are inevitable in human social life and they can produce widespread benefits. Conflicts are a major way people seek to challenge and rectify injustices, to win autonomy and more control over their own lives. In many cases, other people are likely to feel threatened by such efforts and resist them. Therefore the outcomes of conflicts are widely viewed as yielding gains to one side at the expense of the other.

Indeed, the benefits of a conflict generally are not equal for all the contenders, but some benefits may accrue to many contenders, and highly destructive consequences for the contenders can be avoided. Underlying this belief that conflicts can be resolved constructively is the recognition that conflicts often result in minimal mutual losses and even have substantial mutual benefits. Assessments of these outcomes may change over time, as relations among the former adversaries change. Of course, the different parties in a conflict may also differ as to their relative benefits from the conflict's outcome.

The possibilities of waging conflicts in relatively constructive ways are based on seven inter-related realities. These realities are empirically grounded, being inferred from experience and research. They are discussed here as guides for analysis and practice, not as dictated applications. Individually, they can be drawn upon to advance goals that are likely to have beneficial consequences for many people, including many opponents. Some ideas may be applied in the wrong circumstances and yield unwanted results. Nevertheless, combined they can guide strategies that avoid self-defeating behavior and illuminate paths out of seemingly intractable, mutually damaging fights. Together they provide the empirical grounding for the constructive conflict approach.

### VARIETY OF INDUCEMENTS IN WAGING CONFLICTS

The first basic reality is that social conflicts are usually conducted with varying methods that inflict greater or lesser damages on the other side and with varying costs borne by each side. In a severe conflict, all sides are likely to suffer some degree of unwanted impacts. In this book, the severity of the losses and the broader the

range and number of people so impacted constitute indicators of a conflict's destructiveness. Furthermore, different ways to wage a conflict have different chances of yielding significant and widely shared benefits. How damages can be minimized and gains maximized for various stakeholders in waging and settling conflicts will be examined throughout this work.

One reason that conflicts can be waged constructively, and have some good consequences entailing some mutual benefits, is that there are a great array of ways to conduct a struggle. Three kinds of inducements can be variously combined by each adversary to affect its opponent so that it changes its objectionable conduct.<sup>17</sup> One obvious kind of inducement is coercion or negative sanctions, applied to compel the desired change in the other side's conduct. The coercion may be threatened or implemented and may be violent or nonviolent. Another kind of inducement is the use of positive sanctions, offering rewards for the desired changed behavior. The third kind of inducement is persuasion, the use of appeals, justifications, and arguments that the desired changed behavior by the other side will be in that other side's own best interest and help fulfill shared values. Persuasion is often based on the attractive attributes of the persuader who possesses what has come to be called "soft power."<sup>18</sup>

In actuality, each strategy synthesizes these three kinds of inducements in shifting proportions. Richard L. Armitage and Joseph S. Nye, Jr. have written of the value of combining soft power and hard power (negative and positive sanctions, particularly military power) to constitute smart power.<sup>19</sup> These terms were often used by Hillary Clinton in her confirmation hearings as Secretary of State and in subsequent addresses.

The possible good effects of conflicts are widely recognized within societies, and conflict management is institutionalized in political and legal systems so as to derive benefits and reduce the costs of raising and settling contentions. This is at the heart of American political institutions and its adversarial legal system, which are designed to manage many conflicts, but they do not cover all kinds of conflicts and are ineffective at times. The constructive conflict approach focuses on the less formal and institutionalized means of managing struggles, which are largely the means used in foreign conflicts.

## SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS

The second reality is that social conflicts are socially constructed by the antagonists, but not as any one of them would determine it.<sup>20</sup> Members of each adversarial side in a conflict strive to construct their own identity and the identity of the enemy; disagreements about that tend to be contentious. Members of each adversarial party consider



which issues are at stake and how the antagonists are endangering or hampering the realization of their hopes. Within each contending party, political, religious, and intellectual leaders help generate different visions of the fight in which they are engaged. Furthermore, each side's conception of the opponents and the conflict influence the opposing side's self-conceptions. Such interactions can have varying implications.

#### HETEROGENEITY OF ADVERSARIES

The third reality is that each party in a large-scale conflict is heterogeneous in many regards. Most relevant here are the different interests and concerns that are held by leaders and among all the other people in a contending country or adversarial entity. Indeed, it is a common theme in conflicts for leaders on each side to assert that they have no quarrel with the people in the opposing camp, but only with their bad leaders. Leaderships themselves are not uniform and unitary; there are different interests among rivals and even allied groups. Furthermore, every person and group has many interests and values that are to some degree at stake in a given conflict. Consequently, as the relations among the groups within any one side change, a shift in the course of a conflict is feasible. Different factors or parties change in their relative power and influence—regularly through electoral politics, and in many other ways. Notably, in foreign conflicts, relations among allied governments are particularly subject to changing character, and therefore to possible conflict escalation or de-escalation. Each party or faction on each side of a conflict can decide to act relatively constructively or not.

#### INTERCONNECTEDNESS

The fourth reality is that conflicts are interrelated and embedded in larger settings. Many conflicts are linked over time, each waxing and waning in scale and intensity. Others are linked in social space, small ones being nested in a series of ever-larger conflicts. Additionally, each side in a major conflict is engaged in its own set of internal and external fights. Shifts in the salience of one or another conflict affect the significance of other interconnected conflicts. The primary enemy may be downgraded to enemy number two, or even become an ally, when a new conflict and enemy become pre-eminent. Very significantly for the way a conflict is waged, it is not waged as a totally closed system. The social context may be the source of interveners who exacerbate a destructive conflict by helping to perpetuate it and/or to use more lethal weapons. On the other hand, external actors may serve as intermediaries who help constructively transform the conflict; for example, through mediation.

#### DYNAMISM

The fifth reality follows from the other four. It is that conflicts are dynamic; they move through stages and can be transformed to be better waged. They emerge, escalate, begin to de-escalate, and move toward an ending (imposed or agreed-upon), and the resulting outcome becomes the ground for renewed conflict or a stable new relationship. At each conflict stage, members of each contending party can behave with a greater or lesser degree of constructiveness: to stop destructive escalation, minimize outcomes that are destructive, and avoid destructive conflict legacies. There are no clearly demarcated stages with all members of the antagonistic sides moving together in lock-step, in an unvarying sequence. Some members of each side may lag behind in the transitions, while some may resist a particular transition and bring about a regression to an earlier step, either of escalation or de-escalation.

#### MEDIATION

The sixth reality is that mediation can contribute to beneficially changing a wide range of conflicts, from settling a dispute to transforming a complex conflict. Conflict transformation is generally understood as a broad positive change in the relationship between adversaries. Conflicts that are in early stages of escalating contention or that have become locked into self-perpetuating contentions can benefit from mediation.

Mediation varies greatly in form and content and its effectiveness is greatly dependent on the fit between what is attempted and the circumstances of the conflict. Generally, the conflict circumstances set parameters for what mediation can achieve. Nevertheless, the possibilities of mediation in improving the efficacy and quality of transforming and settling specific conflicts are well documented.<sup>21</sup> The study and practice of mediation is a central component of the field of conflict resolution, as discussed later in this chapter.

#### CONSIDERATION OF OTHERS

Finally, the seventh reality is that considering the other side's concerns often has shared benefits. Such considerations can guide contentious conduct toward stable, mutually acceptable accommodations among adversaries. This is the idea that establishing enduring legitimate relations among adversaries is more likely when they take a long-term time perspective and take into account each other's concerns and interests. This empirical generalization must be understood in conjunction with the

fourth idea about the heterogeneity of each adversary. It is not the interests and concerns of oppressive autocratic leaders that must be considered so much as those of the great majority of people within each side in the conflict. It is undoubtedly the most challenging guiding principle for leaders of each side to apply, since it risks losing support from their own constituencies and making themselves vulnerable to demagogic rivals. Of course, consideration of the opponent does not require abandonment of one's own concerns and interests.

Building on these realities, the constructive conflict approach provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing and conducting all kinds of conflicts. This begins with the very definition of conflict. A social conflict occurs when two or more persons or groups manifest the belief that they have incompatible objectives.<sup>22</sup> Note that a conflict is not defined by the way in which it is manifested. In everyday speech, conflict sometimes refers only to relations marked by harsh coercion or violence, and sometimes only to undesirable conduct between people. The objectives that are viewed as incompatible, however, may not be of great significance. They may refer to disagreements about the means to achieve shared goals and contested with little resort to coercion.

Since conflicts change and move through stages, particular kinds of conflict resolution methods are appropriate for different conflict stages. Specific sets of explanatory conditions and processes are important at each conflict stage. In trying to explain how certain members of each party in a conflict move from one stage to another, analysts and partisans point to different factors. Partisans often point to characteristics of their adversary to explain why the conflict arose and why it is waged destructively. Many observers and analysts emphasize how the adversaries are associated and interact with each other to account for escalations and de-escalations. Still other observers and analysts focus on the system or context within which the antagonists exist.

In reality, all three sources of factors and processes combine to explain a specific change in a conflict's trajectory. For certain conflicts at particular times, one combination or another will provide the most valid accounting. On the basis of that understanding, suitable strategies may be adopted to avert destructive escalation, to move toward constructive de-escalation, to reach mutually acceptable agreements, or to build enduring good relations. Such considered choices are made by conflict partisans and intermediaries to maximize the chance of making efficient and effective progress.

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## Constructive Conflict Methods

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The field of conflict resolution is sometimes viewed simply as a set of techniques used by intermediaries who regard themselves as conflict resolvers. In reality, constructive conflict methods are often applied by conflict partisans themselves, and

also by interveners who do not think of themselves as being in the field of conflict resolution.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, evidence for various conflict resolution ideas and practices is based upon the actual experience of diplomats, political leaders, social movement organizers, and many other kinds of people engaged in conflicts.

In this book, the constructive conflict approach refers to the concepts and practices consistent with the seven realities previously outlined and are applied wittingly or unwittingly by partisans or by intermediaries. Three sets of methods of practice warrant attention at the outset: negotiation, escalation, and mediation.

#### NEGOTIATION METHODS

A large number of methods relate to how adversaries may negotiate a settlement of a particular dispute or to take steps that positively transform a major conflict. A core focus of analysis includes practices such as each negotiator listening attentively to what negotiating partners say, uncovering the interests and concerns that underlie stated positions, separating the persons in the negotiations from the conflict, and thinking creatively of new solutions to solve the problem constituted by the conflict.<sup>24</sup> These practices can be learned and are taught in conflict resolution courses.

To increase the likelihood of reaching agreements effectively and maximize shared benefits, fairness, and durability, the parties represented in the negotiations and the settings for the negotiations, as well as the methods of negotiation, need to be appropriate for each particular conflict. Empirical research indicates many ways to reduce asymmetries in resources between opposing sides that will enhance the outcome of negotiations.<sup>25</sup>

#### ESCALATION METHODS

Although much attention in the field of conflict resolution relates to settling disputes and reaching agreements, the constructive conflict perspective recognizes the importance of reaching outcomes that are regarded as legitimate and fair by significant stakeholders in the conflict. Very often, for that to occur, one or another side in a conflict reasonably believes that it must fight before the outcome will be fair. Indeed, escalating a conflict often is necessary to gain rights that have been denied or to defend one party's members from grave threats to what they deem to be highly significant for them. As should be obvious, each side in a conflict may believe that it must defeat its opponents to safeguard itself. In seeking victory, they may cause each other great injuries and severe mutual losses. Misperceptions of the balance of resources that each side can bring to bear regarding the matters at stake certainly can contribute to unanticipated losses.

Utilization of constructive escalation strategies is more likely to occur insofar as the adversaries share and recognize that they share common identities, values, and interests. Adversaries are in a relationship that in reality has some such qualities and is not simply and wholly characterized by incompatible and antagonistic qualities. They usually share an interest in avoiding the costs of a highly escalated violent fight. They often also share some possible gains that working cooperatively might provide.

Developing and adopting ways to escalate a fight with minimal destructiveness is central to the constructive conflict approach. The use of violence in conflicts has been the subject of immense attention. There is a great deal of experience and research regarding the horrors of war and the tendency for violence to be reciprocated and generate escalating exchanges of hurting behavior with fewer and fewer restraints. In many times and places in the past, recourse to violence in combat has been glorified and celebrated. This has become less widespread in human history, and at present, recourse to violence is often regarded as regrettable, although necessary under certain circumstances.<sup>26</sup> Relatedly, wars in recent decades have become less frequent and actually less deadly. One set of reasons for these developments, as discussed in later chapters, has been the increasing efforts to circumscribe and outlaw certain forms of violence. This is illustrated by international norms, laws, trials, and interventions proscribing the use of land mines, the commission of genocides, and gross violations of human rights.

Adopting the constructive conflict approach does not mean advocating that the United States never use military force in any engagement in foreign conflicts. At present, there are times and places where its use can be constructive. Much depends on its magnitude, its purposes, and the context of its use. As will be examined in this book, too often its use has been excessive and even counterproductive.

In the fields of peace studies and conflict resolution, considerable attention is given to nonviolent forms of coercion and to noncoercive inducements. In recent decades, the effectiveness of various nonviolent forms of action in bringing about contentious changes has been documented through considerable theorizing, research, and experience. As a result, knowledge is growing and diffusing about what conditions and policies make for effective nonviolent actions.<sup>27</sup>

#### MEDIATION METHODS

Mediation, a core component of the constructive conflict approach, includes a great range of mediating services or functions. In this discussion, they are roughly sequenced from largely facilitative to highly intrusive. A major service of mediation is

helping adversaries communicate with each other, even when they are engaged in deadly conflict. Mediation sometimes entails helping the adversaries reframe their conflict, perhaps by helping them see shared threats of other problems that they can best manage by working together. This can help result in a constructive transformation of the conflict.

Mediators may help ease the negotiation process by proposing rules and techniques that enable disputants to discuss differences and minimize adversarial argument. These actions may include ensuring time constraints on speaking, sequencing of speakers, and encouraging disputants to ask questions of each other to learn the other side's underlying interests and concerns.

Mediation often helps opposing negotiators discover new options that are mutually acceptable to settle the conflict. This may result from bringing together a few members of the different sides to informally discuss their relationship and identify plausible steps to settle their conflict, as may occur in problem-solving workshops.<sup>28</sup> It also may be fostered by brainstorming, during which members of the negotiating sides suggest possible solutions, putting aside difficulties in implementing them for a short time.

Mediation sometimes takes the form of a mediator shuttling between opposing sides, learning what each side wants, what each may give up, and what each will not surrender. On that basis, a mediator may develop a possible settlement and present it to the opposing sides for their approval.<sup>29</sup> A mediator may be more or less active in formulating the settlement, varying from simply combining elements of each side's position to creatively constructing a new solution that he or she tries to sell.

Some mediators actually add resources that sweeten a settlement deal, resources that none of the adversaries will or can credibly contribute to the settlement. Mediators sometimes can alter the payoffs for each side's acceptance or rejection of a deal by pressuring one or more of the adversaries to reach an agreement.<sup>30</sup> Mediation often provides support for an agreement, which helps give it legitimacy for the negotiators' constituencies. Finally, mediators, insofar as they represent a broader community, frequently are seen as validating the fairness of the agreement and protecting the interests of parties not at the negotiating table. This also contributes to a more constructive conflict outcome.

In summary, many mediating services can enhance constructive de-escalating processes. They may speed initiating and concluding settlements, and may contribute to the fairness of a resulting agreement and help ensure its implementation. However, it is difficult (if not impossible) for the same person or group to perform certain functions simultaneously, but some may be done sequentially, as a mediator increases his or her level of participation. Of course, mediating efforts are often ineffective and sometimes counterproductive, as when they are poorly done or undertaken with

methods that are not appropriate for the circumstance of the conflict. Mediation can fail to be significantly helpful when the mediators' wishes to get any kind of agreement are paramount or their desires to enhance their own interests are too great.

To maximize the potential benefits of mediation in mitigating destructive conflicts, mediation should be understood and conducted in accord with the contemporary conflict resolution field. However, in actuality, heads of countries and major institutions who may be acting as mediators in large-scale, major conflicts are not likely to have had any formal exposure to the ideas and practices of mediation in the context of the conflict resolution approach. Nevertheless, their associates and staff increasingly may have had such exposure.<sup>31</sup> The understandings of the public at large are also important. Insofar as the public is familiar with and supportive of the conflict resolution ideas and practice, its members will support their leaders acting in accord with them.

The approach also embodies many methods that are relevant to averting the outbreak of social conflicts, particularly ones that are conducted destructively. These methods relate to building social relations that are not oppressive or harshly unequal and to establishing legitimate ways of managing inevitable disputes. The methods are wide ranging, including training in conflict resolution practices, promoting curricula that strengthen mutual respect across societal divisions, and building social institution, cross-cutting ethnic, religious, and class divisions.

In recent decades, constructive conflict practices have expanded greatly in programs to recover from the traumas, hatreds, and fears resulting from destructively waged conflicts. The techniques to avert destructive conflicts before they arise are relevant here. In addition, dialogue methods and education to bolster reconciliation are expanding. The choice of these methods will be examined in many contexts throughout this book.

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## International Conflict Perspectives

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The varying ways Americans think about international affairs and how the United States should engage in foreign conflicts are certainly highly relevant for this book. Their ways of thinking guide their own conduct, and the public's views influence elected federal officials' foreign policy choices.<sup>32</sup> Americans widely share many general values and preferences about America's place in the world. However, they also differ in their beliefs about how to actualize their values and prioritize their preferences. In subsequent chapters, this will be discussed in relation to specific foreign conflict involvements.

Undoubtedly, Americans differ in their beliefs about the necessity and efficacy of force and particularly of resorting to various kinds of violence in foreign affairs. Those beliefs affect the feelings Americans have about U.S. military personnel, in peace and in war. In addition, Americans vary in their beliefs and feelings about diplomats and diplomacy, about formal treaties and business contracts, and about international governmental organizations. They also differ in the relative importance of various interests and values they seek to protect or advance in foreign affairs. Obviously too, beliefs and attitudes change over time and vary regarding particular issues.

IR is a large academic field encompassing several schools of thinking about international affairs, with varying influence upon the attentive public and elite actors. Many of the disputes among adherents of these different schools are not germane to this book's purpose, but they do provide important insights that are useful for it. Therefore, I briefly note these diverse schools of thought, but do not discuss them in detail.

These IR approaches are often referred to as theories, but they are not comprehensive, formal deductive systems. Adherents of different schools generally emphasize one or another factor that is deemed to explain the workings of the international system, and some adherents attribute normative implications for the factor they stress.<sup>33</sup> These broad approaches change over time, partly as the world changes. The prominent schools include realism, liberalism, constructivism, and institutionalism, and critical approaches such as Marxist, feminist, post-colonial, and ecological.

Realists emphasize power because states seek security in an anarchic world. State leaders generally are viewed as acting rationally, weighing costs and benefits of different policies, and giving little weight to international law and institutions. There are variations among realists, some emphasizing that states seek to maximize power and to dominate, while others emphasize more defensive strategies.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, realists recognize that some state leaders do not behave realistically, but reason that this will result in trouble for them.

Adherents of liberal IR theory stress that the domestic and transnational social context fundamentally shape state conduct in world politics. The society members' ideas, values, interests, and institutions impact state behavior by shaping state decisions.<sup>35</sup> Some adherents have stressed the empirical finding that democratic countries do not make war against each other and reason that a liberal economic and political world order of democratic countries will be peaceful. The primacy of persons over states also lessens respect for state sovereignty and supports the propriety of interventions into countries where people are suffering mass violence or harsh oppression.<sup>36</sup>



Institutionalism shares some of realism's assumptions, but it stresses how international rules and norms can and do reduce international insecurity and promote cooperation. Empirical research demonstrates how international organizations and regimes can provide greater efficiency and security in conducting international affairs.

Constructivism emphasizes how meanings are derived from ways of thinking about the world, and therefore it focuses on issues of identity and beliefs. State behavior depends on socially constructed perceptions of in-groups and out-groups, of justice, and of threats.<sup>37</sup> Constructivism also emphasizes the role of non-state actors who promote ideologies and beliefs that influence state behavior.

In addition to these IR approaches, there are several schools of thought that are critical of them, particularly of realism. These critiques stem from broad theoretical perspectives that have implications for the field of IR, particularly for international conflicts. For example, feminism is a wide-ranging perspective relating to all realms of social life, but it makes many contributions to understanding international conflicts that have been ignored or underestimated in mainstream IR work.<sup>38</sup> For example, strict gender roles for men and women are sustained by childhood socialization and adult institutions so that masculine ways of making decisions and of interacting are dominant. The result is support for hierarchical controls and ready resort to coercion or even violence in conflicts.

Marxism and other critiques of capitalism or of any large class, status, or power inequalities provide grounds for criticizing IR approaches that ignore state decisions being made to protect the economic or political interests of the ruling elites.<sup>39</sup> It should not be surprising that states do not have "interests" that are equally shared by all their citizens and which their leaders disinterestedly try to secure or even advance. IR theories that assume that the world is made up of such states warrant criticism, and the criticism can and do come from many directions and with different solutions.

Post-colonial critics take another stance, from the point of view of the developing, non-Western worlds. They view much of the mainstream IR theories as looking out from and looking out for the Eurocentric position.<sup>40</sup> That position was the core of the global economic system and it established the rules governing the system, but the post-colonial critics argue that as the world is changing, the Western world is becoming less dominant.

Finally, dealing with specific issue areas can be the source of critiques of the quite general IR perspectives identified here. For example, this is manifestly the case for the field of ecology and environmental challenges at local and global levels. Attention is being given to ecological issues, but theoretical convergence has only recently begun.<sup>41</sup>

The application of any of these ways of viewing a specific international conflict is not a simple matter. It might seem reasonable to expect that realist thinkers would be prone to support resorting to warfare and liberal thinkers less so. On the other hand, some analysts and practitioners stressing the importance of protecting and promoting American values of freedom and democracy have supported undertaking wars in order to expand those values. That was the hallmark of the liberal Democrats who became neoconservatives in the Republican Party or even those Democrats who supported going to war against Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, noted realist analysts were opposed to that war for such idealistic purposes.<sup>43</sup>

Scholars and practitioners in using the constructive conflict approach who are based in the fields of peace studies and conflict resolution have at times been critical of some aspects of IR perspectives. However, they also draw ideas and understandings from the IR approaches. Peace studies is one of the long-standing sections within the International Studies Association. After all, the IR theories emphasizing particular factors are important complements. The constructive conflict approach also is complementary to them. Indeed, in some degree there is a convergence between the conflict resolution and constructive conflict approaches with conventional national security thinking.<sup>44</sup> After all, the recent changes in the global system need to be recognized by those who would try to act effectively in it.

What is relatively distinctive about the constructive conflict approach as presented here is that it emphasizes the agency of persons engaged in conflicts, not general immutable forces. It is about changing conflicts and not only about understanding how they came to be the way they are. Furthermore, its adherents are less likely to regard a particular world system or international relationship as the right one. Their emphasis is on the process for changing and improving the world and relations in it.

These qualities of the constructive conflict approach could make it useful for policy-makers and activists engaged in foreign conflicts. Certainly, official U.S. foreign policy decisions do not flow out of any broadly conceived theory stressing one or another factor determining conflicts. The decisions are tailored by many considerations and understandings of particular circumstances at home and abroad. Some people and organizations may be highly ideological and adhere to strict interpretations of their dogma. However, American political leaders traditionally have been relatively pragmatic. Many presidents have staked out a general approach to their foreign policy orientation to differentiate themselves from predecessors from the other political party and to lend coherence and rally support for their decisions. This will be apparent in later chapters.

The United States is characterized by many voluntary associations, including many that are active in international affairs or have interests or values that bear on

U.S. policies regarding engagement in foreign conflicts. Their own participation in foreign conflicts and their efforts to influence U.S. foreign policy will not be ignored in this book. They may be based on ethnicity, religion, occupation, military veteran status, political ideology, or any number of other bases.

The constructive conflict approach, as I discuss it here, assumes some agency, some capacity for persons to affect the course of events by choosing one course of action over another. It suggests guides to conduct and provides an expanded repertoire of possible actions with broad beneficial consequences. It draws not only on the fields of peace studies and conflict resolution, but on academic theories of IR, other academic disciplines, reflections by engaged practitioners, and the common sense thinking of people everywhere.

## Overview of the Book

Without a doubt, American involvement in foreign conflicts frequently has been ineffective and even counterproductive. The engagements in foreign conflicts have often been justified and supported as serving humanitarian needs and advancing universal norms and values. Yet many people in many countries think of the United States as interfering and dominating in their affairs, while serving crude American interests. Having sacrificed in relying upon highly coercive strategies, there is a natural tendency to want to believe that the sacrifices were worthwhile. It is painful to do otherwise. And there are often some benefits to claim, but too little thought or discussion is devoted to consider how those benefits or greater ones might have been attained with considerably lower human and material costs.

Whatever the good intentions may have been for coercive strategies and recourse to military engagement, those actions often have not produced sustained good results. This tends to be true in large-scale conflicts, where necessarily no single actor has full control of events. There are many contenders in every conflict, and each conflict is interconnected with many others. Therefore, some unintended consequences of any single conflict stakeholder's actions are inevitable. In this book, I offer some reality-grounded alternatives to the failed coercive strategies that have been pursued.

The constructive conflict approach emphasizes the importance of trying to analyze a conflict thoroughly and considering possible policy options before undertaking any one of them. In the following chapters the approach will be applied to analyses of possible application of the perspective. Those applications will test the usefulness of the approach. Judgments of the effectiveness of the approach are not only factual matters. Values and preferences are relevant as well. However, determining which values are

good and how they should shape conduct is not an easy matter. Such issues have been the subject of debates at least since the time of Aristotle. Even now, sometimes it seems we face the unhappy choice between moral absolutes or moral relativism. In our actual conduct, however, other choices do exist.

To examine those other possibilities, I begin with considering the relationship between values and facts.<sup>45</sup> According to a very influential perspective in the social sciences, facts and values are deemed to be separate phenomena, independent of each other. This has been debated and contemporary work has found contrary evidence. Facts are affected by the values of the people discovering and reporting them. Values affect the factual questions asked and they influence the theoretical interpretations made for the facts. On the other hand, values are affected by what are considered facts, as we learn from experience and from studying the consequences of different conduct and policies.

Still, there many sources of morals, norms, and standards of judgment that people access and apply.<sup>46</sup> They are experienced in some degree as external to individual cognitions. Two major sources are faith in divine injunctions and in cultural traditions. These of course are limited to believers and are not universal, which may limit their applicability in conflicts between different communities of believers. Another possible source may be identifiable universal human needs, but these are usually quite general and fulfilled in many ways, often culturally prescribed. In addition, recent research on inherent standards of social conduct indicates that the human species and many other animals reward those who act fairly and punish those who do not.<sup>47</sup> Finally, I draw attention to global social norms. The diffusion of shared norms may be seen in the growing acceptance of the existence of universal human rights and the condemnation of torture, rape, and genocidal acts.<sup>48</sup> They are particularly relevant for large-scale social conflicts.

Synthesizing the multiple sources of values and moral standards with attention to the experience and research about the consequences will enable making judgments about the constructiveness and destructiveness of particular actions in specific circumstances. Instead of proclaiming broad moral principles, the analysis here will consider which policies are better in specific conditions. The analysis can then recognize changes in global political, cultural, technological, and normative conditions over time.

In the following chapters, actions that have contributed to progress toward peace will be noted, and their consistency with the conflict resolution approach assessed. Actions that were followed by destructive developments will also be noted and the possibility that those actions were inconsistent with the conflict resolution approach will be discussed. This analysis should help assess the value of the conflict resolution way of thinking in deciding how to pursue a constructive foreign policy.

Furthermore, the results of such an analysis should provide guidelines for actions to be taken and actions to be avoided under various circumstances.

In judging certain past actions as faulty, I do not mean to simply exploit the easy benefits of hindsight. The persons choosing the actions they did were doing so with limited knowledge and were experiencing pressures that could not be ignored; they were doing the best they could often within terrible circumstances. Viewing the actions with present knowledge and experience, however, can illuminate possibilities that will be more available when similar choices must be made in the future.

The chapters that follow trace the development of the constructive conflict approach and of American involvement in foreign conflicts in their historical sequences. This is useful since the approach evolved from prior work and each conflict involvement had legacies affecting subsequent conflicts. In Chapter 2, the first 24 years of the Cold War, 1945–1968, are discussed, focusing on episodes of adversarial contention and of conflict intervention. In Chapter 3, the transformation of the Cold War, 1969–1988, is analyzed. Chapter 4 examines the ending and immediate aftermath of the Cold War, 1989–1993. Then in Chapter 5, American interventions and other involvements in foreign conflicts during William J. Clinton’s presidency, 1993–2000, are examined. Chapter 6 is focused on the war on terrorism and other conflict engagements during the years of George W. Bush’s presidency. Chapter 7 analyzes the foreign conflict engagements in the years of Barack Obama’s presidency. Finally, in Chapter 8, I discuss how the prevailing ways of thinking in America, conditions of civic institutions in American society, and the American political system can be changed so as to make constructive actions increasingly likely to be realized.