

**Conflict Resolution and Power Politics
Global Conflict After the Cold War
Two Lectures**

Richard E. Rubenstein

WP 10

Working Paper 10

**Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution
George Mason University
January 1996**

Forward

The two public lectures contained in this working paper were presented by Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution faculty member Richard E. Rubenstein at the University of Malta. "Conflict Resolution and Political Power" was presented in Valletta, Malta, on January 12, 1995, under the sponsorship of the International Foundation. "Global Conflict After the Cold War" was given on November 30, 1994, at Sir Teri Zammit Hall, Msida, under the auspices of the University of Malta's Department of Sociology.

Malta's continuing interests in international peacemaking and conflict resolution are well known throughout the world. Almost from the time it became independent, this former British colony saw itself as a force for peace in the Mediterranean region: a natural bridge between Europe and North Africa, the First World and the Third. Pursuing these interests, Maltese public officials and academics have played a leading role in negotiating international agreements on the Law of the Sea and on environmental security. They have reached out to the Islamic nations and to Israel and have convened important conferences on Mediterranean regional problems. In fall 1994, I was pleased to attend the annual meeting of the International Peace Research Association hosted in Valletta by the University of Malta's Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies.

Richard Rubenstein spent a sabbatical semester in Malta at the invitation of a number of key figures interested in conflict resolution, including the University's Rector, Fr. Peter Serracino Inglott, Chair of the Department of Sociology; Fr. Joe Inguanez, and Director of the International Office, former Ambassador Leslie Agius. Professor Rubenstein lectured to university students in sociology, psychology, public policy, and law and to diplomats studying at the Mediterranean Institute for Diplomatic Studies. In addition, he presented the public lectures that are published here, which were attended by high-ranking government officials as well as by members of the university community and the general public. A lively discussion followed each presentation.

Richard E. Rubenstein received his B.A. degree from Harvard College, his M.A. from Oxford, and his J.D. from Harvard Law School. Professor of Conflict Resolution and Public Affairs at George Mason University since 1987, he is a former director of the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution. His books include *Rebels in Eden: Mass Political Violence in the United States* (1970); *Alchemists of Revolution: Terrorism in the Modern World* (1987); and *Comrade Valentine* (1994). He is an author of the recent ICAR monograph, "Frameworks for Interpreting Conflict: A Handbook for Journalists" (1994). His current research focuses on the causes of global religious conflict.

The Institute is pleased to publish these important lectures, which advance inquiry in our field in two difficult and relatively unexplored areas: the relationship of conflict resolution theory and practice to power politics and the sources of socioeconomic conflict in the post-Cold War environment. As usual, Professor Rubenstein has taken well-reasoned, con-

troversial positions that should stimulate much-needed debate. We will be happy to hear from readers about their reactions to these ideas.

Those wishing to quote from these lectures or to reprint them in whole or in part should feel free to do so, provided that proper attribution is made to the author and to the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution.

Kevin P. Clements, Ph.D.
Vernon and Minnie Lynch
Chair of Conflict Analysis
and Resolution
Director, Institute for Conflict
Analysis and Resolution
January 1996

Conflict Resolution and Power Politics

Conflict resolution is a new field of study and practice that seeks to resolve serious social conflicts by assisting the conflicting parties to identify and solve the problems that generate violent or destructive behavior. At George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, we are working to develop more penetrating, comprehensive, and useful theories of intergroup conflict and to test and improve them by acting as mediators or facilitators in a wide variety of conflict situations. Many other institutions, I am happy to report, are similarly engaged. There are now some 20 university-based centers specializing in conflict resolution in the United States, and perhaps 50 more worldwide. The University of Malta's new Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies is a welcome addition to this growing number.

At ICAR, we focus primarily on internal or transnational conflicts of the sort that are sometimes called "intractable" or "deep-rooted," signifying that they resist resolution by ordinary military or political methods. During the past few years, my faculty colleagues and I, together with a number of our graduate students, have involved ourselves as consultants to the parties or facilitators in connection with violent racial, ethnic, religious, and class-based struggles both in the United States and abroad. What I have to say here grows out of these theory-building efforts and practical experiences. The relationship of conflict resolution to power politics is a subject that concerns us greatly both as scholars and as practitioners.

Conflict Resolution, Management, and Settlement

Let me begin with a distinction that may seem "academic" but has proved vital to our work. We are accustomed to distinguishing between the resolution, management, and settlement of conflicts. Conflict *resolution* attempts to get at the root causes of destructive conflict and to eliminate them — if necessary, by altering the system that embodies or produces them. Conflict *management* aims at moderating or "civilizing" the effects of conflict without necessarily uprooting its causes. And conflict *settlement* interrupts hostilities for the time being without either identifying their underlying sources or creating a system of conflict management.¹

Using these definitions, it is easy to see that much of what is often called "conflict resolution" is really conflict settlement. Not long ago, for example, former U.S. president Jimmy Carter procured an agreement by which the generals then ruling Haiti agreed to leave the country in exchange for certain guarantees of personal and economic security. President Aristide, whom they had deposed, was then returned to office. That agreement represented a temporary settlement of the long-standing conflict between the Haitian military establishment and the social forces supporting it, and President Aristide and the social forces supporting him. Obviously, it did not resolve the underlying class struggle that for centuries has made Haiti a social and political battleground. Conflict resolution requires, above all,

that all parties' basic human needs be satisfied. Only when ways are found to satisfy the needs of all Haitians for identity, security, solidarity, justice, and development will we be able to speak of that conflict being resolved.

The Haitian agreement is instructive for another reason — it teaches us something about the relationship between conflict settlement and political power. It seems clear that the generals would not have stepped down without the exercise of power by the United States, which took the form of political efforts to isolate Haiti, economic sanctions against the military regime, a naval blockade to interdict the shipment of military goods, and, finally, a threat by President Clinton to invade the country, if necessary, to restore President Aristide to office. The relationship between conflict settlement and coercion, as this example suggests, is intimate and direct. Conflicts can be *settled* temporarily by victory on the battlefield, credible threats to use force, or power-based negotiations. But they can be *resolved* only when their causes have been identified and eliminated. For this reason, the relationship between conflict resolution and power politics is problematic and complex.

Common sense sometimes tells us that any settlement is better than continued bloodletting or that, as the saying goes, "It is better to jaw, jaw, jaw than to war, war, war." A conflict settlement may be a step on the road to resolution, as we hope that the Haitian settlement will be...but, then again, it may not. Settlements sometimes make things worse. To the extent that it ignores or exacerbates the underlying problems generating the conflict, a temporary peace can lay the groundwork for greatly escalated violence. For example, the Treaty of Versailles, which ended World War I, led by a fairly direct route to the rise of Hitler and the outbreak of World War II.

In this respect, one may also compare the Haitian settlement just mentioned with the far more complex agreement negotiated in 1993 by representatives of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the government of Israel. Both agreements, obviously preliminary and partial, raised popular expectations for full conflict resolution. Both generated considerable pressure on negotiators to travel further along that road. But both were arrived at, in part, by pushing aside the most difficult problems: *systemic* obstacles to peaceful cooperation like Haiti's endemic poverty and quasi-colonial status, the collapse of the Gazan economy, and the continued presence of large numbers of Israeli settlers on the West Bank and in Gaza.

The tendency to base a settlement on existing common ground between the parties, leaving more difficult problems for later determination, is certainly understandable. One wants to start somewhere, especially in cases of long-lasting, seemingly unresolvable conflict. But it is important to recognize that the faith that motivates this diplomatic strategy is often blind. Following a long-sought settlement, otherwise realistic and worldly statesmen can frequently be heard discussing "the momentum of the peace process," as if some sort of Newtonian law of dynamics were operating to convert a partial, often superficial agreement into a comprehensive, lasting peace. Unfortunately, no such law exists. Events in Israel/Palestine have already demonstrated that other issues previously pushed aside will have to be faced sooner rather than later if escalated violence is to be avoided. Similarly, unless economic reconstruction lays the basis for sustained autonomous development in Haiti, that

country is likely to provide another painful example of the distance separating conflict settlement from conflict resolution.

This same distinction should help us to appreciate that United Nations Security Council resolutions, negotiators carrying peace plans, and blue-helmeted military forces operating in a war zone do not convert a temporary settlement into stable conflict resolution. For purposes of conflict resolution, the key questions are these: Have the parties themselves identified the sources of their conflict? Have they agreed on methods of dealing with the problems so identified? Will they be allowed by internal dissidents and powerful outsiders to implement agreed-upon solutions? Since conflict settlement may just as easily be a step toward escalated warfare as toward peace, I contend that the only justification for United Nations or great power intervention to stop a conflict is this: The intervention must be followed immediately by processes of conflict resolution that facilitate problem-solving by the parties themselves and that do not discriminate invidiously between them.

How Power Gets in the Way of Conflict Resolution

Now let me complicate the discussion a bit further by suggesting that, if conflict settlements quite frequently turn out to be counterproductive, this is because they are so often the results of power politics, which is to say, of imposition. This will become clearer, I think, if we look briefly at two important models of conflict resolution processes: the problem-solving model and the reconciliation model.

The problem-solving conflict resolution processes originally developed by John W. Burton, Herbert Kelman, Christopher Mitchell, John Groom, and others are both analytical and participatory. Third-party facilitators influenced by this model organize workshops in which representatives of the conflicting parties work collaboratively to develop joint answers to questions such as these:

Interests and needs. How do the parties perceive and define their immediate interests? What underlying interests, values, and basic human needs are also in play? What is the relationship between perceived interests and underlying needs?

Problems and options. What problems, easily recognizable or more deeply hidden, are at the root of the conflict? To what extent are these problems interrelated or systemic? What is the entire range of solutions that the parties can envision?

Costs and priorities. How do the parties evaluate the costs and benefits of these solutions? Are some solutions mutually acceptable? Which solutions do the parties prefer?

Implementation. Which behaviors of the parties are causing conflict escalation? How can these behaviors be altered? What are the obstacles to implementing the parties' preferred solutions? How can they be overcome?

These questions can be raised and answered in a number of different formats, but processes designed to elicit answers will ordinarily be voluntary, not imposed. People in conflict are not inclined to engage in intellectually and politically dangerous explorations of this sort unless they know that they can walk away from the process at any time they choose.

For the same reason, third-party roles are ordinarily facilitative, not authoritative. Effective problem-solving processes encourage open, imaginative thinking unfettered by the alleged realities of power – what Edward De Bono of Malta calls “lateral thinking”² – and discourage both posturing and power bargaining. By the same token, they are kept private in order to relieve the participants of the usual pressures to posture and to bargain.

The facilitators ask the parties to define their own interests and needs and encourage them to use any theory or combination of ideas that will illuminate the root causes of their conflict. Then they invite the parties to imagine a wide range of alternative solutions without prior constraints or limitations. (Since this is a particularly hard task for those accustomed to accepting the “realities of power,” the facilitators’ role here may be active, although it must remain impartial.) Once a wide range of problem-solving options is on the table, an evaluation of their costs and benefits can proceed, and *if* there are mutually acceptable options, the parties can move toward considering possible methods of implementing them. I emphasize the word “if” because it sometimes happens that no options are mutually acceptable. Where this is the case, the parties understand that their conflict is not ripe for resolution and that a settlement will be the best that they can achieve. But at least they will have developed a basis for understanding what conflict resolution would require.

A second type of process that facilitators have employed stresses the emotional basis of deep-rooted social conflicts and the parties’ needs, if conflict resolution is to take place, for psychological and spiritual healing, mutual forgiveness, and reconciliation. Not surprisingly, a number of the conflict specialists most interested in reconciliation processes have backgrounds in social psychology, psychoanalysis, or religion, and a number of them, like the Americans John McDonald and Joseph V. Montville, are former diplomats. In recent years, a considerable literature on the depth psychology of intergroup conflict has emerged, a number of religious organizations have sponsored conflict resolution efforts, and workshops with what one might call a therapeutic focus have been organized in a number of civil war zones. The reports of these workshops suggest that they can be quite useful, particularly in cases where protracted violence has left a legacy of bitter hatred and desire for revenge, coupled, as these feelings so often are, with self-hatred and a need for spiritual renewal.

Despite differences in approach and emphasis, the problem-solving and reconciliation approaches to conflict resolution are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they are complementary. In several cases, workshops of both types have been used to help parties identify the social causes of conflict and deal with its psychological consequences. On one principle, in particular, both schools would heartily agree: the processes of conflict resolution that they espouse are distinctly at odds with the methods of power politics.

According to John Burton, for example, power bargaining and analytical problem-solving are essentially incompatible activities. The intellectual situation, Burton has remarked, is analogous to the gestalt image that can be seen either as a goblet or as two faces, depending upon how one conceptualizes the figure, but not as both. A party to conflict may either negotiate “from strength” to defend its apparent interests or examine the conflict as an analyst in order to discover its deeper significance. It cannot do both, at least not at the same

time. Similarly, either a party is free to envision and evaluate new options for conflict resolution or it is bound ab initio by the alleged realities of power. One cannot think freely and “realistically” (in this narrow sense) at the same time.³

Many practitioners of conflict reconciliation would also agree with this either/or analysis, although for somewhat different reasons. From the spiritual perspective so beautifully expressed by Martin Buber in *I And Thou*, the parties must stop using each other as objects in a power game (“I-It”) in order to relate to each other (and to themselves) as human subjects (“I-Thou”). From the perspective of depth psychology, coercive power reproduces itself as self-coercion. As Herbert Marcuse put it, “repression from without” is supported by “repression from within; the unfree individual introjects his masters and their commands into his own mental apparatus.”⁴ Moreover, Vamik Volkan tells us, coercive violence creates “shared traumas” that become part of a people’s core identity, generating further conflict until the traumatic material is identified and dealt with.⁵

In practice, of course, conflict resolvers cannot simply turn their backs on power politics. Competent facilitators initially work to free their clients from the tyranny of power-political thinking, and afterwards to prepare them to re-enter a power-ridden world. Even if they are successful in helping the participants to reconceptualize the dispute and agree on mutually acceptable steps toward resolving it, it is still necessary for negotiators to “sell” these understandings to skeptical, sometimes violently antagonistic constituents. For this reason, conflict resolution workshops are generally brought to a close after three or four days. This gives the representatives a chance to consult with their leaders and followers – to re-enter the universe of power politics – and to see if the understandings they have reached are acceptable at home.

Ordinarily, when conflict resolution processes are employed, formal negotiations over the conditions for terminating a conflict – so-called “Track One” negotiations – take place only after one or more “Track Two” workshops have developed common understandings among the parties and pointed the way toward consensual solutions. But sometimes the parties move more quickly than the facilitators, and conflict resolvers find themselves mediating a power-based negotiation. I am reminded of one instance in which the parties to a violent, protracted dispute in a European country waited politely while my colleagues outlined the principles of the problem-solving workshop. When they had finished explaining why the workshop was *not* an appropriate place for hard bargaining, one participant burst out, “Look here – we’ve already analyzed this conflict to death. We understand its causes very well. Please let us get on with putting an end to it!”

Critique of Coercive Power

These practitioners’ insights suggest a more general critique of power politics which I would like to outline before suggesting how conflict resolution might become a more influential and effective movement in world society. We can start with a simple paradigm of coercive force. A commands B: “Do what I say, or else!” In what sense is this type of power inconsistent with the paradigm of conflict resolution?

To begin with, coercive power is a notoriously inefficient method of solving social problems. Even its advocates understand this, since they so often declare that it is only a temporary stopgap, that it is the lesser of evils, that good people have no choice but to use it, or that it will lead directly to the creation of a less coercive environment. Since coercion frequently leaves the problems generating conflict untouched, the conflict itself can generally be counted on to continue, often in altered form.

North Americans have particularly good reasons to be aware of this dynamic. In the 1860s, people in the United States fought a bloody civil war to decide the fate of the slave system in the South. Although that system was violently overthrown, white southerners subsequently organized a successful campaign of terror to drive blacks and their white sympathizers out of politics, and it took another century before the U.S. Supreme Court and the civil rights movement eliminated legal segregation of the races. Even so, these political reforms by no means resolved the social conflict between black and white Americans — a conflict that, bearing new labels and inspiring new ideologies, continues to this day. I am not suggesting here that President Lincoln should have acquiesced to the secession of the South. Perhaps, as he believed, the war was inescapable. But since it was not followed by resolution of the conflict that generated it, the American Civil War, in a real sense, has not yet ended.

Second, groups generally respond to coercive force with force, and not just with “appropriate counterforce” (whatever that may mean), but with a quantity and quality of violence sufficient to deter and punish the adversary. The result, as Pruitt, Rubin, and Kim have suggested, is a “conflict spiral” in which escalation often intensifies until one side or the other has mobilized sufficient power to overwhelm or demoralize its adversary.⁶ Unfortunately, the use of force at *this* level is not only atrocious, it is likely to breed new causes of conflict.

In the United States, for example, current military doctrine advises against the sort of “tit for tat” escalation that made the Vietnam War so costly to all the parties. The result is a doctrine of “invincible force,” which resulted in the conduct and outcome of the Persian Gulf War. That war was successful in evicting Saddam Hussein’s army from Kuwait. It also consumed an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 Iraqi lives without solving any of the fundamental problems that generated the conflict to begin with: extremes of wealth and poverty in the region, the demands of various ethnic groups for autonomy, competition for regional hegemony, Western domination of local economies, and so forth.

Once again, one could argue that the war was necessary or unnecessary; my own view, which I have expressed elsewhere, is that it was not necessary to use force to liberate Kuwait.⁷ In any case, once again, the war has not really ended. Iraqis are still suffering and dying, and, in Western eyes, Iraq remains an outlaw nation.

This conflict illustrates a third consequence of the resort to coercive power: dehumanization of the enemy. As unresolved conflicts escalate, each side moves further from treating the other’s partisans as members of the human family, and violence intensifies almost without limit. Viewers around the world watched the Persian Gulf War on CNN News. Although a seemingly endless supply of film supplied by the military showed “smart”

bombs and missiles hitting Iraqi buildings, there were virtually no reports on the extent of the damage done by high-tech weapons to human beings. At the end of that short war, when it was reported that thousands of Iraq's soldiers had been buried alive in their trenches by tanks and armored vehicles equipped with bulldozer heads, the reaction in most Western countries was the equivalent of a satisfied yawn. Somehow — just as at Hiroshima and at Dresden, at Antwerp and Nanking — enemy lives had ceased to count.

I do not think that this sort of dehumanization can be accounted for by blaming it on the callousness or aggressive impulses of any nation. It seems rather to be a product of the weird logic of power politics, coupled with a normal, if reprehensible, desire to avoid taking responsibility for atrocities. Those using coercive power embrace a utilitarian psychology that assumes that rational people will be deterred from misbehavior by the application of sufficient force. But what if they are not deterred? The conclusion frequently drawn is that the “undeterrables” are not quite rational, not quite human...and therefore deserving of whatever punishment their adversaries care to inflict.

Conflict analysts have discovered that when people's basic human needs remain unsatisfied, coercive force has little deterrent effect. People will continue to behave in ways that may seem to others irrational, antisocial, or even suicidal in order to attempt to satisfy those needs. Policymakers have been slow to recognize this insight, in part for narrowly political reasons, in part because of their deep commitment to the paradigm of power politics. As a result, the same logic that dehumanizes foreign “enemies” turns recalcitrant domestic groups into enemies of the state. In a recent report to the U.S. Institute of Peace entitled *Minorities At Risk*, Professor Ted Robert Gurr describes more than 100 ethnic minorities around the globe that are in danger of genocide, often because they cannot be deterred from asserting rights to cultural or political autonomy or behaving in other ways that majority groups find intolerable.⁸ It is not hyperbole to assert that where deterrence does not deter, coercive power moves inexorably in the direction of genocide.

Has Coercive Power Been Tamed?

So long as coercive force takes the simple form previously discussed — “Do what I say, or else!” — it seems clearly incompatible not only with effective conflict resolution but with fundamental values like security, justice, and freedom. For the past several centuries, therefore, the primary aim of political philosophy and political development has been to civilize and “domesticate” political power, or, to put it somewhat differently, to make deterrence effective at low levels of coercive force. This process of domestication can be described as taking place in four stages:

- First, a regime of law replaces brute force with legally authorized power and substitutes impersonal rules, impersonally interpreted and applied, for mere commands. Coercion thus becomes more shapely, more measured and predictable, and less terrifying. This is what English philosopher Thomas Hobbes described as mankind's movement from a state of nature to a state of civil society.

- Second, universal adult suffrage and the creation of democratic political institutions shift the locus of legal command from narrow elites to popular majorities. Insofar as authorized coercion reflects the *general* will of the community, it has the character of self-coercion, which as Rousseau noted, is no coercion at all.
- Third, capitalism creates a transactional model of human relations based on exchange to which coercive power seems irrelevant (at least so long as no one corners the market). In the eyes of free-market philosophers, coercive power is limited to relations between public authority and its subjects, while the ever-expanding private domain appears as the realm of freedom and voluntarism.
- Fourth, socialization introjects coercive power from various external and public locations into private hearts and minds. As Freud suggested, we no longer need to be deterred from misbehaving by terrifying public displays of punishment; modern education, operating through the individual superego, deters most of us quite effectively from even thinking forbidden thoughts. In short, modern industrial nations have attempted to limit and legitimize coercive power by legalizing, democratizing, privatizing, and internalizing it. But have these efforts actually tamed power, or have they merely mystified it? One would like to believe that law stands as a bulwark between the citizenry and arbitrary force. One would like to affirm that majorities, not elites, rule; that private relationships are essentially noncoercive; and that we have become psychologically as well as politically self-governing. It seems clear, however, that to a large extent these hopes or aims are exactly that: normative ideological propositions that obscure rather than illuminate social realities. Theorists like Foucault and Habermas are correct to point out that relationships of domination and subordination are ubiquitous even in the most advanced societies and, what is more, that the areas of modern life subject to subtle forms of coercive power are expanding rather than shrinking.⁹

Still, even critical theorists must recognize that the efforts to domesticate power have made *some* difference, particularly in relations among those who have not been excluded from the social and economic benefits of life in advanced capitalist societies.

Conflict theory is able to throw some light on this issue, for when we ask how disputes are resolved (or not resolved) in advanced capitalist societies, we discover two answers. Insofar as disputes between individuals or groups involve *negotiable interests*, they can be managed by a system of interest-group bargaining that functions within parameters established by law. But insofar as they are generated by clashing *moral values* or unsatisfied *basic human needs*, the interest-based conflict management system tends to break down, and untamed coercive power reappears with a vengeance.

Conflict Management and Its Discontents

Clearly, coercive power is not absent from the system of interest-group bargaining under law. Within this system, most negotiations between individuals and groups take place “from strength”; that is, their outcomes depend to a great extent on the parties’ relative eco-

Notice that a vital purpose of this four-tiered system is to make the resort to force, whether by private parties or by the state, a *last* resort and one infrequently invoked. It is assumed, in other words, that the great majority of disputes will be settled at the level of negotiation and that most of those left unsettled will be dealt with at the judicial level, leaving only a small number of intractable matters to be dealt with by power politics or direct coercion. This brings us to the heart of the problem, for while modern conflict management systems work reasonably well when dealing with negotiable, interest-based disputes, some parties' demands or requirements cannot be converted by commercial analogy into negotiable interests, and others, although successfully converted at one time, will not remain so.

For example, it is difficult, if not impossible, to convert the basic needs of ethnic groups for identity, recognition, security, and autonomy into negotiable interests. It may be possible to satisfy these needs by measures that fall short of granting each of the world's 10,000 ethnic nations full political and military independence, but in one form or another, they absolutely demand satisfaction. Similarly, religious organizations can sometimes be dealt with as if they were mere interest groups. But at certain times, the gap between their own moral or religious values and generally accepted social practices becomes intolerable to the adherents of a particular faith. Suddenly, matters that seemed relative and bargainable, like the extent to which church and state should be separated or the acceptable level of corruption in public officials, appear subject to the absolute commands or prohibitions of their faith. One may deplore the violence resorted to by some religious zealots, but it is clear that current systems of conflict management are failing to bring this type of conflict under control.

A third example of relatively unmanageable conflict is the continuing struggle between criminals (or criminal organizations) and the state. There are various ways to explain this intractability. Many criminals are members of impoverished classes and pariah groups excluded from bargaining either because they have so little to bargain with or because the majority will not recognize them as legitimate negotiators. Some have no other way to survive or to support a family; in the United States for the past 20 years, the only real "growth industry" in impoverished inner cities has been the drug business. Our city streets are filled with young adults whose unsatisfied needs for identity, security, and human bonding have led them to the "family" of the street gang and the recognition provided by a street "rep." On the other hand, in nations experiencing the early stages of capitalist development — modern Russia, for example — there is little perceivable distinction between legitimate business activity and gangsterism.

The specter that now haunts many nations, East and West, is that of a breakdown of their conflict management systems. It has long been understood that certain types of conflict resist settlement by the methods of negotiation under law. But two fundamental assumptions of virtually all modern systems are that non-negotiable conflicts will be relatively infrequent and that they will not involve a large proportion of the population. When large numbers of people find themselves disputing outside the system, relations between individuals and groups *within* states come to resemble the relations *between* states. Coercive power, which had been legitimized by being reduced to a "last resort," becomes a commonplace. At this point — a point that I believe we are reaching in a number of advanced

industrial nations — we begin to move out of a state of civil society and back toward a Hobbesian state of nature.

Furthermore, as a conflict management system decays, groups whose identity and interactions were in large part defined by that system are compelled to reinvent themselves, often in terms that preclude peaceful negotiations. In the United States, for example, the system that managed disputes fairly well between diverse racial, cultural, and religious groups is under great strain. Equally important in the long run, the elaborate legislative scheme established during the Great Depression to manage labor-management disputes seems on its last legs. As a result, business corporations challenged by intense global competition are finding it possible to subordinate or even “break” their old adversaries and negotiating partners, the trade unions. They are not yet concerned about how labor might reinvent itself outside the interest-group framework, but they should be. When a conflict management system collapses while the underlying conflict continues, a resort to coercion by one or both parties becomes highly likely.

Conclusion: From Power Politics to Political Efficacy

At this point, our discussion comes full circle, for when existing systems of conflict management fail, organized coercion is liberated from prior constraints, and one confronts the frightening implications of the “conflict spiral” discussed earlier. What can be done to interrupt this spiral?

As mentioned earlier, conflict resolvers have sometimes been able to assist conflicting parties to identify the problems generating serious disputes and to envision mutually acceptable solutions. But even where these efforts are successful, the implementation of agreed solutions may prove impossible. Often, those whose apparent interests or established roles are dependent upon a particular system of power relations are unwilling to alter the system in order to satisfy their constituents’ basic human needs. For this reason, many theorists and practitioners of conflict resolution have begun to take a new look at politics and at various kinds of political power.

The issue can be reframed by distinguishing between two types of power. I have argued that coercive power is generally irrelevant to conflict resolution, since coercion is more likely to exacerbate social problems than solve them. But another form of power seems quite relevant. Serious problems of the sort that cause violent, protracted conflicts cannot be addressed and dealt with unless large numbers of people exercise their collective capacity to choose and implement agreed-upon solutions. Some commentators call this capacity “power with,” as opposed to coercion or “power over,” but it may be clearer simply to call it *political efficacy*.

Without political efficacy, even “win-win” agreements to eliminate the causes of conflict remain mere hypotheses. For example, the fate of the agreement now in process of negotiation between representatives of Northern Ireland’s Catholic and Protestant communities, the British government, and the government of Ireland will depend ultimately on the ability of the two Northern Irish communities to build a common life at the community level. My

own study of that conflict makes me an optimist about this since effective intercommunal organizations have already begun to link the former enemies in joint efforts to rebuild and remoralize their country. Paradoxically, though, Northern Ireland enjoys an advantage that more stable societies do not; her power-political system has visibly collapsed, compelling citizens to envision and build new systems of conflict management and resolution. Unfortunately for us, the system of interest-based power politics is not yet obsolete, despite the fact that most modern political parties are unable even to identify the problems that generate serious conflict, much less offer workable solutions.

Many people, for example, might agree that prisons do little more than “recycle” criminals and that alternative rehabilitative programs ought to be designed, implemented, evaluated, and revised. Perhaps in Malta the efficacy necessary to accomplish these tasks exists, but in most countries it is lacking. Redesigning systems and trying alternative institutional arrangements are projects apparently beyond the capacity of most power-political systems. Coercive power, it seems, is a drug as habit-forming as any narcotic substance. That is why, in my view, we need to begin thinking about breaking this addiction and replacing the system of power politics with something better.

Why do political systems lose efficacy in the first place? That question deserves a longer response than can be provided here, but in the case of most modern conflict management systems, the answer seems clear enough. To the extent that government becomes little more than a forum for power-based negotiations between competing interest groups, public policy tends to disappear, and with it the capacity to act collectively to achieve common goals. “Privatization,” in this sense, is not a new idea promoted by free-market ideologues; it is the long-term tendency of any system that defines public policy, in effect, as the sum of all bargains arrived at as of a certain date. Contrary to a currently popular belief, this disintegration of the general will does not create a world of free, spontaneous, *gemeinschaft* private relations. Quite the contrary, by robbing the political system of efficacy, it extends the domain of coercion from the public realm into the realm of private affairs.

It should not be necessary for me to give further examples of inefficacy since they are so well-known. Why do the nations blather incessantly about “family values” while pursuing socioeconomic policies directly at odds with maintaining satisfying family relationships? Why can’t the United States put poor people to work instead of in prison? Why can’t Peru and Colombia find profitable substitutes for the businesses of growing and processing cocaine? Why can’t Italy eliminate her endemic political corruption? In each case, a system defined as an agglomeration of competing interests seems to have lost not only the capacity for efficacious action but, to an alarming degree, the capacity for efficacious thought. And in each case, the spread of coercive power into the private realm threatens to return a modern nation to a precivil “state of nature.”

Particularly scandalous, in my view, is the tendency to *justify* inefficacy on the grounds that people are incapable of working collectively to redesign and rebuild failing systems. The failure of the “invisible hand” of the market, the will of God, or the current democratic system to solve social problems does not mean that they are insoluble. Defeatism is ac-

cepted more easily than one might think by those who have lost faith in politics altogether because of the failures of the power-political order. When I speak about rebuilding America's inner cities, for example, I am often accused of advocating "social engineering," as if this were some sort of neo-Stalinist thought-crime. But the major defect of "social engineering," as that term has been used in the past, has been its elitism. Conflict specialists know that experts cannot resolve conflicts. Only the parties themselves can identify their unsatisfied needs and agree on methods of satisfying them.

Could some of the insights of conflict resolution, combined with those derived from other fields, be used to design an alternative to the system of power politics? This would mean making the search for solutions to social problems, the struggle to humanize human relations, the effort to give genuine effect to political participation, and the imperative to satisfy basic human needs the basis for a new kind of political movement. Above all, such a movement would set out to convince people that efficacy is neither fictional nor totalitarian — that long-standing social ills can be remedied by their own creative thinking and collective effort.

Can one imagine a political organization that would refuse to offer phoney solutions to nonexistent problems? That would define politicians as consultants on system-transformation rather than as a ruling class or power elite? That would design forums in which citizens themselves work together to identify and solve their common problems? Perhaps all one can do at present is to imagine such an alternative. But that, at least, is a beginning.

Global Conflict After the Cold War

In November 1994, some 400 members of the International Peace Research Association convened in Malta in a heady atmosphere of hope, almost of celebration. For more than two decades, peace researchers and peace activists had toiled in the wilderness, studying and describing the causes of global conflict, inveighing against the arms race and warning of a nuclear Armageddon, suggesting alternatives to war, and hoping to persuade or pressure powerful governments to “give peace a chance.” During the period of the Cold War, many of them were dismissed as impractical dreamers or attacked as dissenters of doubtful loyalty, but the end of the era of bipolarity seemed to invest their ideas and concerns with new relevance. Now – or so it seemed – the field of peace studies might finally have a significant impact on public policy.

This apparent change of fortune stimulated a welter of proposals for action. The air at the Mediterranean Conference Center in Valletta was alive with suggestions for peace zones, peace monitors, and peace witnesses; for armaments registries, UN reorganization plans, early-warning systems, and “defensive defense” programs; for preventive diplomacy, second-track diplomacy, and citizen diplomacy; for humanitarian initiatives, economic development initiatives, and conflict resolution initiatives. Problems, of course, were recognized – in particular, the persistence of global poverty and environmental degradation, the proliferation of violent ethnic and religious struggles, the skyrocketing trade in sophisticated weapons, and the globalization of organized crime. One heard sharp, well-reasoned criticism of private and public institutions whose activities could be said to exacerbate these problems, but even so, the overall mood was decidedly upbeat. The end of the Cold War, several scholars suggested, had opened the door to a new chapter of human history, one in which serious conflicts might be resolved without the sort of massive violence that had made the twentieth century the century of genocide.

This optimism was not unsupported by historical evidence.

To begin with, the conflict between capitalist and communist blocs had ended without provoking the large-scale violence that many students of peace and war had anticipated. For reasons that deserve further exploration, the Polish and Soviet regimes provided perhaps the first, and certainly the most important, examples in modern history of well-entrenched political establishments abdicating without mass murder. This seeming miracle was followed in fairly short order by the demise of the South African apartheid regime and, a bit later, by the enforced departure of Haiti’s military government. Peace seemed to be breaking out in the unlikeliest places: Central America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, Northern Ireland, Angola, Liberia, Sri Lanka....

Even the behavior of the great powers gave cause for hopefulness. Rather than repolarizing global politics, as they did after the two world wars, the advanced industrial nations joined in a number of collaborative ventures, strengthening multinational institutions like

the UN Security Council, the CSCE, and NATO, and creating others like the conference of G-7 nations in order to accomplish their joint purposes. Multilaterality seemed the order of the day. Now when peace scholars talked about “world order” or even world government, their ideas did not seem nearly as far-fetched as they had once seemed.

Why, then, did the more cheerful assumptions of the conference seem unjustified? Surely not because they ran counter to the gloomy predictions of theorists like Samuel P. Huntington, who prophesies an inevitable global “clash of civilizations,” or Robert D. Kaplan, who argues that we have entered an era of anarchic, essentially unresolvable ethnic and religious conflicts.¹¹ On the contrary, as a colleague and I argued in a recent issue of *Foreign Policy* magazine, such predictions are based on simplistic, linear projections forward and outward of certain trends current in world society.¹² The overwrought pessimism of these modern Cassandras is a mirror image of the overstated optimism expressed by some of our colleagues in peace research. One may choose to emphasize the reversion to tribalism in the Balkans or Rwanda rather than its apparent transcendence in South Africa and Northern Ireland. Or one may predict, in lieu of peaceful multilateral relations, a renaissance of xenophobic and expansionist pan-nationalism. In either case, however, the analysis is decontextualized; it looks “through” the social and intellectual atmosphere of the present without noticing its existence.

This seems to me a serious mistake. The present has a density that refracts our images of the future. It is time to look more deliberately at the environment that now shapes virtually all attempts to describe the emergence of a new world order.

Across the Great Divide: Periods of Historical Transition

We stand in midstream. The world system based on Cold War bipolarity has been shattered. Since the outlines of a new system have not yet appeared, it is difficult to say which of the observed phenomena are essentially transitional and which are portents or manifestations of a new world order. At present, one can argue with equal persuasiveness that a more peaceful and democratic “post-technological” future has begun or that world society is rapidly reverting to more primitive forms of violent conflict. Similarly, one can predict either that both trends will continue, vastly widening the gap between more and less developed regions, or that new forms of social and political organization will arise to bridge that gap. Rather than take sides in such speculative debates, however, it seems more useful to face the basic epistemological problem squarely. What is a historical transition, and how does it affect our thinking?

We are not the first people to sense that we are transiting between one epoch and another. Other passages of this sort come to mind—times when previous patterns of conflict and collaboration seemed abruptly to have become obsolete, while new patterns, dimly discerned, were just emerging. The period 1945-50 represented such a period, especially for those beginning to experience the process of decolonization. One can also recall the years 1914-21, when the European balance of power system was smashed beyond repair, and Soviet Communism emerged as a major force on the world scene; 1860-68, when the

American Civil War ended chattel slavery and opened the North American continent to modern capitalist development; 1789-1815, ushering in the age of revolutions and the end of the *anciens regimes*; 1648-53 and the nation-state system inaugurated by the Peace of Westphalia; and so on, back to earlier dividing lines like those marking the collapse of Roman power in the West and the beginnings of Islamic expansion in the South and East.

Whether one celebrates or bemoans the passage from a previous world system to a new one, it seems clear that the experience of passing over from one epoch to another is both liberating and traumatic. The transition is liberating because the “dead hand of the past,” to paraphrase Marx, no longer “weighs like a nightmare” on the minds of the living. People formerly implicated in structured systems that seemed if not eternal then fated by custom, habit, and power to endure for a very long time, now discover that customs and habits vary; power seems more porous, organized systems more fluid, and human behaviors far more unpredictable than they had thought. One hears a good deal these days about the essential ungovernability of humankind, the inefficiency and openness of all systems of power and their innate dependence upon customary complicity and the capacity of apparently marginal groups to alter them through acts of will. Some call this sensibility “postmodern,” but I think that it is probably characteristic of most periods of rapid passage between eras.

The chief shortcoming of this perspective, it seems to me, is that it reads the openness and confusion of the transition into an emerging system that is likely to be more highly structured. Philosophies of the transition, with their tendencies to dissolve chronology, causation, and structure into the soup of pure flux, spontaneity, and will, seldom shed much light on the sources or shape of an emerging world order. They may, however, lead unwary reformers to overestimate their own potential for shaping the as-yet-uncreated future. If power is porous and “the system” an illusion, what is there to prevent university-based peace activists, say, from functioning as an effective pressure group? Why should they not be capable of moderating and humanizing the exercise of power by global elites? Those who presently affirm the potency of the intellectuals may not appreciate the extent to which this view reflects that of the elites themselves and of the influential insiders who serve, or “pressure,” them. The closer one comes to power, the more indeterminate seems the system through which it is exercised.

People making the passage between eras do feel liberated from prior constraints, but there is little doubt that they are also traumatized by disorienting change. Vamik Volkan, a psychoanalyst and conflict specialist, has discussed the disturbing dreams occasioned throughout Germany by the tearing down of the Berlin Wall separating East from West Germany.¹³ When walls like this fall, whether they are concrete or purely symbolic, their collapse threatens the identities of groups on each side, identities constructed on the basis of formerly stable but apparently protean distinctions between those who are like us and those who are unlike – between brothers and others. Even without the collapse of empires, the transition between eras generates a widespread crisis of identity. Quite suddenly, one finds oneself not in a well-marked future but in no-man’s land: a place requiring redefinition of one’s relations with former friends as well as former enemies.

Liberating this may be, but it is seldom fun. In an important essay on “Needs as Analogues of Emotions,” Paul Sites has argued that “real or imagined threats to the self evoke the same physiologically based emotion of fear that is evoked when physical security is threatened.”¹⁴ Identity is a basic human need. People react to identity threats as they do to physical threats; indeed, to those who feel endangered, the two sorts of threat may be indistinguishable. The result in action is a defense of the self which is difficult to distinguish from aggression and that can produce an escalation of conflict that moves rapidly toward intense intergroup violence. Furthermore, to the extent that the collapse of a world system destroys inclusive identities, it revives those that are more exclusive. This is not the first time that such a localist revival has taken place in the wake of transformative system change. “In Western Europe,” writes historian Peter Brown, “the fifth century was a time of narrowing horizons, of the strengthening of local roots, and the consolidating of old loyalties.”¹⁵

The current results of this dynamic are manifested in ethnic and religious struggles raging around the world, from Bosnia and Burundi to India and East Timor. But ethnic conflict itself may be viewed as one example among many of “reprimitivized” conflict. Military historian Martin Van Creveld suggests that the warfare of the future “will have more in common with the struggles of primitive tribes than with large-scale conventional war.” And, conversely, as the state loses its monopoly of armed force, “distinctions between war and crime will break down,” with warfare waged by subnational or transnational groups (ethnic groups, religious sects, mafias, etc.) and criminal activity “coalescing along racial, religious, social, and political lines.”¹⁶ Again, there is little doubt that this describes a current trend. But is Van Creveld justified in projecting it indefinitely into the future? It may be useful, in answering this question, to look more closely at the characteristics of social conflict during periods of historical transition.

Conflict During the Transition

History gives us reason to be skeptical about straight-line projections, particularly when they reflect characteristics of the stormy passage between regional or world systems. Group conflict during a transition generally reflects the social and intellectual disorganization characteristic of such periods. By the same token, the construction of a new system reorganizes the prevailing modes of conflict as well as of collaboration. As a result, the “reprimitivized” forms of conflict appearing during transition periods tend first to be supplemented and then replaced by more “advanced” forms of conflict. “Advanced,” in this context, denotes forms of conflict that are relatively well-organized, instrumental, mass-based, and technologically sophisticated.

The passage from the pre-Civil War to the post-Civil War period in the United States provides a suggestive illustration of this process. Approximately 130 years ago in North America, a relatively democratic capitalist regime found itself triumphant over a more authoritarian and less efficient system of production and representation. Then, as now, this victory unleashed an unprecedented scramble for wealth, status, and power in huge territories suddenly liberated for capitalist development. Then, as now, public policy was

overwhelmed by private interest and politics became a disreputable occupation; mass migrations were accelerated by the lure of new economic opportunities; criminal enterprises became an important source of capital accumulation; the lines between social classes were temporarily blurred; and apparently atavistic forms of conflict became endemic.

An American analyst writing around 1875 might have concluded that “Wild West” vigilantism, Indian wars, racist lynchings, shootouts between police and criminal gangs, family feuds, small-group terrorism, and sabotage were the forms of conflict destined to dominate the coming era in the United States. But the analysis would have been mistaken. In fact, the transitional period following the Civil War was incubating more massive and well-organized forms of conflict. The 1870s saw labor-management violence explode on an unprecedented scale, heralding more than 60 years of ferocious battles between workers attempting to organize trade unions and owners attempting to stop them. Massive struggles between immigrant and anti-immigrant or “nativist” groups also erupted during this period, leading to the construction of powerful urban political machines. Moreover, before the nineteenth century ended, the United States had fought an imperialist war against the Spanish, acquiring Cuba and the Philippines as a result. Not long after this “splendid little war” ended in victory, the United States became a combatant in World War I, a far from splendid affair that led in one generation to a second, even more destructive great power conflict.

In this case, a period of transition characterized by a high degree of social disorganization and relatively primitive forms of conflict gave way to an era in which both society and the prevailing forms of intergroup conflict were reorganized and, as it were, modernized. Many similar cases could be cited – so many cases, and from such dissimilar cultures, as to define something approaching a historical “law”: reprimativization precedes reorganization of conflict. Thus, out of Russia’s sixteenth-century “time of troubles,” when “armies took to brigandage and brigands organized themselves as armies,”¹⁷ arose the Romanov dynasty and its hypertrophic army and bureaucracy. In the West, organized interstate warfare was a feature of the political and social reorganization that followed the primitive bloodletting of the religious wars. And the notable rise of banditry, warlordism, and other forms of primitive conflict in early twentieth-century China proved but a prelude to four decades of organized class struggle, international warfare, and state terror.

In the current period of transition, reprimativized conflict is omnipresent. Naturally, in the wake of a struggle for global supremacy, it is the vanquished who experience the most painful effects of disorganization and incoherence. Our friends in the former Soviet republics tell us that their nations sometimes seem to be peopled by ghosts, as virtually the entire range of social groupings, philosophies, and political alternatives present before 1917 reappears. The experience of transformation is unsettling: Stalinists mutate into brown-shirted nationalists, *apparatchiks* into social democrats, and mafiosi into businessmen; nothing is as it was or as it seems to be. At the same time, forms of conflict long thought to be obsolete creep out of the shadows like bad dreams of the past. Once more, Russia and her neighbors are prey to unrestrained gangsterism, ethnic and tribal warfare, peasant revolts, and social banditry. (The only forms of conflict missing, it seems, are revolutionary terrorism and anti-Jewish pogroms.)

More unexpected is the extent to which the malaise and confusion afflicting the former communist states are shared by the Cold War's prosperous victors. Western witnesses also report a pervasive sense of public aimlessness, of mass cynicism about the efficacy of collective action, distrust of leaders and ideologies, demobilization of political organizations, withdrawal of public participation, and a general relocation of politics (or perhaps "submergence" would be a better word) into various realms of private life: the family, the church, private business. The 1994 national elections in the United States exemplified the "anti-political politics" of the transition period. Moreover, the Western nations and Japan also present us with alarming examples of reprimativized domestic conflict, ranging from unsettling increases in violent crime and abuses of police power to urban gang warfare; religious violence; attacks against immigrants, women, and homosexuals; acts of terrorism; and what Johan Galtung refers to as "freezing" rather than "boiling" misbehavior: self-destructive activities like drug and alcohol abuse.¹⁸ Again, one notes a connection between these less structured forms of conflict and the current period of relative formlessness in society.

Whether one considers the capitalist or former communist states, the same question can be asked: To what extent are we justified in projecting current forms of conflict into the future? In my view, doomsday scenarios picturing a continuous regression or descent into global anarchy understate both the power of elites to organize systems of production and government and the capacity of their subjects to mobilize politically in order to satisfy their basic needs. If social reorganization is on the horizon, conflict reorganization will surely follow. But how will this reorganization occur, and what shape or shapes will it take? What forms of conflict and conflict resolution *are* likely to emerge as the current transition period ends and a new world system slowly becomes visible?

Like you, I can peer only a little way into the future. A starting point, however, is the fact that, however one may characterize the emerging world order, the prevailing system of production and exchange is likely to be capitalist. Rather than focusing exclusively on the incoherent violence of the transition, it may be helpful to reconsider the issue that has concerned powerful thinkers such as Adam Smith, Karl Marx, V.I. Lenin, Karl Kautsky, Joseph Schumpeter, and Jurgen Habermas: the relationship of capitalism to social conflict.

Capitalism and Conflict

What line is it, exactly, that we are crossing? From what are we in transition and toward what are we moving? This is not as easy to say as some might think. In 1945, for example, many thoughtful people believed that they were transiting directly from a world-war system to a world-peace system. To them, the Chinese Revolution, the Korean War, the wars of decolonization, and the Cold War came as a great surprise. They were surprised to find that while an era of "hot war" had ended, the system of multinational, ideologically motivated power blocs struggling for global supremacy had not. Similarly, after the enormous shocks of World War I and the Russian Revolution, many keen observers were convinced that the capitalist era going back several centuries had concluded and that several centuries of communism were on the horizon. They now sit in stunned silence while Professor Fukuyama

proclaims the “end of history”: that is, the advent of the thousand-year reign of liberal capitalism.¹⁹

Fukuyama’s work is very much a case in point, since how one defines the current transition largely depends on how one answers two further questions: To what extent is capitalism a conflict-generating system, and if capitalism *is* a system generative of large-scale destructive conflict, what can be done about it?

Generally, the analysts whose work focuses on the types of conflict prevalent during a transition have paid little attention to these issues. An exception is Richard Falk, the distinguished director of Princeton University’s World Order Project, who declared recently that the two most significant movements at the end of the Cold War – the resurgence of local cultural and ethnic conflicts and the globalization of capital – are related trends. According to Falk, the globalization of capital has contributed to a worldwide crisis of identity by weakening institutions that formerly served to express and protect local identities – in particular, nation-states and labor organizations.²⁰ Fukuyama, on the other hand, maintains that this very globalization makes capitalism a *less* conflictual system since it provides the socioeconomic foundation for a new democratic world order.

This disagreement mirrors a historic split in the literature about capitalism and conflict. In considering the extent to which capitalism has been a cause of violent social conflict, there is sharp disagreement between those who locate the root causes of destructive conflict in the very structures and dynamics of the profit system and those who juxtapose an essentially pacific capitalism to bellicose “warrior” systems of various sorts. Procapitalist thinkers like Fukuyama, Joseph Schumpeter, and Milton Friedman contrast the universe of modern economics, which has as its most fundamental transaction a free, rationally self-interested exchange, to the universe of monopolistic, power-dominated, atavistic, and irrational politics. By contrast, anticapitalists from Marx to Ernest Mandel begin with an interpretation of economics as an exercise of power and go on to describe the most characteristic and destructive forms of modern conflict – in particular, world war, social revolution, and crime – as rooted in the competitive struggles and social inequalities generated by the capitalist market system.

According to the anticapitalists, the system of production-for-profit generates serious conflict in four ways. First, it “commodifies” human relations, making it virtually inevitable that people will treat each other as disposable utilities rather than as members of the human family. Next, it sets class against class and the strata of each class against the other strata in an unending struggle for survival which, under capitalism, is the same thing as the struggle for advantage or domination. Third, because of their congenital inability to plan beyond the period of maximum investor interest, capitalist corporations ravage the natural environment, creating the preconditions for intensified conflict over perishable resources. Finally, despite the much-publicized globalization of capital, rival business elites still find themselves compelled to struggle for regional and global supremacy, relying (when push comes to shove) on the armed forces of a state or bloc of states to defend their interests.

