

**Personal Change and Political Action:  
The Intersection of Conflict Resolution  
and  
Social Movement Mobilization  
in a Middle East Dialogue Group**

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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Her main research interests are on how people build social movement coalitions across lines of conflict. This paper, which is based on her dissertation, will be part of a book about Middle East dialogue. Dr. Hubbard recently began new research on how changes in the strategies used by the Palestinian nationalist movement over the years have been viewed by the U.S. Jewish community. She is also interested in cooperation across class and racial divisions in U.S. urban areas.

## **ABOUT THE WORKING PAPER**

This working paper is based on a six-year participant observation study of a U.S.-based grassroots dialogue group of Palestinians and Jews and other Americans. It compares the grassroots dialogue group experience in the United States to problem-solving workshops between Israelis and Palestinians aimed at change on a diplomatic level. It describes and analyses the special challenges dialogue groups face in building a social movement based on mutual reconciliation between Palestinians and Jews in the United States. Finally, it suggests we look more closely at the interrelationship between conflict resolution and social movement mobilization in order to understand how community groups expand their power base.

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## FOREWORD

While much of the literature on "Track Two" contacts between adversaries in protracted and deep rooted conflicts tends to concentrate either on workshops involving participants close to official decision makers within adversaries, or on those involving "notable" or opinion leaders within embattled nations or communities, recent work has tended towards using and analysing contacts at "grass roots" and popular levels.

Most recently, this work has taken two forms. The first has been an interest in the long term process of *reconciliation*, on the grounds that no conflict can be said to be genuinely "resolved" until the relationship between erstwhile adversaries has been transformed, and the trauma caused by the conflict brought into the open and acknowledged by those on both giving and receiving ends. The pioneering work of Vamik Volkan and Joseph Montville has been most notable in this regard.

A second innovation has been an increased scholarly interest in the nature, varieties and - most importantly - the impact on the conflict of grass roots "dialogue groups", whose focus has been on "ordinary citizens" who make up the constituencies that both support and circumscribe the more visible leaders and notables of parties in conflict, and whose purpose is to develop an understanding of the aspirations, concerns and needs of typical members of "the other side", as an indirect means of affecting the search for a mutually satisfactory solution to particular conflicts.

One protracted conflict in which dialogue groups have become a major feature is that between Israelis and Palestinians, and much contact has been made and maintained by groups in the Middle East itself. Dr. Hubbard has now directed attention towards another dimension of this conflict by reminding us of the importance of developing a nuanced understanding of "the other side" among influential diasporas, particularly those in the United States, and how dialogue groups might contribute to such a development. Her interesting study outlines both the difficulties and benefits which arise from efforts to talk with and to understand "the enemy", and raises important questions about the role of such diasporas in resolving or maintaining a geographically distant conflict.

**PERSONAL CHANGE AND POLITICAL ACTION:  
THE INTERSECTION OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND  
SOCIAL MOVEMENT MOBILIZATION  
IN A MIDDLE EAST DIALOGUE GROUP**

## INTRODUCTION

We are becoming increasingly sophisticated in our ability to develop techniques for the resolution of conflict through structured exercises organized by trained professionals and volunteers. However, we must understand better how participants in conflict resolution exercises work within their own communities to promote the consensus they have achieved with each other. This is particularly problematic because the requirements for resolving conflict successfully in small groups and the requirements for mobilizing political power in the general community are often different and can conflict with each other.

For the purposes of this paper I shall consider two different approaches to conflict resolution: (1) the literature on cross-cultural problem solving workshops -- multi-day exercises which bring together influential members of nations and/or communities in conflict for the purposes of working out a joint solution to the conflict and (2) my long-term study of a US-based Palestinian-Jewish dialogue group. This paper will show the difficulties of combining political action and conflict resolution, discuss how one grassroots group coped with these difficulties over a number of years, and raise questions about conventional theoretical approaches to conflict resolution and social movement mobilization.

The problem-solving workshop is one standard approach in the growing field of Track Two Diplomacy. Social scientists bring together participants in a structured exercise designed to encourage them to see the conflict as a jointly-shared problem which they can and must solve together. Conflict resolution in a specialized setting for a limited period of time is the aim and focus of such research. These efforts have involved a wide variety of people from government officials to community leaders and students, but the main emphasis is on involving those individuals who have some influence in their

nations/communities and who can effectively work for political change at home. (For some descriptions of problem-solving workshops, see Burton 1969,1986; Doob 1970; Doob and Foltz 1973; Cohen, Kelman, Miller, and Smith 1977; Levi and Benjamin 1976, 1977; Rogers 1984; Kelman 1986; Cohen and Arnone 1988; Rothman 1989.)

Dialogue groups, on the other hand, are generally formed at the grassroots level by Arabs and Jews and others who may have little access to decision-makers but still wish to get to know each other better and/or work together to build a political movement for peace between their two communities. Although not well known as a movement, Middle East dialogue groups exist in cities all over the United States from Los Angeles to Boston. The focus of these groups is often on convincing the US government to play a role in working for peace. Therefore while they look to their ethnic communities in the United States for help, it may be more often in the context of building a political movement to pressure the US government to promote the peace process.

The problems and dilemmas faced by problem-solving workshop participants and dialogue group members show how our ability to advance positive social change is limited by our difficulty in understanding the complex relationship between conflict resolution and the mobilization of political power. For example, even the best conflict resolution model will not resolve the conflict if the people in power will not come to the negotiating table. Political pressure may be necessary to ensure that the right government officials see it as in their interest to negotiate. On the other hand, an average citizen may be more willing to enter into dialogue but has no power to negotiate a solution. To succeed, he or she must (along with like-minded others) mobilize political pressure through social movement organizations to force government officials to negotiate. But a social movement organization often depends on urgency, crisis, and outrage to mobilize old members, bring in new people, and gain the attention of outside supporters while conflict resolution calls for caution and calm. The success of a social movement may endanger the foundation of the original consensus.

## PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHOPS

While some problem-solving workshop researchers have discussed the possibility of political action outside the workshop (Doob and Foltz 1974; Kelman 1990, 1992), the main focus of most workshops has been how to structure a meeting that will facilitate agreement. The question of "re-entry" into one's home society is still an open one and in much of the scholarship on problem-solving workshops, little space is devoted to the issue of re-entry. For example, John Burton's manual (1987) on organizing problem-solving workshops is 71 pages long but only two pages are devoted to this problem. Edward Azar devoted only an occasional reference to it in his book about a series of workshops at the University of Maryland in the 1980s(1990).

This is certainly understandable. Problem-solving workshops are very difficult to organize, requiring much money, time, resources, and a delicate balancing of political considerations. Necessarily, social scientists have had to concentrate on developing and testing the conflict resolution techniques used within the workshop themselves. And clearly the workshop organizers value political action. For example, Burton sees this as a desirable goal:

*The re-entering parties should be encouraged to establish a base so that they can widen their contacts, and thus both promote the process and prepare the relevant audience to consider the outcomes(1987:69).*

Yet there is absolutely no indication of how this ought to be done or any consideration of what it might take to "establish a base" and "widen their contacts."

The primary concern in the literature on problem-solving workshops is that participants take care to avoid forming their own special "ingroup" separate and apart from their communities. Burton (1987) warned that people who had not participated in the process would feel "alienated" from those who had. Azar (1990) also cautioned that the close personal friendships developed in the workshops would complicate the participants' efforts to keep the real conflict between their communities in the foreground, making it difficult for participants to convey the depth of their experience to

the people back home.

One positive effect scholars have noted is an increased level of contact between participants after the workshop and the birth of new networks across lines of conflict. In a followup to their workshop with Northern Ireland Protestants and Catholics, Doob and Foltz (1974) found even though most of the jointly planned projects had fallen through, some people still maintained limited contact with their counterparts on the other side. Azar noted that one successful result of the Malvinas/Falklands workshop was that participants continued to communicate with each other after the workshop.

Yet for the most part, the question of what happens after the workshop has not received much attention, much less been answered. Only one scholar, Herbert Kelman, has placed this problem on an equal level with the conflict resolution in the workshop itself. In explaining the workshop's goals (1990), he describes a "dual process" which aims at both resolving the conflict between individuals and "transferring" these changes into the political arena. Kelman recognizes the dialectical tension between these two purposes and the difficulty in finding the proper balance. For example in arguing that participants ought to be influential in their communities but not directly involved in decision-making, Kelman pointed out:

*The closer the participants are to the centers of power in their own communities, the greater the likelihood that what they learn in the course of their workshop experience will be fed directly into the decision making process. By the same token, however, the closer participants are to the centers of power, the more constrained they are likely to feel, and the greater their difficulty in entering into communication that is open, non-committal, exploratory, and analytical(1990:286).*

Convincing the people with the power to participate in the process that works is a fundamental problem for conflict resolution practitioners.

For example, the Project on Pre-Negotiation at the Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations at Hebrew University of Jerusalem was a two and a half year project designed to build and refine a sound model of pre-negotiation (Rothman 1991a,b). Jay Rothman, the project director, had worked with diplomats from over a dozen countries in training sessions which involved lectures, discussions, simulations, and

role plays. While the workshops were successful learning experiences, the diplomats themselves raised the question as to whether they were the appropriate audience for the training. They were not mediators or high level diplomats (although Rothman pointed out correctly that they may someday attain these positions). Rothman acknowledged that while he and his colleagues had made great progress in developing a model of pre-negotiation, they were still "challenged to continue searching for ways to aid in the implementation and policy-making process" (Rothman 1991b).

This is a central problem whether it involves (1) bringing the people in power to the table for resolution of conflict or (2) sending people who have resolved their conflicts with each other back into their communities to mobilize others to build political power for a peaceful alternative. The central issue is how to develop and use power. In the first example, we address the problem of how to recruit those who have it. In the second, we address the problem of how those who don't have it, get it. But the problem is essentially the same. Consensus between individuals is not very useful without the community/national power and consensus behind it.

For example, in one of the few articles about political action evolving out of a workshop, Kelman described the difficulty Israeli and Palestinian "doves" faced in building and maintaining coalitions with each other across conflict lines. He argued that doves must work hard to convince their communities that it is in their own interest to negotiate.

*They tend to be preoccupied with how their words will sound and how their actions will look at home, and with the immediate political consequences of what they say and do. But these words and actions, chosen primarily for domestic consumption, may create resentment and reinforce distrust on the other side.*

Thus, the most logical action to take in order to build a social movement -- appealing to self interest -- could hurt the consensus the same individuals have built with their counterparts on the other side. For this reason, Kelman pointed out that the doves must keep a constant line of communication open to their counterparts. Thus coalitions built across lines of conflict are always "uneasy coalitions." Kelman argued that this was a

necessary condition in order for participants to work effectively in their home communities.

## MIDDLE EAST DIALOGUE GROUPS

In 1991, the Hartville Middle East Dialogue Group celebrated ten years of bringing Jews and Palestinians and others concerned about the Middle East together for the purposes of dialogue and political action. "Hartville," a pseudonym for a city in the eastern United States, is the home of what may be the longest ongoing Middle East dialogue group in the United States. It is one of a number of grassroots dialogue groups around the United States that bring together some combination of Israelis, Arabs, Jews, Palestinians and others for discussion and sharing on the Middle East. Through their contact with other dialogue groups, the Hartville group found they shared a common challenge with other groups. That is, how do dialogue groups successfully balance private dialogue between members with each other and joint public political action by members in their communities? Through their long years of experience, they found that dialogue was more than getting good people together from communities in conflict to talk to each other in private. It also required finding ways these same good people could work effectively together in public for positive change.

It is this process that I observed in from 1984 to 1989 in a six-year participant observation study<sup>1</sup> of a Middle East dialogue group whose members -- Jewish, Palestinian, and non-Jewish, non-Arab members referred to as "Others" (non-Jewish, non-Palestinian members)<sup>2</sup> -- sought both mutual reconciliation with each other on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to pressure the United States government to play a positive role in moving the peace process forward. These observations were supplemented by three years' involvement with a national coalition of Middle East dialogue groups and this research has benefited from the reflections of dialogue group leaders on the characteristics of their individual groups.

Experience with these groups has shown how the dialogue group structure, which aids conflict resolution and helps a group successfully reach consensus on mutual points

of agreement through internally-oriented processes can also hinder a group that seeks to have an externally-oriented impact on the political process through the mobilization of others in the community. Dialogue groups do allow access to social and organizational networks in the communities in conflict. However, mobilization along these networks is frustrated for three reasons. One, the different perceptions of the conflict held by the Jewish and Palestinian communities make it difficult for dialogue groups to develop a political strategy that appeals to both communities. Two, the closed structure of this particular dialogue group -- while optimum for conflict resolution -- does not easily provide for the ready mobilization of more than a handful of people. Three, the demands of doing dialogue must be balanced against the demands of engaging in political action. At any point in time, a dialogue group will have to choose one approach over the other due to general time limitations and the constraints imposed by the group's internal development.

Despite these limitations, dialogue groups play an important role in educating Palestinian and Jewish members about how each side views the conflict as well as providing unique access to the other community's networks -- access that provides rare opportunities for communication and cooperation. In essence, dialogue groups have their primary impact through their effect on leaders and activists in the Palestinian and Jewish communities rather than through the mobilization of more recruits to the cause.

The US dialogue group movement has been led by members of the dialogue groups themselves. These community-based groups of Arabs,<sup>3</sup> Jews, and other Americans were not formed by social scientists for the purposes of study. Nor were they formed by conflict management experts to train citizens in conflict resolution. Dialogue groups do include such professionals within their ranks. In fact, what little research has been done on dialogue groups has come from scholars who belong to dialogue groups (Norman 1986; Fiutak 1989; Schwartz 1989). But, for the most part, these scholars participate on an equal basis with other members. In some cases, conflict management experts have been invited into groups to help facilitate the dialogue process, but they are generally seen as consultants, not as directors of the group activity.

These groups have usually met informally and have worked in isolation from

other dialogue groups until relatively recently. In 1986, US dialogue groups came together to form the American Coalition for Middle East Dialogue (ACMED), a coalition of ten to fifteen groups from all over the country. This number reflects only the groups that had officially formed and joined the coalition during this study. There have also been reports of many more attempts at dialogue among individuals which have not blossomed into organized groups. ACMED is not well-known in the national Middle East peace and justice movement and has limited resources, but in its first three years (the period covered in this study) it had established strong personal ties between formerly isolated dialogue groups, produced a national newsletter, published a dialogue manual, and sent a fact-finding Arab-Jewish-"Other" group to the Middle East.<sup>4</sup>

#### THE HARTVILLE MIDDLE EAST DIALOGUE GROUP 1981-1989

This paper describes and analyzes the growth and development of the Hartville Middle East dialogue group from 1981 through 1989.<sup>5</sup> The group is comprised of equal numbers of Palestinians, Jews, and "Others." The Jews and the Palestinians have strong personal, religious, familial, and ethnic ties to the Middle East. Most of the "Others" also had a special interest in the Middle East before joining the group.

Almost all the Palestinians in the dialogue group were born in the Middle East. All have family who were displaced or otherwise affected by the founding of the state of Israel in 1948 or later by the 1967 Arab-Israeli war or the civil war in Lebanon. Some lost their own homes and businesses. Today they are US citizens. They come from a community that sees the Israelis as usurpers of their lands and homes and that sees American Jews as having enormous power in ensuring US support for Israel. Many in the Palestinian community see the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a brutal occupation designed to maintain Israel's hegemony (and through Israel, US hegemony) in the Middle East and keep Palestinians downtrodden and landless.

All the Jews in the group are supporters of the state of Israel and are committed to its survival. Some are secular while others have affiliation with a synagogue. Whether religious or not, they have a strong identification ethnically as Jews. Some

Jewish members of the dialogue group cite specific incidences showing the importance of Israel as a symbol of hope after years of persecution of the Jewish people. In addition, some Jewish members have family living in Israel and they visit the country regularly. They come from a community that sees the Palestine Liberation Organization as a terrorist organization that threatens innocent civilians (both Israeli and Palestinian) and from a community that sees the surrounding Arab nations as a very real threat to the existence of Israel. Many in the Jewish community see Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a security measure necessitated by the hostile behavior of the PLO and the Arab nations. They also feel that the occupation has been judged unfairly when compared to human rights violations in Arab countries.

The "Others" are whites mostly of Protestant background. A number of them participate in the local left-liberal activist community. They have generally had a special tie to the Middle East through having lived or traveled there and/or through marriage to a Palestinian.<sup>6</sup>

It should be noted that group structures vary in certain respects within the dialogue group movement. This particular group is not open to the public. Participants must be invited to join. This group includes "Others." Many groups do not. This group prefers Palestinian involvement and has only recently opened up membership to non-Palestinian Arabs. Most of the members are well-educated and from the middle and upper classes. Most of the members are male. Based on conversations with leaders from other dialogue groups around the country, many of the issues raised in this paper are faced by these groups. However, it would be useful to do more research on open-membership groups, women's groups, and groups that do not include "Others."

This group was formed by Middle East activists who had participated in an earlier open-membership dialogue group whose members had fought with each other. Based on this negative experience, a planning group consisting of two Palestinians, two Jews, and two "Others" developed strict guidelines before organizing a new group. They slowly added new members at a constant rate so that the group would always be ethnically balanced. Eventually membership was set at twenty-one with seven in each caucus. For three years, they held private discussions on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Their

intention was to hold these meetings out of sight of the public eye, with the agreement that no one would be quoted outside the dialogue group without their permission. This was a period of some difficulty as the dialogue group was deeply shaken by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and by the massacres by Phalangist militia of Palestinians at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps after the Israeli military had let them into the camps.

These discussions eventually led the group to write a consensus statement that called for, among other things: (1) "the mutual and simultaneous recognition of the legitimacy of the state of Israel and the legitimacy of self-determination for Palestinians, including the option of an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip" and (2) that "the Israeli government and the PLO recognize each other explicitly and simultaneously and undertake mutual negotiations." They also carefully crafted supplementary comments to explain the reasoning behind the consensus statement. The documents were finished in late 1984. Before releasing the documents publicly, members of the dialogue group talked to leaders in their own communities about the consensus statement in an effort to understand their perspectives on the statement. The dialogue group released the documents publicly in 1984, met with the media, and continued to dialogue with the Jewish and Palestinian communities.

In 1985, dialogue group members decided that they wanted to convince the United States government to play a constructive role in encouraging the peace process. To give weight to that message they needed to involve more people both in dialogue and in political action. This was brought home most convincingly to the dialogue group after two of their members met with a Congressional aide to request the opportunity to testify before a key Senate committee on this issue. Jack, a Jewish member, in talking about this experience later, said:

*Jack: I think we share a general goal of trying to influence American policy and encouraging reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis. That point of view is hardly represented on the national scene. It has very little voice. When we talked to the Senate officers about testifying, they asked us who we had among us and if there were any big names. They only recognized Joe Friedman. People laugh at that.*

Daniel [Palestinian]: *It's sad but true.*

Jack: *They weren't happy about it. They said that's the way it is. It's a problem. There's no way out of the isolation in Hartville and the limitation of being 21 people. The group may have reached its limit on what it can do. How do we break out of this?*

This story was to be repeated later by other members as evidence of the importance of expanding dialogue in order to have enough people to build political pressure on the US Congress to encourage the United States to take a productive role in the peace process. The consensus statement, while a phenomenal achievement on a symbolic level, did not translate into numbers for the politicians. Thus it became clear that to have a political impact, the dialogue group would need to mobilize many more people. They tried to do this by attempting unsuccessfully to organize other dialogue groups and engage national organizations in dialogue. They have been more successful in forming a national coalition, working with the media, lobbying Congress, and helping to form a local chapter of a national inter-religious group. The dialogue group has also added an associate membership that allows interested individuals to receive mailings and newsletters.

From this point on, the central task of the group became political action. On one hand, this was a practical necessity. On the other, it may have allowed the group to avoid dealing with changes in internal relations brought about by the Palestinian Uprising, or intifada, that began in late 1987. In 1988 and 1989, outside pressures from the intifada had increased internal tensions within the group. This was characterized by growing difficulties in taking political action. An "Other" member had returned from a trip to the West Bank and felt urgently that the dialogue group should be calling attention to human rights abuses by the Israeli military. Some Palestinian members also felt the need to take action to counter the worsening situation. In contrast, some Jewish members said that talking about human rights violations would only antagonize the mainstream Jewish community and that the dialogue group should not jeopardize its hard-won credibility with that community. Finally the group returned to dialogue for the purposes of working out a statement on human rights. For a period of time, they

refocused on the internal relations of the group. After the statement was prepared, they released it publicly and then held meetings within the Palestinian and Jewish communities in an effort to stimulate dialogue over the statement.

Yet, writing this statement did not resolve basic conflicts in the group. The dialogue group attempted three times to draft a letter to the State Department and the first two times someone raised an objection about the wording of the letter that led to its being held back and rewritten. Their inability to send a one-page letter to the State Department was an enormous frustration to some members of the group. Ultimately, two members left the group during this period and chose to concentrate their time and energy in other Middle East peace and justice efforts.

The dialogue group members decided to continue to dialogue at this point with the aim of writing a new consensus statement which would address the issues raised by the intifada. During this period a number of members were active politically in the community around the intifada but they did not work through the dialogue group. The group organized very few public events in the community compared to former years because they were so absorbed in dialogue.

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The dialogue group was successful at reaching a consensus for many of the same reasons that problem-solving workshops are successful. The dialogue groups organizers carefully narrowed the arena of conflict until it became a manageable problem that participants could work together to solve. By structuring the group carefully and limiting membership, they were successful in addressing in a constructive manner the points of conflict that were resolvable.

1. Membership structure. (a) Membership was kept limited in an effort to keep the group small and the interactions face-to-face and personal. (b) Membership was balanced so that there were equal numbers of Jews, Palestinians, and "Others." Each group could caucus separately for private discussions. One Jewish member described the reasoning behind this based on the experience in the earlier dialogue groups:

*Part of what would happen by having only a few meetings, at some time there would be a Jew or an Israeli who would have to defend Israel against the onslaught. Or vice versa depending on who happened to show up.....You needed to have enough people show up to feel some security, some support.*

(c) Membership was by invitation only and subject to approval of the caucus to which the person would belong. This allowed the group to invite those who would be the most amenable to dialogue.

2. Who was invited. (a) Those who were invited to join had to agree first to accept the legitimacy of both the state of Israel and self-determination for Palestinians, including the option of an independent Palestinian state. This was a key requirement that kept the composition of the group limited to those people who had a common framework for discussion. In some sense, the members of the dialogue group had much in common right at the outset, and it was the dialogue experience that helped them to recognize that and confirm it.

(b) Those who were invited did not represent organizations. The organizers' past experience had shown that representatives of organizations feel an obligation to promote the views of those organizations and do not feel free to make individual agreements.

(c) No non-Palestinian Arabs were invited to join. The organizers felt that in the past non-Palestinian Arabs had had a different agenda from Palestinians. They felt the group should first concentrate on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and that the resolution of this problem would help to alleviate other Middle East conflicts. In later years, this rule was adjusted so that non-Palestinian Arabs could join the Palestinian caucus as long as they were in the minority.

(d) For the most part, the members had a similar socioeconomic background. While avoiding organizational representatives, the organizers invited people who were respected within their communities and whose opinions would have a greater impact on those communities. This decision led to choosing a membership who were middle-class, upper-middle-class, and wealthy professionals, lawyers, doctors, academics, business people, and ministers.

(However, while the members had similar class backgrounds, there was some lack

of balance in educational levels. Some Palestinian members did make private comments that would suggest they felt intimidated by the Jewish members' level of education and/or verbal ability.)

3. Structure of discussion and decision-making. (a) The caucuses had more power in the voting process than individuals. (b) Confidentiality was ensured. Members agreed not to report publicly what anyone in the group said at a meeting. The group also agreed to make no public statements unless everyone agreed. (c) When reaching an impasse over difficult issues (e.g., the status of Jerusalem under a two-state solution), the members agreed to work on areas where they might agree and to leave the most difficult questions for a later date. A Jewish member described how this worked in an early organizing meeting:

*We were going to press ahead and deal successively with these issues. We came back to the main group and it was quickly apparent that there were lots of issues that, if we tried to deal with them, we'd just end up derailing the whole effort. So we decided instead on the strategy of setting some issues aside that seemed too difficult to deal with, and taking certain ones that we thought we could deal with.*

These issues were the PLO, which the dialogue group was to deal with when writing its consensus statement in 1984, and the status of Jerusalem, which was finally discussed many years later. d) Key members sought to move the level of discussion from arguments over accountability over the past to hopes and dreams for the future.

4) The dialogue group early on committed itself to a joint project which required the involvement of all the members. The writing of a political consensus statement was a very important part of the group's development.

5) The dialogue group also benefitted from the connections the original "Other" members had in both the Jewish and Palestinian communities. The "Other" organizers of the group had contacts with both the Jewish and Palestinian communities and helped bring the Jewish and Palestinian members together for the first meetings of the dialogue group. Having personal connections with both communities was especially important during the invasion of Lebanon. Because of this, Michael was able to warn the Jewish

members that the Palestinian members were upset with the situation. At one meeting I attended, Michael, Jack and Mohammed told me about this period while we were chatting before dinner:

Jack[Jewish]: *Why don't I tell you and Michael can correct me if I'm wrong.*

NOTE: During this monologue, Michael ["Other"] is smiling and looking Jack straight in the eye with strong affection. END

Jack: *Michael is from Long Island and is comfortable with Jewish people and is from Christian background and came to Hartville and was involved in setting up the original dialogue group which was much more antagonistic and that fell apart.*

[Jack describes how the Hartville dialogue group was set up and goes on to explain Michael's role.]

Jack: *It was Michael who knew how to communicate to the Jews when the Palestinians were upset about something during the invasion of Lebanon. Mohammed [Palestinian], for instance, would decide that things were so bad that it really wasn't worth going on and Michael would communicate that to the Jews. And the Jews could move on various issues.*

Michael takes it from there and says that what happened was that people established this friendship with each other and that friendship would still be there, they still had the relationship.

At this point Mohammed comes up behind Jack and joins in the discussion.

Mohammed: [joking] *He didn't do anything!*

They all laugh.

Mohammed: *Have you ever tried to glue two things together without any glue? Well, Michael was the glue. He shamed us into talking to each other. He literally shamed us. He would ultimately say, what is the alternative, look at the alternative.*

NOTE: There is a real sense of pleasure and friendship in this exchange. END

These ground rules permitted the expression of conflict over the Middle East but kept it manageable through narrowing the arena of discussion by (1) inviting only individuals who might be amenable to dialogue, (2) keeping the group small and the interactions face-to-face, (3) putting a heavy emphasis on group consensus, (4) limiting the issues for discussion, (5) working on a joint project requiring the involvement of all the members and (6) relying on the involvement of at least one member who was personally connected in both the Jewish and the Palestinian communities.

## **MOBILIZATION**

However, the very group structure that helped the dialogue group succeed in establishing mutual reconciliation hindered its ability to mobilize other people into the Middle East peace and justice movement in three ways.

One, of necessity, political action draws time and energy away from dialogue and makes it less likely that the group will address interpersonal conflicts. However, if those conflicts are unresolved for very long, they can affect the overall cohesiveness of the group. Two, group structure that enhances conflict resolution is not as well suited for mobilization of large numbers of people into the Middle East peace and justice movement. Three, the need to use tactics and strategy that would appeal to both the Jewish and Palestinian communities limited the dialogue group's ability to mobilize supporters along pre-existing networks in their communities.

## **SOCIOEMOTIONAL RELATIONS WITHIN THE GROUP**

In order to discuss the tension between dialogue and political action, it is useful to apply Bales's work (1950) on small group dynamics. Bales emphasized the interactive effects of task and socioemotional demands on small groups. A small group must move

along both with its task and in resolving socioemotional issues in order to remain cohesive and productive. For example, relations between members can be harmonious, but if the group does not proceed with its selected task, the lack of progress will affect the emotional climate in the group. On the other hand, a group may be very task driven and work hard, but if interpersonal conflicts are not addressed, ultimately task completion will suffer.

The act of engaging in dialogue and writing a consensus statement fulfilled both the socioemotional and task demands of the dialogue group. The original mission of the group was for the members to get to know each other better, share their opinions, and write a consensus statement. One Palestinian member described it this way:

*[W]e had a definite mission there. First to bring it about. We had really a mission. We had the mission of coming up with a statement. We had the mission of relating to each other, getting to know each other, understand each other. There was the planning, and so forth. We were in a structural endeavor there, and it was very exciting.*

However, human beings can only bask in the light of a hard-won accomplishment for so long. Once that consensus statement was finished, the dialogue group wanted to move on to a new task. The members had discussed the situation, come to an agreement, and wanted to take action. An "Other" member described it this way:

*We really wanted to have a task around which the relationships could be built. And so that was the primary kind of rationale. But also we needed to move, we needed to have a goal towards which we were moving psychologically, so that we're moving out of this fear that the individuals had that necessitated no quoting each other out of the group, no going to the press, you know, "I'm sure I'll be misquoted by the other side and used and abused in my own community as a result," and so all those issues were important to deal with in the beginning, but we also needed to envision a way to move.*

However, political action puts certain strains on dialogue: (1) The emphasis on a new task requires "doing business," such as deciding what kind of public event to hold and where to hold it. Members complained about not having enough time to discuss a topic such as the status of Jerusalem. This also takes time away from dialogue and from

addressing interpersonal relations in the group. Personal issues and points of conflict may be avoided or smoothed over in the interest of getting work done.

For example, in a short period in 1985, Palestinian guerillas hijacked the cruise ship, the Achille Lauro, and the Israeli military bombed PLO headquarters in Tunisia. There was almost no comment on these events at the next meeting of the dialogue group despite ample opportunity. When asked about this, one Jewish member saw such a discussion as a "diversion" from the main business of the group:

*It's a kind of discipline that the group exercises. I think if it didn't a lot of people wouldn't come, because as it is I find myself a little irritated at times that we're off talking about something, not tending to business, whatever the business is. Let's move along with it and get something done.*

(2) In addition, it is also highly possible that dialogue group members may not address underlying conflicts in order to avoid threatening their earlier success. The consensus statement is the crowning achievement of the dialogue group and is a symbolic sign of hope for peace in the Middle East. The dialogue group achieved this success by agreeing to avoid dealing with conflicts that they could not resolve, such as the status of Jerusalem. This practice helped preserve the original consensus agreement that had been firmly established on shared trust from the members' earlier experiences with each other. Why bring out "old wounds" as one Palestinian described it when asked about the dialogue group's response to the Achille Lauro hijacking and the bombing of PLO headquarters:

*[We don't talk about these things] not because we are not concerned but we don't think they would contribute. I mean if you would discuss them, we are....hashing over again old things.....Why do they do it? Whose fault it is. We have talked about this when we were -- in that formulating time. And I think just bringing them up is going to bring out old wounds and maybe create conflict that we have already, you know, tried to work through.*

The new emphasis on political action took the group's attention away from interpersonal issues. This would later create problems for the dialogue group as individual members attempted to raise difficult issues about human rights violations by

the Israeli military during the intifada. Failure to address these issues eventually led to increased difficulties in carrying out action plans. In order to carry on with its work, the dialogue group had to return to dialogue and address these interpersonal conflicts. The "Other" member, who pushed for a discussion of the dialogue group's public response to the intifada, believed that the conflict over this also forced the dialogue group to deal with interpersonal conflicts that had been left unresolved. He said later:

*Now since some things have continued unresolved and have not been addressed and then the intifada came along and just heightened everyone's awareness of unresolved tensions in the Middle East, in particularly among the Israelis and the Palestinians. That gave rise to I think an awareness of unresolved things among members of the dialogue that we have found very difficult to address because to address those things would mean we would go back to the first stage of very difficult relationships -- difficult to talk with each other. And given....the joyful experience of the second stage, difficult to go back to the first stage.*

The need to address these conflicts takes valuable time away from political action, which is exceedingly frustrating for people who are deeply worried about peace and justice for Israelis and Palestinians. It is not an impossible balance to maintain, but it is one that takes self-awareness and patience to pursue. Not everyone is willing to do this or sees it as a productive use of their time and energy. It was, however, part of the dynamic process of the dialogue group. When asked about the tension between political action and dialogue, one Jewish member countered that it was rather a natural rhythm of the group:

*And I think also it's less boring if you do different things as a group, you know, instead of spending two or three months trying to figure, what do we think of this, and where are we with that -- if only we did that, it would drive everybody crazy! If we were only probably just proselytizing things, that would get uninteresting also, we'd just , who needs to do it with this group, I'll do it with some other group.....I don't find it a tension, I think that's part of what keeps it interesting, is that we do different sorts of things together.*

However, this process also makes it difficult to take action, a frustration for this Palestinian member who wanted to take action in response to the events of the intifada :

*It stands in the way of the fast, decisive action. If while we dialogue, everything stands still, that's a different situation; but while we are dialoguing the situation, then dialoguing the resolution then dialoguing the action, then we dialogue the release to the newspaper, dialoguing everything....my gosh, that thing has been gone about three or four months.*

## GROUP STRUCTURE

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The closed and balanced structure of the group made it difficult to include new recruits. The dialogue group attempted to circumvent this problem by starting new dialogue groups in other cities. This effort was unsuccessful. Even if this had been successful, it would have solved the problem of recruiting new people into the social movement. It would not have solved the organizational problem the dialogue group faced which was how to bring in new members who had the enthusiasm and skills to tackle its new task.

And yet the dialogue group members were very aware of the importance of political power, especially through the recruitment of large numbers to their cause.

1. Difficulty in integrating new members. Expanding the dialogue through mobilization of others proved to be difficult. The small size of the dialogue group was considered to be a factor in its success in establishing trust between its members. Although its restricted membership helped the group engage in dialogue, it also meant that new members could not be added unless old members left. Furthermore, the experience of this and other dialogue groups has shown that sometimes the veteran members feel that new members want to discuss issues previously considered. Arguments must be repeated. Risks must be retaken. New levels of trust must be reached. Veteran members may be weary of this.<sup>7</sup>

However, new members must also feel that their concerns about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have been addressed if they are to be fully integrated into the group. New members who join a group engaged in action and not in dialogue do not









































