Conflict Termination: An Epistemological Analysis of International Cases

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International conflicts have been presently viewed in terms of the notion of conflict schema, denoting a belief in the incompatibility of goals held by the parties. This belief subscribes to the same epistemic process whereby all beliefs are formed and/or changed. According to the epistemological approach, a conflict situation occurs when at least one of the parties activates the conflict schema. Thus, the retention or modification of the conflict schema may determine whether conflict is maintained or terminated. The present approach suggests two modes of conflict termination: (1) conflict resolution whereby the conflict schema is unfrozen via undermining the conflict belief and (2) conflict dissolution whereby the conflict schema becomes relatively inaccessible. The epistemic processes which characterize the two modes of conflict termination are discussed.

KEY WORDS: conflict; conflict resolution; epistemological theory.

INTRODUCTION

The study of conflicts can be pursued from various disciplinary perspectives and on the basis of different theoretical approaches. However, no single approach has the monopoly on providing the "best" prediction or even the most "complete" explanation. Each contributes a piece to the puzzle, and improves our ability to see the whole picture. Within the psychological per-
The cognitive approach emphasizes the representation of a conflict in the participants' awareness. This does not necessarily imply that such representations are distorted or unreal. The approach recognizes that conflicts are often based on political, economical, military, or societal events; however, in order for conflicts to be operative, they must be first identified as such in the minds of the group members. We recognize that individuals and not groups think and cognize (see Bar-Tal, 1988a). In a group, the members are those who subscribe to cognitive schemas and change them. In our case, decision makers are frequently responsible for bringing a particular situation in as a conflict. Their definition is subsequently often accepted by other group members. Nevertheless, for convenience, we occasionally refer to a party, a nation, or a group as an object of our discussion.

Implicit in our analysis is the assumption that the same external information, or external “given,” may not uniformly determine the beliefs and interpretations different people form about the situation. In other words, the way various persons “take” what is externally “given” is assumed to depend in part on their preexisting repertoires of constructs, the mental accessibility of those constructs at times where their beliefs are being formed, and those persons’ motivations that may prompt them to accept or reject accessible notions about the situation.

For instance, in the case of the Palestinians’ present uprising, two conflicting parties may interpret the “same” external situation in highly discrepant ways, each serving the party’s need to maintain a positive self-image of being righteous and moral. While the Israelis view the uprising as a phase in an attempt to annihilate the state of Israel, the Palestinians consider it part of their struggle for self-determination. Thus, whether the parties in conflict have “realistic” or “unrealistic” perceptions is assumed to be irrelevant to their judgments and conduct in the situation at hand. What is assumed to matter is the content of their representation rather than its “reality status,” particularly whether such content is or is not “conflictual.” This is so because as Krich et al., (1962) suggested:

Man acts upon his ideas. His irrational acts no less than his rational acts are guided by what he thinks, what he believes, what he anticipates. However bizarre the behavior of men, tribes or nation may appear to an outsider, to the men, to the tribes, to the nation, their behavior makes sense in terms of their own world views. (p. 17)

In the context of an analysis of international relations, Holsti (1962) noted that:

The relationship of national images to international conflict is clear: decision makers act upon their definition of the situation and their images of states—or others as well as their own. (p. 245)

AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL VIEW OF CONFLICT

Definition

According to the epistemological view, an essential element in the outbreak of conflict is a knowledge that the involved parties hold about the situation (see also Bar-Tal and Geva, 1985; Klar et al., 1988). This knowledge determines first that a given situation is considered as a conflict and, later, whether the conflict is maintained, terminated, or enhanced. In this view, conflict is considered as a content of knowledge, or as a cognitive schema. A schema is a cognitive structure that represents organized knowledge about a given concept or type of stimulus (Fiske and Taylor, 1984). This knowledge
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Thus, it is not the movement itself that may cause the conflict, but the movement's attributed goal vis-à-vis one's own goals. For example, while the movement of Egyptian troops in May 1973 falsely signaled to the Israelis a war, a similar movement, in October of the same year, was at first wrongly explained as a maneuver. Similarly, in 1962, U.S. statesmen interpreted the Soviet deployment of strategic nuclear weapons in Cuba as a threat grave enough to justify a severe conflict. Yet, the subsequent Soviet build-up in the Mediterranean was not perceived by many of the same statesmen as a challenge sufficient to warrant any confrontational activity.

Even when a conflict situation is cognized, the scope of the conflict depends much on the definition of the specific incompatible goals the parties identify. The more central the incompatible goals, the more serious is the conflict. For example, when Brazil expropriated an American telephone company in 1962, despite popular demand by members of Congress to view this act as a conflict of interest between the United States and Brazil (i.e., conflict between national goals), the President of the United States defined the dispute as one between the governor of a Brazilian province and a single American company over the form and amount of compensation due (i.e., conflict between local goals). This definition prevented the eruption of an international crisis between the two states. By contrast, Eisenhower's insistence that the U2 flight was an official governmental action, instead of an unauthorized CIA venture, as proposed by the Russians, escalated the conflict into a major crisis.

The above examples indicate that beliefs about conflict are neither mere representations of the events nor solely based on mental phenomena. They are rather products of information assimilated to and elaborated in terms of past knowledge. These beliefs reflect state of mind of particular individuals in a specific situation. Accordingly, the conception implies that a specific situation has to be identified as a conflict in order to be treated as such. In what follows we examine how conflict beliefs may be acquired.

Epistemic Process

Beliefs about conflict are acquired via the same epistemic process as all other beliefs. This process is described in detail elsewhere (Kruglanski, 1980a, 1988) and we will only sketch here its main features. The epistemic process consists of two phases: First comes the cognitive generation phase, which addresses the generation of cognitive contents. Second comes the cognition validation phase in which a degree of confidence is attached to the generated contents. The first phase of cognitive generation focuses on what metaphorically was described by Karl Popper (1972) as the "search light"—
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The lay epistemic analysis identifies 3 motivational factors affecting the hypothesis generation process (see Kruglanski, 1988a; Kruglanski and Ajzen, 1983). These factors organize and subsume various previously proposed specific motivations (e.g., Jervis, 1976; Nisbett and Ross, 1980). Motivation for cognitive closure is defined as a desire to have knowledge on a given topic. It disposes the person to generate a pertinent content and to hastily validate it as a belief. Under this motivation individuals freeze. They commit themselves to a belief and refrain from critically challenging it. They prefer structure as opposed to ambiguity, confusion, and uncertainty. This motivation may be enhanced in various situations. For example, under time pressure, stress, or information load, individuals may prefer closure.

The motivation for closure may promote a freezing of knowledge about conflict. Labeling a situation as conflict provides a simple and clear-cut definition which dispels possible ambiguity. Such definition allows for well-defined responses and removes the need for further information search. There exists by now much evidence from real and simulated international and intergroup conflicts that in confrontational situations, where indecision might prove dangerous, intolerance for ambiguity increases (e.g., Singer, 1958; Strelert and Fromkin, 1969). In these situations motivation for closure may be predominant and, as a result, freezing on a specific conflict schema very probable.

The motivation for specific closure is defined as a desire to maintain a particular belief as true. Under this motivation, individuals avoid information inconsistent with the desired conclusion and seek information which confirms it. The desire to uphold a given belief could stem from wishes that individuals may want to fulfill and/or fears that they try to avoid.

The motivation for specific closure is assumed to be particularly characteristic of conflict-situations (Bar-Tal and Geva, 1983). Under this motivation, parties in conflict are motivated to maintain the specific conflict schema and related beliefs as true. Consequently, they usually reject contrary ideas and information and accept supportive notions. The reason for such tendencies is that the contents of the specific conflict schema are functional to various wishes the party strives to achieve and/or fears it tries to avoid. Needs to maintain positive image, to feel superior, or to belong, needs for security, justice, freedom, and survival are only several examples of psychological wishes and fears that may feed and maintain conflictual interpretations in the context of international relations.

In this vein, Finlay et al., (1967) attributed John Foster Dulles' beliefs about conflicting relations with the Soviet Union to his Puritan ideology and commitment to Christian ethics. The Soviets' rejection of Christian principles, promotion of atheism, and preaching of a new social order elevated the threat and danger that reinforced Dulles' conflictual interpretation of Soviet-American relations.
World War twenty years after it ended, simply because “nobody bothered to tell them it was over.” Prolonged conflicts such as between Chile and Argentina, even if through the years they have not involved violent action, are not terminated as long as the parties continue to subscribe to the conflict beliefs. Thus, in our view, any conflict termination between two countries will be insufficient unless paired with a concomitant cognitive change.

From the present perspective, the termination of conflicts can be achieved through two distinct modes. One requires and actual change in the conflict belief itself. The other mode does not necessitate change in the belief, but rather implies a relegation of the conflict belief into a less central position in the cognitive system. In the following discussion, the first mode is referred to as conflict resolution, and the second as conflict dissolution. The next two sections will analyze these two modes in depth.

**CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

As already noted, the specific conflict schema is invoked in a situation wherein a party perceives an incompatibility between own goal(s) and goal(s) of another party. If one of the conflict elements—either the goal or the incompatibility—is eliminated, the specific conflict schema becomes inoperative. Conflict resolution implies the dismantling of the specific core belief that the particular conflict exists. In other words, the party substitutes the belief in the particular conflict by alternate cognitions.

**Ways of Conflict Resolution**

Conflict resolution may occur in three separate ways or their combination. From one party’s perspective, it may be achieved by changing own goal(s), by changing the perceived goal(s) of the other party, and/or by changing the perceived incompatibility between the goals. Each of these changes leads to an awareness that the conflict is terminated.

Elimination of own incompatible goal may occur as a consequence of various causes. A goal may be abandoned simply because the object in question is no longer wanted, because of a realization that it cannot be achieved, because it is believed to have been achieved, or because a different, more compatible, goal has been adopted instead. A few examples can illustrate this way of conflict termination.

For instance, a great number of conflicts in U.S. foreign policy during the Carter administration originated from the goal of preserving human rights around the world. When this goal was abandoned during the Reagan era, many international conflicts in which the United States was involved simply vanished. An additional form of goal shift is goal-partition, where a major goal is separated into a more attainable grouping of subgoals. Kissinger practiced this technique during his mediation of the disengagement negotiation in the Middle East, 1973-75 (Brown, 1980). During the negotiation process he initiated a series of limited agreements step by step, breaking the great objectives into limited and specific issues, in which the disagreement was bridgable, until the final goals of each side were achieved.

Not every goal change by one of the conflict parties needs to result in conflict termination. Iraq, which started the Persian Gulf War with Iran, has indeed abandoned its original goal to conquer Iranian land. But meantime Iran has set for itself new goals incompatible with those of Iraq, notably to replace the Iraqi President and to receive compensation; this has further prolonged the conflict. Another case in which goal change did not diminish conflict is represented by the concessions to Hitler made by the British and French delegations, headed by Chamberlain and Daladier, respectively, in the Munich Conference of September, 1938. Although the Germans received the Sudeten areas they demanded, within a very short time they raised new goals whose fulfillment led to the conquests of Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia. Czechoslovakia ceased to exist as an independent state and the turn of Poland and other countries came shortly after. These examples demonstrate that elimination of the incompatible goal does not guarantee conflict resolution. In some situations, elimination of an incompatible goal by one party may trigger a declaration of another incompatible goal by the other party, so that conflict may continue.

Conflict may also be resolved when one party comes to believe that its erstwhile antagonist has abandoned its incompatible goal. A clear example of this process is termination of the Tunisian-Algerian conflict over the part of Sahara that France had given to Algeria. Tunisia demanded this part from Algeria and the two countries engaged in a bitter conflict. With time, Algeria’s perception that Tunisia had abandoned its goal eliminated the conflict and changed the pattern of relations between the two countries.

Another way in which a belief in conflict can be altered is through change in perceived incompatibility between goals. When the attainment of respective goals by the parties is seen as no longer contradictory, conflict may be terminated. It is a known secret that one negotiation tactic in a conflict situation is to convince the other side that the parties’ goals are not incompatible. One example of this is the recent agreement between Tunisia and Libya. Both parties came ultimately to believe that their goals can be compatible. Tunisia achieved its security, while Libya ended its prolonged isolation in the Arab world.

The foregoing three ways of conflict resolution represent types of change in belief contents which result in an abandonment of the specific conflict
scheme and its replacement by alternative ideas. Such change is assumed to be mediated by the general epistemic process whereby ideas of all contents form and change. This epistemic process of conflict resolution is now described in some detail.

The Epistemic Process of Conflict Resolution

A change of a specific conflict belief requires, first, a formation of cognitive contents which serve as alternatives to that belief, and the validation of these alternatives in light of accessible evidence. The party of conflict can either generate the alternative contents, through its own thinking, or receive them from external sources. Typically, however, a change of a specific conflict schema occurs as a consequence of a combination of one’s own thinking and incoming information, including information provided by one’s antagonist in the conflict situation. Such change usually results from a negotiation between the conflicted parties or, as discussed later, as a consequence of a third party’s involvement.

Thus, unfreezing of a specific conflict schema requires that alternative ideas about the situation become accessible. Another necessary condition for unfreezing is change of the motivational basis of subjective knowledge. Only a conjunction of new ideas/information and motivation to seriously consider those ideas can provide the conditions for substituting old knowledge about conflict by a new and different one.

In the examples provided, the parties (the Reagan administration in the case of Latin of South America, and the Algerian government in the case of Tunisia) changed their knowledge as a result of new ideas and/or information. In part, the ideas/information may have contradicted the belief in goals’ incompatibility and in part may have affected a motivational change that increased the party’s readiness to accept pertinent new ideas and evidence. For example, information that indicates that continued “freezing” of a belief (promoted, e.g., by a motivation for closure or for a specific closure) is very costly may increase the party’s readiness to seriously consider an alternative belief. One may demonstrate that (1) the conflict beliefs are not functional for the party’s needs and may even contradict them; (2) the need underlying the specific conflict schema is less central or important than are alternative needs that the conflict schema may undermine.

The first case can be illustrated with the example of Israel’s realization that the need for security can be better satisfied by a withdrawal from Sinai and a peace agreement with Egypt than by continued occupation of the peninsula and maintenance of the conflict. The second case can be exemplified by a successful termination of the conflict between Italy and Yugoslavia in 1954. Specifically, termination of this particular conflict can be, at least par-}

tially, attributed to Yugoslavia’s split with the Soviet Union. With the split, Yugoslavian needs (i.e., to be part of the communist world under Soviet leadership) disappeared and new needs asserted their centrality (to have relations with the Western world in order not to be isolated) to which previous beliefs about conflict were dysfunctional (see Campbell, 1976).

Often the information needed to demonstrate that the specific conflict schema is contrary to the party’s needs is conveyed via unambiguous actions by the other side. Once such information is absorbed, the parties can move towards conflict termination through its resolution. Three examples illustrate cases where action-based information contradicted previously held beliefs and, therefore, facilitated the termination of a conflict.

First, the determination of the Western powers during the Berlin crisis in 1948-49 to overcome the blockade by airlifting the necessary supplies signalled to the Soviets that the blockade was both ineffective and counter-productive. This constituted important information that led to belief change. Thus, after lifting the blockade on May 12, 1949, the Soviets began negotiations towards peaceful termination of the crisis (Phillips, 1958).

Second, China’s entrance into the Korean War provided significant information to U.S. leaders. It convinced them that the conflict had to be negotiated peacefully, and the North Korea could not be conquered. Following the Chinese intervention on November 28, 1951, Truman tried to limit the war as much as possible until cease fire talks began (Whiting, 1960).

Finally, the dramatic coming of Sadat to Jerusalem in 1977 provided unequivocal and strong information to the Israelis that Egypt was seriously considering termination of the conflict. This move dramatically changed the beliefs and attitudes of the Israelis regarding the conflict.

The Help of Epistemic Authority

In many cases, in order for information and/or ideas to be accepted by the conflicted parties, they should come from a respected epistemic authority. This concept denotes a source that exerts determinative influence on knowledge formation of change (Kruglanski, 1980b). Individuals attribute high confidence to information provided by epistemic authority, often consider it as truth, assimilate it into their own repertoire, and rely upon it. Ideas and/or information emanating from a high epistemic authority cannot be simply disregarded. The conflicted parties process the ideas, information, and/or solutions suggested by the epistemic authority, even when these are inconsistent with the desired beliefs. Thus, the epistemic authority of the source may greatly facilitate, on the one hand, the unfreezing process of the held beliefs and, on the other hand, acceptance of the new ones.
The concept of epistemic authority places unique focus on subjective beliefs concerning the source. A source can become an epistemic authority only to the extent that individuals believe that he/she possesses special characteristic(s) that lend it credibility. A source may serve as an epistemic authority for both opponents, or only one. In negotiations regarding the Middle Eastern conflict, Saudi Arabia fulfills the function of epistemic authority for the Arab side only, while the United States fulfills this function for both Israeli and Arab sides.

In the attempts to settle international conflicts, the role of epistemic authority can be fulfilled by various sources. The authority can be a representative of the third nation (for example, Kissinger), a representative of an institution (for example, the International Court of Justice, or World Bank), or even an individual known for his/her special characteristics (for example, Jesse Jackson). The specific epistemic functions that such an external authority can fulfill may vary in contents and scope. They may include: introduction of new information, reinterpretation of the parties' old beliefs through the introduction of new ideas, changing hierarchies of goals and needs through creation of a "rational" atmosphere, proposing solutions to the conflict, and creating an atmosphere that facilitates peaceful conflict termination (see Burton, 1969; Fisher, 1978; Lockhart, 1979; Raman, 1977; Raymond, 1980; Rubin, 1980; Young, 1967; Zartman and Berman, 1982).

Numerous characteristics can lead the parties in conflict to perceive a source as an epistemic authority. Among the most important ones are: expertise, trustworthiness, empathy, and power. While, in the case of expertise, the epistemic authority derives from the source's perceived capacity to provide valid information, in the case of trustworthiness or empathy, it derives from the source's perceived motivations to do so. A trusted epistemic authority is perceived not to have vested interest in a success of one of the conflicted parties. As Young (1967) pointed out:

In most situations the existence of a meaningful role for a third party will depend on the party's being perceived as an impartial participant (in the sense of having nothing to gain from aiding either protagonist and in the sense of being able to control feelings of favoritism) in the eyes of the principal protagonists. (p. 81)

This characteristic is probably essential for the third party to fulfill a role of an epistemic authority for both parties in conflict (see Franck, 1968). Mediators such as Dag Hammarskjold and Henry Kissinger had to be trusted in order to provide information or ideas. Epistemic authority, deriving from expertise, must be seen to be based on extensive knowledge on the specific problems related to the given conflict. Young noted that "...the power of knowledge, information and understanding is at the very heart of any in-

fluence that a third party may acquire" (Young, 1967, p. 87). Indeed, in a majority of cases, third parties that served as epistemic authorities had a detailed grasp of the conflict which they tried to settle [see, for example, the analysis of Ralph Bunche and Henry Kissinger's mediation of the Arab-Israeli conflict in Touval (1982)].

Sometimes, a source with power is perceived as epistemic authority. In this case, a perception of power may signal knowledge, ability to provide solutions, or resources for conflict termination. Such power, motivating the parties to seriously consider the source's notions, played an important role in the success of Kissinger's disengagement negotiation and Carter's Camp David accord between Israel and Egypt. In these cases, the ability of the United States to offer economic aid and diplomatic support, as well as dependence of Israel and Egypt on such assistance, allowed it to serve as epistemic authority (see Touval, 1982).

An empathetic epistemic authority is perceived as capable of understanding and sympathizing with needs of the conflicted parties. Zartman and Berman (1982) noted that "In interviews, a group of North American diplomats and students of negotiation associated with UN peacekeeping identified empathy and integrity as the negotiator's most important personal skills" (p. 17). In this connection, Perlmutter (1975) contends that Kissinger was able to work so effectively with Arabs and Israelis during his 1973-74 negotiations because he convinced both sides that he understood their aspirations, goals, and fears.

In sum, the epistemic authority of a source may derive from informational (e.g., expertise) or motivational (e.g., power, empathy) bases; both may enhance conflicted parties' readiness to accept suggestions, solutions, or information emanating from the source, and aimed at effecting conflict-termination.

Finally, it should be noted that the service of external epistemic authority is not a necessary condition for conflict resolution. Parties can terminate a conflict on the basis of changes in knowledge prompted by their own thinking and information. Also, direct negotiation without third party intervention may effect changes in knowledge, possibly leading to conflict resolution. The use of external epistemic authority is not only determined by psychological variables, but also by political and sociological factors beyond the present scope. Nevertheless, in general, closure to inconsistent ideas and information, and biased interpretation of available knowledge, which especially characterize the motivation for specific closure, indicate that conflicted parties often have great difficulty in changing their cognitive and motivational state. In such a situation, an intervention of a third party, which serves as an epistemic authority, may make a considerable contribution toward resolving a conflict.
CONFLICT DISSOLUTION

In the preceding section, we have described one mode in which conflict may be ended, i.e., through active modification of one or more elements of the specific conflict schema. The other mode of conflict termination does not require a decomposition of the conflict belief, but rather of decline in its accessibility. In this mode, the belief about the existence of conflict loses its place at the focus of attention, and moves into relative obscurity; as a result, it does not affect judgments, evaluations, or behaviors (Bar-Tal, 1986).

When beliefs regarding a specific conflict are constantly accessible (i.e., central), they maintain and even enhance it. But, when they lose their accessibility, the conflict may be diminished or even terminated because the party is no longer preoccupied with it anymore. There are many examples throughout history of how neighbors who, in spite of standing conflicts, have had normal relations, and become vehement enemies practically “overnight” (for example, Iran and Iraq). Perhaps, in those instances, an inoperable conflict schema came to the fore due to some priming event.

Similarly, two groups may at some occasion be in intense conflict and later experience warmer relations due to the decentralization of the conflict. We can cite numerous examples of nations that were in fierce conflict in the past and at present maintain warm and friendly relations, in spite of the fact that no conflict resolution between them has taken place and the incompatibility between their goals still remains. In such cases, conflict-beliefs may have lost their centrality and have become inaccessible at certain times or situations. The relations between China and the U.S. or Poland and West Germany are good examples of this phenomenon. Prolonged conflicts between two countries do not necessarily have to be characterized by steadily hostile relations. Through time, depending on the position of the specific conflict schema, the relations may fluctuate. Thus, it is not surprising that the relations between the United States and USSR moved from open conflict, to close cooperation, to cold war, to detente, back to overt conflict, and again to warm relations.

Conditions Affecting Accessibility

Several conditions have been suggested to influence accessibility of schemata (Bruner, 1957; Higgins et al., 1985; Higgins and King, 1981; Wyer and Srull, 1981). These conditions will be discussed now in reference to the issue of conflict dissolution.

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Expectation

One of the factors that may affect the accessibility of a conflict schema is an expectation. When the parties expect to continue the conflict, the conflict schema remains accessible. Thus, conflict dissolution necessitates change of expectations of the parties in conflict. Instead of expecting a continuation of a conflict, they have to begin to believe that conflict termination is possible and near, or, at least, that peaceful coexistence is practicable. In this case, the specific conflict schema, though not dismantled, is less accessible and as a result, less frequently affects various evaluations or decisions.

The ideology of detente between the US and USSR was based on this principle (Caldwell, 1981). Although the sources or essence of the conflict have not changed, the change of expectations allows a relaxation of the conflictual tension. The expectation of peaceful coexistence enables an appearance of new central beliefs related to this expectation (e.g., cooperation, conciliation, agreement, mutual interest) and removal of beliefs related to conflict (e.g., arms race, competition, mistrust). In fact, a change of psychological atmosphere as reflected in the modification of expectations is a facilitating factor in conflict termination, in general. Expectations of the parties that the conflict can be peacefully terminated serve as a catalyst in this process.

Motivation

Motivational factors are another determinant of a schema's accessibility. When a specific conflict schema is related to motivational factors as group's needs, or values, it continues to be accessible. In these situations, the salience of needs, or values, keeps the specific conflict schema in the forefront of the cognitive repertoire. Conflict dissolution, thus, requires a change in motivational conditions. But, in contrast to conflict resolution, the specific conflict schema remains intact, although it loses its centrality. In other words, the incompatibility between goals continues. But, as a result of changing motivational conditions, alternative beliefs may come to the fore.

A striking example of a temporary change of needs is represented by the United States and USSR's relations during World War II. Confronted with a common, highly threatening enemy, both countries put their disagreements aside and cooperated in an effort to overcome Nazi Germany. Their beliefs about their own conflict became less central in face of a superordinate threat. But, immediately following victory, the erstwhile allies reverted to their conflictual relations.
Environmental Features

Information from various external sources and cues may keep the specific conflict schema accessible. This process occurs especially when the eliciting cues are salient. Features of the environment may activate or prime the conflict schema (cf. Higgins and King, 1981) that, in turn, may influence the interpretation of subsequent events. Thus, as long as the parties continue to provide conflict-relevant information, the specific conflict schema remains accessible and influential (cf. Bar-Tal, 1988b).

In this vein, of special significance are Tetlock's (1985) findings that indicate a link between foreign policy rhetoric and actions of the two superpowers. Rhetoric that presents issues in black-white terms to communicate firmness and commitment to one's own position elicits a similar rhetoric from the other side. Such rhetoric is, furthermore, associated with an increased likelihood of undertaking major military-political interventions in other countries and a decreased likelihood of arriving at mutually acceptable agreements. In short, it may significantly increase the accessibility of the specific conflict schema.

Another striking example of actions whose primary impact is to increase the accessibility of the specific conflict schema is represented in strategies of terrorist organizations. Specifically, political terrorism today is not designed to perpetuate maximal damage or destruction, nor is it intended against the terrorist's direct victims. Instead, the terrorists “want a lot of people watching and a lot of people listening and not a lot of people dead” (Jenkins, 1975, p. 15). In gist, terrorist strategies are to a large extent designed to remind the apathetic world of the existence of conflict. In present terms they are therefore aimed at increasing the accessibility of the specific content schema in public awareness (for more detailed discussions, see Friedland (1988) and Merari and Friedland (1988)).

Conflict dissolution requires an abstention from information, acts, or cues that increase the accessibility of the conflict schema. It means that if the parties are interested in conflict termination, they should, on the one hand, stop (or at least diminish) activities against each other which perpetuate conflict and, on the other hand, should cease internal propaganda that feeds the conflict. Cease fire, conciliatory gestures, willingness to negotiate, or specific statements may help to remove the conflict schema from its centrality, without changing it.

Examples of diminishing the saliency of eliciting cues for the conflict schema can be found in cases where the two opposing groups, or at least one, emphasized compatible goals, while not necessarily relinquishing the incompatible ones. The Israeli policy of “open bridges” between the West Bank and Jordan, as well as increased economic development in this area,

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has probably succeeded in diffusing, to some extent and for some time, the feelings of conflict among residents of the West Bank. In another case, East and West Germany presently attempt to dissolve their conflict by diminishing the saliency of conflicting cues, in spite of ongoing political and ideological differences.

Chronic Accessibility

The removal of the conflict schema from central position is not an easy objective, since in situations of conflict the conflict schema often becomes chronically accessible (cf. Higgins and King, 1981). That is, both parties may activate it continuously—with or without ambient, conflict-relevant cues. One specific example of a desire to keep the specific conflict schema alive is the decision of Syria to keep the city of Kuneitra in ruins as a reminder of the conflict with Israel.

When the conflict schema is chronically accessible, almost all the information is interpreted in terms of the conflict beliefs. In this situation, parties in conflict are tuned to information supporting the conflict schema which in turn increases its accessibility. Thus, chronic accessibility of conflict schema is not only a consequence of its continuous relation with longstanding motivational factors and expectations, but also is a result of prolonged and frequent exposure to conflict-related information. Under these conditions, as a first step, a decision to reduce information and cues relating to the conflict schema may move the parties toward conflict dissolution. Such a decision, if carried out by both parties, may represent significant progress towards conflict termination.

CONCLUSIONS

International conflict is viewed from the epistemological perspective as a state of mind of two or more parties based on a belief regarding their goals' incompatibility. This belief is stored in the cognitive system as prototype conflict schema, and whenever pertinent situations are identified, the schema becomes operative and leads to the formation of new schemata concerning specific conflicts. The prototypic conflict schema suggests what conflict is (i.e., goal-incompatibility) and what it implies affectively (i.e., stressful, or exhilarating), or behaviorally (e.g., hostile acts or war). The specific conflict schema applies the foregoing prototype to a specific situation involving specific goals and parties. When the specific conflict schema is central and/or accessible in the parties' cognizance, it may influence subsequent cognition,
strain, and decision making in various ways. This approach views conflict as a content-category of a schema.

Accordingly, two separate ways of conflict termination have been identified: conflict resolution and conflict dissolution. Conflict resolution requires an "unfreezing" of the conflict schema pertaining to the specific conflict case and its replacement by alternative beliefs. The unfreezing process is dependent on availability of relevant information and on such internal factors as cognitive capacities of the parties to generate and/or comprehend new ways to thinking about the situation, or epistemic motivations which motivate the parties toward openness or closure to new ideas.

The unfreezing of conflicts may be especially difficult because conflicted parties often have the motivation for specific closure. This motivation fosters closure to disconfirming information and openness to supportive information. Particularly compelling evidence is required to overcome such psychological resistance to cognitive change. Therefore, it is not surprising that in many cases of conflict resolution, third parties play an important role as epistemic authorities. Their function is to provide ideas, information, and alternatives which enable the unfreezing process to proceed. It is beyond the present scope to elaborate the techniques third parties may use, but without the new knowledge that they provide conflict resolution is often difficult to achieve.

Decentralization of the conflict schema, called here conflict dissolution, does not require a dismantling of the specific conflict schema, but its removal into oblivion. In such cases, the specific conflict schema remains intact. The main condition for decentralizing the schema is blocking its accessibility. Change of expectations, and of motivations that support conflict-related beliefs, and the removal of eliciting cues and information may help dissolve the conflict.

The notions of conflict resolution and dissolution place emphasis on the cognitive processes of conflicted parties. Since human beings judge whether a situation implies a conflict, it is important to shed light on the cognitive processes that accompany any international conflict.

The present epistemic approach to conflict and conflict termination could provide a general framework in which previous relevant work receives new meaning, since many of the past contributions have focused on specific ways of unfreezing conflict-related beliefs. (e.g., Kelman and Cohen, 1979; Sheni et al., 1961). Furthermore, our analysis may open new avenues for studying conflict. Many questions regarding the role of cognitive and motivational factors, especially in the realm of schema unfreezing and decentralization, demand further investigation. Such effort could represent a step forward to improve control over conflicts through better understanding of their nature.

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