

**Institute for Conflict Analysis
and Resolution**

Occasional Paper 5

**On Taking Sides:
Lessons of the Persian Gulf War**

**by
Richard E. Rubenstein
Professor of Conflict Resolution
and Public Affairs**

George Mason University

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About the Author

Richard E. Rubenstein, professor of conflict resolution and public affairs at George Mason University, is a member of the core faculty of the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution.

He is the author of numerous works on political violence, including *Alchemists of Revolution: Terrorism in the Modern World* (Basic Books, 1987) and *Comrade Valentine: The Life of Yevno Azeff, Russian Terrorist and Secret Agent* (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, in press). Rubenstein's recent articles include "Dispute Resolution on the Eastern Frontier: Some Lessons for Modern Missionaries," in *Negotiation Journal*, Summer 1992; "The Los Angeles Riots: Causes and Cures," in *Journal of Intergroup Relations*, Winter 1992-93; and "The Analysis and Resolution of Class Conflict," in Sandole and Van der Merwe, eds., *Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice* (University of Manchester Press, 1993). He is also the author (with John Stephens and Frank Dukes) of the forthcoming ICAR monograph, *What Every Journalist Should Know About Conflict*. Professor Rubenstein is currently working on a new book on social conflict and the theory of basic human needs.

About the Institute

The Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University has as its principal mission to advance the understanding and resolution of significant and persistent human conflicts among individuals, groups, communities, identity groups, and nations. To fulfill this mission, the Institute works in four areas: academic programs, consisting of a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) and a Master of Science (M.S.) in Conflict Analysis and Resolution; research and publication; a clinical and consultancy service offered through the Applied Practice and Theory Program and by individual Institute faculty and senior associates; and public education.

The Applied Practice and Theory (APT) Program draws on faculty, practitioners, and students to form teams to analyze and help resolve broad areas of conflict. These three-to-five-year projects currently address such topics as crime and conflict, jurisdictional conflicts within governments, conflict resolution in deeply divided communities (Northern Ireland, South Africa, Beirut), and conflict in school systems.

Associated with the Institute are a number of organizations that promote and apply conflict resolution principles. These include the Consortium on Peace Research, Education, and Development (COPRED), a networking organization; the National Conference on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution (NCPCR), offering a biannual conference for conflict resolution practitioners; Northern Virginia Mediation Service (NVMS), offering mediation services to Northern Virginia residents involved in civil or minor criminal disputes; and Starting Small, teaching conflict resolution and problem-solving skills to children.

Major research interests include the study of deep-rooted conflict and its resolution; the exploration of conditions attracting parties to the negotiation table; the role of third parties in dispute resolution; and the testing of a variety of conflict intervention methods in a range of community, national, and international settings.

Outreach to the community is accomplished through the publication of books and articles, public lectures, conferences, and special briefings on the theory and practice of conflict resolution. As part of this effort, the Institute's Working and Occasional Papers offer both the public at large and professionals in the field access to critical thinking flowing from faculty, staff, and students at the Institute.

These papers are presented to stimulate critical consideration of important questions in the study of human conflict.

Foreword

This essay by Richard E. Rubenstein is an expanded version of the Vernon I. and Minnie M. Lynch Lecture delivered by the author at George Mason University on May 13, 1991, not long after the Persian Gulf War ended. “Ended,” that is, in a manner of speaking. One of Richard Rubenstein’s major points, strongly borne out by the events of the past two years, is that international conflicts generated by unsolved social problems seldom “end” in victory on the battlefield—not even when the victory is as one-sided as that won by the U.S.-led Coalition in the Persian Gulf. Indeed, while these introductory lines were being written, American cruise missiles were again falling on Baghdad, evidence not only of Saddam Hussein’s obduracy but of the inefficiency of force as a resolver of deep-rooted conflicts.

Richard Rubenstein’s tightly argued essay has three major thrusts. First, it illuminates the causes of the conflict in the Persian Gulf and the justifications for intervention in that regional conflict by the United States and other outside parties. Second, it offers a general typology of intellectual frameworks used to justify forcible, third-party intervention in conflicts between foreign contestants. And third, it examines the lessons of the Gulf War for the theory and practice of conflict resolution. Many of our colleagues may well find Rubenstein’s call “to take the case for conflict resolution directly to the people” both stimulating and controversial.

In view of the general importance of this essay and of its subject, those wishing to copy or to republish it are invited to do so without charge or further permission, provided that they credit the author and the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution.

Christopher R. Mitchell
Director, Institute for Conflict
Analysis and Resolution

The Fourth Annual Lynch Lecture

Address by

Richard E. Rubenstein

Professor of Conflict Resolution and Public Affairs

Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution

George Mason University

May 13, 1991

On Taking Sides: Lessons of the Persian Gulf War

Immediately following the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi troops in August 1990, many scholars and practitioners in the field of conflict resolution went on record opposing military action by United States or United Nations forces to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation. At a forum sponsored by the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University and televised nationally by C-SPAN in September 1990, a number of us argued that war was unnecessary because better means of resolving current disputes between Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia were available. Negotiations dealing with the immediate issues in dispute—the Rumallah oil field, Iraq's war debts, and so forth—could get the Iraqis out of Kuwait before they laid waste the country. Meanwhile, using facilitated problem-solving processes, the parties could begin to deal with the fundamental causes of the conflict, of which Saddam Hussein's militarism was only a symptom: problems like the needs of ethnic and religious groups for identity and autonomy, the great disparities of wealth and income among the peoples of the region, and the need of the region as a whole for independence from foreign domination and manipulation. If these problems were not dealt with locally, we warned, the Persian Gulf would remain a hotbed of conflict and a magnet for continuing foreign intervention.

In subsequent months, conflict specialists elaborated these arguments in private consultations, public speeches, conference presentations, newspaper and magazine articles, statements to political leaders, and television interviews. Indeed, in January 1991, on the very eve of the Gulf War, a coalition of university-based conflict resolution centers organized by our confreres at the University of Minnesota pleaded with the U.S. government not to involve itself in a needless, destructive war. Of course, there were disagreements among those involved in these activities as to the most effective and practical alternatives to armed action. Some conflict specialists supported U.N.-imposed sanctions against Iraq, while others doubted the efficacy or justice of coercive methods. Some

emphasized the utility of traditional diplomacy and interest-based negotiations; others advocated the use of problem-solving forums or some combination of bargaining and analytical techniques.

In the end, however, whatever their tone, pitch, or articulation, these voices went unheeded. The Iraqi army was driven from Kuwait at a terrible cost. Tens of thousands of Iraqis were killed, with thousands more dying as a result of postwar chaos and disease. Iraq's industrial infrastructure was laid waste. Rebellions by Kurds and Shiites, encouraged by the U.S. government and others, were brutally suppressed. Kuwait's oil fields were set aflame, with losses estimated in the hundreds of billions of dollars; her waters were polluted by oil spills; and her huge "guest worker" population (mainly Palestinian) was expelled. The war-impoverished Jordan aggrandized Syria (at the expense of the Lebanese) and presented the United States with a Hobson's choice. As many had predicted, the American government was compelled to choose between attempting to govern Iraq as a colonial ruler and leaving the government of Saddam Hussein in power.

The Gulf War succeeded in savaging and isolating Iraq, but it solved none of the problems that continue to make the region a cockpit of internal violence and international strife. The purpose of this essay, however, is not to proclaim, "We told you so." It is to ask why the methods of non-violent conflict resolution were not tried before resorting to war. Why were the historical lessons that seemed so obvious to conflict resolution specialists ignored? Why did the United States commit her forces and those of her allies to a brutal, costly military campaign when Iraqi troops might have been evicted from Kuwait by other means? And why did the American people follow their president so willingly into dubious battle? Answering these questions may help us to envision a more effective role for conflict resolution in the future. For one lesson of the Gulf War, at least, seems clear: the philosophies and processes that we profess and practice have not yet had great impact either on foreign policy decision-makers or on the public.

What we have notably failed to communicate is (1) a paradigm of conflict that views warring parties as people driven by unsatisfied human needs rather than as malicious aggressors or innocent victims; and (2) a paradigm of resolution that considers the conflicting parties themselves, assisted by independent facilitators, to be capable of identifying and satisfying these needs. Confronted by a deep-rooted social conflict, the conflict resolver's instinct is to *avoid* taking sides in order to investigate the underlying issues and to keep the door open for third party facilitation. By contrast, policymakers and the public are strongly influenced by con-

ceptual frameworks that invite outsiders to take sides. Those wielding power generally operate within a framework of *economic or geopolitical interest* that makes intervention, at various levels of escalation, contingent upon the seriousness of the interests purportedly affected by the conflict. The public, on the other hand, is seldom motivated to support an armed intervention unless a basis has also been established for its *emotional or moral identification* with one warring side or the other. One powerful method of uniting the frameworks of interest and identification has proved to be the paradigm of *structural role*, which invites third parties to intervene in other people's conflicts either as law-enforcers or as Good Samaritans.

Each of these frameworks requires further discussion.

Taking Sides: The Paradigm of Interest

It is the framework of *interest* that ordinarily provides governments with reasons for intervening in conflicts between other states. In this situation, a third party, C, perceives that its material or strategic interests will be affected by the outcome of a conflict between contestants A and B, and judges that the expected benefits or detriments of a victory or defeat by one side or the other outweigh the likely costs of participating in the conflict. The Bush administration employed this paradigm by declaring (at various times) that it was prepared to intervene in the Gulf conflict to secure continued access to Kuwaiti and Saudi oil; to liberate an American ally from military occupation; to defend other regional allies against threatened Iraqi aggression; and to inaugurate a "new world order" in which the Great Powers (minus the former Soviet Union) would intervene in regional conflicts affecting their interests through the medium of the United Nations.

The major problem with this framework is that the concept of "interest," which may make perfectly good sense in the context of commercial transactions by individuals or companies, becomes shifty and opaque when applied to the actions of governments claiming to represent the "national interest." Why *bomb* Iraq into submission rather than *negotiate* her out of Kuwait? One answer is that negotiations, even if providing little more than a fig leaf for Iraqi withdrawal, would have left that nation an important power in the Persian Gulf region. But America's national interest, as conceptualized by the Bush administration, required far more than evicting Saddam Hussein's troops from Kuwait. It required nullifying the ability of the Iraqi army to wage interstate war, setting back Iraq's industrial development, weakening her internally by promoting rebellions of the Kurds and Shiites, and establishing an American military presence in the region. The major short-term goal announced publicly—

the “liberation” of Kuwait—was therefore deceptive. It is quite clear that *negotiations* to achieve this goal were never on the American agenda. On the contrary, the U.S. government acted consistently to promote a longer-term design to alter the regional balance of power by eliminating Iraq as a “major player” in the Persian Gulf region.

Other interests too narrow or imperialistic to discuss openly also figured in the calculations that led the United States to insist on military intervention. Saddam Hussein had made no secret of his view, shared by other oil producers outside the Kuwait-Saudi Arabia-Gulf States axis, that Gulf oil was being overproduced in order to lower the world price for the benefit of Western business interests. Public rhetoric about “securing access” to Persian Gulf oil, therefore, masked unrevealed private interests in securing access to *extremely low-priced* oil during a period of economic crisis. Furthermore, Saddam Hussein was threatening to emerge as the leader of a bloc of Arab states determined to renegotiate the terms of trade that enriched the Saudis and their Persian Gulf satellites at the expense of poorer nations. (Twenty years earlier, faced by a similar challenge on the part of Muammar Qaddafi, the United States had satanized the Libyan leader and sanctified his enemy, the Shah of Iran.) Hussein’s misconceived invasion of Kuwait gave the Great Powers the opportunity to present this political and economic threat in purely military terms and to rid themselves of the nightmare of an OPEC with teeth, led by militant Iraqi nationalists.

It may also be the case that the liquidation of Iraqi power and establishment of a long-term U.S. military presence in the region was intended to make America’s leading business competitors, Germany and Japan, dependent upon the United States as a guarantor of access to Gulf oil. The United States might be running third in international economic competition, but in one crucial “export”—military capability left over from the Cold War—it retained a clear supremacy. With the collapse of the “Soviet threat,” the Pentagon and its multi-billion dollar suppliers had a special interest in demonstrating the effectiveness of their weapons and the utility of their use against Third World upstarts. The U.S. government also appears to have viewed the invasion of Kuwait as an ideal opportunity to rid the country of popular aversion to military intervention—the so-called Vietnam Syndrome—in order to facilitate such future interventions as might be deemed necessary to consolidate the “New World Order.” On the day that the bombing of Baghdad began, a Pentagon spokesman vowed that the war in the Gulf would not be another “living room war,” subjecting the American people to the painful spectacle of bodies burned and disfigured by U.S. firepower. The Pentagon kept its promise by subjecting the U.S. news media to the most rigid

press controls ever imposed by an American government at war. While film of "smart bombs" supplied by the Armed Forces held center stage, the Iraqi dead and wounded simply...disappeared.

Private and public interests of this sort, of course, were not identified or debated publicly. If they had been, critics might have pointed out that the American *people's* basic needs were ill-served by interventionist policies aimed at assisting Western industrial and military elites to dominate the Persian Gulf. A number of respected scholars, from Hans Morgenthau to Christopher R. Mitchell, have pointed out that most "national interests," properly analyzed, turn out to be the special interests of powerful subnational groups. Indeed, the very notion of "interest," which implies rational calculation of costs and benefits, opens the door to calculations at odds with those of the nation's leaders. "No Blood For Oil," the slogan of the antiwar marchers, summarized the matter simplistically but neatly. For this reason, in cases where powerful groups seek to intervene militarily in foreign conflicts, they seldom rely publicly on the paradigm of interest, but attempt to rally popular support on the more emotional basis of *cultural or moral identification*.

The Paradigm of Identification

In this situation, public support of a proposed intervention is mobilized on the basis that either contestant A or contestant B "represents" third party C in a cultural, political, or ideological sense. One basis for identification is contractual; by treaty, for example, C may be obliged to come to A's or B's aid in case of attack. But as the United States' Vietnam intervention demonstrated, contract is a thin basis upon which to justify the giving and taking of lives. A far stronger basis is an ethnic, cultural, or ideological tie that can be used to convince C's citizens that an attack on A or B is simultaneously an attack on them.

Current examples include the threat by Turkey to intervene in the Armenian-Azeri conflict on the side of Moslem Azerbaijan and Russia's announced determination to protect the Russian minorities in the Baltic states and Moldova. Historical examples are legion; one recalls that the American public was mobilized for World War II on the basis that the Japanese were "yellow devils" not at all like us; that the Germans, although ethnically similar to the majority of us, were not democrats; and that the Russians, although not democrats, were ethno-culturally like us, as well as being anti-fascists! In the case of the Persian Gulf intervention, however, the paradigm of ethnic or ideological identification was obviously problematic. Why intervene on one side or the other in a contest between undemocratic Arab regimes, all of which had previously been considered U.S. allies? The answer was to portray Kuwait and Saudi Ara-

bia as relatively or potentially democratic states (!) and, more important, as the peaceful victims of unprovoked aggression.

When other bases for identification are weak, interventionists often rely on a paradigm of *moral identification* that divides the world's nations, or their current leaders, into two categories: aggressive militarists and peaceful civilians. In the American version of this framework, the bad nations are fanatical, ideology-driven expansionists, while the good nations are pragmatic, contented, businesslike peoples like ourselves (or, as Jeanne Kirkpatrick put it, businesslike "authoritarians" on the way to becoming democrats like ourselves). Thus the importance of the World War II analogy, which pictured Saddam Hussein as an Arabic-speaking reincarnation of Adolf Hitler, and the invasion of Kuwait as a replay of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Most important from a conflict resolution perspective, the analogy presented negotiations with Saddam Hussein as the modern equivalent of the appeasement of Hitler at Munich. "If we negotiate now," went the argument, "we will have to fight later on less advantageous terms."

Clearly, this framework had a certain popular appeal. Even so, applying it in the context of the Persian Gulf required serious distortion both of Saddam Hussein's aims and the history of the regional conflict leading up to the invasion of Kuwait. To begin with, the Iraqi leader's ambitions (not to mention his resources) were far from Hitlerian. It seems clear, for example, that he had no intention to move his army south of Kuwait, and that the United States knew this to be the case even while deploying several hundred thousand troops allegedly to defend the Saudi monarchy against imminent attack. The "Hitler analogy" was supported in Saddam's case by the Baathist leader's record of executing political opponents en masse, his use of poison gas against Kurdish villages during the Iran-Iraq war, and his ugly threat to "incinerate" Israel. Clearly, Saddam Hussein was—and is—a tyrannical nationalist with bloodstained hands. But singling him out for attack as the region's Hitler required closing one's eyes to the brutalities perpetrated by other regional leaders.

What of America's ally in the crusade against Iraq, President Hafez Assad of Syria, who (among other things) suppressed a fundamentalist rebellion in the city of Hama by killing some 10,000 of its citizens? How to assess the brutality of the Turkish government, named by Amnesty International as a massive and persistent violator of its citizens' human rights, or the record of the Israeli leaders who, during the past decade, invaded Lebanon and seized its southern territories, bombarded defenseless Beirut, permitted the Sabra and Shatila massacres to occur, and suppressed the Palestinian Intifadah at the cost of nearly 1,000 lives? In-

deed, how would one describe the conduct of the United States twenty years earlier in Indochina? Brutal? Yes. "Hitlerian"? No. The Hitler analogy, both inaccurate and insulting as applied to the U.S., Israel, or Turkey, was no more accurate or less insulting when used to pillory Iraq. But the goal of the propagandists who "sold" the analogy to the American public (as the British had attempted to do thirty-five years earlier in the case of Egypt's President Nasser) was not historical accuracy. Their aim was to mobilize popular support for mass slaughter.

Would it have been possible to negotiate an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait without resorting to Munich-like appeasement? The answer to this question hinges on the distinction, well known in conflict resolution theory, between *dispute settlement* and *conflict resolution*. It is clear, on the one hand, that either before or after the invasion of Kuwait, Iraq's *dispute* with that nation and Saudi Arabia could have been *settled* by negotiation. Ever since the end of the Iran-Iraq War, Iraq had been attempting without result to resolve her differences with the Saudis and their regional clients, who had not only undercut the world oil price but also called in loans made during the bloody war with Iran, continued the practice of slant-drilling into the disputed Rumailah oil field, and denied Iraq secure port facilities on the Persian Gulf.

There can be little doubt that this economic warfare threatened Iraq's viability as a modern state. Roger Fisher of the Program on Negotiation at the Harvard Law School and other responsible observers agreed that Saddam Hussein would not have challenged Saudi hegemony over Kuwait if Iraq's concerns had been addressed in a peaceful forum, and that he was prepared to withdraw his troops in exchange for mere recognition that they were negotiable. Instead, the U.S. government refused the pleas of the Algerian, Jordanian, and Soviet ambassadors to provide even a minimal "face-saver" for Iraqi withdrawal.

But the question may still be asked: would not Saddam Hussein, at some time after quitting Kuwait, have continued to lay claim to that territory and to threaten the rich oil kingdoms to the south? Would not his aggression have continued, as Hitler's did after the Munich agreement of 1938? Perhaps it would—if dispute settlement were not followed by *conflict resolution*. Clearly, relieving some of the current economic pressure on Iraq would not have eliminated the causes of conflict in the region as a whole: in particular, ethnic and religious divisions, gross socioeconomic disparities, and foreign domination. Just as clearly, however, *refusing* to negotiate with Saddam Hussein—attempting, instead, to eliminate his nation as a major regional power—would not solve these problems either, but might well complicate them. What war alters least of all, as Ken-

neth Boulding has wryly noted, is the fundamental balance of power! So long as the sources of conflict in the Persian Gulf remain untouched, either Iraq or some other regional power will be tempted to play an aggressive nationalist role vis-à-vis the wealthy *rentier* states of the south and their foreign protectors.

Obviously, this is not to justify military “aggression,” but to point out that the correct analogy is not between Saddam Hussein and Hitler but between Iraq (or any other state with modernizing ambitions and powerful enemies) and the *pre-fascist* regimes of interwar Europe. What drives nations to excesses of aggressive nationalism—especially in the wake of an exhausting struggle like a World War I or an Iran-Iraq War—are unsatisfied human needs for socioeconomic development, national identity, and regional autonomy. If the German people had not been impoverished, degraded, and subjected to foreign control during the interwar period, they would not have felt the need for a vengeful, aggressive *Führer*. By the same token, if negotiations to remove Iraqi troops from Kuwait had been followed (or were even now followed) by problem-solving conflict resolution efforts, the frustrations and hatreds that fuel the region’s competing nationalisms might be dissipated. Assuming that this does not happen and that current efforts to dismember and humiliate Iraq continue, it is not Saddam Hussein that one should fear, but his successors.

The Paradigm of Structural Role

In order to establish popular identification with the Kuwaitis and Saudis in the Persian Gulf conflict, it was necessary for U.S. leaders to resort to historical analogies that were (to put it mildly) farfetched. Indeed, the World War II analogy might have worn thin quickly, as it did in Indochina, if U.S. forces had taken serious casualties in the Gulf, or if the war had produced an explosion of anti-American activity elsewhere in the Arab World, as happened in 1956 after the British and French seized the Suez Canal. Moreover, the framework of identification would not have carried the weight that it did in the days prior to January 1991 had it not been combined with another pro-intervention paradigm—that based on the United States’ and the United Nations’ *structural role*.

In this third situation, C’s role is perceived as being so structured that it is obligated to take a side in a conflict between A and B, even if its interests are not implicated in the conflict and even if it does not identify emotionally or ideologically with either side. The clearest example of this framework—one of considerable importance in American culture and in Western thought generally—is the role of the court in an adversary legal system. We expect the judge or jury, after hearing a dispute, to

rule in favor of the plaintiff or defendant rather than to resolve the underlying conflict by identifying and eliminating its causes. Moreover, we expect legal institutions of all sorts, from prosecutors' offices and grand juries to administrative agencies and legislative committees, to take sides *in accordance with law* rather than arbitrarily or on the basis of their own personal interests or biases. Therefore, if C wishes to gain public support for an intervention on A's or B's side—or even if it wishes to assure itself of the justice of such an intervention—it will present itself, or some other institution in which it participates, as a third party obligated to enforce agreed-upon legal or moral norms by taking sides.

In the case of the Gulf War, this framework, combined with the paradigm of moral identification, was decisive in mobilizing Congressional and popular support for United States intervention. The U.S.-sponsored coalition was not proposing to intervene unilaterally, but under authority of the United Nations Security Council. The purpose of this intervention, authorities declared, was not merely to protect Western economic and geopolitical interests but to uphold universally agreed upon principles of international law enshrined in the U.N. Charter. Using this framework, Saddam Hussein would not be punished in his capacity as a bellicose nationalist leader (a category that might have included even George Bush, the conqueror of Panama) but as an international outlaw. And the result of a legally authorized, multilateral intervention would not be to promote U.S. power in the Persian Gulf but to strengthen the international rule of law. Confronted by this framework, the Democratic opposition to Mr. Bush's war—crippled, to begin with, by its fear of seeming effete or unpatriotic—melted away.

The difficulty with this use of the judicial paradigm—or so one would have thought—was its obvious partiality. The U.S. government, which had thumbed its nose at the World Court in the case of *Nicaragua vs. United States*, and which had ignored both the U.N. and international law where its own military adventures and those of its allies were concerned, now assumed the mantle of the impartial judge and law-enforcer. Somewhat in the manner of Henry VIII securing the consent of Parliament to his divorce, President Bush first secured the approval of the U.N. Security Council for unspecified military action to liberate Kuwait. Whether the Council's mandate authorized attacking civilian targets inside Iraq, slaughtering retreating troops on the "Road of Death," and inciting ethnic and religious minorities to rebel may well be doubted. Nevertheless, use of the United Nations to legitimize intervention by the U.S.-led coalition was hailed as a triumph of internationalism and legality, notwithstanding that it contravened the fundamental maxim of jurisprudence that no one may be judge in his or her own cause. No one, as

one American official slyly remarked, would have been interested in defending Kuwait against a violation of international law if her major crop had been carrots. And it is hard to imagine a U.S. government accepting Security Council jurisdiction over future violations of international law if the defendant happens to be the United States or one of her major allies.

Indeed, prior to American military intervention in the Gulf, a number of us in the conflict studies field argued that using the U.N. for partisan Western purposes would *undermine* the potential of that body, so painfully developed by former U.N. Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar, to function as an impartial, conflict-resolving third party in future international disputes. Nevertheless, Security Council authorization functioned as a sort of lego-political “magic,” clothing the naked partiality inherent in the frameworks of interest and identification with the majesty of impartial justice. It is not difficult to see why the U.S. government and its clients would seek to use this framework to mobilize support for an intervention that might otherwise have been characterized as classically imperialist. (The United States, it will be recalled, had intervened covertly on *both* sides in the atrocious Iran-Iraq War in order to maintain the regional balance of power and to weaken both contestants.) What requires further explanation is the propensity of both the political opposition and the public to accept this partisan justification.

One reason for this acceptance, no doubt, is the tenacious hold on our imaginations of the judicial paradigm, which envisions the neutral third party as an authoritative, fault-finding decision maker. It is part of our vision of a civilized society to assume that serious disputes will be taken *out* of the hands of “interested parties” and decided by a berobed, disinterested third party representing a universal legal order (i.e., the broad rules equally applicable to all parties embroiled in similar disputes). The role of facilitator—one who *decentralizes* decision making to the level of the contestants themselves, and who encourages them to resolve their differences on a “no-fault” basis, without reference to precedent—has, as yet, gained little popular acceptance. Especially in the United States, moreover, we have little hesitation in submitting bitterly contested political, ideological, and even religious disputes to judicial decision making. While business matters are ordinarily considered negotiable by the parties, highly controversial political and ethical disputes are regularly decided by court orders backed by the armed forces of the state. The universality of the legal order, in other words, is not merely territorial but contextual; there are no limits, in theory, to the applicability of the judicial paradigm.

Given this understanding, it is natural for Americans to envision “world order” as a global extension of their own judge-dominated domestic system. Notice that the prevailing paradigm is *not* legislative; legislators are generally considered to be representative of “interested parties,” or to be interested parties themselves, and therefore incapable of settling serious disputes. The American system of judicial supremacy, in which judges appointed for life determine both the meaning and the constitutional validity of legislative acts, is profoundly elitist, as both Alexis de Tocqueville and Franklin D. Roosevelt had occasion to remark. It requires no great imaginative leap, therefore, for Americans to envision the U.N. Security Council, dominated by the wealthy, stable, industrialized Great Powers, as an appropriate judge in the case of disputes between unruly Third World states. “World government” on this model—as opposed to a legislative-supremacy model that would infringe on U.S. national sovereignty—is quite consistent with the judicial paradigm. (The U.N. General Assembly, by the same reasoning, has little legitimacy in American eyes.) When the Security Council renders decisions consistent with American interests, as interpreted by the U.S. government, and with the framework of moral identification, the appeal to “international law” can be quite potent.

Since the Gulf War ended, another variant of the structural role framework has made its appearance: support is sought for military intervention in foreign conflicts for *humanitarian* reasons, e.g., to distribute food to the victims of famine (Somalia), or to put an end to ethnic atrocities (Bosnia-Herzegovina). Here, the third party appears not as a judge enforcing the law, for international law, such as it is, recognizes local sovereignty as a barrier to foreign intervention and grants third parties no right to intervene in purely “domestic” conflicts. The intervenor’s role in these cases is said to be that of the Good Samaritan—one motivated solely by the desire to save innocent lives. As General Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated, sending the U.S. Army into Somalia was “like the cavalry coming to the rescue.”

This analogy, however, must give us pause. The U.S. Cavalry referred to by General Powell did not ride to the rescue of “uncooperative” Indians or runaway slaves; its mission was *selectively* humanitarian, with the principles of selection dictated by the *political interests* of the intervening power.

Not only is armed intervention by a superpower in a Third World nation inevitably linked to calculations of imperial interest, but also, unless the intervention ends almost immediately, it almost always involves taking sides. As Charles Paul Freund put it, speaking of the U.S. interven-

tion in Somalia, “[President] Bush cast the United States as if it were the Red Cross with a Pentagon. Perhaps that is what a great power should be, but in fact the United States remains a political force that, in its every action, operates among other political forces.” With regard to the “images of appalling suffering” emanating from Somalia and Bosnia, Freund had this to say:

...Atrocity imagery is among the most powerful political weapons of the twentieth century; sentimentalizing it is a mistake. Because of the intense emotional reaction it invites, it has been continuously abused as a device to sway opinion, to support military action, to engender hatred; it is the central rhetorical device of modern manipulation. (*The Washington Post Outlook*, December 4, 1992)

Whether humanitarian or legalistic in emphasis, the effect of the structural role paradigm is to obscure the sources of the conflict between A and B and to mask the interests served by C’s intervention. As they applauded the dispatch of U.S. troops to Mogadishu, for example, few Americans were aware that the United States had supplied the murderous Somali dictator, Siad Barre, with weapons and political support from the late 1970s until shortly before his overthrow in 1991; that the ensuing clan warfare and famine had their roots in the manipulation and exploitation of the country by outsiders; or that the U.S. remained interested in military facilities on the Indian Ocean which could provide a forward base for intervention in the Near East. Nor did they anticipate the political decisions that might be required if Somalia’s military occupiers attempted to return that strife-ridden society to “normalcy.” The Good Samaritan, it will be recalled, left his injured protégé at an inn, promising to return, if necessary, to pay the victim’s bill. He did not take the next step of attempting to become the Good Occupier.

Obviously, starving people should be fed and ethnic atrocities ended. The question, however, is whether the conflicts responsible for the breakdown of food distribution systems and for communal atrocities are resolved most efficiently and permanently through armed intervention by interested outsiders or through nonpartisan conflict resolution. The aftermath of the Gulf War provides compelling evidence that, rather than promoting conflict resolution by the local parties themselves, violent intervention breeds further conflict, requiring further intervention. Following the defeat of the Iraqi army, for example, the United States intervened on the side of insurgent Kurds in Northern Iraq, supplying the rebels with humanitarian relief and enforcing a “no-fly zone” over Kurdish territory. But at the same time, America’s ally, Turkey, was

busily continuing its own campaign to smash the Kurdish insurgency in portions of southern Turkey bordering Iraq. The question of the relationship between the Iraqi Kurds and their Turkish brethren was therefore posed, and it was quickly answered...by violence. Shortly before this essay went to press, the Iraqi Kurds' American protectors had convinced their leaders to collaborate militarily with the Turks in order to suppress the Turkish-based P.K.K. (Kurdish Workers Party). For the first time, Kurds were fighting against Kurds; Turkey had been drawn into the regional conflict; and what had begun as humanitarian relief was ending in foreign-sponsored fratricide.

The Psychology of Taking Sides: The Paradox of Strength

We have seen that when the paradigms of interest, identification, and structural role can be made to coincide, the normal resistance of the public to intervention in foreign conflicts may, to some extent, be overcome. Still, cognitive paradigms and rationales for intervention will not explain the enthusiasm with which most Americans endorsed the bloody crusade against Saddam Hussein. In the wake of the United States' relatively painless victory (painless, that is, for the Coalition), it is easy to forget that, while Iraq's defeat was never in doubt, many knowledgeable commentators anticipated as many as ten thousand American casualties, as well as possible poison gas attacks on U.S. allies, terrorist actions against American citizens abroad, mass uprisings in Arab nations, and other potential dangers. Public opinion polls taken in December 1990 showed more than 60% of Americans opposing an attack on Iraq. Why, then, did more than 80% of those queried support the war in "instant polls" taken on the first night of the bombardment of Baghdad? And why did Americans later take such satisfaction in winning an utterly one-sided struggle?

We can begin by noting what might be called the *paradox of strength*, a phenomenon already noted by Andrew Bard Schmookler in his fine study, *Out of Weakness: Healing the Wounds that Drive Us to War* (Bantam, 1988). Observing the United States on the eve of the Gulf War, most analysts thought that they beheld a powerful, confident nation, its Soviet enemy vanquished, flexing its muscles on a global scale in order to usher in a new era of justice and order. The hesitation, self-doubts, and inward turning of the post-Vietnam era—what some called the "Vietnam Syndrome"—were declared to be obsolete. Americans were proud of their strength, proud of their rectitude, proud to be. . . Americans. President Bush, somber and exalted by turns, quoted Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt, but seemed most of all to resemble Theodore Roose-

velt, the interventionist president who first proclaimed the twentieth century to be the “American Century.”

Many conflict specialists accepted this view of American strength as well, arguing that the world’s most powerful nation need not intervene militarily in a dispute between lesser powers resolvable through negotiations. But—here is the paradox—in proposing to attack Iraq, the United States was not acting out of confidence but out of a far more profound sense of weakness. The war was not an activity that Americans chose reluctantly, only after exhausting all other alternatives; it was something that we seemed desperately to *need*. In fact, the same unsatisfied needs named earlier as causes of conflict in the Gulf region—basic needs for economic security, cultural identity, and political autonomy—drove Americans to fight rather than to negotiate.

Economic Security: The end of the Cold War left the United States, paradoxically, with virtually no military enemies but profoundly vulnerable to economic competition by the nations it had vanquished in World War II. Germany and Japan, the principal customers for Persian Gulf oil, formally approved of U.S./U.N. intervention in the region, but did so with little enthusiasm. In the decade before Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, these former enemies had become the world’s leading exporters and creditors, with the fastest-growing economies on the planet. They were prepared to let the world market determine the price of oil and to profit from further “internationalization” of Persian Gulf petrodollars, while the United States, with its banking system in crisis, was not. Popular opinion in the new centers of world economic power was either neutral toward U.S. intervention or (particularly in Germany) opposed—but these nations were not experiencing economic stagnation, enormous budgetary and trade deficits, crippling “deindustrialization,” precipitous declines in labor union membership, massive unemployment of minority youth, or serious increases in crime, drug addiction, and homelessness. While their standards of living rose steadily during the 1980s, those of American workers stagnated or declined.

In the United States, a pervasive and growing sense of economic insecurity fueled anxiety about the apparent threat to an important economic resource and generated a scapegoat mentality: anger in need of an outlet. (Consider the vicious stereotypes of Arabs appearing in American newspaper cartoons, and this during a war allegedly fought to liberate one Arab people from another!) More than that, it inclined Americans repressing a deep sense of failure at home to seek some dramatic success abroad—some proof of U.S. superiority in competition with other nations. One would not have thought that much glory could

be derived from defeating a third-rate military power like Iraq, but the Gulf War nevertheless offered two opportunities for a dramatic display of superiority. First, it showcased America's high-tech weaponry. (As several commentators remarked, "smart bombs" and Patriot missiles were the real "stars" of the nightly telecasts of the war on CNN.) Second, and perhaps more important, America's willingness to intervene militarily was presented as evidence of her *moral* superiority vis-à-vis competitive Great Powers.

During the period of the Gulf crisis, scornful comments about the unwillingness of those outside the Coalition to "fight for freedom," or even to finance the war effort adequately, filled the nation's editorial pages and airwaves. An old propagandistic contrast—energetic New World versus effete Old World—was dusted off and presented again for public consumption. The war effort was held to demonstrate American courage, willpower, and willingness to sacrifice, not in some abstract sense but in comparison to more slothful, self-interested, and perhaps even cowardly peoples. Indeed, this self-praise reached such a pitch that, in one television interview, I ventured to suggest that America's pride in her legions reminded me of Rome's during the era of Imperial decline. In both cases, while economic disruption and political disarray became endemic, military specialists offered up their courage to defend the Empire's borders—for a price.

This resurrection of the warrior spirit, furthermore, was all the more ironic in the context of a war fought almost entirely (on the Coalition's side) by machines. When American servicemen and women came home to heroes' welcomes for participating in what amounted to a mechanized massacre of virtually defenseless opponents, the disproportion between the war's stated aims and its deeper psychological purposes seemed clear. The defeat in Vietnam had been avenged. America's deep-rooted sense of inferiority toward more successful industrial states had been replaced, if only temporarily, by Romanesque pride. If only George Bush had been able to exhibit Saddam Hussein in chains, his Triumph would have been complete.

Cultural Identity: Americans are said to live in a state of perpetual identity crisis, but the end of the "roaring 1980s" brought with them an unusually heightened and painful sense of national disunity. Not only were the rich richer and the poor poorer, but the relatively prosperous and the poor now seemed to inhabit separate cultural planets. With the development of an apparently permanent urban "underclass," the gap between the predominantly white suburbs and the largely Black and Hispanic inner cities appeared unbridgeable. At the same time, a huge increase

in immigration from Latin America and Asia was generating increased intergroup conflict across the nation. (Cultural insecurity was especially evident in the struggle over proposals to declare English the United States' "official language.") Less noticed, moreover, but more divisive than many ethnic conflicts, was the growing cultural split between highly educated "techno-professionals" and the majority of Americans still mired in the lower reaches of the working class. While these cultural differences generated value-based disputes over issues like abortion, school prayer, and homosexuality, the economic slowdown, accompanied by the near-collapse of the U.S. labor movement, produced intensified class conflict over the distribution of shrinking resources.

Little wonder that many Americans turned with an almost audible sigh of relief to a military adventure that would affirm their threatened sense of nationhood. If we could not live together peacefully at home, we could at least fight together against a common enemy. In this respect, the racial diversity of the U.S. Armed Forces and the centrality to the war effort of General Colin Powell, the first African-American Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was particularly revealing. During the 1930s, the slogan of the U.S. Communist Party was, "Black and White, Unite and Fight!" During the 1990s, this became the slogan of business interests and the Pentagon. But what war induces is a *delusion* of unity—a temporary intoxication that leaves one with ragged nerves and a bad headache the morning after. Saddam Hussein, who had hoped to unify the "Arab Nation" by declaring *jihād* against the West, saw both the Arab world and his own nation more disunited at the war's end than at its start. His conqueror, George Bush, watched the American fantasy of unity through combat vanish in the flames of Los Angeles.

Political Autonomy: It is not only Third World nations like Iraq that are driven to take military action in defense against apparent threats to their autonomy. First World nations, as well, can feel their capacity to control their own affairs eroding both for external reasons (e.g., the "Japanization" of world trade) and because of apparently insoluble internal problems. As John Burton pointed out in his pathbreaking study, *Global Conflict: The Domestic Sources of International Crisis* (Wheatsheaf, 1984), war is often the externalization of internal strife, a compensatory outward projection of a nation's inability to govern itself. Why should Americans need to prove at gunpoint that they were "Number One," unless they felt at a deeper, more repressed level that they were no longer either dominant on the world economic stage or competent to solve intractable social problems at home?

Again, the *paradox of strength* presents itself. Behind the facade of political efficacy—the official portrait of a government governing effectively—lay a widely shared sense of collective impotence in the face of unpredictable, incoherent, uncontrollable change. Political leaders (“mere politicians”) seemed incapable of managing the forces undermining American prosperity, prestige, and power. Ironically, even the collapse of the Soviet Empire, hailed as a victory by the West, fed the perception that the events shaping the “new world order” were fundamentally beyond our control.

In his famous essay, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” (1965), Richard Hofstadter demonstrated how this sense of being manipulated by powerful, dimly understood forces could generate mass movements *personifying* perceived threats to group autonomy. If family farmers faced ruin because of falling commodity prices, this must be the result of a conspiracy of “international Jewish bankers.” If American cities were becoming crime- and alcohol-ridden, this was part of the Vatican’s secret plan to flood the United States with immigrants and to subvert traditional Protestant moral values. Updating Hofstadter, we may say that by mid-1990, a nation increasingly frustrated by its leaders’ inability to master threatening change was primed to release hostility against some foreign “devil.” And if the opponent turned out to be far weaker than ourselves—as easy to exterminate, as one American officer put it, as “grasshoppers”—so much the better. The psychodynamics of this intervention resembled a syndrome common among male abusers of women: brutality as a method of silencing the abuser’s fear of impotence. The very unevenness of the war against Iraq gave us joy, since it demonstrated a competence—a control—a *mastery* that we had come to doubt.

That joy, it goes without saying, was short-lived. Crushing the Iraqi army could not restore our sense of autonomy any more than it could reunify us socially or rehabilitate us economically.

But it is not clear that either the American people or the conflict resolution community has learned the lessons of the Gulf War. In offering reasonable alternatives to military intervention, we failed to recognize either the determination of the ruling class to advance its global interests by “all means necessary” or the pervasive, repressed sense of weakness and inferiority that generated popular support for the Gulf adventure. Since the war’s end, many of us have pointed out that virtually every problem that generated the original conflict in the Gulf region has been exacerbated: economic inequality by the policy of pauperizing the Iraqi people; ethnic division by attempts to play off the Kurds and Shiites against the Sunni Moslems; and foreign domination by continued manip-

ulation of the price of oil, as well as escalated arms sales to favored allies and maintenance of U.S. armed forces in the region. But we are still talking in the same way to the same audiences. What *does* it mean, then, to learn the lessons of the Persian Gulf War?

Conflict Resolution and Foreign Policy: An Immodest Proposal

Specialists in international or transnational conflict resolution, a number of them diplomats either by training or by inclination, have typically addressed themselves to two audiences: official or unofficial representatives of the parties in conflict and foreign policy decision-makers. In certain situations, either because the Great Powers favor third party efforts to resolve a particular dispute or because they are not greatly interested in it, conflict resolvers have been able to function as facilitators working directly with the parties' representatives to identify and solve problems generative of violent conflict. This work has proven worthwhile and clearly deserves to be continued. But the Gulf War raises a more difficult question: what can be done to advance the cause of conflict resolution when (as is so often the case) the U.S. government, or that of another Great Power, seems inclined to intervene forcibly to protect its perceived "vital interests"?

The received wisdom in such a case is to offer conflict resolving alternatives to the "foreign policy community": that is, to confer with foreign affairs officials, present arguments and other materials to influential legislators, attend significant conferences, express one's views through the "opinion-making" news media, and so forth. Because this sort of effort was undertaken without success during the period preceding the Gulf War, some of our colleagues have concluded that what is needed is closer and more continuous contact with policy-making officials. In their view, conflict resolving paradigms and recommendations will not be considered during a crisis unless they have already become part of the policymakers' intellectual universe. But this is unlikely to happen, they argue, unless conflict resolvers are considered foreign policy "insiders," respected and trusted by those wielding power.

From this argument a list of recommended activities follows: consulting, conferencing, working in joint task forces, increased private "networking," exchanges of personnel, and the like. In fact, such activities have been going on for some time under the auspices of various research institutions, associations, government agencies, and universities. Fostering dialogue between conflict resolvers and policymakers is part of the mission of the United States Institute for Peace, which sponsored a major conference precisely for this purpose in July 1992 in Washington, D.C. Nevertheless, such efforts do not respond directly to the question

that we have posed. They assume that there is substantial "common ground" on which conflict resolvers and policymakers may meet. What the Persian Gulf situation demonstrated, however, is that common ground does *not* exist where taking sides will advance economic or geopolitical interests deemed vital by the U.S. government and its corporate "partners." If it is the case that powerful elites will pursue these interests by all means necessary, including armed intervention, it seems naïve to suppose that increased contact with advocates of conflict resolution will induce them to do otherwise.

Suppose, referring to our earlier discussion of taking sides, that we replace the abstract parties, A, B, and C, with real groups or nations struggling for identity, recognition, autonomy, security, and development under conditions of unequally distributed wealth and power. Now, if A and B are *allies* or *client states* of C, C may be happy to facilitate a settlement or resolution of their dispute using either traditional diplomatic techniques or the paradigms and processes of conflict resolution. President Carter, for example, used a broad range of dispute-resolving methods to facilitate settlement of the Egypt-Israel dispute at Camp David. Similarly, Secretary of State Haig attempted to reconcile Great Britain and Argentina in 1982, prior to the outbreak of the Falklands/Malvinas war. Again, if A and B are *outside C's primary sphere of influence*—that is, if the outcome of their conflict will not implicate interests deemed vital by C—C may facilitate a settlement of their dispute using its own resources, as the U.S. State Department attempted to do in Namibia and Angola, or by calling on the services of conflict resolvers, as various governments have done in the cases of Northern Ireland, Cyprus, Sri Lanka, the Horn of Africa, etc. In these cases, a good argument can be made for increased communication and "networking" between conflict resolvers and government officials.

Where the outcome of a conflict between A and B *implicates interests deemed vital by C*, however, a different situation is presented. Here, the paradigm of interest ordinarily prevails. In certain unusual situations, C's leaders may recognize that their ability to defend their interests using coercive power is limited or nonexistent; then (like South Africa's rulers at present), they may be compelled to open the door, to some extent, to new intellectual frameworks and other methods of dealing with conflict. Until the uselessness of C's power has been demonstrated, however, efforts to apply conflict resolving paradigms and processes in cases implicating C's "vital interests" may seem not only impractical and irrelevant but positively dangerous. It is a sad fact, but true, that governments representing elite interests (i.e., virtually all governments at present) have no *general* interest in or commitment to conflict resolution. On the

contrary, they consider it their duty to forment, maintain, and exploit conflict where that will assist their corporate or military clients or advance their own bureaucratic interests.

To put the matter bluntly, the recommendations of conflict resolvers in the Persian Gulf crisis were ignored not because the recommenders lacked “insider” status but because their advice was unwelcome. And it was unwelcome because eliminating the deep-rooted causes of conflict in the Persian Gulf was not a goal of the oil companies, the banks, the military-industrial corporations, or the politicians that serve these interests. On the contrary, their goal was—and is—continued domination of the region.

These elites could not be convinced that their power to coerce a “solution” to the conflict in the Gulf was essentially illusory, given that the conflict was rooted in unsatisfied basic human needs. That is a lesson that the peoples of the region will no doubt teach them, in time, by continuing to resist their authority. Where such “vital” interests are involved, furthermore, conflict resolvers are unlikely to be accorded “insider” status unless they *become* insiders: that is, unless they demonstrate their willingness to play the games of power politics according to standards deemed practical, realistic, and responsible by those holding power. The first rule of this game is that advisers must be flexible and pragmatic, not “doctrinaire”; i.e., they must not advocate conflict resolving processes that might potentially alter the current distribution of socioeconomic resources or political power to the detriment of the elite. A corollary is that those wishing to become or to remain insiders do not “go public” with criticisms of government policy, nor (with the exception of President Eisenhower giving his Farewell Address) do they identify the private interests masked by the all-purpose paradigm of national interest. Objections, where they exist, are to be registered in a responsible, “insiderly” manner. Better still, however, to have no objections: that is, to make one’s own definitions of resolvable and unresolvable conflict accord with those of ruling groups.

The devastating effects of this self-censorship on conflict analysis and policymaking during the Vietnam War, ruthlessly exposed at the time by Noam Chomsky, have since been documented by the memoirs of Roger Hilsman, George Ball, and other servants of the Johnson administration. Its effects in the case of the Gulf War are less documented, perhaps because they are still largely unrecognized. Thus, W. Scott Thompson of Tufts University addressed the participants at the July 1992 United States Institute of Peace Conference as follows: “There will

always be leaders like Milosevic and Saddam Hussein unsusceptible to the learning we can gain from dialogues like this one.”

How “responsible” to exclude the foreign policy establishment’s current *bêtes noires* from the communion of conflict resolution! This line of thought, so comforting to those wielding power, promises, in effect, that we will not attempt to resolve conflicts that modern potentates consider unresolvable by peaceful methods. Its gruesome implication, so far as the Gulf War is concerned, is that the Iraqi people got what they deserved. From this “insider’s” perspective flows the following general principle: Where the relevant conflict concerns U.S. allies, U.S. clients, or parties outside the sphere of elite interests, conflict resolvers may be consulted and even employed to settle disputes; but where “vital national interests” are implicated, they must yield to the realities of power.

This tradeoff, if accepted by our profession, would inevitably turn conflict analysis and resolution into a form of management consultancy and conflict resolvers into technical experts, i.e., modern courtiers. Moreover, since the interests of the elite are nothing if not expansive, it would disable us from functioning as independent facilitators in a wide range of serious conflict situations. Most important, an “insider” relationship with ruling groups would undermine the essential mission of our profession, which is to assist conflicting parties to identify and eliminate the causes of violent conflict, whether or not this activity serves the interests of those currently holding power.

During the Persian Gulf crisis, for example, a jagged fault line appeared on the terrain of our profession. On one side of the line stood those who favored U.S. and U.N. sanctions against Iraq and who advocated negotiations within the framework of these sanctions, backed by the threat of war. Either because they considered Saddam Hussein particularly evil or because they found it necessary to accommodate the ineluctable “realities of power,” these conflict specialists acted on the assumption that *all-out war could be averted only by taking sides*. On the other side stood those (including the writer) who opposed coercive attempts to resolve the Persian Gulf conflict. In their view, sanctions were essentially useless, and negotiations with Iraq a necessary but temporary expedient—an alternative to war only if they were followed by system-changing conflict resolution processes. The current distribution of power in the Gulf, they argued, might be “real” but could not be stable in anything but the very shortest of terms, seeing that it was itself a primary cause of the conflict. Under these circumstances, *taking sides could only be a step toward all-out war*.

Although neither side in this debate succeeded in averting the Persian Gulf massacre, two important lessons can be drawn from this experience.

First, conflict resolvers cannot challenge the prevailing paradigm of interest by framing the case for conflict resolution in “acceptable” power-political terms. To take sides in a power struggle like the conflict between Iraq and Saudi Arabia (a contest between two dictatorships for hegemony over a third!) does not establish the conflict resolver’s credibility so much as it reveals his or her philosophical and political weakness. “Give sanctions a chance to work,” pleaded some of our colleagues, along with the leaders of the Democratic Party. But when they did not “work” —hardly a surprise in view of the general ineffectiveness of coercion in such cases—the stage was set for massive bloodletting. Taking sides meant abandoning the paradigm of basic human needs, the only perspective consistent, at bottom, with nonviolent conflict resolution. As adumbrated by John Burton, Johan Galtung, Herbert Kelman, and other conflict scholars, this framework teaches that serious conflicts *cannot* be resolved unless *all* parties have been given the opportunity to satisfy their basic needs for identity, recognition, security, and development. As the Gulf tragedy demonstrates, it is the only perspective that enables us to resist the satanization or sanctification of conflicting parties and to demonstrate, before the fact, the inefficiency of force.

Second, given the corporate elite’s determination to protect its own interests during a period of economic crisis, it was a fantasy to suppose that the architects of the Gulf intervention could be converted to the gospel of conflict resolution. In my view, those who now hope to perform some equivalent miracle in the context of a new administration are likely to be similarly disappointed; Messrs. Clinton and Gore may govern, but the interests that gave us “Operation Desert Slaughter” still rule. To persuade these powerful groups to adopt the methods of conflict resolution might not be quixotic if the paradigms of conflict and resolution that we have discussed were neutral with regard to class and nationality, race and gender—but this is not the case. The paradigm of interest (supplemented, for propaganda purposes, by the frameworks of identification and structural role) reflects the world view and serves the interests of dominant groups. The paradigm of basic human needs makes sense only from the perspective of those whose needs are *not* satisfied by the present corporate-military-bureaucratic system; i.e., the governed, or under circumstances which compel even elites to recognize the uselessness of coercive power. The natural “market” for conflict resolution philosophy, therefore, is not to be found so much in corporate boardrooms or government offices as in the homes and workplaces of citizens like ourselves.

What the Gulf War teaches us, finally, is the necessity to take the case for conflict resolution directly to the people. By all means, let us “speak truth to power.” Conflict resolvers should seize every opportunity to demonstrate to public officials (among others) the efficacy of non-coercive, problem-solving methods of conflict resolution. Even more important, however, is the need to abandon the fruitless quest for “insider” status in favor of a frankly oppositional role: one that recognizes, even celebrates, the fact that we *are* “outsiders.” We do not take sides in conflicts between nations or other identity groups because we want to help resolve them. But conflict resolution, to us, means assisting those afflicted by conflict to analyze and transform the institutions that systematically deny their basic needs for identity, community, and development. It does *not* mean reconciling oppressed peoples and exploited social classes to their oppressors and exploiters.

John Burton clearly hits the mark when he asserts in *Conflict: Resolution and Prevention* (1990) that political legitimacy depends upon a system’s capacity to satisfy these basic human needs. But how is this capacity to be developed? My own view is that conflict resolution will remain marginal to public policy until it has become part of the program of a political *movement* capable of challenging the principles, practices, and political hegemony of war-making elites. To describe how such a movement might be organized is obviously beyond the scope of this essay. Our short-term goal, however, should be to work with others to develop a public constituency for conflict resolution sufficiently large, intense, vocal, and well-organized to make it more difficult for those in power to intervene forcibly in the affairs of other nations. In the near future, the most that we can reasonably hope to do is to hinder would-be interventionists, to some extent, by depriving them of unified public support. Ultimately, however, our aim must be to make violent intervention *impossible* by replacing elite interests that regularly exploit conflict for their own benefit with governments dedicated to resolving conflict through the satisfaction of basic human needs.

An immodest proposal, indeed! It would be utopian as well, were it not for the growing clamor, both in the United States and in other nations, for solutions to problems generally recognized as generative of conflict, but long deemed intractable. There are historical moments—and this is surely one of them—when the incapacity of ruling groups to eliminate the causes of violent conflict becomes apparent. At such times, people yearning for solutions are open to new ideas. If conflict resolvers can make the human needs perspective comprehensible and convincing to a wider audience (not just the largely white and middle class “peace movement”); if they can demonstrate the usefulness of their ideas in

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practice; and especially if they can work with others to help resolve serious social conflicts at home as well as abroad, their work may yet have an unexpected and transformative impact.

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