

Social theory and the de-escalation of international conflict*

Louis Kriesberg

Abstract

Are we like the mothers and fathers at Jonestown, with the cyanide in place, rehearsing for suicide-murder? Daniel Ellsberg (1981) observes that the marchers protesting nuclear weapons are doing what the mothers and fathers in Jonestown waited too long to say 'No! Not our children! This is craziness; we won't be part of it.' He writes that 'It is none too soon to be saying this to the President/Prime Minister/Chairman Jim Jones's of the world; nor is it, yet, too late.'

How did we get into a place that even resembles Jonestown: And more importantly, how do we get out of it? Social theory should help provide answers to such questions, but does not obviously do so. In the first part of this paper I discuss an emerging theoretical paradigm that has particular relevance for understanding how international conflicts increase and decrease in intensity. Then I apply that paradigm to instances of international conflict de-escalation, focusing on declines in tension and hostility between the Soviet and American governments and the Israeli and Egyptian governments. Finally, I will point to some implications of the discussion for social theory and for international policy.

An emerging theoretical paradigm

A general and synthesizing framework is increasingly shared by sociologists and other social scientists. The shared approach is often implicit. Writers in the functionalist, Marxist, conflict, symbolic interactionist and other traditions have broadened their perspectives and in doing so have become *less* distinctive. Consequently, one can discern the outlines

of newly emerging paradigm.

The paradigm emphasizes four sets of ideas (Kriesberg, 1981a). First, persons, groups, and other units are purposive actors who behave with intentions, giving meaning to their conduct. Second, the actors engage in many social processes: they collaborate, contend, and compete with each other. Third, the actors are not clearly bounded, mutually exclusive entities, but rather they are overlapping and cross-cutting and some encompass others. Therefore in any social interaction the parties to the interaction are multiple and the nature of the interaction between any two can readily shift. Fourth, although the parties are unequal in their ability to shape developments, none of the actors is fully able to control them. Correspondingly, there are general regularities in the outcomes of courses of actions as well as a problematic character to the outcome of each particular series of occurrences. In short, events and structures are the resultant of complex interactions among actors.

In unpacking these ideas, I will use examples from international relations and especially international conflict. International conflicts, like other social conflicts refer to relations in which two or more parties, or their spokespersons, believe they have incompatible objectives. Note that such a definition includes awareness by the adversaries, but says nothing about the means that the parties use against each other. International conflicts are conflicts among adversaries acting across national borders, but the actors need not be national governments. Thus transnational entities based on ideology, ethnicity or economic interests can engage in conflicts with each other or with a government. In this paper I discuss international conflicts having the potential of large-scale violence and therefore generally involving governments.

The first set of ideas is related to the multiplicity of actors. Theorists working within the emerging paradigm view conflicts as involving many actors – within, between, and along side the primary ones. This is often contrary to the significant insight that in the *final* analysis a fight is between two sides (Dahrendorf, 1959). Partisans in a fight often insist that everyone must choose sides and be with them or against them. Such views intensify conflict and are significant for the emergence of conflict awareness. Those views are conducive to believing that the adversaries are in a zero-sum situation – what one side gains is at the expense of the other side.

From the perspective of the multiple interaction theorist, however, the multiplicity of actors means that conflicts are never simply zero-sum. Although the adversaries may regard a conflict as zero-sum at a

given time, they may shift their views as new identifications become prominent and coalitions shift. Cleavages regarded as unimportant by partisans at one time may become important at another time. Theorists should be able to recognize which cleavages are the relatively significant ones and under what circumstances one or another cleavage becomes primary. There certainly is no agreement among theories about this and even Marxists, who have been clearest among social theorists about which cleavages are the most fundamental, are wrestling with the autonomous nature of actors other than classes. This is illustrated by the recognition of the state as a somewhat independent actor in revolutionary and international conflicts (Skocpol, 1979).

Actors are multiple in two senses. First many actors exist in parallel, on the same plane, as do national governments with each other. The second sense is more interesting. Actors overlap, crosscut and are embedded or nested in each other (Cardoso, 1973). Thus, an ethnic community or people may be within, cross-cut or, most rarely, coincide with a political unit. This is an extension of our knowledge that people occupy many statuses and play many roles simultaneously. One person may be a mother, a woman, a Catholic, a Kenyan, Kamba, an agricultural worker, a political party member, and so on. Each status or role is part of a collective identity and/or organization which may act as a unit.

Theorists differ in their assessment of which identifications and hence divisions are most fundamental: is it class, nationality, power-holding, gender, or something else? For understanding social conflicts, cations strongly affect the relative importance of the identifications. Primordial identifications are inculcated early and strongly in the socialization process. Gender and ethnicity, as indicated in part by language and religion, are universally fundamental products of socialization. By pervasive, I mean the degree to which a particular identification permeates many statuses. Thus, one's class position or relative social power affects many or perhaps all statuses. The multiple interaction paradigm does not include assertions that any particular identification or cleavage is the fundamental one. Rather, it is consistent with the paradigm to suggest that which one is fundamental varies with the question being asked and its social and historical context. Thus, in certain social systems some of these identifications and cleavages will be more superimposed than in others. Such superimposition, for example of ethnicity, religion, class and power make divisions among those lines particularly likely to be the basis of conflict. That is one of the reasons that international conflicts can emerge and be waged fiercely. It is also consistent with the paradigm that the coinciding of

many identifications is never perfect and that which are prominent varies with issue and context (Kriesberg, 1980).

The multiplicity of actors has significant relevance for understanding the course of international conflicts. No international conflict is merely two-sided. This is obvious in the complex web of fights in the Middle East, but it is also true of struggles between the Soviet and American governments. Allies, allies of adversaries, and potential allies affect the course of a struggle, if only by the way the primary adversaries take them into account. The multiplicity of actors lies not only among units of the same level. Significant actors transcend, cross-cut, and lie within governments and countries. There are international governmental organizations, like the United Nations and international, non-governmental organizations like IBM and the International Sociological Association, and domestic groupings like army bureaucracies and trade unions.

To understand the course of conflicts it is particularly important to recognize the multiplicity of actors within and between countries. The linkage between domestic and foreign policy is of fundamental importance in explaining the transition from peace to war and from war to peace. Developments within countries have their own dynamics which are only partially influenced by external developments. For example, in the U.S., survey data reveal that public support for increased arms spending began to rise in the early 1970s, after the historically unusual opposition to increased arms spending in the late 1960s. This shift was occurring when detente was in full bloom and elites were generally even less supportive of increased arms spending.

This shift in public opinion was due to a variety of domestic forces, whose relative significance changed in the course of the decade. In early years of the decade, some members of the public were returning to their conventional support for increased arms spending, after the misgivings aroused by the Vietnam war ebbed. The distrust of the military leadership diminished. There also was a small increase in support of tough law-and-order policies and other policies suggesting greater conservatism which also gave impetus to increased support to arms spending. Some of this movement may have been in reaction to what some people regarded as the excesses of the 1960s. By the middle of the 1970s, the ideological factor continued to grow in significance. Some elite factions began to mobilize opinion against any probable agreement attainable at SALT II negotiations and to rally support for increased military spending. By the end of the decade the shift had gained enough momentum that there appeared to be considerable agreement that U.S. military dominance had eroded relative to the Soviets and increased U.S. military spending was needed. The events in Teheran and then in

Afghanistan were generally interpreted as confirming the need for military spending and being tough (Kriesberg, Murray, and Klein, 1982).

What policies a government pursues and the characterization of the national interest are shaped by the interplay of many domestic groups and factions. The multiple interaction paradigm helps avoid the reification of the state or nation and makes it more likely to attend to the diverse actors who constitute the state and country.

The second set of ideas in the emerging paradigm pertains to the multiplicity of processes of interaction. *Interaction* refers to mutual responsiveness and not merely internally-driven expressiveness. But interaction in one social relationship may appear as expressiveness in another, as when political rivals express condemnation toward a foreign leader in their search for electoral support from their constituents. *Processes* in the paradigm refer to the variety of forms of interaction: conflicting, exchanging, competing, collaborating, assimilating, and so on. Multiplicity here refers to the idea that all of these forms of interaction are occurring simultaneously among different sets of actors. Thus, while national officials are bargaining with local government heads and competing with officials from other nations, they are also collaborating with officials from still other countries and with several groups within their constituency. Even while collaborating in some regards, they are competing in others with the same interaction partners.

Attention to the multiplicity of social processes has great relevance to understanding international conflicts. Every actor has a wide variety of kinds of relations with many other actors. Economic, political, or military exchanges may be conflicting, competing, collaborative, or symbiotic (Parsons, 1962). These processes are conducted not by countries but by persons claiming to represent governments and by people migrating, investing, buying and selling. This actuality is the basis for the possibility that even in a conflict, when adversaries seek their antagonistic goals by coercion, they also make efforts at persuasion and reward.

In addition to coercion, conflicts are waged by the use of non-coercive inducements: persuasion and positive sanctions (Kriesberg, 1982; Tilly, 1978). Although people in conflict rarely admit to having been influenced by their adversary, they do engage in persuasive efforts as if they thought the enemy might be influenced by them. Over extended periods of time, people do shift their perceptions; communications from others, even from adversary countries, contribute to those shifts. Positive sanctions or rewards are promised for the future to adversaries or groupings within the adversary camp. Non-coercive inducements play a role in a struggle because the adversaries are always complex and multiple. Positive sanctions and persuasive efforts can be

used to divide the enemy, gain allies, rally constituencies, and forge communal interests with the adversary against an even greater shared threat.

Conflict processes are part of most social relations, as are cooperative processes. But in this paper I am concerned with particular conflicts between actors who regard themselves as adversaries. Such specific conflicts are based upon social situations in which actors believe they have incompatible objectives. Conflict situations are based upon a blend of consensual and dissensual issues. Adversaries may have the same values and want the same thing, for example, land; being in consensus, their interests differ. Adversaries may also have different values and wish their adversary held the correct ones; in fact they insist upon it. Insofar as that is happening, the conflict is dissensual.

Through the multiple processes in which adversaries are engaged with each other, they are constantly reproducing and developing themselves. They also help shape each other. Thus, as each adversary seeks to define itself in ways to garner support, it also seeks to impose a definition upon its adversary in order to isolate it. As each party seeks to define itself and the others, its self conception is modified in the interaction. Thus, one can define oneself and hence the adversary in ideological, ethnic, national, or religious terms. For example, to be free and democratic means one is fighting against totalitarianism or to fight against atheists defines the fighters as believers.

The third core idea in the emerging paradigm is that people act purposively. They attribute intention to their conduct and this gives it meaning and direction. This does not mean that conduct follows a carefully calculated review of the costs and benefits of each alternative. Choices are not generally long reflected upon, but actions in conflict are usually awarely taken and justified. Ideologies and prevailing ways of thinking play important roles in providing means and justifications to the actions taken.

Social theorists have long differed about the value of stressing the subjective meaning *or* the objective conditions in the effort to understand and explain social conflicts. In recent years, from many directions, social theorists have been exploring the ways in which people construct meaning systems, for example how shared understandings about work and inequality sustain and reproduce systems of stratification.

The subjective meaning of events, structures, and relations is relevant for international conflicts in two ways. First, our understanding about the development and control of shared ways of thinking is critical to our understanding of the mobilization of constituency support by and

for government leaders in foreign affairs. Presumably, already-present sentiments of identification with country are the bases for rallying support for policies which leaders pursue toward foreigners. Second, since there are many actors and many sets of relations, which one is regarded as the primary one is a matter of selective attention. One fight may seem primary at one time and later become subsidiary to newly-perceived more salient ones.

The perception of foreign events may seem to be primarily based on affective needs or the influence of leaders rather than on an external reality. The ambiguity of foreign affairs and the usual lack of direct experience with them are conducive to subjective license. But the perceptions cannot be entirely fabricated; people try to think about all the evidence available to them. Some events are salient enough and clear enough to be perceived with little distortion. Other events are less clear and accessible and hence more prone to be affected by displacement of affect or the interpretation of leaders.

Government officials and other adversary organization leaders play important roles in determining which conflict is primary for their constituencies. In making those interpretations they themselves are likely to be affected by their own interests and values. Leaders who are heads of state and government tend to reify the nation-state and identify themselves with it. These are mystifications according to the analysis being presented here.

The fourth and final aspect of the emerging paradigm is: the structure of relations is the resultant of the multiple interactions. This structure entails differential resources for different actions (Oberschall, 1973). This inequality is the basis for the reproduction of the unequal social structure. The differential resources for affecting the outcomes of a set of interactions may be referred to as power differences. The reference to resources indicates that power is relative and contingent upon the issue in contention. Furthermore, even when power differences are asymmetrical, power is not completely one-sided. The party with lesser resources has some. The multiplicity of actors also means that each actor has possible allies or coalition partners. Being relatively powerless means being dependent upon the relatively more powerful; consequently, having alternatives through relations with additional actors, modifies the relative power positions.

Of course, the structure of relations cannot be regarded only in terms of power. The resultant of multiple interactions establishes networks of collaboration and exchange as well as common identifications and bonds of obligation: these all channel future interactions.

For our purposes here, we can accept the general outlines of the

world structure which students of international relations have developed and brought up to date. National governments are major international actors and so are non-governmental actors such as multi-national corporations. Persons holding commanding positions in those organizations can exercise considerable autonomy in the short run in directing their organizations. The world structure is constituted by many non-coinciding systems: a very loose bi-polar military system, a world market system with core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral countries, and overlapping sets of national, religious, ideological, and civilizational adherents (Horowitz, 1972; Wallerstein, 1974).

Viewing those structures as a resultant of multiple actors relating through multiple processes lends a dynamic cast to our conception of those structures. It increases our sensitivity to the inability of any one actor to control events. It helps account for the sometimes abrupt escalations and deescalations of international conflicts.

In discussing the elements of a social theory approach increasingly shared by contemporary writers, I have stressed the multiplicity of actors and processes. I wish to underline one implication of this multiple interaction perspective for understanding international conflicts. One or another conflict may be regarded as primary by the partisans or by the observer-theorist; it is the focal conflict. But many, many other conflicts also are present and interlocked with it. The other conflicts may extend over time or social space to encompass the focal one. Others may be within one of the parties or cross-cut the primary adversaries. The existence of many interlocking conflicts is a reason that conflicts are pursued by non-coercive as well as coercive means. Because many conflicts are interlocked, as partisans shift in the salience they give to a particular struggle, it may escalate or de-escalate.

In order to give greater specificity to these ideas and to provide a basis for assessing their value, I will apply them to an important class of international events. Recalling the opening reference to avoiding a nuclear holocaust, I examine periods of conflict de-escalation. I will describe a few such cases and then discuss how the approach helps explain them.

Periods of de-escalation

We sometimes forget that every war ends (Ikle, 1971), and that escalating conflicts also de-escalate. Students of international relations have generally given more attention to the origins of wars than to their ending (Pillar, 1983; Randle, 1973). In recent years there has been some attention to managing crises and rivalry, but still relatively little

to the shifts from increasing to decreasing hostility (Lebow, 1981; George, 1983).

In relations between the Soviet and U.S. governments, we can point to several times since the beginning of the Cold War when agreements have been reached to end or to reduce issues in contention and when cooperative interactions relative to conflicting ones have increased. For example, in late 1954, negotiations were successfully completed to withdraw Soviet as well as U.S., British, and French military forces from Austria and to agree to an Austrian State Treaty. In the summer of 1963, the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was signed by the governments of the U.S., the U.S.S.R. and the U.K. In 1972, the ABM Treaty and the Salt I Interim Agreement were signed.

Generally associated with these agreements were periods in which a wide range of interactions were relatively cooperative rather than conflicting. Edward Azar and others have categorized actions by world actors toward other actors, in terms of their degree of cooperativeness and conflictfulness (Azar and Sloan, 1975). Using these data, we can see that during the post World War II era only in a few years did the sum of interactions which were cooperative exceed those which were conflicting. For Soviet actions toward the U.S. this was true in 1955, 1957, and 1972 through 1975: for U.S. actions toward the Soviet Union, this was the case in 1963, 1964, and 1971 through 1976.

Israeli-Arab relations are generally marked off in years of war: 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973. But there also have been periods of attempted and actual de-escalations. Consider a few in the conflict between the Israeli and Egyptian governments. In the summer of 1953 through the spring of 1954, the Egyptian and Israeli governments carried out negotiations on several issues and reached an agreement about shipping (Avnery, 1971; Jackson, 1983; Berger, 1965). In early 1971, President Sadat took what he said was a peace initiative, offering to begin work on reopening the Suez canal (closed since the 1967 War) if Israel would make a partial withdrawal from the Sinai. In November 1970, Dayan had made a similar proposal. In early 1971, too, Special U.N. representative Gunnar Jarring obtained Egyptian willingness to sign a Peace Agreement with Israel under conditions in many regards similar to those reached in the Camp David Agreements in 1978. But these indirect negotiations did not lead to any agreement. Then, in November 1977, President Sadat went to Jerusalem and after a series of indirect negotiations, marked by breakdowns and then mediations by U.S. government officials, the Camp David Accords were reached in September 1978 and a Peace Treaty between Israel and Egypt was signed in March 1979.

Louis Kriesberg

To understand these and similar de-escalations, I draw upon the multiple interaction approach and focus on the role of multiple actors and multiple processes. Several questions about de-escalatory moves deserve to be answered. What conditions and skills of the initiator leads to reciprocation of initiatives? Under what circumstances and through what processes do de-escalatory initiatives result in explicit agreement?

What determines how enduring the agreement is, if one is reached? What are the shared gains and the relative gains of the de-escalation for the many parties involved? Obviously, all of these questions will not be answered here, most attention will be given to the initiation and reciprocation of de-escalatory efforts and their culmination in an agreement.

Multiple actors. The many governmental and non-governmental actors of international conflicts helps explain the initiation and reciprocation of de-escalatory efforts. We begin consideration of this factor by examining the role of domestic, non-governmental actors, particularly the general public.

In the case of the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Agreement, public concern about the effects of testing in the atmosphere upon radioactive fallout was very high and expressed in demonstrations and by protest organizations (Seaborg, 1981). Détente at the beginning of the 1970s followed the gradual decline in the U.S. during the 1960s in anti-Communist and anti-Soviet sentiments. The sources of this decline were in large part internal and related to increased tolerance and domestic liberalism. It occurred despite the government's engagement in a war against Communism in Vietnam and Soviet military might increasing to parity with the U.S. By the time Nixon and Kissinger were in power, the retreat from Cold War antagonism toward Soviet Russia was enhanced by anti-Vietnam War feelings and the public pressure for detente was palpable (Kissinger, 1979).

Interestingly, as Nixon and Kissinger conducted their détente policy the U.S. public mood began to turn. Support for military spending increased (Kriesberg, Murray, and Klein, 1982). For example, in the spring of 1973, 40 per cent of the people in the U.S. thought the U.S. was spending 'too much' for the military and in 1976 only 29 per cent said so. Thus by the time Carter was elected president in 1976 the shift had gone so far that significantly large proportions of the population thought Carter was not sufficiently confrontational with the Soviets. Carter changed his conduct in 1978 and 1979 but nevertheless was defeated by a candidate who promised to be tougher in dealing with the Soviets.

In Israeli-Egyptian relations, public opinion in Egypt played a significant role in Sadat's 1971 peace initiative since he thought that as a leader he had to appear active and war was not possible (Sadat, 1978). Public opinion in Israel played a very important role in President Sadat's decision to break the psychological barrier in the Arab-Israeli conflict. He thought that his act would profoundly affect the people in Israel as well as in other countries and therefore make possible agreements not otherwise conceivable.

One or more governments, in addition to the primary adversary ones, played critical roles in each of the de-escalations cited. To successfully negotiate the Austrian State Treaty, Austrian government officials actively pursued policies to convince the Soviet leaders that Austria would indeed be neutral in the conflict between NATO and Warsaw Pact countries (Kriesberg, 1981b). Khrushchev also thought about the value of a neutralized Austria in appealing to third world countries to weaken their ties to the Western powers. To understand the attainment of the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Agreement, the Soviet break with the People's Republic of China must be noted: it made Soviet adherence to the Agreement easier and indeed even attractive as a way of pressuring the Chinese and appealing to third-world countries. The U.S.-Soviet move toward détente in the early 1970s was made more attractive to the Russians by the Americans' movement toward normalized relations with the PRC. It was also facilitated by the Federal Republic of Germany's initiation of Ostpolitik (Link, 1980).

The Egyptian-Israeli negotiations in 1953 were probably aided by the common sentiments deriving from anti-British struggles by the Israeli leaders and by the new Egyptian leaders who overthrew King Farouk in 1952. Those common sentiments made the possibility of an accommodation credible. For President Sadat the idea of gaining support from the U.S. significantly contributed to taking peace initiatives in 1971 and 1977. Support from the U.S. government, elites, and the public generally was seen as a way of inducing the Israeli government to make the desired concessions.

Other world actors such as international governmental and non-governmental organizations also played significant roles in these de-escalations. For example, prior to the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Agreement, there had been many informal meetings of Soviet and Western scientists to discuss technical and other issues relating to a comprehensive test ban. These meetings, held under the auspices of Pugwash, provided a means of communicating possible solutions to problems emerging in the formal inter-governmental negotiations and in developing common understandings among the expert advisers in the Soviet Union

Louis Kriesberg

and in the Western countries (Pentz and Slovo, 1981). Another kind of example may be noted in the role played by multi-national corporations based in the U.S. who supported détente moves by the U.S. government because of their interests in expanding trade with the Soviet Union.

The involvement of many actors who coincide in interests, who cross-cut each other, who overlap each other, and who may be internal to and encompassing of each other is a crucial factor in the de-escalation of conflicts. De-escalatory initiatives occur when one or more of the primary adversaries shifts its view of what is the primary struggle. That shift in assessment is a consequence of a new view of the balance, or correlation, of forces—a new view of which groups must have the highest priority to be placated or to be overwhelmed. For example, consider President Sadat's sudden decision to go to Jerusalem in November 1977. His conviction that the U.S. and not the Soviet government was critical in gaining his goals from Israel argued for a non-coercive strategy. The forthcoming Geneva Conference promised to reintroduce Soviet influence in any negotiations; it also promised to give the most rejectionist Arab governments and groupings a veto power that would isolate Egypt. That Israel had new leaders who could be strong enough to make domestically difficult concessions was also a consideration in dealing directly with the government of Israel.

A shift in perception of the focal conflict by one primary actor can lead to initiating a de-escalatory effort, as Sadat did in 1977. Such initiatives may facilitate reciprocation by spotlighting the new view-point. In other cases, there may have been parallel movements toward viewing a new conflict as the focal one that would facilitate mutual moves toward de-escalation. The U.S.-Soviet détente of the early 1970s appears to be an example of this. On the other hand, some de-escalatory efforts may be placed in the context of other conflicts so that they are not perceived by the primary adversary as reducing the salience of the prior conflict between them. Thus, the Soviet agreement to withdraw their occupation forces from Austria in 1955 and Austria's neutralization were partly justified within the context of a strategy of peaceful coexistence, but they were also places in the context of offering neutrality and non-alignment to third world countries and to other countries in Europe. For the U.S. leaders this could easily be seen as a subtle way of undermining U.S. world leadership and furthering Soviet ambitions in their rivalry with the U.S.

Multiple process. Cooperative and exchange processes are never completely absent, even intense hostilities. Such processes affect de-escalatory movements in several ways. I will focus this discussion on

how they make possible the use of non-coercive inducements and how such inducements can facilitate deescalation. As noted earlier, non-coercive inducements include rewards and persuasion.

Non-coercive inducements often play an especially important role in efforts at reducing tensions. Furthermore, promising or granting concessions may make it possible for the adversary to offer in reciprocation what otherwise would not be yielded, even under threat. Such initial concessions of promises of concessions may be signaled privately or boldly, depending upon each party's calculations of consistency and adversarial responses.

Let us consider, here, the possible role of overt, unilateral conciliatory gestures in initiating de-escalatory changes. The role of such gestures is evident in the case of the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (Etzioni, 1967; Kriesberg, 1981b). That treaty followed a chain of interactions greatly enhanced by President Kennedy's American University speech in June 1963. In that speech, Kennedy acknowledged a kind of parity with the Soviets and suggested the possibility that the U.S. might share responsibility for the Cold War. He also announced a halt of nuclear tests in the atmosphere as long as the Soviets also did not conduct such tests. The speech had followed privately conveyed indications from Khrushchev that he was interested in such an agreement and wanted an initiating gesture. Khrushchev immediately responded to the speech with reciprocated gestures. Negotiations for the treaty were conducted quickly and successfully. The de-escalation was based on some interests shared by major leaders in the U.S. and U.S.S.R. and the agreement allowed each group to gain domestic advantage.

The dramatic visit by Sadat to Jerusalem in November 1977 was an outstanding example of the use of the grand gesture. The act was irrevocable. It was public; indeed it was made into a spectacular media event to maximize its impact. The event and the way President Sadat conducted himself profoundly affected the Israeli public and to a lesser extent the American public. These shifts were essential for negotiating and concluding a Peace Treaty.

Many other peace initiatives, lacking comparable important gestures, failed to be reciprocated. Of course many other elements of the peace proposal and the socio-political context also differed. But the lack of an accompanying open gesture probably also contributed to the failure of President Sadat's peace initiative of February 1971, of the Rapacki Plan for a nuclear free Central Europe, and of President Johnson's and Secretary of Defence McNamara's effort in 1967 to begin substantive negotiations for ABM and SALT agreements (Johnson, 1971; Stehle, 1965).

In addition to cases in which major gestures were associated with significant mutual accommodations and the absence of such gestures with the failure of accommodations, some mutual accommodations were made without grand initial gestures. This seems to be true for the Austrian State Treaty and for the American-Soviet détente in the early 1970s, including the SALT I and ABM treaties. In those cases, other factors were strong enough to compensate for the lack of initiating gestures. Finally, there were times when gestures were made and they proved unsuccessful in generating a reciprocated de-escalatory move. Among the cases I have considered, this seems rare. Military cutbacks or withdrawals have sometimes been presented as gestures but were not successful in inducing the accommodating response sought; for example, in 1979, when Soviet troops in East Germany were ostentatiously reduced, other factors working against a mutual de-escalation overwhelmed that gesture.

The underlying conflict structure must be such that an accommodation is possible, presuming that it is skillfully executed by the adversaries and intermediaries. Deescalation can occur when the primary conflict appears to the adversaries to be not purely zero sum but to involve possible mutual benefits to them. The reality of multiple processes also means that adversaries have the basis for resolutions of their conflicts with some mutual benefits. Since hostility between adversaries has some adverse consequences for many groups within each adversary country, reducing that hostility is likely to have some mutual benefits for many people. But there are also likely to be direct shared advantages of reducing the conflict's intensity. For example, there are likely to be possibilities of increased trade which will be advantageous to many people in each of the adversary countries.

Obviously major conflicts do not readily de-escalate. They often persist for long periods of protracted hostility. They sometimes escalate into extensive violence, or the mutual threat of violence, as in the Cuban Missile Crisis. The failure of coercion to bring about the desired outcome often lies behind the recourse to the use of non-coercive inducements and a change in objectives which entails more mutual benefits for the primary adversaries and less of a one-sided gain.

Efforts to move towards de-escalation, even when initiated, usually do not move quickly and smoothly to a mutually desired de-escalation.

Initiatives by one party that are presented as efforts to move toward peace are often not reciprocated. They may be discounted as insincere tricks. In Egyptian-Israeli and U.S.-Soviet relations, it is easy to find more failed than successful efforts at de-escalation. The convergence of many factors is necessary to sustain de-escalatory movement. In the case

even of bi-lateral, intergovernmental de-escalation, officials in both governments must perceive some benefits from de-escalation. This requires a shift in each government and at least some concurrent movement in domestic support. Moreover, the actions of each government toward the other must be viewed by the other as appropriate for de-escalation. In addition, the leaders of each government must believe it is in their interests to pursue the policy. Even the international setting and the many concurrent fights with still other governments must be adequately in congruence to sustain officials in each government in progressing with de-escalation.

Without many of these conditions being supportive of de-escalation at the same time, it will not happen. Good will and great skill on the part of a few persons, even leaders in a government, will not be enough. Furthermore, even if all is in place, de-escalatory movements can be readily broken. Once interrupted, it may be several years, if ever, before the necessary congruence occurs again. For example, the 1968 moves toward U.S.-Soviet arms control were disrupted by the invasion of Czechoslovakia. It was not renewed during the waning months of President Johnson's term because President-Elect Nixon informed the Soviet government that he would do his own negotiating and would not be bound by Johnson's (Kissinger, 1979; Newhouse, 1973). Then, as President, his administration needed time to formulate its position. A different kind of interruption occurred in 1954 in the case of some de-escalatory movement in the Israeli-Egyptian conflict. Among other events, the Egyptian discovery that Israeli agents were operating in Egypt to sabotage American-Egyptian relations hampered negotiations. The sabotage efforts, later known as the Lavon affair in Israel, were not ordered by the highest Israel officials. But they were covered up and the Egyptian punishment of the Israeli agents outraged Israelis. In addition, the introjection of the Cold War and Anglo-French efforts to retain power in the Middle East generated a series of events that stopped negotiations as the slide to the 1956 war gathered momentum (Jackson, 1983).

On the basis of what I have said thus far, and other research, I will make a few summary observations about explaining moves toward de-escalation. A change to reduced hostility, like a change to increased tension, requires the convergence of many factors. In conflict no one party is in charge. The course of a conflict is the resultant of many kinds of interactions among many actors. Consequently, a change in the direction of a fight requires the concurrence of many conditions. This raises problems of interpretation. If twelve reasons might account for a change, they all may be contributory and even essential in conjunction

with all the others. It is also possible that the events are overdetermined. That is, as factors converge in a given direction, some subset of them may be sufficient to produce the effect, but many others occur together and support the new direction. Hence it is difficult to disentangle which factors are essential.

In matters as complex as these, no single set of factors determine whether or not de-escalation will occur. Many different configurations can each generate de-escalatory initiatives, reciprocations, and mutually acceptable agreements. For example, sometimes a 'hard liner' government leader is vital in maintaining constituency support when concessions are made in order to sustain de-escalatory movements. This was the case for Prime Minister Begin in responding to President Sadat's initiatives and negotiating positions. It is also illustrated in the relative successes of President Nixon in reaching agreements with the Soviet Union compared to President Carter's difficulties. If the conditions are generally conducive to de-escalation and there is consensual support for de-escalation by a broad spectrum of the constituency, a 'hard liner' is not as important in bringing about de-escalation, as illustrated by Chancellor Brandt's success in agreements with the Soviets in the early 1970s.

In general, the analyses presented suggest that it is useful to understand changes in the intensity of a struggle in terms of the shifts in the adversaries' views about the primacy of various conflicts. The shift in what antagonists regard as the focal conflict may mean that the one in which they were primarily engaged is relegated to secondary significance and then is de-escalated. This conception also suggests why de-escalations are limited. The de-escalation does not mean that a conflict has disappeared, only that its relative importance has been altered. But as the adversaries pursue a de-escalatory course, shifts in allies, rivals, and segments of constituencies, are likely to be adversely affected and attention will be re-directed to the formerly focal conflict. This may help explain, what needs much investigation, the cyclical nature of many conflicts.

This discussion of de-escalation is not to be understood as assuming that every de-escalation is a good one. The nature of a de-escalatory initiative, its reciprocation and the content of any agreement that may be reached affect various groups differentially and those effects are not likely to be the same in the short and the long run. Some de-escalatory agreements endure, others disappear with little trace while others are a prelude to renewed and perhaps intensified antagonism. However, consideration of these possible repercussions of de-escalatory efforts is beyond the scope of this paper.

Implications

Analyses of international conflict de-escalation contribute to social theory and to social policy. Including international conflicts within the domain of social theory is salutary to social theory for several reasons. First, it draws attention to a fundamental context for many other social developments. Understanding changes in social patterns cannot be adequate if isolated from the societal context in which they occur and the societal context itself is greatly affected by the global context and inter-societal transactions. Nor is that global context simply background. Persons and groups interact across the world. For example, jobs in one city of one nation are affected by corporate investments in cities in other countries.

Increased attention to international conflicts also generates more analyses of the state and elites. Given the generally increasing role of the state in society, this too improves our understanding of and ability to account for changes in social patterns.

Furthermore, attention to international conflicts compels social theorists to think more about the relations between the structure and dynamics of social systems. Conflicts do escalate and de-escalate. It is hard to ignore those shifts. Analyses of such shifts will advance our ability to explain how structures are altered in some ways and not in others, how little changes upon little changes cumulate into fundamental restructuring in some areas while in others the changes cancel each other out so that no restructuring occurs.

Finally, our understanding of changes from war to peace and from increased to decreased tension contributes to answering the basic question of social theory: how is order maintained? The world system is often viewed as anarchic, a setting in which every major actor is struggling with every other. Yet, lacking a common moral order and overarching institutions, most countries, most of the time, are not doing violence to each other. Is it that they hold each other at bay by threats of devastation? I think not. One of the bases of the order is that each country has a great deal of autonomy. What leaders in each country want cannot in good measure be given by leaders in other countries. The domestic conditions are the resultant of largely domestic factors. This is still true despite the increasing integration of the world system. This has analogous import for social theory: many social actors within a society are also autonomous to significant degrees in many areas. Hence the problem of control is not as difficult as it would be if a high degree of coordination and integration were necessary.

Analyses of international conflict de-escalation also have policy

implications. First, knowledge of the conditions¹ for de-escalation and the processes which affect it can be applied by persons occupying decision-making offices when they wish to de-escalate a conflict. The knowledge can improve their skills in limiting escalation and even reducing the intensity of a conflict in which they are primary adversaries. For example, President Kennedy's conduct in the Cuban Missile crisis in October 1962, may be questioned in overall strategic terms, but it was handled ably at the tactical level to limit escalation. Some of the skill in those interactions arose from conscious reflection about what had gone wrong in other crises, especially the one of August 1914, leading to World War I (Schlesinger, 1965; Allison, 1971). The knowledge also can be applied by persons serving in mediator roles, as was the case in the intermediary activities pursued by President Carter and State Department officials in the Camp David negotiations between the Israeli and Egyptian governments (Kriesberg, 1982).

Studies of de-escalating conflicts may also contribute to the control of conflict escalation by affecting public and elite views. If a leader's constituency views non-coercive means as an important part of the government's repertoire of possible inducements to be employed in conflict, the leader will be freer to employ them. More research, analyses, and discussion of persuasion and rewards as well as coercion, of carrots as well as sticks, will increase the likelihood that non-coercive means will be used and even increase their possible effectiveness by increasing the chances that they will be correctly perceived.

Such analyses may also contribute to the popular demystification of the nation-state. Increased consciousness of the multiple identifications that we hold will tend to lessen the significance of any single one. Consciousness of the multitude of actors involved in any conflict will also help people recognize the importance of other fights than the one which seems primary at the moment. That ability also can facilitate the discovery of new common interests and outcomes which yield mutual benefits to the adversaries. The perception of such possible outcomes in itself is a major contribution to conflict de-escalation.

The research cited provides evidence of the autonomy of public opinion and of its significance in conflict escalation and de-escalation. This is true in the U.S. and in other democratic countries. It is probably the case² in authoritarian societies also at particular junctures. The opinion is not passive, but mobilized by political leaders for political action. It is also mobilized in social movements and protest organizations. These have limited escalation and fostered de-escalation in the past, e.g. regarding U.S. waging war in Vietnam; they promise to do so in the future.

We need the vision of a less dangerous world: the vision of a world that would not conjure up similarities with Jonestown. We also need to have ideas about how to get past the immediate dangers. Having a vision can be useful because it helps us choose better and worse ways of muddling through.

We have got into this life-threatening place for a multitude of reasons. No one actor caused it. Many actors, generally with good intentions, interacted to bring us here. Many different people can and must contribute to moving us toward a less dangerous world. To our good intentions must be added more knowledge and the better understanding that social theory can provide.

Received 16 November 1983

Finally accepted 14 February 1984

References

- * An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the Fifth Annual Millennium Conference Lecture, London School of Economics, November 1982.
- Allison, Graham T., 1971, *Essence of Decision*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Avnery, Uri, 1971, *Israel without Zionism*. New York: Collier Books
- Azar, Edward E. and Sloan, Thomas J., 1975, *Dimensions of Interaction*. International Studies Association, Occasional Paper No. 8.
- Berger, Earl, 1965, *The Covenant of the Sword: Arab-Israeli Relations, 1948-56*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Cardoso, Fernando H., 1973, 'Imperialism and dependency in Latin America,' in Bonilla, Frank and Girling, Robert, (eds) *Structures of Dependency*. Stanford, California: Institute of Political Studies.
- Dahrendorf, Ralf, 1959, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Ellsberg, Daniel, 1981, 'Introduction' in Thompson, E.P. and Smith, Dan (eds) *Protest and Survive*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Etzioni, Amitai, 1967, 'The Kennedy Experiment,' *Western Political Quarterly*. 20 (June): 362-80.
- George, Alexander L., 1983, *Managing U.S.-Soviet Rivalry: Problems of Crisis Prevention*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Horowitz, Irving Louis, 1972, *Three Worlds of Development*. (2nd edn.), New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ikle, Fred Charles, 1971, *Every War Must End*. New York: Columbia

- University Press.
- Jackson, Elmore, 1983, *Middle East Mission*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Johnson, Lyndon Baines, 1971, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969*. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston.
- Kissinger, Henry 1979, *White House Years*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Kriesberg Louis, 1980, 'Interlocking conflicts in the Middle East,' pp. 99-118 in Kriesberg, Louis, (ed.), *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*. Vol. 3, Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press.
- Kriesberg, Louis, 1981a, 'Introduction,' in Kriesberg, Louis, (ed.), *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*. Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press.
- Kriesberg, Louis 1981b, 'Noncoercive inducements in U.S. - Soviet conflicts: ending the occupation of Austria and nuclear weapons tests,' *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 9 (Spring). 1-16.
- Kriesberg, Louis, 1982 *Social Conflicts*. (2nd edn.) Greenwich, Conn.: Prentice-Hall.
- Kriesberg, Louis, Murray, Harry and Klein, Ross A., 1982, 'Elites and increased support for U.S. military spending,' *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*. Fall.
- Lebow, Richard Ned, 1981 *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Link, Werner, 1980, *Der Ost-West-Konflikt*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Newhouse, John, 1973, *Cold Dawn: The Story of SALT*. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston.
- Oberschall, Anthony, 1973, *Social Conflict and Social Movements*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Parsons, Talcott 1962, 'Polarization of the world and international order. pp. 310-31 in Wright Quincy, Evan, William M. and Deutsch, Morton, (eds) *Preventing World War III*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Pentz Michael J. and Slovic Gillian, 1981, 'The political significance of Pugwash,' pp. 175-203 in Evan, William M. (ed.) *Knowledge and Power in a Global Society*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Pillar, Paul R., 1983, *Negotiating Peace: War Termination as a Bargaining Process*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Randle, Robert F., 1973, *The Origins of Peace: A Study of Peace-making and the Structure of Peace Settlements*. New York: The Free Press.
- Sadat, Anwar el-, 1978, *In Search of Identity: An Autobiography*. New York: Harper & Row.

- Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr., 1965, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.
- Seaborg, Glenn T., 1981, *Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Test Ban*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Singer, J. David, 1981, 'Accounting for international war: the state of the discipline,' *Journal of Peace Research*, 19 (No. 1) 1-18.
- Skocpol, Theda, 1979, *States of Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Stehle, Hansjakob, 1965, *The Independent Satellite*. London: Pall Mall Press. (Originally published in 1963 as *Nachbar Polen*.)
- Tilly, Charles, 1978, *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel, 1974, *The Modern World-System*. Vol. 1, New York: Academic Press.