"I increasingly participated in Middle East-related meetings and conferences. I traveled extensively in the Middle East... always with my wife, Rose, who became a full partner in this work. My near total immersion... would not have been possible if my wife had not been fully committed to it and participated in it at all levels—from making practical arrangements and taking notes at workshops, to making our Middle East work the center of our social life."

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Interactive Problem Solving: Changing Political Culture in the Pursuit of Conflict Resolution[1]

Herbert C. Kelman
Department of Psychology and Weatherhead Center for International Affairs
Harvard University

Interactive problem solving is an unofficial, third-party approach to the resolution of international and intercommunal conflicts, derived from the work of John Burton and anchored in social-psychological principles. The article presents the approach as a specially constructed microprocess, best exemplified by problem-solving workshops with unofficial representatives of the conflicting parties, designed to produce changes in the macroprocess of conflict resolution through the joint development of new ideas and insights that can be fed into the political cultures of the two societies. The article describes the dual purpose of problem-solving workshops, their relationship to official negotiations, their typical participants, the role of the third party, the ground rules governing workshop interactions, and the broad agenda they are designed to cover. The work of the author and his collaborators on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict over the past four decades is briefly reviewed and its possible contributions to the larger process are suggested. The article concludes with a major challenge to the methods of interactive problem solving in the current phase of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

For nearly 40 years now, my colleagues and I have developed and applied an unofficial, academically based, third-party approach to the resolution of international and intercommunal conflicts, which I have come to call

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Correspondence should be addressed to Herbert C. Kelman, William James Hall, #1304, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138. E-mail: hck@wjh.harvard.edu

interactive problem solving. The approach is a form of unofficial—or what is now often called "Track Two" —diplomacy. It has also been described as "informal mediation by the scholar–practitioner" (Kelman, 2002) to emphasize the unofficial and facilitative form of the intervention and the academic base of the third party.

My approach to conflict resolution derives from the pioneering work of John Burton (1969, 1979, 1984), who developed a form of unofficial diplomacy for which he initially used the term "controlled communication." The method involved bringing together high-level representatives of parties in conflict in an academic setting for confidential, unofficial, analytic communication under the guidance of a panel of political and social scientists. I had the good fortune of serving on such a panel for one of Burton's earliest exercises (or workshops, as we now call them) in the fall of 1966. The meeting dealt with the Cyprus conflict, and was held at the University College of London, where Burton had established the Centre for the Analysis of Conflict.

Starting with that experience (see Kelman, 1972), I became increasingly committed to the development of this approach and to its application in the Middle East and elsewhere, in collaboration with many colleagues and students. The methods of interactive problem solving are applicable to a wide variety of conflicts, and have indeed been applied in a number of protracted conflicts between identity groups around the world, including Cyprus, Sri Lanka, Bosnia, Colombia, and Northern Ireland. My own work, since the early 1970s, has concentrated on the Arab–Israeli conflict and especially on the Israeli–Palestinian component of that conflict (Kelman, 1999).

In our evolving model, both the analysis of international conflict and the workshop methodology are explicitly anchored in social–psychological principles (Kelman, 2007; Kelman & Fisher, 2003). Our workshops are distinctly Track Two efforts in that they target political elites but, as I shall try to show, their fundamental purpose is to contribute to change in the political cultures of the conflicting societies.

THE MICROPROCESS AND THE MACROPROCESS

What makes interactive problem solving quintessentially social–psychological in its orientation is its goal of promoting change in individuals—through face-to-face interaction in small groups—as a vehicle for change in larger social systems: in national policy, in political culture, and in the conflict system at large. The core of the work of interactive problem solving is a particular *microprocess*, best exemplified by problem-solving workshops, to which I shall return shortly. However, this microprocess is intended to

produce changes in the *macroprocess*, in the larger process of conflict resolution, including the official negotiations—in what is now commonly called the peace process (Kelman, 1997). To put it in other terms, our task is to promote *private* dialogue in the hope of influencing *public* policy.

The microprocess relates to the macroprocess in two ways. First and foremost, it provides *inputs* into the macroprocess. The challenge here is to identify the appropriate points of entry: those points in the larger process where contributions from problem-solving workshops and, from a social–psychological analysis, can be particularly useful. Second, the microprocess can serve as a *metaphor* for what happens—or, at least in my view, ought to happen—at the macrolevel (Kelman, 1996). Let me elaborate somewhat on interactive problem solving as a metaphor for the larger process of conflict resolution before turning to a description of the microprocess of problem-solving workshops.

The three components of the term *interactive problem solving*—problem, solution, and interactive—suggest what, I propose, happens or ought to happen in the larger process. First, the conflict needs to be treated as a *problem* that is shared by the parties. Essentially, it is a problem in the relationship between the parties, which has become completely competitive, to the point of mutual destructiveness. Conflict itself is a normal and potentially constructive aspect of relations within and between groups, organizations, and societies, as long as both competitive and cooperative elements are maintained and balanced in the relationship. However, in deep-rooted ethnic conflicts of the kind with which we are concerned, the relationship has come to a point where each party, in pursuit of its own needs and interests, threatens and undermines the needs and interests of the other party and seeks to destroy the other.

Recognizing that the conflict represents a problem in the relationship between the parties, the conflict resolution process needs to search for a *solution* to the problem. A proper solution is one that addresses the underlying causes of the conflict, which can be located in the unfulfilled or threatened needs of both parties, particularly their needs for security, identity, dignity, participation, autonomy, justice, and recognition. A solution that addresses these needs ultimately leads to a transformation of the destructive relationship between the parties.

Finally, the term *interactive* refers to the proposition that the task of solving the problem presented by the conflict is best achieved through direct interaction in which the parties are able to share their differing perspectives and learn how to influence each other by way of responsiveness to the other's needs and concerns. Such responsiveness, based on taking the perspective of the other, is the way in which people normally influence each other in social relationships. In conflict relationships, this process is seriously undermined.

The problem solving required for conflict resolution can occur most effectively in an interactive context in which the ability to exert mutual influence through responsiveness to the other has been restored. A solution arrived at through the direct interaction between the parties is more conducive to a stable, durable peace and a new, cooperative relationship than an imposed solution because it is more likely to address the parties' fundamental needs and to elicit their commitment to the agreement and sense of ownership of it. Moreover, the interactive process of arriving at the solution in itself initiates the new relationship that the solution is designed to foster.

This view of the macroprocess of conflict resolution suggests some of the key components of the process, which must take place somewhere in the larger system. Table 1 lists four such components. The first is identification and analysis of the problem: The parties must identify each side's fundamental needs and fears as seen within each party's own perspective. Moreover, the parties have to become sensitized to the dynamics of conflict—to those interaction processes that are conducive to its escalation and perpetuation.

The second component of the macroprocess of conflict resolution is the joint shaping of ideas for solving the problem that has been identified. This calls for opportunities for the parties to explore options, to reframe issues in ways that make them more amenable to negotiation and conflict resolution, and to generate creative approaches to a win–win solution. Such a process of *pre-negotiation*, at all stages of conflict resolution, increases the likelihood that formal negotiations themselves will be maximally effective. (The absence of such a pre-negotiation process, incidentally, was a major factor in the failure of the Camp David summit in 2000.) The way the issues are framed has a major impact on the parties' ability to achieve a negotiated agreement and on the quality of that agreement from the point of view of producing a lasting peace.

The third component listed in Table 1 is influencing the other side. The essential requirement here is to shift from the heavy reliance on the use and threat of force, which now characterizes the international system, to the use of positive incentives, including incentives in the form of mutual reassurance and mutual enticement. For parties engaged in an existential conflict, such as that between Israelis and Palestinians, negotiations always

TABLE 1
Components of the Conflict Resolution Process

1. Identification and analysis of the problem
2. Joint shaping of ideas for solution
3. Influencing the other side
4. Creating a supportive political environment

loom as dangerous and threatening. The parties are afraid they might be induced to yield too much and to place themselves on a slippery slope, ultimately losing everything, including their national identity and national existence. Therefore, mutual reassurance that it is safe to enter into negotiations and mutual enticement through the promise of attractive gains are key elements of the mutual influence required for conflict resolution. To this end, as I have already suggested, each party has to learn how to influence the other by being responsive to the other's needs and fears. Only influence through responsiveness is conducive to a stable change in the relationship.

The fourth component of the macroprocess of conflict resolution is creating a supportive political environment for negotiations. One of the important features of a supportive environment is the sense of mutual reassurance, which is fostered by sensitivity to each other's concerns and the development of working trust (i.e., the conviction that the other is sincere in its commitment to negotiating a peaceful solution). Another important element of a supportive environment is the sense of possibility—the sense that, although negotiations may be difficult and risky, it is possible to find a mutually satisfactory solution. This sense of possibility contributes to creating self-fulfilling prophecies in a positive direction, to counteract the negative self-fulfilling prophecies that result from the mutual distrust and pervasive pessimism about finding a way out that normally characterize protracted conflicts. A supportive political environment is marked by a shift in the dominant political discourse from power politics to mutual accommodation.

These components of the conflict resolution process, as I have suggested, must occur somewhere in the larger system if conflict resolution is to become possible. They do not have to take place everywhere and at all times. But, somewhere in the system, there have to be efforts to identify and analyze the problem, to engage in joint shaping of ideas for a mutually acceptable solution, to influence the other through mutual reassurance and other positive incentives, and to create a supportive political environment. Problem-solving workshops and related activities in the spirit of interactive problem solving seek to provide special opportunities for these kinds of processes to occur. Let me turn, then, to a description of the microprocess of problem-solving workshops, which bring together members of the political elites of the conflicting societies for direct, face-to-face interaction facilitated by a third party knowledgeable about international conflict, group process, and the conflict region.

PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHOPS

The precise format of problem-solving workshops may vary as a function of the phase of the conflict, the nature of the participants, the particular

occasion and setting, and the specific purpose. Whatever their format, these workshops represent a microprocess that is specifically designed to insert into the macroprocess—in a modest, but systematic way—the components of conflict resolution that I have outlined. One can think of problem-solving workshops as workshops in the literal sense of the term, like a carpenter's or an artisan's workshop: a specifically constructed space in which the parties can engage in a process of exploration, observation, and analysis; and in which they can create new products for export, as it were. The products in this case take the form of new ideas and insights that can be fed into the political debate and the decision-making process within the two societies and, thus, penetrate their political cultures.

Workshops are not negotiating sessions. They are not intended to substitute for negotiations or to bypass them in any way. Negotiations can be carried out only by officials who are authorized to conclude binding agreements; and workshops, by definition, are unofficial and non-binding. It is precisely their non-binding character, however, that represents their unique strength and special contribution to the larger process. They provide an opportunity for the kind of exploratory interaction that is very difficult to achieve in the context of official negotiations. The non-binding character of workshops allows the participants to interact in an open, exploratory way; to speak and listen to each other as a means of acquiring new information and sharing their differing perspectives; and to gain insight into the other's—and indeed their own—needs, fears, concerns, priorities, and constraints and into the dynamics of the conflict relationship that leads to exacerbation, escalation, and perpetuation of the conflict.

Although workshops are not negotiations and not meant to be negotiations, they are directly linked to the negotiations and complementary to them. I view them as an integral part of the larger negotiation process, potentially relevant at all of its stages (see Table 2). At the *pre-negotiation stage*, they can contribute to creating an environment that is conducive to moving the parties toward the negotiating table. Alongside of negotiations, at the *para-negotiation stage*, they may be particularly useful in helping the parties deal with the setbacks, stalemates, and losses of momentum

TABLE 2
Relationship of Interactive Problem Solving to Negotiations

Pre-negotiation stage: Creating an environment conducive to moving to the table
Para-negotiation stage: Helping to create momentum, identify options, and reframe issues
Breakdown of negotiations: Rebuilding trust in the negotiating partner and sense of possibility and hope
Post-negotiation stage: Contributing to implementation, peace building, and reconciliation

that often mark the negotiations of intense, protracted conflicts—as we have observed in the Israeli–Palestinian and many other cases. Thus, they may contribute to creating momentum and reviving the sense of possibility. They can also deal with issues that are not yet on the table, providing an opportunity for the parties to pre-negotiate some of these issues: to identify new options and reframe the issues in ways that make them more amenable to successful negotiation by the time they get to the table. In periods marked by a *breakdown of negotiations*, such as the current stage in the Israeli–Palestinian case, workshops can contribute to rebuilding trust in the availability of a negotiating partner and a sense of possibility and hope and, thus, help the parties find a way back to the negotiating table. Finally, at the *post-negotiation stage*, workshops can contribute to resolving the problems of implementation of the negotiated agreements, as well as to the post-conflict process of peace building, reconciliation, and transforming the relationship between the former enemies.

Our Israeli–Palestinian workshops until 1991 were all obviously in the pre-negotiation phase because there were no negotiations in progress. Moreover, until 1990, all of our workshops were one-time, self-contained events, usually consisting of separate pre-workshop sessions (of 4–5 hr) for each party and $2\frac{1}{2}$ days (often over a weekend) of joint meetings. Some of the individual participants in these workshops took part in more than one such event, but the group as a whole met only for this one occasion. It was not until 1990 that we organized our first continuing workshop with a group of influential Israelis and Palestinians who participated in a series of meetings over a 3-year period (Rouhana & Kelman, 1994). We were unable to mount such a continuing workshop before 1990 for political, financial, and logistical reasons. We have since had a Joint Working Group on Israeli–Palestinian Relations, which met between 1994 and 1999 and—for the first time in our work—was explicitly dedicated to producing joint concept papers on issues in the final-status negotiations. We now have another joint Israeli–Palestinian working group that began in 2001, after the failure of the Camp David summit and the onset of the second intifada, with a special focus on rebuilding trust in the availability of a negotiating partner, and that has met periodically since then.

PRINCIPLES GOVERNING WORKSHOPS

To give some indication of what happens at workshops and the principles that govern them, I describe a typical one-time workshop between Israelis and Palestinians. There are, understandably, important differences between one-time and continuing workshops. There is also considerable variation

among one-time workshops, with respect to the nature and number of participants, the size of the third party, the occasion for convening the workshop, the specific purposes, the setting, and other considerations. However, despite such variations, there is a set of key principles that apply throughout and can be gleaned from the description of an ideal-type, one-time workshop.

The typical workshop participants are politically involved and, in many cases, politically influential members of their communities. However, with occasional exceptions, they have not been current officials. They have included parliamentarians; leading figures in political parties or movements; former ministers, military officers, diplomats, or government officials; and journalists or editors specializing in the Middle East. Many of the participants have been academics who are important analysts of the conflict for their societies—who not only publish scholarly monographs but also write for the newspapers and appear on radio and television—and some of whom have served in advisory, official, or diplomatic positions and are likely to do so again in the future. We look for participants who are part of the mainstream of their societies and close to the center of the political spectrum, but they have to be interested in exploring the possibilities of a negotiated solution and willing to sit with members of the other society as equals.

The number of participants has varied; our workshops generally include three to six members of each party, as well as a third party of two to four members. On a number of occasions, we have arranged meetings between just two high-level participants—one Israeli and one Palestinian—who preferred to meet in complete privacy rather than in a group setting. The group setting, of course, has great advantages because it reveals some of the internal dynamics—including the intragroup conflicts—within each society, which are important dimensions of intergroup conflict. However, the occasional one-on-one meetings have been valuable in their own way, particularly in view of the stature of their participants.

The modal number of third-party members has been three, but here too there has been variation. I have done a series of workshops in conjunction with my graduate seminar on international conflict in which the members of the class have been able to take part by serving as apprentice members of the third party. In all other respects, these workshops have followed the usual workshop design. Although we have sometimes had a third party of 25 members in these workshops, we have been able to organize them in a way that both preserves the integrity of the process and gives the students the opportunity to gain first-hand experience with the model. It should be noted that only five of the students, on an alternating basis, sit around the table at any one time. The others observe the proceedings from an

adjoining room with a one-way mirror—of course, with the full knowledge of the participants. It is understood that, at all times, the students are members of the third party, subject to the discipline of the third party, rather than mere observers.

The academic setting is an important feature of our approach. It has the advantage of providing an unofficial, private, non-binding context, with its own set of norms to support a type of interaction that departs from the norms that generally govern interactions between conflicting parties. Conflict norms require the parties to be militant, unyielding, and dismissive of the other's claims, interests, fears, and rights. To engage in a different kind of interaction, which enables each party to enter into the other's perspective and to work with the other in the search for mutual benefits, requires a countervailing set of norms. The academic setting is not the only setting that can provide such countervailing norms; a religious setting, for example, could do so in its own way. In our work, however, we have found that the university setting is well-suited to performing this function. The norms of this setting both free and require participants to interact in a different way. The fact that the discussions are non-committal—"just academic"—makes it relatively safe to deviate from the conflict norms. The fact that the third party "owns" the setting gives us some authority to prescribe the nature of the interaction.

The third party in our model performs a strictly facilitative role. We do not generally propose solutions, nor do we participate in the substantive discussions. Our task is to create the conditions that allow ideas for resolving the conflict to emerge out of the interaction between the parties themselves. The role of the third party is important. We select and brief the participants, set and enforce the ground rules, and propose the main lines of the agenda. We moderate the discussion and make a variety of interventions: content observations, which often take the form of summarizing, highlighting, asking for clarification, or pointing to similarities and differences between the parties; process observations, which suggest how interactions within the group may reflect the dynamics of the conflict between the two societies; and occasional theoretical observations, which offer concepts that might be useful in clarifying the issues under discussion. Finally, we serve as a repository of trust for the parties who, by definition, do not trust each other: They feel safe to come to the workshop because they trust the third party and rely on it to make sure that confidentiality is maintained and that their interests are protected.

GROUND RULES

The ground rules governing the workshop, which are presented to participants several times—at the point of recruitment, in the pre-workshop

TABLE 3
Workshop Ground Rules

1. Privacy and confidentiality
2. Focus on each other (not constituencies, audiences, or third parties)
3. Analytic (non-polemical) discussion
4. Problem-solving (non-adversarial) mode
5. No expectation of agreement
6. Equality in setting
7. Facilitative role of third party

sessions, and at the beginning of the workshop itself—are listed in Table 3. The first ground rule, privacy and confidentiality, is at the heart of the workshop process. It stipulates that whatever is said in the course of a workshop cannot be cited for attribution outside of the workshop setting by any participant, including the third party. To support this ground rule, the typical workshop has no audience, no publicity, and no record. To ensure privacy, we have no observers in our workshops; the only way our students are able to observe the process is by being integrated into the third party and accepting the discipline of the third party. To ensure confidentiality, we do not tape workshop sessions. Tape recordings would provide a potentially rich source of data for discourse analysis and other types of research, but I have followed the principle—based on my definition of action research—that the action requirements must prevail over the research requirements. I have not, therefore, been willing to take any steps in the interest of research that might interfere with the process required by our practice.

Confidentiality and non-attribution are essential for protecting the interests of the participants. In the earlier years of our work, meetings between Israelis and Palestinians were controversial in the two communities. The very fact that they were taking part in such a meeting entailed political and, at times, legal or even physical risks for participants. Now that Israeli–Palestinian meetings have become almost routine, most (although not all) participants are not concerned if their participation becomes known. Privacy and confidentiality—particularly the principle of non-attribution—remain essential, however, for protection of the *process*. This ground rule makes it possible for the participants to engage in the kind of interaction that problem-solving workshops require. Confidentiality gives them the freedom and safety to think, listen, talk, and play with ideas without having to worry that they will be held accountable outside for what they say in the workshop.

Ground Rules 2 through 4 in Table 3 spell out the nature of the interaction that the workshop process is designed to encourage and that the principle of

privacy and confidentiality is designed to protect. We ask participants to focus on each other in the course of the workshop: to listen to each other, with the aim of understanding the other's perspective; and to address each other, with the aim of making their own perspective understood. Workshops are radically different, in this respect, from debates in which participants listen only for tactical purposes; in which they address the audience, their own constituencies, and third parties, rather than the other party; and in which they often speak for the record. This is why we avoid having an audience or a record and adhere strictly to the principle of confidentiality.

Focusing on each other enables and encourages the parties to engage in an analytic discussion. The purpose of the exchange is not to engage in the usual polemics that characterize conflict interactions. Rather, it is to gain an understanding of each other's needs, fears, concerns, priorities, and constraints. A second purpose is to develop insight into the dynamics of the conflict, particularly into the ways in which the conflict-driven interactions between the parties tend to exacerbate, escalate, and perpetuate their conflict. An analytic discussion is not intended to exclude the expression of emotions. In a genuine discussion between parties engaged in a bitter conflict, one cannot avoid the occasional expression of anger, distrust, anxiety, disappointment, impatience, or outrage. Indeed, sharing these emotions is an important part of learning about one another's perspective. Expressions of emotions should, therefore, be used in the course of workshops as raw material for enhancing the participants' analytic understanding of the concerns of the two sides and the dynamics of the conflict.

Analytic discussion helps the parties move to a problem-solving mode of interaction, in contrast to the adversarial mode that usually characterizes conflict interactions. In line with a "no-fault" principle, the participants are asked to treat the conflict as a shared problem, requiring joint efforts to find a mutually satisfactory solution, rather than try to determine who is right and who is wrong on the basis of historical or legal argumentation. We are not asking participants to abandon their ideas about the justice of their cause, nor are we suggesting that both sides are equally right or equally wrong. We are merely proposing that a problem-solving approach is more likely to be productive than an attempt to allocate blame.

The fifth ground rule, listed in Table 3, states that in a workshop—unlike a negotiating session—there is no expectation to reach an agreement. (Our Joint Working Group on Israeli–Palestinian Relations, which met between 1994 and 1999 and to which I return shortly, was an exception in this respect.) Like any conflict resolution effort, we are interested in finding common ground, but the amount of agreement achieved in the workshop discussion is not a measure of the success of the enterprise. If the participants come away with a better understanding of the other side's

perspective, of their own priorities, and of the dynamics of the conflict, the workshop will have fulfilled its purpose, even if it does not produce an outline of a peace treaty.

The sixth ground rule states that, within the workshop setting, the two parties are equals. Clearly, there are important asymmetries between them in the real world—asymmetries in power, in moral position, and in reputation. These play important roles in conflict and must be taken into account in the workshop discussions. However, the two parties are equals in the workshop setting in the sense that each party has the same right to serious consideration of its needs, fears, and concerns. Within the rules of the workshop, the Israeli participants cannot dismiss the Palestinian concerns on the grounds that the Palestinians are the weaker party and are, therefore, in a poor bargaining position; nor can the Palestinian participants dismiss the Israeli concerns on the grounds that the Israelis are the oppressors and are, therefore, not entitled to sympathy. Each side has the right to be heard in the workshop and each side's needs and fears must be given equal attention in the search for a mutually satisfactory solution.

The final ground rule listed in Table 3 concerns the facilitative role of the third party, which I have already discussed. In keeping with this rule, the third party does not take positions on the issues, give advice, or offer its own proposals; nor does it take sides, evaluate the ideas presented, or arbitrate between different interpretations of historical facts and international law. Within its facilitative role, however, it sets the ground rules and monitors adherence to them; it helps to keep discussion moving in constructive directions, tries to stimulate movement, and intervenes as relevant with questions, observations, and even challenges.

WORKSHOP AGENDA

One of the tasks of the third party is to set the agenda for the discussion. In the typical one-time workshop, the agenda is relatively open and unstructured, as far as the substantive issues under discussion are concerned. The way in which these issues are approached, however, and the order of discussion are structured so as to facilitate the kind of discourse that the ground rules seek to encourage. The workshop begins with personal introductions around the table; a review of the purposes, procedures, and ground rules of the gathering; and an opportunity for the participants to ask questions about these. We then typically proceed with a five-part agenda, as outlined in Table 4.

The first discussion session is devoted to an exchange of information between the two sides, which serves primarily to break the ice and to set

TABLE 4
Workshop Agenda

1. Information exchange
2. Needs analysis
3. Joint thinking about solutions
4. Discussion of constraints
5. Joint thinking about ways of overcoming constraints

the tone for the kind of discourse we hope to generate. Each party is asked to talk about the situation on the ground and the current mood in its own community, about the issues in the conflict as seen in that community, about the spectrum of views on the conflict and its resolution, and about its members' own positions within that spectrum. This exchange provides a shared base of information and sets a precedent for the two sides to deal with each other as mutual resources, rather than solely as combatants.

The core agenda of the workshop begins with a needs analysis in which each side is asked to talk about its fundamental needs and fears—those needs that would have to be satisfied and those fears that would have to be allayed if a solution is to be acceptable in its society. Participants are asked to listen attentively and not to debate or argue about what the other side says, although they are invited to ask for elaboration and clarification. The purpose of this phase of the proceedings is to help each side understand the basic concerns of the other side from the other's perspective. We check the level of understanding by asking each side to summarize the other's needs, as they have heard them. Each side then has the opportunity to correct or amplify the summary that has been presented by the other side. Once the two sides have come to grasp each other's perspective and understand each other's needs as well as seems possible at that point, we move on to the next phase of the agenda: joint thinking about solutions to the conflict.

There is a clear logic to the order of the phases of this agenda. We discourage the participants from proposing solutions until they have identified the problem, which stems from the parties' unfulfilled and threatened needs. We want the participants to come up with ideas for solution that are anchored in the problem—that address the parties' felt needs. What we ask the parties to do in Phase 3 of the agenda is to generate—through a process of joint thinking (or interactive problem solving)—ideas for the overall shape of a solution to the conflict, or to particular issues within the conflict, that are responsive to the fundamental needs and fears of both parties, as presented in the preceding phase of the workshop. The participants are given the difficult assignment of thinking of solutions that respond not only to their own side's needs and fears (as they would in a bargaining situation), but simultaneously

to the needs and fears of *both* sides. It goes against the grain for parties engaged in a deep-rooted conflict to think of ways in which the adversary, too, can "win"—but that is precisely what joint thinking requires.

Once the parties have achieved some common ground in generating ideas for solutions that would address the fundamental needs and fears of both sides, we turn to a discussion of the political and psychological constraints within their societies that stand in the way of such solutions. Discussion of constraints is an extremely important part of the learning that takes place in workshops because parties involved in an intense conflict find it difficult to understand the constraints of the other, or even to recognize that the other—like themselves—has constraints. However, we try to discourage discussion of constraints until the parties have gone through the phase of joint thinking because a premature focus on constraints is likely to inhibit the creative process of generating new ideas. We try to see whether the particular individuals around the table can come up with new ideas for resolving the conflict. Once they have generated such ideas, we explore the constraints that make it difficult for these new ideas to gain acceptance in their societies.

Finally, to the extent that time permits, we ask the participants to engage in another round of joint thinking, this time about ways of overcoming the constraints against integrative, win–win solutions to the conflict. In this phase of the workshop, participants try to generate ideas for steps that they personally, their organizations, or their governments can take—separately or jointly—to overcome the constraints that have been identified. Such ideas may focus, in particular, on steps of mutual reassurance—in the form of acknowledgments, symbolic gestures, or confidence-building measures—that would make the parties more willing and able to take the risks required for innovative solutions to the conflict.

DUAL PURPOSE OF WORKSHOPS

The ground rules and agendas that I have described are designed to help achieve the dual purpose of workshops (see Table 5), to which I alluded earlier. The first purpose is to produce change in the particular individuals

TABLE 5
The Dual Purpose of Interactive Problem Solving

Change in individual workshop participants: Development of new insights and new ideas for conflict resolution
Transfer of these changes into the political debate and the decision-making processes in their societies

who are sitting around the workshop table—to enable them to gain new insights into the conflict and acquire new ideas for resolving the conflict and overcoming the barriers to a negotiated solution. However, these changes at the level of individual participants are not ends in themselves, but vehicles for promoting change at the policy level. To this end, the second purpose of workshops is to maximize the likelihood that the new insights and ideas developed by workshop participants will be fed back into the political debate and decision-making procedures in their respective societies.

What is interesting, both theoretically and practically, is that these two purposes may be, and often are, contradictory to each other. The requirements for maximizing change in the workshop itself may be contrary to the requirements for maximizing the transfer of that change into the political process. The best example of these dialectics is the selection of participants. To maximize transfer into the political process, we would look for participants who are officials, as close as possible to the decision-making process, and, thus in a position to apply immediately what they have learned. To maximize change, however, we would look for participants who are removed from the decision-making process and, therefore, less constrained in their interactions and freer to play with ideas and explore hypothetical possibilities. To balance these contradictory requirements, we look for participants who are not officials, but politically influential. They are, thus, more free to engage in the process but, at the same time, their positions within their societies are such that any new ideas that they develop can have an impact on the thinking of decision makers and the society at large.

Another example of the dialectics of workshops is the degree of cohesiveness that we try to engender in the group of participants. An adequate level of group cohesiveness is important to the effective interaction among the participants. However, if the workshop group becomes too cohesive—if the Israeli and Palestinian participants form too close a coalition across the conflict lines—they may lose credibility and political effectiveness in their own communities (Kelman, 1993). To balance these two contradictory requirements, we recognize that the coalition formed by the two groups of participants must remain an uneasy coalition. By the same token, we aim for the development of *working trust*—of trust in the participants on the other side based not so much on interpersonal closeness, but on the conviction that they are sincerely committed, out of their own interests, to the search for a peaceful solution.

ACTIVITIES OVER THE YEARS

While adhering to the general principles I have outlined, our work has evolved over the years, adapting itself to significant changes in the political

situation. I summarize our Israeli–Palestinian work in terms of four general phases, corresponding to different stages of the conflict itself.

Our earliest work, in the 1970s and 1980s, clearly corresponds to the pre-negotiation phase of the conflict. During that phase, the primary purpose of our efforts was to help create a political atmosphere that would encourage the parties to move to the negotiating table. Our workshops and related activities contributed to the development of a sense of possibility, of new ideas for resolving the conflict, and of relationships among members of the political elites across the conflict lines. Our workshops during those years took a variety of forms and included, among others, a workshop with leading Israeli and Palestinian women; several one-on-one events; a series of workshops in the context of my graduate seminar on *International Conflict*; a "fish-bowl" workshop with a select audience at the meetings of the International Society of Political Psychology; and a workshop in 1985 with five Israeli Knesset members and five leading Palestinians, which took place in the wake of a public symposium and which yielded two adjoining and linked opinion articles in *The New York Times* by an Israeli and a Palestinian member of the group (Sarid & Khalidi, 1984). At the end of this phase, in 1989, we held a public, off-the-record symposium with leading Israeli and Palestinian academic and political figures, including a PLO official; the event was held in public in order to conform to Israeli law at the time governing meetings of Israeli citizens with PLO members. All of the events during this phase were one-time workshops following—with some variations here and there—the ground rules and agenda that I have described.

The second period of our work, which spanned the years 1990 to 1993, can be described as primarily a para-negotiation effort. Although we organized a variety of one-time workshops (including another women's workshop and the workshops linked to my seminar), the most distinctive project of those years was our first continuing workshop. By 1989, in the wake of the 1988 Palestinian National Council (PNC) session in Algiers, which in effect endorsed a two-state solution, the atmosphere for negotiations had greatly improved—which indeed made it politically possible for Israelis to participate in public meetings with PLO figures. In view of these developments, the time seemed ripe in the fall of 1990 for Nadim Rouhana and myself to convene a continuing workshop with a group of high-level, politically influential Israelis and Palestinians, who initially agreed to meet three times over the course of the coming year (Rouhana & Kelman, 1994). C. R. Mitchell and Harold Saunders joined us in this enterprise as senior members of the third party.

The first two meetings took place in the shadow of the Gulf crisis and the Gulf War, which seriously undermined the trust between the Israelis and Palestinians that had been slowly developing during the late 1980s. Much of the work of the parties at these meetings was devoted to repairing their relationship and to persuading each other that there was still a negotiating partner for them on the other side. By the time of the third meeting, in August 1991, the parties were ready to engage in a constructive effort of joint thinking and to formulate mutually acceptable approaches to some of the difficult issues of the conflict. At the end of this meeting, the participants committed themselves to continuing the workshop.

Shortly after this third meeting, the political situation changed dramatically with the initiation of official Arab–Israeli negotiations, starting with the Madrid conference in the fall of 1991 and continuing in Washington, DC. For the first time, our work moved from the pre-negotiation to the para-negotiation phase, where the focus is on ways of overcoming obstacles and creating momentum for negotiations and on addressing long-term issues that are not yet on the negotiation table.

The new situation forced us to confront a new issue: the overlap between the official and unofficial processes. The PLO was excluded from the official negotiations, and the Palestinian delegation was made up of members of civil society—mostly residents in the occupied territories. As it happened, four of the six Palestinian members of the continuing workshop were appointed to the official negotiating team. A year later, a Labor Party government took over in Israel, and several of the Israeli members of the continuing workshop were appointed to high positions in the new administration. The political relevance of the continuing workshop was enhanced by these developments because a sizable number of participants were now actively engaged in the negotiating process. The overlapping roles, however, also created some ambiguities and role conflicts. Several members left the group in light of their official appointments and were replaced by new members. Much of the time during two plenary sessions of the continuing workshop—in the summers of 1992 and 1993—and in subgroup meetings was spent in discussing the advantages and disadvantages of this overlap, as well as the general question of the functions of our group at a time when official negotiations were in progress.

At the 1993 meeting, there was some sentiment that the time had come to focus more systematically on specific issues that the official negotiations seemed unable to resolve and perhaps to work on joint written products. The announcement of the Oslo Agreement within days of that meeting reinforced this sentiment. Accordingly, in close consultation with the members of the group, we decided to close the continuing workshop and to develop a new project, building on our earlier experience, but adapting the purposes and procedures to the new political requirements.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF WORKSHOPS

Our work up to that point—along with many other Track-Two efforts—played a modest but not insignificant role, directly or indirectly, in laying the groundwork for the Oslo Agreement. In my own assessment, three kinds of contributions can be identified (see Kelman, 1995, 2005):

1. Workshops helped to develop *cadres* experienced in communication with the other side and prepared to carry out productive negotiations. Many workshop participants over the years were involved in the discussions and negotiations that led up to the Oslo Accord. The extensive involvement of participants in our continuing workshop in the official negotiations in the early 1990s provides a prime example of this contribution.
2. Workshops helped to produce *substantive inputs* into the political thinking and debate in the two societies. Through the public and private communications of workshop participants—and, to some degree, of members of the third party—ideas on which productive negotiations could be based were injected into the two political cultures and became the building stones of the Oslo Agreement. These ideas, as summarized in Table 6, focused in particular on what was both necessary and possible in negotiating a mutually satisfactory agreement (Kelman, 2005).
3. Our workshops, along with many other efforts, helped to create a *political atmosphere* favorable to negotiation and open to a new relationship between the parties.

TABLE 6
Evolving Ideas for Resolving the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict (1967–1993): The Building Stones of the Oslo Agreement

	Target of the ideas	
Focus of the ideas	*Negotiation process*	*Negotiation outcome*
What is necessary	Negotiations between legitimate national representatives	Mutual recognition of national identity and rights
What is possible	Availability of a negotiating partner	The two-state solution

Note. From "Interactive Problem Solving in the Israeli–Palestinian Case: Past Contributions and Present Challenges," by H. C. Kelman, 2005, in *Paving the Way: Contributions of Interactive Conflict Resolution to Peacemaking* (p. 53), edited by R. J. Fisher, Lanham, MD: Lexington. Copyright © 2005 by Lexington Books. Reprinted with permission.

> [They] have done so by encouraging the development of more differentiated images of the enemy, of a de-escalating language and a new political discourse that is attentive to the other party's concerns and constraints, of a working trust that is based on the conviction that both parties have a genuine interest in a peaceful solution, and of a sense of possibility regarding the ultimate achievement of a mutually satisfactory outcome. (Kelman, 1997, p. 216)

The Oslo Accord marked the beginning of the third period of our work, which corresponded to a phase of the conflict focusing on implementation of a partial, interim agreement and movement to final-status negotiations. The most distinctive project of this period was the Joint Working Group on Israeli–Palestinian Relations, which I co-chaired with Nadim Rouhana and which included Israelis and Palestinians who were highly influential within their respective political communities. The group held its first meeting in the spring of 1994 and continued (with some changes in membership) through 1999 for a total of 15 plenary meetings, as well as a number of subgroup meetings. The explicit purpose of the Working Group was to focus on the difficult issues in the Israeli–Palestinian negotiations that the Oslo Accord had deferred to the final-status negotiations, designed to take place after a five-year interim period. From the beginning, the idea was to explore these issues within the context of the desired future relationship between the two societies. In other words, we asked the participants to think of ways of resolving these final-status issues that would be consistent with the kind of future, long-term relationship that they envisioned for their societies. This required going beyond the balance of power and searching for solutions that would address the fundamental needs of both parties and, therefore, be conducive to a lasting peace, a new relationship, and ultimate reconciliation.

For the first time in our work, the Working Group was deliberately designed to create joint products, in the form of concept papers that would eventually be made public. The concept papers were not intended to be blueprints or draft agreements on a given issue, but efforts—based on needs analysis and joint thinking—to identify the nature of the problem, to offer a general approach to dealing with it, to explore different options to resolution, and to frame the issues in a way that makes them more amenable to negotiation. The Working Group was one of the relatively few efforts to explore the issues collaboratively and to produce and disseminate jointly written documents. It operated on the principle of confidentiality and non-attribution up to the point when the members were ready to go public with a joint paper. The understanding that there would eventually be joint products with which the members would be publicly identified introduced some constraints that made the Working Group different from our previous work and required modifications in our standard methodology.

The Working Group produced numerous drafts of four documents. Three of these have been published: a set of "General Principles for the Final Israeli–Palestinian Agreement" (Joint Working Group, 1998), a paper on "The Palestinian Refugee Problem and the Right of Return" (Alpher, Shikaki et al., 1998), and a paper on "The Future Israeli–Palestinian Relationship" (Joint Working Group, 1999). These papers were translated into Arabic and Hebrew and widely disseminated in all three versions. The fourth paper, on "Approaches to Resolving the Issue of Jewish Settlements in the West Bank and Gaza," was close to completion, but was overtaken by events. The three published papers (as well as the proposals in the unpublished paper) were available during the discussions of the final-status issues in the year 2000.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

This brings me to the current phase of our work, which began with the failure of the Camp David summit in the summer of 2000 and the onset of the second intifada in the fall of that year. The resulting breakdown of negotiations has been accompanied by clashing narratives in which each side perceives itself as having demonstrated its readiness to make peace, but perceives the other as unwilling to make compromises and responsive only to the language of force. These narratives, in turn, have set an escalatory process in motion. In effect, the lessons that have been *learned* over the quarter century that led up to Oslo were dramatically *unlearned* since the failure of Camp David and the onset of the second intifada. The challenge to our work at this stage is to promote a process of *relearning* these lessons—particularly in rebuilding public trust within each society in the availability of a credible negotiating partner and of a mutually acceptable formula for a two-state solution. This has been the theme of our work in the past few years.

Before describing our current and continuing efforts in this vein, let me briefly mention a special project that our program at Harvard carried out in 2002, together with the Public Conversations Project in Boston and the Austrian Institute of International Politics. We organized an event in Vienna on the role of the media in escalating and de-escalating the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The event consisted of a public (but not-for-attribution) symposium, followed by a private problem-solving workshop. The participants included five Israeli and five Palestinian journalists, representing both print and electronic media. The workshop was not intended to generate a joint product. One outcome of the workshop, it seems—apart from what individual participants learned from the experience—was the opportunity for some professional collaboration across the divide. Thus, for example, an Israeli participant who runs a popular radio talk show invited one of the Palestinian participants to appear on the show.

The main thrust of our work since the end of 2000—in partnership with Shibley Telhami—has been a new joint working group, focusing on the theme of rebuilding Israeli and Palestinian trust in the availability of a negotiating partner and of a mutually acceptable formula for a two-state solution. After a variety of difficulties—including the sudden death of a key member of the core group shortly after its first meeting in the spring of 2001 and the last-minute cancellation of a meeting in Cyprus in the summer of 2003 because of travel restrictions imposed on Palestinian participants in the wake of a suicide bombing—the reconstituted group finally met in June 2004 and has had seven further meetings since that time.

Over the course of three productive sessions in 2004 and 2005, the group explored, in different ways, the question of how an agreement to end the conflict through an historic compromise in the form of a mutually acceptable two-state solution can gain wide public support in the two communities. We concluded that the problem was not so much in the terms of the agreement—which the publics, by and large, seemed ready to accept—but in the way the agreement was *framed*, given each public's profound distrust of the other's ultimate intentions. Under the circumstances, we saw a need to reframe the formula for a final agreement in a way that generates *trust* and *hope*—that reassures the two publics that the agreement is not jeopardizing their national existence and that it offers a vision of a mutually beneficial common future. By 2006, the working group was moving toward production of such a framing document: a joint concept paper on how to frame a final peace agreement in a way that would reassure the two publics and elicit their full support.

Since 2006, however, the political landscape has changed significantly, with elections on both sides, the wars of 2006, and the Hamas takeover of Gaza. Members of the group concluded that the time was not ripe for a paper focusing on a final agreement. They have remained very eager, however, to exchange information and ideas, to discuss new obstacles and possibilities, and to explore the implications of the political changes in the two communities. They have made it very clear that they want to continue the group and that they consider Track-Two efforts, if anything, more critical than ever at this juncture. In this spirit, the working group (with some changes in membership) has met four times since 2007, and is planning further meetings. Interestingly, we have returned to our earlier pattern of meeting with an entirely open agenda and without expectation of a concrete product.

There are some indications, however, that the pattern may be changing. At a meeting in 2009, we returned to the question of how to rebuild trust in the availability of a negotiating partner with which this group started its work. The discussions yielded some concrete proposals for statements to be issued by the leadership on each side that might help overcome the profound distrust of the public on the other side. At their most recent meeting, in June 2010, the participants developed some ideas for actions on the part of the U.S. administration that might advance negotiations, and asked the third party to convey these ideas to relevant U.S. officials on behalf of the working group. Thus, there seems to be a renewed interest in the group in working on possible joint products.

CONCLUSION

Turning to the larger picture, what is required, in my view, to break through the profound mutual distrust in the ultimate intentions of the other side and energize public support for peace negotiations is a visionary approach that transcends the balance of power and the calculus of bargaining concessions. Paradoxically, perhaps, this calls for a step toward reconciliation—which is generally viewed as a post-negotiation process—to move negotiations forward. In this spirit, a final agreement would have to be framed as a principled peace, based on a historic compromise that meets the fundamental needs of both peoples, validates their national identities, and declares an end to the conflict and to the occupation consistent with the requirements of fairness and attainable justice.

The framework I propose would start with the recognition that both peoples have historic roots in the land and are deeply attached to it, that each people's pursuit of its national aspirations by military means may well lead to mutual destruction, and that the only solution lies in a historic compromise that allows each people to express its right to national self-determination, fulfill its national aspirations, and express its national identity in a state of its own within the shared land in peaceful coexistence with the neighboring state of the other. The framework would proceed to spell out what the logic of a historic compromise implies for the key final-status issues (including borders, Jerusalem, settlements, and refugees) and offer a positive vision of a common future for the two peoples in the land they have agreed to share—and of the future of the shared land itself. A bold statement of this vision might describe it as a one-country/two-state solution.

Such a formulation would be reassuring—and, hence, trust-building—because it would, of necessity, contain an explicit acknowledgment of each other's national identity and aspirations, which would counter the fear that the compromise is just a temporary maneuver by the other in anticipation of resuming the struggle for total victory at a later point. Moreover, such a formulation would provide a logic for the difficult concessions each side will have to make by showing that they are necessary conditions for the historic compromise, not just the result of power bargaining. It would shift the focus from the painfulness of the concessions to the positive prospect of a fair and mutually satisfactory solution on which a vision of a better future for both peoples—and their land—can be built.

The mutual acknowledgment of the national identity of the other and willingness to accommodate it—which I see as the first step toward reconciliation—can take place only in a context in which the identity of one's own group is affirmed. If the framework I envision is constructed through a joint Israeli–Palestinian process, it can reassure the two publics that the agreement is not jeopardizing their national identity and existence and promises mutual benefits that far outweigh the risks it entails.

The framework I propose requires visionary leadership on both sides. Until such leadership emerges, the primary initiative for constructing and disseminating such a framework rests with civil society in the two communities. A Track-Two approach like interactive problem solving can contribute to such efforts by providing a forum for "negotiating" the precise language of a framework to make sure that it serves to reassure each side without threatening the core identity of the other. Problem-solving workshops are well-suited for such a process of "negotiating identity" in which each side can acknowledge and accommodate the other's identity—at least to the extent of eliminating negation of the other and the claim of exclusivity from its own identity—in a context in which the core of its own identity and its associated narrative are affirmed by the other (Kelman, 2001). Ideas that emerge from such an interactive process can then be injected into the political debate and the political culture of each society. Contributing to the development of a framework for a peace agreement that respects the national identities of both peoples is perhaps the major challenge to interactive problem solving in the current phase of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Herbert C. Kelman is Richard Clarke Cabot Professor of Social Ethics, Emeritus, at Harvard University and co-chair of the Middle East Seminar and former Director of the Program on International Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Harvard's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs.

His work on interactive problem solving and its application to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict since the early 1970s received the Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Improving World Order in 1997.

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