# Negotiation as Interactive Problem Solving

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**Abstract.** The use of the term *interactive problem solving* as a metaphor for negotiation implies that conflicting parties have a shared *problem* – essentially a problem in their relationship – which needs to be *solved* by addressing the underlying causes and the dynamics of the conflict in an *interactive* process. The term has been used to describe an unofficial third-party approach to conflict resolution, which typically brings together politically influential representatives of two parties in conflict for direct communication in problem-solving workshops. The present article draws on the experiences from this micro-process to develop a framework for the macro-process of negotiation. Within this framework, it describes the ultimate goal of negotiation as transformation of the relationship between the parties, which requires an agreement that addresses the fundamental needs and fears of both parties on a basis of reciprocity. It then discusses four components of negotiation – identification and analysis of the problem, joint shaping of ideas for solution, influencing the other side, and creating a supportive political environment – and procedures that the metaphor of interactive problem solving suggests for each. Finally, it identifies vehicles for integrating the perspective of interactive problem solving into the larger negotiation process.

**Key words:** human needs, joint thinking, mutual reassurance, problem-solving workshops, public discourse, reciprocity, relationship building, responsiveness, unofficial diplomacy, working trust

To use "interactive problem solving" as a metaphor for negotiation has both empirical and normative connotations. In the first instance, this metaphor is meant to *describe* negotiation – to propose that interactive problem solving is, in essence, what negotiation is all about. In practice, however, it is quite often the case – certainly in official international negotiations – that the process in which the parties engage deviates substantially from what is implied by this metaphor. Under the circumstances, the metaphor takes on a prescriptive function: It becomes a way of formulating what negotiation ideally *ought* to be about.

The use of the metaphor of interactive problem solving carries three central implications for what happens – or ought to happen – in the negotiating

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process, corresponding to the three words that make up the term. First, negotiation treats (or ought to treat) the conflict or disagreement between the parties at the table as a *problem* that they have in common. Each party, of course, has its own interests, and the two sets of interests are in competition with each other and often seem to be incompatible; this is precisely why there is a conflict. The problem the two parties[1] share is that each side's pursuit of its own interests (or effort to maximize its values and satisfy its needs) undermines or threatens the interests, values, and needs of the other. As a result, each party is stymied in the pursuit of its interests.

The magnitude or the nature of the problem are not necessarily equal for both parties. One of the parties may find the costs of the continuing conflict less burdensome than the other, or may have greater resources to sustain the other's opposition, or may feel more certain that time is on its side and that it will eventually prevail. But if they agree to negotiate or even to contemplate negotiation, they are both acknowledging that there is a problem and that they can at least conceive of some outcomes that would be better than the status quo. Moreover, they are acknowledging that the conflict is a shared problem, calling for a joint effort to identify ways in which both parties can pursue their interests and satisfy their needs without undermining or threatening each other.

In viewing the conflict as a shared problem, the negotiation process starts with the recognition that the relationship between the two parties has cooperative as well as competitive elements. The problem addressed in the negotiation is, in effect, a problem in the relationship between the two parties – a relationship that has become wholly competitive and mutually destructive. Both the process of negotiation itself and the substantive focus of the negotiation are designed to restore the cooperative element in the relationship between the conflicting parties. In contrast to power-based bargaining, problem-oriented negotiation takes the relationship between the parties as the central unit of analysis.

This brings me to the second implication of the metaphor of interactive problem solving: Negotiation is (or ought to be) directed toward *solving* the problem shared by the parties – which ultimately means transforming the relationship between them. Solving the problem – or resolving the conflict – does not imply eliminating all differences or removing the possibility that future conflicts may arise. But it means addressing the underlying causes of the conflict, which generally include unfulfilled needs for security, identity, justice, autonomy, and recognition. Negotiations oriented toward problem solving are thus more likely to generate integrative solutions: agreements responsive to the fundamental needs of both parties. Even at best, agreements are likely to contain a distributive component, in which the outcome for each

party depends on the strength of its bargaining position. Indeed, in some situations – such as limited conflicts that do not threaten the vital interests of either party – a distributive solution may be all that is required, as long as it respects the dignity and sense of fairness of the less powerful party. However, in deep-rooted conflicts that raise issues of identity and group survival, only agreements that address at least the core needs of both parties can produce a stable, peaceful outcome.

Negotiations that attempt to solve the parties' joint problem, by addressing the underlying causes of the conflict and shaping an agreement that meets the core needs of both parties, provide the basis for transforming the relationship between them. Starting with the negotiating process itself, the parties are able to move from a mutually destructive to a cooperative, mutually enhancing relationship in which, among other things, problem solving is institutionalized as a method for dealing with conflicts between them that may arise in the future.

The third implication of the metaphor of interactive problem solving is that negotiation is (or ought to be) an *interactive* process. It is a joint effort, in which the parties work together to generate ideas for a solution that meets both of their needs. The hallmark of social interaction is that each participant tries to enter into the other's perspective and take the other's role, thus gaining an understanding of the other's concerns, expectations, and intentions. This empathic process, in turn, allows the parties to influence each other's behavior to their own benefit by being responsive to each other's needs. When negotiations are truly interactive in this sense, the parties make an active effort to find solutions that maximize not only their own benefits, but also the benefits of the other – in other words, to find ways in which both parties can win. Furthermore, social interaction is a dialectic process, in which the participants do not merely act and react, but in which they change as the interaction proceeds. Truly interactive negotiations can thus produce new ideas for solution that could not have been predicted from the proposals the parties initially brought to the table.

Solutions that emerge out of the interaction between the parties themselves – in contrast to solutions that are imposed or even proposed by third parties – are likely to be superior for several reasons: They are more responsive to the needs and fears of the parties; the parties feel more committed to them; and the process of generating these ideas in itself contributes to building a new relationship between the parties.

## Interactive Problem Solving as an Unofficial Third-Party Approach

For more than two decades, my colleagues and I have been developing and applying an unofficial third-party approach to the resolution of international and intercommunal conflicts, derived from the seminal work of John Burton (see Burton, 1969, 1979, 1984; Kelman, 1972). I have come to use the term *interactive problem solving* to describe this approach (Kelman, 1986, 1990, 1991, 1992a). The heart of our work is to create opportunities for politically influential representatives of conflicting parties (e.g., Israelis and Palestinians or Greek and Turkish Cypriots) to engage in a micro-process characterized by exploratory interaction, generation of ideas, and creative problem solving. The approach is epitomized by the problem-solving workshop – a specially constructed arena for developing new insights and shaping new ideas that can then be exported into the political process within each community.[2]

I have consistently stressed that problem-solving workshops must not be confused with negotiations as such. "They are not meant to be negotiations, or simulated negotiations, or rehearsals for negotiations, nor are they meant to serve as substitutes for negotiations" (Kelman, 1992a: 65). I have been equally strong in arguing, however, that workshops are closely linked to negotiations and that they play an important complementary role in all stages of the negotiation process: in the prenegotiation phase, where they can help create a political atmosphere conducive to movement to the table; in the negotiation phase itself, where they can help in overcoming obstacles to productive negotiations and in framing issues that are not yet on the table; and in the postnegotiation phase, where they can contribute to implementation of the negotiated agreement and to long-term peacebuilding. The unofficial, non-binding character of problem-solving workshops clearly distinguishes them from official negotiations, which can only be carried out by officials authorized to conclude binding agreements. It is precisely this non-binding character of workshops, however, that is the major source of their potential contribution to the larger negotiation process: They provide an opportunity for sharing perspectives, exploring options, and joint thinking that are not readily available at the official negotiating table.

In offering interactive problem solving as a metaphor for negotiation, I run the risk of confounding two processes that I have taken great pains to differentiate. But I find it difficult to pass up the opportunity of spelling out the broader implications of interactive problem solving for the macro-processes of conflict resolution. I have always viewed interactive problem solving as a general approach to conflict resolution – indeed to international relationships as a whole – of which problem-solving workshops are the prototypical but not the only manifestation. The approach is based on a view of international conflict as an intersocietal phenomenon, not merely an intergovernmental

or interstate phenomenon. One corollary of this view is a conception of diplomacy as a complex mix of official and unofficial processes, of which opportunities for interactive problem solving – in the form of problem-solving workshops and related micro-processes – are a necessary and integral part. Beyond that, I have argued that "the assumptions and principles of interactive problem solving can contribute to a reconceptualization of international relationships at the macro-level by encouraging shifts in the nature of the discourse and the means of influence that characterize international relations today" (Kelman, 1992a: 89).

For the present purposes, it is this broader concept of interactive problem solving – as a particular approach to or philosophy for the larger process of conflict resolution – that I am proposing as a metaphor for negotiation. By the same token, I am conceiving of negotiation itself as a broader process, which centrally includes but is not confined to what happens when official representatives sit around the negotiating table to hammer out a binding agreement. What I have in mind is essentially Harold Saunders's concept of a peace process, which embeds negotiations in the domestic and international political process (see, e.g., Saunders, 1991). Negotiation in this sense includes the political decision to go to the table, the efforts to create and maintain a political environment conducive to negotiation, the mobilization of public support, and the public and private communications between the parties.

Thus, I am proposing interactive problem solving, broadly conceived, as a metaphor for negotiation, broadly conceived. However, our experience with interactive problem solving as a more narrowly conceived micro-process, pursued in problem-solving workshops and similar encounters, is directly relevant to the present exercise. Clearly, problem-solving workshops have represented from the beginning an effort to operationalize a particular approach to the larger process of conflict resolution. At the same time, the practice of interactive problem solving in workshops has provided the opportunity to sharpen and refine the larger approach. We can now turn back to our experience at the micro-level and ask how it can inform us about goals and procedures for conflict resolution at the macro-level.

In the remainder of this article, I will ask, first, what the metaphor of interactive problem solving, as honed by our workshop experience, suggests about the goals and desired outcomes of negotiation. Second, what does it suggest for the components and procedures of negotiation? And, finally, what are the vehicles for integrating these goals and procedures into the larger negotiating process?

## Goals and Desired Outcomes of Negotiation

Within an interactive problem solving framework, the ultimate goal of nego-
tiation is to transform the relationship between the parties. Negotiations are
designed, not merely to produce a minimally acceptable political agreement,
but to provide the basis for a stable, long-term peace and a cooperative, mutu-
ally ennancing relationship that contributes to the    :lfare and development
of both societies.

Transforming the relationship becomes increasi.  .iy important the more
intense and destructive the conflict is and the more interdependent the parties
are. The ethnic conflicts that have dominated the world scene in the 1990s –
such as the conflicts within and between the states of the former Yugoslavia
and the former Soviet Union, or in Rwanda and Burundi, or in Northern
Ireland, or between Israelis and Palestinians – are high on both of these
dimensions. They are protracted conflicts, marked by a recent history of
massive violence, at times involving genocide and other gross violations of
human rights, and they raise profound concerns in the embattled communities
about national and personal survival. In such conflicts, there is no substitute
for an agreement that addresses the parties' grievances and existential fears
and transforms the relationship between them, since they must continue to
live together in the same limited space.

Conflicts among parties that are less interdependent may not require an
equally thoroughgoing transformation of their relationship. Still, the degree of
global and certainly regional interdependence among states in such domains
as security, economic affairs, natural resources, environment, health, and
migration, requires an approach to conflict resolution that addresses the long-
term relationship between the parties. The desired relationship is not one
devoid of conflict, but one in which mechanisms of communication and
problem solving are readily available so that conflicts can be resolved before
escalating and becoming mutually destructive.

Conflicts may also arise, of course, between states and communities that
have a long history of peaceful coexistence or even alliance. Such conflicts
are usually relatively low in intensity and certainly not existential in character,
and they focus on specific issues – such as fishing rights and the sharing of
other resources or immigration policies (types of issues, incidentally, that
in less stable relationships may raise serious concerns about identity and
independence). In such instances, negotiations must aim to resolve the conflict
in a way that maintains or restores the earlier relationship, and reinforces
problem-solving mechanisms designed to address conflicts that may arise in
the future.

If the ultimate goal of negotiation is to transform (or restore) the relationship
between the parties, what kind of outcome must the negotiations seek? The

*sine qua non*, in my view, of a solution that can provide the foundation of a new relationship is that it addresses the fundamental needs and fears of both parties. Conflict is caused and escalated to a considerable degree by unfulfilled needs – not only material needs, but also such psychological needs as security, identity, recognition, autonomy, and a sense of justice. Parties in conflict, in pursuit of their own security and identity and related needs and interests, undermine and threaten the security and identity of the other. To resolve the conflict and begin to build a new relationship requires an agreement that satisfies the fundamental needs of both parties and reassures them that their fundamental fears are no longer warranted. In the Israeli-Palestinian case, for example, an agreement that meets these criteria must be based on mutual recognition of the other's national identity and on arrangements that assure each side's political independence, security, and survival.

The micro-process of interactive problem solving in workshop settings is specifically geared to exploring the overall shape of a solution that would meet such criteria. It is helped by the fact that such psychological needs as identity and security – in contrast to more material interests like territory and resources – are not inherently zero-sum in nature (Burton, 1988: 198). Although identity and security are often perceived in zero-sum terms in intense, protracted conflicts, it is often the case that each party's own security and identity are actually enhanced by agreements that meet the other's needs in these domains. Only integrative solutions of this kind enable the parties to move from a relationship in which each sees the other as blocking the fulfillment of its own needs to one in which they actively work toward promoting the fulfillment of both sets of needs.

An outcome that addresses the fundamental needs and fears of both parties will almost certainly be imperfect from each party's point of view. Neither party is likely to feel that all of its interests have been fully met or that the agreement has given it everything it justly deserves. Insofar as the agreement entails division of territory and apportionment of resources claimed by both sides, or curtailment of rights claimed by one side or the other (such as the right of return of refugees, the right to settle in the other's territory, and the right to exercise full sovereignty in military or foreign affairs), it will inevitably require a compromise shaped in heavy distributive bargaining. And, the outcome of such bargaining is likely to reflect the conditions on the ground and the relative power of the two parties. Granting the inevitability of compromise, however, it is essential that the negotiated agreement does not require either party to sacrifice its fundamental needs – the needs that it considers nonnegotiable – or to jeopardize its national existence.

Does the outcome described here meet the criteria for a *just* solution to the conflict? This is a legitimate and important question to ask when interactive

problem solving serves as the metaphor for negotiation. One of the hallmarks of the practice of interactive problem solving at the micro-level is the non-adversarial character of the approach. Without implying moral equivalence in the positions and actions of the two parties, interaction proceeds on the basis of the "no-fault" principle. No attempt is made to establish who is right and who is wrong in terms of legal or historical criteria (although participants are not discouraged from discussing their perceptions of legal and historical rights as part of the process of sharing their differing perspectives with each other). The presumption is that such a process will not yield ideas for a mutually satisfactory resolution of the conflict. While eschewing a juridical and historical approach to determining a just solution, interactive problem solving is not oblivious to the issue of justice. The search for a solution that addresses the fundamental needs and fears of both parties can be viewed as the operationalization of the quest for justice in this approach. To the extent that the solution is responsive to these needs and fears, it does justice to each party.

Since, even at best, the negotiated agreement involves compromises reflecting the strengths and weaknesses of both parties, it rarely conforms to absolute principles of justice. Negotiations in the spirit of interactive problem solving are well suited, however, to achievement of what Walid Khalidi (1979: 155) has called "pragmatic justice," which "takes cognizance of the imperatives of both equity and reality" and "embraces both the changes brought about by the evolution of time and the historical context in which the changes took place."

From an interactive problem-solving perspective, there is another way in which considerations of justice enter into negotiations. To provide a basis for changing the relationships between the two societies, an agreement must have wide support within each population so that a national consensus in favor of the new relationship can evolve (Kelman, 1993). Public support depends heavily on the perception that the negotiated agreement is just and fair. Insofar as the agreement addresses fundamental needs and fears, it is likely to be perceived as just. Indeed, in a protracted and bitter conflict, people's sense of justice – the feeling that at least minimal justice has been achieved – is itself one of the fundamental needs that the agreement must satisfy. Perception of justice also depends, however, on people's conviction that the process whereby the agreement was achieved was fair: that their side's concerns were seriously considered; that the other side did not take advantage of their leaders' weak bargaining position in order to impose an unacceptable agreement; that third parties did not interfere in the negotiations to their disadvantage. In other words, procedural justice interacts with substantive justice in people's satisfactions with the negotiated outcome.

People judge the fairness of the process on the basis of both what they know about the process itself and what they infer from the outcome. Two important criteria in assessing fairness are equality and reciprocity. In the micro-process of problem-solving workshops, these are two principles governing the interaction between the parties. Within the workshop context, the parties are equal in the sense that both parties' needs and fears are addressed and given equal weight in the deliberations, regardless of whatever asymmetries of power or of moral standing may characterize their relationship at the macro-level. Similarly, both in the discussions and in formulations of possible solutions, there is an emphasis on reciprocity in the sense that each party is urged to give to the other what it demands for itself – whether it is reassurance about its security, acknowledgment of its identity, or understanding of its political constraints.

At the macro-level, the negotiated agreement – though it is bound to be characterized by inequalities in outcome (in the Israeli-Palestinian case, for example, in the size of the territory or of the military force granted to the two parties) – can and ought to reflect a process incorporating the principles of equality and reciprocity. Equality is conveyed by indications that the needs and fears of both parties have been given serious and thoughtful consideration. Reciprocity – perhaps the most powerful foundation of a new relationship – is conveyed most clearly by the terms of the agreement itself: Each party extends to the other the same kind of recognition, respect, and reassurance that it receives from the other.

## Components and Procedures of Negotiation

To achieve the goals described in the preceding section, an interactive problem-solving framework focuses on several key components of the larger negotiating process and suggests relevant procedures for each. I will discuss four components of negotiation, recognizing that they overlap in a variety of ways: identification and analysis of the problem; joint shaping of ideas for solution; influencing the other side; and creating a supportive political environment.

### Identification and Analysis of the Problem

If negotiation is a process of interactive problem solving, then the first requirement is to determine the nature and the dimensions of the problem to be solved. Although identification and analysis of the problem clearly must precede attempts to find solutions, these steps are not confined to the beginning of the process. To be sure, they are central issues in the prenegotiation phase, but the nature of the problem must be reconsidered and reanalyzed throughout the negotiation, as new ideas for solution are being proposed and new

obstacles confronted. Indeed, an integral part of the effort to find a solution is to reframe the problem in a way that makes it amenable to solution.

Furthermore, the work of problem definition and analysis cannot be done entirely at the negotiating table itself. Much of it occurs in the prenegotiation phase, but even when official negotiations are already in progress, there are a variety of contexts in which official or unofficial representatives of the parties can jointly analyze the conflict and identify the problem that needs to be solved: formal and informal meetings of officials from the two sides, off-the-record conversations between negotiators, meetings of political leaders, academic seminars, dialogue groups, and – of course – problem-solving workshops and similar unofficial third-party efforts. The important point is that analysis is an essential part of the larger negotiation process, which must take place somewhere in the system. It can often be done more effectively outside of the negotiating room, as long as the products eventually find their way into the room.

One of the reasons the official negotiating room is not ideally suited to conflict analysis is that the process benefits from a setting that permits exploratory, non-committal interaction. Problem-solving workshops are explicitly designed to create such a setting, although they are by no means the only venue conducive to exploratory interaction. What is essential to a joint process of analysis is that the participants feel free to think out loud and to examine their own reactions, without worrying that they will be held accountable for every word they utter; and free to listen to each other, without feeling obligated to counter every point the other side makes. Through such open, exploratory communication, they can gain a better understanding of the causes of their conflict and of the processes that contribute to its escalation and perpetuation.

A key substantive focus of the analysis in which the parties need to engage is exploration of each other's perspective. Before they can find a mutually satisfactory solution to the conflict, they must gain some insight into the concerns, priorities, and constraints of the other side. The forces that drive the conflict can only be understood within the perspectives of the two parties and, furthermore, the differences in their perspectives contribute significantly to the escalation and perpetuation of the conflict. Somewhere in the negotiating process, therefore, there must be opportunities for the parties to engage in what Ralph White (1984) has called realistic empathy and to penetrate each other's perspective.

Of particular relevance in this context is analysis of the parties' needs and fears, since I have argued throughout this article that a negotiated solution must address the fundamental needs and fears of both parties if it is to serve as a basis for a stable, peaceful, cooperative relationship. As the first step in

the typical agenda of problem-solving workshops, we ask the parties to talk about "the fundamental needs that an agreement would have to satisfy and the fundamental fears that it would have to allay in order to be acceptable to their communities" (Kelman, 1992a: 73). We urge the parties not to debate these needs and fears, but to try to understand them from the other's perspective. Only when the two sets of needs are on the table and have been understood do we move on to discuss the possible shape of a solution that might be responsive to them. Pushing behind the parties' incompatible positions, and exploring the identity, security, and other psychological needs that underlie them, has the added advantage of suggesting possibilities for resolving the conflict, since (as I have already indicated) such needs are not inherently zero-sum in nature.

Another important substantive focus for analysis somewhere in the negotiation process are the conflict dynamics that are contributing to escalation and perpetuation of the conflict. Conflict-induced constraints on the processing of new information often cause the parties to underestimate the occurrence and possibility of change and therefore avoid negotiations, even when changing interests make negotiations desirable for both (Kelman, 1992a: 87). Enemy images are particularly resistant to disconfirming information, and tend to form into mirror images of enemy and self (Bronfenbrenner, 1961; White, 1965), which feed the escalatory dynamic of the conflict. Analysis of the effects of mirror images and other symmetries in the parties' perceptions, of the constraints on their information processing, and of the systematic differences in their perspectives, helps the parties differentiate the enemy image and overcome other barriers to negotiation (Kelman, 1987). Similarly, analysis of the structural and psychological commitments to the conflict, in the form of world views and vested interests that help to perpetuate the conflict (cf. Pruitt and Rubin, 1986), clarifies some of the major political obstacles to effective negotiation.

In sum, the metaphor of interactive problem solving suggests a joint, exploratory process of defining the problem and analyzing the causes of the conflict and the conditions that contribute to its escalation and perpetuation as a key component of negotiation. Such a process is essential to overcoming the obstacles to movement to the negotiating table and to productive negotiation once the table has been reached, and to specifying the issues that a mutually satisfactory negotiated outcome must address.

### Joint Shaping of Ideas for Solution

International negotiations must, in the end, produce a binding agreement. Such an agreement, in the current international system, will inevitably entail a compromise achieved to some degree through a process of power-based

bargaining, often spurred by pressures and incentives from powerful third parties at the regional or global level. If the agreement is to be lasting, however, and form the basis of a cooperative, mutually enhancing relationship – if, in other words, it is to achieve the goals spelled out earlier in this article – it must reflect the ideas for a mutually satisfactory solution emerging out of a process of problem-oriented interaction between the parties themselves.

Just like the process of problem identification and conflict analysis, joint efforts to shape ideas for conflict resolution must take place at all stages of the negotiation process, starting with prenegotiation and continuing through implementation of the negotiated agreement. Once again, this is a process that takes place not only around the negotiating table, but in a variety of other arenas – official and unofficial, public and private – suitable for the joint development of ideas that can be fed into the official negotiating process. Problem-solving workshops represent a particularly appropriate arena for this purpose, because joint thinking about the overall shape of a desirable solution and about fruitful ways of framing specific issues to be resolved is central to their agenda.

For this particular component of negotiation, it is especially important to have a setting in which participants can engage in exploratory, non-committal interaction. They must be free to brainstorm, to play with ideas, to generate imaginative scenarios, to explore a range of hypothetical options, and to come up with creative ways of solving refractory problems. The academic context, utilized in problem-solving workshops, is almost tailor-made for this kind of interaction. It is a place devoted to the free exchange of ideas and non-committal, "purely academic" discussions. It is also governed by its own alternative set of norms favoring "open discussion, attentive listening to opposing views, and an analytical approach," to counteract "the polemical, accusatory, and legalistic approach that conflict norms tend to promote" (Kelman, 1992a: 74). In contrast, the official negotiating context impedes the playful generation of ideas and the consideration of hypothetical options, because the participants enact representative roles and the products of their deliberations are binding. Nevertheless, it should be possible to find ways of introducing into the official process itself occasional "time-out" periods, when negotiators can engage in a non-committal, off-the-record process of brainstorming and exchange of ideas.

Although the exploration of solutions, as already noted, takes place at all stages of negotiation, at any given time it is important to place this process within a logical sequence. Thus, in problem-solving workshops, we generally follow an agenda that starts with a discussion of the two sides' needs and fears, then moves to joint thinking about the shape of an overall solution (or ways of resolving a specific issue), then turns to a discussion of political and

psychological constraints that make it difficult to implement such solutions, and finally considers ways of overcoming these impediments. It is important not to talk about solutions before the problem has been defined – before the parties understand each other's fundamental needs and fears, so that they can jointly generate ideas that are responsive to these needs and fears. Similarly, it is important not to dwell on constraints before the participants have explored ideas for solutions that they find desirable. Premature focusing on constraints inhibits creative problem solving by dismissing ideas as politically unacceptable without exploring the possibility of shaping them into a solution that at least the individuals around the table find mutually satisfactory.

The starting point for generating new ideas for conflict resolution is often a redefinition of the conflict or a reframing of specific issues in ways that make them amenable to integrative, win/win solutions. Such redefinition or reframing flows from an analysis that, as mentioned above, pushes behind the parties' incompatible positions to identify the needs that underlie these positions. Focusing on underlying needs – just like focusing on underlying interests rather than opposed positions (cf. Follett's essay on constructive conflict, 1942, as well as Fisher and Ury, 1981) – enables the parties to search for solutions that are unlikely to emerge from positional bargaining. The task, of course, is to come up with ideas for solution that satisfy the fundamental needs and allay the fundamental fears of both parties.

In the philosophy of interactive problem solving, the process of generating such integrative solutions must be interactive. Once the fundamental concerns of both parties have been identified and understood, the parties engage in joint thinking about solutions that address both sets of needs and fears. The hallmark of joint thinking (see Rouhana and Kelman, 1994) is that, as the parties work together on shaping ideas for solution, each is expected to think actively about arrangements that would be satisfactory to the other, not only to itself. In this spirit, joint thinking is governed by the principle of equality and reciprocity and it tends to assess ideas for solution in terms of their implications for the nature of the relationship between the parties.

I have argued that premature focus on constraints impedes the process of brainstorming and generating new ideas. However, once the parties have formed some common ground on the shape of a desirable solution and on the principles that should govern it, they must address the question of how such ideas can be made acceptable within their communities, fed into the official negotiations, translated into formal agreements, and ultimately implemented. At this stage, the political and psychological constraints that are likely to stand in the way of these solutions must be subjected to systematic analysis. Once these constraints on both sides have been identified and understood, the parties are ready to enter into a new round of joint thinking, focusing on ways

of overcoming these constraints, including ways in which the two parties can support each other in these efforts. The exploration of constraints enables the parties to reshape their ideas for solution so that they will be responsive to the political realities as well as the needs and fears of both sides.

The unique value of solutions that emerge out of the genuine interaction between the parties themselves is one of the central tenets of interactive problem solving. To recall what I wrote at the beginning of this article, such solutions are more responsive to the needs and fears of the parties; the parties feel more committed to them; and the process of generating these ideas in itself contributes to building a new relationship between the parties.

### Influencing the Other Side
Negotiation as such is a process of mutual influence in that both sides attempt to induce the negotiating partner to make concessions, to behave in ways that advance their interests, and to sign an agreement that accrues to their advantage. Moreover, influence is exerted not only in shaping the outcome of the negotiation, but also in managing the negotiation process: in inducing the other to come to the table, to stay at the table, to negotiate seriously and in good faith while at the table, to develop commitment to the negotiated agreement, and to implement the agreement conscientiously. Third parties also exert influence on one or both parties to come to the table, to make the kinds of concessions that are required for agreement, to sign an agreement, and to live up to the terms of that agreement. The typical influence process – whether used by the parties themselves or by third parties – entails a mixture of threats and inducements, although the balance between negative and positive incentives varies considerably from case to case.

Conceiving of negotiation as interactive problem solving does not negate the central role of interests in negotiation: Both parties come to the table in pursuit of their own interests and seek to influence the other to their own advantage. But the metaphor of interactive problem solving has implications for the kinds of influence processes that are deemed most relevant and effective. If the conflict is a joint problem that needs to be solved, then influence requires more than the use of a party's power advantage to squeeze out of the other as many concessions as possible. It requires working toward an agreement that meets the other's needs, elicits the other's commitment, and opens the way to a new relationship.

First, an interactive problem-solving approach implies a preference for positive over negative incentives. There is considerable evidence for the view that parties may be driven to the negotiating table by a mutually hurting stalemate, which makes negotiations more attractive than continuing the status quo (Touval and Zartman, 1985: 16; Zartman and Berman, 1982). This view

suggests that one way of inducing the other party to negotiate is to increase the painfulness of the status quo through the use of threats, military pressure, or other coercive means. But reliance on such negative incentives has many liabilities. They may push the parties to the table, but do not necessarily make for productive negotiations once they get to the table; indeed, they often have the opposite effect. Moreover, exclusive reliance on coercive means makes it less likely that the agreement will be mutually satisfactory and durable, and that it will contribute to transforming the relationship between the parties. Negative incentives, thus, must be at least complemented by positive ones (cf. Zartman and Aurik, 1991).

Zartman has spoken, in this connection, about the importance of *mutual enticement*. I would add the central importance of *mutual reassurance*. Parties engaged in conflict – particularly in existential conflict – are afraid to move to the negotiating table and to make concessions at the table, even when the status quo has become increasingly painful and they recognize that a negotiated agreement is in their interest. They are afraid that negotiations may lead to a series of ever more costly concessions that will ultimately jeopardize their security, their national identity, and their very existence. To advance the negotiating process under such circumstances, it is more important to reduce the parties' fear than to increase their pain. Problem-solving workshops provide one arena where parties can explore ways of providing mutual reassurance through acknowledgments, symbolic gestures, and confidence-building measures that are meaningful to the receiver yet affordable to the giver.

There is a second implication of an interactive problem-solving approach that goes beyond the preference for positive over negative inducements: The crucial analytic component of interactive problem solving provides a basis for selecting the *types* of positive inducements that are most likely to be effective. To generate mutual enticement and mutual reassurance is not simply a matter of introducing whatever reward or confidence-building measure happens to come to mind. It calls for actions that address the fundamental needs and fears of the other party. Thus, the effectiveness of an influence strategy based on the exchange of positive incentives and reassurances depends on *responsiveness* to the other's concerns: The parties influence each other by actively exploring the ways in which they can help meet each other's needs and allay each other's fears. Responsiveness also means exploring ways in which the parties can help each other overcome the constraints within their societies that may limit their capacity to take the actions that each wants the other to take. The effectiveness of a strategy of mutual enticement and reassurance also depends on careful adherence to the principle of *reciprocity*. One-sided responsiveness cannot sustain itself for long.[3] Moreover, reciprocity itself is a significant source of

mutual reassurance, in that it signals to the parties that their concessions will not be simply pocketed by the other and thus leave them worse off than they were before.

An influence strategy characterized by responsiveness and reciprocity has important advantages from a long-term point of view. It does not only elicit specific desired behaviors from the other party, but it contributes to the development of working trust and of a valued relationship between the parties. The relationship becomes an incentive in its own right, in that the parties will be inclined to live up to each other's expectations in order to maintain and extend their new relationship. In terms of my distinction, in earlier writings (Kelman, 1961; Kelman and Hamilton, 1989), between three processes of social influence – compliance, identification, and internalization – a strategy of responsiveness and reciprocity can be said to induce change at the level of identification: The parties are likely to change not only their public behavior, but also their private beliefs, albeit maintenance of these new beliefs depends on continuing salience of the relationship. By contrast, a strategy that uses promises and rewards (and confidence-building measures) essentially as "bribes," without reference to the recipient's underlying needs and fears, is likely to induce change at the level of compliance, i.e., a relatively unstable change in public behavior without accompanying changes in private beliefs. In this respect, the effect of random positive incentives is similar to that of negative incentives; they do, however, create a more conducive atmosphere for negotiation and a greater potential for building a new relationship.

A third implication of interactive problem solving is that it provides the potential for change at the level of internalization, in terms of my three-process scheme, i.e., changes in behavior and beliefs that are congruent with the parties' own values and are relatively stable and enduring (cf. Rubin 1991: 268) . Negotiations characterized by an analytical, problem-solving, and interactive approach are conducive to agreements that are inherently satisfactory to the parties because they meet their fundamental needs, and that are lasting because they create a sense of ownership and commitment. The gradual transformation of the relationship between the parties in the course of such negotiations not only enhances the negotiating process, by encouraging responsiveness and reciprocity, but is also a key element of a mutually satisfactory, stable negotiating outcome.

### Creating a Supportive Political Environment

To enter negotiations and to make the concessions required to reach an agreement, particularly in deep-rooted conflicts, political leaders must have wide support within their populations. Mobilization of such support, in turn, depends on a political atmosphere that is favorable to negotiations: Political

leaders themselves, important segments of the political elite in the society, and the general population must have the sense that a negotiated settlement of the conflict is feasible, that it is in the society's interest to pursue it, that it will not jeopardize the society's security and independence, and that the other side can be trusted to negotiate in good faith and to deliver on its commitments. Thus, creating a favorable atmosphere within and between the parties and mobilizing support in both populations is an essential part of the negotiation process.

The metaphor of interactive problem solving suggests three general ways in which the larger negotiation process can create a supportive political environment: by fostering a sense of possibility, by providing mutual reassurance, and by encouraging a shift in the political discourse between the parties from power politics to mutual accommodation.

Interactive problem solving fosters a sense of possibility – a belief that a peaceful solution is attainable and that negotiation of such a solution is feasible – by focusing on the occurrence of change and the conditions for promoting further change, particularly through the parties' own actions. I have written, in this connection, about an attitude of "strategic optimism," which deliberately seeks to "promote change by actively searching for and accentuating whatever realistic possibilities for peaceful resolution of the conflict might be on the horizon" and constructs "best-case" scenarios to balance the "self-fulfilling prophecies of escalation created by the pessimistic expectations and the worst-case scenarios" that parties in conflict often favor (Kelman, 1992a: 89).

A number of ways of fostering a sense of possibility are suggested by the micro-process of problem-solving workshops. Perhaps the most obvious is learning to differentiate the enemy image (Kelman, 1987). As the monolithic and totally demonic view of the enemy camp begins to break down, the parties discover potential negotiating partners: They learn that there is someone to talk to on the other side and something to talk about. They can gradually develop a working trust, based on the recognition that there are at least some elements on the other side who are committed to the search for a peaceful solution. With increasing understanding of the other's perspective, they learn to differentiate the positive and negative components of the other's ideology, recognizing that the other side is dedicated to the achievement of certain positive goals, and not merely to the project of destroying their own side. This recognition makes negotiation a reasonable option and enables the parties to develop a shared vision of a desirable future, "in which fulfillment for one people does not presuppose destruction for the other" (Kelman, 1987: 362).

A second and crucial ingredient of a political environment conducive to negotiation is mutual reassurance, which I have already stressed in the dis-

cussion of influence processes. Domestic opponents of negotiation typically capitalize on fears and concerns that are widespread within the population. In the Israeli-Palestinian case, for example, and in other deep-rooted conflicts, these fears focus on security, group identity, and indeed the continuing existence of the nation. To gain public support for the negotiations, leaders must persuade the population that the process they are engaged in is safe and will not jeopardize the nation's future. Their success in doing so depends heavily on the words and deeds of the other side.

Thus, to move negotiations forward, the parties must work together to identify actions and statements on each side that would offer reassurance to the other's public. In our experience, this has been a central part of the joint effort undertaken in problem-solving workshops. Confidence-building measures are one important category of actions that have the potential of providing mutual reassurance, although their selection and presentation need to be discussed by the two parties in advance if they are to have the desired impact. Otherwise, it may well happen that a measure genuinely intended to reassure the other may be discounted or may even have the opposite effect. Symbolic gestures can often make a major difference in providing the reassurance that makes negotiations attractive, as was dramatically evidenced by President Sadat's 1977 trip to Jerusalem and – within that trip – by his round of handshakes with Israeli officials upon arrival at Ben Gurion Airport (cf. Kelman, 1978) and by his acknowledgment of Israeli concerns and views of history in his address to the Knesset. Mutual acknowledgments – of each other's basic humanity, national identity, authentic ties to the land, historical traumas, sense of injustice, genuine fears, or conciliatory moves – are another significant source of reassurance that can help create a momentum for stalled negotiations (Kelman, 1992b).

Finally, the metaphor of interactive problem solving stresses the need for a shift in the nature of the political discourse between conflicting parties in order to create a political environment conducive to negotiations (and, indeed, to constructive international relationships in general): a shift in emphasis from power politics to mutual accommodation. Such a new discourse can contribute to creating a sense of possibility, to providing mutual reassurance, and to other ways of making negotiations more attractive to the public. Paradoxically, however, political leaders' need to gain public support for negotiations often predisposes them to a style of discourse (as well as action) that represents power politics at its worst. In order to neutralize the domestic opposition to negotiations, they may go out of their way to sound tough, to minimize the concessions they have made and exaggerate those of the other side, to declare certain issues as absolutely non-negotiable, and to boast of their negotiating achievements at the expense of the other. Thus, in the interest of

increasing support for the negotiations on their own side, they may decrease public support on the other side. They may arouse renewed resentment, suspicion, and pessimism, and invite reciprocal toughness from the other side's leadership.

Once again, it is clear that the choice of public discourse on both sides needs to be explored interactively as an integral part of the larger negotiating process. Such exploration is based on the awareness that any public communication has at least two audiences, and hence the need of the parties to sensitize each other to how a given statement is likely to be heard and interpreted on the other side. The kinds of interactions that we have observed in problem-solving workshops can contribute to the development of a deescalatory language, based on sensitivity to words that frighten and humiliate and, conversely, words that reassure and give hope to the other. Moreover, they can help introduce into the general political discourse a binocular orientation that views the issues from the perspective of both parties, an attitude of responsiveness to each other's concerns and constraints, and an emphasis on reciprocity in the process and outcome of negotiations.

## Integrating the Perspective of Interactive Problem Solving in the Negotiation Process

The micro-process of interactive problem solving, as exemplified by problem-solving workshops, derives from a particular view of conflict resolution at the macro-level. In turn, our experience with the micro-process has suggested a potentially valuable perspective on the macro-process, in the form of operational goals and negotiating procedures that can help to make negotiations more productive and more conducive to a long-term peaceful and cooperative relationship between the conflicting parties. How can this perspective be integrated into the larger negotiation process? I suggest three vehicles for doing so: by systematically building special opportunities for interactive problem solving at the micro-level (such as problem-solving workshops) into the larger negotiating process, by bringing the perspective of interactive problem solving into the negotiating room itself, and by bringing the perspective of interactive problem solving to the realms of policy formation and public discourse.

### Creating Special Arenas for Micro-level Interactive Problem Solving as an Integral Part of a Larger Negotiation Process

A realistic conception of the diplomatic process recognizes it as a complex mix of official and unofficial, formal and informal, bilateral and multilateral processes. Problem-solving workshops and other opportunities for unofficial,

informal interaction between the parties provide special arenas in which some of the essential work of negotiation can be carried out. They need to be conceived as an integral part of the larger process, playing a systematic role in anticipation and alongside of the official negotiations. Decision makers could enhance the usefulness of such unofficial efforts by encouraging them and paying serious attention to the ideas they produce – without, however, seeking to control them. The independence of these efforts from the official process is essential to their special contribution in providing a private, confidential setting, conducive to non-committal exploration of ideas. The potential usefulness of such efforts would also be enhanced by the development of institutional mechanisms that would be available to parties in conflict looking for informal, non-committal opportunities to advance the negotiating process. Institutionalization, however, requires great care to avoid compromising the professional and ethical standards, the confidentiality of the process, and the overall credibility of the third party, on which the success of this work depends.

The most obvious contribution of problem-solving workshops or similar unofficial arenas for exploratory interaction is at the pre-negotiation stage, where they can help create the conditions for initiating official negotiations. They can also play a useful role, however, once negotiations have officially started, as the experience with our continuing workshop for politically influential Israelis and Palestinians demonstrated (Rouhana and Kelman, 1994). As negotiations proceed from stage to stage and from issue to issue, there is often a continuing need for "pre-negotiation," in the sense of analysis, exploration, issue framing, and creating political support, in order to overcome new obstacles, maintain momentum, and enhance the productivity of the next step in the negotiations. Thus, for example, the joint working group on Israeli-Palestinian relations that Nadim Rouhana and I organized in the wake of the September 1993 Oslo agreement is now focusing on some of the difficult political issues – such as Israeli settlements, Palestinian refugees, Jerusalem, and Palestinian self-determination – that have been postponed to the final-status negotiations (Kelman, 1995: 25-26). With an eye to the future, long-term relationship between the two societies, the group is exploring options for dealing with these issues and new ways of framing them so as to make them more amenable to negotiation. The unofficial framework allows the parties to explore these issues interactively at a time when they are explicitly excluded from the negotiating table.

Problem-solving workshops and similar activities can play a systematic role in a process of successive approximations on the road to official negotiations, whereby "the parties initiate communication at a level and in a context that represents a relatively low degree of commitment... and gradually move

toward official negotiations, culminating in a binding agreement. The relatively low degree of initial commitment should enable parties to accept a correspondingly lower degree of reassurance as the condition for talking with one another" (Kelman, 1982: 67). As the level of mutual reassurance increases, the parties become able to communicate at correspondingly higher levels of commitment and, ultimately, at the official level. The Oslo process that led to the Israeli-Palestinian agreement – though it took place from the beginning with some official backing – represents the potential of such a process of successive approximations: It started with relatively non-committal exploration in a confidential setting, which gradually led to the development of working trust and to increasingly higher levels of commitment.

*Bringing the Perspective of Interactive Problem Solving into the Negotiating Room Itself*
Despite the constraints under which official negotiators operate, there are many ways in which the perspective of interactive problem solving can inform the official process. Most important, it can provide a conceptual framework for the negotiations – a framework that takes mutual responsiveness, reciprocity, and relationship building as central criteria in framing the issues, setting the goals, and defining a desirable outcome for the negotiation. Furthermore, even in the negotiation room, the parties can engage in the kind of joint analysis that is an essential component of interactive problem solving, without committing themselves to any particular formula for resolving the issues under negotiation. Thus, it should be possible to overcome the inhibitions of the official setting sufficiently to enable the negotiators to share their differing perspectives, to learn about each other's fundamental needs and fears, and to gain some insight into the escalatory dynamic of the conflict in which their two communities are engaged.

The elements of interactive problem solving that are probably most difficult to bring into the negotiating room are those that call for joint exploration, in an open and experimental format, of ideas for shaping a mutually acceptable solution to the conflict or resolving specific issues, as well as ideas for mutual enticement, mutual reassurance, or helping each other to mobilize public support for the peace process. Negotiators are concerned about the possibility that, in such exploratory discussions, they may go beyond their instructions, prematurely reveal areas of flexibility, make concessions that they may later regret, or weaken their bargaining positions in other ways. Nevertheless, skilled and experienced diplomats have always found ways of informally exploring ideas with each other, generally outside of the negotiating room itself – during coffee breaks, receptions, or walks in the wood.

It should be possible to build opportunities for such discussions explicitly into the official process, knowing that they cannot completely overcome the

constraints of the setting. Thus, negotiators might take time out from their formal debate and go off-record to engage in brainstorming, joint scenario building, or free exchange of ideas. Another possibility is to delegate certain problems to small sub-teams of negotiators, who could discuss them in a more informal, exploratory way, and thus reframe them for subsequent debate around the official table. Finally, it may be possible for the negotiators to farm out certain problems that require a more exploratory approach to outside channels – such as problem-solving workshops – to be discussed, reframed, and then brought back to the negotiating room. In this case, an unofficial mechanism would be used specifically to create inputs into the official process, based on interactive problem solving.

The likelihood that the perspective of interactive problem solving would be brought into the negotiating room, explicitly or implicitly, would be greatly enhanced if the concepts and methods of interactive problem solving were included as an integral part of the training of diplomats. Exposure to problem-solving workshops and, ideally, the opportunity to participate in a workshop – as a member of one of the parties or of the third-party team – would further enhance the value of the learning experience. I am not proposing that all diplomats must acquire the skills of a workshop facilitator, but general familiarity with this approach would sensitize them to the social-psychological dynamics of conflict and to the possibilities for resolving conflicts by addressing the needs and fears of the contending parties.

*Bringing the Perspective of Interactive Problem Solving to the Realms of Policy Formation and Public Discourse*
Apart from its effect on the micro-processes of conflict resolution at the official and unofficial levels, the perspective of interactive problem solving can potentially have a broader impact on the formulation and communication of the policies that the negotiations are designed to serve. Its impact depends on the extent to which the goals and procedures of interactive problem solving have entered into the way in which decision makers, political elites, and the media think and speak about conflict and conflict resolution – in general and in the particular case. The perspective of interactive problem solving has special relevance to two aspects of the larger negotiation process discussed in the section on components and procedures of negotiation: first, the political actors' conceptions of how best to exert influence on the other side – to persuade the other to come to the table and to make the desired concessions at the table – and the actual influence processes they employ to these ends; and, second, their conception of how to mobilize support for the negotiations in their own population and on the other side, and the type of discourse they employ in communicating to these publics.

I have already spelled out some of the implications of an interactive problem-solving model for these components of the larger negotiation process. Very briefly, the perspective of interactive problem solving suggests a shift in emphasis in the current practice of international negotiation with respect to the type of influence that the parties exert and the type of discourse they engage in as the negotiations proceed. Influence strategy needs to shift away from its heavy reliance on negative inducements, such as deterrence and compellence, toward greater emphasis on mutual reassurance and other positive incentives. Political discourse needs to shift away from its extensive resort to power politics toward greater emphasis on mutual accommodation. The key elements of an influence strategy and a political discourse that embody the perspective of interactive problem solving are responsiveness to the needs, fears, and constraints of the other, and rigorous adherence to the principle of reciprocity.

The shifts in emphasis that are proposed here have several important advantages for the process and outcome of negotiations. They contribute to a growing sense of security and a working trust between the parties as the negotiations proceed. They reduce the likelihood of serious setbacks in the negotiations in the form of military escalation or renewed suspicion and despair, which may well result from coercive means of influence or the use of threatening and humiliating language. They make it easier for the parties to cope with the realities of their interdependence. And, most important, they are conducive to an agreement that addresses the fundamental needs and fears of the parties and thus provides the basis for transforming their relationship – for developing a new relationship characterized by a stable, long-term peace, and a pattern of cooperation that promotes the security, well-being, and development of both societies.

## Notes

1. More often than not, conflict and negotiation are multilateral. For the sake of simplicity, however, this analysis is confined to two parties.
2. Our work is carried out under the auspices of the Program on International Conflict Analysis and Resolution at the Harvard Center for International Affairs. I gratefully acknowledge the support of our current action research program from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Nathan Cummings Foundation, the CRB Foundation, and the US Information Agency.
3. President Sadat, with his trip to Jerusalem in November 1977, initiated a process of mutual enticement and mutual reassurance through a strategy of *unilateral reward* (Kelman, 1985), but it was based on the expectation (partly prenegotiated) of Israeli reciprocation.

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