Institute for Conflict Analysis
and Resolution

Occasional Paper 1

On the Need for Conflict Prevention

by
John W. Burton
Distinguished Senior Fellow

George Mason University

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About the Author

John W. Burton, B.A., Ph.D., D.Sc., began his career in the Australian public service, becoming permanent head of the Australian Foreign Office in 1947 and high commissioner for Ceylon in 1951. After his retirement from government service, he pursued a distinguished career in research, writing, and teaching at the University of London (1963-1978), in the course of which he became director of the Centre of the Analysis of Conflict in Canterbury. Dr. Burton was professor at the University of Kent from 1979 until 1982, and then served as director of the Conflict Resolution Project of the Center for International Development at the University of Maryland. He joined the faculty of the Center for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University in 1985.

John Burton's career has combined scholarship with practice in unusual degree. As a practitioner of conflict resolution, he has participated in numerous problem-solving workshops and international facilitations, including efforts to resolve conflict in Ceylon, Cyprus, Northern Ireland, the Falklands-Malvinas Islands, and Lebanon. As a theoretician, he has written some 15 books, the best known of which are *Systems, States, Diplomacy and Rules* (1968); *Conflict and Communication* (1969); *World Society* (1972); *Deviance, Terrorism and War* (1972); *Dear Survivors* (1982); and *Global Conflict* (1984). His latest published work is *Resolving Deep-Rooted Conflict: A Handbook* (1987). He is principal author and editor of a four-volume series, published by Macmillan in 1990, that surveys the entire field of conflict resolution.

Dr. Burton's pathfinding work in the theory of international relations has been recognized by a book of essays written in his honor, *Conflict in World Society* (1984), edited by Michael Banks. He is widely considered to be one of the principal founders of the emerging field of conflict resolution. As Professor Herbert C. Kelman of Harvard has written, "John continues to innovate at all levels, challenging old assumptions, modes of thinking, and decision-making models, and proposing new paradigms, methods, and institutional arrangements. In doing so, he has established a unique place for himself among scholars concerned with the understanding and improvement of international relations. His work is a living organism—an open system—that allows others to draw on, to build on, and indeed to criticize the novel insights and imaginative formulations it contains."

About the Institute

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

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

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

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

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

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

Foreword

Dear Friends:

I want to tell you a few things about John Burton that you may not
already know. You know that he is probably the outstanding pioneer in
the field of conflict resolution, a man who surely deserves the title of
founder of that field. You know, too, that he is a ruthless critic of con-
temporary work in conflict resolution, including his own; that he is as cre-
ative and challenging a thinker now as he has ever been. I want to focus
here on three influences on John's thinking and character that I think
may help you to understand him better.

First is the fact that he is Australian. A geographical tendency to see
things from the point of view of the underdog? Say rather that his per-
spective is that of one who came to adulthood and began his career in a
nation as far removed from the center of imperial power as from the op-
pressed periphery. You will recall that John convened a "Middle Pow-
ers" conference several years ago to suggest that those nations that are
neither the richest and most powerful nor the poorest and most ex-
ploited could play a natural mediating role in the world. John has always
been far enough from the center to understand what it means to be an
outsider, and he has often been close enough to power to understand its
uses and abuses—to understand, in fact, the essential irrelevance of coer-
cive power in solving the problems that produce violent conflict.

Second, John was the youngest head of the Australian Foreign Of-
fice in that nation's history, a post that he held with great distinction
from 1947 until 1951. In that capacity, he was his country's delegate at a
series of historic conferences that effectively decolonized the British Em-
pire and established the United Nations. He went on from this to be-
come high commissioner in Ceylon and to witness firsthand the type of
violent ethnic conflict that he has been so determined to resolve.

What you may not know is that at the end of John's public career in
the Australian Foreign Office, he endured an experience of the sort that
destroyed many of the most creative minds of his generation. To put it
very briefly, John declined to authorize Australian participation in the
Cold War, believing instead that his country's role was to help the Great
Powers settle their differences, not to intensify world polarization with
its concomitants, the nuclear-arms race, and the recolonization of large

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portions of the earth. For this, he was subjected to a merciless campaign of McCarthyite slander and vilification by those who could not distinguish between peacemaking and appeasement.

And so he left political office for academia. There were some, no doubt, who hoped that he would retire gracefully to a comfortable academic post in one of those institutions that the late Abbie Hoffman rightfully called "bastions of rest." Their disappointment is our delight, for rather than retiring in any sense of the word, John continued his battle on new terrain.

The third great influence I want to mention is his fight, which has not yet ended, to establish conflict resolution as an autonomous discipline, resting on a theoretical basis of its own and bridging the gap between theorizing and policy-making.

In England, then in the United States, John not only founded the first academic centers for the study of conflict resolution but wrote a series of great books, of which the best known are probably *Conflict and Communication, World Society, Global Conflict,* and *Deviance, Terrorism and War.*

But John has never been satisfied just to write books. His campaign to create and define conflict resolution has been fought on two fronts.

The first front lies in the profession he helped to create. John's struggle here has been to establish conflict resolution as a genuine alternative—not just an adjunct—both to coercion as a method of settling disputes and to traditional forms of negotiation and mediation. One key to his thinking during the past few years has been the distinction between "settlement of conflict," which merely establishes a truce between warring parties by negotiating a compromise between them, and "conflict resolution," which terminates conflict by discovering and eliminating its fundamental causes. This distinction has driven John to the conclusion that, in order to become practitioners of genuine conflict resolution, we must develop a theory capable of illuminating conflict at its deepest and most intractable level: a theory of basic human needs. You will not be surprised to learn that this human-needs theory has already become an academic storm center.

The other battlefront, perhaps the one most germane to tonight's lecture, is John's struggle to make the theory of conflict resolution relevant to politics in the most practical sense, to foster the adoption of conflict-resolution concepts and processes in dealing with the violent conflicts that most plague today's world—in particular, deep-rooted con-

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flicts between racial, religious, ethnic, national, and class-based identity groups.

Now John has been working on this for some time, and although his telephone rings frequently with requests for advice and entreaties to consider intervening in this conflict situation or that, the world has not yet adopted conflict resolution as an alternative to other methods of resolving disputes. Lesser men might be satisfied, in this situation, to continue preaching their particular gospel to the converted while cursing the ignorance of the philistines. But John Burton has consistently acted on the premise that, if the world does not immediately adopt his ideas, the fault is not necessarily the world's. The problem may lie with the ideas, or at least with the way in which they are expressed. John has always viewed incomplete success as an invitation to get back to work.

And so, once again, the lights burn late into the night on Forest Avenue. John's word processor hums at top capacity, close to overload, and his colleagues and students get ready for another new departure, another challenge to accepted modes of thought, including those accepted a year or two ago by John Burton himself.

Now we must get ready. We are privileged this evening to hear another challenge—to receive, if you will, another wake-up call—from our friend, teacher, colleague, and, in the most essential respects, our model: Dr. John W. Burton.

Lynch Lecture on Conflict Resolution
Address by
John W. Burton
Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution
George Mason University
April 26, 1989

On the Need for Conflict Prevention

Introduction

For many years Dr. Edwin and Mrs. Helen Lynch, endowers of the
Vernon M. and Minnie I. Lynch Chair in Conflict Resolution, have been
most supportive of this Center. Dr. Lynch and other members of an Advi-
sory Board; the chairman Douglas Adams; the tireless organizer Drucie
Cumbie, whose husband, Steve, has now endowed the Drucie French
Cumbie Chair in Conflict Resolution in her honor; and others who came
regularly to monthly meetings have, along with President Johnson, acted
largely on the basis of faith, asking few questions about direction and phi-
losophy involved in this new *a-disciplinary* study of conflict and its resolu-
tion.

I wish this evening to promote further the valuable interaction that
this Center enjoys with members of its Advisory Board, the university ad-
ministration, and its other supporters, and to invite observations on a
fundamental issue: the evolving mission of the Center.

From Resolution to Prevention

The Mission Statement issued by the Center two years ago refers to
an "analytical problem-solving process." The focus was clearly on the *res-
olution* of conflict, making a clear distinction between problem-solving
resolution and coercive *settlement*.

The subject of my talk this evening is "On the Need for Conflict Pre-
vention." I wish to suggest for your consideration that the Center must
now, because of developments within nations and in the world society,
and also because of developments in the field of conflict studies, move to-
ward an emphasis on *prevention*. By prevention I mean eliminating the
sources, removing the causes of conflict, and most of all promoting the
conditions that eliminate an environment of conflict. Resolving one case
of domestic violence, gang warfare, ethnic conflict, or confrontation with
another nation does nothing to prevent the next incident. The source of

and reasons for problems must be tackled if such conflicts are not to occur.

I pause here to draw attention to a troublesome and significant problem of language. We have no word that describes the kind of prevention to which I have referred. The word "prevention" implies containment and settlement by means of deterrence, coercion, or legal power. The absence of a suitable word reflects the fact that prevention of an undesired event by removing its causes has not been a focus of attention of societies or of scholars. This reluctance, or failure, over the years to give prevention a high priority goes to the root of the disturbing problems societies and civilizations now face. Societies usually react to adverse conditions only after it is too late to do much about them. We are oriented toward remedial measures rather than prevention by dealing with sources of a problem. As a consequence, "prevention" tends to mean tying the dog up, putting more police on the streets, incarcerations, killing the potential terrorist, subjugating the perceived enemy. If I had been able to find that word, it would have been in the title "On the Need for Conflict...." What is the word I want? We probably need to invent a term, and *"provention"* has been suggested to me. I will be using this invention this evening.

The Problem of Prediction

Provention—doing something about sources before they cause conflict—presupposes prediction. It could be that our inability to predict is our main problem in conflict provention. Prediction is a general problem of decision making that affects corporate and official policies, and decision making at all levels. In practice, prediction tends to be based on expectations of behaviors consistent with the requirements of the system in which they occur, not on any adequate understanding of behavior. Employees are expected to be "rational" and not to strike if a strike is likely to threaten the company and, therefore, their futures. We term "irrational" the behaviors of some national leaders if these behaviors do not accord with our norms and expectations. False predictions lead to self-defeating policies, ranging from the collapse of major companies to false interpretations of data by intelligence agencies to involvement in wars that cannot be won. What kind of prediction do we require for the provention of conflict?

Probabilistic Prediction

There is a kind of statistical prediction on the basis of past experiences. For example, experiences of ethnic conflicts could predict future conflicts in similar circumstances; experiences of past car accidents are a

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means of predicting future ones. Authorities make such predictions constantly. Prior to a political protest or political anniversary, they make the necessary police and military preparations to prevent trouble.

This probabilistic-type of prediction based on experience leads merely to avoidance of events anticipated on the basis of past experiences. It is generally the basis of containment policies and remedial measures. It does not require any explanation of conflict. It is irrelevant to the unknown future. It does not depend on or provide any insights that could lead to prevention.

Games Without End

There is another type of prediction that takes place within what Osgood in 1962 described as "games without end." Games without end are thought systems and the policies they promote that are based on self-fulfilling assumptions and prophecies.

There is the strategic game in which deterrent strategies of peace-through-strength lead to constant increases in arms levels until resource scarcities provoke arms-control agreements. Arms-control negotiations apparently require increased arms as bargaining tools in negotiation. After an arms-control agreement, the reduced arms are then compensated for by modernization within any new conditions agreed. The basic predictive assumptions of the game—that there is constant threat of aggression by others, and that such threats can be deterred by threat—are not questioned. The extent of the threat and the success of deterrence are evaluated by those within the game, thus ensuring its continuity. So there it is—a game without end, at least until it becomes apparent that the costs and failures of deterrence have led to conditions that render domestic conditions a more serious threat to the nation than does any external threat. A game without end is a self-fulfilling, and therefore misleading, basis for prediction.

Analytical Prediction

When we look to prediction as a step toward the provention, rather than merely the avoidance or prevention of conflict, we are involved in discovering the causal factors that must be dealt with. The knowledge of what to look for and the discovery of what conditions provoke the behaviors to be provented require *an adequate theory of human and societal behaviors*, including, in our case, a reliable theory of conflict and conflictual behaviors.

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Traditional Assumptions About Human Behaviors

I wish to argue that, despite the obvious difficulties, reliable prediction of conditions that provoke conflict is now possible. This is so because we are now shifting from a theory of behavior that led in the past to false predictions and to games without end to another theory that theoretically and retrospectively seems to have greater reliability.

Assumptions about the nature of persons underlie philosophies and political, sociological, and psychological theories. If we wish to get somewhere with problems of conflict and its provention, examination of our assumptions must be our starting point. We cannot afford to base thinking and policies on artificial constructs that are designed to suit preconceived theories and policies; we have to discover the real person and from this deduce theories and policies.

The fact is that just as there is an economic construct, "economic man," so there has been a political-social-psychological construct, though not acknowledged as such. Economic man suits the requirements of economic theory in a free-enterprise system. This political-social-psychological construct has been no less the product of the system into which it has had over the years to fit.

This construct takes the form of a person, group, or nation that is probably aggressive by nature, or has an acquired consequence of the need to compete for scarce resources or for some other reason depending on the microtheory advanced, and who therefore needs to be socialized into conforming behaviors. Ernest Becker in his 1968 *Structure of Evil* reviewed the thinking of most scholars who had expressed themselves on this issue during the previous 200 years. He noted their microtheory differences but believed that he had discovered what he termed a "simple unifying principle," which he expressed in this way: "The whole early training period of the child can be understood in one simple way: it is the period in which he learns to maintain his self-esteem in more-or-less constant fashion by adapting his reactions to the *dictates* and the possibilities of his human environment."

From an historical-institutional perspective, this is an understandable construct because it, like "economic man," assumes and justifies existing institutions. It readily deals with evil, sin, and maladjusted personalities—the deviant, the addict, the terrorist, the gang member, and others, these being persons who do not willingly submit to such dictates. Fault in any social setting thus lies with the individual and not with authorities or with society and its institutions and policies. An alternative focus—not on evil or unsocialized persons but on environmental

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conditions that might provoke aggressive or antisocial behaviors, suggesting the need for change in structures, institutions, and policies—was seen to be unstabilizing.

The construct and its implications, furthermore, justify the conventional wisdom that authoritative power at all social levels, from the parent to the state, is the foundation of peace domestically and internationally, since only power can control inherently antisocial human behaviors. The view expressed in 1964 by Lord Lloyd in his *The Idea of Law* is validated: there are those who have a right to expect obedience, and those who have a moral obligation to obey.

There can be no doubt that there is in all human relationships a large degree of adjustment, leading to conformity and, in this sense, socialization. But what is implied in this traditional view of behavior is that this socialization process has no limits. This convenient construct presupposes that the person has no needs to be satisfied that are inherent or human: the individual can adjust to all environments, all relationships, all deprivations of self, provided there is the willingness to learn, conform, and accept the "dictates" of society and betters. It promotes the view that the individual is to serve society, but that society has no obligations to serve in the development of what is human in the individual.

A New Conception of Human Behavior

In the last decade or so, however, insights from different disciplines and experience have begun to come together, and we are beginning to see what could be looked back upon in the future as a critical turning point in the development of institutions and, furthermore, of political systems. We are catching the first whispers of a theory of human behavior that argues that the human being, whether or not by nature evil or antisocial, or requiring socialization by parents and society, has certain needs that are human, that are not malleable, that must be satisfied if there is to be development and conforming behavior. There is a widespread murmur in all disciplines, including law—hold it, we may have had it all wrong.

The human being that is now being discovered is a far more complex and difficult product to accommodate than the traditional and socially convenient construct. If the human being were simply aggressive by nature but nevertheless malleable, life would be much easier than it is turning out to be. Coercion could possibly be effective if there were enough of it. Law and order could be enforced. We could continue to expect the sinner to be persuaded or forced to seek redemption and be forgiven by society.

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The human being, however, appears to have certain inherent drives that are not necessarily within his or her ability to control, and that certainly cannot be suppressed by external socialization, threats, and coercion. While this difficult but real human being is responsive to opportunities for development, and in this sense malleable, there is little or perhaps no malleability regarding basic human needs, especially needs such as recognition, autonomy, dignity, and bonding. It follows that policies, no matter how coercive, that neglect human needs must generate protest behaviors and conflict.

Becker, and those whose thinking he surveyed, asserted that an inherent desire for self-esteem provides the opportunity for parents and societies to socialize the individual into required behaviors. The human-needs theory argues, on the contrary, that there are certain ontological and probably genetic human needs that *will* be pursued, and that socialization processes not compatible with such human needs, far from socializing, will lead to frustrations and to disturbed and antisocial personal and group behaviors. The individual cannot be socialized into behaviors that destroy his/her identity and other need goals, and therefore must react against social environments that do this. It probably has never been fully understood by parents, teachers, societies, political philosophers, or scholars in separate disciplines, such as economics and politics, that there are human needs more compelling in directing behaviors than any possible external influences, and that these are easily frustrated by environments, sometimes seemingly caring family and social environments, that deny opportunities for development.

In 1979 scholars from many countries met in Berlin seeking the basis of an interdisciplinary theory of personal development. Their papers were printed in 1980 under the title *Needs Theory.*[1] While they were not directly concerned with conflict resolution or provention, it seemed to some of us that they were offering a framework relevant to our conflict studies. Some of these scholars and others met with us for a week last year with the help of a grant from the German Marshall Fund of the United States. As a result of this seminar, a book, *Needs Theory and Conflict Provention and Resolution,* was produced by Macmillan in London and St. Martin's in New York. This book tries to define what human needs are and their nature in the context of conflict provention and resolution. There are many contributions to this book that suggest a major shift in thought is taking place. Insights at this stage are like early insights at the beginning of atomic science—the long-term policy

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[1] Lederer, Katrin (ed.), *A Contribution to the Current Debate.* Cambridge, Mass.: Oelgeschlager, Gunn and Hain, 1980.

implications are not yet within our imagination, but their importance for education and policies generally cannot be in doubt.

Once one denies the traditional assumption about the social malleability of human nature and asserts the existence of some human needs that will be pursued, regardless of circumstance and consequences, some important insights emerge into the nature of conflict and its provention and resolution. Deterrence theory, the basis of domestic enforcement and international strategic policies, is undermined because deterrence cannot deter when human needs are affected. Attention is directed to the political power of human behavior, both at the individual level and at the level of identity groups, such as nations. If conflicts cannot be settled by coercively controlling people or nations, there is no option but to seek their provention by dealing with their environment origins. In short, a precondition of conflict provention and resolution is the satisfaction of individual and identity-group needs by providing the appropriate structures and institutions.

Experience Reassessed

This explanation of behaviors on the basis of human needs, and the conflict provention processes they imply, relates closely to our experience. It seems to provide, for example, an explanation of why a small Catholic minority in Northern Ireland cannot be controlled by a large British army, why a majority constitution in Cyprus led to multiethnic clashes and separate states, why there is ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, in the Soviet Union, and in 60 or so other nations. We can understand why the white population in South Africa is not voluntarily accepting one-man-one-vote, which would place it in the same position as Catholics in Northern Ireland and Turks in Cyprus. We can understand why Iran, having been subjected to greater power interventions over many generations, reacts in ways that, in traditional terms, can only be described by the use of the term "irrational." Our new explanation of human behaviors explains why Qaddafi has been reacting against generations of foreign invasions, about which he learned from his father and grandfather, and why he seeks, as his biographies make clear, a real independence, acceptance, and identity as an Arab state. If it is true that there are inherent human needs of identity, recognition, and autonomy, we must expect leaders and people to react in some circumstances in extreme and provocative ways. Threats and coercion are not a remedy.

Such a theory of behavior also explains why, in large industrial cities, there are street gangs comprising young people who are alienated and unconsciously seeking some role, recognition, valued relationships, and opportunities for development. Those of us who have had the good for-

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tune to belong to privileged majorities can, within this theoretical frame-
work, at least begin to have some appreciation of what it must be like to
be a member of a minority group. No amount of repression and police
supervision can be a substitute for opportunities for development. A
human-needs theory opens up a new world, different interpretations of
the past and future, and different policy possibilities.

It is my view, incidentally, that for this reason women and persons
who have had the experience of being a member of a minority commu-
nity have a special role to play in the area of conflict and its prevention.
It is not that females are more peace-oriented or less forceful, but that
they, along with minorities within societies, have been treated as an artifi-
cial construct, a construct that has been socially convenient but has de-
nied them their full recognition and identity. Because of their social
experiences they have a better understanding of human-needs theory and
the consequences of the denial of needs fulfillment.

The Basis of Prediction

To the extent that needs theory provides us with an explanation of
behaviors, it provides us with a basis for prediction. Any set of circum-
stances, any institutions, any social relationships that deny identity, rec-
ognition, autonomy, or the preconditions for the drive toward
development, create an environment of conflict and put societies and the
world society at risk. In such an environment there are no containment,
coercive, or deterrent strategies that can for long avoid conflict, and
probably violent conflict in one form of another. Even if drug supplies
are cut off, the problems that induce drug abuse and associated violence
will not go away until conditions of development and autonomy are met.
Instead, some other means to gain recognition will be resorted to, includ-
ing street violence, robbery, and riots. It is a predictive certainty that
within the social frameworks that prevail in most industrial societies, for-
tress homes will be the norm of the future. Societies will be segregated
even more between those who have prospects of fulfilling needs of iden-
tity, acceptance, and bonding, and those who do not.

These same considerations apply at international levels. Great pow-
ers and their leadership wish to be treated with respect as equals and,
therefore, indulge in expensive symbols of superiority, provoking similar
responses from their rivals. This, more than any perceived threat, is the
source of their competitive strategic game without end. In order to assert
their independence and autonomy, smaller states challenge greater ones
by terrorism or other means.

Exponential Change

There is another predictive factor to be deduced and taken into account. Conflicts are not new problems. What is new is that we must now anticipate an escalation of conflict at an exponential rate. The reason is that we live in a cumulative environment of conflict, due very largely to the means that have been, and are being, employed in containing it.

Societies seem to not be fully aware of or understand the phenomenon of exponential change, despite the fact that much change is of this character. This lack of awareness is a reason why decision makers have been slow to appreciate the intensifying significance of change, and the need to adjust to it quickly and effectively.

A typical exponential-change curve moves along in an almost horizontal line for a long period of time before showing any marked upward change in direction, and then once there is a significant increase in the rate of change, there is a sudden acceleration until the curve moves sharply into a nearly vertical direction. In population growth, environmental changes, increases in social violence, and the introduction of some new disease, there are imperceptible movements of change at first. No special attention is given to them. Then there appears to be an increase in the rate of change, which attracts attention but only when it is too late to make adjustments.

Take population and energy growth curves, for example. Population increases provide a typical example of exponential change. General population increase in the world was fairly stable until about the time of the Industrial Revolution. In the mid-nineteenth century world population was about *one* billion. By the mid-twentieth century it was about *two* billion. It has *doubled* again in the last 50 years; that is, in half the time. Another example is energy consumption. In billion metric tons of coal, or its equivalent, it was about one at the beginning of the twentieth century, having increased only slightly over the previous century. It was about five times as much 50 years later. At present growth rates it would be 50 billion at the end of this century.

The time span of perceptible change in any phenomenon thus becomes progressively shorter when there is such an exponential rate of change. What is hardly perceptible, what is acceptable, suddenly becomes dramatic and unacceptable.

We are concerned with increases in the incidence of conflict in all societies and at all societal levels. Ethnic conflicts have increased in numbers dramatically in the last two decades. They have historical causes, such as boundaries determined by colonial wars, and have been encour-

aged by environmental conditions that aggravate them, such as denial of political participation or discriminations where jobs, educational opportunities, and houses are scarce. Less conspicuously, there are other phenomena that are a by-product of such problems, and therefore have the same exponential quality, such as numbers of socially alienated persons, and loss of personal and group identity/autonomy. Thus there develops an environment that promotes conflict. We have to assume that the exponential curve of conflict and violence will be far more explosive than the population curve, and more in the nature of the energy-consumption curve.

Dealing with conflicts only as they emerge is not an answer to the kind of exponential changes societies now face. Dealing with the symptoms of social problems—and specific cases of conflict and violence are just symptoms of problems—is not an answer to their solution.

What we are experiencing in these conflicts is an accumulated response to social-control measures that were based on a false assumption regarding the nature of the human person; the more they are applied, the worse the situation becomes. Despite the fact that our conceptions of human behavior have altered radically over several decades, we still employ the techniques of control based on the assumption that all behaviors could be curbed to conform with prevailing conditions in societies. In practice, such techniques merely exacerbate the problem.

Freedom, an Opportunity for Development
It may well be asked what sets societies and the world society off in the direction of high levels of violence and conflict, leading to such exponential rates of change. One reason seems to be that the inherent drives involved in human-need satisfaction do not and cannot emerge in conditions in which there is total despair and apathy, as in conditions of physical and authoritarian suppression, or where there are conditions of drought or other circumstances of bare survival. Freedoms prove opportunities for development; development needs once liberated are not readily controlled. The greater the liberation and opportunities for development, the more likely are struggles for further fulfillment. Members of the Third World within the world society and of the underprivileged world within developed economies now have at least some opportunities to pursue needs of identity and to demand recognition, thanks to a measure of development, and thanks also to their possession of a means of violence and access to communications. In the absence of developmental opportunities provided by society, the drug market and the gun game provide a means by which to achieve needed stimulus and identity and to find a kind of personal dignity.

Provention Implies Change

Another reason for this growing environment of conflict is that civilizations have dodged provention to date, no doubt partly because of problems of prediction. The altered explanations of behavior that direct attention to the need to adjust systems to people, rather than the other way around, provide a predictive base that usually points to the necessity to alter environments and conditions as the means of provention. For this reason, prediction and provention of conflicts in most policy areas are not only unusual but unwelcome. Although remedial treatments of specific cases can be made within the existing structures and institutions of a society, provention could require far-reaching changes in them. Say, for example, research were to discover that major societal problems such as drugs, teenage pregnancies, or domestic violence could be provented only by a redistribution of available resources to the extent necessary to provide conditions for all members of society to attain both individual development and social bonding. This would mean providing rewarding jobs, suitable accommodation, and, perhaps most important of all, the stimulus of education and opportunities for establishing valued relationships. A program with these ends in view would be costly, and would be seen to threaten the immediate interests of most of those who determine economic and social priorities. It is far easier politically to concentrate on punitive tactics like incarceration or remedial conflict-management measures case by case, as and when circumstances require, even though the longer-term costs may be far greater than would be the costs of provention.

Vested Interests Versus Uncertainties

But there are understandable and good reasons why societies and leaderships have been reluctant to abandon traditional remedial means of dealing with future threats. There are, obviously, serious practical problems associated with predictions and proventions. If there were convincing predictions and if there were a high degree of certainty that relevant policies would achieve their goals, the costs of provention might be acceptable even to those who would have to foot the bill. For example, if it could be demonstrated that health care reduced health and industrial costs in the future, some resource reallocations might be possible. If it could be demonstrated that housing, community organization, and education could with certainty reduce single-parent families and associated problems of development among young alienated persons, there could be more support for such provention activities. In short, it is understand-

able that there will be resistance to provention unless, and until, prediction is surer and provention more than a vague ideal.

Conflict Resolution as a Means of Change

Even if there were support for provention policies that are likely to be reliable in achieving their goals, there would still be needed processes of change that are not socially disruptive, for only such processes are acceptable and beneficial.

We have not yet discovered means of change that are continuous, nonthreatening, and generally beneficial. The scholarly literature on change is sparse, except that which is devoted to discontinuous change. Structural and institutional change by improved decision-making processes, by means that preserve and lead to the satisfaction of the legitimate interests and needs of all concerned, has not attracted scholarly attention.

The Role of Scholarship

At this point in time, political leadership cannot be held responsible for the unreliability of prediction, for an absence of proventive policies, or for the absence of recognized change processes. These are, at this stage of development of thought, the uncontested role and responsibility of scholarship. Academics, when critical of what they see, are in reality pointing a finger at themselves.

Interactive, analytical, problem-solving processes of conflict resolution may be one step toward solving this problem of social evolution. Problem solving in a specific situation can suggest processes and norms acceptable in that situation, which can then have a general application. The resolution of a particular street-gang conflict or an ethnicity conflict, for instance, points to the specific conditions needed to eliminate and provent the problem of street-gang warfare and ethnic conflict in general. Success in the specific context can pave the way for acceptance of similar measures applied more widely. This fearful dilemma of change is one to which analytical problem solving can make a special contribution.

It is here that we have the connecting link between resolution and provention. The resolution process applied to particular situations is socially insignificant in proportion to the number of specific conflicts that emerge in societies. It can, however, act as the creative and validating process in theory building or explanation, and, therefore, in provention. It can, by establishing new norms in particular situations, initiate an acceptable change process.

Remedial and Provention Approaches: Two Different Fields

Remedial and proventive approaches to any problem area are very different, requiring different curricula for two quite different professional callings. In the conflict area, remedial approaches are for those interested in a profession of facilitated conflict management and focus largely on process. Any limited background study of the phenomenon of conflict that is part of such curricula is thus attuned to that particular purpose. Preventive measures, on the other hand, are relevant to those concerned with policy making at local, regional, corporate, legal, administrative, and parliamentary levels, and in international organizations, and require a far deeper background knowledge of the sources of conflict and of the environmental changes that would be required to provent it.

The question I am posing this evening is whether there is a call for professionalism in the area of conflict provention in addition to conflict management and resolution, and whether the Center could and should respond to such a call?

It could be that industry and administrations at all levels, rather than undertake necessary and far-reaching changes, will continue to try to exist by the use of traditional means of containments, coercion, and deterrence, with whatever help can be given by courts and alternative dispute resolution processes, and case-by-case conflict-management procedures. This is certainly tempting from an immediate political perspective, and administrators much prefer problem management to solving problems. In an historical perspective, however, such a complacent attitude would be, for all concerned, a fatal one to take.

If the felt need for it does not yet exist, then it may be that the Center has an obligation to promote a call for professionalism in provention. Once again, it is not leaderships that have the role of prediction. And provention depends upon well-founded and well-articulated ideas and their wide dissemination, which sometimes leadership has the imagination and opportunity to grasp.

Furthermore, the aim of prediction and provention is to be proved wrong! Successful provention suggests that there may have been no problem in the first place. Only by *failing* to provent that which is to be prevented can the prediction of the event be seen to be valid. It is a no-win game. But it is a game that scholarship, if not politics, should be prepared to play.

But there is another immediate consideration that prevents us taking the easy way out by opting merely to improve means of conflict management or resolution on a separate-case basis. If we were to confine

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ourselves to disputes over wages, developmental projects, corporate planning, or others that are basically interest disputes over negotiable issues, conflict provention would not be of great interest. But this Center was designed for another purpose, and it is this that has made it unique. Its purpose is to deal with intractable conflicts that involve deep-rooted needs and values—autonomy, acceptance, recognition, and identity—that are not negotiable, such as those that emerge in ethnic conflicts, independence struggles, and street-gang violence. It is these conflicts that are threatening societies and the world society, and it is a concentration on these that places, in my view, an obligation on this Center to move forward toward provention.

Furthermore, the reality is that we cannot train students of conflict resolution to be adequate facilitators in the particular case of deep-rooted conflict unless they have an understanding of what makes an environment of conflict and of the changes that are required to eliminate it in the particular case.

The Center and Its Possible Contribution
It seems to me, given the exponential increase in violence and conflict worldwide, and given that dealing with situations on a case-by-case basis does not stop other cases occurring, steps must be taken as a matter of social urgency to reduce the environment of conflict. Cases of facilitated conflict resolution provide some of the raw data that lead to further insights into the nature of conflict. This is their limited value, and it is very limited. There is, I believe, a call for the study of provention.

The present is a critical one universally. We are at the closing stages of colonialisms and imperialisms of all kinds, which means a high level of political chaos and defensive conflict globally until there is a local sorting out prior to the emergence of some global system based on identity-group independence and reciprocity. We are moving into an era of intense conflict at all political levels, domestic and international.

Great powers, because they are powerful, tend to get caught up in policies that turn out to be self-defeating. They are more apt than others to assume that coercive power can overcome human resistances, and they tend to discount drives for autonomy and independence. For this reason, one by one they come to the end of their imperialisms. The United States and the Soviet Union are at this stage. All their external and internal problems that were previously cloaked by power are now being revealed.

In 1963, Dean Acheson said, "Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role." Finally the present great powers must find a

role and win back respect and self-respect by repairing and building bridges, bridges at home neglected in favor of defense budgets, and bridges abroad missing because of hostile responses to their interventions and exercise of power. There is, I understand, an initiative within the permanent members of the Security Council to explore provention rather than rely so much on deterrent prevention. One means could be agreements not to intervene in the conflicts of others unless the parties involved have first attempted to resolve their differences by conflict resolution means. This would require some institutionalized framework for facilitated conflict resolution. There are great opportunities for them to work together positively in their own now desperate interests.

This Center for Conflict Analysis and Resolution may have limited opportunities in the field of facilitated conflict resolution of conflicts in the international system because it is based in the United States, not now seen to be neutral. But is has, it seems to me, a major role to play in helping to build and repair some of these United States bridges at home and abroad at a critical stage of American history. There are research and applied areas demanding innovative attention, from inner-city class and ethnic strife and youth alienation to the handling of forms of terrorism and relations with previously exploited neighbors, nations, and identity groups.

So I conclude with the observation that the George Mason Center for Conflict Analysis and Resolution is not complete, and cannot fulfill its mission, in the absence of a component that seeks to find ways by which to reduce the environment of conflict. This means research into fundamentals, such as needs theory, predictions based on such a theory, processes of continuous change, and related topics. The goal, the focus, is the discovery and the articulation of that theory of human behavior that allows for reliable prediction in decision making, and promotion of harmonious and collaborative relationships, thus proventing conflict.

There is a practical implication. Such an orientation means that the Center should seek to attract, in addition to students of conflict resolution, students from—or who hope to join—corporations, public administrations, and legislative bodies, all of which are engaged in predictive decision making. Lawyers are in a profession that touches the boundaries of conflict resolution, and there is a pressing need for cooperation. The theoretical emphasis on the human dimension, the analytical emphasis on the questioning of assumptions and clarification of concepts, and the consequent predictive capability make the study of conflict, its provention and resolution, one that contributes to decision-making theory and administration at all social levels.

The Center for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University, located where it is, is in a position to play a role that could make a difference. The nature of that role must be an evolving one, based on research and most importantly on interaction with concerned people with diverse viewpoints. Let us translate the vision that President Johnson and Dr. Bryant Wedge had 10 years ago into a national and world asset that could make a difference. The need is a pressing one.

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