

Burying the Hatchet: Tribalism is Essential to Peacemaking

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Violent intergroup conflicts continue to plague human societies despite continuous and persistent efforts to peacefully resolve long-standing disputes between nations. Social psychology has spearheaded these efforts and has offered a plethora of explanations for why intergroup conflicts take place and has developed numerous interventions that could potentially resolve protracted intergroup conflicts or at least minimize their noxious effects. These theories and interventions have been shown to be effective in empirical research conducted over decades, yet it is less clear that the processes identified by social psychologists as elemental to intergroup conflict resolution significantly contribute to the resolution of intergroup conflicts between nations in the real world. In the current chapter, we pit social psychological theories of conflict resolution against the history of actual interstate conflict resolution from the end of WWII to this day. We show that, more often than not, conflicts between nations are resolved for reasons vastly different than those posited by social psychologists. We attempt to explain the mismatch between conflict resolution in the lab and in the real world and offer suggestions on how to bring psychological research in this field closer to the reality of peacemaking.

Conflict and conflict resolution

The psychological literature on intergroup conflict resolution is rich and impressive. The essence of much of this research is the belief that intergroup conflict is the manifestation of individual psychological processes that are shared by many people in a society, and that these processes provide the fuel that initiates and perpetuates violent intergroup conflict (Bar-Tal & Hameiri, 2020). There are several major themes that characterize this literature: The main goal of research in this field is

to identify generic principles for resolving intergroup conflict (Fisher, 1994). Based on this motivation, the processes proposed by social psychologists to resolve intergroup conflicts are ostensibly universal processes. This one-size-fits-all perspective on intergroup conflict resolution often ignores the nuances of specific contexts and cultures. Even when cross cultural research is conducted it usually tests whether supposedly universal processes work in different contexts and cultures. Importantly, tribal group-based needs are often ignored. Even when there is a consideration of group needs such as the needs-based model (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008) the orientation is still universal and general and does not consider the fundamental specific needs of specific groups.

A related assumption is that conflict is the product of internal psychological processes (such as feeling hatred towards the other group) and not the product of an external reality that by nature would be different in different conflicts and contexts (Klar & Branscombe, 2016). In this chapter, we claim that if a common denominator there be for group needs, then survival would be the primary motivation. We examine the level of correspondence between psychological theories of conflict resolution and actual conflict resolution through the lens of group survival theory (Hirschberger, 2023) and suggest that groups are motivated to survive and thrive as a primary motivation. Getting along with other groups, from this perspective, is a goal only insofar as it contributes to survive and thrive motivations. Thus, intergroup conflict resolution is a possible, albeit not always necessary or even relevant, means of promoting group survival. We suggest that a better understanding of fundamentally tribal group survival motivations will help us shift from utopian models of conflict resolution to more realistic ones.

Psychological theories of conflict resolution

One of the most broad and comprehensive models of intergroup conflict and its resolution is the integrative model of sociopsychological barriers (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011). This model integrates short-term cognitive, motivational, and emotional processes with long-standing worldviews and enduring conflict-supporting societal beliefs. One of the main assumptions of this model is that conflict is the product of closed-mindedness and cognitive freezing (Porat et al., 2015) whereas peace requires cognitive unfreezing and openness. The integrative model proposes four main types of barriers that piece together much of the literature on intergroup conflict. The first barrier is termed *general worldviews* and includes general beliefs and orientations that are not necessarily directly related to intergroup conflict. Examples are orientations that may promote open or closed mindedness such as right-wing authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1988) or social dominance orientation (Pratto et al., 1994). The second type of barrier *conflict-supporting societal beliefs* consists of beliefs that are specific to intergroup conflict such as beliefs about the justness of one's group and its goals, beliefs about security and threat, and beliefs that delegitimize the enemy (Bar-Tal, 1998). The third type of barriers include *negative intergroup emotions* towards the adversary that ostensibly freeze conflict supporting societal beliefs (Tam et al., 2007), and finally the fourth group of barriers contain *universal cognitive motivational biases* that impede progress during actual negotiations (Bar-Tal & Hameiri, 2020).

The combination of general worldviews with conflict related beliefs give rise to an ethos of conflict (Bar-Tal et al., 2012). The ethos of conflict is described as a vicious cycle of thought processes, beliefs, and worldviews that form when people become trapped in intractable intergroup conflict. These processes are constantly reinforced by a perception of reality that validates beliefs about in-group

victimization, the belief in the goodness and righteousness of the in-group, beliefs about the nature of patriotism, and the belief that the group has done all that it can to make peace and it is the enemy that is rejecting the peaceful offers. Intergroup conflict from this perspective constitutes the product of irrational biases, unchecked emotions, and rigid cognitions.

These ideas have recently been expanded to the notion of conflict-supporting mindsets (CSM: Saguy and Reifen-Tagar, 2022). CSMs are not just about societal beliefs but focus on intra-individual and collective emotional and cognitive processes. CSMs are believed to be responsible for the perpetuation of intergroup conflict as they consist of negative beliefs, emotions, and convictions that ostensibly drive support for intergroup violence. For instance, negative beliefs such as stereotypes elicit violent reactions against out-groups (Mange et al., 2012). Delegitimizing out-group members narratives (Szabó et al., 2020) or believing that out-group members are less than human, legitimizes harm to them (Leidner et al., 2013).

Studies stemming from these perspectives often unquestionably assume that “a peaceful solution to intractable conflicts first of all requires a dramatic change of conflict supporting societal beliefs and attitudes by participating parties, and especially by leaders” (Bar-Tal et al., 2021). It is important to note, however, that most of this research is based either on individual reactions to other individuals that belong to other groups, or individual reactions to other groups. There has been little attempt to study whether attitudes and attitudinal change have any bearing on actual processes of conflict resolution between nations and states. Is a dramatic change in societal beliefs a necessary prerequisite, as Bar-Tal and his colleagues (2021) suggest, for there to be peace at the nation level?

Because intergroup conflict is conceptualized as the collective manifestation of mostly intra-individual psychological processes, the resolution of intergroup conflict in this literature also focuses on these processes. A rich set of ideas and interventions are proposed to help curtail intergroup hostility such as promoting a common in-group identity (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005), facilitating intergroup contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), and intergroup friendships (Paolini et al., 2004), fostering empathy and understanding (Stephan & Finlay, 1999), changing beliefs about group malleability (Halperin et al., 2011), processes of forgiveness (Noor et al., 2008), regulating negative emotions (Halperin et al., 2014), fostering hope for peace (Cohen-Chen et al., 2015) and humanizing the other (Gubler et al., 2015).

Special emphasis has been given to several negative emotions such as fear, anger, and hatred that are considered to be destructive emotions that must be successfully regulated for peaceful conflict resolution to take place (Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2016). Accordingly, research has shown that direct emotion regulation strategies such as cognitive reappraisal increase peaceful cognitions (Halperin et al., 2013). Because some people do not respond to reappraisal as expected, indirect emotion regulation strategies have been employed to coerce even the most tenacious into compliance (Halperin, Cohen-Chen, & Goldenberg, 2014).

Even if reconciliation was in its very essence an emotion regulation process involving positive affective change, as this literature claims (Cehajic-Clancy et al., 2016), it would seem unfeasible to regulate emotions at the group or nation level. Moreover, the impressive efforts to regulate emotions for the cause of peace may have overlooked the potential costs of emotion regulation to group survival and the possibility that an overzealous desire to resolve conflict may sometimes ironically increase the potential for violence (Hirschberger, 2023). Most importantly, there is no

evidence whatsoever that emotion regulation strategies or any other type of psychological intervention actually contribute to peacemaking between nations and states.

There are occasional acknowledgements in the conflict resolution literature that real-life contexts may differ from laboratory studies, surveys and field interventions (Bar-Tal et al., 2021). For instance, research conducted in Northern Ireland on the role of intergroup friendships in intergroup conflict resolution concedes that "notwithstanding these optimistic findings and these hopes for the future of Northern Ireland, it must be pointed out that having outgroup friends is not, unfortunately, a panacea for prejudice or a vaccination against conflict" (Paolini et al., 2004). There are in fact numerous horrific examples throughout history on how people turn to massacre their former neighbors and friends who happen to be members of the other group (Gross, 2001; Staub, 2001).

The extant literature would have us believe that hope, empathy, understanding, and forgiveness are the basic elements of turning foes into friends, of transforming bitter enemies into partners for peace. These assumptions go unchallenged and sweeping causal statements such as "empathy is important for resolving intergroup conflict" (Hasson et al., 2022) do not seem to require any further explanation or any evidence. It seems so intuitively true that processes that operate at the interpersonal level are inextricable aspects of intergroup conflict resolution, that they have been seldom contested. In this chapter, we contend that conflict resolution in the real world occurs for reasons that are vastly different from the theories proposed by many social and political psychologists. Based on an analysis of 32 major conflicts since WWII, we propose a new perspective on conflict resolution that is consistent with conflict

resolution in the real world, is sensitive to context, and that offers a less-than-ideal yet realistic way to reduce intergroup conflict.

How are intergroup conflicts resolved in the real world?

We contend that throughout much of human history, four main patterns of conflict resolution may be observed: 1. The complete defeat of an adversary. 2. Frustration from conflict and its' price. 3. International intervention; 4. The principle of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” These four patterns of conflict resolution have little to do with the processes of peacemaking offered by social psychology. This is not to say that psychological processes are entirely absent; it only suggests that the ones currently studied by social psychologists seem to have little to do with actual conflict resolution at the nation and state level. To substantiate this rather provocative claim, we examined 32 major conflicts since the end of WWII to this day (see Table 1) and indicated how the conflict ended, whether conflict resolution was achieved, and whether there were any post-conflict reconciliation attempts. Although this list is not exhaustive, it captures most of the main intergroup conflagrations that have occurred over the past 78 years or so and provides an opportunity to examine how conflicts are resolved in the real world.

In Table 1, we list the conflicts and briefly describe them. We note how conflict resolution has been achieved with conflict resolution being defined at the minimum as cessation of violence (i.e., negative peace). We also examined whether there is any evidence for societal-level changes in conflict related beliefs that precede conflict resolution to test Bar-Tal et al's (2021) claim that this is a prerequisite for conflict resolution. As we could not possibly trace every single attempt to change conflict-related beliefs, we defined such change as significant if it reached the international

media and/or the academic literature. Finally, we examined whether there were reconciliation processes post-conflict resolution. These are defined as processes that occur at the government or national level and that gain media and/or academic attention.

As can be seen in Table 1, 55% of conflicts ended with the defeat of one side. Defeat was defined primarily as military defeat, but in one case, the Cold War, we considered ideological defeat as well; 48% of conflicts ended due to international intervention that is defined as at least one third party that either intervenes militarily (as in the Bosnia war) or diplomatically (as in the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt) to end the conflict; 39% of conflicts ended because of frustration¹. Frustration is defined as the inability of at least one side to achieve its goals, and as a result, often reluctantly abandons the path of violence in favor of a peaceful resolution. Only one peace process, the Abraham Accords, follows the principle of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” These conclusions corroborate previous research that has indicated that between 1946-1990, most conflicts ended with military victory rather than negotiations, and that since 1995, most conflicts end with negotiations (Call & Cousens, 2007). It is important to consider, however, that conflicts ending through negotiated settlement are about three times as likely to relapse into violence as those ending through victory (Westendorf, 2015). Further, between one third to one half of all conflicts revert to warfare within five years (Doyle & Sambanis, 2006), indicating that conflict resolution should be seen as part of an ongoing process and not as the end of history.

¹ These modes of conflict resolution are not mutually exclusive.

When examining the operation of psychological processes to resolve conflicts, in none of the conflicts in nearly eight decades is there any indication of a change of worldviews, a regulation of negative emotions towards the other group, an unfreezing of cognitions or any of the other processes posited by social psychologists as necessary for conflict resolution to take place (see Table 1). It is always possible that such changes in hearts and minds do take place but are undocumented. The burden of proof, alas, is on the proponents of theories of conflict resolution. It would be vitally important for the field to document psychological processes that precede conflict resolution at the nation and state level, and that can be shown to significantly contribute to it.

In about one third of the conflicts surveyed there was some indication of a post-conflict reconciliation process that may include elements of forgiveness, empathy, justice, and social reconstruction. One could argue that the line between conflict resolution and post-conflict reconciliation is blurred, as hostilities often continue even after a conflict is officially settled. This may be true, but even so only in three of the cases we surveyed was there a comprehensive nation-level process of reconciliation and nation-building: After Apartheid ended in South Africa, following the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland, and after the Genocide in Rwanda. All of the other cases include often reluctant official apologies that could hardly be considered signs of reconciliation (e.g., The Japanese apology to Korea in 1965; Israel's apology for an assassination attempt in Jordan in 1997).

The case of Rwanda deserves special attention due to the deliberate use of psychological theory and research to reduce actual conflict (not just attitudes) in an active conflict setting. Radio La Benevolencija broadcasted radio dramas in Rwanda, Burundi, and the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo in the early 2000s (Bilali &

Vollhardt, 2015). The dramas were in fact carefully constructed interventions based on psychological research and theories of intergroup conflict and reconciliation (Staub, 2014), as well as on clinical theories about trauma healing after mass violence (Staub & Pearlman, 2006). The dramas educated about the roots and evolution of violence and encouraged non-violent solutions to intergroup tensions. These radio programs were popular, with listener rates ranging from 65% in Burundi to 85% in Rwanda (Staub, 2014).

One of the main interventions employed was to encourage “active bystandership” (Staub, 2018) which means to act out against violence and not turn a blind eye to it. Research conducted on the effectiveness of the radio interventions indicated that the programs had a significant and positive effect on conflict-related attitudes. The effects on actual behaviors, however, such as on active bystandership were mixed (Bilali Vollhardt and Rarick, 2016). Thus, this research has many merits in studying conflict in vivo with real-life interventions, but even this impressive research falls short of demonstrating that psychological interventions may significantly impact the resolution of conflicts at the inter-group or inter-nation level.

Research recently conducted in Bosnia casts further doubt on the utility of psychological interventions for intergroup conflict resolution. This research shows, as in the case of Rwanda and the DRC, that psychological interventions such as positive intergroup contact predict positive attitudes toward ethnic outgroup members (e.g., outgroup trust, closeness, empathy, humanization, and willingness for future contact). But, across two studies these interventions did not predict holding more positive broader construals of relations between ethnic groups as enemies or allies (Burrows et al., 2022). These interventions, therefore, improved attitudes at the interpersonal level, but had no discernable effects even on attitudes at the group level.

Similar conclusions are drawn from research conducted in Northern Ireland. Intergroup contact in this context also had an effect on the interpersonal but not on the intergroup level (Cairns et al., 2005). The authors of this research suggest that “it was easier to forgive an individual than a group, because it was easier to trust an individual than each member of the other community,” and conclude: “interpersonal and intergroup conflict are distinct phenomena, and it is therefore likely that interpersonal and intergroup forgiveness are distinct phenomena.”

It would also be prudent to consider another distinction made in the literature on intergroup conflict resolution. The difference between positive and negative peace. Negative peace (Galtung et al., 2013) simply means the absence of war, whereas positive peace includes building relationships, processes of reconciliation, and some level of functional interdependence. The list of conflicts in Table 1, suggests that full positive peace is absent or at least rare. Most conflicts seem to range on the continuum between negative and positive peace, and this continuum is dynamic. For instance, if in 1994, right after signing an agreement, the peace between Israel and Jordan appeared to be warm with a potential for positive peace, then unfortunately today the peace still holds but the tensions between the two countries are escalating. Perhaps aside from the Abraham Accords that are still in the honeymoon phase, most resolved conflicts seem to lean towards negative peace as the list of conflicts in Table 1 suggests. This is not surprising given the fact that most conflicts are resolved due to defeat, third party intervention, or frustration. Negative peace may not be ideal, but in the real world it is a bona fide accomplishment that is not easily obtained and should not be viewed negatively. Social psychological research should expend more efforts to understand the processes of conflict resolution in the real world. The psychology of defeat, victory and frustration seem especially pertinent and under investigated.

Explaining the gap between the lab and the real world

Why is there such a discrepancy between psychological research on intergroup conflict resolution and the actual process of conflict resolution between nations? We offer six possible explanations: First, conflict at the interpersonal and intergroup levels are often confounded; second, social psychologists study attitudes about conflict resolution, not conflict resolution itself; third, context often precedes attitudes; fourth, conflict resolution and reconciliation are confounded; fifth, the idiosyncrasies of different conflicts are seldom considered; sixth, psychological research tends to ignore tribal forces.

I. Confounding interpersonal and intergroup processes

Understanding the gap between social psychological explanations to conflict resolution and the history of how conflicts between nations and states are resolved requires a closer look at the difference between resolving conflict at the interpersonal and intergroup levels. According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), social behavior will vary along a continuum between interpersonal behavior and intergroup behavior. Interpersonal behavior refers to behaviors between two or more individuals; intergroup behaviors are when people behave according to the social categories that they belong to. Self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1983) clarifies this process by claiming that the self can be categorized at different levels of abstraction ranging from the individual self “I” to the social self “we.” The theory further suggests that the self-concept is fluid such that a person may invoke a myriad of self-conceptions in different situations.

Most of the theories and interventions provided by the intergroup conflict literature operate at the interpersonal level or at the most operate at the level of

personal attitudes towards other groups. There is, however, an important discrepancy between how individuals of two conflicting groups may interact at the interpersonal level and how they relate at the group level. Research shows, for instance, that there is an irony of harmony wherein positive interpersonal encounters between members of different groups have no bearing on the willingness to support social change – a group level process (Saguy et al., 2009). Thus, it is very possible that much of the psychological literature on intergroup conflict that was conducted at the interpersonal level, does not apply to conflicts between nations and states.

The Christmas Truce of 1914 stands as an example of the stark difference between the interpersonal and intergroup level during violent conflict. German, French, British and Russian soldiers who up until that point were trying to kill one another, spontaneously crossed trenches to exchange seasonal greetings, talk and sing Christmas carols together. These troops clearly did not hate each other at the interpersonal level. But, once the festivities ended, they resumed firing at those who only moments ago were their makeshift friends. The transition from the interpersonal to the intergroup level can be dramatic. As individuals, the troops of rival militaries could get along. But, as French, Germans, British, and Russians they were bitter enemies. This transition from the individual to the collective self-construal is often predicated on threat (Choi & Hogg, 2020), especially existential threat (Greenberg et al., 1997) that is abundant in times of war.

Many interventions in the intergroup conflict literature focus on reducing prejudice (Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013). These interventions are clearly important at the interpersonal level (although it is not clear that they even work at that level: Palluck et al., 2021), and have been shown to change attitudes about members of other groups even at a young age (Nasie et al., 2021). There is little evidence,

however, to suggest that prejudice has anything to do with conflict resolution at the nation level. Future research should attempt to examine whether and how prejudice reduction contributes to peacemaking at the nation and state level.

2. Attitudes do not predict peacemaking

The psychology of conflict resolution focuses primarily on cognitions and emotions, with less research devoted to the question of whether attitudinal or emotional changes correspond with real changes in levels of hostility between groups. Research has shown that there is often a gap between attitudes, intentions and behavior (Sheeran & Webb, 2016) and that only under specific conditions do attitudes predict behavior (Ajzen, 1991). The research on intergroup conflict resolution is faced with an ominous task of not only showing that attitudes and emotions concerning intergroup conflict are related to behavior, but that this purported change predicts actual intergroup conflict resolution.

3. Peacemaking may predict attitudes.

Whereas there is little evidence to date to suggest that attitudinal and emotional change correspond to peacemaking at the nation level, there is some evidence to suggest that the opposite is true: Peacemaking may predict peaceful attitudes. When Anwar Saadat visited Jerusalem in 1977 only four years after a bloody war between the two nations, Israelis reacted with a surge in support for peace. Before Saadat's visit 70% of Israelis believed that Arabs don't want peace, and after the visit that number dropped to 18%; similarly, 80% of Israelis believed that Arabs want to destroy Israel and that number dropped to 48% after the visit; Only 30% believed that peace was possible with the Arabs before the visit and that figure climbed to 73% after the visit (Oren, 2009).

During the last round of talks between Israelis and Palestinians in Annapolis in 2007, support for a two-state solution among Israeli Jews was 71% (Israeli, 2017). The 16 years that have since elapsed have eroded support for this solution that in June 2022 showed a 33% all-time low. Attitudes, therefore, are not necessarily a precursor to peacemaking but fluctuate in association with the process of peacemaking. Whether these attitudes are cause or consequence is yet to be determined.

4. Psychology plays a role in reconciliation

intergroup conflict resolution occurs at the nation or state level, processes of reconciliation are often interpersonal in nature. As our analysis indicates, major reconciliation processes occurred only in 3 of the 32 conflicts surveyed but these do provide an example of how to elevate reconciliation research to the collective level and influence social change and post-conflict reconstruction. The processes that we critiqued earlier for not contributing much to nation level conflict resolution, may be crucially important in post-conflict reconciliation. Northern Ireland stands as an example of how fostering empathy towards the other is associated with a willingness to forgive (Moeschberger et al., 2005; Tam et al., 2008). In post-conflict Bosnia similar processes were observed (Cehajic et al., 2008). In contexts wherein the conflict is still active such as in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is less clear whether studies showing that expressions of empathy increase the willingness to reconcile during conflict (Nadler & Liviatan, 2006), or studies showing that empathy towards members of another group and may foster reciprocal empathy (Gubler, Halperin, & Hirschberger, 2015) contribute to actual conflict resolution.

5. Not all conflicts are the same: Idiosyncrasies matter.

The one-size-fits-all perspective on intergroup conflict resolution (Bar-Tal et al., 2015; Fisher, 2004) is naturally motivated by the goal of psychological science to discover human universals. Considering the idiosyncrasies of each and every conflict, however, are critically important for resolving conflicts in the real world. To broker peace in Northern Ireland, US Senator George Mitchell crafted an ingenious agreement known as the Good Friday Agreement, signed in 1998, which ended decades of conflict between Irish Loyalists and Republicans. The agreement based on referendums in Ireland, in Northern Ireland and the UK provided a framework for shared governance. Importantly, the agreement maintains British sovereignty over Northern Ireland, but this could be overturned in a referendum in which most people in Northern Ireland choose independence. The Good Friday Agreement carefully tailored to the Northern Irish situation is not easily applicable to other situations. Senator Mitchell spent the final years of his political life as US special envoy to the Middle East and returned frustrated after his repeated efforts to facilitate talks between Israelis and Palestinians had failed. What worked in one context was irrelevant in the other.

6. Tribalism matters.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War brought with them a surge of optimism that was most clearly reflected in Fukuyama's *End of History* (2006) promising the ultimate triumph of liberal Western democracy as the final form of human government. From a bird's eye view, the data also seem to show that the world is becoming more peaceful and less violent over time (Pinker, 2011). The liberal international peacebuilding paradigm (Paris, 2011) follows this perspective and assumes that common interests, economic ties, the spread of

democratic values, human rights, and the high cost of war would make peace prevail and conflict become less likely.

Soon after Fukuyama proposed the end of history, political scientist Benjamin Barber suggested that there are parochial, tribal forces at play that are being ignored. In his *Jihad vs. McWorld* (2010) he contends that the forces of globalism will clash with tribal forces that have their own unique culture, interests, and needs. These tribal forces feel threatened by the takeover of a fabricated global culture that is foreign to them. He used the term Jihad as a metaphor to describe local, tribal forces of resistance worldwide that are likely to clash with those advancing the global village.

Much of the psychological literature on intergroup conflict resolution stems from the logic of the liberal world order and assumes that conflict is inherently irrational and that if only people would unfreeze their cognitions and regulate their emotions, peace – the logical solution – would prevail (e.g., Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011; Saguy & Reifen-Tagar, 2022). When considering the deep-seated tribal forces posited by Barber (2010), however, it becomes questionable whether peace is the ultimate goal of most human groups. The obstinate nature of intergroup conflict can be explained by the possibility that other goals may be more important to groups than living in peace.

Tribalism is not all negative

Nationalism, the modern organizing structure of human tribes, has earned its negative reputation. Nation-glorifying ideologies are responsible for the death of millions in the 20th century and for indescribable human suffering. Today nationalism is once again raising its ugly head in the form of xenophobic, authoritarian regimes from Russia to Nicaragua. Nationalism, however, is first and foremost the product of

liberal thought. Inspired by the French revolution, it promised to provide not only freedom and equality, but also a sense of social unity – brotherhood. Nationalism in the 19th century and early 20th century hailed the right of self-determination and has given rise to the nation state that provides citizens with rights. Nationalism has provided the ideological foundation for institutions such as democracy, the welfare state, and public education, all of which were justified in the name of a unified people with a shared sense of purpose and mutual obligation (Tamir, 2019).

Because of the undeniable damage caused by extreme forms of nationalism, liberalism today is often viewed as antithetical to nationalism. This may explain why social psychology has opted to focus on universal processes of conflict resolution that are free from considering the needs of national groups, the needs of the tribe. But, if we also consider the contribution of nationalism to human prosperity, we may be more accepting of tribal concerns and of the right of the historical cultural group to defend itself.

Conflict resolution and group survival

Group survival theory (Hirschberger, 2023) compliments social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) by positing that human groups function not only to provide social identity, but to safeguard human existence. At the individual level, humans are puny and weak and are ill-equipped to deal with the many threats facing them (Chapman & Chapman, 2000). The human ability to coalesce in large and effective tribes has allowed them to overcome their individual physical limitations and deal with threats as a group (Ein-Dor & Hirschberger, 2016). Because cultural-historical tribal groups have safeguarded individual human existence over evolutionary history, people are motivated to defend the groups that serve to protect them. The motivation to protect the group may be great to the extent that people may be willing to sacrifice

other individuals from their group (Kahn, Klar, & Roccas, 2017) and even themselves (Caspi-Berkowicz et al., 2019) if they believe that this will increase the chance of group survival over time.

From a group survival perspective, therefore, the axiomatic notion that intergroup conflict resolution is the only rational option (e.g., Bar-Tal et al., 2021) needs to be revisited. Wars and conflict threaten individual lives and may threaten the existence of nations. But wars may also be perceived as a temporary cost in the present that will yield important revenues for the group in the future. In such cases, there may be little motivation to resolve intergroup conflicts. The needs of the tribe often trump individual motivation as long as group members agree that current losses are a necessary investment for the future of the group.

The implications of this analysis on intergroup conflict resolution is that conflicts will be resolved only insofar as the resolution of conflict is compatible with group survival needs. The analysis we conducted on nearly eight decades of intergroup conflict supports this conclusion (see Table 1). Most conflicts are resolved either by defeat, foreign intervention, or because of the frustration of not being able to subdue an enemy. These solutions imply that when the group realizes that the costs of conflict are threatening its future, it may be willing to make the necessary compromises for conflict resolution.

Intergroup conflict, according to this model, does not arise from internal psychological states and cannot be resolved by changing internal states. Existential concerns lie at the heart of intergroup conflict, and these concerns are often real and not just biases that need to be regulated or changed. The research we reviewed here suggests that the internal psychological states that accompany intergroup conflict are

more often than not consequences, not causes, of the conflict and many of them serve survival goals. Intergroup conflict resolution is only a means to an end and not an end in and of itself. Put simply, group survival theory suggests that conflict resolution will occur only if the resolution of the conflict is perceived as improving the group's existential condition and securing its long-term survival.

Conflicts will not be resolved when: (a) one of the parties is not threatened by the conflict and has no interest in resolving it. This is often the case in asymmetrical conflict wherein the powerful side is not significantly threatened by the weaker party. The Chinese occupation of Tibet since the 1950's stands as a case example. It is unlikely that China will surrender its control over Tibet even if emotion regulation, empathy, and forgiveness interventions are employed; (b) conflict resolution is risky and may place the existence of the group in jeopardy. The ethos of conflict perspective (Bar-Tal et al., 2012) would have us believe that perceptions of threat are always a bias that need to be regulated. But sometimes threats are real and pose a conflict resolution dilemma (Hirschberger et al., 2016): The conflict is threatening, but its' resolution may demand compromises that could also place the group in jeopardy. Israelis seem to experience this dilemma with regards to the conflict with the Palestinians. Opinion polls consistently show that Israelis would like to resolve the conflict, but are concerned that a withdrawal from Palestinian territories would compromise their country's security (Hirschberger & Hirsch-Hoefler, 2023). For them, the conflict constitutes the tension between physical threat that may be dealt with by controlling more territory, and symbolic-identity threat that requires territorial concessions to maintain the Jewish and democratic character of the country (Hirschberger et al., 2016); (c) conflict resolution may be perceived as antithetical to long-term collective motivations. Conflicts clearly have costs but also have several

notable benefits. Conflicts, for instance, may bolster a people's sense of meaning and purpose (Rovenpor et al., 2019) and may be perceived as necessary to advance group goals. Surveys recently conducted among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip indicate that during the past year or so there is an attitudinal shift from supporting a solution to the conflict with Israel (either a one state or two state solution) to increased support for armed conflict (<https://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/938>). For them, conflict resolution seems to come at a cost that many of the younger generation are unwilling to pay. Thus, for both Israelis and Palestinians, long term tribal concerns may override the immediate benefits of conflict resolution in saving lives and resources.

Conclusion

Hope, empathy, understanding, and forgiveness are believed to be the basic elements of turning foes into friends, of transforming bitter enemies into partners for peace. This is the unquestioned ideology that underlies much of the conflict resolution scholarship (e.g., Bar-Tal et al., 2021). It seems so intuitively true that these processes are inextricable aspects of intergroup conflict resolution that they have been seldom contested. The current chapter offers a critical look at the discrepancy between psychological theories of conflict resolution and actual conflict resolution between nations and states. The goal of this critique is not to question the value of social psychology to conflict resolution, but to suggest that the focus of social psychological theory and research need to change from utopic models to realistic ones. We suggest that intergroup conflict resolution is first and foremost a group survival strategy, and as such is a possible (albeit not necessary) means towards the end of group survival. Thus, more research should be expended on the specific security and survival needs of specific human tribes and groups; on the reasons some groups will be motivated to

resolve conflicts and others not; and on how to balance the security and survival needs of rival groups.

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