

INSTITUTE FOR RESOURCE AND SECURITY STUDIES
27 Ellsworth Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139, USA
Phone: (617) 491-5177 Fax: (617) 491-6904
Email: info@irss-usa.org Web: www.irss-usa.org

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND THE ORGANIZATION
FOR SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

by Paula Gutlove and Gordon Thompson

July 1997¹

As violent conflicts have emerged across the OSCE region during the 1990s, governments, intergovernment organizations and nongovernment organizations have searched for ways to restore and maintain peace. The OSCE has been prominent in this search. While some significant actions have been undertaken, there are many other important opportunities which deserve further exploration. This essay identifies some of those opportunities.

Conflict between individuals and groups has always been part of the human condition. On countless occasions, intergroup conflict has become deadly. Yet, while history provides an ample record of deadly conflict, there is also a long record of actions that have prevented, or helped to prevent, deadly intergroup conflict from breaking out or re-occurring. Analysts use the term "preventive actions" to cover actions of this type. Preventive actions have been taken by a variety of actors, including individuals, nongovernment organizations, governments, and intergovernment organizations. To take a large-scale example, the post-World War II Marshall Plan is often mentioned as a successful preventive action.

Where preventive actions are considered successful, this may be because a number of actions were taken in combination, or because prevailing circumstances created an enabling context for preventive actions. The definition of success can also vary. Some preventive actions have been successful for limited periods, as in temporary cease-fire agreements, while other actions have prevented violence over periods of many years. Each case has unique features.

Here, we focus on a class of preventive actions that is commonly described as "conflict management". We use this term to encompass: (i) efforts to obtain early warning of conflict; and (ii) nonviolent interventions that seek to prevent, mitigate, transform or resolve conflicts. These interventions are distinct from, but often complementary to, other preventive actions such as peacekeeping, sustainable development, humanitarian assistance, and the application of economic leverage. In the OSCE region, conflict management has become particularly important during the 1990s, as violent conflicts have emerged across Europe and the former USSR (Gutlove and Thompson, Helsinki Monitor, 1995).

¹ Published in the *OSCE ODIHR Bulletin*, Volume 5 (1). Warsaw: OSCE, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Warsaw. 1997.

This essay begins with an introduction to the field of conflict management and a description of the challenges that must be met if the field is to achieve its full potential. Then, we describe some of the efforts the OSCE has made to promote conflict management, focussing on its efforts to improve cooperation with nongovernment conflict management specialists. Finally, we suggest some actions by OSCE participating states, to be taken through the OSCE or other channels.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

For many generations, government and nongovernment actors, when faced with deadly conflicts, have sought ways to restore and maintain peace. These efforts have included a class of nonviolent, non-military interventions that seek to prevent, mitigate, transform or resolve conflicts. Religious communities have often been prominent in pursuing such interventions. During the past two decades, however, especially since the end of the Cold War, conflict management has begun to emerge as a distinct, professional field. Nongovernment specialists have taken the lead in this field.

Indigenous Conflict Management Capacity

In the 1980s, conflict management practitioners and academic centers were concentrated in north America and western Europe. During the 1990s, specialists from these regions have helped to seed a culture of nonviolent conflict management elsewhere, especially in countries that appear particularly susceptible to violent conflict. These efforts have had varying degrees of success. In many conflict-torn countries, partly as a result of work by international specialists, there now exists substantial indigenous conflict management capacity, often in the form of a local, nongovernment conflict management organization. However, these local organizations are financially fragile and often at risk in a politically hostile environment.

Practical and ethical considerations argue for a progressive strengthening of the roles and capabilities of indigenous conflict management practitioners. A logical accompaniment to this trend will be the adaptation of conflict management practices to particular cultural settings and local problems. Thus, a healthy conflict management enterprise will be one in which indigenous practitioners play a growing role, while practices reflect useful cultural traditions and are adapted to meet local needs. The indigenous practitioners must receive adequate financial and organizational support, so that they can provide a professional, useful service. International conflict management organizations will continue to play a supporting role, through functions such as training, consultation, research, and evaluation.

The Role of Information Exchange

Partly because it is a developing field, and partly because of its intrinsic nature, conflict management is a field where competence and achievement are not always easy to assess. There is, at present, no formal certification process for practitioners. Evaluation of a program's performance may be difficult, for a variety of reasons. For example, several major factors (e.g., political and

economic factors), in addition to the conflict management intervention, may be responsible for the outcome in a particular situation. It may be difficult to determine the influence of each factor.

Open, broad-based exchange of information is becoming recognized as a tool that can assist evaluation and can also help conflict management to become a more mature field in other ways. This type of information exchange will help to match conflict management needs with capabilities, will allow practitioners to learn from each others' successes and failures, will improve the prospects for coordination, and will yield other benefits (Gutlove and Thompson, Vienna seminars report, 1995).

Integrated Action

Peacekeeping, peacebuilding and other humanitarian programs have always involved some degree of conflict management work. However, integration of the various approaches has often been done on an ad hoc basis, without specific planning or personnel training. The deliberate integration of conflict management, through "integrated action" programs, is a recent development.

Through integrated action, sometimes called "functional reconciliation", conflicting parties are brought together to work on a humanitarian program that involves super-ordinate goals, and are provided with significant, concrete incentives for cooperation. At the same time, the humanitarian program receives the benefit of conflict management expertise. There is a limited body of experience with integrated action programs of this kind, but there are grounds for optimism about their potential.

The number of examples of actual and proposed integrated action programs is growing. In Macedonia, for example, the Catholic Relief Services, in partnership with the US Agency for International Development, has created mixed-ethnic Parents and Teachers Organizations (PTOs) to promote diverse community responsibility for the reconstruction of schools in conflict-torn communities. A key part of the process is the integration of conflict management functions in the initiation and functioning of the PTOs. In Slovakia, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) is engaged in a multi-faceted program of integrated action. With facilitation and training from CSIS personnel, mixed-ethnic community councils are designing and executing a range of programs to serve broad community interests, ranging from public health education to restoration of historical buildings. Aspects of conflict management are integral to, and embedded in, the overall design of the program.

Integrated action appears to offer a variety of advantages. Through the integration of conflict management with development and relief actions, it is possible to create synergy between the various actions and to work more effectively toward shared goals. Indigenous conflict management capability is likely to develop in a more sustainable way when conflict resolution principles and techniques are applied within communities toward concrete, cooperative outcomes. By working with local facilitators and community leaders on an ongoing basis, conflict management practitioners can develop culturally appropriate practices. Also, integrated action can promote multi-faceted coordination. The tasks that provide the basis for

functional reconciliation can be more effectively coordinated with other relief and reconstruction activities. Local and national authorities, intergovernment bodies and nongovernment actors (including the local community) can be more effectively linked. Finally, integrated action can build upon positive aspects of the local society that have survived despite episodes of violence.

To illustrate the potential for integrated action, consider the health care field. Partnerships between professionals in this field and conflict management specialists can create a new dimension of integrated action, whereby medical professionals, with training and assistance from the conflict management community, create "health bridges for peace" in conflict-prone areas (Gutlove, 1997). A program of this kind can establish a peaceful bridge between communities in conflict, in which "health can become a common objective and evoke a binding commitment that is shared by warring parties" (World Health Organization, 1995, page 19). In this way, common health needs can provide an opportunity to bring people together for collaborative action, dialogue, and the healing of relationships. This approach has been tested in several instances. For example, the World Health Organization launched a vaccination campaign in Afghanistan in 1994, during which the conflicting factions agreed to a cease-fire. In 1996 the Institute for Resource and Security Studies launched the Health Bridges for Peace project, to promote integrated action in the health care field (Gutlove, 1997).

OSCE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE COOPERATION WITH NONGOVERNMENT CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SPECIALISTS

By 1993, rising concern about the escalation and spread of conflict in Europe had created an urgency in both government and nongovernment circles about finding creative conflict resolution alternatives. The ODIHR responded by holding a January 1994 seminar in Warsaw to address the role of the CSCE in early warning and preventive diplomacy. Both government and nongovernment actors perceived that scheduling an official seminar at that time was a recognition of the potential of alternative conflict management options.

An important aspect of the Warsaw seminar was its focus on the roles of nongovernment actors in the overall context of preventive diplomacy. Official delegates at the seminar and nongovernment participants both expressed the belief that programs in early warning and preventive diplomacy had the potential to enhance and preserve security in Europe. Moreover, it was stated that CSCE-NGO cooperation in these efforts could be mutually beneficial, and should be explored.

The engaged presence of appropriate parties at the Warsaw seminar opened the way to a variety of cooperative government and nongovernment initiatives. One such initiative was a cooperative effort of the CSCE Secretariat and the Institute for Resource and Security Studies, through the Balkans Peace Project, to convene a seminar in StadtSchlaining, Austria, in September 1994. This seminar brought together about twenty heads of CSCE delegations and CSCE officials with an equal number of representatives of nongovernment organizations that are engaged in conflict management activities in the OSCE region.

One of the unique features of the meeting was the degree to which it was broadly and significantly representative. Key CSCE officials and ambassadors attended,

including fifteen heads of delegation. This attendance demonstrated how serious the CSCE delegations are about the issue of conflict management and the role of nongovernment conflict management specialists. Participation from the nongovernment community was similarly representative, featuring nongovernment conflict management specialists from the USA, Canada, the CIS and across Europe.

At the meeting, three important areas of convergence between the CSCE and the nongovernment conflict management community were delineated. First, the CSCE and this nongovernment community share the key objectives of preventing conflict, building civil society, and protecting human rights. Second, there is significant overlap between the CSCE and this nongovernment community in the approaches they use, namely persuasion, dialogue and conciliation. Third, between the CSCE and the nongovernment conflict management specialists there is a useful complementarity of roles, in all phases of conflict management from the grass roots level to the political and governmental level (Balkans Peace Project, 1994).

The StadtSchlaining meeting also clarified areas in which nongovernment conflict management specialists could provide expertise to the CSCE, including: (i) education, training, research, and conceptual analysis of conflict, conflict prevention and conflict management; (ii) communal dialogue on the local level; (iii) provision of information; and (iv) unofficial, peaceful, sub-diplomatic interventions in conflict situations.

The meeting yielded a number of recommendations, many of which focussed on the need for better information exchange, in both directions, between the CSCE and the nongovernment conflict management community. Another recommendation from the seminar was that an oral and a written report of the meeting be submitted to the 1994 Budapest CSCE Review Conference, describing the broad range of ideas and possibilities that were explored at the seminar. This was done, and presentation of the seminar findings in Budapest was met with strong support. It was acknowledged that expert consultation from nongovernment conflict management specialists could well be one of the most useful and cost-effective resources available to the CSCE, and that the CSCE needs to improve its ability to utilize this resource. To emphasize this point, a special edition of the Helsinki Monitor, published in 1995 to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, included an article on OSCE-NGO cooperation in conflict management (Gutlove and Thompson, Helsinki Monitor, 1995).

To follow up on the recommendation that better information exchange be facilitated, in both directions, between the CSCE and the nongovernment conflict management community, the Institute for Resource and Security Studies, in cooperation with the Conflict Prevention Centre of the OSCE, convened a seminar to examine needs and opportunities for improved exchange of knowledge about conflict management. This seminar, held in Vienna in June 1995, allowed OSCE officials and delegates to share perspectives with representatives of nongovernment organizations, on needs and opportunities for improved exchange of knowledge about conflict management. A related seminar, for the nongovernment specialists, was held on the following day.

For many of the OSCE and nongovernment participants, the seminars were their first exposure to the concept that careful attention to information generation and

processing can yield credible, timely, accessible and conveniently packaged knowledge. For them, the meeting was truly an eye-opener, shattering assumptions about the inevitability of either doing without vital information or drowning in the increasingly abundant stream of random information that is available through ever-advancing technology. For those participants who had previously taken part in the development of information conventions and systems for information management, for example in the context of human rights or relief work, the meetings were an opportunity to share the lessons they had learned and to confirm what they had achieved (Gutlove and Thompson, Vienna seminars report, 1995).

Participants broadly agreed that the information needs of the conflict management field are great and growing, and that the potential for addressing those needs lies within our grasp, particularly if the lessons learned in other areas are applied here. One key lesson, oft repeated, was that the introduction of information conventions, and training in their use, cannot be done effectively through an arbitrary or top-down approach. Instead, there must be broad participation in developing a conceptual structure for the field and the information conventions which flow from that structure.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS BY OSCE PARTICIPATING STATES

As governments, intergovernment organizations and nongovernment bodies search for ambitious, imaginative but realistic approaches to conflict management, they must use all the capabilities at their disposal. In doing so, they should seek judicious cooperation across institutional lines, and should seek opportunities to integrate conflict management with other humanitarian functions. A strong indigenous capability in conflict management, in every country, will be essential if this effort is to succeed.

Another essential ingredient of success will be the broad sharing of useful knowledge, including the lessons of practical experience. There must be increased understanding throughout nations and governments about the causes of violent conflict and the options available to prevent it. Also, conflict management will yield its best fruits if pursued cooperatively by everyone who can make a difference, whoever and wherever they are. Centralized control of the field is neither feasible nor desirable. Thus, communication and information exchange are crucial.

These imperatives create some needs for practical action. Accordingly, we suggest that OSCE participating states:

- (i) provide greater resources for building and sustaining indigenous conflict management capabilities;
- (ii) promote "integrated action", in which conflict management is integrated with other functions; and
- (iii) support improved communication, coordination and information exchange, both within the conflict management field and between this field and related fields.

The field of conflict management, while promising, requires further development and refinement if it is to achieve its full potential. In its region, the OSCE is well placed to be the leading intergovernment actor on conflict management matters. To carry out this role, the OSCE needs to systematically coordinate its work with other relevant actors, whether from the conflict management community or from the relief and development communities, in a manner that is synergistic and mutually beneficial. In this manner, the OSCE can make a major contribution to a sustainable peace for Europe.

REFERENCES

Balkans Peace Project, Exploring the Potential for Collaboration by the CSCE and NGOs on Preventive Diplomacy: Summary Statement from a seminar convened by the Balkans Peace Project with the support of the Secretary General's office of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, StattdSchlaining, Austria, 23-24 September 1994 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Institute for Resource and Security Studies, October 1994).

Gutlove, Paula, "Health Bridges for Peace: Integrating Health Care with Community Reconciliation", paper presented to a conference, organized by MedAct, on the theme Preventing Violence - the Role of Health Professionals, London, 12 April 1997.

Gutlove, Paula, and Gordon Thompson, "The Potential for Cooperation by the OSCE and Non-Governmental Actors on Conflict Management," Helsinki Monitor, Volume 6, Number 3 (1995), pp 52-64.

Gutlove, Paula, and Gordon Thompson, Exchanging Knowledge About Conflict Management: A Report on Seminars in Vienna in June 1995 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Institute for Resource and Security Studies, September 1995).

World Health Organization, "Health in Social Development", position paper prepared for the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, March 1995.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Paula Gutlove is the director of the Program on Promoting Understanding and Cooperation, at the Institute for Resource and Security Studies, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Dr. Gutlove has taken a leading role in promoting professional interchange and assessment in the field of conflict management. She has been a public member of the US delegations to the November 1996 OSCE Review Conference in Vienna, the November 1994 CSCE Review Conference in Budapest, and the January 1994 CSCE seminar in Warsaw. Dr. Gutlove has facilitated dialogue and conflict resolution training with international groups in the former Soviet Union, Japan, Australia, Europe, and the Balkans.

Gordon Thompson is the executive director of the Institute for Resource and Security Studies. Dr. Thompson has worked on a variety of natural resource and international security issues, including preventive actions in general and conflict management in particular. His work on conflict management has focussed on policy, institutional and managerial aspects.

*****END OF ESSAY*****