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Preparing the Psychological Space for Peacemaking

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Peace processes fail for many reasons, but one of the critical factors is the state of mind of the participants around the peace table. Often the atmosphere is one of mistrust and suspicion: the traumatic effects of the conflict and the degree of suffering makes the parties likely to be more interested in retribution than accommodation. This state of mind keeps conflict parties rigidly and emotionally attached to their positions and often psychologically blocked from being able to engage productively in a peace process and achieve outcomes that meet their best interests.

This article proposes that to make conflict resolution efforts more effective, conflict parties need help to become psychologically ready to enter a peace process. It argues that any commitment to a psychological process must be understood in the context of geopolitical realities, and it recognizes that power dynamics are a critical piece of any assessment of what will bring about an end to conflict. It makes a plea to understand how and why individuals and parties are behaving as they are around the peace table, in terms of power dynamics and human motivations, and how they can be better prepared.

A methodology is needed that can transform the intense emotions of war into strategic calculations and in doing so to help get to the end of conflict. This article advocates the creation of a safe space, where conflict parties can explore their feelings, internal narratives, and personal motives and understand that these intense emotions may not be serving their best interest. The aim is to work with the parties to help them abandon their rigid emotional attachments to their positions, modify their expectations, and achieve an improved state of “psychological readiness” that allows them to be in a better state of mind to participate around the peace table.

Mediation is currently the most prevalent form of dispute resolution in managing or resolving violent conflict. While the field of mediation has made tremendous strides in embedding academic research and professional training, the real challenge is determining how to operationalize these theories. The long unresolved Israel-Palestine conflict and, more recently, the continually unsuccessful rounds of international mediation in the Syria and Yemen conflicts demonstrate the limits of current mediation practice. A better approach is needed: one that employs an efficient and effective toolkit for the twenty-first century with a methodology that prepares parties psychologically to engage around the peace table.

Violence hardens the heart and calcifies the mind, and so it is no wonder that parties are often not ready to enter talks to resolve violent disputes through negotiation or mediation. They are not in a state of mind to make the necessary compromises; instead, they often continue to see the world in a binary equation of good/evil, enemy/friend, or black/white. And when, or if, they do agree to participate in talks, their strategy reflects the conflict dichotomy of a win/lose outcome. There are no shades of gray: alternate viewpoints or options are vehemently rejected. The negotiation room becomes a battlefield of words, with the parties trying to achieve through negotiation what they had hoped to achieve through

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violence. In addition, the cost, time, effort, and emotional trauma of violent conflict add to the often-unyielding positions of the parties, regardless of political and military realities.

Current academic knowledge on mediation argues that for mediation to be successful, the conditions must be ripe and the parties must be ready.¹ Ripeness is often described as a moment in the conflict when parties are symmetrical in power, but when the conflict dynamic is about to shift to the weaker party.² At this timely juncture, when the potential exists for a successful end to the conflict, an offer of mediation is most likely to be accepted. Recent knowledge has also advanced the idea of readiness, championing the need for a broad central coalition within the conflicting parties before they can embrace an offer of mediation.³

Although knowledge of ripeness and readiness has advanced the abilities of mediation practitioners to define opportune moments for successful mediation, these theories have not sufficiently helped practitioners to identify those moments while mediation is being carried out. Current efforts are often aimed at consulting the parties on their positions, advising them on negotiating strategies, and training them for negotiations. Well-meaning as they are, these efforts are rarely able to move disputants from the emotionally intransigent space that they find themselves in after years of war and trauma.

The emotional world of mediation is hardly a consideration in current international mediation practice. This gap is likely caused by several factors. The field of politics and conflict resolution is often defined by rationality and populated by those with formal education. These characteristics, often a product of a Western approach to learning, are influenced by Cartesian philosophy, in which the primacy of logic and reason are unquestioned. The field is also highly male-dominated at the upper echelons of decision making and leadership, where being emotionally attuned is considered a feminine trait.⁴ Also, in the practice of international mediation today, the choice of mediator is influenced far more by a candidate's nationality, leverage, and prior success than by his or her empathy and emotional intelligence, which reflect culture, gender, and informal education.

In such an arena, conflict analysts and practitioners are highly unlikely to understand the logic of weak and disorganized parties that may choose to contend with a militarily stronger and superior force. Moreover, they are unlikely to understand why parties may be willing to endure further suffering by not accepting the "reasonable" terms of settlement they have been offered.⁵

This article addresses this "psychological gap" and the need for a methodology that can help transform the emotional, reactive behavior of the conflict parties into more strategic thinking about peace initiatives, be they negotiations or mediations.

Addressing Geopolitical Realities

Increasing the awareness of the emotional state of the different actors will be insufficient if they are unable to understand and strategically assess the wider geopolitical context of the conflict. Often the emotional position of a conflict party might seem unrealistic because of their relative power and the geopolitical situation—their demands do not always match their leverage. Most parties maintain a false estimation of their own power. They believe that they are entitled to more because they can either continue to withstand the status quo or win on the battlefield or because they hold the righteous position under international law.⁶

The Syrian conflict is instructive here; different parties became stuck in fixed positions, often speaking in platitudes. Government parties have sat around the table saying, "Assad must stay," while opposition groups have insisted, "Assad must go." This polarized negotiating position was mirrored by governments on the international stage who have been involved in a proxy war in Syria. The United States and Saudi Arabia have insisted Assad must go and Russia and Iran have insisted that he should stay.

A preparatory mediation process would have helped the different actors think through their strategic options, examining questions such as: Are their expectations grounded in reality? Will their current position increase the suffering of their people or do they have a realistic endgame, and are they protecting the communities they represent? Members of the Syrian opposition have struggled to find coherence among themselves; their rivalries and competition have weakened their bargaining power to achieve their objective of regime change. Critical opportunities may have been missed because of the state of mind of the participants but also because the participants lack an accurate assessment of the wider geopolitical forces at play and how this may have been translated into peacemaking.

One step in preparing parties to be psychologically ready is to enable them to see the power realities in the conflict zone and in the larger, geopolitical situation. Another is to help parties move away from simply insisting on their position and help them make realistic demands consonant with their relative power, or to attain what they want by altering their relative power. In some situations, understanding the power reality and the geopolitical situation is straightforward. Verifiable battle losses, including the loss of personnel, strategic locations, and territory, make it easy to confront parties with reality. In such a situation, little persuasion is required to pivot parties from unrealistic positions to their actual relative power positions. Parties who find themselves in this situation often look to the preparation team to advise them about how to maximize their gains or what they can get in the negotiating room in keeping with their relative power. Often, however, conflict parties who have been psychologically affected by the conflict are not yet ready to accept the geopolitical situation or the outcome they can achieve with the real bargaining power they have.

The Psychological State as a Result of Conflict

Addressing the geopolitics of power will then need to be placed in a bed of understanding the deep emotions that are often blocking any movement forward. These emotions may reflect the parties' sense of powerlessness and may be an expression of the difficulties they are facing in the effort to transform their emotional content into strategic power.⁷ Rage, anger, grief, and distrust preside. In this tumultuous state, parties are rarely able to hear advice, face reality, or make the necessary strategic calculations to promote the best interests of those they represent. Accepting anything less than what they want and what in their perception is right and just will often feel like a betrayal to their cause.

War creates the conditions for human regression, where the conflict parties have often done terrible things to each other. Those involved in negotiating an end to the conflict justify their own disturbing and brutal actions in the name of war. These are not the conditions for self-awareness. It is far more likely to find the parties in a deep state of denial, particularly about the horrors they have committed on the enemy, and the suffering they have caused their own people by not finding a solution earlier. This kind of denial often creates a rigid mindset in which the leadership believes in the rightness of their cause and their own interpretation of events, where they have contributed a narrative to justify the righteousness of their own behavior. Within this frame of mind, several psychological states and interests will be obstructive to peacemaking.

Trying to impose what is "rational" or "logical" at this point without addressing the parties' emotional concerns surrounding the issues will often create a breakdown of talks. Most people are capable of understanding logic, but they do not make important life decisions based on what they *think* about an issue. Rather, people, particularly in conflict environments, are more likely to make their decisions based on how they *feel* about the issue. At this juncture, what the parties need is not advice, negotiation, strategy, or training. What they need is someone to listen to them with empathy, which means getting into the mind of

the other and understanding their experience and why there is an intensity of emotion that is sitting in the way of pursuing their own or their group's best interest.

Creating Safe Spaces for the Parties

The preparatory work involves creating a containing and safe space where those who are to be around a future peace table are able to express intense emotions. At this early stage, the hostility and suspicion between the conflict parties is often so great that it will be impossible for them to be in the same room. Being placed together will most likely only highlight and exacerbate their differences. Parties may be more concerned about exacting retribution and making the other side suffer than about working with their enemy to find a solution. The pain of losing their friends, family, home, and livelihood is likely to have resulted in hardened attitudes and a gap between the warring parties that seems unbridgeable. Thus, the parties will need separate, safe spaces.

A safe space is a physical space that is warm and inviting, where the environment is quiet, relaxed, informal, and culturally friendly. A warm and comfortable room is a far more intimate space and therefore a more appropriate space in which to hold confidential and personal discussions than a large conference room or the lobby of a hotel. The preparation team would need to identify a space befitting the depth of feelings within the conflict parties to help ensure that they feel relaxed and able to speak openly. A safe space enhances the quality of the discussions, in particular, their degree of informality. Discussions that have an informal style are usually "personal" and "off the record." The more formal and high level the interlocutor's personality and position, the less likely the interlocutor is to achieve a quality of informality in discussions with the conflict parties. It is the job of the mediator to act as a container and make it safe for parties to try, with the mediator's help to translate their emotions into strategic thinking.

Encouraging the Parties to Express Intense Emotions

Listening is the first step to preparing the parties to enter a peace process with a more strategic outlook. It is important that the parties feel that they are heard, that their emotional experiences are recognized and taken seriously. Helping them process their feelings will involve listening to them express their political views and gradually helping them see how their views are shaped by their own internal narratives, biases, and motives. This process is slow and often requires enormous patience and strategic questioning from the listener. Moreover, for the process to be successful, the listener must demonstrate genuine interest, asking open questions that allow a deep exploration of the individual or parties' narratives, especially how they have been constructed and whether there is a possibility of the parties' being open to different ways of thinking.

Once the combatant feels that he or she has been heard and that his or her emotions have been validated, the listener may think it is important to challenge the narrative. The extent to which the expression of these emotions should be encouraged, however, before the narrative is challenged requires careful consideration. The listener must be conscious of the risk that individuals and their groups will become stuck in a state of victimhood; too much encouragement may risk affording legitimacy to individuals and parties who wear their trauma as a badge of honor. Thus, finding the optimum time for challenging the narrative is a delicate balancing act.

Identifying Values

The intention is to help translate or elevate the participants' emotions into more strategic calculations. As part of the process for doing this it can be helpful for participants to identify their values: What are the things they care about? What are the ideas they deeply value? Here, it may be useful to differentiate between individual values and group values. It is not only parties' outermost feelings that need to be listened to; it is also important to explore the deeply ingrained values that have shaped their ideology and belief systems. Identifying these at an early stage can be a critical part of the work.

Those who have fought in the conflict often express a devotion to core values—such as the welfare of their family and country or their commitment to religion, honor, and justice. When they believe they are being taken advantage of or asked to give up their core values, they can become more extreme in their positions. A vacuum may be created that leads to more violent behavior or a breakdown of the self. Thus, it is important to identify what they care about in order to understand what is negotiable and what is non-negotiable.

Scott Atran has spent considerable time talking with extremist groups in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine, exploring the idea of non-negotiable values, which he terms “sacred values.”⁸ In his book *Talking to the Enemy* he identifies sacred values as the values people hold inside, which may involve honor, protecting their family, or avoiding humiliation. These deeply ingrained values make up one's ideological belief systems. For example, a fighter's belief that his most important responsibility is to feed his family or protect the family honor must be addressed before that fighter can be integrated back into society. As Rifkind and Picco point out: “Any deal that feeds the humiliation or the sense of marginalization is likely to fuel further violence. Therefore, negotiators must be capable of understanding the sensitivities and wounds that have shaped ideological rigidity.”⁹ Establishing these red lines is essential preparatory work.

In practice, sacred values are seldom susceptible to being dislodged. These personal thoughts and beliefs are often deep within our DNA and thus are part of our identity from birth.¹⁰ For this reason, the theory of managing radical differences, which is explored later in this article, becomes a relevant and important methodology. It does not assume that people will change their minds or see the other person's point of view; it advocates for people to establish their red lines and their areas of mutual self-interest. Though establishing these lines is essential work, it does not in any way undermine the importance of listening at this early stage.

Changing Minds

Theories of psychological change and power, pressure and leverage have much to say about how people change minds and what might influence their negotiating position. Often clients or combatants remain competitive and are unlikely to be interested in a change of position; they are more likely to want to apportion blame entirely to the other side. It is probably too painful for them to examine their motivations for war and to confront the fact that their participation in war may have been a futile exercise causing suffering, destruction, and huge numbers of deaths. The desire to remain rigidly attached to the motivation to go to war is powerful, and self-examination can cause a crisis of identity.

Psychologically, it is almost impossible to realize and accept that one has been mistaken for decades and that the horrors of the past could have been avoided. As the Israeli writer David Grossman points out, “Behind the deafening noise of shrill political rhetoric, in every Israeli and Palestinian's soul there is a dark, silent place in which they know all of the horrible suffering of this conflict was utterly futile and useless.”¹¹ This is the state of mind in which parties often face each other across the table.

Psychological theories have much to say about why people resist change, block it, or even create a delusional narrative to reinforce their position. These theories are relevant to peacemaking when those involved in conflict have done terrible things to each other and find it easier to live in a state of denial than to recognize that some of the aggressive and potentially destructive behavior they have engaged in has done little to further the peace and much to stimulate the war.

Those involved in conflict may be susceptible to creating a delusional narrative. Examples include an unrealistic assessment of the power they have or the inability to accurately calculate an achievable endgame. Part of the preparatory stage, then, is to help those involved make a more realistic assessment of their power and influence. This step will help the parties face what is a more pragmatic and realistic outcome and will also increase their awareness that by not coming to the peace table, the situation could worsen for their families and their communities.

The theory of change suggests that a shock or crisis will lead to changes in both the individual and the group.¹² A history of conflict can create a “peacemaking complacency”; not least because elite groups may benefit from a conflict environment, economically or emotionally or in terms of their positions of power. The questions to be asked are What would disturb this status quo and what would allow people to take the necessary risks involved? If the level of shock is sufficient, and those who have been exposed feel that they have already lost so much, they may become more willing to re-examine the status quo. One can compare this situation to that of a divorcing couple. Only at the point of loss—whether it be the loss of money, the loss of a home, or the loss of access to children—are the parties prepared to make some of the more difficult compromises. Often when emotion has become entrenched, parties get themselves locked into positions and do not know how to find a way out; sometimes only a shock to the system provides the impetus for movement.

In international conflict, this shock or disruption may be part of ripening the conditions to bring the parties to the peace table. But the entangled power relationships cannot be ignored; when the power relationships are asymmetrical, and the weaker party has few bargaining chips, that party is reluctant to engage. Only when the members of the weaker party recognize a recalibration of this power balance and feel they are in a stronger position will they be more prepared to come to the peace table.

Psychological theories do not primarily hold that people change only as a result of disruption. Theories often assume a more benign view of human behavior and identify a trusting and safe relationship, in which the mediator holds the interests of the client, as a more likely precursor to change. According to this more benign view of human behavior, a trusted interlocutor or mediator can create a safe space in which the combatants can move beyond the emotions associated with the trauma of war and begin to think about and evaluate strategic options. The seasoned negotiator John Alderdice makes a persuasive argument for the importance of centralizing the preparatory process in his article “Off the Couch and Round the Conference Table.” He argues that minds must be “heard, valued, contained, explored and expressed” and calls for a “fluid appreciation of the emotional tone around the table at any time.”¹³

Opening Up Incentives

Frequently, there are incentives to keep the status quo and for parties to remain in their comfort zones. How can third parties help create a change in behavior, where parties would see it in their best interest to engage positively in a peace process? Opening up the imagination and asking probing questions can be useful; this process can elicit creative thoughts and enable the exploration of alternate ways for parties to achieve their interests.

The aim is to help parties move from rigid thinking to more creative exploration. Parties can be asked to articulate an ideal end-state of the conflict or vision for a postconflict reality. Exploration of the imagined end-state helps the conflict parties think about the best outcome they could hope for, or what a future could look like.¹⁴ Once careful, sensitive work has been done on what the parties can live with, they can begin to reframe more realistic possibilities.

This kind of engagement could be applied in the Israel-Palestine conflict to ripen the conditions for change and incentivize the Gazans in the refugee camps. It would involve more than just asking the usual questions, leading refugees only to repeat that they wish to return to their homeland within the state of Israel, which in the current political climate is an unrealizable dream. Instead, questions could be asked to stimulate the imagination, such as What changes would offer a better life for their children? Or what would a secure future look like?¹⁵

Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein's nudge theory of behavioral economics may have something to contribute to the theory of changing minds.¹⁶ It describes two distinct modes by which information is processed: the first is rapid and feels more instinctive; the second is more reflective and constitutes a deliberate, self-conscious reasoning. Any successful nudge strategy has to account for both modes of thinking, because conflict between these two modes frequently leads to an individual's selecting a wrong option. Applying this theory to peace building underlines the importance of mediators' using what Thaler and Sunstein describe as a "choice architecture." In other words, considering how choices are presented to parties: nudging parties with questions to help them reflect on why they want a particular outcome. This strategy will help parties draw out and differentiate between their strategic interests and their emotional needs.

The Role of the Mediator

Individuals who seek to take on the role of mediator must have either an intuitive knowledge or formal training in psychological understanding to work empathetically with conflict parties. Because the political and humanitarian urgency to make progress in the peace process can sometimes make villains out of victims, the mediator must be careful not to emit impatience over the emotional state of the parties and to avoid branding the parties as obstructive because of an inability to immediately respond rationally or realistically. Listening to parties express their feelings and reflecting these feelings with empathy allows the parties to process their intense emotions of rage, anger, grief, and distrust. Waiting until the interlocutors are emotionally spent allows them to be more ready and agreeable to contemplating the next steps.

The mediator may struggle with his or her own feelings if the combatants have been involved in horrendous acts of killing. It is not role of the mediator, however, to pass judgment. Because it is essential that the mediator be self-aware, it may be helpful for him or her to reflect on how he or she might have behaved in such circumstances. Mediators need to learn to contain their feelings so that they can keep an open mind and respond nonjudgmentally. Learning this skill may require training.

Determining When to Promote Psychological Readiness

When the parties focus solely on either emotions or reason, they are left dissatisfied, having neglected a critical aspect of their decision-making process. To determine how to avoid this outcome and ensure an effective peace process, we need to understand how emotions interact with reason.

Before conflict parties enter into negotiations or mediation, they need to understand how they feel about the conflict and they need to be able to reflect on their emotional attachments

to particular positions. Being psychologically ready before engaging in talks allows the parties to be open-minded and able to rationally consider offers from the other side or proposals from the peacemaker rather than reacting emotionally and rejecting them.

Often, only when a peace process gets stuck because of the intransigence of one or both sides in the conflict or the lack of trust between them do peacemakers realize that the parties are not psychologically ready to constructively engage in peace talks.¹⁷ Peacemakers often find that the parties are so traumatized and enraged by the war that they can do little more than vilify the other side during the peace talks, reacting emotionally, with complete distrust and obstinate opposition to any ideas from the other side or the peacemakers.

Helping the parties to develop their psychological readiness during the peace initiative entails working behind the scenes, often in concert with a mediator or, in a formal peace process, with a high-level peacemaker. Helping the parties develop psychological readiness involves evaluating and helping to develop the ability of the conflict parties to be open to offers, creative in developing solutions, in making realistic demands, and in offering strategic concessions. It also means communicating with the peacemaker about when the parties are psychologically ready to hold productive discussions.

Who Should Support Conflict Parties with Psychological Readiness?

Several types of interlocutors have the potential to promote psychological readiness. The most appropriate ones, however, are best determined by the timing of the initiative and the type of conflict actors. Track one or formal diplomacy may involve the use of interlocutors who have the psychological skills to psychologically prepare the parties. But before this process begins, mediators may play a relevant role in track two or informal diplomacy. These lower-level interlocutors, who can maneuver without the scrutiny and attention of the media, may find that they have easier access to the conflict parties. These interlocutors are members of academic or other nongovernmental institutions or they may be private individuals who have some legitimate relationship or access to the parties and have sufficient international personality but little leverage to influence the position of the state actor.

Once a conflict has erupted and there is a de facto recognition that state sovereignty has been reduced, formal mediation initiatives become possible. The state may continue to be cautious about overinternationalizing the conflict and may block initiatives that have the potential to strengthen nonstate actors or make them more equal to the state actor. In this context, international nongovernmental organizations from other peacemaking states and regional organizations are well placed to undertake preparatory work. An important aspect of preparing parties to be psychologically ready is to ensure that the formal mediation team is kept separate but informed. Doing so allows the mediation team to maintain its impartiality but stay informed about the state of readiness of actors so the peace process can proceed at the right pace.

Working with Spoilers, Hardliners, Moderates, and Liberals

In many conflicts, there are some individuals or groups who have a vested interest in retaining the status quo and obstructing any peace process. They gain power, wealth, and influence from the continuation of the war and may be responsible for recurring violence. Preventing these individuals and groups from blocking a peace process is not about changing their minds but, where possible, creating new sources of power, wealth, and influence in a postconflict context and enabling them to see the opportunities within the peace process.

One of the tragic consequences of war is that people hold their positions passionately and dogmatically, blocking any possibility for the vision and flexibility required for peacemaking ideas to emerge. This intransigent mindset often makes parties bring their fight-to-win

attitude to the negotiating table. They have little interest in understanding the other side or in finding mutually acceptable outcomes, least of all solutions that may require power sharing and the inclusion of the perceived defeated or wrongful party. They may prefer a military solution to conflict resolution and therefore are likely to oppose negotiations. They may take the posture of self-righteousness; they feel legitimate in their stubborn opposition to making peace with the enemy. In this state of mind, thinking is often polarized and extreme and is antithetical to the more complex and nuanced flexibility that is essential for finding creative solutions to end the conflict.

A conflict party will also include more moderate members who feel protective of their value system. Within this group will be a small number of members with an open and liberal mindset, usually those who have suffered the least during the war or who have an elite education and a worldlier outlook. They are often willing to work closely with the peacemakers to find a solution. But because they are often a minority in a conflict party, they are usually distrusted by the rest of group. Any agreement made with these members can prove costly because they are rarely able to persuade the rest of the group to accept a deal. If these liberal members play prominent roles at the beginning of a peace process, they will be marginalized, because they are considered “sell-outs” by the rest of the party. If they become more prominent later in the peace process, when the approaches of the “hard-liners” have failed, they can play an important role in developing the party’s strategic thinking and creative solutions.

Promoting Realistic Demands

When the facts about the zones of conflict remain opaque, the preparation team will have to work with the parties to assess how realistic their demands are and to examine what is required to bring about the power shift between the parties and within geopolitics that would allow them to attain their political aims. This process will also involve a realistic assessment of the parties’ ability to take responsibility for and their commitment to the effort required to attain their desired outcome.

If in confronting these realities it becomes apparent that the parties have neither the will nor the means to change their relative power or affect the geopolitical situation, then the parties need to recognize that they themselves are prolonging the war and the suffering of their own people by continuing to insist on impossible goals. Preparatory work would therefore also need to involve helping the conflict parties determine how long they are prepared to prolong a war that they can never win and whether they are truly representing the interests of the people they claim to represent.

Managing Radical Differences

Helping the parties prepare psychologically is an important prerequisite of any peace process but it requires a realistic understanding of the limitations of reconciling different conflicted points of view. Parties with radical differences are often not open to the possibility of compromise and may have no desire to find a compromised solution. In this instance, defining these differences is the first step. Once this step has been taken, it usually becomes clear that the positions of the adversaries are nearer than either assumed. What has proven effective is recognizing and accepting the radical differences without seeking to resolve them.

Oliver Ramsbotham, who has written extensively about such radical disagreement, emphasizes the importance of having parties identify areas of mutual self-interest in situations where cooperation is beneficial or necessary.¹⁸ Oxford Process has developed these ideas further by recognizing that radical differences can be managed. Our experience tells us that rather than trying to get conflict parties to understand and accept the other, it is more

productive to help them become psychologically ready to understand their relative positions.¹⁹ Once they are confident that they are not being required to give up their beliefs, cooperation can be promoted in areas that benefit their self-interest. With this approach, even without resolving underlying radical differences, mutually beneficial agreements can be reached and sustainably implemented to allow co-existence without violence. As John Paul Lederach points out, “The capacity to live with apparent contradictions and paradoxes lies at the heart of conflict transformation.”²⁰

Conclusion

Peace processes take place in the midst of intense emotions. Successful peacemaking requires flexibility and creativity and the capacity to live with apparent contradictions, which the emotional disturbance and intensity of conflict often makes more difficult. Increasing the awareness of the emotional state of the different actors within conflict parties and helping them understand and strategically assess their relative power and the wider geopolitical context of the conflict can help a mediation team advance a peace process.

A preparatory team can help prepare the conflict parties to become psychologically ready to engage in peace negotiations. The team would aim to help participants be more aware of their behavior and of their relative power and the geopolitical situation and help them define what they can realistically achieve. Such preparation will also help conflict parties examine how far their current emotions and behavior potentially enhance or obstruct their ability to achieve what they can in a peace process. The aim of this preparatory methodology is to provide support to official peacemaking efforts by working behind the scenes to help elevate the emotions from the heat of war to rational thought and in so doing to prepare those in positions of leadership to undertake strategic analysis that is in the best interests of the group they are representing.

Notes

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¹⁷ Herbert C. Kelman, “Building Trust among Enemies: The Central Challenge for International Conflict Resolution,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29, no. 6 (2005): 639–650.

¹⁸ Oliver Ramsbotham, *Transforming Violent Conflict: Radical Disagreement, Dialogue and Survival* (London: Routledge, 2010).

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²⁰ John Paul Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (New York: Good Books, 2014).