Cognitive Networks, Third Parties, and Negotiations

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INTRODUCTION

Thanks very much to all concerned for inviting me to the workshop on Negotiation, Rational Discussion, and Agreement.

After the German workers revolted against the “workers’ government” in East Germany, a party hack suggested that people would have to work harder to win the confidence of the government. Bertolt Brecht responded that it would be easier for the government to dissolve the people, and elect another.

Colombia does not need a new people. Its people are as good as those anywhere in the world. And, as in many countries, there are parties who have serious grievances with the government. Unlike many countries, however, Colombia suffers armed intrastate conflict. The causes of the origin of the conflict differ somewhat from the causes of the maintenance of the conflict. Maybe it would have been more fortunate for Colombia to have had a different geography and a different botany. The geographic fragmentation of the country has long limited the control of the state over large portions of the territory, and lowers the cost of starting an armed rebellion. The profits from illegitimate coca enterprise are attractive, and raise the cost of ending armed rebellion. Grievances that elsewhere would have been settled either by swift repression or democratic cooptation were not so easily remedied in Colombia. Finally, until recently, international third parties were little interested in helping to resolve the conflict.

Increasing consensus on democratic and liberal values in Colombia and around the world render irrelevant the ideologies once offered to justify the opposing sides. Yet it is not clear how to bring these wasteful conflicts to an end.

In this essay, I apply an approach from my study of democratic deliberation to the different arena of settlement negotiation of armed intrastate conflict. It’s observed that in democratic settings people argue, but seldom seem to change their minds. I recite evidence that the effects of persuasion are often latent, indirect, delayed, and disguised,
and I say that this is due to the fact that an attitude targeted for persuasion is not isolated but rather is located in network structure of attitudes. Due to the network structure, people do change their minds, but slowly on the latent level, although suddenly on the manifest level; as one sees in scientific revolutions, for example, in the shift from the Ptolemaic to the Copernican theory of the universe. With respect to negotiated settlement of conflict, there is much academic discussion of robustly resolving the security dilemma, and of bargaining along a single dimension of conflict. I say in addition that in armed intrastate conflict the parties could even differ on what is the dimension of conflict, and that each party may hold a mutually incomprehensible worldview, beyond the already difficult problem of each seeing itself as good and the other as evil. I connect up to and bolster approaches to conflict settlement which see the need for a third-party mediator to bridge the chasm between the parties, because they are affectively and cognitively incapable of making progress on their own. In concluding, I suggest that settlement of intrastate armed conflict differs in kind from talks in the post-Soviet transitions and in constituent assemblies.

THE PUZZLE OF UNCHANGING MINDS

The Network Structure of Attitudes. Recently, I completed an essay on the question of whether democratic deliberation changes minds (Mackie 2005). The puzzle is this. We frequently observe discussion in parliaments and in natural groups, and we also frequently observe that discussion seems seldom to change anyone’s mind. I suggest that the resolution of the puzzle has to do with the coherence of any given individual’s attitudes, of the webbed interdependence among her various beliefs, desires, and actions, which makes it such that the effects of persuasion are typically latent, indirect, delayed, or disguised.
My basic premise is that a given belief or desire is not isolated, but rather is located in a network structure of attitudes, such that persuasion sufficient to change an attitude in isolation is not sufficient to change the attitude as supported by its network.

The minority influence school of social psychology developed several clever lines of experiments showing that the effects of persuasion can be latent, indirect, or delayed. The most astonishing experiments applied persuasion to perceptual judgments, such as whether a presented slide is blue or green. Latent effects of persuasion are shown quite robustly. The contrary claims of a minority do not change a subject’s manifest judgment, but it is shown that his latent judgment shifts a bit in the direction of the minority’s claim (the more manifest the resistance, the greater the latent change). An example of indirect effects is shown in an experiment with Franco-era Catholic students exposed to persuasive messages favoring the legalization of abortion. The students’ views on abortion don’t change, but their views on entirely unmentioned contraception do change, and a similar experiment showed interesting delayed effects as well. Earlier, and independently, some of the cognitive consistency theorists also demonstrated latent, indirect, and delayed effects of persuasion.

Such effects are consistent with a network structure of attitudes. A given belief, such as in the wrongness of abortion, is not isolated, but is located in a network of attitudes. Persuasion sufficient to change the attitude in isolation is not sufficient to overcome it within its network. The persuasive message is not discarded, however. It reverberates within the network, shifting the target attitude some small degree in the direction recommended by the persuasive message, in its implications shifting more strongly some connected attitudes, and the full adjustment of the network continues over time (the experiments measured implicit changes over several weeks).

Further, I suggest that consistency among attitudes is not an intrinsic motivation, but that consistency is instrumentally motivated in the pursuit of the goals of accuracy in understanding the world, avoidance of wastefully self-defeating action, integrity of self,
and credibility among one’s fellows. Among democratic politicians there is a tension between the need to maintain consistency for the sake of integrity and credibility, and the deliberative demand that one be open to ideas and interests of others. One maintains one’s credibility by being steadfast, which includes being slow to change one’s mind. Even if one is swiftly persuaded by a new argument, it might be best to disguise that change, to express publicly that one is unchanged, but less publicly to go along with the action recommended by the new argument. Consider the rhetoric we frequently hear in practical politics: we cling to our principles but we reluctantly agree to this unpleasant but unavoidable compromise. Compromise on action rather than consensus on principles better respects the integrity and credibility of the actors. As time passes, yesterday’s compromise slowly becomes today’s principle. The better decision is made, but everyone saves face.

One mechanism is that, within a network of attitudes, the effect of a persuasive message is latent, indirect, and delayed. Another mechanism is that, in agreeing on collective action, for the sake of integrity and credibility one should not appear to be too easily persuaded. These effects suggest an explanation for why the unchanging minds hypothesis seems to be true, but is actually false.

**Conceptual Revolutions.** The American politician Gary Hart said you can’t turn someone around one shoulder at a time. What he means is that you shouldn’t be surprised by an audience’s resistance to persuasion on a single point. One has to change a good number of their interconnected beliefs and desires over time before they will be comfortable with a new approach.

Most of us are familiar with Kuhn’s (1962) account of scientific revolutions. A scientific theory, say the geocentric theory of the universe, simply accounts for thousands of empirical observations. Some observations are inconsistent with the theory, but the great weight of observations accounted for by the theory declares that those anomalous observations are suspect, probably wrong. Since practically we can conduct only a few
observations out of the many possible, a theory also guides us as to where to look. The geocentric theory does a very good job, but over time a number of anomalous observations accumulate, and as they do the explanatory power of the geocentric theory slightly declines. In an act of innovation someone devises the heliocentric theory of the universe, which after development explains more of the observations than does the geocentric theory. The heliocentric theory explains most of what geocentric theory explained plus most of what it didn’t explain. No matter how apparently obvious, it takes years if not decades for the new theory to displace the old one, even among those committed to scientific principles.

This story about scientific revolutions can be extended to conceptual revolutions generally. Paul Thagard (1992, see also 2000) models such conceptual revolutions with simple connectionist networks borrowed analogically from neuroscience. As with working through simple game theory, working through a simple connectionist model makes explicit a number of previously implicit understandings. This coherence model is capable of modeling changes in beliefs and desires, singly and in combination, gradual and sudden, as well as ambivalence, local inconsistencies, framing effects, and latent, indirect, and delayed effects of persuasion. It also efficiently explains conceptual revolutions. In an attitude network the geocentric theory is connected positively to supporting observations and connected negatively to contradicting observations, as are competing theories. The geocentric theory’s positive link to many observations uniquely gives it a positive coherence value – not perfect, but best. A few anomalous observations are not sufficient to devalue the theory (even more so in the absence of any plausible alternative). The anomalous observations accumulate to the point of a critical mass, however, and just past that point, rather suddenly, as in a gestalt shift, the network accepts the heliocentric theory and rejects the geocentric theory. A similar model nicely explains, for example, the Necker Cube illusion, where a two-dimensional line drawing is seen as depicting either one or the other of two distinct three-dimensional cubes, but
never both. The connectionist model also suggests that observations that are unequivocal and precise, as in physical science, would yield one reigning theory and many rejected ones. Equivocal and vague observations, however, as in much of social science, because they are less constraining, might yield two or three positively valued theories (and many negatively valued).

*Attitude Change is Latent, Indirect, Delayed, and Disguised.* Even in physical science, according to Thagard (1992, 59), persuasion is not instantaneous:

The major mechanism by which [a new conceptual system *publicly* overcomes an older one] is scientific *argument*. It would be naive to suppose that arguments directly convince people. Rarely on an issue of any complexity and importance can you simply say to someone: Here are premises you accept, from which the conclusion follows, so accept it. There are always responses [available to] arguments. But this does not mean that argument is futile, for the process of argument and later reflection on it can lead to revision of conceptual links, enabling an alternative system to come to the fore. . . . Chemists resistant to Lavoisier's ideas nevertheless repeated his experiments, thereby acquiring parts of his conceptual system. Perrin reports that it typically took several years for people to pass from opposition to Lavoisier's views to their acceptance. On my account, these years were spent both building up the new system and strengthening its links to where the new system seemed more coherent than the old.

The Habermasian democratic theorist Simone Chambers (1996, 169-170) offers parallel observations:

*We do not like to admit that we are wrong even in the face of evidence; we are very attached to our views; we often enter conversations with set opinions and leave with*
the same set opinions. . . . That a single . . . conversation, especially on a highly charged subject, appears much more likely to end in disagreement than agreement is not strong evidence against the power of rational argumentation. If we step back from the model of the single conversation, we see that people do in fact change their minds; they do find new arguments, positions, and perspectives more convincing than old ones; they are swayed by argumentation. This process goes on over time, however . . . . We often reevaluate our position between conversations rather than within them. We are sometimes not even aware that our position has subtly shifted in response to and reflection upon a criticism or challenge. Not only is the process gradual but it is fragmentary and partial. . . . that single conversations often do not end in agreement does not mean that people are not swayed by argumentation.

Because of the network structure of attitudes, major attitude change is a delayed gestalt-shift type of process, a process of rational resistance in the short run and rational conversion, if appropriate, in the long run.

I think of one of my acquaintances who changed from being a Marxist-Leninist to being a boring social-democrat. In 1974, all the invective aimed at bourgeois democracy seemed to her to be correct: the U.S. backed vicious tyrannies, the so-called socialist states were effective anti-imperialists, the Vietnam war was a humanitarian disaster, students were shot dead in demonstrations, Nixon was a crook, and the installation of Pinochet in Chile showed that oligarchic professions of democracy were nothing but a ruse. It goes without saying that there were a great number of observations inconsistent with the Marxist-Leninist view, but the bourgeois view appeared less coherent at the time. The theory made the anomalous observations suspect: they were at best false, at worst excusable. As she learned more about the history and practice of Leninism the anomalies accumulated. The repudiation of Maoism in China was another
blow, but not decisive. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the same. She attended with her friends a propagandistic war crimes trial of the U.S. government on behalf of the ayatollahs of Iran. The celebration by the international left of the new theocracy was the final blow. For a few years before she would only momentarily waver in her affirmation of the Leninist view. After the final blow, however, the final abandonment took place over only a few weeks. But there remained issues of integrity and credibility, and there were social networks and friendships to consider. It is hard to become the turncoat one once so vigorously denounced. Publicly, she stopped affirming the old view, but declined to affirm the new view for about three years, and revealed the complete change only bit by bit after that.

If persuasion discloses little or no manifest, direct, immediate, and candid effects in the peaceful setting of parliamentary debate, then, I suggest, it is even less likely one would observe such effects in the process of the settlement of an armed conflict. That is not necessarily a counsel of despair: latent, indirect, delayed, disguised, and decisive change could be happening beyond view. Look for these signs of subterranean change. Continuing disagreement but the granting of a slight credence to the opposing party’s view on a question. A party refuses demanded change on a major point, but in response volunteers change on a related point. A party resists a suggestion at the session at which it is introduced, but returns at a later session with a constructive response to it. Resistance to conceding on principles but readiness to compromise on joint action.

The parties to the settlement of an armed conflict sometimes possess quite different worldviews. Next, I will try to apply some of my observations about democratic deliberation to this different arena. I don’t have any training in the field of international relations, and I don’t know much of the literature on armed conflicts and their settlement. Sometimes, however, a naïve outsider can suggest a perspective that would not have easily occurred to the insiders, and this perspective can usefully be
blended into the insiders’ conceptual schemes. It’s more likely that such innovations would fail rather than succeed, but often it’s worth a try.

SETTLEMENT OF ARMED INTRASTATE CONFLICT

Conflict Ripe for Settlement. Assume first that an armed conflict is ripe for settlement. The parties find themselves in an intolerable stalemate, believe that some kind of peace settlement would be better than the war, and thus are motivated to undertake negotiations. For the crudest sort of social theory, that would be the end of it: the two parties want peace, and all they have to do is write up the details.

Political actors who are playing for high stakes – for their own survival, that of their families, friends, and colleagues, and for their core values – understand that much more is involved than a wish to settle. Among other things, such actors understand the security dilemma, of the need for entirely credible guarantees of the future safety of each party, the requirement that each party has robust incentives to stick to the peace agreement. In recent decades, game theorists have precisely mapped for us the contours of the security dilemma, and there are many comparative and historical studies of conflict settlement illustrating the value of that model.

Everyone agrees that the establishment of robust external incentives is a must. Another issue is whether each of the parties is truly ripe for a stable settlement: what are their internal incentives, and how can those incentives be discovered? Does each have a will to settle, and if a will, does each have the resolve, the internal discipline, to live up to a settlement? It is not merely possible that a leadership could agree to be bound by a settlement, and be constrained by external incentives, only to have an unaccountable faction break away or even take control, and opportunistically return to violence. This may be one reason – there are several – for confidence-building measures. Testing the will and the resolve of the other party on a series of issues, starting with the smallest, and gradually increasing in stake, is a well-known negotiation device.
It seems to me that one of the most regrettable events in recent Colombian history was the extermination of the Union Patriotica by right-wing death squads (even more regrettable in that the organization likely would never have attracted more than a handful of votes). This had a vivid demonstration effect: if you agree to peace, and abandon the military road for the political road, you end up dead. Surely this overshadows any aspirations to peace today. The FARC, on its webpage, raises the issue in an essay titled, “You can’t castrate the same dog twice.” It also must have had several filtering effects: those individuals and factions more willing to take the political road were eliminated, and those more willing to take the military road survived; and those who otherwise could start imagining themselves taking the political road no longer mull over the possibility.

If we are assured that external and internal incentives are right, there still remains the issue of the structure and content of the settlement. Is there one salient model of settlement, say, to establish a boundary line between one territory and another? If so, then the usual bargaining models might aptly characterize the situation. Here we assume that the outcome is like some number between 0 and 100. Say there is a contested territory 100 miles wide. The western party is secretly willing to settle for as little as 20 miles east into the contested territory and of course as much as 100. The eastern party, because it is stronger, is secretly willing to settle for as little as 40 miles west into the territory and as much as 100. There is a range of boundaries that both parties together would be willing to settle on, from the western party’s point of view, from 20 miles east to 60 miles east into the territory. The indeterminacy gives rise to a bargaining dilemma and maybe even a stalemate making both parties worse off. That is because each side has an incentive to disguise its preferences. If the western party lets on that it would settle for its minimum demand, then the eastern party would grab it. Thus, the two parties obfuscate and bluff during negotiations. Perhaps within this salient general model of settlement (boundary adjustment) there is one salient specific solution,
to demarcate the boundary at a major river or at some scarcely inhabited line of peaks. Then the parties, after bargaining to exhaustion, might find it convenient to settle on that obvious boundary.

What if there are several salient solutions, or none? Then there is likely an impasse. One idea is that a third-party mediator can break through the indeterminacy. A faithful third-party mediator discerns, or is told in confidence, the minimum demand of each of the parties, and then proposes a single solution which reflects something equitable within the range of feasible solutions. The solution could be somehow equitable to the parties within the constraints, but need not be fair from any larger point of view.

No Salient General Model of Settlement. We have been supposing a single salient general model of settlement, for concreteness, boundary settlement. Now suppose things aren’t so easy, there is no single salient model of settlement, rather, each side has its own model of settlement, or neither side has a model of settlement. Each party has its own view of the world, of the nature and meaning of the conflict, of what victory would mean. The warring parties don’t even agree on what they disagree about. It’s not that there is more than one dimension to the conflict, no, what the dimensions of the conflict are differs across the parties. When they sit down together, it’s like a fish and a bicycle trying to carry on a conversation. Their worldviews are almost mutually incomprehensible. (Empirically, could there be patterned differences between potential conflict settlements where there is a single salient model of settlement and where there are dual or multiple models of settlement?)

Part, but only part, of the problem is the enemy image (I follow Kelman 2005). Normally, social interaction helps us to adjust, however imperfectly, to one another’s ideas and interests. We do so by taking on the role of the other, on the assumption, at least initially, that the other has a mind like one’s own. Roletaking capacity is impaired in the midst of conflict, however, due to dehumanization of the enemy. Mirror images
develop: each side sees itself as good and peaceful, only defensive, prepared to compromise, and the enemy as evil and belligerent, aggressive, responsive only to force. When we do good, it is dispositional, because it is our nature to do good, and when we appear to do evil, it is situational, we had no choice in the circumstances. When they do good, it is situational, only because they have no choice, and they do evil because their nature is evil. Consider these quotes from some Colombian combatants:

We are not in favor of the war, we have not selected the war as a path to defend ourselves from injustice; the war has been imposed on us as the only possible way to defend our rights. *Guerrilla Chief Leader*

We only exist because the guerrilla is out there. They have been attacking us and we are just defending ourselves. *Paramilitary Chief Leader*

The guerrillas say they want to help the people. In fact they are the ones attacking towns and destroying infrastructure. They are the aggressors, we are only defending Colombia from them. *Army Official* (Azcarate n.d.)

The images are self-fulfilling, in that they cause the actions they expect, and they are self-maintaining in that those locked in conflict rarely confront contradictory information. When contradictory information is encountered, it is dismissed as suspect, because of the network structure of attitudes. Add to this the approval of one’s comrades for statements extolling the goodness of our side and the evil of the other. Even to suggest that the other side is situationally constrained marks one as most likely a traitor (the Bush regime does this repeatedly). After all, the existential risk of underestimating the enemy’s hostility is greater than the risk of overestimating the enemy’s hostility (this risk assessment could be myopic).
There is more separating the party’s worldviews than the enemy image. In a protracted war, “conflicts are folded into the history and mythology of the parties, an ideological explanation for national efforts and problems, and so parties become reliant on them and are loath to part with them….they become institutionalized” (Zartman 2005, 49).

People involved in a long-standing and deep-rooted conflict tend to develop a worldview that includes the conflict as a central component…attitudes and beliefs about the conflict may become embedded in the entire structure of one’s thinking and feeling. In this way, people become committed to the continuation of the conflict because ending it would jeopardize their entire worldview, it would force them to revise the way they think and feel about significant aspects of their national and personal lives. The resistance to change may be particularly pronounced among intellectuals, who have more elaborate cognitive structures… (Kelman 2005, 222).

Two competing nationalisms are hard enough to understand, but the other side can be imagined with a simple substitution: what they feel for their people is what we feel for our people. However, stalemated parties of different ideologies striving to monopolize violence within the same territory could be more mutually bewildering than competing nationalisms. I don’t know enough of the facts, but in the abstract perhaps paramilitaries performing some state functions at the behest of renegade state sectors could be more easy to reconcile to the mainstream democratic view, if what they truly want is to stop kidnapping and killing and to return to normal life. Next, urban guerillas live in the cities, are exposed to national and international media arguments and norms, to the actual opinions of the masses, to friends and family with a multitude of political stands, to the great variety of ideas and interests which recommend to many the institutions of liberal
democracy. There is a chasm between the lives and the worldviews of each side, but it is a more bridgeable chasm.

The chasm is much wider between the urban democracy and an insular, even antique, agrarian socialism. One source reports that the government sees FARC as narcoterrorists without ideology and without political support (International Conflict Group 2005, p. 10). The view is understandable, but it doesn’t seem to be right. The FARC imagines it is involved in a social struggle in which thousands participate and millions will take power (International Conflict Group 2005, p. 13). Again, understandable, but wrong. How is that the vast majority of the population supports the state? From my point of view, perhaps a limited one, the gap between FARC’s social-justice discourse and its participation in drug commerce, kidnapping, use of land mines, and of child soldiers is quite remarkable. There is a gap between the less ambitious oligarchic discourse of justice and its practices as well, I suppose.

Third-party Mediator Bridges Initially Incommensurable Worlds. Given the initial incommensurability of the party’s worldviews, there is a conceptually distinct role for the third-party mediator, as translator of worlds. The skilled mediator is to understand not only the ostensible demands and likely motivations of each party, but also as much as possible of each party’s complete conceptual scheme. In the much humbler setting of family get-togethers, I would be the one to explain my son’s circumstances and utterances to his grandmother, and the grandmother’s to the son. Without me as a bridge, they were unable to understand one another’s intentions.

Although there is a chasm, the more experienced grandmother understands more about the less experienced grandson than he understands about her. Although there is a chasm, the urban “bourgeois-democrat” might better understand the rural “democratic-centralist” than the rural party understands the urban party. It is suggestive that United Nations mediators Egeland and LeMoyne saw it important to break “the historic isolation of the FARC” (Arnson and Whitfield 2005, 252), arranging for its leaders to tour
European capitals, taking them out of the jungle and into the modern world. If it were feasible, perhaps blanketing the rebel zone with free satellite television, mobile phones, and bus tickets to the city would help hasten the end. Arrange for study tours of North Korea and South Korea. Anything that would enrich and complexify the experiences and understandings of the rebels and their followers is worthy of consideration. Further, the Leninist network of attitudes is tightly connected, and thus highly resistant to change, but likely to be largely abandoned when change does come; hard, but brittle. For most, however, abandonment would be disguised, if my analysis is correct.

It is hard enough to understand the other side, but two-party settlement negotiations are one of the least promising venues for such an enterprise. Who is appointed to the negotiation teams? Following Kelman (2005), appointing anybody less than the most ideological and the toughest invites being taken advantage of by the other side. Such negotiators evaluate themselves and their colleagues by how strongly they support their side’s case and how staunchly and cleverly they avoid compromise. The exercise confirms the enemy image. Any hints of flexibility, any differentiation within parties, goes unnoticed. The exercise is bad enough in private, and is disastrous in public. A third-party mediator is indispensable for busting up the enemy image.

Should the parties come to understand each other’s worldview, it is probably difficult for each to understand the other sympathetically. The understanding is labored, uncertain, confused, like the first year of speaking a foreign language. The experienced third-party mediator would likely retain an advantage in understanding as negotiations develop. Whether or not there is understanding between the parties, there is the further problem of constructing a third worldview, that of the peace settlement. Again, I suggest, it is likely that the skilled mediator is more affectively and cognitively able to construct a satisfactory conceptual framework for a settlement (as well as the practical framework), especially if he or she belongs to a policy community with theory and experience doing such things. The mediator must patiently identify and reframe each
outstanding issue, counter the delusions of the parties, and with them integrate the reframed issues into a package ultimately favorable enough and credible enough for each party. Expect genuine negotiations to cover multiple points, not all of them immediately relevant, expect the negotiations to take a long time, and to result in compromise on action rather than principled agreement.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Again I confess unfamiliarity with the details, but it seems to me that there is an important difference with the post-Soviet negotiations. In Eastern Europe the parties were once locked in the Manichean drama of communism against anticommunism. The communist state dominated every area of life, and the opposition defined itself only as opposition to it. The withdrawal of Soviet military guarantees, and the domino collapse of regimes, threw both parties into a new situation. Everything that had once defined them had vanished. There were no longer two difficult-to-bridge conceptual schemes struggling to construct a third conceptual scheme of settlement. Except for diehards, there were no major conceptual schemes barring the former enemies from the construction of a new way of life. They could concentrate without obstruction on issues of life and liberty. Also, the collapse of legitimacy demanded immediate action, delay was not an option.

I suggest as well that the discussions in peace negotiations differ essentially from the discussions in parliaments or constitutional assemblies. Yes, in a constitutional assembly there is both bargaining and arguing. Such bargaining can contain veiled threats of violence, or more usually involve more mundane compromise, and a number of important issues are settled by arguments about the right choice. The fact that there is a constitutional assembly, however, indicates not just a willingness but a conditional commitment to resolve all future issues peacefully within the constitutional framework. Usually there are multiple parties of diversely overlapping interests. The enemy image is
weak or absent. In a parliament, social peace is well established. Even then, I argue, respect for the integrity and credibility of the parties often recommends that agreements be labeled compromises on actions rather than consensus on principles. In contrast, peace negotiations do not presuppose a conditional commitment to a political future, the polarization and passion of war mean there are two or a few parties with sharply distinct interests, and the enemy image is foremost in everyone’s mind. I have emphasized as well the initial incommensurability of the party’s worldviews. I think it’s unrealistic in these circumstances to expect the parties to be oriented to communicative action. The security dilemma must first be strategically resolved, and robustly. Thereafter, stating matters in terms of strategic compromise is recommended in order to preserve the dignity and thereby allegiance of the old warhorses. Stability first. The next generation can ennoble the compromise as an accomplishment of great principle, and reach new moral consensuses within its framework.

Throughout I have assumed that the parties face intolerable stalemate and are ripe for a settlement. Suppose that one or both of them are willing to tolerate the conflict indefinitely. Nothing third-party mediators could do would bring about a settlement in the absence of mutual desire for it. Indeed, formal talks under such circumstances invite the recalcitrant parties to manipulate the process for military gains, bolsters the enemy image, and risk increasing negotiation fatigue among the parties, any mediators, and their constituencies and audiences. A phony peace process is worse than no peace process. Of course, in the absence of ripeness, quietly facilitating communication between the parties might help, and informal organizations, national and international, can promote popular discussions about peace-seeking among the parties.

Sadly, many of the individuals on every side of this conflict intend to pursue justice. But the pursuit of justice through violence rather than through persuasion leads to the most unjust consequences.
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