Introduction:

In recent years a particular approach to conflict resolution is being taught, researched, and practiced in many settings. In this approach, attention is given to making mutually acceptable conflict settlements possible. It may become possible because a common danger appears that threatens the embattled adversaries. Or, the conflict comes to be seen as a shared problem when the fighting becomes mutually destructive. This problem-solving approach may also be adopted when the adversaries redefine the conflict and transform it.

I stress a comprehensive application of this approach. This examines how conflicts sometimes are conducted constructively at various conflict stages. I analyze and suggest ways that the destructiveness of conflicts can be reduced, as they arise, escalate, are transformed, are settled, and the relationships between adversaries are rehabilitated. This is examined more fully in my book published in 2003: *Constructive Conflicts: From Escalation to Resolution, 2nd Ed.* Lanham-Boulder-New York-Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield. For discussions of particular aspects of this approach, see other of my publications cited below.

I. Analyzing Conflicts

Conflicts are a kind of relationship in which 1) social entities see themselves as having a shared identity, distinct from other groups, 2) one or more collectivity regards itself as having a grievance, an improper deprivation or threat, 3) members of at least one group come to believe that another group is responsible for their grievance and they formulate a goal that the other party change so as to alleviate the grievance, and 4) a group believes it can induce the other side to change as it wants and undertakes to bring about the change.

A. General features of conflicts

1. Conflicts are inevitable in social life, but they need not be waged destructively.
2. Every conflict tends have a trajectory, and go through several stages
3. The adversaries in large-scale conflicts are not unitary, but include many groups and are embedded in larger ones.
4. Each conflict tends to be interlocked with many other conflicts.
5. Trying to harm the other side is not the only way of inducing a change in the adversary; offering benefits and persuasive appeals also are used, often in varying combinations with coercion.
B. Analyzing the specific features of a particular conflict.
   1. Assess who are the parties in the conflict, and what their interests in various outcomes are.
   2. Assess what the various issues in contention are.
   3. What is the full range of relations between the adversaries, including cooperative.
   4. Assess the social context and what interventions might occur from other actors.

II. Constructive Conflict Resolution Strategies and Tactics

   A. Basic strategies
   Strategies to help transform conflict from a zero-sum conflict into one with possible mutual benefits include:
   1. raise the salience of common interests and identities,
   2. create new options by packaging trade-offs or by adding new resources from outside of the conflict,
   3. include additional stakeholders in the conflict or exclude parties that reject possible settlements,
   4. use intermediaries,
   5. construct conflict management systems and institutions.

   B. Tactics
   1. For everyone
      a. Listen, ask questions, try to understand each parties’ views and interests
      b. Consider how this conflict is both like some others and unlike any others
      c. Be creative.

   2. For antagonists—representatives, negotiators
      a. getting to the table
         (1) determining who should be represented, about what issues, and in what settings
         (2) coordinate de-escalating moves

      b. at the negotiations
         (1) discover own and other’s underlying interests and not be stuck with positions,
         (2) separate the person from the problem,
         (3) invent new options,
         (4) set standards that may be used to choose an option,
         (5) consider what the best alternative is to a negotiated agreement.
3. For interveners especially mediators
   a. External actors can help transform destructive conflicts by providing mediating
      and other intermediary services. Such services include:

      (1) providing a safe place for representatives of adversary sides to meet,
      (2) transmitting information between antagonists who do not communicate
           well or not at all directly,
      (3) help arrange which parties will be represented at a meeting,
      (4) help structure agendas and procedures for meetings,
      (5) suggest new options,
      (6) legitimate agreement for adversaries,
      (7) help monitor and implement agreements.

   b. The persons and groups providing some of these services in international and
      large-scale destructive conflicts include:

      (1) representatives of major governments or of the United Nations or
          other international organizations, which control resources that can be
          used to help win acceptance of a peace agreement.
      (2) they also may be officials of relatively small countries such as
          Norway, which can provide non-threatening facilitation, or officials of
          neighboring countries with long standard interests in the country beset
          with an intractable conflict.
      (3) non-governmental persons and groups also provide significant
          mediating services, in what has come to be called Track II diplomacy.

C. Matching Strategies And Tactics To A Specific Conflict

The effectiveness of any strategy or tactic depends on many factors, including:

1. the stage of the conflict and whether the objective is to prevent the outbreak,
   escalation, or continuation of a destructive conflict or to hasten and ensure a
   constructive transformation, settlement, and recovery from a destructive conflict.

2. who is undertaking the action and that person’s or group’s skills, resources, and
   values.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION SOURCES:

Books, articles, chapters:


**Journals:**

The Journal of Peace Research
The Negotiation Journal
The Journal of Conflict Resolution

**Websites**

A. Methods of Conducting and Settling Conflicts
The Conflict Resolution Information Source: www.crinfo.org
Information about resolution, training, and mediation: mediate.com
Nonviolent action www.aeinstein.org/pubs_index.html
UN peacekeeping: www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/home-bottom.htm
Program on Negotiation: www.pon.harvard.edu/main/home/index.php3

B. Domains of Conflicts
Communal and Civil
Ethnic conflicts: www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/cds
Islamic studies: www.arches.uga.edu/~godlas
Conciliation Resources: www.c-r.org
Human Rights Watch: www.hrw.org

International
The Japan Center for Preventive Diplomacy: www.jcpd.gr.jp/index_e_t.htm
Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information: www.ipcri.org/index1.html
Information relating to the Middle East: www.mideastweb.org
U.S. Institute of Peace: www.usip.org