The Implementation of Communication Theories to Assist in
Resolving Perennial International Conflicts

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Introduction

The politics and violence of modern conflicts has become increasingly complicated due to the invention of new ammunition and the growing grey area in the rules and guidelines for war. No longer is war determined by battles won and land conquered. Now there are dueling ideologies and dominating globalized power. The conflicts of today are a special class in that they are exceptionally complex and often involve disputes of identity, religion, collective understanding, justice and global influence. The beliefs underlying these conflicts are often so strong that they resist even the most resilient attempts at a peace agreement. These conflicts are referred to as perennial conflicts – disputes that many never be resolved.

The effect of these types of conflicts is severely damaging, not only in terms of casualty rates, but also through the long-term material damage that often results from these types of conflicts. The disputes often create a loss of trust, intergenerational transmission of trauma and grievances, polarization and a demonization of the "other". Each of these effects places all of the blame onto the opposing side, with a tendency to exclude any situational factors or self-reflection about what needs to be considered to reasonably discuss a conflict. Instead, each of these physiological outcomes is a means to further perpetuate limited productive behavior, thus reinforcing the perennial aspect of the conflict.

Through the study of past and current perpetual conflicts, it is probable that each is characterized by ethnic victimization, unaddressed historical grievances and traumas, economic divide and unequal distribution of resources. These types of characteristics stem from the long-standing effects of colonialism and

ethnocentrism. It is because of these factors that scholars are questioning the effectiveness of hard power on these types of conflicts. The presence of force does not have the means to resolve psychological repression and distress. In this paper, I argue that the knowledge acquired through communication studies has the ability to aid political science scholars and foreign policy leaders to resolve the issues of perennial conflicts through the means of soft power.

Language and action are the source of all conflict. It is how individuals do or say something that will create, or end, a conflict, but it is also the method for resolving those disputes. Conflicts that have gone on for so many years are often fought without fully understanding the initial reason for the violence. Violence stems from the core values of a community, however these core reasons are often lost in the discussion. It is the job of a third party intervener to unveil those core values. It is through the theories of intercultural and interpersonal communication that scholars have the ability to analyze the history and culture of a community to understand its core values. This is because, "language is central to intercultural communication. While language may seem 'natural' and neutral' as part of our everyday communication, it is a medium through which our deeply held values, beliefs and ideologies are produced and maintained" (Sorrells and Sekimoto 103). It is through the study of communication that scholars can understand where a conflict originates. Nations and warring groups are not different from individuals – they mistrust one another, they experience trauma and they have grieved for the dead. However, individuals, just like states, have the ability to overcome differences and slowly mend ties that appear to be perpetually broken.

In the current political sphere, intercultural and interpersonal communication have been overshadowed by the use of technical and power-oriented, realist thought. Through the concept of fundamental value and cultural orientation, this paper will apply a dialectical framework, as well as bridgework theory, to prove the significance of communication studies in the field of political science for the use of resolving international conflicts. In order to elucidate this claim, I will explain the current method of conflict resolution through the method of hard power as well as develop the proposed addition of soft power to conflict resolution. Then through the use of past and current examples of conflict in the Middle East, Northern Ireland and the Congo, I will further support the necessity of using communication theories by applying them to peace agreements applicable to each conflict.

Current Forms of Conflict Resolution: Some Background and Context

As a result of the elevated tensions caused by the Cold War, there was an increased fixation on building ammunition through nuclear arsenals and on strict rules of policy founded on Realist thinking in academic circles (Roselle, Miskimmon and O'Loughlin 70). This meant that military action was also conducted through strict orders and conventional forms of intervention. Although the tensions of the Cold War have died down, the tactics of an exponentially increased hard power military during a time of war have remained at the same level today (Roselle, Miskimmon and O'Loughlin 70). According to the Global Fire Power Index, the leading source for comparing the military power of states, the United States is the

leading country in military force by a significant margin (Macias, Bender and Gould 1). The most influential factors in assessing the strength of a military are its budget, the number of aircraft carriers and nuclear stockpiles (Macias, Bender and Gould 1). The measure of nuclear stockpiles is not a factor in the Global Fire Power Index, but it is known that the US is strongly armed with this form of ammunition (Macias, Bender and Gould 1). The budget of the United States military is over 600 billion dollars, four times higher than that of the second highest budget China (Macias, Bender and Gould 1). Aircraft carriers are another vital aspect to a military interested in hard power through its ability to project its force far beyond the borders of their country (Macias, Bender and Gould 1). Essentially, aircraft carriers are mobile naval and air force bases, and also have means to hold drone aircrafts (Macias, Bender and Gould 1). Aircraft carriers are owned by very few countries and the United States owns ten - five times the amount of Italy, the second highest country (Macias, Bender and Gould 1). As seen by these statistics, the United States has not backed down from the traditional military defense mechanisms it used throughout the Cold War.

Hard power military intervention involves the use of military and economic resources in order to instill peace in areas of international or internal conflict (Roselle, Miskimmon and O'Loughlin 73). These resources are kept as reserves until specific moments require their involvement (Roselle, Miskimmon and O'Loughlin 73). This intervention includes fast-paced and strict procedures, with the objective of halting the specific conflict at hand (Roselle, Miskimmon and O'Loughlin 73). Although the use of dangerous forms of enforcement is not the initial form of

military intervention, it is typically the only form of influence in a chaotic conflict zone. This method of conflict resolution stems from what is known as Realist Theory, the most prominent form of academic analysis in political science (Mowlana 2). The Realist approach to international relations believes the nation-state is the major decision maker in international relations and conflict, and thus is the most important actor in conflict resolution (Harknett and Yalcin 503). Realist thinking also believes conflict is solely a struggle for power between differing groups (Harknett and Yalcin 504). If this is truly the case in all conflicts, the thinking goes that military and hard power are the only forms of reasoning that will make the conflict stop. The only option in this situation is military force because humanitarian approaches look to find the underlying reason behind the power struggle (Roselle, Miskimmon and O'Loughlin 72). If there is no understanding of the deeper consciousness fueling the power struggle, there is no use for humanitarian intervention. However the soft power approach argues that an underlying consciousness is always present within a conflict, but it is not always understood or acknowledged due to conflict and hard power intervention barriers. It takes the effort of state and non-state actors on all levels, to make an impact on a culture through a humanitarian approach. Beneath a power-struggle is historical and cultural repression that has transcended and intensified through the years, and cannot be solved through means that does not recognize the importance of that past. If you look to the history and culture of former conflicts scholars categorized as perennial, the solution to the conflict can then be considered in terms of soft power, communicative interaction thought. So, in other words, I am making the claim that it

is possible, even desirable, to assume that most conflicts do not have to be solely addressed through the means of hard power.

Adding to this, traditional Realist methods of conflict resolution also dictate how to rebuild a society after hard power forms of intervention have subsided. Because Realist thinking sees the nation-state as the main influence, and Western states are so successful in their liberalized founding documents and traditions, they often attempt to enforce a democratic way of governing onto other cultures (Mowlana 2). Many states founded on the Anglo-Saxon tradition of liberalism tend to see any form of government that is more centralized, such as a dictatorship or an authoritarian government, as the cause or justification for war or military intervention (Mowlana 2). Western theory believes in the industrialization of the economy, the secularization of thought and integration into the "world culture," often at the expense of traditional thoughts and methods from the culture (Mowlana 234). This theory believes that because a culture dominated the past, it is not modern enough to reside in the current economic and social culture (Mowlana 234). If the Western power were to take a more facilitative approach, rather than the controlling position they typically take, and allow the conflicting state to establish a distinct government system and set of political customs fit for their particular society, they run the risk of the system being non-democratic and thus against Western theory of government. Therefore each state that is transitioned by a Western state follows a similar liberal constitution, even if this form of governing may not be the best for their culture.

An example of this tactic can be seen through the involvement of the United States government in Iraq. After the terrorist attacks on September 11th the U.S. Administration focused their efforts on promoting democracy in the Middle East (Dalacoura 963). Their hope was that fostering democratic thinking in the Middle East would dilute the influence of terrorism and anti U.S. sentiment (Dalacoura 963). Although the ousting of Saddam Hussein was a major transition for the Iraqi government in terms of democratization, in reality it did not effect much change in terms of democratic freedoms (Dalacoura 971). The elections held in January 2005, although ostensibly a major accomplishment for the U.S, did not allow for a genuine contestation of power since the opponents were not viable voting options for Iraqi citizens (Dalacoura 968). Thus, the elections were more of a façade, and, in reality, were a new way for semi-authoritarian regimes to maintain the status quo while still "opening up" the political discussion (Dalacoura 968). Not only have the elections implemented by the U.S. had little impact on freedom in Iraq, the United States' involvement has in fact hurt Iraq's ability to achieve democracy in the long term (Dalacoura 971). Currently human rights and democratic freedom are only present in Iraq due to U.S. occupation through security and military measures (Dalacoura 971). The Iraqi government is not strong or diligent enough to enforce the democratic freedoms instilled in Iraq today. Therefore it needs to be implemented through an international agent with a forceful form of persuasion. Without the opportunity for Iraqi civilians and their government to succeed independently under a democratic system, they will never be able to sustain this form of government. The presence of U.S. military force is vital for the continuation

of democratic improvements, however this is not a realistic solution (Dalacoura

971). Therefore, when U.S. presence in Iraq departs, along with it will go the efforts

to improve democratic freedoms in Iraq.

      Structural intervention and the traditional approach to authoritative

intervention is a significant factor in conflict resolution. I am not arguing that hard

power should be eliminated from international intervention. However academic and

military authority needs to expand their views to new forms of conflict resolution.

Currently in the study of International Relations, scholars and individuals in

government authority positions have mostly overlooked the impact of societal and

intercultural communication (Mowlana 1). This has resulted in a cookie-cutter

approach to international relations, one of which focuses on the technical, political

and economic aspects of the field (Mowlana 1). Present-day conflict resolution

strategy tends to believe that we can solve conflicts involving different cultures

through the same systematic equation and achieve the same successful outcome. I

aim to dismiss this conclusion, and claim that because each culture is unique in its

historical and cultural values, each method of intervention needs to uniquely adjust

to fit the specific needs and considerations of the cultures involved. Every conflict

that arises may look similar, in that there are at least two warring sides and a

mounting amount of conflict, however the way each conflict came about is as

distinct as the cultures themselves. Intervention that acknowledges cultural

differences is thus vital to conflict resolution because it will address the underlying

problems that initiated the hateful sentiments and violence.

This section has explained the traditional thoughts and actions of international conflict resolution. And although this traditional, Realist form of thinking is important to consider, the need to involve new methods of thinking when approaching intervention strategies is now evident. The method that I will introduce is soft power, with a focus on the discipline of communication studies. This approach aims to enhance communication between the dissenting sides in the conflict, as well as to improve the cultural understanding for the third party. I will prove its significance through an explanation of how the study of communication approaches various human interactions and then how it can be applied to understanding political, international conflicts.

Intercultural and Interpersonal Communication in Conflict Resolution

As stated, hard power has been the main form of influence in international relations since the 1950's and yet not much has progressed in terms of success with conflict resolution (Mowlana 3). With the lack of results, scholars are beginning to inquire about alternative solutions to conflict. Soft power grew as a viable option for political action as people began questioning the effectiveness of hard power (Mowlana 3).

Soft Power Approach

Soft power, in terms of International Relations, is the ability to influence others through the understanding and factoring in of culture, values and policies (Roselle, Miskimmon and O'Loughlin 72). This form of interaction can set the stage

for shared understanding, and can thus enhance interactions between enterprises and coordination for shared goals (Roselle, Miskimmon and O'Loughlin 72). The goal of peace is not to eliminate conflict, but to stop the violence through the reconstruction of a society in terms of how to approach conflict (Roselle, Miskimmon and O'Loughlin 72).

I take the approach that the use of soft power can be a significant tool for conflict resolution approaches. Although hard power has its place in using physical influence to stop violence, the incorporation of soft power would allow those who intervene to understand the root causes that initiated the disagreement, which is often ignored, resulting in detrimental long-term effects. The humanitarian approach to conflict resolution sees "peace [as] much more than the absence of war. That peace requires attention to individual's orientations, relationships between individuals and groups and the role of institutions [to] discourage violence" (Broom and Collier 251). Unlike hard power, soft power approaches do not have an "end-state," but rather promote a transformative way to deal with the conflict that continuously evolves and develops with the society (Broom and Collier 251).

Dialectical Theory

Intercultural and interpersonal communication use theories and applications of study that intersect with soft power theories in fundamental and meaningful ways (Broom and Collier 246). Communication concepts can aid in the examination of the context of historical and contemporary relations of power, highlighting linkages between local and global influences, as well as incorporating critical social

justice approaches (Broom and Collier 246). The way in which communication

studies is able to achieve this level of analysis is through the various studies of

dialectic relationships. A dialectic is the understanding that an idea will always

generate an opposite (Baxter 181). Thus, the dialectic process is a lens through

which to view various forms of seeming opposites, in order to see where there can

be a reconciliation process between the dividing sides (Baxter 181). Currently the

political science viewpoint is that some disagreements are never solvable. However

through various studies by communication scholar Leslie Baxter, it is evident there

is a way to unite, or reconcile, even the most complex and engrained seeming

contradictions. The theory views the two opposing sides not as opposite ends on a

spectrum, but rather, as two possible ends which mutually define each other. There

are six types of dialectics, according to Baxter: Cultural/ Individualistic,

Personal/Contextual, Differences/Similarities, Static/Dynamic, History/Past,

Future/Present and Privilege/Disadvantage. These various conflict situations allow

for dialectical thinking to be applied to all forms of conflict, especially to

communication theory work relating to interpersonal and intercultural barriers

(Baxter 186). As Baxter states: "Contradictions are not located in individual heads,

serving as dilemmatic goals that direct individual's communicative strategies.

Rather, from a dialogic perspective, contradictions are located in the communication

between relationship parties" (184). With an analytic perspective that it is not based

on an individual's mindset, but rather on the process of communicating through the

contradictions, essentially, there is no opposing side unwilling to find a solution

(Baxter 182). The key to conflict resolution through a dialectic analysis and

approach is that the mediator needs to uncover the unity that connects the competing values (Baxter 182). Dialectics discourages either/or thinking, thus encouraging talking back and fourth – which is the point where conflicts become resolved. "Communication is the interpretation of united-yet-competing values", and it is through this relation of values that constructive connections are formed (Baxter 184). Analysis that encompasses the core assumptions of dialectics thus gives communication scholars the knowledge needed to assess the underlying and often subconscious oppositions within a dispute, and therefore find the most-likely means to reconcile those seeming opposites.

A substantial reason why soft power is rarely utilized to solve international conflict is because it takes a longer duration of time to achieve successful results (Roselle, Miskimmon and O'Loughlin 72). Successful humanitarian solutions involve creating a shared consensus among all parties involved in the conflict. However there is strong evidence that, if this consensus is achieved, it is often a longer lasting solution than results from a hard power approach (Roselle, Miskimmon and O'Loughlin 72). Through a soft power approach the intervener creates a realignment of values that occurs through the process of creating a collective understanding (Roselle, Miskimmon and O'Loughlin 72). Thus, the values incorporated in the shared consciousness should eventually become a cultural reality that can define ones lifestyle and identity. Currently, in many perennial conflicts, their culture is based upon the destruction of the opposing side. By creating a new cultural reality that stems from acceptance and cooperation, rather than one founded on opposition and hatred, the lack of conflict would be a part of

their culture and thus more engrained in society. When a way of thinking is a part of

the culture rather than enforced through physical or judicial means, the result is

often more successful and sustainable.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

The concepts of cognitive dissonance and its appeal to core values, under the

study of communication and psychology, can also provide major insight to the field

of international relations. Scholars have come to realize that agreements with a

stronger bind to specific values are more likely to succeed compared to a peace

agreement that does not appeal to the participants' core values (Harmon-Jones and

Harmon Jones 71). The challenging aspect of soft power is getting the conflicting

sides to acknowledge that they share similar core values, and that these are being

sacrificed because of the conflict. This can be achieved through the application of

cognitive dissonance theory. Leon Festinger formed a theory in the mid-1950's to

explain the tension found within people when a belief or action is inconsistent with

their core belief system (Harmon-Jones and Harmon Jones 71). When this tension is

recognized people are motivated to engage in psychological work to remove that

inconsistency to ease the tension (Harmon-Jones and Harmon Jones 72). It is at this

stage in cognitive dissonance that peace mediators can aid key figures in accepting

and coping with the dissonance created, by adding or subtracting key cognitions to

allow them to support a more core-value-oriented belief system (Harmon-Jones and

Harmon Jones 72).

An example of a failed peace negotiation due to a lack of appeal to core values can be seen in the latest Israel Palestinian peace agreement with U.S. mediator, State Secretary John Kerry (Rudoren, Jodi and Kershner 1). In the proposed treaty, Kerry offered military and financial incentives that appealed to both parties' interests (Rudoren, Jodi and Kershner 1). This is what both sides claim to want in order to gain peace. However, the desire to gain military and financial incentives stems from the fundamental value of protecting the fundamental ideals of their culture and religion (Ury). Because the agreement did not incorporate appeals to their core values, within two days the talks disintegrated. Both Israel and Palestine did not see how the peace agreement's benefits outweighed the benefits of war (Rudoren, Jodi and Kershner 1). So, the negotiations led to another failed attempt at establishing a ceasefire (Rudoren, Jodi and Kershner 1).

Currently both the Israeli and the Palestinian core belief systems revolve around protecting their identity and pride as a culture, one which, in their eyes, has fundamental rights to the practice of political and religious freedoms (Mathew 27). However this belief is based on the destruction of their opposition, thus perpetuating conflict between Israel and Palestine (Mathew 27). One way to address this contradiction is if mediators were to use the tactics of Cognitive Dissonance to make the basis of their identity founded upon the generosity and kindness of Abraham, rather than hatred. This approach to the confrontation would create a greater likelihood for a productive conversation towards peace (Ury). Both religions find the acts of Abraham to be sacred teachings to their culture and thus both could relate to this form of unity. However, it would take more than just a conversation

about Abrahamic thought to make the action of kindness towards strangers a value that each Israeli and Palestinian civilian would embody as a reflection of their culture and religion (Ury). Therefore through the efforts of William Ury and other concerned individuals, people have created paths that reflect the unity of, or overlap between Palestinian and Israeli culture. Ury has physically mapped out the life of Abraham from the place Abraham was born, to monumental sightings of him, and finally to his resting place (Ury). It has become a journey that anyone can experience, and thousands have done so already. For people who don't have the opportunity to travel to the Middle East to partake in this journey, major cities have organized marathons that travel from church, to synagogue, to mosque, in order to represent the unification and tolerance of all religions (Ury). Events and opportunities, such as these paths of Abraham, remind people of the positive effects of togetherness. The potential of this embodiment of unification is the ability to change the way people frame to Middle East conflict. As Ury stated, the goal is "to change the frame from hostility to hospitality, from terrorism to tourism." If the people of Palestine and Israel realize that their hatred and violence towards the "other side" is in contradiction to the beliefs of their religions' forefather, Abraham, it could be enough of an incentive to reevaluate the necessity of conflict. It is through this embodiment of peace that, through the use of communication, scholars and civilians alike can change the game of the Middle East framing of the conflict.

Soft Power and Perennial Conflict

A major difficulty with peacebuilding through a humanitarian approach is dealing with an already in place, perennial and violent conflict. This form of conflict makes intercultural dialogue difficult, if not impossible (Broom and Collier 257). With the increased militarization and ethnocentrism that typically accompanies conflict, individuals have a hard time stepping outside the "enemy images" they have developed (Broom and Collier 257). Ethnocentrism is a framework based on the perception that one believes their own cultural group is superior to other groups (Ragsdale 205). This position often results in framing the outsider as biologically or morally inferior beings, making it more difficult to reason with this form of contradiction (Ragsdale 205). The physical separation that also characterizes conflict means fewer opportunities for meaningful interaction across the divide (Broom and Collier 257). When opportunities for interaction do occur, communication is often distorted through the psychological barriers that surround the conflict (Broom and Collier 246). In this situation it is often helpful to provide special forums that bring together participants across the conflict divide with the purpose of exchanging ideas, establishing a common ground for the discussion and discovery of possibilities for moving beyond the damage inflicted by the conflict (Broom and Collier 257). This can occur through discussion forums, integrative camps and activities or increased education about the other culture (Broom and Collier 256). The positive effects of this can be seen in a United States peace-building program in which young Palestinian and Israeli women spent time together learning about each other and bonding on a personal level. The result was that the women

admitted changes in their previous, over-generalized representations about the other's culture (Broom and Collier 256). One woman from the program stated, "We do not want to keep comparing the casualty lists to see who 'wins.' There's no winner; we all suffer" (Broom and Collier 256). These young women later went to their schools to give presentations about their experiences with "the other side" so that the lessons from their involvement could be passed on and hopefully spread throughout their communities (Broom and Collier 256). However, in order to utilize the successes of the approach, the intervener needs to understand the intercultural implications that foster successful communication forums.

Concepts derived through communication studies have the ability to play a major part in the tactics of soft power. Through these tools mediators can positively impact the success of solving international conflicts. As seen by way of the previous examples, truly understanding the knowledge about a culture and its' history is a complex process that takes time and diligence. However it is vital to achieving the result of sustainable peace. The absence of violence is not the only characteristic of peace - it is also the ability to perpetuate shared understanding and tolerance. In order to achieve these results, scholars need to utilize communication theories such as dialectics, core values and cognitive dissonance in order to understand and unify competing values and communities.

Use of Intercultural and Interpersonal Communication in UN Policy

To demonstrate the necessity of strong cultural and communicative understanding this paper will use a past United Nations intervention that has been highly condemned.

Problems with the U.N. Today

United Nations peacekeeping operations have undergone a significant amount of scrutiny for their lack of success in stopping violence and sustaining long-term peace in conflict zones. Not only do they often not provide a solution, they often worsen the situation. Much of their mistakes fall under problems involving a lack of successful communication in respecting cultural norms, a misunderstanding of cultural codes and lack of linguistic knowledge (Autesserre 118). UN missions are typically derived from volunteers from all over the world that are unfamiliar with the culture and skills for successful peacebuilding in the specific culture with which they are intervening (Autesserre 60). Former UN peacekeeper Sèverine Autesserre often witnessed criticisms by the local residents against international peacekeepers as "arrogant," "condescending" and "paternalistic," that "outsiders ignore their ideas and knowledge," a process that they found "fundamentally disrespectful" (Autesserre 98). In order to have a successful mission for peacebuilding it is important to have thematic knowledge, acquired through a classical form of education, but it is also necessary to adjust and learn from local knowledge in order to develop an informational and trusting relationship with the local community (Autesserre 70)

U.N. Failings in the Republic of the Congo

Through the research Autesserre has conducted, she sees a pattern of violence that occurs due to the communication barriers and lack of trust through the lack of understanding of the local culture. In 2010 members of a local militia called the Mai Mai Sheka gang-raped 387 civilians over the course of three days in Luvungi, a village located close to a UN peacekeeping base in Walikale territory, in The Democratic Republic of Congo (Autesserre 118). The victims were assaulted in their homes, and in secluded areas and in bushes (Autesserre 118). It was later discovered that a patrol of Indian peacekeepers moved through the village during the days when the atrocities were taking place (Autesserre 118). However, due to linguistic barriers, a lack of understanding to the cultural code of the Luvungi villagers and the villagers' lack of trust towards the UN military, the UN patrol group passed through the village without ever knowing about the mass raping until the atrocity had passed (Autesserre 118).

When looking at barriers between people in different cultures, intercultural communication analysts have seen this common trend of misunderstanding conflict due to cultural norms, assumptions, values, histories and a lack of shared language (Autesserre 118). With the poor ability to communicate, as well as insufficient research and observation, it can often create a skewed understanding. This has happened in the past, with social scientists being subconsciously racist, sexist and elitist through the rhetoric of their findings, and the distortion of observation is still occurring today in the observation of "the other" (Bell 144). In cultural studies the

"other" is often treated as inferior, especially when compared to the intellectual, rational, Western men who are studying them (Bell 144). This occurs in many situations in which the scholar is from a Western, developed area and is studying a non-Western, less developed country. Their analysis is typically skewed in favor of the scholar's way of thinking and problem solving, rather than accommodating and factoring in the norms of that particular culture (Bell 144).

Communication Studies Influence within U.N. Foreign Policy

Studies show that solutions rooted in the domestic realities of the intervened culture are much more likely to be sustainable because they are more easily maintained for the local population after foreign peacebuilders have left (Autesserre 64). From a social justice perspective, we cannot take ethical or socially just actions without understanding the implications of our privilege within dynamic relations of power (Sorrells and Sekimoto 64). Intercultural communication scholars understand the implications of historical contexts, ideologies, power and privilege in forming relationships (Sorrells and Sekimoto 143). This knowledge is attributed to the study and application of various communication theories that have the tools to analyze a culture and extract the specific information needed to foster successful communication. A strong intercultural communicator can thus uncover the information necessary to appeal to the universal human, the norms of a person's culture and the specifics relating to that individual (Shockley-Zalaback 313). This is accomplished by a communicator's ability to analyze and construct various forms of communication environments (Shockley-Zalaback 313). If utilized and applied

correctly, this information would dramatically improve the success of United Nation missions.

A Quick Case Study: the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

It can be argued that the information and tactics gained from the study of human communication could affect even the most insurmountable of conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. This conflict stems from the disagreement in which both Israeli Jews and Palestinians feel entitled to the holly land currently occupied by Israel (Reuters 2). Few places in the world have seen the same level violence that has occurred in the city of Hebron, located in the West Bank (Reuters 2). Hebron is the "place in which age-old hatreds, stoked by religious fervor, politics, prejudice and myth have exploded into horrendous carnage twice in the past troubled century" (Reuters 2). The current violence over the land began in 1917 when Britain drafted the Balfour Declaration, declaring their support for Zionism and the establishment of a national home for the Jewish community in Palestine ("A Chronology of the Middle East Conflict" 1). Zionism is the quest to develop, and then protect, the Jewish state as a homeland, and involving Jewish sovereignty (Segev 1). The pursuit of Zionism persisted as Jews were persecuted by Christians in the Middle Ages and then throughout the continent of Europe during the era of Nazi Germany control (Mathew 27). However, the land the British declared as Jewish holy land, was already home to 70,000 Arabs that both the British and Jewish community refused to acknowledge had political or religious rights (Mathew 27). As the disagreement heightened, tensions persisted over who owned the territory.

The first major act of violence to spur the conflict witnessed today occurred on

August 23 and 24 of 1929 (Reuters 3). As Zionist-led immigration increased, an

Arab mob armed with clubs, knives and axes ran through the city murdering sixty-

seven Jewish men, women and children (Reuters 3). "The attack on the Jews of

Hebron was born of fear and hatred. The Muslims believed the Jews intended to

violate the sanctity of Islam, and that the Zionists wanted to dispossess them of their

country" (Reuters 3). Being removed from their homes, living in refugee camps and

suffering from endemic unemployment and poverty infuriated the Palestinians' to

the extent of launching the second Intifada (Reuters 43). On May 15, 1948

Palestinians, along with Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq attacked Israel,

spurring a war that continued till 1959 (Reuters 12). Israel won the war, as well as

the Arabs remaining territory within Palestine (Reuters 12). Once again Palestinians

fled the country or were forced out of their homes (Reuters 12). This sporadic war

over territory is the same perpetuating period of violence that is occurring today.

Since 1947 the UN has offered various partitions for a two-state solution; however,

every peace talk thus far has failed ("A Chronology of the Middle East Conflict" 1).

One of the main factors seen in the peace negotiations are solutions based on

material and territorial goods. These types of incentives have not been strong

enough to stop the conflict. Through the use of communication theories, scholars

have the ability to analyze various communication scenarios through a unique lens

that can find a new approach to solving the conflict. Through the study of

Intercultural Bridgework, developed by communication scholar Nilanjana Bardhan,

scholars can analyze how connections and relationships are formed across different

and conflicting cultures (Sorrells and Sekimoto 43). The use of bridgework searches for the voice, self-determination and agency within the community that makes it more or less open to productive communication (Sorrells and Sekimoto 55). It is when a culture has a lack of voice, self-determination and agency that a culture is more prone to clash with others. The lack of these elements studied from Intercultural Bridgework can be seen in both the Israeli and Palestinian states due to the lack of territory to call their own and the sovereignty to give them a sense of purpose and the power to be heard. With the use of bridgework, peace negotiators could find different and creative ways to break stereotypes, reconfigure hegemonic relationships, and establish connections when only differences are visible (Sorrells and Sekimoto 61). The ability to break stereotypes involves the re-conception of mental representations of cultures or groups we are not familiar with. Through this process, bridgework has the ability to reframe the mentality with which people approach unfamiliar or foreign groups. Although stereotypes are a natural development that allows information processing to be more efficient for the human brain, it can draw false and harmful conclusions that are misrepresentative of a culture. Then through the reconfiguration of hegemonic relationships, a peace negotiator has the ability to bring both sides of the conflict to an equal playing field in the negotiation. If either side feels that one is favored and dominating the negotiation, the progress thus far will come to a standstill due to harmed egos. And finally, the establishment of connections between the dissenting sides gives the ability to see commonality when differences seem to be the only apparent characteristics. When the sides acknowledge similarities, the conception of the

"foreign other side" begins to fade away and in replace of it begins to build familiarity. These factors of bridgework theory are what allow negative beliefs and values, an essential factor to a perennial conflict, to slowly become insignificant.

The concepts found within the theory of bridgework can be seen through the work of anthropologist William Ury, in a proposal for the first step to resolve the conflict in the Middle East (Ury, Presentation). Ury approaches every conflict as a story – there is always a beginning (Ury Presentation). The beginning of the story in the Middle East occurred four thousand years ago with a man named Abraham (Ury Presentation). The story goes, "Four thousand years ago a man and his family walked across the Middle East, and the world has never been the same since" (Ury Presentation). This is the one point of unity the two cultures have – the unity, respect and kindness found in the acts of Abraham (Ury Presentation). Ury claims that it is the values of Abraham that will make them find perspective and see how damaging the violence is to both cultures (Ury Presentation). If the Israeli and Palestinian people were to unite under the values of Abraham, then they would find synchronicity and humanity between their cultures and acknowledge that at the root of their religions are unity, respect and kindness (Ury Presentation). It is ideas such as these that need to be taken into consideration when approaching peace negotiations as complicated and drawn out as that in the Middle East. It could be said, then, that the only way to stop the violence is to find a way to bond cultures that believe there is no bond between them worth preserving.

Northern Ireland Conflict

Another conflict viewed as intractable was the Northern Ireland conflict from

1968-1997 (Pruitt 1520). June of 1996 saw the end to a violent twenty-nine year

war between the Protestant and Catholics within the Northern Ireland territory. The

war began as a peaceful protest by the Irish community, calling for an end to their

political and social marginalization (Pruitt 1520). The historical, social, economic

and psychological factors of the conflict resulted in a deeply imbedded feeling of fear

and victimization on both sides (Curran, Sebenius and Watkins 112). Those

sentiments turned into a bloody civil war claiming over 3,700 lives (Pruitt 1520).

After years of discrimination the Nationalists, the Irish Catholic community, believed

that because their ancestors were the original inhabitants of Ireland, the British

needed to completely depart from Northern Ireland and allow the region to unite

with the rest of Ireland (Pruitt 1520). The Unionist side, the British Protestant

community, was against this request (Pruitt 1520). The Nationalists would hold

non-violent demonstrations that would often get violently shut down by the

Unionist police force (Pruitt 1521). After a period of time, the Nationalist side

became aggressive through the IRA (Irish Republican Army) targeting Unionist

police, soldiers and government officials (Pruitt 1521). Also, although maybe not

intended, many protestant civilians were killed due to the violence (Pruitt 1521).

However, by 1996 the United Kingdom and the Irish Government appointed former

U.S. Senate Majority Leader, George Mitchell, to mediate what was soon to be one of

the most successful peace negotiations in history (Curran, Sebenius and Watkins

111). Through this example, it is evident how instrumental soft power and careful communication processes can be to a successful peace agreement.

The first major factor Mitchell implemented was the establishment of a designated agenda and set of rules for the negotiation to follow (Curran, Sebenius and Watkins 127). Mitchell was so relentless at this stage of the negotiation process that it took over a year to formulate (Curran, Sebenius and Watkins 126). The purpose of the obsession over the logistics of the negotiation process was so that the two sides could have the opportunity to talk and even argue (Curran, Sebenius and Watkins 127). However, the aggression would be towards trivial aspects such as procedure and agenda agreements rather than complex conflicts that had not been resolved for twenty-nine years (Curran, Sebenius and Watkins 127). If Mitchell were to initially dive into the complexities of the year that had perpetuated for twenty-nine years, tensions would rise due to the sensitivity of the discussion and would halt the conversation altogether - as it had done in past approaches to peace negotiations in Northern Ireland (Curran, Sebenius and Watkins 127). This approach to conflict resolution is congruent with the concepts of Core Values. A person's belief system is a series of layers. The deeper the layer, the more strongly that belief is held (Smolicz, 78). The top layers, by contrast, are more pliable and most open to discussion. However, it is the centermost layer, the core values, where they are more defined and not subject to change (Smolicz 78). Core values are the fundamental and strongest beliefs a person has about how they believe their world should work (Smolicz 78). When an audience feels that their understanding of the world is being threatened, they are less open to understanding the perspectives of

others and more likely to cling to what is familiar (Foss 11). In order to approach a

controversial topic, such as overcoming twenty-nine years of civil war and brutality,

Mitchell found a less threatening topic to discuss that would allow each side to

relinquish their anger without violating either sides core values – which would have

halted the conversation altogether as it had done in past approaches to peace

negotiations (Curran, Sebenius and Watkins 127).

This focus on the regulations of the negotiation also allowed for a level

playing field of rules and procedures that both parties had contributed to building

(Curran, Sebenius and Watkins127). Without the creation of a new negotiation

agenda and procedures, then, they would have chosen the Anglo-Irish regulations,

making the Protestant side feel even more threatened and defensive throughout the

negotiation process (Curran, Sebenius and Watkins 127). The focus on interpersonal

relationships is one of the most significant and transformative sites for intercultural

communication. So, through Mitchell's process, each person at the negotiating table

needed to feel that they were being treated equally and fairly in terms of the

regulations of the conversation. (Sorrells and Sachi 143). It is through Mitchell's

tactics for focusing on procedural differences that communication was productive,

and not destructive; to prompt communication and the ability to succeed in listening

and understanding one another was in place.

Northern Ireland has become the quintessential example of the influence soft

power can have on conflict mediation. Many political scholars have studied the

Northern Ireland conflict claiming it to be a miraculous negotiation. However, if

looking to theories within communication studies, it is not as much a miracle as it is

scientific. Whether Mitchell had planned for this form of soft power approach, it just

worked out that way, or he had some intuitive understanding of what to do, his

formatting of the negotiations coincides with the each of the communication

theories addressed thus far. Through the process of slow negotiation Mitchell did

not threaten any core values, established bridgework by allowing the parties

involved to find commonalities in even the slightest of victories such as agreeing on

negotiations rules, and used dialectic theory in order to slowly form a collective

unity between the dissenting sides.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout this paper I have explained the benefits that result from

conscientious communication through the study of a conflict's history, culture,

customs and differences. I argue that these are all viable aspects to consider when

trying to address conflict; whether it is an interpersonal conflict, a conflict at a

peaceful stage in a given tension, or a conflict that has intensified to bloodshed and

war and which has endured for a long period of time. Despite the promising

attributes regarding strategic dialogue, there are also a number of challenges to

solving a conflict through communication-attuned means alone; challenges that can

be more difficult to resolve in the real world than in theory. One of the major

challenges is how to stop the violence long enough to get people to begin a

discussion (Broom and Collier 256). I understand that conflict in the form of

physical violence cannot be stopped with soft power. There are times in conflict

resolution in which military power is necessary and vital in order to instill peace within a conflict zone, at least in the immediate and short term.

Another challenge to a soft power approach to conflict resolution is that dialogue depends on reciprocity, and one side or the other, or both, just may not be willing to participate (Broom and Collier 256). In this instance, it may be necessary to coerce by means or threats of hard power. Or, is it better to wait and allow the conflict to continue until all sides are ready to communicate? This, of course, becomes and interesting and important question.

Power issues are always part of the dynamics of dialogue, and can serve to reproduce the existing pattern of domination, especially when it is used as an engagement strategy too early in the process (Broom and Collier 256). By waiting until all parties are ready, a power struggle may be avoided, allowing all parties to willingly come to the table for possible negotiation. But how long should a third party be willing to wait for the conflicting sides to want to negotiate; all the while lives on both sides of the conflict are being sacrificed? Again, a vital, if tricky to answer, question. The presence of hard power in conflict resolution is absolutely necessary for instilling peace. However soft power approaches that focus on the psychological and communication aspects of influence need to be acknowledged and implemented into Western foreign policy.

By taking an analytical, close look at past and present conflicts, such as those in the Middle East, Northern Ireland and the Congo, it is evident that the amount of influence communication concepts can contribute to the application of peace negotiations is strong, and should be heeded. With fundamental values and cultural

orientations as the foundation to communication studies concepts and theories,

analysts are able to uncover the more subconscious thoughts, values, beliefs, and/or

attitudes of participants in a conflict. Then, through the concepts of bridgework and

dialectics, scholars can find the divisions and distances between the opposing

parties, and possibly find that one key similarity to that could mend those severed

ties. The key to solving a conflict is not just "talking it out." If it were, there would be

no life-long divisions between families, no political disputes and no warring states.

Perennial conflicts are a severely complex issue, often having originated during the

states' colonial period. The solution to these conflicts is also an intricate and

complex matter. It is the obligation of the intervening state, or institutional body

(such as the U.N. or other non-governmental organizations) to address the situation

ethically and responsibly. The way to achieve this is by acknowledging the

complexity of the conflict. The solution to a conflict that has developed and been

perpetuated for hundreds of years will require a solution as idiosyncratic as the

history and culture of the conflict itself. This does not mean that it will be achieved

solely through soft power, but rather that it will be achieved by looking at the

conflict through various academic lenses. Those who study or theorize matters of

conflict resolution, as well as those who are in positions of actual power and

decision-making when it comes to international relations and large-scale conflict

management, need to look outside the norms of political science thought in order to

address the perpetuating conflicts of today. In the end, it is my contention that soft

power, communication and culture-attuned approaches are under-valued as an

influential force in international relations. Through the implementation of

communication methods, third party interveners have the opportunity to reshape

the strategy of conflict resolution on a global scale.

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