SOCIAL CONFLICT

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1. Introduction

Social conflict occurs when one person or group makes negative claims on another. Negative claims are those which, if realized, would hurt the other's interest -- the other's probability of achieving some desirable situation. The claims include both threats and direct attacks. When they involve direct seizure or damage to persons or objects, we often use the word violence. Conflict is sometimes asymmetrical: one party makes negative claims, while the other does not. A common name for asymmetrical conflict is coercion. More often, however, it approaches symmetry, with each party making at least some claims to counter the other's. Conflict is a special case of competition, the simultaneous pursuit of mutually exclusive advantages (or avoidance of mutually exclusive disadvantages) by two or more parties. Routine competition turns into conflict when one competitor explicitly makes potentially damaging claims on another; bidding more than your neighbor for a piece of land you both desire does not in itself qualify as conflict, but threatening to attack your neighbor if he outbids you does qualify as conflict. By this definition, running a race with someone stands at the margin of conflict, since if losing makes no difference to either runner no conflict occurs, but if either has an interest in winning the competition becomes a conflict. Tripping your fellow-runner to slow her down, in any case, clearly identifies the race as a conflict.

Conflict complements cooperation, in which social units make positive claims on each other: cooperators, that is, offer promises and rewards rather than threats and attacks. Social relations involving explicit threats or attacks by one party against another constitute the home ground of conflict. For that reason, individuals and groups controlling concentrated means of coercion -- weapons, warriors, supernatural symbols, access to bad publicity, and so on -- play a disproportionate role in conflict; they specialize in negative claims, and have superior bases for making them. Most important of all are states, which specialize not only in accumulating and deploying coercive means, but also in controlling other people's use of coercion within their territories. Social conflict includes all interactions in which individuals or groups threaten or attack each other, and much of it involves states as active participants, third parties, or arbiters.

Although this definition already covers a wide range of human action, some analysts prefer to give social conflict an even broader scope. To the extent that individuals and groups might gain, in theory, from having some benefit, or occupying some position, or living under some social arrangement currently enjoyed or blocked by other individuals and groups, a kind of conflict pervades all social life. Some theorists (e.g. Lukes 1974) insist that no theory of power -- and therefore, by extension, of conflict -- that fails to take such suppressed alternatives into account can be valid. Johan Galtung (1969) introduced the concept of "structural violence" --

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wrongs done to people by the existing structure of power -- with a
similar argument in mind. At this level, a theory of social conflict
amounts to a general theory not only of existing social life but of
possible alternative social lives.

In this broad sense, conversely, every general political theory
also entails a theory of social conflict. Thus Marxist political
economy, through its analysis of exploitation, discovers conflict in
many social relationships whose participants are not struggling with
each other, and does so by comparing them with other social relation-
ships that might, in principle, exist. By such arguments it becomes
possible to conclude that Italian workers are exploiting their coun-
terparts in Taiwan and Singapore.

Incontestably, the broad view of conflict raises fundamental
issues that a narrower view can avoid. Yet it also has two serious
drawbacks: first, it generalizes the problem so far as to make it
virtually insoluble and to take it out of the realm of verifiability;
second, it obscures the original problem, that of determining the
conditions under which conflicts that exist in principle generate
real claims in practice. The following discussion pays some attention
to these broad matters, but concentrates on explicit, direct con-
flicts in which at least one of the parties is making visible claims
on another.

Strictly speaking, only individuals, not groups, make claims.
Yet social conflict is clearly a collective phenomenon, in which indi-
viduals act together and frequently make claims in the name of
large social categories such as classes, communities, and religious
faiths. In such cases, it is a useful simplification to speak of
groups as the actors. The individuals who act together come 1) from
categories of people (e.g. those born in the same region) who have
some recognized trait in common, 2) from networks of individuals
(e.g. patron-client chains) who are connected by a certain kind of
interaction but otherwise have no shared identity or, more impor-
tantly, 3) from category-networks -- catnets for short -- of persons
(e.g. workers in a particular shop) who share both a recognized trait
and a set of social relations. Only rarely do all members of a
category, network, or catnet act together in conflict.

The usual gap between membership in the relevant category,
network, or catnet and direct participation in the making of claims
sets the problems of collective action and mobilization. Collective
action refers to joint effort on behalf of shared interests. Mo-
bilization refers to all those processes by which resources that col-
lective action employs -- labor power, money, arms, and so on -- come
under collective control. Since collective action is often not only
risky but expensive, and frequently diverts resources from other con-
pelling uses, most groups maintain low levels of mobilization, act
collectively only intermittently, and see only small proportions of
their members join directly in the action. Those moments of minority

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collective action are crucial nevertheless, since their outcomes have significant impacts on the relations of all group members with each other and with members of other groups. Even in mass revolutions like those of Russia or China, the vast majority of peasants continued to tend their plots as best they could throughout the turmoil, but those who did join the revolutionary movement made a tremendous difference to the fates of all the rest.

2. General Explanations of Conflict

A good deal of social-scientific work on conflict consists of description and interpretation rather than theoretically-informed analysis. The existing literature teems with case studies of particular revolutions, rebellions, strikes, social movements, and neighborhood conflicts, undertaken from innumerable different points of view. (See the bibliography for multiple examples.) Although such case studies are indispensable as evidence, and sometimes contain remarkable theoretical insights, taken as a whole they lack theoretical focus.

When theories become explicit, however, a relatively small number of questions and ideas dominate the discussion. The main questions concern three problems: 1) Origins: What conditions promote or hinder the making of negative claims? 2) Participants: How and why do the groups that make such claims form and mobilize? 3) Dynamics: Through what processes, and with what consequences, do conflicts begin, rise, fall, and end? Applied to the entire domain of conflict, these are huge questions. No single theory can hope to explain origins, participants, and dynamics all at once.

General explanations of social conflict divide along two basic dimensions. The first dimension concerns the social relations involved in conflict: a) those that connect individuals to society as a whole or b) those that connect one individual or group to another. On one side, analysts who see social life as a confrontation of sharply-defined individuals with an overarching society; on the other, analysts who locate the essence of social life in concrete relationships with real others. When Montesqueu identified a whole society, shaped by its environment and its shared historical experience, as the source of its members' moral sentiments, and Rousseau countered that moral sentiments sprang from the concrete relations of a person to those immediately around him, they were taking positions on opposite sides of this barricade.

The second distinction concerns the social processes that produce conflict: a) the malfunctioning of ordinary regulatory mechanisms or b) the activation of contradictory interests. To the extent that one conceives of social life as a functioning organ or machine, it becomes easy to conclude that conflict results from a disease or a breakdown. Nineteenth-century observers of rapid urbanization and industrialization often attributed a wide variety of Social Conflict: 3
social ills to that sort of breakdown, and proposed appropriate repairs. Others, however, see conflict-producing interests as built into social life, but muted or activated by varying circumstances. A Freudian world, for example, seethes with strong impulses waiting for the opportunity to express themselves.

We might diagram the four conceptions that result from crossing the two dichotomies as follows:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>SOCIAL PROCESS</th>
<th>INDIVIDUAL-SOCIETY</th>
<th>GROUP-GROUP</th>
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<td>MALFUNCTION</td>
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<td>intergroup relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>INTEREST ACTIVATION</td>
<td>intrinsic character</td>
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The four conceptions are not theories, but meta theories -- sets of ideas that are not specific enough to be verifiable in themselves, but that guide theory, research, and interpretation of events.

The metatheory of social stress presumes that society exists, and individuals confront it as a superior, external force. It also presumes that social order is natural, but change causes disorder, and disorder causes conflict. Conflict, for the metatheory of social stress, is an avoidable pathology. Although many empirical propositions take their inspiration from similar principles, none of these presumptions is empirically verifiable or falsifiable in these general terms. Emile Durkheim is a good example of a thinker who usually approached conflict with a metatheory of social stress and ordinarily framed his empirical arguments in accordance with that metatheory. For Durkheim, if the division of labor outruns society's capacity for integration, individuals lose their attachments to society, anomie prevails, and disorder, including conflict, ensues. Durkheim's more specific theories, for example his analysis of suicide, generally conform to the social stress metatheory.

The metatheory of group struggle, in almost total contrast, assumes that individuals and social relations among them are the fundamental social realities, that individuals and groups have shared interests, and that social life consists of interactions among interest-oriented groups. Karl Marx is a quintessential example of a group struggle metatheorist. For Marx, interacting sets of human beings constitute the fundamental social reality, all individuals and groups have interests shaped by their positions within the system of production, contradictory interests inhere in almost all systems of production, and open conflicts result chiefly from contradictory interests.

The other two categories also have distinct properties. Intrinsic-character ideas of social conflict combine the image of an individual confronting society at large with a sense of conflict as
the activation of latent interests. Such ideas often posit some sort of biological determinism, which in its extreme form treats conflict as the expression of a genetically-programmed drive for battle. Thus Konrad Lorenz (1963) portrays aggression as deeply rooted in human biology, fostered by genetic selection for fighting ability. But any explanation of conflict by means of the peculiar propensities of certain kinds of individuals or groups -- inherited, learned, or environmentally-determined -- qualifies for this category. Brian Crozier (1974: viii), for example, derives his conclusion that conflict is inevitable and yet must be repressed from the "axioms" that man is innately envious and aggressive, his nature is not subject to change, his behavior is nevertheless susceptible to change for the better or the worse, and he has an overwhelming need of order. Crozier's analysis reveals the conservative potential of intrinsic character ideas.

Intergroup-relations approaches commonly assume that conflicts result from prejudices, misunderstandings or misperceptions which information, education, persuasion, or sustained contact will remove. When struggles break out along racial, ethnic, or religious lines, intergroup-relations explanations usually become popular. The recurrent proposals of educators and politicians to reduce conflict by means of exhortation, education, and contact with one's enemies prove that this sort of idea still lives. Nevertheless, conceptions of intrinsic character and intergroup relations have had relatively little impact on recent social-scientific analyses of conflict. Instead, most contemporary theory and research follows the line of social stress or that of group struggle. This review draws chiefly on those two perspectives, and offers judgments as to their relative utility.

Although the metatheories are themselves too broad to verify or falsify, they deeply inform thinking about social conflict. Particular theories that are verifiable, furthermore, typically locate clearly within one or another of the metatheories. When Samuel Huntington (1968), for example, seeks to explain the ebb and flow of political conflict in developing countries, he argues that the degree of conflict is a function of the extent to which social mobilization outstrips societal (and especially governmental) institutionalization; the larger the gap, the more widespread the conflict. Because it is difficult to gauge the degree of institutionalization independently of the extent of conflict, the theory runs the risk of circularity. Yet with appropriate definitions and measurements, it is verifiable. By its combining of a sense of malfunction with an idea of confrontation between individual and society, Huntington's theory falls unambiguously into the category of social stress.

Kenneth Boulding (1962), in contrast, argues that economic conflict becomes more acute in poor countries than in rich ones because with small margins available for survival each gain by one group is likely to mean a loss for another group. He also builds repeatedly

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on Lewis Richardson's models of arms races in analyzing other kinds of conflicts. (The Richardson models, in their simplest form, treat the arming of one nation as a function of 1) the armament of a rival, multiplied by an index of sensitivity to that armament. 2) the cost of new arms production, 3) level of grievances against a rival: with rivals responding to each other, a two-equation model demonstrates the possibility of a spiraling arms race even in the absence of changes in the levels of grievance or the costs of armaments.) As these two examples show, the activation of interests by competing groups stands at the center of Boulding's analysis. That style of argument places his theory emphatically in the group struggle category.

3. Conflict and Means of Coercion

On one point, adepts of group struggle and social stress theories agree: the form and control of available coercive means shape the character, intensity, and consequences of social conflict. When coercive means change, conflict changes. Coercive means include anything people use to enforce negative claims, from gossip to bombs. The means of making negative claims are very unequally distributed in all times and places. For millennia, adult males have controlled most lethal weapons, and a good share of non-lethal weapons as well: as a consequence, women and children have had a permanent disadvantage in conflict (see Eisler 1987). In the contemporary world, with great stockpiles of horrendous weapons in the armories of a few states, coercive means are arguably even more unequally distributed in the world than food, medical care, wealth, or income. The unequal distribution of coercive means leads to unequal involvement in conflict. The larger the scale of the conflict, the greater the inequality. At a very large scale, no matter how a conflict begins, states inevitably become the major actors. In our own time, national states have become the great specialists in the initiation, pursuit, and control of conflict, especially violent conflict.

A state is a relatively autonomous and specialized organization that controls the principal concentrated means of coercion within a substantial territory. If no group has a disproportionate share of coercive means (for example, if every household or band has similar weapons, and no other kind of organization has more of them) or if the organization controlling coercive means is indistinguishable from kinship groups, no state exists. In this sense, major parts of the Americas, Africa, the Pacific, and South Asia were stateless a thousand years ago. Today, no significant part of the world lacks states. And a previously unusual kind of state has taken over: the national state.

A national state is a relatively large, specialized, differentiated organization that controls the principal concentrated means of coercion within a substantial, bounded, and contiguous territory. It differs from the city-state, the empire, and the urban federation, which once predominated among the world's states. Since the fif-
teenth century, a system of national states originating in Europe has come to dominate the entire world. With the decolonization that followed World War II, the established powers mapped almost all of the globe into formally autonomous national states. As that happened, each new state created its own distinct armed forces, thus radically shifting the patterns of social conflict in the Third World from colonial control and anticolonial resistance toward local struggles for power.

States play a central role in social conflict because they specialize in controlling and using concentrated means of coercion. The distinction between states and other actors therefore provides the basis for a crude typology of social conflict according to the major pairs of actors:

- state vs. state: e.g. war, conquest
- state vs. nonstate: e.g. rebellion, revolution, social movement
- nonstate vs. nonstate: e.g. industrial conflict, village fights, religious struggles

The typology holds only approximately, since many conflicts involve more than two parties, since the line between state and nonstate actors often blurs, and since conflicts among states almost inevitably draw in nonstate actors. Some important varieties of conflict -- for instance, interpersonal crimes -- fall precisely on the boundary between the second and third categories, with agents of the state regularly intervening in those conflicts and largely determining their outcomes. Studies of conflict have suffered from academic specializations that encourage one group of scholars to study war and diplomacy, another revolutions and rebellions, still others crime or ethnic conflict, each paying little or no attention to the others' domain. So we should take care not to think of state-state, state-nonstate, and nonstate-nonstate conflicts as entirely separate phenomena.

Yet on the average the taxonomy marks out important differences. Consider state vs. state conflicts. In the contemporary world, where states are the dominant organizations and form a relatively tight international system, conflicts among states generally have far wider impact than other conflicts: even a relatively minor dispute between two states rapidly activates third parties that have something to gain or lose from the conflict's outcome. Conflicts involving states (both state vs. state and state vs. nonstate) more frequently produce violence, in the sense of damage or seizure of persons or objects, than do nonstate conflicts because states have greater means of violence at their disposal. (That fact commonly escapes attention because observers ignore war and domestic repression when cataloging violent incidents.) Conflicts among states, pursued through armed forces, also produce violence on a much larger scale.
than other conflicts -- although civil wars, which resemble interstate conflicts in many regards and sometimes become indistinguishable from them, occasionally surpass interstate wars in violence.

Conflicts between states and nonstate actors mark the entire history of state formation: managers of states have sought to check their domestic rivals, to control their subject populations, and to extract from those populations the means of making war as well as of other characteristic state activities, while groups within the state's perimeter have tried to shield themselves from state demands, to influence state action in their own favor, and occasionally to seize power over some or all of the state. Since ruling classes generally use the state apparatus -- for example, the police -- to protect their own interests and attack their competitors, many manifest state-nonstate struggles actually originate in conflicts between nonstate actors.

As compared with the first two categories, conflicts among actors outside the state more often activate high proportions of all the people whose interests are at stake in the conflicts' outcome, chiefly because the state's control of coercion deters many people from entering conflicts in which the state is one of the parties. Within the category of nonstate vs. nonstate, class conflict provides a major impetus to social change, especially when it occurs on a regional or national scale. That is because its stakes directly concern the organization of production, which in turn provides the basis for other forms of social organization. The form of class conflict varies fundamentally from one mode of production to another, with the opposition of peasants to landlords prominent in classic feudalism, the struggle of workers against capitalists central to industrial capitalism, battles of workers and party bureaucrats indigenous to state socialism. The wonder of these systems is that open conflict does not wrack them continuously. It does not because dominant classes exercise repression, because third parties (including the state) intervene to mitigate conflicts, because subordinate classes receive payoffs, because class formation is a difficult, contingent process, and because mobilization and collective action pose risks and divert resources from other pressing activities.

For similar reasons, the vast majority of potential conflicts among religious, ethnic, racial, and other culturally-defined groups never stimulate the open making of claims. They only become acute, and tend to generalize, when control of production or of the state apparatus is at issue and when activists within the groups (often leaders who find their own positions at risk) articulate their problems in terms of oppression or unfair competition (see Gellner 1983, Olzak and Magel 1986).
4. The Dynamics of Conflict

Through what processes, and with what consequences, do conflicts begin, rise, fall, and end? For many years, the most popular answers to these questions about dynamics came from the social-stress metatheory. The social-stress accounts of dynamics fall into two main groups: a) natural histories: postulated sequences for revolutions, social movements, and other conflicts that follow from certain structural strains (e.g. Smelser 1963), b) social-psychological models of a frustration-aggression or relative-deprivation kind, which typically see conflict as the release of emotion generated by social experience, especially by the appearance of large discrepancies between people's expectations and the realities they face (e.g. Gurr 1970). So far, neither of these two lines of analysis has proved very effective in explaining variations in the character, incidence, or dynamics of social conflict. (For extensive reviews, see Gurr 1980 and Zimmerman 1983.)

The most coherent body of theory concerning social conflict draws on group struggle ideas, and takes the form of strategic analysis. Strategic analysis, as currently practiced, deals little with the causes of conflict, not much more with its participants, but very extensively with its dynamics. Indeed, it takes causes and participants for granted in order to get the dynamics right. Much strategic thinking goes back to the reasoning of Niccolo Machiavelli’s *Il principe* by way of Jeremy Benthan, the English Utilitarians, and contemporary microeconomics. Taking the initial interests and means of the actors as given, it analyzes the making of negative claims as rational interaction in which each party seeks to gain advantages and avoid disadvantages.

Strategic analysis of social conflict encompasses three somewhat different enterprises: 1) the effort to identify the set of social relations and decision rules that best characterizes the way a particular conflict or class of conflicts actually occurs (example: determining to what extent an adequate model of the Iran-Iraq war must take third parties into account); 2) the attempt to deduce the outcomes of different conflict strategies (example: computing the effects of different paths to disarmament); 3) the search for the best way to assure a particular outcome to conflict (example: examining ways to end police encounters with hostile demonstrators without bloodshed). In all three enterprises, analysts often draw on the branch of decision theory called the theory of games: the mathematical analysis of decisions in situations where outcomes depend in part on the choices made by other actors, where each actor is aware of all possible outcomes and has a clear order of preference among them, and where each acts to seek his own maximum advantage.

The strongest examples come from the study of international relations. There, strategic analysts customarily treat diplomatic and military confrontations as complex games in which the possible

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outcomes are various combinations of victory, defeat, and damage for different participants. Thus game-theoretical reasoning suggests an account of the shift in Chinese-American relations from war in 1950 to a degree of rapprochement in the 1970s as a kind of coalition formation resulting from the relative decline of American vis-à-vis Soviet military power and the relative rise of Chinese vis-à-vis American military power (Luterbacher and Ward 1985, p. 248). While one can reach similar conclusions without formal game theory, the formalization provides ways of pitting such formulations against equally plausible alternatives.

Robert Axelrod’s studies of the prisoner’s dilemma show that simple specifications of game theory yield illuminating results. In its elementary form, the dilemma characterizes an interaction in which the self-interested action of both parties leads to undesirable outcomes for both, yet a combination of self-interested and cooperative action on the part of the two participants leads to an even more desirable outcome for the self-interested party and an undesirable outcome for the cooperator. Many real-life situations resemble the prisoner’s dilemma: environmental pollution, arms races, legislative bargaining, and even the natural encounters of organisms having the possibility, but not the certainty, of symbiosis. In the course of a single interaction, both parties have strong reasons to avoid cooperation and to pursue their individual interests without regarding the interests of the other.

If, however, the parties enter into frequent interaction, the situation changes. During repeated encounters, even entirely egoistic parties tend to gain from strategies combining initial cooperation with sharp discrimination among responses depending on whether the other party cooperates or continues to serve his individual interest. The strategy of tit for tat -- I start by cooperating in our first encounter, and then imitate your response faithfully -- tends to win over every more egoistic strategy. The advantage of a strategy of initial cooperation, furthermore, grows with a) the probability of further encounters, b) the sharpness of discrimination among responses, c) the certainty of the other party’s identity, his actions, and their consequences. Even in the midst of a population of irremediable egoists, a cluster of tit-for-tat players tends to win. So the analysis demonstrates; among other things, the advantages of coalition.

In that regard, Axelrod’s findings recall Mancur Olson’s analysis in *The Rise and Decline of Nations*, of the probability that small groups and groups having access to selective incentives will form "distributional coalitions." Industrial employers, craft unions, and producers’ associations serve as examples. Such groups, according to Olson’s scheme, gain from their organizational advantage by influencing the production and distribution of goods. In the long run, that influence leads to sclerosis, or at least to pronounced deviation from classic market rationality. Whence a cycle following
each great national struggle: first a relatively open expansion during which those who have the capacity to form distributional coalitions start to do so, then slowdown as a result of the coalitions’ actions.

There exist, according to Olson, two ways of escaping from that sitting up: either smash the coalitions from time to time, or assure the formation of global coalitions whose particular advantages also serve the general interest. In the schemes of Axelrod and Olson, the certainty and continuity of social relations facilitate the formation of stable coalitions serving the mutual interest of actors who continue to follow their particular interests and global coalitions serving the general interest.

Axelrod’s theoretical and experimental results immediately suggest analogies to legislative bargaining, military and diplomatic alliances, and collusion among industrial firms. These analogies, in turn, suggest the possibility of generalizing the foundations of game theory to the level of large-scale structural processes. That is, in fact, the project proposed by Jon Elster, and pursued (in rather a different direction from Elster’s) by Andrew Schotter.

Obviously, strategic analysis applies to domestic as well as to international conflict. James DeNardo (1985) has, for example, created a general, essentially microeconomic, model of the process by which dissidents choose different combinations of numbers and violence in their action against a regime, while Barbara Saler and John Sprague (1980) have developed models representing the internal dynamics of violent interactions between demonstrators and police. At the level of micromobilization, Mark Granovetter, Clark McPhail, John Lofland, and other researchers have formulated useful models of the communications processes that transform a passive aggregate into an acting group — that is, of mobilization for collective action.

William Gamsan’s research team, for example, conducted a series of experiments on resistance to unjust authorities. The central experiment exposed its subjects to a supposed researcher who systematically and progressively violated the group’s initial agreement by seeking to influence their testimony. According to Gamsan’s analysis, open resistance to that violation, when it occurred, resulted from the coalescence of three kinds of actions. Organizing actions increased the group’s collective capacity, divesting actions neutralized ties to the authority, and reframing actions created a new context for the interpretation of the authority’s actions; in this case the new frame labeled the authority as unjust. A successful rebellion against unjust authority, in this model, results from a sequence of organizing, divesting, and reframing acts.

Mark Granovetter has edged in on the dynamics of micromobilization from another angle. His “threshold models of collective behavior” postulate a distribution of actors each having his own cal-
calculation of costs and benefits for participation in a particular action, a calculation that depends strongly on the proportion of others who are already acting or committed to act. Activation of the entire group, if it occurs, depends on the successive arrival of different actors at their thresholds -- for example, 20 percent of the rest, 40 percent of the rest, 90 percent of the rest -- as others join the action. In these models, two groups with identical average propensities to act (e.g., two groups in which the average member is prepared to join the action when 40 percent of the rest are already involved) can differ significantly in their collective propensity to act, depending on the distribution of individual thresholds. Granovetter's models lend insight into the information-gathering about other people's commitment that commonly precedes a risky action: milling, reviews of tactics, recollections of previous encounters, appeals to solidarity, striking of bargains among pairs of participants, and so on.

Despite this promising line of research and theory, strategic analyses of domestic conflicts have not been as popular as those of international conflicts, for two main reasons: 1) international analysts habitually think in strategic terms, while domestic analysts commonly think in terms of etiology, and 2) it is easier to apply unitary decision-making models to states than to most actors in domestic conflicts.

As a general approach to the explanation of social conflict, in fact, strategic analysis still faces severe limits. First, in the present state of knowledge effective strategic models require very restrictive assumptions: fixed numbers and identities of actors, interests and choices known to the actors and specified a priori, and so on; in many conflicts, however, these features actually change as the struggle proceeds. At the limit (as E.P. Thompson, Alain Touraine, and Francesco Alberoni all argue, if in rather different ways), conflict actually produces new identities, interests, and choices. Second, some of the crucial processes in conflict -- for example, those by which warring states rebuild their resources and the commitment of their citizens -- are not strategic in any strong sense of the word; they require models of accumulation, communication, and control. Third, if we are to take seriously the program of explaining not only the dynamics of conflict but also its participants and social origins, then we must examine the creation and transformation of the relevant actors, interests, choices, knowledge, and forms of conflict; strategic analysis provides little help in those regards.

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5. Forms of Conflict

Social conflict takes many forms. The forms vary as a function of the surrounding social structure and the previous history of conflict among particular sets of actors. Take the case of industrial conflict. Strikes, in the sense of concerted withdrawals of labor from production coupled with demands for changes in the conditions of production, occur chiefly where labor has proletarianized, capital has concentrated, and workers labor in close communication with each other. But the particular forms of strikes, as Michelle Perrot (1985) has shown for nineteenth-century France, grow out of struggles among workers, capitalists, and agents of the state; as a result, each country accumulates its own special laws, police practices, bureaucracies, worker routines, union techniques, and employer strategies around the fact of the strike. That accumulation then shapes the incidence, timing, frequency, character, and outcome of strike activity.

What is true of strikes holds generally for all forms of conflict. As compared to the forms of conflict that are theoretically possible, any pair of actors that engage in sustained conflict tend to employ an extremely limited set of routines, adopting the same ones over and over again with minor variation. In contemporary capitalist states, concerted conflicts between employers and workers take the forms of strikes, lockouts, committees, demonstrations, demands for state intervention, sabotage, and very little else.

In eighteenth-century European countries, on the other hand, masters and workers confronted each other in shaming ceremonies (such as parading a strikebreaker on a donkey), and what the English called a turnout: the gathering of disaffected workers of a particular town and town in a protected location, their marching from shop to shop in their trade calling for workers to join them, a new workers’ assembly, collective framing of demands, sending of delegations to masters and local authorities, counter-assemblies of masters (and sometimes of local authorities), negotiations, refusals to work during the negotiations, eventual agreements, both on a community-wide level and shop by shop. That the turnout did not always follow this exact sequence — that, for example, individual employers sometimes locked out all their workers, and refused to hire them back — confirms that it was not an empty ritual, but an actual means by which antagonists worked out conflicts.

In western countries, since World War II a form of conflict that rarely occurred earlier became quite common: one group seizes a symbolically-important space, person, or object, and holds it hostage while bargaining with another group. Aircraft hijackings fit this pattern, as do factory occupations and sit-downs in offices or public squares. Hostage-taking has an ancient history in war, and demonstrations have gravitated to major public spaces for more than a century, but as a deliberate tactic this seizure-and-bargaining con-
stitutes a new departure. It overlaps with the tactics of that heterogeneous array of conflicts authorities call "terrorism".

Clandestine attacks on authorities by illegal groups have occurred for millennia. In that general sense, terrorism is nothing new. The novelty of recent terrorism, as Donatella della Porta (1983: 14) indicates, lies in the frequent choice of symbolically, rather than materially, critical targets, the search for psychological effect, the matching of the message to the target, and the direction of many attacks against persons who do not have the power to respond to the perpetrators' demands. These tactics, when successful, simultaneously confirm the existence of the activist group, publicize their claims, demonstrate the vulnerability of the authorities, and hold third parties hostage to the response of authorities. Gradually they, like other forms of conflict, crystallize into recognizable routines.

One name for the array of means for conflict employed by any pair (or larger set) of actors is its répertoire. The theatrical metaphor conveys a sense of a limited number of relatively distinct routines calling for interaction among allies and enemies that the participants deploy according to negotiated rules, that are more or less familiar to all the participants, that vary from one performance to the next, and that those involved seek to manipulate to their own advantage. Innovation in the forms of conflict does, of course, occur, but it occurs chiefly at the periphery of forms that already have established places in the répertoire. Within conflict répertoires, moments of bursting creativity such as July 1789 or May 1968 are extremely rare. Thus nineteenth-century British political activists created the demonstration step by step as a set of variations on the public meeting, the petition march, and the delegation, all of which had some standing in the British répertoires of the later eighteenth century. By the later 1830s, the mass demonstration had become a standard tactic of groups seeking concessions from authorities.

The advantages of this innovation in the shadow of existing répertoires are obvious: participants in the new form have relatively little to learn, and to the extent that the répertoire has acquired de facto or even de jure legitimacy, opponents have more difficulty invoking legal and moral sanctions against innovations that seem to fall within its perimeter. Its disadvantage follows almost as a corollary: to check the innovation, opponents can use means similar to those they have already employed in counteracting its predecessors. As a result, innovators in conflict constantly have to weigh the advantages of familiarity and legality against the undoubted advantages of surprise.

Conflict répertoires vary according to the structure and history of the social relations in which they are embedded. That is one reason for differences among state-state, state-nonstate, and Social Conflict: 14
nonstate-nonstate conflicts: interacting states create one set of standard conflict routines, states and their domestic opponents hammer out another, antagonists outside the state yet another. Over several centuries after 1500, Europeans imposed their own sort of state system on the world as a whole. With the state system came the apparatus of embassies, delegations, international conferences, treaties, standing armies, and declarations of war -- all of which, in their turn, established the stylized répertoire of contemporary relations among states. Although the internal organization of states, the membership of the state system, the dominant powers, and the interests they pursue have all changed enormously over the last century, the survival of that military-diplomatic apparatus has maintained a certain continuity in the forms of conflict among states. They still involve espionage and creation of hostile alliances, as well as threats, displays, and applications of military and economic force. Similar continuities appear in state-nonstate and nonstate-nonstate struggles.

Take the case of the social movement: the sustained challenge to authorities in the name of a population that lacks advantages many other populations enjoy. Some time between 1780 and 1880 the apparatus of the social movement as we know it today took shape in most western countries. It includes named associations, public meetings, announced programs, statements, slogans, marches, petitions, and recognized speakers for both sides. On the side of the authorities, it also includes standard routines for policing, spying, containing, hearing demands, and negotiating. Just as demonstrations often generate counterdemonstrations, social movements often generate countermovements representing parties whose interests the movements threaten.

Analysts of social movements have had an unfortunate tendency to write of them as if they were groups, when they actually consist of sustained interactions between challengers and authorities. Only rarely does a single, unified group make the challenge. Much more often, movement organizers spend much of their energy patching together coalitions, inventing grouplike names for those coalitions, suppressing rivals or inappropriate allies, and disciplining participants to maintain the illusion of a united front. The whole apparatus bears a remarkable resemblance to that of electoral campaigns. Nor is the resemblance fortuitous: the social movement came to thrive as a standard form of conflict when the expansion of suffrage gave political leverage to anyone who could provide public proof that large numbers of people supported a particular person, demand, or program. Since the nineteenth century, the social movement has occupied a large place in the conflict repertoires of most western countries.

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6. Conditions for Widespread Conflict

What social conditions promote or hinder the making of negative claims? How and why do the groups that make such claims form and mobilize? These are the questions of origins and participants in social conflict. Social scientists have by no means arrived at consensus concerning the answers to them. Indeed, the traditions of social stress and group struggle divide on precisely these points. For theorists in the social stress tradition, rapid, uneven social change promotes conflict, and the groups cast loose by social change participate disproportionately in it. (Another version of social stress centers on discrepancies between expectations and achievements; it is more static, but its essential logic is the same.) For their opponents in the group struggle tradition, conflict grows from the intersection of solidarity and contradictory interests: above some threshold level of solidarity and interest, any social conditions that cause solidarity within interest groups to rise or contradictions among interests to increase promote overt conflict. Notions of "rapid, uneven social change" and "contradictory interest" are too global, imprecise, and controversial to permit crisp, empirical confrontations of the two perspectives.

The bulk of the systematic evidence accumulated so far raises serious doubts about social stress formulations and favors one variant or another of group struggle arguments (for a critical summary, see Zimmerman 1983). Over and over, empirical results concerning individuals, groups, and nations fail to show reliable relationships between the character or intensity of conflict, on the one hand, and the pace of different sorts of social change, the extent of frustration, the degree of change in expectations, the prevalence of social pathology, or other variables suggested by social-stress arguments.

No one could claim, however, that social scientists have proved group struggle theories valid, if only because many inconsistent ideas travel under that banner. But some recurrent findings point in that direction: the over-representation of relatively coherent social groups in sustained conflict, the insistent importance of power position as a predictor of individual or group involvement in conflict, the standardization of forms of conflict within particular populations, the widespread presence of state agents in conflicts at the larger scale, and similar results of systematic research. The evidence in favor of group struggle theories consists especially of the reasonable fit between patterns of conflict and reasonable imputations of interests, organization, alliances, resources, and power to the relevant actors (for reviews, see DeNardo 1985, Goldstone 1982, Gurr 1980 and 1986, Jenkins 1983, Luterbacher & Ward 1985, Oberdell 1978, Roy 1984, Schellenberg 1982, Singer 1980, Tilly 1978, Zimmerman 1983).

When large, stable disparities of power exist among the parties...
to a conflict, for example, some fairly predictable responses occur: in two-party conflicts, a much weaker party typically either does not act at all or employs what James Scott (1985) calls "weapons of the weak": sabotage, arson, flight, false compliance, foot-dragging, and so on; in conflicts involving three or more actors, the weaker parties typically ally against the stronger. As antagonists approach equality of power, open and sustained conflict becomes more likely (Korpi 1974).

The rules change when power shifts rapidly: well-organized groups (such as artisans threatened by mechanization) that face sudden threats to their interests often act despite long odds against them, and relatively weak groups (such as peasants in revolution) often strike out when the authority of their chief antagonists suffers a blow (as when a state loses a war or proves unable to quell rebellions elsewhere). If the actions of one party violate the established rights of another or strike directly at supports of the second party's identity (such as language, religion, or symbolically-crucial property), the aggrieved party commonly fights back despite daunting odds (see Moore 1979). These and other regularities give support to a group-struggle conception of social conflict, and set serious limits on the possible validity of social stress, intrinsic-character and group relations conceptions.

7. Historical Trends in Conflict

Trends in conflict differ sharply from one arena and type of conflict to another. In terms of open war, the twentieth century has become the bloodiest in human history. From 1480 to 1800, international wars broke out at a rate of about 40 per century, from 1800 to 1944 at about 75 per century, since 1944 at about 90 per century (Beer 1974: 12-15; Small & Singer 1982: 59-60). Putting large international and civil wars (the distinction is not always easy) together, the eighteenth century saw 68 wars with 4 million deaths in combat and the nineteenth century 205 wars with 8 million dead; at the rate it followed through 1985, the twentieth century will bring about 275 wars and 115 million deaths in battle (Sivard 1986: 26). These terrible figures, furthermore, exclude civilian deaths as a result of war.

Over that period, surprisingly, wars among great powers have become shorter, rarer, and smaller in number of participants. In great contrast to the European sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the civilian populations of powerful states less and less often endure the depredations of battling troops -- the enemy's or their own country's. World Wars I and II wrought devastation in important parts of Europe and Asia, yet they differed from a Thirty Years War in being short and intense. With respect to death rates, great-power wars have become much more severe; when war does occur, the young men of powerful states are increasingly at risk to die (Levy 1983: 116-149). As the European state-system has expanded to include the whole
world, secondary states have warred with each other more frequently and lethally, while the rarer great-power wars have become apocalyptic.

In the western world, at least, death from interpersonal violence outside of war has declined dramatically over the same period (Chesnais 1981, Burr 1981, Hair 1971, Stone 1983). Homicide rates in thirteenth-century England, for example, ran about ten times those of today, and perhaps twice those of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Similar trends appear all other western countries for which we have reasonable evidence. If it were not for war, state repression, suicide, and the automobile, the risk of violent death would be incomparably lower in western countries than it was three or four centuries ago. As the state sphere has become more and more violent, the sphere of civilian life has turned relatively peaceful.

These changes reflect, among other things, the long drive of national states to monitor and monopolize the means of violence. As the European state system began to form, many people carried lethal weapons, private armies abounded, bandits thrived, and many antagonists settled their differences by force of arms. Gradually, as part of their effort to build up their own strength and check their competitors, managers of states either broke up or coopted private armed bands, suppressed the duel and other private battles, drew disputes into their own courts, and disarmed the civilian population. As a result, civilian life grew less violent, and the contrast between the armed power of the state and the weaponless condition of its citizenry all the more striking.

Whether nonviolent conflict declined during the same process depends on how we define its intensity and weigh its many different forms: in the United States, for example, litigation has proliferated while vigilantism has dwindled (Friedman 1985). In any case, no one has collected the necessary evidence for even a single country. A reasonable guess is that conflict as a whole has not declined, but changed its form and -- outside the realm of the state -- shed most of its violence. In the meantime, states have become ever more violent.

Exploring the whole realm of conflict is like running a boat through an archipelago in a fog: every once in a while an object heaves into view and becomes clear, but much of the time the navigator sees nothing but murky outlines. The danger of a bad bump lies on every side. We have some glimpses of regularities, but remain far from a systematic science of conflict.
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