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# SPECIAL REPORT

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# Reconciliation Strategies in Iraq

## About the Report

This report, which is a shortened version of an unpublished working paper written for the United States Institute of Peace in May 2007, examines effective processes of relationship building and dispute resolution, drawing upon the author's three years of experience working with Iraqis. Informed by both Islamic and tribal customs, the report presents a series of steps for breaking out of a cycle of revenge. It also presents elements of an effective negotiation process with illustrations of successful dispute resolution facilitated by trained Iraqis.

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## Summary


- A window of opportunity now exists for post-conflict reconstruction in Iraq despite the resurgence of violence in the spring of 2008. The creation of Sunni Awakening Councils, the ongoing presence of sufficient U.S. troops, and the decrease in combat activity by the Mahdi Army provide a real, though tenuous, opportunity to continue building on the gains of the past year.
- In all societies emerging from conflict, reconciliation efforts are the glue that holds the post-conflict reconstruction process together. Reconciliation must be pursued not only on national but also on local levels and not only in the political but also in the social domain. At all points within a society, people and groups must be encouraged to work together constructively for the common good.
- Reconciliation in Iraq must be approached with sensitivity to its shame-oriented culture, which emphasizes community, authority, honor, and hospitality. Reconciliation must also be approached with an awareness of the importance of primary identity markers—religion, ethnicity, tribe, and family—and the possibilities for creating bonds based on secondary markers—class, profession, internally displaced persons (IDP) status, and so forth.
- Moving toward reconciliation in the context of severe and widespread violence requires that special attention be given to steps one can take to break the pattern of revenge and transform relationships. These steps include mourning, confronting fears, identifying needs, acknowledging responsibility, envisioning restorative and operational justice, and choosing to forgive.
- When good groundwork has been laid in relationship building, then groups in conflict are better able to engage in constructive dispute resolution. Seven elements form the basis for this process of negotiation or problem solving: identifying interests, alternatives, options, and criteria, and working on relationships, communication, and commitments.
- Internationals need to develop programming that focuses on process, rather than substance, to train and equip local Iraqis to be more effective mediators and facilitators. This programming should include conflict assessment, psychosocial and spiritual healing, conflict resolution training, facilitated dialogue, and problem solving.


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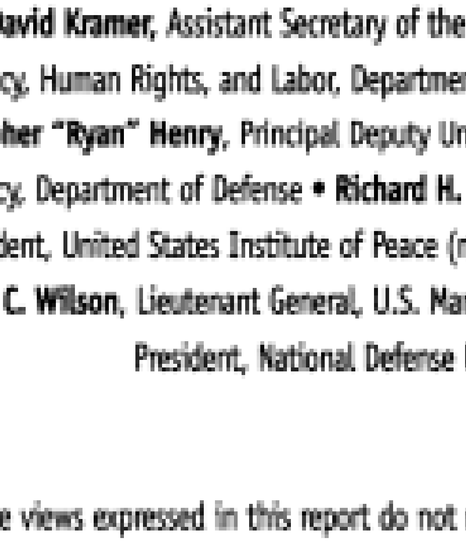


## The Context

The task of designing effective strategies for reconciliation in Iraq must be done in the context of a recent history dominated by tension rather than unity, suspicion rather than trust, and dictatorship rather than democracy. The brutal oppression of Saddam Hussein, the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, and the economic sanctions imposed after the first Gulf War in 1991 seriously undermined Iraq's cohesion as a unified and stable nation-state.

A frequently stated goal of American intervention in Iraq has been to create a model democracy in the Middle East. Washington believed that, by ensuring greater popular participation in national and local decision making, all Iraqis would realize the benefits of participatory democracy. Unfortunately, this goal has proved to be exasperatingly difficult to reach. Instead, the record, as documented in numerous sources, is full of failures, especially in the initial stages of the occupation: inadequate planning on the part of the U.S. government, lack of training and insufficient equipping of Iraqi counterparts, corruption and mismanagement of billions of dollars in Iraqi and U.S. funds designated for economic development, and tensions among the three main ethnic/sectarian groups.

The lack of security and employment, coupled with historic grievances, stereotypes, and growing fears of domination and exclusion, led to an escalation of violence. At the beginning of the occupation, foreign-born Sunni Islamic extremists, along with indigenous Sunni loyalists from the regime of Saddam Hussein, were responsible for much of the violence. Their targets were largely Shiite. The initial response of leading Shiite clerics, especially the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, was to urge restraint, and many Shiite extremists, rather than lashing out at Sunnis, joined them in attacks on coalition forces. The major tipping point that produced a sharp escalation in mutual sectarian violence was the bombing of the Askariya Mosque in Samarra in February 2006. The response of Shiite militias, especially the Mahdi Army led by the cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, was devastating. Shiite militias began a more systematic campaign and Sunni insurgents responded in kind. The Iraqi security forces, especially the police, to which the coalition military had by this time transferred most security operations, proved unable and unwilling to stem the tide of violence. The number of kidnappings, acts of torture, executions, suicide bombings, and efforts at "sectarian cleansing" of neighborhoods continued to increase until February 2007, when three simultaneous developments began to change the security picture.

First, the U.S. military surge, not fully implemented until June, began to engage successfully with the Iraqi population and to crackdown on sectarian violence, especially that precipitated by al-Qaeda in Iraq. Second, Sunni tribal leaders began turning against al-Qaeda in Iraq and other jihadist groups, forming Awakening Councils that have cooperated with the coalition forces and, to some extent, with the Iraqi government to provide security in many of the Sunni-dominated regions. As a result, al-Qaeda in Iraq has been forced out of most of its former strongholds, retreating first to northern areas of the country and more recently relocating primarily to the desert regions of the north and west. Third, Muqtada al-Sadr has declared a series of cease-fires, ordering the Mahdi Army to avoid direct confrontation with coalition forces, the Iraqi Army, and Sunni insurgents. Although radical elements have broken away from his leadership, resulting in frequent low-level violence, al-Sadr's efforts to curb militant action have reduced violence overall. During late April and May 2008, the Mahdi Army was again in conflict with Iraqi government and coalition forces, but violence has since diminished.

Despite the recent spate of violence, an opportunity still exists to promote reconciliation through trainings, dialogue processes, and interethnic and intersectarian cooperation on projects designed to benefit both sides. The window of opportunity is unlikely to last more than a year, given the likelihood of U.S. troop reductions in 2009 and the possible reversal of allegiance within the Sunni Awakening movement when—as scheduled—U.S. funding of salaries terminates at the end of 2008. The Iraqi government, with international support, will need to increase its efforts to encourage Sunni participation in government and in society, to provide public services, and to foster economic development. These

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reforms need to include better protection of minority rights, negotiated solutions to conflicts over access to resources and distribution of political power, and more effective work performance on the part of Iraqi civil servants. Although there has been some progress toward meeting legislative benchmarks related to oil-revenue distribution, constitutional reform, provincial powers, amnesty, and de-Baathification, much more work remains to be done to clarify and implement these measures. All of these components—security, good governance, rule of law, economic development, and provision of essential services—will have to work in concert in order for Iraq to experience post-conflict reconstruction and democracy.

## The Place of Reconciliation Efforts in Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Reconciliation efforts, which involve restoring the best possible relationships among conflicted groups, are an integral part of post-conflict reconstruction. Often requiring action in incremental stages, beginning with stabilization, reconciliation must be pursued not only on national but also on local levels, and not only in the political but also in the social domain. At all points within a society emerging from conflict, people and groups must have the ability to work together constructively for the common good. Reconciliation efforts are the glue that holds the post-conflict reconstruction process together. Without effective dialogue and dispute resolution mechanisms that can establish good working relationships between conflicted groups of people, democratic governance will likely become deadlocked, security will be derailed by suspicion, economic development will succumb to interests that appear to be competing, delivery of essential services will be obstructed, and even justice will be construed only in negative terms of guilt and punishment rather than as a mutual search for the values and mores that can underpin the common good.

***Reconciliation efforts are the glue that holds the post-conflict reconstruction process together.***

At the same time, reconciliation cannot be the only focus of reconstruction. Because conflict influences the performance of each of the other components, reconciliation must interface with each of them in order to help parties handle differences effectively and resolve disputes that arise within each arena. The converse is also true. Progress on each of the other components is essential in order to realize full reconciliation. Experience shows the importance of the interplay between all these components in post-conflict reconstruction in various countries and regions. Although they overlap significantly with other components of post-conflict reconstruction and democracy building, reconciliation efforts, as already indicated, have a unique role to play in peacebuilding at the individual, community, national, and international levels. To be fully effective, efforts at the resolution of conflict need to address three distinct dimensions of conflict—people, problems, and systems—each of which presents a challenge to overcome. First, there is the relational challenge of establishing trust, healing grievances, breaking the pattern of revenge, reducing biases and stereotypes, and building ties across divides so that people can begin to live and work together constructively. Second, there is the issue-oriented challenge of imparting the problem-solving skills necessary to help people resolve local disputes and develop concrete action plans to address more complex issues that divide their society. Third, there is the systemic challenge of identifying changes in the social structure that can promote peacebuilding. In this report, I focus on the first two parts of this three-tiered approach to reconciliation: relationship building and dispute resolution. The report does not aim to propose concrete solutions to problems; instead, it seeks to propose a process whereby Iraqis can more effectively build constructive relationships and resolve their own disputes.

Louise Richardson, in her book *What Terrorists Want* (2006), identifies three factors that motivate terrorist behavior: renown, revenge, and reaction. Any effective response to terrorism, argues Richardson, must address these motivations. Although it is certainly inaccurate to describe more than a very small section of the Iraqi population as terror-

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ist, Richardson's delineation can be instructive in examining the behavior of many actors within Iraq—and indeed within many other societies caught up in escalating civil violence. The desire for renown is rooted in fundamental needs for identity and status. The desire for revenge is motivated by a strong compulsion to redress humiliation and achieve justice. Finally, the desire of the perpetrator to provoke a reaction, whether one of repression or capitulation, requires a change in attitude and behavior that leads to a proactive response. Relationship-building efforts in Iraq, then, must address the issues of status and identity and break the cycle of revenge.

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## Relationship Building

### *Addressing Status and Identity*

Identity formation is a complicated process. Multiple layers of belonging help groups of people to define who they are, differentiate themselves from "others," and set out the parameters within which they can relate effectively to outsiders. In Iraq, the major markers of identity include religion, ethnicity, tribe, and family, though other factors, such as nation, region (Arab or Middle East), political party, municipality, class, profession, and gender, also play a role. A people's sense of belonging and motivation are particularly affected by the beliefs and values they hold. Consequently, both faith tradition and tribal customs have an immense role to play in formulating the various identities of the Iraqi people. Even among Iraqis who do not espouse strong religious or traditional tribal belief systems, certain values, perceptual mind-sets, and customs contribute significantly to their identity-formation process. Sometimes these factors set groups apart from one another. At the same time, other cross-cutting values, belief systems, and cultural factors transcend the ethnic, religious, and tribal divisions. These common perceptual sets can unite a people or they can contribute to the fueling of destructive patterns of conflict on all sides.

Some of the overarching values that tend to distinguish Middle Eastern cultures from Western cultures include an emphasis on tradition, group welfare, hierarchy, respect for authority, and saving face as opposed to innovation, individualism, equality, respect for law, and frank communication. Cultural anthropologists have used the distinction between shame-oriented and guilt-oriented societies to capture the essential characteristics that distinguish many tradition-based, communal societies from Western societies. According to many studies of Arab culture, the pursuit of honor and the avoidance of shame are the primary motivators of behavior. Honor must be acknowledged by one's community. Conversely, taking away one's honor brings shame on both the individual and his or her group. In societies where shame is the dominant motif, tensions occur not because laws have been broken but because someone has violated the proper ordering of relationships.

***In societies where shame is the dominant motif, tensions occur not because laws have been broken but because someone has violated the proper ordering of relationships.***

Honor can either be ascribed (through birthright or bestowal from someone with status) or achieved in relation with one's peers. In many tradition-based, communal societies, the latter type of honor has been perceived as a zero-sum game, one person's acquisition of honor entailing another's loss. The basic structure of this contest includes (1) a claim to honor, (2) a challenge to that claim, (3) a response to the challenge, and (4) a public verdict. Such a lens is important in order to understand many tribal feuds. The intense competition inherent within battles for personal honor or family reputation can also help explain how tensions that appear to be resolved publicly, through norms of superficial cordiality and ritualized reciprocity, can suddenly erupt in suspicion and antagonism. It can help us to understand that, in a culture where honor and pride are significant social determinants, one will find a depth of anger and shame that can generate kidnapping, sectarian cleansing, and suicide bombing.

It is important to add, however, that honor also carries very positive connotations. There is a distinction between an "honor of precedence," which is competitive and aggres-



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sive, and an "honor of virtue," which is conciliatory. The first type involves the domination of persons. The second type, however, enhances reputation and promotes loyalty and hospitality. Even in modern, urban Arab culture, hospitality is one of the most important factors upon which self-esteem depends. It is closely connected with both the bestowal and the reception of status and honor. The host must house, feed, and protect the guest, even at the risk of the host's own security. The host must even forgo revenge if the visitor asks for sanctuary or asylum. The recipient, whether friend, stranger, subordinate, or bitter foe, is expected to show respect to the host. Furthermore, honor and hospitality are always being negotiated in the presence of the local community. This is a dynamic, not a static, process, one that can allow perceptions and behavioral options to evolve. Its communal nature allows for a certain degree of malleability, which can be used creatively by a third-party intervener skilled in understanding indigenous practice and in professional third-party facilitation.

It is not difficult to understand why honor and shame are dominant motifs in Iraqi culture. They are deeply imbedded in ancient Bedouin society and have been sustained by modern experiences of oppression and subjugation. The violation of security has also had an effect on identity. When security degenerates to the level that survival is at stake, the parameters of identity are drawn even more narrowly. Identity tends to become attached exclusively to one marker, be it religion, ethnicity, tribe, family, or another locus of belonging. This exclusive marker is then bounded by increasingly fixed and rigid definition. All members of the in-group are tested for their loyalty, while all those marked with other identity labels are viewed with suspicion and are likely to be targeted for attack.

***When security degenerates to the level that survival is at stake, the parameters of identity are drawn even more narrowly.***

In Iraq, today, these identity boundaries are frequently drawn very narrowly, though not by all Iraqis. One aim of this report is to outline a process that will assist the Iraqi people to address the full complexity of identity issues. A mutual identity formation process, one that creates self-definition without denigrating or demonizing another group, must be fostered. Furthermore, in the same way that negative tipping points, such as the bombing of the Askariya Mosque, can accelerate the escalation of violence and trap a society in fear and suspicion, successful dialogue processes that broaden people's identity formation and begin to build common bonds between groups can lead to joint efforts at peacebuilding. The problem facing Iraq is how to reverse the direction so that a critical mass within the population joins in the effort to create a peaceful democratic society. Examining identity is one place to begin.

Four approaches can be taken to address this question of identity. They are laid out below, beginning with the most difficult option and ending with the most feasible approach.

- **Discovering a different primary identity that all persons can hold in common.** Some voices still maintain that it is possible to create a unified national Iraqi identity. However, very many Iraqis reject this vision.
- **Discovering that the primary identity marker one has chosen does not represent one's most basic concerns or values.** Some have argued that the basic divide between Shiite and Sunni in Iraq is not religious, but political: competition over the right to rule. However, while it must be acknowledged that political competition is rife, this argument ignores the fact that religion can be staunchly embraced as a primary mark of identity even when the actual conflict has little or nothing to do with issues of faith. During a session on identity issues during a workshop on negotiation skills for twenty-six Iraqis held in March 2006, every single participant (twenty-five Shiites and one Catholic) identified religion as their primary marker of identity, even placing it above family and their names, representing their lineage. These people, many of whom held positions in provincial government, were very aware of the political, economic, and tribal conflicts confronting their society, but they did not discount the role played by religion.

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*A creative dialogue process aimed at correcting misperceptions might well clarify where there already is greater Shiite flexibility than is feared by Sunnis.*

- **Redefining the current primary identity in more flexible terms**. It may be possible to redefine how one group perceives another group's primary identity. Sunni consternation over rule by Shiite religious parties may prove to be overblown if those parties are, in reality, less rigidly religious than feared. The existence of multiple Shiite political parties and militias indicates that there is not one united Shiite agenda. A creative dialogue process aimed at correcting misperceptions might well clarify where there already is greater Shiite flexibility than is feared by Sunnis. Such a process might also stimulate creative reflection that could lead to greater flexibility at least in the way that religion is presented. Shiite provincial leaders from south central Iraq, for example, demonstrated remarkable openness in the way in which they approached many issues, including a conflict over the teaching of religion in a school in Qadissiyah Governorate. Some months following the workshop, participants from Diwaniyah negotiated a settlement to this dispute in which it was agreed that religion would not be taught in the school in question, a decision that might surprise non-Shiites from other regions.

  In addition to one group changing its perception of another group, it is also possible for a group to redefine its own identity. Dialogue within a tradition can bring more conservative and more liberal representatives into contact, allowing a group to explore how best to understand and express its own identity. These formats offer opportunities to engage even extremist elements in an important process of reflection on cherished values. In a training held exclusively for Iraqi Shiites in December 2005, for example, members of the Sadrist movement were able to interact constructively with others holding more moderate views. Following the workshop, one of these participants, an advisor in the al-Sadr office in Amarah, negotiated the end of a violent conflict between two police units, while another participant, a second advisor in the same office, negotiated a conflict over the price of benzene. Both men also participated, during a subsequent training workshop, in analyzing and role playing a tribal conflict that pitted radical Shiite militias against the provincial government in Qadissiyah Governorate. It was obvious that initial suspicion and restraint had been overcome as the "in-group" of these Sadrists became defined in more flexible terms.

- **Discovering and/or affirming the importance of one's secondary identity markers.** Examining one's secondary identity markers increases the chances of finding common ground. For example, the realignment of the Sunni Awakening Councils represents recognition of the importance of their secondary identity markers, allowing them to cooperate with former enemies against former allies. Affirming secondary identity markers is a promising approach especially because it does not require that the person abandon, or even reprioritize, his or her primary identity. People who find commonality at the level of second-tier identity might be able to bridge ethnic or sectarian divides. Minority groups—for instance, Kurdish Shiites, people in mixed marriages, and returning exiles that belong to different ethnic or sectarian communities—are frequently well positioned to facilitate such encounters. Tribes that include both Sunni and Shiite members (e.g., the Jaburi, Shammar, Bani Tamim, Hashimi, Dulaim, and Khafaji tribes) may be some of the most important groups to include in an intergroup dialogue or conflict resolution training process in Iraq. Political parties that include members from different tribes can also become important bridge builders.

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Identity formation is inherently tied to the preservation of primary values, and thus any examination of identity is bound to pose a significant threat for some people. Especially when profound suffering has led to a sense of victimization, individuals and groups naturally wrap themselves in protective barriers. Therefore, some groups may need to have their grievances heard before they are able to examine identity. Depending on the readiness of a given group to share on this level, it may be advisable to offer a workshop designed to deal creatively with the sense of victimization.



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## Breaking the Cycle of Revenge

Building toward reconciliation in the context of severe, widespread violence requires that special attention be given to the expression and acknowledgment of grievance. People must find a different way to address humiliation and injustice than by resorting to revenge. In order to facilitate the transformation from hostility to reconciliation, it is essential to begin with people's experience, starting where they are, not where we might wish them to be. In the context or aftermath of severe, widespread violence, this necessitates empathizing with people's experience of victimization. To facilitate exploration of this dynamic, it is helpful to examine both the typical cyclical pattern of victimhood-aggression and a series of steps one can take to break this pattern and transform relationships. The following description of both destructive and constructive cycles is adapted from an original process designed by Olga Botcharova at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

The first stage in the victimhood-aggression cycle is a state of injury and pain in which it is common for people to be in state of denial. The second stage is when the person comes to a realization of loss of home, health, loved ones, possessions, identity, job, culture, and so forth. The third stage involves suppression of grief and fears. The attempt to avoid pain is a common survival mechanism in the midst of trauma. The fourth stage involves anger at anyone associated with the perpetrators. A deep sense of having been violated as a person or a community carries all the weight of communal shame, dishonor, and humiliation. The fifth stage involves a desire for justice or revenge. The perceived need to rectify the group's diminished strength and blemished honor culminates, then, in a conviction to destroy the perpetrators and/or members of their group. The quest for justice has turned from a strategy for defense into a crusade of revenge. In the sixth stage the victim creates myths, heroes, and the right conflict history in order to create a web of understanding that explains all that has happened, convinces him and his identity group that they are absolutely right, and justifies the act of revenge. Actual events are separated from their context and mixed with popular beliefs, stereotypes, and legends from the historical memory of one's group. It is a black-and-white mentality that excludes the possibility of acknowledging any other perceptions that might reflect the complexity of the issues or the interests of other parties. Therefore, the seventh and last stage is an act of justified aggression. After the mobilization of moral justification, the victim is ready to strike back. The previous victim has now also become an aggressor. However, there is no justification for this action from the perspective of the other, who may or may not be exactly the same person or group responsible for the initial aggressive action. The new victim now perceives this act as the beginning of the conflict and will trace everything back to this moment of his own suffering in order to justify his own subsequent retaliation. The cycle has been completed, the roles are now reversed, and the cycle continues, spiraling to encompass more and more people with each round of retaliation.

In order to break this cycle of victimhood and revenge, a number of steps can be taken, though not necessarily in the order presented below.

### *Step 1: Mourning—Expressing Grief and Accepting Loss*

Enabling people to experience an effective grief process is an important first step in reconciliation and peacebuilding. Without a sensitive process of mourning, one that encompasses religious ritual as well as empathetic understanding, traumatized individuals and communities cannot prevent their understandable hurt and anger from developing into revenge and counteraggression.

The annual Shiite commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein provides a powerful illustration of the potential that religious ritual has to help people successfully deal with grief and accept loss. Despite the enactment of terrible violence—beating of chests, flagellating with chains, and slashing of foreheads with swords—this process of grieving is not designed to lead participants to retribution and revenge. Instead, its purpose is to provide a model for bearing one's suffering with honor and dignity and to claim the

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ultimate victory of blessing, joy, and rest as stated by the Prophet Mohamed in the script of the Karbala enactment.

This perspective may be at odds with the typical Arab penchant for retribution and, therefore, many Shiites may, in actual practice, use the grief experience to stoke the fires of revenge. However, the interpretation presented is in keeping with the ancient practice of lament that has existed among Semitic peoples since the time of Moses. Its purpose is to enhance the expression of hurt, loss, and grief, even to express outrage, while at the same time limiting vindictive behavior by providing a formalized ritual within a community framework. This litany of lament comforts the believer with a sense that Allah hears the pain, proclaims the suffering to be unjust, and promises protection, blessing, and even vindication. Islamic belief that everything is the will of Allah means that, ultimately, Allah will put all things right and the believer is freed from the temptation to overreach in his quest for justice.

***The current surge in Islamic identity in Iraq could help to restrain the tribal propensity to exact excessive retaliation.***

The current surge in Islamic identity in Iraq could, if carefully guided, help to restrain the tribal propensity to exact excessive retaliation; much like the Prophet Mohammed attempted to curb disproportionate violence practiced in Arab blood feuds during the seventh century. Today's indigenous Iraqi religious leaders—of all sects—must be the ones to evaluate how their specific traditions of mourning can express, yet transform, the people's rage and lead them away from vengeance. Given the stature they have as some of the most respected authority figures in their communities, these religious leaders can provide the foundation upon which other reconciliation programming can build.

Other methods can also be used to transform the process of grief and loss. Experience in numerous cultural contexts indicates that storytelling in small groups of six to eight people is one of the most effective ways to address grief and loss. If care is taken to design an environment where each group member can feel safe enough to share his or her personal experience of loss and explain what helped him or her to live through the loss, then participants can experience being heard even by the "other." When they discover that their hurts, whether great or comparatively small, are taken seriously by others, cross-cutting bonds begin to develop. Refugees from one group have listened and cried with refugees from a rival group as they realized the depth of their common experience. In this way, people's deep pain, rather than becoming a barrier, becomes a bridge. This sharing of experience, though, needs to be interspersed with interpretive information on the grief process. Here, it is important to draw on local religious knowledge as well as professional psychological theories. Finally, attempts to ritualize this process by pulling together elements from all the stories, weaving similar and dissimilar components into a shared catharsis, guarantees everyone's experience has been remembered and grieved. Communal grief processes such as this help to limit vindictive response even though people will still disagree about many of the perceptions, causes, diagnoses, and solutions regarding the conflict.

### *Step 2: Confronting Fears—Assessing Threats and Dangers*

Moving from grievance to fear involves turning one's attention from the past to the future. In many cases, there is, in fact, an intrinsic connection. Victims of atrocities, for example, tend to believe that the trauma they have experienced will happen again, that the perpetrator will come back. People in the midst of war are legitimately afraid of many things: threats to personal safety, social transformation, economic crisis, political manipulation, and so forth. Iraqi Sunnis fear Iranian influence over Shiite political parties running the government as well as attacks by Shiite militias and Iraqi police. Shiites fear loss of long-awaited political power as well as attacks by Sunni insurgents. Kurds fear loss of autonomy and potential independence. All groups fear foreign control, indigenous threats to security, and the loss of dignity and honor.

Yet if reconciliation is to occur, people must not to be controlled by fear, which makes it important to help people make wise choices in handling anxieties. In Arab cultures,



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moreover, one may also observe resistance to acknowledgment of fear, because such acknowledgment would appear to demonstrate weakness and shame. Rather than appear weak, an Arab will likely deny the fear, and perhaps even express anger over the suggestion that the fear exists.

Arabs finds it much easier, however, to observe fears in people not closely related and not present. Workshop participants from Amarah, for example, had no problem identifying the fears present within two local tribes, the Bani Malik and the Beet Slaim, which had recently been involved in a blood feud following the murder of one tribe member. One tribe feared that justice would not be done and the murderer would go free. The tribe also feared the intervention of a political party affiliated with the other tribe, an action that would escalate the conflict into a political one. Members of the other tribe feared that the murderer would go to jail, that their tribe would be banned from certain areas, that the conflict would expand to include a larger tribal confederation, and that a cease-fire would become impossible. Recognizing these fears helped one workshop participant to better assess how to mediate the conflict and, in the process, restore honor to the offended tribe.

Addressing this topic by utilizing the same small groups in which people shared their grief and loss builds on the rapport that has already been established there. Some people may be more forthcoming if they are asked about threats or dangers, rather than fears. This line of questioning allows the person to objectify the fear, focusing on the outside stimulus rather than the internal emotion. As one talks about the fears of the group or the external danger, one's own feelings will be apparent, even if not self-acknowledged. Although acknowledging one's fear, rather than simply blaming others, is valuable, there can still be cathartic value to this process for people who need to distance themselves from direct acknowledgment. People can be helped to explore the degree to which the danger is real, re-perceive the situation and one's response to it in the light of new information received, and experience support from their religious faith as well as the empathy (and perhaps shared apprehension) of others, possibly including people from the feared community.

### *Step 3: Identifying Needs and Rehumanizing the "Other"*

At this point in the process, attention shifts from oneself and one's group to the "other." Now the main question to be addressed is, "Why did *they* do this to us?" The tone must not be accusatory, however, but honestly inquisitive. One must really want to know who the other is—their needs, concerns, and motivations. It is not easy to ask this question due to the existence of persistent stereotypes—distortions functioning as a group survival mechanism and often fueled by anger. These biases quickly become entrenched, misrepresenting and contaminating one group's perception of another. Yet it is possible to recognize that the actions of one's adversary are motivated by legitimate human needs. In fact, the only approach likely to change the adversarial dynamic is an effort to understand the other's fears and concerns. If workshop participants have previously identified each others' fears in step 2, they have already recognized some needs. Fear, by definition, is related to the potential deprivation of perceived needs. While adversaries' demands may be unacceptable, it is always important to rehumanize the adversaries themselves by expressing solidarity with basic needs as well as any legitimate pursuit of them.

Many needs and fears are held in common by supposedly incompatible groups. Discovery of such compatibility where it is not expected can help build bridges of understanding or even empathy. In his book *Motivation and Personality* (1954), Abraham Maslow laid out a hierarchy of needs, beginning with security, as the lowest and most essential rung on a ladder, and moving upward to include identity, community, and self-actualization. This hierarchy can help different groups identify and prioritize likely needs within any community's experience at a given time.

***While adversaries' demands may be unacceptable, it is always important to rehumanize the adversaries themselves by expressing solidarity with basic needs.***



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In the case of Iraq, almost every level of basic need is under extreme threat. The threat to security, the bottom rung, involves life and death, but beyond recognizing that security is a legitimate concern of all groups, the average Iraqi can do little to address it. Given their other, more basic concerns, most Iraqis probably regard the threat to self-actualization as superfluous. The levels of need that average Iraqis can most reasonably address, through dialogue and reconciliation programming, involve threats to identity and community. In fact, addressing this impending fundamental failure in social cohesion is extremely important in a culture that values honor and hospitality—though to do so may entail altering one's conception about what honor involves. Despite the fact that, in Arab and Mediterranean shame-oriented cultures, honor is often associated with confrontation, the highest grade of honor can be achieved only at the expense of the performer—for example, the granting of sanctuary when an enemy requests it. If honor requires saving an enemy's life, does it not also require rehumanizing him? A concerted effort to extend the honor of hospitality, to whatever degree is possible, will be key to breaking the cycle of revenge in Iraq.

***A concerted effort to extend the honor of hospitality, to whatever degree is possible, will be key to breaking the cycle of revenge in Iraq.***

### *Step 4: Acknowledging Responsibility—Truth-Telling and Making Apology*

In a society rife with targeted violence, accountability is even more difficult to ensure than normally is the case. Yet calls for accountability will necessarily become part of any successful effort even to initiate a stable and just peace. When approached with sensitivity, acknowledgment of responsibility is possible, even in the wake of endemic violence. But it must be preceded by identification with the suffering experienced by the group (step 1). If reconciliation begins with an effective grief process that acknowledges the suffering of all groups, then one must be prepared to admit that, for each group afflicted, responsibility exists somewhere. This does not mean that all groups are equally guilty or that all accusations are correct. At the same time, when violence is pervasive throughout a society, one needs to understand that pain has been inflicted not only by the other side but also by one's own group.

Accepting accountability for one's own behavior or that of one's group is an especially difficult process in a shame-oriented society. The fear of losing face (a term that, in Arabic, actually translates as "blackening the face") tends to block acknowledgment of responsibility. The act of apology, itself, may be seen as incurring dishonor to oneself or one's family or tribe, because apology calls attention to, or even magnifies, the sense of failure or inadequacy. Even within shame-oriented cultures, however, there is a sense of obligation to take responsibility for the shame itself, especially if someone has, in fact, done something to bring dishonor upon himself or herself and his or her group. Furthermore, because no society is completely shame oriented, there is also likely to be some sense of guilt over the transgression committed. The influence of Islam, which introduces a very specific legal code in Sharia law, adds to the complexity of the social dynamics regarding the making of apology. Islam requires all people to take responsibility for wrongdoing, both personal and social; no one is to blame another for his own wrong deeds (Surah Al-Nisa, 112). From an Islamic perspective, interpersonal human justice depends upon the ability of every member of society to realize when moral injury has been done to others, even when the perpetrator is among one's own people. Identifying any cognitive dissonance between espoused Islamic values and the reality of competitive feuding, sometimes based on tribal custom, can be an important first step in enabling people to take responsibility for the actions of their own group.

One of the central tasks in promoting reconciliation in Iraq is to encourage further dialogue about the conception of honor within Iraqi society. There is, in fact, precedence for raising this question within Islam, which has, from the very beginning, tried to extend honor beyond the ties of family and tribe. The Prophet Mohammed actually condemned *asabiyya,* the unconditional loyalty to family or tribe, as contrary to the spirit of Islam. Although Islam has incorporated many aspects of the competitive pre-Islamic tribal feud mentality, Islam also limited and modified the expression of that mentality.



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"Honor of virtue," with its focus on honesty, hospitality, and conciliation, is emphasized over "honor of precedence," with its tendency toward competition, aggression, and domination. Islam affirms that a lack of honesty actually injures one's own sense of self-respect and self-worth. Humility, resulting from honest self-assessment (but not humiliation resulting from invalid accusation or alienation by others), is a necessary prerequisite to repairing self-respect.

At the same time, the most effective truth-telling process will be sensitive to the values of a shame-oriented society. First, it is important to evaluate the amount of shame that parties might incur and to estimate the potential cost of losing face. For example, by designing a process of parallel self-examination by separate groups in conflict, each group can be helped to acknowledge its accountability by knowing that the other group is undergoing the same exercise and by meeting, first, in private caucus so that no group is shamed in front of adversaries.

***By designing a process of parallel self-examination, each group can be helped to acknowledge its accountability by knowing that the other group is undergoing the same exercise.***

Second, it is important to determine the most effective timing and mode of communication. Helping people expose, in manageable portions, those aspects of the truth that are difficult to embrace, will involve progressing at a speed that is comfortable. Indirect methods of communication can sometimes be more beneficial than confronting issues overtly. Such methods can include the use of stories, parables, proverbs, music, drama, or other rituals that can stimulate a deeper awareness of underlying issues.

Third, it is important to mention that the use of a third-party mediator or arbitrator is very common in shame-oriented cultures. In some instances, the third party is the one who actually presents an apology from one party to another. In other cases, the third party is the one to confront one or more of the parties, encouraging them to acknowledge their responsibility. In two of the previously mentioned Iraqi cases, the blood feud between the Beet Slaim and Bani Malik tribes in Amarah and the conflict between two police units in Maysan Governorate, the third-party arbitrators encouraged the killers to acknowledge responsibility for the crimes.

### *Step 5: Envisioning Restorative and Operational Justice*

When individuals or groups within a society have begun a mutual process of identifying needs and acknowledging wrongs vis-à-vis all significant stakeholders, then they are ready to examine the question of justice. However, the justice that needs examination is radically different from that emanating out of the revenge mentality expressed in the victimhood-aggression cycle. In fact, an adequate definition of justice needs to start from a different reference point than the monitoring and punishment of unjust acts. Although vitally important to the maintenance of a stable society, exposure and retribution represent only the negative side of justice. A fully adequate understanding must begin with an evaluation of the norms and values that form the foundation for a positive vision of right relationships between all units within the society. In the case of Iraq, development of these norms involves creative interaction among ancient tribal customs, Islamic understandings of law, and Western democratic ideals.

The understanding of justice in Iraqi society is very much influenced by the shame-oriented culture of the society's tribal roots. In such cultures, the moral code is built around respect for, and duty toward, others rather than compliance with abstract laws. Mutual obligations become far more important than individual rights. Greater emphasis is placed on conformity to one's primary group than on punishment. In Iraq today, however, the infractions both within and between tribes and religious communities are extremely serious, thus significantly escalating the punitive response and turning what, in more stable times, might have been an emphasis on restorative justice into a very intractable version of retributive justice, one that relies on the law of vendetta rather than law based on inalienable rights. At the same time, the fundamentally communal understanding of justice, especially if it were infused with a broad conception of hospitality, might provide a basis for reconstructing an Iraqi adaptation of restorative justice.

***The fundamentally communal understanding of justice might provide a basis for reconstructing an Iraqi adaptation of restorative justice.***

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In Islam, the ultimate goal is also restoration of relationships, but significant emphasis is placed on retributive justice as well. The Quran does allow, but does not require, an "eye for an eye." In fact, it commends one who refrains from retribution and forbids any action in excess of equal retaliation (Surah Al-Ma'ida, 45; Surah Al-Isra', 33; and Surah Al-Baqara, 178). Revenge, however, is not perceived as having any place in justice: "Let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice" (Surah Al-Ma'ida, 8). In other words, retribution is worth pursuing only to the extent that it leads to acknowledgment of responsibility, then to forgiveness and finally to rehabilitation of the wrongdoer and restitution (exact repayment of what was lost) or reparation (payment in lieu) to the wronged party.

Although support for both retributive and restorative justice can be found within Iraqi tribal custom and Islamic law, as well as in Western democracy, restorative and communal understandings are at the roots of the tribal ethos and at the heart of the Islamic perspective. Given that the restorative lens is particularly important in fragile states and has been given less attention than retributive justice by the international community in Iraq, it will be especially important to promote restorative justice programming alongside the rule of law. For example, restorative justice programming can be developed through interethnic/intersectarian working groups that grow out of training workshops held in various contexts.

Focusing on the restoration of right relationships between individuals and groups can flow quite naturally out of progress made while addressing the previous steps discussed. Because restorative justice focuses on harm inflicted, rather than on blame and punishment, the grievances and fears shared in steps 1 and 2 can provide a natural starting point in the identification of specific justice concerns. Because restorative justice requires giving attention to the needs of all parties, the mutual needs identified in step 3 can help disparate groups discover common and/or compatible justice concerns. Because restorative justice is concerned with identifying the obligations of each party, the acknowledgments of responsibility made in step 4 can provide the initial impetus toward taking corrective measures. The purpose of the whole process of helping working groups brainstorm ideas and then implement specific projects, is to find justice concerns that all ethnic/sectarian units within the society can affirm and identify positive measures that can be undertaken jointly to meet these needs.

Yet there must be some kind of selection process among the various justice concerns. Meeting all the needs of any society is unrealistic. One way to make justice operative is to select one of the most basic levels in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, picking one that is being thwarted in a given region, and to ask a group of people how they might work together to address the obstacles that block fulfillment of this need. The locus of activity need not relate to the legal system, although it might be beneficial in some cases to work in concert with courts and prisons. A number of conflicts mediated by Iraqis—from the teaching of religion in schools to the price of benzene to disputes between armed groups—demonstrate the high value placed on restoring relationships in the quest for justice.

### *Step 6: Choosing to Forgive*

There are three basic understandings of forgiveness, each suggesting its own approach or methodology: (1) Forgiveness is seen as an interactive process between parties, one in which the parties negotiate their way from violation to restoration of relationship. (2) Forgiveness is seen as a unilateral act in which, for one's own sake, a wronged party decides to set aside one's own anger and resentment, neither requiring nor eliminating the need for action on the part of the other party. (3) Forgiveness is seen, not as a single act or even series of actions, but as an ongoing moral process in which the virtue of forgiveness is learned and developed as a character trait that can be used as needed. These three theories are not mutually exclusive. Elements of one or more can be integrated into all the others. However, it will be helpful to look at them one at a time.

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Forgiveness as an interactive process is the most common understanding in very many cultures. In this case, forgiveness is an objective act on the part of both or all parties, not merely a subjective process. Offenders acknowledge their wrongdoing, express remorse, and engage in restitution or reparation as agreed and appropriate. Victims refrain from vengeance, express empathy for offenders as fellow human beings, and may release offenders from all or part of their deserved penalty. As mentioned previously, however, in fragile states such as Iraq, the task of separating victims from offenders is by no means easy. Another complicating factor is that all people, at least by extension into tribe and religious sect, are potentially on both sides of this dynamic. If the interactive forgiveness process can be fully implemented, however, it has the greatest chance of restoring full relations between the parties.

Although interactive forgiveness is a difficult process, specific methodologies have been developed within Islamic law, and within the shame-oriented Arab culture, that are based on this approach. The practice of paying blood money in place of revenge killing, well documented in the Quran and in Arab practice, is an example of reparation. In certain situations, the Quran is specific about the exact terms that an offender is to pay. However, actual practice varies widely within Islam today. Even in the case of crimes as serious as murder, some Muslim scholars indicate that the victim's family has the choice of turning the murderer over to the authorities for execution, or accepting monetary compensation, or releasing him or her from any obligation.

***Although interactive forgiveness is a difficult process, specific methodologies have been developed within Islamic law, that are based on this approach.***

Forgiveness as a unilateral practice need not involve any negotiation at all. It is an approach that has its origins in a therapeutic understanding of the victim's need to find release from captivity of one's own anger and hatred. Forgiveness, in this case, is not done primarily for the benefit of the other party, but for oneself. It is not an act that frees others from, or forces them to face, the consequences of their actions. It does not mandate anything for society, though it might model compassionate behavior for others. In fact, a person who has experienced freedom from hatred and resentment may be able to engage in the process of restorative justice with greater openness, honesty, and compassion. This approach to forgiveness can be described as giving up all hope of a better past and investing oneself in the future.

A unilateral process like this is undoubtedly more difficult in shame-oriented cultures, in which acceptance depends more heavily on social status than on individual decision and in which vehement venting of one's anger is often encouraged. Yet the strong desire to recreate harmonious community, a central goal for shame-oriented cultures, might encourage people to alter their perspective. Within Islam, there is certainly much support for such a process of self-evaluation. One Hadith counsels the believer to "beware of hatred—it strips you of your way of life (or your religion)" (Malik's Muwatta, book 47, number 47.1.7). To contain anger and hatred, however, does not mean stifling them. In order to place effective controls over them, one needs to find appropriate ways to vent the hurt that underlies anger and hatred in order to eventually free oneself from their captivity. It is instructive to note that participation in the reenactment of the Karbala tragedy during Muharram, as described in step 1 on expressing grief, is said to connect the suffering of the mourner with intercession and forgiveness. Connecting to the initial point will be especially important for anyone wanting to break the cycle of revenge.

Forgiveness as a learned character trait is important because one needs to be prepared to practice forgiveness in very trying circumstances. Exercising forgiveness requires great humility and involves significant attitudinal change and moral courage, traits that are not easily developed at a moment's notice. Furthermore, forgiveness needs to be lived out on an ongoing basis, so that one is prepared to deal with the repressed resentment that suddenly surfaces while still viewing and responding to the other as a person of dignity and honor. Islam certainly provides significant support for the development of forgiveness as a desirable character trait. The Quran says, "To endure with patience and to forgive is an incumbent duty at the very heart of things" (Surah Al-Shura, 43). Furthermore, one of the most trusted of the Prophet Mohammed's

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companions, Bilal bin Rabah, was known as a model of compassion and forgiveness, having been taught these traits by the Prophet.

Storytelling remains an excellent way to approach the topic of forgiveness in training workshops. What has been the experience of people in offering or receiving forgiveness? What difficulties have they experienced in being on either end of the process? As people begin to share their experience, many questions get raised: What to do when falsely accused? What to do when you are convinced the other side is more responsible for the problem? Or when others will not participate in the process? Or when one fears betrayal after an agreement is made? Discussing these and other issues in response to previous experience helps everyone feel more comfortable addressing the topic. Experience frequently shows that people who enter a workshop determined that they will never consider forgiving the other side, leave believing that forgiveness is possible, even if they are not yet ready to act on that conviction. They have gained a better understanding of what is involved and what the benefits might be.

## Dispute Resolution

When good groundwork has been laid in relationship building, then groups in conflict are better able to engage in constructive negotiation and mutual problem solving that can produce creative alternatives with which to address concrete justice concerns within their society. There are two predominant approaches to dispute resolution: competitive/adversarial (win-lose) and cooperative problem solving (win-win), although various combinations do exist.

### *Outlining an Effective Generic Process*

The cooperative problem-solving methodology presented here was developed at the Conflict Management Group in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and was used in training workshops for Iraqis under the auspices of Mercy Corps in 2005 and 2006. It can be used in official negotiation contexts or by unofficial interethnic/intersectarian working groups that have been given, or have selected for themselves, the task of finding the best approach to address specific restorative justice concerns. Seven elements form the basis for this process of negotiation or problem solving.

**Interests.** Interests are not positions. Positions are parties' demands, what they say they want. Interests are what the parties actually need, given their basic concerns, hopes, and goals. They reflect the reasons the parties make their demands. Focusing on positions frequently leads to deadlock because the demands are mutually exclusive. Focusing on interests allows for a wider variety of possible solutions. The better an agreement satisfies the interests of all parties, the better the deal. It is to everyone's advantage to help all parties identify their own interests and the interests of others. One can help parties move from positions to interests by asking, "Why do they make their demand?" "What do they really want?" and "What motivates them to take their position?"

**Alternatives.** Alternatives are the walk-away possibilities that each party has *if an agreement is not reached*. In general, neither party should agree to something that is worse than its best alternative to a negotiated agreement "away from the table." These alternatives, both one's own and those of the other party, must be thoroughly tested. In addition, options must be found that meet each party's interests better than that party's best alternative.

**Options.** Options are the full range of possibilities through which the parties might conceivably reach agreement. An agreement is better if it is the best of many options, especially if it utilizes all potential mutual gain in the situation. Brainstorming ideas is one effective way of creating options. Creativity can be encouraged by initially discussing a large number of ideas without regard to their feasibility. Options can then be


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evaluated by their value (the degree to which they satisfy the interests of the parties) and their feasibility (the extent to which they can be implemented given resources available and obstacles to overcome).

**Criteria.** Each party in a negotiation wants to be treated fairly. Measuring fairness by an external benchmark, criterion or principle beyond the simple will of either party improves the process. General principles such as efficiency, precedent, equal treatment, reciprocity, or proportionality can be employed. Ethical or moral standards, cultural values, and traditional customs can also be used to establish guidelines for fairness within a particular society. Finally, one can appeal to specific laws, rules and regulations, recognized professional standards, current practice, standard operating procedures, and expert opinion to make one's case.

**Relationship.** Most important negotiations are with people or institutions with whom we have negotiated before and will negotiate again. In general, a strong working relationship empowers the parties to deal well with their differences. Any transaction should improve, rather than damage, the parties' ability to work together again. It is important to continually monitor how well the parties have built and maintained rapport. Is any party, or subparty, caught in a cycle of victimhood and revenge? How might such negative patterns be transformed?

**Communication.** Good communication helps each side understand the other side's perceptions, concerns, and messages. An outcome that satisfies each party's basic needs will be reached more efficiently if each side communicates and listens effectively. It is important to ask how well each party feels heard, how well the perspective of each is understood, and how well each can communicate its perspective persuasively.

**Commitments.** Commitments are oral or written statements about what a party will or will not do to implement an agreement or action plan. They may be made during the course of a negotiation or may be embodied in an accord reached at the end of the negotiation. In general, an agreement will be more satisfying and sustainable to the extent that the promises made have been well planned and well crafted so that they will be practical, durable, easily understood by those who are to carry them out, and verifiable if necessary.

This seven-step methodology can also be employed by a third-party intervener, who can play a variety of different roles in facilitating the settlement of a dispute. Three commonly performed roles, listed in descending order of the degree of influence the third party has over the outcome, are *arbitration,* which gives the third party complete control over the outcome; *mediation,* which places the third party in charge of a process designed to help the conflicted parties come to a decision; and *facilitated brainstorming,* in which the third party leads a process of dialogue that is designed to generate a number of good options but stops short of any decision to commit.

## Employing the Methodology in Iraq

Arab reconciliation has traditionally used a collective consultation process, known as *shura,* in order to arrive at a negotiated decision that adequately resolves a dispute. The investigative process is normally facilitated by a third-party presence, traditionally an arbitrator or mediator. In Arab culture it is especially important that this third party knows the context and the parties in dispute well, is equally distant in relationship to all parties, demonstrates impartiality, and enjoys very high status (usually an older, wealthy, married male from reputable lineage). Whether the consultation process is led by a sheik, religious leader, political leader, or other respected authority figure, decisions are reached by consensus. Opportunity to contribute to the process is given to all, though the weight given an individual's input depends on that person's status. At the end, the third party will summarize the decision that all parties will accept. If a mutually respected authority leads the process, then normally no enforcement will be necessary.

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*In situations featuring pervasive violence such as that which recently engulfed much of Iraq, acceptable third parties are hard to find.*

The shura process works best when there is adequate time to deliberate in Arab extended fashion and when mutually accepted authority structures are present. When intertribal conflicts are being addressed, a joint council is sometimes formed that can engender enough prestige and respect to successfully undertake the third-party role. In situations featuring pervasive violence such as that which recently engulfed much of Iraq, acceptable third parties are hard to find even though the urgency is substantially increased. In such contexts, skills learned in cooperative problem solving can enhance the consultative process, enabling participants to arrive at optimal solutions that restore honor and dignity by designing solutions that best meet the interests of all parties.

Iraqi participants have shown great interest in learning and applying the cooperative problem-solving approach in order to improve their abilities in reconciliation efforts. For example, participants from Diwaniyah undertook a complete seven-element problem-solving assessment of the conflict over the teaching of religion in one school in the Qadissiyah Governorate. The group of participants, which included the mediator of the dispute, identified the complicated set of interests represented by multiple parties, brainstormed numerous options and weighed their strengths and weaknesses, mapped out the relationships, and developed an action plan, including the sequencing of meetings that the mediator subsequently conducted with each party. As the head of the education committee in the provincial council, the mediator resolved the dispute by demonstrating that venues did exist that provided adequate religious education, thereby meeting the interests of the vast majority of the community. He also questioned the appropriateness of the request to teach a radical form of Islam in the school by reaffirming a consensus among most of the stakeholders that the school needed to operate on the basis of recognized criteria, including standard operating procedures for introducing a new curriculum and for hiring teachers. The mediator claimed that his understanding of all the steps in the cooperative problem-solving process had enabled him to resolve this dispute successfully.

This consultative process, however, is normally set within a larger framework, one that usually begins with the need to be invited to intervene and continues with a variety of formats, both public and private. The invitation can come from one or more of the disputing parties themselves or from an authority figure that is respected by them. In many of the successful cases mediated by Iraqi participants, the third parties were members of the provincial government and were sent by the governor, by one of the ministries in Baghdad, or by the prime minister's office. However, many interveners also functioned on an unofficial level. A member of a labor organization in Kut mediated a dispute over equal distribution of food rations by facilitating a hearing in which complaints were publicly aired, resulting in a new distribution schedule based on mutually accepted criteria. Later, the mediator, reflecting on the value of the cooperative problem-solving approach, stated that he had discovered that people with different interests could come to a better solution than they initially expected.

In another case, a woman working as civil society coordinator in the Wassit Governorate was invited to intervene in a dispute within a women's non-governmental organization. She led a group of trained intermediaries that held numerous facilitated brainstorming sessions with the disputants, during which many options were explored, though any final decision was left to the organization itself. Later, the coordinator indicated that she had drawn on the seven-element problem-solving process in her attempts to resolve many disputes.

In a third case, a woman from an Islamic women's union in Kut, at her own initiative, privately arbitrated a dispute between high-level male personnel in a hospital. The point of breakthrough in the case was facilitated by the intervener herself performing a key task. An extended role like this for the intermediary is not unusual in Arab culture. Third parties typically help with tasks such as finding a job for someone, speeding government action, establishing and maintaining political influence, navigating bureaucratic procedures, and making contact with outsiders. As is clear from all these cases, there are various ways to gain access, obtain the necessary credibility, and effectively perform any of the intermediary roles.



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When violence is involved, however, the third-party role is even more complicated. First, the intermediary needs to stop the fighting, impose restraints, and provide protection. When fighting broke out in Amarah, killing twenty-five people in two days in October 2006, two members of the provincial council who had attended conflict management workshops were asked to negotiate between the Iraqi Army and the Mahdi Militia, a battle that also pitted local tribes and rival militias against one another. The mediators stopped the fighting by using tribal customs. They met with tribal leaders in the home of one of the mediators, agreed to raise tribal flags and walk between the two sides, then met with each party alone and negotiated a partial agreement, a three-day cease-fire. The prime minister then sent a team from Baghdad that joined with the two mediators from Amarah to negotiate a twenty-day cease-fire and set up an ongoing process to explore ideas for addressing the remaining issues.

In a similar conflict in a village in Maysan Governorate in January 2006, violent fighting broke out between two families in the same tribe over the rights to a contract for construction of a new police station. Another workshop participant from the provincial government led the same type of mediation process, working with the tribal leader to negotiate a ten-day cease-fire. During the subsequent absence of the government official, the tribal leader successfully completed a final settlement whereby the family that gained the contract agreed, among other stipulations, to pay the second family a sum of money to compensate for their loss of the contract. Once this tribal practice of reparation payment was made and publicly acknowledged, the conflict was successfully resolved.

## Recommendations

These recommendations (which are aimed at both international and indigenous interveners) focus on process rather than substance. The Iraqi people and Iraqi institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, should be the primary parties to address substantive issues. These recommendations include methodologies and approaches that can assist in facilitating reconciliation but do not attempt to formulate how issues should be resolved. Various types of programming are outlined below, together with examples of issues that could be addressed and the diversity of primary groups that should be involved at appropriate points. All of these recommendations emphasize the importance of capacity building—the development and training of indigenous people and institutions that can provide encouragement, resources, and expertise.

To take full advantage of the current window of opportunity created by enhanced security, international conflict resolution experts need to enable Iraqi counterparts in efforts not only to design but also to implement a plan for social and political reconciliation. The plan should provide as much support as is feasible for building good working relationships and resolving disputes nonviolently. This plan should include the following elements, each of which could be employed many times and in many different places throughout Iraq.

- **Conflict Assessment.** Local communities, governorates, and regions should be assisted in conducting conflict assessments. These assessments should use surveys, interviews, and focus groups to identify and analyze significant data and propose constructive conflict-related programming. Focus groups could be led through a relationship-mapping exercise to delineate local and regional power relationships and decision-making processes. Such an assessment could become the basis for determining how these conflict issues can best be addressed.
- **Psychosocial and Spiritual Healing.** Psychosocial and spiritual programming should be developed in local communities where attacks have occurred. Using the steps outlined above, the cycle of revenge can be broken by holding sessions on trauma recovery. These sessions would not seek to develop a complete training program in


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relationship skills building, but would have the more modest goal of helping people process their grief and grievance in positive ways. The primary methodology would be storytelling, although less direct formats involving art and drama might also be useful, especially with children. Sensitive interfacing of religious traditions and psychosocial approaches would maximize the effectiveness of the sessions. Such programming could be established through health clinics, schools, and various local non-governmental, civil society organizations.

- **Conflict Resolution Training.** A series of workshops, each lasting between three to five days and involving between fifteen to thirty participants, should be held to provide an extensive opportunity to reevaluate perspectives and practice skills. Individual workshops could focus on each of the following topics:
  - *Identity Formation.* Workshop participants drawn from a single identity group would be encouraged to examine their values, face internal differences and tensions; and evaluate their traditional ways of handling conflict, their place within the society, and their relationship to other groups within the society. Single-identity workshops could be followed by workshops involving different groups within the same identity marker (e.g., two or more religious groups or ethnic, tribal, political, or military groups).
  - *Relationship Building.* This workshop would help participants understand cycles of victimhood and aggression, break patterns of revenge, and reduce biases by constructively addressing issues of grief, fear, basic need, apology, justice, and forgiveness. These healing processes could be addressed through sessions designed to change attitudes, clarify perceptions, develop communication skills, and manage difficult conversations. Participants could be encouraged to use their own traditions to discover positive ways to face these issues.
  - *Problem Solving.* Participants would be taught to diagnose and analyze social problems, map complex relationships between stakeholders, understand and practice an interest-based approach to negotiation and mediation, create options through facilitated brainstorming, develop strategies for change, and frame recommendations persuasively. The purpose of the workshop would be to train people in skills that can be used to resolve disputes peacefully and to mobilize local communities and national entities to plan and implement concrete projects that will promote justice and reconciliation.
  - *Leadership Development.* Participants would include anyone in a leadership or potential leadership position, including government personnel and other influential people in the society, such as professional people, business people, and leaders of organizations and agencies. The purpose of the workshop would be to enhance the participants' ability to develop a vision for the future, influence others to adopt that vision, and develop the management skills necessary to implement it. A key element of this training would be the effective management of transitions.
  - *Training of Trainers.* This workshop would seek to develop indigenous capacity to the point where local people and institutions can carry out all aspects of assessment, training, dialogue, and problem solving.
- **Facilitated Dialogue and Joint Problem Solving.** The following forms of dialogue and problem solving should be facilitated:
  - *Track-II Diplomacy:* an informal, back-channel of communication in which non-governmental actors attempt to build trust with political players on either side of a conflict and brainstorm and present creative options that address complicated social and political problems. For example, staff from Iraqi civil society organizations could quietly shuttle between conflicted parties to find an optimal solution to a major conflict.


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- *Civil Society Dialogue:* a process whereby non-governmental actors attempt to build better relationships between non-governmental conflicted groups and generate creative options for transforming conflict. This format can be more open-ended, less tied to a specific dispute resolution process. It can be as informal as hospitality offered to a diverse group of neighbors meeting for tea in a home or a mixed group of women talking about their domestic and professional roles. More ambitiously, civil society dialogue in Iraq could address major differences between rival religious, ethnic, or tribal entities.
- *Roundtables:* a more formal, time-specific dialogue process designed to facilitate clear and effective communication between opposing groups over specific topics in dispute. The purpose of roundtables is to foster mutual understanding and, if possible, make joint pronouncements or affirm specific actions acceptable to all parties. Although the traditional format tends to involve more presentation and debate than dialogue, roundtables in Iraq could be facilitated to achieve maximum interaction between perspectives and a minimum of posturing.
- *Reconciliation Commissions:* a more formal truth and reconciliation process designed to restore relationships rather than develop options for decision-making bodies to consider. Reconciliation commissions could be set up according to local customs to approach the tasks of truth telling, restorative justice, and healing. The work of such commissions could contribute to a rewriting of recent and current Iraqi history by raising public awareness of all sides of the story. These reconciliation commissions could be organized at local levels as well as at regional and national levels. At the local level, they could operate as neighborhood watch groups and grievance committees, but with a restorative justice mandate rather than a legal one. Tribal leaders, as well as municipal and provincial authorities, would need to play a central role in this process, ensuring that those selected to facilitate were well respected and competent.
- *Working Groups:* composed of a cross-section of identity groups within the society, working groups can lead to the development of creative options and the implementation of concrete initiatives designed to promote justice and reconciliation. Such groups could focus on specific concerns (e.g., security, good governance, economic development, education, or media) or address problems of a particular locality or identity group by devising creative approaches for dealing with social tensions (e.g., repairing various places of worship).

- **Primary Target Groups.** Different types of programming should be targeted at different types of participants. Psychosocial and spiritual healing, for instance, needs to reach the most traumatized individuals and groups. Conflict assessment must also involve groups directly affected by conflict, but can be more broadly targeted to include all stakeholders and potential interveners. Dialogue processes and training programs for mixed identity groups should involve those with a high degree of interest in and commitment to reconciliation, significant influence on decision making within their communities, and leadership potential. People with both commitment and influence will be more likely to generate a multiplier effect. Dialogue and training events for single-identity groups, however, should involve a wide variety of perspectives, including those not open to dialogue with outside groups. Such events offer an opportunity to engage with more extremist elements and to address sensitive conflict issues within an identity group.

Target groups include

- all political parties;
- government personnel—elected officials and civil servants at national, provincial, and municipal levels;
- tribal leaders—leaders not only of the major tribes but also of subunits and confederations of tribes, especially those from mixed Sunni-Shiite tribes and those participating in the Awakening Councils or other similar stabilizing efforts;

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- armed groups—military personnel, national security officials, police, and (to the degree possible) members of militias and insurgent groups;
- all religious groups—clerical leadership, populist religious figures, and minority groups such as Kurdish Shiites and Christians, especially leaders interested in engaging in single confessional assessment, interfaith dialogue, faith-based peacebuilding, and dialogue with extremists.

The Baghdad office of the United States Institute of Peace's Center for Post-Conflict Peace and Stability Operations is currently conducting a variety of projects along the lines recommended above. For instance, workshops in relationship building, negotiation, and problem solving have been offered to officials in the Ministry of Human Rights, members of the Iraqi parliament's committees on human rights and national reconciliation, a 134-strong group of Iraqi facilitators, and local government, tribal, and civil society leaders in the Salah ad Din Governorate. In another initiative, a dialogue process led by Iraqi facilitators produced a peace agreement, signed by thirty-two Sunni and Shiite sheiks in Mahmoudiyah in Babil Governorate, that has allowed the reintegration of that community.

These reconciliation efforts should deepen and broaden during the next year. For example, in partnership with the Provincial Reconstruction Teams, the Baghdad office is hoping to establish assessment, training, dialogue and problem-solving activities in many of Iraq's eighteen governorates during the next year.

However, the window of opportunity for such efforts may not be open indefinitely. U.S. government involvement in Iraq will likely diminish over the next year because of domestic pressures, other international concerns, and Iraqi moves toward greater autonomy. It is thus critical that major efforts be undertaken in the near future to seize this opportunity to enhance Iraq's capacity for social and political reconciliation at both governmental and non-governmental levels.

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