

The Taxonomy for Conflict Prevention and Resolution

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"...[I]t is a common observation here that our cause is the cause of all mankind, and that we are fighting for their liberty in defending our own." --Benjamin Franklin

Introduction

This chapter seeks to identify a taxonomy for conflict prevention. It is based on the assumption that conflict at some level is normal, and that by understanding the structure of conflict within a culture or society conflict can be held to a war of ideas and open armed conflict can be prevented. This is a proposal. Over time, this taxonomy for conflict prevention may be refined as it is applied to provide a conceptual framework for the discussion, analysis, and prevention of conflict.

When the Berlin Wall fell, the world paused sucking in a collective deep breath, and then cheered. Shortly thereafter the Soviet Union collapsed, the Cold War ended and the world was at peace. However, in reflecting on our new found peace the West discovered that we were far from being at peace, war, albeit small wars, were numerous and indeed common. Our preoccupation with the Cold War may indeed have blinded us to the large number of small wars that were being fought in anonymity. Rather than finding a world without war at the end of the Cold War, we seemed to be discovering the wars that were all around us. Not our

wars, but wars never the less. More important to note is the propensity for unresolved wars to be resumed after conditions of restraint, such as the Soviet Union, were no longer in place.

Identifying the Antecedents to Conflict

Man's normal condition is to strive towards greater security. In so doing he is constantly interacting with the environment around him, gathering knowledge and wealth. Often working alone, but more often working collectively in homogeneous small groups, family units, extended families, villages, communities, ethnic groupings, and organized nations. Success breeds population expansion and a tendency to spread out in search of food, land, and opportunity to gain greater security. Time, distance, and isolating topography permit man to develop in diverse ways in isolation. Over time common language, beliefs and experiences become unique to individual geographical groups. Within these various frameworks man expends energy to secure a future for himself, his family and his friends. During this process of striving to gain greater security man comes in contact with those not numbered among his family, or friends. With these others he competes as he strives towards the ideal of greater security. These two dimensions, security and diversity, interact in such a way that they can be used to explain much of the conflict experienced. See Figure 1 below.

Insert figure 1

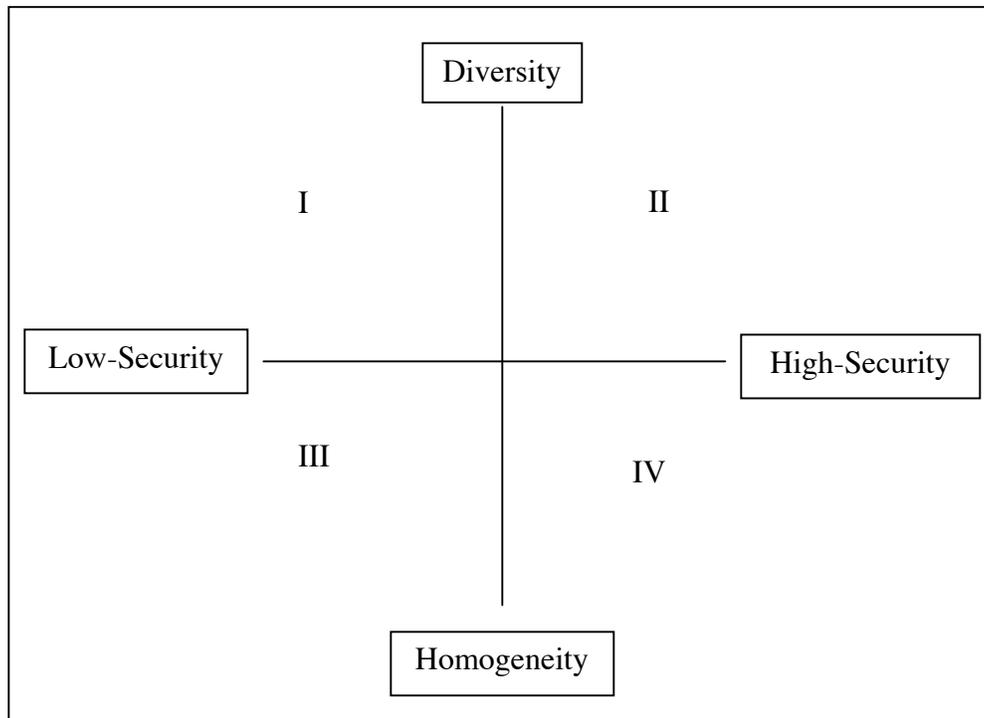


Figure 1. The potential for conflict is greatest when a population has low-security and must compete with others groups, Quadrant I. As the number of competing groups increases, so does the likelihood of conflict. At the low-security end of the continuum, individuals or groups may engage in desperate acts to gain security. As a group gains security, they become less likely to initiate conflict.

An analysis of the figure above reveals that Quadrant I represents the conditions most likely to produce conflict, and that Quadrant IV represents the conditions to most likely reduce the likelihood of conflict. In Quadrant I the population has low-security and thus must strive towards greater security in an environment of diverse populations, which compete with each other as they each strive towards achieving greater security. In Quadrant IV the population is homogeneous and

enjoys high-security, and thus does not have to compete to maintain security. Of special note is the notion of a homogenous nature of the population associated with Quadrant IV. Homogeneity refers to a unifying group identity. However, there is a third dimension, Tolerance, which can and does cut across the other two dimensions and set the stage for conflict. Aspects of Tolerance can be conceived as a continuum extending from Indifference at one end towards Radical Intolerance at the other end. Indifference towards other groups may be defined as a simple unawareness of the other group's existence, or the idea that the other group's existence is unimportant. Radical Intolerance can be defined as the active belief that a group should not exist, and should be fundamentally changed or eliminated.

The following figure depicts a three dimensional conception of the prerequisites for conflict to occur based on the discussion above.

Insert Figure 2.

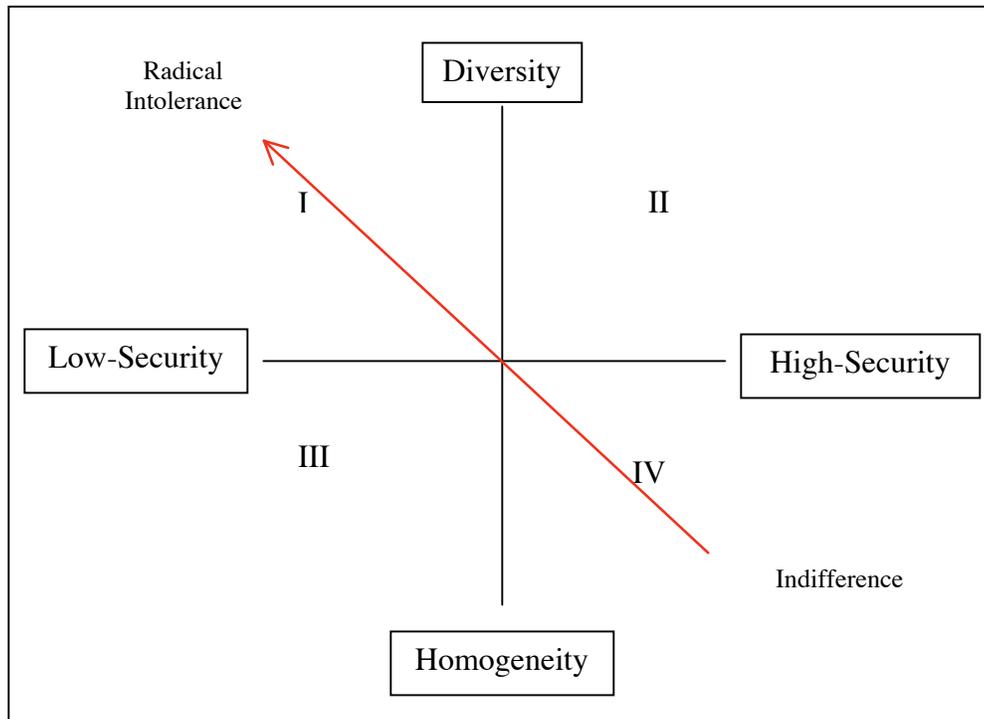


Figure 2. Again, the potential for conflict is greatest when a population has low-security and must compete with others groups, Quadrant I. A third dimension, Tolerance, cuts across the other two dimensions as is worthy of note. At its extreme, Radical Intolerance, genocide or enslavement may occur.

Beyond the two dimensional conception must be added a component associated with radical intolerance. Radical intolerance is the extreme end of a continuum which moves from Indifference towards those not members of your group to Radical Intolerance. This intolerance may be extended along any dimension of group identity such as race, creed, language, ethnicity, or religious belief. For example in some cultures the notion of group identity may contain a component of intolerance for anyone not included as a member of the group. This attitude of intolerance may result in considering the non-group members to be inferior to the

dominant group. Once considered a non-member and inferior the dominant group may treat non-member groups in an unfair or discriminatory manner. For example, in some political structures extending borders and subordinating other populations to serve the dominant society is seen as essential to assuring the security of the whole. While in other societies non-members may be enslaved or placed in cast systems that deny them basic human rights. Still in other situations the intolerance may require isolation for the non-member group or the active destruction of non-member groups. This intolerance is further identified as Radical when the dominant society's interaction includes an overt commitment to action to subordinate or eliminate the non-member group.

War has been classified as low-intensity, mid-intensity, and high-intensity armed conflict (NATO Military Doctrine). Low-intensity armed conflict is the most common. It can be characterized as an organized overt act of aggression by a group not recognized as legitimate by any formally constituted government. Mid-intensity conflict occurs between formally constituted governments with limited objectives. A simple extension of this classification to include pre-conflict structure would look like that depicted in the table below.

Establishing a Taxonomy

Insert table 1.

Taxonomy of Conflict

	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5
A	Pre-agriculture	Agricultural Age	Agricultural Age	Industrial Age	Information Age
B	Family/Clan	Clan/Community	City States	Nations	Mutual Defense Alliances
C	Single Group	Multiple Groups	Geo - Political Structure	Nation States	Nation States with mutual defense treaties
D	Homogeneous	Diversity	Multiple groups within a single structure	Multiple groups within a single structure	Multiple groups within a single structure
E	Peace	Competition	Low-intensity conflict	Mid-intensity conflict	High-intensity conflict
F	Unity of identity	Diverse Identity	Discrimination	Dispute of resources, territory, ideology between individual countries	War to acquire resources and territory
G	No competition for security	Competition for security	Conflict to address discrimination	Conflict to address differences	Conflict to protect national identity
H	No Conflict	Conflict to protect self-identity	Conflict to subvert another group	Conflict to convert another group	Conflict to eliminate another group
I	Indifference	Tolerance	Intolerance	Radical Intolerance	Radical Intolerance
J	Birth Identity	Racial Identity	Ethnic Identity	Religious Identity	Philosophic Identity

Table 1.1 This Taxonomy of Conflict is presented as a rotate-able matrix. It lays out a taxonomy for understanding the basic nature of the conditions within

which conflict occurs in an increasingly complex world. The columns represent the increasingly complex world from a structural perspective. The rows represent the nature of the world within each column.

Table 1.1 is designed to structure our thinking about conflict on several levels and provide a simple framework within which to analyze past and potential future conflicts. An initial analysis revealed that imposing Toffler's "Age" taxonomy from "Future Shock" might be helpful to those familiar with his work. Thus they have been placed within the columns in Row A. They may be generally applied, as long as one respects the fact that not all parts of the world are within the same functional age. Indeed we have some groups today that are still pre-agriculture in nature, and much of the world has not made the transition into the Information Age. Thus column 1 represents the simplest conflict model in which the group sees itself as completely homogeneous and not in competition with any other group as it seeks to maintain its security. That is not to say that such a group could not exist within the conditions associated with column 5. Such a group could exist, however its belief system and self-identity would be such that it does not view its security as based on competing with any other group. Such a group might have the simple view of one planet, one people.

Organizing the taxonomy into columns and rows is not intended to imply that hard boundaries exist within the rotational matrix. Quite the opposite is the case. However the matrix should be useful in considering the historical conditions

under which conflicts have occurred and to then consider ways similar conflicts might be avoided.

Rows B and C are intended to show the increasing complexity of human society and political structure as we move from column 1 to column 5. Rows B, C, and D can be used to discuss the increasing complexity of group identity, Rows D and E address the increasing complexity and diversity of social and cultural groups across time, and the increase in the level of potential conflict as man has gained control over his environment and has gained the ability to apply his increasing knowledge in the art of war.

Row E indicates there is a normal continuum from peace through high-intensity conflict. Over time various groups may experience each element of the continuum. Absolute peace is rare, as is high-intensity conflict. The definition of low-intensity and mid-intensity conflict are also fluid. As the world gains knowledge, the level of violent conflict has increased dramatically. At the same time the amount of total destruction and risk of loss of life have also increased. Somewhat surprisingly the length of time over which high –intensity conflict is sustained has decreased.

Rows F, G, and H depict conditions under which conflict has been justified. Not

shown are the defensive responses and rationale. Rather, for the purposes of this taxonomy it appears prudent to focus primarily on the aggressor's rationale for initiating conflict. Finally, Row J identifies the increasingly complex way individuals structure their self-identity and group identity. Birth identity under this construction is considered neutral. Racial identity, depending on its construct, enables an individual to view as justified armed conflict with another racial group in order to gain additional security. An ethnic identity recognized that as the dispersion of human populations across the planet have occurred, various ethnic groups may be of mixed racial stock. Self-identity of a group may cross all known racial and ethnic boundaries when it is associated with a unifying religious identity. Finally, one may obtain a self-identity based solely on ones philosophical orientation such as the notion of one planet, one people. Thus the Figure 1 can be modified to depict this fourth dimension as indicated below.

Extending the Taxonomy

Insert Figure 2

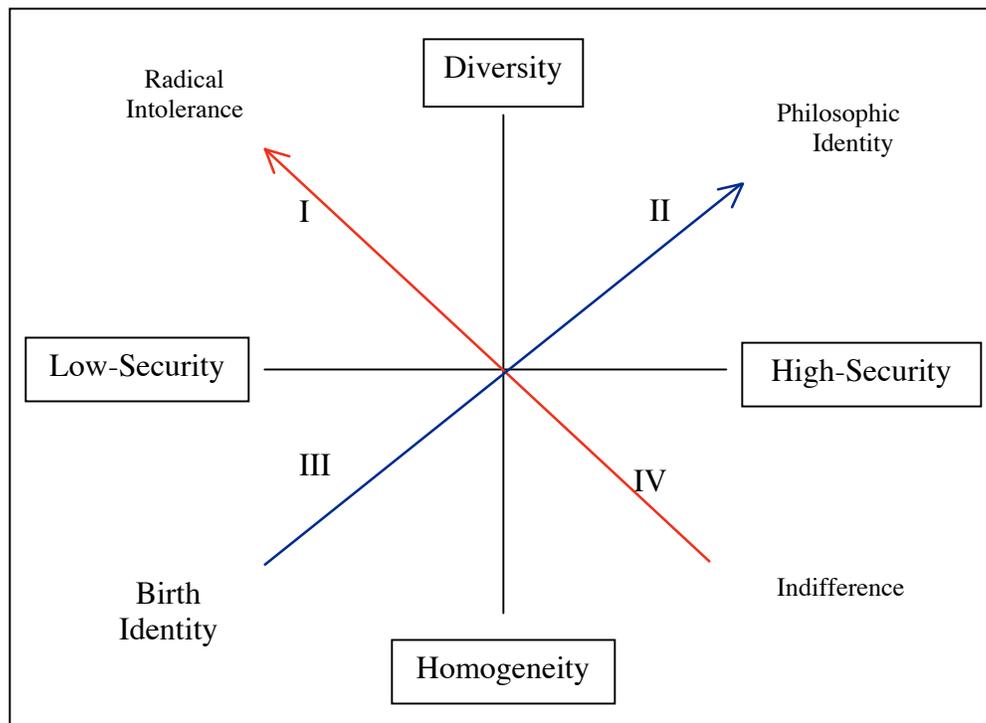


Figure 3. The blue arrow moving from Quadrant III to Quadrant II represents the increasing complexity of self-identity in an increasingly complex world and adds a fourth dimension to this conceptualization.

Analyzing Figure 3 should permit one to do several things. First, each axis can be considered independent of the others as to its ability to foster or resist conflict. For example low-security fosters conflict, while perceived high-security reduces the likelihood of conflict. A homogeneous group is less likely to engage in internal conflict, while a diverse population is more likely to engage in internal conflict. Likewise, a geographical area occupied by just one homogeneous population is less likely to be involved in a regional conflict because their group identity would tend to preclude it. However, should the idea of difference

between various factions of a homogeneous population be fostered, homogeneity breaks down and the likelihood of conflict increases. Isolation fosters such a process.

Radical intolerance is of special note because it can be fostered within a single family, racial, or ethnic group through the spread of radical ideas. Thus infanticide, the devaluing of women, or unclean classes of people can be fostered as ideals which create sub-groups at risk within what would normally be considered a homogeneous population. Radical intolerance can be extended to subpopulations within a culture to place at risk those with a different colored skin or creed to justify wars of ethnic cleansing. Finally, radical intolerance can be extended between religious groups and nations and used to justify all out wars of elimination.

The fourth dimension added in Figure 3, addresses the impact individual self-identity can have on group identity and issues of conflict prevention. It recognizes that within a fluid world of rapid information flow and knowledge diffusion individuals, indeed complete populations may develop identities which are separate from their birth identity, racial and ethnic identity, or indeed their national or religious identity. Indeed it appears quite possible to develop a group identity for humanity, which essentially eliminates the potential for open conflict.

I call this group identity “One Planet, One People.”

Recommendation

Future analyst may be able to take this taxonomy, using either Table 1, Figure 2, Figure 3, or modified versions of each, and assign numerical weights to the various aspects of the conditions that foster conflict. Using these numerical values they may be able to prioritize and predict where the potential for open conflict is greatest. The taxonomy may also be used to identify steps which may be taken to reduce the likelihood of open conflict, and thus prevent conflict.

This work is a beginning. It is important that others engage in this work to apply past historical conflicts to this taxonomy and refine the utility of the taxonomy. It would also be helpful to use the taxonomy to evaluate potential future conflicts to determine if there are ways to increase security for various populations, decrease the perception of diversity, move radical intolerance in the direction of indifference, and foster a world philosophic identity of one planet, one people.

Author Biography

Terrence R. Redding, Ph.D., President and CEO of OnLine Training, has been designing and teaching adult education courses since 1968. Redding is a past W. K. Kellogg Fellow and has a doctoral degree in Adult and Higher Education. He has a Masters in the Psychology of Education and is an honors graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree in Education. His research has dealt with adult motivation theory and the origins of self-directed learning readiness. He has specialized in cognitive learning models and is the co-developer of the Honeycutt Redding Cognitive Task Analysis Model. For the past twelve years he has been involved in an on going series of research projects associated with the development of high self-directed learning readiness. Of great significance is the finding that children between ages 8 and 15, who become high self-directed learners, typically share a common childhood experience. Redding has labeled this experience "the first moment of lasting excitement." High self-directed learners who share this common experience can remember some event that has captured their imagination for life. Typically these individuals find their life long learning endeavors in some way tied to this "first moment of lasting excitement." Redding retired from the US Army in 1988. Following the Gulf War Redding conducted an analysis of lessons learned, operational requirements, and developed a prioritization for leveraging the development of US strategic technologies. Later he wrote the US Army Field Manual for conducting Deep Operations during mid-intensity conflict. Today Redding's focus is on extending access to education on a global scale, and on fostering the notion that this is one planet, and we are one people.