**UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT  
AND WAR: VOL. 5:  
THE JUST PEACE**

**Principles Of  
Conflict Resolution**[**\***](http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/TJP.CHAP10.HTM#*)

**Beverly Hills, California:  
Sage Publications, 1981**

**By R.J. Rummel**

**In  *the Minds of Men* (1979a)**[**1**](http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/TJP.CHAP10.HTM#1) **I described three principles, attendant subprinciples and rules for making, keeping and fostering peace. They are based on or consistent with the theory, analyses, and conclusions of the previous volumes and are meant to be general principles of conflict resolution for all levels and types of social relationships. They are particularly relevant and important for dealing with potential or actual violent conflict over the national or international status quo. Here I need only summarize the major ideas involved in these principles, keeping in mind the aim to make incremental reforms toward a just peace possible.**

**10.1 THE PEACEMAKING PRINCIPLE**

**If extreme conflict or violence over a status quo erupts, the central problem is to achieve a new, just balance with minimum conflict. Whether from the perspective of a partisan or third party, the Peacemaking Principle is this:[1a](http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/TJP.CHAP10.HTM" \l "1a)**

***You make peace by balancing powers.***

**Conflict over the status quo is a breakdown of what people and groups want and can and will do. It is a balancing of different powers. To make peace, then, is to achieve a balance of powers--an interlocking of mutual interests, capabilities, and wills.**[**2**](http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/TJP.CHAP10.HTM#2) **The means to accelerate or facilitate this process must therefore be focused directly on the balancing of these elements or the conditions influencing them. These means are diverse and involve a number of considerations, which I have organized into the nine peacemaking subprinciples listed in Table 10.1.**[**3**](http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/TJP.CHAP10.HTM#3)

***10.1.1 Clarify the Conflict Situation***

**Conflict is a dispute in a situation defined by the parties' underlying goals and beliefs, mutual perception and communication, and the facts involved. The conflict itself is a process of communication--an engagement of fields of expression.**[**4**](http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/TJP.CHAP10.HTM#4) **Passions and beliefs become evident; the nature and intensity of hidden interests surface. In the process of achieving a new structure of expectations, conflict integrates underlying goals and mutual perceptions into a balance among the central interests at stake, the resolution, and the ability of the parties to support them. The balancing process can be shortened, intensity reduced, antagonism lessened, and the resulting expectations made more realistic by clarifying the conflict situation. In this four rules should help the parties.**

* **Uncover the underlying or hidden goals and beliefs. Look beneath the conflict. A dispute really may be about hidden, perhaps even unconscious, beliefs and values.**
* **Determine the facts. Fact finding is essential to resolving conflict, for often conflicts are generated by a misperception or misunderstanding of the facts involved.**
* **Be sensitive to the other's position and perspective. See the conflict through his eyes. Resolving conflict is partially empathizing with the other, understanding his**[**5**](http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/TJP.CHAP10.HTM#5) **frame of reference, and sensing this reading of one's field of expression.**
* **State the other's argument and demands. Miscommunication and misperception can play a large role in conflict. One way to reduce these problems is to seek mutual agreement on the issue, claims, and justifications.**

**These four rules--look underneath, look at the facts, look at oneself, and look at the other--alone will not make peace, but they help to focus on the real issues and reduce the emotional content.**

***10.1.2 Define a "Yesable" Interest***[***6***](http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/TJP.CHAP10.HTM#6)

**Peacemaking partially involves a party separating what they want the other to do from the conflict's self-assertive and emotional contents. To this end, phrase demands or requests so that the other can respond with a simple "yes" or "no." Focus on the decisions the other should make and clarify the outcome of these decisions. That is, what will happen if their answer is "yes"? Or no?**

**Moreover, divide a large interest into smaller ones.**[**7**](http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/TJP.CHAP10.HTM#7) **In some conflict situations agreement is easier on several small issues than on a big one. Concessions on some issues then can be exchanged for a yes on some others. In any case, avoid making principle an issue. Demanding or requesting specific behavior is less conflictful than requiring agreement on a principle. Indeed, some of the most intense national and international conflict--the bloodiest massacres, revolutions, and wars--have occurred over religious and ideological principles. In the final analysis one still may have to stand on principle, but this should be a conscious and rational decision.**

**Finally, whatever the demand or request, phrase it such that the other's self-esteeem is unaffected. For example, demands that would implicitly concede one's superiority or demean the other invite intense and antagonistic opposition. If esteem related, "yesable" demands must be made, couple them with face-saving, "yesable" offers.**

***10.1.3 Invoke Overriding Interests***

**Invoking overriding common interests with the opposing party may reduce the conflict's intensity and scope and make it easier to resolve. One such paramount interest can be shared loyalty to church, party, country, or cause. A common goal may also be invoked. The more important this goal, the more likely it will help to avoid or dampen conflict that might hamper it. For this reason some elites have fomented foreign conflict to unify a nation driven by internal violence. In other situations leaders have raised the specter of a potential aggressor to spur cooperation between ideologically hostile states.**

***10.1.4 Focus on an Exchange***

**Conflict over the status quo usually involves force and coercion. Violence is their manifestation. To win or frustrate the other's goals is the intention. Often, however, more will be achieved out of such a conflict and its resolution furthered by (1) making attractive offers and (2) rewarding agreement--that is, by seeking an exchange in which interests are mutually satisfied. This can provide a more durable balance of powers for subsequent cooperation and contribute to a peace of mutual satisfaction.**

**Of course, one may not always be able to focus on an exchange, especially if the other insists on altering the status quo in his favor, or if making an offer in response to aggression or threats communicates weakness or appeasement. Moreover, the other may make completely unjust demands in the hope that through compromise he will get something. Nonetheless, one should have a disposition toward an exchange. It is the use of force and coercion in a particular situation that should always require the most careful justification.**

***10.1.5 Emphasize Legitimacy***

**The more one can establish some legitimate reason, explanation, or justification for the decision one wants the other to make in a conflict situation, the more likely one is to induce a "yes," not because he fears the consequences of a no, nor because he desires what is promised for a yes. Because he believes a yes is right.**

**To invoke legitimacy, seek precedent for a solution. Showing that what is wanted has been agreed to before by the other party, or by those the other respects, tends to make a demand or request legitimate. Precedent can exist in previously made formal decisions (as in judicial settlement), previous agreements (as in formal contracts), or in previous behavior (as in previous practices or procedures).**

**Besides invoking legitimacy, recognize a conflict's legitimacy. The other, of course, will see the issues in light of his own interests. But it will hardly facilitate peacemaking to scorn, ignore, or ridicule him for this. To say or imply that his demands or requests are meaningless or silly is unnecessary and intolerant; it raises the heat of conflict and may prolong it. Acknowledge the significance of what the other believes important enough to argue or fight about. Accept the legitimacy of the issue. And accept the legitimacy of the other.**

**It may also help to involve a legitimate third party. A third party can provide objective fact-finding, encourage hidden interests or beliefs to surface, clarify misperception and miscommunication, and propose compromises. Even the mutual acceptance of a third party and the process of clarifying the issue for him can be first and second steps toward conflict resolution.**

***10.1.6 Keep Issue and Power Proportional***

**Excessive promises, threats, or appeals to authority weaken credibility and defeat their use when a vital issue comes along that merits extreme power. And even if successful, excessive power may only buy an expensive, temporary victory, creating resentment and sullen acceptance. Whatever sanctions, threats, offers, or promises are made, keep them in line with the demand or request. That is, make them consistent with the interests involved.**

**Two rules formalize this important means of easing conflict resolution. Apply power *proportional* to the interests at stake. And apply power only as *relevant* to these interests.**

***10.1.7 Display Commitment***

**Attention to how the other perceives one's will is essential to peacemaking. Whether he believes one's promises or threats, questions one's legitimacy, or accepts one's capability will help determine if he escalates or settles the conflict. To avoid unnecessary escalation and misunderstandings, therefore, strive for credibility: the basis of demands, requests, or offers should be believable; threats or promises clearly intended and performable. Moreover, protect one's reputation for power. The image of power projected in a conflict substantially influences its resolution. Do not make demands, requests, or offers that question one's power, for the strength and duration of the resulting peace and the nature of future conflicts partially depend on the image of power fostered in this conflict. Finally, through relevant actions and preparations, display a readiness to react to the other's positive or negative responses.**

***10.1.8 Consider Creating Distance***

**Creating distance in space from the other party and distance in time from a conflict can calm emotions and facilitate a more rational perspective on the issues. This can be done by temporary withdrawal from the conflict. Of course, in collective social or political conflict and violence, withdrawal can concede moral and physical ground to the other side and thus seriously endanger one's interests. But where the parties are relatively equal, a mutual withdrawal may be workable. A ceasefire in place could be negotiated; a third party (such as United Nations peacekeeping forces) invited to interpose itself between belligerents.**

**The parties could also be separated. In fact, this may be the only solution to irreconcilable differences between majority and minority racial, religious, ethnic, and nationality groups. As a matter of social justice (the Free Choice Principle)[8](http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/TJP.CHAP10.HTM" \l "8) groups should be free to form their communities and independently pursue their interests. As a matter of resolving protracted and violent conflict, minorities should have self-determination. For these reasons, voluntarily formed racial or cultural neighborhoods, ethnic reservations, or autonomous regions can contribute to a just peace.**

**In sum, conflict may be resolved simply by allowing it to fade out or by eliminating the conflict situation. This is achieved by a withdrawal or separation of the parties that allows the heat of battle to cool, rational perspectives on the issues to develop, and the underlying interests to change; or which gives each party an opportunity to satisfy independently their conflicting interests.**

***10.1.9 Resist Aggression***

**Violent conquest is usually wrong (the Just Package). Forcibly imposing one's values and goals on another, aside from its general immorality, can create smoldering resentment, grievance, and hostility that later may burst into greater conflict and violence. Nonetheless, in some exceptional conflict situations, the only resolution possible or desirable may be through conquest: a test of strength and the unambiguous violent defeat of the other side--as of Hitler's Germany. To believe that conflict should always be resolved through negotiation, mediation, and compromise invites an aggressor to assume that what is his is his, but what is yours is negotiable. Resisting aggression forces a test of interests, capabilities, and will--if the aggressor so wants it. And this may be a faster, ultimately less conflictful, less violent way of resolving conflict than conciliation or appeasement.**

**In resisting aggression, gauge different power responses. Do not automatically respond to aggression in kind. The most effective response is one which shifts power to bases which can be employed more effectively, while lessening the risk of violent escalation. And respond proportionally. To meet aggression in equal measure is legitimate, while overreaction risks escalation to a more extended and intense conflict, and underreaction appears weak and risks defeat and repeated aggression.**

***10.1.10 Conclusion and Qualifications***

**Such are major subprinciples of peacemaking. Conflict engages what the parties want and can and will do in a situation in which relevant status quo expectations are disrupted. Situational perceptions, expectations, interests, capabilities, and will are the elements of the conflict--and of peacemaking. Material things--land, people, wealth, ports, borders--are merely the tools or objects of conflict. And material conditions, such as the topography of a country or a mountainous border between states, only frame and physically limit conflict. The essence of conflict is an opposition of minds. The arena of conflict is the mental field. The principles and rules for its resolution are psychological.**

**Now, peacemaking is not necessarily the best and most immediate response to conflict. Doubtlessly, some conflicts are unnecessary, some needlessly intense and long-lasting. But some also are a real and unavoidable clash, the only means through which one, as a partisan, can protect or further vital interests and achieve a more satisfactory and harmonious just peace. For example, war against Hitler's Germany from 1939 to 1945 cost millions lives, but it prevented the greater misery, the terror, the executions, the cold-blooded murders which probably would have occurred had Hitler consolidated his control of Europe and subjugated the Soviet Union.**

**We always can end a conflict when we want by surrender. But some ideas are more important than peace: Dignity. Freedom. Security. That is, peace with justice--a just peace.**

**Peacemaking is not necessarily one's highest goal in a conflict, then. But the peacemaking principle and subprinciples ease this process. They help avoid pointless escalation and aggravating conflict interaction. They speed up the trial-and-error adjustment of opposing interests. And they help establish a more acceptable, more stable peace permitting incremental progress toward social justice.**

**There is another relevant qualification. The term "peacemaking" is well established, and I used it accordingly. Unfortunately, the verb "make" can imply that peace is designed and constructed, as a house is planned and erected brick by brick or a road engineered and built. This implication is especially seductive in this age when society is seen as manmade (rather than having evolved),[9](http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/TJP.CHAP10.HTM" \l "9) and many believe that communities should be centrally planned and managed.**

**But peace is not constructed like a bridge. Peace *emerges* from the balancing of individual mental fields. What the leaders of a group or nation honestly believe, actually want, truly are willing to get, are really capable of achieving are unknown to others--and perhaps only partially to themselves. Nonetheless only they can best utilize the information available to them to justly satisfy their interests. For a third party to try to construct and enforce an abstract peace imposed on others is foolhardy. Such a peace would be uncertain, forestall the necessary trial-and-error balancing of the parties themselves, and perhaps even create greater conflict later. The best peace is an outcome of reciprocal adjustments among those involved. At most, peacemaking should *ease the process.***

**A final qualification. Pacifists believe that violence and war cannot occur if people laid down their arms and refused to fight. But this ignores unilateral violence. Under threat, a state or government may try to avoid violence by submission. The result may be enslavement, systematic execution, and elimination of leaders and "undesirables." The resulting genocide and mass murder may ultimately end in more deaths than would have occurred had people fought to defend themselves.**

**I agree that in some situations nonviolence may be an effective strategy for waging conflict,**[**10**](http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/TJP.CHAP10.HTM#10) **as in the successful Black civil rights demonstrations of the 1960s in America; or the successful nonviolent, civil disobedience movement for Indian independence from Britain begun by Mahatma Gandhi in 1922. In some situations refusal to use violence may avoid unnecessary escalation and ease peacekeeping. However, there are also conflicts, especially involving actual or potential tyrants, despots, and other such oppressors, in which nonviolence cannot buy freedom from violence by others or a just resolution of a dispute. Then a down payment on such a peace requires public display of one's capability and a resolve to meet violent aggression in kind.**