



# Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict

## Pathways toward terrorism and genocide

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## **Governments, publics, and enemies: Intragroup dynamics as barriers to conflict resolution**

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Scholars and political commentators have long noted that domestic or internal politics can play a significant role in the development of foreign (or other intergroup) relations. In the context of international (or other intergroup) conflicts, the literature notes that such features as disparate interests within a group or leader–constituent dynamics can impede the prospects for intergroup conflict resolution. Scholarly writing on the topic, however, tends to be cabined along disciplinary lines. This article is interdisciplinary and draws lessons from different fields, particularly from political science and social psychology, to describe various intragroup structures and dynamics that can constitute barriers to intergroup conflict resolution. Among other observations, the article notes the unintended effect that statements directed towards one audience in a conflict setting (i.e. the negotiating adversary or key outside actors in the international community) may have on the other audience (i.e. the speaker’s domestic constituency), and how these effects can serve to diminish the prospects for conflict resolution.

**Keywords:** conflict resolution; intractable conflict; intergroup conflict; social–psychological conflict dynamics

In November 2013, the United States and the other members of the so-called “P5 + 1” (the UK, France, Germany, Russia, and China) reached an agreement with Iran on a Joint Plan of Action (JPA), a preliminary arrangement aimed at resolving the long-standing dispute between Iran and leading members of the international community over Iran’s nuclear program, which Iran insists is intended for civilian nuclear energy purposes but which the US and others believe is a program meant to clandestinely develop nuclear weapons. The JPA involves a series of step-by-step undertakings by Iran to eliminate some of the more problematic aspects of its nuclear program and to accept greater monitoring of that program, in exchange for step-by-step reductions of US and European Union sanctions against Iran. Almost immediately, however, political leaders in both the United States and Iran were confronted with significant domestic political opposition to the JPA. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, according to one press account (Davari, 2014), warned “that he was facing domestic opposition to [the] landmark nuclear deal with major powers,” notwithstanding the potential sanctions relief offered to Iran under the arrangement: “‘A group does not wish to see the sanctions lifted,’ [President Rouhani] said. . . . ‘This group – for their individual and party interests – is against the normalisation of relations with the world.’” In the US, the JPA similarly generated vociferous domestic political opposition. According to one press account (Solomon, 2013):

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The leaders of both the Democratic and Republican parties are threatening to break with President Barack Obama's policy [reflected in the JPA] and enact new punitive sanctions on Iran, arguing that the interim deal reached in Geneva . . . yields too much to the Islamist regime while asking too little . . . . Such a move could kill the nascent nuclear accord, U.S. and Iranian officials agree . . . .

The difficulties of overcoming domestic opposition to a P5 + 1 agreement with Iran continued, and even mounted, as the negotiations approached the July 2014 deadline the parties had originally set for reaching a deal. American negotiators, according to one press account (Sanger, 2014):

face[d] . . . constraints at home: A letter from key members of the Senate to President Obama describes what a deal to prevent Iran from producing a weapon should look like, and suggests that anything short of that would not lead to the lifting of sanctions, the only incentive the American team can dangle in front of the Iranians.

Iran's lead negotiator, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, reportedly faced similar domestic challenges: "Mr. Zarif has a parallel negotiation underway with Ayatollah Khamenei and the generals of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, which runs the military side of the nuclear program and barely trusts its foreign minister" (Sanger, 2014). One unnamed American official offered the following assessment of the talks:

It may be the most complex negotiation I've ever seen . . . Everyone is using the constraints they face back home as a reason to avoid compromise. And the fact of the matter is that there are many generals in Iran and many members of Congress in Washington who would like to see this whole effort collapse. (Sanger, 2014)

Stories such as these about the role domestic politics can play in international relations processes in general, and in conflict resolution processes in particular, are familiar. Accordingly, it is not surprising that the scholarly literature has been grappling for quite some time with the interaction between domestic and international dynamics in the context of international relations. In his seminal piece, Putnam (1988) terms this interaction "the two-level game." According to his thesis, at the national level (level II), domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favorable policies, and politicians seek to maintain and maximize power by constructing coalitions among those groups. At the international level (level I), national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments. It follows, then, that neither of the two games can be ignored by central decision-makers, so long as their countries remain interdependent, yet sovereign.

Putnam's two-level game teaches us that the domestic level (i.e. level II) both affects, and is shaped by, international relations dynamics. This general insight raises additional questions regarding both substantive and procedural aspects of these domestic-level dynamics; that is, which processes that take place on the national level affect the development of policy positions on international relations matters? These questions, as we shall see, can be particularly acute in the context of international conflicts. Similar dynamics also frequently function in intractable, potentially violent, non-international political conflicts between groups divided on ethnic, nationalist, sectarian, or similar lines. Accordingly, our analysis of the intragroup dynamics that affect intergroup conflicts and conflict resolution processes in this article applies not only to international conflict, but also to intractable intergroup conflict, particularly asymmetric conflict.<sup>1</sup>

This article sets forth a range of different intragroup dynamics or processes that affect intergroup conflict dynamics and that can serve as barriers to conflict resolution efforts. We focus in particular on relationships between political leaders and their constituents. In the first main section of the article, we outline the constraints arising from disparate or

competing interests of political actors within a particular community, drawing largely on political science and game-theoretic approaches that analyze how those disparate interests may shape decision-making in collective organizations. In the second main section, we focus more on the dynamics of public–leadership interactions, including the political and social psychological processes that help shape them. Each of these clusters of processes is in turn broken down into a host of more specific dynamics. One of the key lessons we draw concerns the danger that leaders may articulate public justifications for intransigence that have the effect of deepening their publics’ resistance to compromise. Leaders may do so either because they employ what might be seen as rational “hardball” tactics in their negotiations with the adversary, because they are appealing for support from outside actors in the international community, or because they are psychologically ill-disposed to reaching even welfare-enhancing agreements. We term these phenomena *stance internalization* and *stance conviction*.

The psychological resistance to compromising with the enemy, which we refer to as *enemy aversion*, may be particularly acute in asymmetric conflicts in which the adversary is intimate and/or in which the non-state side uses acts of terrorism to advance its political goals. Because of the domestic audience costs associated with changing positions, statements directed by leaders towards one audience (the adversary) may limit their ability to subsequently change their calculation of the potential costs and benefits of a prospective peace agreement; in other words, leaders may inadvertently help create the intragroup barriers to conflict resolution that prevent the parties from reaching an agreement that would improve the well-being of both sides. We call this process the *double audience dilemma*.

We note two clarifying points before proceeding. First, although we have treated Putnam’s seminal work as a point of departure, we want to flag a potentially misleading aspect of the phrase “two-level game.” This might imply that the dynamics we are examining occur within the context of a bilateral negotiation, with negotiators facing one another across a table, which is too narrow a frame of reference. Our analysis more generally encourages a focus on the interactive dynamics within and between groups that help shape the overall relationship between parties to conflict, which can in turn affect their behavior at the negotiating table. In this sense, drawing on the original “barriers to conflict resolution” framework set out by Mnookin and Ross (1995), we explore how a range of “organizational, institutional, and other structural” factors can inform the “tactical and strategic” behavior of the parties in negotiations, and how the interaction of these factors and processes can prevent the disputants from reaching agreements that would serve them better than remaining in a state of conflict.

Second, we want to stress that not all of the processes and dynamics we describe here are necessarily present in all conflicts, and in some intergroup conflicts we find none of them. As with the original barriers framework, “different arenas of dispute, even different specific disputes, may bring into play very different resolution barriers” (Mnookin & Ross, 1995, p. 7). In short, we describe a menu of psychological processes and institutional dynamics often present in conflict situations that have the potential, especially in light of the way they interact dynamically, to become barriers to conflict resolution. Although it is beyond the scope of this article, an important area for further empirical research is to examine the particular circumstances under which the various dynamics or processes we identify are most salient, i.e. a conditions analysis. In view of the phenomenon of audience costs discussed below, for instance, are democratic regimes more likely to remain frozen in intractable conflicts? Is the phenomenon of enemy aversion more likely to arise in the context of strategic rivalries (Colaresi & Thompson, 2002)?

### **Interest-based constraints arising from competing interests of political actors**

We begin by looking at constraints in the domestic sphere arising from the competing interests of political groups. These constraints, which Mnookin and Ross (1995) refer to as part of a larger group of “structural barriers” to conflict resolution (p. 6), reflect the fact that conflicts between collective groups implicate the interests of individuals and interest groups other than those involved in negotiations aimed at resolving the conflict; they occur in various contexts, and are managed by different institutions. According to Mnookin and Ross (1995), this type of constraint takes us into the domain of political science, organizational theory, and transaction-cost economics (pp. 6, 19–22). For analytical purposes, we will treat these constraints in a stylized fashion as involving interests which for each actor are exogenously given, independent, and static. We distinguish between four main types of such interest-based constraints: the principal–agent problem, the role of powerful constituents who affect the political process, the effect of political process structure, and the role of outside actors.

#### ***The principal–agent problem***

According to Mnookin and Ross (1995), the basic idea of the principal–agent problem, as drawn from the work conducted on transaction-cost economics, is that the personal interest of an agent (whether it be a lawyer, employee, or officer) serving as a negotiator may be quite different from the interests of the principal party the agent represents (Moe, 1984; Pratt & Zeckhauser, 1985). Mnookin and Ross (1995) use civil litigation as an example of such problems, where the fact that lawyers are paid by the hour does not create adequate incentives for opposing lawyers to cooperate with one another to settle a dispute (p. 21; Mnookin, 1992, pp. 242–243). These problems do not relate exclusively to the distribution of financial costs and benefits. Rather, agents may give heavy weight to their reputations as “tough” or “cooperative”; may have ideological axes to grind; or may feel that their clients are not aware of their own best interest or, alternatively, that their clients are giving too much weight to their own best interest over the “public’s” interest.

Applied to international or intergroup conflicts, the notion of the principal–agent problem highlights that leaders may pursue their own, personal interests, which are not necessarily aligned with their constituents’ best interest. Putnam (1988) describes this problem as stemming from the role of the chief negotiator, or the leader, in an international interaction. In such situations, the leader is the only formal link between the two levels of the “game” as defined by Putnam, and she may have veto power over possible agreements. As an empirical matter, Putnam contends, the preferences of the chief negotiator may well diverge from those of her constituents. The motives of the chief negotiator include, among other things, enhancing their standing in the domestic level II game; shifting the balance in the level II game in favor of domestic policies she prefers; and pursuing her own conception of the national interest in the international context.

A similar constraint relates to the leader’s existing domestic coalition. That is, the international agreement might oblige her to build another coalition which will make her reluctant to endorse it (Putnam, 1988, pp. 456–458). In the most extreme case – which is often the situation faced by leaders in intractable conflict settings – a decision to make the compromises or concessions that may be required to conclude a (mutually beneficial) agreement with the adversary may produce sufficient domestic opposition to ultimately bring about the leader’s loss of power. Some accounts of the failure of the Israeli–Palestinian negotiations at Camp David in 2000<sup>2</sup> suggest that Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat was unwilling to accept proposals offered by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak

because of fears that domestic Palestinian groups opposed to concessions would bring down Arafat's government (Malley, 2004); one account even suggests that Arafat feared being assassinated by Palestinian opponents of the proposed agreement (Barzak, 2005).

Colombatto and Macey (1996) refer to the principal–agent problem in similar terms, as part of public choice theory. They argue that domestic government actors who forge international agreements, whom they refer to as “regulators,” will not agree to enter into international agreements unless it is in their (private) interest to do so. Furthermore, regulators are political-support maximizing actors; they respond to political pressure and to self-interest. Therefore, international regimes would not respond to public goods problems, but rather to the needs of politicians, bureaucrats, and interest groups of the countries that constitute the relevant decision-makers within the regimes. According to this theory, it is implausible that regulators and policymakers will enact policies that threaten their own authority and autonomy, much less their very existence, merely because such policies are consistent with the national interest. This basic aspect of public choice theory is thus compatible with Putnam's description of the principal–agent problem in international relations.

Existing scholarship examines the operation of principal–agent dynamics as potential barriers to the resolution of intergroup conflict. Downs and Rocke (1994), for instance, discuss the problem of ensuring that chief executives act in accordance with the wishes of their constituency on conflict-related issues. They argue that this problem is particularly acute in the area of foreign military intervention, where the head of state (as agent) can be expected to possess substantial information advantages over the public (as principal) she represents, and may have preferences for or against participation in war that are different from those of the median constituency member. According to empirical evidence Downs and Rocke present, under information asymmetry, a constituency that places a high value on having its wishes respected with regard to conflict initiation will base decisions on whether to use the removal sanction on conflict outcomes. That is, the greater the information asymmetry, and the worse the conflict outcome, the more we expect the removal rate of executives who are unsuccessful at war to exceed the removal rate of executives who do not go to war. The high degree of uncertainty means that the constituency must base its decision to retain an executive on the outcome of a conflict and not on its apparent *ex ante* advisability. This imposes a cost on the constituency, which may unnecessarily remove an effective, “innocent” executive who made an *ex ante* advisable decision to initiate conflict, and on the well-meaning executive, who may be removed from office after making the best possible decision; for him, the privacy of information becomes a curse rather than a blessing.

Yet, as Downs and Rocke acknowledge, this model is schematic in a few ways. First, war is not a once-and-for-all decision; it unfolds across time, with many opportunities to continue or reduce the level of conflict. A decision not to initiate conflict at one moment does not imply that a decision to act cannot be taken later. Moreover, the sanction of an executive's removal from office cannot be applied immediately. In the US, for instance, voters' sanction can be applied only at fixed election times.

Another important contribution made by Downs and Rocke (1994) in this area concerns the effects of this sanction mechanism, which is meant to deter executive adventurism. Downs and Rocke develop the notion of the paradoxical *gambling for resurrection* effect, in which an unsuccessful war that a well-informed principal would terminate is continued because cessation could cause the agent to be removed from office. The main problem here is the limited range of sanctions available to the public. Once the constituency seems determined to expel the executive from office for poor performance, it

has no other sanction to apply. An executive, then, risks little by gambling and may gain the right to stay in office if the gamble, even an *ex ante* unreasonable one, is successful. The principal–agent approach encourages us to view unprofitable escalation as a strategy used by a head of state to avoid the punishment costs associated with a poor outcome – a kind of personal “slippery slope” designed to avoid the loss of political power.

An interesting implication of this study involves the trade-off between removing executives from office to cope with the principal–agent problem and minimizing “gambling for resurrection.” The more a constituency tries to limit future executive aggressiveness by increasing the punishment for poor outcomes, the more it creates an incentive for an executive who has initiated an unsuccessful war to continue the conflict, even though it would be terminated by a fully informed constituency. Conversely, the more a constituency seeks to mitigate the problem by being sympathetic to an executive’s argument that a war has gone badly for reasons that could not have been foreseen, the more that constituency will be led into conflicts that it would not, if fully informed, have entered. Because confusion between the two situations can have significant costs, this should lead to developing solutions for the agency problem that do not increase the incentive for “gambling for resurrection,” such as free press and a parliamentary democracy, which permit a more timely removal of an executive.

Finally, Richards, Morgan, Wilson, Schwebach, and Young (1993) refer to yet another aspect of the principal–agent problem in international conflict: the problem of state or other collective group leaders who, when faced with poor domestic political conditions, have an incentive to engage in diversionary foreign policy behavior. The standard view is that an aggressive foreign policy can benefit the executive by leading the public to ignore domestic problems and “rally around the flag” to meet the foreign threat. Richards et al. note that the theoretical–historical arguments offer little insight into the precise causal linkage by which domestic problems lead to aggressive foreign policy, beyond the accepted notion that international conflict is a unifying force for nations or other collective groups.

In contrast to the historical literature, the underlying argument has been formulated in other domains in more systematic terms. Early versions were based on the in-group/out-group hypothesis found in sociology. This body of research contains empirical evidence showing that social groups become more cohesive when faced with a challenge from an outside group. Because members of small groups pull together and overlook their own differences in a common effort to meet an external threat, it is perhaps natural to assume that nations would as well. This leap from small groups to nations is supported empirically by the *rally-around-the-flag* phenomenon, first introduced by Mueller (1970, 1973) and Stoll (1987). This phenomenon shows that public approval and congressional support for American Presidents increase after the US has used force abroad. Previous literature also made attempts to determine whether a systematic linkage exists between domestic political problems and the external use of force.<sup>3</sup>

Richards et al. (1993) present the diversionary argument as a principal–agent problem, in which the state executive is an agent under contract to a public whose choice to retain or dismiss the executive is based on whether the agent is judged to be competent. As in the model of Downs and Rocke, the authors assume that the competence of the executive is private information and that the public updates the probability of executive competence based on domestic and foreign policy outcomes. Several implications flow from this model. First, the competence of executives and their attitudes towards risk are central to the decision to engage in diversionary foreign policy. Second, an executive often can improve his chances of being retained only by altering the public’s perception of the

difficulty of the foreign operation. Third, the model points to the need to distinguish between short-term, rally-around-the-flag effects of diversion, and the public's long-term assessment of executive competence. This distinction is consistent with previous empirical work which focused on executive popularity (Richards et al., 1993, p. 509).

The work of Richards et al. also speaks to agency problems in the involvement of the public in foreign policy. On the one hand, leaders will manipulate the information available to the public in an effort to alter the public's perceptions of the leader's competence. On the other hand, the public can nevertheless generally – although perhaps inefficiently – structure the leader's incentives. That is, the public's ignorance regarding foreign policy may not hinder its ability to judge the leader's competence as it can base its judgment on the success or failure of the policies adopted.

To sum up, the literature establishes that leaders, like other agents, are prone to pursue their own interests instead of their constituents' interests. It has also elaborated particular features of the principal–agent problem in the context of international relations and intergroup conflicts, revealing important phenomena such as “gambling for resurrection” and “rally-around-the-flag.”

### *Powerful constituents who affect the political process*

The constraint posed by powerful constituents who affect the political process, sometimes termed the “multiple principals” problem (for instance, Miller, 2005), is essentially another application of public choice theory. As mentioned previously, public choice theory posits that governments do not have preferences, people do. That is, governmental policy reflects the preferences of powerful constituents, rather than a mystically or arithmetically determined set of preferences that might be described as the “national interest.” Thus, under public choice theory, interest groups will, at times, galvanize into effective political coalitions which pressure policy-makers to adopt policies that provide such groups with private benefits but fail to maximize welfare for the state or collective group. In this regard, Macey (1998, p. 172) quotes Posner (1982, p. 265), who asserts that “... legislation is a good demanded and supplied much as other goods, so that legislative protection flows to those groups that derive the greatest value from it, regardless of overall social welfare.” By the same token, according to the public choice model, ordinary citizens will remain “rationally ignorant,” while interest groups with relatively larger stakes in policy issues will invest the resources to achieve their goals.

In this context, Olson (1965) identified the effect of group size on collective action: the smaller the group, the easier it is for the interests of its members to dominate. In other words, small groups with intensely held preferences should, in general, dominate more diffuse groups with small stakes, such as taxpayers and consumers.<sup>4</sup>

The literature has applied these notions to international relations in general, and to conflict processes in particular. In conflict settings, especially those which embrace multiple issues, different interests and stakes are involved for different parties on the domestic level. The policies favored by empowered interest groups may cause conflict internationally (Colombatto & Macey, 1996, pp. 931–932). Frequently, a small, well-defined group of individuals stands to lose a great deal, while larger and less easily defined groups of individuals face prospective gains and losses that are less certain and involve less concrete matters of “quality of life” (Mnookin & Ross, 1995, p. 20; Putnam, 1988, pp. 445–446). According to Putnam, this drives differences in groups' involvement in the political process on the domestic level. For example, when the costs and/or benefits of a proposed agreement are relatively concentrated, it is reasonable to expect that those

constituents whose interests are most affected will exert special influence on the ratification process (Wilson, 1974). Mor (1997) echoes this argument, and highlights the role of recurrent power interest groups that may impede the conclusion of net-welfare producing settlement agreements. He notes that enduring conflict can produce powerful coalitions – especially in the defense establishment – that benefit from the continuation of conflict. Such domestic coalitions, according to Leeds (1999), benefit from international conditions and would suffer from a change in policy. When accountability is high, the interests of these coalitions have an influence on policy. Thus, there are both short- and long-run factors that encourage consistency in policy. This may have significant implications for conflict resolution processes.

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict offers a salient example; the likely solution to the conflict, although it would arguably improve overall welfare for both parties to the conflict, would impose substantial costs on powerful minority groups. On the Israeli side, settlers living in the West Bank who would presumably have to be relocated represent the faction that would experience costly losses. On the Palestinian side, refugees (and their descendants) who would presumably be required to forgo their claimed “right of return” to their former homes in Israel constitute the relatively concentrated group that would face substantial losses. Mnookin, Eiran, and Mitter (2006) have detailed how the interests of these two groups have effectively prevented a settlement of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict on the basis of a “two-state accord that might satisfy the interest of most Israelis and most Palestinians” (p. 301).

The composition of the domestic sphere is also affected by the *politicization* of the issue. Often, politicization activates groups that are less worried about the costs of no agreement, thus reducing the effective “win-set.” According to Putnam (1988), this is one reason why most professional diplomats emphasize the value of secrecy to successful negotiations. Typically, the group with the greatest interest in a specific issue is also likely to hold the most extreme position on that issue. This combination of group characteristics – that is, holding the most extreme position on the issue and at the same time being less worried about the cost of no agreement – can in some cases give rise to groups characterized as “spoilers,” an extreme version of powerful constituencies affecting the political process. According to Stedman (1997), spoilers are leaders and parties who believe that peace emerging from negotiations threatens their power, worldview, and interests, and who use violence to undermine attempts to achieve it. By signing a peace agreement, leaders put themselves at risk from adversaries who may take advantage of a settlement, from disgruntled followers who see peace as a betrayal of key values, and from excluded parties who seek either to alter the process or to destroy it. Furthermore, by implementing a peace agreement, peacemakers are vulnerable to attack from those who oppose their efforts (Stedman, 1996, 1997). Such extremists constitute a substantial constraint on conflict resolution processes.

The literature has thus discussed a wider variety of phenomena which can be seen as part of powerful constituents’ capacity to constrain – from the basic insights drawn from public choice theory, through its application to international conflict processes, to the extreme case of spoilers.

### *Effect of political process structure*

A further constraint on conflict resolution efforts that arises from the domestic level relates to the way in which the domestic political process is designed. Putnam (1988) argues, for instance, that the separation of powers in the US imposes a tighter constraint on the win-set, which increases the President’s bargaining power but also reduces the scope of international cooperation. Conversely, other political cultures such as Japan’s create a propensity for

seeking the broadest possible domestic consensus, unlike majoritarian political cultures. In similar vein, the level of autonomy of central decision-makers from their constituents on the one hand, and the number of levels of ratification required on the other hand, may also affect the domestic process (Putnam, 1988, p. 449). Finally, politicians' tendency to respond to short-term incentives rather than long-term interests might be another hindrance in conflict resolution processes (Bland, Powell, & Ross, 2012, pp. 266–267).

### *The role of outside actors*

An additional structural factor that can impede the realization of welfare-enhancing peace agreements is the role of outside actors. Just as powerful internal constituents can exercise influence that prevents a party to conflict from reaching an agreement that would be to its collective benefit, outside states acting in the pursuit of their own interests might furnish political, economic, or other forms of support that provide incentives for at least some actors involved in conflict to continue to fight. The role of outside actors is particularly, though not exclusively, prominent in asymmetric conflicts taking place between governments and insurgent groups. Weaker parties in such conflicts may seek to overcome a power imbalance by securing the support of outside actors, which may in turn prompt counter-intervention by states who see the initial outside intervener as a rival.

During the Cold War, for instance, the parties in civil wars in countries ranging from Mozambique to Angola to Nicaragua were engaged in proxy conflicts in which the warring factions were supported by the US and the USSR. Although in these situations it might have been possible to contemplate agreements that would have been welfare-enhancing for the parties engaged in conflict themselves, those agreements might not have been in the interests of the powerful outside states supporting the conflict. And it is not only great powers that can undermine conflict resolution efforts. Indeed, Downs and Stedman (2002) argue that one of the key environmental variables likely to lead to the failure of agreements aimed at ending civil wars is the presence of “neighboring states that oppose the peace agreement” (p. 44). The role of outside actors can be so prominent in asymmetric conflicts in particular that the parties might be said to be “bargaining in the shadow of third parties.”<sup>5</sup>

Where outside actors have significant influence on the course of a conflict, their interests present another constraint on the ability of parties to successfully conclude an agreement. Any proposed settlement must accommodate not only the interests of the negotiators at the intergroup level (level I) and their domestic constituencies within each group (level II), but also the interests of the invested outside actors. Accordingly, it may be more appropriate to conceive of efforts to solve many intergroup conflicts, particularly asymmetric conflicts, as a three-level game.<sup>6</sup> This is significant not only because of the exogenous constraints on settlement options that outside actors impose. As we will see, outside international actors are another audience to whom parties in conflict make both claims about the blameworthiness of the other party to the conflict and demands about what a minimally acceptable peace agreement requires. These claims and demands can contribute to the phenomena of stance internalization we describe below.

### **The dynamics of public–leadership interactions**

We now turn to a second set of structural constraints on conflict resolution efforts, namely, the dynamic interaction between leaders and publics. These dynamics are naturally affected by the first set of static or structural constraints mentioned above, as phenomena

such as the principal–agent problem and the role of powerful constituents shape and define the domestic setting.

The literature on intergroup conflict has generally not given sufficient attention to the fact that “public and leadership beliefs, perceptions, and preferences are formed within the context of an extended and dynamic interaction” (Mor, 1997, p. 199). That is, the literature has often viewed these beliefs, perceptions, and preferences as relatively fixed and given, rather than constantly and iteratively evolving. In this section, we consider the dynamic nature of the interactions between publics and their leadership groups and explore the ways in which these intragroup interactions shape intergroup conflict processes.

***Enemy aversion: public opposition to negotiating or compromising with the other side***  
*Conflict and the construction of enemy relationships*

One of the accepted notions in the social psychology literature is that intractable conflict may give rise to *enemy relationships*, in which publics develop societal beliefs that demonize the other side (Bland et al., 2012). But what are the social–psychological processes by which such *demonization* or *delegitimization* of the other side takes place? According to Bar-Tal (2007), who describes the socio-psychological dynamics of intractable conflict, societies involved in such conflicts develop certain societal beliefs, which are cognitions shared by members of society on topics and issues that are of special concern for their community and contribute to their sense of uniqueness. Themes may, for instance, pertain to a security issue, a view of an out-group, or equality in a society. Societal beliefs feature often on the public agenda and are discussed by society members. These beliefs serve as relevant references in decisions made by the leaders and influence chosen courses of action. The ethos of conflict consists of various societal beliefs, including societal beliefs delegitimizing the opponent; that is, beliefs that deny the adversary’s humanity.

Oren and Bar-Tal (2006) define delegitimization as categorization of a group into extremely negative social categories that exclude it from the sphere of human groups acting within the limits of acceptable norms and/or values, as these groups are viewed as violating basic human norms or values. In severe conflicts, the label *enemy* is also used together with other categories of delegitimization, which generates very negative implications. Social categorization as an enemy defines the other group as a severe threat and implies a confrontational and hostile attitude towards the other group and an attribution of negative characteristics. Bland et al. (2012, p. 289) explain that in these relationships:

[t]he adversaries appear to each other not as rivals with whom business can be done where interests converge, but as *enemies*. In these instances, the conflict is seen as a zero-sum struggle in which any potential gain by an enemy constitutes a threat and a loss to oneself; and any loss that can be imposed on that enemy is seen as a gain.

According to Finlay, Holsti, and Fagen (1967), the processes of decision-making, socialization of citizens, and maintenance of values or ideology are all influenced by perceptions of the enemy. The “enemy” image results in greater polarization of good and evil, which may lead to heightened nationalism, unity, and consensus (Finlay et al., 1967, pp. 13–22).

Societal institutions actively impart societal beliefs – such as delegitimization of the other side – to society members, and encourage their acquisition. The process of *institutionalization* is characterized by four features: (a) *extensive sharing*: the beliefs of

the socio-psychological infrastructure are widely held by society members; (b) *wide application*: the repertoire is not only held by society members internally, but is also put into active use by them in their daily conversations. It is dominant in public discourse via channels of mass communication. Moreover, it is often used for justification and explanation of decisions, policies, and courses of actions taken by leaders; (c) *expression in cultural products*: such as literary books and TV programs. Through these channels societal beliefs can be widely disseminated and can reach every sector of the public; (d) *appearance in educational materials*: the socio-psychological infrastructure appears in the textbooks used in schools. These in turn are used as tools for socialization (Bar-Tal, 2007, pp. 1444–1445).

Another factor which might be influential in fostering enemy relations, thus fueling opposition to dealing with the other side, is *nationalism* or *patriotism*. Patriotism is a mobilizing, cognitive-affective force that not only binds individuals together, but also provides the necessary ideology, explanation, and justification for collective action on its behalf. According to Bar-Tal (2000, pp. 73–86), patriotism implies perception of a common interest and a common fate. In this respect, it enhances integration and feelings of solidarity and minimizes in-group differences by focusing on a communality and allegiance. These beliefs also draw the line between one's own society and other out-groups.

Evera's work (1994) takes this analysis of nationalism a step further. He discusses the perceptual conditions for war-promoting nationalism, and argues that nations can coexist most easily when they share a common image of their mutual history, and of one another's current conduct and character. Relations are worst, conversely, if images diverge in self-justifying directions. According to Evera, chauvinist mythmaking is a hallmark of nationalism, practiced by nearly all nationalist movements. The myths come in three principal varieties: self-glorifying, self-whitewashing, and other-maligning. *Self-glorifying* myths incorporate claims of special virtue and competence, and false claims of past beneficence toward others. *Self-whitewashing* myths incorporate false denial of past wrong-doing against others. *Other-maligning* myths incorporate claims of others' cultural inferiority, false blame of others for past crimes, and false claims that others now harbor malign intentions against the nation. This perspective provides an account of the relationship between nationalism and the development of the conception of the enemy. It also highlights the self-justificatory discourse which parties in conflict use to justify the costs they bear and the morally questionable acts they do.

#### *Enemy aversion: reluctance to negotiate or compromise with the enemy*

The implications of delegitimization and demonization of the other side are significant for conflict resolution. Such attitudes towards the adversary can discourage parties from compromising, or even entering into negotiations, with the enemy, a phenomenon we refer to as *enemy aversion*. According to Mor (1997), "because enemies have important psychological, sociological, and political functions, the decision to radically change policy towards the opponent is much more difficult than, say, a drastic change in economic policy" (p. 199). As demonization of the rival becomes entrenched, says Mor, "it becomes all the more difficult to terminate the rivalry" (p. 202). In such circumstances, parties may be reluctant even to enter into negotiations with an enemy, based on opposition to "bargaining with the devil" (Mnookin, 2010). While there seems to be a "commonly-held view" that professional politicians can easily change views or positions without emotional cost (Bennet & Howard, 1996; Cowen, 2004), this may not be the case for the general

public, which – as noted above – may be less informed about the costs and benefits of pursuing peace versus sustaining conflict in social welfare terms, and which as a result is likely to be far less flexible in changing attitudes towards the other side once those have been fully formed.

Particular challenges in this regard arise in the context of certain kinds of asymmetric conflicts between states and non-state groups, in which enemy relations might be heightened by perceptions of *threat* and other *emotional responses* induced by terrorism or other forms of political violence. Studies have shown the counterproductive nature of terrorism in this respect. For instance, Friedland and Merari (1985) show that while terrorism is highly effective in inducing fear and worry, even when the actual damage it causes is moderate, it fails to produce the attitudinal change desired by its perpetrators. On the contrary, terrorism causes perceived threat, which increases a desire for retaliation and promotes animosity toward the threatening enemy. This may lead to hardening of attitudes, strong opposition to any form of political reconciliation, and widespread support for extreme counterterrorist measures (Friedland & Merari, 1985; Huddy, Feldman, Taber, & Lahav, 2005). In other words, such a threat from an adversary generates anger on the part of the threatened party, a response which is likely to induce the threatened party to see the other side as what we have described as an “enemy.” This phenomenon may be particularly evident in asymmetric conflict between “intimate enemies,” like the Israelis and the Palestinians (Benvenisti, 1995). That is, the close and frequent interactions between such enemies increase the emotional responses to terrorism and other forms of political violence,<sup>7</sup> thus highlighting the perception that the conflict is existential, exacerbating the enmity in the relationship, and increasing opposition to entering into negotiations with the adversary.

#### *Enemy aversion: potential pathways and the role of leaders*

An important question arises from this review of the bases of public opposition to negotiating with the other side, or, as we termed it, enemy aversion. What are the pathways by which such opposition emerges and develops, and more particularly, what role do leaders play in this process? That is, do leaders support or even create narratives of nationalism and demonization, either as part of “hard ball” negotiating tactics in the level I interaction, to appeal for support from outside actors in the international community, or to maximize their own interests? In the next subsections, we consider the potential pathways by which enemy relationships are formed, with a particular eye towards the various roles leaders may play in this context.

*Leaders’ enemy aversion driven by the public’s perceived interest.* Under the circumstances described in the previous subsections of demonization, violence-induced threats, and nationalism, accountable leaders might be disinclined to make compromises with the other side in a conflict even when it would be rational or welfare-enhancing to do so. Such leaders may avoid compromises that are clearly in their publics’ (i.e. the principals’) best interest, due to fear of public opposition to such compromises. In the realm of credible commitments, this phenomenon is described as the difficulty in inducing the agent to act inconsistently with the principal’s erroneous assessment of its own interest (Miller, 2005; Schelling, 1960). According to this analysis, because the principal’s pursuit of its own perceived self-interest might be self-destructive, the solution is to ensure that the agent is unresponsive to those interests. In conflict processes, the application of this notion

would require leaders at times to act inconsistently with their constituents' perceived or expressed interests, when those are irrational or inefficient, and to mobilize a reluctant public towards peace agreements. This is particularly true due to the information asymmetry that often exists between leaders and publics (Downs & Rocke, 1994). In other words, when the agent knows what is best for the principal – because of superior information – she needs to mobilize the principal to do what is in its own interest.

Particularly in political systems with high levels of political accountability, however, it will be difficult for leaders to act in this manner, as they may find it hard to resist their public's militaristic inclination and to embark on conflict resolution processes. This may be true even in cases, as we discuss below, where the public's confrontational inclination has been induced by leaders themselves, who may have previously created narratives that *oppose* resolving the conflict.<sup>8</sup> In such cases, it is not the role of powerful minority interest groups that function to prevent the leadership from pursuing a settlement that would be welfare-enhancing; it is rather broad public hostility towards the enemy – or enemy aversion – that prevents the leadership from pursuing an efficient agreement.

Public antipathy towards an adversary can be particularly acute in the context of asymmetric conflicts, especially those in which the non-state group has engaged in terrorist activities that have had the effects, described above, of creating a pervasive sense of threat to a public. Even in circumstances in which leaders recognize that there might be benefits to seeking a negotiated agreement with a group that employs terrorist violence, public opposition may make it too politically costly for leaders to pursue such negotiations. During the conflict in Northern Ireland, for example, the British government adopted a public policy of refusing to negotiate with the Irish Republican Army (IRA) (Neumann, 2007; Toros, 2008); in the words of a spokesman for British Prime Minister Thatcher, "We do not negotiate with terrorists and have no intention of negotiating with the IRA or their political wing" (Longworth, 1990). In fact, the British Government, which had seen the potential utility of exploring a negotiated settlement with the IRA, had for years pursued secret, back-channel negotiations with the IRA. When those negotiations were disclosed, the public backlash "came as a body blow" to then-Prime Minister Major (Brown, 1993; Neumann, 2007). The fact that the government believed that negotiations with the IRA could only be carried out secretly reflects an assessment that the British public would have opposed such talks – an assessment borne out by the subsequent political reaction, at least in the short term. In the words of one publication that examines engagement by states with groups that use terrorist tactics:

Negotiators and mediators must also consider the dynamics of their own domestic constituencies. The weight of opinion within a government or public may be so heavily set against engaging a terrorist group that any effort to do so might, were it to become widely known, provoke a backlash that would turn the negotiator or mediator into a liability for the peace process. (Quinney & Coyne, 2011, p. 32)

The escalation of the crisis between Israel and Hamas in the summer of 2014, initially triggered by the kidnapping and killing in the West Bank of three Israeli teenagers, offers evidence of how enemy aversion can operate not only to discourage a government from negotiating with the enemy, but to intensify violence against it. Contemporaneous press accounts noted that although Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu had initially launched airstrikes against targets in Gaza, he sought to avoid a significant escalation of the confrontation. According to one account, Netanyahu had through the first days of the military conflict "resisted significant public and political pressure for more aggressive action in Gaza... 'He is paying the full price, no discounts,' wrote veteran political

journalist Yossi Verter in the liberal Haaretz newspaper, calling him the ‘tragic hero’ of the conflict.” Some political opponents accused Netanyahu of “feebleness and defeatism and charge[d] that he failed to react strongly enough when the three Israeli teenagers were killed” (Bryant, 2014). Netanyahu’s restraint ultimately did not last, and Israeli ground troops entered the Gaza Strip on 17 July. Although we cannot know with certainty what factors went into Netanyahu’s decision to invade Gaza, the invasion appears to have been contrary to his own judgments about how best to manage the conflict. Intense public hostility to Hamas, in the context of a politically accountable system, may have induced the Israeli government to pursue more confrontational strategies than those the leadership itself (or at least parts of it) may have deemed to be more prudent.

*Enemy manipulation: enemy aversion driven by leaders’ own interests.* Yet, leaders may act on the basis of entirely different motives. They may self-consciously mobilize negative perceptions of the other side as an enemy, and foster ethnic or national antipathy, to advance their own self-interests, even when an efficient agreement could be reached. This is a phenomenon we refer to as *enemy manipulation*. According to Finlay et al. (1967, pp. 13–22), the process of producing enemy perceptions of the other side among the public is open to manipulation by those interested in maintaining the system as it is, or in maintaining their own position within the system. This may stem from leaders’ attempt to address domestic political threats, as a form of the aforementioned “rally-around-the-flag” phenomenon. As we have seen, in cases where such behavior on the part of leaders generates costly conflict or precludes efficient compromises, this situation reflects a variation of the principal–agent problem (Richards et al., 1993).

In this context, the literature documents cases in which leaders have made self-interested, self-conscious efforts to shape or even manipulate political opinion to build public support for a pro-conflict policy position they favored. Menheim and Bennett (1993), for instance, examine the framework of cues in which the 1990–1991 Persian Gulf conflict was presented to the American public by the news media and the degree to which this portrayal facilitated or impeded timely and meaningful public debate of policy responses to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. They find that the range of media coverage was established at each stage of the crisis by the narratives designed by officials; that the range of in-depth views presented was quite narrow; and that media cues throughout the crisis reflected those propounded by the administration and its allies, such as the analogy between Saddam Hussein and Adolf Hitler that drove administration rhetoric throughout the crisis.<sup>9</sup>

In similar vein, Hutcheson, Domke, Billeaudeau, and Garland (2004) discuss the pro-American themes articulated by US government and military leaders in their public communications following the 11 September 2001, terrorist attacks against the US. Focusing on language about Osama bin-Laden, the al Qaeda network, 9/11 terrorists, and Afghanistan’s Taliban regime, the authors find that the demonization of the “enemy” followed the good-versus-evil discourse employed effectively during the Cold War and the first Gulf War. By affirming positive aspects of the “US self” through emphasis upon mythic American values, and at the same time denigrating the “other” through blame attribution and demonization, US political and military leaders framed the conflict in the historically familiar good-versus-evil terms that marked US discourse in past conflicts. In so doing, they fostered the public’s negative perceptions of the enemy.

According to Evera (1994, p. 30), such myths of nationalism emanate largely from nationalist political elites, for whom they serve important political functions, such as a

potential avenue for dealing with domestic economic crisis. Gagnon (1995) argues further that violent conflict along ethnic cleavages may be provoked by elites in order to create a domestic political context where ethnicity is the only politically relevant identity. Such a strategy is a response by ruling elites to shifts in the structure of domestic political and economic power: by constructing individual interest in terms of the threat to the group, endangered elites can fend off domestic challengers who seek to mobilize the population against the status quo. As with the rally-around-the-flag phenomenon discussed above, leaders avail themselves of the insecurity that often characterizes conflict to enhance their own status and power. What this thread of research additionally highlights, however, is that such strategies may serve not only to strengthen an incumbent ruler; they may also create or deepen public hostility towards the group framed as the enemy – an effect which can persist after the domestic political vicissitudes of the day have passed. Weiner (2011) argues in a related context that constitution-making processes in deeply divided societies can have the effect of increasing the salience of a given ethnic, sectarian, or other cleavage “to the point where it may become *the* issue that defines [participants’] sense of political identity.” This can “deepen the extent to which citizens’ political identities are organized around the most divisive issues, which in turn fosters deeper social conflict” (p. 13).

To conclude this subsection, it is important to note the dynamic nature of enemy aversion, i.e. the opposition to negotiating or compromising with the other side in a conflict. The literature shows that interactions between leadership and publics contribute to such reluctance through various processes, affected by iterative social and political dynamics alongside the self-interests of key players. In the next subsections, we will describe additional processes which may be less conscious than those described above but which nevertheless influence the way conflict processes play out.

### ***Leaders’ behavior in conflict relations influences the domestic sphere***

In the previous subsection, we considered processes by which leaders deliberately played a role in fostering the public’s opposition to negotiating with the other side for self-interested or other reasons. We now turn to look into another potential force that might be in play as a result of less deliberate mechanisms. We posit that leaders and publics may be influenced by leaders’ negotiating positions – whether motivated by *strategic* calculations or *psychological* factors – that have been publicly directed towards the adversaries in the course of negotiations or towards outside actors as part of an effort to garner international support. Such statements towards (or about) the adversary, even when initially intended for strategic purposes, might set in motion various processes – psychological, organizational, and political – that develop “a life of their own” and may be difficult to reverse at a later stage, when a compromise outcome is seen, at least by leaders, as efficient or welfare-enhancing. The next subsections elaborate on these processes.

### ***Stance internalization: rational strategic intransigence on the intergroup level creates public commitment to extravagant negotiating positions***

In this subsection we describe the implications of presumptively rational behavior on the part of leaders in the intergroup sphere on their domestic constituents’ perceptions, as well as their own perceptions of the conflict. At the outset, we should clarify that it may indeed be rational for leaders, in exhibiting “hard ball” negotiating tactics, to demand more than they are actually willing to settle for in order to maximize their share of the “zone of potential agreements” (Bland et al., 2012, p. 267). It may similarly be rational to stake out

such extravagant positions, or to pursue strategies to portray the adversary as a blameworthy villain, as part of an effort to secure international support in the “three-level game.” However, contrary to the common belief that tactical negotiation positions will remain entirely separate from leaders’ and publics’ expectations of a future agreement with the adversary, such positions can move beyond the realm of posturing; they can generate perceptual changes and form attitudes towards the other side and the assessment of the costs and benefits of compromise. That is, negotiating stances can cause parties – both leaders and publics – to internalize or to come to believe in their stated positions, and subsequently foster sufficient enmity towards the adversary so as to impede conflict resolution efforts. We term this phenomenon *stance internalization*.

Allee and Huth (2006, p. 229) offer empirical support for the proposition that leaders who have taken hardline stances in negotiation in the context of territorial disputes are far less likely to offer bilateral concessions in subsequent negotiating rounds, but they do not elaborate on the reasons why this is so. The social psychological literature offers insights into how such convergence between bargaining positions and public perceptions might take place. Once an actor has taken a position, the literature suggests, she tends to act in a manner consistent with it, even when the subsequent action is not in her own – or in the case of a leader, in her society’s – interest. This tendency for consistency, sometimes referred to as the *sunk-cost bias* (Staw, 1976), postpones acknowledging errors to one’s self and others. Based on this notion, Cialdini’s work (2009) suggests that securing initial commitment is the key to compliance, since after making a commitment (that is, taking a stand or position), people are more willing to agree to requests that are in keeping with their prior commitment. Furthermore, people often add new reasons and justifications to support the wisdom of commitments they have already made. As a consequence, some commitments remain in effect long after the conditions that spurred them have changed (Elster, 1995, pp. 256–257). Similarly, Bennett and Howard (1996) note that it is surprisingly difficult for people *not* to believe in their own stated intentions. In their words: “it appears impossible completely to isolate oneself from [positions communicated to] one’s intended audience” (p. 610). According to Bennett and Howard’s analysis of the effects caused by unwilling threats, the more people say they would be prepared to carry out a threat, the more it becomes true that they would. Subsequently, people find reasons to support this new preference. Moreover, conscious reasoning will be likely to reinforce subconscious rationalization. The original aim may have been to convince others that a certain position is genuine, but it is scarcely plausible that the arguments will not affect the speaker’s own beliefs.

It is likely that a similar process occurs with regard to positions taken as part of an interaction with the adversary in conflict relationships or as part of an effort to broaden international support or sympathy for one’s side. Such stands, although initially taken for bargaining purposes, may turn into a commitment from which it would be difficult to backtrack. In this context, it is interesting to review the work done by Elster (1995). Of particular concern, in terms of the interaction between leaders and their constituents, is the impact that positions directed towards an adversary at the intergroup level have on the leader’s own domestic community. Elster discusses the transition from threats (credibility claims) to warnings (truth claims) as part of a negotiation. According to Elster, who uses labor conflicts for illustration purposes, if a leader stirs up unrest and discontent among her followers in order to enhance the credibility of warnings about what will happen if her wishes are not heeded, she may get more than she bargained for, as “the action of a crowd does not lend itself to fine-tuning.” Thus, says Elster, when both sides can and do seek to enhance the other side’s perception of the truth of their warnings, efficiency will suffer.

Moreover, the tendency for induced popular ferment to get out of hand can easily lead to outcomes that nobody had intended or desired.

Elster's argument is consistent with the assumption that leaders who adopt intransigent or extravagant positions as part of an intergroup negotiation may cause the public to internalize those positions, which then gives rise to dynamics that make it politically difficult to change positions. Similarly, leaders' arguments that demonize the opponent as part of a bargaining process – whether directed towards the other side or towards the international community – are likely to foster negative perceptions of the other side among their constituents. Both processes contribute to the societal repertoire of beliefs about the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2000), which pressures leaders, if they are accountable, to maintain extravagant positions. As Mor (1997, p. 202) notes, statements by leaders that ascribe bad faith to the other side convey such attitudes to the public, and become part of the public's socialization of an enduring rivalry. At the same time, these narratives may come to affect leaders themselves, reinforcing their perceptions of the conflict – both about the reasonableness of their demands and the character of the other side. This may push them to internalize a more extreme position towards the other side.<sup>10</sup> In the next subsection, we deal with other psychological and organizational factors that may discourage leaders from backing down from their original extreme positions.

An illustration of this phenomenon may be the demand by Israel, in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, that the Palestinian side recognize Israel as a Jewish state. Although there is debate about when Israelis first introduced this demand into the negotiating process (Becker, 2011), it did not gain prominence until 2010, when Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu offered to extend a moratorium on settlement construction then in place “[i]f the Palestinian leadership will say unequivocally to its people that it recognizes Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people” (Bronner, 2010). Until this demand became a central element of negotiations, Israeli leaders presumably felt that a two-state solution could be achieved provided that the Palestinian leadership unequivocally recognized Israel's right to exist as a state, without necessarily conditioning that requirement on Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state. More recently, however, Netanyahu has described Palestinian recognition of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people as the “minimal requirement” for and an “essential condition” of any negotiated settlement (Rudoren, 2014) – in effect a non-negotiable demand. Press accounts suggest that 77% of the Israeli public now supports making this demand central to peace negotiations with the Palestinians (Visser, 2014). In other words, a position that may have been adopted for strategic reasons *vis-à-vis* the Palestinians has become a critical requirement for the Israeli public, a position to which many Israelis are now committed. For reasons explained in the following subsection, this development may make it politically difficult for Israeli leaders to abandon the demand that the Palestinians recognize Israel as a Jewish state, even if an advantageous agreement could be reached without Palestinian acceptance of that demand.

The 2014 Israeli– Hamas crisis also illustrates the phenomenon of stance internalization at work. As early as 2011, commentators noted that Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, motivated both by domestic political constraints and skepticism about prospects of peace with the Palestinians, had been “selling the Israeli public the idea that the Palestinians have never accepted Israel's existence” (Strenger, 2011). According to this view, the Israeli public has internalized the negative attitudes towards the Palestinians espoused by its leadership: “The result of Netanyahu and [foreign minister Avigdor] Lieberman's systematic fanning of Israeli's [*sic*] existential fears is tangible in Israel: polls show that Israelis are deeply pessimistic about peace [and] they largely do not trust

Palestinians . . . ” According to some, Israel’s leadership has also adopted increasingly nationalistic positions, such that “the predominant mood is that anyone who is more extreme in nationalist issues and who shows greater hostility toward the Arabs has a better chance of winning the hearts of the right. There is a competition underway over who can be more extreme” (Mualem, 2014).

This competition appeared to have influenced the Israeli public’s response to the confrontation with Hamas, dubbed operation “Protective Edge.” After Israel launched airstrikes against targets in the Gaza Strip in July 2014, at least one Israeli commentator who compared the Israeli attitudes prevailing at the time with those manifested during previous Israeli military operations in Gaza stated, “The atmosphere in the streets and in people’s homes is a little more secure and less panicky – thanks to the Iron Dome system – but at the same time it is far more violent, nationalistic, religious, militaristic and, above all, aggressive and intolerant” (Levy & Levac, 2014). These observations highlight how the positions and policies adopted by leaders not only can become internalized by the public, but can also reinforce feelings of nationalism and demonization of the enemy, feelings which – as we have seen – can further reinforce opposition to negotiating a peace agreement with the adversary. And, as we have noted, such intense feelings among the public may ultimately limit leaders’ ability to take a more balanced or conciliatory approach towards the other side, even if they come to see such an approach as preferable in terms of the overall well-being it offers their community.

*Stance conviction: psychological and organizational dynamics encourage parties in conflict to adopt extravagant negotiating positions and discourage them from adjusting those positions*

The previous subsection addressed the risk that leaders may, for strategic reasons, adopt intransigent positions in intergroup conflict resolution processes that have the effect of shaping public expectations about minimally acceptable conditions for settlement. This danger is exacerbated by the fact that other factors, apart from negotiating tactics, may give rise to extravagant or unreasonable demands by parties to a conflict and may discourage them from changing or adjusting positions once they have adopted them. In particular, there are several *psychological* biases and dynamics that may affect leaders, and that may cause them to genuinely believe in the rectitude or fairness of the negotiating positions they take. These dynamics give rise to what we refer to as *stance conviction*.

Among these, *naïve realism* is the notion that we believe we see the world as it really is, an assumption of isomorphism between subjective experience and objective reality. That is, people tend to think that their perceptions, beliefs, priorities, and the like are objective and free from distortion due to self-interest, dogma, or ideology. Furthermore, people tend to think that other fair-minded people will share their views – provided that they have the same information (i.e. the “truth”) and that they process that information in an objective, open-minded fashion (Ross & Ward, 1996). As a result of this phenomenon, leaders may not actually perceive their extravagant demands towards the adversary as unreasonable. And, as noted above, once leaders make those demands public, they are likely to generate, or reinforce, public expectations of the minimally acceptable terms of a settlement.

Another psychological phenomenon that can serve as a barrier to the realization of a welfare-enhancing settlement is *loss aversion*, identified in research by Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman and his co-author Amos Tversky (1979). According to their work in the domain of behavioral economics, people tend to experience the psychological hurt of

losses more strongly than they experience the good of gains, and thus tend to strongly prefer avoiding losses to acquiring gains. This tendency may cause parties to a conflict to be reluctant to make objectively reasonable trades of gains and losses, as they will tend to focus on the losses instead of the gains.

A related phenomenon, *reactive devaluation*, suggests that when an offer for compromise is put on the table, parties to a conflict will value it less than if the offer had been identified as a hypothetical offer in advance, or if it had been proposed by a third-party mediator (Ross, 1995). This phenomenon, particularly when working in tandem with loss aversion, explains why parties may be psychologically ill-disposed to making the exchanges or compromises that would be necessary to resolve an intractable conflict; because of the way parties to a conflict experience feelings of gain and loss, they may perceive compromises that a third-party observer would rate as advantageous as entailing unacceptable trade-offs. This in turn reinforces their commitment to unreasonable negotiating positions, or what we have described here as their stance conviction.

The phenomenon of loss aversion is in many ways connected to the general human tendency to justify the current system and to stick to the status quo. *System justification theory* suggests that people seek to maintain or enhance the legitimacy and stability of existing forms of social arrangements. System justification is conceptualized as a response tendency possessed by most members of society to see aspects of the overarching social system as good, fair, and legitimate. Consequently, alternatives to the status quo are often derogated or avoided for ideologically defensive reasons. In other words, system justification is an inherently conservative inclination to preserve “the way things are,” sometimes even at the expense of objective social interests (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). Furthermore, research reveals that heightened existential motives to minimize fear and threat are associated with increased conservatism (Jost, Ledgerwood, & Hardin, 2008). This may explain the enhanced tendency towards system justification in the face of conflict which produces existential threat.

This theory relates to the psychological phenomenon termed *dissonance avoidance/reduction*, by which suffering paradoxically increases commitment to the sources of one’s suffering through dissonance reduction mechanisms (Jost & Hunyady, 2003). According to Mnookin and Ross (1995, p. 18):

People involved in protracted conflict or unsuccessful negotiations are likely to minimize the amount of psychic regret or “cognitive dissonance” (see Festinger 1957; Aronson 1969) to which they are subject. Such attempts at reducing and/or avoiding dissonance create obstacles to dispute resolution, as disputants are continually motivated to rationalize or justify both their past failure to settle and whatever costs they are bearing in continuing the struggle.

As mentioned, such attempts are usually encouraged by their leaders. This occurs when leaders convince themselves (and tell others), for example, that the causes for which they are struggling are nobler than those of the adversary, or that the other side is untrustworthy. Such justifications, which successfully reduce parties’ dissonance, in turn constitute additional psychological barriers to settlement, as it is difficult to change attitudes about the benefits of concluding an agreement (Mnookin & Ross, 1995).

In other words, people’s suffering as a result of conflict may paradoxically lead them to continue the conflict rather than attempt to end it, due to the tendency to reduce dissonance by justifying the status quo. As a result, parties engaged in conflict are unlikely to adjust their assessment of costs and benefits, and may develop a “stay the course” mentality. As with the “sunk-cost bias” noted in the subsection discussing “stance internalization” above, such mentality may cause parties to conflict to continue fighting long after an efficient agreement might have been reached, and to insist on their extravagant status quo positions.

There are also *organizational* dynamics which may discourage leaders from moving away from the status quo. Organizational momentum might create incentives to “stay the course,” as a result of significant efforts which have already been put into the conflict strategy. As Bennet and Howard (1996) note, “[i]f one’s own organization has taken the commitment seriously, preparations to carry it out may have to be undone, with costs in both material and morale. Organizational momentum can be considerable” (p. 611). Domestic deadlocks about whether to pursue peace “tend to create dynamics that enhance resistance to accommodation” and require a “shock treatment” if they are to be overcome (Mor, 1997, p. 197). Such organizational momentum, when combined with the abovementioned psychological dynamics, makes it difficult for leaders to move beyond status quo positions and towards an efficient agreement.

In the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, Israel’s demand that the Palestinian side recognize Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people may illustrate the tendency for parties to perceive their positions as inherently reasonable and to develop deep commitments to those positions that obscure their ability to reach welfare-maximizing agreements. As noted, the Israelis have increasingly come to characterize their insistence that the Palestinians recognize Israel as a Jewish state as a non-negotiable condition for any peace agreement. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, meanwhile, has countered this demand by saying “there is ‘no way’ he will acquiesce to the demand for a public declaration that Israel is a Jewish state” (Wilner, 2014). Just as Israeli public support for the recognition of an Israeli state has grown as it has been articulated as an essential condition by Israeli leaders, public opposition to such a condition among Palestinians has grown as the Palestinian leadership has become more entrenched in its opposition to the notion. According to a *New York Times* report, “[p]olls by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research show that Palestinian support for such recognition [of Israel as a Jewish state] has dropped over the past decade to a low of 40 percent last September, from a high of 65 percent” (Rudoren, 2014).

*The double (or triple) audience dilemma: audience costs provide disincentives for leaders to back away from their extravagant demands*

In the previous subsection, we noted the psychological and organizational dynamics which might discourage leaders from moving away from status quo positions that serve to maintain the conflict. However, there might be *political* dynamics in play in this context, as well. As Mor (1997) notes, “even if decision-makers come to realize that the conflict cannot be resolved unilaterally and prefer a negotiated settlement, their hands are tied by the legacy of the past” (p. 202). But what are the specific political factors which may affect leaders’ action, or inaction, with regard to intergroup conflict? As Bennet and Howard (1996) suggest, one of the reasons for people, including leaders, to become bound by commitments is that by backing away, they risk appearing inconsistent – hence either indecisive or duplicitous – to a range of audiences: to potential future opponents or partners, to third parties whose opinions are of value, and to others. Fearon (1994) extends this notion to international relations. According to his analysis, leaders will suffer “domestic audience costs” if they issue threats or promises and fail to follow through. Citizens, it is argued, would think less of leaders who back down than of leaders who never committed in the first place.<sup>11</sup> Fearon observes that when a leader makes threats and engages in highly conflictive activity with a rival, the national honor is seen to be at stake. In a world with audience costs, the prospect of losing domestic support – or even office – could discourage leaders from making empty threats and promises.

While we agree that audience costs can play a critical role in conflict resolution settings, we believe that the assumption that leaders will avoid empty threats discounts the risk that leaders will make extravagant demands or adopt intransigent positions (the equivalent in conflict resolution contexts of making an empty threat), either because they are (rationally) employing “hardball” tactics in their negotiations with the other side, because they are (rationally) seeking to enlist the support of outside actors in the international community to strengthen their negotiating position, or because they do not – in light of the psychological processes noted above – perceive their demands as unreasonable or extravagant. Once leaders articulate extravagant positions in the course of negotiations, in political systems where leaders are held accountable for their actions, each display of intransigence results in the potential for increasing domestic audience costs for backing down, giving rise to what we dub the *double audience dilemma*. (As noted above, if outside actors in the international community are another audience for the leadership’s statements, it might be more appropriate to refer to this as a *triple audience dilemma*.)

As a result of the costs faced from backing down from a public statement or action, highly accountable leaders are likely to follow through on threats; when they escalate crises, their willingness to use force increases because changing policy becomes more costly. In Fearon’s words, “domestic audiences may provide the strongest incentives for leaders to guard their states’ ‘international’ reputations” (1994, p. 581). In the context of conflict resolution processes, the variant on these insights is that leaders will be unwilling to compromise from positions they have insisted upon – even when such compromises might ultimately produce a settlement that would improve the condition of their polity.

Tomz (2007) has explored the issue of audience costs through experimental research aimed at assessing public distaste for empty threats. Tomz’s experiments show that citizens, especially in the group best positioned to apply electoral penalties, disapprove of empty threats. His findings reflect popular disapproval of leaders who behave inconsistently by saying one thing and doing another. Many of his respondents complained that waffling would hurt the reputation and credibility of the country; others reflected a normative preference for honesty rather than – or in addition to – an instrumental concern for reputation; and some disliked inconsistency for reasons such as proof of incompetence. These responses offer preliminary empirical support for a reputation-based theory of audience costs, similar to the model suggested by Fearon. We stress that audience costs matter to leaders not only because they fear they will be voted out of office or otherwise removed by a disapproving public, which may be a remote sanction. Leaders who suffer from reduced credibility face a greater risk of having their political authority challenged by opposition forces and accordingly are less likely to be able to govern effectively even if they remain in power (Allee & Huth, 2006, p. 222).

Although these findings suggest that accountable leaders<sup>12</sup> will avoid making threats they subjectively know to be empty, it is not obvious that leaders will necessarily see the same danger in adopting intransigent positions or making extravagant demands in the course of negotiations that Fearon presumes leaders will perceive in making empty threats. Moreover, the temptation for leaders, particularly weaker leaders in asymmetric conflicts, to make extravagant demands they know cannot be met as part of an effort to enlist the support of outside actors in the international community – a tactic aimed at offsetting an imbalance in power or status between the parties – also undermines the assumption that domestic audience costs will deter leaders from making such demands. And, as noted, the role of psychological processes in shaping the parties’ perception of conflicts complicates the situation. As we have seen, in the context of intractable conflict, leaders may articulate

extravagant or intransigent positions because they are inclined to see them as reasonable – even though they may effectively prevent the conclusion of a welfare-enhancing agreement.

If leaders articulate unreasonable demands or intransigent positions for any of these reasons, research by Fearon and Tomz supports the notion that audience costs will discourage leaders from modifying those demands or negotiating positions. Huth and Allee (2002), who explore territorial disputes, provide empirical support for the proposition that although democratic regimes are generally more likely to make concessions in negotiations than nondemocratic states, they are less likely to make concessions when they face what we would deem to be high audience costs, such as when they face strong domestic opposition forces or impending elections. Moreover, democracies involved in territorial conflicts are less likely to offer concessions during negotiations where a stalemate has arisen – precisely the kind of conflict during which enemy aversion is likely to be most acute. Separately, Allee and Huth (2006, p. 230) show that states that are democratic and have a strong domestic opposition, i.e. highly accountable states, are much less likely to offer concessions in negotiations over territorial disputes than states where neither condition is present. Demands and positions articulated by leaders, as we have seen, are both informed by and influence public perceptions of the minimal conditions required for a just settlement. Citizens may seek to elect leaders who value what they perceive to be the national reputation and who they believe would be especially competent at preserving it. For the reasons noted above, these may be the leaders least inclined to compromise with the adversary. This suggests that although democracies may be unlikely to go to war with other democracies – the well-known democratic peace notion (Doyle, 1986; Russett, 1993) – they may also be unlikely to settle intractable conflicts once they have arisen.

To summarize, as Bennett and Howard (1996) explain, “making unwilling threats and promises credible, through emotion and argument, necessarily sets in train processes – psychological, organizational, political – that will be difficult or costly to reverse” (p. 611). The dynamic and iterative nature of conflict processes on the domestic level are in full force when it comes to the impact of leaders’ intransigence – whether it is based on strategic decisions in intergroup negotiations, strategic appeals to outside actors in the international community, or the leaders’ own psychological indisposition to compromise.

## **Conclusion**

We have in this article elaborated on the ways in which intragroup dynamics can serve as barriers to the ability of states or other groups in conflict settings to reach agreements that would improve their conditions. We began by exploring certain static intragroup features, including principal–agent issues, the role of politically powerful minority constituency groups, other organizational features of a party’s political structure, and the role of third parties. We then added two key elements to our understanding of the role of intragroup processes. First, we highlighted the phenomenon of enemy aversion, i.e. the social–psychological factors that, in the context of violent or intractable conflicts, may create perceptions or construals of the adversary that heighten opposition – both on the part of publics and leaders – to negotiating with the other side or making the concessions that would be required to produce a settlement agreement, even where such an agreement would be welfare-enhancing. Second, we noted the dynamic nature of interactions between leaders and their constituents. We demonstrated that leaders may, for reasons related to their own interests, foster enemy aversion that generates public opposition to negotiating welfare-enhancing agreements, and that “irrational” public hostility towards an adversary may constrain leaders from entering into agreements that would be beneficial for their side.

A particularly troubling feature of these intragroup dynamics is that leaders may reinforce their own publics' opposition to reaching welfare-enhancing agreements by virtue of the dynamics of stance internalization or stance conviction. As we have seen, there could be several reasons for this. First, a leader might – as part of rational “hardball” negotiating tactics directed towards the other side – articulate intransigent or extravagant positions aimed at securing a better outcome, i.e. to obtain a bigger share of the pie available under the range of potential mutually acceptable outcomes. Second, a leader may seek to buttress support from outside actors in the international community by arguing for the justice or reasonableness of its maximal demands and the injustice or unreasonableness of the positions of the other side. Third, leaders may, for a variety of reasons related to their own perception of the other side or their construal of prospective gains and losses, be psychologically ill-disposed to reaching a welfare-enhancing agreement, and may as a result articulate public justifications for the refusal to compromise. Given the dynamic nature of interactions between leaders and their constituents, the articulation for any of these reasons of objectively extravagant demands will undermine the public's willingness to make the compromises necessary to reach an agreement. Even if a leader subsequently desires to change her negotiating tactics, or reassesses the potential costs and benefits of peace, she may through prior public statements have reinforced public opposition, among her own constituents, to compromise.

A central lesson to be drawn from the analysis offered in this article is that leaders involved in conflict resolution processes should be deeply aware of the mutual and iterative interaction between the domestic sphere, the intergroup sphere, and the international sphere in conflict relations, and that this awareness should affect their behavior on all fronts. These insights may in some cases offer specific prescriptions for particular problems. For instance, leaders should carefully manage their responses to actions by the other side's “spoilers.” That is, being conscious of spoilers' potential detrimental effect on conflict resolution processes, leaders should avoid “taking the bait” for behavior clearly aimed at sabotaging such processes. Instead, they should project to the adversary and to their own constituents their understanding that such spoilers are extremists who do not represent the other side as a whole. In addition, leaders may seek to avoid potential audience costs by limiting the public nature of negotiations with the adversary. This way, extravagant positions taken strategically in the negotiation process will not have an unintended impact on another audience – the leaders' domestic constituents.

More generally, the key lesson is that a leader involved in conflict resolution processes, in crafting public negotiating positions, needs to be cognizant of the double (or triple) audience dilemma. He should take care to formulate demands and positions towards the adversary, and to structure appeals to the international community, in a manner that avoids creating audience costs that would preclude him from later being able to reach a peace agreement that would benefit his community. In this context, savvy leaders should present tough positions *vis-à-vis* the other side and before the international community without demonizing the adversary, as demonization may set in motion an irreversible process. For example, posing a counter-narrative, which characterizes the adversary as a tough and difficult but respected foe, may allow leaders more flexibility in the future, should they decide to begin negotiating with an adversary with whom no talks have yet been held, or to change positions in ongoing negotiations and explore new compromise solutions.

We have noted the dynamic nature of the processes described in this article and the fact that communicating to multiple audiences presents leaders with a dilemma. Mere awareness of these dynamics cannot change the underlying motivations of participants in

conflict resolution processes. For instance, even if a leader wishes to avoid demonizing an adversary as part of a conflict resolution process, she might elect to do so for her own benefit in times of domestic crisis, reflecting how principal–agent problems can impede conflict resolution efforts. What we hope the article highlights for leaders is how espousing hostile characterizations of the adversary, or making public commitments to unreasonable negotiating positions, can have the unintended consequence of trapping leaders in positions that will prevent them from making peace, even should they have a change of heart and decide they want to become peacemakers.

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### Notes

1. The term “asymmetric conflict” can describe a variety of conflicts in which there are different types of asymmetries between the parties. Gallo and Marzano (2009) have described three types of asymmetry: power asymmetry, strategic asymmetry, and structural asymmetry. Any conflict between a state and a non-state group exhibits structural asymmetry; such conflicts often involve power and strategic asymmetries, as well.
2. We emphasize that “some accounts” suggest that this is the reason for the failure of the Camp David negotiations. There is a range of other explanations, some of which place far greater emphasis on Israeli positions and tactics (Shikaki, 2004). For a particularly thoughtful analysis, see Malley and Agha (2001).
3. Richards et al. (1993) cite previous research which argues that state leaders react only to their level of support from within those elements of society comprising their “ruling coalition” rather than their overall level of support in the population. However, data also suggest that use of force is more likely when the leader’s overall support is relatively high. This supports the notion that state leaders require a fairly high level of overall support to undertake foreign aggression (i.e. diversionary behavior is unlikely in times of severe domestic turmoil), but such actions might be taken in response to a loss of support from within the leader’s ruling coalition.
4. This is not necessarily the case in all contexts; Oliver and Marwell (1988) argue that the *size* of groups is not necessarily negatively correlated with the chances for collective action (i.e. it is not necessarily true that the larger the group the smaller the chances of collective action). According to their argument, the effect of group size in fact depends on costs. A good with jointness of supply costs the same no matter how many people “enjoy” it (for instance, a bridge), and this affects the chances for collective action. According to this analysis, if the costs vary little with group size – that is, when there is pure jointness of supply for the public good – larger groups should exhibit more collective action than smaller ones. This is because larger groups have more resources and are more likely to have a critical mass of highly interested and resourceful actors. Nevertheless, Olson’s argument is correct for cases in which the cost for providing the good is proportional to the number of individuals who share in it (zero jointness of supply). If the costs of collective goods rise with the number of individuals who share in them, larger groups act less frequently than smaller ones.
5. We owe this phrase to our colleague Lee Ross. It is inspired by the seminal essay by Mnookin and Kornhauser (1979) entitled “Bargaining in the Shadow of the Law.”
6. See Patterson (1997) for another example of expanding Putnam from a two-level to a three-level analysis.
7. For more on the connection between terrorism and emotions, see McCauley (2004).
8. Conversely, some perspectives suggest that the public may grow weary of the costs of a prolonged conflict and may consequently come to favor moderation or compromise on the part

- of its leaders. This could imply that publics that do not like the costs of conflict might actually be over-inclined to resolve conflicts (Mor, 1997, p. 203). In such cases, based on Schelling's and Miller's rationale, the leadership might work to prevent an inefficient agreement from being signed, in order to protect the public from its own irrational inclination towards peace.
9. The use of media in general, and of new media (such as social networks) in particular, is prominent in the literature on leaders' intentional efforts to affect public opinion on foreign policy issues (Entman, 2009). The literature notes a range of potential measures used by leaders to this end, the most extreme of which is the deliberate effort to control the information available to the public online through social media censorship (King, Pan, & Roberts, 2013). New technology thus allows leaders to manipulate their public, which may assist them in deliberately creating barriers to conflict resolution by, among other things, fostering negative public perceptions of the adversary. Yet, these mechanisms could also become a way to overcome such barriers by disseminating counter-narratives to the public. A key point is that these self-conscious efforts to manipulate public attitudes are strategies intentionally adopted by leaders, unlike some of the other dynamics, described below, through which leaders inadvertently generate public opposition to negotiation or compromise with an adversary.
  10. In this context, another psychological bias that might be in play is the tendency towards overconfidence (Johnson, 2004). Leaders may be overconfident with regard to the likelihood that their extravagant demands will be accepted by the other side at one point, causing them to underestimate the likelihood that they will have to abandon those demands at a later point. The phenomenon of "naïve realism," discussed in the subsection addressing "stance conviction," also relates to the overconfidence bias.
  11. It is less clear what the domestic audience costs would be of making appeals to outside actors in the international community – as opposed to negotiations with the adversary – of a purported requirement or condition for resolving a conflict if the leader must ultimately settle the dispute without that demand or condition being met.
  12. For an analysis of the relationship between credible commitments and regime type, see Gaubatz (1996) and Leeds (1999).

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