

## Multidisciplinary Method

Innovative Approach for Sustainable Peace: Connecting People, Power, and Prosperity

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## 1. Introduction

There are more armed conflicts worldwide than at any point since 1946 and the number of civil wars has risen substantially over the past few decades. Signed peace agreements or ceasefires dissolve more often than not, leaving people with unfixed relationships and unstable economies. The humanitarian, economic and ecological costs of conflict have increased drastically.<sup>1</sup> This development is further influenced by a combination of new forms of warfare, more complex threats, and a breakdown of norms, values, and principles. Many hold the view that traditional models of conflict management do no longer always suffice in this changed context.<sup>2</sup> Is there a way to foster more impactful resolution of conflicts?

This paper argues that conflicts end not with the signing of a peace treaty but when the people involved in the conflict have made the conscious and deliberate shift in their mindset and agreed on a shared vision and narrative for the future in a sustainable manner. It suggests that conflict resolution strategies will be limited in their effectiveness when they only approach conflicts from a pragmatic political problem-solving angle. As the root causes of conflicts are multidimensional, including emotional, economic, societal, and cultural factors, the approach of conflict resolution cannot be one-dimensional. This paper underlines that in conflict resolution in particular, the socio- psychological, political, and economic drivers of conflict need to be addressed holistically to curb violent conflict. We therefore suggest, based on experience and extensive research, to work in multidisciplinary concept with conflict management teams whereby sociopsychologists, entrepreneurs, negotiators, military, anthropologists, creatives in public and private sector connect the various dots that fuel conflicts in a comprehensive manner. While multidisciplinary working is standard practice in many other industries, it has, until now, rarely been adopted in the field of conflict resolution.<sup>3</sup>

We present a way forward for such a multidisciplinary approach in conflict resolution.

## 2. Challenges to Conflict Management

With endless conflicts in the Middle East, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Yemen, and new conflicts that continue to emerge, as we have seen most notably and recently in Ukraine, there is an urgent need for peace. Yet, dishearteningly, nearly half of the signed peace agreements relapse into conflict within a decade.<sup>4</sup> We suggest that this is primarily due to the complexity of the contemporary international context and the inherent limitations of conflict management mechanisms, especially during a time of geopolitical fragmentation such as the one the international community is currently undergoing.

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<sup>1</sup> IEP, *Positive Peace Report 2022*. Joseph et al., “Entrepreneurship and Peacebuilding,” 324.

The cost of conflict and violence estimated at US dollar 14.76 trillion, or 10.5% of global GDP

<sup>2</sup> Peace Dividend Initiative, “Creating a Peace Dividend Ecosystem”; Seu, *States of Mind in Conflict*; Waldman, *Falling Short: Exploring Mediation Effectiveness*.

<sup>3</sup> Körppen, Schmelzle, and Wils, *Systemic Approach to Conflict Transformation*.

<sup>4</sup> Collier and Hoeffler, *Breaking the Conflict Trap*.

The nature of threats has evolved considerably, which causes intricate challenges for the field of conflict management. The emergence of new and more sophisticated forms of violent conflict, such as hybrid warfare and the use of advanced technologies, has fundamentally transformed the landscape of conflicts. Moreover, systemic pressures on large scale, exacerbated by modern developments like climate change and the rapid dissemination of information through digital platforms, have made conflict management confront increasingly complex and multifaceted scenarios.

The heightened transnational dimension of challenges and the interconnectedness of the world have allowed a wide array of actors, including non-state groups and regional as well as international players, to exert influence.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the advent of social media has empowered citizens to become active participants who not only express opinions about foreign policy but also contribute to its shaping and execution.<sup>6</sup> This adds significantly to the diversity of perspectives and further complicates the underlying causes of conflicts.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, traditional conflict management approaches often neglect participation of non-state parties, despite their ability to comprehend the conflict dynamics and promote peacebuilding measures.<sup>8</sup> Hereby failing to recognize an important conflict constituent, as the political elite who sign the accords usually do not control all those engaged in conflict.

A fragmentation of actors involved with conflict and an imbalanced political system make it increasingly challenging to achieve a unified international response. Conflicting interests among geopolitical powers perpetuate divisions and impede progress in conflict management discussions, preventing resolutions from emerging, while the United Nations often finds itself with a reduced role or in a deadlocked position on these matters.<sup>9</sup> We face a shifting global order, the outcome of which will determine much of the conditions of possibility for future conflict management approaches.

Despite the constantly changing landscape, conflict management practices have remained largely unchanged since the 1990s.<sup>10</sup> Failing to adapt to this new context means that approaches have not been able to generate conditions that guarantee broader long-term social and political peace. Critical self-evaluation has been insufficient even though it can be considered crucial to ensure that conflict management organizations institutionalize lessons learned.

Conflict management continues to rely heavily on a rationalist framework, with an embedded resistance to models that deviate from this framework.<sup>11</sup> This exclusively rationalist approach sees decisions of conflict parties as based on a rational cost-benefit assessment of their options. In

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations; World Bank, *Pathways for Peace*.

<sup>6</sup> Citizens can virtually move across the world through internet, and often use the online space as an extension of the public realm. Civic engagement and political participation have become accessible to anyone with internet facility, which signals a new era of governance. Direct and participative democracy is becoming more relevant. Conflict management should promote this message and empower individuals and communities to engage in dialogues about conflict. This manner citizens have the ownership to find their own solutions for the future.

<sup>7</sup> McNamee and Muyanga; De Coning, Muto, and Saraiva.

<sup>8</sup> Doyle, "Power-Sharing in Divided Societies." See also: Lehti, *Era of Private Peacemakers*.

<sup>9</sup> Doyle, "Power-Sharing in Divided Societies"; Waldman, *Falling Short: Exploring Mediation Effectiveness*, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Waldman, *Falling Short: Exploring Mediation Effectiveness*, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Seu, *States of Mind in Conflict*, 55-83.

addition, under this framework, post-conflict reconstruction prioritizes the rebuilding of the state, often neglecting the reconstruction and healing of societal members.<sup>12</sup> We see that it is essential that societal members' needs are addressed to ensure sustainable peace.<sup>13</sup>

Many actors globally argue that a Western bias continues to be inherent in conflict management approaches. Such biases tend to overlook the unique local dynamics, traditions, and aspirations of non-Western societies, limiting the effectiveness and legitimacy of conflict management efforts. Double standards in the application of these approaches have been observed, with selective interventions and different standards applied depending on geopolitical interests and power dynamics. This often leads to skepticism and resentment among stakeholders in conflict regions to traditional conflict management models based on Western value systems.

The limited availability of funding resources further hinders the success of conflict management strategies. Conflict management receives less than 0.1% of what is spent on the military and is thus just scratching the surface of what it can contribute to.<sup>14</sup> Funding partners require measurable results within a specific timeframe, which often does not reflect the complexities of conflict dynamics and non-linear processes of its resolution on the ground.<sup>15</sup> Long-term funding commitments are difficult, resources either run out or are allocated to other conflicts with a higher priority, resulting in neglected implementation and monitoring of agreements.<sup>16</sup>

To effectively address the changing landscape and new challenges, we must adapt and respond accordingly. We argue that conflict resolution should not merely focus on signing a political agreement, but also on establishing an environment where there are opportunities for all segments of society to meet needs and develop. This will lead to higher levels of societal resilience that will make peace more sustainable.<sup>17</sup> As political power-sharing models have dominated conflict management efforts since the mid-1990s, primarily involving formal interactions among high-level representatives and assistance of governmental or United Nations officials, conflict resolution processes remain rather state-centric exercises.<sup>18</sup> We do not propose to discard these models, rather, we advocate going beyond them to cultivate a strategic shift in the relationships between conflict parties, and addressing core needs and fears, building pragmatic trust and reciprocity, and fostering an economic environment conducive to genuine transformation.<sup>19</sup>

All conflicts encompass a combination of rational and emotional factors. While rational factors may include state resources, ethnic composition, access to key geographical locations, and stability within neighbouring states, emotional factors pertain to subjective elements that impose constraints on

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<sup>12</sup> McNamee and Muyangwa, *The State of Peacebuilding in Africa*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Lehti, *Era of Private Peacemakers*, 27.

<sup>14</sup> Waldman, *Falling Short: Exploring Mediation Effectiveness*.

<sup>15</sup> Körppen, Schmelzle, and Wils, *Systemic Approach to Conflict Transformation*.

<sup>16</sup> Beardsley, *The Mediation Dilemma*; McNamee and Muyangwa, *The State of Peacebuilding in Africa*.

<sup>17</sup> IEP, *Positive Peace Report 2022*.

<sup>18</sup> During this era peace and conflict mediation developed as a specific and regulated practical tool of international diplomacy. The amount of mediation efforts skyrocketed to roughly 170 cases per year, compared to the roughly 30 a year that were observed in the decades before. See: Lehti, *Era of Private Peacemakers*; Faget, *Mediation in Political Conflicts*; Doyle, "Power-Sharing in Divided Societies."

<sup>19</sup> Kelman, "Social-Psychological Perspective on Ending Violent Conflict," 1-3.

rationality. In each conflict the blend of rational and emotional factors varies, but it is evident that socio-psychological and economic drivers and incentives play significant roles across the board. Therefore, we will delve into these aspects in greater detail.

### 3. A Holistic Approach: Connecting Socio-Psychological and Economic Drivers to Political Solutions

#### *Socio-Psychological*

The importance of applying socio-psychological techniques during conflict management is increasingly recognized among academics and practitioners.<sup>20</sup> Contrary to common belief, our human capacity for rational judgment is much shallower than research tells us.<sup>21</sup> Electroencephalogram and hormonal testing for example reveal that our intuitive/emotive thinking is faster and more influential than the more rational part of our mind, especially in times of tension.<sup>22</sup> It is often our emotive thinking, as opposed to rational considerations, that informs and drives our decision making. This results in several perceptual and cognitive constraints that conflict management strategies should consider, not as a separate track, as is until now, if at all, often the case, but as part of the resolution process.

Understanding the rationale of conflict parties requires an examination of their backgrounds and the socio-psychological context in which their statements are made.<sup>23</sup> The security dilemma exemplifies this. The solution of a problem for one party, such as arming itself in an environment perceived as insecure, is the problem for the other party, as they perceive a heightened security threat, which leads to reinforcing the first problem.<sup>24</sup> This highlights how the actions of one party can inadvertently undermine the feeling of the security of other parties and ultimately contribute to a less secure overall environment. It is crucial to comprehend the feedback loops that perpetuate this cycle of fears.

In comprehending conflict, we argue that the principles of systemic thinking should be embraced more emphatically, recognizing that it goes beyond a collection of isolated incidents or individual actors. Conflict is not simply the sum of its parts, rather, it is an intricate system with patterns interwoven within dynamic frames and network structures.<sup>25</sup> As such, we recognize that the logic of a conflict system is not linear, and the path to peace may unfold in non-linear and unpredictable ways.<sup>26</sup>

Conflict is a process driven by collective needs and fears. It is these, and not merely the rational calculations of objective interests on the part of a political elite, that often produce long-lasting,

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<sup>20</sup> Seu, *States of Mind in Conflict*; Funk, Good, and Berry, *Healing and Peacebuilding After War*; Fitzduff, *Our Brains at War*.

<sup>21</sup> Fitzduff, *Our Brains at War*, 26-27.

<sup>22</sup> Fitzduff, *Our Brains at War*, 27.

<sup>23</sup> Bar-Tal and Halperin, "Nature of Socio-Psychological Barriers to Conflict Resolution"; Kelman, "Social-psychological approach to conflict analysis and resolution," 171; Körppen, Schmelzle, and Wils, *Systemic Approach*, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Körppen, Schmelzle, and Wils, *Systemic Approach*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Körppen, Schmelzle, and Wils, *Systemic Approach to Conflict Transformation*, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Körppen, Schmelzle, and Wils, *Systemic Approach to Conflict Transformation*, 6.

intractable conflicts.<sup>27</sup> Beyond security concerns, there are existential fears that play part in all conflicts. Subjective factors and basic psychological needs, such as identity, autonomy, and a sense of justice, impose limitations on rationality. These subjective factors often hinder parties from engaging in negotiations, even when it is in their best interest to do so, out of fear that concessions may compromise their very existence.<sup>28</sup>

These psychological needs, together with a set of guiding beliefs, emotions, and narratives develop collectively to cope with the harsh conditions of conflict, shape rigid conflict positions.<sup>29</sup> These dispositions inform a selective, biased, and distorted information processing that obstructs the reception of alternative information in favour of information that aligns with beliefs and narratives that support the initial position.<sup>30</sup> Conflict positions and narratives tend to become ‘frozen’, acting as barriers to peaceful resolution. Narratives are often conflict-supportive, as conflicts become deeply ingrained in the collective identities of parties, and individuals will often prove resistant to persuasive counterarguments and alternative information that could facilitate conflict resolution.<sup>31</sup> Another major effect of this is that parties often systemically underestimate the possibility of change.<sup>32</sup>

An openness to the acceptance of alternative information is also haltered by a negativity bias. People are more motivated to preserve what they already possess than to strive for what they lack.<sup>33</sup> Fear tends to dominate over hope. Resistance to change, even if it appears counterintuitive from a rational point of view, arises from the tendency to associate familiarity with safety.<sup>34</sup> Maintaining the known and familiar ideology, the status quo, is often favoured over taking risks and thinking creatively about alternative views.

This resistance to alternative information makes it increasingly difficult to acknowledge and access the perspective of the other party. The process is further exacerbated by the dehumanization of the enemy. Conflicting parties tend to seek evidence that confirms their negative images of each other while resisting evidence that contradicts these views.<sup>35</sup> This cognitive bias perpetuates a cycle of hostility and hinders constructive dialogue and reconciliation between the conflicting parties.

Socio-psychological considerations are not only crucial at a political decision-making level but play a role at civil society level as well. A certain level of healing, that is, restoring a sense of safety, identity, dignity, and trust in oneself and the other, is necessary for a positive change to take place. Failure to address these issues keeps the brain in survival mode, even after the peak of violence has passed. This inhibits empathy, leads to a lower quality of life, and reduces civil society engagement, which

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<sup>27</sup> Seu, *States of Mind in Conflict*; Funk, Good, and Berry, *Healing and Peacebuilding After War*; Fitzduff, *Our Brains at War*; Waldman, *Exploring Mediation Effectiveness*; Bar-Tal and Halperin, “Nature of Socio-Psychological Barriers to Conflict Resolution”; Kelman, “Interactive Problem Solving.”

<sup>28</sup> Kelman, “Social-psychological approach to conflict analysis and resolution,” 171.

<sup>29</sup> Bar-Tal and Halperin, “Nature of Socio-Psychological Barriers to Conflict Resolution.”

<sup>30</sup> Bar-Tal and Halperin; Bar-Tal, Halperin, and Pliskin, “Why Is It So Difficult to Resolve Intractable Conflicts Peacefully?”

<sup>31</sup> Bar-Tal and Halperin, “Nature of Socio-Psychological Barriers to Conflict Resolution,” 2.

<sup>32</sup> Kelman, “Interactive Problem Solving.”

<sup>33</sup> This adheres to the ‘prospect theory,’ see: Bar-Tal and Halperin, “Nature of Socio-Psychological Barriers to Conflict Resolution.”

<sup>34</sup> As illustrated by the ‘attachment theory,’ see: Bowlby, “Bowlby-Ainsworth Attachment Theory.”

<sup>35</sup> Kelman, “Social-psychological approach to conflict analysis and resolution,” 175.

feeds into negative feedback loops that increase the risk of future outbreaks of violence.<sup>36</sup> Psychosocial recovery methods are essential to address these more intangible issues of conflicts, which often remain unaddressed under purely strategic political conflict management.<sup>37</sup>

This understanding calls for practitioners to go beyond the traditional rationalist approach, and involve the socio-psychological dimension, crucial for tackling the socio-psychological barriers conflict parties face that block progress in peaceful – and sustainable – settlements. In addition to signing peace agreements, conflict management should focus on transforming the mindsets and conflict narratives of those involved to ensure the sustainability of agreements. This first and foremost requires socio-psychological expertise, emphasizing the need to incorporate sociopsychology more prominently in conflict resolution approaches, rather than on the side lines.

### *Economic incentives*

Economic aspects of fostering peace are an important yet often under-valued component of conflict management.<sup>38</sup> One significant force that shapes conflict is the control and distribution of economic resources. Access to public funds and opportunities for corruption have consistently motivated parties to vie for power at local and national levels. These funds are frequently embedded with patronage systems that reward and incentivize violence and disruption. The politicized economy not only acts as a driver of conflict but also hinders the path to peace. Conversely, it is essential to explore how economies and business can contribute positively to sustainable conflict resolution. Beyond traditional development assistance and humanitarian aid efforts, we argue that there is a need to develop economic incentives that support lasting peace agreements and that there should be a closer connection between peace and business investments.<sup>39</sup> Individual economic and social empowerment is crucial for creating conditions that encourage individual to distance themselves from conflict, rather than resorting to violence – when faced with political disagreements.<sup>40</sup>

Conflicts impose significant direct and indirect costs on the affected regions. Violence depletes valuable economic resources that could otherwise be allocated to more productive sectors. In the aftermath of a conflict, the consequences are evident in reduced GDP growth, an unstable and less predictable economy, high unemployment rates, weakened institutions, diminished levels of investment, and heightened inflation.<sup>41</sup> Conflict-affected countries experience an average economic growth rate of -0.5 percent in the years preceding the conflict, in stark contrast to the 2 percent average observed in peaceful countries.<sup>42</sup> Business competitiveness and economic productivity are all associated with the most peaceful countries.<sup>43</sup> This entanglement of conflict and economic

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<sup>36</sup> Funk, Good, and Berry, *Healing and Peacebuilding After War*.<sup>37</sup>

Funk, Good, and Berry, *Healing and Peacebuilding After War*.<sup>38</sup>  
Wennmann, *Economic Dimensions of Peace Mediation*.

<sup>39</sup> Bell, *Economic Power-Sharing, Conflict Resolution and Development*; IEP, *Positive Peace Report 2022*; Collier, Hoeffler, and Rohner, "Beyond Greed and Grievance"; Wennmann, *Economic Dimensions of Peace Mediation*; Becker and Kruk, *Economic Development in Conflict-affected Countries*.

<sup>40</sup> Joseph et al., "Entrepreneurship and Peacebuilding," 349.

<sup>41</sup> IEP, *Positive Peace Report 2021*.

<sup>42</sup> Collier, Hoeffler, and Rohner, "Beyond Greed and Grievance."

<sup>43</sup> IEP, *Positive Peace Report 2022*.



underdevelopment is often described as the 'conflict trap,' where economic deprivation fuels conflict and, reciprocally, conflict perpetuates and sustains economic underdevelopment.<sup>44</sup> Conflict analysis requires examining this intricate relationship between economic resources and conflict dynamics.

Escaping the conflict trap can be considered essential for the sustainability of peace agreements in conflict-affected regions. Economic prosperity acts as a driver of peace and is highly effective in stabilizing a post-conflict situation. It diminishes economic grievances and incentives that fuel conflicts, and fosters personal transformation, enabling the integration of individuals into society instead of perpetuating cycles of violence in the field of conflict, thereby reducing the likelihood of conflict recurrence.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, inclusive economic growth tackles wealth inequalities that reinforce group cleavages and weaken social contracts.<sup>46</sup> This is particularly important for regions where there are horizontal inequalities related to social or ethnic disadvantage.<sup>47</sup> The link between economic inequality and the onset and durability of conflict is thus well-established, peace cannot be sustainable without long-term economic incentives to peace.

Unfortunately, governments and development organizations often focus on livelihood projects and institution building, not on creating business or building local management capacity.<sup>48</sup> International attention, a major source of income, often subsides too soon. Without any commitment to post conflict economies, economic peace dividends do not become tangible. This results in a 'commitment gap', a transition period where actors are expected to disarm in return for the promise of future economic opportunities.<sup>49</sup> Encouraging small enterprises and business start-ups is fundamental in empowering societies and in turning individuals into guarantors of peace and stability.

An economic capacity that can be considered highly relevant to include in conflict management processes is therefore the private sector. This is a particularly important and necessary source of long-term employment, and has the potential to mobilize resources and rebuild the social capital of a region through the restoration of social services.<sup>50</sup> It is thus closely associated with the number of jobs, levels of income, and the quality of livelihoods of a society.<sup>51</sup> In addition, the private sector drives a region away from reliance on a few key sectors, often dominated by a handful of powerful actors, which decreases the risk of relapse into conflict.<sup>52</sup> Fostering active, stable and competitive private sectors is a crucial element in a conflict resolution process.

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<sup>44</sup> Collier and Hoeffler, *Breaking the Conflict Trap*; Collier, Hoeffler, and Rohner, "Beyond Greed and Grievance"; Becker and Kruk, *Economic Development in Conflict-affected Countries*.

<sup>45</sup> Collier and Hoeffler, *Breaking the Conflict Trap*; Collier, Becker and Kruk, *Economic Development in Conflict-affected Countries*, 14; Joseph et al., "Entrepreneurship and Peacebuilding," 349.

<sup>46</sup> Bell, *Economic Power-Sharing, Conflict Resolution and Development*, 32.

<sup>47</sup> McIntosh and Buckley, *Economic Development in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States*, 11.

<sup>48</sup> McIntosh and Buckley, *Economic Development in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States*; Peace Dividend Initiative, "Creating a Peace Dividend Ecosystem."

<sup>49</sup> Wennmann, *Economic Dimensions of Peace Mediation*, 80; Becker and Kruk, *Economic Development in Conflict-affected Countries*, 14.

<sup>50</sup> McIntosh and Buckley, *Economic Development in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States*; Becker and Kruk, *Economic Development in Conflict-affected Countries*.

<sup>51</sup> Becker and Kruk, *Economic Development in Conflict-affected Countries*, 7.

<sup>52</sup> McIntosh and Buckley, *Economic Development in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States*.

The private sector could play a crucial role in conflict resolution, but there is an inherent risk that private sector investments in conflict-affected areas may inadvertently fuel and incentivize the dynamics of conflict.<sup>53</sup> To mitigate this risk, it is imperative to include investors, business actors, and entrepreneurs in conflict resolution processes. Their participation ensures that investments are tailored to the contextual dynamics, contributing to resilience and greater stability. Fragile and conflict-affected settings are usually the toughest markets, often compounded by weak rule of law, corruption, lower levels of security and basic services. These settings are not characterised by lack of governance but by competing sources of governance. Informal power relations influence most if not all business decisions. To better harness market forces in support of peace and allowing investments to make an impact for peace understanding the potential interaction between investments and context is paramount.<sup>54</sup> It provides a basis for strategies to minimise negative and maximise positive investment contributions to conflict and peace.

Building capacity for economic growth in post-conflict countries is necessary to reduce the risk of a return to conflict and to accelerate the improvement of well-being for everyone, particularly the conflict-affected population. Economic incentives should be included in conflict resolution processes by creating joint futures, identifying positive-sum outcomes, managing expectations in the economy, reducing the effect of spoilers, and providing peace dividends for all parties involved. Conflict-affected countries have an openness to reform that can and should be seized, and economic tools are highly effective to accelerate such a reform. Here, the key is to create a vision for the future that convinces parties that it is worthwhile to stop fighting.

Harnessing the power of economic incentives and leveraging the expertise of the private sector and entrepreneurs are essential components of effective conflict resolution. By involving economists and entrepreneurs in conflict resolution procedures from the start and comprehensively, we can foster economic growth, empower communities, and create a compelling vision for a peaceful and prosperous future, as an essential part of a conflict management process.

### *Other*

The political, socio-psychological, and economic domain are not the only drivers of conflicts. Other factors may contribute to varying degrees depending on the specific case and context of a situation. Think of historical, cultural, religious, spatial, and environmental factors and conditions that contribute to conflicts. Depending on the needs of the case, in addition to socio-psychological and economic expertise, specific expertise in these areas should also be included in the conflict management teams.

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<sup>53</sup> Hartevelde and Kaye, *Investments in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States*.

<sup>54</sup> Hartevelde and Kaye, *Investments in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States; PDI, Peace Dividend Ecosystem to Harness Market Forces for Peace*.

#### 4. Our Multidisciplinary Approach to Conflict Resolution

Conflicts are rooted in multidimensional complexity. We have seen that drivers of conflict, and conflict resolution, arise from political, socio-psychological, and economic domains. Here, a mutual reciprocity is of the order as these drivers are inherently linked.<sup>55</sup> Interactions along economic, psychological, and social-structural dimensions both within and between conflict parties shape the political environment in which governments function and define the political constraints under which they operate. To promote lasting, positive peace, an optimal environment for human potential to flourish, all drivers of conflict must be addressed holistically.<sup>56</sup> This means that one pillar of conflict management must be integrated into and coordinated with efforts undertaken in the other pillars. For example, addressing the socio-psychological barriers fosters trust-building, which functions as a basis for new political power sharing settings, which allows for more equal access to economic opportunities. Embracing a holistic approach that engages in conflict resolution through multiple levels and by multiple means will set the framework for achieving progress towards positive change and lasting peace. Therefore, we propose a way of contributing to the management of violent conflict that we deem innovative in both its holistic and multidisciplinary approach.

In this reasoning, accomplishing a holistic approach requires a long-term engagement and collaboration of a wide range of experts working in multidisciplinary teams. These teams will include sociopsychologists, economists, and mediators, and depending on the context also lawyers, engineers, artists, urban planners, and security experts. Their blend of expertise will not only allow for more comprehensive conflict analysis but also bring innovative methods of trust-building, scenario planning, and entrepreneurship into conflict management. The idea of working multidisciplinary is not unique, the approach is routinely applied in other sectors such as healthcare, security, and technology, finance, and marketing companies. Think, for example, of partnerships between law enforcement, prosecution, medical centers, and mental healthcare for abuse recovery cases. In these sectors such an approach is commonly endorsed as main mechanism and seen as essential to recognize the complexity of situations.<sup>57</sup> What is unique, is the implementation of the multidisciplinary approach in conflict management.

Additionally, exploring the connections between conflict management and other sectors can uncover valuable opportunities. One such examples is the intersection of urban planning and post-conflict reconstruction.<sup>58</sup> While reconstructing war-torn cities may not directly address deep-rooted political

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<sup>55</sup> Körppen, Schmelzle, and Wils, *Systemic Approach*; Becker and Kruk, *Economic Development Practitioners Note*.

<sup>56</sup> See e.g. IEP, *Positive Peace Report 2022*.

<sup>57</sup> For healthcare, see Fier, “Multidisciplinaire Aanpak+”; Hickman et al. “Multidisciplinary team interventions”; Jefferies and Chan, “Multidisciplinary Team Working”; Persson et al. “Nursing Homes Multidisciplinary Team’s Perspective.” Multidisciplinary team working has been endorsed as the main mechanism to ensure truly holistic care for patients throughout their disease trajectory. The multi-dimensional skillset and recognition of the complexity of health conditions are seen as essential to optimize health outcomes. Also familiar with the multidisciplinary approach are institutions that help with domestic and sexual violence and abuse, which calls for a partnership between law enforcement, prosecution, medical centres and mental health care to stop the violence and provide treatment for recovery. For companies see McKinsey Quarterly, *ING’s Agile Transformation*. In order to achieve agility, flexibility and high-quality service these companies work in multidisciplinary teams of marketing and product specialists, data analysts, user-experience designers and IT engineers.

<sup>58</sup> See Venhaus and Dreiseitl, “Sustainable Site Design Process”; Wahba, Bordia, and Chun, “Urban Resilience Through Post-Conflict Reconstruction.” Urban spaces are often microcosms of social place, and urban planning should thus account for the

divisions, it presents an opportunity to rebuild public spaces in a manner that promotes reconciliation. Post-war cities require more than mere physical reconstruction; they necessitate a shift in political economy away from the remnants of conflict. Urban planning can play a vital role in this process by contributing to the reduction of socio-economic disparities in residential areas and geographic regions affected by conflict.

We therefore propose a multidisciplinary approach that not only underscores the significance of working with diverse teams but also highlights the importance of forging connections with other sectors. By recognizing the interdependencies and addressing them through multidisciplinary collaborations, we aim to maximize the potential of conflict management, a sector which has historically operated in isolated silos.<sup>59</sup>

### *Method*

The intention of the multidisciplinary approach is to invite a conscious and deliberate shift in the mindset of those involved and a collaboration in developing a shared vision and narrative for the future. Creating the necessary conditions for open-minded dialogue is crucial, as it enables individuals and groups to embrace empathy and inclusiveness for others, and to reconsider their perspectives. To achieve this, we suggest that the facilitating entity<sup>60</sup> will form a multidisciplinary team comprising individuals with desired profiles, capabilities, and experiences, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives and expertise.

Through a comprehensive and multi-dimensional conflict analysis, the team explores socio-psychological barriers, political constraints, economic incentives, and sector specific opportunities, enabling the transformation of conflict dynamics by unfreezing entrenched positions. Conducting such a conflict analysis requires a nuanced understanding of the intricate web of causal interactions, time delays, and inherent resistances that hinder the linear progression of peacebuilding initiatives. Adopting a systemic perspective, this analysis delves into the complex dynamics of reinforcing and counteracting feedback loops, aiming to identify recurring patterns and the key driving factors that sustain tensions in protracted conflicts.<sup>61</sup> It therefore draws attention to the underlying causes and resistances and the need to find ways of addressing the mindsets connected with the dominant attitudes in polity and society.

Central to this approach is the careful selection of dialogue participants, prioritizing inclusivity and representation from diverse backgrounds, ideologies, and professions. We recognize the importance of involving traditionally underrepresented groups, such as the youth, in conflict management processes, providing them with meaningful opportunities to participate. This inclusive process is

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unique social, economic, environmental, and spatial endowments of a place. To achieve sustainable site development a wide range of expertise is required, accomplished by a multidisciplinary design effort.

<sup>59</sup> As is confirmed by High Representative Josep Borrell in his speech to the EU Ambassadors at the Annual Conference of 2022.

<sup>60</sup> MIRCURY

<sup>61</sup> Körppen, Schmelzle, and Wils, *Systemic Approach to Conflict Transformation*, 25.

instrumental in achieving comprehensive and creative outcomes. By assembling a group of representative influentials who share intention, mandate, confidence, and sense of importance, we create the necessary foundation for meaningful progress.

The multidisciplinary approach consists of three core components: trust- and narrative building dialogues, socio-economic investment projects and social platforms. Through these we aim to facilitate constructive engagement, innovative initiatives, and broader avenues for communication and mindset shifts.

### Dialogues

The first step to foster the conditions for sustainable conflict management is to confront the socio-psychological barriers that hinder reconciliation. These barriers can account for the dynamics of recurring behavioural patterns within a system, which withhold actors in a system from adapting their behaviour according to proclaimed goals, like promoting peace. Addressing these seemingly ‘irrational’ resistances necessitates a thorough exploration of the hidden dimensions and secondary gains at play, such as ethnic outbidding, mutual disappointment, and dilemmas of asymmetry.<sup>62</sup> Mapping these is an important initial step towards initiating change in the ‘frozen’ conflict supporting repertoire.

Here, the assumption is that the persistence of socio-psychological barriers and limited political cooperation stems from a lack of sufficient information and understanding of each other’s humanity, objectives, hopes, and fears. The dialogues are meant to foster trust-building by reducing ignorance among conflicting parties and promoting empathy among individuals and groups. In these dialogues, parties are encouraged to depart from the usual norms that govern their interactions, allowing for a greater openness to alternative perspectives and a genuine attempt to understand one another.<sup>63</sup> Here, we go a level deeper than conflict settlement, as we aim for structural change and the development of new relationships. To achieve this, innovative approaches grounded in neuroscience, psychology, and behavioural science are applied.

One key element of these dialogues are dignity/non-violent communication sessions. During these sessions, participants are encouraged to openly share their experiences of dignity violations while also acknowledging the experiences of others. By fostering an atmosphere where individuals feel included, respected, acknowledged, and recognized for their inherent worth, we honour each other’s dignity.<sup>64</sup> This mutual honouring of dignity often leads to a transformative shift in the dynamics of relationships, by creating a mutual bond and the healing of shared injuries.<sup>65</sup> Related is addressing the role of neuroscience in conflict. There is often a tension between the parts of our brains that deal with fear, instincts, and memories and those that serve analytic reasoning. Understanding this balance, or lack thereof, can help explain why social tensions can arise easily and why killings and

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<sup>62</sup> Körppen, Schmelzle, and Wils, *Systemic Approach to Conflict Transformation*, 30-35.

<sup>63</sup> Bar-Tal and Halperin, “Nature of Socio-Psychological Barriers to Conflict Resolution”; Kelman, “Interactive Problem Solving,” 193.

<sup>64</sup> Hicks, *Leading with Dignity*, 8.

<sup>65</sup> Hart, “Building Peace in Complex Contexts,” 67. See also: Hicks and Tutu, *Dignity: the Essential Role it Plays in Resolving Conflict*.

genocide can occur in various contexts, such as Uganda, Myanmar, and Ukraine. Furthermore, recognizing how bicultural differences can affect perspectives provides insight into the potential breeding grounds for human conflict. These sessions play a vital role in cultivating trust and creating an environment that prioritizes safety, empathy, and understanding, setting the stage for a more meaningful and cooperative dialogue.

Another core element involves systemic work sessions grounded in the systems theory. This theory examines how different parts of a system impact one another to maintain overall stability. To grasp the system as a whole, one must consider the interaction of relationships among parts, their interconnectedness, and the feedback dynamics between them.<sup>66</sup> Systemic work sessions provide essential tools to explore the ways individuals and groups interact with each other to fulfil individual needs and form a cohesive social unit, which offers insight into the different commitments to positions each group has.<sup>67</sup> By adopting a network-oriented perspective and mapping the patterns of interaction and feedback loops, these sessions address the dynamics within a system that impede the potential for change. This enables the group to collectively define and pursue peacebuilding needs that are mutually acceptable.

The dialogues will furthermore incorporate the approach of future scenario planning, providing participants with a powerful tool to construct shared understandings and establish clearer intentions for the future.<sup>68</sup> These sessions will elucidate the different futures that are possible and help conflicting actors to shape, and ultimately create, their jointly envisioned future. These sessions are thus not focused on predicting or simply imagining the future; instead, they actively involve participants in the transformative process of shaping it, thereby moving away from the status quo.

The key outcome of engaging in dialogue is not an agreement, but the possibility of developing an entirely different conflict narrative.<sup>69</sup> This process is facilitated through strategic narrative practice, which aims to foster collaboration and disrupt the divisive nature of dominant narratives that tend to exacerbate differences.<sup>70</sup> By embracing complexity and diversity within the narrative landscape, strategic narrative practice creates a pathway to collaboration. As participants collaborate on the creation of a future narrative, the narrative landscape within groups, as well as across groups, can change.<sup>71</sup> This forms a vital general element of the dialogues, as participants should begin to hold the initial conflict-supporting narratives differently and embrace an alternative story for the future.

In this manner, an effective transformation of relationships, mindsets and conflict narratives takes place.

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<sup>66</sup> Ricigliano, Robert, *Making Peace Last*, 21-22.

<sup>67</sup> Körppen, Schmelzle, and Wils, *Systemic Approach*, 36.

<sup>68</sup> ReosPartners, "Method: Transformative Scenarios."

<sup>69</sup> Seu, *States of Mind in Conflict*, 20.

<sup>70</sup> Cobb, Sultanli, and Castel, *Collaborating Across Differences*, 40.

<sup>71</sup> Cobb, Sultanli, and Castel, *Collaborating Across Differences*, 36.

### Socio-economic peace investments

A new narrative requires tangible support in practice.<sup>72</sup> Socio-economic investment projects are therefore established to reinforce the reconciliation narrative, deliver real-life successes, and inspire the wider community. These projects should be politically relevant, non-partisan, societally important, and carried out in close cooperation with local partners and the private sector.<sup>73</sup> Engaging local communities and stakeholders is essential to ensure contextual relevance, sustainability, and address the specific needs of affected communities.<sup>74</sup> Collaborative action between dialogue participants, local stakeholders, and the private sector enables rigorous due diligence and maximizes impact and returns through meaningful partnerships.

The type of project is determined by the dialogue group, and various areas can be targeted, including administrative improvements, private sector development, social initiatives, and economic empowerment. Examples include looking to strengthen entrepreneurship and peace positive investments and utilize future economic incentives by developing low- and high-tech start-ups that strive for equal opportunity, meritocracy, and ability. These can be complemented by addressing governance improvements, such as decentralisation or justice sector reform, addressing societal challenges such as community relations, education and segregation, or urban planning in post-conflict neighbourhoods. These projects can be engineered to foster pathways to economic prosperity, transform the livelihoods of people in conflict and contribute to positive change. In this manner, investments can contribute to the dynamics of resilience and peace.<sup>75</sup>

It is important to consider sustainability beyond the duration of the socio-economic investment projects. Therefore, alongside project implementation, a focus on capacity-building efforts is crucial. Providing training, skills development, and knowledge-sharing opportunities to local individuals and communities enhances their ability to actively participate in and benefit from the projects. By equipping them with the necessary tools and resources, they can become empowered agents of change and contribute to the long-term success and sustainability of the initiatives. Additionally, adopting a flexible and adaptive management approach allows for necessary adjustments and improvements along the way. This iterative process of learning and adaptation contributes to the effectiveness and long-term success of the projects.

### Social Platforms

As the process of trust building and socio-economic investment projects is underway, the multidisciplinary approach will shift towards promoting public debate and involving incumbent political leaders in embracing the new reconciliation narrative. ‘Selling outwards,’ gaining a buy-in from the wider public, is decisive for the success of conflict management and reconciliation

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<sup>72</sup> See e.g.: Beardsley, *The Mediation Dilemma*.

<sup>73</sup> Bell, *Economic Power Sharing*; McIntosh and Buckley, *Economic Development in Fragile States*.

<sup>74</sup> De Coning, Muto, and Saraiva, *Adaptive Mediation and Conflict Resolution*; Lehti, *Era of Private Peacemakers*.

<sup>75</sup> Hartevelde and Kaye, *Investments in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States*.

narratives.<sup>76</sup> By actively participating in public and political debates and decision-making processes, pro-reconciliation influentials become catalysts for mindset change on a macro level.<sup>77</sup>

To achieve this, social platforms will be established where the influentials interact with citizens and elites, fostering constructive relations at the local and/or national level. The socio-economic investment projects serve as an access point to initiate a dynamic exchange between influentials and officials, addressing high-level issues that impact the sustainability of conflict. This engagement is necessary to challenge elements of the societal “status quo,” including politicians, government officials, and entrenched business interests.

These social platforms bridge local initiatives with national-level engagement. By creating an alternative perspective for national political leadership, they aim to reform formal political processes and negotiations. By elevating local initiatives to the domestic and regional levels, these platforms seek to create an enabling environment for effective negotiation and implementation. Ultimately, management of conflict requires binding agreements that can only be achieved at the official level. However, to create a favourable empowerment for such agreements, it is essential to involve diverse sectors of society in the process.

The social platforms aspire to reach as many segments of the society as possible to inspire collective action. In addition to leveraging traditional social media platforms, we will embrace a creative approach to engage diverse communities. We encourage the exploration of innovative avenues such as films, theatre, and festivals to challenge entrenched beliefs, foster a sense of shared humanity and ignite change. These creative mediums serve as powerful tools for storytelling, which is necessary to amplify the reach and impact of the new reconciliatory narrative and vision of the future.

These three components – dialogues, socio-economic investment projects, social platforms – are not stand-alone activities but are designed to complement the other in an integrated process run by multidisciplinary teams. The multidisciplinary nature of these teams is precisely what enables these components to function together in a holistic process.

### *Applicability*

The multidisciplinary approach is results-oriented and flexible, meaning it can be meaningfully applied to a number of cases to enhance the impact of conflict management measures. Due to its multidisciplinary nature, the approach can be used in many different types of conflicts.

Currently, the multidisciplinary approach is being implemented through a project in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Here, the objective is to overcome the damaging effects of a persistent post-conflict political stalemate and foster more resilient conflict management and peacebuilding.

For a detailed overview of how the multidisciplinary approach is operationalized, please refer to the process design example below.

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<sup>76</sup> Körppen, Schmelzle, and Wils, *Systemic Approach*, 47.

<sup>77</sup> Bar-Tal, Halperin, and Pliskin, “Why Is It So Difficult to Resolve Intractable Conflicts Peacefully,” 87.



## 6. Conclusion

We have reasoned that traditional conflict resolution practices appear inadequate to produce the desired results. When a peace agreement is signed and international interest has subsided, people are often left with a legal document, unsettled relationships, and an ineffective economy. If conflict resolutions want to be effective, it must adapt to the new challenges an increasingly complex and changing international context advances.

We have proposed an approach to the resolution of conflicts that aims to be innovative in both its holistic and multidisciplinary approach. We underline the need for complementarity between security related, political, socio-economic, and cultural factors in conflict resolution. Building on the routine use of such a mechanism in healthcare, business, and schooling sectors, we suggest that it may provide an opportunity to recognize the complex conditions of conflict and ensure a holistic approach that strives for positive peace, an optimum environment for human potential to flourish.

Lives depend on conflict management. A structured, ongoing process of research, reflection and development is needed to strengthen and improve the multidisciplinary method. The question here is not whether it works, but whether it works better than any other approach.

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