

Chapter 6

The Confman.2002 Data Set

Developing Cases and Indices of Conflict Management to Predict Conflict Resolution

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1 INTRODUCTION

There can be no doubt that conflict in general and international conflicts in particular are amongst the most important phenomena that we should study. Tens of millions of people have died as a result of conflict in the last century, untold destruction was wreaked on many societies, and millions of people lost all and became refugees as a result of some conflict or another. No other social process threatens the stability and order of the international system more than conflict. No other social process threatens the complete elimination of another person, group or nation. Clearly, there is much to be learned about conflict and how best to resolve it, to avoid the undesirable and negative consequences associated with conflict. Knowledge about the conditions and causes of conflict, and an understanding of its dynamics and modes of termination can help us transform a potentially violent process into a more constructive one. This chapter purports to suggest a way, a method, of thinking about conflict management, and presenting some ideas for scholars and policy makers that might suggest how best to approach a conflict. Our focus here is avowedly practical, though our approach is strongly theoretical (Deutsch, 1973).

As is the case with other phenomena we study, different approaches and methods are used by different people to shed light on the question at hand. The single case study approach has been the dominant research strategy in conflict studies. This approach focuses on an in-depth study of a single case of conflict to highlight its dynamics or mode of termination. At times the single study is used to illuminate a hypothesis; at times it is a mostly descriptive

account of what happened in any given conflict. Either way, a case study approach is useful to trace processes and to build up a reservoir of knowledge on comparative cases of conflict (see, for instance, Dahlitz, 1999).

As well as looking at conflicts in isolation, there has been a strong tendency among many scholars to view all international conflicts as discrete, single or isolated events. No patterns were looked for, nor was there any thought given to features such as continuing conflicts, repeated conflicts, same parties in conflict etc. The study of international conflict was thus mostly the study of one conflict, and its causes, evolution and termination were generally discussed in terms of unique features. Here we want to present a very different logic and a very different methodology.

There can be no doubt that international conflict, and how best to deal with it, is one of the most important issues social and behavioral scientists face. We are also convinced that if we are to make any progress in the study of conflict and its resolution, we have to adopt a different approach; an approach that recognizes that conflicts have many features in common, and that we can make better decisions about conflicts when we learn more about conflict in general, rather than about a specific conflict in particular. With that in mind we have been working on developing a high quality data set on international conflict and its resolution, and using statistical and computer software programs to seek out patterns and trends that may tell us something about the initiation of hostilities, consequences of conflicts, and the conclusion of a peace treaty or a compromise. We believe that the data set we present below (CONFMAN 2002) takes us a long way toward achieving these objectives.

2 CONFLICTS—AGGREGATE STUDY OF

For a very long time we had little or no aggregate data or information on social events. We may have had aggregate information on individual events, such as diseases or intelligence, for quite some time, but no general information on, say, wars, strikes, demonstrations, alliances, etc. These events were assumed to be too complex to study in the aggregate. No one collected information on such events; no one believed it could be a useful exercise.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s the first major efforts to collect data on social events in a scientific manner were undertaken. Pioneers like Sorokin, Richardson and especially Quincy Wright (1965) began studying and recording events such as conflicts and wars, using a systematic approach, and carefully evaluating and measuring every aspect of these social events. The main concern of these three great pioneers of aggregate studies in the social sciences was very much with the processes of conflict and political violence.