Twenty-to-Two, Women and Men! Coercion and Respect Can Be Combined

How can cycles of humiliation among conflict partners be contained by third parties without inflicting even more humiliation on them?

Colin Powell, former U.S. Secretary of State, recommended a *power strategy* in military conflict. He wanted something like five times as many forces on his side as in the opponent's camp. Donald Rumsfeld, U.S. Defense Secretary, stood for a more mobile, flexible, and inexpensive approach. The two strategies share the element of overpowering – for Powell it is *overpowering with numbers*, and for Rumsfeld *overpowering with speed and the element of surprise*. I agree that coercion and overpowering may be necessary to ensure local and global peace. But this *overpowering coercion should be wedded to respect*.

I was amazed at the low rate of crime and unrest in Cairo, a metropolis of approximately 10 to 15 million people. A high degree of *social control* is part of

Egyptian culture. I frequently witnessed incidents such as the following situation, which gave testimony to this social control:

An accident occurs in the street in the middle of overcrowded Cairo. The two drivers get out of their cars and angrily survey the damage. They shout and jump at each others necks. They scream, they shove and hit one another.

Around this scene, in the street, in coffee houses, in shops, people watch attentively, their faces reflecting seriousness, urgency, respect and involvement. About ten to twenty men, usually young and strong, slowly approach the two men. They stand in two groups of five to ten men each, with each group assuming responsibility for one of the opponents, restraining and talking to him. The restraint used is enough so that neither opponent can hit or hurt the other, but both can still shout and scream and make brief attacking lunges.

Each group speaks with the man to which it has assigned itself, talking calmly and with respect. They show him that they understand the urgency which forces a man to behave in such a dramatic manner (a person who is *outside* him/herself is almost holy in Egypt). The "facilitators" try to understand the nature of the conflict and propose various compromises to resolve it. They do not focus unduly on the rational side of the conflict, they rather constantly grant respect to the fact that the opponents are psychologically overburdened and that the rupture of social peace has to be healed.

After ten or fifteen minutes the opponents begin to calm down. If it's appropriate, they agree on a compromise. If necessary, some facilitators promise to act as witnesses and/or enforcers of the compromises. The conflict is over. The opponents leave. The facilitators go back to their previous occupations without a lot of fanfare. Patching up conflicts is routine.

The conflict resolution and containment street scenes that I witnessed usually included a ratio of 20 to 2 ratio, or at least 10 to 2. 20 physically powerful men were required to *cool* and *pacify* two clashing opponents. If this scenario is a blueprint for conflict resolution, resources for the prevention, containment, and resolution of conflicts around the world need to be increased. *Overpowering* numbers of blue helmets/global police persons with a credible *overpowering* mandate and well-devised *overpowering* strategies are required. The Powell and Rumsfeld approaches need to be intelligently combined with each other, and embedded into *respect for opponents* as underlying orientation.

In many regions – the so-called *failing states* – the absence of good police forces must be remedied. In other regions it is the highjacking of police forces by elite interests that has to be addressed. Resources invested in prevention and containment are well spent; they prevent the much higher investments that are necessary post-mayhem.

The international community can develop a wealth of creative ideas based on the 20 to 2 ratio blueprint. Why is it that hundreds of thousands of soldiers are available, but not hundreds of thousands of inspectors? Or, what about human shields preventing atrocities? In the final part of his book *Getting to Peace*,

William Ury (1999) suggests ten roles for Homo negotiator: the provider, the teacher, the bridge builder, the mediator, the arbiter, the equalizer, the healer, the witness, the referee, and the peace-keeper.

It is interesting to observe how the Egyptian approach combines elements of coercion and respect from traditionally male and female roles. The scene combines "female" talking, understanding, empathizing, perspective-taking, and healing on one side, and a "male" potential for overpowering, coercion, force, violence, and aggression on the other. "Male" strength and moderated counter-aggression restrain the fighters. "Female" awareness of the cohesion of the social fabric creates an atmosphere in which the fighters feel they are being taken seriously. To combine the "male" aspect of force with "female" empathy could be the modern recipe of conflict resolution. The old "male" strategy of using destructive force is not appropriate in an interdependent modern *global village*, but the "male" ability to use restraining force continues to be an important tool.

Today's men and women are invited to share roles – men to use more of the traditional "female" role characteristics and women to become more "visible." Formerly, visibility was connected to the man guarding the frontiers separating *inside* from *outside*, just as clothes protect and hide the *inside* from *outside* viewers. There is an Egyptian saying, "The woman is the neck and the man the head; the woman turns the neck wherever she wants." In other words, Egyptian women feel that they create relevant content *inside* the home, which is presented to the *outside* by their men. With the disappearance of an *outside* sphere in a *global village*, this "division of labor" loses its significance, letting women and men alike dwell together *inside*, in intimate privacy, and appear visibly *outside*.

UNESCO's Culture of Peace Programme urges the strengthening of the "female" aspect in conflict resolution efforts. The list of potential female contributions is a long one (adapted from Lindner, 1999): using multitrack, "track II," and citizen-based diplomacy; installing early warning institutions; rethinking the notion of state sovereignty; setting up projects to study and understand the history of potential conflict areas, collecting this information, and making it available to decision makers; using psychology on a macro level, taking identity as a bridge; keeping communication going between warring parties; talking behind the scenes; including people besides the warlords in peace negotiations; developing conflict-resolution teams with less hierarchy and more creativity; setting up mediation teams; installing "truth commissions"; allowing warring parties to feel the world community's care, respect, and concern; taking opponents in a conflict out of their usual environment; taking the adversaries' personal feelings and emotions seriously; recognizing the importance of human dignity; introducing sustainable long-term approaches on the social and ecological level; progressing from spending aid money after a disaster to allocating resources to prevent it; and so on.

According to the *Culture of Peace Programme* and conflict resolution experts around the world, these "female" efforts must be combined with a certain amount of "male" coercion to achieve peace. The term *social control* expresses the combination of both aspects. On the national level, police and prisons represent some of the coercive aspects (incidentally more effective if the average citizen does not carry weapons), while institutions like lawyers, courts, and rehabilitation programs have the potential to fulfill the role of social caring and healing. Such a *culture of peace*, merging formerly separate "male" and "female" role descriptions, contains cycles of humiliation among conflict parties without humiliating them.

If we desire world peace, we need to build global awareness and global institutions that are strong enough for the task of social control. On April 17, 2003, Kofi Annan explained that he rejects the idea of the UN taking on a task it cannot fulfill. Annan wants resources and a strong mandate to avoid a UN failure caused by member states withholding support. He says, in short, that you should not send out a boy with a stick to kill a lion, then lament the boy's ineptitude.