Solution Oriented Conflict Transformation

SYRIA

Issued March 19th 2012: A Statement by Prof. Johan Galtung on

the Syrian Crisis[1]

Wе all feel desperate watching the horrible killing, feeling the suffering of the bereaved, the whole people. But, what to do? Could it be that the UN, and governments in general, have a tendency to make the same mistake, again and again, of putting the cart before the horse?

The formula they use is generally:

[1] *Get rid of No. 1[Mugabe-Saddam-Ghaddafi-Assad etc]* as key responsible, using sanctions; then

[2] *Cease-fire*, appealing to the parties, or intervening, imposing;

[3] *Negotiation* among all legitimate parties; and from that

[4] *A political **solution*** as a compromise between the positions.

It looks so logical. There is a key responsible, President Assad, ordering the killing; get rid of him by all means. Then the cease-fire, the fire ceasing; then negotiation, and then the solution emerges. Logical, yes; but maybe not very wise.

No. [1], as identified by his own, by outsiders, and by the media in a Western No. 1-oriented culture, no doubt matters. But being that important, he may also hold some keys to **the solutions**. He may later step down or be ousted, but first listen to his words.

No. [2], Cease-fire: Why would they do it with no **acceptable solution** in sight? Would that not be capitulation, even to outsiders? Useful for a break in the fighting, rest for the fighters, time to redeploy and to rearm; but neither **necessary** nor **sufficient for a solution**.

No. [3], Negotiation, with a major party eliminated, and a *de facto* monitored capitulation? Whose agenda will be favored by that?

No. [4], A political solution? Indeed yes, but under these three conditions the outcome is given in advance.

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[1] http://www.transcend.org/tms/2012/03/syria/

Let us look at the opposite order, **[4]-[3]-[2]-[1].** We **start with a solution**, then negotiation about details, if successful, even compelling, an armistice may emerge. And then, maybe, No. 1 steps down, having done his part of the job.

But how can anybody find a **solution** when the killing is rampant? Well, the motivation is high. Make a cease-fire and the motivation dwindles, as we saw in Sri Lanka. Tourism picked up again, but the **search for solutions** abated down to zero, and the cease-fire was used by both for the purposes mentioned above.

But how can there be a **solution** when key actors have their arms full of arms? Who said they should do it? They have deputies; moreover, the country is full of people who have given thoughts to the problems, not only to who is bad and who is good. And who are not only victory-oriented, but **solution-oriented**.

The search could be for solution**s**, not for *the* solution. Let 1,000 dialogues blossom, in each quarter, each village, enriching the gross national idea product, GNIP. UN-supported facilitators, with knowledge of mediation, rather than with guns and binoculars.

To do this, let the parties, outside and inside Syria, talk. Let them state their goals, the Syria they would like to see.

First, an image of the goals of some outside parties:

Israel: wants Syria divided in smaller parts, detached from Iran, status quo for Golan Heights, and a new map for the Middle East;
USA: wants what Israel wants and control over oil, gas, pipelines;
UK: wants what USA wants;
France: co-responsible with the UK for post-Ottoman colonization in the area, wants confirmed friendship France-Syria;
Russia: wants a naval base in the Mediterranean, and an "ally";
China: wants what Russia wants;
EU: wants both what Israel-USA wants and what France wants;
Iran: wants Shia power;
Iraq: majority Shia, wants what Iran wants;
Lebanon: wants to know what it wants;
Saudi-Arabia: wants Sunni power;
Egypt: wants to emerge as the conflict-manager;
Qatar: wants the same as Saudi Arabia and Egypt;
Gulf States: want what USA-UK wants;
The Arab League: wants no repetition of Libya, tries human rights;
Turkey: wants to assert itself relative to the (Israel-USA) successors to the (France-UK-Italy) successors to the Ottoman Empire, and a buffer zone in Syria.
UN: wants to emerge as the conflict manager.

Over this looms a dark cloud: Syria is in the zone between Israel-USA-NATO and Shanghai Cooperation Organization-SCO, both expanding.

Then, an image of the goals of some inside parties:

Alawis (15%): want to remain in power, "for the best of all";
Shias in general: want the same;
Sunnis: want majority rule, their rule, democracy;
Jews, Christians, minorities: want security, fearing Sunni rule;
Kurds: want high level autonomy, some community with other Kurds.

Every single statement here can be challenged and challenged again. But let us for the sake of the mental experiment assume that this image, with 16 outside and five inside parties, is more right than wrong. Is the terrible violence outside "terrorism", or inside "state terrorism", against those wanting democracy?

Both. But asking who is more responsible in a powder keg, nitrate, sulfur, carbon, or the blow, or who constructed the powder keg (France) is not helpful.

Rather, is there any solution in sight? Not by violence. Whoever wins will be deeply resented by the rest, in a house and a region so deeply divided against itself. Not by sanctions, regardless of how deep, and broad, with Russia and China participating. It is like punishing a person with microbes and the immune system fighting inside for having fever. The weaker the patient, the more contagious.

What comes to mind is a Swiss solution. **One Syria**, federal, with local autonomy, even down to the village level, with Sunnis, Shias and Kurds having relations to their own across the borders. International peacekeeping, also for the protection of minorities. And non-aligned, which rules out foreign bases and flows of arms, but does not rule out compulsory arbitration for the Golan Heights (and June 1967 in general), with Israeli UN membership at stake.

Napoleon invaded to control Switzerland in 1798-1806, but gave up. Will the present Napoleons, Netanyahu-Obama, do the same?

The alternatives are two more catastrophes: open war with Saudi-Jordan-Qatar; or R2P (Responsibility to Protect) *a la* Libya, with 7,700 bombs and missiles. The winner is resented; and with no sustainable solution in sight.