

The Changing Nature of Conflict: The Need for a Conflict-Sensitive Approach

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1 Introduction

Conflicts and complex emergencies provide the most pervasive context for contemporary humanitarian action as they drive more than 80% of current humanitarian need.¹ Conflicts are a universal feature of society, although every conflict is unique in terms of its actors, causes, consequences and dynamics. For humanitarian organisations

the word ‘conflict’ is usually used with reference to countries where there is politically motivated violence, internally or internationally, and where several parties (e.g. states, communities, political parties or groups) are involved in acting out their disagreement using violence.²

It is imperative for humanitarian actors to understand the dynamics of conflict contexts as they seek to bring relief and protection to vulnerable populations caught up in complex emergencies. A 2011 study by Zicherman et al.³ found that 85% of humanitarian practitioners surveyed had witnessed aid inadvertently causing or exacerbating an existing conflict. The respondents agreed that *understanding the context*⁴ was one of the top challenges for any aid worker. The instrumentalisation

¹Global Peace Index (2016), http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/GPI-2016-Report_2.pdf; UN WHS Secretariat (2015).

²Trocaire (2011), p. 6, <http://www.trocaire.org/resources/policyandadvocacy/conflict-sensitivity-toolkit>.

³Zicherman et al. (2011), p. 6. This study surveyed five members of the Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, ActionAid International, CAFOD, CARE International, Plan International and World Vision International.

⁴*Id.*, p. 9.

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of humanitarian aid in the complex emergencies of the early 1990s led to the realisation that *when international assistance is given in the context of a violent conflict, it becomes a part of that context and thus also of the conflict.*⁵

Awareness, both of self and of the context one operates in, is critical to gaining access to vulnerable populations, negotiating with social gatekeepers, maintaining security of humanitarian personnel, remaining neutral in a politically charged and polarised environment, coordinating with peacekeeping and development actors and minimising the inadvertent harmful impact of humanitarian aid.⁶

The changing character and protracted nature of contemporary conflicts have also forced the humanitarian community to re-evaluate its response to violent crises and demand greater political leadership in preventing and ending violent conflicts. The international organisation Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF) while explaining its decision to pull out of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) of 2016 said that a ‘fig-leaf of good intentions’⁷ was no longer acceptable as a sop for failure of States to fulfil international humanitarian commitments and their obligations to uphold humanitarian and refugee law.

The deliberate targeting of aid workers and humanitarian establishments,⁸ the widening gap between humanitarian needs and available funding, the blatant violation of international humanitarian and human rights law, unprecedented levels of mass displacement and the lack of protection for at-risk populations point to the need for a seismic shift in humanitarian response to contemporary crises.⁹ The recently concluded WHS identified political leadership to prevent and end conflicts as Core Responsibility #1 in its Agenda for Humanity.¹⁰ Other shared responsibilities include upholding the norms that safeguard humanity, protecting at-risk populations, shifting focus of aid from delivering relief to ending need and, finally, investing in capacity building.¹¹

While the modern humanitarian profession is said to have originated from the battlefields of Solferino in 1859, systematic analysis of conflicts and the call to mainstream conflict-sensitive humanitarian responses to complex emergencies is a relatively recent phenomenon. Conflict analysis as a field of study progressed during the Cold War years primarily to handle the tensions between the American and Soviet power blocs.¹² Using tools such as system analysis and game theory, analysts tried to understand the dynamics of conflict in terms of changing relations

⁵Anderson (1999).

⁶Loane (2011).

⁷Médecins Sans Frontières (2016, May 5), <http://www.msf.org.uk/article/msf-to-pull-out-of-world-humanitarian-summit>; UN Secretary-General (2016).

⁸In 2015, 75 hospitals managed or supported by Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF) were bombed.

⁹MSF (2016, May 5) and UN Secretary-General (2016).

¹⁰UN Secretary General, *ibid.*

¹¹World Humanitarian Summit (2016).

¹²Wallensteen (2007).

between conflict parties,¹³ assessing the risks of a global conflict in a nuclear world and strategic analysis.¹⁴ The 1960s and 1970s saw a broadening of conflict analysis to study needs, greed and grievances to understand intrastate, local, societal conflicts that were plaguing nations, especially the United States.¹⁵ Peace research expanded the meaning of violence to incorporate cultural and structural violence, and analysts differentiated between negative peace, i.e. absence of physical violence, and positive peace, i.e. a condition characterised by cooperation, freedom from fear and want, absence of exploitation, freedom of action and prevalence of economic development, pluralism, justice, equality and dynamism.¹⁶

With the thaw in the Cold War and the scaling down of some regional and interstate conflicts, the 1980s and 1990s saw a renewed interest in conflict resolution.¹⁷ Simultaneously, for humanitarian practitioners, conflict of the early 1990s, especially the Rwandan genocide, resulted in the Do No Harm doctrine and the rise of a conflict-sensitive approach to humanitarian action.¹⁸ Since 2001, after 9/11 and the subsequent *War on Terror*, however, conflict analysis again became preoccupied with strategic analysis, especially in conflicts relating to terrorism.¹⁹

While tools for conflict analysis continue to evolve and become more sophisticated, applying the conflict-sensitive approach to humanitarian action remains problematic.²⁰ The divergent origins of conflict analysis have led to a multitude of frameworks, all of which must be understood to comprehensively analyse conflicts.²¹ However, the complexity of contexts in which humanitarian actors operate, lack of access to information and the speed at which humanitarian professionals are required to respond leave little scope for sophisticated analysis and data collection.²² Thus, conflict analysis in humanitarian practice is a constant trade-off between the desirable level of analysis and what is feasible within a given context.

¹³The Cold War demonstrated how allies such as the US, UK and USSR who fought a major war together can get locked into a dangerous conflagration within a matter of few years. At the same time, the coming together of two former enemies, Germany and France, under the same bloc showed a potential for reversing the conflict dynamics (Wallensteen 2007).

¹⁴Wallensteen (2007) and Ramsbotham et al. (2011).

¹⁵Wallensteen (2007).

¹⁶Galtung (1967), http://www.transcend.org/files/Galtung_Book_unpub_Theories_of_Peace_-_A_Synthetic_Approach_to_Peace_Thinking_1967.pdf; Galtung (1969), pp. 167–191.

¹⁷Wallensteen (2007).

¹⁸Conflict Sensitivity Consortium (Undated), <http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/do-no-harm-local-capacities-for-peace-project>; Zicherman et al. (2011).

¹⁹Wallensteen (2007).

²⁰Zicherman et al. (2011).

²¹Wallensteen (2007).

²²Zicherman et al. (2011).

2 Definition and Types of Conflict

There is no one universally accepted definition of conflict or a theoretical framework that presents a typology of conflict in terms of its scale, intensity and consequences. However, according to the following definition, which is widely accepted and considered to be comprehensive, conflict is a *social situation in which a minimum of two actors (parties) strive to acquire at the same moment in time an available set of scarce resources*.²³ International humanitarian law identifies two main types of armed conflicts during which it is applicable²⁴:

- *international armed conflict* between two or more opposing States;
- *non-international armed conflict* between governmental forces and non-governmental armed groups or, in certain cases, between such groups only.

The category of ‘other situations of violence’ is frequently used by humanitarian actors, especially the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to describe situations of violence that do not fall under either of the two above-mentioned legal categories.²⁵ The challenges to classify situations of violence due to imprecise criteria of conflict categories in legal texts are recognised and accepted.²⁶

The classification of armed conflicts is often linked to political considerations as parties involved tend to interpret facts in accordance with interest.²⁷ Commenting on water conflicts, Kalpakian opines that ‘serious conflict means war, tense diplomatic standoffs, insurgencies and openly hostile diplomatic relations. Water disputes can and often do occur between states that have no serious conflicts with each other’.²⁸ Other scholars, such as Zeitoun, however, disagree²⁹:

We need to make a distinction between violent conflict and conflict itself. . . . Absence of war does not mean absence of conflict. . . . In Chad, in Western Darfur, you have different tribes, sometimes members of the same tribe fighting over limited resources of water.³⁰

Various efforts have been made to systematically analyse conflicts and categorise them to identify trends, triggers and impacts. The categories and criteria for inclusion of conflicts vary between databases and are constantly evolving with the changing nature of conflict.

²³Wallenstein (2007).

²⁴ICRC (2008), <http://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/opinion-paper-armed-conflict.pdf>.

²⁵Lawand (2012), <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/interview/2012/12-10-niac-non-international-armed-conflict.htm>.

²⁶Vite (2009), pp. 70–94; Human Security Report Project (2013).

²⁷For example, sometimes States tend to play down the intensity of a situation of violence and claim to undertake actions in the name of maintaining public order, see Vite, *ibid*.

²⁸Kalpakian (2004), p. 193.

²⁹Zeitoun and Mirumachi (2008), pp. 297–316.

³⁰Inter Press Service News Agency, Wars, No, Conflicts, Yes, 2007, <http://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/198/40379.html>.

The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) deems a conflict to be active if *there are at least 25 battle-related deaths per calendar year in one of the conflict's dyads*.³¹ In the case of one-sided violence, an actor is considered active if *an organised group incurs at least 25 deliberate killings of civilians in a year*.³²

The Correlates of War Project (COW), one of the first initiatives to systematically analyse war, stipulated that the threshold for war is 1000 battle-related deaths in a year to distinguish it from other situations of violence.³³ Prior to the end of the Cold War, the COW project categorised conflicts into international wars and civil wars depending on whether military action was taking place within or beyond the State's territory.³⁴ However, critics point out that stringent data coding rules regarding the *number of battle-related deaths* mean that a large percentage of the deaths that result from organised criminal violence or as an indirect result of the conflict (such as epidemics, forced displacement) cannot be coded and therefore do not get recorded.³⁵

The UCDP currently classifies conflicts into four main categories in terms of actors and their location. These are extrasystemic armed conflict, interstate armed conflict, internal armed conflict and internationalised internal armed conflict.³⁶

The Heidelberg Conflict Barometer (HIK)³⁷ measures conflict intensity on a five-point scale of dispute, non-violent crisis, violent crisis, limited war and war. It determines the intensity of a conflict by collating points along five parameters: weapons (type and usage), personnel (total number of conflict actors), casualties (number of direct conflict-related deaths), refugees and IDPs, and destruction (or threat to existence).³⁸ Thus, the Conflict Barometer takes into account the means as well as the consequences of violent conflict in order to determine its intensity. While HIK's parameters are comprehensive enough to capture conflicts of varying intensity, they are also subjective. Hence, it is important to keep in mind that the methodology for calculating the number of conflicts, its actors and the number of people affected by it is constantly evolving and trying to keep up with the changing nature of conflict. Conflicts may also be categorised by the level at which

³¹UCDP, Definitions, <http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/>.

³²*Ibid.*

³³Sarkees (2011), http://cow.la.psu.edu/COW2%20Data/WarData_NEW/COW%20Website%20-%20Typology%20of%20war.pdf.

³⁴Sarkees and Schafer (2000), pp. 123–144.

³⁵Human Security Report Project (2013).

³⁶UCDP, Definitions, <http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/>, extrasystemic conflicts refer to colonial wars or wars of independence, which occur between governments and non-state groups located outside a State's own territory. Interstate armed conflicts involve two or more States. Internal armed conflicts are those that take place between the government and non-state groups located within the State or between two non-state actors within one State. It does not involve outside actors. Internationalised internal conflict however, is an internal conflict with intervention from external actors on one or both sides.

³⁷HIK (2015), http://www.hiik.de/en/konfliktbarometer/pdf/ConflictBarometer_2015.pdf.

³⁸*Ibid.*

Table 1 Examples of conflict at different levels (developed from Ramsbotham, O; Woodhouse, T; Miall, H; Contemporary Conflict Resolution, 2011)

Level	Example of conflict
Global	Geopolitical transition, North–South economic divide, weapons proliferation, ideological contestations
Regional	Outwards (spillover, contagion, diffusion), inwards (influence, interference, intervention)
State	Contextual and structural
- Social	Weak social institutions: ethnic, class stratifications
- Economic	Weak economy: poor resource base, relative deprivation (uneven development)
- Political	Weak polity: partisan government, regime illegitimacy
Conflict Party	Relational—group mobilisation, intergroup dynamics
Elite/ Individual	Exclusionist policy, factional interest, belligerent leadership

they occur. Table 1 lists examples of conflicts at various levels and their possible causes.

While conflict often involves personal loss and societal destruction, not all conflicts are characterised by physical violence and devastation.³⁹

Galtung suggests that conflict be viewed as a triangle with three vertices or key aspects⁴⁰: attitude (A), behaviour (B) and contradiction (C). To characterise a situation as a full-blown conflict, all three elements (A, B, C) need to be present. A conflict without physical violence or conflict behaviour (B) is known as a latent conflict, as well as negative or unstable peace. It denotes a situation where individuals, groups, communities or countries have differences and a negative attitude towards each other but neither party attacks the opposite side. Unequal distribution of power, marginalisation, contest over resources, differing interests or values all have the potential to spark conflict if a triggering event occurs.⁴¹

Paul Wehr observes that ‘social life is above all a struggle for power and status regardless of the type of structure. An inevitable power differential between groups, and between individuals, produces latent conflict in all social relations’.⁴² The post-Cold War era particularly saw a proliferation of so-called protracted complex emergencies, which may be described as follows:

[They] tend to have multiple causes, but are essentially political in nature and entail violent conflict. They typically include a breakdown of legitimate institutions and governance, widespread suffering and massive population displacements, and they often involve and require a range of responses from the international community, including intense diplomacy and conflict resolution efforts, UN policing actions, and the provision of multilateral and bilateral humanitarian assistance by official and private agencies. A complex

³⁹Jeong (2008).

⁴⁰Galtung (1967, 1969).

⁴¹Brahm (2003), <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/latent-conflict>.

⁴²*Ibid*, citing Wehr, P., Conflict Emergence, <http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/problem/cemerge.htm>.

emergency tends to be very dynamic, characterized by rapid changes that are difficult to predict. Thus, complex issues are raised regarding the timing, nature and scale of response.⁴³

At this stage, it is useful to note the characteristics of intractable conflicts as distinguished from manageable ones. Deutsch and Coleman have summarised the key features of an intractable conflict as follows⁴⁴:

- *Time and intensity*: intractable conflicts tend to persist and cycle over time, with sporadic increases in intensity and occasional outbreaks of violence. These protracted social conflicts typically last at least a generation, often many generations. At times, they may go underground and appear to be resolved, but if their root causes are not addressed they tend to resurface and intensify when external circumstances permit or encourage their expression.
- *Issue centrality*: intractable conflict tends to involve needs or values that the disputants experience as critical to their own (or their group's) survival. Often these concerns are unrelated to the issues that initially trigger the conflict, but as the conflict escalates the issues are often transformed and ultimately take on a basic and threatening character. Deutsch offered the label 'malignant social process'⁴⁵ to characterise this stage of intense, conflict-filled relationship that is 'increasingly dangerous and costly and from which the participants see no way of extricating themselves without becoming vulnerable to an unacceptable loss in a value central to their self-identities or self-esteem'.⁴⁶
- *Conflict pervasiveness*: the experience of threat associated with such conflict is often so central and basic to the human experience that the effects of the conflict spread and become pervasive, affecting most aspects of a person's or a community's social and political life. Cultural, religious, educational, public and political institutions become involved with the conflict, as do many of the community's scholars and leaders.
- *Hopelessness*: typically, the disputants in an intractable conflict reach a point where they feel hopeless about the potential for constructive resolution. The conflict is usually experienced as a lose–lose situation.
- *Motivation to harm*: at this stage of intensity, the motivations of the disputants are typically at a point where their primary objective is to physically and psychologically harm one another.
- *Resistance to resolution*: finally, intractable conflicts are resistant to repeated and concerted attempts to resolve them. Traditional approaches such as diplomacy, negotiation, mediation and unilateral use of threats or force by either side often fail to bring about conflict de-escalation or resolution. Intractable conflicts require development of extraordinary alternatives to be resolved.

⁴³Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (1996), p. 3, <http://www.oecd.org/derec/sweden/50189495.pdf>.

⁴⁴Deutsch and Coleman (2000), pp. 428–450.

⁴⁵Deutsch (1983).

⁴⁶*Id.*, p. 4.

Humanitarian actors acknowledge that, in recent decades, horrific bloodshed has been the outcome of diverse situations of violence in rural and urban spaces, which did not necessarily meet the criteria of armed conflict or reach the threshold of battle-related deaths stipulated by various databases and therefore did not constitute a humanitarian crisis in the conventional sense.⁴⁷ In this vein, a recent ICRC policy document states that

sometimes chronic situations of violence, whether spawned by social or political upheaval, identity-related tension and/or repressive or discriminatory State policies, or criminal acts, create dramatic humanitarian situations with consequences that are as, or even more far-reaching than those of armed conflicts. They have emerged against the backdrop of globalization, which in some cases has worsened inequalities within societies, hastened the privatization of violence in the absence of State services in certain contexts or encouraged 'identitarianism' or political or social contestation. Phenomena such as easily accessible weapons, climate change, urbanization, migration and the development of communication technologies have accelerated the emergence of violence and play in favour of certain perpetrators. The violence may also be the work of the State, which, through its use of law enforcement, arrests and detentions, etc., itself becomes a perpetrator of the violence.⁴⁸

3 Contemporary Conflict Trends and Humanitarian Response

There are several organisations and projects that systematically map situations of violence on a yearly basis, making it possible to assess the changing nature of conflict over time.

Frequently used databases that provide a comprehensive overview of conflicts at various levels include the following:

- Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP),
- Heidelberg Conflict Barometer,
- Global Peace Index,
- ECHO Forgotten Crisis Assessment,
- OECD States of Fragility Report,
- Human Security Report Project.

The Correlations of War project was established in 1963 by J. David Singer as one of the earliest initiatives in this field. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program and Heidelberg Conflict Barometer are frequently used to analyse global conflict trends. Other reports such as the Global Peace Index, the OECD States of Fragility Report and the Human Security Report are not strictly speaking conflict databases. They go beyond the stringent definitions of conflict events to analyse violence from a societal perspective. However, these reports help to assess the impact of conflict

⁴⁷Human Security Report Project (2013).

⁴⁸ICRC (2014), p. 277.

on global peace, human security and fragility of States. DG ECHO's Forgotten Crisis Assessment (FCA)

identifies serious humanitarian crisis situations where the affected populations do not receive enough international aid or even none at all. These crises are characterised by low media coverage, a lack of donor interest (as measured through aid per capita) and a weak political commitment to solve the crisis, resulting in an insufficient presence of humanitarian actors.⁴⁹

Estimates of the total number of conflicts and casualties worldwide vary. It is reported that the total number of active conflicts has remained stable at 31–37 over the last decade.⁵⁰ However, if we broaden the criteria of conflict, it is estimated that there were 409 active political conflicts in 2015, including 43 highly violent conflicts.⁵¹

Table 2 provides an overview of conflicts (2010–2015) and their geographical breakdown over the last 5 years, based on data from the Heidelberg Conflict Barometer. The figures in brackets indicate the number of highly violent conflicts recorded in the region. From the table it is clear that there has been an increase in the overall number of political conflicts, though there are slight variations every year. The greatest proportion of conflict events (almost one-third) was recorded in Asia. However, sub-Saharan Africa has been afflicted by the largest number of highly violent conflicts over the years. The Middle East has seen an increase in the number of political conflicts and a marginal increase in the number of violent conflicts. The data also shows that more political conflicts have been recorded in Europe compared to the Americas over the last 5 years. Nevertheless, Europe is clearly the most peaceful region in this estimation with the lowest number of highly violent conflicts.

Table 2 2010–2015 conflict overview

	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Asia and Oceania	126 (6)	127 (6)	129 (8)	128 (10)	124 (8)	114 (9)
Sub-Saharan Africa	97 (20)	104 (18)	97 (18)	90 (19)	91 (12)	85 (6)
Middle East	71 (10)	74 (14)	71 (12)	69 (9)	62 (13)	55 (9)
Europe	62 (1)	67 (3)	63 (1)	58 (1)	65 (1)	64 (2)
Americas	53 (6)	52 (5)	54 (6)	51 (3)	46 (4)	45 (2)
Total	409 (43)	424 (46)	414 (45)	396 (42)	388 (38)	363 (28)

Developed by the author, Sulagna Maitra, compiled from data belonging to the Heidelberg Conflict Barometer 2010–2015. Data used by kind permission of the publisher, Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIK 2015), <http://hiik.de/en/konfliktbarometer/> (accessed on 14 April 2017)

⁴⁹DG ECHO (2015), http://ec.europa.eu/echo/what/humanitarian-aid/needs-assessments_en.

⁵⁰Global Peace Index (2016) and United Nations WHS Secretariat (2015).

⁵¹HIK (2015).

Approximately 1.5 billion people live in States affected by repeated cycles of violent conflict.⁵² The economic impact of violence was estimated to have attained \$13.6 trillion in 2015 (13% of the global economy) with losses of up to \$2.5 trillion and \$742 billion from crime and/or interpersonal violence and conflict respectively. A total of 76% of the world's poor live in countries that are environmentally vulnerable or politically fragile or both.⁵³ The Global Peace Index 2016 states that

overall global levels of peace continue to deteriorate while the gap between the most and least peaceful countries continues to widen. . . So intense is the violence and conflict in the Middle-East and North Africa (MENA) region that, when looking at the rest of the world, the average levels of peacefulness in fact increased.⁵⁴

Along with the internationalisation of the MENA conflicts, the report also noted an increase in efforts by States over the last 10 years to fund UN peacekeeping operations and a decrease in global military spending over the last 3 years.⁵⁵ A worrying trend is that 91% of official humanitarian assistance in 2014 went to long- and medium-term recipients, including regions facing long-term and protracted crises.⁵⁶

In terms of causes, terrorism and political instability have emerged as the two main factors destabilising global peace.⁵⁷ Terrorism-related deaths increased by 80% between 2014 and 2015, and the number of *battle-related deaths* are the highest in 25 years.⁵⁸ While there is currently no way of assessing the total number of people affected by conflict and the severity of their needs, reports show that the number of people displaced by conflict doubled between 2007 and 2015, reaching a total of 65.3 million people.⁵⁹

In terms of long-term trends in conflict, the Global Peace Index⁶⁰ collates information from the UCDP to report the following findings:

- Over the last 50 years, the number of countries involved in internal conflicts has overtaken the number of countries involved in external conflicts. Since the end of World War II, three-quarters of all conflicts have been intrastate conflicts.⁶¹ While the rate of *civil-war onset* was stable during the Cold War, the end of that period saw a dramatic rise in intrastate conflicts.⁶²

⁵²United Nations WHS Secretariat (2015).

⁵³Global Humanitarian Assistance (GHA) Report (2016).

⁵⁴Global Peace Index (2016), http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/GPI-2016-Report_2.pdf.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹GHA Report (2016).

⁶⁰Global Peace Index (2016), http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/GPI-2016-Report_2.pdf.

⁶¹PRIO (2015), <http://www.prio.org/Projects/Extensions/ConflictTrends/Graphs/>, accessed on 06 December, 2016.

⁶²Uppsala Conflict Data Program (2016a, b, c).

- The last decade has seen an increase in the number of internationalised internal conflicts. They constituted only 3% of total conflicts in 1991 but made up for 32.5% of the total number of conflicts in 2014.
- Up to 2,023,283 million people (1989–2015) have died as a direct result of violence in State-based, non-State-based and one-sided conflicts since the end of the Cold War.⁶³ The number of battle-related deaths reached a 25-year high in 2014 due to the conflict in Syria. The number of deaths from one-sided violence has also increased in the last decade. Six episodes of genocidal violence, resulting in the deaths of more than 256,000 people, have been recorded since 1965.

Overall, there is a strong consensus that, even though the world has become less violent since the end of World War II, the last decade has seen an increase in conflict and violence.⁶⁴ Going forward, analysts caution against a high risk of internationalisation of internal armed conflicts in the next 10 years, given the interconnectedness of global politics and trends in mass migration.⁶⁵ Due to the complex and protracted nature of contemporary conflicts, humanitarian interventions in most crises last for more than 5 years.⁶⁶ The humanitarian response to conflicts also operates in a constant state of scarcity.

Needs of vulnerable populations as a result of political and environmental crises are higher than ever before. There was a 45% recorded shortfall in meeting humanitarian needs in 2015, even though the total amount of international aid reached an all-time high of US\$ 28 billion.⁶⁷ Humanitarian professionals are thus increasingly required to serve people in a politically charged, polarised and highly volatile environment. The constant shortfall in aid implies that humanitarian relief needs to be efficient and effective in order to succeed in an environment of scarcity.

Furthermore, contemporary humanitarian workers are required to operate as part of joint integrated missions involving a host of other actors and local stakeholders, such as UN peacekeeping forces, development organisations, private for-profit actors, local governments, regional and local political, social and economic power brokers and gatekeepers. The plethora of actors operating in a humanitarian context does not necessarily share a commitment to the humanitarian principles, which in turn directly affects the humanitarian space available in a complex emergency.

⁶³*Ibid.*

⁶⁴Global Peace Index (2016), http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/GPI-2016-Report_2.pdf.

⁶⁵United Nations WHS Secretariat (2015).

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁷GHA Report (2016).

4 Conflict Analysis Frameworks and Tools

The analytical framework for conflict can be broadly classified into three categories, depending on their focus: conflict dynamics, causes of conflict (basic needs) and rational calculations (game theory). Based on these theoretical frameworks, several tools have been developed to map conflicts.

Galtung's Conflict Triangle (1969) is one of the influential models in contemporary conflict resolution.⁶⁸ While Galtung revised and clarified his analysis in his subsequent publications,⁶⁹ the ABCs of conflict dynamics remain key analytical categories in conflict research today. Galtung is joined by several other scholars, such as Kriesberg, Mitchell, Pruitt and Rubin and Wiberg, in attempting to present a dynamic perspective of conflict analysis paralleling advances in game theory.⁷⁰ Figure 1 represents a diagrammatic presentation of the ABC triangle.

Galtung postulated that conflict moves among the triangle's three corners where corner A refers to conflict attitudes, B to conflict behaviour and C to the conflict or contradiction itself. Conflict resolution or conflict transformation is therefore a *never-ending* process and a solution in the *sense of a steady-state, durable formation is at best a temporary goal*.⁷¹

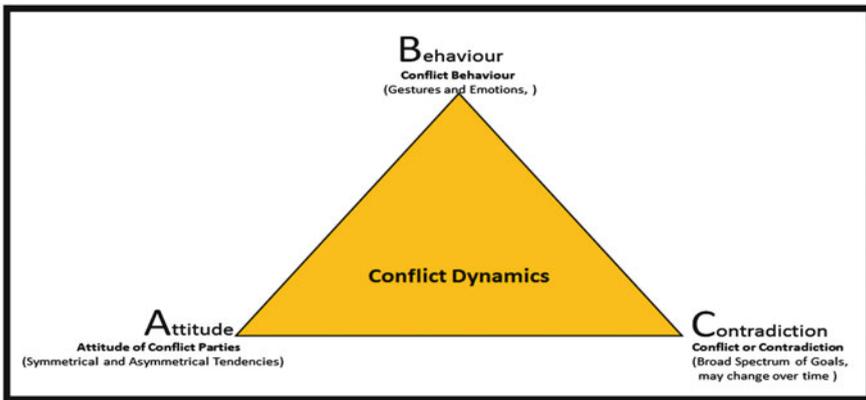


Fig. 1 Galtung's conflict triangle. Reproduced and adapted by kind permission of the publisher from Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse & Hugh Miall Alexander, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, Figure 1.1, p. 12 (Polity Press, 4th Edition, 2016)

⁶⁸Ramsbotham et al. (2011).

⁶⁹See www.transcend.org for a comprehensive bibliography of Galtung's publications on peace and conflict research.

⁷⁰Wallensteen (2007).

⁷¹*Ibid.*

All conflicts usually involve some sort of behaviour or action.⁷² It is important to note that conflict does not always involve inflicting physical harm as action or behaviour. It may also include coercion, verbal abuse and other types of hostile behaviour.⁷³ An end to hostile behaviour or physical violence, however, rarely means an end to conflict.⁷⁴ The underlying *issues* referred to or the contradictions that motivate their behaviour need to be resolved to truly end conflict.⁷⁵ A full-blown conflict encompasses all three characteristics, i.e., contradictions, negative attitude and coercive or violent behaviour.

It is interesting to note that Galtung in his conceptualisation of the conflict triangle acknowledged the existence of *secondary* conflicts, i.e. those that emerge as the *core* conflict spreads and deepens, *sucking in* other issues and actors.⁷⁶ This observation does not feature explicitly in his discussion on institutionalised conflict resolution and thus creates problems in understanding how the conflict resolution mechanisms deal with these *secondary* conflicts. However, at this stage, it is important to point out that while the category of *secondary* conflicts may exist conceptually or in the eye of the respective conflict resolution mechanism, it may not be regarded as such by the parties to the conflict. Hence, they might want to deal with the core and the *secondary* conflicts simultaneously. This will create a challenge (or *stress* in terms of systems analysis) on the conflict resolution mechanism.

Another limitation of the conflict dynamics framework concerns its ability to analyse the start of a conflict within its broader context, i.e. the reasons for the contradictions and the negative attitudes to emerge.⁷⁷ Here, alternative frameworks focusing on basic needs, position, interest and power provide helpful insights. Scholars such as Coser and subsequently Azar argued that the basis of a conflict is the denial of others' needs, and therefore any conflict resolution process must identify those needs and find ways to respond to them.⁷⁸ Other scholars posit that there is a difference between the needs or interests of conflict parties and the positions they assume. For example, in negotiations between Egypt and Israel over Sinai, even though both parties position their claims around national sovereignty, Egypt's main interest was national territorial integrity, while Israel's primary concern was security.⁷⁹ Thus, while both parties' positions were incompatible, discussions on their respective interests yielded in the Camp David settlements.

⁷²*Ibid.*

⁷³Galtung (1971), pp. 173–206.

⁷⁴Wallensteen (2007).

⁷⁵*Ibid.*; Galtung (1971).

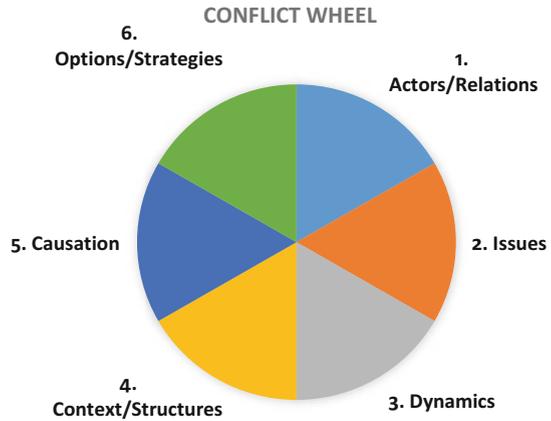
⁷⁶Ramsbotham et al. (2011).

⁷⁷Wallensteen (2007).

⁷⁸*Ibid.*; Ramsbotham et al. (2011).

⁷⁹Ramsbotham et al. (2011).

Fig. 2 Conflict wheel.
 Reproduced and adapted by kind permission of the publisher from Swiss Agency of Development and Cooperation (SDC), Conflict Analysis Tools, Tool 1, p. 3 (SDC 2005), <http://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/15416/CSPM%20Tipp%20Conflict%206.3.pdf> (accessed on 14 April 2017)



At this point, it is useful to briefly summarise the conflict tools available to analyse conflicts. The following summary of frameworks has been collated from The Centre for Security Studies' Conflict Analysis Tip Sheet,⁸⁰ Trocaire's Conflict Sensitivity Toolkit (2011),⁸¹ OECD's Conflict Analysis and its use in Evaluation (2012)⁸² and Ramsbotham et al. (2011).⁸³

The Conflict Wheel The conflict wheel is a meta conflict analysis tool. The *wheel* is divided into six parts: actors/relations, issues, dynamics, context or structures, causation, and options or strategies (see Fig. 2). Each of these sections needs to be further analysed with the help of relevant tools discussed below. The main purpose of the conflict wheel is to help organise the various conflict analysis tools focusing on a specific part/section of the conflict (for example, actors, issues, etc.) and provide an overview of the conflict. The wheel symbolises wholeness and movement.

The Conflict Tree The *conflict tree* (Fig. 3) is a visualising and sorting tool. This influential framework model was developed and applied in the Responding to Conflict Programme at Birmingham.⁸⁴ The tree helps to visualise the interaction between the root causes or structural factors, core problems or issues and its multiple effects. It also helps to differentiate the time horizons of various conflict transformation approaches.

Conflict Map A conflict map simplifies the conflict and attempts to visualise the actors and their powers or influence on the conflict, their mutual relationship and the

⁸⁰SDC (2005), <http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-security-studies/pdfs/Conflict-Analysis-Tools.pdf>.

⁸¹Trocaire (2011).

⁸²OECD (2012).

⁸³Ramsbotham et al. (2011).

⁸⁴*Ibid.*

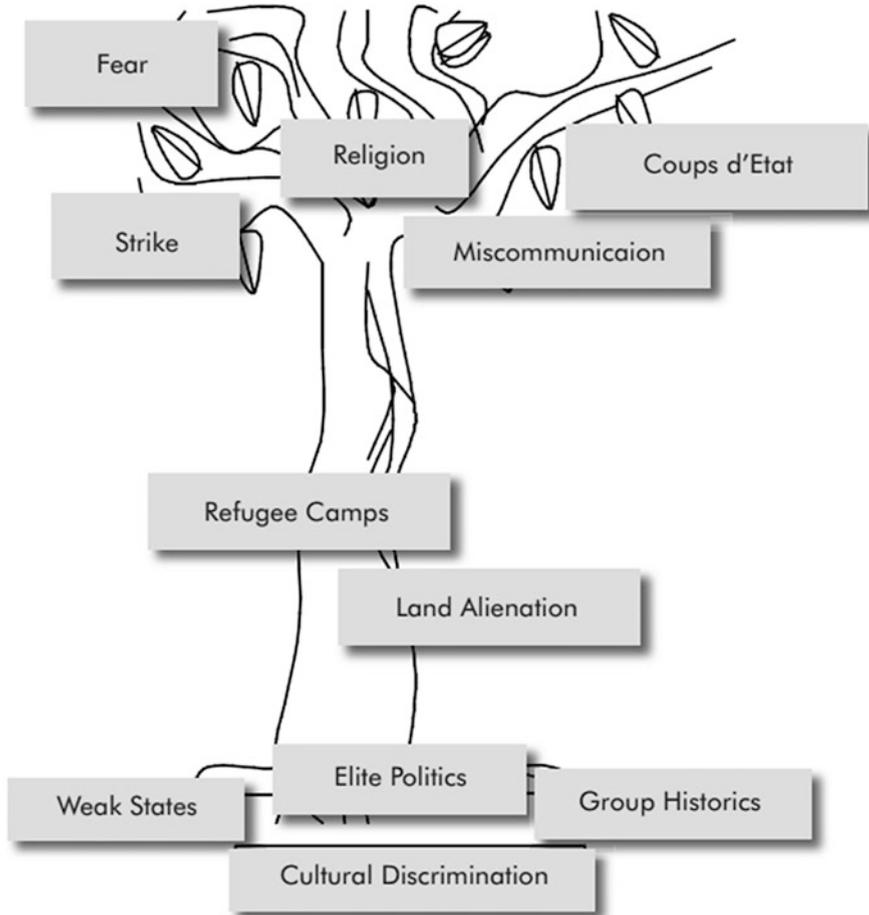


Fig. 3 Conflict tree. Reproduced by kind permission of the publisher from Swiss Agency of Development and Cooperation (SDC), Conflict Analysis Tools, Tool 2, p. 4 (SDC 2005), <http://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/15416/CSPM%20Tipp%20Conflict%206.3.pdf> (accessed on 14 April 2017)

conflict issues at hand. Unlike the other conflict analysis tools, this framework represents the specific viewpoint of a conflict actor (individual or group), of a specific conflict situation (in a simplified manner) at a specific moment in time. Thus, similar to a geographical map, it presents a static image of the conflict terrain. Figure 4 provides a basic template for conflict mapping. In the figure, different symbols are used to denote the respective type of actor, its allies and enemies, the power/influence it exerts and its direction.

Conflict Escalation Model The purpose of this tool (see Fig. 5) is to examine the level of escalation of conflict. The form and force of any conflict intervention must

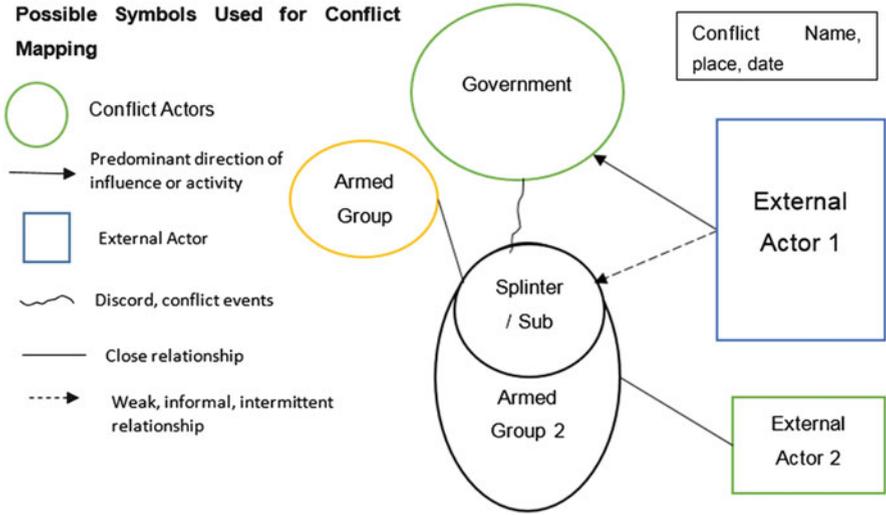


Fig. 4 Conflict map. Reproduced and adapted by kind permission of the publisher from Swiss Agency of Development and Cooperation (SDC), Conflict Analysis Tools, Tool 3, p. 5 (SDC 2005), <http://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/15416/CSPM%20Tipp%20Conflict%206.3.pdf> (accessed on 14 April 2017)

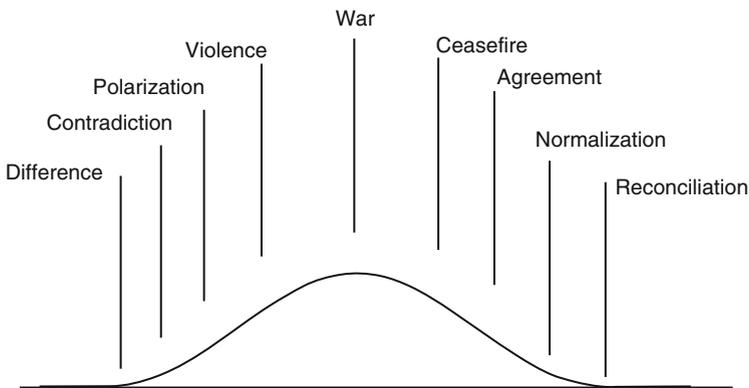


Fig. 5 Conflict escalation and de-escalation model. Reproduced by kind permission of the publisher from Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse & Hugh Miall Alexander, Contemporary Conflict Resolution, Figure 1.3, p. 16 (Polity Press, 4th Edition, 2016)

be appropriate to this level. Escalation refers to an increase in tension in a conflict. The process of conflict escalation is complex and unpredictable. Glasl presents a nine-tier model of escalation where the conflict parties increasingly get sucked into the conflict dynamics.⁸⁵ The model thus chooses a downward movement to denote

⁸⁵*Ibid.*

Table 3 Needs-fears mapping framework

Actors	Issues	Interests/Needs	Fears	Means	Options
A1					
A2					

Reproduced and adapted by kind permission of the publisher from Swiss Agency of Development and Cooperation (SDC), Conflict Analysis Tools, Tool 6, p. 10 (SDC 2005), <http://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/15416/CSPM%20Tipp%20Conflict%206.3.pdf> (accessed on 14 April 2017)

the downward spiral. The progressive levels of escalation, according to Glasl, are (1) hardening of attitudes; (2) debates, polemics, (3) actions instead of words; (4) images, coalitions; (5) loss of face; (6) strategies of threats; (7) limited destructive blows; (8) fragmentation of the enemy; (9) together into the abyss. Conflict levels 1–3 may be managed or transformed through self-help and moderation. Levels 4–7 need various forms of third party mediation. Level 8 needs arbitration to transform the conflict. Finally, at level 9, conflict may be resolved only through power interventions. The stronger a conflict escalates, the more forceful the intervention needs to be. At the initial levels, conflict escalation parties may accept external intervention out of trust. As the conflict escalates into war, intervention may require a substantial use of force, even submission of conflict parties. Thus, the potential for self-help or de-escalation of conflict through self-regulation is higher at relatively lower levels of the tier.

Needs-Fears Mapping This tool seeks to clarify in a comparable format the various actors' attributes in terms of their needs and fears and possible options to deal with these. It is useful to understand mutual perceptions and stimulate discussion. Table 3 presents a simplified template for Needs-Fears Mapping.

For each actor, the issues, interests/expectations/needs, fears, means and options are listed in a comparative table.

Multi-Causal Role Model This tool (see Fig. 6) may be used to trace causal mechanisms, patterns, to distinguish between the different quality and role of the various factors that lead to conflicts.

TWINS Matrix of Conflict and Cooperation The Transboundary Waters Interaction Nexus (TWINS) framework borrows from and builds on Craig's (1993) analysis of transboundary river water conflict and cooperation, Arnstein's ladder of participation (1969), the EU Water Framework Directive of risk-taking projects and the securitisation theory of the Copenhagen School to develop the scales of cooperation and conflict. This framework is especially useful to map environmental and social conflicts that simmer below active conflict threshold levels and oscillate between cooperation and confrontation. The matrix allows to prepare for different levels of cooperation (for example, ad hoc measures or risk-taking measures) based on intent and action, as well as different levels of conflict from the perspective of the State

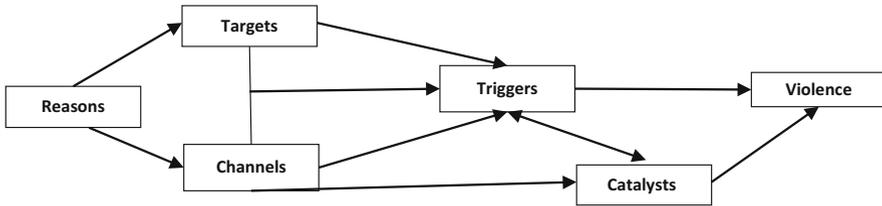


Fig. 6 Multi-causal role model. Reproduced by kind permission of the publisher from: Swiss Agency of Development and Cooperation (SDC), Conflict Analysis Tool 7, p. 11 (SDC 2005), <http://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/15416/CSPM%20Tipp%20Conflict%206.3.pdf> (accessed on 14 April 2017)

(non-politicised where the issue is off the radar to politicised where measures of warfare are taken).⁸⁶

5 Challenges of Conflict Analysis in Humanitarian Action

Since its advent in the early 1990s, most humanitarian organisations working in conflict incorporate a conflict-sensitive approach into their operations:

A conflict sensitive approach involves gaining a sound understanding of the two-way interaction between activities and context and acting to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts of intervention on conflict, within an organisation's given priorities/objectives (mandate).⁸⁷

Some of the prominent conflict sensitive analysis toolkits are listed below.⁸⁸ Further, humanitarian charters and standards such as SPHERE, while not explicitly mentioning conflict-sensitive approach, incorporate measures to minimise the negative impacts of aid:

- Conflict Assessment Framework—United States Agency for International Development (USAID);
- Conflict-Related Development Analysis—United Nations Development Programme (UNDP);
- Manual of Conflict Analysis—Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA);
- Aid for Peace—Paffenholz and Reychler (2007);
- Making Sense of Turbulent Contexts: Analysis Tools for Humanitarian Actors—World Vision;

⁸⁶Zeitoun and Mirumachi (2008).

⁸⁷Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, Introduction, <http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/an-introduction-to-conflict-sensitivity-3/>.

⁸⁸OECD (2012).

- Conflict Prognosis: A Conflict and Policy Assessment Framework—Goor and Versteegen (2000), Clingendael Institute;
- Conflict Sensitivity Toolkit: A Resource for Trocaire Staff—Trocaire;
- Participatory Conflict Vulnerability Analysis (PCVA) Framework—Action Aid;
- Benefits-Harm Analysis—CARE International;
- Quick Guide to Good Enough Conflict Analysis—CARE International;
- Local Capacities for Peace—World Vision.

These resources provide detailed and step-by-step instructions on how to evaluate conflict context during all the different stages of a project cycle. Good practice warrants that conflict analysis should ideally take place during the design and implementation period and mainstreamed at all stages of the project cycle to incorporate conflict risk reduction within the programme.

However, Zicherman et al. have revealed several challenges in operationalising a conflict-sensitive approach to humanitarian action.⁸⁹

First, it was found that *questions on conflict tend to be included mostly as part of the recovery phase (generally at least four weeks from the beginning of the emergency) rather than as part of the initial assessment,*⁹⁰ where it could help to figure out possible ways in which negative impact of aid may be eliminated or at least minimised.

Second, the capacity of staff to carry out systematic data collection is key to the success of the analysis as the frameworks are multi-layered and the context quite volatile and subjective. In spite of the availability of operational checklists to implement conflict-sensitive approaches, the process remains a challenge for untrained staff, especially surge capacity staff employed during large-scale emergencies. Human Resources and Logistics/Procurement staff thus need exposure and training in these approaches.

Third, humanitarian protection and the language of human rights are not a perfect match for a conflict-sensitive approach. Protection- and human-rights-focused programmes generally tend to assign blame and categorise actors as either victims or perpetrators of human rights abuses. This language can pose challenges for conflict analysis if not handled carefully within a volatile context.

The study further found that organisations usually employ *good-enough approaches* to conflict analysis in the immediate aftermath of crisis and undertook a more detailed analysis in weeks 6–12, i.e. during the so-called *re-design* phase. Ad hoc measures without a conflict sensitivity tag were undertaken by organisations to minimise the harmful impacts of aid and improve its effectiveness. These included inviting headquarter staff with specific regional and sectoral knowledge to country offices for expert consultations, initiating detailed discussions about

⁸⁹Zicherman et al. (2011).

⁹⁰*Id.*, p. 3.

staff's ethnic identities and related risks involved in working on sensitive programmes, developing inter-agency codes of conduct and advocacy with donors to widen the beneficiary population in order to avoid causing conflict.

6 Conclusion

A review of existing frameworks and tools reveals that conflict analysis is playing constant catch-up with the changing nature of conflict. Significant progress has been made in developing sophisticated frameworks for an in-depth analysis of conflicts. However, applying them on a regular basis in humanitarian contexts still remains a massive challenge.

Meanwhile, humanitarian actors continue to struggle to cope with the increasing needs of vulnerable populations caught in protracted crisis. Humanitarianism is not a tool to end war or to create peace,⁹¹ but it must constantly deal with the consequences of conflict. Throughout history, the nature of conflict has significantly shaped humanitarian action. Death, destruction, disease and displacement caused by conflicts mobilised civilians to instinctively organise rescue and relief efforts for vulnerable populations struck by political crisis and institutional failure. However, today's humanitarian system is on the brink of a breakdown baulking at the widening gap between needs and available resources. The global political system needs to generate the necessary political will to end and prevent violent conflicts and deliver on its commitments to uphold international humanitarian frameworks and standards.

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⁹¹Orbinski (1999), http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1999/msf-lecture.html.

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