

## The Social Psychology of War and Peace

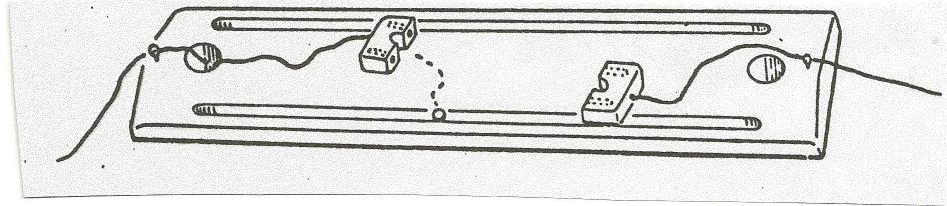
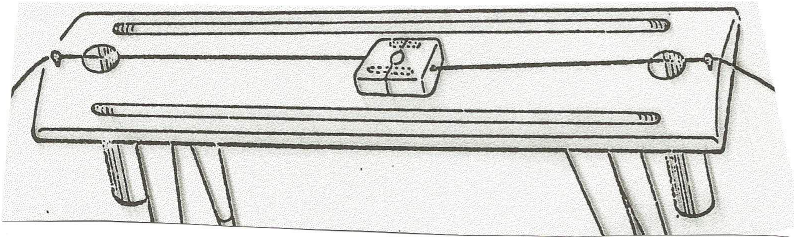
### I. Common instigating causes of war (and of interpersonal aggression)

**Injustice** (e.g., U.S. Revolutionary War)

**Threats to security and interests** (e.g., war w/ Iraq, WW 1 & 2)

**Conflict – Perceived incompatibility between goals, values, or beliefs** (e.g., Civil War)

Of course, these instigating circumstances do not always lead to war. There are other ways of dealing with them. The major objectives of this lecture are to examine some of the alternatives to war and to understand why human beings sometimes go to war even though there are often better ways to deal with injustice, security threats, and conflict. I want to begin this examination of alternatives by describing some research I conducted with children in which children behaved in a competitive way in a conflict where cooperation would have been a much better alternative. [Show transparency of Marble Pull task and describe the experimental situation – Ask students to imagine themselves in this situation and think about what they would have done]



**II. A study of children's responses to conflict - Ten year olds in urban societies engaged in "maladaptive competition" in conflict situations requiring cooperation. Their concerns about winning and "not losing" blinded them to the alternative of cooperating.**

**Children in rural societies that value sharing and cooperation did not engage in maladaptive competition.**

They immediately thought about the alternative of cooperating. I have designed similar situations for Cal Poly students, where students imagine they are working for money, and they tended to compete in ways such that they made much less than if they had cooperated. Maladaptive competition is not limited to children.

### III. Alternatives to military action

- A. Economic sanctions
- B. Positive incentives & friendly initiatives
- C. Negotiation – Identifying interests & seeking integrative solutions
- D. Third party involvement – e.g., mediation, arbitration, "third side" influence
- E. Nonviolent resistance (practiced by Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King)

In some of my research I use a survey to assess people's attitudes about military actions and the alternatives. [Show examples of the survey items and ask students to respond on paper. Then show how those items would be scored.] For each statement, choose the response that best describes your degree of agreement or disagreement:

1. Our national security depends more on international cooperation than military strength.

Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

2. The President should be more willing to use military force to promote the national interests of the United States.

3. Cooperation and negotiation are more effective than military force for dealing with international conflicts.

4. Military threat is usually the best way to deal with a potentially aggressive nation.

Disagree or Strongly Disagree on items 1 and 3 indicates militaristic attitude. Agree or Strongly Agree on items 2 and 4 indicates militaristic attitude.

#### **IV. Militaristic attitude –**

**(1) Favoring military actions vs. cooperative actions to deal with international conflict and (2) Believing that national security depends more on military strength than on cooperation with other nations**

**“Militaristic  $\leftrightarrow$  Cooperative” (an attitude dimension)**

**Can a person be both militaristic and cooperative?**    Yes, but in some situations they are incompatible. Middle scores probably indicate that a person sees value in both strategies.

**Militaristic attitude relates to:**

**Gender (male)**

**Political party identification (R)**

**Valuing power & dominance**

**Accepting revenge norms**

**Imposing values on others**

**Closed mindedness**

**Low perspective taking**

**Low empathic caring**

**Low humanitarian goals**

**And is unrelated to intelligence & problem-solving ability**

**Militaristic attitude also correlates with self reported interpersonal aggressiveness. Perhaps there is an underlying attitude dimension of Contentious  $\leftrightarrow$  Cooperative.**

#### **V. Militaristic & cooperative approaches to current international problems (Threat of nuclear attack, Terrorism)**

##### **A. Threat of nuclear attack**

The militaristic approach for dealing with the threat of nuclear attack is based on the concept of deterrence:

**Deterrence – Preventing aggression by threatening punishment**

#### **Four psychological problems with nuclear deterrence**

##### **1. Human error could be catastrophic.**

**Misperception of enemy intentions** - Misperception was involved in about half of the major conflicts that led to war in the last century. The War with Iraq is an example –the U.S. perceived that Saddam

Hussein would not destroy his WMD, but he had done so. For example, a nation might misperceive that another nation was planning to attack it with nuclear weapons.

### **Accidental launch**

**Misinterpretation of early warning systems data** - In 1978 the data suggested that 200 missiles were headed toward the U.S. There were birds, but no missiles. The decision makers had 15 minutes to decide whether to launch a counter attack. Fortunately, they decided that the data was probably misleading.

### **Groupthink - Pressures for conformity and consensus cause poor decision**

**Making** - Psychologist Irving Janis described many cases of this as a cause of warfare. A recent example is the CIA error in concluding that Iraq possessed WMD in the lead up to the U.S. attack on Iraq in 2003. The Senate Intelligence Committee concluded that groupthink was the major cause of that mistaken judgment.

### **2. People sometimes act without concern about expected punishment**

Many psychological studies have found that people often act in irrational and even self destructive ways. Suicide bombers intentionally carry out acts of terrorism that they know will result in their death. So, deterrence might not work with national leaders who are mentally ill or with terrorists who can escape punishment by hiding or who are willing to suffer and die for their cause. There is also a possibility of unauthorized use of nuclear weapons. For example, a small group of extremist military officers within a country with nuclear weapons might acquire the ability to control the weapons without proper authorization and might launch an attack without the normal concerns about retaliation and punishment.

### **3. Competitive thinking has resulted in dangerous levels of nuclear weapons**

Competitive thinking causes nations to error on the side of having too many weapons. We tend to think that more is always better. This has resulted in arms races and absurd and dangerous levels of weaponry. A single U.S. ballistic missile submarine has 24 missiles with 4 warheads each = 96 nuclear bombs. That could potentially destroy about 96 cities in an enemy nation. Think what it would mean to a nation to lose one major city. Consider how disruptive it was to lose 2 large buildings to terrorist attack in Manhattan on 9/11/2001. As of 2012, we will have 12 of these subs in operation = 1152 warheads. They are nearly invulnerable to attack. But just in case, we also have 450 ICBMs with 500 warheads and 114 bomber aircraft with 540 warheads (as of plans for 2012). That totals about 2200 deployed warheads. If one warhead could pretty much destroy Moscow or Beijing, why do we need 2,200? [Actually, the U.S. has about 5,000 nuclear weapons counting the ones in storage. Numbers will gradually go down by 30% with the new START agreement].

Do we really need any nuclear weapons at all? We can also destroy cities with conventional weapons that cause massive fires as done in World War 2 in Japan and Germany. Wouldn't the threat of that be sufficient to deter rational leaders of other countries from attacking us? The costs to a nation for attacking the U.S. would be horrendous even if we had no nuclear weapons.

### **4. Our nuclear policy promotes proliferation of nuclear weapons.**

So long as some nations have them, other nations feel unsafe and also want them. Insecure nations with weak military forces might believe that they would be able to deter aggression by nations with stronger military forces if they could obtain nuclear weapons. The more nations with nuclear weapons and the greater the number of nuclear weapons in the world, the greater the probability of nuclear war by deliberate decision, by error, or by unauthorized use, and the greater the probability of terrorists obtaining them. The idea that some nations should be denied nuclear weapons while others are allowed to keep them is seen as unfair and unacceptable to some of the nations that do not yet have them.

The alternative to our militaristic policy of deterrence is universal nuclear disarmament:

**Would it be safer to negotiate and cooperate with other nations for the elimination of nuclear weapons?** That issue is addressed in a new video titled “Nuclear Tipping Point.” I will show the first part of this video. Show video. End video after 6 min. at title “The Tipping Point”  
If you would like to see the entire video, you may order it without cost from:  
**WWW.NUCLEARTIPPINGPOINT.ORG**

**Why do some political and military leaders change their minds about nuclear policy after leaving office?**

1. Decrease in social pressure to be strong on national defense.
2. Decrease in groupthink pressures (pressure for consensus with other policy makers).

**B. Terrorism** – We have spent most of our resources for countering terrorism on a militaristic approach, though we have also used cooperative and nonviolent strategies.

**Pros and cons of our militaristic approach**

1. We have disrupted terrorist communication, training, and planning.
2. We have killed many terrorists.
3. We may have created more terrorists than we have killed.

**Nonviolent alternatives to military actions could address the causes of terrorism:**

**1. Perceived injustice leads to anger, rage, & revenge**

**[Address grievances, improve communication of our perspective, treat all groups equitably]**

**2. Hopelessness & lack of alternatives to violence**

**[Provide assistance for education and economic & social development]**

**3. Social support & approval for violence**

**[Urge Muslim leaders to condemn Jihadist ideology]** This is happening. Survey research in Jordan, Pakistan, Indonesia, Lebanon, and Bangladesh show substantial declines in the number of people who say suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilian targets can be justified to defend Islam. Wide majorities (85 to 90%) say such attacks are rarely, if ever, acceptable. Newsweek, Feb. 22, 2010.

**[Provide deradicalization programs for detainees]** Deradicalization programs for terrorists have been successful in a number of countries: Egypt, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Iraq (involving 26,000 detainees). Psychologists are researching these programs to identify what works.

*Observer*, Association for Psychological Science, Jan. 2010.

**VI. Awareness of alternatives to military action reduces support for military action (except for highly militaristic people)**

Conclusion – To create a more peaceful world, we need to foster cooperative attitudes and find the right balance between cooperative and militaristic approaches.