

*José María Santé Abal*

*Air Force Lieutenant-colonel. Military Staff graduate. Master in Security and Defence, University Complutense, Madrid. Diploma in Advanced Studies in the field of International Public law and International Relations, UNED-Instituto Universitario General Gutierrez Mellado. Doctorate in International Peace and Security, UNED-Instituto Universitario General Gutierrez Mellado.*

*E-mail: [jsanaba@oc.mde.es](mailto:jsanaba@oc.mde.es)*

## HOW TO PREVENT SOCIAL CONFLICTS FROM BECOMING ARMED CONFLICTS

### **Abstract**

*There are voices within academia that deem it impossible to predict armed conflict on the basis of the polemological analysis of its causes. Yet, in any armed conflict, in addition to its causes, we see actors and circumstances that surround such conflict and that condition its evolution. This leads us to believe that the answer to the question about whether it is possible to prevent a social conflict from becoming an armed conflict could lie in the study of these actors and circumstances. This article will reveal an avenue for research that could provide a response to the proposed hypothesis.*

### **KeyWords**

*Social conflict, armed conflict, violence, prevention, history of warfare.*

## HOW TO PREVENT SOCIAL CONFLICTS FROM BECOMING ARMED CONFLICTS

### INTRODUCTION

The analysis of violence and warfare has remained a constant element within philosophy, a precursor to sociology. War is a philosophical concern for humankind since the impact that armed conflict may exert on the lives of those it affects can be radical.<sup>1</sup> The history of humanity also encompasses very diverse positions and inference as to the reasons why humankind wages war, which are brandished by strategists and philosophers and more recently by sociologists and political scientists.

Amongst the classics, we may recall that for Croesus, king of Lydia, war is a folly, one of whose outcomes is to increase the number of fathers who will have to bury their sons.<sup>2</sup> Horace refers to the victors, whose joy is measured by the tears of mothers.<sup>3</sup> Irrespective of the historical debate surrounding the possibility of preventing armed conflict,<sup>4</sup> we concede that violence is not desirable. This is the very reason why the study of warfare and force has remained a constant throughout history.

The armed conflicts of this day and age tend to catapult violence onto the civilian population in an attempt to produce a favourable outcome in the interests of those in charge. The Bosnian War provides us with a recent example of an armed conflict that did not exclusively consist of a conflict between conventional forces; it also entailed, moreover, the continued use of violence against civilians.<sup>5</sup> This has become a constant in armed conflict over the past few decades.<sup>6</sup> The study of warfare and violence is not merely of historical concern, it must be seen as a matter of urgency.

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1 FRAGA IRIBARNE, Manuel. *Guerra y Conflicto Social [War and Social Conflict]*, Madrid, Instituto de Estudios Políticos, 1962, p IX.

2 Apud FRAGA. *Ibid.* pp 88-89.

3 QUINTUS HORATIUS FLACCUS. *Carmina, Odes I*, p 1 Apud FRAGA *ibíd.* p 89.

4 FREUND, Julien. *Sociologie du Conflit*, Madrid, EME Publications Service, 1995, ISBN 84-7823-385-7, p 27.

5 KALDOR, Mary. *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, Barcelona, Tusquets, 2001 p.65-80.

6 STEPANOVA, Ekaterina. "Trends in armed conflicts" en SIPRI Year Book 2008: *Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* New York, Oxford University Press, 2008 p 44-45.

Analysis of war and violence requires transdisciplinary approaches that lead us away from specialised academic papers that are divorced from the reality of a multidimensional problem. The term transdisciplinary denotes the combination of the individual merits pertaining to each discipline, with a view to studying a discipline from a different angle. It is a concept that differs from interdisciplinarity, which relates to the grouping together of study of the same issue from different scientific perspectives.<sup>7</sup>

It is only by means of transdisciplinarity that we may move beyond the point at which the work of the different social sciences reached the bounds of their own field of research.<sup>8</sup> The fact that no one sole cause of violence exists renders the problem of studying the origins of armed conflicts so complex that it requires a transdisciplinary approximation<sup>9</sup> whilst avoiding that elements essential to analysis get left out along the way.

There exist opinions in academia that cast aside the possibility of predicting armed conflict depending on its root causes. A widely-held view amongst sociologists is that violence is innate to society. This does not mean that we should allow ourselves to be swept towards the fatalistic conclusion that it is impossible to strengthen the mechanisms that aim to prevent armed conflict.

What sets the human race apart from other creatures is its tendency to destroy those of its own species, as illustrated by the well-known Hobbesian literary aphorism “*Homo homini lupus*”, first seen in the works of writer and playwright Plautus.<sup>10</sup> This is why we must not desist in our fight against violence. The presence of violence, as it permanently lies in wait for us, must spur us on to never let our guard down and to continue to carry out research that prevents, or at least minimises, its effects. The suffering generated by any armed conflict is so great that it alone should afford us sufficient motivation in a permanent quest for ways in which to minimise violence.

International law encompasses provisions applicable to the prevention of armed conflict, the most prominent being the United Nations Charter,<sup>11</sup> or the Helsinki

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7 SENGHAAS, Dieter, “The Specific contribution of peace research to the analysis of the causes of social violence: transdisciplinarity” in JOXE A. (coord.), *La Violence et ses Causes*, Paris, Unesco, 1981 p 113-114.

8 Ibid. p 113-16.

9 KLINEBERG, Otto. “The causes of violence: a social-psychological approach” in JOXE A. (coord.), *La Violence et ses Causes*, Paris, Unesco, 1981 p 136.

10 PLAUTUS, T. Maccius. *Asinaria* Madrid, Gredos, 1992 ISBN 84-249-1496-1 p16.

11 UNITED NATIONS. *United Nations Charter* [online] United Nations [New York] 26 June 1945 [accessed 3 February 2015] Available at: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/>

Final Act.<sup>12</sup> The organisations that resulted from these documents, the United Nations and the OSCE, are examples of the existence of mechanisms within international legislation that are designed to prevent armed conflict. Today, prospective or foresight studies provide us with the scientific tools required for work on any social system, with a view to guiding its evolution towards desired scenarios.<sup>13</sup>

In all armed conflict there is an evolutionary process prior to construction, known as the escalation of conflict. Escalation confirms that the risk of the conflict turning into an armed conflict exists. What today is a risk, may be a danger tomorrow and then a threat to peace the day after tomorrow.<sup>14</sup>

When this risk exists, we may say that the conflict in question must constitute a security concern, yet when this risk begins to endanger or threaten peace, the issue becomes a challenge that may easily entail preventive measures that require the use of force. In this case, conflicts pose a danger or a threat to security when they lead to preventive action involving diplomatic and economic measures and, ultimately, the use of force.

If a procedure were to exist that allowed for the assessment of the risk of a social conflict becoming an armed conflict, we would have enough leeway to make use of the instruments afforded in international law and prospective studies in order to alter the conditions surrounding the conflict in question, whilst always striving to prevent it turning violent.

The issue of the prevention of armed conflict, as we had anticipated, has not yet been resolved. The analysis that we carry out over the course of this article shall be dedicated specifically to the process of evolution observed in those social conflicts that spiral into armed conflict. Over the course of this article, we will aim to demonstrate, from a transdisciplinary perspective, a research path that may presumably be pursued as part of the search of answers to the question of to what degree it is possible to prevent this from happening.

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12 Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe *Helsinki Final Act* [online] OSCE [Helsinki] 1 August 1975 [accessed 3 February 2015] Available at <https://www.osce.org/mc/3950?download=true>

13 BAS, Enric. *Prospectiva. Como usar el pensamiento sobre el futuro*. [Prospective. How to use thinking about the future.] Barcelona, Editorial Ariel S.A., 1999, 2002 edit., pp 56-59.

14 BALLESTEROS, Miguel A., “Las estrategias de Seguridad y Defensa” [Security and Defence Strategies] in BALLESTEROS, Miguel A., et al *Fundamentos de la Estrategia para el siglo XXI* [Foundations of the Strategy for the 21st Century] Madrid, Ministry of Defence, 2004, ISBN 84-9781-087-2 pp. 17-18.

## AN APPROXIMATION OF THE CONCEPT OF CONFLICT

The definition of conflict is not a matter for which extensive consensus has been reached amongst researchers.<sup>15</sup> Before we begin, it seems appropriate, in the light of this disagreement, to define what we must understand conflict to be and to define social conflict and armed conflict too.

As part of this definition process, despite the fact that we will utilise concepts developed by well-known authors and researcher, we shall eschew contemplation of their theories and definitions since the purpose of this article is not to present these or subject them to analysis.

In general terms, researches recognise that in all conflict, opposition exists. This may occur in numerous facets of life.<sup>16</sup> Opposition is something that also exists within competition. In competition, the objectives of parties are mutually incompatible<sup>17</sup> or divergent,<sup>18</sup> a circumstance generally associated with their scarcity.<sup>19</sup> The incompatibility of objectives gives rise to opposition.

Aggressiveness is an innate characteristic of human nature,<sup>20</sup> which is evident to a greater extent in those competitors who obtain the best results.<sup>21</sup> Aggressiveness is a tendency to act or to react aggressively,<sup>22</sup> that is to say, in a violent manner.<sup>23</sup>

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15 FREUND. Opus cit, p 58. See also BOTTOMORE T. B. "Sociological Theory and the Study of Social conflict", in MCKENNEY J. C. and TIRYAKIAN E. A. *Theoretical Sociology* New York, Appleton Century, 1979, p 138 reprinted in BOTTOMORE T. B., *La sociología como crítica social [Sociology as social criticism]*, Barcelona, Peninsula, 1976 apud GINER Salvador, *Sociología*, Barcelona, Ediciones Península, 1979, ISBN: 84-297-0924-X, p187.

16 GINER, Salvador. Opus cit. p 64-65.

17 MITCHELL, Christopher Roger. *The Structure of International Conflict*. New York, St Martin's Press, 1981 p 17.

18 ROSS, Marc Howard. *The Culture of Conflict*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995. Translation by José Real Gutiérrez, Barcelona, Ediciones Paidós Ibérica SA, 1995. ISBN 84-493-0166-1. p 38

19 MAC IVER, R. M., and PAGE, C. H. *Sociología 3rd Edit*. Madrid, Tecnos, 1966 p 69. See also GINER Salvador, opus cit. p 65.

20 FREUND. Opus cit, pp 114-17 According to this author, sociologists have not reached unanimity when determining if this is instinctive behaviour or not.

21 Ibid. p 121.

22 REAL ACADEMIA ESPAÑOLA. *Diccionario de la Lengua 23rd edit*. [Online] RAE [Madrid] 2014 [accessed 10 March 2015] Available at <http://lema.rae.es/drae/?val=agresividad>

23 REAL ACADEMIA ESPAÑOLA. *Diccionario de la Lengua 23rd edit*. [Online] RAE [Madrid] 2014 [accessed 10 March 2015] Available at <http://lema.rae.es/drae/?val=agresivo>

Aggressiveness is not conflictive in itself, but it is what spurs us onto aggression, to the use of force, if the prevailing conditions act to encourage it.<sup>24</sup> Aggression is a response characterised by the use of force with the intention of harming people or assets,<sup>25</sup> while we understand violence to be the use of physical force in order to harm, to damage or to forcefully curtail personal freedoms.<sup>26</sup> Aggressiveness thus contains an element of hostility, that is to say: it includes the “intention to harm another”.<sup>27</sup>

Hostility is thus the element of aggressiveness that propels aggression when conditions favour this. When hostility appears over the course of competition, competition becomes conflict.<sup>28</sup>

As we were saying, that kind of hostility, that desire to cause harm to another, is what can lead to the use of violence as part of an effort to break the will of the other over the course of the conflict.<sup>29</sup> Violence is therefore a consequence of hostility.

Moreover, when the parties add emotion to their positions, they can no longer view them as trivial.<sup>30</sup> Significance becomes characteristic of these positions and from this moment onwards they evolve into uncompromising values. Antagonism stems from the fact that a value or a set of values is held up as unyielding when compared with other values, as they become principles. If antagonisms come into play, hostility acquires the hard-line quality pertaining to such antagonisms.<sup>31</sup> We can affirm that the fact that conflict is loaded with emotion makes hostility a factor that is impossible to eliminate.

A curious example is that of many football fans when they exhibit *schadenfreude* thanks to the misfortunes of a rival team despite the fact that these misfortunes do not benefit their own team. This attitude contradicts the concept of competition as in competition one wants to match up to a rival, not to get them out of the way by any means possible. A good competitor wants to face the very best so they can size each another up. When these fans are asked about the reasons for this attitude, so far removed from the ethical values that have been instilled in them, the result is always

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24 FREUND. Opus cit, p 121.

25 DELGADO, José M.R. “The neurological basis of violence”, *International Social Science Journal*, Vol XXXIII, 1971, P 27-35 apud KLINEBERG. Opus cit. p 123.

26 MACKENZIE, W. J .M. “Power, violence, decision” Penguin, 1975, p 39 apud KHAN Opus cit. p 191.

27 FREUND. Opus cit. p 121.

28 Ibid. p 121.

29 Ibid. p 10.

30 ROSS. Opus cit. p 102.

31 FREUND. Opus cit, pp 124-25.

the same: “A real fan of this team will always be glad about its eternal rival’s bad luck, whatever that may be”.

In addition to hostility, another characteristic that distinguishes competition from conflict is the absence of respect for the rules governing the former.<sup>32</sup> The fact that the ultimate goal of both competition and of conflict is to impose the will of one onto another gives rise to escalation.<sup>33</sup> One of the consequences of escalation is the risk of sidestepping the rules of competition. When all parties commit to adjusting the rules, or the deterrence afforded by the fear of sanctions if rules are not respected produces the same effect, escalation is delimited within the desire to improve matters. On the contrary, when the limits to confrontation set by the rules are overstepped, competition shifts towards conflict.

The presence of hostility in conflict, combined with escalation, has the consequence that violence thresholds are transgressed. The problem lies in the fact that once this transgression of violence thresholds occurs, hostility and escalation combine to act as a catalyst of violence, encouraging different parties to intensify the negative consequences for the other party.

Furthermore, it would seem right to specify the difference that exists between crisis and conflict. Both terms are used in an indistinct way by the media, on many occasions incorrectly.

Crisis does not equate with conflict nor vice versa: Crisis implies the presence of a third party, whereas conflict tends to be bipolar. When the third party in a crisis wanes away, thereby favouring bipolarity, conflict is the result.<sup>34</sup> The intrusion of an impartial third party in a conflict may thus defuse the conflict. This is why the figure of mediator is so important and it is exactly for this reason that the image of the mediator cannot be linked with partiality.

As we stated above, hostility, significance and escalation combine to convert competition to conflict, and subsequently into violent conflict. We can therefore define conflict as ***“the opposition of two parties (bipolarity) in the pursuit of a mutually exclusive objective, transgressing the rules of competition and with the presence of hostility, whose development may lead to the use of violence and whose escalation could reach the most extreme consequences”***.

Neither does there exist a general theory on the concept of social conflict that allows us to limit ourselves to a commonly accepted definition.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, having defined

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32 GINER. Opus cit. p 65.

33 FREUND .Opus cit. p 165.

34 Ibid. p 272.

35 GINER, Salvador., opus cit. p 196.

the concept of conflict for the purposes of this article, we will move onto define what we should understand social conflict to be each time that we come across this term. In order to do so, we shall simply delimit the scope of the concept of conflict that we addressed in the previous paragraph:

Social conflict is thus ***“that in which the opposing parties are groups of people who cohabit the same space and time in a specific region of the world defined by the territorial delineations of a state”***.

With this definition, we have abstained from indicating the motives of the conflict, unlike other definitions given by authors such as Coser<sup>36</sup> or Giner.<sup>37</sup> We dismiss the use of terms such as contest<sup>38</sup> or dispute,<sup>39</sup> also used in other definitions, but which could also apply to competition. We would remind you of the definition given for conflict above.

For the spatial delimitation of social conflict we comply with the artificial recourse to territorial delineations of states. This approach allows us to rule out cases in which social conflict sees the same group encounter other groups across different states, as is the case in the case of the Kurds.<sup>40</sup> The reason for this decision is that social conflict for the group in question varies across each country in which it is present, despite the fact that the group tries to portray it as one single conflict in their discourse. Simply the fact that state systems exist under different legal codes and with different communities that the group theoretically faces in each state leads one to conclude that these are different social conflicts.

Solely for the purpose of this article, we should understand armed conflict to be ***“a social conflict in which one of the opposing groups, organised in a conscious manner and following a plan, carries out actions using arms against the opposing group or sectors of the population that it identifies as belonging to this group, with a view to achieving the underlying objective to this opposition”***.

This definition of armed conflict accommodates the classic contribution on war made by Clausewitz, whereby it is an act of force used to impose the will of one group onto another by means of the attrition of the latter group and for which limits

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36 COSER, Lewis A. *The Function of Social Conflict*, Glencoe: Free Press, 1956, p 8 apud GINER Salvador opus cit, p 65.

37 GINER, Salvador. Opus cit. p 65.

38 Ibid. p 65.

39 MAC IVER, R. M. and PAGE C.H. Opus cit. p 65.

40 ZORRILLA, José Antonio. “The Kurds” in *IEEE Position Paper 52/2014* [online] Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies [Madrid] 12 May 2014 [accessed 22 March 2015] Available online at: [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_opinion/2014/DIEEO52-2014\\_Kurdos\\_ULtimo\\_JAZorrilla.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2014/DIEEO52-2014_Kurdos_ULtimo_JAZorrilla.pdf) p 2.

may not be contemplated.<sup>41</sup> Baquer also defines it as a relationship between groups of men marked by the intentional use of violence or the dialectic of hostile desires.<sup>42</sup> In the same vein, the definition of war provided by Giner<sup>43</sup> may be accommodated within our definition of armed conflict. Over the course of armed conflict, escalation and hostility may meld until they engender a desire to destroy or to subjugate the opposing group and lead to bloodshed.

Nevertheless, although we must admit that war falls under the spectrum of armed conflict in our definition, we do not endeavour to establish a conceptual delimitation.<sup>44</sup> The purpose of this article is to research the transition process that sees social conflict become armed conflict, if applicable, without drawing distinctions between the type of armed conflict and restricting ourselves to the definitions provided.

On the other hand, we must mention that war is a phenomenon that does not merely come about due to social conflict. Despite the fact that wars arising from clashes between states may be linked to factors related to the existence of social conflict within one of the opposing states, they do not fall under our concept of armed conflict since neither do they fall under the scope of our concept of social conflict wherein we established that the geographical sphere of the concept would remain delineated by state borders.

It thus follows that we may conclude that war is a phenomenon that may ensue from social conflict and that when this is the case it falls within the armed conflict system as defined for the purposes of this article.

By way of conclusion, it is worth noting that this definition of armed conflict seeks to exclude the phenomenon of terrorism from the concept defined. This is because one fundamental characteristic of terrorism is that attacks are not perpetrated against the opposing group but instead against state-level social organisation in attacks against those that the terrorists identify with this system.<sup>45</sup>

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41 CLAUSEWITZ, Carl. von, *On War* HOWARD Michael (Trad.) and PARET Peter (Trad.) Princeton (New Jersey) Princeton University Press, 1976, ISBN 0-691-05657-9, 1985 edit. ISBN 0-691-01854-5 p 75-77.

42 BAQUER, Miguel A. ¿A qué denominamos guerra? [*What do we call war?*] Madrid, Ministry of Defence, 2001, ISBN 84-7823-854-9, p 13-14.

43 GINER, Salvador. Opus cit, p 197.

44 See an example of the delimitation of the concept of war in the reference to the definition of the SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) given in ORTIZ Román D. “Las nuevas guerras civiles” [The New Civil Wars in CUETO Carlos de and JORDÁN Javier (Coords.) *Introducción a los estudios de Seguridad y Defensa* [Introduction to Studies of Security and Defence], Granada, Comares, 2001, ISBN 84-8444-278-0 p 36.

45 LÁZARO, José. “Los mecanismos de la violencia: Diálogos con Enrique Baca Valdomero” [Mechanisms of Violence: Dialogues with Enrique Baca Valdomero] in AZNAR Federico et al, *La*

Terrorism is conflict in origin according to our definition. Yet, on the flipside, we cannot consider it social conflict according to our own definition, because this implies the opposition of a group to a system and not to another social group. The narrative discourse of terrorists will see the selection of the target groups for their attacks that best match the current needs of this discourse with a view to producing an effect on the population they claim to support against the system.<sup>46</sup> The fact that terrorism materialises as attacks perpetrated by one social group against another leads us to believe that this in fact consists of two opposing groups when in reality it is one group acting against a system of social organisation.

By delimiting the problem in this way, this article will focus its analysis upon the process whereby social conflict evolves into armed conflicts in the cases where this occurs.

## THE DEBATE ON FORECASTING ARMED CONFLICT

It remains the case that when we analyse a social conflict that runs the risk of escalating into armed conflict, we observe conflicts that lead us to draw conclusions about the evolution of this conflict, almost from a deterministic perspective. We naturally tend to apply reasoning, based on previous experience, to predict what will ensue.<sup>47</sup> Though, on the other hand, polemology warns us that it is impossible to prevent war on the basis of its root causes.<sup>48</sup>

Over the following paragraphs we will try to explain why this is the case with a view to reaching a conclusion as to whether there is any leeway to prospectively anticipate<sup>49</sup> armed conflicts resulting from social conflict.

The study of numerous armed conflicts that can be classified as those that began as social conflicts (Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Palestine, Spanish Civil War, Darfur, Rwanda, Somalia etc. ) corroborates the recurrence of circumstances prior to the conflict. Examples of these recurrent circumstances are the existence of populist

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*Guerra contra la Violencia*, Madrid, Triacastela, 2014, ISBN 978-84-95840-87-5 p 64-65.

46 Ibid. p 65-66.

47 BAS, Enric. Opus cit p 40-44.

48 AZNAR, Federico. *Las nuevas guerras. Validez de la polemología para el análisis de los conflictos del siglo XXI*. [New wars. Validity of polemology for the analysis of conflicts in the 21st Century] Doctoral Thesis. Madrid. Political Sciences and Sociology Faculty of the Complutense University of Madrid. 2009 p 58.

49 BAS, Enric. Opus cit p 40-44.

discourse underpinned by assertions about differences between social groups, a scarcity of economic resources, low levels of education, an inability on the part of the state to exercise its monopoly on violence, the loss or absence of a state's legitimacy, high levels of organised crime, external influence and a tendency of certain cultures to resort to force to resolve disputes, etc.

Conflict arises in a random manner. The causes that one day may provoke conflict might not do so under other circumstances. As a result, it is not possible to know a priori which causes will beget conflict,<sup>50</sup> although we can indeed study the past causes of conflict. This is what Weber refers to as causal imputation.<sup>51</sup> We cannot be sure if a common cause will lead to a given conflict, yet if conflict ensues, we can study it for the purpose of identifying one or several causes.

In any event, conflicts follow a causal plurality, which makes studying their origins extremely difficult. Moreover, as Clausewitz indicates, some causes may remain hidden.<sup>52</sup>

In turn, Gastón Bouthoul discusses presumed causes, advising us of the imprecision pertaining to this type of research.<sup>53</sup> The combination of this plurality of presumed precedents and circumstances makes it extremely difficult to predict how happenings will pan out or to remedy a conflictive situation on the ground. It is hence impossible to identify a pattern for the evolution of a social conflict by basing this solely on the determination of its causes.

Society is a complex system, within which it is not straightforward to discern the causes of an action. It is better to identify mechanisms of action by way of knowledge of the system.<sup>54</sup> By studying each society, it is possible to discover the specific mechanisms that enable it to function. Knowledge of these mechanisms then permits influence over its functioning with a view to producing effects that lead to desired scenarios, as proposed by prospective studies. The principle of action-reaction, pertaining to Cartesian thinking, is too simple to allow us to predict the future on the basis of the visible causes of conflict.

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50 FREUND. Opus cit. p 107.

51 WEBER, Max. *Essais sur la théorie de la science*, Paris, Plon, 1965 p163 apud, FREUND Ibid. p 107-8.

52 CLAUSEWITZ, Carl, *von De la Guerra*. TII p 553 apud AZNAR, Federico. Opus cit. p 138-39.

53 BOUTHOU, Gaston. *Traité de Pôlemologie* Paris, Payot, 1970 8th part apud FREUND Opus cit. p 109.

54 LABORIT, Henri. "The biological and sociological mechanisms of aggressiveness" in JOXE A. (coord.), *La Violence et ses Causes*, Paris, Unesco, 1981 p 47.

No two conflicts are alike.<sup>55</sup> Each conflict is surrounded by its own circumstances, which are unrepeatable and serve to make each conflict unique.<sup>56</sup> The causes lie at the origin of the conflict but its evolution is determined by these too.<sup>57</sup>

Galtung draws a distinction between two basic theories about the origin of violence. On the one hand, the theory of “conditioning” concerning the origin of violence maintains that it is circumstances that condition the behaviour of individuals. On the other hand, the “trigger” theory upholds the view that circumstances act as a catalyst for an innate inclination of humankind.<sup>58</sup> Irrespective of which is most or least correct, both place fundamental value on the fact that an individual may turn to violent behaviour by force of circumstance.

Research carried out at the end of the 1960s on violence in the United States concludes that our nature only provides us with the capacity for violence; whether we effectively exercise this capacity and the way in which we do so is dependent on social circumstances.<sup>59</sup>

The unpredictability of conflict is related to the action taken by the characters involved.<sup>60</sup> Without a doubt, the uniqueness of an individual and the combination of circumstances surrounding a conflict make it unpredictable.

Nonetheless, although we must admit that no two conflicts are alike, it also seems to be clear that there is some room for prediction, as evidenced by the fact that the success of the outbreak of conflict is connected to selecting the right moment to trigger it.<sup>61</sup> This need to correctly select the best moment to unleash conflict, if we understand the triggering of conflict to be the stimulation of latent social conflict, issues from the presence or absence of these circumstances conditioning its evolution.

The unpredictability of conflict makes a sociology academic’s research an incredibly complex task. Freund recognises that sociology’s capacity to predict armed conflict

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55 FREUND. Opus cit. p 157.

56 AZNAR, Federico. Opus cit. p 138.

57 FREUND. Opus cit. p 166.

58 GALTUNG, Johan. «Typologies of Violence» in JOXE A. (coord.), *La Violence et ses Causes*, Paris, Unesco, 1981 p 104.

59 *Violence in America. Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence*, New York, Signet Books, 1969 apud KLINEBERG. Opus cit. p 126. This is the final report of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, which US President Lyndon B. Johnson brought in being following the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy.

60 SHUPILOV, V. P. “Methodological problems of the study of violence from the standpoint of criminology” in JOXE, A. (coord.), *La Violence et ses Causes*, Paris, Unesco, 1981 p 166.

61 FREUND. Opus cit. p 158.

is surpassed on certain fronts.<sup>62</sup> The ability of sociology to address this issue is not absolute, only allowing for a certain degree of approximation, which may be more or less precise or, in other words: when assessing the potential of a conflict becoming armed conflict, we must always keep in mind terms such as “possible” and “probable” and distance ourselves from absolute concepts.

Whilst we concede that the evolution of a conflict is unforeseeable, there must clearly exist enough scope for anticipating whether it is hardly or highly likely that a social conflict will spiral into violence, according to its protagonists and concurrent circumstances.

## VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL ORGANISATION

Violence is intrinsic to any society. It can be repressed but not suppressed.<sup>63</sup> It is exactly for this reason that great pains have been taken since ancient times to attempt to regulate the violence of any conflict. Within the realm of domestic policy, these are expressed in constitutional charters and the legal frameworks of modern states that Max Weber identifies as the transfer of the monopoly on violence to state institutions. Yet they are also reflected at external policy level, with the ratification of important international conventions that regulate the use of force, which is traditionally known as international law.<sup>64</sup>

The Hobbesian stance that security within the community is the purpose of politics identifies the latter as a guarantor of security. Customs, rules, laws, conventions and agreements at different levels reveal how society regulates human life in order to avert any recourse to violence, for which dominion is confined to institutions, whilst they themselves are also subject to various control mechanisms.<sup>65</sup>

During the 19th Century, theories began to emerge relating to the monopoly on violence in the hands of the state. For Marx, the state exercises this monopoly by oppressing the people to favour a ruling class. According to Weber, violence is a means that only the state must resort to, whilst always respecting the “legitimate use of physical force”.<sup>66</sup> In the model of Weberian statehood, the constitution is the supreme precept,

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62 Ibid. p 24.

63 ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, V, 1301 b-7-10 apud FREUND. Ibid. p 34.

64 FREUND. *Opus cit.* p 69.

65 Apud FREUND. Ibid. pp 90-94.

66 WEBER, Max. “Politics as a vocation” in GERTH, H. H. and MILLS, C. Wright *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* London 1967 p 78 and WEBER, Max. *The theory of social and economic*

as it regulates the use of force by the government at the hand of its institutions.<sup>67</sup> In the following paragraphs, we intend to analyse the reasoning that underpins this form of state organisation and the yielding of the monopoly on violence to the state.

The process by which humankind chooses to live side by side is complex; it is underpinned, in broad brush strokes, by an observation of the advantages offered by life in society as compared to that of an isolated individual. This associative and imaginative capacity is unique to human beings and distinguishes us from other animals.

This ability to associate with one another allows humankind to establish rules that help situations of well-being to reoccur, something that other animals may only do instinctively or in an extremely simple manner. This mechanism is what spurs man on to organise the rules governing society. By the same token, human beings are able to set rules that allow them to distance themselves from potentially dangerous situations.

Freund refers to an agonal state as he describes a utopic situation in which humankind successfully organises itself into a society and establishes rules that dispel violence from any activity. It is a model of state organisation within which all conflict is substituted by competition. In an agonal state rivalry is ever-present, and may occasionally be conflictive, but the rules preclude any recourse to violence. Hostile intentions also fall outside of the boundaries. Those who do not adapt to these rules are punished (sanctions) and even removed from society (imprisonment).<sup>68</sup>

The political organisation of modern societies has given rise to models whereby this monopoly on violence has been ceded to the state. We know such models as democracy and autocracy. In reality, in the case of the latter, there is no cession of monopoly, instead a social group, usually lead by an individual, obtains this monopoly on the use of force and employs it to ensure its own order.

One fundamental difference between both systems of social organisation is that an autocracy excludes competition from state organisation with a view to safeguarding the order that prevents generalised violence. In current times, we could say that the form of social organisation that most resembles the agonal state is the democratic state.<sup>69</sup>

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*organization* New York 1966 p 407 apud KHAN, Rasheeduddin, "Violence and economic and social development" in JOXE, A. (coord.), *La Violence et ses Causes*, Paris, Unesco, 1981 p 192.

67 Apud FREUND. Opus cit. p 90-94.

68 Ibid. p 72-74.

69 Ibid. p 74.

The democratic systems conducive to competition have engendered societies that develop at a faster rate than those that install totalitarian political regimes that, by favouring order as a means to prevent generalised violence, do not foster competition.

We can say that when people who aspire to the same conditions vis-à-vis well-being or the absence of danger coexist within one space, competition ensues. If no rules exist as to the pursuit of this competition, conflict will result. The agonal state guarantees the existence of these rules of confrontation.

Hierarchical organisation thus issues from this competition. In industrial societies, specialists and bureaucrats hold the most important positions within the social hierarchy, which in the past corresponded to other activities. It is the actions of the state that safeguard this hierarchy through the rules it establishes for competition. Nonetheless, when state control weakens and the monopoly on the use of force ceases to be in the hands of the state, others, who disregard the rules governing competition, may seize the opportunity to accede to top positions in this hierarchy<sup>70</sup>.

As part of this deregulated competitive process, those that secure pre-eminent positions in a hierarchy will do so by suppressing the rest of the group by force. At this point, all social order is sidestepped, leaving the social group at the mercy of the most belligerent. The victor will occupy the top positions within the hierarchy, thereby imposing his order.

The transfer of the monopoly on violence to the state is this an instrument deployed by all democratic societies to protect themselves as regards the use of force. However, this does not mean, as will transpire, that violence disappears from democratic societies.

## **EFFECTIVE OR DIRECT VIOLENCE AND VIRTUAL OR STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE.**

Although the prospect of “non-violence” is a respectable one, it does not make sense to seek to achieve the complete eradication of violence in the light of widespread violence that manifests itself in varying forms. Violence does not only exist when we see it, but it exists with a multitude of facets and circumstances of human relations.<sup>71</sup>

The term violence that we used to define conflict is defined as the use of physical force in order to harm, to damage or to forcefully restrict personal freedoms.

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<sup>70</sup> LABORIT *Opus Cit.* pp 50-63.

<sup>71</sup> DOMENACH, Jean-Marie. «Violence» in JOXE, A. (coord.), *La Violence et ses Causes*, Paris, Unesco, 1981, ISBN 92-3-301809-1, p 39.

Freund provides us with a far more complex definition of violence that we will reproduce here since it will help us to comprehend subsequent debate as to the limits of violence:

“Violence consists of a relationship between powers, not merely between forces that develop between various individuals or human groups of varying dimensions, who renounce other ways of maintaining relations between themselves to directly or indirectly force the one party to act against its will and comply with the intentions and desires of the other under the threat of intimidation or aggressive or oppressive means, which can infringe upon the physical or moral integrity of the other party, putting at risk their material goods or their most cherished ideas and exposing them to the danger of physical annihilation in the event of alleged, deliberate or persistent resistance”.<sup>72</sup>

Freund recognises the existence of two types of violence:<sup>73</sup>

- Direct or active violence, which is the violence perpetrated during an attack, from threats to physical violence, with or without arms;
- Indirect or situational violence, which is not openly apparent and is of an insidious and wide-spread nature. This category of violence has a very broad spectrum. Its most acute form is reflected in oppressive systems of social organisation (autocracies), and, at its lowest level, certain authors such as Galtung, extend this to include manipulation.<sup>74</sup>

Galtung classifies violence into four types that lead him to acknowledge Freund's pairing:

1. Conventional, physical or psychological violence. Directly attacks the psychophysical condition of another human being.
2. Poverty. Infringes upon the basic needs of a human being.
3. Repression. Violates human rights.
4. Alienation. Adversely affects the finer needs of the human race, those connected its condition as a rational being.

The last three constitute what Galtung calls structural violence, which lacks an identifiable perpetrator and which is not manifest.<sup>75</sup>

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72 FREUND. *Opus cit.* p 84.

73 *Ibid* p 85 - 86.

74 *Ibid.* p 88.

75 GALTUNG *Opus cit.* pp. 98-99.

As we can observe, Freund and Galtung agree on a classification broken down into two groups: direct violence and indirect or structural violence. For the sake of simplicity, we shall call them direct and indirect violence.

Despite the fact that they both split violence into two different categories, Freund clearly nuances Galtung's concept of indirect violence, claiming that the laxity of latter when defining the bounds of indirect violence destroys the significance of violence. For Galtung, if there are "differences in living conditions", violence already exists. The problem is that all social relationships harbour these discordant living conditions. Freund argues that if everything is violence then nothing is violence as it cannot be distinguished with clarity.<sup>76</sup>

According to Freund, for violence to exist there must be an intention to "force" an opponent to accept someone else's will, whether directly or indirectly.

Once we have defined the concept of indirect violence, we can revisit the concept of conflict, based on the idea of violence.

We referred to violence stating that conflict occurs beyond the rules of competition, with palpable hostility, which as it develops could see those involved resort to violence. Indirect violence may exist within the same rules that govern social organisation. This places indirect violence beyond the conflict, but linked to societal organisation. This analysis matches Freund's statement about indirect violence constituting violence without conflict.<sup>77</sup>

Direct and indirect violence are very closely linked.<sup>78</sup> Several authors, such as Senghaas<sup>79</sup> and Mertens<sup>80</sup> state that direct social and political violence may be the only outlet for a social group faced with the indirect violence inflicted upon individuals by society.

The social system itself is capable of engendering violence even as it quells it<sup>81</sup> as it seeks to stamp it out.<sup>82</sup> The case of the operations in Libya against Ghaddafi's regime,

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76 FREUND. Opus cit. p 87-91.

77 Ibid. p 86.

78 GALTUNG. Opus cit. pp 100-01.

79 SENGHAAS. Opus cit. p 111.

80 MERTENS, Pierre. «Instiutional Violence, Democratic Violence and Repression» in JOXE, A. (coord.), *La Violence et ses Causes*, Paris, Unesco, 1981 ISBN 92-3-301809-1 p 260.

81 POKLIEWSKI-KOZIELL, Krzysztof. "The Study of Violence from the Perspective of Social Defence" in JOXE A. (coord.), *La Violence et ses Causes*, Paris, Unesco, 1981 p 172-182.

82 DOMENACH. Opus cit. p 43.

launched to protect the civil population,<sup>83</sup> is illustrative of how attempts to remove violence from the equation of the protests of the “Arab Spring”, has resulted in a state of civil war<sup>84</sup> and in the uncontrolled use of weaponry in a region of our planet, the Sahel, where state activity is conspicuous by its absence.<sup>85</sup>

It is not possible to govern all social relationships. Moreover, the fact that societies, due to technological, economic and social advances, are in a state of constant evolution means that rules become obsolete and are no longer able to regulate the social reality. This propagates situations of indirect violence. Once this is instilled, sooner or later it will bring direct violence in its wake.

It is paramount to ensure that social organisation constantly develops in order to guarantee transition towards formulae that, although they may not satisfy the needs of all social groups, at least make certain that these are taken into consideration.

A debate exists surrounding the relationship between social evolution and conflict that aims to determine if changes to social organisation provoke violence or if, on the contrary, it is violence that leads to such change. According to Lewis Coser, violence serves society by advancing festering social conflict when the dominant sector, the party that holds the monopoly on violence, does not want to accept change.<sup>86</sup> Hannah Arendt and R. Dahrendorf contemplate the relationship between violence and social change,<sup>87</sup> whilst other authors, such as the structural-functionalists Lucian

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83 UNITED NATIONS. Security Council, *Resolution 1973* [online] United Nations [New York] 17 March 2011 [accessed Spanish version 10 February 2015] Available at: [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1973%282011%29](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1973%282011%29) p 3.

84 MESA, Beatriz. “Libya, the new narcoterrorism” *IEEE Position Paper 120/2013* [online] Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies [Madrid] 10 December 2014 [accessed 5 February 2015] Available at: [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_opinion/2013/DIEEEO120-2013\\_DerivaLibiaExtremismo\\_BeatrizMesa.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2013/DIEEEO120-2013_DerivaLibiaExtremismo_BeatrizMesa.pdf) p 2.

85 FUENTE, Ignacio. “The hybrid threat: Jihadism and organized crime in the Sahel” *IEEE Position Paper 57/2014* [online] Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies [Madrid] 03 December 2014 [accessed 3 February 2015] Available at: <http://www.ieee.es/contenido/noticias/2014/12/DIEEEA57-2014.html> p 11-12.

86 PUD BIENEN, Henry. *Violence and social change* Chicago, 1968 p 21 apud KHAN Opus cit. p 202-03.

87 ARENDT, Hannah. *On violence* New York, 1970 and DAHRENDORF, R. *Class and class conflict in industrial society* Stanford, 1959 apud KHAN. Opus cit. 205.

Pye,<sup>88</sup> Edward Shils<sup>89</sup> and Clifford Geertz<sup>90</sup> maintain that it is social change that causes violence because of the sense of insecurity attributed to this change

It is possible that both standpoints are correct, and that circumstances determine this order in every conflict. Indirect violence thus requires disturbances, which are replicated by others in a succession leading to other manifestations of indirect violence.

Irrespective of the debate as to which comes first, it seems clear that social conflict and change are closely interlinked. Whether conflict serves as the means through which social changes are brought about, or instead is a consequence of social change,<sup>91</sup> conflict permits new situations to be addressed, those encountered due to societal change or even problems that were thus far not tackled for various reasons,<sup>92</sup> if rules governing competition do not exist, thereby entailing recourse to direct violence. When conflict is contained within acceptable bounds there is development. If it oversteps the mark, this breeds revolution and the direct violence associated therewith.<sup>93</sup>

Although we should not tolerate the use of direct force to resolve a conflict, since we would be accepting that the end justifies the means, we must concede that over the course of history, there have been cases in which direct violence has been one of the few credible alternatives available in the face of the structural violence within a system devoid of mechanisms that would have allowed it to evolve. The debate about the legitimacy of direct violence as a means to defeat indirect violence is a long-standing one.<sup>94</sup>

Violence is the solution that requires least ingenuity and which wreaks the most misery for many, detached from calls for change and with the social design that prevents it. For theorists of violent revolution such as Lenin, Mao and Debray, the shortest distance between two points may be organised violence in certain circumstances.<sup>95</sup> These theories rest upon the argument promoting the benefit for the group as supposed

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88 PYE, Lucian. *Guerilla communism and Malaya*, Princeton 1956; *Politics, personality and Nation Building: Burma's search for identity* New Haven, 1962; *Aspects of political development* Boston 1966; and PYE, Lucian and VERBA, Sidney. *Political culture and political development* Princeton 1965 apud KHAN. Opus cit. p 206.

89 SHILS, Edward. *Torments of secrecy* Glencoe 1956 p III; *Political development in the new states* New York 1962 apud KHAN Opus cit. p 206.

90 GEETZ, Clifford. (dir.) *Old societies and new states: the quest for modernity in Asia and Africa* New York, 1963 apud KHAN. Opus cit. p 206.

91 FRAGA IRIBARNE. Opus cit. p 21.

92 FREUND. Opus cit. p 77.

93 FRAGA IRIBARNE. Opus cit. p 21.

94 MERTENS. Opus cit. 241-42.

95 BIENEN. Opus cit. p 46 apud KHAN Opus cit. p 205.

to individual benefit, although they usually fail to mention that this is what a few consider to be beneficial for the group versus the misfortune of a far higher number of individuals. Hence, this is a modern form of enlightened despotism.

It must be acknowledged that structural violence may force an individual to take a course of action, in collaboration with others, to effect social change in order to alleviate this pressure. Notwithstanding this point, history affords us with multiple examples of non-violent movements that have been able to achieve their objectives despite being confronted with structural violence. Gandhi, Luther King, the Polish trade union Solidarnosc, the Carnation Revolution in Portugal, the fight against Apartheid, or the Spanish Transition, to name but a few.

As human beings, what singles us out from the rest of the animals is our rational capacity. The path of reason is a slow one. It requires study, intelligence and personal sacrifice vis-à-vis the sacrifices of others.

If violence is part of the human social condition, intelligence also forms part of human nature. To betray this is to betray our human condition. To justify direct violence as the only way out of structural violence is nothing but a way of justifying discourse that aims to encourage others to make sacrifices in the pursuit of goals that run counter to the real interests of the group.

Although there is no justification for direct violence, except in the event of self-defence, and nor can one justify acquiescence in structural violence, it is not realistic to aspire to a world characterised by the absence of violence. This would be a utopia. Since violence will always be present, it is necessary to work tirelessly to tame it in all its forms.

## THE ROLE OF FRUSTRATION IN SOCIAL CONFLICT

Law forms part of the reality of conflict. Any claim is nothing but an assertion of that which is seen as a right, we can thus consider law as a source of conflict.<sup>96</sup> The agonal state cannot resolve all issues. The need for modifications shall always exist, either because of incompleteness, because of socio-economic changes to a place or, quite simply because it contradicts natural law.<sup>97</sup>

When a body of law does not have mechanisms at its disposal in order to effect change, this leaves no other alternative to conflict as a way of modifying something seen as an injustice. Law cannot be considered a solution to violence, but it does serve

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96 FREUND. *Opus cit.* p 278.

97 *Ibid.* p 286.

to contain it,<sup>98</sup> perhaps acting as a prevention mechanism, which permits conflict to persist while controlling the risk of it becoming violent.

We should not rule out the possibility that societies may exist whose reform mechanisms would not be up to the task of channelling the potential aspirations of the population. Nevertheless, we should not simplify the situation here by drawing a distinction between democratic systems and autocratic ones.

It does not ensue that within an autocratic system the only way to effect change is through violence, nor even in a democratic system that rejection of the path of violence is a given. The history of Spain in the 20th century is one example of this, with the transformation from a democratic system of the Second Spanish Republic to the Civil War or the peaceful transition from the autarchic system under the Francoist dictatorship to a democratic system.

History shows us, through a multitude of examples, that it is not social systems in themselves that have assured alternative ways forward, but instead that people and circumstances had an essential part to play in the path chosen and the success of this decision.<sup>99</sup>

On the assumption that alternatives to direct violence exist as a way of vanquishing structural violence, we should ask ourselves what inspires the group to choose one over another. In order to try to answer this question, we shall begin by studying the turning point of the conflict.

One of the principal arguments advanced by many researchers as to the origin of violence is one linked to a generalised state of frustration among a group. According to Graham-Gurr, frustration is the main reason for the violent behaviour observed in certain social groups in the United States.<sup>100</sup>

Frustration is a factor that, alongside other factors, may trigger violent behaviour. Relative frustration, provoked by comparison, is incredibly powerful, both for comparison with others and when comparing how things were for oneself in the past.<sup>101</sup>

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98 Ibid. p 279-80.

99 ROBERTS, Adam. "Introduction" in ROBERTS, A., and GARTON, ASH T. (edit.), *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*. Oxford University Press, 2009, New York. ISBN 978-0-19-955201-6 p 20-24.

100 GRAHAM, H. D. and GURR T. F. (dir.) *The History of violence in America. Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence*, Bantam Books, 1969 apud HALLORAN, James D., "Mass Communication: Symptom or Cause of Violence?" in JOXE, A. (coord.), *La Violence et ses Causes*, Paris, Unesco, 1981 p 142 .

101 KLINEBERG Opus cit. p 129-31.

The theory of the origin of violence put forward by John Dollard, known as the frustration–aggression theory, maintains that the underlying cause of violence is the anger produced by frustration.<sup>102</sup>

T. R. Gurr's theory of relative deprivation illustrates that violence finds its origins in the perception people have of a discrepancy between their hopes and opportunities on two levels: what an individual believes they justly deserve and what they believe they can achieve with their means. When someone faces up to reality and realises that they cannot achieve what they believe they should achieve, this breeds discontent. In social terms, generalised discontent is channelled politically and then used to encourage violence as a means to pursue political objectives.<sup>103</sup>

With his J-curve theory, J. Davies states that violence occurs in times of depression following long periods of expansion that have fuelled hopes of continued growth and not during long periods of deprivation. It is the comparison between expectations and real outcomes that really lies at the origin of the violence.<sup>104</sup>

Feierabend and Nesvold's theory of social change and systematic frustration advances the view that systematic frustration is the root of violence. It may come about for a multitude of reasons, yet these can be grouped into: frustration resulting from a mismatch between aspirations and successes, frustration resulting from forecasts, frustration resulting from uncertainty and frustration resulting from aspirations and contradictory prospects.<sup>105</sup>

The last three theories are based on the first. We can discern one element they have in common: the frustration caused by relative deprivation as a principal trigger of episodes of social violence. Research undertaken about this aspect of social psychology demonstrates that a clear link exists between the genesis of social discontent and a sense of relative deprivation.<sup>106</sup>

The hostility that characterises a conflict tends to be associated with major losses

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102 DOLLARD John *Frustration and aggression* New Haven, 1939 p 21 apud KHAN Opus cit. p 194.

103 GURR Tomas Robert *Why men rebel* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1970 p 13 apud KHAN Opus cit. pp 194-95.

104 DAVIES James C. "Toward a theory of revolution" *American Sociological Review*, No. 27, February 1962 pp 5-19 apud KHAN Opus cit. p 195.

105 GRAHAM, H. D., and GURR, T. F. (dir.) Opus cit. pp 635-38 apud KHAN. Opus cit. pp 194-97.

106 BROWN, Rupert. "Intergroup Relations" in HEWSTONE, M. et al. (Dir. and Coord.) *Introducción a la Psicología social. Una perspectiva europea. [Introduction to Social Psychology. A European Perspective.]* 3rd edition, Barcelona, Ariel, 1992, ISBN 84-344-0855-4, p 392.

over the course of competition. These losses give rise to feelings of frustration<sup>107</sup> linked to the conflict. In social conflicts, relative deprivation plays an essential role as a source of frustration.

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107 ROSS. Opus cit. p 242.

## CONCLUSIONS

We have cited numerous social movements that have successfully achieved the reform objectives they sought without the need to resort to direct violence. Moreover, we have also highlighted how organised direct violence may be the fastest route. The circumstances surrounding a social conflict dictate the greater effectiveness of actions.

Direct violence gives rise to penury that may affect a significant portion of the group. Assuming that the decision to take the path of direct violence may be a conscious process<sup>108</sup>, the chances of success should be weighed up against the adverse effects as different options are evaluated. The outcome of this deliberation would need to lead the group to believe that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. This begs the question of whether this is possible and, if so, how to exert influence over this assessment.

Apparently, it is indeed possible to influence this evaluation and decision-making process carried out by the group. A higher or lower perception of the losses suffered as part of competition with another group may aggravate this state of frustration. Perceptions fall within a subjective realm and therefore are subject to environmental influence.

The perception of chances of success and imagining the future post-conflict, as well as assessment of a situation by a group are all subjective. This renders the decision-making process dependent on any element that influences or motivates the group whether these be individuals or circumstances. This possibility to influence the group decision-making process enables circumstances and actors to determine the evolution of a conflict, just as we indicated in discussion of whether it was possible to prevent armed conflict.

By becoming aware of the factors that influence group motivation processes, we are likely to uncover the reason why social groups opt for the path of direct violence.

Likewise, given this capacity to influence individuals and events, it is possible that mechanisms exist that are able to control the degree of influence in decision-making. The study of such mechanisms will probably furnish us with a response as to the possibility of preventing social conflicts becoming armed conflicts.

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<sup>108</sup> BOUTHOUX Gaston, *Traité de Polémologie*, Madrid, EME Publications Service, 1984, ISBN 84-500-9615-4 p 68.

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