

Putting the Pieces Together: The Story of *Security for a New Century*

What foreign policy priority can the oil industry, environmentalists, the Quakers, the Bush White House, Senate Democrats, and the US Navy all agree on? Support for US ratification of the UN Law of the Sea Convention. Originally negotiated in 1982 and substantially modified to accommodate US concerns through negotiations concluded in 1994, the Convention constitutes the legal framework governing the world's oceans. With Senate Foreign Relations Committee approval of this Convention by a unanimous vote of 15-0 in February of 2004 and White House support, quick US ratification appeared certain. However, the majority opinion in favor of this convention is not carrying the day.

At this writing, the status of the Law of the Sea Convention exemplifies several of the problems addressed in previous chapters. A handful of anti-treaty pundits—referring to this Convention as the Law of the Sea Treaty (LOST)—have proceeded to overstate the decision-making authority of the United Nations under the Convention, misconstrue its impact on US intelligence gathering, and falsely assess the impediments it imposes on President Bush's Proliferation Security Initiative.¹ The impact of this small group is reverberating with the White House during an election year as well as the Senate Majority Leader's willingness to prioritize floor time for Senate

¹ The Convention provides no decision-making role for the UN; the US military (which is responsible for all intelligence operations of relevance) has stated the convention has no impact on their activities; and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Chief of Naval Operations confirm that US ratification would facilitate efforts under the Proliferation Security Initiative. See Senator Richard G. Lugar, "The Law of the Sea Convention: The Case for Senate Action," address at the Brookings Institution, May 4, 2004, available online at <http://www.brookings.edu/comm/events/20040504lugar.htm>

deliberations and a vote. Despite broad consensus among informed citizens and policymakers, Senate ratification during this session appears unlikely. Waning political will, competing political priorities, the time constraints of the congressional calendar, and a pending presidential election are all interrelated factors delaying action clearly in the US interest. The public feedback imbalance of a vocal, well-organized minority encapsulated in this example pervades the current policymaking process on the Hill and requires a nuts and bolts strategy to overcome.

Thus far, we have laid out the urgent needs that must be met, along with the institutional obstacles that hinder change and reinforce persistent imbalances in the approach to “security” as it is considered in Congress. We have also discussed different examples of security issues as they relate to committee structures and congressional staffers, and offered extensive tips and tools on how to do the spadework prior to engaging the Hill. How might all these concerns, constraints, and connections be translated into an action plan?

This chapter details an education strategy for Congress that was implemented in the late 1990s and continues today. The following description is not meant to illustrate a typical strategy, but rather to offer a case study of how carefully organized research and networking, along with the formation of strategic partnerships, can result in a successful program for dialogue on peace and security issues within the US Congress.

THE STORY OF *SECURITY FOR A NEW CENTURY*

Security for a New Century (SNC) is an ongoing briefing series—also known as a “study group”²—for Congress. The *SNC* study group meets regularly with US and international policy professionals to discuss the post-Cold War and post-September 11th security environment. *SNC* was founded in 1998 by a staffer and three Members of Congress concerned about the lack of

² The term “study group” was chosen because it had no existing rules and regulations associated with it, and because it conveyed the general objective of the briefing series: increasing understanding of emerging international security challenges by serving as a cutting-edge educational resource for congressional staff.

substantive and informal gatherings on the Hill to discuss new security challenges. The elimination of the Arms Control and Foreign Policy Caucus in 1995 and the increased partisanship had rendered Congress bereft of such informal bipartisan venues. The acute need for such cooperative, problem-solving opportunities became obvious in the wake of the Cold War, when elected leaders lacked clear consensus on foreign policy priorities. Important government programs that were created to address topics like rule of law and peacekeeping did not garner widespread recognition in Congress. These and other security issues—nuclear threat reduction, democratic transition aid, and even issues of terrorism—were falling between the cracks of the existing committee system and therefore were not receiving the attention that they deserved.

The study group was created with the benefit of initial research and insights garnered during 1994, when co-author Lorelei Kelly spent a semester working in the House of Representatives for Congresswoman Elizabeth Furse (D-OR). Representative Furse, a member of the Armed Services Committee, was interested in helping shift the priorities in the security policy debate toward prevention and peacekeeping. Her hope was that the conflict resolution movement across the United States would provide compelling information to spur the political will to change priorities.

The following insights gathered from a wide range of opinion leaders during interviews conducted in 1994 capture the opportunities and problems that *SNC* was created to address:

“This is the gold rush stage of the conflict resolution movement—it is full of chaos and excitement and claims—sort of like a mining camp. Well, now we need to find some city planners.” (*Head of a nonprofit*)

“We don’t need any more seminars in the Capitol conference rooms. What we need is to be told by a significant number of constituents that this idea is a good one, and that they will support our risk-taking policy initiatives. And these folks who support us need to be talking from a common and coherent script. It needs to be reliable.” (*Member of Congress*)

“There is no resistance to these ideas in the US Government, and in fact, there is substantial lip-service; there are budget limitations, however. The agencies want to do their existing programs well. Remember, this bureaucracy was not set up to do this; it was hired to fight the Cold War. Before they’ll change, they need ‘yes-able’ propositions.” (*Former Department of Defense official*)

“What we in the activist world may do is increase the evidence, make the possibility real, and then help translate it into the reality of operating in Washington.” (*Staff member of an international humanitarian nonprofit*)

“The conflict resolution movement is not an anti-Pentagon movement. In fact, the Pentagon promotes and has succeeded in providing some of the best examples of conflict resolution policy that exist within an agency.” (*Scholar at the federally funded United States Institute of Peace*)

“One mistake would be the chip-on-the-shoulder, moralizing type of attitude, like movements of the past.” (*Local activist*)

“One thing that interested academic constituencies could do is to take some issue that DC is concerned about (like democracy policy) and use the Washington jargon to hook people in and then expose them to all this other thinking.” (*Think-tank scholar*)

The comments and information generated from myriad interviews and discussions led to a basic research question: how could we leverage the knowledge of academics and on-the-ground experts—local, federal, and international—in a manner helpful to policymakers? What could be done to bridge the disconnect between and within the existing, anachronistic federal bureaucracies? How could conflict resolution itself be applied to an inherently divisive institution such as Congress?

THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Conflict Resolution Principles and *Security for a New Century*

Security for a New Century is a case study in moving from conflict resolution theory to practice. For more than two decades, California's Hewlett Foundation supported organizations working to anticipate and respond to domestic and international conflict; prevent and resolve disputes; facilitate systemic change in states; and promote deliberation and participation in democratic decision-making. With these goals in mind, several universities across the United States were funded to set up conflict resolution theory-building projects and create a solid repository of knowledge in this new field.³ At Stanford, this movement gave rise to the Stanford Center on Conflict and Negotiation (SCCN). The framework and ground rules of *Security for a New Century* are based on the theories produced at SCCN.

The Stanford Center on Conflict and Negotiation was established to explore structural, strategic, and psychological barriers that prevent parties—whether individuals, groups, or nations—from reaching mutually advantageous agreements, and also to study policies and interventions that might overcome those barriers. Research began with a few central questions: why do negotiations so often fail even when there are possible resolutions that would obviously serve disputants better than protracted struggle? Also, if resolutions are achieved, why does success often come after heavy and avoidable costs? These questions spurred discussion on business and legal disputes, and encouraged researchers to explore the numerous religious, ethnic, and political conflicts that impose staggering costs on the world.⁴

Research on conflict and negotiation lends itself to interdisciplinary exploration because crosscutting themes like decision-making and participation do not belong to any one area of

³ For more information about these programs, see the “field infrastructure” section of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation’s website at www.hewlett.org.

⁴ Kenneth Arrow, Robert H. Mnookin, Lee Ross, Amos Tversky, and Robert Wilson, eds., *Barriers to Conflict Resolution* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1995), p. 5.

academic inquiry. Important components of *Security for a New Century* were derived from the knowledge gained from many schools of research, including social psychology, law, business, and economics, to name a few. The study group focused on highly charged political environments, interpersonal communication obstacles, and interpersonal misunderstandings, each of which have significant implications for policymaking. Conflict resolution theory—like many products of academia—can be dense and even overwhelming. But thankfully, it can be broken down into basic concepts that seem much more practical. The creators of the study group set out to distill user-friendly adaptations from esoteric concepts and then use the resulting insights as the foundation of the study group itself. What follows is a list of the most important guiding concepts modified for the study group:

Naïve Realism.

This is a general term to describe how some individuals relate in society and to the world they perceive around them. For example, if I am a naïve realist, I think that my own view of the world is objective and realistic, and therefore shared. If I share my information with others, I believe that they will endorse my point of view. If they don't, they are probably irrational or biased. A key part of naïve realism is the tendency for individuals to insist that the way they see issues is the way things really are.

False Consensus Effect.

This effect is a corollary to naïve realism—it arises because individuals tend to overestimate the extent to which others share their views. Thus they make insufficient allowance for differences in how others frame or construe information. The unfortunate result of this over-estimation of common ground is misunderstanding and unwarranted inferences about others' values, beliefs, and even sincerity. False consensus is exacerbated to the degree that individuals tend only to associate with and talk to others who share their views.

False Polarization.

This concept describes the seeming opposite, but actually complementary, notion to false consensus. It describes the underestimation of common ground that occurs when individuals

consider the position of those on the “other side.” Here the problem is that once we know someone disagrees with us, we think his views must reflect his own self-interest or ideology (e.g., “If he were truly objective, there would be no disagreement.”) False polarization also occurs because decisiveness resonates with an audience more than ambivalence. For various strategic, social, and political reasons, many of us are generally unwilling to acknowledge our own ambivalence or uncertainty publicly, and consequently find it difficult to appreciate valid arguments on the other side.

Fundamental Attribution Error.

This term describes how individuals often fail to understand other perspectives when they encounter surprising, unexpected, or perhaps even unwarranted, responses from someone who holds those views. They tend to attribute any action or outcome to the person’s disposition (or character) and fail to factor in situational circumstances. This is particularly relevant in the social or political realm. In other words, someone making a fundamental attribution error might judge a response by concluding, “I knew it, he’s a liberal/conservative,” instead of acknowledging the complexity of the issue at hand by reflecting, “yes, this situation is confusing,” or “I’ll bet his experience makes what I’m saying seem strange.”

Labeling.

This concept relates to the tendency of individuals to use shorthand to overestimate differences and underestimate common ground, leading them to miss important common values in the process. This tendency manifests as stereotyping where one word substitutes for a complex and layered explanation. The best example of this in Congress is when Members use the shorthand provided by the party leadership, i.e., a bumpersticker formulation, to express their positions, instead of seeing the issue as a problem-solving opportunity. A label is used instead of breaking the issue down to more complex, but also more meaningful, parts.

Framing.

This is a counterpart to labeling and refers to whatever manipulation or technique one uses to change the way a decision

or problem is understood. Simply put, framing describes an issue's terms of reference—or how a question is approached. How is a problem formulated? An example of framing is the question: Is the glass half-full or half-empty? The description of the question (the glass in this case) can significantly influence the listener's response and/or choice of next steps. Framing for maximum polarization is common with controversial political issues—where the language used to introduce the issue gives away a bias. Defense issues are often framed as either/or budget trade-offs, with rhetoric about who is “strong” or “weak” on defense. Each of these frames denotes a particular interpretation of the issue and leaves out many important details and complexities. In political debates, issues are often framed in absolute terms, and partisans use misinterpretations or even purposefully put the wrong construction on the words or actions of their perceived opponents. How an issue is framed will go far in determining the capacity for finding common ground. If there are limited opportunities to explore and resolve these tensions, conflict emerges due to the gap between real and perceived differences.

Reactive Devaluation.

This term describes a situation in which the very act of offering information or a proposal—if it comes from a supposed adversary—may diminish its value. Reactive devaluation is often seen in policymaking as a partisan cue, making a situation so toxic that sharing and problem solving become impossible.

Loss Aversion.

For individuals, this concept entails a reluctance to accept risks unless the payoffs are very favorable. It describes an individual's tendency to avoid immediate loss, even if the apparent cost is more than offset by a future gain. Loss aversion favors the status quo. The term also refers to the asymmetry in the evaluation of positive and negative outcomes, as losses loom larger than the corresponding gains. It points to the superiority of certainty (that which I have now) over mere probability (that which I might have in the future).

Information Asymmetry.

This concept is often found in discussions of financial markets, where some, but not all participants know information. For our purposes, it is used to describe information about peace and security issues as a public good—one that is distributed unequally because of systematic informational and political barriers inherent to Congress. Conflict prevention improves to the extent that information asymmetry is reduced. While recognizing that good faith can't be assumed in politics, the study group addressed this question: how do we optimize information sharing to prevent these issues from falling victim to partisan politics?

The preceding terms outlined important considerations for the founders of *Security for a New Century*. The perceptions and actions of politicians on Capitol Hill provide an ideal laboratory for observing each of these concepts at work on a daily basis. Given the conditions of naïve realism, attribution errors, loss aversion, and unevenly distributed information, how might we engage problem solving in an environment that is both focused on the short term, and often antagonistic? Moreover, how might we do this during times of transition and uncertainty like after the Cold War, and then following September 11th?

Applying the Principles

From its inception, the study group reflected conflict resolution research, taking advantage of solid empirical knowledge in the art and science of peace-making and participatory systems. The study group was a test case of conflict resolution theory. The founders were interested in how individuals use information to make decisions, and what kind of information is most desirable in the process. The stakes were high: Congress is a contentious battleground of ideas where framing issues is a competitive sport. The fast-changing agenda makes uncertainty an important consideration, while the egos and political implications of public positions render elected leaders risk-averse. Moreover, our target audience was Hill staffers who are wary of information shared by outsiders, especially lobbyists and those seeming to have a biased perspective. Let us turn to how the art and science of conflict resolution was applied in our approach to creating and implementing *Security for a New Century*.

The study group was founded on the premise that the major impediment to congressional support for US cooperative engagement is information asymmetry. In other words, that many Members were defaulting to Cold War thinking or just taking cues from party leadership because credible alternatives were not available. As we've discussed already, the deliberative process of Congress is hindered by dated concepts, distorted by narrow jurisdictions, and lacking in feedback mechanisms for problem-solving. The lack of unbiased, timely, and authoritative information seemed like a challenge we could address. As one of the founding goals of the study group was to create a feedback loop between Congress and US policy agencies, we actively searched for active or recently retired government policy professionals who could share a "ground truth" perspective. Viewed this way, the study group also amplified the ability of Congress to conduct thorough oversight.

Examples of reactive devaluation occur often in Washington's policy debates. Partisan politics required us to prevent the automatic discounting of speakers because of a suspicion of bias by being particularly careful about who addressed the study group. Hence, we avoided "big names" and/or individuals with an obvious party affiliation. To this day, our ideal speaker is an individual who understands the broad nature of security and the interagency aspects of policy, but who also had much practical experience implementing policy. This tactic also helps avoid the perception that the speakers come with a particular agenda. In order to maximize the learning experience, we treat participants as potential naïve realists, with the corresponding understanding that we need to prevent attribution errors as much as possible. Providing for naïve realism has been relatively simple. Peace and security issues allow much room for identifying common values. How these values are prioritized with funding resources, however, is often where conflicts arise, especially if the issues are framed as trade-offs or policy opposites, (i.e., "guns versus butter") instead of policy alternatives.

Peace and security issues also suffer because of a hangover of bitter political legacies from decades past, as discussed in Chapter 2. For this reason, it was imperative at the outset not to allow our topics and speakers to be categorically dismissed through easy stereotypes ("He's a jarhead, what does he know about peace-building?") or "Why should I come listen to the Birkenstock crowd

talk about security?") Hence, our charge is to find "unusual suspects" to discuss issues. We have done this by inviting military professionals to address the humanitarian or soft aspects of security needs in which they actively have played a role, such as AIDS and disaster relief. We also invite economic development and relief specialists to discuss how their issues are part of post-Cold War security, and how they often work in partnership with the military to achieve overall goals. Mixing and matching in this way does not come without tension and debate, but it is where the power of the study group framework comes in handy. Ground rules have been established. Everyone present knows that the purpose is dialogue and information sharing, not political point scoring. These values have been our reference points. The fact that neither the framework nor the ground rules have changed during the life of the study group is a testament to the power of careful framing.

Attribution errors occur when individuals don't sufficiently account for perspectives different from their own. We assume that if individuals come to the study group, they come with an open mind, and that our purpose is to offer as much solid knowledge and creative problem-solving as possible. Our task is to prevent, to the extent possible, the tendency for staff to close their minds about creative, pragmatic alternatives.

Conflict resolution theory highlights the important role of an objective third party to act as mediator or facilitator. The study group designates the host as facilitator. The "host" is a staffer, not an outsider. In a partisan "winner-takes-all" place like Capitol Hill, the facilitator's objective is to foster a problem-solving atmosphere and encourage discussion, thereby creating an opportunity for participants to think in new ways about a particular security challenge.

"In a sense, the mediator can turn the parties' attention away from the direct pursuit of equity to the pursuit of enlightened self-interest. While divergent views of the past are inevitable, the mediator can employ techniques designed to at least help each side understand the case from the other side's perspective."⁵

⁵ Kenneth Arrow et al., eds., *Barriers to Conflict Resolution*, p. 22.

The active facilitation of a third party is essential. From the outset, it has been vital to give the content center stage, underscoring the basic framework of security as a broadly shared concern that has complex parts. It also stresses that this understanding of security requires many policy tools. In practice, this means no long-winded introductions or announcements. Rather, the facilitator blends in with the rest of the audience after a brief introduction, then reappears to help with questions and answers. The invited guests are also issued advance “Speaker Guidelines” with tips on how to prepare for and connect with a congressional audience. Occasionally, the facilitator intervenes to clarify, repeat questions, redirect interrogative questioning, and clear up obvious misunderstandings.

Finally, it has been important to construct the study group in a way that minimizes the effects of loss aversion. This has been especially important after September 11th. Although September 11th made broad notions of security more obvious, it also revealed the inertia of the policy conversations of the post-Cold War 1990s, when many opportunities for dramatically reframing security were marginalized or ignored. September 11th, therefore, encouraged lawmakers to begin questioning both narrowly defined security issues and the reliance on traditional methods of providing for security through higher defense spending. Like the American people, many lawmakers’ initial reactions to September 11th were anger and fear. Through the study group, governmental agencies, congressional staff, and the policy community engaged in discussion about a more comprehensive vision of peace and long-term security. The study group attracts superb participants, and only rarely suffers from the antics of disruptive attendees. To illustrate, here are just a few topics the study group has covered:

Hearts and Minds: An Arab Reformist’s Perspective

With Dr. Hossam Badrawi, Chairman of the Education and Scientific Research Committee in the Egyptian Parliament and leader within the reformist wing of the National Democratic Party.

The Iraq Survey Group

With Dr. David Kay, former Special Advisor to the Iraq Survey Group and Chief US Weapons Inspector in Iraq.

The US Role in UN Peacekeeping

With Dr. Jane Holl Lute, Assistant Secretary-General, UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

The US Army: Transforming to What?

With Colonel Douglas A. MacGregor, Center for Technology and National Security Policy, National Defense University.

Techniques and Tactics in Practice

The actual practice of the study group encompasses conflict resolution techniques such as facilitated dialogue, not-for-attribution discussion, a problem-solving framework, and “ground truth” perspectives of operational experts (policy implementers) as frequently as possible. For Hill staff who are often jaded by constant advocacy and lobbyists plugging commercial interests, the study group was a welcome respite and an instant hit.

Security for a New Century was created as a flexible venue to respond to the needs of Hill staff on issues where background knowledge can inform current policymaking (e.g., lessons learned in the Haiti peacekeeping mission during the 1990s and how those lessons might apply to our policies in Iraq). We also decided to open most of the meetings to off-the-Hill participants in order to demystify Congress for those working on peace and security issues in and around Washington, DC. Most importantly, however, the principle of inclusion has been foremost, so all participants can hear as many perspectives as possible on the issue being discussed.

The purpose of *Security for a New Century* is simple: to broaden the international outlook on Capitol Hill in the interest of the public good. The overarching premise, endowing the study group with a problem-solving (not political) ethic, is that the Cold War is over and that we need a better understanding of contemporary threats and solutions. Moreover, we want to reap the good intentions of elected leaders who generally agree that when it comes to US security, military force should be used only

as an option of last resort. If our guiding principles are indeed true, then we have many areas to explore—areas that carry with them significant policy implications.

Framing an Updated Worldview

Security for a New Century set out not only to frame the security challenges of globalization consistently, but also to root this notion of change in reality by using specific examples. We needed a basic framework within which participants would be asked to construe global peace and security issues. We therefore decided early on to map the discussions of the study group according to the proposition that today's security issues: (1) exist *across* as much as *within* traditional boundaries; (2) are *affected* by constantly evolving communications technology; and, (3) require new and nontraditional partnerships, both public and private.

One way we hope to foster participation in the study group has been to highlight the opportunity for fairness in discussion. In comparison to committee hearings, which are Member-focused, formal, and stage-managed, the study group recognizes no formal hierarchy. The only exception to this rule has been that Hill staff are recognized first during the question and answer period. It is our hope that if discussants feel heard, the knowledge gained will have more legitimacy. Other ground rules have also been established: the study group is off-the-record and breaks on the hour; its guests avoid acronyms; and it is not an advocacy venue.

For the study group to be perceived and function as a shared resource and a public service, we decided that its activities must be transparent and inclusive. The first step in this undertaking was to make sure the project had bipartisan sponsorship.

The second important task has been to make sure that all staff are invited every time. This has been accomplished via the use of internal mail. The study group's "Dear Colleague" letters are signed by the co-sponsoring Members and alert staff to upcoming events. A typical *SNC* "Dear Colleague" might read as follows:

Dear Colleague:

Security for a New Century 108th Congress

Toons Routing Out Terror

When: Monday, March 25 at 3:00 pm

Where: Hart Senate Office Building, Room 454

Roger Rabbit, former movie star turned CIA supersleuth, will be on hand to discuss the operations of toons in investigating terrorist financing networks, efforts to track their origins, and techniques utilized to identify persons involved in them. Special Agent Rabbit will discuss the flexibility inherent in an organization that is charged with the investigation of a covert structure that utilizes everything from gold to diamonds as its means to move money among many countries and continents. The questions he will address include: What have we learned about terrorist financing networks since September 11th? What types of international cooperation are required to help facilitate US investigative efforts? In what aspects are these efforts lacking?

Security for a New Century is a bipartisan study group for Congress. We meet regularly with US and international policy professionals to discuss the post-Cold War and post-September 11th security environment. All sessions are facilitated and off-the-record. It is not an advocacy venue.

Sincerely,

Senator So-and-So (R)

Senator So-and-So (D)

“Dear Colleagues” are supplemented by internal email notices to alert staff about sessions. The email list for Hill staff is all-inclusive, so all staffers are notified each time. Off-the-Hill lists are compiled via self-referral and sign-up sheets.

It continues to be the main goal of *Security for a New Century* to highlight forward-thinking efforts and to seek the silver lining of the difficult lessons learned from September 11th. By raising the

general level of knowledge about international issues on Capitol Hill, and by stressing the importance of American leadership in forging international cooperation, the study group has provided a practical example of conflict resolution theory in action. By showcasing authoritative knowledge and organizing a forum for dialogue, it has bolstered issues of common concern, made complex issues apprehensible, and positively reframed many policy alternatives as a choice between the better of two goods rather than the lesser of two evils.

Security for a New Century is a balanced voice that highlights the benefits of active cooperation on peace and security issues. It is just one of many possible ways to help elected leaders move past the institutional barriers that keep Congress stuck in old-fashioned or partisan ways of thinking. We look forward to seeing similar endeavors as you and your colleagues organize to pursue the same goal.