

Johnson Institute

for Responsible Leadership

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John and Susan Collin Marks: Resilient Leadership in a Global Search for Common Ground

Prelude

Throughout human history, groups have responded to their divergent interests and priorities by engaging in violent conflict. To prevent violence and protect citizens, countries often establish military and police forces. Yet in some nations, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), security forces have been accused of perpetrating violence rather than preventing it.

The DRC has been embroiled in deadly conflicts for decades, including the Second Congo War from 1998 to 2003, which cost more lives than any conflict since World War II [1]. Both in times of war and peace, members of the Congolese army have been accused of theft, sexual abuse, torture, and murder [2]. This behavior is not isolated to war zones and has even entered soldiers' homes. Sylvie, the wife of a soldier from the village of Walungu, recalls: "Our husbands used to drink a lot, and sometimes they hit us...My husband also chased other women. Sometimes he did not come home for a few nights" [3]. Elsewhere in South Kivu Province, Army Captain Henri Bukasa remembers with regret his actions and those of his colleagues, stating: "After a while, we lost all sense of self control" [4]. Colonel Alphonse Panzu suggests that soldiers' traumatic experiences of violence detached them from their communities, making them unable to live peacefully alongside civilians or even with their families.

In 2007, Search for Common Ground ("Search"), a nonprofit organization that focuses on the prevention and resolution of conflicts across the globe, launched efforts to transform the Congolese security sector [5]. Search recognized that peace in the DRC required mutual trust between citizens and security forces. To achieve this goal, Search launched a project called Lobi Mokolo Ya Sika, "Tomorrow is a New Day." The project has three components, each corresponding to one of three programmatic avenues that Search implements across the globe [6, 7]. The first centers on the promotion of peaceful **dialogue** between conflicting groups. Search organized 24 local security councils comprised of military commanders and community members. The councils design security plans that are responsive to the desires of citizens and better prepare the military to protect their human rights. The second component creates opportunities for soldiers and citizens to interact within a shared **community**. To restore trust and cooperation, Search brought together soldiers and villagers to grow crops on a communal field, attend movie screenings, and participate in sporting events. The third component leverages the **media**



John and Susan Collin Marks of Search for Common Ground accept the 2016 Johnson Institute Exemplary Leadership Award. The video of the award event can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ab19uMkwJc&t=8s>.

by airing content that promotes peace [8]. Search produces a TV program entitled *Ndakisa*, in which a fictional army officer fights corruption and upholds the rights of citizens.

The three integrated components of Tomorrow is a New Day have resulted in improved perceptions of security forces among citizens and increased attention to human rights among soldiers [3]. Moreover, the project has inspired citizens to take the lead in building peace in their communities. In Walungu, Sylvie has organized a committee comprised of the wives of soldiers. The committee provides support to victims of domestic violence and individual counseling to soldiers and their wives. Colonel Panzu recognizes the change that Search has brought to the broader army, stating: “a lot of soldiers have changed from bad to good” [4]. Tomorrow is a New Day has helped transform soldiers from perpetrators to protectors, and has mended lives and families in the process. Henri Bukasa recalls: “When my wife noticed me change, she fell in love with me again.”

Tomorrow is a New Day is one project of many in Search’s effort to end violent conflict in the world [9]. Under the leadership of Founder and former President John Marks and former Vice President Susan Collin Marks, Search has been attempting to build sustainable peace for over three decades. Through lifetimes spent working in the world’s most embattled places, John and Susan have discovered that peace relies on continuous and recurrent interactions between individuals on both sides of a conflict. They built Search upon the philosophy that personal interaction allows adversaries to uncover commonalities and form relationships based on understanding and trust [10]. To create openings for such interactions, Search implements innovative programs that facilitate dialogue, build communities, and leverage the media. Across the world, their integrated approach to conflict resolution has transformed environments that breed violence into environments that enable cooperative problem-solving.

Given the deep, systemic roots of conflict in the DRC, some find it difficult to imagine a sustainable peace arriving in the near future. Indeed, many individuals note that violence has been ubiquitous throughout human history and reject the idea that the world can completely achieve peace. However, John and Susan don’t see conflict this way. They are visionaries who see acts and threats of violence and

instead focus on opportunities for adversaries to cooperate and co-create new visions for the future. Search’s persistent efforts to build sustainable peace worldwide mirrors the tenacity that the Marks display as individuals and as leaders. Together, they have built an organization with dogged perseverance at its core, one that operates under the following principle:

There’s no instant cure for violent or destructive conflict—it’s a process, not an event. To shift a conflict situation, we have to make a long-term commitment to work in partnership with local people from various sectors of their society [11].

Through expertly conceived programs and a bit of risk-taking, Search has brought together adversaries in over 43 countries. These ongoing efforts required the resilient leadership of John and Susan, which has been the driving force behind Search throughout its 35-year history.

The History of Search for Common Ground

The road that led John Marks to discover that peace-building was his life’s purpose began in close proximity to one of the most violent conflicts in history. Upon graduating from Cornell University in 1965, John commenced his career by joining the U.S. Foreign Service. He was slated to serve his first tour in the U.K., but faced being drafted to the military upon the outbreak of the Vietnam War. As an alternative to being drafted into the military, John agreed to have his assignment changed to Vietnam where he served for 18 months as a civilian working in the U.S. Government’s “pacification” programs [12]. John likes to see the puzzled faces when he tells people that he “is one of the few members of my generation to have avoided the draft by serving in Vietnam.”

When his tour ended, John returned to the U.S. to work first as an analyst of French and Belgian affairs and then as an assistant to the State Department’s Director of Intelligence. Despite his quick ascent, he resigned only four and a half years after entering the Foreign Service. John’s experiences in Vietnam led him to vehemently oppose the war. Inspired as a political activist, he joined the office of Senator Clifford Case of New Jersey as an Executive Assistant. During his time on Capitol Hill, John was the



staff member in Case's office responsible for the Case-Church Amendment, which was approved by Congress in 1973 and cut off funding for American participation in the Vietnam War. John also opposed many of the actions being carried out by U.S. intelligence agencies, which led him to co-author the 1974 bestseller *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence* with Victor Marchetti, a former CIA employee. The book maintains that many CIA operations were not consistent with American legal and ethical norms [13]. Though the CIA ordered 339 passages to be censored, after prolonged negotiations only 168 passages were removed [12]. The publisher released the book with blank spaces in place of the removed passages and bolded the censored passages that remained.

Pressing on as a social activist, John then authored an award-winning book, *The Search for the Manchurian Candidate* (1979), which discussed the CIA's secret use of mind-control experiments during the Cold War. With two critically acclaimed publications under his belt, a fellowship with Harvard's Institute of Politics, and a Visiting Scholar appointment at Harvard Law School, John's future as a successful author seemed secure [14]. Yet in the early eighties, John decided to take an alternate path. "I didn't like the isolation of writing," John recalled later in his career, "I decided that my politics were defined by what I was against, and I decided that it was time to be *for* something—to stop trying to tear down the old system, but rather to build a new system. I also wanted to be a participant instead of an observer" [12]. His realization came at a time when tensions between the U.S. and Russia

were very high, largely based on concerns surrounding nuclear arms development and proxy warfare in developing nations. In the midst of this seemingly intractable tension, John had a vision that humanity could transform the way it deals with conflict, "from win-lose, adversarial approaches to non-adversarial, win-win solutions" [15].

In 1982, John put this ambitious vision into action when he founded Search for Common Ground. Headquartered in Washington D.C., Search began with a limited budget and just two employees, including John. Initially, the organization focused on finding common ground between the U.S. and the Soviet Union [16]. Among other activities, Search formed a task force of influential Americans and Soviets to develop shared strategies in opposing terrorism [17]. This project laid the groundwork for actual cooperation between the CIA and the KGB and led to a jointly written U.S.-Soviet book, called *Common Ground on Terrorism* [12].

When the Cold War ended with the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union, John's vision for Search expanded. Its mission became ending violent conflict, across the *entire* globe. John never saw this immensely ambitious dream as unattainable. Instead, he built the organization around a philosophy that was firmly rooted in the realities of conflict [16]. Central to Search's philosophy is that conflict is a natural part of the human condition; as individuals and groups act in their perceived best interest, they inevitably come into conflict with others that have different beliefs or priorities [11, 16]. Yet violent conflict is not inevitable. Rather, it arises when people respond to their differences with anger, fear, and hatred [11]. The key to this approach is understanding that violence is only one possible response to conflict. Under this premise, John founded Search to act on a simple operating principle: "Understand the differences; act on the commonalities" [16]. If adversaries could recognize their shared interests, values, and needs, they could work together to avoid violent conflict [15].

In addition to applying an innovative philosophy, Search sought to transform the field of conflict resolution by employing innovative methods to create understanding between adversaries. John recognized that the traditional means of conflict resolution, such as holding workshops and conferences, only engaged small groups of people [15, 18]. To reach a broader audience, John, who became

a self-taught media producer, launched Common Ground Productions (CGP) in 1986, a media production entity that was set up to produce original content, including television, radio, and film programming. CGP started with a 10-episode talk-show, aimed at enabling adversaries to search for common ground on contentious issues. This series appeared on over 100 public television stations in the U.S.

John also began to expand Search's geographic scope. In 1991, Search began working in the Middle East by facilitating unofficial conversations between influential Arabs, Israelis, Iranians, and Turks [12]. In 1993, Search opened its first international office in Macedonia, and in 1994 deployed a field office in Ukraine [18]. During this expansion, CGP also extended its reach by airing television content in Russia and Macedonia.



Exercise #1: John Marks' life is an excellent example of the importance of life-long learning, self-knowledge, and the circuitous path in a leader's journey. Many leaders mention that their career paths were not linear and that there were "critical junctures" that took them in different directions.

Possible questions:

1. Consider the career path of a leader you admire. What critical junctures did they face and how did they respond?
2. Interview a leader in your community or career field. What critical junctures or life-long learning experiences influenced their career path? How can you apply the lessons they learned to your own work?
3. Consider your own career or education path until this point. What critical junctures have you experienced that caused you to change course? Can you envision some junctures you may face in the future that could change your path?

A Deeper Engagement

In 1993, John traveled to South Africa to film a television series called *South Africa Searches for Common Ground*, a twenty-six-part series that addressed societal conflict during the transition from apartheid to democracy. The idea was to promote constructive dialogue about the nation's future [8, 15]. It was during this trip that John would form a personal bond that would forever change his life, along with the trajectory of Search. John was introduced to Susan Collin by his co-producer in South Africa. Within 26 hours of meeting, Susan and John felt a deep affinity for each other and recognized the harmony of their respective life's

purpose; a harmony that Susan would later describe as their "shared destiny" [19]. Nine months later, they were married and Susan moved to Washington, D.C. to partner with John in running Search.

A native of South Africa, Susan realized from an early age that apartheid was wrong. Profoundly influenced by her mother, who was a human rights activist, Susan recalls that apartheid separated individuals so completely that many were blind to its inherent injustice. Enlightened by her mother's convictions, Susan developed an acute awareness of the inequity that surrounded her. Susan recalled later in her career:

My mother stood up to the law in a time when there was no rule of law. From her, I learned to have the courage of my convictions. My life became a continuation of hers. I grew up with a deep sense of justice and injustice and what they meant. When I came of age, I understood that we are advocates for something all of the time. For me, that calling was for reconciliation, forgiveness, and bridge building [19].

Susan's commitment to peace and equality led her to serve as a mediator during South Africa's transition to democracy. Susan served on the Executive of the Western Cape Peace Committee, which played a seminal role in the transformation of the police force to a police service [14]. Her book, *Watching the Wind: Conflict Resolution during South Africa's Transition to Democracy* (2000), documents her experience and perspective on the nation's conflict resolution movement as an organizer at the local and regional level.

When Susan joined Search as Vice President in 1995, she brought with her a drive to expand Search's influence across the globe [15]. John and Susan recognized that the growth of Search would require them to entrust more responsibility to staff, and to bring aboard new leaders to manage additional regional and country offices [19]. Growth would present risks, as the field of nongovernmental conflict resolution was still small and underdeveloped. Search was committed to having staff on the ground from all sides of the conflict, to serve as a model that adversaries could co-exist and even work together. This meant that Search had to develop talent in-house through training, mentoring, and hands-on experience, because the field of conflict resolution was virtually non-existent in the countries where they operated. Shortly after Susan arrived, Search grew from 12 to 40 staff members (known as "Searchers" within the organization). In 1995, Search opened its first African field office in Burundi in order to prevent the kind of genocide that occurred the year before in neighboring Rwanda. Also in 1995, while remaining an American NGO, Search became a Belgian NGO and opened an office in Brussels. Funding for this dramatic growth came from the European Union, as well as foreign aid and diplomatic agencies of the Netherlands, the Nordic countries, the U.K., and the U.S. In the early 2000s, Search opened offices in the DRC, Morocco, and Indonesia [18]. Search has continued to grow—today it is the world's largest conflict prevention organization, with 49 offices in 43 countries and more than 630 Searchers, of which 83% are nationals of the countries where they serve [2].

As Search grew, its philosophy for ending violent conflict remained steadfast. It would continue to design and implement programs that allow adversaries to uncover their shared interests and ignite cooperative action. Search specifically aims to engage ordinary citizens, individuals that do not work within governments or as leaders of conflicting groups. It refers to this strategy as "Track II Diplomacy," a term first coined in 1980 by Joseph V. Montville, a former Foreign Service officer, at a conference at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California [12]. Montville said, "citizens could take some action rather than simply being bystanders while the grown-up governments acted like jerks" [20]. It had been observed by academics and bureaucrats that private individuals can on occasion

find common ground where officials (Track I Diplomats) cannot, hence the focus on Track II Diplomacy.

Today, Search designs unique programs for each conflict under its three integrated avenues: "Dialogue+", "Community+", and "Media+" [11]. The three avenues were developed as Search grew and evolved, and were strengthened by the contributions of John, Susan, and their colleagues. Through their extensive experience in peace-building, they recognized that implementing programs in each of the avenues enabled them to reach a robust, diverse array of individuals, from prominent leaders to community members at the grassroots level [7].

Through Dialogue+, its most traditional conflict resolution avenue, Search facilitates and mediates conversations between conflicting groups and provides conflict management training. These interventions allow adversaries to understand each other's fears and concerns, and uncover shared goals and cooperative solutions for achieving them. Within subnational conflicts (conflicts between groups within one country), Search often promotes dialogue among persons that have few avenues to express their perspectives. For example, in Jos, Nigeria in 2013, Search organized the Naija Girls Camp, which convened Muslim and Christian teenage girls to learn about the root causes of violence and how it can be overcome [21]. The camp is part of a larger effort to engage youth as advocates for peace and end the decades-long cycle of violence between the two groups.

In addition to promoting dialogue between ordinary citizens, Search has been a pioneer in convening "unofficial contacts"—prominent individuals outside of government—in both international and subnational conflicts [10]. Unofficial contacts may include former government officials, policy experts, or business leaders. They are generally less restricted by formal policy positions, and have more freedom to share their perspectives and collaborate with counterparts. Search facilitates and moderates conversations to yield a shared understanding of the conflict and to uncover mutually-agreeable solutions that can later be shared with governments. Search has used this method to circumvent diplomatic blockages and lay the foundation for official agreements between conflicting nations, including the U.S. and the Soviet Union, and armed groups in Burundi, the DRC, and Sierra Leone.

Projects under Community+ aim to provide safe spaces for conflict resolution at the local level by taking advantage of shared interests [7]. Search has organized sporting events, movie screenings, music and theater performances, and participatory development projects that bring together adversaries [2]. For example, in Jordan there are tensions between a growing number of Syrian refugees and natives of the communities that host them [22]. In response to the separation of Jordanian and Syrian youth in the school system, Search organized a soccer clinic for girls in Mafrq. In addition to soccer, the girls received training in nonviolent communication and designed community activities that would promote cohesion. Friendships arose among participants in the clinic, and the children's parents also began to form relationships. The clinic has laid roots for the creation of a community where Jordanians and Syrians can live in harmony.

Search's Media+ projects fall under the umbrella of Common Ground Productions, which today works directly with local country offices to create unique content for each conflict, with the intention of promoting awareness of the causes of violence and educating the public on strategies for cooperation [8, 14]. Search estimates that its television programs (which have aired in more than 20 countries) and radio programs (21 countries) reach 51 million individuals each year [23]. Among its programming is a multi-national television drama entitled *The Team*. Each episode displays characters on different sides of cultural, religious, or socio-economic conflicts that must cooperate as part of a soccer team. The show has aired in countries across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

Through these and many other successful interventions, the distinctive approach employed by Search has caught

the attention of practitioners and scholars in the field of conflict resolution. William Ury, acclaimed author and conflict resolution expert, has stated:

No one has done more to advance the field of practical conflict resolution around the globe than John and Susan Marks. And they have done it with initiative and intelligence, with head and heart, with passion and persistence, to advance the cause of peace [15].

Ury's opinion is widely shared, as indicated by John and Susan's numerous honors, which include honorary doctorates from the U.N. University for Peace, the Skoll Award in Social Entrepreneurship, President Jimmy Carter's Waging Peace Award, and the Institute for Noetic Science's Creative Altruism Award.

The integrated Track II approach that John and Susan have pioneered is intended to transform environments that breed violence into environments that promote cooperation. This takes time and persistence. Search has been present in some countries for over two decades, including Burundi, Macedonia, Israel, and Jordan. John attributes many of Search's successes to its long-term commitment to a country's peace process [16]. For instance, its sustained commitment in Burundi has been credited for helping to assuage the ethnic hatred that had previously left the country on the brink of genocide [24]. Nevertheless, John concedes that Search has faced setbacks [16]. Despite nearly three decades of working to resolve conflict in the Middle East, violence continues to grow and international relations remain unsteady. But this hasn't stopped Search, which has conducted a region-wide evaluation of its activities and designed new programs to address the region's unique challenges. Undoubtedly, John and Susan have built Search to remain resilient in the face of adversity.

Exercise #2: You have read about Search's integrated approach in countries including the DRC, Nigeria, and Lebanon. Select an active conflict between two countries, or between two groups within a country or region. Using Search's approach of 1.) facilitating dialogue, 2.) building communities, and 3.) leveraging the media, design an integrated plan to help resolve the conflict. In your plan, address the following:

1. How do the three components that you designed work together in a complementary manner?
2. What type of information would you need in advance to ensure that each component would be successful? How would you collect this information?
3. What resources (human, capital, institutional) would be necessary to put your plan into action? How would you secure these resources?
4. How is Search's integrated approach different / similar to other conflict resolution strategies that you have studied? For example, how does it compare to the framework proposed in *Getting to Yes* (Fisher and Ury)?

Finding Common Ground: U.S. and Iran

One of the most entrenched international conflicts that Search has attempted to ameliorate is the long-running dispute between the U.S. and Iran. Though relations between the two countries were amiable for over a century, in the 1950s a flicker of resistance to foreign influence was kindled in Iran, which was nurtured to full blaze when Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh nationalized the British-owned Iranian oil industry in 1951 [25, 26]. The resultant geopolitical struggle led to the ousting of Mosaddegh in a coup organized by the U.S. CIA and the British Secret Intelligence Service. The coup contributed to the anti-American sentiment that in 1979 led supporters of the Islamic Revolution to occupy the U.S. embassy in Tehran and hold 52 Americans hostage for over a year [27]. The event compelled the U.S. to sever diplomatic ties with Iran, which have not been restored to date [28].

Since the hostage crisis, the relationship has involved acts and threats of military aggression, economic sanctions, and accusations of illegal surveillance. The polemics of former leaders provide insight into the rift that has grown between the two nations. In the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, U.S. President George W. Bush stated that Iran “aggressively pursues [weapons of mass destruction] and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people’s hope for freedom” [29]. Bush pronounced that Iran, Iraq, and North Korea constituted an “axis of evil,” that would “threaten the peace of the world” by developing weapons and allying with terrorists. Bush’s statements smothered backchannel discussions that had been occurring at the U.N. offices in Geneva, where U.S. and Iranian diplomats shared intelligence aimed at removing the Taliban from Afghanistan [30]. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad reiterated Iran’s mistrust of U.S. leadership in June 2008, stating that Bush was a “wicked man” who wished to “harm the Iranian nation” [31].

Despite multiple setbacks in U.S.-Iran relations—the virulent rhetoric of the nations’ leaders, the threats, attacks, accusations, and sanctions—Search has remained persistent for over twenty years in its attempts to transform the diplomatic environment from confrontational to cooperative. Search’s involvement in the delicate conflict provides a powerful example of how it navigates perpetually changing social and political conditions. As

the conditions evolve, Search repeatedly identifies and leverages opportunities for peace-building by implementing programs across its three integrated avenues. Given John and Susan’s direct involvement in designing programs and facilitating dialogue, the conflict also provides a window on their unique strengths as leaders and practitioners.

Promoting Constructive Dialogue

Search’s efforts to find common ground between the U.S. and Iran began in 1996. The year prior, President Bill Clinton imposed an economic embargo that cut off all trade and investment with Iran, arguing that Iran was pursuing nuclear weapons and financing terrorist groups [32]. In 1996, the U.S. Congress passed an act that imposed sanctions on both American and non-American businesses with oil and gas investments in Iran [33]. The sanctions would widen the diplomatic rift, and Search began considering how it could build trust and increase constructive communication. The original idea to establish an unofficial U.S.-Iranian Working Group came from Mohammad Jafar Mahallati, Iran’s former Ambassador to the U.N. and the son of the Grand Ayatollah of Shiraz [34]. Mahallati had been participating in Search’s Middle East project, and he wanted to try a similar approach between the U.S. and Iran. After multiple meetings, Mahallati and Search agreed to convene meetings of influential and well-connected Iranians and Americans, including foreign policy experts and former government officials, in a series of three-day meetings.

When the Working Group started in 1996, it had been more than 15 years since Americans and Iranians had engaged in official dialogue. John viewed the breakdown in official relations as an opportunity to increase communication through finite and achievable projects. When asked about his strengths as a leader and social entrepreneur, John observed, “I’m good at rearranging reality and finding ways that people can come together. I often see new possibilities” [12]. John’s colleagues note his pragmatic, analytical approach to overcoming obstacles that are inherent in every conflict [15]. Rather than focusing on the monumental rift between Washington and Tehran, John concentrated on incrementally transforming the conflict by making the Working Group a reality.

The absence of official relations between the U.S. and Iran presented obstacles to assembling the Working Group.

Discussions between Americans and Iranians were viewed by both governments as suspicious. Governmental attitudes in both countries necessitated holding the meetings in secrecy in order to protect attendees from accusations of misconduct. In fact, when John shared his plan with a retired U.S. ambassador, he was advised that holding the meetings could put Search at risk [34]. Nevertheless, John forged ahead by seeking a venue that would provide a safe, confidential environment for both Americans and Iranians. Search reached out to a high official within Sweden's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who agreed that the Ministry would back the meetings as long as the U.S. Government had no objections. In response, Search arranged for a high-ranking U.S. State Department official to telephone the Swedish Ministry and deliver a message that the U.S. had no objections.

Through years of experience, Search has developed a number of principles to guide its Track II diplomatic efforts, the first of which states: "Stay ahead of governments, but keep them informed." Moving ahead with the Working Group required John to take a risk. The risk paid off. At the first meeting of the Working Group in May 1996, Search shared a message from Washington, wishing them success. The message was from President Clinton.

Getting influential Americans and Iranians seated around the same table required John's expert political tact. Once they were there, fostering an environment that promoted constructive dialogue required Susan's facilitative leadership skills. An emerging leadership paradigm, facilitative leadership refers to one's ability to create conditions that allow for deep collaboration and a shared sense of responsibility for outcomes [35, 36]. Susan's work exemplifies this paradigm, as she has years of experience in creating safe, welcoming spaces for negotiation and understanding. Vivian Lowery Derryck, former Assistant Administrator for Africa with USAID remarked:

What's unique about Susan is this ability to meet people and present herself in such a warm, open manner that you're inevitably drawn to her. She makes you respect her and you can trust her, and that trust is just so important going forward in her work and in her life. Susan is also a spiritual person, and she brings that dimension to her work in negotiation, mediation, and peace-building [15].



One of Search's principles for Track II Diplomacy reads: "Talk to people, even if you don't like them" [34]. Susan recalls a palpable cloud of wariness that loomed over the first Working Group meeting, stemming from years of public animosity between the U.S. and Iran [19]. Through years of experience, she knew that overcoming the wariness would require earning the trust of participants, as well as building trust between the two sides. She has learned that the quickest way to do this is through meticulous attention to detail: the layout of the meeting room, the disposition of the facilitator, the organization of the agenda. "All of this in my view is absolutely critical to the success of getting moving," Susan advises. "The smallest thing when people are nervous can derail [a meeting] very easily" [19].

Fortunately, the setting for the first Working Group meeting was picturesque and private. The Swedes had recommended an isolated inn adjacent to a lake, close to the Stockholm Airport [34]. To disarm participants and make them feel welcome, Susan arranged for the meetings to commence with a meal served in a dining room, beautifully adorned with flowers and elegant table settings. Further, Search made sure to provide food and beverages that fit the cultural and religious customs of participants. Susan recalled that prior to a Working Group dinner, an Iranian participant made it clear that he did not want alcohol served. When Susan shared this request with the American delegation, one participant stated, "I will drink wine. I'm not going to give up who I am" [19]. In recalling this episode, Susan stressed the importance of treating this discord as an integral part of the negotiations, rather than overlooking it as trivial.

“That’s just as important as anything else,” She advised. “The discussions don’t start when you say we’re starting; they start with something like that.” To navigate the discrepancy, Search informed the Iranians that their objection to alcohol had been communicated, and that they planned to serve one American a small pitcher of wine, while everyone else would receive fruit juice. The Iranians did not object, and were satisfied that their preferences had been taken seriously.

One of Search’s most fundamental Track II principles reads: “Sit together and face a shared problem” [34]. Search does not ask adversaries to compromise [11]. Compromise entails that each side has to set aside a deep-seated concern, or forgo the pursuit of a goal. In other words, in compromise there are winners and losers. In framing a dialogue as a pursuit for compromise, shared goals and opportunities for collaboration are often overlooked. As a peace-builder in South Africa, Susan sharpened her ability to facilitate dialogue so that adversaries view a conflict as a shared problem that can only be solved through collaboration. In addition to skillfully employing proven facilitation methods to steer the Working Group towards cooperative solutions, Susan evokes the importance of deliberate nonverbal communication:

I’m very intuitive and feel everything that’s going on and that’s one of the ways you have to do this. It’s not just technical, it’s transformational and, as an example, body language is very important. And I sat for three days without crossing my legs at the top of the table where everyone could see. I knew I had to have an open stance and that’s one of the hardest things I’ve ever done. It’s so uncomfortable and I took more breaks than normal. I knew I had to do everything in my power, everything I could think of to keep an open room. By the end of the first meeting, the Americans and Iranians had bonded and we were in good shape. After that, I could cross my legs anytime, though at times of tension, I reverted to the open stance. I have used this technique for years in multiple settings, and I believe that it makes a difference [19].

Once the Working Group participants began to feel comfortable enough to share their perspectives, bonds of trust began to emerge. Susan also made a concerted effort to ensure that every participant felt heard. Susan sees inclusive dialogue, bringing individuals to the table who are often overlooked or oppressed, as a necessity for sustainable peace-building [15]. It is her philosophy that everyone

must feel represented in the peace process. Otherwise, negotiated agreements will perpetuate the inequality, miscommunication, and exploitation that caused conflict in the first place. Through the legacy of Susan’s leadership, Search engages marginalized groups in nearly all of its community projects. Even in a meeting of high-ranking Americans and Iranians, Susan recognized when deliberate action was necessary to maintain an inclusive dialogue. One of the Iranian Working Group participants served in the Iran-Iraq war, where he suffered serious injury from chemical weapons that resulted in chronic pain [19]. At the meetings, he would sometimes have difficulty expressing himself through his pain. In one key moment, with great emotion he expressed his primary concern: the impact of economic sanctions on the ability of Iranian citizens to acquire life-saving medications. When others around the table moved on to another topic, Susan interjected, stopping the meeting. She encouraged the entire room to listen, and began engaging the participant in a one-on-one conversation, asking questions to understand the depth of his pain and the difficulty of acquiring pharmaceuticals in Iran. She ensured that the participant was heard, and his perspectives valued. Susan remembers this episode as a critical turning point at that particular Working Group meeting. Afterwards, participants became profoundly attentive and the sessions went to a new level of openness and intimacy.

John recalls that Susan’s facilitation “allowed participants to move beyond demonization and connect as human beings” [34]. By fostering an environment of equality and respect, participants began to trust each other. Former Ambassador Mahallati has said of the meetings: “Here for the first time I experienced a kind of atmosphere, a kind of spirit...in a gathering, which permits people to open themselves up without reservation and speak out of their hearts” [15]. Through the meetings, friendships between Americans and Iranians were formed that endure to this day [34].

At the fourth meeting in September 1997, the Working Group reached a consensus, which it referred to as a “grand bargain,” that outlined a strategy for dealing with issues including frozen assets, expropriated property, narcotics, nuclear weapons, and regional security. However, when the participants returned to Washington and Tehran to promote the bargain with their government contacts, it received virtually no support. American participants

could not stir up the political will necessary for the U.S. government to jettison longstanding preconditions for opening discussions with Iran. Iranian participants faced similar challenges in bringing their officials to the table. Though the grand bargain didn't spur government action, John and Susan didn't let this quell their drive to find common ground between the U.S. and Iran. Another of Search's Track II principles states: "Be an applied visionary. Break down a vision into finite, achievable pieces" [34]. Rather than backing down, Search went back to the drawing board to approach the conflict from other avenues.

Building and Broadcasting an International Community

The lack of government support for the grand bargain left the Working Group participants disheartened when they met for the fifth time in January 1998 [34]. Still, there was a glimmer of hope in a statement made by Mohammad Khatami, Iran's newly elected president, who called for creating a "crack in the wall of mistrust" through cultural dialogue and exchanges [37]. In other words, Khatami was advocating for the creation of an international community where Iranian and American citizens could interact. To capitalize on this opening, an Iranian Working Group participant suggested that the open presence of Americans in Tehran could lead to an important breakthrough. Since the hostage crisis in 1979 to 1981, no Americans had openly visited Iran. Among the U.S. public, the concept of relations between the two nations invoked adverse images that were perpetuated by the media, such as the American flag being burned in the streets of Tehran. The Iranian participant recognized the challenge of inviting ordinary citizens or government officials. Nevertheless, he identified one group of Americans that he suspected would be welcomed to Iran: wrestlers. Wrestlers are widely viewed as mythical heroes in Iranian folklore, and the modern sport of wrestling remains immensely popular there.

John returned to Washington determined to bring American wrestlers to Iran. He made contact with USA Wrestling, the national wrestling association. He learned that American wrestlers had been invited to participate in the upcoming Takhti Cup, an international wrestling tournament held in Tehran in February 1998 [37]. However, the team was not planning to participate because of security concerns. John impressed upon the American wrestling officials how important a visit to Iran could be,

and that the Iranian government would guarantee their safety. He arranged a meeting for the American officials with the Iranian Ambassador to the U.N. At the meeting, Team USA was assured

by the Ambassador that their athletes would be safe. John also told the officials that the Swiss, who represent U.S. interests in Iran, would provide assistance in the case of a security incident. Convinced that their athletes could travel safely to the tournament, USA Wrestling agreed to participate. A month later, John and the American national wrestling team were on their way to Iran.

When the Americans arrived, they were warmly welcomed. At the tournament's opening ceremony, Team USA entered the arena carrying the American flag and were greeted with cheers from Iranian fans. As anticipated, there was heavy media coverage of the event by American, Iranian, and international outlets. One iconic picture that was circulated in American television and print media captures Iranian Mehdi Kaveh giving the surprised American Shawn Charles a celebratory kiss on the cheek after their hard-fought match. John recalls that the tournament provided an opportunity for negative images, such as an American flag burning in Tehran's streets, to be replaced with images of mutual respect, such as the wrestlers embracing and congratulating each other [34]. Later in the year, Team USA reciprocated the good-will of the Iranians by inviting their wrestlers to compete at a tournament in Oklahoma [38] and, to this day, wrestling provides one of the very few venues where Iranians and Americans regularly meet.

When the American wrestlers returned home following the Takhti Cup, President Clinton invited a delegation of Searchers and wrestlers to the White House. In recognizing this extraordinary visit to Iran, Clinton was signaling that his administration was interested in improving relations with Iran. His remarks to the group in the Oval Office were filmed and transmitted to Iran through U.S. government broadcast channels as a signal to Iran that the United States was open to a new relationship. Clinton also encouraged



other American organizations to participate in cultural exchanges with Iranians, echoing Kahtami's statements from two months earlier [34, 37]. The event's theme of reconciliation was deepened by the attendance in the Oval Office, along with the Searchers and wrestlers, of Bruce Laingen, the highest-ranking U.S. diplomat held during the hostage crisis [34].

"Wrestling diplomacy" opened the door for Search to pursue further exchanges, which would allow them to build an international community of Iranians and Americans. Over the next ten years, Search organized a series of events in the U.S. including Iranian film showings, art exhibits, and residencies for Iranian filmmakers [34]. Search also arranged for American astronauts and astronomers to view the last eclipse of the 20th century in Iran, and hosted reciprocal visits of scientists, environmentalists, and doctors. Elsewhere in the world, Search organized two Iranian-American film summits at Cannes. More recently in 2015, Search arranged for the American contemporary jazz group, Animation, to perform at the Tehran Opera House. The concert was the first performance by American musicians in Iran in over 35 years.

Search's intercultural exchanges have created numerous relationships between Iranians and Americans. In addition, the associated media coverage has demonstrated to the world that citizens of the two nations can come together peacefully. Nasser Hadian, a professor of political science at Tehran University has stated that Search's programs have had a "profound effect on the psyche of both the [Iranian] public and the elite," and that "no other activities have had such an effect" [34]. Search hopes that by creating a constituency for change within each nation, their Track II efforts can pave the way for improved official relations. Despite their efforts, official relations remain frozen. However, as we will see in the next section, the enduring relationships that Search has built helped resolve a highly

publicized international crisis, in which the lives of ordinary citizens hung in the balance.

Track II Diplomacy in an International Crisis

In 2010, Cindy Hickey and Laura Fattal contacted William Miller, a senior adviser to Search. Miller was previously a Foreign Service Officer in Iran and the U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine. The year before, Cindy's son Shane Bauer was living in Damascus as a freelance journalist with his girlfriend, Sarah Shourd, who was teaching English to Iraqi and Palestinian refugees [39]. On July 31, 2009, the couple was hiking in the Zagros Mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan with their friend and Laura's son, Joshua Fattal [40]. On the advice of locals, the trio of Americans hiked for a few hours through a meandering valley in pursuit of scenic views of the region's expansive terrain. As they approached their destination, a lofty ridge overlooking the valley, they spotted an armed soldier who waved them up the trail. The hikers soon discovered that they had accidentally entered Iran. By the following day, news broke in the U.S. that three hikers had been arrested for crossing the Iranian border [41]. In the months that followed, the hikers were charged with espionage and detained in Tehran's Evin Prison, where they were subjected to the mental anguish that accompanies ongoing interrogation and solitary confinement [40, 42]. On September 14, 2010, Sarah was set free by Iranian authorities, who cited her deteriorating health as grounds for the release [43]. Though Sarah was reunited with her family in the U.S., Iran announced that Josh and Shane would remain in prison and stand trial.

The hikers' imprisonment came at a time when relations between Iran and the U.S. were immensely strained. Though the Clinton and Khatami administrations had expressed their interest in improving relations, neither were able to instigate meaningful change. The mutual mistrust of their successors, Presidents Bush and Ahmadinejad, widened the diplomatic rift. By 2009, when the hikers were arrested and imprisoned, the recently-elected Obama administration had reengaged in U.N. negotiations regarding Iran's nuclear program. Despite Obama's strategy to engage in "tough, direct diplomacy with Iran," missing were the robust diplomatic channels necessary to expeditiously secure the hikers' release—there was simply

Exercise #3: When the U.S.-Iran Working Group failed to influence change in official relations, Search pivoted, and leveraged relationships built during the Working Group to open the door for international exchanges. Return to your plan in Exercise #2. How might the historic, cultural, or economic complexities of the conflict that you selected cause one of your components to fail? How would you respond to this failure?

no direct contact between American and Iranian officials [34, 44]. Though Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pressed for their release through the media and intermediaries, the attempts were unsuccessful [42].

Thus, it was with waning hope that their government would secure their children's return that Cindy and Laura contacted Miller. The mothers learned that Search had cultivated relationships with several influential Iranians, which they hoped Miller could leverage to free their sons [34, 45]. Miller agreed to help, and began to formulate a strategy that would be separate but complementary to the activities of the State Department. Miller came up with a plan: They would engage religious leaders to help negotiate the hikers' release. Susan recalls the rationale for this decision:

You use the people who can make a difference. And in this context, it was the religious people. Because it's a theocracy in Iran, bringing high-level religious leaders to be interlocutors is perfect, because there is a tremendous respect between religious leaders at the highest level [19].

Miller believed that Iranian authorities would be wary of appearing to succumb to pressure from the U.S. Government. Involving religious leaders, rather than government officials, would make it easier for the Iranians to cooperate [34].

Fortunately, Miller's vast network extends well beyond the field of international relations. He was acquainted with the retired Catholic Archbishop of Washington D.C., Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, and John Chane, the former Episcopal Bishop of Washington D.C. During his career, McCarrick traveled the world as an advocate for human rights, and in his retirement was pursuing academic research on Islam [46, 47]. Chane is regarded as a global leader in interfaith relations, and has promoted peace through dialogue with Iranian religious and political leaders since 2006 [48]. Notably, both Chane and McCarrick had made multiple visits to Iran and are among the few Westerners that have spoken in person with its Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei [49, 50]. One of Search's Track II principles advises: "Enroll credible participants and get them to the table." By securing the help of McCarrick and Chane, Miller had enrolled two credible Americans in the eyes of Iranian officials.

With the Cardinal and the Bishop onboard, Miller began organizing meetings with influential Iranians by leveraging his own network and the relationships that Search had been building for years. Meetings were held once or twice each month and were intended to build trust and discuss possible avenues for the hikers' release [34]. A critical turning point came in September 2010, when President Ahmadinejad was in New York City at the annual U.N. General Assembly. In a Manhattan hotel conference room, Ahmadinejad met with McCarrick, Chane, and Miller [49]. During the meeting, the Cardinal and Bishop asked for the hikers' release. Ahmadinejad responded by inviting the Catholics to visit Tehran. It took almost a full year but, in September 2011, Iranian officials indicated that they were ready to free the hikers and issued a formal invitation to McCarrick and Chane [47]. They left for Iran four days after receiving the invitation, with their expenses paid by Search.

The Catholic leaders were joined by Nihad Awad, Director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), and Larry Shaw, CAIR's chairman. Shaw previously served as a Senator in the North Carolina General Assembly and was the highest-ranking U.S. elected official practicing Islam [47]. After President Obama telephoned to wish them good fortune, the delegation arrived in Tehran on September 13, 2011, and over six days met discreetly with influential religious leaders and academics. Just days before their arrival, Ahmadinejad announced that Josh and Shane would be released, but was overruled by a judiciary comprised of Shiite Muslim clerics [49]. McCarrick recalls the purpose of the delegation's numerous meetings in Iran: "...members of the judiciary were hesitant and they needed to be persuaded. So our job was to create an atmosphere in which the religious leaders could agree" [47].

McCarrick and the delegation realized that they had succeeded during a meeting with Ahmadinejad, who assured them that the hikers would be released within days [49]. According to Chane, Ahmadinejad made it clear that it was because of their work that the hikers' release could move forward [34, 49]. The delegation returned to the U.S. on September 19, confident that Josh and Shane would soon follow. Two days later in an occasion marked with joy and tears, the hikers were released to Oman where they were reunited with their families.

Exercise #4: Throughout the case, you have come across four of Search's "Track II Principles":

- Stay ahead of governments, but keep them informed
- Enroll credible participants
- Be an applied visionary (break down a vision into finite, achievable pieces)
- Talk to people, even if you don't like them. Face shared problems.

Based on how Search has navigated the U.S.-Iran conflict and the hiker negotiations, write three more principles that you think might guide Search's unofficial diplomatic efforts. Explain how each principle would help the organization achieve success.

Conclusion

Search's involvement in the U.S.-Iran conflict is a testament to the organization's philosophy that peace will only arise through resilient effort. It sought peace with its trademark integrated approach, by facilitating constructive dialogue, forming international communities, and leveraging the media to replace images of violence with images of cooperation. These efforts have deepened the relationship between the U.S. and Iran through direct human contact [45]. Susan recalls the excitement that an Iranian member of the Working Group felt after forming deep relationships with his American counterparts. His negative opinions of Americans had been transformed, and at one meeting he exclaimed: "Wouldn't it be extraordinary? Won't it be extraordinary when the U.S. and Iran get together? Because they're two halves of a whole. When you bring those two together, you get something that's very whole" [19]. Transformations like this one can end conflict, according to Susan: "In our vulnerabilities, we come together. Finding our common humanity is crucial, as it binds us together more than our differences divide us" [19].

There is much work to do before sustainable peace is achieved between the two nations. The U.S. continues to levy economic sanctions against Iran, political prisoners are held on both sides, and the nations' leaders have stated their mutual mistrust. This comes as no surprise to John, who notes that peace-building is often intermingled with intermittent failure. John recalls: "This project has been sustained for twenty years, with years where we had no results" [12]. These setbacks have not stopped Search, which

in the face of adversity remains committed to building bridges between Americans and Iranians.

John and Susan recognize that only governments can negotiate and implement binding peace agreements. They view their work as transforming the atmosphere of a conflict from violent to cooperative, which provides a foundation for official relations to be built [11]. In all her years of promoting peace, Susan has recognized: "The path towards peace gets worn by early trail blazers, and then a few followers, and then suddenly the path is well known" [19]. Undoubtedly, John and Susan have been trailblazers for peace across the globe, affecting millions of lives along the way.

In 2014, after a four-year transition period, Susan and John stepped down from their leadership roles at Search but continue to serve as senior advisors to the organization's new leaders. Susan now has the title of Peace Ambassador, which she says "is the best title I've ever had" [19]. Though they have passed on responsibilities to the next generation of peace-builders, the field of conflict resolution has been permanently transformed by their work. As for John, he still has not given up on his dream of ending violent conflict worldwide. Shortly before stepping down as President, he addressed Search's employees and the public with a letter containing the following statement:

Although the world is overly polarized and violent behavior is much too prevalent, we remain essentially optimistic. Our view is that, on the whole, history is moving in positive directions. Failures in peacemaking do not cause us to give up. Rather, they convince us that we—and the world—must do much better in addressing conflict [16].

Exercise #5:

1. Search is an organization built largely upon the philosophy of John and Susan. What are the challenges of sustaining and growing such an organization after the founders step down? How are the core values of an organization formed and maintained? Under what conditions should core values be reevaluated and modified?
2. Imagine that you are on the governing board of Search. What governing mechanisms and strategies would you promote to ensure that Search continues to be relevant and impactful?
3. Imagine that you are John or Susan. As you lessen your daily engagement with the organization that has essentially been created in your image, what steps would you take to ensure a smooth transition of leadership?

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