

# **Dialogue Sustained**



# Dialogue Sustained

The Multilevel Peace Process  
and the Dartmouth Conference

*James Voorhees*



UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE PRESS  
Washington, D.C.

CHARLES F. KETTERING FOUNDATION  
Washington, D.C.    Dayton, Ohio    New York, N.Y.

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Washington, DC 20036

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444 North Capitol Street NW  
Washington, DC 20001

© 2002 by the Endowment of the United States Institute of Peace

First published 2002

Printed in the United States of America

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standards for Information Science—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Voorhees, James, 1952-

Dialogue sustained : the multilevel peace process and the Dartmouth Conference / James Voorhees.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-929223-30-7

1. United States—Relations—Soviet Union. 2. Soviet Union—Relations—United States. 3. Dartmouth Conference. 4. United States—Foreign relations—1945–1989. 5. United States—Foreign relations—1989– I. Title.

E183.8.S65 V66 2002  
303.48'273047—dc21

2002017293

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## Foreword

WARS ARE OFTEN SAID to be seedbeds of invention, germinating all kinds of new ideas and technologies. Certainly, the Cold War saw its share of innovations, some of them good (satellites and microelectronics, for example), some of them bad (biowarfare agents, for instance). Many of these have not outlived the Cold War, passing like public fall-out shelters into the pages of history. Other innovations, however, have demonstrated their intrinsic worth by surviving, and even thriving, in the very different world that has emerged since the Soviet Union was disbanded. The Dartmouth Conference is one of these useful byproducts.

Launched in 1960 in the frigid atmosphere of the Cold War, the meetings of the Dartmouth Conference sought to counter the profound lack of contact and understanding between eminent citizens of the United States and Soviet Union. Leading Americans and Soviets from the arts, sciences, and politics—none of them in government at the time—were invited to sit down together at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire and talk. There was an agenda, but the topics of conversation were less important than the conversation itself. Over the next forty years, in a succession of plenary conferences and smaller meetings, the conversation deepened and widened. As James Voorhees explains in this fascinating account of a unique enterprise we would now characterize as “sustained dialogue,” the participants began to talk *with*, rather than *at*, one another; propagandistic speeches gave way to genuine discussion unencumbered by the rituals of official diplomacy; mutual understanding grew. This sustained dialogue permitted participants to forge personal relationships and to exchange often surprising ideas and information, creating a new level of insight that filtered into policymaking circles both directly, as some participants entered government, and indirectly, through the media and in conversations with high-ranking officials.

With the end of the Cold War, it might have been expected that the Dartmouth Conference would end too. But instead “Dartmouth”

(the shorthand term for a long list of activities, approaches, and techniques that had evolved in the context of the Dartmouth conferences and task forces) demonstrated continuing relevance by taking new directions and forms. Notably, it inspired the Inter-Tajik Dialogue, a series of meetings in which opposition groups helped to lay the foundation for a more peaceful and democratic Tajikistan. As the new century turned, Americans and Russians familiar with the spirit of Dartmouth sought to rekindle interest in the future of the Russian-U.S. relationship, with no fewer than one hundred public forums being held by citizens in both countries in the year 2001 alone.

What is it about Dartmouth that accounts for its enduring appeal and utility? What qualities set it apart from other approaches to conflict resolution and conflict management? What has it taught us about the limitations of traditional diplomacy and the role that citizens outside of government can play in shaping a peace process? Five lessons stand out from the forty-plus years of the Dartmouth Conference.

*First, citizens outside government promoting sustained dialogue can become significant actors in helping to transform the most intractable relationships from enmity to mutual understanding.* The essential role of government in managing foreign relations need not be diminished by their work. Indeed, their work can productively complement what governments do by addressing tasks that governments do not do well—such as changing conflictual relationships when conflict has deep human roots. As readers will discover in the following chapters, the idea that dialogue among citizens outside government could transform adversarial relationships between states was a bold and controversial one in 1960, when the first Dartmouth conference was held. Until that time, efforts to ameliorate conflict had traditionally focused on formal mediation, intergovernmental negotiation, and diplomacy. At its outset, Dartmouth enlarged the field of conflict resolution; over the succeeding years, it also enlarged the level of understanding among the makers and shapers of policy on both sides of the superpower divide.

*The second lesson that Dartmouth teaches us is that networks—“transnational communities,” to use James Voorhees’ phrase—are as great a resource as dollars.* They generate political will, which can’t be bought. Dartmouth wasn’t a series of events; it was—and is—a company of people. Dartmouth veterans attending the fortieth-anniversary reunion

in the fall of 2000 referred to their extended dialogue as the “Dartmouth movement.”

*Third, as we learned in Tajikistan, ending violence alone does not ensure peace; the role of civil society is critical in building an enduring basis for the nonviolent resolution of conflicts.* A comprehensive peace process requires opening spaces where citizens can resolve their differences peacefully through deliberative dialogue. As citizens work to create those spaces, they build elements of civil society around a multilevel peace process. They perfect the practices that permit citizens to work together across natural and social divisions and establish institutions to perpetuate them. As described in chapter 6, the Inter-Tajik Dialogue’s Public Committee for Democratic Processes embodies this point. The committee also connects the development of civil society with economic development by building “social capital”—the long-missing ingredient now recognized as essential to economic development.

*A fourth, related lesson is that the idea of a “multilevel peace process”—articulated by participants in the Inter-Tajik Dialogue—places the work of interactive conflict resolution within the whole body politic to embrace many actors, including government.* While not incompatible with the thinking behind “multitrack diplomacy,” the emphasis in the multilevel peace process differs in that the focus is on the process of interaction among individuals as individuals, not as formalized representatives of governmental organizations, professions, or institutions.

*Fifth, and potentially most important, the process of sustained dialogue can be adapted for use in other conflicts.* Much of the credit for making the process transferable must go to Harold Saunders, director of international affairs at the Kettering Foundation and coauthor of two chapters in this volume. Drawing on the experience of thirty-five meetings of the Dartmouth Conference Regional Conflicts Task Force, which was begun in 1982, and on thirty-two meetings of the Inter-Tajik Dialogue since 1993, Saunders has conceptualized the process of sustained dialogue into a five-stage process that can be applied in other conflict settings. Indeed, that process has already inspired a wide variety of efforts, including reconciliation projects in several American cities burdened with various types of internal tensions.

When the Dartmouth Conference began, few would have guessed that it would yield such a rich legacy. The project was heavily criticized

in the Cold War environment. Experts advised against it. Editors criticized the “naiveté” of Americans who spoke honestly to Soviets while hearing only a Soviet party line in return. Initially, there were few visible indications of success, and tangible products were nonexistent. In such circumstances, the pioneers of Dartmouth had to demonstrate remarkable fortitude, commitment, and self-belief—and they deserve recognition and credit for doing so. On the U.S. side, Norman Cousins and David Rockefeller have been recognized among many contributors as the builders of Dartmouth’s foundation. On the Soviet/Russian side, special leadership was exercised by Yuri Zhukov, Georgi Arbatov, Alexander Korneichuk, Vitali Zhurkin, and Evgeni Primakov.

As copublisher of this book, the Kettering Foundation is proud to have played a part in advancing the Dartmouth process. It is an example of the action-based research the foundation does. As an inventor, Charles F. Kettering always encouraged the foundation he created to take on the big problems, or what he called “the problems behind the problems.” Knowing that such problems demanded time and patience, trustees such as Richard Lombard let change evolve. They weren’t consumed with being successful in the sense of producing quick results. Their successors on Kettering’s board have kept this tradition alive. It is an outlook that helps explain why, in 1969, Robert Chollar, then president of the foundation, and his fellow trustees turned to the Dartmouth Conference as a source for foundation research to develop a new form of nongovernmental dialogue. Now sustained dialogues are recognized as a useful means of addressing conflicts when differences can’t be mediated by a third party or when differences are not ready for formal mediation or negotiation.

This support has been more than repaid, for Dartmouth has had a profound influence on the Kettering Foundation. The organizations in Russia that collaborated with Kettering in organizing the Dartmouth meetings have grown to more than two hundred in fifty-five countries in every part of the world, and their ties to the foundation ensure that it always looks at problems from the perspective of more than one country.

The other publisher of *Dialogue Sustained*, the United States Institute of Peace, also has a well-established record of supporting work on nongovernmental dialogue and Russian-U.S. relations. Mandated by the

U.S. Congress to promote research into, and awareness of, measures by which international conflict can be peacefully managed or resolved, the Institute is pleased to disseminate the important lessons learned from the Dartmouth Conference experience. Dartmouth is of particular interest to the Institute not least because it has lessons for the policymaking, NGO, and academic communities. In practical terms, Dartmouth seems to have made a significant difference in transforming Soviet-U.S. relations during the latter years of the Cold War, its influence extending on occasion to the topmost ranks of the policymaking elites in both countries. Unquestionably, the Inter-Tajik Dialogue has had a concrete and positive impact on the political situation within Tajikistan. In theoretical and analytical terms, Dartmouth has been no less productive, yielding important insights into the dynamics of communication and influence in situations of conflict, and inspiring such useful concepts as sustained dialogue and the multilevel peace process.

The degree to which the objectives of Dartmouth and the interests of the Institute coincide can be gauged from just a few of the books published by the Institute in recent years. For instance, *Herding Cats: Multiparty Mediation in a Complex World*, edited by Chester Crocker, Fen Hampson, and Pamela Aall, offers a series of firsthand accounts of mediation in action and features an article by Dartmouth participant Harold Saunders on the multilevel peace process. Another volume edited by Crocker, Hampson, and Aall, *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict*, explores the sources of contemporary conflict and the array of possible responses to it by both governments and nongovernmental actors. The subject of reconciliation between deeply entrenched adversaries is addressed by John Paul Lederach in *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. The challenges confronting contemporary Russia are highlighted in *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms: Market Bolshevism against Democracy* by Peter Reddaway and Dmitri Glinksi; in *Russia and Its New Diasporas* by Igor Zevelev; and in *Ukraine and Russia: A Fraternal Rivalry* by Anatol Lieven. And the future of relations between Russia and the West is taken up by James Goodby, Petrus Buwalda, and Dmitri Trenin in *A Strategy for Stable Peace: Toward a Euroatlantic Security Community*.

Together, then, the United States Institute of Peace and the Kettering Foundation applaud the goals that inspired the creators of

the Dartmouth Conference and commend this thoughtful study of the fruits of their labors. *Dialogue Sustained* chronicles the development of a unique invention of the Cold War, one that by virtue of its intrinsic conceptual worth and of its ability to evolve not only influenced the management of Soviet-U.S. relations during that war but has since proved a powerful tool in promoting reconciliation in very different conflict situations in diverse places.

DAVID MATHEWS, PRESIDENT AND TRUSTEE  
CHARLES F. KETTERING FOUNDATION

RICHARD H. SOLOMON, PRESIDENT  
UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

## Preface

SOMETIME IN THE SPRING OR EARLY SUMMER OF 1961, Norman Cousins, the editor of the prestigious *Saturday Review of Literature*, a man I had known and admired for many years, came to see me in my office at the Chase Manhattan Bank in Lower Manhattan. Norman invited me to attend, according to my notes at the time, a “US-USSR conference” in January of 1962 at Airlie House near Washington, D.C., as part of the American delegation. Norman said that this would be the third meeting of the group—the first of which had been held on the Dartmouth College campus in Hanover, New Hampshire, in the autumn of 1960—and that the conference had the support of senior officials in the Kremlin, as well as in the U.S. government. When I asked the purpose of the conference, Norman said it might improve relations between the two countries because the Soviets seemed eager to put the Stalinist era behind them and find ways to engage the West in “useful dialogue.”

Norman loved the word “dialogue” and placed great stock in face-to-face meetings as a means of changing attitudes and solving problems. I was much less optimistic than he that conversations would somehow diminish the ideological, political, and military threat that the Soviet Union posed to the United States. But Norman was a tremendously persuasive man. In the end, he convinced me that there was merit to his idea.

After consulting with my advisors and checking my schedule, I agreed to join the delegation and attend the January meeting. As luck would have it, the meeting was postponed and the location changed to October of 1962 in Andover, Massachusetts, on the campus of Phillips Academy. Meanwhile, my own schedule (I was president and co-chief executive officer of the Chase at the time) prevented me from participating in all but the initial stages of the conference, which, in retrospect, was probably the most memorable of all Dartmouth conferences. The Soviet and American delegates met and continued their “dialogue” against the

chilling backdrop of the Cuban missile crisis—certainly the darkest and potentially deadliest moment in the entire Cold War.

I attended most of the Dartmouth meetings over the following thirty years and found them incredibly useful in exactly the way that Norman Cousins had claimed they would be. Both the Americans and the Russians who were privileged to attend these annual gatherings learned a great deal about each other. It was as if we were holding up gigantic mirrors in which we could see exactly how others saw us. And, while I cannot claim that our meetings hold the key to understanding the end of the Cold War or explain why neither side resorted to the use of nuclear weapons—Norman Cousins' deepest concern—it is nevertheless my belief that Dartmouth made a profound difference in the relationship between the two superpowers.

That is why this book is so valuable. It places these meetings in the context of the times and carefully documents how that context changed from confrontation to *détente* to renewed confrontation in the late 1970s and 1980s. It is ably written and carefully researched. I found the meetings coming to life vividly—I could almost taste the caviar and savor the vodka we were served. It also reminded me of many old friends who are now departed—most especially Norman Cousins. This book is a tribute to his steadfast courage and indomitable belief that “dialogue” between people of good faith can indeed make a difference. We shall have to put that lesson to use again and again in the years to come.

DAVID ROCKEFELLER  
NEW YORK CITY, DECEMBER 2001

## Acknowledgments

THE DARTMOUTH CONFERENCE was a nebulous thing for many of us who studied the Soviet Union through the 1970s and 1980s. We sensed that some meetings were being held and that they were important, whatever they were about. But we knew little about them. Even today, scholars working on the history of the Cold War find it difficult to learn much about the conferences.

I had the good fortune to be drawn into the circle of those associated with Dartmouth while a graduate student. I took a course on conflict resolution that Hal Saunders co-taught with William Zartman. I came to the course as a dedicated skeptic and self-described hardheaded realist about international politics. Hal, ever patient, gave me the benefit of his experience, gained in the Dartmouth conferences and elsewhere. He opened my eyes to the potential that properly conceived and prepared dialogue held for managing, and perhaps even resolving, conflict.

Hal later asked me to work with him on a project that was run by Phil Stewart at the Mershon Center. Later still, he had the courage to ask me to work for him at the Kettering Foundation. These opportunities were blessings. Not only did I learn about Dartmouth; I met many of the people involved in Dartmouth—David Mathews, Vitali Zhurkin, Georgi Arbatov, the inestimable pair of interpreters George Sherry and George Klebnikov, and many others. I was even able to attend a meeting of the Regional Conflicts Task Force.

I came to my classes with Hal convinced that it was unrealistic to view dialogue as useful in mitigating or resolving conflict. The picture I had was of well-meaning gentlemen dispassionately exchanging views about the abstractions that divided them. But dialogue is not just for gentlemen. And it is about passions more than abstractions. Indeed, a dialogue in which the passions that underlie a conflict are not aired is useless. People have to get mad, and the course of dialogue cannot run smooth. The Dartmouth dialogues have not run smooth, as the pages

that follow will show. It was this very roughness that made the achievements of Dartmouth possible.

As I came to understand the Dartmouth process, I became convinced of its value. At this writing, the murderous terrorist actions committed on September 11, 2001, have produced a call to arms against terrorism that promises to commit the United States and other countries to a battle that will be waged across the world for years or even decades to come. But it is against a nebulous foe. We know not his number, his face, or his country. We may, indeed, find ourselves fighting against foes that seem to multiply the more we try to destroy them, like the broomsticks empowered by the sorcerer's apprentice. But we can know that conflict engenders terrorists. Our efforts to hunt down those responsible for the killing in September will not end the terrorist threat. Too often, terror is a tool used by the weaker side in conflict. Israel itself, now terror's victim, was made possible, in part, by it.

To end terror, we must facilitate other means of struggle. The Dartmouth process is one of these. The process emphasizes talk, and so might be dismissed as "mere talk" by those inclined solely to "action." But action alone, particularly military action, has often proved itself ineffective or, worse, counterproductive. It is true that talk can be used for many purposes. It can be glib and facile. It can be deceptive. It can be divorced from the reality that lies behind the spoken word.

Talk in Dartmouth is not easy, however. Dartmouth provides a forum where people can struggle to end conflict. This is not a struggle where people suffer and die—it is precisely the desire to end struggles of that kind that leads people to Dartmouth. It is the difficult struggle to make one's enemies understand one's side and to try to understand the reasons behind the actions of one's enemy. This is not a struggle that can be fashioned into a best-selling novel. And it is best kept out of the newspapers. But it is vital that we conduct it now, with our new goals found in the rubble of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, if we wish to meet those goals, keep terrorists finite, and prevent the horror from recurring.

There are many people to thank for making this project possible. First and foremost, it would not have been possible without the inspiration and encouragement of Hal Saunders. Nor could it have been done without the support and advice of David Mathews, the president

of the Kettering Foundation. Pat Coggins was also essential, to me as to Dartmouth, in numerous ways. I owe Vitali Zhurkin thanks for his support and for coordinating suggestions from Russian veterans of Dartmouth. My work here follows earlier work by Alla Bobrysheva, who has been helpful in numerous ways. Not the least of these is her compelling enthusiasm for Dartmouth and its people. Philip Stewart and Yale Richmond were generous in the time they gave to reading and commenting on the manuscript. Many of the people associated with Dartmouth also commented on at least part of the manuscript. They include David Mathews, Brent Scowcroft, Paul Doty, Antonia Chayes, Arnold Horelick, Thomas Gouttierre, Randa Slim, Robert Kaiser, Allen Lynch, Evgeni Primakov, Aleksei Arbatov, Gennadi Chufirin, Apollon Davidson, Aleksandr Kislov, Andrei Kortunov, Viktor Kremenyuk, Stanislav Kondrashov, Vladimir Lukin, Vitali Naumkin, Sergei Rogov, Nikolai Shmelev, Yuli Vorontsov, and Irina Zviagelskaya. Their comments helped to fill important gaps and saved me from significant errors. It hardly need be said that those that remain are my own. Two anonymous reviewers gave helpful criticism that has made this a significantly better book. Nigel Quinney of the United States Institute of Peace provided sage advice, invaluable assistance, necessary prodding, and a welcome dose of optimism.

The author was generously given access to the files on Dartmouth at the Kettering Foundation. The foundation also provided financial support and the help of Katharine Wheatley and Philip Lurie in the Washington office. Many thanks for their help in preparing the manuscript. A trip to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign made it possible to go through Philip Mosely's files, which are held in the archives there. The account of the early conferences would be but a sketch without them. I am grateful to Robert T. Chapel for making them available. The project might not have happened at all had David Rockefeller not sent David Mathews copies of the documents about Dartmouth that he had saved in his files.

Lastly, the debt I owe my wife, Jenni, and my children, Gus, Rose, and Simon, is immeasurable. Norman Cousins conceived of Dartmouth as a means for preserving life in a dangerous age; they are constant reminders of why life is worthwhile.



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