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Abstract. This article describes the hypothetical construct of motivation and illustrates a political application of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Motivation is a hypothetical construct that denotes some force or impetus that activates human behavior. Psychologists differ over whether there is such a force or impetus, and, if so, what it is--if not, what is the most suitable analogy to describe an "as if" of human behavior, i.e., humans behaving as if there were an initiating force or impetus. Common approaches to the motivation construct include the satisfaction of sexual and aggressive instincts, the maximization of the continuity of genetic material, the maintenance of some hypothesized equilibrium, the reduction of primary and secondary drives, and the achieving of goals based on calculi of expectancies and values.

An alternative model--oblique not orthogonal to the above--is Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This hierarchy has three main premises. The first is that motivating needs follow a certain order from those most involved in basic physical survival--e.g. hunger and thirst--to those least involved--e.g., engaging in creative artistic pursuits. The second is that most people end up being motivated most of the time by a specific need or needs combination--e.g., getting respect from associates and/or attempting to ensure safety. The third is that some individuals do not follow the order described in the first premise above. For example, self-actualized individuals may be motivated by creative pursuits to the virtual exclusion of respect from associates or of love. Maslow's hierarchy has found a significant place in the psychological pantheon of motivation based mostly on conceptual, not empirical or experimental, analysis.

The political application of Maslow's hierarchy can be illustrated through analysis of the Mexican federal government's current interactions with the Zapatistas of Chiapas state. In seeking to defuse the political and military threat from the Zapatistas, the government is seeking to make what it terms "concessions" to them. The problem is that the so-called concessions often address needs that seem not to be impelling the Zapatista's political and military behavior. For example, the government has sent troops into Zapatista areas to ensure safety and has initiated social programs to meet basic physiological and safety needs. However, a more salient need of the movement may be obtaining the government's sincere respect, esteem, and the opportunity to engage in self-actualizing aspects of social and cultural activities. Thus, it should not be surprising that some Zapatista communities have refused government aid, including the provision of safe drinking water and financial indemnization for relatives of massacre victims. (Of course, part of the refusal reflects the politics of control--viz., pressure from Zapatista leaders who seek to maintain control of their followers and to stanch defections.)

In seeking to end rebellions, the government should adequately ascertain what seems to be the rebellion's motivational sources--an obvious point that is too often not followed because of hubris stemming from the corruption of political power. These sources should form the basis of counter-rebellion technique. Although violence and coercion will not always be avoided--and indeed may almost always be the techniques of choice in totalitarian, authoritarian, and corrupt democracies--a resort to analyzing the hypothetical construct of motivation may most likely help resolve a crisis of conflict. (See Ajila, C.O. (1997). Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory: Applicability to the Nigerian industrial setting. IFE

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Psychologia: An International Journal, 5, 162-174; Maslow, A.H. (1970). Motivation and personality (2nd ed.) New York: Harper & Row; Preston, J. (March 6, 1998). Overtures to Zapatistas raise tensions in Chiapas. The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Soper, B., Milford, G.E., & Rosenthal, G.T. (1995). Belief when evidence does not support theory. Psychology and Marketing, 12, 415-422; Strange bedfellows: Abraham Maslow as defender of human rights violations, Jiang Zemin as humanist. (November 7, 1997). IBPP, 3(15); Watson, T.J. (1996). Motivation: That's Maslow, isn't it? Management Learning, 27, 447-464.) (Keywords: Maslow, Needs, Typology.)