CONF 610
PHILOSOPHY AND METHODS OF CONFLICT RESEARCH

Semester: Spring 2011
Class Time: Tuesday, 7:20-10:00 pm
Location: Arlington Campus, Founders Hall, Rm. 308
Instructor: *Dr. Dennis J.D. Sandole*
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Course Abstract

This course deals with the role and utility of select approaches and methods for the *design* and *implementation* of research on the **causes** of, *and* optimal **responses** to *complex* political, social, religious, cultural, economic and other problems that result in *intractable*, often *violent conflicts* within and between states. One of the major premises of the course is that these problems could be effectively dealt with by appropriate **development** strategies undertaken by local, national, regional, and global (governmental and nongovernmental) actors in order to *transform* the corresponding conflicts into *positive* and *sustainable peace*. Exploring just what kinds of research approaches and methodologies might be appropriate for these purposes will be the major objective of the course.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course deals with the following broad questions:

. ***Ontology***: What is the "nature" of the world about which we try to obtain knowledge? For instance, are conflicts in Afghanistan, the Balkans, Chechnya, Columbia, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Iraq, Israel/Palestine, Ivory Coast, Lebanon, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, U.S., Zimbabwe, or elsewhere reflective of *cultural, economic, identity, political, religious*, and/or other dimensions?

. ***Epistemology***: What is "valid" *knowledge* for any particular conflict situation? How do we determine the **"facts"** about any conflict and what are the difficulties involved in their acquisition? (For examples of such "facts," see Hewitt, et al. [2010].)

. **_Methodology_**: How do we conduct research into aspects of _complex conflicts_ in order to test existing and/or generate new knowledge about them?

In effect, the course deals with issues in **philosophy of science** such as: (1) _why_ do we perceive what we perceive?; and (2) _what_ is the "nature" of what we perceive? Both issues can impact what we deal with subsequently, such as:

. our _identification of research problems_ associated with particular conflict situations;

. our _selection of research methods_ which may be relevant to a better understanding of, _and_ response to those problems; as well as

. our design of particular _interventions_ into those conflicts.

Course objectives are to:

(1) Familiarize students of conflict analysis and resolution (CAR) with what research into complex conflicts is all about;

(2) Enable them to better understand and utilize the information they uncover in the research-based conflict/conflict resolution literature, and;

(3) Encourage them to undertake research into conflict and conflict resolution themselves, especially as a _necessary_ (but not _sufficient_) condition for preventing or otherwise dealing with conflict, especially protracted, violent conflict situations at the _intra-_ and _inter_-state levels.

In summary, therefore, the course deals with the **design** _and_ **conduct** of **conflict research**, the assumption being that we have to first know something about a particular conflict -- i.e., we have to first _analyze_ it -- before we can attempt to do something about it, e.g., _prevent, manage, settle, resolve,_ and/or _transform_ it.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Prerequisites**: Acceptance into ICAR's MSc. or Ph.D. program and successful completion of either CONF 501 or 801, or permission of the instructor.

2. **Class Format**: Classes will follow an _interactive seminar format_.

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Hence, class attendance, participation, and the *completion of relevant readings prior to class* are enthusiastically recommended.

3. **Assessment:** A *mid-term paper*, worth **40% of the final grade**, will be due on 22 March 2011. A final *research design/pilot study*, representing **50% of the final grade**, will be due on 17 May 2011. *Student participation* will be worth **10% of the final grade**. [Overall in-class participation will determine whether a "borderline" final grade of, for example, B+/A- remains in the B or A category.]

(a) The **midterm paper** (15-20 double-spaced pages) will be a response to the statement and corresponding question, *"Truth like beauty lies in the eye of the beholder: Implications for conflict, conflict analysis and conflict resolution (with regard to conflicts included in Hewitt, et al., 2010)?"*

(b) The **final paper** (20-25 double-spaced pages) will be a combined *research design/pilot study* in which:

[1] Each student will do a *research design*; i.e.,

-- identify and discuss *WHAT* she or he **would want to study** for a "Directed Reading" (CONF 697), "Research Methods II" (CONF 611), MSc. thesis, or other project, if given the chance, time, and other resources;

-- *WHY* he or she would want to study it, spelling out its importance or significance for the field, the community, etc.; and

-- *HOW* she or he would study it, articulating and discussing the concepts, theories, and research methods relevant to solving the problem implied in the "what." And then:

[2] Each student will then do a *pilot study*: "operationalize" a part of the research design by **actually studying a very small scale version of it**, not just to acquire experience in data generation, collection, processing and analysis, but also to explore the viability (*"do-ability"*) of the more comprehensive research design.

For example, if one's (a) *research design* calls for interviewing Palestinians and Israelis about the prospects for "positive peace" in the Middle East, rather than interview hundreds of members of each "identity group," as might be called for in a funded, "statistically representative" version of the project, for the (b) *pilot study* the student might go to the Johnson Center on the main GMU campus, locate five Palestinian and five Israeli/Jewish GMU students and interview

them.

Again, the objective of the *pilot study* is to get students to actually *apply* some of the ideas and techniques they would otherwise only read and hear about in class; i.e., to go beyond their research designs *and*, on a small scale, actually conduct systematic research into complex conflicts and their constructive handling.

NOTE: Since the mid-term and final papers are meant, among other things, to demonstrate that students have been in the course, *the two papers should contain appropriate references to course concepts and the corresponding readings*. For further clarification -- including on the GMU Honor Code (e.g., avoiding any hint of <u>plagiarism</u>) -- students should feel free to consult with the instructor.

(c) **Active Student participation**. Students will be given opportunities to lead discussions on the required course readings.

Office Hours: Tuesdays, immediately following each class and by appointment.

REQUIRED READINGS

(1) Brewer, John and Albert Hunter (2006). *Foundations of Multimethod Research: Synthesizing Styles*.
Thousand Oaks(California) and London: Sage Publications.

(2) Creswell, John W. (2009). Research Design: Qualitative,
 Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (3rd Edition). Los Angeles and London: SAGE

(3) Hewitt, J. Joseph, Jonathan Wilkenfeld and Ted Robert Gurr (2010). *Peace and Conflict 2010*. Boulder (Colorado): Paradigm
 Publishers.

(4) Hollis, Martin (1994). *The Philosophy of Science: An Introduction*. London and New York: Cambridge University Press.

(5) Kuhn, Thomas S. (1996). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. (3rd Ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

(6) Sandole, Dennis J.D. (1999). *Capturing the Complexity of Conflict: Dealing with Violent Ethnic Conflict in the Post-Cold War Era*. London and New York: Pinter/Cassell [Continuum International].

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(7) Sandole, Dennis J.D. (2002). "Virulent Ethnocentrism: A Major Challenge for Transformational Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in the Post-Cold War Era." *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, Vol. 1, No. 4, pp. 4-27, available online at www.ethnopolitics.org.

(8) Sandole, Dennis J.D. (2007). *Peace and Security in the Postmodern World: The OSCE and Conflict Resolution.* New York and London: Routledge [Taylor & Francis].

(9) Sandole, Dennis J.D. (2009). "Critical Systemic Inquiry (CSI) in Conflict Analysis and Resolution: The Essential Bridge between Theory and Practice." In *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (Dennis J.D. Sandole, Sean Byrne, Ingrid Sandole-Staroste, and Jessica Senehi, eds.). London and New York: Routledge. (Available from the instructor.)

(10) Sriram, Chandra Lekha, John C. King, Julie A. Mertus, Olga Martin-Ortega,and Johanna Herman (2009). *Surviving Field Research: Working in Violent and Difficult Situations.* London and NY: Routledge.

(11) Wilkinson, Richard and Kate Pickett (2009). *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger.* New York and London: Bloomsbury Press.

RECOMMENDED READING

Nachmias, David and Chava Frankfort-Nachmias (2000). *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*. (6th Ed.). New York: Worth Publishers.

COURSE STRUCTURE

25 Jan   **I. Introduction**.

        A. Introductions (including Conflict-Relevant Backgrounds).
        B. Expectations.
        C. Preferred Research Domains.
        D. Course Overview.

1/8 Feb   **II. Indicators of Major Conflict-Relevant Trends Worldwide.**

        The easiest way to get into conflict research is to look at some relevant data generated by conflict research, e.g.,

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> A. Armed Conflict.
> B. Self-Determination Movements.
> C. Democracy.
> D. Peacebuilding (Development) Capacities.
> E. Suicide Terrorism.
>
>> READ: Hewitt, et al., 2010;
>> Sandole, 1999, Ch. 1;
>> Sandole, 2007, Ch. 1.
>
> These are *dependent variables*. How would we begin to *explain* or *understand* the behavior of these variables in terms of select *independent variables*?

15 Feb   **III. "Realities" Behind the Data?**

> In other words, what are the *"causes"* of these behaviors? How do we uncover the "drivers" of conflict?
>
>> A. "Mapping" Potential Causes and Conditions.
>>
>>> 1. *3 Levels of Conflict Reality*.
>>> 2. *3 Pillar Framework of Conflict and Conflict Resolution*.
>>>
>>> READ: Sandole, 1999, Ch. 6;
>>> Sandole, 2007, Ch. 2.
>>>
>>> 3. *Explanation* (**"Erklären"**): "Action Meaning".
>>> 4. *Understanding* (**"Verstehen"**): "Act Meaning".
>>>
>>> READ: Hollis, 1994.
>
> How would we -- *in this course* -- do *our own* research to either "explain" or "understand" conflict phenomena? (**Mnemonic #1: P[PT^{2}DT]**.)

22 Feb   **"Mapping," cont'd.**

1/8 Mar   **IV. Sources of Influence on Decisionmaking of Researchers, Practitioners, and Disputants (including "suicide terrorists"): _Paradigms_   (P).**

      A. Normal Science.
      B. Anomalies.

          1. *Cognitive Blindness*.
          2. *Cognitive Resistance*.
          3. *Evaluative-Affective Resistance (EAR) 1*.
          4. *Evaluative-Affective Resistance (EAR) 2*.

      C. Crisis: Breaking the "Paradigmatic Deadlock".

      D. Clashing Paradigms: *Realpolitik* ["Hard Power"]
         vs. *Idealpolitik* ["Soft Power"].

      E. Scientific Revolutions.

         READ: Kuhn, 1996;
         Sandole, 1999, pp. 109-113;
         Sandole, 2002.
         (Recommended: Nachmias, 2000, Ch. 1.)

15 Mar: **Mid-Semester Break.**

22 Mar: **Midterm Papers Due.**

22 Mar   **V. Constructing the Research Design.**

      A. Research Design Overview (**Mnemonic #2**).

         1. What?
         2. Why?
         3. How?

      B. Problem in Need of Solution: The **"What"** of
         Research.   (**P**)

         1. The General Problem Area.
         2. The Specific Problem.

            a) Units and Levels of Analysis.
            b) Accessibility to Research.
            c) Ethical Considerations.
      C. Reasons Underlying Selection (Significance of the
         Problem): The **"Why"** of Research.

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1. Theoretical Significance.
                    2. Practical Significance.

                       READ: Creswell, Chs. 1-6;
                       Review Sandole, 1999, Ch. 1;
                       Review Sandole, 2007, Ch. 1;
                       Sandole, 2009.
                       (Recommended: Nachmias, 2000, Chs. 2-4.)

29 Mar   **D. Researching the Problem: The "How" of Research.**

                    E. Type of Study.   (**T**)

                    1. Exploratory.
                    2. Descriptive.
                    3. Causal.

                    F. Theoretical Setting.   (**T**)

                    1. Concepts.
                    2. Hypotheses.
                    3. Models.
                    4. Theories.

                       READ: Creswell, Ch. 7;
                       Sandole, 1999, Ch. 2 (review Ch. 6);
                       Review Sandole, 2007, Ch. 2.
                       (Recommended: Nachmias, 2000, Chs. 5-6.)

5 Apr   **G. Operational Setting: Data Sources.**   (**D**)

                    1. Library/Archival Setting.
                    2. Natural Setting.

                       a) Surveys (Sampling).
                       b) Field Studies.
                       c) Field Experiments.

                    3. Artificial Setting.

                       a) Laboratory Experiments.
                       b) Simulation.

                    4. "Mixed Methods" (*Triangulation*)

                       READ: Brewer and Hunter, 2006;
                       Creswell, Chs. 8-10;

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Sandole, 1999, Ch. 3 and App. A;
Sandole, 2007, Ch. 4.
(Recommended: Nachmias, 2000, Chs. 8-13.)

12 Apr   **H. Data Collection.**

1. Other-Generated (Existing) Data.

    a) Personal Documents.
    b) Statistical Records.
    c) Mass Communications.
    d) Scholarly/Literary/Pedagogical Works.

2. Self-Generated Data.

    a) Interviews.
    b) Questionnaires.
    c) Observation.

READ: Sandole, 1999, Ch. 4 and App. B;
Sandole, 2007, Chs. 5-9.

19 Apr   **I. Data "Measurement" and Processing.**
1. Translating Data into Indicators.

    a) *Nominal Level* of Measurement.
       - **Coding** (Content Analysis, 1).
       - Computation of **Modes** and **Ranges.**
    b) *Ordinal Level* of Measurement.
       - **Scaling** (Content Analysis, 2).
       - Computation of **Medians** and **Quartile Deviations.**
    c) *Interval/Ratio* Levels of Measurement.
       - Computation of **Means** and **Standard Deviations.**
       - Standardization.
       - Transformation.

2. *Reliability* and *Validity* of Indicators.

READ: Sandole, 1999, Ch. 4 (cont'd) and App. C;
Sandole, 2007 (cont'd);
Review Hewitt, et al.
(Recommended: Nachmias, 2000, Chs. 7, 14-15, 18.)

    J. Data Analysis.

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            1. Trends.
            2. Differences.
            3. Relationships.

                a) Correlation.
                b) Regression.

                READ: Sandole, 1999, Ch. 4 (cont'd);
                Sandole, 2007 (cont'd);
                Hewitt, et al.(cont'd).
                (Recommended: Nachmias, 2000, Chs. 16-17,
                App. A.)
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26 Apr   **K.** **Validating the Results**.

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            1. Norms of Validation.

                a) Correspondence.
                b) Pragmatic.
                c) Coherence.

            2. Statistical Significance.
            3. The *Verification – Falsification* Controversy.

                READ: Sandole, 1999, Ch. 5 and App. D;
                Review Kuhn, Ch. 12.
                (Recommended: Nachmias, 2000, Ch. 19.)

        L.  Interpreting the Findings.

            1. The Theoretical Setting Revisited.              (**T**)

                a) Descriptive Theory.
                b) Prescriptive Theory.

            2. The Paradigmatic Deadlock Revisited.
            3. *Understanding* and *Explanation* Revisited.

                READ: Sandole, 1999, Chs. 6-8;
                Sandole, 2007, Ch. 10.
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3/10 May   **VI.** **Further Examples of *Applied* Research**.

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        A. *Qualitative*: Conducting Research in Violent
           Conflict Settings.
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READamp; Sriram, et al.

    B. *Quantitative:* The Real-World Verification of *Structural Violence.*

    READ: Wilkinson and Pickett.

10 May   **VII. Implementing the Research Design.**

    A. Pilot Study.

        1. What?
        2. Why?
        3. How?
        4. Findings?
        5. Implications for Further Study, Practice, Policy, Teaching?

    B. Communicating the Findings: *The Research Report.*

        1. Embedding the Findings in Relevant, User-Friendly Frameworks.

        3. ***Penetrating the Images of Others***:
            The Effective "Selling" of Ideas and Their Translation into Constructive Action (Part of the *"Re-entry Problem"*).

        3. Ethics Revisited.

            READ: Review Sandole 1999;
            Review Sandole, 2002;
            Review Sandole, 2007;
            Review Sandole, 2009.
            (Recommended: Nachmias, 2000, App. B, review Ch. 4.)

17 May   <u>**RESEARCH DESIGNS/PILOT STUDIES DUE**</u>

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