

CONF 610
PHILOSOPHY AND METHODS OF CONFLICT RESEARCH

Semester: Fall 2005
Class Time: Tuesday, 4:30 - 7:10 pm
Location: Arlington Campus, *Truland Bldg.*, Rm. 333A
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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 into 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, and international (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:

. *Epistemology*: What is considered "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 Marshall & Gurr [2005] and Pape [2005].)

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

. *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 and conflict resolution 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 in the U.S. and elsewhere in the world, including conflicts underlying the events and aftermath of 11 September 2001.

In summary, the course deals with the **design and conduct of conflict research**, the assumption being that we have to 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*. 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 1 November 2005. A *final research design/pilot study*, representing 50% of the final grade, will be due on 13 December 2005. *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 implicit in, among other sources, Marshall & Gurr [2005] and Pape [2005])?"

(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 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 design.

For example, if one's 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 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 here 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 actually design and 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 plagiarism at all costs) -- students should feel free to consult with the instructor.

(c) **Active Student participation.** Students will be given opportunities to lead discussions on various readings (e.g., Marshall & Gurr, Pape). In addition, once we enter into *Part V* of the course

structure (see below), students will participate in weekly working-group discussions of aspects of research design and implementation, usually after class break, with reports back to the overall group. During these sessions, students will "brain-storm" on how concepts and methods discussed during the first half of the class apply to their *research designs*, for feedback from the group and the instructor. Students will take turns acting as facilitators for these discussions.

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 7:15 - 8:00 pm (following each class) and by appointment.

Withdrawal: The last day to drop the course without academic liability is 30 September 2005.

REQUIRED READINGS

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

Marshall, Monty G., and Ted Robert Gurr (2005). *Peace and Conflict 2005: A Global Survey of Armed Conflicts, Self-Determination Movements, and Democracy*. College Park, Maryland: University of Maryland, Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM).

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

Pape, Robert A. (2005). *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. New York: Random House.

Sandole, Dennis J.D (1998). "A Comprehensive Mapping of Conflict and Conflict Resolution: A Three Pillar Approach." *Peace and Conflict Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, December, pp. 1-30 (www.gmu.edu/academic/pcs/sandole).

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

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, June, pp. 4-27 (www.ethnopolitics.org, then "archive" (left side of page), and then "volume I" and "issue 4." "Sandole" article is the first one listed).

Sandole, Dennis J.D. (forthcoming). *Brave New Worlds and Beyond: Peace and Security in the Postmodern World*. Prepublication chapters.

COURSE SYLLABUS

30 Aug/
6 Sep/

I. Introduction.

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

13 Sep/
20 Sep

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.,

- A. Armed Conflict.
- B. Self-Determination Movements.
- C. Democracy.
- D. Peacebuilding (Development) Capacities.
- E. Suicide Terrorism.

READ: Marshall and Gurr, 2005;
Pape, 2005.

These are *dependent variables*. How would we begin to *explain* or *understand* the behavior of these variables in terms of select *independent variables*?

27 Sep

III. "Realities" Behind the Data?

In other words, what are the "*causes*" of these behaviors? How do we uncover causes and conditions?

- A. "Mapping" Potential Causes and Conditions: the **3PF**.

READ: Sandole, 1998;
Sandole, 1999, Ch. 6.

1. *Explanation* ("**Erklaeren**"): "Action Meaning".
2. *Understanding* ("**Verstehen**"): "Act Meaning".

Now, how would we -- in this class -- do our own research to either "explain" or "understand" conflict phenomena? (**Mnemonic #1: P[PT²DT]**.)

4 Oct/
18 Oct/
25 Oct

IV. Sources of Influence on Decisionmaking of
Researchers, Practitioners, and Disputants:
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;
Nachmias, 2000, Ch. 1;
Sandole, 1999, pp. 109-113;
Sandole, 2002.

1 Nov

V. Constructing the Research Design. (P)

- A. *Research Design Overview (Mnemonic #2)*.
 - 1. **What?**
 - 2. **Why?**
 - 3. **How?**
- B. *Problem in Need of a Solution: The "What" of Research*.
 - 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*.
 - 1. Theoretical Significance.
 - 2. Practical Significance.

READ: Nachmias, Chs. 2-4;
Sandole, 1999, Ch. 1;
Sandole, forthcoming, Ch. 1.

MID-TERM PAPERS DUE (1 November).

8 Nov

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: Nachmias, Chs. 5-6;
Sandole, 1998 (review);
Sandole, 1999, Ch. 2, review Ch. 6;
Sandole, forthcoming, Chs. 2-3.

15 Nov

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.

READ: Nachmias, Chs. 8-13;
Sandole, 1999, Ch. 3 and App. A;
Sandole, forthcoming, Ch. 4.

22 Nov

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, forthcoming, Chs. 5-9.

29 Nov

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: Nachmias, Chs. 7, 14-15, 18;
Sandole, 1999, Ch. 4 (cont'd) and App. C;
Sandole, forthcoming (cont'd);
Review Marshall & Gurr;
Review Pape.

J. Data Analysis.

1. Trends.

2. Differences.

3. Relationships.

a) Correlation.

b) Regression.

READ: Nachmias, Chs. 16-17, App. A;
Sandole, 1999, Ch. 4 (cont'd);
Sandole, forthcoming (cont'd);
Marshall & Gurr (cont'd);
Pape (cont'd).

6 Dec

K. Validating the Results.

1. Norms of Validation.

a) Correspondence.

b) Pragmatic.

c) Coherence.

2. Statistical Significance.

3. *The Verification - Falsification Controversy.*

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

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, forthcoming, Ch. 10.

VI. **Implementing the Research Design.**

A. **Pilot Study.**

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

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

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

2. **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: Nachmias, App. B, review Ch. 4;
Review Sandole 1999;
Review Sandole, 2002;
Review Sandole, forthcoming.

Tuesday, 13 December

RESEARCH DESIGNS/PILOT STUDIES DUE