

George Mason University

School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (S-CAR)

CONF 642: Integration of Theory and Practice

Semester: Fall 2015  
Class Time: Mondays, 7:20-10:00 pm  
Location: Arlington Campus, Founders Hall, Rm. 120  
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**COURSE BACKGROUND**

CONF 642 came into existence fairly early in S-CAR's evolution in response to sustained student demand for a "capstone" course at the end of their MSc. studies to help them "*pull it all together.*"

What this meant has not always been clear, including to faculty. Since MSc. students take courses in -- and experience in nontraditional ways -- *theory, research methods, and practice*, "pulling it all together" means to *somehow* integrate theory, research methods, and practice.

Adding to the complexity of the issue, some S-CAR faculty felt that "integration" was something that students should do for themselves, as was the case in other disciplines. But other faculty disagreed, arguing that conflict analysis and resolution (CAR) was not like other disciplines; instead, it was a *multi-discipline* and an *applied-theory* field. According to this view, which ultimately prevailed, S-CAR should offer some kind of opportunity and environment at the end of students' studies to facilitate the integrative process.

Hence, this "course"! Although, like other courses, it includes lectures, readings, class presentations, class exercises, and written assignments, CONF 642 is nevertheless unique because its subject matter, "in theory," comprises the entirety of the CAR field. "In practice," however, the subject matter is -- and often uniquely for each student -- the combined wisdom students have accumulated through *all of the courses* they have taken by the time they enroll in the course.

Accordingly, the subject matter of the course is not only a partial framing of the totality of the CAR field, but it may be different depending upon who taught the courses - even the "same" courses (e.g., CONF 501) -- that students have taken, plus the various conflict-related experiences students may have had in, for instance, internships and practicums (the APT) or at conferences and through employment in the field (e.g., with development NGOs), etc. The upshot is that CONF 642 is *not* a "course" in the "normal" sense.

This presents us -- students and faculty -- with a unique challenge: How to make the course "work"! This syllabus represents one *static* contribution to the process. The rest is up to us -- teacher and student -- and our *dynamics*: Our respective weekly contributions, informed by appropriate preparation, plus our interactions, including reciprocal feedback, over the course of the next 12 or so weeks.

#### **CLASS DESCRIPTION**

CONF 642 is, therefore, the "exit course" for S-CAR's MSc. students, designed to provide them, in *their final semester*, with opportunities to "bring it all together," to *integrate* into a *coherent whole* all that they have been exposed to in the program and "in life": Conflict resolution *theory* and *practice*, with *research methods* playing a pivotal role in facilitating the application of theory to practice and, via *evaluation research*, the implications of practice for theory.

My role as instructor is to encourage and help students to weave together into a coherent knowledge system, "bits and pieces" from the courses they have taken, and related experiences, dealing with:

(a) **Theory [A]** on the *causes* and *conditions* of [violent] conflict initiation and escalation at *all* levels;

(b) **Theory [B]** on hypothesized approaches and *processes* for dealing with conflicts, plus **Practice** of actual approaches and *processes* for dealing with conflicts at *all* levels; and

(c) **Research methods** for applying theory to practice and feeding the results of practice back to theory, to *reinforce*, *revise*, *refute*, *reject*, and to *replace* a theoretical system with

another, in part or in whole (the "5Rs").

To facilitate achieving course objectives, our class interactions will be structured around three (3) Core Questions:

- (1) *"What do we know?"*
- (2) *"What don't we know?"* And
- (3) *"How can we find out what we don't know?"*

These questions will be applied not only to the CAR field in general, but also to six contemporary conflicts - international and domestic -- that are in pressing need of resolution: Conflict between the US/EU and Islamic State; Russia's "Hybrid War" with Ukraine; China's Conflict with Japan over disputed islands in the East China Sea; Social conflicts implicit in the surge of violent crime in the US; White-on-Black violence in the US; and the Trump Phenomenon.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. **Prerequisites:** S-CAR MSc. students in their *final semester* or permission of the instructor.

(a) The first of two required short "thought papers," due two weeks after Labor Day, on the implications for the CAR field of a 96-minute video presentation by Jeremy Rifkin on, "The Empathic Civilization" (5-8 double-spaced pages). **Due: Monday, 28 September 2015 (20 percent of final grade)**. Students can watch and listen to Rifkin's video at:

[http://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/jeremy\\_rifkin\\_the\\_empathic\\_civilization/](http://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/jeremy_rifkin_the_empathic_civilization/)

(b) The second of the two brief "thought papers," in this case, on the relevance of recent developments in neuroscience - plus of biological and physiological factors in general -- to the discussion of what drives violent conflict. In preparation for this assignment, students are asked to complete the appropriate course readings (e.g., by Mitchell, Sandole, and Wilkinson and Pickett: see below), plus watch and listen to a brief 15-minute TEDx Talk by Tim Phillips on "Neuroscience and Social Conflict" (5-8 double-spaced pages). **Due Monday, 26 October 2015 (20 percent of final grade)**. Phillips' TEDx Talk can be accessed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AfljJGTVcKE>

(c) A final paper will be required in which students utilize the *three pillar framework (3PF)* [see below] to “map” a violent conflict in terms of its essential characteristics (Pillar 1), causes and conditions - “drivers” (Pillar 2/*Theory A*), and optimal 3<sup>rd</sup> party interventions (Pillar 3/*Theory B*). Conflict options are: Conflict between the US/EU and Islamic State; Russia’s “Hybrid War” with Ukraine; China’s Conflict with Japan over disputed islands in the East China Sea; Conflict underlying the surge in violent crime in the US; White-on-Black violence in the US; and the Trump Phenomenon (double-spaced pages). **Due: Monday, 14 December 2015 (50 percent of final grade).**

(d) Students will also participate in class discussions of the status of the field, and course readings (10% of final grade).

**Office Hours:** After class (10:00-10:30 pm) and by appointment.

**2. Withdrawal:** The last day to drop the course without tuition penalty is 8 September 2015.

### **3. REQUIRED READINGS**

(1) David A. Backer, Jonathan Wilkenfeld, and Paul K. Huth. *Peace and Conflict 2014*. Boulder (CO): Paradigm Publishers, 2014.

(2) Peter T. Coleman, Morton Deutsch and Eric C. Marcus (eds.). *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice* (3rd Ed.). San Francisco (CA): Jossey-Bass, 2014.

(3) Christopher Mitchell. *The Nature of Intractable Conflict: Resolution in the Twenty-First Century*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire (UK) and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

(4) Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse, and Hugh Miall. *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts* (3rd Ed.). Cambridge (UK) and Malden (MA): Polity Press, 2011.

(5) Dennis J.D. Sandole. “A Comprehensive Mapping of Conflict

and Conflict Resolution: A Three Pillar Approach." *Peace and Conflict Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1998, pp. 1-30. Available online at: [www.gmu.edu/academic/pcs/sandole](http://www.gmu.edu/academic/pcs/sandole)

(6) Dennis J.D. Sandole. "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 2002.  
[http://www.ethnopolitics.org/ethnopolitics/archive/volume\\_1/issue\\_4/sandole.pdf](http://www.ethnopolitics.org/ethnopolitics/archive/volume_1/issue_4/sandole.pdf)

(7) Dennis J.D. Sandole, Sean Byrne, Ingrid Sandole-Staroste, and Jessica Senehi (eds.). *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution*. London and New York: Routledge, 2009.

(8) Dennis J.D. Sandole, *Peacebuilding: Preventing Violent Conflict in a Complex World*. Cambridge (UK) and Malden (MA): Polity Press, 2010.

(9) Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*. New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2011.

### Course Structure

31 Aug: Introduction.

- A. Student Expectations.
- B. Course Overview.

7 Sep: **No Class (Labor Day)**

14 Sep: **No Class. First "At home Assignment"**: Sensitizing Ourselves to the "Bigger Picture" of Conflict Analysis and Resolution (CAR): The "Global Problematique". Watch Video of Jeremy Rifkin's Discussion of "The Empathic Civilization" and Explore its Relevance to the CAR Field and to the Course:

[http://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/jeremy\\_rifkin\\_the\\_empathic\\_civilization/](http://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/jeremy_rifkin_the_empathic_civilization/)

**5-8 page "Thought Paper" Due on Monday, 28 September.**

21 Sep: *Integration for What?* To Enhance Critical

Problemsolving: Solving Complex Elements of the "Global Problematique" That Drive Deadly Conflicts and Which, in turn, are Driven by Deadly Conflicts:

- A. Conflicts and Other Problems Likely to Characterize the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
  - 1. The U.S.: Likely to remain the most violent country in the industrialized world?
    - a. Gun-related violence.
    - b. Police-community relations.
  - 2. Worldwide: Anticipated trends in *identity-based* conflicts; e.g., ethnic, racial, religious? Terrorism? "Clashes of Civilization"?
    - a. Relations between Europe's Muslim communities and dominant ingroups.
    - b. Global distribution of extremist groups and the Islamic State.
    - c. Global refugee crisis.
  - 3. Environmental Degradation and Resource Scarcities, plus Natural Disasters (e.g., tsunamis, hurricanes, wild fires, etc.). US Department of Defense: "Global warming is a *threat multiplier!*"

Read: Backer, et al., *Peace and Conflict 2014*, All. Ramsbotham et al., *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, Ch. 3.

- B. The Moral and Practical Need to "Do the Right Thing": the Raison d'etre for *Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (CAR).

28 Sep: Frameworks for Facilitating Responses to the 3 Core Questions, Mapping the CAR Field, and *Bringing It All Together "in Theory"*.

- A. Nested Paradigm (Dugan).
- B. 4 Worlds Framework (4WF. Sandole)).
- C. 3 Levels of Conflict Reality (Sandole).
- D. Leadership Pyramid (Lederach).
- E. 3 Pillar Framework (3PF. Sandole)).

Read:

Ramsbotham et al., *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, Chs. 1-2;  
 Sandole, "A Comprehensive Mapping of Conflict and Conflict Resolution," all; and  
 Sandole, *Peacebuilding*, Chs. 1-2.

**Rifkin "Thought Paper" Due.**

5 Oct Frameworks, continued.  
 12 Oct **No Class (Columbus Day). Meet Next Day on Tuesday.**

13 Oct/  
 Tuesday: Theory A: Conflict Drivers  
 A. Individual Level.  
 B. Societal Level.  
 C. International Level.  
 D. Global/Ecological Level.

Read:

Coleman, et al., *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, Chs. 6, 12, 17, 22, 29, 30, 32.  
 Mitchell, *The Nature of Intractable Conflict*, Chs. 1-

4.

Ramsbotham et al., *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, Ch. 4  
 Sandole, "Virulent Ethnocentrism".  
 Sandole, et al., *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resoluton*, Part 1, especially Chs. 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, & 8.  
 Wilkinson and Pickett, *The Spirit Level*, All.

**Second "At-home Assignment":** Watch Tim Phillips' TEDx Talk on "Neuroscience and Social Conflict." In subsequent paper, explore the relevance of neuroscience - plus biological and physiological factors in general -- to the discussion of Drivers of Conflict between the US/EU and Islamic State; Russia's "Hybrid War" with Ukraine; China's Conflict with Japan over Disputed Islands in the East China Sea; Conflict Underlying Surge in Violent Conflict in the US; White-on-Black Violence in the US; and the Trump Phenomenon:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AfljJGTVcKE>

**5-8 page Paper Due on Monday, 26 October.**

19 Oct: Theory A: Conflict Drivers, continued.

26 Oct: Theory A: Conflict Drivers, continued.

**Phillips "Thought Paper" Due.**

2 Nov: Scenarios Development - for Bringing It All Together "in Practice".

A. Identity a *Conflict* (Current, Developing or Potential) that Could Worsen during the Next 5-10 Years (*Pillar 1*). *Options*:

1. US/EU Conflict with ISIS.
2. Russia-Ukraine "Hybrid War".
3. China-Japan Conflict over Islands in the East China Sea.
4. Conflict Underlying Surge in Violent Crime in the US.
5. White-on-Black Violence in the US.
6. The Trump Phenomenon.
- 7.

B. Explore Conflict Trajectories:

1. Identify the Factors -- "*Drivers*" -- that Could Make the Conflict Worse or Better (*Pillar 2*).
2. Construct a *Scenario* Indicating How these Factors Could Combine to Make the Conflict Worse (Worst-Case Scenario=Negative Trajectory) or Better (Best-Case Scenario=Positive Trajectory) (*Pillar 2*).

C. Design a *Strategy* for Responding to these Factors ("*Drivers*") to Either Undermine their Potential Negative Impact or Enhance their Positive Impact on the Conflict (*Pillar 3*).

9 Nov: Theory B: Exploration of Relevance of Remaining Chapters in Coleman, et. al., *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, to Handling Conflict between the US/EU and



Islamic State; Russia's "Hybrid War" with Ukraine; China's Conflict with Japan over Disputed Islands in the East China Sea; Conflict Underlying Surge in Violent Crime in the US; White-on-Black Violence in the US; and the Trump Phenomenon.

- 16 Nov: Continuation of discussion based on Coleman, et al.
- 23 Nov: Theory B: Exploration of Relevance of Remaining Chapters in Sandole, et al., *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution*, to Handling Conflict between the US/EU and Islamic State; Russia's "Hybrid War" with Ukraine; China's Conflict with Japan over Disputed Islands in the East China Sea; Conflict Underlying Surge in Violent Crime in the US; White-on-Black Violence in the US; and the Trump Phenomenon.
- 30 Nov: Theory B: Exploration of Relevance of Remaining Chapters in Ramsbotham, et al., *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, to Handling Conflict between the US/EU and Islamic State; Russia's "Hybrid War" with Ukraine; China's Conflict with Japan over Disputed Islands in the East China Sea; Conflict Underlying Surge in Violent Crime in the US; White-on-Black Violence in the US; and the Trump Phenomenon.
- 7 Dec: Theory B: Exploration of Relevance of Chapters 5-12 in Mitchell, *The Nature of Intractable Conflict*, and Chapters 3-5 in Sandole, *Peacebuilding*, to Handling Conflict between the US/EU and Islamic State; Russia's "Hybrid War" with Ukraine; China's Conflict with Japan over Disputed Islands in the East China Sea; Conflict Underlying Surge in Violent Crime in the US; White-on-Black Violence in the US; and the Trump Phenomenon.
- 14 Dec: **Final Papers Due.**