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commentary

American Democracy & Conflict

A Tale of Two Incommensurate Visions of the City on the Hill[1]

By Dennis J.D. Sandole, Professor of Conflict Resolution and International Relations, dsandole@gmu.edu

The current U.S. presidential campaign between President Barack Obama and former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney is one of the most bitterly fought contests in American history. It is a form of domestic warfare occurring within the larger context of gridlock and decisionmaking paralysis, causing alarm globally as well as nationally: The U.S., the world's "indispensible nation," no longer "works!"

I am less concerned here with how we arrived at this dysfunctional situation – e.g., Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell's veritable declaration of war in January 2009 that his "single most important goal for the next four years [was] to ensure that Barack Obama [was] a one-term president."[2] Instead, I am more concerned with what might be done to mitigate this toxic state of affairs. To assist in this project, I have sought the wisdom of one of America's premier political scientists, Robert A. Dahl, who has explicitly addressed conflict and conflict handling in the American political system.[3]

According to Dahl, "the framers deliberately sought to build conflict into [our] constitutional structure,"[4] through the fragmentation of power and system of checks and balances between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the central government, and the competing jurisdictions of the federal and state levels of government. Even without this structured basis for conflict, however, the very nature of "being human" makes conflict "an inescapable aspect" of communal life.[5] James Madison, fourth president of the United States, subscribed to this theory of conflict. Writing in The Federalist, Madison declared that our

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Photo: Flickr User Glyn Lowe Photoworks.

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events

S-CAR's Annual Welcome Dinner

Balsamic Chicken & Innovation

By Mark Hardee, S-CAR Newsletter Editor, mhardee2@gmu.edu

On September 8, 2012, the School for Conflict Analysis held its annual Welcome Dinner, open to all faculty, staff, and students. The dinner provided an opportunity for friends, colleagues, and acquaintances of past years to come together and express their projections for the future of S-CAR, with fresh and innovative input from new scholars and practitioners.

The event began with an introductory speech by Solon Simmons, and from there it was established to be much more than a simple reunion and meet-and-greet. Richard Rubenstein had the opportunity to introduce the school's faculty members, and Julie Shedd acknowledged the full variety of the visiting scholars that were present for the evening. While this dinner was a fun and engaging social experience to those who attended, S-CAR benefited in more ways than one. The sheer diversity of cultures and intellectual backgrounds present at the banquet afforded an opportunity to draw on various conceptions of what the conflict analysis and resolution field should be, and subsequently enabled S-CAR to capitalize on innovation.

Perhaps the best term to capture the meaning of this event was 'resonance.' To gauge what resonated with each attendee when they thought of S-CAR and the role the school plays in the practical and academic worlds, Lisa Shaw invited those who attended to discuss the terms that came to mind when they thought of the school. Members of each table then selected one or two terms that resonated for their group and shared them with the larger audience. Among the terms proposed, it seemed that the phrasing was extremely important in revealing how attendees advocated for a practice-oriented future informed by theory and knowledge. This builds on the practical foundation S-CAR has constructed over the years. Examples include: 'hope for our home,' 'infiltration of conflict,' 'honor the past,' 'crossroad of theory, research, and practice,' 'pragmatic and successful,' and 'evolving and relevant.' This interactive conceptualization of the inherent nature of the school both diversifies and focuses future initiatives that S-CAR's students, staff, and faculty may choose to engage in.

Using the Welcome Dinner as a springboard, S-CAR as a community must delve headlong into this very realizable future. As is to be expected, our community will do this first by analyzing the past, then resolving to build on its success. ■

Dean Bartoli and S-CAR students at the 2012 Annual S-CAR Welcome Dinner. Photo: S-CAR.

Insight Conflict Resolution Program

Theory, Research, and Practice

By Alessandra Cuccia, S-CAR M.S. Student, insight@gmu.edu

The Insight Conflict Resolution Program (ICRP) is a center of theory, research and practice at S-CAR that is focused on developing the Insight approach to conflict analysis and resolution and applying it to transform deep rooted social conflict. ICRP started in 2010 with a grant from the Sargent Shriver Peace Institute. Sargent Shriver, the master peace builder who renewed trust in America through the Peace Corps and brought voice and agency to disenfranchised Americans through the War on Poverty, is its icon.

The Insight approach is a cutting edge contribution to the field. It uses Bernard Lonergan's critical, reflexive philosophy as a framework for explaining what we are doing when we are in conflict and when we disengage from it. The Insight approach directs our attention and curiosity toward our operations of consciousness. It asks how the meanings we construct and the value we assign to those meanings pattern the decisions we make. The goal of ICRP is to articulate and implement a method in peacebuilding that can consistently and reliably enable the kind of social change that builds sustainable peace.

One focus of ICRP is the persistent problem of retaliatory violence, especially pertaining to retaliatory homicide in the United States. Retaliatory homicide is a problem that not only affects individuals that are involved in the violence but also the communities surrounding these regrettable, preventable events. In January of 2012, ICRP started working on the Retaliatory Violence Insight Project (RVIP). ICRP, through a grant provided by the Department of Justice and the Bureau of Justice Assistance, has set out to develop retaliatory violence interventions with law enforcement based on the Insight approach. RVIP focuses its research and practice in two cities in the United States: Lowell, Massachusetts and Memphis, Tennessee. Megan Price, a Ph.D student at S-CAR, is the current Director of ICRP and also contributing to the Retaliatory Violence Insight Project. Dr. Jamie Price, along with Megan and Frederick Johnson of Intersections International travel to these neighborhoods and bring along with them the Insight approach to help these areas tackle retaliatory violence. By looking at the dilemma of retaliatory violence through an Insight lens, Dr. Jamie Price and Megan hope to help change retaliatory dynamics within these struggling communities.

Dr. Jamie Price and Ph.D. Student Megan Price in Lowell, MA. Photo: S-CAR.

ICRP has planned many engaging events throughout the semester. On September 18th, Megan presented an "Introduction to the Insight Approach to Conflict Resolution" at the Center for Peacemaking Practice (CPP) Lunch, where a background on the Insight approach was described, followed by a discussion on its applications in the conflict analysis and resolution field.

The following week, on September 25th, ICRP launched its Insight Practice Lab. All students and faculty were welcome to join ICRP in learning, practicing and refining their Insight skills. Insight Practice Lab sessions will continue every other Tuesday following the launch in Truland Building room 555 from 12-2pm.

Dr. Jamie Price of S-CAR and Marnie Jull of Carleton University in Ottawa will also be teaching a class, Insight Micro-Skills or CONF 795, during the Fall 2012 semester at S-CAR. During the weekend of October 12th and the following four Wednesdays from 7:00-9:00pm, this one-credit integrated theory and practice class will teach students conflict resolution skills in interpersonal mediation, group facilitation and action research for social intervention.

The Insight Conflict Resolution Program can be reached by email at insight@gmu.edu or by phone at (703)-993-8305.

diverse abilities, diverse interests, and corresponding opinions about religion, politics, economics, and society, and loyalties to select political leaders have "divided mankind into parties, influenced them with mutual animosity, and rendered them much more disposed to vex and oppress each other than to cooperate for the common good."[6]

The dynamic interaction between a conflict-prone "human nature" and conflict-embedded political system renders conflict on the American political landscape as inevitable. The core question then becomes, "how is conflict handled?" Despite the systemic breakdown of the Civil war (1861-1865) and near collapse generated by the Vietnam war (1960s/1970s), the U.S. has tended not to descend into the Hobbesian "state of nature," where "the life of men [is] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."[7] Indeed, the state of the American "leviathan" is relatively resilient! But this resilience is always at risk of being undermined by a dilemma: "In a democratic system moderate conflict is both inevitable and desirable"[8] because conflict can drive essential change. "Severe political conflict [however,] is undesirable, for it can endanger *any* political system."[9] A democratic system can mitigate this dilemma only if conflict is kept manageable. But how is this done?

Photo: Flickr User University of Denver.

Maintaining conflict within tolerable parameters means avoiding severe conflict, which develops when a conflict has been framed as zero-sum and about high stakes, e.g., about incompatible ways of life, in which the parties view themselves as enemies to be destroyed. The intensity of conflict rises also when there is an increase in the number of actors who hold extreme, opposing views and when there is an increase in the number of other conflicts along the same lines of cleavage.[10]

Given these criteria, we could easily conclude that current political conflict in the U.S. is severe, with implications for systemic breakdown. Although Democrats and President Obama are not blameless, much of the credit for this sorry state of affairs, according to Republicans and former Republicans, goes to the GOP.[11] Indeed, as the former Republican governor of Florida Charlie Crist said at the Democratic National Convention, "I didn't leave the Republican Party; it left me."[12] Former Republican Mike Lofgren, a long-time staffer for Congressman John Kasich of Ohio, a conservative fiscal hawk, indicates, in his new book,[13] that he left the Republican Party because it had been taken over by crackpots and lunatics, "an apocalyptic cult [in which] a disciplined minority of totalitarians can use the instruments of democratic government to undermine democracy itself."[14] Further, "The party's cynical electoral strategy was to deadlock government and thus undermine the public's faith in it and its presumed allies, the Democrats. Beholden to billionaires, the military-industrial complex and Armageddon-craving fundamentalists, the party of Abraham Lincoln had become a threat to the nation's future."[15]

Climate change is one issue where the Republican position lacks credibility and about which Republicans and Democrats are in profound conflict. In his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention in Tampa, Mitt Romney made only one reference to climate change by mocking President Obama: "Four years ago, the president promised to begin slowing the rise of the oceans. And heal the planet. My promise is to help you and your family."[16] By contrast, in his acceptance speech a week later at the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, Barack Obama responded to Mr.

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Upcoming S-CAR Community Events

Tuesday, October 23, 2012
Insight Practice Lab
12pm-2pm, Truland Building Room 555

Wednesday, October 24, 2012
Lynch Lecture
7pm-9pm, Founders Hall Room 125

Tuesday, October 30, 2012
Revisiting the Theory of Reflective Judgement
4:30pm-6:30pm, Truland Building Room 555

http://scar.gmu.edu/events-roster

Opinion
Improving Rhetoric About Rape: The Todd Akin Comments

By Elizabeth Degi, S-CAR Ph.D Student, Dean's Fellow on Gender & Violence, edegi@gmu.edu

Rep. Todd Akin's (R-MO) bombastic comments about "legitimate rape" should be heard as an urgent call for practitioners, researchers, and theorists working in the conflict analysis and resolution field to highlight more empirically sound understandings of rape, power and gendered violence within the public and political spheres. The recent political hoopla following Akin's statement that a woman's body has the ability to "shut down" a pregnancy resulting from "legitimate rape" suggests that Akin's comments were atypical of rhetoric on sexual violence, abortion, and women's health. However, despite wide condemnations from both the established Right and Left, critical analysis of public and political discourse surrounding rape suggests that Akin's comments reflect larger the political discourse on rape, victimization, and reproductive justice.

Last year the "No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act" (H.R. 3)—which would have cut off federal funding for Medicaid recipients seeking an abortion unless a woman could prove that she had been 'forcibly' raped—went to the House floor with more than 150 co-sponsors from both established political parties. Outside of the political sphere, rape jokes have become mainstream—see Daniel Tosh's shameful attempt to silence a heckler in July at L.A.'s famed Laugh Factory, saying, "Wouldn't it be funny if that girl got raped by, like, five guys right now? Like right now?" Just as disturbing as jokes like Tosh's (and the hordes of comedians that defended his comments) is the recent rise of the use of rape as a metaphor, ie: "The Yankees raped the Red Sox." As feminist sociologist Michael Kimmel glibly illustrated how absurdly inappropriate such comparisons are in his August 23 op-ed for the Huffington Post, "You got raped? Me too! I totally got raped in that math quiz."

The current state of public and political discourse on sexual violence holds ghastly implications. The 'legitimate rape' discourse reinforces narrow conceptions of sexual violence that are deeply discordant with the lived experiences of most victims. Rape is positioned as an act of violence committed by a threatening, unknown male perpetrator who attacks a vulnerable female victim. Leading theorists and researchers on sexual violence argue that this construct excludes the vast amount of sexual violence—which often occurs between acquaintances or intimate partners. The narrow construct implied by the 'forcible' rape discourse tacitly implies that any rape that doesn't fit within this conceptualization was in part a result of victims' behaviors—what they were doing, what they were wearing, what they were drinking. Furthermore, this construct further stigmatizes men who have been victims of sexual violence. While the US Dept. of Justice has reported that one out of every thirty-three men has been raped, the pervasive conception of a rape delegitimizes these victims' experiences.

While the 'legitimate' rape discourse impacts all victims of sexual violence, calls to legislatively redefine rape as within this narrow framework has even harsher implications for women victims on Medicaid seeking to terminate a pregnancy resulting from rape. Politicians' cries to end federal funding for abortion serves a means of garnering votes from pro-life constituents at the expense of the relatively narrow cross section of society directly dependent on Medicaid funding for abortion: low-income, minority women with little political capital. We in the CAR field must view the current state of discourse surrounding rape and reproductive rights as an auspicious opportunity for addressing intersections of direct and structural violence. ■

Recent S-CAR Articles, Op-Eds, Letters to the Editor, and Media Appearances

Could a Nuclear Iran Bring About More Stability, Rather Than Less?
Marc Gopin, S-CAR Professor, Director of CRDC
The Huffington Post, 9/12/12

The Anatomy of an Anti-Taliban Uprising
David H. Young, S-CAR Masters Alumnus
Foreign Policy, 9/12/12

Democratic Party Looks Like America
Michael Shank, S-CAR Ph.D. Alumnus
The Hill, 9/6/12

Only Catastophes Lead to the Sharing of Sovereignty
Dennis J.D. Sandole, S-CAR Professor
The Financial Times, 8/9/12

http://scar.gmu.edu/media

Soolmaz Abooali, Incoming S-CAR Ph.D. Student

By Kwaw de Graft-Johnson, S-CAR Ph.D. Student and Knowledge Management Associate, kdegraft@gmu.edu

Soolmaz Abooali is part of an exciting class of Fall 2012 Ph.D. students joining the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution. She brings a unique perspective to the program, as she is a very accomplished amateur athlete. This is evident in her being a seven-time U.S. National Champion and a World Silver Medalist in Shotokan Karate, a traditional style of martial arts.

Soolmaz is no stranger to the dynamics of conflict. After the Islamic revolution in Iran, she became a refugee from a very young age. Having spent some time in various locations like Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Canada, Soolmaz and her family eventually came to settle in the United States.

Like many people who are forced to relocate to a totally different culture, she had to navigate and rise above various internal conflicts. She had to develop an identity that would fit her new surroundings and at the same time complement her Iranian heritage. As she stated, "karate put me in the position to constantly self-evaluate under pressure-cooker situations, such as identifying my strengths and weaknesses, my goals, and who I want to be. Because of this type of training—and thus evolution—I was able to better navigate through and overcome challenging periods in my life."

Soolmaz Abooali, S-CAR Ph.D. Student. Photo: S-CAR.

One of her role models is Miyamoto Musashi, a famous Japanese swordsman whose sharp skills, desire for excellence, and vision made him an accomplished warrior and statesman. Those same values, she stated, "drive me to have big dreams and persist, like bees to honey, until I achieve them." She hopes she can contribute in an innovative way to conflict resolution by utilizing the martial arts in a "mind, body, spirit" approach that empowers others in conflict settings. Ultimately, she hopes her experiences and evolving research at SCAR will help chart a unique and dynamic course of action for women in conflict around the world. ■

Meet the rest of our new PhD students at scar.gmu.edu/phd-program/2012-phd-cohort

Clara Driscoll, Incoming S-CAR Masters Student

By Kwaw de Graft-Johnson, S-CAR Ph.D. Student and Knowledge Management Associate, kdegraft@gmu.edu

Clara Driscoll grew up in a bilingual household (Danish and English), and lived in Denmark and Singapore. Clara's parents taught her to place value on travel, exploring different cultures and developing an intellectual curiosity about how the world works. After graduating from Johns Hopkins University in 1999 with a degree in history, Clara joined the United States Army and received a commission as an Army officer. During her 13 years in the Army she has lived and worked in Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Qatar, Kuwait, Italy, and Germany. She made it her goal to develop a genuine interest in the history, culture and, when applicable, conflict that exists in each of those countries. According to Clara, "my time in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kosovo impressed upon me the importance of cooperation amongst all stakeholders in effectively dealing with conflict."

Clara applied to the S-CAR program because she had a keen desire to better understand conflict and the methods by which it can be resolved. As she said, "I have a real world knowledge of the damage that severe conflict can cause and an appreciation for the role of nonviolent methods of resolution."

Clara Driscoll, S-CAR Masters Student. Photo: S-CAR.

As a newcomer to the S-CAR program and the academic field of conflict resolution, she has yet to decide what her focus in the program will be, but she is very interested in the roles that culture and religion play in international conflict. Upon graduation from S-CAR, she hopes to use her Masters degree to further the cooperation among stakeholders in the resolution of conflict in conflict and post conflict settings. Clara says, "After the military I will likely seek employment with either USAID or the State Department. My husband, who is also an Army officer, and I moved to the area so that I could attend S-CAR. Currently, we live in Old Town Alexandria with our dogs Gus and Sofie." ■

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Romney by stressing the urgency of the issue and its importance for American families that is beyond politics; i.e., "climate change is not a hoax. More droughts and floods and wildfires are not a joke. They are a threat to our children's future."[17]

Former President Bill Clinton's rousing, inclusive, conflict resolution-friendly speech in Charlotte further reflects the Republican – Democrat divide on multiple issues:

> *"We Democrats think the country works better ... with business and government working together to promote growth and broadly shared prosperity. We think "we're all in this together" is a better philosophy than "you're on your own." ...*
>
> *It turns out that advancing equal opportunity and economic empowerment is both morally right and good economics, because discrimination, poverty and ignorance restrict growth, while investments in education, infrastructure and scientific and technological research increase it, creating more good jobs and new wealth for all of us.*
>
> *Though I often disagree with Republicans, I never learned to hate them the way the far right that now controls their party seems to hate President Obama and the Democrats. ...*
>
> *When times are tough, constant conflict may be good politics but in the real world, cooperation works better. ... Unfortunately, the faction that now controls the Republican Party doesn't see it that way. They think government is the enemy, and compromise is weakness.*
>
> *One of the main reasons America should re-elect President Obama is that he is still committed to cooperation ... [to building] a world with more partners and fewer enemies.*
>
> *President Obama's record on national security is a tribute to his strength, and judgment, and to his preference for inclusion and partnership over partisanship.*
>
> *He also tried to work with Congressional Republicans on Health Care, debt reduction, and jobs, but that didn't work out so well. Probably because, as the Senate Republican leader, in a remarkable moment of candor, said two years before the election, their number one priority was not to put America back to work, but to put President Obama out of work."*[18]

For his part, Governor Romney recently generated further conflict, not only with Democrats but with half of the American electorate. According to videos of a fundraiser held in Boca Raton, Florida on May 17, 2012, the candidate is seen and heard stating, "There are 47 per cent of the people who will vote for the president no matter what ... who are dependent upon government, who believe that they are victims, who believe that the government has a responsibility to care for them, who believe they are entitled to housing, to you-name-it ... These are people who pay no income tax. My job is not to worry about those people. I'll never convince them they should take personal responsibility and care for their lives."[19]

Not only does Mr. Romney hint that, if elected, he would not serve as president of all Americans, but he discounts the desire of Palestinians to live in peace with Israel, that all Palestinians are "committed to the destruction and elimination of Israel," a view which clashes with the Republican Party's own platform on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Clearly, Mr. Romney does not believe that "we're all in this together," whether in his own party, nationally, or globally!

The virulent 2012 presidential campaign, severe levels of conflict between Democrats and Republicans on multiple issues, and the continued neck-in-neck status of the two candidates, raises a compelling question: Must "catastrophic crises" (e.g., World War 2 and the Holocaust) precede structural change (e.g., establishing the UN and EU)? In other words, could the looming forced spending cuts called for by the Budget Control Act of 2011, otherwise known as "sequestration"–scheduled to become operational as of January 2013—constitute enough of a "catastrophic crisis" to capture the attention of the two campaigns and political parties so that they start working together instead of against each other?

It would be ideal if, at one of the three debates between President Obama and Governor Romney, the moderator would ask the two candidates (a) what they would do now to avert the "catastrophic crisis" and potential systemic breakdown posed by sequestration, and (b) how, if the draconian cuts took effect, President Obama or President Romney would deal with those cuts and their destabilizing consequences during the next four years.

Such an exercise would hopefully force the candidates to transcend scripted one-liners on complex issues and actually "think" before they speak, thereby providing the American people with relevant information about which political party and which candidate are more competent for enacting creative policies that would contrib-

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ute to enhancing and further developing the national and global "commons!" ■

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1. The author gratefully acknowledges Dr. Ingrid Sandole Staroste (Department of Sociology and Anthropology, GMU) and Yasmina Mrabet (former editor of SCARNews) who read and commented on an earlier version of this article.
2. See <http://www.datalounge.com/cgi-bin/iowa/ajax.html?t=11045355#page:showThread,11045355>.
3. See Robert A. Dahl, Democracy in the United States: Promise and Performance, 4th edition, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981.
4. Ibid., p. 281.
5. Ibid., p. 274.
6. Cited in Dahl, 1981, p. 274.
7. Thomas Hobbes, The Leviathan, first published in 1651.
8. Ibid., p. 276.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., pp. 276-283.
11. See Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided With the New Politics of Extremism, 2012; and Mike Lofgren, The Party is Over: How Republicans Went Crazy, Democrats Became Useless, and the Middle Class Got Shafted, New York: 2012.
12. See <http://www.politifact.com/florida/statements/2012/sep/06/charlie-crist/crist-jeb-bush-ronald-reagan-moderate-gop/>.
13. Mike Lofgren, The Party is Over: How Republicans Went Crazy, Democrats Became Useless, and the Middle Class Got Shafted, New York: 2012.
14. Cited in Colin Woodward, "Hurling blame in all directions (Review of The Party is Over), The Washington Post, September 16, 2012, p. B7.
15. Ibid.
16. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/09/201291082334804592.html>.
17. Ibid.
18. See <http://www.macon.com/2012/09/05/2164298/full-text-of-bill-clintons-speech.html>.
19. See http://search.aol.com/aol/search?enabled_terms=&s_it=wscreen50-bb&q='There+are+47+per+cent+of+the+people+who+will+vote+for+the+president+no+matter+what+Mitt+Romney.
20. Scott Wilson and Ed O'Keefe, "Romney told donors Palestinians don't want peace with Israel," The Washington Post, September 19, 2012, p. A5.

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