ICAR News

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commentary

Dramatizing Political Traditions:

The Lesson of the 2010 Midterm Elections

By Solon Simmons, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Conflict Analysis and Resolution, ssimmon5@gmu.edu

One of the challenges for the field of Conflict Analysis and Resolution is to develop its analytic tools and practical techniques to deal with the problems of political conflict in general and domestic political conflict in the United States in particular. There is little doubt that the heart of the field is devoted to bloody conflicts between ethnic rivals in the far-flung places that we have all come to know with a striking intimacy, but it is impossible to ignore the problems in ICAR's backyard that carry hints of intractability. The tumultuous transition from the 2008 presidential election to the midterm elections of 2010 demonstrates how symbolic forces in the United States can lead to perplexing outcomes worthy of sustained attention from conflict resolvers. Conflict resolution processes often take place within elite circles and behind the scenes, but deeper resolutions have a public side as well. Barack Obama is surely the most conflict resolution friendly president America has had since Jimmy Carter, but the challenges he has faced, like his rise to power, highlight the challenges inherent in developing this public face of resolution processes—to move away from simple conflict management to something closer to resolution or transformation.

Opponents and supporters of President Barack Obama. Photo: T. Richardson.

If one reviews the record of the President's achievements, it may seem odd that Obama took the "shellacking" he did on November 2nd. Consider his record of legislative successes from renewing the bank bailout plan, to negotiating a massive stimulus (with tax cuts), to salvaging General Motors, to achieving the dream of national health care, to extending student loan programs, financial regulation and so on. If it is fair to say that Obama shares President Carter's taste for

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EDITOR: TOM RICHARDSON

New ICAR Website Launched:

A Web of Knowledge for a Community of Practice

By Paul Snodgrass, ICAR Technology and Knowledge Management Director, psnodgra@gmu.edu

On October 23 2010, ICAR launched its new website, a knowledge management system (KMS) that showcases the activities of ICAR and highlights the contributions to the field made by our expanding community of scholars and practitioners. On the new site, visitors can quickly get up to date on ICAR's latest publications, media appearances, and upcoming events.

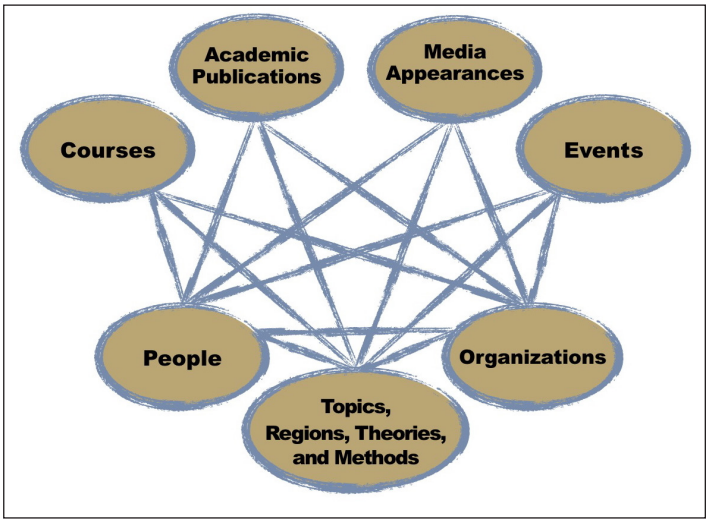
Each member of our community will be invited to participate in this new online home for ICAR by creating a profile and sharing information about their background, professional careers, and accomplishments. An important strength of the KMS is in our profile pages that highlight publications, projects, media appearances, courses taught, and presentations given. Profiles also feature blog entries and highlight participation in social media and networks.

network

The ICAR KMS is the result of a year-long collaboration between ICAR's Knowledge Management team and Xululabs, a Drupal development firm based in Fairfax, VA. From admissions information to events, the ICAR staff have stepped up to provide the content of the new website and faculty have been working to find a home on the site for their projects.

Partnering with Faculty, Alumni, and Students, the staff of the John Burton Library has utilized the KMS to organize and showcase an extremely large and robust collection of Conflict Resolution resources generated by ICAR's community of scholars and practitioners. This will be an ongoing process and it is designed to keep us up-to-date and aware of the activities at ICAR.

Screenshot of the new ICAR website. Photo: P. Snodgrass.



Mind Map of the new ICAR website. Photo: P. Snodgrass.

The concept of linked data is the foundation of the KMS. All of the content stored on ICAR's website stands in relationship with other content, creating a web of information that highlights the connections between people, organizations, academic publications, media appearances, courses, events, topics, and geographical regions.

The goal of the ICAR KMS is to reach and communicate with ICAR's core audiences: Students, Alumni, Prospective Students, Practitioners in the field of Conflict Analysis and Resolution, Policy Makers, the media, and the public. The site aims to inform visitors about Conflict Analysis and Resolution and what it is that ICAR does to lead and contribute to this field. For the first time, ICAR has a repository that can store and share the accomplishments of our very active community members.

In addition, the site serves as a launch pad for students to publish articles, present at conferences, find jobs and internships, and develop their understanding of Conflict Analysis and Resolution. The accomplishments of others at ICAR serve as a pathway, illuminating the journals that publish our work, the conferences that feature our papers, and the organizations that hire our people.

The ICAR KMS is a living virtual representation of ICAR's activity that communicates what is already there: a vibrant community of scholars and practitioners who are building the field every day. We hope that you will find it professionally and academically useful, and that you share with us your ideas and hopes for what you would like to see it become.

You are invited to visit the site at: icar.gmu.edu ■

CRDC Celebrates Ambassador McDonald:

ICAR Advisory Board Member Honoured by PTPI

By Nawal Rajeh, CRDC Office Manager and ICAR M.S. Alumna, nrajeh@gmu.edu

On November 16 2010, People to People International (PTPI) held an event with ICAR on campus titled "From Revenge to Reconciliation: A presentation on the Israeli/Palestinian peace movement." People to People International was founded in 1956 by President Dwight Eisenhower and is currently run by Mary Eisenhower, his granddaughter. The evening included the presentation of a Lifetime Achievement Award to Ambassador John McDonald, who championed disabled persons rights in the United Nations. Ambassador McDonald has been a friend and vital part of PTPI's work with the disabled for the past thirty years and is a member of the ICAR Advisory Board. The speakers for the event were the Center for World Religions, Diplomacy, and Conflict Resolution's (CRDC) Aziz Abu Sarah, a Palestinian from Jerusalem, and Kobi Skolnick, an Israeli native. They each gave a personal narrative about growing up on opposite sides of the conflict and their experiences with family tragedy. Recounting events in their upbringing, they explained the "shift" that led them from revenge to active peacemaking.

"I realized that what we know of each other is only part of the truth," said Abu Sarah when describing his first encounter with Jews in Israel who were neither settlers nor soldiers. He spoke about the "emotional wall" between Jews and Arabs that keeps them separated. Abu Sarah and Skolnick both joined and became vital members of the Parents Circle-Families Forum, which consists of five hundred families, both Jews and Arabs, that have lost family members in the conflict. "…Somebody has to break down the cycle of violence and the cycle of revenge. Regardless of what happens to you, it's not true that you have no choice how to respond - we all have choices," explained Abu Sarah. Skolnick added, "the missing part of the whole process is that no one talks with real people, everybody talks with the factions [comitting] the violence. When you have five hundred people, [from] Israeli and Palestinian families, meeting on the same day [as] Palestinians or Israelis throwing stones or shooting, - [the violence] will be the headline-but if we are together-it is not a headline."

From Left to Right: Mary Eisenhower, Aziz Abu Sarah, Meg Carter, Ambassador John McDonald, Kobi Skolnick. Photo: CRDC.

Ambassador John McDonald accepts his life time achievement award from Mary Eisenhower. Photo: PTPI.

Abu Sarah and Skolnick combat this by running dual narrative tours in Israel and by speaking at home and in the U.S. in high schools, universities, and with family and friends about their shared vision of coexistence. "I've gotten to know Aziz and Kobi after traveling with them to Israel and the West Bank," said ICAR alum Jason Miller. "After hearing their own personal stories about how it is they came to work for peace, it only encourages me to help them in their quest…All people, not just those connected to the conflict in Israel and Palestine should hear them speak because they make the conflict human and real." Meg Carter from PTPI expressed her respect for the work of CRDC: "Aziz and Kobi's presentation was so personal that it touched all that heard it. I agree with them that we need to reach out to one person at a time to change the world into a more peaceful environment. Our People to People International event was well received by the attendees." ■

events

ICAR OPEN HOUSE:

Facilitating Community Growth and Evolution

By Jacquie Antonson, ICAR M.S. Student and ICAR Events Coordinator jantonso@gmu.edu

Undergraduate Student Services Director Lisa Shaw. Photo: ICAR.

On November 11 2010, ICAR held its annual Open House, a tradition that helps our community stay connected and share our current endeavors. This year's Open House focused specifically on recent practical work and research from our ICAR faculty, alumni, and affiliates. Even within a community as small as ICAR's, it is far too easy to become absorbed in our personal projects without stopping to take a breath and considering the vast number of accomplishments our Institute has achieved as a whole.

The evening featured a multitude of table displays presenting the most recent faculty and alumni publications, as well as the ICAR Newsletter, Unrest Magazine, information on the China Initiative, the New Malta Program Partnership, the Ben Franklin Institute with Asia, the New ICAR Practice Project, and ICAR's brand new website and knowledge management system. The undergraduate program displayed a sample of the projects and events that are occurring on the Fairfax Campus.

Throughout the evening, short side bar events allowed guests to hear presentations focused on ICAR's recent and forthcoming initiatives. Speakers included faculty, staff, students, and affiliates drawn from the Arlington and Fairfax campuses. Topics included Georgian and South Ossetian Confidence Building Workshops, the current work of and guiding philosophies behind our Genocide Prevention Program, an introduction to the new Malta Program, and reflections from the ICAR Liberia trip and this past summer's Ben Franklin Institute. All presentations were well attended, and sparked enaging and informative discussion sessions.

This year's event was also well attended by ICAR's student population. As a first year Masters student myself, I can attest to the fact that, while attempting to juggle classes, term papers, readings, research, and some form of gainful employment, it's immensely difficult to remain aware of all the projects that are constantly going on at ICAR. This evening brought many of these projects into one place, where students could gather information, ask questions, and find opportunities to supplement their education by becoming actively involved in these endeavors.

Such opportunities are not only beneficial but often provide a valuable space for us to come together to share our work, and to facilitate discussion and feed back. ICAR may be a leader in the field in terms of its practical work and research, but only through sharing it with each other can we truly grow and evolve as a community. It is my sincere hope that the Open House provided a space for this sharing process. ■

Upcoming ICAR Community Events

Sunday, December 5, 2010
Workshop and Discussion on Citizen Activism
1.30 - 3.30pm, 555 Truland Building, Arlington Campus

Thursday, February 10, 2010
Contentious Conversation II:
Searching for a Research Tradition in ICAR
12.15-1.15pm, 555 Truland Building Arlington Campus

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

Hussein Yusuf, Ph.D. Candidate, and Melanie Smith, M.S. Alumna. Photo: ICAR.

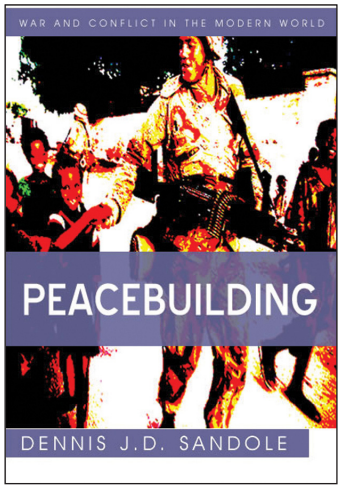
Book Review - Peacebuilding: Preventing Violent Conflict in a Complex World

By Saira Yamin, ICAR Ph.D. Candidate, syamin1@gmu.edu

Professor Dennis J.D. Sandole's latest book, "*Peacebuilding: Preventing Violent Conflict in a Complex World*" brings into sharp focus the challenges to building a sustainable peace in the modern world. Highlighting the evolving nature of the international security architecture in the post 9/11 landscape, Sandole reflects on various forms and manifestations of global conflict including terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, genocide, state failure, climate change, ecological degradation, poverty, and forced migration. In making a case for preventive mechanisms in response to these threats, he explores a range of multi-lateral peacebuilding processes underpinning the zeitgist for global governance. The discussion comes alive with a broad spectrum of case studies including the Turkish-Armenian conflict, Israel-Palestine, India-Pakistan, the Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Haiti, Lebanon, South Africa, and Rwanda. Ruminating on lessons learned from history, Sandole persuasively evaluates the implications of preventive vis-à-vis reactive responses to global problems. The book, in Sandole's words, is "about sustaining life on a fragile planet."

Central to the discussion is an assessment of the 'Global War on Terrorism'. Acknowledging the complex nature of the problem, Sandole offers a range of comprehensive strategies for creating the conditions for durable peace and security in the world. Sandole's diagnosis of the global problematique prescribes a comprehensive framework for complex problemsolving. Making a case for global solutions for global problems, he proposes a post-zero-sum, post-Machiavellian world view. However well practitioners and policy makers may understand the concepts of conflict prevention, management, settlement, resolution and transformation, this volume provides substance for re-thinking global security. Thus, Sandole underscores the imperative for a collective global response for peacebuilding in the 21st century, guided by an idealpolitik world view that "national interest is global interest and global interest in national interest." Revisiting theory and practice, Sandole describes potential intervention premised on effective communication, coordination, cooperation, and collaboration between domestic, regional and international actors, including states and organizations.

In keeping with Sandole's track record of scholarly publications, the treatise is an outstanding and timely contribution to the literature on conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Clearly a product of decades of research in the realm of peacebuilding it will undoubtedly influence peace research and practice in the modern world. The content is theoretically rich and will be immensely valuable for students, researchers, and practitioners in the fields of conflict and peace studies, international relations, security studies, public policy, and the like. World leaders and policy makers will find that the book offers innovative models and solutions to address the global problem-solving deficit. Peacebuilding: Preventing Violent Conflict in a Complex World (published by Polity Press) will be available in the UK in December 2010, and in the US, Australia and New Zealand in February 2011. ■



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

Iraq: Can Flawed Political Agreement be Implemented?
By Danial Kaysi, ICAR Alumna
Los Angeles Times, 11/19/10

Working Abroad a Big Help on the Hill
By Michael Shank, ICAR Ph.D. Candidate
The Hill, 11/16/10

The Leonard Lopate Show: Why Americans Choose War
Featuring Richard Rubenstein, ICAR Professor
WNYC - National Public Radio, 11/11/10

Think Locally, Act Globally: Towards a Transnational Comparative Politics
ByTerrence Lyons, ICAR Professor
International Political Sociology, 11/01/10

http://icar.gmu.edu/media

icar spotlight

Jacquie Antonson, ICAR M.S. Student and Events Coordinator

By Tom Richardson, Newsletter Editor and ICAR M.S. Student, trichar7@gmu.edu

Observant readers of the newsletter may have noticed recurrent contributions by ICAR's new Events Coordinator, and M.S. student, Jacquie Antonson. As Events Coordinator, her job is challenging and requires a great investment of personal energy. However, Jacquie sees this as a blessing because it allows her to keep her finger on the pulse of ICAR, making connections throughout its community on a daily basis.

A native of upstate New York, Jacquie studied at Middlebury College, majoring in Theater and English. After graduating, Jacquie worked extensively in the Balkans, where she is director of her own non-governmental organization, f-r-e-e. Friendship, Respect, Education and Engagement (f-r-e-e) is a peacebuilding organization that seeks to empower the next generation of Bosnians. Jacquie explains, "we work solely with the youth population, which in my opinion is the group of people who will be the change makers of Bosnian society. How well they are able to make transformative change will depend on their ability to interact with one another." f-r-e-e currently works in the central Bosnian city of Zenica, bringing together populations of ostracized children for month-long friendship and trust-building camps.

Jacquie Antonson, ICAR M.S. Student. Photo: GMU Creative Services.

Although only in her first semester, Jacquie already feels at home in ICAR's academic community. "I love it!" she extols. Hoping to strengthen her existing interests in post-conflict development, Jacquie seeks to focus on education reform and post-conflict education. She would like to proceed to a Ph.D., with the ultimate goal of a university teaching position whilst continuing her work with f-r-e-e. She hopes to expand existing projects and ensure that they run more consistently through out the year. Clearly, Jacquie's ambitions are those of a scholar-practitioner, a hallmark of the ICAR community. ■

Ibrahim Sharqieh, ICAR Ph.D. Alumna

By Terrence Lyons, Associate Professor of Conflict Analysis and Resolution, tlyons1@gmu.edu

ICAR graduate Ibrahim Sharqieh has been named a Fellow and Deputy Director of the Brookings Institution's Doha Center. Born and raised in the West Bank, Sharqieh received his undergraduate and Masters degrees from Birzeit University and a one-year diploma in comparative politics from the University of Amsterdam. Sharqieh received his Ph.D. in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from ICAR in 2006. His dissertation was entitled "Ripe for Violence: Public Perception as an Early Warning Indicate" and was based on primary field research in Kosovo and Palestine. The dissertation sheds light on key questions of the timing of conflict and how subjective public perceptions may complement conflict early warning systems. Terrence Lyons chaired the dissertation committee that included Dennis Sandole and Peter Mandaville. "Ibrahim wrote an excellent dissertation and has a long history working for peace and education in the Middle East," said Lyons.

Terrence Lyons, ICAR Professor. Photo: GMU Creative Services.

Dr. Ibrahim Sharqieh, ICAR Ph.D. Alumna. Photo: Brookings Institution.

After graduation Sharqieh, worked with the Academy for Education Development in Yemen, with the U.S. Department of State Middle East Partnership Initiative civic education project, and taught at George Mason University and George Washington University.

The Brookings Doha Center, based in Qatar, is a project of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Washington DC-based think tank, the Brookings Institution. The Doha Center was established in 2007 and emphasizes research on regional governance, human development, and international affairs. It is directed by Salman Shaikh, former United Nations Special Coordinator for Middle East Peace Process. ■

Elections

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Solon Simmons, ICAR Professor. Photo: GMU Creative Services.

pragmatic problem solving, then he also shares President Johnson's knack for maneuvering his programs through the legislative logjam. Not only has the President been extremely successful in promoting his legislative agenda, he has also confirmed two Supreme Court justices whose legal philosophies seem to closely resemble his own. On administrative performance criteria, he has been a success.

What is surprising is how thoroughly the American people have rejected the President's programs. It has been suggested on the left that much of this is a messaging problem, in that the President was too busy governing to worry about marketing his legislative agenda, yet the disconnect in this explanation is glaring. Ironically, Obama is the great communicator who was criticized by Hillary Clinton on Meet the Press in the 2008 primaries for relying too much on mere rhetoric. Did President Obama simply overcorrect and give up his rhetorical focus to concentrate on deeds rather than words, assuming that pragmatic Americans respect results?

I think not, and the gap in our understanding here speaks to a crucial weakness in our thinking about political processes. What made the election of 2008 so exciting and historic was not the policy debate that tended to be overlooked in election coverage. Differences in policy focus were important in both the primaries and the general election, but the grand social drama that had the whole world watching was the chance for Americans to demonstrate that the era of Jim Crow was behind us. These post-racial musings were always exaggerated and it is never enough in a struggle for social justice to simply place leaders of a certain demographic in power. However, the symbolic clarity of such a move was lost on no one and the social drama being played out before the world had implications not only for the nation, but also for that global audience. The President's nickname, "no drama Obama" only reinforces the central theme of the 2008 election. Obama had little need to dramatize America's struggle for racial redemption because he himself embodied the drama. Symbolic politics helped to drive the outcome in 2008, as they would again in 2010 in very different form.

One can often learn more about what interests will be served in government by following the problems facing industries and the campaign funders than by polling public opinion. But these special interests work within the medium of political culture and cannot violate the key features of its traditions if they wish to succeed. In 2008, the Democrats were able to exploit the social justice tradition to energize their constituencies with a clear and compelling narrative that directed their attention and outrage. Connecting the dots, it is impossible not to see a line drawn from Frederick Douglass, to Rosa Parks, to Martin Luther King, to Barack Obama. This story was the context for the reconstruction of political meaning in 2008. Special interests could hook their wagon to it and go far in the direction they would travel.

In 2010, another perhaps more pervasive political tradition returned to prominence. This is the classical ideal of the liberal society in which rugged individuals band together against the government to promote moral and economic success through self-regulating processes. Arguably in its purest form, this resurgent conservative philosophy, a tradition that its proponents associate with Thomas Jefferson, has been discredited in an era in which giant corporations have revenues larger than many national governments. However, the moral and intellectual resources behind the laissez-faire ideal provide Americans with a social drama just as compelling as that which carried President Obama to the stunning heights of January 2009. It is a story of moral order grounded in individual virtue. Many Americans can see themselves in this story and know that what makes them who they are—their collective identity if you will—is wrapped up in the application of this great liberal tradition to emerging political circumstances. By electing an African American to the highest office in the land, America achieved a core goal of the social justice strain of the American political tradition, but in purely logical terms, promoting diversity and promoting economic exploitation can be rendered perfectly compatible. At the limit, if the governing classes come to look like America, so too could the hapless and unemployed. In today's world, the once contrary traditions of social justice and unbridled capitalism have settled into a kind of truce.

This brings us to the lesson of Obama's setback in 2010, which must inform any political recovery the Democrats can hope for. To be successful in the future, Obama would need to engage in a clash of liberal traditions in which one strain is pitted against another. This would take all the dramatic resources he could muster. It would not be enough to be the drama of enacting social change, instead he will have to enact the drama, relying on the third core fighting faith in the American political storybook: the populist strain— the ideal of social protection from an impersonal and socially disruptive market system. Moving in this direction would be extremely difficult for him to do. Public-spirited institutional reforms of the free market system have few organized constituencies and are often caricatured as a form of socialism on the right or vitiated by association with various forms of atavistic bigotry on the left. But arguments

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in favor of universal social protection, when advocated under the umbrella of principled economic liberalism (read conservatism), have historically commanded popular consent. Good examples are Social Security and Medicare.

A perfect example of what happens to mixed economy reforms in the absence of clarifying social drama can be seen in the health insurance law, which was not dramatized to fit a story of transformative justice on a scale comparable to the historic dimensions of the 2008 campaign. Health reform was passed on pragmatic grounds by techniques of compromise among elites with the hope that the people would recognize the practical benefits down the road. Here the President could have promoted his agenda by cultivating the drama rather than down-playing it, even at the risk of failure. Dramas require villains, risk, conflicting values, and sacrifice. These were most clearly demonstrated by opponents of health reform rather than by its proponents.

The lessons for the analysis of political conflict are clear: conflict scholars should attend to the history and rooted dramatic potential of political traditions in the conflicts we study. By working within those political traditions, those who seek transformative change can gain broad political support. Without that support, conflicts are simply deferred to a later date. Like basic human needs, traditions cannot be negotiated away, but they can be navigated, tailored, developed, and combined. We can glean a sense of how this process works in the gubernatorial election of Jerry Brown in California, who paradoxically suggested that he would look for common purpose without compromise. This well describes the principled politics of the Republican Party in the era of movement conservatism. The goal is to simultaneously win over key portions of the public with a vision of justice while out-positioning one's adversaries. Matching the tradition to the moment—the dramatic action to the play—is the key to this process. Conservative success in this regard should not be arrogantly dismissed as pathology.

The challenge for the President and for the left in America more generally is that the transformative moment may have passed. By failing to frame our contemporary social issues in terms of structural violence, Obama may have undermined acceptance of this line of interpretation for a generation. Even so, the near certainty of wrenching market dislocations that will attend the application of the laissez-faire ideal provides the Democrats with a chance to recover. The American political future is destined to be filled with high drama and we have three complementary dramatic traditions on which politicians can draw: classical liberty, social protection, and social justice. It is up to those who would invoke them to determine how these traditions will help us reconstruct the meaning of our collective political challenges. ■

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