

The Escalating "War on Terror": Is there a Role for Conflict Resolution?

By Richard E. Rubenstein, University Professor of Conflict Resolution and Public Affairs, rrubenst@gmu.edu

Clint Eastwood's Oscar-nominated film *American Sniper* (2014), the most profitable war movie ever made in the United States, encapsulates the problem of thinking about America's "war on terror." Most of the film's crucial scenes are shown from the point of view of Chris Kyle, the heroic Navy SEAL sniper. From the very start, the visual and moral field narrows down to what Kyle sees through the scope of his high-powered rifle: an Iraqi mother hiding an anti-tank grenade under her chador and giving it to her child to use against U.S. troops; an insurgent teenager preparing to fire a rocket-propelled grenade; a sadistic Iraqi torturer; a fiendishly accurate enemy sniper – all guilty of trying to kill Americans, and all meriting death at Kyle's hands. As



1/11/2015 - 60 world leaders gathered in Paris to participate in a unity march to show solidarity with France and honor attack victims. Photo: Flickr user Matthieu de Martignac/OECD.

cellphones, hiding weapons under trapdoors in their floors, planting improvised explosive devices in roads or strapping explosives onto themselves in order to be suicide bombers. They are devoid of human qualities. ("Killing Ragheads for Jesus," *truthdig*, January 25, 2015).

The name of this cinematic and political game is extreme focus: a limitation of vision, at first willful, later apparently "natural," that occludes or eliminates background, context, motives, and causation. Extreme focus

ensures that the sniper kills no one by accident, nor do U.S. air strikes or ground attacks cause any observable collateral damage. By narrowing the field, the focus prevents us from developing any idea of why the insurgents fight. They fight because they are aggressive – a sinister tautology which immediately produces an American motive: Kyle and his comrades are there to defend each other, and the Homeland, against Muslim aggressors.

One might call this view of the enemy a focused blur. The sniper and his son see the results of al Qaeda's truck bomb attacks on U.S. embassies in East Africa on television. Then he and his wife witness the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Building and the Pentagon. Finally, impelled by a vision of himself as a violent protector ("Regardless of what your mama told you, violence does solve problems"), he becomes one of the invaders of Iraq, hunting down insurgents whom he calls "savages" and identifies with previous previous Muslim enemies.

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Chris Hedges points out in a brilliant, acerbic takedown of the movie, there are virtually no innocent "natives" in the film:

Mothers and sisters in Iraq don't love their sons or their brothers. Iraqi women breed to make little suicide bombers. Children are miniature Osama bin Ladens. Not one of the Muslim evildoers can be trusted—man, woman or child. They are beasts. They are shown in the film identifying U.S. positions to insurgents on their

COMMENTARY

Agora - Advancing Perspectives in the Conflict Field

By Dylan Bates, S-CAR Undergraduate Student and Founder and Outreach Officer of Agora, dbates@masonlive.gmu.edu

Agora is an official student organization of the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution. Agora exists to create an environment to socialize, network, and discuss current events, conflict theories, field involvement, and other relatable topics. The organization also seeks to provide student-to-student mentoring, scholarships, and the promotion of student accomplishment through awards, honors, and special recognition, among many other things. In essence, Agora is for students by students. Meetings are held every Monday night at 7:30pm in the Johnson Center Meeting Room B. Agora is open to all students at George Mason University.

That is Agora. That is the elevator speech that will show a clean, condensed, and inviting picture for all who read it. If you look at Agora's webpage on S-CAR's website, or on Facebook, or on WordPress, you will see a variety of smiling faces, students, and events. So how do you really understand what Agora is? That is what you see for most organizations, so how is this one any different? Why are so many students getting involved, why has the number of members jumped from 5 to well into 100 in just one year? It all started with an idea.

In the fall of 2013, a core group of students came together. These students were mostly Conflict Analysis & Resolution students, as well as government and global affairs majors. At the helm was Joel Borgquist with Stephen Kakouris, Anthony Reo, Ramsay Boly, Amber Bergeron, Dylan Bates, Haris Fazliu, and Kelsey Laster, among a few others. The idea was that we had no community as undergraduate S-CAR students. Even George Mason in general has not had a real undergraduate organization to create community, recognize achievements, and allow undergrads to act on their ideas. So that fall the group worked tirelessly to build the foundation. This created Agora: an undergraduate organization dedicated to students with as little hierarchy as possible. There were five Archons (officers) with equal power yet different specializations to keep the organization smoothly functioning. Members have nearly as much power as they do, as the focus on the organization is dialogue, recognizing achievements, growing ideas together, and collaborating to create projects and initiatives that can have a real impact. It is a simple system, yet it is designed in a way that a member at any time can create a project. By becoming a member of Agora, they have a unified undergraduate community for support and collaboration.

At the heart of the organization are our weekly discussions. Nearly every week we have a member-approved topic of conversation. These have ranged from the current Ukrainian conflict to sexual violence.



Agora logo.

When you first step in to the room at one of these discussions the air is meant to be light, friendly, and energized with excitement for the conversation that is going to take place. Members of Agora have said that among others there are two overwhelming reasons they hold it in such high regard. The first is that the majority of the time you are there it feels like a real community. Students are friendly, will come up to you to strike a conversation, make jokes and get to know each other. The second is the discussions themselves. They are designed in a way that you sit in a circle with other students and give your thoughts, ideas, and perspectives to the topic. The discussion takes turns you would never anticipate. Yet you come out of it with a new perspective, new knowledge, and a drive to get more involved. One of the principles is that communication is the first step to real change. Bring a community together, create a dialogue, and take action. It can be seen as an extension of a classroom dialogue when the time is up and you want to keep having the heated debate.

Yet the discussions are only one point. As mentioned above each student as well as teams of students create their own initiatives. We have a monthly newsletter filled with articles, spotlights, and current events, as well as events throughout the semester, workshops in planning to provide real practice, and publicity to students' articles to give them an edge in their career. Our shirts and other creative designs were completely student run. We have also created programs for mentorship, Class Representatives, and are in the process of creating S-CAR awards and scholarships. Most importantly, we have our first Agora conference on *Polarized Conflict Between Parties* on April 8, 2015 from 1pm to 4pm in Research 163. It will be an incredible panel discussion with a breakout group involving speakers from Congress, a Macedonian Parliamentarian, and other knowledgeable professionals.

Although Agora is young, the reception has been tremendous. It is an organization that fills a hole in the undergraduate community that includes S-CAR, psychology, sociology, biology, pre-med, law, global affairs, government, and so many other majors. We hope that more students are able to hear about and get involved in Agora. It has positively changed so many students' experiences here at George Mason University. Though if there is ever a time when the organization shrinks back to just five members, it will still be just as special since it is not the amount of members involved but the feeling of community and the conversations that stem from the raw potential of students. Not to forget all of the incredible staff and faculty that are actively involved to keep it growing and succeeding as well. As go the pillars of Agora, may you go forward and succeed with wisdom, autonomy, and practice. ■

Analyzing Civil War and Local Peacebuilding at S-CAR

By Christopher Mitchell, S-CAR Professor Emeritus of Conflict Analysis and Resolution, cmitchel@gmu.edu

Interest in local peace zones, local peace communities and local peacebuilding actually started at ICAR – as it then was – as the result of a visit that Dennis Sandole and I (plus one doctoral student) paid to a small town on the Armenian side of the border with Azerbaijan in the early 1990s. The Soviet Union had just collapsed, several of that Union's constituent republics had obtained their independence, and, on independence, Armenia and Azerbaijan had taken to fighting sporadically but lethally over a chunk of Azerbaijan known as Ngorno Karabakh, which Armenians claimed should rightfully belong to Armenia as it had an overwhelmingly Armenian population. At the time there was a precarious truce, Armenia was desperately short of power because an earthquake had damaged and shut down their nuclear power plant, and the State University of Yerevan, our host, was continuing to teach courses with the greatest of difficulty.

After a large and lavish dinner, with many toasts, the local mayor – a formidable and impressive lady – arose and announced that she and her opposite number in the town across the border in Azerbaijan, who had been a friend and colleague until just a few years ago, were thinking of establishing a peace zone along their mutual border "...to prevent accidents, to control armed clashes and to build bridges between local people who until recently had been neighbours..." She was sure that the experts from George Mason University's conflict and peace programme would have some useful ideas to offer.

Fortunately, the doctoral student we had with us was Lt Colonel Moorad Mooradian, U.S. Army (Retd.), who proceeded to save ICAR's - and our - reputation by making a number of sensible and practical suggestions for setting up a local peace zone as a tranquil "buffer" along what had recently become a contentious, international border. However, as Dennis and I drove back from the mountains towards Yerevan, we agreed that we had to find out if anyone at ICAR was working on or knowledgeable about peace zones and how they worked.

As it turned out, there wasn't - so I asked my then-GR, Susan Allen, to start making arrangements for a conference at ICAR that would involve scholars and practitioners who could talk about zones of peace and give us ideas about their nature, varieties, and effectiveness. The conference duly took place about a year and a half later and involved a huge variety of knowledgeable people who came and talked about their experiences with peace "zones," small, medium and large, locally or nationally initiated, territorially or communally based. Among the participants were Robert Gravelle, who had helped to establish the Ledra Palace Hotel on the Green



San José de Apartadó, one of the more well known zones of peace. Photo: Thomas Flores.

Line in Nicosia as neutral and peaceful ground; Indian Major General Indarjit Rikye who had set up "the Rikye" safe zone amid the first civil war in the Congo in 1963 and then gone on to found the International Peace Academy (IPAC) in New York to study peacekeeping forces; Liam Mahoney, the expert on protective accompaniment for local individuals and organizations directly threatened with violence; Professor Ed Garcia, originally from the Philippines and knowledgeable about local peace communities there and in Colombia; and then-ICAR Director, Kevin Clements, who discussed the record of nuclear weap-

ons free zones. A student research assistant was then assigned to each speaker to help produce a joint article and the results were finally published in June 1997 in the journal *Peace Review*.

What next? Coincidentally, at that time ICAR started to receive a cohort of bright and active doctoral and masters students from Latin America - Catalina Rojas, Beatriz Vejarano and (a bit later) Mery Rodriguez, all from Colombia, as well as Giselle Ober from Peru, Adriana Salcedo and Maria Dolores Rodriguez both from Ecuador, and Yves Renee Jennings from Haiti. All of them wanted to know why ICAR was doing so little work in and on Latin America, while the Colombia students were already aware of a large number of local peace communities and violence free zones that existed amid the long drawn out civil war in their own country. There was some mention of the work of a Colombian umbrella organisation, REDEPAZ (Network of Initiatives for Peace and against War) that was trying to coordinate, extend and reinforce the activities of some of the pioneering peace communities in Colombia – La India, Mogotes, Samaniego, San Jose de Apartado.

REDEPAZ had just been given a 2-year grant by the EU - later extended by another 4 years - to support their project "100 Municipalities of Peace" and was hosting an organizing conference of peace communities in Bogota in the Fall of 1999. I managed to wangle myself an invitation to this meeting, met many of the brave and determined campesinos and others who were trying to create islands of peace amid a vicious, three sided civil war, and talked with Ana Teresa Bernal, the dedicated Director of REDEPAZ. I came back to ICAR thinking that we might help by surveying and analyzing this local activity aimed at establishing peace zones in Colombia, as well as in other strife torn countries. Could useful lessons be learned?

Local Peacebuilding Working Group (LPWG)

The Zones of Peace Initiative is being revived under the heading *Local Peacebuilding Working Group*. Students interested in joining this group can find more information at: scar.gmu.edu/zones-of-peace

initiatives

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Reflections on Practice Through Intervention and Arts Based Approaches

By Laura Villanueva, S-CAR PhD Student, ivillian2@masonlive.gmu.edu

In early February, the Center for Security Studies at ETH Zurich, together with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, organized a retreat for practitioners working on conflicts with religious dimensions. It combined arts-based reflection and peer exchange. I attended the retreat, along with another member of the PhD cohort, Jerome Armstrong, and Dr. Susan Allen, who was one of the facilitators of the afternoon sessions.

In linking arts-based approaches with intervention, the goal was to create synergies that would stimulate practitioners' different 'zones of learning' (rational, cognitive, intuitive, experiential, emotional). The mornings were dedicated to an art-based approach, led by Margie Gillis, an internationally acclaimed solo modern dancer/choreographer.

The afternoons offered space for practitioners to reflect and discuss specific challenges they were facing within their work. The safe space allowed practitioners to learn from each other and to address specific cases and served as fertile ground for new ideas. I use the word 'fertile' because we were entering those afternoons inspired by our morning exploration and communication through dance.

As a field, I believe we are in need of finding new ways of approaching conflict. The social effects of conflict



Laura Villanueva. Photo: Laura Villanueva.

ners as we move in and through conflict. She reflects, "it is astonishing what can be accomplished through the smallest movement patterns. A layered and complex narrative can be generated from the most compact experience. The transmission of worldviews is not only derived from an intellectual stance but through subtle gestures. Even the slightest movements can increase or decrease levels of receptiveness in relationships. What slips through the cracks of communication can be recovered through somatic sensibilities." A shared challenge that I have heard many times in the field from different practitioners is how to address 'what slips through the cracks of communication.' Ms. Gillis' approach brings the human body as a "teacher" and choreography itself as a

form of "cognition."

Every morning, she led 22 practitioners in dance movements/exercises that encouraged us to think not only about the body but also with the body. This approach enabled us to experience and understand a new level of body awareness. The creativity that we seek to encourage as we move through conflict is a product not only of the mind but also of the heart and the body. Practitioners hailed from different cultures and this also provided an additional enriching and learning space since each one of us was able to reflect on what the body means in our respective cultures and how it would feel and fit into our work. The openness we seek to cultivate in our practices usually refers to the mind. However, in the workshop the openness and fluidity in our body translated into the openness and fluidity in our minds. This asks of us as practitioners to revisit how such practices could benefit the field and the possible impact on shifts or transformations in conflict. In order to pursue this, we should begin with ourselves as practitioners. Integrating the body into theory and practice in our field requires that we first explore such practices, which are being informed by neuroscience.

It would be difficult in this short reflection to fully explore this methodology and its applications. However, as a practitioner I highly recommend taking some time to read *The Choreography of Resolution*. In this book, you will not only read about this methodology but also about other pedagogical frameworks. I do believe that we must invest more time in understanding the mind and body connection and how movement/dance is a resource for our work that involves transformational processes as well as a resource for self-care as practitioners. The retreat not only provided us with a new tool to consider for our practitioner's toolbox but it was also re-energizing for the body, mind and soul. ■

are also so complex that finding new mediums and languages that can address the effects and cut across cultures is a challenge. It is then both joyful and inspiring when you experience a new approach. Margie Gillis engaged us during the retreat in her art-based approach of "Dancing from the Inside Out." I will share a reflection written by Ms. Gillis that I believe speaks to how this approach could be useful in its applications to our work and for practitio-

Upcoming Events

Tuesday, March 17, 2015

Undergraduate Brown Bag Lecture Series: Complex Insults in the Dynamics of Conflict
2:00pm - 5:00pm

Wednesday, March 18, 2015

S-CAR Salon: Human Rights - Marc Gopin and Daniel Rothbart
1:30pm - 3:00pm

Wednesday, March 18, 2015

Realizing Peace: Loius Kriesberg
7:00am - 9:00pm

Wednesday, March 18, 2015

S-CAR's Dialogue and Difference Series
7:30pm - 9:00pm

For more, visit: scar.gmu.edu/events-roster

Opinion: Remembering Forgiveness

By Ibrahim Al-Hajjri, S-CAR PhD Student, ialhajjr@masonlive.gmu.edu

A cursory look at today's headlines paints a picture of a troubled world with growing violence and complex conflicts. Local and international news outlets continue to reflect those dire realities. From the shootings of unarmed young black American men and the point-blank murder of unarmed American Muslims to issues abroad with the extremist attacks on cartoonists and the emergence of a new order of global deadly violence. Almost every continent, region, country, and community is plagued by a global nexus of interrelated conflicts.

Consequences of these conflicts are often translated into cultures of fear and hate, which fuel anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, racist, or sexist paradigms. The world we live in today is in desperate need of a potent dose of healing and reconciliation. Joseph Montville sees forgiveness as an integral part of processes that lead to healing and reconciliation. However, there is very little talk about prospects for forgiveness. Perhaps, the time has come to reprioritize forgiveness within the clashing public spheres.

Forgiveness is not a new phenomenon, and the word "reprioritize" was chosen purposefully to demonstrate the roots of such an old understanding. Forgiveness is perhaps as old as humanity, and is certainly embedded in all major religions and exists in the spirit of humankind. As forgiveness is timeless, it is also impactful, with continued influence even years after an act of forgiveness. A notable example of such long-impactful forgiveness is illustrated in the case of Pope (Saint) John Paul II. Pope John Paul II was shot by Turkish extremist Mehmet Ali Agca in 1981. Pope John Paul II spoke publically from the hospital, and forgave the man who had tried to kill him, before visiting him and forgiving him privately in person.

John Paul II's public and private gestures of forgiveness captured the hearts of millions around the world. He was a religious authority and a world leader who personified the notion of love and forgiveness. His message and this important act of love remain in the hearts and minds of so many of his admirers to this day and serves as an example of the lasting power of forgiveness. Seeking a richer understanding of such a powerful notion, the former Dean of S-CAR, Dr. Andrea Bartoli, and I designed and implemented an exploratory action research with support from the Fetzer Institute (2012-2014). The core idea was to test esteemed Saudi Arabian Islamic scholars' reactions to a Catholic leader's act of forgiveness towards a Muslim assassin, and

at the same time unravel insightful meanings of Islamic forgiveness. The data collection took place in Saudi Arabia, which wields great influence over the Islamic world, but is simultaneously often greatly misunderstood. The project was designed to strengthen the understanding of forgiveness concepts from an Islamic perspective, raise awareness of historic acts of forgiveness, and engage



Ibrahim Al-Hajjri.
Photo: S-CAR.

Muslim scholars and leaders in conversations on forgiveness.

For this project, I took two trips to Saudi Arabia and collected data in the cities of Jeddah and Mecca. I approached as many scholars as I could, but was faced with the challenges of arranging for meetings in a society not usually open to engaging with external initiatives. Nevertheless, through the efforts of a capable research assistant and the support of key local contacts, I was able to meet with over twenty scholars and ask them a set of open and closed questions in a semi-structured informal approach. Many of the interviews took place at Umm Al-Qura University, one of the most renowned Islamic universities in the world. Other meetings took place at research centers, in scholars' homes and offices, in and around mosques, and places of historical significance.

This research initiative yielded a number of informative results. These results began with the difficulty of transferring the literary meaning of the word forgiveness and unveiling the richness of such word in the Arabic language, to appreciative reactions of Muslim scholars towards the historic Pope's act for forgiveness vis-à-vis many other acts from Islamic history. After engaging with Muslim scholars in Saudi Arabia, in what could best be described as difficult interviews on sensitive issues, we discovered that no harm could be done by raising awareness of historical acts of forgiveness even in reticent societies. Rather, by remembering those examples from history, a rewarding positive learning experience may be the only obvious result of such initiative. We learned that not only were the majority of Saudi scholars appreciative of the Pope's choice to forgive, but some went as far as saying that he should have been rewarded. As much as the Muslim scholars demonstrated gratitude towards the Catholic leader's action, they were also adamant in responding with examples from Islamic history. Islam does not require forgiveness but encourages and rewards such acts, and thus there are many examples of Islamic forgiveness in history. Famed Muslim leaders such as Saladin showed compassion and forgiveness post-Crusades, and Emir Abdelkader, who protected the Christians from the Druze in nineteenth century Damascus. Abdelkader's character earned global recognition, even as far as the U.S., where the city of Elkader in Iowa was named after him. Abdelkader and Saladin, among all Muslims, drew their inspiration from the Prophet Mohammed.

Recent Media Appearances

Ethiopia's Media War

Alemayehu Weldemariam, S-CAR MS Student
Al Jazeera 02/18/15

To Finally see the Invisible Israelis before our eyes

Walid Jawad, S-CAR Alumnus
Al Arabiya News Channel 02/17/15

Conflict Analysts from S-CAR have appeared on 14 occasions since the last newsletter. These 2 represent a sample of those publications. For a complete list, please visit: <http://scar.gmu.edu/media>

PROGRESS

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Caroline Chisolm, S-CAR Undergraduate Student

By Dylan Bates, Undergraduate Student Founder and Outreach Officer of Agora, dbates3@masonlive.gmu.edu

Originally from Rhode Island, Caroline Chisolm is a current student at S-CAR and one of the most passionate and energetic student leaders. She has been very active in S-CAR's undergraduate organization, Agora, regularly attends discussions and gives great insights into issues. Caroline is also as very proactive in organizing events, starting new initiatives, and supporting others.

She is enthusiastic because "everyone has such different experiences to share and it is a very like-hearted group of individuals that want to make the status quo better." Since joining S-CAR, she has focused her interests on preven-



Caroline Chisolm. Photo: Caroline Chisolm.

tative measures in international conflict near the non-profit sector. This drive stems from her experience of being inside the Pentagon during the September 11 attacks as well as the broad mistreatment and stereotyping of Muslims that resulted from that sad incident.

Caroline also served as the Vice President of Communications for Alpha Omicron Pi, is in the Honors College, and was a writer and photographer for *Her Campus GMU*. She likes to travel abroad and

is currently studying at Oxford University for the semester. Caroline has made a strong impression with her work ethic, intelligence, and creativity. We look forward to more great things to come from Caroline. ■

Nicole Eisenschenk, Dual Master's Degree in Conflict Resolution and Mediterranean Security

By Thanos Gatas, S-CAR PhD Candidate, agatsias@gmu.edu

Nicole Eisenschenk is a student in the Dual Master's Program in Conflict Resolution and Mediterranean Security, which S-CAR offers in cooperation with the University of Malta. Nicole earned her Bachelor of Business Administration in Management with a minor in Sports Management from Stetson University in DeLand, Florida.

After years of trying to find the perfect job, Nicole worked in customer service based jobs mainly in her hometown of Key West, Florida. Dissatisfied with the job market, she decided to leave it all behind and move overseas to teach English as a second language. Her love for travel and experiencing new cultures was the motivating factor in this life change. She also believed that the certification and experience gained from teaching overseas could help her continue to do what she loves - traveling and interacting with people.

In 2012, Nicole flew to Phnom Penh, Cambodia to begin her 4-week TESOL certification course and, after two weeks moved to Pattaya, Thailand, to continue her training. After her TESOL graduation, Nicole settled in Bangkok, Thailand where



Nicole Eisenschenk. Photo: Nicole Eisenschenk.

she worked for Wall Street English Thailand, an English language school that catered to students over the age of 15 from many different educational and professional backgrounds.

Nicole enjoyed her time immensely in Bangkok. Not only was she able to experience the life and food of the city, she was able to travel to numerous locations in Southeast Asia. After two years of teaching, Nicole felt that she could do more to make a difference in the lives of people but felt that her educational background was insufficient enough. As she looked

for Graduate Programs in Europe she decided to see if there were any programs in Malta, a country where her mother's family lives. She happened to find the Dual Master's Program and immediately knew this was what she was destined to do. Nicole focuses her attention on conflicts in Maghreb and Mashreq. She also plans to pursue a thesis focused on that region of the world. She hopes to take the Foreign Service Officers examination come the summer so that she can pursue a career in diplomacy, something she would never have imagined for herself when she finished her undergraduate degree. ■

The Escalating "War on Terror": Is there a Role for Conflict Resolution

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The invasion's role in generating insurgency is, of course, entirely outside the scope of his vision. Meanwhile, the "savages" live up to their billing when hundreds of them surround Kyle and his buddies in Fallujah in a clear replay of the climactic Cowboys vs. Indians battle that ends so many Hollywood Westerns. Here, the exclusionary focus serves the additional purpose of turning the forces whose mechanized assaults killed tens of thousands of Iraqis and led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands more into an outnumbered, outgunned handful of heroes.

"American Sniper" deserves a far longer discussion. Since many people believe that its vision is noble and true, even that its depiction of Kyle's PTSD and family difficulties makes it an "anti-war" movie, it deserves the sort of public discussion that S-CAR helped organize in the case of Mel Gibson's equally divisive film, "The Passion of the Christ" (2004). But the issue I want to emphasize here is how extreme focus, eliminating both breadth and depth, historical context and psychological motivation, afflicts our general approach to the "War on Terror" and effectively rules out conflict resolution.

In a previous book (Rubenstein, 2010), I argued that such a narrowing of vision often occurs as public attention is drawn increasingly to the depredations of hostile foreign forces. People generally begin as skeptical of hawkish claims and demands. But this skepticism fades when enemy atrocities, sometimes involving American victims, seize center stage. We are revolted and affrighted by the adversary's methods and ideology. As violent, sinister forces make territorial and propaganda gains, a growing sense of vulnerability inclines us to think in terms of self-defense. Soon, all we can see is what appears in the sniper's scope: in this case, Muslim extremists attacking cities, beheading hostages, slaughtering captured soldiers, destroying priceless antiquities, and threatening to annihilate civilians they brand "apostates."

What motives can they possibly have? In particular, what can explain the propensity of Islamic State leaders to produce and circulate slick videos of their fighters committing such atrocities? A current answer commanding wide attention explains that, as passionate fundamentalists, they believe in the justice and current applicability of all the customs and punishments described in the Koran, from slavery and concubinage to crucifixion and the execution of prisoners. Moreover, like the Aum Shinryko sectarians who released poison gas in a Tokyo subway twenty years ago, they are fanatical believers in a coming apocalypse: an end-of-days battle with Christian forces ("Rome") that will inaugurate the messianic kingdom and return the Islamic empire to its former glory (Wood, 2015. For competing views, see Jenkins, 2015, and Tharoor, 2015). Other commentators, stressing the Islamic State's capture of territory and campaign to create a united caliphate, have compared its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, to the megalomaniac German conqueror, Adolf Hitler. According to them, what attracts recruits to the extremist camp is conquest, which produces jobs, loot, adventure, comradeship, sexually exploitable women, and glory. Videos dramatizing the conquerors' ruthlessness thus offer power and pride to potential allies while spreading fear among potential enemies.

These views, which imply the necessity to fight to the death against ISIS and its sympathizers, are not so much wrong as blindingly partial. They neither ask nor answer questions like: How did a handful of violent ideologues become the rulers of a state that "now controls territory the size of Belgium, governs millions of people, draws on billions of dollars in revenue and commands tens of thousands of foot soldiers" (McCaul, 2015)? Why have so many people, including

young Muslims from Western nations and Sunnis who do not share the ISIS theology, attempted to join forces with them or to aid them? Why is their influence spreading so rapidly outside Iraq and Syria? Responding to such inquiries requires that one pay attention to the history of the region, including the roots of Sunni-Shia conflict, the legacies of colonial rule, the role of capitalist institutions in generating mass joblessness and inequality, and the story of how Western interventions abetted the rise of Islamist extremism. Perhaps more important, it requires broadening one's focus to include the basic needs of Arab and other Muslim peoples (not just their leaders) which, unsatisfied, incline masses of alienated people to support extremist solutions.

What are these needs? Only those suffering deprivation can tell us, but they seem to include an end to gross political, judicial, and economic corruption – a demand that has fueled violent puritanical movements since the Protestant Reformation – as well as needs for decent jobs; opportunities for morally fulfilling, socially useful work; satisfying personal relationships; secure, positive cultural identities; and the right to make collective decisions and to decide one's own fate free of foreign domination. (Surely, the demand for a revived "caliphate," which many Westerners view as unspeakably weird, reflects a widespread distaste for the political divisions imposed upon Arab peoples by the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 and other colonial 'divide and conquer' schemes.) If, in fact, people are joining extremist organizations in order to satisfy such needs, the question that then demands an answer is precisely that of conflict resolution. How can the parties caught up in brutal conflict be brought together to determine for themselves what imperative needs demand satisfaction and what institutional changes are required to do the job?

This question also indicates what's missing in the Hitler/al-Baghdadi analogy. Having captured Europe's leading industrial state (with the aid of its leading industrialists), and joined forces with Asia's leading industrial state, Adolf Hitler and his Axis allies could be dealt with in no way other than all out war. Before the 1930s, however, when Germany was saddled with war guilt, impoverished, and humiliated by myopic Allied leaders, policies devoted to conflict resolution rather than punishment might well have helped satisfy the urgent needs that, left to fester, led directly to the rise of the Nazis.

The situation in the Middle East at present seems much closer to that of the twenties than the thirties. The problem is how to prevent ISIS from winning the loyalty of the Muslim masses and committing further atrocities against non-Sunnis and Sunnis they consider impious or apostates. The solution, I believe, is not to fight the apocalyptic war the extremists seem to be hoping for, but, while helping to defend communities threatened by extinction, to make it possible for representatives of warring peoples who are willing to talk with each other do so. Attempts to wipe out groups like ISIS will produce only pyrrhic victories, since unsatisfied basic needs will continue to generate violent extremism. Surely, it's time to see what can be done by the parties themselves, assisted by trusted, independent facilitators, to resolve a network of escalating conflicts.

NOTE: The references for this article will be available on the online version at: <http://scar.gmu.edu/newsletter-article/escalating-war-terror-there-role-conflict-resolution>



Richard Rubenstein.
Photo: Mason Creative Services.

From this thought, and with the support of faculty such as Kevin Avruch and Wallace Warfield, emerged the Local Zones of Peace Working Group (ZoPWG) consisting of most of our Latin American students and many others who were interested in the topic, often as one aspect of their dissertation work, among them Pushpa Iyer, originally from Gujerat but interested in zones of peace in Mindanao; Landon Hancock, working on his dissertation about Northern Ireland; Bobby Jose from the Philippines; Krista Rigalo and Nancy Morrison who had both worked in the Sudan and were interested in peace “corridors” for delivering food and medical supplies to civilians; and Jennifer Langdon, already teaching on the Criminal Justice Program at Towson University but willing to help write about Peru and the Rondas Campesinas there. We were also fortunate in obtaining a small grant from USIP to support the work and this enabled us to employ a Colombian anthropologist, Sara Ramirez, as a field worker to undertake interviews, although the dangers of such work became evident when one of the local paramilitary groups accused her of being a guerrilla agent and she had to leave the country and spend a year at ICAR working directly with ZoPWG.

So that was how ICAR became interested in local peace zones and communities. As with many ICAR projects and programs, the ZoPs Working Group arose from the shared interests of a group of faculty and students and their willingness to spend scarce and valuable time and effort on the program, even though it was not part of the formal course work, even though nobody gained 1, 2 or 3 credits for the work, and even though it took participants away from outside work, family, courses, and writing. I can only hope the rest of the Group gained as much knowledge and insight about conflict analysis and resolution as I did – and enjoyed it as much. ■

The Muslim scholars explained that the Prophet Mohammed remains the exemplary character to emulate for all Muslims. His acts of forgiveness were revisited by all the scholars that participated in this research effort. Perhaps the most recognized example was when Prophet Mohammed forgave the people of Quraish who had attempted to kill him and his followers for years before he returned to Mecca. In a well known example from biblical history, Prophet Mohammed referenced Joseph and his forgiveness of his brothers, and let everyone who had been fighting him go free. The examples set by the interviewees portray a side of Islam that contradicts ongoing media-driven misconceptions of the world’s second largest religion, a side that is often overwhelmed by understandings of violence and extremism. Saudi scholars recognize that the image of Islam as an unforgiving religion is false. In fact, they insist that Islam is the most forgiving religion. Muslims believe that forgiveness combined with reconciliation will earn them a reward from Allah, which is a strong source for motivation. In addition, Islam puts forgiveness in very high regard. Mohammed Abu-Nimer says, “The forgiveness that vanquishes hatred and anger is a prized virtue in Islam, greater even than justice.”

No matter which world religion is the most forgiving, competition towards greater forgiveness seems more useful for our field than competition towards more violence. As the CAR community continues to research ways to approach and deal with conflict, forgiveness becomes increasingly relevant to the study of conflict resolution. The power of forgiveness may influence positive and lasting change, an important concept to understand for scholars and practitioners in our field. It is time to remember and reprioritize forgiveness in the face of growing global fear, hate, and violence. ■



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