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Newsletter

Center for Peace and Conflict Studies

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Meet Our New Fellows! - February 2022

The Center for Peace and Conflict Studies

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Newsletter February 2022

[The Center for Peace and Conflict Studies](#)

Meet our New Fellows!

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Happy New Year! May 2022 bring you peace, health, and happiness.

Throughout 2021, the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) continued to work globally to reduce violent conflict. Our [Asia Pacific and US-China Relations Programme](#) organized a series of online conferences on improving understanding and cooperation between the U.S. and China, and bringing together leading scholars and former officials from the two sides. The learning from this process is being compiled into a book co-authored by the participants. [Our Middle East and North Africa](#) (MENA) team supported peacebuilding through economic development in Yemen, and health cooperation in Libya. The reputation of our MENA team is demonstrated by its facilitation of the UN-Germany led donor coordination process on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in Yemen. The Center also expanded our [Training and Mentoring](#) to governments, multilateral institutions, and civil society. We signed new agreements to support the conflict sensitivity of Swiss foreign aid across the MENA region, with a particular focus on education and water aid during the Lebanon crisis, to conduct conflict analyses in support of German development assistance in Libya and Yemen, and to assist UNDP in drafting a regional conflict prevention strategy in the Middle East. An important part of our work has also been pro-bono advisory support to civil society organizations in Syria and Yemen. CPCS continued its contribution to global learning on best practice in peace and conflict, starting a new initiative on [Ethical Political Commemoration](#) and continuing its partnership with CSS ETH Zurich and British Columbia on how to [Mediate Worldview Conflicts](#). Finally, our team produced an impressive array of [publications](#) in top journals in the field, penned [media articles](#) for a wider audience, and [convened speaker](#) events on issues ranging from Women, Peace, and Security, to political polarization in the United States.

All of this work was conducted by a mixed team of experienced peace academics and promising graduate students. The Center's work provides unique opportunity to students for hands on learning in managing peace projects. Indeed, two of our recent graduates – Maria Teresa Gonzalez Esquivel

and Sushant Naidu – undertook a field mission to Amman to establish our partnership with the University of Jordan and kick start our economy and peace project in Yemen. We are very proud our young graduate team’s work, which has also helped them further their careers beyond the School. In 2021, Hussein Ibrahim (our first full time project officer) joined Ideas Beyond Borders as its MENA Region Director and Pallavi Shahi joined SaveLIFE Foundation as Senior Manager.

CPCS also welcomed its inaugural cadre of [Senior and Non-Residential Fellows](#). Our Senior Fellows are collaborating with the Center on specific initiatives. Rajaa Altalli, who will serve as the School’s Sergio Vieira de Mello Endowed Visiting Chair in 2022, is establishing a programme on women peacemakers at the Center. Tatsushi Arai (a Visiting Chair in 2019) is a leading voice in the learning process on worldview conflicts and served as a United Nations Senior Mediation Advisor. Hans Gutbrod established the Center’s ethical political commemoration initiative. Joseph Huddleston, a professor at the School of Diplomacy, provides ongoing support for our economy and peace programme Yemen. Our Nonresidential Fellows bring significant knowledge and networks to CPCS, including in international diplomacy, community peacebuilding, strategic communications, negotiation, and mediation. They all have connections to the Center and the School of Diplomacy. Three of them, Vance Crowe (M.A. ’10), Chandra DeNap Whetstine (M.A. ’10) and Brandon Kotlow (M.A. ’16), are School of Diplomacy alumni. Andrew Cheatham has worked with our team on a project focused on Iraq, and Hussein Ibrahim has continued to support the team via offering Iraqi local and national contexts for conflict sensitivity programming and training.

This newsletter introduces you to our new Fellows, their professional experience, the lessons and challenges they face in their peacebuilding work, and their vision for their fellowships with the Center. We believe that with the Fellows, the Center is now in an even better position to conduct our important peacebuilding work as we enter the new year.

With gratitude,



Zheng Wang
Director



David Wood
Director of Peacebuilding and Statebuilding in
the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Senior Fellows

Rajaa Altalli: In March, 2011 I co-founded the [Center for Civil Society and Democracy](#) (CCSD) to support and strengthen Syrian civil society, to promote the transition to democracy in Syria. To accomplish these objectives, we supported women and civil society members to meaningfully participate in the peace process in Syria and also in resolving conflicts in their local communities. Through CCSD, we led many successful interventions and initiatives to release detainees, negotiate ceasefires, promote diverse identities through cultural activities, negotiate humanitarian access and other important interventions. In terms of my peacebuilding work in Syria, the security challenge continues to be the biggest challenge. For example, the likelihood of the threat of detention and torture by the Syrian government for civil society activists and for political activists is very high. Sustainable peace requires setting in place a truthful justice mechanism. Justice requires the political will to achieve peace. Inclusive Dialogue Forums is one vital tool to engage more

civilians in building sustainable peace, reconciliation and justice. The collaboration with the CPCS will involve transferring the knowledge and the practice of building peace in Syria to the region of the Middle east and beyond mainly in the Women, Peace and Security field.



Rajaa Altalli
Co-Founder of Center for Civil Society
and Democracy for Syria

Tatsushi Arai: My work essentially focuses on understanding the systemic roots of violent conflict and building sustained efforts, initiatives, and processes to manage and transform them. During the past decade, I have devoted much of my time and effort to peacebuilding training, training of trainers, facilitation of conflict resolution dialogues, and development of networks and platforms in conflict-affected societies in Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East. Establishing a peacebuilding initiative in the midst of conflict is very difficult. Yet what is far more difficult is to sustain the initiative for a long time. Many of us in the field are familiar with initiating something important for peace. But few of us are trained and experienced in sustaining peacebuilding efforts over decades and generations. And yet, a truly significant social change can take place only when we stay committed for a very long time. I view the Center as a dynamic hub and an expanding forum of exchange where different scholars, practitioners, and students can get together and generate something meaningful for a shared cause of peacebuilding. I look forward to developing a shared vision with others through dialogue, reflection, and learning, while sharing my research on mediative practice, which I define organized activities that provide mediating social functions in conflict-affected settings where there is no formally designated mediator taking the lead in conflict resolution.



Tatsushi Arai, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies
at Kent State University, Ohio

Hans Gutbrod: My main focus at CPCS will be an Ethics of Political Commemoration. We want to develop a framework that allows commemoration to be constructive and to exit circular loops of remembering. In a way, this approach can bring history back under control, and highlight that what we make of the past is up to us, especially in our relationship to others. This directly matters to peace and conflict, since distrust and unwillingness to engage often relies on a narrow way of seeing past events. One great challenge can be how to approach vexing questions of the past. People often are overwhelmed, and do not know which direction to take. A great example for that is the Stalin Museum in Georgia (in the Caucasus). Recently, the Georgian government put together a commission to figure out how to deal with this murderous legacy, still venerated by many. With the Ethics of Political Commemoration we are trying to give a sensible direction to efforts of commemoration. In the coming months, I hope to engage with the Center by collaborating with colleagues, developing the concept further, and testing its application and engage with various audiences, including students, to see what we can learn from each other, and hopefully also attract some partners to work with the Center, on this issue.



Hans Gutbrod, Ph.D.
Associate Professor at Ilia State University in Tbilisi, Georgia

Joseph Huddleston: My research focuses on diplomacy by nonstate actors in conflict, as well as on economic consequences of protract social conflict. From the peacebuilding perspective, successful diplomacy provides alternatives to violent confrontation, serving as the catalyst of peace and ceasefire agreements that have historically drawn ends to horrific bloodshed. Yet it can also drastically worsen conflict, inviting arms and actors to flow and weakening chances for peaceful resolution, or else freezing conflict in states of irresolution. Much of our knowledge about diplomacy war focuses on the state, so understanding the role diplomacy plays for key nonstate actors is crucial for identifying pathways towards peace. The biggest lesson I have drawn from my work on both diplomacy and war economies, as that for many parties in conflict, perceptions of those who have legitimacy is a key determinant of the trajectory of conflict. Legitimacy is this unclear, ethereal factor in governance and politics, and yet despite its abstractness, it translates directly into concrete outcomes: negotiation of ceasefires, humanitarian aid networks, and power sharing agreements. I look forward to continuing to work with the Center on studying the effects of protracted conflict on vulnerable people caught in the crossfire, as well as unexpected actors of influence who can help forge new paths to peaceful change.



Joseph Huddleston, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor at the School of Diplomacy
and International Relations, Seton Hall University, New Jersey

Non-Residential Fellows

Andrew Cheatham: My work as an advisor to the President and CEO of the [United States Institute of Peace](#) (USIP) seeks to help all parts of the organization to promote four key objectives: First, mitigating the potential for violent conflict created by strategic rivalry among major world powers. Second, reducing violence, extremism, and fragility in countries central to U.S. interests. Third, reducing the potential for violent conflict from global shocks by helping to identify, establish, and field-test mechanisms that will help fragile states and societies manage coming disruptions. Fourth, promoting U.S. peacebuilding norms and values, including social justice and rules-based engagement. I believe the biggest lesson for peacebuilding is that multilateralism works. This is evidenced by the relative peace and prosperity humanity has witnessed since the creation and promotion of major international and regional organizations since World War II. That said, international norms and legal frameworks need to be revised along with the much-needed reform of multilateral institutions. The current organizations were not fit for purpose in 2021. New global problems like exponential technological advances in the information space (media), biotech, financial transactions, monetary instruments, logistics, and of course warfare, require an updated unified intergovernmental effort. Of course, other unforeseen global shocks from climate change and pandemics also require new types of collective action.



Andrew Cheatham
Senior Advisor to the President and CEO
of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP)

Vance Crowe: As the CEO of [Articulate Ventures](#), a strategic marketing firm, I have found myself advising farmer organizations that feel deeply misunderstood and alienated by the urban populations. These farmers feel as though the majority population wrongly believes they are mistreating animals, using chemicals irresponsibly, and that they should not have the freedom to raise their agricultural products. This is a challenging situation because these rural and urban groups represent radically different cultures and yet are governed by the same system. They are intertwined as networks and yet they feel driven apart. I look forward to collaborating with the Center for new ideas and perspectives on how to bring these wary groups together as these cultural differences are likely to increase in tension during these uncertain times.



Vance Crowe '10
CEO of Articulate Ventures, Saint Louis, Missouri

Chandra DeNap Whetstine: [One America Movement's](#) work addresses the symptoms and drivers of America's division in order to arrest the cycle of toxic polarization that can lead to irrevocable divisions and even violence. The biggest challenge of this work (and the most important thing to learn!) is that it moves at the speed of trust and relationships. We can't bring people together across divides without first building trust which is long, slow work. It begins when groups and their leaders examine the norms and behaviors that are acceptable within their communities and can only then lead to meaningful engagement across divides. In partnering with the Center for Peace and Conflict studies I hope to leverage One America Movement's approach to support CPCS expand towards working on domestic issues, and I hope to learn from the work of CPCS abroad.



Chandra DeNap Whetstine '10
Vice President of Programs and Operations
at the One America Movement

Hussein Ibrahim: My work focuses on increasing peacebuilding literature through online content translation from English to Arabic. Also, we empower undergraduate students by giving them training courses on translation, editing online articles, media literacy and critical thinking. We then give them practical opportunities to transform their theoretical learning into practice. All together, we hope to expand access to peacebuilding knowledge and skills so that they can be leveraged by future developing leaders. The biggest challenge in the communities we work in (at local government levels) is the lack of awareness on peace dividends. As a result, I envision collaborating with the Center on projects that one, connect youths to local government and civil societies in their communities, and two, empower future leaders in their work to build peace more sustainably in ways that are sensitive to the conflicts that may surround them.



Hussein Ibrahim
Regional Director, Ideas Beyond Borders, Iraq

Brandon Kotlow: The institution building projects that I support enhance the strategic capacity of the Ministries of Interior, Public Security, and Defense, and operational and combatant commands to improve the sustainability and impact of modernization and reform programs. We provide guidance to address policy and implementation gaps, assess institution-building needs and design, implement capacity building support to meet those identified needs, and advise on best practices to institutionalize enhanced processes and procedures to meet the recipient institution's mission and goals. I find that sustainability is one of the major challenges to foreign assistance, and that two essential components are often missing. First, all efforts must have local ownership. Second, project activities should be flexible to adapt to local constraints. As a former MA graduate of the School of Diplomacy and International Relations, I recognized that there is room for improvement in preparing students with the practical skills that will help them enter the workforce. This is an area that I hope to collaborate with the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies on as a Non-Residential Fellow, in addition to providing career path advice for current and former students and supporting the Center in other areas.



Brandon Kotlow '16
Program Officer, Strategic Capacity Group (SCG), Virginia

Read [CPCS's May Newsletter](#)

Read [CPCS's January Newsletter](#)



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