



## **The 3Ds in Action: A System-Wide Approach to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Security**

**The final forum in a series on Defense, Development and Diplomacy**  
(Co-sponsored by the 3D Security Initiative, and Global Systems Initiatives)

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### **SUMMARY AND MAJOR POLICY POINTS**

Washington, DC – September’s **Conflict Prevention and Resolution Forum (CPRF)** was held at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009. Over 110 individuals from government agencies, think-tanks, non-profits and local universities attended the event. The CPRF is organized by the non-profit organization **Search for Common Ground** and is co-sponsored by the **Alliance for Peacebuilding, American University, Council on Foreign Relations, George Mason University, Johns Hopkins University, Partners for Democratic Change, United States Institute of Peace and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.**

The September CPRF was the 100<sup>th</sup> session since its inception in 1999. Moderator and Senior Vice President of Search for Common Ground, **Susan Collin Marks**, opened the discussion by drawing attention to the unique role the CPRF plays in Washington: “There are over 200 forums in any given day in Washington... but we didn’t find any that were focused on finding the commonality between people.” This led Search for Common Ground to develop the Conflict Prevention and Resolution Forum, which provides information from a wide variety of perspectives; explores possible solutions to complex conflicts; and provides a secure venue for stakeholders from various disciplines to engage in cross-sector and multi-track problem-solving.. In this spirit, the panelists in this forum discussed how security policy can be developed “not from silos, but how each piece of security policy can be linked and strengthened”, acting on the commonalities between each department bureau and agency.

The first panelist, **Louise Diamond**, President of **Global Systems Initiative**, spoke about “what is needed to take a systems approach” to addressing global security. Dr. Diamond outlined three major principles related to systems that can help explain how to address security challenges. First, is that “all living systems exist within their own unique context, emotional, political, human, etc. And [the most important component] within the human context, [is] the narrative.” In order to address security throughout a globalized and interconnected world system, Dr. Diamond calls for decision makers to “challenge the assumptions within those narratives.” In order to fully understand a specific conflict situation, Dr. Diamond suggested “we must articulate and challenge the stories we tell ourselves” about the victims, the oppressors as well as our own as observers.

The second principle related to the new ideas of international systems brought about by the election of President Obama. “We chose a new world view,” explained Dr. Diamond. “During the campaign, Obama said over and over again, ‘we’re all in this together.’ We are coming out of a world view that said ‘it’s us-against them’ ...based on a ‘scientific’ view of everything being separate.” The latter statement is contrary to the notion that our world is now, more than ever, shaped by web-like systems. Dr. Diamond continued, “we live in an interdependent and interconnected world. [In order to] efficiently work with the world system [we must] look for the places where things have been disconnected... Power [now] lies with who has the greatest number of connections, not who has the largest army.” Specifically, Dr. Diamond notes that the U.S. Department of State has focused many of their projects on empowering disenfranchised women. This, in effect, brings nearly half of the world’s population to the table and addresses their narrative.

The final principle put forth by Dr. Diamond discussed “emergence” and adaptation to change: “Whole systems are on or over the edge of chaos,” Dr. Diamond stated. “Examples are climate systems, bio diversity systems, economic systems, the system around rogue actors and nuclear weapons. These were old “systems [that] were based on assumptions and premises that no longer exist in a globalized world.” Dr. Diamond concluded that we must be able to adapt and work with emerging systems.

Louise Diamond, Ph.D., founded Global Systems Initiatives to apply transformative whole systems thinking to complex global security and environmental issues. Previously, Louise co-founded The Institute of Multi-Track Diplomacy (IMTD) with Ambassador John McDonald, where she worked extensively as a peacebuilder and change agent in conflict zones around the world.

The next panelist at the CPRF was **Cynthia Irmer**, a Senior Conflict Prevention Officer at the **U.S. Department of State**, whose presentation and own work represents a whole-of-government approach to International Security. Elaborating on the President's call that we are all in this together, Dr. Irmer argued, “we have a great deal of responsibility, each one of us, [to bring interconnectedness] into our own work...We are a part of an international system.” In a brief critique of past policies, Dr. Irmer spoke about how the United States has previously interacted with the international system as an “other” and not as an integral part of it. Dr. Irmer explained

that we cannot battle against it, “we cannot make it what we want but we can constructively work with and influence it”.

Dr. Irmer then highlighted her work in developing the “Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework” (The document can be found [here](http://www.crs.state.gov/shortcut.cfm/C6WW), or by copying and pasting the following link: <http://www.crs.state.gov/shortcut.cfm/C6WW>). The group brought a “systems perspectives into the U.S. Government for thinking about how to address conflict in other parts of the world.” Dr. Irmer’s multi-stakeholder group was able to “tell the narratives from departments, agencies and bureaus, identifying core grievances” in conflict situations around the world in an effort to holistically address “the [root] cause of people’s unhappiness.”

Dr. Irmer highlighted one of the group’s key findings, which was the importance of working with the existent “resilience” displayed by people living amidst traumatic conflict. The question for government response, explained Dr. Irmer, is “not how do we decapitate a terrorist group, not how to bring down drivers of conflict—but how do we search for and understand the existing resilience and work with that.”

Dr. Irmer concluded by summarizing her own five principles for dealing with conflict from the systems perspective. First, “the system is a given,” and it will only change with influence, not necessarily from abrupt action. Second, one must include the unknown and the unknowable into planning. Third, we must learn how to work with the dynamism of the system, to feed and interact with it. Fourth, the components of the system are interdependent. And fifth, thought and action feed the system—not only what we do, but what we think.

In her position with the US Department of State’s office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, Dr. Cynthia Irmer leads inter-agency teams conducting conflict analyses in pre- and post-conflict countries, collaborates with interagency planning teams to promote prevention and mitigation of conflict, and provides training for US Government users of an interagency conflict analysis methodology.

**Lisa Schirch**, director of the **3D Security Initiative**, spoke next about the evolutions of systems theory from an academic discussion to its applicability toward international security. Ms. Schirch opened by stating that we need to focus on “the analysis of security and conflicts in the world as not just pure cause and effect, but seen in a very interconnected world.” Ms. Schirch noted, for example, that conflicts based on environmental and climate systems have increased over the past decade. Furthermore, Ms. Schirch suggested that one must “look at evil action as emerging from a system of action and reaction over decades,” not necessarily a one-time event. According to Ms. Schirch, this way of looking at conflict will serve as “a blueprint for looking to more effectively build security.”

Ms. Schirch noted that systems theory first explained how natural systems are all interdependent, that when the “bats die out, you have an excess of mosquitoes” and the system is therein thrown out of balance. Generally speaking, this is how many view the current problems with U.S. foreign policy. We are dealing with an unbalanced, broken system. Furthermore, sighting examples of efforts in Belgium and Canada, Schirch noted that “security is more than a defense

problem; it includes development and diplomacy.” In the United States, “we need to act together [to] get on the same page in analyzing and coordinating policy.”

Ms. Schirch identifies with Dr. Diamond in including the narratives of everyone in conducting conflict analysis. Schirch argued that a way to address the situation in Afghanistan is to deal with the system of action and reaction. “What are those local voices saying about U.S. policy in the region, [including how] the Taliban uses American attacks as a recruiting tool leading to greater threats of terrorism today than there were in 2001?”

Unfortunately, Ms. Schirch argued, we have moved away from the systemic question – “Why do they hate us” – to “a question of how to change and manipulate.” Ms. Schirch identified the recent attacks in Afghanistan as evidence that the U.S. foreign policy still has not completely grasped the action and reaction cycle. That said, Ms Schirch concluded that “the military is having paradigm discussions, moving from enemy-centered security to population-centered security”. According to Ms. Schirch, this is a positive step in inclusive analysis of conflict systems. Furthermore, she claims, there “needs to be dialogue from other agencies and NGOs about grassroots perspectives, [which offer the] ability to talk about human security for everyone”.

Lisa Schirch is the Director of the [3D Security Initiative](#), which promotes civil society perspectives on conflict prevention and peacebuilding in US security policymaking. Schirch is a also professor of peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University where she teaches conflict assessment and conflict prevention strategic planning at the graduate program in the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding.