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| |  | | --- | | <http://news.sciencemag.org/sciencenow/2012/05/live-chat-why-do-we-fight.html> Live Chat: Why Do We Fight? *by Elizabeth Culotta*on 16 May 2012, 9:43 AM | [33 Comments](http://news.sciencemag.org/sciencenow/2012/05/live-chat-why-do-we-fight.html#sci-comments)  [See below](http://news.sciencemag.org/sciencenow/2012/05/live-chat-why-do-we-fight.html#chat) for the chat box. Join us each Thursday at 3 p.m. EDT for a live conversation with leading scientists and expert reporters.  **TODAY'S TOPIC**  The modern world is driven by war and conflict, much of it fueled by tension and suspicion among ethnic and religious groups. What are the evolutionary roots of prejudice and war? What drives suicide bombers to kill themselves? And given our history, will we ever be able to live in a world without war?  Join us for a live chat at **3 p.m. EDT on Thursday, 17 May**, on this page. You can leave your questions in the comment box below before the chat starts. The full text of the chat will be archived on this page  **Elizabeth Culotta:**  Hi everyone,  Welcome to our Science Live chat on Why We Fight. We’ll be discussing the evolutionary roots of prejudice and war. I’m Elizabeth Culotta, a contributing news editor at Science. We’ve got two very knowledgeable guests:  Scott Atran is director of anthropology research at the French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris. His work includes studies of sacred values and conflict, suicide bombers, and why people in conflict may make seemingly irrational choices.  Steven Neuberg is an evolutionary psychologist at Arizona State University in Tempe. His research seeks to understand the origins and nature of prejudice, as well as how religion may shape conflict among groups.  We’ve already gotten a lot of comments and questions, and I hope you’ll take a moment to add your own.  Welcome to both of our guests. I’d like to start with a question to both of you:  From sports teams to street gangs to wars, humans seem predisposed to divide the world into coalitions—into “us” and “them.” Is that a real part of human nature, and if so, why are we like this? |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png | |
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| **3:03** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  People everywhere tend to favor members of their own group over outsiders in choosing friends, business associates, and others who they interact and exchange with. Gather students or even perfect strangers and, by a coin flip, arbitrarily tag some as belonging to a “Red” group and a “Blue” group, you’ll soon find members of each group spontaneously forming emotional bonds with one another. You’ll also see Reds systematically discriminating against Blues while showing generosity to their own group in matters trivial (sharing candy) and consequential (fighting).   It’s pretty universal in adversarial relationships to clump and split all potential allies and enemies into a binary opposition, such as good versus evil, where each side’s hidden essence is characterized as “good” by one’s own side and “evil” by the other side. Human minds adore binary oppositions, whatever the domain of thought. This universal cognitive predisposition to dichotomize fits like a glove over a general primate social disposition to form exclusive social groups, naturally-selected so that bunches of genetically-related individuals may better cooperate to compete with rival or unrelated bunches. Now add to the evolutionary brew a universal human tendency to bound one’s own group with proprietary sacred notions, symbols, taboos and rituals that reliably identify even unknown individuals as potential cooperators – but in being proprietary increase disbelief and distrust towards outside groups – and you have a world of antagonistic coalitions underlying a continuing semi-anarchic system of global politics. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:04** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Elizabeth Culotta:**  Paul McCartney said, "I worry that religions start wars." It seems that people often think of those who are different religions as "outgroups." But are most wars really fought over religion? |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:04** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  In the “Encyclopedia of Wars,” Phillips and Axelrod survey nearly 1800 violent conflicts across history; only 7 % were religious. In the BBC-sponsored “War Audit” run by Greg Austin and colleagues, which evaluated major conflicts over 3,500 years rated on a 0-5 scale for religious motivation (e.g., Punic wars = 0, Crusades = 5), they found that > 60% had no religious motivation whatever, with < 7% earning a rating > 3.   Nearly all major international conflicts in recent times, which have been far more murderous than in the past (look closely at the power-law distributions in Steve Pinker’s “The Better Angels of Our Nature”), have been decidedly non-religious (the two World Wars, the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the Cambodian and Rwanda genocides, etc.). At particular times in history, religions are strongly associated with intellectual creativity and the expansion of human freedoms and opportunities. At other times, the opposite is true. No evidence I’m aware of suggests that belief in religion necessarily or probably leads to violence or that belief in science and devotion to atheism leads to tolerance and peace.  Nevertheless, in cross-cultural experiments and surveys, Jeremy Ginges and I found that religious and sacred values can sustain wars even against one’s own material interests and prospects for favorable outcomes, and that in intense or prolonged conflict mundane issues such as disputes over material resources can become sacralized, which works to make these conflicts intractable to negotiation or compromise. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:06** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Steven Neuberg:**  Conflict between groups is often based on resource competition and/or incompatible values. Religion can facilitate resource competition by justifying rights to have access to resources, and by marshalling human, financial, and other tangible resources for the conflict. Religion can also be the basis for conflicts over incompatible values. Some unpublished data of ours shows that even low power groups will engage in violent conflict if religion is a very important part of that group’s everyday life. The effects of value incompatibility on enhanced conflict are also magnified in groups that are highly religiously infused. So although religion certainly isn’t necessary for intergroup conflict, there are powerful mechanisms through which it can create or enhance it. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:08** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Elizabeth Culotta:**  Each one of us is the descendant of men who fought for their survival - and won. This means that modern men are genetically programmed to fight, an inheritance whose power we underestimate. When resources are plentiful, men's survival instincts are quiescent. But when resources - food, water, land, shelter - are in short supply, our men instinctively fight. That's what testosterone is for. The instinct to fight is as strong in men as the nurturing instinct is in women, and for the same reason. My question is, how can we understand and perhaps modify this basic, biological source of aggression? Is it possible (or even desirable) to eradicate it?. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:09** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Elizabeth Culotta:**  This question came from guest Alison |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:10** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  How can we eradicate or channel propensity to war into less belligerent endeavors? Perhaps by making other, competing modes of behavior more advantageous or emotionally appealing (e.g., civil and human rights vs. racism and prejudice), focusing aggression more against commonly harmful states of affairs than on people (e.g. war on poverty). Unfortunately, however, I do think that that an end to war entirely is about as likely on this planet as unending day. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:11** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Steven Neuberg:**  I agree with Scott. I want to make two other points. As Alison suggests, intergroup aggression does seem to be largely a male phenomenon, and in particular a young man phenomenon. And I agree that it is very important that we acknowledge our natures – not because our behavior isn’t influenced by developmental, social, and cultural forces – but because it gives us a ‘cold-eyes’ view of what the challenges are and what it is we need to overcome. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:12** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Comment From Guest**  Are we really seeing the level of human violence going down, as some studies suggest? |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:12** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  Steve Pinker, in "The Better Angels of Our Nature," documents how everyday violence between people has declined markedly since the Stone Age. But this underplays another well-documented trend (known as a "power law distribution") that big wars (as well as large terrorist attacks) since about 1500, though increasingly infrequent, are very many times more murderous and wide-ranging than those preceding. Each bigger event generates more world-shaking consequences than the last: politically, economically and socially.  Since 1945 there has been no "Big War." For Steve that's because the same factors that led to a gradual decline in interpersonal violence - increasing global dependencies, awareness and empathy with others' values, and above all Reason - finally caught up management of intergroup violence. I don't buy it at all: the interpersonal trend downward has been going on for centuries, even millennia. But the trend for large-sale intergroup violence has been powering upward until very recently. I do not believe we avoided nuclear war, and will continue to do so, because we are suddenly empathetic, globally aware, and reasonable. To figure in catastrophic events, as nuclear war would undoubtedly be, one has to figure in the risk of such an event, not just instances of actual occurrence. People involved in decisions at the time the calculated risk in October 1962 was "about 20%". That would mean the power law distribution upwards is pretty much on target through 1962. With the collapse of the Soviet Union there's been a dip in risk. But Pakistan, for example, has tripled bomb production recently while spiraling into political chaos and economic decline, and many there believe nuclear war with India is inevitable (at least some of the educated jihadis I've talked to, who have some very sympathetic ears in the ISI and Pakistani Atomic Energy Commission - the head of the commission said that he was "proud never to have soiled my hands by shaking them with Abdus Salam"). |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:12** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Comment From Dean Davis**  Dr. Atran, in your opinion, why is it that decision makers make so many errors when dealing with individuals and groups that engage in conflict? |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:13** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  The problem is that Americans, just like most other nations and cultural groups, believe that most of what they do is motivated by a morality based on Golden Rule principles of fairness and do no harm (unless first done to you), and that heinous acts committed by one's own kind occur because the actor has a screw loose or was suffering unbearable social or economic pressure. In fact, recent work in evolutionary psychology indicates the Golden Rule principles operate fairly in all cultures, most of the time, but not between cultures. People in other cultures are generally thought to commit terrible acts for calculated reasons, underscored by some perverse morality that can be readily discounted, so that only the consequences of their actions should be judged, whereas for one's own group motivation is, and what ought to, mostly count. What goes for individuals, goes for whole nations: When our country kills and shreds the flesh of others, whether flatly described in technospeak as "collateral damage" involving a few dead individual bystanders or "strategic bombing" that annihilates tens of thousands of civilians, it's almost always for fine moral reasons and because we want to save lives in the end; but if others do similar things with similar consequences, it's almost always because they are calculating evildoers. This asymmetric mindset has been with us since our species emerged from the caves, and is a continuing cause of much misunderstanding and distrust between groups in the organized anarchy of our ever-violent world. In this regard, America is unexceptional in its reaction to a massacre perpetuated by any of its own against others. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:14** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Comment From Robin**  Isn't in-group identification also important for cultivating compassion and sacrifice? Why aren't we evolutionary constructed to "wage the peace" both in our own groups and among them? |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:15** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  We can and do wage peace, by making groups more inclusive. Indeed, universal religions virtually invented the notion of "humanity." The probelm remains though that salvational, universal religions and their secular variants "all the great modern - ideological isms") do not abide recalcitrants and that also inevitably leads to even greater conflicts. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:17** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Steven Neuberg:**  It is a bit of an irony that the same evolved mechanisms that enhance ingroup compassion and sacrifice also contribute greatly to intergroup conflict.   We do sometimes “wage the peace” with other groups…we are sometimes xenophilic, seeking out other groups for opportunities, for trade and mating especially, but intergroup wariness and conflict tends to dominate. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:17** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Comment From Steven Hrotic**  Neuberg wrote, “even low power groups will engage in violent conflict if religion is a very important part of that group’s everyday life.” Do you have a sense as to which groups maintain strongly religious identities? In particular, is this more common in low power groups? |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:18** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Comment From Ben Tremblay**  What I studied: how group membership was such an important component of self-identity that individuals adopt a strong opinion regarding proposition X regardless of the proposition's real meaning and consequence i.e. saluting the banner or being on the attack against the group's enemies. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:19** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Comment From Thomas Murphy**  Religion seems like a special case of identification, in this case with a belief system or ideology. The polarization between self and other, with self based upon shared elements of identity, seems to be the problem. When self is thoroughly identified with all, conflict is extinguished. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:19** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Steven Neuberg:**  From our data, religious infusion – the extent to which religion is integrated throughout everyday life – is largely independent of a group’s power. That said, one could reasonably hypothesize that oppression would lead people to seek meaning in life, and religion certainly is one means of attaining meaning. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:20** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  One reason that low-power groups, including revolutionary and terrorist groups, often succeed against materially stronger foes (since 1950 on average victory against 10 times greater material power of states) is that these low power groups are motivated by heartfelt values that generate great, non-rational commitments that are independent or all out of proportion to likely prospects of success (consider that medical students and doctors and science students, esp engineers are far overrepresented as they display willingness to delay gratification). By contrast, state power relies on military and police that depend on standard material incentives, like pay and career moves. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:21** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Comment From Gabriel**  We saw worldwide violence declining, but do you think that the this trend will maintain itself with declining supplies of petroleum, water and arable land ? |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:23** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  Interpersonal violence has been declining since the Neolithic, but international group violence has been on the uptick, especially since the 16th century. There has been a lull since 1945 because of nukes, whether that will continue is far from sure or even likely. I don't think conventional wars over resources will decline all that much as long as the semi-anarchic world system of nation states endures. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:23** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Comment From Ben Tremblay**  FWIW individuals will quite willingly profess nonsense to maintain group membership. Cog-psych experiments in conformity (e.g. the relative length of lines, or color of shapes) show this. There is a willingness to abandon free-thinking. This is cult dynamics. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:24** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Comment From Ben Tremblay**  But "more inclusive" cuts against the group membership dynamic i.e. individuals often/usually create self-identity by contrasting their own group against others. Key here is self-esteem. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:25** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Comment From Ricardo**  Is war part of human nature? |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:26** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Steven Neuberg:**  The impetus towards warlike conflict is certainly a part of human’s social nature, which we also see in hunter-gatherer tribes and chimpanzees. Formal, planned aggressions of the sorts we see these days are facilitated by capacities and opportunities created by culture. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:27** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  Depends on what you mean by "war", if large-scale intergroup violence, then like religion it isn't innate but a product of our cognitive and social predispositions developed over the course of increasing large-scale and pervasive group competition. As I indicated in the postings:  There were two broad and overlapping epochs in human prehistory: one in which men primarily hunted animals, and another in which men primarily hunted men. The passage from one to the other may be the most important advance in human social evolution.   Humans cooperate to compete first against the elements of Nature, and then against each other. Our ancestors lived in a world inhabited by rivals far more numerous, stronger and savage than themselves. It was a competition humans very nearly lost. Human salvation lay in persistent reliance on a social band of kin and kith for collective strength, and a special form of primate wit that made it work as a winning team.   “The art of war,” Adam Smith wrote in The Wealth of Nations “is certainly the noblest of all arts.” The reason, he argues, is that it has allowed the progressive advance of commerce and civilization, bringing the greatest benefits of peace and prosperity to the most people for the longest time. People are most cooperative and creative when they fight others in war. “War alone brings up to their highest tension all human energies and imposes the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to make it,” exulted Benito Mussolini. This sentiment has been felt and proclaimed throughout history, regardless of whether war was to conquer or set people free.  War between human groups is as much or more a constant part of the evolution of society and civilization as peace. Except that war is better at defining who the group is, what its boundaries are, and what it stands for. War is also more compelling and effective in generating solidarity with something larger and more lasting than ourselves. War compresses history and dramatically changes its course.  There is urgency, excitement, ecstasy and altruistic exaltation in war, a mystic feeling of solidarity with something greater than oneself: a tribe, a nation, a movement, The Group. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:27** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Comment From Doug Studebaker**  Is there an attribution or reference for the statement: "...consider that medical students and doctors and science students, esp engineers are far over represented [in revolutions] as they display willingness to delay gratification." |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:29** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  Diego Gambetta on "Engineers of Jihad" (Oswford U), Peter Bergen onthe role of Medical studies in leadership of Jihad, Marc Sageman in "Understanding Terror Networks" (U Penn press) |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:29** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Comment From Jessica Wyndham**  What might be the ways in which your research could be applied to to transitional justice and reconciliation work? |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:32** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  We do peace negotiations in which we probe leaders about the values that motivate them as see to what extent these values resonate with the general public. We find that they understand their own motivations and those of their people, but systematically refuse to consider the moral perspective of the other side. For examples of what we try to do see the SCIENCE article (in 2007) by S. Atran, R. Axelrod and R. Davis on "Sacred Barriers to COnflict Resolution" where we are dealing with Middle East leaders and public. But we have faced similar probelms and possibilities in our discussions and briefings at COngress and the WHite House. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:32** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Comment From Ian**  American progressives advocate for more communal economic policies (a form of enhanced cooperation and altruism among members of society) and also for the preservation of cultural diversity. Given what Steven said about human's tendency to be less altruistic and more wary towards out-groups, is it the case that American progressives must necessarily choose which they value more - communal economic policies or cultural diversity - since it is untenable to demand optimal amounts of both? |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:32** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Steven Neuberg:**  The solution may lie in creating a superordinate, common ingroup. To the extent that surface distinctions between people can be minimized and fundamental similarities emphasized, the tension between the two values can be reduced. Of course, that’s easier said than done, although the experiences of many of America’s immigrant groups, which have been accepted and integrated into mainstream society, suggest that it’s possible. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:33** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Comment From Gabriel**  Do you think that economical reasons are often the true underlying factor behind armed conflicts ? |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:34** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  SOmetimes, but not in seemingly intractable conflicts. Unlike other creatures, humans form the groups to which they belong in abstract terms. Often they make their greatest exertions and sacrifices not in order to preserve their own lives or their family, but for the sake of an idea -- the conception they have formed of themselves, of "who we are." This is the "the privilege of absurdity to which no living creature is subject, but man only'" of which Thomas Hobbes wrote inLeviathan. In The Descent of Man, Charles Darwin deemed it "moral virtue," with which winning tribes are better endowed in history's spiraling competition for survival and dominance.  My research with colleagues, supported by the National Science Foundation and Department of Defense, indicates that the prospect of crippling economic burdens or huge numbers of deaths doesn't necessarily sway people from their positions on the moral virtue of going to war, or opting for revolution or resistance. In seemingly intractable situations of intergroup conflict, "sacred values" appear to operate as moral imperatives that defy the cost-benefit logic of realpolitik or the marketplace, and generate actions all out of proportion to their probable results, "because it is the right thing to do, whatever the consequences." |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:35** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Comment From Rafa R.**  Isn't a large portion of conflict research based upon experiements with university students? If so, what does this actually tell us about the nature of conflict? Isn't there a better way? |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:38** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  Work with college students is convenient, and perhaps serves as a control group, like a placebo. But for understanding deep seated conflicts of relatively little worth, I believe. We can get students to take almost any position on conflicts and their opposite depending on the framing of the issue. But in real situations of matters of life and death, there is much less willingness to compromise and a blindness to risk in some cases, whereas in lower scale conflicts real people respond more like students to proffered risks and rewards. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:38** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Steven Neuberg:**  Yes, much conflict research is based on experiments with university students. The focus of this work isn’t on establishing external validity, but rather establishing possible causal relations of hypothesized factors leading to conflict. Much research has also been performed with members from broader communities, both within the United States and abroad. Other work has tracked real conflicts throughout the world, both at the levels of large societies (e.g., nations, large ethnic groups), as well as small hunter-gatherer tribes. So although there’s much to learn, I think we’re making very good progress. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:39** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  We should get together on this, Steve, and find out what where the truth lies. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:39** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Steven Neuberg:**  Works for me. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:41** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Comment From mohamad**  What drives suicide bombers to kill people? |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:43** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  SO here’s my take after interviewing would be suicide bombers, failed suicide bombers, and their families, handlers and supporters from Indonesia to Morocco: There are many millions of people who express sympathy with Qaeda or other forms of violent political expression that support terrorism. There are, however, only some thousands who show willingness to actually commit violence. They almost invariably go on to violence in small groups of volunteers consisting mostly of friends and some kin within specific “scenes”: neighborhoods, schools (classes, dorms), workplaces, common leisure activities (soccer, mosque, barbershop café), and, increasingly, online chat rooms. The process of self selection into violence within these scenes is stimulated by a massive, media-driven political awakening in which jihad is represented as the only the way to permanently resolve glaring problems of global injustice. As Saudi Arabia’s General Khaled Alhumaidan said to me in Riyadh, “The front is in our neighborhoods but the battle is the silver screen. If it doesn’t make it to the six o’clock news, then Al Qaeda is not interested.” These young people constantly see and discuss among themselves images of war and injustice against “our people,” become morally outraged (especially if injustice resonates personally, more a problem with immigrants in Europe than America), and dream of a war for justice that gives their friendship a cause. Most human violence is committed by young people seeking adventure, dreams of glory, and esteem in the eyes of their peers. They want to be more than morning mist, to turn their personal passion into great acts of great magnitude. They kill and die for faith and friendship, which is the foundation of all social and political union, that is, all enduring human associations of non-kin. The most heroic cause in the world today is jihad, where anyone from anywhere can hope to make a mark against the most powerful country and army in the history of the world. In the long run, perhaps the most important counterterrorism measure of all is to provide alternative heroes and hopes that are more enticing and empowering than any moderating lessons or material offerings (jobs that help to relieve the terrible boredom and inactivity of immigrant youth in Europe and the underemployed throughout much of the Muslim world, will not alone offset the alluring stimulation of playing at war). It is also important to provide alternate local networks and chat rooms that speak to the inherent idealism, sense of risk and adventure, and need for peer approval that young people everywhere tend toward. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:43** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Elizabeth Culotta:**  As a follow to that question, does identification with ingroups help spur people to join terrorist groups? |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:46** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  Sure, but it works a bit like this: there's the dominant cultural view which does not satisfy. Then there's a countercultural movements. Militants stem from this protest movement, but are even angrier at their protest peers because of their perceived inaction. ANd so they break off, usually with a few other action oriented friends, move off into a parallel universe and come to believe that only they can save the culture's "true" values through spectacular violent actions that publicize and thus enlist others to their cause. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:46** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Comment From Michelle Briffa**  Colonizations of the past have led to present wars and conflicts. Do you think this true? |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:46** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Steven Neuberg:**  Some wars and conflicts are indeed based on circumstances created by colonization and similar injustices. It’s important to recognize, though, that intergroup conflict is more fundamentally about managing the threats that groups see other groups as posing, and about seeking opportunities potentially provided by the resources held by other groups. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:47** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Comment From Ulysses Forrester**  I am having trouble with Scott's use of the term "non-rational commitments". Would you disagree with the notion that morality and ethical values are actually a conventional mechanism for generation "rational" behaviour? |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:50** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  By non-rational i mean the technical sense of not based on likely risks and rewards, expected outcomes, calculations of material costs vs benefits. There are also other non-rational aspects such as violations of principles of transitivity in preference schedules (e.g., suicide bombers express willingness to delay a suicide bombing to help a sick father, but not save save their whole family, including the sick father, from certain death by retaliation) |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:50** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Comment From Bob**  Can you address the seriousness of fear-mongering by American press and politics in stoking the fires of war and conflict? |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:50** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Steven Neuberg:**  People rarely see threats directly, but rather infer them from cues. The media has great power to make some cues more salient than others, and given the media’s inclination to sensationalize, threat cues are more likely to be the focus of attention than security or opportunity cues. By highlighting threat cues, politicians and the media engage a natural psychology that creates fear prejudices and defense-minded inclinations towards hostility. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:54** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  The hysterical reaction to the 9/11 attacks was certainly unhelpful for our people and many others in the world, but it was a sort of political excitement (though, thankfully less so now). COnsider by contrast the fact that during the COld War the US and USSR had tens of thousands of nukes that could have annihilated much of our populations, whereas in their wildest dreams, even terrorists obtaining a "gun type" nuke (unlikely, but possible) would not threaten our nation. As Dick Garwin once said to me: A terrorist attack could never destroy our country, but our reaction it it might." |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:54** | **Comment From Shaun Keihn**  http://cdnmo.coveritlive.com/media/image/201205/php5Q8PL8eulogiani_reasonably_small.jpg  It could be said that much of what occurs in the international theater today is influenced by various nation-state investment in the Mid-east, both financial and social, and yet despite a variety of attempts to shape peace-building between entities li  http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:55** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  Sure, as Reagan mused to Gorbachev: If only we had a Martian invasion to bring us together and end war." But the trick is to find common values in a competitive world. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:55** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Steven Neuberg:**  This is no easy task. But as I mentioned above, the history of many immigrant groups who came to America and assimilated its basic customs, language, and values shows that superordinate common ingroups can be created. However, I suspect that it does require large degrees of assimilation because speaking different languages and holding different customs are natural signals to others of outgroup status, and thus possible threats. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:57** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Comment From Eric Appleby**  You two don't seem very cheery about the future. Do I take it you would expect a nuclear conflict in South Asia or the Middle East? |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:59** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  Political effervescence and division within many nations is approaching levels not experienced around the globe since the 1920s. Structural failures in economic management bring on such crises when they fail to maintain expectations for improvement in the standard of living among the middle class, the mainstay of democracies and principal source of political stability in the modern world. Such conditions open the way for revolutionary rethinking in politics, when the old moral order teeters and competing ideologies vie to replace it, as with the rise of Fascism and Communism in the 1930s.  One surprising fact is that among my students today, there is little awareness of the threat of nuclear war, which makes it all the more threatening |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:59** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Steven Neuberg:**  I have no particularly educated opinion on the likelihood of nuclear conflict. Whether I’m cheery or not about the future? My belief is that intergroup conflict will always be with us, but that we can learn to manage it better. One important thing to remember is just as groups pose tangible threats to one another, they also potentially offer great opportunities to one another. The key is highlighting and making more salient those opportunities. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **3:59** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Elizabeth Culotta:**  Our time is up, and I'm sorry we couldn't answer every question. Thanks to our expert guests and to all our readers. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **3:59** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Scott Atran:**  Thanks friends |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |
| **4:00** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Steven Neuberg:**  Thanks to all; this has been fun. |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |

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| **4:00** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | **Elizabeth Culotta:**  Join us next week for a chat on nanomedicine. How is the science of the tiny revolutionizing medicine? |   http://cdnsl.coveritlive.com/templates/coveritlive/images/icons/fb_share2.png |