Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution Revisited: A Micro Study

Ronald GARDNER & William BARCELLA

Abstract. *Subsequent to military conflict between two countries, scholars advocate conflict resolution be pursued. This qualitative research measures laypersons' perceptions of conflict resolution across Western and Arab/Muslim cultures. Querying a sample of citizens from Iraq and the United States, we measure respondents' receptiveness to conflict resolution in the context of the United States and Iraq relations. We simultaneously qualify which principles and factors they determine acceptable to induce conflict resolution. Research findings demonstrate that respondents across our samples believe conflict resolution in this instance is necessary. Respondents also predominantly embrace similar principles and factors to advance a resolution process. Our theoretical approach and survey findings challenge contemporary conflict resolution comparative discourse between Arab/Muslim and Western approaches, demonstrating that there is a quantifiable degree of convergence that would enable a process to be pursued.*

Key words: *cross-cultural survey, conflict resolution.*

Introduction

The United States and Iraq have been engaged in a violent conflict relationship that has lasted for more than two decades. Since 1990, there has been an exchange of structural and physical violence during the 1991 Persian Gulf War, provoked by Saddam Hussein's annexation of Kuwait. The war was followed by international sanctioning and containment of Iraq between 1991 and 2003. Saddam Hussein's failure to comply with international weapons inspections, and George W. Bush's act of demonization, among other reasons, led to the invasion and occupation of Iraq between 2003 and 2011. Nearly simultaneously, the United States has been criticized for the maltreat-

Ronald GARDNER
  Ph.D. student,
  Peace and Conflict Studies at
  Universitat Jaume I in Castellón,
  Spain.
  E-mail: rlgardne@uno.

William BARCELLA
  Ph.D.,
  Department of Statistical Science at
  University College London, UK

ment of Arab/Muslims in places like Guantánamo Bay or Abu Ghraib, and it continues to project military force and political influence in the Middle East. The combination of this violent interaction understandably gives the impression that the US, and Muslims and Arabs are mutually engaged in an existential struggle. Their aggregated manifestation has consequently produced animosity and grievances at the societal level among Arab/Muslims in general, and Iraqis in particular. While recommending that conflict resolution be pursued between Westerners and Arab/Muslims, scholars have not directly called for conflict resolution between Iraq and the United States. This article breaks the silence while challenging the accepted theoretical approach and findings of contemporary comparative conflict resolution discourse through our unique methodological approach.

Concerning the latter, we are able to counter theoretical suppositions made by Arab/Muslim and Western conflict resolution scholars in the past by transferring discourse of "Arab/Muslim" and "Western" understanding of conflict resolution from the macro level to the micro level. In our opinion, the macro approach spearheaded by scholars is inappropriate because it amalgamates diverse and complex theory and practices, and thereafter makes generalizations to about "Arab/Muslim" or "Western" opinion and approaches. Painting sentiment with such broad strokes is not always representative of political, cultural, and historical nuances that impact on societal perceptions and expectations, conflict particularities and the factors deemed acceptable for resolving or transforming a given conflict. To measure the impact of broad generalizations on theory, we directly queried a sample of respondents from Iraq and the United States to challenge basic assumptions found in contemporary Arab/Muslim and Western literature. Utilizing a convenience sample of laypersons, we are able to extricate micro level conceptualizations, and comparatively analyze how a group of cross-cultural respondents conceptualize interstate conflict resolution between Iraq and the United States and believe conflict resolution could be induced.

Background

Scholars argue that both individuals and collectives subjected to long-term violent conflict are increasingly likely to construct negative opinions of those deemed responsible for the wrongdoing, harms and humiliation endured (Bar-Tal, 2000; Rosoux, 2009). Paraphrasing Galtung's (2007, 16) assessment of deconstructive relational patterns, he argues that conflict creates frustration, frustration leads to polarization; polarization can produce existential worldviews, existential perceptions can manifest in violent behavior, and violent interaction produces trauma and aspirations for revenge. As these processes evolve, deconstructive perceptions and behavior, generally rooted in fear and distrust, proliferate (Galtung, 2007; Parent, 2012).

These deconstructive components are by products of prolonged exposure to conflict, and their perpetuation can deepen negative perceptions of the "other" (Bar-Tal, 2000; Parent, 2012; Rifkind & Picco, 2014). Over time, said elements become incorporated

into the identity of those involved, and can be transferred vertically and horizontally throughout society (Rifkind & Picco, 2014). They are equally subject to expression between the societies engaged in the conflict. In this manner, a conflict perpetuates itself, rooting in the psyche and behavior of those engaged, creating relational impasses and intractability. At its extreme, adversaries comparatively define themselves as direct opposites, de-humanizing the "other" and identifying them as an existential threat (Funk & Said, 2004; Galtung, 2007; Kelman, 2004; Parent, 2012). When this maximum level is obtained, violence becomes an acceptable and justified response (Kelman, 2004). To counteract these trends, conflict resolution is advocated to resolve or transform the quality of the relationship. For the purposes of this essay, we apply a broad understanding of conflict resolution, adhering to Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall's (2011: 10) conceptualization of the process on a continuum which ranges from "'conflict settlement' at one end of the spectrum and 'conflict transformation' at the other."

This progression of conflict evolution just outlined is observable in the evolution of contemporary US-Iraq relations. The long-term deconstructive relationship endured by these two countries has produced protracted violence and animosity across referents. Distrust in the United States is high in Iraq (Opinion Research Business, 2007), while the United States equally expresses predominantly negative opinions of Iraq for the past two decades (Gallup, 2014). We therefore recommend that the US and Iraq embark on a campaign of conflict resolution to alter the years of mistrust and animosity that has formed in the public spheres. Conflict resolution is recognized as beneficial for counteracting the deconstructing negative psychological, behavior, and social effects within a society, thereby breaking the cycle of violence and preventing conflict continuation or escalation (Bar-Tal, 2000; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall, 2011; Parent, 2012; Worthington, 2006). However, our recommendation for conflict resolution to be pursued in this context presents two questions. First, are citizens in both countries supportive of such a program? We hypothesize they are, and test this using survey research. Second, how compatible is the conceptualization of conflict resolution in this case, or which principles and factors are deemed acceptable across the two cultures? The latter question is theoretically relevant because Arab/Muslim scholars criticize Western conflict resolution principles and practices are inapplicable and unacceptable to Arab/Muslims (Al-Ramahi, 2008; Irani, 1999). Our survey of laypersons' opinion of principles and tools permits us to test this scholarly assumption, while equally providing insight into which principles and factors laypersons determine applicable.

Highlighting cultural incompatibility

Similar to their Western counterparts, Arab/Muslim scholars recognize the importance of resolving conflictual relationships at all levels (Irani, 1999; Pely, 2009). The process is theorized necessary because Arab/Muslim understanding of conflict presumes that past injuries produce grievances that can "fester," sequentially engendering conflict con-

tinuation or escalation (Irani, 1999, 11). While Western scholars posit parallel theory, a reading of Arab/Muslim literature suggests that cultural divergences emerge thereafter. A cursory reading, in fact, underscores that Arab/Muslim scholars believe that cultural approaches thereafter irreconcilably diverge. According to this assumption, cultural particularities such as communal identity, collective responsibility, in addition to the influence of Islam, as well as other cultural particularities, radically change the way that conflict resolution is conceptualized and practiced in the Arab/Muslim culture (Al-Ramahi, 2008; Irani & Funk, 2000; Marsella, 2005; Safa, 2007). As a consequence of these real or hypothetical divergences, the principles and factors of resolving conflict are frequently deemed incompatible. For instance, Irani (1999) insists that cultural divergences in approaches include the level at which conflict is resolved, the importance of religion to the process, and expected outcomes.

Briefly addressing these three issues, scholars agree: that Arab/Muslim culture manages or resolves conflict primarily at the community level; Islam is inextricably linked to the process, and; not all conflicts are perceived as resolvable (Al-Ramahi, 2008; Irani, 1999). Although Arab/Muslim scholars insist that these theories are absent in Western theory, their hypotheses are based on a narrow interpretation of a vast array of Western conflict resolution literature. Most notably, the spiritual and social-psychological approaches found in Western literature are seldom referenced. Consequently, influential Western theory proposed by John Paul Lederach, among others, is marginalized or outright omitted. The theoretical importance of this marginalization cannot be overemphasized as the spiritual and social-psychological approaches have noteworthy parallels with the Arab/Muslim approach.

For instance, both the social-psychological and spiritual approaches advocate community/societal involvement in conflict resolution (Kelman, 2004; Lederach, 1995). Equally relevant, the spiritual approach is accommodative of religious influence, embracing, for example, principles such as forgiveness and healing at all levels of conflict (Lederach, 1995; Worthington, 2006). Finally, not all Western scholars believe that a conflict can be resolved (Rosoux, 2009). Hence, the impact of three of the purported cultural divergences noted by Arab/Muslim scholars' critiques of Western theory and practice is reduced. Albeit, according to their narrow interpretation of Western theory, Arab/Muslim scholars hitherto have referred to Western conflict resolution principles and techniques as excessively individualistic, inapplicable, and undesirable in the context of Arab/Muslim customs and traditions (Irani & Funk, 2000; Marsella, 2005; Safa, 2007). While this assumption might be legitimate at the community level, we do not think that it impacts on conceptualizations of conflict resolution at the interstate level. To test macro level theoretical assumptions as articulated in Arab/Muslim and Western conflict resolution literature, we directly queried a sample of laypersons at the micro level. Utilizing this methodology, it is possible to comparatively analyze findings across our cultures through our samples and to compare laypersons' opinion with scholarly theory.

Methodology

Our research of a convenience sample of US and Iraqi respondents was guided by three working hypotheses. The first hypothesis states that a majority of respondents will support conflict resolution between the United States and Iraq following decades of violent conflict between the two countries. Hypothesis two states that respondents across our sample will find acceptable most of the sixteen principles presented. Finally, Hypothesis three states that a majority of respondents will support the use of thirteen conflict resolution factors to improve US-Iraq relations. Attention now turns to explaining our survey methodology.

Our questionnaire was administered online between September 2013 and December 2013. A convenience sample of 109 adult citizens from the US and Iraq completed the survey. Concerning the demographic composition of our research samples, the US sample contains 58 participants, of whom 21 are male (36%) and 37 are female (64%). Its ethnic composition includes: 69% Caucasian (n = 40); 10% African-American (n = 6); 7% Native American (n = 4); 4% Hispanic (n = 2); and 10% claim multiracial or indicated no distinction (n = 6). Age distribution of the US sample comprises of: 8 respondents between the ages of 18-25 (14%); 13 between 26 and 35 (22%); 21 between 36 and 45 (36%); 3 between 46 and 55 (5%); 12 between 56 and 65 (21%); and one between 66 and 75 (2%).

Comparatively, our Iraqi sample contains 51 adults. Of those, 27 are refugees from Iraq currently residing in Italy. In addition, the sample includes citizens from Iraq living, studying and working in Europe (n = 18) and the United States (n = 1) solicited through social networking. Finally, 4 citizens living in Iraq participated in the research and one respondent failed to specify his location. Combined, this sample contains 36 male respondents (70.5 %) and 15 female (29.5 %). Ethnically, the sample includes: 51% Arab (n = 26); 45% Kurd (n = 23); 2% Assyrian (n = 1); and 2% claim no affiliation (n = 1). In terms of age, our Iraq sample contains: 21% between the ages of 18-25 (n = 11); 63% between 26-35 (n = 32); 14% between 36-45 (n = 7); and 2% between 46-55 (n = 1).

The religious affiliations of both samples are distributed in the following manner. The US sample of respondents is predominantly (64%) Christian (n = 37); followed by 26% who claim no affiliation (n = 15); 5% which claim an amalgamation of faiths (n = 3); 2% Jewish (n = 1); and 3% unspecified (n = 2). By comparison, respondents from Iraq associate themselves in the following manner: 39% of participants affiliate themselves with Shi'a Islam (n = 20); 19% with Sunni Islam (n = 10); 18% with Sufi Islam (n = 9); 18% claim no religious affiliation (n = 9); and 6% with Christianity (n = 3).

Finally, we requested the highest completed level of education from our respondents. On the one hand, fourteen percent of the US sample has a high school degree (n = 8); 9% have an associate's degree (n = 1); 34% have a Bachelor degree (n = 19); 33% have a Master (n = 19); 9% have a doctorate (n = 1); and 2% an M.D. (n = 1). On the other

hand, 27% of the respondents in our Iraqi sample completed middle school (n = 14); 31% have a high school diploma (n = 16); 4% a technical degree (n = 2); 20% have a Master (n = 10); 12% a Bachelor (n = 6); and 6% a doctorate (n = 3). Combined, both population samples are well educated.

Following closure of the survey, the data was transferred and analyzed using R programming language (http://www.r-project.org). Due to the sample's small size the data could only be processed and analyzed descriptively. Since the data was treated as ordinal, non-parametric tests were utilized to measure reliability (Gadermann, Guhn & Zumbo, 2012). First, Cronbachs Alpha, which is the most widely utilized test to measure internal reliability, based upon the covariance (Revelle, 2013). Next, standardized alpha, whose measurement is based upon correlations, was utilized (Mehra, 2003; Revelle, 2013). We will introduce the reliability of our data sets as we introduce our research findings.

Openness to Conflict Resolution

Founded upon the hypothesis that conflict resolution should be pursued between the United States and Iraq subsequent to the 2003 war and occupation, our survey first queried respondents about the necessity of conflict resolution in this context. Hypothesis 1 states that subsequent to decades of deconstructive and violent relations between the United States and Iraq, exemplified by the 2003 Iraq War, a majority of respondents from our convenience sample will agree that conflict resolution is necessary to improve contemporary US-Iraq relations. Our hypothesis is confirmed with a reliability of 0.76 with both tests. When questioned if respondents believe that the Iraq and US governments should reconcile their relationship, 79% of US (n = 46) and 63% of those from the Iraq sample (n = 32) agree this is necessary. Hence, a clear majority of respondents from both our convenience samples advocates conflict resolution in this context. This finding confirms Hypothesis one.

Subsequent to qualifying general openness to the program, we transitioned our attention to allowing respondents to rate principles and factors associated with this objective. In this manner, we can qualify similarities and divergences across our samples.

Perceptions of Principles

Next, we measure laypersons' perceptions of principles that Arab/Muslim or Western scholars emphasize in the literature. We hypothesize that respondents will embrace these same principles across cultures. Hypothesis 2, therefore, states that a majority of respondents from our samples will embrace similar principles when conceptualizing conflict resolution. Reliability of the question set regarding 16 conflict resolution principles is 0.85 with both Cronbach's raw and standardized Alpha.

To begin our analysis, we recall that scholars assert that Arab/Muslim societies prefer the principle of religion as a component of conflict resolution while the West minimizes

it (Gulam, 2003; Irani, 1999). As expected, when conceptualizing conflict resolution in general, a majority of US (57%) respondents (n = 33) rejects the influence of religion. Comparatively, the Iraq sample is polarized with 51% of respondents (n = 26) stating that religious values should not guide conflict resolution. Similarly, when rating religious values as a principle of conflict resolution, a minority of US respondents (43%) supports its influence (n = 25). In fact, 38% of our US sample (n = 22) opposes the principle of religion in conflict resolution and 19% are undecided (n = 11). By comparison, 65% of respondents from Iraq believe that religion should be a fundamental principle of conflict resolution (n = 33), with 23% opposed (n = 12) and 12% undecided (n = 6). These findings demonstrate that our Iraq sample is more inclined to support the principle of religion in conflict resolution, while the US sample rejects it as Irani (1999) surmises.

The second principle qualified is forgiveness. This principle was tested due to the dissension it produces in Western literature, and in order to introduce laypersons' opinion into the discourse. Recalling the critiques proffered by Western scholars, forgiveness is suggested to be a religiously laden concept (Bar-On, 2005) that invokes a sense of idealism (Rosoux, 2009) and/or a "forgive and forget" attitude (Bloomfield, 2006, 23-25; Rothfield, 2008, 559). However, our US sample does not appear to be adverse to forgiveness at the interstate level, contrary to the theory offered by Bloomfield (2006) and others (Lerche, 2000; Rothfield, 2008). Instead, a majority of respondents from the US (72%, n = 42) agrees that showing forgiveness is essential to resolving a conflict. Their endorsement suggests that some Western scholars, such as Bloomfield (2006), may be misrepresenting laypersons' openness to forgiveness and, consequently, may be devaluing the relative utility of this principle. We concluded that our US sample advocates forgiveness as a principle and practice of conflict resolution, similar to Western scholars including John Paul Lederach (1995) and others (Avruch, 2010; Parent, 2012; Wohl & Branscombe, 2009; Worthington, 2006).

By comparison, 80% of the Iraq sample (n = 41) supports forgiveness. The prioritization of this principle among our Iraqi sample confirms Arab/Muslim scholars' theory that forgiveness is an essential component of conflict resolution in the Arab/Muslim context (Abu-Nimer, 2000; Ashki, 2006; Soliman, 2009). Affirming our collective findings on forgiveness denoted hitherto, when forgiveness is rated as a principle of conflict resolution, eighty-one percent of US participants (n = 47) advocate its use. Comparatively, an overwhelming majority (98%) of respondents from Iraq (n = 50) embraces the principle. Combined, our findings indicate that a clear majority of our US and Iraqi samples embraces forgiveness as a component of conflict resolution.

The next principle analyzed was honor. Arab/Muslim societies place a significant amount of weight on individual and family honor as it impacts individual and collective identity and social status (Gellman & Vuinovich, 2008; Irani, 1999; Pely, 2009). According to our survey findings, honor is an esteemed principle in terms of conflict resolution

across cultures. Combined, 84% of participants from the US (n = 49) and 88% from Iraq (n = 45) favor the principle. Interestingly, nearly thirty-eight percent of US respondents (n = 22) give honor the highest ranking on the Likert scale versus twenty-three percent of those from Iraq (n = 12). Overall both samples largely support its application.

Dignity (Gellman & Vuinovich, 2008; Pely, 2009) and respect (Irani, 1999) are also venerated principles in Arab/Muslim conflict resolution literature, and were like-wise included in the survey. Our findings indicate that 90% of participants from Iraq (n = 46) and 86% of US respondents (n = 50) agree that dignity is a valuable principle, with response distribution of the Iraq sample (39%, n = 20) weighing more favorably than the US (29%, n = 17) in absolute terms. Concerning the principle of respect, majorities from both sample populations agree that respect is crucial to conflict resolution. An overwhelming 98% of the US (n = 57), compared to 100% of the Iraq sample (n = 51), positively rate the principle, with more than fifty percent from each sample group qualifying respect as absolutely imperative. Thus, both samples overwhelmingly support respect and dignity as principles of conflict resolution.

Thereafter, we explored the principles of satisfaction of interests and needs of stake-holders as advocated by Western scholars (Adelman, 2005; Briggs, 2003; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall, 2011; Reimann, 2004). It should be recalled that Arab/Muslim scholars express diverse views toward these principles, as they must be considered in relation to Islamic teachings and norms. On the one hand, a clear majority of respondents from our US (78%, n = 45) and Iraq samples (86%, n = 44) asserts that satisfaction of the "interests" of those involved in a conflict is indispensable for resolution. On the other hand, 92% of respondents from Iraq (n = 49) prioritize satisfaction of stakeholders' "needs" versus 84% of US participants (n = 47). Hence, clear majorities across both sample populations support the satisfaction of stakeholders' interests and needs when resolving a conflict, with our Iraq sample expressing more support than our US sample.

Then, Arab/Muslim (Abu-Nimer, 2000; Ashki, 2006; Bekdash, 2009) and Western (Anderlini, Conway & Kays, 2004; Kriesberg, 2004; Rouhana, 2004) scholars prioritize the principle of justice. Unsurprisingly, a clear majority from both samples favors the principle of justice in conflict resolution. There are, however, notable discrepancies across cultures. Foremost, 88% of the U.S. respondents (n = 51) favor the pursuit of justice compared to a plurality (96%) of those from our Iraqi sample (n = 49). There is also a notable distribution difference, with forty-five percent of those from Iraq (n = 23) making justice an absolute priority versus twenty-seven percent among respondents from the United States (n = 16). Amalgamated, our data illustrates that our Iraqi sample is more inclined to embrace justice than our US sample, although a majority from both samples support the principle.

Subsequently, perceptions of truth as a principle were qualified. Truth, or the establishment of an objective, detailed account of what has occurred in the past, is hypothesized

as essential to conflict resolution according to both Arab/Muslim (Abu-Nimer, 2000; Ashki, 2006; Bekdash, 2009; Said & Funk, 2001) and Western scholars (Adelman, 2005; Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004; Kelman, 2004; Rosoux, 2009). Our research confirms this hypothesis. A plurality of respondents from Iraq (96%, n = 49) prioritizes the principle of truth when resolving conflict. By comparison, a clear majority of US respondents (88%, n = 51) equally favors the inclusion of the principle. Both samples, therefore, embrace truth as a principle, while our Iraq sample expresses an increased degree of support.

Similarly, we measured respondent perceptions of accountability when resolving conflict. We found overwhelming majorities across cultures advocate this principle, with 95% of participants from the US (n = 55) and 96% from Iraq (n = 49) favoring accountability. However, our Iraq sample ranks this principle higher than their US counterparts, with forty-three percent of respondents from Iraq (n = 22) ranking accountability as an absolute priority versus thirty-two percent of respondents from the US sample (n = 19). Nevertheless, a clear plurality of respondents from both samples embraces accountability in conflict resolution.

The next principle explored was the protection of individual rights, which Abu-Nimer (2000) suggests is essential to Arab/Muslim conceptualizations and practices of conflict resolution. Our data illustrates that absolute majorities from both countries positively rate the protection of individual rights. Ninety-five percent of participants from the US (n = 55) and 100% from Iraq (n = 51) claim that the protection of stakeholders' individual rights should be prioritized when resolving conflict. Hence, this principle is likewise shared across cultures.

The most noteworthy difference in perceptions of principles qualified between our US and Iraq samples revolve around the importance of compensation extended to those who have suffered during a conflict. Although compensation or restitution is a recognized principle and factor of conflict resolution in both Arab/Muslim (Abu-Nimer, 2000; Bekdash, 2009) and the Western theory and practice (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004; Kriesberg, 2004; Rosoux, 2009), there is a noteworthy discrepancy between how our respondents rate this practice. While a plurality (94%) of participants from Iraq (n = 48) support the payment of reparations, only 67% of US respondents (n = 39) express the same opinion. US respondents are not only less supportive of the factor, 22% reject the principle (n = 13) compared to two participants from our Iraqi sample (4%). Thus, although a majority from both samples approves the principle of restitution, our Iraq sample is more inclined to embrace the principle compared to our US sample.

Thereafter, empowerment was explored. Empowerment is a principle embraced by Arab/Muslim (Abu-Nimer, 2000) and Western (Lederach, 1995; Reimann, 2004) scholars, and support for it was measured using multiple scenarios. First, respondents were asked whether the opinion of those involved in a conflict should be consulted when constructing conflict resolution between two countries. A plurality of participants from

Iraq (98%, n = 50) agrees that getting the opinion of those involved is crucial when resolving conflict. Comparatively, 86% of US respondents (n = 50) share this sentiment. Next, respondents were queried about the importance of listening to the other. Once again, a plurality from both samples agrees on the importance of listening, with 97% of US (n = 56) and 96% of our Iraq sample (n = 49) expressing support.

Linked to the above, respondents were then asked if practices acceptable to affected stakeholders should be incorporated into conflict resolution. Consultation to identify factors utilized in conflict resolution is advocated by Western scholars such as Stover, Megally and Mufti (2005). Our data show a majority of US participants (93%, n = 54) agrees conflict resolution practices should be acceptable to affected stakeholders. By comparison, 86% of respondents from Iraq (n = 44) believe practices should be mutually acceptable. Therefore, we found that our samples think citizens should be consulted on conflict resolution, they felt that listening to the other was important and that practices utilized to resolve a conflict should be mutually acceptable.

Finally, we explored the principle of mutual benefit. Although Arab/Muslim culture is suggested to minimize the importance of mutual benefit *vis-à-vis* their prioritization of collective interests during the resolution of a conflict (Irani, 1999; Irani & Funk, 2000; Said & Funk, 2001), this research measured respondent openness to mutual benefit. Our data illustrate that 88% of US (n = 51) and 82% of respondents from Iraq (n = 42) perceive mutual benefit as an essential principle of conflict resolution at this level. Thus, both our samples advocate mutually beneficial resolutions.

Table 1. Respondent Support for Principles in General

Principle	U.S. sample		Iraqi sample	
honor	84%	✓	88%	✓
dignity	86%	✓	90%	✓
respect	98%	✓	100%	✓
satisfaction of interests	78%	✓	86%	✓
satisfaction of the needs	84%	✓	92%	✓
protection of individual rights	95%	✓	100%	✓
appropriate compensation	67%	✓	94%	✓
consultation (getting opinions)	86%	✓	98%	✓
listening to the "other"	97%	✓	96%	✓
mutual benefit	88%	✓	82%	✓
acceptable practices	93%	✓	86%	✓
justice	88%	✓	96%	✓
truth	88%	✓	96%	✓
accountability	95%	✓	96%	✓
forgiveness	81%	✓	98%	✓
religion	43%	✗	65%	✓

Table 1 provides the percentage of respondents from our survey who supported conflict resolution principles in general. Check marks indicate that a majority of respondents in the sample supported the principle in question.

Combined, our survey of principles demonstrates that most respondents in the US and Iraq samples esteem similar principles. Only the principle of religion is rejected by a majority of US respondents. See Table 1 for a summary of our research findings according to the percentage of support each population expressed for conflict resolution principles. These findings confirm Hypothesis 2, demonstrating that a majority of US and Iraqi respondents embraces (similar) conflict resolution principles.

Perceptions of Thirteen Factors in Context

Hypothesis 3 projects a majority of research participants from our US and Iraqi samples will agree on conflict resolution factors to transform the quality of US-Iraq relations. Reliability of the question set is 0.90 with Cronbach's Alpha raw and standardized alpha. This is a high rate of reliability.

When asked if US politicians should take Iraqi public opinion into consideration when drafting US-Iraq policy, 83% of US (n = 48) and 76% of respondents from Iraq (n = 39) agree such consultation should take place. More specifically, 35% of our Iraqi sample (n = 18) express that politicians should "definitely" take opinions into consideration when drafting US policy, compared to 52% of US respondents (n = 30) holding the same opinion. This finding reiterates one of the lessons learned from US government analysis of occupied Iraq, namely that the host population should be engaged to determine their needs and desires (Bowen, 2013).

Next, focus was placed on structural factors of conflict resolution in context. We found that pluralities support continued economic cooperation between the United States and Iraq. 86% of our Iraq (n = 44) and 81% of our US sample (n = 47) advocate the tool. This finding was expected as majorities in Iraq had previously stated that the US should provide financial resources to reconstruct Iraq in the aftermath of the 2003 war (ABC News, 2008; Iraq Centre for Research and Strategic Studies, 2006). Similarly, increased political cooperation is advocated by a clear majority of citizens from Iraq (84%, n = 43) and the US (88%, n = 51). Combined, clear majorities from our samples embrace economic and political cooperation between the United States and Iraq as means of altering their relationship.

In addition, respondents widely support security cooperation. Seventy-two percent of US respondents (n = 42) support security cooperation, which is slightly less than our Iraq sample (84%, n = 43). While a clear majority of US respondents advocate security cooperation with Iraq, this means is less appealing to US respondents by comparison. Support among the Iraq sample was expected as ABC News (2008, 5) found that 76% of respondents from Iraq thought that the United States should train and equip the Iraqi Security Forces. Moreover, a majority of Iraqi respondents had expressed interest in United States assisting Iraq with national security against neighboring countries such as Turkey and Iran (ABC News, 2008).

Thereafter, the survey measured respondents' openness to retributive justice mechanisms. Seventy-eight percent of respondents from Iraq (n = 40) support an international tribunal to investigate wrongdoing committed during the 2003 War in Iraq. Of those, 37% of participants from Iraq (n = 19) "definitely" support an international tribunal compared to 41% (n = 21) who claim they would "probably" support such an inquiry. A total of 20% of the Iraq sample is undecided about the relative utility of an international tribunal. By comparison, sixty-nine percent of all US respondents (n = 40) support an international tribunal in this instance. Thirty-eight percent (n = 22) of our US sample proclaims they would "definitely" support such a tribunal, and thirty-one percent (n = 18) claim they would "probably" be supportive. Nevertheless, twenty-four percent of US respondents (n = 14) reject this means in context compared to only two percent of those from Iraq (n = 1). Amalgamated, a clear majority from our samples supports an international tribunal as a means of transforming US-Iraq relations; although our US sample is less likely to support it and nearly one-quarter reject international tribunals in context.

Similarly, respondents were queried about government inquiries into the 2003 War. These were incorporated to determine the potential value of these types of inquires by comparison to other forms of determining the truth (such as trials or truth commissions). On the one hand, a US government inquiry into the 2003 US-Iraq War is supported by 62% of US respondents (n = 36) compared to 49% from our Iraq sample (n = 25). Among these, forty percent of US respondents (n = 23) "definitely" support a US government inquiry compared to eighteen percent of those from Iraq (n = 9). These figures indicate that a majority of US respondents supports a US government inquiry while the Iraq sample is generally polarized on the issue. Concerning the latter, twenty-five percent of our Iraq sample (n = 13) are undecided on the utility of inquiries. While the survey could not qualify the source of reluctance and indecision, we hypothesize that our Iraq sample distrusts the US government to objectively conduct an inquiry.

Reversely, respondents were asked if they would support a Government of Iraq inquiry into the 2003 war. In this instance, our US participants (66%, n = 38) express slightly less support for an Iraq inquiry into the war versus 78% of participants from Iraq (n = 40). Together, our data indicate that clear majorities from both populations support the use of an Iraqi inquiry, but our Iraq population expresses more support. It can also be surmised that our Iraq sample has more faith in a GOI inquiry than one conducted by the United States government.

Subsequently, attention turned to qualifying support for restorative justice mechanisms in context. The data shows there are notable discrepancies across our population samples. Firstly, a plurality (96%, n = 49) of participants from Iraq supports a truth commission compared to 69% of US respondents (n = 40). The nearly unanimous support expressed by the Iraqi sample dwarfs that expressed by the US sample. An analogous

discrepancy is found in the appropriateness of a US apology for its actions in Iraq. Ninety percent of those in our Iraq sample (n = 46) favor the use of an apology compared to only fifty percent of US respondents (n = 29). In this case, a clear majority of respondents from Iraq supports an apology while the US sample is polarized on the mechanism in context. Finally, nearly twice as many respondents from Iraq (96%, n = 49) favor the payment of reparations by the US, compared to 53% of their US counterparts (n = 31). It should be recalled that US participants gave these three means marginally positive rating in general terms. Hence, clear majorities from our Iraqi sample support these three means in context, while US respondents clearly embrace a truth commission, but support is polarized on reparations and apology.

The next mechanism examined was third party intervention. Two questions were asked concerning mediation. Firstly, when queried if respondents would support conflict resolution if a third party proposed it, 69% from the US (n = 40), and 57% from Iraq (n = 29), assert that they would. Among those, twenty-four percent of US participants (n = 14) say they would "definitely" support conflict resolution if a third party proposed it versus eighteen percent of those from Iraq (n = 9). However, fourteen percent of US (n = 8) and sixteen percent of respondents from Iraq (n = 8) state that they would not support conflict resolution if proposed by a third party. Nonetheless, a majority of respondents from both countries would support conflict resolution if proposed by a third party. Secondly, respondents were asked to rate third party intervention in the context of contemporary US-Iraq relations. A slight majority from our Iraq (69%, n = 35) and the US samples (69%, n = 40) rate third party involvement positively. Hence, both sample populations similarly embrace this mechanism in context.

Table 2. Respondent Support for Factors in Context

Factors in context	U.S. sample		Iraqi sample	
a U.S. inquiry	62%	✓	49%	✗
consultation with Iraqis	83%	✓	76%	✓
cultural exchanges	81%	✓	96%	✓
international tribunal	67%	✓	92%	✓
a U.S. apology	50%	✗	90%	✓
security cooperation	72%	✓	84%	✓
an Iraq inquiry	66%	✓	78%	✓
truth commission	69%	✓	96%	✓
economic cooperation	81%	✓	86%	✓
third party intervention	69%	✓	69%	✓
positive media coverage	81%	✓	84%	✓
political cooperation	88%	✓	84%	✓
reparations	53%	✓	96%	✓

Table 2 provides the percentage of respondents from our survey who supported conflict resolution factors in the context of contemporary US-Iraq relations. Check marks indicate that a majority of respondents in a given sample supported the factor in question.

Finally, tools for advancing cultural awareness were incorporated into the survey to measure respondent rating of their utility for altering US-Iraq relations. On the one hand, clear majorities advocate positive media coverage. Eighty-four percent of the Iraqi sample (n = 43), and eighty-one percent of US participants (n = 47), perceive positive media coverage as beneficial for transforming US-Iraq relations. Thirty-three percent of US respondents (n = 19) give this the highest priority versus 19% of those from Iraq (n = 10). On the other hand, clear majorities express openness to cultural exchanges. An overwhelming 96% of participants from Iraq (n = 49) approve cultural exchanges compared to 81% of those from the US (n = 47). Both positive media coverage and cultural exchanges are, therefore, supported by our US and Iraq samples.

Combining our findings demonstrate that both samples approve a plurality of the conflict resolution tools introduced in this section in the context of contemporary US-Iraq relations. See Table 2 for a summary of the percentage of respondents who supported these conflict resolution practices to improve contemporary US-Iraq relations. Our Iraqi sample only rejected a US government inquiry, while our US samples rejected a US apology and narrowly approved the US payment of reparations. In 9 of 13 instances, the sample from Iraq views these conflict resolution mechanisms more favorably in context than their US counterparts. Accordingly, Hypothesis 3 is confirmed as a majority of our research participants agrees on conflict resolution to transform the quality of US-Iraq relations.

Conclusion

Subsequent to decades of conflict between the United States and Iraq, we wanted to determine if citizens of both countries were open to bilateral conflict resolution and how they conceptualized said process. Our research was guided by three working hypotheses: that stated respondents would be open to conflict resolution between the United States and Iraq; that principles would largely converge; and that mechanisms for pursuing such a process would largely converge.

Supporting hypotheses one, our survey of laypersons finds that a clear majority of respondents from our Iraq and US samples believe that conflict resolution should be pursued between Iraq and the United States. Upon confirmation of Hypothesis one, we qualified which principles and practices respondents deemed relevant for resolving conflict at the interstate level. Our data indicate that clear majorities from both samples embrace 15 of the 16 conflict resolution principles analyzed. Two conclusions can be deduced from this data. On the one hand, despite the frequent assertion that Western and Arab/Muslim conceptualizations of conflict resolution diverge, we find that there is notable convergence of principles embraced across our US and Iraqi samples when interstate resolution is considered. Cross-culturally embraced principles include justice, truth and honor, which are widely accepted among our respondents.

On the other hand, our US sample rejects the inclusion of the principle of religion. This finding supports Arab/Muslim theory that Westerners reject religion as a principle of conflict resolution. However, forgiveness and truth, principles frequently associated with religion, were widely embraced by our US sample. We conclude that direct reference to religious dogma is rejected by our US sample, while related principles are deemed acceptable. Our recommendation would be that emphasis be placed on associated principles as opposed to

Lastly, we queried respondent receptiveness to thirteen conflict resolution tools for resolving contemporary US-Iraq relations. Of those introduced, each sample rejects one. The US respondents do not support an apology, and respondents from Iraq do not endorse a US government inquiry into the 2003 war. Our US sample was also nearly polarized on the issue of payment of reparations. However, at least 65% of US respondents support each of the remaining twelve, compared to at least 75% of respondents from Iraq who supports the remaining twelve. Therefore, a majority of our US and Iraq samples embrace twelve of thirteen mechanisms presented in the context of US-Iraq relations, confirming hypothesis three.

Combined, our survey of laypersons from Iraq and the United States proves there are marked commonalities across cultures regarding preferred principles and factors for resolving interstate conflict. Our data contradict the hypothesis that conflict resolution theory and practices across Arab/Muslim and Western cultures are incompatible. Despite our qualification of a high degree of commonality between Arab/Muslim and Western theory and practice among our sample, which exceeds that generally acknowledged in scholarly comparisons of cross-cultural conflict resolution techniques made hitherto, we do not suggest that Western standards and practices should be prioritized or imposed. On the contrary, our position is that there is reason to believe that there is a higher degree of parallel than the literature acknowledges. Upon this finding, we believe commonality exists and could easily be built and expanded upon to create mutually acceptable, symmetrical approaches of resolving conflict at the interstate level across these cultures. We equally believe that more collaborative research should be conducted to further qualify comparisons and divergences of conceptualizations of conflict resolution among Arab/Muslim and Western scholars and laypersons, especially in the case of the U.S.-Iraq relations.

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