

Communitarian Observations

I often write about rather different matters, but in my mind they all deal with one core question: the guidance our shared values, especially the common good, provides to our public policies.

From My Diary

Recent conversations with Jeffrey Sachs raised the following ideas about a Forward Rolling Sustainability Bond fund. The main idea is that funds made available to developing nations to move towards sustainability will not be grants or "aid" money nor loans that they need to repay to the source—but funds they will dedicate to other developing nations for sustainability once the first recipients of the funds have reached a "developed" status. And the second recipients will act in the same manner—revolve the funds to third parties when the day will come. (The decision of when a nation graduates to "developed" status will be up to each nation.) This approach removes any notion of receiving handouts or having to repay to those who have plenty, and allows all nations to look forward to the day when they will be in the position of being able to give a leg up to others. It of course also keeps the funds originally dedicated to sustainability to be used again and again.

During an on-the-record meeting at the Council on Foreign Relations, Barney Frank argued that Wall Street should have done more to defend the Federal Reserve against its critics. Asked if he believed that Wall Street support of the Fed might not help it on Main Street, Frank responded by pointing out that if Wall Street were to give members of Congress five thousand dollars each in campaign donations and ask them to quietly support the Fed, Congress members would have done it. It seems that it does not cost much to sway our elected officials.

I Read

Dexter Filkins [wrote](#) in the *New Yorker* on the subject of Major General Qassem Suleimani, the head of Iran's Quds Force, who has "sought to reshape the Middle East in Iran's favor, working as a power broker and as a military force: assassinating rivals, arming allies, and, for most of a decade, directing a network of militant groups that killed hundreds of Americans in Iraq." American response?

In a recent article at [The Economist](#), Jeffrey Sachs argues that conventional economic models that advocate for "growth, full stop" place "short-term priorities and long-term ends [...] at odds." For this reason, he suggests that macroeconomists must be more forward-thinking in their solutions for today's economic woes, and that the U.N. and other relevant international organizations must develop a set of "Sustainable Development Goals" that help national policymakers prioritize sustainability.

On the front page of the *New York Times*, Sharon LaFraniere wrote on July 20, 2013 about the "[Math Behind Leak Crackdown: 153 Cases, 4 Years, 0 Indictments](#)," and found that "not a single government official [...] had been prosecuted for leaking national security secrets."

Short Pieces

"Will someone explain why they consider the policy issues raised by Iran's recent move much of an issue, a subject that needs much deliberating? Unlike Syria, where it is difficult to know with whom to side, and Egypt—where no one seems to have any good suggestions—the situation with Iran seems abundantly clear. No one in his right mind can suggest that the US should reject out of hand the offer by the newly elected president of Iran to show that his country's nuclear program is strictly for peaceful purposes, that Iran has no intentions nor plans nor facilities for making nukes, and that all he wants in turn is for the sanctions on his country to be lifted. Of course there is no other possible response than: 'great, we love it, let's go.'" (Read more at our website.)

The United States and China, as well as the international community, would benefit significantly if both powers adopted a strategy of Mutually Assured Restraint (MAR). It would help them to move away from the current distrust both sides exhibit in their dealings with each other, cap the military build up, reduce the risks of unintended conflagrations, allow both nations to dedicate more resources to urgent domestic needs, and increase collaborations in many matters that concern both powers. (Read more at [our website](#).) In response, Michael Haas argued that “there are major problems with the MAR scheme that raise serious doubts about its viability,” including the inability to distinguish between offensive and defensive weapons and the fact that MAR “fundamentally misconstrues” the objectives of both countries. (His full thoughts can be read at [The Diplomat](#).)

“To avoid the United States and China falling into the Thucydides trap, both nations will be served if they embrace a strategy of Mutually Assured Restraint (MAR). Political scientists argue that history shows, since the days of the ancient Greeks, that when a new power arises and the old superpower does not yield ground quick enough -- wars ensue. However, the record shows that there are no historical Iron Laws. Indeed, Harvard's Allison Graham points to four cases out of 15 since the 16th century that were not war followed -- include the rise of the U.S. in the 1890s as a global power.” (Read more at [our website](#).)

Nikolas K. Gvosdev wrote a compelling article about the emerging norm of “conditional sovereignty” that seems to be replacing Westphalian sovereignty. In [“The Realist Prism: Libya, Somalia Raids Point to Emerging Sovereignty Norm.”](#) Gvosdev argues that “willingness to violate Libyan sovereignty to seize Nazih Abdul-Hamed al-Ruqai, who masterminded the 1998 embassy bombings, and to bypass a post-Gadhafi government that has been characterized as a strategic partner of the United States further confirms that the United States is moving to adopt a new norm of “conditional sovereignty” in international relations.” We recently published an [essay](#) in the *Stanford Journal of International Law* that Gvosdev cites. It argues “that the current normative and legal paradigms that shape the United States’ response to security threats posed by acts of transnational terrorism are misapplied. In the international arena, we should downplay states’ right to sovereignty in favor of a paradigm that requires nation states not only to protect select common goods including the responsibility to protect (R2P), but also to observe a new duty, namely, not to harbor or support terrorists. With regard to those alleged terrorists who are captured, the current paradigm that treats them as criminals should be replaced with one that treats them as a distinct class of defendants, entitled to their own rights and procedures—just as we deal differently with ex-cons, sex offenders, and many other classes of offenders. Finally, those terrorists faced in armed conflicts should be expected to abide by the rule of distinction and, if they violate it, they should bear part of the onus for the resulting collateral damage. The paradigms most often employed in conceptualizing and legitimating counterterrorism campaigns—the paradigms of war among nations and of law enforcement—are ill-suited to meet new realities. The considerable policy mistakes, misjudgments, and above all, morally flawed positions that are caused by the misapplication of these concepts, point to a need for a distinct normative and legal paradigm for dealing with transnational terrorism. [The article] focuses on the normative assumptions of such a paradigm, which have clear legal parallels. Further, [the article] seeks to develop this distinct paradigm by situating it in ongoing transnational moral dialogues on the just and effective ways to combat terrorism. This distinct paradigm would benefit if it were consolidated into a new Geneva Convention in the future.”

“In his 2011 best-selling book, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman summarizes the findings of [Behavioral Economics](#), which show that people cannot make rational decisions. Our brains are hardwired to process information poorly and draw wrong conclusions. In response, consider the Humble Decision-Making Theory, a few suggestions for how investors, managers, and consumers can deal with this fast-paced, data-packed world we inhabit. (Read more at [our website](#).)

“Liberals are in a gloating mood. They say Republicans, who are [engaged in a civil war with each other](#) while campaigning to defund Obamacare, are ignoring the wishes of the majority of [Americans](#). Above all, liberals contend that if the GOP continues on its present course, it will [once again shoulder the blame](#) for shutting down the government, or worse — pushing it into default. Yet these liberals seem to

pay little mind to the fact that history rarely repeats itself and that, this time, the blame may very well be spread more widely; Obama's approval rating is already declining." (Read more at [our website](#).)

"On Tuesday, the U.S. Supreme Court will decide whether the core, remaining limits on campaign contributions -- the individual caps -- should be struck down in *McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission*. Given the Court's conservative majority and that the same Roberts Court recently put an end to caps on what corporations and labor unions can donate (in *Citizens United*) -- one should expect the worst: allowing those with deep pockets to use unlimited amounts of money to sway politicians." (Read more at [our website](#).)

Events and Announcements

The Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics (SASE) will hold its 26th annual conference in Chicago on July 10-12, 2014. The conference is organized into "networks," of which one is dedicated to communitarian subjects, and each network has ample slots for sessions about its subject broadly understood. The theme of the conference is "The Institutional Foundations of Capitalism" and its description can be found [here](#). The Communitarian Network Section is inviting proposals for paper presentations; all communications about and proposals for paper presentations should be directed to José A. Ruiz San Román at jar.sanroman@gmail.com (please CC Kenneth Megan at kmegan@email.gwu.edu for administrative purposes).

On September 29, 2013, Mike Eman was re-elected as the Prime Minister of Aruba. He is a highly regarded strong communitarian.

Videos

The number of people who have viewed our most popular video, [You Don't Need to Buy This](#), has reached more than 17,000 and continues to rise.

New Endorsements

If you wish to endorse any or all of the ideas or platforms advanced by the Communitarian Network, please email icps@gwu.edu.

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For more about the communitarian project, please visit <http://icps.gwu.edu>. For more notes, please visit <http://blog.amitaietzioni.org>.