



Citizen-Centered Approaches
to State and Market



Roundtable on Insights from Social Psychology for the Peacebuilding Field

Crisis Management Institute and ISE

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**Roundtable on Insights from Social Psychology for the Peace-
Building Field**
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On December 13, 2013, the Crisis Management Institute (CMI) and the Institute for State Effectiveness (ISE) co-hosted a roundtable discussion with UCLA psychology Professor Matthew Lieberman. His groundbreaking research on social cognitive neuroscience is focused on how the human brain processes connectedness. His book, *Social*, explores mechanisms by which humans feel inclusion or exclusion.

The meeting was convened as part of a series to expose key thinkers and practitioners in the peace-building field to new research and to explore jointly its implications for approaches to building, brokering and sustaining peace. Recognizing shortfalls in the current approaches to peace-building, CMI and ISE have started a dialogue to identify missing elements from peace-building and development processes.

The group found Professor Lieberman's work had important potential implications for peacebuilding, especially for the questions of how to integrate marginalized individuals and communities into social and governance systems, and how to minimize triggers for violence.

Professor Lieberman's research team uses functional neuro-imaging machines alongside neuropsychology. He and his colleagues use these tools to test various hypotheses relating to social cognition. He examines pain and pleasure responses to emotional stimuli in humans and seeks to clarify how non-rational thoughts can affect behavior, and eventually lead to violent acts.

Professor Lieberman's results indicate that humans are inherently social creatures, and that feelings of connectedness lead to a willingness to listen and cooperate. A sense of fairness can open a line to rational consideration, while a sense of exclusion can lead to depression, and shut down the ability to engage with proposals or negotiations. Persuasion is effective when opponents' views are relatively similar, when each person feels that they are arguing with someone to whom they can also connect. Essentially, feeling right or wrong, supported or unsupported, matters to the brain just as much as actually being right or wrong.

The group commented that these results could have application for addressing marginalized populations. Previous studies, it was noted, have indicated that poverty and exclusion correlate with an inability to act rationally, and that violence occurs as a last resort when people feel unheard. Conversely, evidence

shows that affirmation – either self-affirmation or external praise – can open people to new information. Demonstrating explicitly to fringe groups that they are valued in negotiations could potentially build support for and change the nature of government institutions and help to facilitate nonviolent interaction.

Attempts to broker peace only among narrow elites, where the bargaining table is only composed of men around a table, have clear shortcomings, and have frequently led to the resumption of violence. Instead, attempts to integrate marginalized populations into governance structures could help to reduce the risk of outbreak of violence. This would point to the relevance of work on social inclusion, shared societies and citizen participation in governance as central to the peace-building agenda.