Society for Risk Analysis Explores Decision Making Strategies Regarding U.S. National Security


As world leaders confront old and new global security problems, they can use this understanding to face problems while also taking into account cognitive and behavioral shortcomings that affect their decision-making.

Two papers presented at the Society for Risk Analysis (SRA) Annual Meeting will explore decision-making related to national security interests. The symposium, U.S. National Security Interests and Transnational Security Decision Making, will take place on Tuesday, Dec. 12 from 10:30 a.m. - 12 p.m. at the Crystal Gateway Marriott in Arlington, Virginia.

Leading risk analyst and psychologist Paul Slovic observes that there is often a disconnect between the high value top government officials place on saving lives and the apparent low value revealed by government decisions not to intervene to protect those lives.

“When multiple objectives are in play, highly regarded humanitarian values seem to collapse in the competition with national security and economic security objectives,” said Slovic. His presentation, Confronting the Collapse of Humanitarian Values in Foreign Policy Decisions, will explore the moral, ethical and strategic implications of this bias, which devalues efforts to intervene in massive humanitarian crises.

A related presentation will discuss opportunities for government attorneys to help the president, and other senior national security officials, resist that collapse of humanitarian values. Psychologists have identified a “prominence effect” that makes it difficult for officials to promote humanitarian values when facing security concerns. According to David Delaney, a senior fellow at the University of Maryland, improving decision-making processes can help prevent this from happening in the U.S.

“Public officials must be able to identify and overcome psychological factors for their policies to be most effective,” said Delaney. “Psychology is an important element of professional and executive education for lawyers, policymakers and legislators.”

Judge James Baker, who served as President Clinton’s national security lawyer, will offer his perspective on areas such as formal and informal processes for national security decisions, Congress’s national
security powers, the suitability of decision-making processes in transnational law and opportunities to improve legal support for senior government officials. The symposium’s final presentation will feature commentary on the presented papers from Max Stearns, professor at the University of Maryland Carey School of Law, drawing upon insights from public choice and other relevant law and economics methodologies.

*Paul Slovic, Ph.D., from University of Oregon and David Delaney, J.D., M.A., from University of Maryland and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill will be available for media interviews at the 2017 SRA Annual Meeting. Please contact Melanie Preve at melanie@bigvoicecomm.com for all interview requests.

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About SRA
The Society for Risk Analysis is a multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, scholarly, international society that provides an open forum for all those interested in risk analysis. SRA was established in 1980 and has published Risk Analysis: An International Journal, the leading scholarly journal in the field, continuously since 1981. For more information, visit www.sra.org.