



## NEW HISTORIES FOR ENDURING CONFLICTS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

*Thoughts from a One-Day Conference – Thursday, January 15, 2015*

At Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

The centennial anniversary of the Armenian genocide and the seventieth anniversary of World War II's end in Europe and in the Pacific permit fresh, cross-cutting and comparative discussion regarding how those histories are remembered by societies and are recorded by historians.

With support from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation's Washington Office, on January 15, 2015 the Carnegie

Endowment for International Peace, the Wilson Center for International Scholars and the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies/Johns Hopkins University assembled a group of historians and social scientists to consider their role in writing and disseminating history in enduring conflicts in need of reconciliation.



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## TEN OVERARCHING THEMES EMERGED FROM THREE EMPIRICAL CASES OF ARMENIA-TURKEY, RUSSIA-BALTICS, AND JAPAN-KOREA

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**There are both advantages and disadvantages of comparison.** Comparing disparate cases causes us to question what we think we know and to be open to new ideas, but it should not render us forgetful of the unique contexts, histories and cultures of individual cases.

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**Terminology matters.** In enduring conflicts, terms like “genocide,” “aggression,” “ethnic identity” and “ethnic cleansing” are open to differing levels of acceptance and interpretation and are always politically and emotionally charged reference points. There are also different meanings ascribed to the term “reconciliation:” peaceful co-existence and the absence of war (minimal); rapprochement (intermediate); and transformations of attitudes and institutions from enmity to amity (maximal). Maximal reconciliation is a long-term, arduous and non-linear process. In both enduring conflicts and processes of reconciliation, terms have both moral and highly pragmatic dimensions.

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**Many conflicts, including the ones discussed at this conference, are asymmetrical, with a larger and often imperial power committing abuses against a smaller nation.** This asymmetry needs to be addressed in reconciliation efforts with the larger nation having a greater responsibility to act and reach out first. Reconciliation can facilitate a re-calibration of power relations, resulting in reductions in asymmetry.

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**There is a distinction between “history” and “memory,” between fact and interpretation. In enduring conflicts both history and memory are malleable and manipulable.** In a process of reconciliation, there is a minimum acceptance of foundational historical facts, with memories continuing to be varietal and sometimes clashing.

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**To move from enduring conflict to a process of reconciliation, “acknowledgement” of history and grievances and its more neutral meaning might be a more productive vehicle than the notion of “apology.”** Whichever term we employ, we should focus on who performs the act, where, when and with what kind of response.

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**In deep reconciliation, history assumes an ongoing presence through institutionalization, consistent commemoration and remembrance, and extensive educational activities.** While history is a central element of reconciliation as both catalyst and constructive irritant, this direct focus is accompanied by other indirect reflections through societal and governmental institutions and activities that can promote the new relationship.

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**In enduring conflicts, the distinction between victims and perpetrators is often blurred.** In processes of reconciliation, the categories become clearer.

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**Diaspora communities often have particular interpretations of history that differ from those of participants in the region.**

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**Territorial disputes are an essential feature of enduring conflicts that connect directly or indirectly to disputes over other historical issues.** In reconciliation, territorial disputes do not necessarily disappear but can be subject to management or have their explosive potential dissipated through the development of cooperative societal connections in other realms.

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**Historians and social scientists can play a central role in perpetuating conflicts through one-sided interpretations but can also be pivotal in promoting reconciliation through balanced analysis.** Other actors – civil society elites and political leaders – are also key actors in either stymieing or stimulating the passage from conflict to reconciliation.

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**Thomas de Waal,**

Senior Associate, Russia  
and Eurasia Program

Carnegie Endowment for  
International Peace

## SESSION ONE: ARMENIA-TURKEY

The first speaker argued that for the Armenian diaspora, the genocide issue is fundamental. For Armenians living in Armenia, it is not. He said that it was not scholars' responsibility to write history in a way that makes conflict resolution possible, but good history should help humanize both sides in conflict situations. When conflicts are abstracted, it becomes easier to hate and more difficult to reconcile. In Turkey, there has been an opening up

of scholarship. Meanwhile, the Armenian diaspora scholarship has become more analytical and that of Armenia proper remains descriptive; Armenian historians are in danger of losing their jobs if they become too analytical. Across all groups, the use of history has become more important than the actual history.

Under the Levon Ter-Petrosian presidency, the genocide was not initially the basis for Armenia's policy towards Turkey. But this changed when Turkey rejected Armenia's seizure of territory in the conflict over Nagorny Karabakh. Now, the current Armenian leadership has begun to make genocide an existential issue, portraying Turkey as its main threat.

The second speaker said that the scholarship on this region has vastly improved from even ten years ago when the literature was horribly polarized. He gave credit to the Workshop on Armenian and Turkish Scholarship for improving the quality of the scholarship, "empirically and conceptually." He argued that the term "genocide" is fraught and often overused or abused in situations when it is not appropriate. Genocide pushes us towards black-and-white readings of history and risks "normalizing atrocities that have not reached the level of genocide."

Irrespective of the terminology, he estimated the Armenian death-toll at being between 700,000 and one million, and said the deaths were "not unintentional" and cannot be written off as a by-product of the war. In 1914, Armenians were a significant part of eastern Anatolia; by 1921-23, they were not. Unfortunately, the fate of the Assyrians and others,

who were also deliberately massacred, is overlooked when discussing the case of the Armenians.

There are two camps of scholarship on this issue. The pro-Turkish camp argues "nothing happened, and besides, they deserved it." Many people think that Turkish experts knew what was happening and lied through their teeth, but it's a more complicated story. A great number of them were trying to suppress a traumatic event. The lack of access to sources and to trained, qualified historians has also complicated the matter. The Turks have damaged their own case by covering up too much. Many people came to expect the worst and the Young Turks were portrayed as Nazis.

There has also been a mis-representation of the sources in the Armenian camp. If the situation was clear cut, why did they blatantly misrepresent so many facts? Academic research can help bring facts to the fore, but it also complicates things. Both sides will certainly try to weaponize certain versions of history. It is not historians' job to render a verdict, and they are mistaken to do so.

The third speaker said that we may never reconcile the differences between some historians on this issue. He said that it was the job of the historian to explain what happened, without in any way justifying it. He argued that the genocide of the Armenians and Assyrians is indisputable. We now have enormous amounts of information and it is clear that the purpose of the genocide, carried out by the Young Turk government, was to cleanse eastern Anatolia of the Armenians. The genocide was carried out through dispersion, massacre, and conversion to Islam.

Traditional Turkish historians argue that it was a rational attempt by the government to eliminate an existential threat to their country. This required a deliberate construction of the Armenians as a people who betrayed the empire. For many years, the Ottoman Empire allowed a great degree of multiculturalism. Assyrians and Armenians were ethnic nationals, but they were also Ottomans. The decision to wipe out the Armenians did not come about overnight. However, with the loss of the Balkans and the imminent collapse of the empire with World War I, Armenians were a "perceived threat" to the Young Turk government. Historians need to investigate how that existential threat was constructed.

The fourth speaker highlighted new scholarship that is informing our discussion of the region and mentioned the enormous role played by scholars increasingly working in the languages and archives of the region. The new history has helped to inform the broader history of the late Ottoman Empire, which had previously been characterized by two, polarized images. One saw the Ottoman Empire as a victim of European imperialism since the 18th century. The other saw the empire as a morally and financially bankrupt state

that brought its destruction upon itself. The scholarship has now moved beyond the earlier polarization as memoirs, diaries, and other self-narratives have helped us understand the conflict in a different way. Diaries have been particularly important because they show the evolution of thinking and attitudes. For example one diary of an Ottoman soldier in 1914 shows the changing attitudes towards Armenian conscripts fighting alongside Muslim soldiers. New scholarship has also helped us contextualize the history of the First World War and to understand the ways in which the war devastated the region's social fabric.

The fifth speaker started his session by discussing the use of the term "historical memory." He argued it was a problematic term because memory is constructed and it is in the interests of nationalists and genocide deniers to believe that there is a cloud of historical memory that hangs over the discussion. He also argued that it may not be possible to "get history right" and then move towards reconciliation; the process was more likely to happen the other way round. Our understanding of genocide is complicated by this new notion of linking communal identity to communal suffering and the idea that you are a real country only if your people have experienced genocide. The Ukrainian Holodomor, the Circassian genocide and others have all served ethnic nationalism. Unfortunately, many groups can make this claim since the destruction of a people is a frighteningly frequent event in human history. Conflict resolution often requires complicating the history of the perpetrator. In this sense, Turkish history is terribly important and it is important for Turkey to own its history.

In the subsequent discussion, one speaker noted that the Armenian Genocide is being instrumentalized to legitimize the Armenian government internationally and domestically. The genocide created a significant identity divide between those Armenians from the Ottoman Empire who are Genocide survivors and those who are from the Republic of Armenia. In Armenia, the Armenian Genocide has been used in Armenia with regard to the Nagorny Karabakh conflict. Its history is undoubtedly being instrumentalized and hate speech is increasing in Armenia.

The speaker said history had made "a triangle of victimization" involving the great powers, the Ottoman state, and the Armenians. The European powers victimized the Ottomans, who in turn victimized the Armenians. Genocide has been used in a number of ways. Turkish president Erdogan used the term in relation to the Holocaust, Balkans and Syria, but he would not talk about the Armenian deportations as genocide.

Another speaker commented on Young Turk paranoia. Talat, the Turkish Interior Minister, who was born in Bulgaria, said before the genocide that there was danger of eastern

Anatolia becoming the next Bulgaria. Clearly, there was a great fear in the state—a sense of trauma. If it had not been for the First Balkan War, the CUP would have been out of power, and the future of the Ottoman Empire would have taken a very different turn.

There was a discussion on the term genocide. One speaker agreed that it is a problematic term: "In order to be a modern state, you need to have an opera house, a film studio, and a genocide," but said we still needed to use terms, however. He said that not to call it a genocide is to side with a state that massacred Armenians, to side with the old Turkish narrative. There are some politics to using the word—or to not using it—and we need to be careful. The Kurdish question is also important. They have moved beyond the question of terminology. The term can be used analytically.

*“It is not scholars' responsibility to write history to make conflict resolution possible, but good history should help humanize both sides in conflict situations.”*

Another speaker clarified his position, saying "To be clear, I don't object to the use of genocide, though I don't use it myself." He said the best argument for it is that it has forced the Turks to confront their history. The Young Turks weren't the only ones who viewed the Armenians as a threat. The Kurds certainly did as well. And the Kurds were brutal to the Armenians as well. When writing the history of the period, it's important to remember that the Unionists weren't all ethnic Turks. Using broad categories is like writing the history of World War I by referring to "Europeans."

One speaker noted that there has been no serious examination of history by the victims (the Armenians) yet. He said that to look back at this conflict, it is necessary to look back on the history of the foundation of both the Turkish Republic and Armenia.

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**Matthew Rojansky**

Director of the Kennan  
Institute

Wilson Center

## SESSION TWO: RUSSIA-BALTICS

The first speaker opened by discussing the origin of the occupation narrative in Latvia and argued that it was developed by the Latvian diaspora community in North America during the Soviet period and popularized by certain political groups in Latvia during the 1990s. According to the speaker, the regular use of term “genocide” in the case of Latvia is much more striking and hurtful, especially since it has not been

debated by historians or politicians. The conjectures of the diaspora historians have not been properly discussed, leading to the wholesale acceptance of the equalization of anti-Nazi and anti-Soviet claims. In this Latvian narrative, Russians have always held the role of perpetrators.

Latvian politics has been framed by this perceived need to assert that Latvia will never be occupied again, that it is independent, and that the Latvian language and culture are dominant in the country. The preamble to the constitution has been changed to frame Latvia as an ethnic democracy. There is a party on the left that portrays itself as social-democratic but is perceived by the other parties as pro-Russian. These are just some of the reasons why reconciliation is difficult.

Further complicating the issue is the fact that Latvia has always had a split media presence with Latvian and Russian language speakers receiving their news through different channels. It was not until recently that this problem was quantified and a major Latvian station began broadcasting in Russian on a large scale (and not only news programs) to reach this important target population.

The speaker also mentioned the commemoration of the massacre in Audrini, eastern Latvia where a Russian ethnic village was wiped out during World War II by Latvian police units. At last year’s commemoration, the Latvian defense minister participated and made a statement stating that anyone can be turned into a beast. This is the first time in its modern history that the Latvian government has recognized that Latvians were also perpetrators, not just victims.

The second speaker argued that there is no unified view of Russia in Latvia. There is doctrine of “continuity of the state” in Latvia which is the basis for the country’s current political approach and for its citizenship law. The doctrine of continuity of state means that today’s Latvia is the same Latvian republic that existed before soviet occupation in 1940. Thus, the citizenship law implies that if you or one of your ancestors were Latvian citizens before 1940, you are automatically a citizen. Everyone else has to be naturalized. Meanwhile, a part of the Russian speaking Latvian community and “Russian” political parties take the view that today’s Latvia is a brand new state. This second approach would presume that everyone should have automatically received citizenship in 1991.

“*In trying to understand Russian public diplomacy, we have to understand that Russia securitized the interpretation of history. For the current administration, security always trumps other considerations leading state institutions to work together with NGOs to fight certain interpretations of history. Securitization means that you can mobilize society against real and perceived threats as part of identity construction in Russia.*”

Russian foreign policy toward the West and toward Latvia changed in 2005 following the “color revolutions” that the Kremlin feared could undermine the Russian state. The new Russian foreign policy thinking focused on establishing a common communication area in Russia and its neighboring states. In trying to understand Russian public diplomacy, we have to understand that Russia securitized the interpretation of history. For the current administration, security always trumps other considerations leading state institutions to work together with NGOs to fight certain interpretations of history. Securitization means that you can mobilize society against real and perceived threats as part of identity construction in Russia.

The problem is that this process of identity construction goes beyond Russian borders. There was a Ruskiy Mir

(“Russian World”) foundation established in 2007 and the grants they gave to Latvian organizations were all related to interpretation of history. The result is an undermining of social integration policies in neighboring states. Latvia hasn’t done enough to socially integrate everyone, but the Russian efforts have certainly not helped the Latvian government communicate effectively with a large section of its population.

Russian propagandists are saying that life in Soviet Latvia was not that bad. Surveys show that ethnic Latvians view Soviet era as generally negative while ethnic Russians are more split. The Russian Federation plays up some of these popular sentiments: “look at you now, you are a puny country, among the poorest in the EU, etc.” Latvians are getting more nervous—and for good reason. Just take a look at Putin’s recent statements on the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact!

The third speaker chose to focus more on the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad and why it was different from Latvia. Kaliningrad has quite successfully maintained an untainted narrative of Baltic liberation and this working myth has no question there. Kaliningrad had never been part of the Russian state until 1945; it was a city built on 700 years of German and Prussian culture. After the war, the northern third of the Polish Corridor was given to Russia and was turned into Kaliningrad. About 150,000-200,000 Germans remained in Kaliningrad after the war and 40 percent of them died within the next three years due to starvation, deportation, and other state-imposed hardships.

The reason there has been no reconciliation in the case of Kaliningrad is that the Germans cannot ask for it. It is not possible to make any territorial or right of return claims because of the complete population transfer and the myth of liberalization. This same myth was part of the Soviet consensus. But starting with Glasnost, local historians began doing interesting work to question this myth and to discuss the very real German suffering following the war. These efforts have been locally censored; the work is not being incorporated into the region’s collective remembrance of the war or postwar. Public discussion is interested primarily in the experience of Soviet citizens, and therefore little discussion has taken place about commemorating sites connected to Nazi crimes. Local lack of interest in memorializing the site of a Nazi-organized death march of upwards of 10,000 concentration camp inmates in the village of Palmnicken (now Iantarnyi) has sparked the dissatisfaction of Holocaust memorial groups abroad, who have raised complaints.

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**Lily Gardner Feldman**

Harry & Helen Gray  
Senior Fellow

Director of the Society,  
Culture and Politics  
Program  
American Institute for  
Contemporary German  
Studies/Johns Hopkins  
University

## SESSION THREE: JAPAN-KOREA

The first speaker identified a number of issues regarding the relativization of history in the context of East Asia. The first was Japanese Prime Minister Abe’s questioning of the use of the term “aggression” in relation to Japan’s actions before and during WWII. While this seems like a straightforward term, it is actually quite contentious from the government’s perspective, and there is domestic and international concern about whether debates about the term’s definition serve to increase tensions in the region. The question of addressing history and moving the dialogue past the concept of formal apologies and toward the more neutral concept of acknowledgement is also key for a process of reconciliation. Finally, there must be a frank discussion of the actors who take part in confronting history in this part of the world. What role do civil society historians play in comparison to governments and how different are their interests, goals, and methods in discussing history?

The second speaker argued that the onus rests not with Japan, but with the last two years of the Abe administration. For example, the State Secrets Law enacted last year recently went into effect and is already curtailing researchers’ access to documents. This year is particularly significant as it marks the 70th anniversary of the end of the war, and Abe will look to the 1995 Murayama Statement when issuing a new statement. There is a chance that this year’s statement will differ. This is related to the San Francisco Treaty system, where Japan accepted the verdicts of the War Crimes trials that took place in Tokyo. In Japan, this issue of acknowledgement and apology is mostly a moral one.

Denialism has great traction in Japanese society. In November 2014, Japan asked international publishers to take out references to comfort women. This suggests that historians are not being asked to prove the existence of comfort women—this has been proven again and again—but are

simply being left out of the discussion. Japanese society is no longer talking about history, but about memory. South Korean President Park has said that she will meet with Abe, but without raising the historical issue of comfort women.

The speaker also drew attention to Abe's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) platform for the December election where South Korea was lumped in with China and North Korea as

*“Comparing disparate cases causes us to question what we think we know and to be open to new ideas, but it should not render us forgetful of the unique contexts, histories and cultures of individual cases.”*

a nation with which Japan should improve its ties. Sentiment notwithstanding, it was shocking for South Korea to see that the LDP thought ties were so bad that they would be grouped with these two de facto enemies. While the US is an ally of both, and was listed as such in the party platform, it is difficult for the US to get the two to work together.

The third speaker pointed out that the Japanese government and the people do not realize the significance of national reconciliation with Korea. Though historians from various countries have cooperated on these issues, the societies in question have not. Since 2006, Japanese school children have been educated in a system that is required by law to foster a love of country. Meanwhile, liberal media in Japan has been weakened by the attack on Asahi Shimbun, a newspaper that retracted previous articles about comfort women when the testimony of a key source was found to be fabricated.

Internationally, territorial issues have become more serious and intertwined with history problems. Japan thinks that if it “loses” the history issue, then it could be forced to make territorial concessions as well. Japanese public opinion is that postwar Japan should be viewed with respect. They feel that it is difficult to talk with South Koreans, because South Korea does not acknowledge the peaceful Japan of the past 70 years. Including Southeast Asian nations as mediators in talks between Japan and Korea could be useful. Postwar Japan's reconciliation policy combined with substantial economic assistance has worked better in Southeast Asia than in Northeast Asia, and mitigated their bad

image of “aggressive” Japan. Postwar Japan's reconciliation with Southeast Asian countries, at least relatively, can be regarded as a successful case.

The fourth speaker argued that despite great challenges there were a number of opportunities—some taken, some missed—in promoting reconciliation with Japan. For example, the Japanese government missed a valuable opportunity with Korea in late 2013 when reacting to the unveiling of the controversial memorial in Harbin, China that was dedicated to a Korean who assassinated a senior Japanese politician a century ago. Also, though Xi Jinping chose to include the official number of victims in commemorating the Rape of Nanking in December 2014, he added that it was important not to demonize a whole people due to some militarists. The speaker also found hope in the New Year's address of the Japanese emperor who, in contrast to Abe's insistent focus on the future, argued that Japan must learn from its history of war that started with the invasion of China in 1931.

However, according to the speaker, many in present-day Japan do not believe that it should continue apologizing for its role in the war of more than 70 years ago. Many Japanese feel that South Korea is more influential in terms of ‘soft power’ and cultural sway around the world. They particularly worry about the economic and military rise of China and call for a more assertive Japan. Prospects for closer regional cooperation thus face many challenges. History books jointly authored by South Koreans, Japanese, and Chinese have been published, but have remained of marginal impact. There is, however reason to be optimistic in seeing younger historians socializing and collaborating internationally.

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# CONFERENCE AGENDA

## SESSION 1:

### **Armenia-Turkey – History and 2015**

In the year of the centenary of what most scholars call The Armenian Genocide of 1915, Armenian and Turkish historians have led the way in collaboration, seeking to provide a nuanced account of the tragic story of the destruction of the Ottoman Armenians in World War I. In doing so, they provide a real historical basis for Armenian-Turkish dialogue which confirms the authenticity of the Armenian experience as the worst atrocity of that war, and also provides a context which gives agency to Armenians as actors and recalls the suffering of Muslims in that era. This scholarship is re-writing the history of Turkey and re-conceptualizing the narratives of the Diaspora Armenians.

#### **Moderator:**

Thomas de Waal, Carnegie Endowment

#### **Lead Discussants:**

Prof. Gerard Libaridian, Cambridge Massachusetts.  
Prof. Michael Reynolds, Princeton University.  
Prof. Ronald Suny, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor  
Prof. Mustafa Aksakal, Georgetown  
Prof. Charles King, Georgetown

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## SESSION 2:

### **Russia-Baltic States (with a special emphasis on Latvia)**

In the wake of the unfolding crisis in Ukraine, poisonous memory politics within and between Russia and the Baltic States pose a serious danger to both East and West. The so-called “double occupation” narrative of 1939-1991 championed by many ethnic Latvians slams headlong into Russian historical memory, which lionizes the Red Army as the destroyers of Nazism and the liberators of Europe. So far, efforts to reconcile these two visions have been limited, at best. A formal bilateral historians’ commission process was briefly launched in 2010, but has ground to a halt amid the current negative atmosphere for East-West relations. Can it still be salvaged? Are there any precedents for success? How might the danger stemming from negative relations be channeled into an incentive for dialogue on the political, professional historical and broader social levels?

#### **Moderator:**

Matthew Rojansky, Kennan Institute

#### **Lead Discussants:**

Dr. Nicole Eaton, U.C. Berkeley  
Dr. Andis Kudors, Center for East European  
Policy Studies, Riga, Latvia  
Prof. Katja Wezel, University of Pittsburgh

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## SESSION 3:

### **Japan-Korea**

For some years, historians from Japan and South Korea have been engaged in dialogue over contentious history issues resulting from Japanese colonial rule and World War II. They have produced joint history textbooks and developed a bi-national, epistemic community of scholars committed to reconciliation, but their work has displayed little resonance in the broader society and in government circles. How can historians better engage with society (especially young people); with other civil society groups working on historical issues; and with officials? Would an internationalization of dialogue, including discussion of other cases, enhance the capacity of historians to influence the current debate about history in Japan and South Korea?

#### **Moderator:**

Dr. Lily Gardner Feldman, AICGS/Johns Hopkins

#### **Lead Discussants:**

Prof. Alexis Dudden, University of Connecticut  
Dr. Seiko Mimaki, Reischauer Center, SAIS  
Prof. Daqing Yang, George Washington University

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## ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION: **Conclusions and Comparisons**

This concluding discussion will seek to focus on four topics: a summary of the main themes emerging from the day’s deliberations; an identification of the issues for future research and practice; the perspective of non-historians involved in memory work and reconciliation; the comparative experience of Germany’s efforts to face the past.

#### **Lead Discussants:**

Prof. Martin Leiner, University of Jena  
Thomas de Waal, Carnegie Endowment  
Matthew Rojansky, Kennan Institute  
Dr. Lily Gardner Feldman, AICGS/Johns Hopkins