

# New security challenges: broadening the Pugwash agenda?

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Building on the legacy of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto and the success of the Pugwash Movement, this paper reflects on the nature of contemporary threats to human security and its implications to the agenda of Pugwash. On the basis of recent conceptual developments in the field of conflict studies and significant changes in current policy practice in the field of 'peace & conflict', this article puts the risks emanating from armament and especially weapons of mass destruction into a larger framework of human security and human development. It argues that contemporary security and conflict analysis especially tends to emphasize the importance of non-military factors and processes in causing and escalating lethal conflict. The article explores the implications of these observations for the Pugwash agenda and how to do justice to the fundamental questions arising from these recent developments in the framework of Pugwash's agenda and interests.

## **The end of superpower rivalry and the emergence of a different type of conflict**

In peace and conflict studies the earlier emphasis on military aspects and 'classical' war studies seems to have dwindled and a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to conflict studies has emerged in academic and policy circles in response to current crises. This development had partly to do with the end of the Cold-War epoch and the resultant changes in perceptions. During the Cold War the focus had been nearly exclusively on the contradictions and (military) power balances between the two superpowers and on the proxy wars they fought. The risk of nuclear escalation of superpower rivalry lay at the basis of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto and the establishment of the Pugwash Movement. The destructive power of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction had grown to such proportions

that the very survival of mankind was deemed at stake, once those weapons were deployed in war situations.

Paradoxically, the prevalence of those weapons and the risks involved in their use also led to what was termed 'mutual deterrence'. Similarly, 'Third World conflicts' used to be contained to 'manageable' levels, particularly to avoid 'spill-over' and escalatory effects eventually leading to superpower nuclear confrontation. However, after the end of the Cold war this worldwide 'brake' on local conflicts disappeared and the so-called 'decompression effect' occurred, seemingly leading to a multiplication of local and regional conflicts in the early nineties, even though many of them had older roots. Modern media showed the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of those wars, adding urgency to the need to manage and resolve these conflicts. Consequently, the political, military, humanitarian and academic attention turned to a type of conflict that seemed to be characterised by other causes, motives, actors and strategies than the wars associated with an earlier period that had inspired the establishment of the Pugwash Movement.

### **The new face of war**

It is a challenge to define contemporary conflict. If we compare conflict today with conflict in the past, we must admit that not every individual feature of today's conflict is new. However, most present-day conflicts show a different constellation of conflict factors than earlier ones. Some academics therefore have labelled them as 'New Wars' compared to 'Old Wars' [1]. Others have used the notion of 'complex political emergencies', stating that 'contemporary conflicts are not merely complex, but they are ... messes. They are not specific problems with identifiable causes that can be fully understood and for which 'solutions' can be generated. At best, understanding will always be partial, contingencies will play havoc with linear notions of cause and effect and predictability will be at low levels' [2]. Again others use notions like 'non-state trans-boundary conflict', 'post-modern conflict', 'ethnic conflict' or 'intrastate conflict' to describe and analyse these conflicts.

None of these notions may, however, completely encapsulate the complex nature and distinctive features of present-day conflicts, underlining the need to describe them more fully in their time- and place-specific contexts. In this connection, there has been a plea to adopt an ethnographic approach to study those conflicts [3]. Obviously, there is a large diversity in the type, scale and cultures of contemporary conflicts. Even though they tend to share some general features, there are many competing conceptual and theoretical approaches as to their explanation. In the framework of this paper I cannot do justice to the extremely vibrant and varied debates on the nature of current conflict, but shall briefly discuss some important issues reflecting present views in the literature.

### *The regional and international dimension of intrastate conflict*

The author Holsti states that not the relations between states, but the characteristics of the state itself have to be seen as underlying current conflicts [4]. This denotes the fact that the causes of these wars are basically of an internal nature. In this article I therefore refer to contemporary conflict as intrastate conflict. However, I recognise the limitations of this notion. It does, for example, not imply that there is no 'foreign' involvement in these conflicts. On the contrary, neighbouring countries, the United Nations, international organisations, international NGOs, foreign corporate firms, mercenaries, traders, trans-boundary criminal

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networks etc. are all involved in the pursuit of war or peace in those countries. Another important factor in this connection is the role of the diaspora, which has contributed to the spread, 'de-localisation' and 'de-terrorialisation' of conflict [5]. In this connection, the word intrastate refers basically to the genesis of the conflict, but not so much to its other characteristics.

#### *The causes of intrastate conflict*

Regarding the causes of conflict, some authors focus on the lack of nation-building or state formation, while others tend to promote neo-malthusian explanations about resource scarcity and population pressure. Some do believe that 'poverty breeds conflict'. Others talk about 'identity politics' and even 'ancient hatreds'. Recently, more attention has been paid to the role of 'discourses of violence' in the legitimisation and violent escalation of conflict. In order to explain intrastate conflict we need to take a broad range of factors into consideration on the basis of a trans-disciplinary approach and an eclectic theoretical framework that is constantly confronted with empirical reality. The following remarks reflect some ideas that are generally subscribed to in discussing intrastate conflict.

Intrastate conflicts are usually caused by a complex of factors built up over a long history of tension. Most conflicts seem to have a fundamentally *political* aspect, as they are fought over power and scarce resources. Simultaneously, they are expressions of existing social, political, economic and cultural structures and cleavages [6]. They tend to occur in societies where state legitimacy and popular representation are low, or states are failing. Particular identity groups are excluded from power and political participation. They feel discriminated against. This is compounded by a lopsided distribution of goods and services, where their access to scarce resources is limited or altogether denied by the state. In addition, the religious or cultural identity of these groups is often suppressed. In this way grievances build up over time. Initial demands and peaceful protests are frequently oppressed violently and thus the situation gradually escalates into violent conflict. In contrast to interstate conflicts, it is the polity and society itself that make conditions conflict-prone. Deprived groups may be easily mobilised into violence by conflict entrepreneurs and political opportunists.

Case-studies confirm the importance of political factors in causing conflict and show also that a high incidence of poverty or inequality does not cause conflict directly, but tend to perpetuate and aggravate conflict. This is especially the case, when poverty and inequality are perceived from a perspective of relative deprivation and come to be seen as a consequence of conscious discriminatory government policy. Similarly, external involvement is not a prime cause of conflict, but tends to prolong and intensify the conflict [7]. The same applies to availability of arms that *per se* are not a root cause of conflict, but rather function as an aggravating factor at most.

The role of *economic* factors in present wars is still subject to considerable debate. The emergence of 'economies of violence' that thrive on and feed into those wars has led to a growing emphasis on economic explanations of contemporary conflict as exemplified in the 'greed and grievance' debate [8]. Collier states that contemporary conflicts can better be explained by the economic 'feasibility of predation' than by grievances. He says that rebel movements need a 'discourse of grievance' or a 'language of protest' for their national and international relations, but that these grievances are not the real 'objective' causes of conflict

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[9]. It is now increasingly argued, however, that an approach acknowledging the relevance of both greed and grievance would greatly benefit a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary internal conflicts. While social and cultural grievances provide underlying motives for group mobilisation into violence, economic motives do play a role when the war has gained momentum and a scramble for personal gain erupts under armed factions and warlords [10]. It has also been suggested that leaders and followers may be motivated by different sets of factors and that these motives also may change during the course of the conflict.

In conclusion, it can be stated that intrastate conflicts are historical, dynamic and multi-dimensional phenomena that have multiple causes and consequences. The relative importance of military aspects or arms in the explanation of Cold War rivalry has given way to an emphasis on historical, political, economic and social factors in contemporary approaches to intrastate conflict. This also means that the present challenges are more complex and diffuse, less predictable and probably also less amenable to remedial action.

### **Changing war, changing peace: the need for different approaches**

The conduct of intrastate wars shows considerable differences from the classic interstate wars that dominated Cold-War perceptions. Fighting in intrastate conflict takes place between variegated parties and temporary alliances, made up by state and non-state actors. It often becomes hard to discern who are combatants and who are non-combatants. Usually, the civil population is directly targeted by the perpetrators of violence and accounts for 90% of all victims, most of them being women and children. In addition, civil society is subject to widespread displacement combined with large-scale and deliberate destruction of houses and other property. Women often bear the brunt of this violence, as they are usually left behind unprotected by their male relatives taking part in the fighting. They are also less mobile, as they have to take care of young children or old and ill family members. Therefore, they are often unable to flee the onset of violence.

Other characteristics of intrastate conflict are that international conventions and rules for warfare are disobeyed. Many methods directed against the civil population are prohibited under war law and international humanitarian law, and include systematic rape, ethnic cleansing and starvation. Women are targeted specifically as they are considered to be symbols of culture and identity. Attacks on them intend to demoralise and to 'pollute' the whole community. Violence is not bound to the battlefield, but is widespread and fragmented. Hit-and-run attacks are combined with urban warfare, and guerrilla and counter-insurgency strategies. Intrastate conflicts tend to be protracted, but may show periods of relative calm interspersed with episodes of intensive fighting. Zones of peace alternate with zones of war. Use is made of light weaponry and 'small arms' and even of agricultural implements and knives. The technological aspect of those new wars is relatively less salient and sophisticated, and most arms are relatively inexpensive compared to conventional warfare.

These characteristics of warfare necessitate other approaches to conflict prevention, conflict management, peace building and reconciliation and – for that matter – arms control. The conventional concepts and methods of peacemaking through diplomacy, 'high politics' and negotiations exclusively between government bodies no longer suffice. In this regard, Hilhorst and Frerks ask: 'How to negotiate when it is not even clear whom to invite to the

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negotiation table? How to apply diplomacy if leaders have no clue or couldn't care less about the Geneva Conventions? How to call a cease-fire if there are not even armies? How to organise disarmament when much of the weaponry consists of everyday tools? And how to isolate combatants when they involve much of the civil population? [11] They argue that 'warfare' calls for 'changing peacefare'. This reasoning obviously also affects efforts in disarmament and arms control that mainly concern interstate relations.

### **Peace and security revisited**

Current conflicts therefore necessitate a new notion of peace and security. The dichotomy between peace and conflict seems to hold no longer. Currently, most societies in conflict show a hybrid nature and are characterised by a bizarre combination of both peace and war. The then Dutch development minister Jan Pronk stated: '... ever more countries linger in prolonged states of half peace/half war. The nature of present intrastate conflicts makes it increasingly difficult to determine when and where violence ends and peace starts. .... This is also true the other way round: in many societies we are not certain when and where peace ends, and violence starts' [12]. Johan Galtung has introduced the distinction between 'negative peace' and 'positive peace'. Whereas the former only denotes the absence of violence (weaponry), the latter implies a movement toward a more egalitarian and just society, where the root causes of conflict are being addressed.

Not only the notion of peace is subject to change, but also the concept of security. Instead of using the concept of military security, academics and policymakers in the field of intrastate conflict nowadays often use the notions of 'comprehensive' and 'human security', which transcend a purely military approach to war and peace. Human security has been defined by the UNDP in its Human Development Report: 'For most people today a feeling of insecurity arises more from worries about daily life than from the dread of a cataclysmic world event. Job security, income security, health security, environmental security, security from crime – these are the emerging concerns of human security all over the world.' The introduction of this concept has led to a shift from security through armament to security through sustainable human development and one that transcends the usual emphasis on territory [13].

It nowadays is acknowledged that security is a public good like other goods, such as education or health. The provision of such human security is obviously not anymore the exclusive domain of policy makers, diplomats and military specialists, but has opened up the possibility for development, relief and peace-building agencies to contribute to security and peace. In policy circles there is at present a plea to formulate integrated, multi-actor responses to the comprehensive security challenges faced, combining the efforts of the Departments of Foreign Affairs, Defense, Development Cooperation, Environment and Trade. Such a comprehensive understanding of security has now become widely accepted, as evidenced in recent publications such as *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility* by the UN High Level Panel [14], *State of the World 2005: Redefining Global Security* by the Worldwatch Institute [15], or the *European Security Strategy* formulated by the European Union.

Also in Pugwash, this comprehensive type of analysis has been emerging. At the 54th Pugwash Conference in Seoul (2004), Secretary General Paolo Cotta-Ramusino stated: 'We in Pugwash started as a small community made up almost exclusively of scientists who wanted to promote dialogue and mutual understanding and point out the risks associated with the

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presence of nuclear weapons and other WMD. As you can see from our activities and participation, many of us are still scientists concerned with our responsibility and with the possible consequences of developments in Science and Technology. It is not only weapons, which matter when we are talking about human security. Other non-military aspects (unequal economic development, the spread of specific diseases, the environment) can have a dramatic impact on our security and ultimately provide sources of conflict. There is certainly space now and in the future in Pugwash for these problems.'

The High Level Panel report mentions crime, poverty, infectious disease and environmental degradation as serious security threats apart from interstate and intrastate conflict, terrorism and nuclear, radiological, chemical and biological weapons. The Worldwatch Institute Report talks about 'problems without passports', such as endemic poverty, growing inequality and unemployment, international crime, population movements, recurring natural disasters, ecosystem breakdown, new and resurgent communicable diseases. It also emphasises that a military approach to the problems alone is inadequate and probably counterproductive. Individual (donor) countries, like, for example, The Netherlands and the UK, have adopted similar comprehensive perspectives to deal with conflicts in their foreign and aid policies.

This implies that economic and development aid policies are now focusing explicitly on the issue of conflict and are mobilised to contribute to conflict resolution and peace-building. This has led to significant changes in those policies. They have become 'conflict-sensitised' [16] and must now work 'on conflict'. In a publication on donor practice in conflict situations, Jonathan Goodhand introduced this notion implying that development programmes can exploit opportunities to positively affect the dynamics of conflict. Instead of continuing 'business as usual' or 'working around conflict', development co-operation should explicitly refocus its programs to address the root causes of the conflict, e.g. governance, poverty alleviation, social exclusion. In addition, they should continue to work on incentives for peace and disincentives for violence, and promote conflict mediation and protection of human rights.

### **Implications for Pugwash**

The Russell-Einstein Manifesto and Pugwash's advocacy with regard the elimination of nuclear weapons and the attendant initiatives in non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament continue to be of utmost relevance today. Yet, the changing nature of contemporary conflicts and the emergence of 'new security challenges' as compared to conventional warfare, have added new concerns to the global agenda and perhaps also changed the order of priorities. The last decades Pugwash has in fact started to explore the challenges emanating from this current, comprehensive security problematique.

The Dagomys declaration of 1988 already stated 'Without reducing our commitment to arms reduction and war prevention, we must recognise that environmental degradation and large-scale impoverishment are already facts and can lead to a massive catastrophe even if nuclear war is avoided. .... These linked environmental problems affect all nations. They exacerbate international tensions and increase the risk of future conflicts'.

The Goals of Pugwash in its Tenth Quinquennium (2002-2007), include: 'working to transform and reverse the conditions of economic deprivation, environmental deterioration, and resource scarcity and unequal access that are deplorable in themselves and give rise to despair, resentment, hostility, and violence around the world. Pugwash will continue to address

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this broad web of inter-related dangers, and to work for the sustainable use of energy and natural resources and the constraint of anthropogenic disruption of climate.'

Pugwash has gained considerable experience in those domains from a diversity of Pugwash workshops that addressed themes such as 'Human Security in the Southern African Context', 'Intervention and Sovereignty', 'Public Health Systems in Developing Countries', 'The Impact of Agricultural Biotechnology on Environmental and Food Security', 'Methods for Implementing the Framework Convention on Climate Change', 'Sharing the Planet: Population - Consumption - Species', 'The Security Aspects of HIV/AIDS', 'Economic and Social Inequities in Latin America', and a number of workshops addressing regional conflicts (in South Asia, East Asia and the Middle East).

Obviously, more efforts are indicated before we can fully conceptualise these contemporary challenges and deal with them. A number of issues are still to a certain degree contested, but on the other hand developments are moving rapidly, also in terms of emerging, evidence-based insights.

Extending the line of thinking that Pugwash has already developed in the past decades, Pugwash should systematically include these contemporary challenges in its regular agenda. In particular, the conceptualisation of such challenges within a larger framework of Human Security and the criteria for attaining a clear action-oriented focus need further debate. In this connection, Pugwash's former Secretary General, George Rathjens, emphasised at the 52nd Pugwash Conference in La Jolla (2002) that 'Pugwash should focus on problems of importance, and, in general, since it is an international organisation, on those of direct concern to more than one country .... It should concentrate its efforts in areas where it has comparative advantage over other like-minded organisations .... [And it] must concentrate its efforts generally on what I will call knife-edge problems: on decisions where the forces on the two sides of an argument are close to being in balance: problems where possible Pugwash involvement might be instrumental in pushing the decision one way or the other – and on a time-scale measured in months or years; not one measured in decades.'

Many of the issues discussed above require the same intellectual and moral resolve and effort as the nuclear threat nearly fifty years ago. At the same time we recognise that the multiplex and diffuse nature of the current security challenges make them less easy to address and it may also be more difficult to mobilise the same public response or indignation. We also move from the relatively clear-cut domain of armament and hard science to the more complicated and arguably less tangible domain of politics, economics and social science. Yet, Pugwash members cannot ignore these challenges and should relate to these issues as they present themselves here and now.

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**Notes**

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  5. J. Demmers, *Diaspora and conflict: Locality, long-distance nationalism, and delocalisation of conflict dynamics*, *The Public* 9 (1) (2002) 85-96.
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  16. FEWER, *International Alert and Saferworld, Conflict-Sensitive Approaches to Development, Humanitarian Assistance and Peacebuilding: Resource Pack*. ([http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/resource\\_pack.html](http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/resource_pack.html)).
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