

SIPRI Annual Lecture. 28 May 2018

*As delivered*

Hans Blix: **Is the world on the road to peace or war?**

Just 20 years lapsed between the First and the Second World War but since 1945 we have had more than **70 years without any global conflagration**. Which are the factors that help maintain peace and which lead to war? One simple and much cited answer is the **Roman line**: 'If you want peace, prepare for war' -- '*Si vis pacem, para bellum*'. A better line, I submit, is '**if you want peace, prepare for peace**' -- '*si vis pacem, para pacem*'.

*Need for broad research*

It remains true that the build-up of **military force** may serve to deter aggression and help maintain peace, but it is also true that such build-ups may raise tensions and increase the risk of conflict. **Both** aspects need to be studied. It is good that venerable **war academies** are now supplemented by institutions that **study** the many factors that are relevant for peace.

In 1966 SIPRI --the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute -- was established to celebrate Sweden's 150 years of peace. SIPRI has acquired an excellent reputation and I feel greatly honoured to be invited to inaugurate this series of **annual lectures**.

*Fewer interstate armed conflicts?*

For several years until about 2010, SIPRI annually published findings that were made under Professor Peter Wallensteen at Uppsala University, and that showed that the **number of wars** had been going down. They raised optimism but also met with doubt. Some said simply that 'there have **always been wars** and always will be...'

I leave such facile quips aside. Instead, I shall cite the views of **three prominent modern authors** who have a sceptical outlook.

**Hans Morgenthau**, a leading figure in the influential '**realist**' school, sees a '**quest for power**' as an ever present force. He is deeply worried about the risks posed by nuclear weapons and feels a vague hope that **wise diplomacy** may save humanity from catastrophe.

**Francis Fukuyama**, famous social scientist, finds a '**quest for recognition**' driving most wars. Both Morgenthau and Fukuyama see **military power** as a decisive factor in state relations and both write with some scorn about the UN's capacity to prevent armed conflict.

**Azar Gat**, lastly, gives us a **Darwinist explanation** of the 'quests'. He says that just like our stone age ancestors, we are **genetically programmed to compete about scarce resources-- if need be by using force**. But for these genes our species would not **have survived and thrived**. Gat sees a **chance** that when resources are no longer scarce, people in opulent democratic states may turn their backs to the use of armed force as counterproductive.

The views of the three writers seem to me to be both converging and reflecting reality. The US **national security strategy** presented last year by the Trump administration sounds like an echo of Morgenthau:

*"The strategy is guided by principled realism. It is realist because it acknowledges **the central role of power** in international politics"*

The role of power was stressed **even more bluntly** in 2003 in a lecture by the recently appointed US National Security Adviser:

*"... the United States will decide what is legitimate and what is not and can do so because of its coercive power. It is a philosophy based at least in part ... on 'might makes right'..."*

The quest for '**recognition**' that Fukuyama saw as a driving force, we can hear in words of President **Putin**. Last March he described new Russian weapons that cannot be stopped by current missile shields and said:

*"No one has listened to us"... "You listen to us now".*

But let me also cite **President Obama**. In a speech at Hiroshima in 2016, he said:

*".... On every continent, the history of civilization is filled with **war**, whether driven by scarcity of grain or hunger for gold or compelled by nationalist fervour or religious zeal..."*

He added:

*"... We're **not bound by genetic code** to repeat the mistakes of the past. We can learn. We can choose. We can tell our children a different story, one that describes a common humanity, one that **makes war less likely and cruelty less easily accepted.**"*

I do not think that Obama meant that we can modify genetic programs that are engrained in us. Rather, I think that he meant that genes do **not send blind reflexes** that lead us to violence. The genes enable us to be violent killers, but above all they reward the **fittest** in the competition for resources for survival and well-being. What is 'fitness'? The Swedish translation --'den starkaste', the strongest-- is not satisfactory. Physical strength and power and readiness to use it are parts of 'fitness'? Yes, but also '**smartness**': David won over Goliath. The Greeks won by use of the Trojan horse.

Smartness may lead human beings to violence and killing-- but also to avoid such behaviour. We **live in societies** where **laws allow us to compete but not to kill**. They warn us from killing each other and authorities **lock us up** if we do. Our genes do not condemn us to break such laws. Rather, fitness -smartness - leads us **to refrain from** the prohibited behaviour. It is this smartness that the English **philosopher Hobbes (1588-1679)** relies on, when he declares that **it is possible** to tame the human beings to avoid a violent and unruly fight for gold or grain.

It can be done, says Hobbes, **in a state** where a dominant central power-- a **Leviathan** -- provides legal bans and enforces them.

Our three modern writers would probably agree, but they would also point out that the world of independent countries **is no state**, that the **United Nations** is no stern Leviathan and that the image of a world government that enacts and enforces laws is a **distant dream**.

**All this would be true**, but at the same time we must note that people refrain from killing each other for a variety of reasons -not just because of **penal law and prisons**. In the same way, **many factors** and changes in the world **impact on states' behaviour**.

*Changes in the world have impact on peace*

I mentioned the reported trend to fewer wars. Harvard Professor **Steven Pinker** pointed to them and to a broad historical inquiry of his own into human conduct and concluded that we may today be

*"living in the most peaceable era in our species" existence and that the "decline in violence may be the most significant and least appreciated development in the history of our species"*

Whether or not we agree with Pinker's conclusion we cannot fail to see that over the centuries **changes** in the world's political **structure** and in **people's thinking** have impacted upon peace. **Decolonization** ended foreign domination but also wars of liberation. In Europe, wars, peace treaties, and royal marriages drastically reduced the number of **independent units** that were able to wage war and recently **integration** has all but eliminated the risk of war between members of **the EU**.

A momentous **current change** is that the world is **becoming multipolar** after a long period of frozen **bipolar** stability and a brief period of Pax Americana. The military and technical evolution currently gives **dominance** to three **nuclear** armed states: the **US** with 35 % of the world's military expenditures, **China** with 13 % and **Russia** with 3,8 %. A **conflict involving the three** is **the gravest short term threat the world is facing**. In the medium term, **India** with a population of over 1 billion and rapid economic development, will be a fourth major factor. Serious conflicts - but hardly world conflagrations -- could also flow from the effects of global warming and from a continued economic gap between rich and poor countries.

**Some changes** in the world **clearly reduce the risks of war**. Throughout history, rulers fought wars to move **borders and acquire land** to reap gold, grain and glory. Territory is still precious, but the **conquest of territory** is no longer an important means to achieve gains and glory. Yes, **Kuwait and Crimea** were seized and occupied and Taiwan, Kashmir, areas in the Himalayas and islands in the Pacific pose risk of conflicts. Nevertheless, it would seem that **the slicing of the territorial cake is largely over**.

In the same way, borders are jealously guarded, but relatively few **differences over borders raise threats of armed action**. There are some important exceptions --as between India and China and in the Middle East. Yet, while **migration** makes some borders highly charged, a world of freer trade and freer movement of capital and goods makes border changes less important.

**However**, quests for **hegemony remain an incentive to use force**, especially for major powers and they resort to '**interventions**' by **armed force and other means to achieve it**.

*Land grabbing may be out but intervention is still in*

**The term 'intervention'** covers a broad but not very well defined spectrum of actions, both cross border military and non-military. They are pursued with limited time perspectives and political objectives short of conquest. A little over a hundred years ago a powerful creditor state could **intervene in a debtor state** by sending a gunboat and demanding the payment of debts. Such interventions would not happen today. More likely a visit by some computer armed experts from the IMF...

However, both armed and other interventions continue. In today's world of interdependence one dire need is to find the proper line between states' **legitimate influencing** of each other and **unacceptable intervention**. For instance, **cyber action** may span from the innocent dissemination of data to devastating attacks on vital infrastructure and the large scale planting of false information.

When **substantive 'subversive activities'** are pursued -- as in the Soviet coup that overthrew the Czechoslovak Government in 1948 and the Anglo-American actions that toppled the Mossadeq regime in Iran in 1953 -- what is **commonly regarded** as legitimate action has clearly been exceeded. Even more so, when **interventions** are undertaken openly **with arms** in violation of clear and binding restrictions.

**One might have hoped** that after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Russian actions against Georgia and Ukraine these kinds of unlawful, **uninvited** armed interventions would be so thoroughly discredited that there would be no similar actions. **President Obama** gave **some nourishment** to that hope when he called the invasion of Iraq a 'dumb war' and relied on negotiations rather than armed force to persuade Iran to limit its nuclear program. He also **resisted pressure** for armed US intervention to **punish** the regime in Syria, when it had used **chemical weapons** in 2013 and thereby crossed a **red line** that he had drawn.

**President Trump** has shown no such restraint but acted as a **self-appointed world sheriff** and twice ordered **punitive interventions** in Syria without caring for any green light from the UN Security Council. Talk in the US has also been rampant about unilateral **armed intervention** in **North Korea** and **Iran**. Such unilateral attacks could not be justified as 'self-defense'. They would amount to **preventive war** and violations of the UN Charter.

### *The R2P*

The term '**humanitarian intervention**' has sometimes been used in attempts to glue a respectable sounding label on interstate uses of force undertaken for various political reasons. However, the **painful reality** is that **human rights** are sometimes violated in such a terrible and extensive way that inaction by the world community becomes a shame for all. The **genocide in Rwanda** in 1994 was one such occasion.

It was with the thought of such situations that in 2005 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution highlighting states' responsibility to protect people - **R2P** - within their territories. It **further declared** that where this responsibility was gravely breached, the **UN can intervene** -- in the very last resort by the **use of force**. The resolution looks to the Security Council for decisions on any such '**enforcement actions**'. It provides no ground for individual member states to act as '**global sheriffs**'.

In my view the **R2P is a remarkable conceptual break-through**: Without modifying the Charter, the General Assembly practically asserts an ultimate **UN prerogative** to protect people all over the world against extreme violations of **human rights**. However, **another matter** is practical action. Are members of the UN ready to pay the costs in lives and provide the military and other resources that may turn out to be required -- perhaps for years?

### *The relation between military force and peace*

Throughout most of human history battle and conquest were associated with **glory**. This image **died in the mud** during the First World War. The world came to regard the **pursuit of war -- except in self-defense** -- as condemnable. One -minor- manifestation of the modern outlook is that most '**ministries of war**' are now named '**ministries of defense**'- regardless of what they are up to.

The **UN Charter** reflects the new way of thinking. It talks about the '**scourge of war**' and it **both outlaws the threat or use of force and creates machinery to deal with aggression**. It assumes that most states have military forces for **individual or collective self-defense**, but articles **envisaging disarmament** show awareness that **excessive national armed forces** may pose dangers to peace.

**What is 'excessive'** is left to member states to decide and, if possible, agree **on in negotiations about disarmament**. Most people and governments might agree that the **current global** quantity of 15.000+ nuclear weapons and the current global level of annual

military expenditures of some 1.700 billion dollars are **tragically excessive**. Yet, **arms races** are what much of the world is **currently engaged in**. Even **heaven is not left in peace**. **Outer space** is already 'a war fighting domain' filled with satellites and many can be mobilized for war. Low level cyber war is already here. **Nuclear weapons, star-wars and missile shields are again in focus**.

*How do nuclear weapons impact on peace?*

In 2009, President Obama and then Russian President Medvedev declared in London that they would work for a **total elimination** of nuclear weapons. **Today**, there is no trace of such negotiations. Rather, several states -- notably the United States and Russia -- keep reminding the world of their arsenals. At the forthcoming 2020 review conference of the **NPT**, nuclear weapon states parties will no doubt argue that a **step by step** approach is the only practical way to disarmament. Non-nuclear weapon states will remind us that step by step action has been urged for 50 years with meagre results. Now it is practiced -- **backward**. The **stocks** of nuclear weapons still **suffice to end** human civilization in a **quick suicide**, while we have added the risk of a **slow suicide** through global warming.

**Some claim** that the nuclear weapons have helped to prevent armed confrontations. They point to the **Cuban crisis in 1962**, when the fear of a nuclear exchange made the US and the Soviet Union shy away from war and agree to a diplomatic solution. **Others remind us** that on a number of occasions misunderstandings and mistakes nearly caused nuclear exchanges and that **only luck** saved the world.

Last year, **frustration** among **non nuclear states** and **civic society** led to the negotiation of a **Treaty** comprehensively **prohibiting possession and use of nuclear weapons**. As none of the states possessing nuclear weapons will adhere to the treaty it will **not lead to nuclear disarmament**. Indeed, some of them are so opposed to the treaty that they seek actively to **dissuade other states** from joining. I shall not enter the rather technical discussion. Only suggest that the main political aim of the treaty perhaps is not the unrealistic one to achieve nuclear disarmament, but rather to further **delegitimize nuclear weapons and thereby add restraints to their use and strengthen a nascent general norm against use**.

Which are the restraints?

*MAD*

The **first restraint** undoubtedly flows from the **fear** that an attack with nuclear weapons may lead to a **retaliatory -second- nuclear**

**strike**, and **mutually assured destruction (MAD)** or unacceptable devastation. This **restraint** and the **stigma** attached to any nuclear weapons use no doubt **continues to weigh** heavily on **military planners**. From time to time military officials are heard to voice doubts that they can seriously plan for the use of nuclear weapons.

Perhaps recent proposals to introduce new types of smaller nuclear weapons are advanced in view of a perceived reduced credibility of the old nuclear weapons? However, **low yield, 'more useable' nuclear weapons** would not be fit for the possibly legal use in the **'extreme circumstance of self-defense'** to which the International Court of Justice has referred. They would be battle field weapons with a **lower threshold for use**. **In my view, they deserve to be opposed and discredited**. From this view-point, the 2017 **Treaty Prohibiting Nuclear Weapons** was timely and welcome.

It is rightly said that so long as nuclear **weapons exist** they **may come to be used**. It is paradoxical that this risk may also act as a **constant warning** to nuclear weapon states not to let themselves to be drawn into **controversies** that might escalate to a nuclear conflict. In 1985, President Reagan and Chairman Gorbachev showed that they were fully aware of this and voiced a line that must never be forgotten:

*'A nuclear war cannot be won and must not be fought'.*

*The conflict preventing role of international norms*

**How can nuclear weapon states -- or, for that matter, all states -- avoid being drawn into grave conflicts?** In a moment I shall discuss several factors of relevance. At this point, I would like to focus on the **conflict preventing role of norms**. As was recently well formulated, international law *"provides rules of the road and states collide less often and cooperate more frequently as a result"*. It was in the 19th century that the use of treaties began to generate interstate rules on a large scale and to create intergovernmental organizations. It has continued ever since. The conventions on the law of the sea provide contemporary examples of conflict prevention through norms. In most areas, this treaty based **law** is respected- even without sanctions- and keeps the world going.

However, in the crucial area of **the use of force** between states international **norms** have been **late to emerge**, short on detail and insufficiently reliable. It is true that already in the **4th century A.C.**, **St Augustin (354-430)** presented norms in the famous **doctrine of**



'**just and unjust war**' and for more than a thousand years this doctrine guided the Christian church and theological and legal doctrine. **Secular rulers** may often have paid lip-service to it, but their real attitudes were possibly better described by **Machiavelli**: *'that war is just which is necessary and every sovereign entity may decide on the occasion for war'*.

Neither the Westphalian Peace Conference in 1648 nor the Congress of Vienna in 1815 developed any prohibitions of the use of force between states. There emerged, on the other hand, a sense of **great power responsibility** for European balance of power and peace, not least in the so-called '**Concert of Europe**' that played an amazingly interventionist role to uphold order --monarchic order - in Europe.

The **Covenant** of the League of Nations -- the great gift of US President Wilson to the world -- meant a giant leap forward in the world's organization and also a confirmation of a key role for the **great powers in the** maintenance of peace. It declared **international law** the norm for state conduct. However, it shied away from enunciating a norm that categorically prohibited war. It sought - unsuccessfully - to cope with the issue of war through **disarmament, arbitration** and **action** by the League Council and Assembly.

*At long last, norms emerge prohibiting war*

It was only through the **Briand-Kellogg Act of 1928** that states subscribed to a **blanket renunciation of war** as an instrument of national policy and only through **the UN Charter** that **succinct binding norms** on the interstate use of force emerged. **Article 2:4** commits states

*"to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state."*

The **rule does not stand alone**. The authors of the Charter sought to **learn** from the failures of the League. They **added rules** meant to give the UN a **greater capacity than the League** had had to uphold peace in the world. The Security Council was **authorized to decide on sanctions**, including military enforcement action in cases of breaches of the peace and acts of aggression. **But** -- an important but -- for valid decisions **support was required by the five great powers** that were made permanent members of the Council. Each of them was given a **veto**.

Where majority decisions with support of the five are attained, action evidently builds on massive power. This was the case in 1990

and 1991, when Iraq's occupation of Kuwait was stopped by a multilateral force authorized by the Council and led by the US. **It strengthened the authority of the Council and the authority of the norms** against the use of force. President Bush the elder spoke with just pride about a *"new international order."*

However, in **cases** where the great powers are not agreed and no valid majority decisions can be reached the Council is like a powerful engine with the gearshift in the neutral. This was the case at the invasion of **Iraq in 2003** by the US **and** the Russian annexation of the **Crimea in 2014**. Some may not like the two cases being mentioned in the same sentence. However, in both cases the authority of the Council and the **norms** of the **Charter** against the use of force were ignored and **undermined**. The same occurs when **binding decisions** of the Council are violated, as will now happen regarding a decision by the Council to lift economic sanctions once imposed on IRAN because of its nuclear program. (Res. 2231(2015)). In this case, the current US administration and much of the US Congress are not only showing their indifference to UN obligations by reintroducing economic sanctions lifted by the Council. They may also seek to ensure that the lifted sanctions are again implemented within UN members that wish to abide by the valid decisions of the Security Council.

Clear-cut cases of violations of the Charter apart, we **should not ignore real difficulties** that we meet in interpreting and making norms from 1945 about the regulation of force workable in 2018. To take an example, **cyber attacks** may not be 'armed force', but they may have similar devastating effects. Another example: does the right of self-defense against an armed attack arise when a missile is launched and seems to fly toward you or only when reaches your air space?

After these comments on the significance of **norms** for peace, I must also note, of course, that while supporting the UN norms restricting the use of force, **states do not naïvely rely** on their effective working. **President Obama** who had a positive attitude to the UN said in Oslo when he accepted the Nobel Prize, I quote:

*"...I believe that all nations -- strong and weak alike - must **adhere to standards** that govern the use of force." But he continued: "I - like any head of state - reserve the right to act **unilaterally if necessary** to defend my nation. Nevertheless, I am convinced that adhering to*

*standards strengthens those who do and isolates - and weakens -- those who don't."*

**So, is the world on the road to peace or war?** It is sometimes said that old age is the price you pay for wisdom. Alas, I am not old enough to give a wise answer to the question. But I have pointed to factors and changes that I think are relevant. It is true that our **militant genes have not changed** and that the quests for power and recognition remain. Strivings for local, regional and global **hegemony** continue. However, as I have noted, these driving forces influence us in **a world that has changed dramatically** since the time when our Viking ancestors combined trade with marauding -- armed intervention-- and some grabbing of land.

**In the future**, civil, local and proxy wars will continue to erupt, sometimes with gruesome consequences -- as in Syria, Somalia and Afghanistan. However, it is striking that for **70+ years** the great powers have **shied away from direct armed confrontations**. The fear of **MAD** --mutually assured destruction -- is likely to **remain** and provide a strong but nerve-racking restraint. Another -- weaker-- restraint may lie in the rising cost of ignoring an accelerating mutual economic dependence - **MED**.

Many **institutional factors** influence our journey into the future. In the League of Nations, **disarmament** and the settlement of disputes by **judicial means** were prime -- but unsuccessful -- recipes for peace. While still of great potential they have yet to become major factors to world peace. On the other hand, **a wealth of common norms** underpin and allow relatively friction free massively increased international economic and other relations. We have also seen the emergence and growth of a **common global ethics: Human Rights** are ever more broadly asserted by public opinion, invoked by states and monitored by international institutions. Lastly, while the Security Council is far from an executive government of the world, the large number of UN linked intergovernmental organizations function as a kind of world **administrative departments**. It remains essential that they - and the UN itself - continue to be served by **professional impartial civil services that provide** dossiers and documents that are objective and unbiased. 'Factfulness' -- with a term that is rightly gaining ground.

In the end we have to admit that when it comes to preventing **the threat or use of force** the approach that the world established some 70 years ago has **serious shortcomings**. Despite many improvements in

**the UN system the road we are travelling remains risky.**

Understandably and inevitably the **great powers** winners of WWII claimed and were given the **central role** in the UN Security Council's mission to maintain peace in the world. They often reach the agreement between themselves that is a precondition for action. The 100.000 blue UN berets spread for **peace keeping** in conflict areas are an oft overlooked testimony to this. Tomorrow, 29 May, we rightly celebrate the International Day of UN Peacekeepers. 70 years after the start of the first peace-keeping operation in Palestine,

**Collective leadership** is no easy form of governance, whether national or international - as in the structure of the Security Council. Yet, what we can and should do, is to **demand** of the five great powers in the UN Security Council that they live up to the power and responsibility that they asked for and were given in 1945. To do so, they must -- like other states -- **recognize and show regard for each other's and others' legitimate interests**, adapt to each other and show respect for the institution and norms that they have, themselves, created.

Allow me to conclude this discussion of grave issues with some lighter lines. During the nuclear tensions of the Cold War the Danish poet Piet Hein named a way for rulers to overcome their quests for recognition:

*The noble art of losing face*

*May*

*One day*

*Save the human race.*

As we realize that this art may be very difficult, we might turn at last to Hans Morgenthau's desperate hope for **wise diplomacy** to bring salvation -- as it actually did in the Cuban crisis. So I end with a brief poetic effort of my own:

*Let diplomacy be the noble art*

*That prevents an upset of the nuclear apple cart*

*That saves the famous ruler's face*

*And allows him to retreat with grace.*