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IS THE WORLD ON THE ROAD TO PEACE OR WAR?

HANS BLIX

SIPRI Lecture 01

STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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SIPRI Annual Lecture No. 1

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Preface

On 28 May 2018, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute proudly hosted the inaugural SIPRI Lecture, in the presence of His Majesty Carl XVI Gustaf and Her Majesty Queen Silvia.

The conceptional basis for the SIPRI Lecture recognizes oration as particularly important in light of today's impulsive media landscape. A monograph may struggle to captivate a reader's attention while short interviews may reduce nuances to soundbites. A lecture allows for the articulation of complex thoughts while directly engaging with an audience.

HE Dr Hans Blix—the speaker for this SIPRI Lecture—needs little introduction. Dr Blix's work ethic, integrity and independence underpin his career of distinguished public service dedicated to peace, disarmament and non-proliferation. His appointments include his time as Sweden's Minister for Foreign Affairs, as Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and as the Executive Chairman of the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission in 2000–2003. Given Dr Blix's experience and wisdom, the theme for this year's SIPRI Lecture, 'Is the world on the road to peace or war?' is fitting.

On behalf of SIPRI, I would like to extend sincere thanks to Dr Blix for inaugurating the SIPRI Lecture series and for his continued connection to SIPRI as a Distinguished Associate Fellow. I would also like to thank Ambassador Jan Eliasson, Chair of the SIPRI Governing Board, for his introductory remarks, as well as Dr Katarina Engberg, formerly of the Swedish Government Offices, and Mats Karlsson, formerly of the Swedish Institute for International Affairs, for their engaging discussion following the lecture. Finally, I would like to thank State Secretary Annika Söder for her closing address and also Staffan Scheja for his piano accompaniments during the event.

Dan Smith
Director, SIPRI
September 2018

Is the world on the road to peace or war?

Just 20 years lapsed between World War I and World War II 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*'.

The 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, the 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 United Nation'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 over 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 United States national security strategy presented last year by the Donald J. 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 quest for 'recognition' that Fukuyama saw as a driving force, we can hear in words of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Last March, Putin 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 former US President Barack 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.

Obama 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'? Physical strength and power and readiness to use it? 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 Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) relies on, when he declares that it is possible to tame 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 UN 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 an 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 ended 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 European Union (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 USA with 35 per cent of the world's military expenditures, China with 13 per cent and Russia with 3.8 per cent 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 one billion and rapid economic development, will be a fourth major factor. Serious conflicts 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 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 International Monetary Fund (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 USA has also been rampant about unilateral, armed intervention in North Korea and Iran. Such unilateral attacks could not be justified as 'self-defence'. They would amount to preventive war and violations of the UN Charter.

The responsibility to protect

The term 'humanitarian intervention' has often 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 breakthrough: 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 World War I. The world came to regard the pursuit of war—except in self-defence—as condemnable. One minor-manifestation of the modern outlook is that most 'ministries of war' are now named 'ministries of defence'—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-defence, 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 over 15 000 nuclear weapons and the current global level of annual military expenditures of some $1700 billion US 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 cyberwar 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 former 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 USA and Russia—keep reminding the world of their arsenals. At the forthcoming 2020 review conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, 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 nuclear weapons have helped to prevent armed confrontations. They point to the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, when the fear of a nuclear exchange made the USA 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.

What are the restraints?

Mutually assured destruction (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 or unacceptable devastation. This restraint and the stigma attached to any nuclear weapon 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 usable' nuclear weapons would not be fit for the possibly legal use in the 'extreme circumstance of self-defence' to which the International Court of Justice has referred. They would be battlefield weapons with a lower threshold for use. In my view, they deserve to be opposed and discredited. From this viewpoint, the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of 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 Ronald Reagan and Chairman Mikhail 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 Convention on the Law of the Sea provides 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 fourth century AD, 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 Woodrow 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 Pact 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 of Nations. 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 peace and acts of aggression. But for valid decisions, support was required by the five great powers that were made permanent members of the Security 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 Security Council and led by the USA. It strengthened the authority of the Security Council and the authority of the norms against the use of force. President H. W. Bush 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 Security 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 USA 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 Security Council and the norms of the Charter against the use of force were ignored and undermined. The same occurs when binding decisions of the Security Council are violated, as will now happen regarding a decision by the Security Council to lift economic sanctions once imposed on Iran because of its nuclear program, Resolution 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 Security 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, cyberattacks may not be 'armed force', but they may have similar devastating effects. Another example: does the right of self-defence against an armed attack arise when a missile is launched and seems to fly towards you or only when it reaches your airspace?

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 over 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 World War II 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 peacekeeping in conflict areas are an oft overlooked testimony to this. Tomorrow, 29 May, we rightly celebrate the International Day of UN Peacekeepers. Seventy years after the start of the first peacekeeping 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 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.

Hans Blix

Hans Blix (Sweden) is a Distinguished Associate Fellow with SIPRI. He has extensive experience as a diplomat, politician and author. From 1963 to 1976, Dr Blix was Head of Department at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and served as Legal Adviser on International Law. From 1961 until 1981, he was a member of Sweden's delegation to the United Nations General Assembly, while from 1962 to 1978 he was a member of the Swedish delegation to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. In 1976, Dr Blix served as the Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, in charge of international development cooperation. He was appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs in October 1978, serving in that position until 1979. Following his tenure as Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Dr Blix was named Executive Chairman of the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. He served in that position from January 2000 until June 2003.