

Opening Presentation by Roy Love at Quakers in Yorkshire, April 2023

Theme: Peace and Conflict Resolution

What is not mentioned is why conflict broke out in the first place – Thus, before looking at the personal impact of the breakdown of peace and conflict resolution we need to ask why such breakdowns and their frequent recurrence can arise.

This requires an understanding of **the causes of conflict**

(a) in as much as these usually need to be addressed and fully understood for any peace process to be successful and

(b) that if not done comprehensively and with each side's full agreement, then a propensity for it to reopen will be there.

E.g. the peace agreement at the end of WW1 effectively punishing Germany for starting the war, thereby contributing to the outbreak of WW2, twenty-one years later.

Causes of conflict, and processes of peace (Conflict resolution).

Simple explanation – **Greed or Grievance!** But overly simple.

Often grievances can have a long historical record (e.g. Northern Ireland, inequality, and religious identity). – often legacy of colonialism: weak preparation for governance, artificial boundaries and consequent internal ethnic rivalries.

Many levels. A small regional group may take to arms if perceived injustices have been ignored. Local ethnic competition for grazing land/water holes (caused by drought/climate change; boundary changes) depend on the balance between negotiations of elders and the armed young men of each side throwing taunts at each other. These can often blow up into a wider scale.

Major regional conflicts, either within a country or between countries, usually begin with minor events or major threats followed by a sequence of talks in which disagreement intensifies.

At some point one side will take a calculated decision to attack the other, choosing the intensity strategically. Conflict then escalates (Sudan today - plus global factors ... Russia/US and the West). Also creating refugees, women and children at particular risk.

All in the background are the forces of what has been called the '**triple paradigm crisis**':

- a. Dominance of **neo-liberal market economics** of the West in the global system,
- b. **Climate breakdown**; and
- c. An entrenched **security culture centred on the ready use of military force** in responding to threats (*Paul Rogers paper 2019*). (e.g. invasion of Iraq).
- d. Also, **businesses and groups making money out of conflict** – not only arms and ammunition but a range of other contracts which gives them an interest in the continuation of conflict.

[**But** bear in mind **Europe's violent history** over the centuries up to the present, and the idea of a critical '*sattelzeit*' or saddle period of around a century in the transition from traditional society to industrial take-off and wider 'modernity', e.g. 1750 to 1850 in Europe]

Peace:

(a) **One side may be defeated** ... but leaving grievances that may well lead to later recurrence of conflict (Germany in WWs 1 and 2).

Or (b) **both sides may be equally matched** and wish to avoid prolongation How to indicate this, however, without seeming weak (Russia-Ukraine?).

Often **informal channels used to bring in mutually trusted intermediaries** (H.W. Van Der Merwe and **ANC-SA government** – Book: *'Peace-making in South Africa. A life in Conflict Resolution'*).

Continuing problems in Middle East Islamic jihadism and its causes. [Israel and Palestine; Northern Ireland and religious divisions]

Relevance to the rest of today's programme

Displaced populations flee, younger members may embark on longer migrations to earn money for remitting (Hawala system). Or may join an armed group.

If one side defeated then **losers may flee**, fearing persecution.

Winning side may persecute any opposition, can be classed as 'terrorist'

Issue of child soldiers.

- Often when **armed groups experience severe attrition through desertion or fatalities** they turn to child recruits.
- Most **common amongst non-state armed groups** but occurs in state armies when under duress [But see UK below]
- In addition to increasing the numbers of combatants and support functionaries, **children have other useful attributes.**
 - Can be **more easily disciplined** and directed to different types of duty,
 - Are **cheaper to feed and accommodate**,
 - Are **less likely to desert**
 - Availability of **lightweight weaponry** means that they are physically able to engage in combat.
 - **'Immature' moral sensibility** can result in brutality and indiscrimination in whom they attack, which alarms their enemies,
 - Should they desert or be killed, they **can often be readily replaced.**

Militant groups use many children as looters, spies, messengers or informants, porters, couriers, spies, guards, suicide bombers or human shields for an armed group. Children who clean and cook or who are used for sexual exploitation in the conflict context are also considered child soldiers

UK and child soldiers <https://jobs.army.mod.uk/how-to-join/can-i-apply/age/>

- You must be at least 16 years old to join the Army as a soldier.
- You can start your application when you're **15 years and 7 months, but you won't be able to go to the assessment centre until you're at least 15 years and 9-month-old.**
- Be enlisted before your 36th birthday.
- If you're under 18, you'll also need parental consent to join.

More generally **begs question of how 'child' is defined in different cultures.**

Relevance of all the above to CRESST, at school or local level:

Learning through practice about causes of conflict, its resolution and preventions at individual level helps to minimize it at social and community levels, and in resolving differences otherwise prone to violence.

Would widespread **emulation of the example of CRESST** help in diminishing the possibilities of physical conflict across the potential scales from local to international?

Yet, the **presence of past grievances** are often difficult to dispel (e.g. NI where Catholic/Protestant enmity is deeply entrenched by historically determined social inequalities.)

Also is the **question of where warriors/soldiers come from?** Deprived areas; school visits by national army recruiters; effect of common culture.

Will the likes of CRESST affect a **young person's decision to join the armed forces?** –

Question of wider values Just war e.g.?

Is it part of a continuum affecting all of society?

Or essentially only **teaching children to be nice to one another?** Wider issue of **child soldiers** again, and influence of the media.

Conclusion

What can we as Quakers do on the larger scale with our own limited resources?

First, educate ourselves on how conflict begins at that level.

Second, continue to support our United Nations Offices where behind the scenes diplomatic communications can be supported.

Third, work at international understanding and friendship. Research shows that ethnic hatred increases during war and feeds into a repeated cycle of conflict.

Fourth, support international mediation organisations which can operate behind the scenes.

Fifth, in the aftermath of conflict work to break the cycle by assisting in the process of ensuring that post-war rehabilitation and recovery is equitable.

And at local community level?

Support

(a) **Local initiatives** such as CRESST, youth clubs, church clubs, talks to schools etc.

(b) **Join or support** relevant political parties and movements,

(c) **Extend welcome to refugees fleeing conflict**, whilst recognizing the global and historical factors often at work in the conflicts from which they have been fleeing, and our own country's frequent part in leading to these circumstances.
