Sustainable security

A briefing for Friends

Living out the peace testimony means much more than condemning war. Embracing our Quaker heritage of nonviolent resistance to violent conflict means building and promoting radical alternatives: showing our communities and decision-makers how conflict can be dealt with positively, without resorting to military confrontation. One framework for this alternative is the concept of 'sustainable security'.

This briefing has been co-produced by peace and security think tank the Oxford Research Group (ORG), Northern Friends Peace Board (NFPB) and Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) in order to stimulate discussion, reflection and action among Friends. It is based on analysis by ORG, with the addition of reflection points for Friends.

What is sustainable security?

As Quakers, we have come to understand that there is that of God in everyone: "each one of us is unique, precious, a child of God".[1] So, we must work to ensure that all life is valued and that no one is seen as disposable. Whilst we understand that conflict is inevitable, violence is not.

This understanding is not reflected in the current mainstream approach to national and international security, which is based on the assumption that military force and political containment can maintain security and the status quo. Oxford Research Group describes that as 'the control paradigm'. Such an approach does not attempt to address the reasons why violent conflict happens. Instead violence is responded to with violence. A good example of this belief is the so-called 'war on terror', which aims to 'keep the lid' on terrorism and insecurity by using military force against those who are believed to be the perpetrators. This approach fails to address the factors that drive terrorism and political violence.

The control paradigm is reactionary, neglects long-term conflict prevention, and distracts from the task of developing solutions to the threats the world is likely to face in the 21st century. The major trends likely to cause large-scale loss of life and security over the coming decades are:

- marginalisation of the majority world[2]
- climate change
- competition over resources
- global militarisation.

These are factors which can be mitigated successfully in ways that do not involve violent conflict. We are not powerless in the face of them, nor are we short of alternatives. However, addressing these issues requires a fundamental shift in the way the world is organised, and in the way power is held.

Sustainable security is one way of thinking about this shift. At the centre of the sustainable approach is the understanding that we cannot successfully control all the consequences of insecurity. Instead we must work to tackle the causes: curing the disease, rather than fighting the symptoms. It translates the spirit of local peacebuilding initiatives, which aim to resolve tension before it reaches violence, onto a global scale.

The underlying drivers of insecurity are also not isolated issues. In fact, they connect closely with concerns already held by many Friends, such as the economic system being driven by markets rather than human needs, exploitation of the natural world, and poverty. Friends in Britain have a role to play in managing their own impact on the issues that may drive conflict in the future, and in advocating the resolution of them. The testimonies can help shape our response.

Marginalisation of the majority world

The main question for us who are comfortable is whether we use our positions of comparative power to arrogate to ourselves more than our reasonable share of the resources of the world. If so, we should try to redistribute what we can, to live in a more responsible way…

We cannot take more than our share of finite resources unless we have the power so to do. Poverty and powerlessness are bound up with each other. Poverty leads to powerlessness, and powerlessness leads to poverty.

Martin Wyatt, 1988. Quaker faith & practice*, 23.22.*

Over recent decades, global wealth has increased, but the benefits of this prosperity have not been equally shared. There has been a concentration of wealth in relatively few parts of the world.

In 2011 people in the UK speak of living through a 'recession', but the pre-recession era of prosperity was never widely shared. The worldwide 'bottom billion'[3] – individuals and families that live in absolute poverty – were never party to the benefits delivered with the West's economic growth in the first place. In parallel with this group live the global elite of about 1.5 billion (which probably includes every single person who will read this briefing) who

either live in the global North or are part of small global South elites. While the poorest 40 per cent of the world's population account for five per cent of the global income (2.5 billion people living on less than $2 a day), the richest 10 per cent, the vast majority of whom live in the global North, account for 54 per cent.[4]

This inequality creates a feeling and experience of marginalisation. With improved literacy and education in the majority world, aspirations are cultivated, but the economic situation in their communities means these ambitions are often frustrated. At the same time, the spread of telecommunications means people in the developing world can *see* the riches of people in wealthier nations through the media, in a way that would never have been possible fifty years ago.

Justifiable dissatisfaction at this inequity can fuel political instability, increasing tension between and within communities. As the anti-corruption activist Dr P.L.O Lumumba put it at a talk in Nairobi last year, "whilst I have four pairs of shoes and my neighbour has none, I must worry." Tensions around inequality may be expressed in unrest including social disorder, uprisings both violent and nonviolent (like the Zapatistas in Mexico and the Naxalites in India), criminality (such as against gated communities) and even terrorism. Whilst we may be distressed by violent acts, many of us will be able to understand the frustration that they stem from. It is at the root causes of the aggressors' anger, therefore, that a sustainable security response must start.

The problem of marginalisation exists at the local and international level. States from the global South are not represented in many international groupings: for example, no nations from Latin America, the Middle East or Africa are permanent members of the UN Security Council. There is also a sense that these states are speaking from the periphery in financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. This can frustrate governments in the global South, hampering co-operation and adding to the feeling of powerlessness in many populations.[5]

In terms of foreign and defence policy specifically, Western governments and their military strategists often regard threats as stemming solely from the global South (or from immigrants or proxies in the global North). The South (particularly areas of strongly contrasting ideology) therefore becomes an area to be controlled, in the interests of Western 'security'. This approach doesn't recognise the interconnected nature of today's world. As Paul Rogers puts it, "The castle gates simply cannot be closed".[6] In order to create a more sustainable approach to security, Western nations must lay down the tendency to see the majority world as a collection of weak or failed states that present a challenge to their power and safety. Instead, the global South must become partners in creating a more peaceful world.

Reflections

Quaker testimonies are convictions that arise from our experience of living in the world and through the Spirit. The testimony to equality reflects the belief that each one of us is of equal worth. While this has spiritual impacts such as the commitment to the priesthood of all believers, it also has political ones, as a belief in equality often proves incompatible with the materialistic age in which we live. Thus, Friends are led to challenge the systems that cause injustice and hinder true community. This includes the reduction of poverty and marginalisation.

The lifestyle of each one of us has an impact on the lives of others, and upon the environment: we can bring about exploitation or prosperity. The testimony to equality can be demonstrated through our consumption. For example, Friends can ensure the produce we buy is made by people who receive fair payment; we can invest in organisations that support the marginalised; we can consider how our time can be used to tackle inequality, for example through supporting campaigning groups or organisations,

or volunteering with the marginalised in our own communities; we can work to politically support policies that tackle inequality both internationally and locally. In our engagement with MPs, we can assert the claim put forward in *The spirit level*[7] that more equal societies are more socially cohesive, more trusting and produce less crime. This argument can also be applied to a global context.

Environmental limits

As to our own planet which God has given us for a dwelling place, we must be mindful that it is given in stewardship. The power over nature that scientific knowledge has put into our hands, if used in lust or greed, fear or hatred, can bring us to utter destruction. If we choose life we may now feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and heal the sick on a world scale, thus creating new conditions for spiritual advancement so often till now prevented by want. Many of our resources – of oil, of coal and of uranium – are limited. If by condoning waste and luxury we overspend the allowance God has given us, our children's children will be cheated of their inheritance. Limited too is the annual bounty of nature. The material foundation of our life is the tilling of the earth and the growing of food... We must conserve the goodness of the soil and not exploit it.

Norfolk, Cambs & Hunts Quarterly Meeting, 1957
Quaker faith & practice*, 25.07*

While not as long-standing among Friends as the peace testimony, the need for a commitment to the environment has become very strong among Quakers in Britain recently. The earth, which is abundant in natural and material resources, has been used to fulfil the desires (some essential, some not) of the population that lives on it. Many of the resources which have been exploited, such as fossil fuels, cannot be replaced; the extraction of others places habitats and ecosystems in danger; others produce damaging pollutants when used.

The treatment of the natural world by humankind has contributed towards the two related major trends that are likely to drive insecurity in the coming decades: climate change and competition over natural resources.

Climate change is high on the international political agenda. The likely and actual physical affects of these processes are well documented; the earth will be changed. Climate change will also have dramatic social and economic impacts. For example: a loss of or damage to infrastructure, shifts in disease patterns (e.g. spread of diseases like malaria and dengue fever, as the mosquitoes that transmit the infection are able to inhabit new locations because of changing temperatures), human crises as a result of more frequent extreme weather events such floods, water scarcity, and the mass displacement of peoples as some regions become uninhabitable. These trends could produce serious security consequences.[8]

A closely related driver of insecurity is competition over resources. The planet is more heavily populated than ever, and today some populations are already consuming far more than their share of the planet's resources. As population growth continues, there will be greater scarcity of resources including food, water and energy, particularly if consumption patterns also increase. Once major demographic changes and the effects of climate change are factored in, greater competition for such resources should be expected. This will have local and global effects, as those nations rich in natural resources become subject to competition between local populations and international corporations who wish to buy their resources for sale in other parts of the world.

Resource-conflict is already an issue: many anti-war activists cited oil as a cause behind the invasion of Iraq (central to the Persian Gulf, an oil-rich region) in 2003; water access is an ongoing source of tension between Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories around the River Jordan basin; and in the same region, there are differences in how much water Israeli settlers
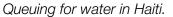
and Palestinian inhabitants of the West Bank are able to access.[9] The final example will relate in future also to climate change, as the Middle East is highly likely to suffer increased occurrences of drought.[10] Competition will make some existing conflicts worse, and produce new struggles.

These two related environmental crises will disproportionately affect the poor, and further entrench marginalisation. The Climate Justice movement has been prominent in describing the injustice of this situation: it is the poorest that have contributed least to the greenhouse gas emissions that are catalysing climate change, yet they will suffer most because of it.[11]

Reflections

Many Friends are coming to regard the relationship with the earth as a key part of our witness as Quakers. As we inherit the earth's resources, we must appreciate the beauty of God in the natural world around us, understanding our dependence on it, rather than regarding it as a quarry for personal comfort and economic gain. At this time of apprehension about the future of the planet, Friends can take advantage of wider society's consideration of these issues, encouraging governments, businesses and individuals to grow in their respect for the earth and all living things. These dual crises necessitate a re-evaluation of our consumption; Friends, alongside others, can advocate for a rapid move away from carbon-based economies – reducing our consumption of fossil fuels, and moving towards renewable energy. We need to grow into right relationship with the planet, recognising humans are part of the natural world, rather than conquerors of it.

This is also an opportunity to speak out in celebration of the testimony to simplicity. True simplicity is not just a reaction against the material greed that has "got us into this mess in the first place", but also a radical freedom from dependence on material security. Simplicity leads us to focus on true spiritual and material needs, rather than the gratification of false or 'manufactured' needs that are encouraged by the consumerist system in which we live. A commitment to simplicity is a dissention from what much of society stands for, but is called for both as a witness to our Quaker values, and as a way out of the unsustainable fashion in which humans live on this planet.

Soldiers in Iraq.
Photo: US Army

Global militarisation

No one ever said it would be easy, no one promised it wouldn't hurt. This way of life, this trusting one another and trusting God, is no impermeable shield, guaranteed to protect us by cutting us off, building barriers, keeping the bad things and the bad people out. It's messy, muddly and sometimes painful – but the other way, the search for some kind of mechanical invulnerability, for some kind of scientific guarantee against physical death, that way I am sure lies the death of the Spirit.

Mary Lou Leavitt, 1987
Quaker faith & practice*, 24.55*

The *SIPRI yearbook 2010* states, "despite the financial crisis and its aftershocks around the globe in 2008 and 2009, sustained upward trends in military spending, arms production and arms transfers continued essentially uninterrupted".[12] The weapons it refers to are produced and sold for profit, and bought in the belief that they can help contain security threats. This is a reactionary and militarist approach, representative of the 'control paradigm' – responding only to the outbreak of violent conflict, without targeting the root causes of the dispute.

The availability of weapons at the local and global level is potentially devastating in a number of ways. Physical violence is more likely to occur when weapons are readily available.[13] Moreover, an arms race is encouraged when ownership of weapons is associated with ensuring your own security at the expense of the security of others (with the likely response being that those you are 'defending' yourself from, arm themselves in turn). This is as true with guns in a Cape Town slum as it is with nuclear weapons between states, and the continuing quest for ever more powerful weapons is a catalyst for such spiralling behaviour. Profits from the arms trade are also vast and increasing (including government subsidies[14]). Arms companies benefit from the continuation of violent conflict. This financial dimension makes research and development into weaponry a substantial moneymaking enterprise, diverting expertise and investment away from other fields.

This expertise has been crucial in advancing weapons technology. Militarisation itself is not a new driver of conflict, but in the 21st century advances in technology make it particularly critical. Developments have occurred in long-range conventional missile systems, chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and there have been moves towards the weaponisation of space.

Meanwhile, the prevalent military containment tactics have recently led to casualty-heavy invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, as part of the 'war on terror'. This type of warfare has utilised Special Forces, long-range strike missiles, counter-insurgency weaponry including mine-resistance vehicles and armed drones. These have attempted to contain the irregular, asymmetric warfare that has evolved, where a relatively small number of fighters have been able to tie down many thousands of the world's best-equipped troops.

Reflections

For Friends, doing "that which tends to the peace of all"[15] is a long-held aspiration. In today's political context, this means tackling the prominence of the militarism and self-interest that shape the belief that with enough military and political might, we may crush all threats with force. While not underestimating the weight of the fear of terrorism for example, and the uses that fear can be put to when manipulated by

the media or political groups, Friends can show that there is another way to address insecurity that doesn't involve violence. One way of acting upon this truth is to protest against weapons developments, advocate for disarmament, and support civil society groups that stem the flow of weapons to insecure regions.

Friends recognise the intrinsic value of all people, sometimes describing it as "that of God". One way of expressing this is through encouraging empathy and the importance of trying to understand the feelings and experiences that others have. Individuals and states need to recognise that when one uses force to 'secure' oneself, it makes others feel insecure. This, in turn, can result in their use of force – building a spiral of insecurity. The only way out of the spiral is the building of local and global communities based on empathy.[16]

Concluding thoughts

As consumers, producers and investors, or as travellers, readers and campaigners we can be active in support of the Two Thirds World. Our use of energy connects us directly to the greenhouse effect and to world food supplies. Our bank interest rates link us to the debt burdens that are forcing many countries to destroy their environment to produce cash crops and foreign currency. Our ability to acquire knowledge gives us the chance to act as a mouthpiece on behalf of the environment and the poor who are suffering most from its destruction. Indeed we have the responsibility to use that knowledge wisely.

Ruth Tod, 1990
Quaker faith & practice*, 25.11*

Addressing the drivers of insecurity may feel daunting, but it is central to the welfare of the global community. The current way of dealing with threats, the control paradigm, has a sustainable alternative. The alternative solutions to global threats described in this briefing are summarised in Table 1, below.

Friends express leadings by speaking truths to those in power. The message for those with power now is that peace cannot be wrought through political and military containment, but by addressing the challenges at source. Over the coming years these challenges are likely to be related to four connected trends: marginalisation of the majority world, climate change, competition over resources and global militarisation.

Friends can also do all we can to make our own lifestyles a living expression of our values; and we can engage with others to help them do the same.

Table 1   Two approaches to instability[17]

Responses based on the → control paradigm	GLOBAL THREATS	← Responses based on sustainable security
Control of the Persian Gulf →	**Competition over resources**	← Moving away from a carbon-based economy
Nuclear power →	**Climate change**	← Renewable energy
Social control →	**Marginalisation**	← Poverty reduction
Counter-proliferation →	**Global militarisation**	← Disarmament

Further reading

- 'Building sustainability, building peace', a thinkpiece from QPSW. Available at www.quaker.org.uk/sustainability. Includes a section 'What can Friends do?' to inspire your own action.

- *Global security after the war on terror* by Paul Rogers. Available from the Oxford Research Group website, or in hard copy by contacting Hannah Brock at hannah@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk.

- 'Sustainable security: A statement of concern' from the Northern Friends Peace Board. Available on their website, www.nfpb.gn.apc.org.

- www.sustainablesecurity.org for regularly updated articles, book reviews and commissioned papers on the four likely drivers of future insecurity.

Endnotes

1 *Advices & queries*, 22.
2 A note on terminology: 'majority world' refers to the majority of the world's population living in poorer nations. This can also be referred to as the 'global South', since the southern hemisphere contains many of these poorer regions (including Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and much of Asia). By contrast the 'global North' refers to countries of Europe and North America, and the term is used interchangeably with 'the West'. Australia and New Zealand are also included in descriptions of the global North, as despite their geographical diversity, socio-economically these nations are similar to the West.
3 A colloquial term (popularised by Paul Collier in *The bottom billion: Why the poorest countries are failing and what can be done about it*, Oxford University Press, 2007) referring to those living in extreme poverty. This year the number of people living on less than $1.25 a day or less is actually 1.44 billion (United Nations Development Programme, *United Nations Human Development Report 2010*).

4 Emmanuel Kattan. *2006 annual report: Global partnership for development*, United Nations Development Programme, June 2006, p. 8.
5 For example the climate change negotiations in Copenhagen and Cancun, at which majority world nations were often peripheral. The 'Copenhagen Accord' that came out of the December 2009 meeting was pushed through by the major powers without genuine engagement with key voices from the developing world, which will be most affected by climate change.
6 Paul Rogers (2009) *Global security after the war on terror*, Oxford Research Group, p. 6.
7 Wilkinson, R. and Pickett, K. (2009) *The spirit level: why more equal societies almost always do better*, Allen Lane, London.
8 See Dyer, G. (2010) *Climate wars*, Oneworld Publications: Oxford, and Abbott, C. (2008) *Uncertain futures: Law enforcement, national security and climate change*, Oxford Research Group.
9 "In a recent drought, settlers used four-fifths of water in the West Bank". See 'Israelis get four-fifths of scarce West Bank water, says World Bank', *The Guardian*, 27 May 2009.
10 See Tolba, M. K. and Saab, N. W. (2009) *Impact of climate change on Arab countries*, Report for the Arab Forum for Environment and Development.
11 "The most difficult revelation is that climate change is harming the poorest first and worst – those that contribute virtually nothing to global warming but are the least able to deal with its repercussions" from Climate Action Network Europe (2009) *Report on climate change and development*.
12 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI yearbook 2010: Armaments, disarmament and international security*, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 6.
13 See Brennan, I and Moore, S. (2009) 'Weapons and violence: A review of theory and research' *Aggression and Violent Behaviour* 14 (3) pp. 215–225 for a review of how this process plays out in the UK and USA.
14 See Ingram, P and Isbister, R. (2004) *Escaping the subsidy trap: Why arms exports are bad for Britain*, Oxford Research Group.
15 Declaration to Charles II on behalf of 12 Friends (including George Fox), 1660/1.
16 See Booth, K. and Wheeler, N. (2007) *The security dilemma: Fear, cooperation and trust in world politic,* Palgrave: Hampshire.
17 Adapted from C. Abbott, P. Rogers and J. Sloboda (2006) *Global responses to global threats,* Oxford Research Group, p. 29.