

Pugwash and the Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Constraining the use of Nuclear Weapons 1945-2010

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‘Who could have believed fifty years ago that a new century would arrive...without any nuclear weapons being fired at a target?...Something quite unanticipated happened. Rather, something widely expected didn’t happen’¹ (Schelling, 2002)

Since August 9th 1945 there has not been a single detonation of any nuclear weapons against any country anywhere in the world. This situation, for many political theorists and security analysts, has been unexpected. From a historical perspective, Tannenwald correctly notes ‘it is rare for a weapon found useful [by military staff] on one occasion to remain unused in the next’² conflict unless, it could be argued, a more powerful weapon has been created. A nuclear weapon, in terms of instant devastation of human lives as well as damage to infrastructure and material targets from a single blast, is still the most powerful weapon known to man, hence the term “Weapon of Mass Destruction”.

It could be suggested that the nuclear weapons of today are more powerful and efficient than those of 1945. Today, nuclear weapons are cheaper, easier to manufacture and deploy than ever before, while they are also smaller and more efficient in detonation than ever before. In addition, the means of delivery are more accurate, faster, and the inception of multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles makes these weapons more flexible and precise than ever before. There are more states in the international system which have the capability to launch a nuclear attack than in 1945- however, despite the efficiencies and improvement in material capability for weaponry and proliferation, there has been no use of nuclear weapons since 1945. A more powerful weapon has not been replicated since then, so there must be a reason as to why nuclear weapons have not been used in conflicts post 1945.

Why has this been the case? Well, it was aforementioned that the ‘improvements’ to nuclear weaponry are *physical only*-faster, smaller, cheaper, more widely accessible-the changes are considered improvements in the material world of hard power. States that rely solely upon materialist assumptions and a world model premised upon conceptions of ‘hard power’ thus discover the challenge of these ideals. The material conditions have been satisfied for more nuclear use, yet none has occurred. Those who fail to appreciate the importance of cultural diplomacy and ideational soft power are not as equipped to handle or explain these situations than those whose world model is not entirely based upon hard power.

¹ Schelling, T 2002, ‘Foreword’, in Larsen, ‘Arms Control and a changing environment’ Boulder,CO: Lynne Rienner, piii

² Tannenwald, N (2007), ‘The Nuclear Taboo-the United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons since 1945’, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Wendt correctly notes 'materialist assumptions are no longer unproblematic in IR theory, and materialistic scholars are facing a resurgent idealism that puts the question of "what difference do ideas make?" clearly on the table.'³ Indeed, the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy itself is committed to exploring this question and it is the question that this paper seeks to explore further. 'Despite the inattentions of most international relations scholars...moral and emotional factors related to neither political nor economic advantage but instead involving religious beliefs, humanitarian sentiments, faith in universalism, compassion, conscience, paternalism, fear, prejudice, and the compulsion to proselytize can and do play important roles in the creation and the evolution of international regimes.'⁴ (Nadelmann, 1990)

This paper would suggest that ideas have played an incredibly powerful, if sometimes underestimated role, in suffocating the use nuclear weapons since 1945. It is not believed that ideational, as soft power is sufficient to prevent any future aggressive nuclear detonation alone. However, to simply dismiss the norms and taboos generated by epistemic communities involved in such exchanges would be churlish and ungrateful to those who held many meetings in public and secret to prevent a world being torn apart by nuclear war.

During the Cold War a great degree of fear pervaded the international community, a lot of distrust and panic resulted in a bipolar world where West threatened East and vice versa. However, against this background of tension and paranoia a series of meetings were being held for a very specific group of people.

One organisation facilitating and organising these meetings was called "Pugwash", and to this day it still holds annual conferences.

The first Pugwash conference was initiated as a result of a paper issued in 1955 by Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein. It was signed by Max Born, Percy Bridgman, Leopold Infeld, Frederic Joliot-Curie, Herman Muller, Linus Pauling, Cecil Powell, Joseph Rotblat, and Hideki Yukawa. This paper called upon scientists of *all political persuasions* to assemble and discuss the threat posed to civilization by the advent of thermonuclear weapons. The 1957 meeting was attended by 22 eminent scientists (seven from the United States, three each from the Soviet Union and Japan, two each from the United Kingdom and Canada, and one each from Australia, Austria, China, France, and Poland). Having such an international mix was considered an impressive achievement for the time.

The official Pugwash website describes its desire 'to bring together, from around the world, influential scholars and public figures concerned with reducing the danger of armed conflict and seeking cooperative solutions for global problems. Meeting in private as individuals, rather than as representatives of governments or institutions, Pugwash participants exchange views and explore alternative approaches to arms control and tension reduction with a combination of candor, continuity, and flexibility seldom attained in official East-West and North-South discussions and negotiations. Yet, because of the stature of many of the Pugwash participants in their own countries (as, for example, science and arms-control advisers to governments, key figures in academies of

³ Wendt, A (1999), 'Social Theory of International Politics', Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

⁴ Nadelmann, E. A. (1990). "Global Prohibition Regimes - the Evolution of Norms in International Society." International Organization 44(4): 479-526

science and universities, and former and future holders of high government office), insights from Pugwash discussions tend to penetrate quickly to the appropriate levels of official policy-making.’⁵

By collecting the world’s elites in the field of nuclear weaponry, Pugwash encouraged and enabled them to engage with each other in a fruitful, positive and relaxed way which helped foster trust and mutual understanding. Trust in the international system was very hard to produce, and despite what might have been said in public and no matter how tense the international community became—the regular meetings and discussions (held in private) ensured a bond was maintained and that a line of communication was perpetuated. The lessons learned during the cold war are still valid now, ‘in today’s world, as during the Cold War, it is politics that determines how much arms control can accomplish’⁶ (Bohlen 2003) The select few who attended these conferences could be described as an ‘Epistemic Community’. They had a claim to policy-relevant knowledge, shared a common understanding of causation regarding social and physical phenomena, shared a common interest in preventing the use of nuclear weapons and had a common understanding of the scientific method.

This exercise helped bond those who sat around the table, and were united by more than what divided them as it created an atmosphere of mutual respect. Those who sat around the table were able to relate to each other, realise they shared similar problems and had common ambitions, aspirations and challenges to face. By regular and respectful meetings, cultural diplomacy began to grow. As negotiation and diplomatic processes started to take place, diplomats began to share not only policies but also sets of ideas. ‘This exchange of beliefs and images is especially significant in the area of nuclear weapons where the issues of perception and deterrent psychology bulk so large.’⁷ (Adler 1992)

Due to the specialist nature of nuclear technology and its complex theme, academics and scientists became what Robert Gilpin called ‘full partners with politicians, administration, and military officers in the formulation of policy’. Politicians and military leaders spoke to scientists for guidance on nuclear issues; the same scientists who attended the Pugwash conferences. As a result of this, scientists were actively meeting with scientists working for countries which did not have the best relations with. The aforementioned epistemic community a vital role in maintaining the non-use of nuclear weapons. The cultural diplomatic efforts exchanged during those private meetings helped nuclear scientists and academics to realise the importance of unity, the values they shared with ‘the enemy’, and the artificial nature of the East/West divide. The scientists who engaged in these private meetings fully understood the danger of nuclear weaponry and were the only ones who could play such an influential role to their respective policy makers. They began to see themselves not as West or East, but as nuclear scientists seeking to prevent aggressive use of their technology which played a pivotal role in nuclear policy.

Just as the concrete buildings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were destroyed by nuclear bombs, so too eventually was the international community’s traditional understandings and conceptions of modern warfare. The system of values established by Pugwash and other epistemic communities during the

⁵ <http://www.pugwash.org/about.htm> Accessed 13/8/2010

⁶ Bohlen, A (2003), ‘The Rise and Fall of Arms Control’, *Survival*, Vol. 45 No. 3, pp. 7-34.

⁷ Adler, E (1992) ‘The Emergence of Cooperation: National Epistemic Communities and the Evolution of the Idea of Nuclear Arms Control’, *International Organization*, Vol. 46, pp. 101-145.

Cold War in regards to nuclear weapons still operates and is prominent today. Powerful norms have been established against the use of nuclear weapons which help constrain their use. There may well be a nuclear weapon used in the future, however such an event should not devalue the work done by such epistemic communities to date. 'Just as a violation of the law does not mean that laws have no effect, so an occasional norm violation does not disprove the norm, especially if there are consequences to such norm violation'⁸ (Bunn 1999) Ethics and value systems do not usually determine outcomes, however they shape the realms of possibility. By delegitimizing nuclear weapons, defining them as unethical and generating a sense of revulsion around them, epistemic communities such as Pugwash have established a powerful norm which has exponentially decreased the likelihood a nuclear bomb will be used.

Evidence of this ethical system generated by those epistemic communities with policy relevant knowledge can be found most clearly in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty 1968 (not long after the first Pugwash conference and the Treaty negotiations were likely influenced by Pugwash attendees!). The treaty provides readers with a reason for its creation, declaring:

'Considering the devastation that would be visited upon *all mankind* by a nuclear war and the consequent need to make every effort to avert the danger of such a war and to take measures to safeguard the *security of peoples*'

Cultural Diplomacy led to nation states escaping their narrow, self-interested decision making processes and choosing to declare worldwide their intention of securing peoples and prevent the devastation of all mankind rather than using language of 'citizens' or 'nationals'.

A further commitment by signatories to negotiate 'in good faith' towards disarmament signals a feeling that nuclear weapons are morally wrong and should not be stockpiled-a sentiment expressed from the genesis of Pugwash. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is a black and white example of cultural diplomacy at work.

However, normative values and ethical systems exist not only in the conventions and treaties of international and criminal laws of nations but also in the 'implicit rules and patterns that govern behaviour'⁹ (Nadelmann 1990). Behaviour concerned with nuclear weapons was conducted by a very select few as mentioned before. These academics and scientists were therefore instrumental in establishing the implicit rules and patterns of behaviour from the outset.

They helped define what was 'appropriate' in regards to nuclear weaponry and knowledge relating to arms control and those cannot be separated from values. It's these values that look to the past in their frequent appeal to past conduct for justification, and also guide anticipatory and goal-directed behaviour which affects expectations. The knowledge exchanged during the Pugwash meetings demonstrated an interdependence of facts and values which implied a constant shift between empirical and normative elements in decision making. It is this constant shifting; the fine balance of

⁸ Bunn, G (1999) 'The Status of Norms against nuclear testing', the non proliferation review, Vol.6 no.2 pp20-32

⁹ Nadelmann, E, (1990) 'Global Prohibition Regimes: The evolution of Norms in International Society', International Organisation, Vol.44 no.4 Autumn pp479-526

empirical and normative elements which best explains the non-use of nuclear weapons since Nagasaki.

By coming together in private, these Pugwash conferences and Epistemic Communities concerned with nuclear weaponry have helped constrain their use since 1945 establishing an anti-nuclear weapon use sentiment in the international system that hopefully will be perpetuated.

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