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Is there a necessity for new definitions of war?

by Michael Brzoska

The long-awaited *Human Security Report* has recently made the headlines worldwide. One central message of this report is that the number of wars is declining and the number of people dying in combat is at a historical low. The report argues that more active international conflict management, including an unprecedented number of international military peace support interventions is one of the main causes for this.

For those regularly observing international statistics on wars, the reported trend does not come as a surprise. The various data sets available have all shown downward trends as of the mid- or end of the 1990s. In parallel to the still burgeoning literature on wars, a new strand of analysis explaining the decline in the incidence of war is developing, with John Mueller of Ohio State University's *The Remnants of War* being one prominent example.

However, the impression of the general public—and purveyed by the media—is a different one. 'New wars' conducted by warlords against civilians for economic reasons seem to be rampaging through large parts of Africa and at least some regions in Central Asia. Peace agreements appear to regularly fail, and situations to vacillate between shaky peace and bloody fighting.

Why this divergence between what hard data seems to prove and widespread perception? I see three major reasons, which I will briefly discuss here.

The first point is that definitions of war used by social scientists and the perception of wars are increasingly contested.

All major definitions of war—be it the Correlates of War project, the Uppsala University Peace Research Institute Oslo war project or the one used by the

Arbeitsgemeinschaft Kriegsursachenforschung at the University of Hamburg—have three common core elements: there needs to be fighting; such fighting is conducted by organized groups; and at least one of the parties has to be the government. Such definitions used to be quite useful to distinguish wars from riots and fighting among rival gangster mobs. Now, they poorly reflect some of the phenomena that mark recent wars, such as the one in the DR Congo, where many people are killed despite little fighting, and where 'government' is an unclear and shifting concept. There are several options of how this problem can be dealt with. One is to reserve the word 'war' to those phenomena covered by the mentioned definitions—the option chosen by John Mueller. The other is to extend the definition of war to cover all forms of organized violence—this is what media reporting is doing. So far war researchers have not reached a solid common understanding of what to include in alternative definitions of war and what not. Is street violence in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro 'war'? Is the killing of unarmed civilians in

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Darfur 'war'? More conceptual work is needed to develop one, or possibly several, alternative definitions of war that have a chance to find wide recognition.

The concept of 'new wars' brought into the debate by Mary Kaldor of the London School of Economics a few years ago has strong potential but needs to be further operationalised.

The second point is that we lack data. We do not know whether more or less people die in war, however defined. We do not know for sure whether an extended definition of war covering deliberate killings of civilians would produce a trend different to traditional war statistics or not. Reliable data on deaths caused by war simply does not exist. Often quoted numbers, such as that 90 percent of all war deaths are civilian, are based on very scant evidence. Therefore, we do not know whether the relation between battle deaths and war deaths—the loss of human life in some way connected to collective violent conflict—has changed over the last decade or so. As a result of this, we don't even know whether the good news on war and battle deaths

reported in the *Human Security Report* is relevant for what really counts, namely the total human cost of war.

My third point is that while the international community has improved in suppressing warfare in the traditional sense, and possibly even suffering from war in a broader sense, it seems to have stagnated in its support of the construction of post-war societies. Despite the fact that there are a good number of cases of a successful peaceful economic and political development following an international intervention to prevent, stop or end a war (Mozambique, El Salvador, and hopefully Sierra Leone) success has not improved along with the number of international interventions. Many of the near-wars capturing international attention are also precarious post-conflict situations.

Contrary to what the Human Security Report can claim for warfare, post-war reconstruction has been far from successful. Obviously, the tasks are more complex and difficult. The newly established United Nations Peacebuilding Commission has a demanding job carved out. It will have to mobilize the international community in new ways. In addition, much more academic research will be needed to inform international political action.

Hopefully with these and other concerted actions, our track record at post-conflict reconstruction will, in a few years time, receive as positive an assessment in the Human Security Report as that of the international community's capacity to contain and stem the incidence of war.

Michael Brzoska, former research director of BICC, is now director of the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg.

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Staff Spotlight

Heike Webb



Heike Webb (Germany) grew up in Krefeld, went to school and lived for three months in France when she was 14 and studied at the University of Mainz / Gernersheim where she obtained a diploma in translation (English and Portuguese). As part of her studies she spent a year abroad at the University of Sussex, Brighton, and went for a three-month internship to Lisbon. Upon receipt of her diploma, Heike worked as a freelance translator and teacher of English for adults for three years before she joined BICC in 1996. There she started in the project management department, where she was involved in the base closure project in North Rhine-Westphalia and the general administration of BICC.

Upon returning from her maternity leave, she worked in the PR-department where she was responsible for the publishing management and editorial coordination of BICC's yearbook, the *conversion survey*, besides English language editing of various papers and reports. Heike also co-developed the layout of the BICC/DCAF series *Security Sector Governance and Conversion Studies*.

In 1999, she became the assistant of the then-director Herbert Wulf. Her duties were, amongst others, to organize BICC conferences and to coordinate BICC's intern- and fellowship program. In 2003, shortly after the birth of her second son, Heike moved back to the administration department where she is again responsible for the internship program, English language editing, travels and the organization of workshops and conferences.

In her spare time, Heike likes to read, listen to—mostly—classical music and jazz, and spend quality time with her family and friends.

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Inventory of security sector reform (SSR) efforts in partner countries of German development assistance

The Bonn International Center for Conversion was tasked by the German Technical Cooperation's (GTZ) Sector Program "Security Sector Reform" to research brief assessments of SSR efforts in partner countries of German development assistance. The GTZ Sector Program "Security Sector Reform" advises the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) on technical issues and in the development of the conceptual foundations for SSR support. The assessments of BICC are intended to provide for a first, brief overview of SSR efforts in select countries. For some countries of special interest, such as for example Afghanistan, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kenya, Palestine and the Ukraine, additional research was conducted.

In addition to BICC's archives, assessments are primarily based on research in standard sources on SSR, including from organizations such as the Global Facilitation Network for Security Sector Reform (GFN-SSR), the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). All information was supplied on the basis of best effort within strict time constraints. Researchers involved Michael Brzoska, Marc von Boemcken, Igor Grebenshikov, Ana Kantor and Cornelia Michels.

The country assessments sketch relevant recent developments with regard to defense forces, defense ministries, police forces, paramilitary forces, including border guards, etc., intelligence services, penal justice, prison system, parliamentary oversight bodies and the corresponding legal framework. The more detailed country studies include additional information on the context of reforms. Both the country assessments as well as the country studies may be downloaded on the BICC website at www.bicc.de/ssr_gtz.

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Reader for the Fernuniversität Hagen

BICC is cooperating with the Fernuniversität Hagen within the framework of its Master Program for Peace and Conflict Research. One result of this cooperation is the reader authored by BICC. The

purpose of this 220-page-strong teaching material is to reflect the topical breadth of conversion and its connection with the transformation of conflict. The reader starts with a short overview of the terminology and practice of conflict transformation by Beatrix Schmelzle of the Berghof-Zentrum für konstruktive Konfliktbearbeitung in Berlin. The following contributions are all from BICC staff members. Michael Brzoska, Hartmut Kühle, Lars Wirkus as well as Andreas Heinemann-Grüder and Manuel Winkelkotte deal with 'classic' conversion in research, development and industry, base conversion as well as the integration of former military staff into civil society. Marc von Boemcken writes about private military companies (PMCs) and their operations, in particular during and after the wars in the Balkans, in Afghanistan and Iraq. The appearance of these new actors in international conflicts gives rise to new questions for conversion, namely questions of how to deal with the demand for new normative and legal rules and regulations. Similar issues are dealt with in an article by Michael Ashkenazi and Julie Brethfeld on the dissemination of small arms and light weapons. The reader closes with contributions to the reform of the security sector (SSR) in conflict and post-conflict regions, a key topic both for development policy and for international interventions. These contributions on SSR (Brzoska, Heinemann-Grüder/Grebenshikov, Sedra and Hood) clarify the achievements of external actors but also show the dilemmas and limits of a 'security export' by the International Community.

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Die Rückkehr der Condottieri?

Krieg und Militär im Spannungsfeld zwischen
Verstaatlichung und Privatisierung

Eine gemeinsame Tagung des Arbeitskreises Historische Friedensforschung, des Arbeitskreises Militärgeschichte, des Arbeitskreises Militär und Gesellschaft in der Frühen Neuzeit, des Hamburger Instituts für Sozialforschung und des Militärgeschichtlichen Forschungsamtes mit Unterstützung des BICC (Bonn International Center for Conversion)

12. bis 14. Mai 2006

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New BICC Publications

paper 45:

Joakim Kreutz, *Hard Measures by a Soft Power? Sanctions Policy of the European Union*, January 2006

paper 46:

Lars Wirkus (ed.), *Water, Development and Cooperation—Comparative Perspective: Euphrates-Tigris and Southern Africa*, February 2006

paper 47:

Munir Ladaa, *Transboundary Issues on the Caspian Sea Opportunities for Cooperation*, February 2006

brief 31 (Serbian version):

Tobias Pietz, *Demobilizacija i prekvalifikacija za budućnost Vojska Srbije i Crne Gore*, November/December 2005

brief 32:

Volker Böge et al., *Who is Minding the Store? The Business of Private, Public and Civil Actors in Zones of Conflict*, February 2006

forthcoming:

brief 33:

Volker Böge, *Water, Conflict and Transboundary Water Governance. Southern African Experiences*, March 2006

BICC Notes

The third meeting of the advisory board to the Action Plan “**Civilian Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding**” of the German Federal Government took place on 23 January at the Foreign Office in Berlin. Dr. Angelika Spelten (Frient) who was elected chair in the previous meeting presided the meeting. Deputy chair is Dr. Stefan Mair (SWP). Prof. Dr. R. Korte stressed the relevance of health care policy in crisis prevention. An animated discussion evolved both around the self-perception and the recommendations of the advisory board to the Interministerial Steering Group. The advisory board welcomes the fact that the new government has actively incorporated the Action Plan into its new agenda. BICC will continue to participate in the work of the advisory board.

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On 24 January the new BICC/DCAF Assessment Study “**Demobilizing and Retraining for the Future—The Armed Forces in Serbia and Montenegro**” was

officially launched at the Swiss Embassy in Belgrade. This study was elaborated by the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), in close collaboration with BICC.

The main goal of this study, which is now available in English and Serbian, is to provide an overview on the most pressing issues related to the ongoing military reform. The author of the study, Tobias Pietz (BICC), presented his findings and answered questions of the media that showed a great interest in the event. Representatives from Union State level, the Ministry of Defense, Serbian and Montenegro Republics, NGOs and foreign embassies in Belgrade were also present at the launch.

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In a small official event on 25 January, the Bonn International Center for Conversion, BICC, said ‘good bye’ to **Michael Brzoska**, who has taken on the position of research director of the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy (IFSH) at the University of Hamburg, Germany. For more than 11 years, Michael Brzoska was Head of Research at BICC. The management as well as his colleagues thank him for his long and intensive collaboration and wish him all the best for his new position.

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On the occasion of the 10th Federal Congress for Political Education, the exhibition “**Millennium Development Goals 2015—Acting Globally for Poverty Reduction, Peace and Development**” will be opened on 3 March in the Staatstheater Mainz. BICC has been invited to show this exhibition by the State Agency for Civic Education of Rhineland Palatinate. The photo show can be seen in Mainz until 17 March.

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The city of Bonn, United Nations University (UNU), BICC and the Bonner Freundeskreis Vereinte Nationen are inviting to an open lecture on 9 March by Professor Dr. Ramesh Thakur, Senior Vice Rector of the United Nations University Peace and Governance Programme, Tokyo, and Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations. Its title is: “**The United Nations and Human Security: Incoherent Concept or Policy Template?**” It will take place at the Altes Rathaus Bonn, Markt, 53111 Bonn, at 5 p.m. (Registration requested).

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