

Networks of organize violence: conference documentation

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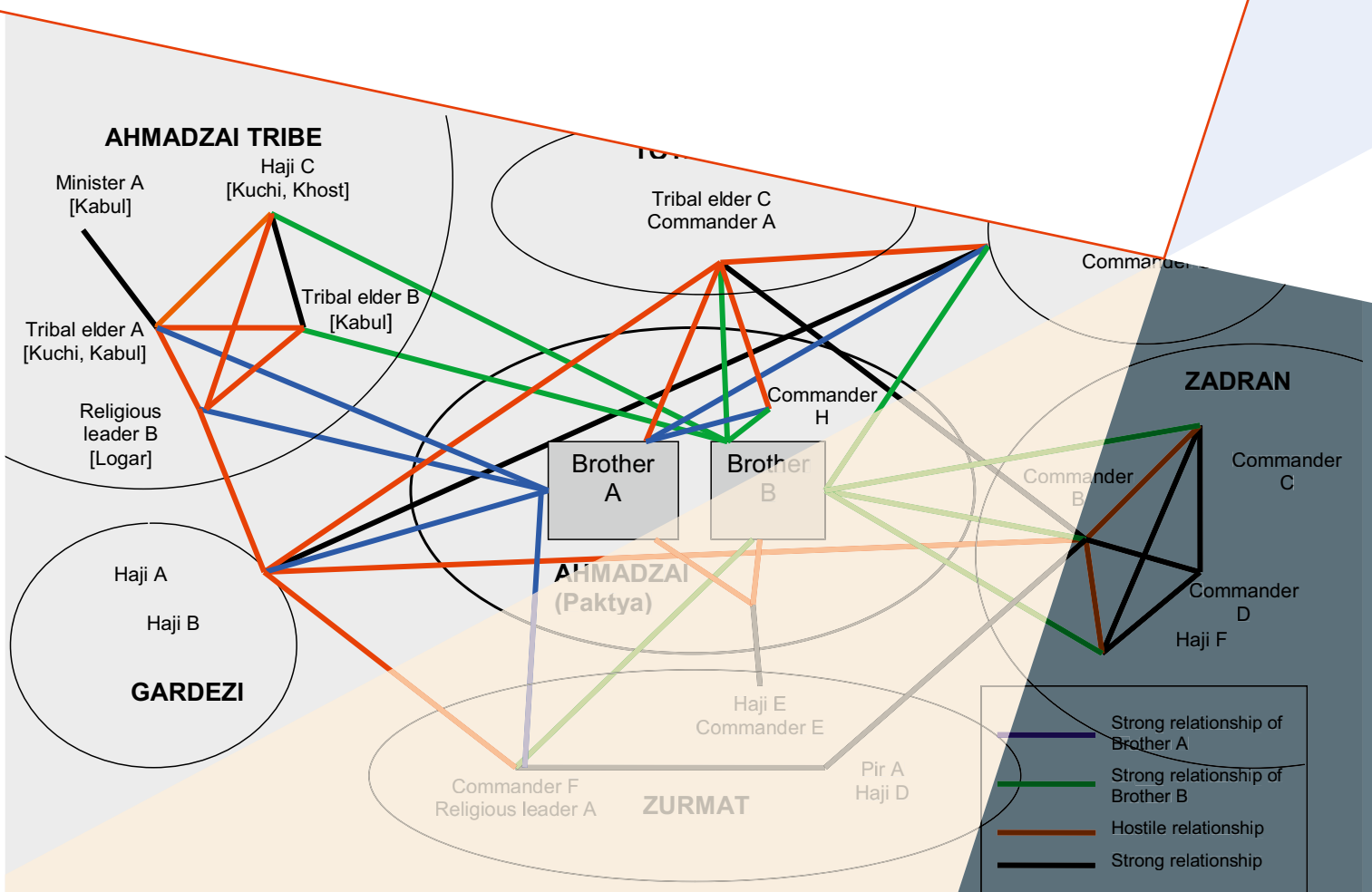
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Networks of Organized Violence

CONFERENCE DOCUMENTATION

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SUMMARY

On 28 October 2015, BICC hosted its annual international conference entitled “Networks of Organized Violence”. This topic was chosen because of a perceived shift from the primacy of the state to the importance of networks in perpetrating organized violence. The aim the conference was to view networks of organized violence from different academic angles and to discuss various methodological approaches to understanding the role of networks. The first panel illustrated the relevance of exploring local dynamics of violent conflicts, including the behaviour of groups and the networks in which they are embedded. The second panel looked at the interconnectedness of structures, systems and people involved in the procurement and application of military technology, using a more classical understanding of networks. The final panel discussed the use of network analysis as a tool for understanding armed actor groups. The conference concluded that while understanding networks of organized violence is critical to limiting its destructive effects, networks should also be examined for their potential to build peace and reduce organized violence.

Graph “Tribes and Relations. An Example from Afghanistan”.

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Conference participants \ lively debates and attentive audience



The panellists (r. t. l.) \ Andreas Heinemann-Grüder, Sami Faltas, Teresa Koloma Beck, Margit Bussmann

New Forms of Multidimensional Warfare

Moderated by Sami Faltas, University of Groningen, Teresa Koloma Beck, Centre Marc Bloch at Humboldt University Berlin, Andreas Heinemann-Grüder, BICC, and Margit Bussmann, University of Greifswald, considered the variation in human experiences of violent conflict, the motivation and patterns of individual and group participation in violent conflicts, and the logic behind the practice of one-sided violence in conflict.

Globalization and Everyday Life in Internationalized Violent Conflicts

Teresa Koloma Beck, Centre Marc Bloch at Humboldt University Berlin, discussed her research on the role of armed conflicts in globalization processes. Her approach is to observe the everyday practices of people and question whether and how they are affected by armed conflict. Beck shared her experience in Angola in 2005 where a rural, elderly woman spoke to her about the importance of women's participation. What struck Beck was the language and concepts that this woman used, because it was clearly based on the global discourse on gender equality in a setting that is least likely to be touched by global discourses. Indeed, this discourse had been brought into the village by an agricultural aid organization that was in the village during the Angolan civil war in the late 1990s. As such, this organization had a high degree of credibility amongst the villagers, and this seems to have enabled villagers to internalize its discourse. This experience demonstrated to Beck that while armed conflict is often conceptualized as a disruption of globalization processes, it may also contribute to the production of global social structures.

Beck offered two ways in which armed conflict can produce 'the global': observation and interaction. Focusing on the latter, Beck conducted field research in Afghanistan in 2015 because it is a highly internationalized armed conflict. There, she found a constant tension between proximity and distance in the interaction between local Afghans and internationals. Among other things, Beck pointed out that this tension in the interaction between Afghans and internationals risks jeopardizing the credibility of the whole intervention project because it precludes international personnel from adapting to the local context, and it transfers security risks onto Afghan locals.



Teresa Koloma Beck \ talked about the role of armed conflicts in globalization processes

Beck concluded by observing that in the Angolan case, the elderly woman had experienced the global in terms of being helped, enabled, and included. Afghans, on the other hand, experience the global in terms of exclusion, hierarchy, and asymmetry—the practices that attempt to bring peace to the country contain structures of separation and segregation that betray the very universal values that the intervention claims to bring.

Recruiting Actors of Violence: Insights into Ukraine

Andreas Heinemann-Grüder, Senior Researcher at BICC, presented his preliminary research on the rapid emergence of violent groups in Ukraine. Framing it as a problem of collective action, Heinemann-Grüder asked how this problem can be explained beyond a consideration of structural factors and the practice of collective violent action itself. He methodically considered a number of enabling factors for collective violent action followed by catalysts that make an environment conducive for collective violent action. Heinemann-Grüder discussed the characteristics of pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian groups in some detail, considering factors such as their source of revenue, ideology, military equipment, support networks, and recruitment,

among other things. He examined the patterns of violence used by the pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian paramilitaries, observing different forms and logics of violence. He observed that in some cases, violence is aimed at the control of strategic holdings, while in others violence is used to teach the other side a lesson. What is more, violence is used for building internal cohesion within the groups and to punish deserters from the group.

With regard to the groups themselves, Heinemann-Grüder stressed the need to study the interaction patterns between state-controlled forces and irregular armed groups more thoroughly to see what kind of social orders or typologies of interactions may emerge.

By way of conclusion, Heinemann-Grüder offered several theoretical insights from his preliminary research on Ukraine. First, he emphasized that structural correlates and ideologies cannot explain the onset of violent collective action. Second, there are multiple incentives to participate in paramilitary groups, and these incentives coexist and vary over time. Also, neither greed nor grievance explains the initial participation in a paramilitary group; while there are individual and group frustrations, they do not appear to be a dominant reason for joining. The reality is that engagement in violent action always comes with a high risk of being killed. An individual's assessment of risk must change in order to join a group—there must be a benefit to joining compared to not joining. A better understanding may be gleaned by undertaking a collective biographical portrait of those individuals who are so easily mobilized to kill.

Andreas Heinemann-Grüder (r.) \ presented insights into Ukraine



The Logic of One-sided Violence in Civil Wars

Why do some civil wars experience a lot of one-sided violence, while others experience less? Margit Bussmann, University of Greifswald, presented her research on the topic, beginning with three types of explanations found in the literature. The first is the strategic explanation, which assumes that violence is used as an instrument to demonstrate dominance or power. It is observed that civilian victimization increases after military losses, an attempt by the losing side to assert their power. The nature of the violence depends on how much control a group has over a particular territory and its people: If the armed group is weak, violence tends to be indiscriminate. If in addition the group does not have support within the population, it will probably resort to looting to acquire resources.

The second explanation is the internal organization of an armed group. The question here is whether there is organizational anarchy or hierarchy and whether actors control their agents. Is one-sided violence linked to positive incentives (looting as a reward) or to negative incentives (sanctioning mechanisms)? The third explanation is the absence of the international community in stopping one-sided violence. Regarding humanitarian military interventions, the question is whether a neutral intervention is more effective in stopping violence than a partial one. With the right mandate, UN peacekeeping missions can help reduce killings, whereas pure observer missions may have a negative impact on the violence because they send a weak signal.

In terms of prevention, Bussmann's research found that compliance with international law is low, particularly with respect to the protection of civilians. Seminars on international humanitarian law conducted by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) did not prove to be helpful on either side of the conflict in ending violence. Atrocities also did not decline after condemnations by the international community. With regard to interventions such as mediation, Bussmann's research found that offers of mediation are more forthcoming when there are high levels of victimization. When a government is involved in one-sided violence, there are more offers to mediate, but governments are less likely to accept. In turn, where rebels commit one-sided violence, they are generally interested in mediation, as it provides them with legitimacy. Furthermore, Bussmann found that levels of one-sided violence committed by rebels declined during the process of mediation, but not so for violence committed by government forces.



Margit Bussmann \ asked why civil wars experience one-sided violence



Jocelyn Mawdsley (moderator) \ with Niklas Schörnig

Networks of Military Technology

Moderated by Jocelyn Mawdsley, University of Newcastle, Niklas Schörnig, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, Pieter Wezeman, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, and Max M. Mutschler, BICC, discussed the relationship between military technology and the behaviour of armed groups, namely states, in fighting violent conflict.

Unmanned Warfare and the Future of Military Intervention

Niklas Schörnig, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, referred to the argument that there are no longer wars of necessity, but rather wars of choice that are now fought under constant media surveillance. As a result, one of the defining features of modern military interventions is the priority placed on avoiding casualties amongst one's own troops. Unmanned systems fulfil this priority, and unmanned combat aerial vehicles (i.e. drones) are able to fulfil this priority with precision.

Do unmanned systems lower the threshold to go to war or to engage militarily? Do they make military personnel more trigger-happy? Schörnig stressed that there is no systematic data on the latter, but there are indications that the reverse may be true: Individual soldiers who see the impact of their actions in high definition actually exercise more restraint, not less. At the political level, however, Schörnig warned that unmanned systems open up options for political decision makers to fight the 'new Western way of war'. This is because the new systems do not put their soldiers in harm's way, so states can avoid any military casualties and meet their military goals more effectively and efficiently.

In conclusion, Schörnig argued that unmanned systems, especially armed systems, have the potential to be destabilizing and raise the likelihood of interventions. The Western world needs stricter rules and better criteria for when to use unmanned systems.

Military Technology Networks and Strategic Stability

Pieter Wezeman, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, discussed how international networks are used to diffuse military technology. For example, South Korea has created a political and economic network that gives it access to military technologies that it is using to build a kill chain to intercept any missiles launched from North Korea. It also has a network of intelligence. As such, Wezeman argued that the asymmetry of military power on the Korean peninsula has increased.

In South Asia, Wezeman observed the introduction of new and networked military technologies in China and India. Over the past two decades, Chinese armed forces have developed from low technological capacity to now a rapidly developed network of positioned assets that could strike deep into territories of neighbouring countries. These developments are seen with apprehension in India. India has continuously failed in producing indigenous weapons, but it has a well-established network for procuring weapons: Good relations with Russia, Europe, Israel and now the United States. India has acquired long range strike capabilities, which Pakistan is looking upon with a great deal of apprehension. There is now a situation of asymmetry between India and Pakistan.

In the Middle East, Wezeman argued that there is a highly asymmetric situation in the availability of military technology. The dire economic situation in Iran has limited their ability to procure weapons technology. This contrasts starkly with developments in the Sunni Arab states in the Gulf region that have succeeded in maintaining a large arms supply network primarily based in the United States. Israel has a much smaller network but a more effective one, as it has good relations with the United States. In sum, the asymmetry between Iran, the Sunni Arab groups and Israel continues to grow.



Max Mutschler (r.) \ with Pieter Wezeman

Wezeman emphasized that the introduction of networked advanced precision weapons may lower the threshold for states to engage in small scale military interventions, though there is the risk that these interventions escalate into a larger one. Finally, in the case of growing military asymmetry in the Middle East, Wezeman questioned whether the introduction of new and networked military technologies in Arab states and Israel has been one of the factors for Iran to resort to another form of networked warfare: Supporting and arming militant groups abroad (e. g. Hezbollah). He shared his concern that other states may react by following the same type of networked warfare—namely getting involved in supporting and supplying arms to rebel forces in Syria.

On the Road to Liquid Warfare

Max Mutschler, BICC, introduced the term ‘liquid warfare’ as referring to a way of warfare where 1) the aim is not to conquer territory, but rather to destroy enemy forces and infrastructure; and 2) the dominant method is to have the capacity to strike the enemy with high precision while remaining entirely out

of reach of the enemy. Mutschler argued that liquid warfare is spreading, not because of casualty aversion among Western democratic states, but rather because of the reduced importance of territory and the increased proliferation of military technology.

Mutschler pointed out that the reliance on air strikes instead of ground forces is characterized as a Western phenomenon; however, he believes this may be too narrow an understanding of the future of warfare. The new way of warfare has more to do with the reduced significance of conquest and the administration of territory. Referring to Zygmunt Bauman’s work on liquid modernity, Mutschler argued that territory is not the sole source of wealth and power in the era of globalization, since resources can be obtained through free trade. While territorial claims have not lost their meaning completely, states often have other motives for resorting to force: For example, regime change, the establishment of humanitarian safe zones, targeted killings, etc. Mutschler explained that the conquest of territory might be a means to those ends but is no longer an end in itself.

Mutschler warned that the proliferation of liquid warfare reduces the constraint on the use of organized violence. Capabilities to conduct precise strikes might lower the threshold to make use of them, risking an escalation of violence. In addition, these capabilities might increase the unwillingness of states to bear any consequences of having used organized violence—a state that engages in liquid warfare can withdraw easily but cannot be held responsible for its actions. Mutschler concluded that this type of ‘hit-and-run’ practice, if it becomes commonplace, may further contribute to the erosion of the norm of territorial sovereignty and weaken the general prohibition on the use of force over time, as it is enshrined in international law.



Max Gallop (m.) \ explained about anti-government networks in civil conflicts

Blurring of the Frontline: Shifting Alliances and Actors

Under moderation of Simon Yazgi, UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Carina Schlüsing, BICC, Max Gallop, University of Strathclyde Glasgow, and Conrad Schetter, BICC Director for Research, presented different, yet complementary ways, for analyzing the multiplicity of armed actor groups and their course of action.

Actor Fragmentation and Network Constellations: The Example of Kurdish Political Actor Groups

Carina Schlüsing, BICC, presented a case study of Kurdish political actor groups in the Middle East and argued that for a better understanding of conflicts it is necessary to analyse political actors according to their degree of cohesion/fragmentation, for example the differentiation in ideological positions, political aims and cooperation mechanisms. She studied these relationship networks through a multi-level perspective, capturing the relative position of Kurdish self-determination groups with regard to the national states, the Kurds as transnational actors as well as the intensity of the (military) relationship amongst themselves. Drawing from the literature on fragmentation, Schlüsing identified a severe actor fragmentation within the Kurdish movement based on the number of actors, the degree of institutionalization and power distribution between these groups. Furthermore, using the toolbox of social network analysis, she examined the patterns, intensity and stability of relationships between two political actor groups, namely the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) network and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and commented on their network dynamics. Schlüsing concluded that in-depth actor- and network-based research leads to a better understanding of complex political actor groups such as the Kurdish movement, as it understands groups as separate units and focuses on their, constantly dynamic, relations. However, she also pointed to the time consuming character of such analyses, which can only present snapshots of reality, and the problem of network visualizations, where the definition of terms and the rating of characterizations is oftentimes simplified.

Anti-government Networks in Civil Conflicts

Max Gallop, University of Strathclyde Glasgow, employed advanced quantitative network analysis to reveal a differentiated linkage between anti-government network structures and civil conflict. The initial starting point of his research derived from a general structural model of predicting civil crisis, e.g. rebellion or ethnic conflict, through macro level factors as economic growth or domestic political institutions and through dynamic lower level conflictual and cooperative events. These predictions were doing poorly in the case of Thailand, where various and relatively conflictual anti-government groups could be identified. Gallop stated his main hypothesis that the provision of public goods by different rebel networks was resulting in conflicts with the government. These goods are produced through strategic actions of anti-government groups and interactions between them. The conflict utility for one group varies according to interconnections



Carina Schlüsing \ discussed Kurdish political actor groups



Conrad Schetter \ underlined that tribal connections still matter in resolving and mediating conflicts

between the rebel groups, defining the possibility to gain mutual benefits from conflicts and the amount of individual investments needed. Gallop found support for the hypothesized influential role of different network structures in generating conflictual behaviour, thus the more polarized and fragmented anti-government networks are, the higher the level of conflicts with the government. This study underlines how more precision in statistical predictions can be obtained through shifting the attention from structural and economic predictors to a more differentiated analysis of social networks in conflict studies.

Social Networks and the Tribal in Eastern Afghanistan

Conrad Schetter, BICC, presented his research on tribal networks in south-eastern Afghanistan conducted approximately 10 years ago, so far left unpublished due to data and data-provider sensitivity issues. His main focus of interest was to identify tribal identities and tribal structures, though he stressed that these are not the only determinants that matter when it comes to understanding the situation in the Afghanistan province of Paktia. He indicated that social network analysis from an anthropological perspective can be highly useful to explain the situation in Paktia, where the outcome of a cost-intensive intervention was not what the international actors had intended.

Schetter's unique snapshot of the tribal dynamics in this region was based on an extensive face-to-face narrative with tribal leaders. He underlined that connections between the main tribal actors are mainly based on a code of honour. As with all daily matters, also conflicts between tribes (i. e. tribal politics) are mediated in circle gatherings of men.

Schetter concluded that tribal connections still matter in resolving and mediating conflicts. Any international or national actor who aims to cooperate with the tribes in Paktia must pay attention to tribal traditions. This has often been neglected in the past and is often part of the answer as to why international interventions in Afghanistan cannot be evaluated as effective.



The concluding panel \ Teresa Koloma Beck, Jocelyn Mawdsley, Owen Greene, Conrad Schetter (l. t. r.)

Networks of Organized Violence: A Challenge to Generating Sustainable Peace

In the closing panel, Conrad Schetter, BICC, Teresa Koloma Beck, Centre Marc Bloch at Humboldt University Berlin, and Jocelyn Mawdsley, University of Newcastle, were asked by moderator Owen Greene, University of Bradford, to take a forward look at the issues discussed throughout the day.

After the terrorist attacks in New York on 9/11, Mark Duffield spoke of the advent of ‘network war.’ He claimed that while states and their security sectors remained essential, they increasingly had to operate through networks that were not bound to territory. According to Jocelyn Mawdsley, this is the essence of the challenge of networks today—understanding who to deal with and how to reach them to effectively curb organized violence. The question of building a sustainable peace is even more challenging, she argued, because it requires dealing not only with networks of organized violence but also with how we in the West have undermined structures to regulate organized violence. For example, states have outsourced security functions to networks without any democratic accountability. These ‘networks of security’ need to be looked at critically to see whether and how they interact with or operate through networks of organized violence.

Teresa Koloma Beck pointed to conflicting insights from the different panels: On the one hand, advances in the technology of warfare have allowed war to be de-territorialized—perpetrators assume new identities that are not based primarily on territorial belonging. On the other hand, territory and local public goods are drivers of organized violence. Both insights are plausible, but there is a conceptual lacuna that needs to be followed up with. She pointed to some of the methodological challenges of analyzing networks of organized violence and supported the need to continue dialogue between different approaches, connecting quantitative and qualitative research over the long term.



Concluding session \ Comments from the audience

Conrad Schetter underlined that the reason for focusing BICC’s conference on networks of organized violence was to move away from the dominant focus on institutions, structures, and states. The question is whether the concept of networks or methodologies of studying networks offer any new insights into or ideas on organized violence. Is this a useful concept and if so, how can we use it better?

Comments from the audience highlighted that there has always been, and will always be limits to data collection—no one method can be expected to collect all relevant data. The goal is to combine different tools and methods of understanding organized violence. Network analysis can only offer a snapshot of a moment in time, as networks are inherently fluid and dynamic. Network analysis may be more useful in providing this picture if the sample size is small, rather than large. In fact, it has proven very useful for understanding networks of resilience against violence. Perhaps a question to ask, then, is what insights into sustainable peace can be gathered from network analysis?

Networks are part of the current landscape of peace and security—they have likely always been, but they are perhaps more so today. Rather than consider them as a challenge only, they could also be seen as having potential for building peace and reducing organized violence, and should be examined accordingly.



Conrad Schetter (r.) \ asked whether the concept of networks offers new insights into organized violence

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