BASEL PEACE FORUM 2017

RETHINKING PEACE
INNOVATING THE FUTURE

The Basel Peace Forum 2017 intended to inspire new and unconventional ideas for peacebuilding. About 120 decision-makers from business, diplomacy, academia and civil society from 20 countries met on 15 and 16 January in Basel to rethink peace. Linkages between peacebuilding and health, artificial intelligence as well as risk analysis took center stage.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES TO PREVENT CONFLICT AND BUILD PEACE
CRITICAL REFLECTIONS OF THE BASEL PEACE FORUM WORKSHOPS ON "ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, WARFARE, ETHICS"

by David Lanz

OVERVIEW

This workshop discussed ways in which new technologies, in particular Artificial Intelligence (AI) and virtual online platforms, can enhance global efforts to prevent conflicts and build peace. Two core ideas emerged from expert inputs and ensuing discussion among participants. First, development and research around AI needs to be refocused to how the technology can promote peace, rather than wage war. Second, the establishment of virtual platforms building trust through social and commercial interactions should be explored in countries emerging from conflict.

SPEAKERS

The workshop benefitted from the inputs of two renowned experts, **Ronald C. Arkin** and **Hanne Melin Olbe.** Mr. Arkin is a professor for robotics at the Georgia Institute of Technology in the United States. He has been an outspoken advocate for the need to explore the potential of AI to make warfare more ethical, for example by allowing for a better distinction between combatants and civilians. In the workshop, he outlined the current state of the discussion about the use of AI in warfare and proposed a few avenues for reflection for how the technology can be applied in peace promotion. Ms. Melin Olbe is director global public policy at eBay Inc. She has worked on new models of commerce, also called 'commerce 3.0', in particular virtual commerce platforms, allowing people to do trade via the Internet irrespective of distance and of physical infrastructure. She presented ideas for how such virtual commerce platforms can benefit peacebuilding, notably by promoting trade and connecting people. The workshop was moderated by **Ursula König**, mediator and consultant with Ximpulse in Switzerland.

CORE IDEA 1: TAKING AI FROM WAR TO PEACE

Artificial Intelligence has been used for military purposes, most controversially to develop lethal autonomous weapons. Human Rights Watch and others argue that the development and use of fully autonomous weapons, which they call 'killer robots', should be banned. Others, including Mr. Arkin, to the contrary make the case for stepping up research on military uses of AI in view of realizing the potential of making war more ethical and more in line with International Humanitarian Law. What is uncontested is that research on military uses of AI is quite advanced, while knowledge of AI in peacebuilding is limited. There was consensus that this needs to change. Therefore, **the first core idea of the workshop is to invest significant non-military resources to study how AI can benefit peacebuilding.** One avenue to be explored is how AI could enhance the analytical capacity of peacebuilders, for example by dynamically analyzing social network data or drone imagery in order to recognize potential conflicts early on, monitor developments in a conflict contexts and assess the effectiveness of international responses. Another possibility is using AI for training purposes, for example by simulating conflict situations and giving feedback on responses by international mediators and peacebuilders.

Critical Reflection: Broadly speaking, AI serves two main purposes: either to help humans better perform a given function or to substitute humans in performing a given function. The controversy around the use of AI in warfare precisely stems from (potential) developments of the technology from the latter to the former. In peacebuilding, however, AI substituting human activity does not seems to be feasible, given the centrality of complex social interactions and political analysis. Reflection should therefore concentrate on how AI can support peacebuilding work. Having said this, ethical questions are nonetheless highly relevant, especially as the analytical capacities generated by AI to support peacebuilding could be misused for military purposes. To cover the different aspects of the topic, swisspeace suggests **launching a large-scale multidisciplinary research project involving roboticists, engineers, mathematicians, lawyers, ethicists, political scientists, forecasters as well as peacebuilding practitioners in a joint endeavor to study the potential use of AI to prevent conflict and build peace.**

CORE IDEA 2: PEACEBUILDING 3.0

Platform-enabled online commerce, exemplified by companies like eBay, Etsy, Amazon, Alibaba, etc., has seen rapid growth in recent years, both in developed and in developing countries. Ms. Melin Olbe made the case that this type of business has great potential also in fragile contexts. On the one hand, the online commerce platform, which supplements for, inter alia, information asymmetries and distrust in formal institutions, enables small enterprises to extend retail businesses across large distances at low cost and without investing in physical locations in distant markets, has the potential of boosting economic growth in countries emerging from conflict. On the other hand, online commerce builds trust among individuals engaging in it and can therefore contribute to reconciliation. However, rather than the specific business idea of online commerce, workshop participants thought the general model of online-based virtual platforms was promising in the context of peacebuilding. **The second core idea of the workshop is therefore to explore how virtual platforms foster social and commercial interactions, which, in turn, promote trust between individuals** in different geographic locations and belonging to different groups in peacebuilding contexts.

Critical Reflection: Online commerce has potential in fragile contexts, for example by facilitating the market entry of small and micro-sized companies without costly investments. However, online commerce still requires know-how, global payment and logistic services, and Internet connectivity infrastructure, which begs the question of how feasible it is to promote economic growth in fragile contexts. Also problematic is the situation where small and micro-sized companies are empowered, through Western country-based platforms, to reach consumers worldwide, not the least

Western countries, but are then prevented or discouraged from efficiently serving consumers in such countries because of low thresholds for customs administration and duties or local sales taxes that affect remote small companies disproportionately as they do not get any value from physical presence or impose any burdens on local community infrastructure. To maximize its contribution to peacebuilding, the basic features of online commerce – virtual networking platforms favoring social interactions – should be preserved and recalibrated for public gain. In particular, the potential of virtual platforms to promote trust between individuals using the platforms, but also between individuals and the platform provider should be harnessed. To this end, swisspeace suggests **initiating pilot projects in which virtual networking platforms are set up in partnership with local authorities, the private sector and NGOs as a way to connect people in peacebuilding contexts.** These platforms allow people to address a specific need – for example farmers exchanging on use of different technologies – but also build trust between participants and between participants and the convening authorities and organizations. The results of the pilot projects should be critically evaluated to learn for the future.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. David Lanz is the head of the Mediation program at swisspeace, which aims to make peace processes more legitimate.