

Communicators in the Cold War:

The Pugwash Conferences, the U.S.-Soviet Study Group and the ABM Treaty Natural Scientists as Political Actors. Historical Success and Lessons for the Future

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Summary

The award of the Nobel Peace Prize for 1995 to Joseph Rotblat and the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs (COSWA) was a tribute to a type of natural scientist who engages in political action and seeks to have a political effect, either over and above his professional work or as a result of his view of an appropriate political ethos. In recent years, natural scientists have also been discovered by the discipline of International Relations, especially as transnational actors. The activities of the scientists who came together in the late 1950s within the framework of the Pugwash Conferences belong to this category. These scholars functioned as icebreakers during the Cold War and also during the Vietnam War, and the honor of the Nobel prize has come very late. In addition to the award of the Nobel Peace Prize there is another reason why this is an appropriate moment to examine the Pugwash Conferences and the work they have done: Pugwash celebrates its 40th anniversary in 1997. This study therefore also seeks to answer the question of what lessons for Pugwash's future work can be drawn from the history of the organization.

Sources which have not hitherto been systematically evaluated make clear the historical significance of the Pugwash Conferences as a communication forum, but they also reveal their limitations. In order for these natural scientists to be able to bring their responsibility as experts, to which they frequently appealed, effectively into play in the political process, there was a need for smaller-scale, more effective forms of communication and cooperation. The idea of setting up a U.S.-Soviet Study Group on Arms Control and Disarmament was first put forward at the Pugwash conference in Moscow in 1960. The leading figures on the Soviet side changed with the passing of time, and on the American side the Harvard biochemist Paul Doty was the leading figure from 1962 to the end of the project in 1975 - hence the name Doty group. The history of this group, like that of the Pugwash movement as a whole as a communication forum, is the political success story of a network of specialists who had recognized expertise and competence in the domain of arms control and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within this domain - an "epistemic community". These two groups made a major contribution to two achievements of historic significance. The USSR adopted the U.S. scientists' approach to arms control, an approach which had hitherto been quite alien to the Soviets, and on the question of anti-ballistic missile systems (ABM) the Americans were able to bring about a radical change in the Moscow leadership's position. Pugwash and the Joint Study Group did much to lay the intellectual, conceptual, and political foundations for the policy of cooperative regulation of armaments between the USA and the USSR. This policy was codified in the 1972 SALT I and ABM treaties.

In the arms control community of this period the issues at stake were not in the first instance scholarly or scientific methods and goals in a narrow sense. In the transnational discussions between American and Soviet scientists it was more a matter of "trans-scientific debates". Although controversies of this sort are in most cases conducted with the help of natural-scientific and technical arguments, they are strongly ideologically-politically (and sometimes emotionally) charged. In the arguments put forward, which were often scenario-dependent, there were two main issues at stake (apart from debates over figures and calculations): (1) Are the relevant military technologies feasible, and if so are they desi-

rable (techno-cultural dimension)? (2) How do we, as Americans and Soviets, want to live with the other side (foreign policy dimension)? This knowledge and its premises are not objective, but socially, politically, and institutionally constructed.

A historical study is not an end in itself. The objective in this case is to offer contemporary, natural scientist-dominated epistemic communities some proposals derived from the Pugwash experience that may be helpful in their work, which is as important today as it has ever been. In spite of the new circumstances and the difficulty of translating earlier successes into the present-day context, the case study makes it possible to identify three main conditions that made the success of Pugwash's strategy possible.

- The subject matter: a field of action that was seen as important, or as becoming important, was introduced into the debate at the right moment.
- The organizational factor: lasting communication and cooperation networks were set up.
- The strategic factor: a communication and cooperation strategy was designed (the identification of common interests).

These three conditions of Pugwash's historical successes are then applied to certain fields of policy that are currently of great importance: the East-West agenda and the establishment of a dialogue with states whose nuclear policies are problematic. The current situation in the East-West relationship is in its essentials comparable with the beginning of the 1960s. Now, as then, the problems facing us require new, more efficient forms of cooperation which offer more than the simple discussion forum furnished by Pugwash.

It is not to be expected that the Pugwash Conferences will transform themselves from a primarily scientific-political into a technically-oriented organization. In view of the existing spectrum of East-West scholarly contacts, which is in the process of expanding considerably and takes numerous different forms, there will continue to be a need for an informal umbrella organization that can act as a forum for communication. A rejuvenated Pugwash which was part of a network linking these groups and projects and which was not alarmed by the fact that many arms control questions are becoming more technical would be suited to this role.

One particular and important policy question springs to mind here which is ignored by most transnational actors from the relevant societal environment and has in recent years been mentioned only in passing by the Pugwash Conferences: missile defense, the field in which Pugwash achieved its greatest arms control success in the 1960s. The achievements of that era are currently being placed in grave danger by the policies of the Clinton Administration and the U.S. Congress. In the spirit of Pugwash's historical agenda, this issue should therefore be made a matter of immediate, high-priority and long-term concern and a network of established experts working in the field should be established.

Over and above this, the scientific-politically oriented Pugwash Conferences remain important in the East-West relationship. The organization's most valuable contribution in the coming years is likely to be the provision of support for the democratization process in the CIS during the present difficult and uncertain transition phase. There is more need for scholarly internationalism than ever before.

On the basis of Pugwash's history and past successes and its emphasis on long-term contacts and quiet diplomacy, it is of all existing transnational societal actors the one best suited to initiating new structures of scholarly cooperation. One of the major challenges confronting us at present is the need to conduct quiet scientific-political diplomacy with nuclear problem states like China, India, Pakistan, Libya, and Iran, and to do this over a long period of time, systematically and with a concentration on the most important questions.

In some of these cases the room for maneuver and chances of success are better than in others. Libya is a particularly difficult case because the country's scientific-political structures are completely centered on Colonel Qaddafi. Even so, a systematic attempt should be undertaken, at the first available opportunity and on a long-term basis, to involve Libyan scientists and scientific-political officials in international Pugwash conferences. Even Qaddafi will not be around for ever.

The question of whether to include or exclude Iran is currently being heatedly discussed, especially between Bonn and Washington. What is the "correct" policy toward Iran, a country that clearly har-

bors ambitions to construct its own technical infrastructure for nuclear weapons and missiles? Although there are differences between Iranian foreign policy and the entirely negative Libyan behavior, the Pugwash Conferences will need to pay more attention than hitherto to specific cultural and religious-political factors as they attempt to establish scientific-political cooperation with these two Islamic countries.

There is no need to spell out the importance and urgency of the need to cooperate systematically and more intensively with scientists and the corresponding institutions in India, Pakistan, and China. It should be no problem to find topics of conversation which interest both sides and extend beyond proliferation -- for example, conversion. In the case of China, though, the problem is that in view of fundamental foreign policy, social, value, and norm-related differences it is difficult to identify common political interests and to build up cooperation in these areas. The parallels with the state of U.S.-Soviet relations at the beginning of the 1960s are striking. The lowest common denominator between the Clinton Administration's strategy of "comprehensive engagement" and the school of opinion in Beijing that inclines towards cooperation would be the aspiration to reserve differences and seek common ground. Among the state bodies in Beijing, the Foreign Ministry would probably be the best addressee of attempts to raise the level of cooperation - Foreign Minister Qian Qichen is, like party General Secretary Jiang Zemin, reckoned by observers to belong to the "cooperative" school.

"To avoid a new cold war, the two sides must step back from the brink and realize their larger national interests (...). The burden of stabilizing the (U.S. - Chinese, B.W.K.) relationship falls with both sides. Without stability there can be no cooperation" (David Shambaugh). Against this background Pugwash, with its capacity to focus on the long term and its well-founded global reputation, could make an important contribution to avoiding such a new cold war, without falling into the "stability trap" that is more likely to have a negative effect on the human rights situation.

On the basis of this agenda or one close to it, an agenda which builds on the organization's past achievements, Pugwash could provide to many other epistemic communities dominated by natural scientists a fine example of how to approach present and future security challenges with a good prospect of success.