

Tuesday 14 June | Complex Wars: How Does the Peace Movement respond?

For the past decade the peace movement has been coping with conflicts that are growing in complexity. Traditional interstate wars have been replaced by conflicts across borders that involve a range of stakeholders. The rules of the game are changing: civilian areas are increasingly being targeted and humanitarian aid facilities are not spared. International treaties and agreements are becoming less binding and are on several occasions simply ignored. This debate focused on the way the peace movement positions itself in these new developments. Jan Jaap van Oosterzee (PAX), Thea Hilhorst (ISS) and Gabriëlla Vogelaar (GPPAC) shared their experiences.



Actors of Change

PAX is determined to support 'actors of change', such as Syrian activist Maha (Aleppo). She believes bombing IS will not change anything, since bombs are not dealing with the source of the problem: the brutality of the regime. Recently PAX published a policy letter which supports this point of view. However, van Oosterzee considers military intervention as legitimate in some (exceptional) cases, for example, the genocide at Mount Sinjar (August 2014). PAX focuses on strengthening civil society initiatives and maintaining 'islands of civilizations' wherever possible. They also launched a campaign to increase international awareness of the horrible circumstances under which Syrians in besieged areas (by the Assad regime) are living.

Van Oosterzee: "Syria is the perfect example of a complex conflict"

Strengthening networks

GPPAC takes a multi-layered approach in working towards peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Vogelaar states that GPPAC serves as an intermediary between local, national, regional and international levels. They inform, for example, regional and local networks in conflict areas of the decisions made at the UN headquarter in New York. GPPAC also focuses on preventing conflicts. Vogelaar's primary focus is on enhancing the EU's role and capabilities in building peace in the Ukraine, Mali, Yemen and Georgia. She manages the WOSCAP project that researches from which position and where the EU can positively contribute. Vogelaar also stresses the peace movement has become more professional and in the international policymaking sphere there is more room for soft power.

Vogelaar "The international community should address the root causes instead of just patching up the wounds"

Humanitarian relief

Hilhorst observes an increasing need for humanitarian assistance in conflict areas. Next to this, humanitarian assistance should not equal development efforts. There is a growing need for human relief and protection. Hilhorst stresses humanitarian aid should become more effective, there is an urgent need for inclusive peace-building initiatives.

Hilhorst: "The forces that bring about peace need to be bigger than the forces that bring about war, at this moment I don't see that"

The complexity of peace-building

The message of the three speakers is clear: the hard military approach is not working. Fortunately, an increasing amount of policy-makers, government officials and NGOs are observing the same. However, the world is strangled by the power of big forces. The future of Syria lies for example in Moscow and Tehran. Diplomacy is the preferred route to establish long-lasting peace, but how can diplomacy help to solve a crisis so complicated as Syria? Van Oosterzee states that a profound analysis of the effectiveness of foreign policy is necessary. Hilhorst stresses diplomats need additional training to adjust to local circumstances. Next to this, the range of potential allies needs to be expanded. Allies who support peace-building should be welcomed.

Van Oosterzee: "Our successes are very limited"

Hilhorst: "Bombing democracy in a country is rarely a good idea"

What can YOU do?

Hilhorst stresses the need to increase the forces that support peace, but she is pessimistic. The map of 'non-complex areas' is almost equal to the map of 'complex areas', but we are on the brink of non-complex areas turning complex. This risk increases with the possibilities of Donald Trump becoming the leader of the 'free World' and a Brexit.

Vogelaar pleads for taking initiative and joining activities which overlap with your passion.

Van Oosterzee focuses on the importance of creating a future perspective. The refugee flow to Europe is the result of warfare, but the 'refugee crisis' can easily be turned in a conflict driver when there is no hope for a future perspective. Consequently, the perfect breeding ground for radicalization can be created.

Van Oosterzee: "People need to be seen, heard and supported!"

[Learn more about Maha here](#)

[Read PAX policy letter here](#)

[Get more details on Vogelaar's project here](#)

Written by Marijn Clevers.

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