

ROTARY DISTRICT 5440 NEWSLETTER FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACEBUILDING  
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**GUNS, PEACE AND COMMUNITY**

**Their Challenges for Sustainable Peacebuilding, Internally and Externally**

William Timpson, Del Benson, Bob Meroney and Lloyd Thomas  
 Fort Collins Rotary Club

In these newsletters of the Rotary District Peacebuilders, we want to invite readers for contributions and ideas, suggestions and possibilities for our efforts to educate others by promoting the foundational skills for promoting sustainable peace and civility, i.e., nonviolent conflict resolution, improved communication and cooperation, successful negotiation and mediation. We also want to encourage the critical and creative thinking that can help communities move through obstacles and difficulties among people in more sustainable ways, i.e., with the interconnected health of their people, their economies and their environments. In this issue we focus on the ideas and skills that can help us better deal with conflicts and issues surrounding guns, including access domestically and sales abroad.

**Wed. September 1, 1:30-2:30 MT  
 GUNS, PEACE AND COMMUNITY**

**Their Challenges for Sustainable Peacebuilding, Internally and Externally**

**BOB MERONEY**

All are invited. Share this newsletter and the ZOOM link with a friend or colleague.  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/494943309?pwd=SmtTUDYzTlZrcVBhblVLRmdvbVh6dz09>

**TWO KINDS OF GUN VIOLENCE**

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There are two types of gun weapon violence that disturb peace. There are weapons that are produced to impose national will on other nations and peoples, and there are weapons produced to harm or kill other individuals, person on person. Both destroy peace and community. POTUS and General Dwight D. Eisenhower twice warned about the dangers of excessive weapons at the national level:

*Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. ... President Eisenhower (1953) Cross of Iron Speech.*

*In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. ... President Eisenhower (1961) Farewell Address*

Sadly, production of weapons of war has become a significant part of United States national infrastructure and wealth. Today, the US business in war materials makes up a significant part of the nation's foreign exchange and GDP. In FY2020 commercial and government managed arms exports to foreign governments increased by 2.8 percent to \$175.1 billion.

Of the total amount \$55 billion included government-to-government sales of F-35 fighter aircraft to Japan, helicopters to Morocco, fuel, aircraft and supplies to Israel, F-35B STOVL aircraft to Singapore, attack helicopters to Egypt, Hawkeye aircraft to France, and Osprey aircraft to Indonesia. Simultaneously, direct commercial sales of \$115 billion were made by US military contractors to Australia, Italy, UK, Austria, Finland, Germany, Norway, Qatar, Canada, Denmark, and Japan.<sup>1</sup>

Between 2018-2020 the United States also distributed its national wealth to maintain counterterrorism activities or training in some 79 countries, perform joint military exercises in 41 countries, send US troops into combat in 12 countries, and arrange drone strikes in 7 countries. In the post-9/11 wars through 2020 the United States has spent or obligated \$6.4 trillion including care for veterans over the next forty years.<sup>2</sup>

The US government, according to its own records provides 66% of all weapons exported to the least democratic nations on earth. Of the 50 most oppressive governments, the US arms 41 or 82% of them. These include: Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Brunei, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, China, Democratic Republic of Congo (Kinshasa), Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini (formerly Swaziland), Ethiopia, Gabon, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Libya, Mauritania, Nicaragua, Oman, Qatar, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Yemen.<sup>3, 4</sup> In addition, human costs of people killed directly in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and elsewhere due to United States war involvement are estimated to be over 801,000 lives. These numbers include US military, US civilians, and US contractors, civilian nationals, opposition fighters, journalists, and humanitarian/NGO workers.<sup>5</sup>

But gun violence is not limited to lands outside the United State borders. It is a statistical truth that guns kill Americans at a higher rate than any other developed or high-income nation in the world by a factor of 25. Americans are 4.4% of the global population but own 42% of guns. In the US in 2013 guns were involved in 21,175 suicides, 11,208 homicides, and 505 accidental deaths. In the same year Japan (1/3 size population as US) had a total of 13 gun-related deaths.<sup>6</sup> Access to a gun triples the risk of death by suicide, white men represent 73% of firearm suicide victims, and gun suicides are concentrated in states with high rates of

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.state.gov/u-s-arms-transfers-increased-by-2-8-percent-in-fy-2020-to-175-08-billion/>

<sup>2</sup> Most of these dollars are borrowed, so interest alone is expected to exceed an additional \$8 trillion by the 2050s. Costs of War Project, Watson Institute, Brown University.

<sup>3</sup> SIPRI, Stockholm Peace Research Institute, SPIRI Arms Transfers Database: 1950 to 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>

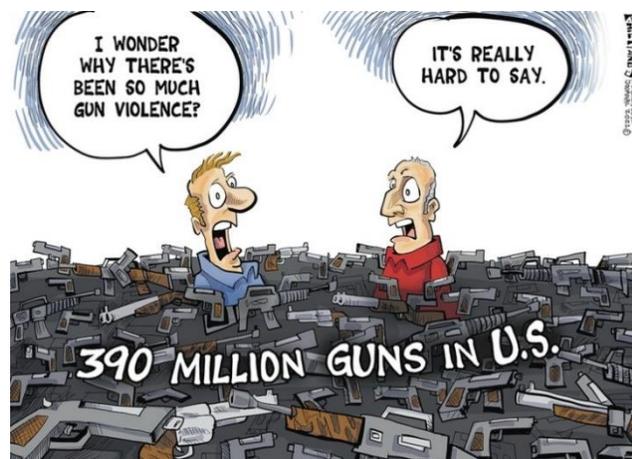
<sup>4</sup> Foreign Military Sales, Construction and other Security Cooperation Facts, [https://fas.org/asmp/profiles/FMS\\_FACTS/FMS\\_Facts\\_Index.html](https://fas.org/asmp/profiles/FMS_FACTS/FMS_Facts_Index.html)

<sup>5</sup> <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2019/Direct%20War%20Deaths%20COW%20Estimate%20November%2013%202019%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> There are only 3 countries that begin with assumption people have an inherent right to own guns: USA, Mexico, and Guatemala.

gun ownership.<sup>7</sup>

In the US death rate from gun homicides is about 31 per million people, or **more than 100 Americans are killed with guns and more than 230 are shot and injured every day of the year.** The risk of dying by gunshot in the US is about the same as dying in a car accident. Firearms are the leading cause of death for American children and teens.<sup>8</sup> Higher rates and risks only exist in El Salvador and Mexico. Japanese population gun death risk is about equivalent to a lightning strike.<sup>9</sup>



**Conclusions: If Americans really want to decrease international and national gun violence, then:**

- **Encourage your Congressional Representatives to pass the “Stop Arming Human Rights Abusers Act.” H.R. 4718.<sup>10, 11</sup>**
- **Support sensible gun laws and a culture of safety as summarized by the Prevention Institute who propose an integrated 14 step program.<sup>12</sup>**

### WHO CAN FORGET

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In my 2019 book, *Learning Life's Lessons*, I offer some reflections on my work overseas through both Fulbright Awards and Rotary Global Grants. Who can forget the shock of the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado where 12 were killed and 21 injured or the shooting rampage at Virginia Tech in 2007 when 33 were gunned down and 23 more wounded?

<sup>7</sup> Currently US population is believed to be 333.2 billion. So, we have enough weapons available to arm every man, woman, and child in the United States.

<sup>8</sup> <https://everytownresearch.org/report/gun-violence-in-america/>

<sup>9</sup> Phil Hands, Hands on Wisconsin: More guns lead to gun violence, Madison State Journal, Aug 8, 2021 [https://madison.com/wsj/opinion/cartoon/hands-on-wisconsin-more-guns-lead-to-gun-violence/article\\_b6533222-6164-5458-957c-24b1f3b44780.html](https://madison.com/wsj/opinion/cartoon/hands-on-wisconsin-more-guns-lead-to-gun-violence/article_b6533222-6164-5458-957c-24b1f3b44780.html)

<sup>10</sup> [https://actionnetwork.org/letters/pass-the-stop-arming-human-rights-abusers-act/?clear\\_id=true&link\\_id=3&can\\_id=c87d1b654844f0893c002ac5f75af541&source=email-wait-who-is-arming-oppressive-governments&email\\_referrer=email\\_1259926&email\\_subject=wait-who-is-arming-oppressive-governments](https://actionnetwork.org/letters/pass-the-stop-arming-human-rights-abusers-act/?clear_id=true&link_id=3&can_id=c87d1b654844f0893c002ac5f75af541&source=email-wait-who-is-arming-oppressive-governments&email_referrer=email_1259926&email_subject=wait-who-is-arming-oppressive-governments)

<sup>11</sup> H.R. 4718 – Stop Arming Human Rights Abusers Act (Introduced 7/27/2021) <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/4718?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22%5C%22Stop+Arming+Human+Rights+Abusers%5C%22%22%5D%7D&s=1&r=1>

<sup>12</sup> Prevention Institute, Summary of Recommendations to Prevent Gun Violence, March 2018, <https://www.preventioninstitute.org/publications/prevention-institute-summary-recommendations-prevent-gun-violence>

Then we were horrified by the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School when 20 six and seven year olds along with 7 school staff were gunned down? And then came the school shooting in Parkland, Florida where 17 were killed and 14 wounded. While previous shootings had sparked nationwide calls for gun control measures what was different in 2018 was the involvement of students in demonstrations. Inspired activism can spring from the most troubled of times.

My work overseas has provided so many lessons and just as many examples of inspired change. For example, facing angry mobs as they hurled threats, rocks and bottles, Mairead Maguire and her fellow peace activists chose umbrellas for defense amidst the “Troubles” in Northern Ireland in the 1970’s and helped spark a revolution in thinking about guns, security, fear, peace and prosperity. Mired in polarized positions following British colonization and the wounds of three hundred plus years of fighting between independent minded Catholics and Protestant loyalists to the United Kingdom, people needed new thinking.

Like the students who protested the gun violence in 2018, these activists in Northern Ireland did not choose to be “soft targets” as the advocates for arming school staff argue. Instead they chose to become peaceful warriors in the face of fear mongers who insisted on guns and bombs as the ways to fight for a better life. Eventually the Good Friday Peace Accord was signed in 1998. For her courage and leadership, Maguire was a co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977. Visiting with Maguire in 2002 as I worked on my book, *Teaching and Learning Peace*, I remember her insisting that arming themselves would have only deepened the fear, the bloodshed and the wounds.

In the light of gun violence everywhere we must remember how the decommissioning of weapons in Northern Ireland has been critical for reducing the violence there. It is also important to know that funding from American supporters of the IRA was also shifted from weapons to economic development.

With our work through Rotary Foundation Global Grants in Burundi, East Africa, we see that the University of Ngozi (UNG) has a very special, albeit tenuous, position in the world. It may be the only university with peace and reconciliation as the very first, foundational commitments in its mission followed soon thereafter with a commitment to sustainable development. The only comparable university we know of is the University of Peace in Costa Rica. Established by a vote of the United Nations it has subsidies that UNG does not enjoy and that is significant.

With a modest scholarship fund for studies and projects in sustainable peacebuilding, we hope to inspire new thinking and efforts at all levels, but especially among students and teachers, church and community leaders. The story of this commitment to peace is all that more remarkable because it arose out of the burning horrors of a devastating civil war raging in this already impoverished post-colonial legacy in Burundi. It arose before the Arusha Peace Accords were signed, a commitment by the people of the Ngozi region to “wage war against war.” These peacebuilders went door to door to ask for household contributions. They also got some initial funding from the Catholic Church although the founders were clear about being “ecumenical” and serving all faiths. UNG also got the use of a small campus-like space from the city of Ngozi.



*A mural on the outside walls of the University of Ngozi honor the names of the world's peacebuilders, both international and local: Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Bishop Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther King, Jr. Students there have joined with Rotarians to support a variety of peacebuilding efforts including improved water projects in nearby poor communities. Local school children have also started a Peace English Club to prepare themselves for interactions with the larger world.*

Prior to the release of Elise Boulding's 2000 book, *Cultures of Peace*, the people of Ngozi knew that they needed to make a commitment to the study of peace, reconciliation and sustainable development. Because Hutu students had been murdered at the government funded University of Burundi, community leaders in Ngozi wanted to chart their own destinies in a safe place that would also commit to ensuring that every student in every discipline would have a foundation in the ideas and skills that could mediate conflicts and negotiate cooperative responses to problems.

As novel as this may seem, consider that every nation on the earth dedicates some amount of public monies to education for war. In the U.S. we have four major military academies that provide a free college education to those admitted. It is important to note that the Rotary Foundation has stepped into this gap to offer a fully funded two-years master's degree program in some aspect of peace studies at one of five university campuses world-wide.

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Every one of us experiences conflict at some time in our lives. The results of conflict can be highly destructive. Conflict outcome can also be highly beneficial and creative of a whole new relationship. The *context* in which conflict occurs, has a definite effect on whether or not conflict is destructive or creative.

Destructive conflict usually occurs in a context of competition, when one person (or nation) has to "win" at the expense (loss) of the adversary. Intimidation, threat, violence, power plays, and force are common methods used in bringing about a "solution" in a destructive conflict situation.

The fundamental method used for creating a "resolution" to conflict is collaboration or cooperation. If you seek collaboration with others, with whom you are in conflict, the context of that conflict becomes very important. Here are some basic criteria for evaluating the context in which creative collaboration has a chance of occurring.

1. Clear and accurate information is exchanged. The clear communication of accurate information is more complete, honest, encouraged, and utilized in a collaborative context. Open and clear expression of thoughts, feelings, and opinions fuels the creative fires leading to a positive synthesis, or synergistic outcome which is satisfactory for both sides of the conflict.

2. Mutual support of each contributor is required. Creative conflict requires a context where individuals feel safe enough with each other as people, to challenge each other's ideas. Safety of individuals and/or the whole group is essential for creativity to evolve. Fear requires defensiveness. Defensiveness protects (stops) creative events from emerging from inside an individual as well as prevents (or filters) outside ideas from entering.

3. Constructive conflict must be valued. Each individual in the conflict must see the value of controversy as the crucible from which emerges a positive outcome or resolution. In competition, there is always a loser. Losing is unpleasant, leading to negative beliefs about the conflict. Certainly, cooperative experiences build stronger beliefs about the positive value of conflict. When the results of conflict are beneficial to all conflicting parties, our fear of conflict itself diminishes.

4. Individual feelings and emotions are addressed. Ideas are cognitive in nature. Emotions are physical, energetic, bodily events. Emotions power (motivate) us. The best ideas in the world will not be implemented without the emotional power to put them into effect. Constructive conflict recognizes this and addresses people's feelings as valuable and essential to the resolution of the conflict. Therefore, they must be taken into account you are in conflict.

5. Conflict is defined as "the preferred method" to jointly resolve problems. If conflicts are managed from an "I-win-you-lose" frame of reference, one is isolated within his/her own point of view. No synthesis is possible, since only one frame is present. A cooperative frame of reference merges with another (and others) to form a new combination of frames...a constructive and best solution to any given problem.

6. Similarities of positions are sought, recognized and acknowledged. Creativity equally values both similarities and differences. For it is out of the merging of both that the creative resolution "re-merges," to form a new solution. If we were ever in need of new solutions to conflict, the time is now!

In our competitive culture, most of us have never been taught the benefits of conflicting to create the results we desire. We have never learned the nature and benefits of creating through conflicting. However, if we understand the above criteria for defining the context of conflict, then our conflicts are much more likely to be creative, collaborative and will result in the best possible resolution for everyone involved.

## GUNS AND CIVIL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: ASSOCIATIONS, ACCESS AND ATTITUDES

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Human conflicts are complex and often relate to some aspect of the environment (uncertainty about food, land, and people)! They range from failures with interpersonal communications to breaches of international security. Solutions are never simple. Suggesting to use guns or to take them away does not face reality.

Humans have been in conflict since history began. Self-interests justified invading territories, taking food and slaves, destroying art and lives, and becoming the next inhabitants who likely would face similar fates in time. Associations, access and attitudes are foundational to why and how humans behave. Common phrases to associate with conflict resolution include *“speak softly and carry a big stick,” “never bring a knife to a gun fight,” “to the victor goes the spoils,”* and *“fight fire with fire.”* These phrases are reviewed with minimum depth to follow.

### Associations

The association of environments and human needs therein are the foundations for progress and conflict. According to Jared Diamond’s book, “Guns, Germs and Steel” were associated with the building and conquering of nations in Eurasian and North African civilizations. Geographic advantages in relation to advances in society and environmental outputs fostered successes, and failures. Desires and needs to reach out beyond the capacity of one civilization toward others resulted in conflicts. Strong words and bigger guns aided successes.

Humans are a product of their associations with the land and other humans. Coping with environments is fundamental to human decisions, which places pressures on societies to adapt. President Theodore Roosevelt recommended using words first to resolve disputes through his diplomacy of **speaking softly and carrying a big stick**. The stick was a metaphor to fight also if necessary. Adversaries need to understand the strengths and consequences of both tactics, if either are to be successful.

Speaking and fighting use words and deeds to solve problems, and preparation for action requires forethought and the appropriate tools. **Taking a knife to a gunfight** would not be logical. The gun has an advantage. Being out-thought, out-discussed, out-maneuvered, or out-tooled leads to unnecessary and unwanted outcomes. In earlier history, when humans talked or fought about food, land, and people, they generally took the power and the riches of conquest if they succeeded. There were distinct winners and losers.

**The victor got the spoils of food, land, and people.** Fate of the losers was often dire and inhuman. **Starting a fire to fight a fire** removes combustible fire materials from in front of a blaze used as a common technique to stop a conflagration. Tools of spraying water or retardant on fires are smaller solutions. Using appropriate tools in an appropriate offense is a good defense.

In modern times, diplomacy and war still exist, but in many situations, the lines of conflict resolution, victory, and defeat are a blur with complexity. Taking the spoils of food, land and people was a simpler but much less honorable approach. The U.S. for example has become an international police force with strategic and humanitarian interests in countries that we engage. We do not have the winner take all mentality, but the desired outcome is still to achieve our interests and goals.

In fact, the U.S. tries to rebuild countries, food, land and people after conflicts. Outcomes are less clear in modern times and one needs to look no farther back than U.S. involvement in Afghanistan and the problems encountered when ending our role in the conflicts. Working from positions of strength are still valuable compared to being weak, thus the phrases we have explored still apply.

### **Access**

As a child of the 50s and 60s, I learned to be afraid of Russia threatening us with nuclear war, and I guess we threatened them also, thus we have been in arms races and limitations ever since. Let us leave international considerations and focus on local use of guns in relation to conflict. When I was a child, fists, knives and chains used by local gangs and bullies worried me. Now domestic violence using guns has increased in the U.S. because they are more effective, readily accessible, and human attitudes has limited our ability to reduce gun-based violence.

### **Attitudes**

The U.S. is a relative new country formed by rebels against the British Crown. Frontier expansion evolved with firearms used by militias, armies, for personal protection, protection against predators and crop invaders, subsistence and recreational hunting, and sport shooting. The Right to Keep and Bear Arms is part of the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution. Designed to protect the country and to maintain personal freedoms, firearms have now emerged as threats to law, order, and personal safety.

The U.S. is now about 85% urbanized and needs of firearms for protection and recreation should be lower. However, when criminals use guns, law enforcement and citizens are under more pressure to be secure. The bigger stick mentality now overshadows the speaking softly mentality. Attitudes, laws, and actions favor guns rather than place limitations upon their use. I write about guns, conflicts, resolutions, and interests in civil behaviors, with the added insights as a long-time instructor for firearms, hunting, and safety. We teach defensive tactics for persons facing threats. The logic is to run, hide, and then fight as a last resort. I would always want the best tools available and proper training to fight effectively when facing the last resort.

We also teach offensive techniques about using firearms for positive ends, which always stresses safety, not shooting at unintended targets, keeping muzzles in safe directions, and fingers away from the trigger until you have the correct attitude to pull the trigger thoughtfully and safely. Firearms are tools for positive and negative ends. It is the attitude of the user that is most critical. Poor attitudes are associated with tools other than firearms. Conflicts do not come with easy answers. Solutions are complex, interrelated, situational, and adaptive. A wide array of tools is necessary for the success of diplomacy and conflict management. Conflicts will likely never go away. Our approach to resolution should be civil.

## **PRIORITIES OF THE ROTARY FOUNDATION**

See the RI website: <https://my.rotary.org/en/learning-reference/about-rotary/our-priorities>. You can find some of our past issues at the Rotary District 5440 website: <https://www.rotary5440.org/sitepage/peace-building-newsletters>. Future issues may explore the following: SEPTEMBER—Leaving Afghanistan? If you have ideas for future topics, please send them to any of our writers.