Peace Research and the Connection between University and Society: a Case from Enschede

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ABSTRACT

During its peak, Peace Research was among other things characterized by a strong connection between academic research and the broader movement of peace activism. Even more than publishing scientific articles or visiting academic conferences, peace researchers published many more popular scientific books and articles for a wider public and travelled around the country to deliver introductions to local peace groups or to participate in panel discussions. On the other hand, citizens were welcomed at the so-called University Peace Days not only to get acquainted to but also to get involved in academic Peace Research discussions. With the decrease of the Dutch movement of peace activists since the end of the Cold War this once strong and essential connection loosened and almost disappeared. The name “Peace Research” is commonly replaced by “International Relations”, “Strategic -“ or “Security Studies” and addresses mainly (future) professional diplomats, politicians and security specialists.

In this paper we emphasize the importance of restoring the connection with the broader public, since “peace is too important to leave to specialists”. Especially in this era in which the role of civil society, both as victim and perpetrator of violent actions but also as (potential) actor of peace processes has become increasingly immanent, it is important to share the insights resulting from Peace Research with “ordinary citizens” and also to involve these “ordinary citizens” giving their experiences and ideas concerning relevant processes as input for Peace Research. This is also a matter of empowering civil society to form a countervailing power against certain sectors in society that strengthen the tendencies towards securisation and militarisation.

After a short overview of the further disconnecting process between Peace Research and the remains of the peace movement in the Netherlands during the last decade, also in the university city of Enschede, we present the initiative taken two years ago between the Science Shop of the University of Twente (located in the city of Enschede) and the local peace group “Enschede voor Vrede” (Enschede for Peace) to organize a series of annual symposia during the national Peace Week at the end of September. During these symposia, of which meanwhile three have taken place, researches at the University of Twente and representatives of peace related Non-Governmental Organisations are invited to reflect on a research subject related to the national theme of the Peace Week and to discuss their findings with each other and the public consisting of university students and “normal citizens”. We will conclude this paper with presenting our experiences and expectations and with the suggestion to others to follow this Enschede example that, as a matter of fact, is completely in line with the philosophy behind the concept of Science Shops to inspire scientists by signals from society.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of the annual nationwide Peace Week in the Netherlands, on September 24, 2014 the Science Shop at the University of Twente and the local Enschede peace group “Enschede voor Vrede” jointly organized a symposium on the “Two Faces of Drones”, exploring the thin and often unclear borderline between civilian and military use of this new and emerging technology. Among the only few students attending this symposium there were two orienting themselves on this subject on behalf of a committee within the Constructive Technology students’ association “Isaac Newton” that was about to organize a larger and externally sponsored symposium on military applications of constructive technology with the central theme “How to protect ourselves and our military forces?”. Actually, their symposium with speakers representing international, national and regional arms manufacturers as Boeing, Bayards, Damen, Thales, and the main sponsor Microflown AVISA, happens to take place just one day before the start of the conference “Past, Present and Future of Peace Research “ this paper is meant to be presented.

This example clearly shows that the military sector has no difficulty to find its way to and within the academic world. Many peace research projects and institutions started with the explicit aim to
Counterbalance the military influence on science and technology, for scientific knowledge evolves in accordance with the practices in the society it connected to [Vries1995]. The future of peace research, therefore, is not only a matter of importance to the peace movement but also to the academic world, while connecting low budget organizations to academic institutions and helping them to articulate their issues into scientific questions is also a responsibility of the university. This is most explicitly embodied by the Science Shops, a concept which was developed in the Netherlands in the ‘70s of the previous century. In recent publications on peace research, the connection between academic theories and societal practices of peace has been identified as one of the main characteristics of the very diverse field of peace research. Paul Rogers points out that “peace researchers very frequently engage systematically with non-government organizations (NGOs), government departments, and intergovernmental agencies. They frequently see this as part of a process of empirical testing of theoretical insights, regarding it also as a two-way process.” Moreover “Many people working in the field regard the policy implications of their work as more significant than its reception among fellow academics.” He warns “Given the modern era of ‘research assessment’ in some Western countries that is primarily geared to academic output in the conventional literature, this can be a disadvantage for the discipline. Furthermore, this ‘engagement’ with the policy process does not fit in with the prevailing academic culture in most Western countries, even if it is more commonly found in academic centres in the majority of the world” [Rogers2013]. Another ‘peace research researcher’, Peter Lawler, after addressing a number of another disadvantages of too strong links between the academic world and society to the status of academic work, he clearly states that “this is not to suggest that peace studies should abandon its traditions of interdisciplinariness, epistemological diversity, or its historical relationship with peace activism” [Lawler2013].

Apart from internal developments in the academic world, like the increasing role of ‘research assessment’ mentioned by Paul Rogers in the quotation above, and the almost autonomously ‘disciplining process’ described in Peter Lawler’s article we referred to, dramatic changes at the societal side are, maybe even more so, responsible for weakening or even abandoning the – as said – essential connection between peace research and peace activism. The fall of the Berlin Wall, the celebration of which 25th anniversary is just a month behind us, and the End of the Cold War for which it became the ultimate symbol led to series of paradigm shifts in the dominant thinking about war and peace and security issues. The general perception regarding the army and the wider military sector has changed – at least in Western Europe – and the once broad and omnipresent peace movement heavily declined while the remaining parts of it struggle with the choices between remaining absolutely pacifist or to support even military interventions in order to protect civilians threatened by armed violence of rebellious groups or even by their own governments.

The question we want to address in this paper is how to re-establish the connection between the peace movement and the academic world in a way that this connection is more sustainable and able to survive endangering developments both within the academic world as well as in society. We’ll try to answer this question not from a theoretical stance, but from practice: the situation at the University of Twente. Twente, being a once heavily industrialized region in the eastern part of the Netherlands with Enschede, Hengelo and Almelo as its main cities. In order to come to our answer, we start with a description of two previous institutionalized connections between university and society when it comes to peace research and peace activism: the Centre for Studies of Science, Technology and Society and the University Peace Days. After dealing with the past, we will address the present in describing the current cooperation of the Science Shop at the University of Twente and the local peace group “Enschede voor Vrede”. From this, we will try to draw a few lines towards the future of a less institutionalized peace research, but at least a form of it that may remain connected to peace activism.

**CENTRE FOR STUDIES OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY**

Distinct from the example presented at the very beginning of this paper describing the Constructive Technology students eager to organize a symposium on the protection of ourselves and our military with arms technology, in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s of the previous century many students in science and technology developed an aversion to the application of “their” scientific discipline to military purposes and the resilience among many prominent scientist hiding behind the often heard excuse this application was not their responsibility but a choice made by politicians. Students and younger scientists started to organize themselves in
study groups addressing the societal responsibility of scientist to safeguard “their” science from military abuse as for instance in the development of nuclear arms and chemical or biological weapons actually used during the Vietnam war [Smit2005]. Somewhat unique in the Netherlands, this broader and international “Science and Society” movement became institutionalized at the young University of Twente (founded in 1961 and called “Twente Polytechnic”, at that time) when on February 1st, 1975 the Centre for Studies in Science, Technology and Society was opened in a completely reconstructed former farm building, called “de Boerderij”, on the Campus of the university. The first staff members of this Centre partly came from the Science and Society movement, partly from the Polemological Institute of professor Bert Röling at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. They shared their interest in the possible consequences for safety and security of the uranium enrichment plant of the Dutch, British and German URENCO consortium that was at that very moment under construction in nearby Almelo. The scientists of “de Boerderij” presented their concerns about the development and (commercial) exploitation of uranium enrichment by ultracentrifuge technology which could easily enrich uranium also to a level applicable to nuclear arms instead of only nuclear power installations. Unfortunately, the warning in the very first “Boerderij Cahier” uranium enrichment by ultracentrifuge technology might contain a huge risk for the undesirable proliferation of nuclear arms was proven right when it turned out that a Pakistani nuclear scientist involved in the construction work of the URENCO plant in Almelo, Abdul Qadir Khan, by espionage activities later become the “father” of not only the Pakistan nuclear weapons, but most likely also of the nuclear arms programs of Iran and North Korea. The recommendations in this very first ‘Boerderij Cahie’r and in later papers to control the actual production of enriched uranium as well as the technological knowledge needed to do so by international institutions and not just by (semi) commercial companies, are still valid. Especially so at this moment that the governments of the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Germany are considering to sell their shares in the URENCO consortium to a commercial party. In his ‘epilogue’ “30 years philosophy of science and technology” Wim Smit states that he and the other staff members of “de Boerderij” were not “against” technology, but that disadvantageous aspects of technological development should be taken into consideration. Especially since technological research is human labour in which choices are to be made. Choices that should be based on analyses of possible implications of technology in the context of the evolving society. According to the Centre’s annual reports of the first years of its existence, three levels of research were present: 1) analyses of actual problems by studying examples of the relationships between science and technology (case-studies) – this was always an incentive for “de Boerderij” in exploring new actual themes; 2) research and evaluation of the fundamental structure of problems within this field; 3) reflection on the character of this interaction, to appoint moral, ethical and political dilemmas, and issues concerning societal responsibility. The activities of “de Boerderij” in the ‘70s of the previous century can be characterized as providing its analyses (mainly risk analyses) to societal groups, as to the antinuclear and peace movements, as well as to politicians to strengthen their positions in the debates on on-going technological developments with the representatives and proponents of these developments. In doing so “de Boerderij” positioned itself serving both institutionalized organisations (in politics, in jurisdiction and in strategy development) as well as mobilizing public opinion by presenting new facts. Empirical research and visualization techniques were at the heart of their expertise as they worked simultaneously at designing new interpretation frameworks. In the early years the work was especially focussed on the fields of nuclear energy and weapon technology. For instance the second Boerderij Cahier, named “Kernenergie in discussie” (Discussing Nuclear Energy), played an important role in the “Brede Maatschappelijke Discussie” (Broad Societal Discussion) on nuclear energy that was initiated by the Dutch government to create support for the establishment of three new nuclear plants in the Netherlands and which actually was abruptly ended by the nuclear catastrophe in the Chernobyl nuclear plant on April 26, 1986, where a scenario evolved that was also more or less foreseen in this second Boerderij Cahier. “De Boerderij” was frequently invited by environmental groups like Friends of the Earth in the Netherlands to speak as experts at their meetings or on their behalf at official political or juridical hearings and was invited by the Dutch peace movement, especially the Interchurch Peace Council IKV to write brochures on new developments in weaponry, nuclear (dis)armament and international security. Individual staff members became regular advisors or even board members of various NGOs in the antinuclear and peace movement as well as of official advisory committees of the government and parliament of the
Netherlands. Their own research and participation in international forums enabled them to question or correct the information presented by the government, for instance when it came to the actual reach of the Patriot antimissile systems the Dutch government was about to buy and which are currently employed at the Turkish-Syrian border. The activities of “de Boerderij” were predominantly driven by its research and international developments in the academic field, and slightly a “scientification” of these activities evolved. From analysing specific scientific and technological developments in their societal context to provide society, but also the academic world, with the information to be able to make responsibly choices, the focus shifted somewhat towards the analysis of these processes themselves: the study of dynamics in scientific research. Less Boerderij publications occurred in the magazines of the environmental and peace movement and more in scientific journals. In the course of the ‘80 the pressure of ‘research assessment’, as Paul Rogers calls it, could be noticed.

In the late ‘80s and early ‘90s “de Boerderij” got involved in a discussion within the University of Twente on a proposed joint research project of its research group on high power laser technology with the aforementioned URENCO company in Almelo aiming to develop a new procedure of uranium enrichment by laser technology. A new technique that, when proven feasible, would be cheaper and easier than the ultracentrifuge technology that was used, but that would also have a much higher risk towards the proliferation of nuclear weapons than the ultracentrifuge technology “de Boerderij” had warned against in its very first report. This time, however, “de Boerderij” was not primarily involved in the provision of information on which the university could make a responsible decision to sign the contract with URENCO and to get involved in this controversial project or not, but was only asked by the board of the University (after it had actually signed the contract) how to deal with questions like this in the near future. This led to the publication of a report in which the institutional responsibility of a scientific organization as the University of Twente was explored.

A kind of societal reflection on research activities within the university was also promoted by “de Boerderij” during its earliest years of existence, when it organized on an almost weekly base so-called “Actualiteitencolleges” (lectures on current events). With respect to a developments with interrelated societal and scientific aspects described in the newspapers, a scientist in the field at stake was invited to share his (or her) view on the matter and to give some more background information. There was a preference to invite scientist from within, working at the University of Twente, to give such a presentation and it turned out to be a good instrument to raise some awareness of the societal impact of and discussions on scientific and technological developments University staff members themselves were involved in. After a few years this activity was handed over to the Studium Generale bureau of the University of Twente.

UNIVERSITY PEACE DAYS

Inspired by the Belgian Nobel Peace Prize Laureate George Pire, in the early ‘70s of the previous century some Belgian scientists launched the idea of “University Peace Days”. It was their aim that all institutions for higher education in the world would dedicate at least one day a year to work specifically on emerging questions of peace and security. Support for this idea came from UNESCO, the International Peace Bureau in Geneva, and a number of Nobel Prize Laureates; not only of the Peace Prize, but also of the prizes for Physics, Chemistry and Medicine. A special stimulus was given by the 1978 UN conference on disarmament calling for the development of programs for peace education at all levels of education. When two Belgian universities responded positively to the call, the University Peace Days were born. March 1, was proposed to be the main date for the University Peace Days since that was the day in 1954 the Japanese fishing vessel ‘The Lucky Dragon’ was hit by the nuclear fall-out of a H-bomb explosion on the Bikini atoll.

In 1982 and 1983 the Belgian example was followed by some Dutch universities and in March 1983 the first University Peace Day was organized in the form of a panel discussion with among others professor Bert Röling of the polemologic institute at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen and chaired by the University of Twente rector magnificus professor Wiebe Draijer. Its theme was “The role of the (technological) university with respect to disarmament and conversion”.

A group of peace activists in the nearby city of Hengelo had already established a Conversion Working Group to develop realistic and feasible proposals for the conversion of the largest arms manufacturer in the Netherlands, the Hengelo based Hollandse Signaal Apparaten, nowadays part of Thales. By the end of 1993 this Conversion Working Group sent a request to the board of the University of Twente to give the University Peace Days a more institutional status instead as being just an event. The response of the University board
was positive, stating that “… as many people as possible have to reflect on the relation between their work, their discipline and the issue of peace and disarmament. For this, the University offers a perfect platform for those who have thought about it to exchange their opinions. The concept of University Peace Days … could be an excellent means to that end. The University board is very much in favour of the possibility to organize University Peace Days in the future.”

Given this amount of support, a preliminary organizing committee was formed and asked the University board to provide them with a student-assistant for a duration of six months. In September 1985 the University board agreed, with the unanimous support of the University council. A new University Peace Days committee was formed consisting of two students, a former rector magnificus of the University, a staff member of the aforementioned Centre for Studies of Science, Technology and Society, one of the students’ chaplains and the head of the Studium Generale bureau who became the immediate supervisor of the student-assistant made available by the University board. There was no representation of a local peace group, a NGO or the Hengelo conversion working group in it.

The aim of the University Peace Days as formulated by this new committee was to ‘stimulate discussions within the University departments (in order to involve the people as immediately as possible) on the following questions:

- To what extent and in what way are education and research within the department relevant with respect to peace and security (for instance for the development of new security policies, the verification of arms control agreements, purely defensive weapon systems, peace education, economic and technological cooperation between East and West)?
- To what extent and in what way could and should research and education within the department focus on the way it contributes to the issue of peace and security?’

The student-assistant employed by the committee was charged with the coordination of the overall program. This meant to maintain in close contact with the organizers of the University Peace Days activities within at least ten departments taking part in this initiative and also supporting them when needed with additional information and documentation. Also the communication and publication of the overall program with the central and decentralized activities was part of his responsibilities. The program organized in March 1986 consisted of at least sixteen movies, lectures, panel discussions, etc. Many members of the University community (students and staff members) as well as people from outside the university attended these activities.

In its evaluation of the University Peace Days of 1986 the committee was very positive about the support for this initiative both at the central level (University board and Council) as well as within the different departments of the University where many students and members of staff put a lot of energy in organizing the various activities. The attendance of the activities varied from 20 to 100 persons. The committee stated that some of the activities (especially the movies shown) had primarily a motivational aim instead of offering a direct reflection on the education and research programs within the department. According to the committee this might be important to the incoming new generations of students, but the main focus should be on the connection with actual education and research. One of the recommendations of the committee was also that the issue of peace and security should become an integral part of the education and research projects within the departments. The committee admitted that this was already the case within some departments, but it stressed that the aim of the University Peace Days was only reached when “there is a structural place for education and research on peace issues in all departments.”

For the future the committee advised to organize a central University Peace Days event once every two years and have a decentralized program for the University Peace Days in the alternating years [Thijssen1986]. This model was maintained at the University of Twente until the year 1999. Meanwhile the theme of the University Peace Days had been broadened to other societal issues like privacy – the subject of the very last event. The participation within the departments of the University however was decreased to a level the committee had to come to the conclusion it was better to let this initiative come to an end after 16 years.

The same happened at most Dutch universities, sooner or later. An important exception being the University of Utrecht, where the University Peace Days was still a major event until 2012 and changed its name afterwards in “A Struggle for Peace”. An explanation for this exception could be that this event is organized in close collaboration with the local chapter of SIB (the students’ association on international relations) and several strong and peace related NGOs having their national headquarters in the city of Utrecht. The other exception is, of course, the host of the conference,
this paper is presented: the University of Groningen. In Groningen however, the annual University Peace Days were moved from March to September, coinciding with the annual Dutch Peace Week.

THE SCIENCE SHOP AS MEDIATOR

The nationwide Dutch Peace Week was initiated by the Interchurch Peace Council IKV in 1967 to start each new season after the annual summer holidays with a week full of activities on peace. At the beginning primarily within the churches, but later on also in schools and other sectors of society. It turned out to be an effective concept that soon became adopted by other (secular) peace organisations in the Netherlands and also in Belgium and certain parts of Germany. With the decrease of the once massive peace movement in the Netherlands also the celebration of the annual Peace Week became less spread, but IKV (meanwhile merged with the Pax Christi branch in the Netherlands to ‘PAX’) successfully revived the concept by introducing the additional concept of ‘Embassies of Peace’ to it. Local churches, other religious or cultural centres, peace groups or even organisations especially established to this goal can become a local ‘Embassy of Peace’ that promotes peace activities in its village, city or city part. In the only four years after its introduction the number of ‘Embassies of Peace’ increased from a little bit more than a dozen to 72 in 2014.

In the city of Enschede, where the University of Twente is located, the remaining parts of local peace groups, branches from national peace organisations and local peace activists some of them being involved in international peace work joined hands in 1996 in establishing a new local peace group “Enschede voor Vrede” (Enschede for Peace). Its main goal was to present to the Enschede citizens there was still a peace movement working on nonviolent approaches towards the solution or transformation of violent conflicts. According to its informal constitution the most important means to this end was to organise a diverse and appealing program during the annual Peace Week. It goes without saying “Enschede voor Vrede” was among the first Embassies of Peace.

Inspired and increasingly motivated by the new Embassy concept, “Enschede voor Vrede” tried to reach new target groups outside the traditional peace movement. Soon, joint regular activities were established with the interreligious council in Enschede, a number of migrants’ organisations as well as local human rights organisations. In order to reach out also to the academic world at the University of Twente, “Enschede voor Vrede” approached the science Shop at this University, established in the early ’80s of the previous century striving to perform research that has an ‘emancipatory character’.

The Science Shop aims at supporting civilians active in societal organizations to achieve their goals, for the good of society, by making the expertise present at the University available to them. This is done (roughly) in four ways: 1) giving advice, 2) organizing knowledge links with experts within the University or with experts from other knowledge institutes, 3) exchanging knowledge and spreading awareness by organizing events, and 4) by organizing and co-performing research (performed either by experts working within the University or by student researchers backed-up by competent scientific staff) that is inspired by the knowledge and research questions as they are present within society.

During the preparations of the Peace Week program of 2012, which was about international conflicts over natural resources, the question “Enschede voor Vrede” asked the Science Shop was what expertise was present at the University of Twente on the development of new materials and energy resources for the Dutch or European society to become less dependent on these natural resources and by that to make conflicts less apparent. Soon it became also clear to both parties that the question was not simply resolved by giving a plain answer, but had the character of awareness building both within the University as well as by the population of Enschede. In line with the 3rd way described above, the Science Shop and “Enschede voor Vrede” decided to organize a mini symposium at the Peace Week on the further development of renewable energy as an alternative for increasing conflicts on oil and gas. A spokesman of SOMO Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations was invited to sketch out the societal developments and two scientist from within the University presented their research activities on renewable energy. Some students demonstrated a pyrolysis experiment to produce oil from wood wastes. Initially also the bureau for nature and environment in the province of Overijssel, Twente is part of, participated in this mini-symposium and it was considered by the coordinators of the Peace Week at IKV / PAX as an innovative activity to which a camera team was sent to make some shots for the overall filmic report on the Peace Week for that year [Hattem2012].

During the evaluation of this event “Enschede voor Vrede” and the Science Shop concluded that this concept met the goals of both organizations and
decided to continue with this concept that was formulated as “relating the nationwide theme of the annual Peace Week to research activities at the University of Twente and bringing speakers from the societal field connected to the theme and University researchers together into a mini symposium to be organized as part of the Enschede Peace Week program”.

In 2013 the nationwide theme of the Peace Week was “peace activism”. It was inspired by the evolving societal movements as seen in the Arab Spring and the worldwide Occupy movement, but just some months before the Peace Week the Gezi park protests in Istanbul got a lot of attention while there were similar protests going on in Bulgaria and Brazil. The theme was related to the scientific and technological research at the University of Twente in focussing on the role of social media in the aforementioned protests and the title of the mini symposium became “Peace Activism 2.0”. The coordinator within IKV/PAX of the organisation’s “Adopt a Revolution” project was invited as speaker introducing the societal developments, a University researcher of the use and abuse of social media was invited, as well as a student from Turkish and staff member of the University from Bulgarian origin, both heavily involved in solidarity actions with the protesters in their respective countries. As a form of demonstration a skype connection was established during the symposium with a famous blogger who was considered as one of the leading persons in the Bulgarian protests [Hattem2013].

And the current year, as already mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the nationwide theme of the Peace Week was ‘disarmament’ which was related by “Enschede voor Vrede” and the Science Shop to the development of new, innovative weaponry like drones and to the question how this in turn was related to drones research performed at the University of Twente. A researcher on the drones technology itself at the faculty of Constructive Technology was invited as a speaker, as well as a researcher at the faculty of Governmental Studies dealing with the legal aspects of the use of drones in protecting the borders of Europe especially in the Mediterranean. We also found a specialist on the ethical aspects of armed drones among the academic staff, but unfortunately he moved to a university in the United Kingdom during the summer holidays and therefore we had to find a speaker on this aspect outside the University of Twente [Hattem2014].

Reports of the three symposium we organized until now, have been published by the Science Shop and are also available online. We noticed that the speakers from within and outside the University, more or less representing the academic and societal context, very much appreciated discussing the subject from both points of view and exchanged their addresses afterwards. In a way these symposiums are comparable with the “Actualiteitencolleges” (the lectures on current affairs) “de Boerderij” started in 1975 and that slightly disappeared during the ‘90s of the previous century. It provides the identification of controversies and challenges students, staff members but also ordinary citizens to reflect on specific scientific and technological developments in the context of societal developments especially related to peace and security. In order to attract more attendees both from within as from outside the University “Enschede voor Vrede” and the Science Shop already came to an agreement with the bureau of Studium Generale to integrate this annual symposium in the latter’s program of weekly activities.

**EXPECTATIONS**

Because of the concept that a small, joint committee composed of members of the local peace group, the Science Shop and (in the future) Studium Generale will relate the nationwide theme of the Peace Week to research activities within the University, it is to be expected that in this model the connection between University and Society that is considered to be an essential characteristic of Peace Research can be guaranteed.

Since the concept is also light and needs almost no additional funding or organisation, this way of working could also easily be applied by other peace groups in cities where a University and preferable also a Science Shop is located. Instead of complaining that Peace Research almost has disappeared from the Dutch Universities, the peace movement could also initiate the confrontation of societal and scientific developments in the field of peace and security by finding a way to raise this issue in the academic world themselves.

Once the connection between the peace movement and the academic world is more or less re-established, it may be expected that at a certain moment specific questions could be mediated by the Science Shop to the corresponding research groups and that ultimately they may give rise to the development of new research areas and contemporary Peace Research.

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