

Public Opinion and Global Security

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Abstract

With the invasion of Ukraine by Russia the prospect of a third world war became a reality if NATO forces engaged with Russian forces in the defence of Ukraine. In this context the imperative to give adequate attention to the needs of humanity and the planet in terms of global pandemics, climate change and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals are not being given the attention they require. Together these threats of world war and environmental collapse pose an existential threat to the entire global population. With all these points in mind the research proposals for a World Peace Poll published and discussed at numerous WAPOR conferences are revisited again and placed in the context of the author's work with the UN and OSCE over the past two years. Research in the public domain is reviewed from Yemen, Libya, Lebanon, Israel and Palestine, Kashmir, Sudan, Bolivia, Iraq, Moldova and Transnistria to illustrate the successes, failures and lessons learnt using both AI Digital Dialogues and conventional public opinion polls. It is concluded that with the deployment of a World Peace Poll to provide both baseline and tracking data on all conflicts it would be possible to better prepare the world and mitigate the existential threats to world peace and security in this our twenty third century.

Introduction

Public opinion polls were first used in a time of war during World War II prior to the invasion of Italy by US and allied forces in 1943. The Americans wanted to know if the Italians would resist their invasion or would they only have to fight the German forces.¹ The polls suggested the Italians would not resist the invasion, which went ahead and successfully began the liberation of German occupied Europe. Following their military campaigns in Chechnya in the 1990s, in Georgia in 2008, Crimea in 2014 and Syria in 2015, Russian forces massed along the northern and eastern borders of Ukraine in January 2022 in support of Russian backed rebels in the Ukraine eastern provinces of the Donbas. At that time Russia said they had no intention of invading Ukraine, which was probably the correct military decision given the fact that public opinion polls run in Ukraine indicated that the local population would be able to resist such an invasion (see Table 1).

	27-28 January 2022	12-13 February 2022	16-17 February 2022
Not sure	15	17	13
Rather unsure	23	19	19
Difficult to answer	6	7	4
Rather certain	34	32	36
Absolutely certain	22	26	28

Table 1 'If the invasion of Russia takes place, how confident are you that Ukraine will be able to repel the attack?'²

¹ Smith, T. W., (2015) *The Globalization of Surveys*, 68th WAPOR Annual Conference, Buenos Aires, Argentina, June 16-19.

² Rating Group, (2022) *Dynamics of military threat assessment February 16-17, Ukraine*. Available at: https://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg_files/rg_threat_assessment_18022022_press.pdf

However, on February 24th Russia did invade, their forces were opposed and pushed back in the North saving the capital Kiev from occupation, and the elected government of Ukraine. Clearly President Putin and his generals had not taken the public opinion research seriously. Had they done so they would, at the very least, have been better prepared to confront the Ukraine resistance and their fighting ability, given the Ukraine track record of fighting the Germans alongside the Russians in their race to take Berlin in 1945. It also appears to be the case that the Americans underestimated the strength of Ukrainian resistance as the administration did not give Ukraine all the support that they asked for prior to the Russian invasion³ believing, as the Russians did, that the war would likely be short lived in favour of Moscow. Had either the Russians or Americans taken the polling intelligence seriously then perhaps the Russians would have been better prepared for a decisive short war, or no war, or the Americans might have supported Ukraine sooner and stronger making the war shorter in Ukraine's favour. They may have even prevented a war. Sadly the outcome seems to be the worst of all possible worlds with a drawn out conflict that detracts us from the global problems of climate change, global food and energy poverty, pandemics and the UNs Sustainable Development Goals.⁴ There was nothing wrong with the public opinion research done in Ukraine prior to this war, the problem was the policy makers and planners not taking the research seriously. Why is this and how can this failure of informed decision making be rectified to better manage global security for the common good and wise stewardship of the Earth's limited resources?

Global security and existing public opinion practice

Following the success of the survey of public opinion in Italy during the second world war Gallup was provided with all the resources necessary to expand his polling company into a global franchise that was able to provide the United States of America and her allies with critical opinion data on any state / conflict they had an interest in. This mostly confidential research is supplemented by more public research undertaken by NGOs most notably the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI) in addition to independent state / NGO think tank projects completed by state governments for their own use.

These polls tend to be bespoke to the state / conflict being monitored. At a regional and global level the World Values Survey and regional barometers track common sets of variables to monitor political and social change comparatively. All these data are in the public domain and provide the academic community with a wealth of research opportunities but unlike the bespoke confidential work carried out by governments they cannot quickly respond to security issues in a time of crisis. Exceptionally the Arab Barometer has started to run phone polls to address some critical topical issues in the MENA region but sadly this is the exception rather than the rule and at a global level such innovation presently does not exist. My own experience with working for NGOs on security issues is that I got asked to help when everything else seems to have failed. A case of too little and too late.

The UN made an effort to sample public opinion on security issues globally as part of their UN75 activities in 2020.⁵ Regrettably, the polling was not up to WAPOR standards in terms of both sample

³ Merchant, T. and Lee, M., (2022) American spy agencies review their misses on Ukraine, Russia, AP News, 4 June. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-afghanistan-zelenskyy-kyiv-9e1952d290e7f20f53c54ed8a832a650>

⁴ Guterres, A., (2022) UN chief appeals for cooperation to address 'world in peril', UN General Assembly, 14 September. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/14/un-chief-appeals-for-cooperation-to-address-world-in-peril>

⁵ Irwin, C., Gilani, I., Gilani, M. B., (2020) *A critical review of the UN75 Global surveys presented to the 2020 UN General Assembly*, WAPOR 73rd Annual Conference, October 6-10. Available at: <https://peacepolls.etinu.net/peacepolls/documents/008897.pdf>

and questions asked with the exception of a subset of their sample completed by PEW.⁶ Of course cost is always a critical factor when wanting to run polls globally so when the UN Innovation Cell in the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UNDPPA) asked me to help them apply a new technology that uses Artificial Intelligence to collect opinion data, in real time, with ‘Hard to Reach’ populations, I welcomed this research opportunity in the hope that the costs of such work in conflict settings could be greatly reduced.

AI Digital Dialogues

The UN had partnered with Remesh AI in 2019 to develop Artificial Intelligence for conflict resolution⁷ and I joined the team in 2020 to help implement the application of these new tools in the field. Between June 2020 and March 2022 we ran a series of AI Digital Dialogues in Yemen, Libya, Bolivia, Haiti and Iraq in support of the UN Missions there. Technically a lot of learning and advances were achieved. Up to 1000 participants could join a ‘conversation’ from their mobile phones, tablet or computer having been given a link to join on a given time and date. They would then be asked a series of onboarding / demographic questions typically age, gender, education and ethnic or geographical markers that would distinguish the ‘sides’ in the local conflict. The dialogue would then proceed to ask simple polling questions similar to any online poll followed by open ended questions. The personal opinion answers were then shared with other participants anonymously for them to agree or disagree with and / or choose a preference between two suggested answers from other participants. These results created thousands of data points from which, in real time, an analysis would be available that determined degrees of agreement on any issue asked by all the demographic criteria given at the beginning of the ‘conversation’.

The dialogues were run in the local language with results available in real time in any Google language using Chrome. Inevitably there were biases in the sample but we knew what they were and could interpret our results accordingly. From my perspective the most important advance made by Remesh AI at this time was the ability to ‘branch’ the stream of data / results along two paths of those who agreed with a certain suggestion or poll result and those who disagreed. Unlike most market research with a focus on what people want conflict resolution research must also be able to focus on what people do not want. Additionally the Remesh AI platform continues to increase its capacity to facilitate larger numbers of participants - which in turn can produce quota samples, adding more analytical tools to the platform, and the ability to merge data sets from different ‘conversations’. Although the results lacked the precision of a carefully implemented random sample poll the insights from the dialogues were nearly always the same as comparable polling survey data. Significantly the AI Digital Dialogue results were available in real time at a fraction of the cost.

The limits of public opinion research, public diplomacy and peace making

Critically it is what is done with the results of a peace poll or AI Digital Dialogue that is important in a peace process. Who the results are shared with and to what end? And is there a public diplomacy, dissemination and communications strategy in place that can take the peace process forward? Sadly, in terms of achieving positive peace process outcomes these AI Digital Dialogues were subject to the same political difficulties that traditional peace poll surveys encounter. Given the responsibility for

⁶ Pew (2020), Research Center, *International Cooperation Welcomed Across 14 Advanced Economies*, 21 September. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/09/21/international-cooperation-welcomed-across-14-advanced-economies/>

⁷ Bilich, J., Konya, A., Masood, D., and Varga, M. (2019) *Faster Peace via Inclusivity: An Effective Paradigm to Understand Populations in Conflict Zones*, AI for Social Good Workshop at NeurIPS, Vancouver, Canada.

global security entrusted to the UN under their charter we might have expected the UN to take the global lead in the application of opinion research for peace making. Regrettably this is not the case and perhaps that is why my colleagues undertaking the intelligence work around the world, pioneered by Gallup, sometimes ask me “Why are the UN so bad at public opinion research?” In an attempt to answer that question I will review a few of the case studies I was involved in with the UN, while being conscious that I should not reveal confidences that I was asked to keep, as follows:

Yemen

The first application of the Remesh AI platform for conflict analysis was in Yemen in 2020.⁸ The questions, or dialogue, was developed by the UN communications team at the UN Mission to Yemen, the UN Innovation Cell in New York and the programmers at Remesh AI with the addition of any advice I could offer from a peace polls perspective. The questions covered in the digital dialogue were all the issues identified by the UN Special Envoy to Yemen.⁹ The results were never published but in 2021 the Mokha Center for Strategic Studies and the Polling Yemen Center (PYC) completed a poll: *Summary of Public Opinion Trends on the Current Situation and the Role of the Conflict Parties - a survey of opinion of citizens in the internationally recognised government-controlled areas*¹⁰ that produced very similar results when similar questions were asked. However unlike the Mokha study the digital dialogues covered all of Yemen including the Northern area under the control of the Houthi rebels. Other polls completed by other third parties have produced very good results from across all of Yemen with the insights from the polls and digital dialogues very much the same. However, the polls, when they used random samples were able to add more precision to detailed questions on, for example, political support for various political actors and groups. Sadly, none of this excellent work has been published with the exception of the Mokha study that is limited to one side in the conflict. I am certain that some ‘truth telling’ in this case would help to advance the peace process in Yemen and with this point in mind I advised all those involved to undertake peace polls in Yemen, with input from all sides in the conflict, and to publish the results.¹¹

Regrettably this has not yet been done in line with best practice. Having completed the first series of peace polls in Northern Ireland in support of their successful peace process in 1998 I recommended that such polling should be built on three simple principles:¹²

1. All the parties to a conflict should draft and agree to all the questions.

This was done to make sure all possible options for peace were covered in the questionnaire, to eliminate bias in the questions, and to prevent the parties to the conflict saying ‘this was the wrong question’ when they did not like the results.

2. All the communities and peoples to the conflict should be asked all the questions.

In addition to agreeing to the questions the parties to the conflict should also agree the methodology so they can not dismiss the results as a bad or biased sample.

⁸ OSESGY News (2020) *Cutting-Edge Tech in the Service of Inclusive Peace in Yemen*, 3 August. Available at: <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/cutting-edge-tech-service-inclusive-peace-yemen>

⁹ Griffiths, M., (2020) *Concerns and Hopes of Yemenis at Heart of UN Plan for Better Future*. OSESGY News, 16 July. Available at: <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/concerns-and-hopes-yemenis-heart-un-plans-better-future>

¹⁰ Mokah Center, (2021) *Yemeni Indicator*, WAPOR@listserv.unl.edu, 27 December. Available at: <https://peacepolls.etinu.net/peacepolls/documents/009500.pdf>

¹¹ Irwin, C. J., (2022) Personal Communication, Mokah Center, Istanbul and OSESGY, Amman, Jordan.

¹² Irwin, C. J., (2020) *The People’s Peace Second Edition: Public Opinion, Public Diplomacy and World Peace*, CreateSpace, Scotts Valley, CA, p. 4. Available at: <http://www.peacepolls.org/peacepolls/documents/008880.pdf>

3. All the results should be made public.

If all the results are not published the parties to the conflict can ignore the results and / or ‘cherry pick’ them and leak the results they like best to their publics. Public dissemination also extends ‘ownership’ of the peace process to all those involved in the conflict.

Libya

Libya was the second UN Mission to use AI Digital Dialogues after Yemen. As with Yemen the UN had a very good communications team to manage their Mission website and social media used to generate the participants for the dialogues. We also teamed up with our WAPOR colleague Nedal Swehli of Diwan Research, Libya, to both run some of the questions he had run in his conventional polls as well as using his demographic questions for comparative purposes. In terms of peace process the results were both a disappointment and a great, and unexpected success. This success came with the 5th AI dialogue run on January 31st, 2021 in preparation for the election of a new Government of National Unity (GNU) by the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF). On this occasion the public were asked what questions they wanted to put to the GNU candidates and these results were published in real time on Facebook and then, in real time, on Libyan television to a 1.4 million audience.¹³ In Northern Ireland it would take a minimum of two weeks to get the results into the *Belfast Telegraph* but here we were reaching a third of the adult Libyan population, with their issues and questions, in real time. Subsequently, the election of the GNU was a success that ushered in a period of relative stability and peace. But then national elections that should have taken place the following Christmas failed to materialise when the constitutional arrangements for those elections were a matter of keen dispute between the warring parties. Critically, the questions run to address this delicate issue were not drafted by local constitutional experts representing the two sides to the conflict. Their ‘by-in’ to any compromise options was essential if such arrangements were to have any chance of success. In part, perhaps, because all this research was being undertaken remotely, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the kind of personal engagement with stakeholders, so necessary for sensitive discussion of options beyond their publicly stated negotiating positions, just did not happen. In the absence of credible national elections conflict returned to Libya in 2022. Nedal Swehli, quite rightly, identified the real time social media publication of AI Digital Dialogues as an important ‘outreach’ tool. Especially when the questions and issues are framed by the audience.

Bolivia

The third AI Digital Dialogue was undertaken by the UN Mission in Bolivia.¹⁴ Their Mission was not as well-resourced as Yemen and Libya so they employed one of our WAPOR colleagues, our WAPOR National Representative, Daniel Morales, to help them program and manage their AI dialogues. These ‘conversations’ were written in cooperation with the Government of Bolivia, and as Bolivia is a country with a majority indigenous population and given my past work with the Inuit of Northern Canada, I took a particular close interest in this project. Technically it was a success and Daniel was able to run many of the questions in the AI Digital Dialogues in a national public opinion poll. The results were substantially the same with the same insights to be drawn. Unfortunately, however, the parties involved could not be persuaded to run more AI dialogues with real time publication as we had done so successfully in Libya. Even when most of the questions asked in Bolivia dealt with positive issues relating to the people’s priorities for themselves and their country’s future. The almost universal bureaucratic tendency not to take risks, however small, prevailed, and an opportunity was lost for what could have been a creative dialogue between the political elites of Bolivia and their peoples, in both Spanish and the most widely spoken indigenous languages. This would have been possible using the Latin script as the Remesh AI platform uses ‘natural language’.

¹³ Irwin, C. J., Masood-Alavi, D., Waehlsch, M., Konya, A., (2021) *Using Artificial Intelligence in Peacemaking: The Libya Experience*, WAPOR 74th Annual Conference, November 2-6. Available at: <http://www.peacepolls.org/peacepolls/documents/009260.pdf>

¹⁴ UN Web TV (2022) Liita’s Conversa, 27 June. Available at: <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1t/k1tnalzsw8>

Other opportunities with the UN: Haiti, Iraq, Israel / Palestine, Lebanon and Sudan

Using 'natural language' an AI Digital Dialogue was run in Haiti with an operator fluent in Haitian French based Creole. With help from our WAPOR colleague Munqith Dagher of IIACSS Iraq, an AI Digital Dialogue was also run in Iraq prior to their elections in 2021. It should be understood that the UN Innovation Cell in the Department of Political and Peace Building Affairs that was initiating these AI researches is understaffed and is constantly going from one emergency to another. Sadly this was very much the case in Iraq so this project fell short of its full potential. With expert input from Munqith and his daughters we could have done much more. Israel and Palestine was often discussed as a potential project in the Innovation Cell. Separate but parallel dialogues can now be run in Arabic and Hebrew on the Remesh AI platform and a combined Israel / Palestine dialogue in the lingua franca of the youth, English, would also be possible to publicly address pressing issues at that time in both Jerusalem and Gaza.¹⁵ Following the explosion of the grain silos in Lebanon that destroyed their docks Arab Barometer ran a very good short poll on the crisis that then befall the government of Lebanon in 2020.¹⁶ Such polls can easily be run on the Remesh AI platform and with the benefit of this accurate random sample to put an AI Digital Dialogue in context it would have been very easy to run these questions and then follow up the quantitative answers given with open ended explanations and recommendations for remedial action. In AI Digital Dialogue terms this was a 'no brainer' golden opportunity. But it did not get done,¹⁷ and then there was a focus on Sudan where street protests were likely to lead to the failure of the Sovereignty Council interim government. Having worked in Sudan before¹⁸ I had very good contacts there who in turn knew all the key players. I suggested we run an AI Digital Dialogue and broadcast it on Facebook and local television as we had done so successfully in Libya. Sadly, before this plan could be put into action, the military rebelled displacing the legitimate government in a coup on 25 October 2021. A widely broadcast AI Digital Dialogue in Sudan may not have heralded a period of relative peace and calm as it had done in Libya but at least it should have been tried.

Other opportunities with the OSCE: Moldova, Transnistria, Ukraine and Kosovo

I was first encouraged to run a peace poll in support of negotiations to resolve the Transnistria / Moldova issue by the Director of the International Peace Institute (IPI), Walter Kemp, in 2012. In 2015 he invited me to Vienna to give a talk to interested parties including the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).¹⁹ We wrote several draft proposals together and eventually I was brought to Moldova by the OSCE to write a detailed proposal for such a poll in 2019. But this proposal did not materialise as a project until July of this year after Russia invaded Ukraine and Moldova became a potential unwilling participant in a wider war. That peace polling project is now underway with results expected before the end of the year.²⁰ However, when I first went to Moldova I met with the Russian Ambassador as well as going to Transnistria in the hope of running the poll in both Moldova and Transnistria. Regrettably, under present circumstances, the poll will only be run on potential options to resolve the Transnistria issue in Moldova. Clearly it would have

¹⁵ Lederer, E. M., (2022) UN: 2022 likely deadliest for Palestinians in West Bank, AP News, 29 October. Available here: <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-israel-united-nations-west-bank-peace-process-e7ef5c3b74d71ade2032a8c9dc4a703b>

¹⁶ Arab Barometer VI (2021) *Lebanon Country Report*. Available at: <https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/Public-Opinion-Lebanon-Country-Report-2021-En-1.pdf>

¹⁷ Subsequently the UN published a promotional film for an AI Digital Dialogue completed in Lebanon in May 2022. Available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mHOjuO_YeA4

¹⁸ Irwin, C. J., (2020) p. 171-192. Available at: <http://www.peacepolls.org/peacepolls/documents/008880.pdf>

¹⁹ Irwin, C. J., (2015) *Making Peace Through Polling*, International Peace Institute (IPI) Vienna, 16 December.

²⁰ The Government of the Republic of Moldova (2022) THE TRANSNISTRIAN ISSUE WAS THE SUBJECT OF DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE HEAD OF THE REINTEGRATION POLICY OFFICE ALIN GVIDIANI AND THE RESEARCHER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL, DR. COLIN IRWIN. 19 July. Available here: <https://gov.md/ro/content/tematica-transnistreana-fost-obiect-al-discutiilor-dintre-seful-biroului-politici-de>

been better to have run the poll some years ago and then to have extended the research to Ukraine in the hope of preventing the present war there as we had in Macedonia in 2002.²¹ Earlier this year political reverberations from the war in Ukraine seemed to ‘spill over’ into another sphere of Russian influence in Kosovo²² where I had conducted a peace poll 17 years earlier to help resolve their unfinished business with Serbia regarding the enclave of Mitrovica. The OSCE are also responsible for peace there and like the frozen conflict in Moldova little progress has been made although the peace poll run there clearly indicated what needed to be done.²³

The limitations of UN and OSCE peace making

It wasn’t too difficult for the UN to ask all the parties to the conflict all the questions (Peace Poll rule 2 above). So this gets done most of the time when they do undertake surveys of public opinion. However, I have not included any of the detailed results of the various AI Digital Dialogues in this paper because they have never been published so Peace Polls rule three is systematically ignored. The Facebook publication of one of the Libyan dialogues was the exception and it was very effective. Peace polls rule one was also never followed. All the parties to the conflicts reviewed here were not asked to draft and agree the questions. Ownership of the research rested with the UN and not the parties to the conflict. So the research had little positive impact on the peace process.

For many years I thought this failure to follow peace poll best practice was due to incompetence and lack of appropriate expertise. But when I got to work with the various UN Missions and the Innovation Cell at the UN DPPA I discovered that the people I worked with were some of the brightest, hard-working, dedicated people I have ever had the pleasure to work with.²⁴ There was no problem with the UN staff, the problem was their institution. The problem, I discovered, was that all UN Missions have to be approved by the UN Security Council and the permanent five (P5) have a veto, so each and every UN Mission must be very careful not to get on the wrong side of a P5 member state or their mandate could be lost next time it came up for renewal. So better, then, not to publish anything that might invite criticism and also better be careful who to engage with and how. Safety lies with keeping control and ownership of peace research in house and not giving such ownership to the parties to the conflict when the sides to the conflict might be allies of one of the P5 Security Council members. Critically, this is often the case as many wars are proxy wars in which a P5 member state has an interest. Exceptionally the UN Mission to Cyprus got around this problem by having an NGO Interpeace, subcontract the peace polling there to Alexandros Lordos and his colleagues and to myself in 2016/17²⁵ and a peace poll is presently being run in Moldova now that there is a war in neighbouring Ukraine. In Moldova I was often told by my OSCE colleagues there that we must ‘do no harm’. I whole heartedly agree with this principle borrowed from the Hippocratic oath, but it is often the case that ‘harm’ can be done by failing to do something that could and should be done. The ‘expressed function’ of UN and OSCE Missions is to make peace but the ‘latent function’ of the Mission is to preserve the life of the Mission and this must necessarily include not taking any risks that might put them on the wrong side of a UN Security Council member state with a veto. As a consequence proactive peace polling that follows the rules of peace polling only gets done by third parties with limited resources and / or by the UN and OSCE when all else has failed, and then it is too little and too late and we end up with a world of unresolved frozen conflicts. The very first article of the 1945 Charter

²¹ Irwin, C. J., (2020) p. 39-46. Available at: <http://www.peacepolls.org/peacepolls/documents/008880.pdf>

²² Falk, T. O., (2022) What’s behind the renewed tensions between Serbia and Kosovo, Al Jazeera, 4 August. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/4/whats-behind-the-renewed-tensions-between-serbia-and-kosovo>

²³ Irwin, C. J., (2020) p. 54-59. Available at: <http://www.peacepolls.org/peacepolls/documents/008880.pdf>

²⁴ UN DPPA Innovation Cell (2022) *Making People’s Voices Matter – Artificial Intelligence-assisted Digital Dialogues*, 8 July. Available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3QuK4bz1BM>

²⁵ Irwin, C. J., (2020) p. 225-239. Available at: <http://www.peacepolls.org/peacepolls/documents/008880.pdf>

of the United Nations, also confirmed and adopted by the OSCE in 1975, informs us that “The Purpose of the United Nations are:

1. To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace;”

Some UN agencies, such as the UNDP and UNICEF, have in house expertise for managing and running public opinion polls in states where they have a responsibility for development and child welfare. However, the UN Department of Political and Peace Building Affairs lack such in house expertise. Heads of UN Missions can get access to polling surveys done by member states when states choose to share such information with them. However, inevitably, this research is biased by the interests of the commissioning state, that may or may not choose to undertake such research, and when, and with what questions asked. There are some notable exceptions but they are the exceptions rather than the rule. The vast majority of polling done in conflict zones is done by states with an interest in those conflicts and not by the UN Missions to those states. Additionally polling done by UN member states in war zones is done in a timely way to provide their security services with the information they need to make the best possible strategic decisions whenever they are required. We can call this ‘war polling’, peace polling, on the other hand tends to be too little and too late, it can be used to help make peace but cannot be expected to prevent conflict. Exceptionally, a peace poll run in Macedonia in 2002 by a third party NGO did help to keep Macedonia out of that Balkan war.²⁶ So how can this exception be transformed to become the norm in compliance with the imperatives of the UN Charter? We cannot be at all certain that a timely programme of peace polling in Moldova and Ukraine would have prevented the war there anymore than the excellent peace polling done by Khalil Shikaki in Israel and Palestine.²⁷ But the UN and OSCE should have tried. The world should have been told what compromises the peoples of these states would have been willing to accept for peace. Peace polls can do that.

Peace polls can also help to protect democratic values when they are under threat and that is why totalitarian regimes oppose peace polling in states like North Korea and increasingly China. When in Istanbul earlier this year I was slightly surprised by the suggestion made by the Mokah Center think tank that they thought it was in the interests of all the parties to the conflict in Yemen to maintain the status quo of a frozen conflict as that would prevent the proper development of democracy there. They were of the opinion that a democratic Yemen was seen as a threat to the autocracies in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Iran. Similarly it could be argued that the democracy in Ukraine was a threat to the Putin regime in Russia and Lukashenko regime in Belarus while China has an interest in the status quo in North Korea, the suppression of democracy in Hong Kong and arguably do not want a free and democratic Taiwan so close to home. We are told that ‘My enemies, enemy is my friend’ and when that enemy is democracy then it is entirely possible that Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Iran could be ‘friends of convenience’ but would never admit as much. The Western values of free speech and democracy that all in WAPOR hold dearest and deepest are under threat by both wars and frozen conflicts. We need to do something about it. But what?

²⁶ Irwin, C. J., (2020) p. 39-46. Available at: <http://www.peacepolls.org/peacepolls/documents/008880.pdf>

²⁷ Khalil Shikaki’s polls are available on his website here: <https://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/192>

Solutions: A World Peace Poll

We now know that the UN and the OSCE must operate under the threat of a veto, for the UN it is a P5 veto in the Security Council and for the OSCE it is any member state. As such they cannot be expected to run independent peace polls, or for that matter any research that might compromise the status of a UN or OSCE Mission. Periodically there is much talk about reforming the UN Security Council and my colleagues at the OSCE have expressed their hopes that they could move away from every state having a veto to some form of majority decision making. But it seems to be just ‘talk’ and perhaps we can not expect any state to give up their veto any more than we might expect the proverbial turkeys to vote for Christmas. Senator George Mitchell advised me not to work with the UN²⁸ after we completed our work on the Northern Ireland peace process so he made introductions for me to the International Crisis Group (ICG) which he presently chaired. The ICG undertake excellent analysis of conflicts around the world and make appropriate recommendations for positive change but they do not get involved in pro-active peace making. That is left to UN member states, the UN, OSCE and other regional IGOs who are not truly independent as we have seen. The UN can not help us so then we must help ourselves to help them.

When it comes to running bespoke independent peace polls perhaps all that needs to be done is to institutionalise what I have been doing for the past twenty five years. The first peace poll that I ran in Northern Ireland was payed for by the editor of a local newspaper, the *Belfast Telegraph*, then after that a Quaker charity, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, picked up all the bills and we got to peace. Similarly most of my peace polls have been paid for by charities, NGOs and states on an ad hoc basis. What is needed here is a coordinator that can match up the requirement for peace polling, where ever WAPOR members see a need, with appropriate funders who have an interest in those peoples, states and regions. For example much of my work in the Balkans was covered by the George Soros Foundation. Perhaps this is something WAPOR could do and / or a WAPOR spin off charity / NGO. If such an entity had existed some years ago, then when I started to work with the OSCE in Moldova I would have turned to that entity and asked them to match the project with a funder. The OSCE would have been delighted with such an arrangement and the Moldova peace polling could have got done in 2016, after the IPI presentation in Vienna in 2015, followed by peace polling in Ukraine.

In time such peace polling, that followed the three rules of peace polls: engagement with all parties, polling all publics and publishing all results, could establish these standards as the norm rather than the exception. A few more conflicts would be avoided and a few more peace agreements would be made and kept. But we also need to deal with all the other threats to global security detailed in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and their targets and indicators that need to be tracked. This is a very big task that UN member states are meant to do but of course they don’t. The key here is to set up a global polling entity that is agile and responsive using the most innovative data collection techniques and sample designs to cut costs and time. Arab Barometer have made progress with this in the MENA region. This now needs to be done systematically, globally.

The major Human Rights NGOs support the work of the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva by providing them with independent research and these NGOs, in turn, are supported by contributions from the worlds law firms and public donations. Similarly the market research companies around the world could set up and manage an independent peace polls NGO that could do independent research when the UN cannot. The expertise to do this exists in WAPOR with our corporate members who could see this as a ‘lost leader’ business opportunity rather than a burden. At a much smaller scale

²⁸ Senator George Mitchell co-chaired a bipartisan Task Force on UN Reform for the US Institute of Peace. These reforms were not implemented with a follow-up report available here:
https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/un_update.pdf

many of my peace polls were run at cost on the understanding that the companies concerned would gain the PR benefits of public dissemination.

With all these points in mind I partnered with ORB International and Gallup Pakistan in 2016 to write a research proposal to establish such an entity with what would amount to seed funding from the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).²⁹ Those applications (2014/16) were not considered to be a priority by the Research Council at that time. But the global security situation has changed and new technologies and methodologies can significantly reduce costs. Also we now know enough to be very economical and pragmatic about what is tracked globally to identify conflicts with the potential for violence and war. Tracking the UN SDG 16 indicators for peace and justice would be a good place to begin.³⁰ However, this would only be a start, success should breed success to cover all SDGs in time, and when combined with global AI Digital Dialogues in coming years, that eventually will be multilingual, then global public opinion will have come of age with, perhaps, even the emergence of a global polity to confront and have opinions on global problems in a Metaverse.

Conclusion

When politicians do not want to know the truths of public opinion they inevitably say that the people do not understand the issues and / or have been manipulated by the media to answer with the party line of the controlling political elites. There is some truth in this but not as much as the dissenting voices might wish. We know how to deal with 'spiral of silence' problems in electoral polling and we can understand and 'mine' the multiple streams of information in the modern social media environment³¹ to draw informed conclusions about what people think and want, and they nearly always want peace, security and the benefits that peace can bring for themselves and their children. With these truths in mind and all the skills and talents at our command we cannot fail. And if we are to create a global discourse that can effectively track and probe the danger points in public opinion that might herald an impending war, then we must not fail. In this panel and the next our WAPOR colleagues will unpack these issues and reveal the truths upon which our discipline is based and the public opinion foundations upon which wars are prosecuted, fought and lost. Then we must act. Too little, too late is not acceptable when global security is threatened.

²⁹ ESRC Grant Application (2016) Analyzing Violent 'Glocal' Conflicts in Global, Regional, Transnational, National and Local contexts using 'Global Centric' Samples. Available here:

<http://www.peacepolls.org/peacepolls/documents/008718.pdf>

³⁰ Irwin, C. J., Gilani, I., Gilani, M. B., (2020) *A critical review of the UN75 Global surveys presented to the 2020 UN General Assembly*, WAPOR 73rd Annual Conference, October 6-10. Available at:

<https://peacepolls.etinu.net/peacepolls/documents/008898.pdf>

³¹ For example Facebook was used as early as 2012 to instigate the hatred for the Rohingya five years before their violent expulsion in 2017, and Amnesty International have now brought a case for reparations against Meta in this regard. See 'Meta owes Rohingya reparations for Myanmar violence, says Amnesty' available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/29/meta-owes-rohingya-reparations-for-myanmar-violence-says-amnesty>