

Dialogue Across Divides

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The Pugwash Conferences in the Twenty-First Century

By

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and Katariina Simonen

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“We appeal, as human beings, to human beings: Remember your humanity and forget the rest. If you can do so, the way lies open for a new paradise; if you cannot, there lies before you the risk of universal death.”

—Russell-Einstein Manifesto, 1955

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Poul Erik Christiansen and Katariina Simonen
March 2025

CHAPTER 1

PUGWASH IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs is hardly a household name and yet, considering its size, resources, and modest impact on world politics, it has developed a significant reputation in different parts of the world. Over the past thirty years, there has been scholarly attention paid to the organization in studies of modern history and disarmament movements (Wittner 1997; Evangelista 1999; Brown 2012; Rubinson 2017). Recent contributions have focused more closely on detailing the achievements of Pugwash groups and members in specific countries (Kraft and Sachse 2019a; Kraft et al. 2018). However, the overwhelming focus of these works is on what Pugwash and the scientists who participated in its activities did during the cold war. To be sure, this period was one of significant achievement for the fledgling organization and its co-founder, Joseph Rotblat, a Polish physicist who was the only member of the Manhattan Project to leave on grounds of conscience. However, such works caution that

“We nevertheless have only partial understanding of its transnational character and activities, know even less about its internal dynamics and development, and lack detailed accounts of its work around the world.”
(Kraft and Sachse 2019b, 7)

Similarly, what is less understood, and certainly less documented, is what Pugwash has done since the end of the cold war. This book is the first attempt to systematically capture what, and importantly, where Pugwash activities have taken place in the 21st century.

1.1 Dialogue across divides: Background and evolution

The Pugwash Conferences on Sciences and World Affairs (henceforth, “Pugwash”) launched in 1957 to provide scientific analysis of a critical and dangerous feature emerging in the cold war: the nuclear arms race (Rotblat 1962). This was prompted by the 1955 “Russell-Einstein Manifesto”, a

clarion call to governments and societies alike—but scientists in particular—to wake up to the inherent danger that nuclear weapons could exterminate humanity. The Manifesto urged leaders of the world to “think in a new way,” to renounce nuclear weapons, to “remember their humanity” and to find peaceful means for the settlement of all matters of dispute between them (The Russell-Einstein Manifesto 1955). Centrally, it called upon scientists of all political persuasions to assemble to discuss the threat posed to civilization by the advent of thermonuclear weapons. It led directly to a 1957 meeting, hosted by the Canadian-American philanthropist Cyrus Eaton at Thinkers Lodge in Pugwash, Nova Scotia, from which the organization subsequently took its name.

Henceforth, spearheaded by Rotblat, scientists were to gather and debate the latest developments that would affect the political impasse between East and West, principally the United States and Soviet Union. From the beginning, the initiative was intended to reduce tensions through providing a forum for individuals from both sides of the Iron Curtain to meet, harnessing a common scientific language to avoid the pitfalls of political divides. Indeed, the notion of science as a way to put aside national allegiances was a central organizing principle, but one that simultaneously stood as a convenient fiction:

“The leadership was not naïve: they knew these claims for the most part to be unattainable ideals within the constraints of the bloc system. But they saw in them a potentially powerful resource for mobilizing scientists, for asserting a (mostly fraternal) relationship, a rationale for coming together, and a starting point for building trust between them, all of which would be important in terms of creating a sense of community across national loyalties and the bloc divide.” (Kraft and Sachse 2019b, 13–14).

Crucially, however, as Rotblat noted, the meetings were “never intended to be a purely academic exercise, solely for the purpose of acquiring knowledge,” because most of the participants had some form of communication with or access to policymakers, often as government advisors (Rotblat 2001a, 46). This was a pioneering form of unofficial or “Track Two” diplomacy and, as such, the Pugwash model of “dialogue across divides” was born.¹ The essential features of this approach were harnessed time and again by successive leaders of Pugwash.

¹ There are several labels for this kind of unofficial, problem-solving approach to international affairs which takes place out of the limelight (see Jones 2015 ch.1); we stick to “Track Two” or “Track Two diplomacy” throughout the book.

After the inaugural conference, the Pugwash meetings were held at least once or twice a year but with increasing frequency as various workshops and study groups were added to the agenda.² By the late 1960s, a model was implemented of a single annual conference accompanied by several thematic meetings and symposia during the course of each year. Although the founding focus was on disarmament of nuclear weapons, the meetings soon broadened in scope to accommodate a largely American-Soviet concern on arms control, the emerging threat of chemical and biological weapons, as well as a core focus on the social responsibility of scientists.

The first two decades of Pugwash coincided with some of the most dangerous years of the cold war, marked by the Berlin Crisis, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the repression of the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia, and the Vietnam War. In this period of strained official relations and few unofficial channels, the meetings and lines of communication behind-the-scenes provided by Pugwash played useful background roles and helped lay the groundwork for the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) of 1963, the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972 (ABM) and Strategic Arms Limitation Talks/Treaty (SALT I), the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) of 1972, and later the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, as well as the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) of 1993.

During this period, Pugwash finessed a *modus operandi* as a venue for participants to gain understanding of others' perceptions and develop relationships in a largely informal setting. A critical dimension of the Pugwash conferences was the immersive experience that became the hallmark of bridging the political divide: so-called "walks in the woods" and ample time to encourage relaxed socialization and friendship all contributed to a burgeoning sense of community among participants who had little other opportunity to meet given the political climate. A second novel dimension was the formation of National Groups centred in a country. These provided a home for many interested individuals, many of whom helped to fundraise for meetings, as well as pursue domestic activities related to the central interests. In this way, Pugwash influence spread within countries—often groups were housed with a country's national academy of science—and linked back to the overarching International Pugwash structure, which maintained a fluid and decentralized operating principle.

² The document 'Participants in the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs Meetings, 1957–2007' contains the full listing of the first 50 years' meetings, available at <https://pugwash.org/history/resources/>

As such, Pugwash has come to be seen both as an organization in its own right but also as a social movement, a global network, or “epistemic community” of committed scientists and influential policy experts.³

Moreover, the first four decades of its operations established Pugwash as a credible conduit for contact and communication across the polarizing divide of the cold war.⁴ Propelled by interest from members, Pugwash was making contributions on a wide range of issues, including the social responsibility of scientists, nuclear energy production, crisis management, non-military dimensions of global security and the developing world. In some cases, Pugwash members were involved in quiet backchannel diplomacy on key issues. For example, the Vietnam initiative, code named PENNSYLVANIA, began at a June 1967 Pugwash meeting in Paris. Attended by three scientists from France, three from the US, two from the Soviet Union, and Joseph Rotblat as Pugwash Secretary General, a “formula to stop the escalation of the war” emerged. Personal connections between two French participants and Ho Chi Minh permitted informal debriefs with Henry Kissinger and messages could be passed between Washington and Hanoi. Robert McNamara (later a frequent Pugwash participant) credited these contacts with laying the groundwork for the San Antonio accords, “the foundation for the start of the negotiations between North Vietnam and the U.S. in Paris” (McNamara 2017, 298–300; 1996).

In 1995, the Pugwash Conferences and its co-founder, Sir Joseph Rotblat, shared the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of their decades-long work to reduce the threat of nuclear war. As announced by the Norwegian Nobel Committee at the time of the award, they were being acknowledged “for their efforts to diminish the part played by nuclear arms in international politics and in the longer run to eliminate such arms” (The Nobel Peace Prize 1995).

1.2 The post-cold war reorientation of Pugwash

The end of the cold war heralded a refocus of priorities at the inter-governmental level. With the seeming end to an East-West confrontation

³ Epistemic communities are transnational groups of experts mobilized to advocate or influence policy decisions through their collective knowledge claims; see Haas (1992) generally, and Adler (1992) on arms control especially.

⁴ As recounted to us, Mikhail Gorbachev was apparently very aware of Pugwash, noting that “four or five of the key architects of perestroika had been involved in Pugwash meetings over the years” (Butcher 2024).

centred in Europe, the 1990s can be seen as an era of hope, cooperation, and globalization. As expressed by John Holdren in the Nobel Prize acceptance speech (given in his capacity as the chair of the Pugwash Executive Committee):

“The long dark night of the Cold War has finally passed, and with its passing the peril of a global thermonuclear conflagration has substantially receded. This alleviation of the nuclear danger is unquestionably a great blessing and a proper cause for celebration.” (Holdren 1995)

At the same time, the shift brought into focus an array of inter- and intra-state conflicts and concerns of Western intervention in what had become a unipolar world. To be sure, Pugwash had consistently pursued a broader range of topics than weapons of mass destruction (WMD) alone,⁵ but the post-cold war environment stimulated an exploration of regional issues that not only reflected the prospering diversity of its membership but explicitly drew on the Manifesto’s commitment to seek an end to wars and conflicts.

The events of 11 September 2001 had an equally profound impact, and Pugwash again began a process of adaptation to the new realities (the evolving nature of the Pugwash agenda will be explored more fully in the next chapter). It is worth noting here that the 51st annual conference in Agra, India, scheduled for November 2001, was postponed primarily due to political difficulties for certain participants to secure visas as well as challenges to air travel (Boutwell 2023). When it did finally take place, in March 2002, it heralded a period of change within Pugwash: Sir Michael Atiyah, President of Pugwash since 1997, was succeeded by M.S. Swaminathan, a prominent Indian scientist and proponent of the Green Revolution in agriculture; and Secretary General George Rathjens was succeeded by Paolo Cotta-Ramusino, an Italian physicist. The position of Secretary General

“is the chief executive officer of Pugwash and has responsibility for the organizing of activities... for formulating decisions related to the proposed agenda, nominations of chairpersons, speakers, and authors, and lists of participants for Pugwash conferences, workshops, meetings and consultations” (see Pugwash 2013c).

⁵ To name but a few: “Science in Aid of Developing Countries,” Addis Ababa (1965); “Peace and Development in Africa”, Cairo (1975); “Development Resources & World Security”, 25th Pugwash Conference in Madras (1976); “Crisis Prevention and Control in Africa,” Lusaka (1985); “East-West Conflicts and the Third World,” Campinas, Brazil (1985); “Foreign Debts and International Stability,” Lima (1987).

As such, the new Secretary General had broad scope to define the agenda, and he did so decisively, expanding the Pugwash agenda “toward conflict resolution in explosive regions such as the Middle East, Northeast Asia and South Asia” (Boutwell 2023).

The recognition that Pugwash could find its role through addressing resolution of conflicts in areas of the world where nuclear and WMD risks are present became the defining feature of Pugwash in the 21st century. This is not to say that the central organization, national groups, or members abandoned their core mission of disarmament and nuclear risk reduction. To the contrary, in the changing security environment of the post-9/11 world, as noted by the Secretary General in one of his early conference reports, Pugwash defined itself through “understanding the motivations that can push some specific countries to acquire or to refuse to dismantle WMDs, and dealing with the relevant specific threats and threat perceptions” (Cotta-Ramusino 2004e). This implied addressing countries and regions where the risk of proliferation, either vertical (that is, qualitative improvements to existing WMD forces) or horizontal (the emergence of new nuclear or WMD-armed states), would negatively impact the security environment. In particular, the conflicts were exacerbated by an underlying problem of misunderstanding and misperceptions, rooted in a culture where official and public communication between rivalrous states was lacking. However, as recounted by one long-standing Pugwashite, internally among Pugwash members the perceived change of focus was controversial, with many of the “old guard” feeling that the hallmark of Pugwash—seen as addressing predominately European security issues and East-West nuclear arms control—had fallen off the agenda and diminished in priority (Miller 2023).

1.3 Pugwash histories: plan of the book

This is the background to the current book: the following chapters cover a period of almost twenty years from the election of Cotta-Ramusino as Secretary General in 2002 and the work of Pugwash since that time to address some of the most intractable regional conflicts. Why did we embark on this mission? It was specifically in the autumn of 2022, at the regular Italian Pugwash meeting at Castiglione della Pescaia, in Italy, that we faced the harsh reality: Cotta-Ramusino and the old guard of the Pugwash membership, many of them giants of the cold war, were getting noticeably old; what’s more, much of their work (and axiomatically, the Pugwash history) was neither widely known nor even documented. This was unacceptable to us, considering the amount of pioneering work carried out by Cotta-Ramusino

and his team over a period of over 20 years. We felt strongly that the lessons that could be learned from this work would provide valuable inputs for all those involved in studying or practicing conflict-prevention, Track Two diplomacy, and international negotiation. They would also serve as a reminder for Pugwash and its membership of the movement's unique role in bridging divides while promoting solutions to some of the critical conflict situations in this period. What better incentive for us to start our project than preserving the memory of recent Pugwash work and achievements?

Hence, the book illustrates the untold stories of Pugwash's quiet diplomacy in the 21st century. The timeframe is not arbitrary: although there was no revolution in the agenda of Pugwash and its community members, the period provides a useful heuristic for reflecting on the global priorities and relevance of nuclear weapons at the beginning of post-9/11 era. It charts the attempts made by one small non-governmental organization to address these issues through an evolving model of conflict resolution in areas where nuclear dangers were prevalent. The period also allows us, as researchers, to access many of the people involved, who provide an immeasurable wealth of anecdotes and insight that must be captured before they are lost.

A caveat is in order at this point. The case studies which we highlight are by no means the only work that Pugwash was undertaking in this period. If anything, crosscutting is the word that best describes Pugwash work. Namely, the organization was active across the range of disarmament and proliferation issues, including activities in support of international treaties—the NPT, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the CWC and the BTWC—and meetings on science and ethics, biotechnology and the threat of AIDS/HIV, as well as economic inequities in Latin America, to name a few. For instance, two former Presidents of Pugwash serving during Cotta-Ramusino's time, Jayantha Dhanapala and Sergio Duarte, worked relentlessly to advance disarmament and non-proliferation in several international fora, such as the NPT Review Conferences, as well as in regional and subregional formats from south (Cairo and Amman) to north (Stockholm and Helsinki), from west (New York) to east (Nagasaki, Hiroshima). This is to underline that Cotta-Ramusino's work is part of a bigger stream that is Pugwash and that our study is but one of hopefully many to come over the years.

A second caveat is also important to underline. We have selected programs of work in the Middle East and South Asia because they constitute the core focus of activities under the banner of International Pugwash. They were

the central interests of Cotta-Ramusino in this period and most starkly illuminate the Pugwash approach to some of the most compelling global issues of the time. Indeed, Cotta-Ramusino's idiosyncratic way of working created a central challenge to pursuing the research and producing a complete picture: as those who know him can attest, it is perhaps an understatement to say that he is an avid correspondent, staying in touch persistently with key people via phone, text, and email. We of course do not have access to these records, except the very rare exception that an email was printed and left in the physical files of the Pugwash archive. Those archives are uneven but generally reflect that in the early period (2002-08), formal letters were a primary means of communication, and thus some of the work of the period can be captured where memories are not as strong. Later on, as discussed below, we are more able to draw on the recollections of those who were present and helped us to reconstruct much of what took place. The cases also demonstrate the depth of the Pugwash network and how groups coalesced around the Pugwash activities. But to be clear, we are not cherry-picking "successful" cases. Indeed, as will be made clear in the following chapters, whether Pugwash had any impact on the country, people, or official processes involved, is quite subjective. In any case, decades of research in this area has shown that measurement of success in any example of Track Two diplomacy is a thorny issue (Jones 2015) and we only attempt to make a kind of evaluation in the final, stand-alone chapter that summarizes certain findings and lessons learned.

The book is subsequently divided into thematic chapters focused largely on one or two countries or a specific issue. We have tried, where possible, to be as broadly inclusive of the activities in question during the full time period. However, in some cases, earlier meetings took place that ultimately were not relevant in what came later on; in other cases, certain meetings appear to be "stand-alone", unlinked to the broader thematic programs of work. It must be re-emphasised here that one of the key features of the Pugwash agenda in Cotta Ramusino's time as Secretary General is precisely the crosscutting nature of the work: contacts were sometimes made in many different countries across regions that only became useful at a later date; similarly, certain issues and avenues were pursued in one context that lent themselves to trying a similar tack in another country. Unpacking this characteristic nature of Pugwash work in the 21st century will be the focus of the next chapter, before we embark on specific country files.

For the benefit of the reader, each chapter begins with a short contextual explanation of the issues at hand: why Pugwash sought to pursue dialogue

on, for example, Kashmir or Afghanistan, is explained in reference to the broader international or historical context. We move on to illustrate what Pugwash did in each case: the meetings held are of course the most significant manifestation of dialogue and the many reports are summarized by us (especially when they are not published), in order to provide an insight into the discussions. However, it is critically important in both appreciating the *modus operandi* and assessing the contributions made that one does not rely solely on these written artefacts. Meeting reports are, by their nature, broadly reflective of the discussions held and the main points that can be classed as outcomes or recommendations. But they do not capture the full tenor of the discussions, the vibrancy of the exchanges inside and outside of the meeting room, as well as the significance of how certain participants were convinced to join, all of which can be gleaned from interviews with those who were there. Relying on just reports implies we “would miss everything that is important about this kind of work” (anonymous Pugwash participant, cited in Christiansen 2019, 30), such as why meetings were held in a certain way, location, or time; what participants drew from the experience and how they subsequently used what they learned. We try, where possible, to trace connections and thematic consistencies between these meetings. We also, where possible, triangulate our documentation of activities through drawing on the archive of organisational materials to provide the fullest possible picture of what was taking place.

As such, the chapters supplement the existing written record through collecting these other data points to provide a richer, more comprehensive portrait of Pugwash’s work. We cover the objectives of each intervention Pugwash made in these different areas, acknowledging that, in many cases, hard and fast lines between each cannot be drawn due to the interconnectedness of the work. We also delve into the substantive discussions held at different levels to illustrate how Pugwash was seeking to achieve an impact. And we importantly provide a snapshot of who was involved: the personalities engaged in the Pugwash network or those drawn into Pugwash’s activities often through the distinctive skills of Paolo Cotta-Ramusino.

This last piece of the puzzle in particular illustrates the “moveable feast” of operations conducted in these years (Raphel 2024), where scientists, politicians, officials, academics, non-governmental experts, journalists and activists all played a part in shaping options and opinions on some of the most dangerous and critical dimensions of the international security agenda. It is through these people that we demonstrate the unique style of unofficial, personal diplomacy that characterised Pugwash in the 21st century.

1.4 Our Methodology in Theory

A significant part of the research project and design of this book is based on oral history, a method of qualitative interview, which collects personal memories and commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews, collecting information that is not previously known or available from elsewhere (Leavy 2011, 3). Oral history refers to both the interview process and the products that result from a recorded spoken interview, whether audio, video, or other format (OHA Principles and Best Practices 2018). In some cases, the video format has not been available, and the notes of the interview were taken manually. Recordings of our interviews are transcribed and manual notes summarized and then placed in a digital archive.

Oral history today is a multidisciplinary method used in the humanities, social sciences, and interdisciplinary fields such as American studies, cultural studies and gender studies (Leavy 2011, 4). Oral history is as reliable or unreliable as other research sources. No single piece of data should be trusted completely, and all sources need to be tested against other evidence (Ritchie 2014, 9–10). Oral history, like all historical research, aims to describe the past as precisely as possible; however, there is no objective historical truth since every research produces a result that is based on sources available and used as well as the method to analyse these (Ylikangas 2015, 13–15). We acknowledge these preconditions yet have strived to produce as complete a picture of the past as our written and oral sources allow us to do. In our case, this has meant the posing of further questions after the original interview or even second or third rounds of interviews with the same person.

Frisch's 'shared authority' concept promotes the notion that both the interviewer and the interviewee are participants in an interview and are responsible for its creation and share its authorship (Frisch 2003, xx–xxiii). We believe this to be the case in part, since the ultimate value of the research rests on the interviewee's memories. We, as interviewers, must strive to provide the best conditions for the interviewee's story to be told in full, thereby making an oral history project an example of co-operative research. We acknowledge, too, that regardless of best efforts at objectivity, all historical research is bound to involve an element of interpretation: what to pay attention to, what to disregard? We understand that despite best efforts at scholarly detachment, historians work with only partial information and must interpret what they collected in order to make sense of it.

The Oral History Association (OHA) has published *Principles for Oral History and Best Practices for Oral History* as summaries of the organization's most important principles and best practices for the pre-interview preparation, the conduct of the interview and the preservation and use of oral histories (OHA Principles and Best Practices 2018). We draw on these principles in our work: we uphold to respect the narrators through the whole process, from the interviews to preservation, use and access; we aim to guarantee the transparency of the whole oral history process; we strive to be sensitive to different dynamics that shape the interview process, including the selection of the interviewees, research questions, interactions, interpretations and preservation of data; we strive to protect both the interviewer and the interviewee from harm to the greatest extent possible, thereby abiding by relevant laws on copyright and data protection as well as pledging to uphold all ethical values that may arise during the process; we do our best so that our oral history interviews and their accompanying documentation can be preserved and made accessible to other users.

In addition to oral history, our book stems both from the traditions of contemporary history (Aunesluoma 2022, 67; Barraclough and Kellett 1964, 17–18; Spohr Readman 2011, 506–7), as well as total history (Bloch 1992; Harsgor 1978, 1–13). Contemporary history methodology, particularly source criticism, allows us to write the history from the present to the past, while profiting from our contemporaneity often “inside the room” as participants in consultations, for fuller understanding of different contexts, persons and meanings behind mere words. The “inside the room” approach is based on our long-term membership in Pugwash structures, Christiansen having started to assist in organizing for Pugwash in 2008 and working presently in the Pugwash International Secretariat, and Simonen starting in 2010 in the Finnish Pugwash group and since 2013 becoming a member of the Pugwash Council. The total history approach, in turn, allows us to approach the phenomenon under study as comprehensively as possible, from different angles and different disciplines, thereby combining personal history, local history, political history, war history, international politics and international law. In sum, our work is anchored in historical research traditions above, and, like any historical work, our study is as comprehensive as our sources and our capabilities as researchers have permitted us to produce.

We have gathered oral histories over the course of two years, which has been an interesting, but also challenging, period of data collection. Memories can be unintentionally biased and unreliable, considering that we have been asking individuals involved in Pugwash work to cast their minds

back sometimes two decades to offer recollections and impressions. These individuals were often involved in other similar endeavours and thus we must accept that recollections may be confused; they also often did not keep records or diaries of their own involvement. Therefore, we began this project by piecing together the record of what meetings took place where and when, to construct timelines that would refresh memories.⁶ For these we drew on access to the Pugwash archive of organizational materials: meeting reports and participant lists (many, but not all, of which are publicly available on the website), and internal documents including funding proposals, grant reports to donors, and Council meeting minutes. This contextual information allowed us a privileged entry-point into conversations with the research participants, helping us to prompt and pinpoint recollections of Pugwash activities. It needs to be mentioned, too, that most of our sources used are so-called primary sources, i.e. first-hand accounts of a topic from people who had a direct connection with it. These include, for instance, peer interviews, speeches, original documents and original research.

We contacted more than 40 individuals who were centrally involved in Pugwash work in the Middle East and South Asia. Several of those contacted were not able or willing to be interviewed but a total of 36 interviews were carried out during the period between April 2023 and February 2025. The persons interviewed include staff members such as former Executive Director, Jeffrey Boutwell, and program coordinator and later Executive Director, Sandra Butcher. We interviewed many key figures from the Pugwash Council, such as (the late) Wael Al Assad, Hussain Al-Shahristani, Sergey Batsanov, Pervez Hoodbhoy, Taghreed El-Khodary, Happymon Jacob, Sverre Lodgaard, Amitabh Mattoo, David Menashri, Steve Miller, Götz Neuneck, Robin Raphel, Moeed Yusuf, Reza Ziaran, Aharon Zohar, and Jean-Pascal Zanders. We also interviewed several others involved in Pugwash or with its work, such as Shlomo Brom, Martin Butcher, Brandon Friedman, Richard Guthrie, Chris Kolenda, Douglas Lute, Erszébet Rózsa, Svein Sevje, and Siddiq Wahid. In some cases, we have had to maintain the anonymity of the interviewee due to reasons of personal security. To all of those who participated in our research we remain incredibly grateful for the time taken in preparation and spent with us reminiscing, remembering, and recounting their part in the work. Cotta-Ramusino himself has been interviewed several times as our narrative has matured on the basis of these other interviews and written material from Pugwash archives (open and closed sources).

⁶ These timelines are provided at the beginning of each chapter as an orienteering tool for the reader.

Some division of responsibilities has taken place in the writing of this book. The introduction and conclusion chapters are the result of common drafting and editing. The primary responsibility for the writing of thematic chapters has been divided, so that chapters two, three and seven are authored by Christiansen, whereas four, five, six and eight were penned by Simonen. The other writer has had a free hand to comment and modify the draft text but any differences in style may be explained by our different scholarly backgrounds (Christiansen being a scholar of political science and Simonen of legal history and international law). In sum, the book has been a truly interdisciplinary and joint effort.

Finally, it is our hope that the book is of interest to a wide audience: naturally, the Pugwash community itself, as well as scholars working in diverse fields such as peace and disarmament, diplomacy, international relations, regional studies, and anyone interested in the near historical events in the Middle East and South Asia. Considering that we have only scratched the surface of Pugwash's contextual realities, we hope that our study would serve as an inspiration for further studies into the rich history of what Pugwash is and what it has done.

CHAPTER 2

REDEFINING THE DIALOGUE ACROSS DIVIDES

Since its founding in 1957, Pugwash has convened close to 500 meetings all over the world. As the introduction noted, the majority of these have been Track Two efforts on nuclear and WMD arms control and conflict resolution in areas of nuclear risk, with various notable exceptions. It is worth remembering that as the cold war developed, Pugwash was by no means the only organization conducting such efforts and participants were often involved in various different groups (Evangelista 1999). This has been ever more apparent in the post-9/11 environment as the number of organizations, institutions and think tanks, and civil society groups involved in this field has proliferated greatly. So, we caution against trying to neatly categorize what is inevitably a messy enterprise, especially when an organization instinctively feels its way across new ground.

In one clear sense, any perceived change of agenda after 2002 wasn't necessarily a new way of working for Pugwash: since 1957 there had always been dialogue across divides and activities across the world where regional dynamics might affect the macro nuclear order. In particular, the period of the late cold war and after witnessed a flourishing in the range of topics within Pugwash as the confrontation between nuclear-armed superpowers receded. These are recognized in Holdren's Nobel speech of 1995:

"Although the Pugwash Conferences came into being, four decades ago, in response to the extraordinary dangers posed by thermonuclear weapons, and while the pursuit of ways to reduce those dangers has always remained at the core of Pugwash concerns, our founders recognized from the outset the seamlessness of the web of interconnections linking the nuclear danger with the dangers of other weapons of mass destruction, with conventional conflicts, and with the ultimate causes of war rooted in the human condition." (Holdren 1995)

As examples of this expanding Pugwash agenda, Suraj Kund in India was host to the first Pugwash workshop on "Non-Military Dimensions of Global Security" in November of 1989. Subsequently, October 1990 saw the first

Pugwash workshop on “Security and Cooperation in the South Atlantic,” held in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This was followed by the first Pugwash workshop on “A Comprehensive Regional Security Structure in the Middle East and Gulf Area,” held in December 1991 in L’Aquila, Italy. In August 1992, Pugwash, Nova Scotia, hosted the first workshop on “Social Tensions and Armed Conflicts: Ethnic and Other Aspects”. A one-off workshop on “The Balkans and the Nordic Regions in the 1990s” was held in Bulgaria in October 1993 and in 1998 Pugwash held its first meeting in South Africa on “Human Security in the Southern African Context.” By 1999, Pugwash held a workshop in Seoul on “Nuclear Proliferation and Security in the Pacific Rim” followed in April 2001 by its first workshop on “East Asian Security” in Seoul. In the same month, Pugwash held its seventh workshop on the Middle East (cf. Participants in the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs Meetings, 1957–2007).

This brief survey illustrates that Pugwash had often, at various times and at different frequencies, reacted to external priorities and developed activities beyond the core focus of nuclear disarmament. It is important to emphasize that our research period shows much continuity with the past way of doing things, taking into the account the quite different, and at times dramatic, world events that shaped global priorities in the new millennium. However, the intensification of the Pugwash agenda after 2002, we believe, is illustrated by, firstly, a more systematic focus on regional nuclear order problems as the key elements of global nuclear danger—this was acutely tailored to the prevailing policy concerns of WMD terrorism and nuclear proliferation challenges. Moreover, second, it was the way in which these were conceived as problems of conflict resolution which could spill over into nuclear confrontation and how this framing was used to justify interventions in, for example, Palestine and Afghanistan, that marked a subtly different emphasis. Thirdly, and finally, a determining factor of the period was the sheer force of personality of the new Secretary General.

Cotta-Ramusino believed that what was common across all the meetings and work he undertook was that

“The most important thing is to look for and establish connections and solutions that are different from antagonism. [The goal was to] keep communications going [and] develop reciprocal respect between groups in conflict.” (Cotta-Ramusino 2023c)

This approach shaped not only the themes to be taken up, but also where dialogues were to take place and the method of engagement in these

different areas. In some cases, what look like dead-ends or failed attempts may have led or contributed to, later or inadvertently, other initiatives within or outside of Pugwash.¹ As characterized by one of the key staff members of the time: “The challenge with Pugwash history has always been, how do you capture something like that, a little spark at a meeting and it just goes off on its own, who knows what happened after it” (Butcher 2024). Some of the meetings and histories recounted in this present chapter are, in a sense, one-off explorations that do not recur in later chapters but form part of the narrative of how Cotta-Ramusino worked. The following sections will drill down into these elements to identify a *modus operandi* of the research period. The emphasis of this chapter is to illustrate the interrelated and cross-cutting nature of the different strands of dialogue, providing the context and a lens through which to view the subsequent country chapters.

2.1 Cultivating new networks

Since its early days, Pugwash had a foundational ability to draw people with expertise on the issues and often with a certain influence to be able to ensure that the results of the meetings would reach the corridors of power. This notion is of course readily obvious to those involved in or with experience of track two diplomacy but the Pugwash reputation among the expert community was strong entering the new millennium, having also been enhanced by the Nobel Prize.

In South Asia there had been growing involvement of individuals since the mid-1970s, in line with the greater interest in both India and Pakistan in nuclear technology and the subsequent development of nuclear weapons in each country. The Indian Pugwash Society had in fact been founded in the mid-1970s and, unusually for Pugwash, has always remained close to the establishment, providing a set of politically influential individuals such as Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, who became a long-standing Pugwash Council member. Despite some sporadic meetings taking place in the region, it was not until the late 1990s—when the bilateral rivalry became a serious nuclear dyad following the 1998 nuclear testing by both India and Pakistan—that International Pugwash began to hold regular meetings, and a more formal Pakistan Pugwash Group emerged alongside. It is not always obvious how people first came to be involved in Pugwash meetings, but the recollections of one former Pugwash Council member, a nuclear physicist

¹ This relates to Esra Çuhadar’s notion of ‘lateral transfer’ (2009, 649), discussed also by Christiansen (2019a, 150 & 232–33) with reference to Pugwash and professional networks.

from Pakistan, is revealing in this particular cultural context:

“I do remember being asked by the chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission whether I would be interested in going to Pugwash. Now, that was very strange because you wouldn't expect the head of the program to ask an outsider like me. And he said, you know, ‘it's pretty harmless. All you do is you go to meetings. We need representation because the Indians have representation in Pugwash. It'll be good for Pakistan if you're there.’”
(Hoodbhoy 2024)

Similarly, in the early 1990s, Pugwash strengthened its network in the Middle East. Beginning with a 1991 L'Aquila meeting a new series of regional workshops was launched. The continuing work of the Chemical and Biological Weapons workshop series also broadened the participation of regional representatives, in particular involving officials as the series was organized as direct input to the annual meetings of states taking place in Geneva or The Hague. National Pugwash groups expanded in Israel, Egypt, Palestine, and Jordan, although in some cases such groups consisted of a handful or less of committed individuals who participated in the International Conferences. As time wore on, such groups became more institutionalised; the Israeli group, for example, initially lent heavily on the credibility of senior figures such as Shalheveth Freier, former head of Israel's nuclear weapons program for many years, and the links he instigated with the Israeli National Academy of Sciences (Zohar 2023). Similarly, the Palestinian group for many years relied on the determination of Gabi and Haifa Baramki to bring Palestinian people into the regional discussions, as well as ensure that Palestinian voices were brought into the formation of the agenda. National groups were also formed in Iraq after 2003 and Iran soon after. The latter became deeply important to the work of Pugwash in this period and is picked up below.

Overall, the breadth and influence of the national groups and prominent individuals involved often provided Pugwash with an advantage of domestic credibility and entry points into decision-making circles not always available to many other international groups carrying out similar work. What became critical is how Pugwash evolved from a core of natural scientists addressing technical challenges related to nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction to a network of influence centred on the political challenges. Sandra Butcher, International Pugwash staff member between 2008-2016, illustrates this well:

“For example, earlier with the [nuclear] testing stuff, Pugwash had come up with, in its meetings, ideas about ‘black box’ technology that could be used for detecting seismic [activity]. That’s not what was needed post-9/11. You didn’t need that, what you needed was an understanding of how to get out of this horrible logjam of people with completely different worldviews. Trying to understand the profound impact on national psyches of the new world that we were all in, while the ignorance of the nuclear dangers still exists. The need for confidence-building among these areas was really important. I think that’s why the Jammu Kashmir work was really important at the time that they did it, because you’re talking about a major conflict zone between two countries where maybe we don’t all have confidence—nor should we have confidence that any nuclear state has the brakes on escalation that it should do—but certainly between India and Pakistan, with this being such a hot border. We needed that kind of work and that’s why the work that Paolo did there was really important. And bringing some of the leaders from there to meet with others. It’s mind-boggling really.” (Butcher 2024)

Notably, within a few years of each other, an incidental set of circumstances intertwined to make these networks incredibly powerful: the nuclearization of the Asian subcontinent was followed by 9/11 and its attendant war on terror, followed in short order by the revelations of a covert nuclear program in Iran. At a time when the international agenda became absorbed by the twin challenges of terrorism and a controversial so-called ‘clash of civilizations’ pitting the West against the Islamic world, the new Pugwash Secretary General was able to hit the ground running with rich networks through which to explore possible avenues of dialogue.

2.2. Identifying a Pugwash agenda

As the introduction chapter alluded to, the 1990s peace dividend brought about by the end of the cold war had begun to seriously shift the Pugwash agenda away from a core of US-Soviet arms control to a wider scope of issues affecting global instability. Under the leadership of George Rathjens (1997-2002), Pugwash had reacted to the evolving international landscape through developing programs concerned with humanitarian intervention, sovereignty, and human rights. For example, in 1999, the first meeting of a new Study Group on “Intervention, Sovereignty, and International Security” was held in Venice, Italy. The logic for initiating such a series is illuminating:

“This new Pugwash endeavour stems in part from the lively discussions generated during a Pugwash workshop in Spain in July 1999 on the inter-related issues of NATO’s intervention in Kosovo, the West’s relations with

Russia, and the prospect of future military interventions by the international community. Given the complexity of the issues discussed in Spain, George Rathjens (Secretary General of Pugwash) was convinced of the need for more in-depth analysis by Pugwash of the important and continuing tensions on issues relating to intervention and sovereignty.” (Boutwell 1999)

The series convened a further three such meetings—in Como (September 2000), Castellón de la Plana (May 2001) and in Pugwash, Nova Scotia (July 2001)—with a regular roster of participants, while publishing two Pugwash Occasional Papers.² US Pugwash member Steve Miller, who had first participated in Pugwash in June 1988, recounted an impression that Rathjens had already sensed that the emerging world order fitted awkwardly with the organization’s traditional East-West focus and Rotblat’s long-term vision of a nuclear weapons free world (Miller 2023; cf. Rathjens 2002). At this time, there was wider discussion within the Pugwash Council and membership of what the agenda should include, from the challenges of climate change to problems of terrorism and regional conflict resolution (Miller 2023). Indeed, by 2002 both Rathjens and the outgoing President, Sir Michael Atiyah, in their valedictory speeches, urged Pugwash to engage with the evolving international agenda, noting that,

“The causes of terrorism, and which kinds of actions even merit the sobriquet, ought to get a lot more attention than they are now getting by governments and NGOs, and that Pugwash can have a comparative advantage in considering them – and those of intervention, as well – given the diversity of its constituency.” (Rathjens 2002; cf. Attiyah 2002)

The concurrence of a new Secretary General taking over so soon after the 9/11 terrorist attacks both consolidated this new direction but also contributed to a further consequential turn in the Pugwash agenda.

2.2.1 US pre-eminence, terrorism, and the Islamic world

Given the military interventions in Afghanistan (2001) and later Iraq (2003), one might have expected the Pugwash “Intervention, Sovereignty...” series to continue its thematic discussions as it was planned, “over the next several years” (Pugwash 2000, 1). However, it appears to have morphed into a new strand of Pugwash work centred on “Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction”, hewing more closely to the core Pugwash tradition and base

² The collected papers are published in Occasional Papers series 1:I (February 2000, containing three contributions) and 1:ii (January 2001, containing four contributions); cf. <https://pugwash.org/history/resources/issue-briefs-and-occasional-papers/>

of expertise. Indeed, it was noted in the report of the first meeting of this new workshop series that,

“Multilateral institutions and agreements are being marginalized by the Bush administration, and could set dangerous precedents for other countries. This could especially be true in the area of nuclear weapons testing. Accordingly, Pugwash should base its thinking and action on seeking to strengthen international norms and regimes. The absence of superpower rivalry provides unique opportunities to create new international frameworks and norms of behavior, and Pugwash should continue to bring its expertise to bear in these areas.” (Neuneck 2002)

That workshop, in Como on 26-28 September 2002, and the one which followed in Como in October of 2003 were also important for the examination of the connections between Islamic radicalism and WMD terrorism. This preoccupation and policy prescription of the Bush Administration—and increasingly a funding priority of US foundations—had been highlighted in a September 2002 Pugwash issue brief, *Nuclear Terrorism: The Danger of Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU)* (Boutwell et al. 2002). At the same time, the composition of both Como meetings reflected the changing agenda, drawing on participants from the Pugwash series of workshops on the Middle East initiated in the previous decade, but also bringing in new serving officials, such as Jeremy Issacharoff (then Deputy Director General for Strategic Affairs in the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and Tariq Rauf (Head of the Verification and Security Policy Coordination Section at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), as well as wider expertise from the Bonn International Center for Conversion and the Political Violence Research Unit of Tel Aviv University.

Broadly speaking, the twin concerns of, on the one hand, the consequences of US unipolarity, and, on the other hand, the connection between potential WMD terrorism and Islamic radicalism underpinned the emerging priorities of the tenure of Cotta-Ramusino. Speaking at the 53rd Pugwash Conference in Halifax in 2003, less than a year after taking over, he elaborated that,

“Since 2001, Pugwash has been also active in seeking to promote understanding of the various aspects of the new evolution of terrorism. This Pugwash interest, I would say with particular emphasis, also extends to the consequences of the present antiterrorist campaign (the so-called ‘war against terror’). We want to understand how much the present anti-terrorist policies affect human rights worldwide and the mutual understanding of cultures and peoples, and also how such policies in reality affect the evolution of terrorist activities. As an example, it is obvious that invading a