



# The Afghanistan Imbroglio, an Affirmative Nonkilling Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

The paper aims to comprehend the ongoing Afghanistan crisis, and the role of U.S.A in it. It includes an analysis of Afghanistan as well as the military activities of the U.S.A. in the post-cold war period to realize the status of human rights. This is a qualitative as well as quantitative study covering the status of Afghanistan from 1989 to 2020. Secondary sources of data collection have been relied upon to collect data relating to killings and violence. Amidst the hot tensions in Afghanistan, the authors propose an idea of affirmative nonkilling. The paper is written with the idea of materializing peace and security in a volatile region. The authors have explained the ideology of affirmative nonkilling and also have proposed methods by which it can be put into practice in order to attain peace.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Nonkilling, Taliban, Human Rights, America, Violence, Security

It is now finally ingrained in the minds of all individuals and nations that the Taliban is in firm control of Afghanistan. There is a deep sense of hopelessness across all democracies, including America. The ease with which the Taliban swept across Afghanistan and the abject capitulation of government forces are stunning.

Before commenting on the impact of the Afghan situation, it is worthwhile to recap its recent history briefly. In 1979, Soviet Russia, the second power after England in the recent era, ventured into Afghanistan to install a Communist government. Russian forces met with determined opposition from traditional forces of Afghanistan, generously helped by America. The American-backed Islamic Mujahideen compelled Soviet Russia to withdraw in 1989 to its disintegration. Withdrawal of Russian forces led to bitter internal civil conflicts. In 1995, an ultra-Islamist Pakhtun group, the Taliban

emerged as the dominant power. Next, year in 1996, it formed one of the most regressive Islamic governments the world has known in modern times. The Taliban had no regard for women or human rights and tortured their own sisters and daughters in the name of Sharia. Unfortunately, Afghanistan became a nursery for many terrorist groups, including the notorious Al Qaeda. Osama bin Laden masterminded from Afghan soil a most devastating terror attack on 9/11, 2001 at World Trade Centre, New York. No wonder a humiliated and vexed America responded by invading Afghanistan in hot pursuit of the terrorists. A somewhat democratic Afghan government replaced the Taliban with the help of American armed forces. On May 2, 2011, America finally hunted and killed Osama

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bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan. America could have retreated from Afghanistan after this but continued as a nation builder. Twenty years after the invasion, President Biden announced on April 14, 2021 withdrawal of U.S. and allied troops<sup>1</sup> (Jha, 2021). Biden openly said that Afghans should decide their fate. America started withdrawing without any future constructive arrangements in Afghanistan, leaving Afghan allies in a lurch. America surreptitiously abandoned some air bases without even informing the Afghan government. Thus, it was not an organized withdrawal as claimed by President Biden, but appeared as a fleeing away from the battlefield after spending \$2 trillion and losing 2448 men; NATO allies lost 1144 men<sup>2</sup> (Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, 2021).

Pakistan has, for two decades, providing access to the United States for its war in Afghanistan and reaped full advantage by getting funds and weapons. On the other hand, it covertly helped Taliban and Haqqani groups expand their networks. Now in retrospect and perhaps in euphoria, it expects a significant say in the Taliban government. Some accounts point to efforts being made to make it a safe training sanctuary for terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba. Also, it is suggested by experts that it expects the battle-hardened Afghan militants to wage war in Kashmir as it may find a more enormous backyard for its deep state. China, as a significant power, appears to take the first steps to fill the vacuum created by the departure of America. It appears to have extended its Belt and Road Initiative (B.R.I.) by connecting Afghanistan with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It will pour its cash to ensure its stranglehold on Afghanistan and that terrorists don't move toward Xinjiang province. China also eyes Afghanistan's

resources of energy and minerals. Russia is fast drifting towards Pakistan and China, almost making an axis. Its interest in Afghanistan is to ensure the complete security of Central Asian republics that it treats as its backyard. Even Iran may be compelled to maintain friendly neutrality towards Afghanistan. Afghanistan is part of the extended influence of extremist Islamic presence. In the last 20 years, India has spent \$750 million on various infrastructure schemes in Afghanistan<sup>3</sup> (Das, 2021). Only the Taliban will benefit from this expenditure. Pakistan may also meddle, with renewed enthusiasm, to hurt the internal situation in Afghanistan. Only probably countries may be restrained because of their interest in selling heavy weaponry. We can only hope that the new version of the Taliban may be more mature than its earlier avatar. By force of events, nations may have apparent posturing; however, clairvoyance remains that nations do not display any permanent interest, particularly in affirmative nonkilling peace.

## Role of U.S in Afghanistan affairs

The presiding President, Joe Biden, in his remark on Afghanistan, claims, *"We went to Afghanistan almost 20 years ago with clear goals: get those who attacked us on Sept. 11, 2001, and make sure Al Qaeda could not use Afghanistan as a base from which to attack us again. We did that. We severely degraded Al Qaeda in Afghanistan"*<sup>4</sup>... (The New York Times, 2021). However, it was not just Al Qaeda that was degraded, rather, the whole of Afghanistan was degraded in the name of 'Just War'. In his speech, Biden clearly stated that nation-building was not a concern for the U.S. Yet, the U.S. managed to spend a lot of money on destroying Afghanistan. An estimate over 2 trillion has been spent on the war in Afghanistan, including 800 billion in direct war-fighting costs and \$85 billion to train the vanquished

<sup>1</sup>Jha, L.K. 2021. US President Biden Announces Complete Withdrawal of Troops from Afghanistan. The Wire. [Online] Available at: <https://thewire.in/security/us-president-biden-announces-complete-withdrawal-of-troops-from-afghanistan> [Accessed 7 September 2021].

<sup>2</sup>Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, 2021. Human and Budgetary Costs to Date of the U.S. War in Afghanistan, 2001-2021 | Figures | Costs of War. [Online] Available at: <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/figures/2021/human-and-budgetary-costs-date-us-war-afghanistan-2001-2021> [Accessed 20 August 2021].

<sup>3</sup>Das, K., 2021. Decoded | India's investments in Afghanistan as Taliban return. India Today. [Online] Available at: <https://www.indiatoday.in/business/story/decoding-india-investments-in-afghanistan-return-of-taliban-impact-1841897-2021-08-17> [Accessed 20 August 2021].

<sup>4</sup>The New York Times, 2021. Read the Full Transcript of President Biden's Remarks on Afghanistan. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/16/us/politics/biden-taliban-afghanistan-speech.html> [Accessed 18 August 2021].

Afghan army<sup>5</sup> (Forbes, 2021). It is perspicuous that the Afghan war has been financed by the United States, putting at stake, not just the U.S. taxpayers' money but also the lives of the Afghani citizens. Owing to the military funding now, the Taliban forces are technologically equipped to fight a more dangerous battle than before<sup>6</sup> (*Hindustan Times*, 2021). The United States claims that its war was only against terrorism and not against the state of Afghanistan or the ordinary people of Afghanistan. If this is assumed to be accurate, a question that arises is why it did not make use of the new weapon system such as Precision Guided Missiles (P.G.M.), non-lethal weaponry, and cyber policing. Academicians have opined that using such techniques would avoid casualties. So, this implies that the U.S. government was probably very casual or was not much concerned about the lives of innocent Afghani civilians.

Some academicians had predicted that the Taliban would control the government if the U.S. military force decides to withdraw<sup>7</sup> (Chaudhari & Shende, 2020). Afghanistan is not the first country where the U.S. has intervened. During the Cold war, it intervened in countries like Vietnam, Indonesia, Korea, and Cuba. The purported pretext was to contain communism which the U.S. is recognized as a significant threat. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Cold War ended, but American intervention in foreign states had never really ended. In the name of democracy, peace, and security, the U.S. government has been intervening in other countries like Iraq, Libya, Sudan, Yugoslavia,

Afghanistan, and many more<sup>8</sup> (Global Policy Forum, 2005). The pretexts were often baseless, and its actions were rarely sanctioned and supported by the world bodies such as the U.N. itself. Its military intervention never brought the state of peace and security that it promised instead that what followed was more catastrophic. For instance, the debacle brought upon Saddam Hussein's regime resulted in the rise of terrorism in Iraq<sup>9</sup> (Khanna and Kumar, 2019). It is asserted in certain quarters that to date, Iraq is suffering because of the political crisis created by the S.U.S. and its allies.

### Cost of Violence

The Afghan crisis escalated by U.S. intervention had put the lives of not just the Afghans at stake but also the soldiers and civilians of the U.S. As per research reports, 'about 241,000 people have been killed in the Afghanistan and Pakistan war zone since 2001. More than 71,000 of those killed have been civilians<sup>10</sup>' (Crawford *et al.* 2021). The war effects include mental health problems, elevated rates of disease due to lack of clean drinking water, malnutrition, and reduced access to health care.

As per the data produced by Uppsala Conflict from 1989 to 2020, Afghanistan has experienced interstate, intrastate, non-state, and one-sided categories of organized violence, as defined by UCDP during this period. The data collected for the same is presented in table 1.

**Table 1: Battle-Related Deaths in Afghanistan<sup>11</sup>**

Year	Battle Related Death
1989	5174
1990	1370
1991	3302
1992	4276

<sup>8</sup>Global Policy Forum, 2005. US Military and Clandestine Operations in Foreign Countries - 1798-Present. [Online] Available at: <https://archive.globalpolicy.org/us-westward-expansion/26024-us-interventions.html> [Accessed 17 August 2021].

<sup>9</sup>Khanna, V.N. & Kumar, L.K. 2019. International Relations. 6th ed. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd.

<sup>10</sup>Crawford, N.C. *et al.* 2021. Afghan Civilians. The Cost of War. [Online] Available at: <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/civilians/afghan> [Accessed August 18 2021].

<sup>11</sup>Davies, S., Pettersson, T. & Öberg, M., 2022. Organized violence 1989-2021 and drone warfare. *Journal of Peace Research*, 59(4).

<sup>5</sup>Forbes, 2021. The War In Afghanistan Cost America \$300 Million Per Day For 20 Years, With Big Bills Yet To Come. [Online]

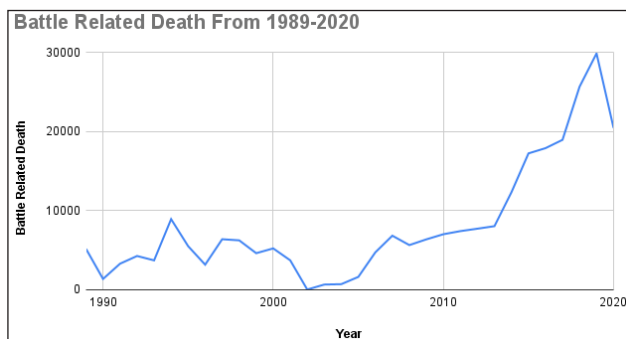
Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hanktucker/2021/08/16/the-war-in-afghanistan-cost-america-300-million-per-day-for-20-years-with-big-bills-yet-to-come/?sh=42f5a91c7f8d>

[Accessed 19 August 2021]

<sup>6</sup>Hindustan Times. 2021. Badri-313: Meet Taliban's elite commando unit with modern gear, U.S weapons. [online] Available at: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/videos/world-news/how-taliban-2-0-elite-commando-unit-badri-313-is-ruling-the-streets-of-kabul-101629373698291.html> [Accessed 20 August 2021].

<sup>7</sup>Chaudhari, R. & Shende, S., 2020. Dealing With the Taliban: India's Strategy in Afghanistan After U.S. Withdrawal. [Online] Available at: <https://carnegieindia.org/2020/06/02/dealing-with-taliban-india-s-strategy-in-afghanistan-after-u.s.-withdrawal-pub-81951>. [Accessed 17 August 2021].

1993	3721
1994	8937
1995	5516
1996	3177
1997	6396
1998	6256
1999	4629
2000	5235
2001	3725
2002	30
2003	660
2004	711
2005	1628
2006	4734
2007	6843
2008	5655
2009	6381
2010	7029
2011	7423
2012	7730
2013	8048
2014	12345
2015	17255
2016	17916
2017	18968
2018	25679
2019	29903
2020	20473



**Fig. 1:** Battle Related Death (Davies *et al.* 2022)

The above graph has been developed from the data provided by UCDP. The -related deaths from 1989-2020 are 2, 61,125 while the total fatalities due to state-based violence, non-state violence, and

one-sided violence resulted in 2,78,783. It is to be noted that Islamic Mujahideen had been backed since 1989 by the Americans, aided and abetted by Pakistan, and since then, the Afghans have been living in a state of turmoil. The killings of a state are studied with the help of a nonkilling index which identifies four parameters: homicide, suicide, war-related deaths, and capital punishment<sup>12</sup> (Singh and Swarup, A. 2020). The statistics of killings in Afghanistan is high mainly due to the conflict between the state and non-state actors.e., the parameter of war-related death is of particular importance in this study.

Meanwhile, the economic cost of violence, as ascertained by the Global Peace Index (GPI), 2022 is 29.9 % of the G.D.P. of Afghanistan<sup>13</sup> (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2022) -related deaths, terrorism, losses from refugees and internally displaced people, and G.D.P. losses from conflict have wrecked the country. So much so that in the GPI report of 2022 Afghanistan stands in last place.

## Status of Women in Afghanistan

The Taliban rule has had a devastating impact on the status of women in Afghanistan. Their right to education and work has been hampered<sup>14</sup> (Human Rights Watch, 2022). It has been reported that following the Taliban takeover, there was an economic crisis triggered by former donor countries, including the U.S. The Taliban has taken away the right to work from women. As put by Halima Kazem-Stojanovic, a core faculty member of San Jose State University's (SJSU) Human Rights Institute and a scholar on Afghanistan. "They are caught between Taliban abuses and actions by the international community that is pushing Afghans further into desperation every day<sup>15</sup>" (Human Rights Watch, 2022). In interviews conducted by Human

<sup>12</sup>Singh, K. & Swarup, A. 2020. *The Nonkilling Paradigm: for World Peace and Enlightenment*. Singapore: Springer

<sup>13</sup>Institute for Economics and Peace, 2022. Global Peace Index: Measuring Peace in a Complex World. [Online] Available at: <http://visionofhumanity.org/resources>[Accessed 10 July 2022].

<sup>14</sup>Human Rights Watch 2022. Afghanistan: Taliban Deprive Women of Livelihoods, Identity. Human Rights Watch. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/01/18/afghanistan-taliban-deprive-women-livelihoods-identity>

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid*



Rights Watch and SJSU with some women, it was revealed that for most families women were primary wage earners, but now, as they are prohibited from working, there remains no source of income for their family. The educational curricula have also been changed to focus more on religious studies. There is a deep feeling of insecurity amongst the women because of the discriminatory policies of Taliban. Those women who had served with the foreign organization or the former Afghan government face potential security threats. According to Fawzia Amini, formerly a senior judge in Afghanistan's Supreme Court "The Taliban have institutionalized discrimination against women; they are denying our fundamental rights...they want to wipe women from the face of society and make us all prisoners in our own homes"<sup>16</sup> (Amnesty International, 2021).

### Analyzing the Reasons for the Conflict

According to Oxfam, 70% of people saw poverty and unemployment as the main reason for conflict in Afghanistan<sup>17</sup> (Noormal, 2015). Unemployment was a major problem in Afghanistan, making people resort to terrorist activities. But this is not the sole reason for the rise of terrorism as Afghanistan lacks a civil society. It is because of the dynamics between the socio, political and economic factors that Afghanistan has been undergoing this crisis of terrorism for such a long time.

According to the report published by Afghanistan's Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, Afghanistan possesses at least \$1 trillion of untapped mineral resources<sup>18</sup> (Haddad, 2021). They are untapped

<sup>16</sup>Amnesty International, 2021. Afghanistan: Women call on the international community to support women's rights amid ongoing Taliban suppression. [Online] Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/11/afghanistan-women-call-on-the-international-community-to-support-womens-rights-amid-ongoing-taliban-suppression/> [Accessed 18 May 2022].

<sup>17</sup>Noormal, A. N., 2015. Conflict Analysis: Afghanistan Since 2001. [Online] Available at: <https://www.beyondintractability.org/library/conflict-analysis-afghanistan-2001> [Accessed 1 June 2022].

<sup>18</sup>Haddad, M. 2021. Mapping Afghanistan's untapped natural resources. Infographic News | Al Jazeera. [Online]

because the western idea of modernization has not been embraced and also because there is no indigenous knowledge to overcome the problems relating to unemployment. The conflicts are based on a religious premise. They are frequently occurring as a response to the western ideology of modernization being practiced and professed for a long time in Afghanistan. International forces have time and again intervened in the cultural environment of the country, and as a backlash to it, they are resisting all western constructs. The problem of Afghanistan can be best understood by invoking the theory of Samuel Huntington in *The Clash of Civilizations*. He highlighted in his work that the different civilizations will play an essential role in determining world political affairs and as because a multicivilizational system has surfaced, conflicts are bound to be there. However, the mere presence of multiple civilizations is not the reason for increasing conflicts. Huntington also notes that:

*"The West is the only civilization which has substantial interest in every other civilization and also has the ability to affect the politics, economics, and security of every other civilization"*<sup>19</sup> (Huntington, 2002).

When the U.S. entered Afghanistan, it was with a security interest and in this regard, it tried to unfurl its western ideology. The Islamic fundamentalist rejected it, yet there remained a significant section in the society who, unlike the Taliban wanted to embrace the western idea of modernization; and were not resonating with the ideology propounded by the Taliban. Resistance groups, because of these differences, have emerged, and clashes are reported in different parts of the country, such as Panjshir, Ghazni, Herat, and some other areas. This was a crucial period for Afghanistan in which there was political and economic turmoil in the country. Initially efforts were made to bring stability to the region, but for that, only military initiatives

Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/24/mapping-afghanistans-untapped-natural-resources-interactive> [Accessed 10 July 2022].

<sup>19</sup>Huntington, S.P. 2002. *The Clash of Civilizations And the Remaking of World Order*. Re-issue edition ed. London: Simon & Schuster, pp. 81

were taken. As only coercion was being used to bring stability, there was no conviction amongst the people. Once the situation went out of control, U.S. decided to retreat while the other international forces decided to keep away from this crisis. Now the conflicts have escalated because an enormous amount of war booty<sup>20</sup> (Metzler, 2021) has been left by the Americans in a country that is not united, which is suffering economically, and whose youth are militarily trained to kill. Those in power are religious fanatics and would prefer the people to die than grant them any kind of liberty that has not been sanctioned in their religious books.

Hence, as a counter reaction whatever little progress was made in the society with regard to the socio-economic status of women, development in the sector of health, education, and economy was all retracted.

## Current Scenario

As per the reports, the current modus operandi is ruled through violence<sup>21</sup> (O'Donnell, 2022). Basic human rights are denied; there is no freedom for women to study or to work. International organizations and prominent nation states like the U.S. have gone on a back foot. They refuse to provide any kind of support even to the resistance groups fighting the Taliban. The most extensive form of resistance is given to them in the Panjshir area. The Taliban, which is primarily Sunni, have been accused of ethnic cleansing of the Tajiks and Shiite Hazaras. Some harrowing accounts of killings have been provided by the Afghans living inside and outside the country. With these kinds of turmoil and complexities, the future for Afghanistan indeed looks bleak. It would be unwise to think that what occurred in Afghanistan was a matter of fate or coincidence. That what happened in Afghanistan was a repeated pattern of some powerful states meddling with the internal socio-political affairs

<sup>20</sup>Metzler, J.J. 2021. Taliban war booty exceeds most countries military spending. [Online].

Available at: [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2021/12/797\\_319880.html?fl](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2021/12/797_319880.html?fl) [Accessed 14 July 2022].

<sup>21</sup>O'Donnell, L. 2022. The Afghan Resistance Is Still Fighting. [Online]. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/05/12/afghanistan-resistance-taliban-clashes/> [Accessed 20 June 2022].

of another state for the sake of their skewed approach to their purported national interests. Now the apathetic and inhumane attitude toward this volatile state is further evidence in itself of how unconcerned and apathetic the United Nations and other international humanitarian organizations have been to the Afghan imbroglio. We observe in history that killings take place for the interest of the majority; for the sake of expanding and consolidating power; and to protect honor, morality, and upholding justice. In this regard, the argument put forth by nonkilling advocates is that human life is precious and needs to be protected primarily. Nonkilling is a measurable and achievable goal and hence, the state and society should make all endeavors to protect human life. However, to foster peace we first need to analyze as to what the inherent tensions, stresses and problems create disturbance in a society. Is it the political instability or some societal fault lines disturbing the stability and peace in the society? It may be rightly argued that we cannot and should not be prescribing any one remedy at this stage, as has been the case in all such conflicts and interventions as in Afghanistan. Perhaps the solution ultimately lies in a more pragmatic socio-cultural approach where women are also involved in the decision-making process in all future interventions where all nations embrace positive peace through affirmative nonkilling.

## Call for Affirmative Nonkilling

To create a society devoid of all forms of killings, humiliations, and all kinds of injustices that provokes one to kill, we need to recognize universal human values. Liberty, equality, and fraternity are some classic examples. As modern philosophers, we would like to add to it, 'affirmative nonkilling'. The idea of nonkilling was advocated initially by Glenn D. Paige, wherein he first studied what were the causes of humans to become killers<sup>22</sup> (Paige, 2009). In this regard, he discovered that cultural conditioning and institutions play the most crucial role. Culture is something that stems from within the society and cannot be changed quickly, and the institutions are

<sup>22</sup>Paige, G.D. 2009. *Nonkilling Global Political Science*. Honolulu: Center for Global Nonkilling.

built up on cultural conditioning. Hence simply changing the institutions would not be helpful. Instead, a nonkilling culture has to be developed, and therefore the idea of affirmative nonkilling is being introduced. Affirmative nonkilling may be described as positive in nature and based on the structure of education and advocacy against killing<sup>23</sup> (Singh & Swarup, 2018). To further elaborate in normal and positive circumstances state and people are to refrain from indulging in any activity that can provoke any kind of violence or killing in society. However, in a state of war or terrorism such as that in Afghanistan, the call for affirmative nonkilling would look like a Utopian idea. Yet it is a feasible task. The killings have reduced after the withdrawal of U.S. forces, yet violent internal clashes are consistent, and an authoritarian government has been formed, which denies fundamental human rights, especially to the women section of the society. The people of Afghanistan are looking for help from the international community. Awareness about such authoritarian power must first be brought about to solve this crisis. The first step in this regard would be to build up a narrative of the people who were victims of collateral damage. This would help in creating awareness about the lost lives and build empathy for them. The next step would be to withdraw power from the such an authoritative state. The citizens, as well as the international community, can contribute towards it. The citizens would have to show their resistance which in reality is being shown by few groups, particularly in the Panjshir region. The international community needs to put economic and political sanction on such government and if need is felt they could rely on minimal form of violence i.e., use of precision-guided missiles (P.G.M.), non-lethal weaponry and cyber engagement. Cyber engagement must be combined with peace and educational development<sup>24</sup> (Schlichtmann, 2013). With the pace of innovation in military technology,

casualties can be minimized. The kind of brutal authority that has taken control over the state of Afghanistan, peace would not come by the call for nonviolence, and that is the reason for invoking the call for affirmative nonkilling. Military interventions in the name of peace had been there on previous occasions too, but it was without any commitment towards the idea of nonkilling and international supervision. The intervention was done with the intention of showing power dominance and not with any humanitarian approach. This has been proven by the death rates that occurred in the presence of the U.S. military. Peace will come to Afghanistan provided the international agencies and nation states start thinking beyond national interest and adopt a humanitarian approach while solving the crisis, and the first step would be to adopt the approach of affirmative nonkilling.

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<sup>23</sup>Singh, K. & Swarup, A. 2018. A Global Nonkilling Index As A Critical Measure of Human Development and Progress. *International Journal on World Peace*, XXXV(3), pp. 45-68.

<sup>24</sup>Schlichtmann, K. 2013. The Role of UCAV, PGM, Nonlethal Weaponry and Cyber Policing. In: J.E. Pim, ed. *Nonkilling, Security, and the State*. Honolulu: Centre for Global Nonkilling, pp. 199-227

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