

CAN CONFLICT RESOLUTION EFFECTIVELY DEAL WITH TERRORISM? CRITICAL OVERVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGE TO INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Ana Fritzhand, Dr. Sc

*Faculty of Philosophy – Skopje, Republic of Macedonia
e-mail: anaf@fzf.ukim.edu.mk*

Marjan Gjurovski, Dr. Sc

*Faculty of Security – Skopje, Republic of Macedonia
e-mail: mar.gjurovski@gmail.com*

Abstract

This paper focuses on the dilemma whether conflict resolution can effectively deal with terrorism. It also question the potential of conflict resolution to extinguish terrorism. Some authors argue that conflict resolution has nothing to do with this phenomenon. They further say that negotiating with terrorists legitimizes their groups, goals and means. Therefore, talking to them would incite even more violence and weaken the democracy. However, there are others who believe in the opposite, i.e. that specific conflict resolution approach aimed towards resolving complex and fluid terrorist behavior have to be considered as part of a wider counter-terrorist strategy. Conflict resolution approach offers an innovative path toward understanding terrorism by engaging with it as a form of violence that is part of a broader conflict. Thus, the present paper provides critical overview of this contemporary challenge to international security and discuss why conflict resolution is crucial for an effective counter-terrorist intervention.

Keywords: conflict resolution, terrorism, international security, counter-terrorist intervention

INTRODUCTION

New structural trends in international security are addressed in relevant literature as multiple and multi-dimensional. In the attempt to explain those trends authors differentiate three aspects - globalization, human security and securitization. The first

one – *globalization* - has increased the interconnectedness between societies and states. It also created global challenges as well as global public goods and decreased the capacity of states to manage global security threats and risks alone. *Human security* is among the most influential attempts at re-conceptualizing security. This approach advocates a people-centered, universalist and non-military focus that takes due account of threats to human life such as underdevelopment, poverty and deprivation. *Securitization* refers to the process by which specific problems are constructed as security issues. It occurs when a concern is identified and declared as posing an existential threat to a designated referent-object and requiring the adoption of extraordinary or even emergency measures (as cited in LeGloannec, Irondelle, & Cadier, 2013).

In all abovementioned aspects, terrorism holds an important place, meaning that it is present internationally and affects both human security and securitization. Terrorism today holds central position in the course of international relations. International terrorism has absolutely diverted the attention of the major powers and institutions of the world from supporting basic developmental issues and focus largely on curbing terrorism. Economic and social issues have been attached with the counter-terrorist activities. It has become a source of making or marring the relations on international level. Referring on data reported in Global Terrorism Index 2017, there is a positive trend in fighting terrorism manifested through the decrease in the number of people killed by terrorism. More precisely, there is a global decline in the number of deaths from terrorist attacks (25,673 people in 2016), which is a 22 per cent improvement from the peak in 2014. Data also indicate that terrorist violence has fallen significantly in countries with the highest risk from terrorism, such are Syria, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria. It is noted that “the ten countries with the largest improvements experienced 7,348 fewer deaths, while the 10 countries with the largest deteriorations experienced only 1,389 terrorism deaths” (GTI 2017; p.2). Evidence from the field indicate that most common actions as a response to terrorism, are military ones. However, it also shows that those types of actions are not effective enough in order to resolve and even extinct terrorist behavior. Moreover, many times they end up with major negative contra-effects by provoking even more destructive and more violent actions from terrorists. One probable reason for this is the nature of terrorism itself, since it represents a mosaic of different types of behaviors (as cited in Kendall Hope, 2014a). Therefore, if counter terrorist strategy is to be effective, with long-term benefits for all parties, more should be added into it. In that sense, specific conflict resolution approaches aimed towards resolving complex and fluid terrorist behavior have to be considered as well. It means to act simultaneously on different levels and domains (as cited in Ташковски и Танески, 2018).

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND TERRORISM

Although there is a large body of research on terrorism, studies about the role of conflict resolution approaches towards countering terrorism are still scarce. There are various reasons for this. Namely, there is an intensive debate whether such approaches should be considered at all in dealing with terrorists. Often, many believe that this is not the right way to fight terrorism since negotiating with terrorists is a sign of weakness, or because it will strengthened their positions and will only provide false legitimacy to their actions. Nevertheless, experienced negotiators provide evidence against such standing, explaining that it is usually the case when the situation is evaluated incorrectly and/or the negotiation process is conducted unprofessionally (Weiss, 2003). Furthermore, it is considered that the scope of terrorists actions is too wide, which makes them hard to be reached for identifying the leaders of terroristic groups and to negotiate with them. Other arguments of why not to negotiate with terrorists are considering negotiation, mediation, and dialogue with terrorists as weakness. Some terrorist groups are structured in such a way that they force the negotiators or mediators to physically contact them to convey their messages. The lack of open communication channels increases isolation and distrust and often make conflict resolution approaches unsuccessful. Rigidity and the mentality of religious extremists often make it difficult for policymakers to resolve conflicts with them peacefully, and thus be compelled to use coercive measures to combat terrorism. (as cited in Ташковски и Танески, 2018).

However, there are certain strategies that can actually contribute to the non-violent resolution of conflicts involving terrorist violence and can help reduce the prevalence of terrorism. Such conflict resolution approaches offer an innovative way through understanding terrorism as a form of violence that is part of a wider conflict. According to Weiss (2003), in crisis or during conflicts more communication is essential in order to resolve these conditions successfully. Conducting proper negotiation means to be focused on reaching the best possible solution to the conflict, without undermining one's own positions. The dialogue can help educate and connect people from different social backgrounds, from different religions and cultures and so on. Thus, conflict resolution approach if used properly, can lead to peace, even with terrorists.

Amin (2017) points out that long-term conflict resolution approaches are best suited to tackling terrorism. Several effective political strategies are possible here. One is the inclusiveness of people and the problems. This strategy is important because it has the potential to reduce frustration from unmet basic human needs,

which is a great incentive for people to support terrorists and terrorism and / or resort to violence. In this sense, terrorism becomes a strategy used in conflicts by actors who believe that this is the best decision that needs to be made at a given time. From the point of view of conflict resolution, terrorism cannot be considered out of the conflict and can be analyzed only in this wider context. Thinking realistically, one should not expect magic overnight, because even the best strategies for resolving conflicts are not all-powerful (Toros, 2016).

Nevertheless, there are limitations in the adoption of conflict resolution as an approach to fight terrorism. One important aspect in decision making is how to approach terrorists and whether to enter into negotiation with them. As Zartman (2008) clearly explain, there are several criteria that distinguish terrorists and terrorism, which directly affects the choice of whether to enter into negotiations (i.e., whether there is a basis for expects that there is a real opportunity for the negotiations to succeed) or not. In this regard, the relevant literature points out that there are so-called *absolute* and *contingent* (instrumental) terrorists. The former (such as, for example, suicide bombers) carry out terrorist actions that are non-instrumentalist and self-compliant, i.e. they end up with suicide and are not a means of achieving another instrumental goal. Absolute terrorists are still divided into conditionally absolute and totally absolute (or revolutionaries). With totally absolute terrorists one cannot negotiate, because there is nothing to negotiate about (although some governments do such attempts), given that regardless of whether the cause of the action is a world social and political revolution or immediate access to the heavenly reward, it becomes an elusive ambition in earthly life and is used to justify the full tactic and ultimate outcome.

On the other hand, contingent or instrumental terrorism includes much of the literature on negotiations with terrorists (mainly regarding hostage-taking). Contingent terrorists use victims' lives for other purposes, and even require negotiations. Their main goal is to exchange their victims for publicity, redemption or release of their members. Violence in this type of terrorism is not definitive or absolute. In particular, only part of the violence is realized through the act of taking hostages, and the rest is carried out in jeopardizing their fate, if the set requirements are not fulfilled. Between the categories of totally absolute and instrumental terrorists, there are conditional absolute terrorists who have something to negotiate for (for example, territory, independence, conditions), even when their suicidal tactics are absolute. These terrorists are not instrumental, they do not require negotiations as part of their act of action. However, their claims can potentially be negotiated, which depends on the one with whom they negotiate. When dealing with the so-called "nihilist terrorists", who are religious terrorist groups, who have absolute aims and are driven by fanaticism, approaches such as mediation and negotiation cannot produce effective results because these groups tend to be rigid in their position.

However, coordination with religious leaders and the attempt to build a relationship with them can to some extent reduce violence. Hence, it is very important to divide the terrorists, separating the instrumental and conditional absolutes from total absolutes, which means creating conditions for something that is real and feasible (Zartmann, 2008).

There are other measures that can be applied to respond to terrorism, as well. One is conviction aimed at reducing the motive of the parties to the conflict to resort to violence and minimizing support for terrorists. This process involves ideologies that trigger terrorism, convincing the parties to conflict to use non-violent and unrelenting tactics, in order to reduce the attractiveness of terrorism. Showing greater humanity and efficiency of non-terrorist alternatives and convincing the parties that non-violent measures can best meet their strategic goals, a long way in effectively dealing with terrorists and their support groups can be made. Reducing the vulnerability and defeat of hardline supporters, or, in other words, "denial" can also be used in response to terrorism. At the same time, the coordination and maximization of international efforts are needed to effectively respond to terrorism (as cited in Ташковски и Танески, 2018).

Analyzing the potentials and limitations of conflict resolution in dealing with international terrorism presented in the relevant literature highlights several main conclusions. In this sense, the potential of conflict prevention must not be overestimated in conflicts caused by terrorist violence, which can be particularly resistant to such an approach. It is well known that violence can have a major impact on the negotiations. The beginning or end of violence is rarely marked with clean trends. There is usual asymmetry in conflicts marked by terrorist violence. In the context of terrorist violence, there is a potential need for secrecy at the start of the negotiation process. Negotiations can also often fail. The possibility of negotiations being rejected by extremist groups is another serious challenge. However, inviting terrorists to negotiate is in any case useful, because it increases the chances of a successful outcome and all options for opening new requirements are closed by putting everything that matters at the table. In addition, practical experience shows that extremists who have already come to negotiations clearly show that they are ready for a solution, which will enable efficient closure of the dispute. At the same time, extremists are aware that they are the last level after which there is no one to contest the agreement reached, so they will have no pressure when making compromises or concessions (Фрчкоски, 2012).

HOW CONFLICT RESOLUTION CAN CONTRIBUTE TO EXTINGUISHING TERRORISM

Psychologically speaking, terrorism is a set of various behaviors and since one cannot eliminate behavior, the final goal of every effective counter-terrorist strategy should be to *extinguish* terrorist behavior. According to Victoroff (2005), terrorist behaviors are heterogeneous and that is a main reason why there are so many definitions of this phenomenon. In addition to this, there is a variety of declared or assumed motivations, as well as the question of the point of view – are they terrorists, or freedom fighters (for someone)? Another important aspect, especially relevant for psychology, is that there may be heterogeneity in the temperaments, ideologies, thought processes, and cognitive capacities of terrorists within political categories, hierarchical levels, and roles (Taylor and Ryan 1988; Reich 1998; as cited in Victoroff, 2005).

Understanding the causes, motivations and determinants of terrorist behavior is a big challenge, but it is vital to countering violent extremism's threat to global security (Borum, 2011). This knowledge is also very important for decision making of how and when to apply conflict resolution strategies, that could bring effective solution to a conflict provoked by terrorist violence, as explained earlier. In this sense, Kendall Hope (2014a) argue that the cycle of violence must be transcended in order for growth and reconciliation to occur. One of the crucial requests here is to understand the enemy, since in understanding lie the opportunity to readdress the problematic questions, redefine the problems, reflect emotions, and restore non-violent behavior.

Violent conflict is one of the greatest challenges to development. According to Kendall-Hope (2014b), all conflicts in certain way originate from the (perception of) crisis and can progress negatively or positively. Cycles of violence are invisible in the beginning, but they originate inside of a person(s) in so called internal cycle of violence, which could also result from the internalization of a conflict from the outside. If an individual or a group perceives a crisis, they act upon it as it is reality to them. This choice of whether the individual acts on these perception is usually related to time passing. On the other side, the external cycle of violence mostly begins with an act of harm that is left unaddressed. It becomes part of dysfunctional circular repetition of reactions that deepen into internal conflicts between individuals and/or groups, who then start to act according to these new perceptions. Violence relates to verbal, physical or weaponized actions which are intended to harm others. It begins as thought and feeling. Hence, violence is a complex concept, because it is associated with institutions, cultural properties and behavior that prevent or limit the development of human potentials and endeavors to control their body, behavior and social environment.

In order to make real transformational changes, Mitchell (as cited in Мурцева-Шкарик, 2007) believes that several key changes in the quality of interconnections should occur. These changes involve shift from unbalanced to balanced exchanges or at least between parties agreeing that they have reached approximately the same value

in exchanges. There should be a shift from the dependent to interdependent exchanges, where all parties are satisfied, and in the near future, the same exchange is expected. Then, there is also a change from dissonant to consonant exchange estimates, where the parties share the same views on the usefulness and acceptance of the exchange. Another important shift is from illegitimate to legitimate estimates of the exchange, so that the parties equally accept fairness, and even the fairness of the exchange, and want it to continue. Therefore, transformation introduces systematic changes involved in a process that leads to greater equity and equality in the social system as a whole.

Another important point is the one of perception and perspective. Who is evil to whom, who is terrorist or maybe a freedom fighter - are positions that could change the whole prognosis of the outcome. In this sense, not less important is the impact of culture and sub-culture, as well as the impact of media on shaping the perceptions of individuals and groups. Today, terrorists actively and effectively use propaganda to gain support from individuals and groups. The practice continuously show that in many cases this propaganda is successful. The reasons for this lie in the sharing of the same or similar culture and value system. Western countries are often regarded as enemies who do not truly understand their needs and want to acculturate them by changing their laws, the system of belief, the way of life, etc., which directly affects their identity. Therefore, many individuals from the Middle East sympathize with and support the radical Islamic groups because they are culturally much closer, that is, they are part of their culture and are "fighting to defend" their values and needs (in this case, after violent and a destructive path). Therefore, to have a deeper understanding and awareness of how culture and media influence individual interaction, is vital for the success of conflict resolution approach. In this regard, very important are ideological and political sub-cultures (as cited in Kendall-Hope, 2014b).

As mentioned previously, there is a variety of declared or assumed motivations of terrorist behavior and understanding of those motivations is substantial for the whole process. This is the point where communication skills come to the light, since one of the main prerequisites for successful resolution of any conflict (including the one provoked by terrorist violence) is to know how to listen. Education is another important aspect together with systematic and holistic approach to the conflict. Final goal of this process is to re-build the relationship, the society and manage to reconcile.

CONCLUSION

It is clear by now that conflict resolution could be effective in dealing with terrorist violence. However, it is long, delicate and very complex process which faces many challenges. Overnight solutions are not possible so are not to be expected either. New

strategies are needed, as well as positive motivation and readiness to overcome any obstacles that might come on the way. Winning should be mutual. This means that the success should be redefined in order to fit the expectations of all parties. In the process of making peace with terrorists differences in terms of culture, religion, socioeconomic status, education, social disparity etc. must be seriously considered. Moreover, long-term thinking should be applied, while still taking one step at a time in the process of peacebuilding. Finally, reconciliation should be the ultimate goal where it is realistically reachable.

Long-term peace in a society can be established only by building and maintaining a culture of peace. The establishment of a culture of peace is a complex, long-lasting and difficult process. This is especially true for multicultural societies and for post-conflict societies where much needs to be done to overcome differences and misunderstandings and transform them into mutual trust, respect and active tolerance. Galtung (as cited in Муџева-Шкарик, 2007) argues that the culture of peace represents, at the same time, different levels of culture and different levels of peace. Building trust among enemies, as Kelman (2005) would argue, is the central challenge for international conflict resolution. Mutual trust, which is essential in social relations and the sense of security that is necessary for the establishment of long-term peace, can be strengthened by reconciliation and forgiveness. When talking to terrorists this is probably the most difficult task to achieve. However, without entering the peace process it cannot be expected that the trust will occur and be maintained. This is the value of efforts invested into a process of resolving conflicts with terrorists that many people think is meaningless. It is not. The defeat only comes when one side stops trying, because practice shows that passive position does not bring solutions – it only widens the gap.

REFERENCES

- Amin, S.J. (2017). Adopting a Conflict Resolution Perspective towards Terrorism – Possibilities and Limitations. *International Journal for Excogitation Education and Research*, 1(2), 48-54
- Borum, R. (2011). Understanding Terrorist Psychology. In: Silke, A. (Ed.). *The Psychology of Counter-terrorism*. UK: Routledge.
- Фрчкоски, Љ. Д. (2012). *Преговарање во конфликти на идентитети*. Скопје: Магор
- Global Terrorism Index. (2017). *Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism*. Institute for Economics and Peace
- Kelman, H. C. (2005). Interactive Problem Solving in Israeli-Palestinian Case: Past Contributions and Present Challenges. In: Fisher, R. (Ed.), *Paving the way*:

- Contributions of interactive conflict resolution to peacemaking.* 2-28. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books
- Kendall Hope, M. (2014a). *The Middle East: How Conflict Resolution can Extinguish Terrorism.* Pax Pugna Publ. North Carolina
- Kendall Hope, M. (2014b). *Transcending the Cycles of Violence.* Pax Pugna Publ. North Carolina
- LeGloannec, A. M., Irondelle, B., & Cadier, D. (Eds.) (2013). *New and Evolving Trends in International Security.* Transworld ISSN 2281-5252
- Мурцева-Шкарик, О. (2007). *Ненасилна трансформација на конфликти.* Скопје: Филозофски факултет
- Ramsbotham, O. Woodhouse, T. & Miall, H. (2016). *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts.* Polity Press.
- Ташковски, И., Танески, Н. (2018). *Решавање конфликти и меѓународен тероризам.* КА ЕЛ ЕС Принт, Скопје
- Toros, H. (2016). *Terrorism, Counterterrorism, and Conflict Resolution: Building Bridges.* Center for Excellence Defence against Terrorism. NATO
- Victoroff, J. (2005). The Mind of the Terrorist: A Review and Critique of Psychological Approaches. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 49(1), 3-42
- Weiss, J. (February, 2003). "Why Has Negotiation Gotten a Bad Name?" достапно на: <http://www.mediate.com/articles/weissj.cfm>
- Zartman, W. (2008). *Negotiation and Conflict Management. Essays on Theory and Practice.* Routledge. NY.