Global Terrorism: Causes, Consequences and Solutions

Par Prof Timo Kivimäki et Edu Montesanti
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Thème: Terrorism, US NATO War Agenda

Edu Montesanti: *Professor Timo Kivimäki, you have been a frequent consultant to several governments (Finnish, Swedish, Danish, Dutch, Russian) , as well as to several UN and EU organizations on conflict and terrorism. Please, Professor Kivimäki, speak a little regarding these consultations.*

Timo Kivimäki: Actually, not only these: I have helped altogether 11 governments with conflict related problems. But the ones you mention I have helped more than others. I have helped Finland and Denmark (and marginally Sweden, too) to design their strategy of development cooperation so that it would be more conflict sensitive, i.e. that it helped prevent rather than fuel conflicts.

Timo Kivimäki

For Finnish, Danish and Russian foreign ministries I have offered some help for their foreign policy argumentation, by offering reviews on how different arguments relate to existing research findings. I have also tried to help these three government with initiative they have had to launch peaceful dialogue processes.

I trained the Moldovan government negotiation team to their peace negotiations with Transnistrian separatists and I have also trained some Indonesian and Myanmar conflicting parties for peace negotiation. Furthremore, I have helped one of the defence ministers of Thailand to understand some of the complications of the conflict in Southern Thailand.

All in all I have realized that many goverments are very eager to promote peace despite

their public unwillingness to show any signs of willingness to make compromises. Governments tend to try to avoid signals that could be interpreted as weakness and this is why it is sometimes important for academics to take the initiative and help governments in something they cannot do without showing signs of weakness.

In the article First Do No Harm: Do Air Raids Protect Civilians? [Middle East Policy 22, no. 4 (2015): 55–64] you revealed that protection wars, that is, wars that are justified by referring to the cosmopolitan motive of protection of « global civilians », kill more civilians than any other type of warfare. Would you please detail this?

There is a growing cosmopolitan, universalist sense of solidarity in the world now and this solidarity of citizens urges leaders to « do something » when the media reveals unfairness and violence against civilians, regardless where these civilians are. This in general is very good and offers opportunities to build a less violent and more just global order.

If within the next 100 years the international security system moves from state-based communities to one global community, this could be very good. Historically wheneven securty governance is moved to greater communities – from familities to clans, from clans to sedentary societies, from small societies to city states, from city states to nation states – a lot of violence disappears. So the growing solidarit is potentially a good thing.

However, today, solidarity is not followed by an effort to allow common security agency: those nations that have been keen on punishing Saddams and Talibans and imposing they interpretation of global norms have not been keen on strengthening the UN, the so far only truly global organization that could represent the world in the imposition of compliance with global humanitarian norms.

On the contrary, those powers that are imposing norms on other countries have been reluctant to commit to the strengthening of global norms together with all countries, and instead of working through the UN, they have formed ad hoc coalitions of the willing. In the imposition of justice and fairness these countries have become actors while others, especially developing countries and Muslim countries, have become the objects of the discipline of coalitions of the willing.

This has caused resentment and the military operations to intervene in violence in the Middle East have escalated the violence that has existed there, and protection has turned against the ones it has intended to protect. If we look at those countries where our protection has operated we can see that more than half of world's conflict fatalities are produced there.

How do you see United States invasions of Afghanistan in 2001, and of Iraq in 2003, from a legal point of view?

I think that from the legal point of view they have been slightly different types of operations as Iraq has been explicitly outside the UN mandate. At the same time the continued military operations there has been very unpopular in both places and it has resulted in a lot of suffering. From the point of protection of civilians both operation has been a disaster.

Washington and its allies has hardened the speech and policies toward terrorism, harming human rights and diminishing civil liberties. The Barack Obama regime has dramatically increased the drone strikes. Has the « War on Terror » helped secure the United States and

its allies from terrorism?

The war against terrorist organization has been a cathalyst of terror simply because of the fact that conflict and terror is always interaction, not just action of one side. While the reason for our violent countering of terrorists has been the horrific actions of the terrorists, it is clear that the reason for the terrorists violence has been our violence. The logic of escalation in the war against terrorist organizaiton has always been interactive, and only through interactive, dialogical peace action could this spiral of escalation be ended.

I think the problem has been that there has never really been a war of terror, there has only been a war on terrorists. This is very different, as a war on terror would be focusing on the targeting of civilians trying to prevent that, while the war on terrorists has aimed at killing as many terrorists as possible even if this means a lot of collateral damage, i.e. loss of civilian life.

A war on terror would not be able to use means that border terroristic, as it is against terror, while war on terrorists has often used means that might be effective against terrorists but increase terror. Focusing on principles rather than demonizing enemies would be important in this situation to de-escalate tension, and that would also mean that we should not point our fingers at the United States or its allies, but instead we should blame bad strategies for the violence we see around us.

We should try to negotiate ways to limit these violent strategies rather than demonizing each other, since the logical conclusion from a view attributes violence to a demonizes « other » is the motive to destroy this « other ». Destruction and demonization of our enemies is not a way to peace.

What are the real roots of terror, Professor Kivimäki, and what would efficient policies should be envisaged to terrorism?

I think we should not think of terror as something that has roots that simply cause terror. Terror is an immoral tactic that people use, even though they should not, for their political goals. If we look at terror that abuses Islam as its platform, it seems clear that at the roots of this type of terror is the perception that there are no peaceful options to bring about chance.

More than ten years ago I studied the origins of terrorist individuals and organizations statistically and also by commissioning and conducting a lot of interviews among people suspected or convicted of acts of terror. Then I was working for the Danish and Finnish foreign ministries. It turned out that most of the terrorist individuals came from countries where any mobilization for a peaceful change is completely impossible. Saudi Arabia was the birth place of 15 of the 19 operative perpetrators of the 9/11 attack, while at the time Algeria was the main source of terrorist individuals in the European list of terrorist individuals.

Due to the fact that any organization was impossible in these countries and in Hosni Mubarak's Egypt many of these desperate people moved to failed states where they could mobilize resistance. Afghanistan became the hub of terrorist organization despite the fact that not many terrorists originated from there.

In these failed states individuals who were prepared for violence to advance their goals

could not find a common agenda in their resistance of their own governments as they came from different countries, and consequently the fact that many of authoritarian regimes of these countries were supported by the USA and some of its European allies became the target of their new common focus.

This I think is the origin of the current type of terrorism, but once the process of fight against the West and the West's fight against these terrorists had began it started getting new forms. Some margins of immigrant communities found resonance to their frustration of their own marginalization in the radical anti-Western rhetoric of these original Islamist groups, and new types of terror started emerging.

The massive Western military operations that undermined the sovereign rights of many Muslim countries, and caused a lot of fatalities gave rise to the expansion of anti-Western Third World Muslim radicalism. The logic of escalation, deepening and spreading of hatred on both sides took over and new forms of terrorism emerged.

What is common to all these processes was that hate and destruction gives rise to hate and distruction and the only way forward would be dialectical focusing on our common interest in the prevention of violence. The mutual focus on the destruction of one's enemy only fuels violence.

Syria has drawn the world attention, and has divided the mainstream and the alternative media. How do you see the roots of the Syrian civil war, and how do you evaluate the United States and Russia intervention in that country, the first oppositionist to the President Bashar al-Assad, the second one supportive to the Syrian government?

I think it is sad that we have wasted the peaceful diplomatic opportunities that existed in 2011. This is also what I wrote about in my article*First Do No Harm* that you mentioned. I do not see any positive opportunities for solutions in the supporting of the capacity to kill on either side of the conflict: the US military support to very shady violent groups Syria and the Russian support to a rotten violent regime are both just ways to expand the magnitude of violence in Syria.

I think the only way forward is inclusive negotiation between all conflicting parties, including the ISIS.

Would you please comment about the limits between resistance and terror, please?

I think resistance is activity defined by the goal of the action while terror should be defined as a specific tactic. Resistance is activity against a rule that is perceived as illegitimate, and it can be violent of non-violence, terrorist or non-terrorist depending on the methods resistance uses.

Terrorism, again, is tactics in which a person or a group tries to infuence decision-makers by using the lives of innocent civilians as a barganining chip. I think it is useful to create, with the concept of terror, a distinction between violent tactices that target innocent civilians and other types of violence. Without the concept it would not be possible to define the norm against the targeting of civilians.

However, there is a problem even with the correct definition of terror, let alone the politically manipulated definitions. The main problem I see with the correct definition of terror is the "either-or" nature of the concept.

If someone intentionally targets civilians as a conflict strategy that someone is a terrorist, but what if you have conflicing parties that target military targets but use weapons and target areas that are known to result in collateral damage.

Are these people then slightly terroristic? In the Palestinian conflict there are actors that intentionally target civilians in some of their operations. They are rightfully called terrorists. But there are also actors, like the state of Israel, that target militants, but do it by hitting militants in civilians centers with cluster munitions. Could this also be called terrorism? Can it be that one killed militant makes an operation that kills tends of civilians something less than a terrorist operation?

In Palestine, I have realized that fatality statistics make it very difficult to justify the concept of terrorism as an either-or concept: there are clashes with more Palestinian child fatalities than Israeli fatalities. This means that even if Israeli operations managed to kill a few militants, too, they tend to kill more civilians than Palestinians. Should we not then call Israeli operations terroristic, even if they also target militants?

The main problem with the current usage of the word terrorism is that more and more often terrorism is associated with political goals that some terrorists aim at. In order to foster a norm against terror one should try to avoid associating terrorism with specific political objectives, as we would like to think that peaceful resistance and the promotion of political objectives is legitimate even if there are terrorists that also promote those same objectives by using immoral terroristic tactics.

Too often we use the concept terrorism to describe activities to promote Islamist political goals even if they were not promoted with terroristic means. This practice obviously erodes the legitimacy of the norm against civilian targeting among communities that would like to see Islamist political order if the term reserved to targeting of civilians is confused with actions to promote Islamist politics. This conceptual practice of associating terror with Islamism makes it also easier to the War of Terror to target civilians if terrorism is associated with Islamism. Thus we should not be fooled about this manipulation of the concept ”terrorism”.

Charles Krauthammer wrote in *The Washington Post*: « [The US must create] the psychology of fear’ in order to ensure ‘deep respect for American power ». How do you see it?

I do recognize that control with power can keep violent opportunities in check. Conflicts in weak, fragile states prove this point: without competent law enforcement there will be anarchy.

Yet when there is a will there is a way: if the US uses a lot of violence to create that fear, it will also create the will to resist its order. I am more in favor of Henry Kissinger’s conclusion in his book World Order, according to which power has to be coupled with legitimacy in order for it to produce stability and peace. Right now, it seems that legitimacy, not power, is what is missing from the US global governance.

It is the US imposition of its order and the resistance of that order that is the source of so much violence in areas where the United States is operating militarily. More fear will not result in more legitimacy of US imposition of its order, quite on the contrary. Thus I think Krauthammer is wrong with his prescription.

How much has the « War on Terror » widened the prejudice against Islamists around the world?

The problem has been the escalation of tension and violence between terrorists that misuse Islam as their platform and the violent War on Terrorists (there is no War on Terror. If there was, it would not use terror as its tactic).

This escalation has created prejudice against Muslims in the Western world, and against Americans and Westerners in the Muslim world. This escalation is one thing we should try to reverse by means of dialogue and negotiations rather than by killing our opponents.

How do you evaluate the coverage of the mainstream media on world terror?

The so-called free Western media has occassionaly in reality been amazingly unfree in their practices of repeating the terms, labels and narratives of Western politicians and securocracy. When a group is called terrorist because of its objectives by politicians that oppose those objectives the media too often simply publicizes the label.

A critical media should always be alert to the interests of politicians to avoid uncritically serving them. I sometimes find it amazing what we can read even from the most respected newspapers about world terror even after we have had access to the revelations by Chelsie Manning, Wikileaks, Glenn Greenwald and Edward Snowden. It is sometimes as if none of these revelations were ever made.

Edu Montesanti

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