

# WAR ON TERROR(ISM) – OR DIALOGUE?

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## ABSTRACT

The article discusses dialogue as an alternative to the “war on terror”, by posing a question which *kind of dialogue* is useful in the context of asymmetric conflict, such as the “war on terrorism” that currently dominates on the global scene. Taking into account that the “war on terror” is far from being a success, two models of communication are presented: 1) dialogue or negotiations between high-ranking political and military officers; and 2) open meetings and symmetric dialogues between all stakeholders in a conflict, including extremists. The effects of these two models are discussed in elucidation of three empirical examples of asymmetric conflict: Northern Ireland, Iraq after the US invasion in 2003 and the US/West vs. Taliban/Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan/Pakistan. The article argues that in the two former cases, mediation and negotiations probably preceded the change of attitude among the belligerents, especially those of the rebel groups using terror tactics. However, in the third case, there is hardly any indication that Jihadists will participate in a genuine dialogue. Consequently, a revised or third model of dialogue has to take the following question into consideration: Can genuine dialogue take place between people who are widely different not only in terms of power and relation to the conflict, but also in attitude towards dialogue itself? The paper presents a third model for dialogue that embeds symmetric dialogues in a wider structure of dispute and dialogue.

**Key words:** terrorism, dialogue, war, asymmetric conflict, Al-Qaeda

## АПСТРАКТ

Статијата го анализира дијалогот како алтернатива на „војната против тероризмот“, преку поставување на прашањето: „Кој вид дијалог е корисен во асиметричен конфликт, како што е војната против тероризмот која моментално доминира на глобалната сцена?“ Тргувајќи од фактот дека „војната против тероризмот“ е далеку од успешна, се презентираат два вида комуникација: 1) дијалог или преговори помеѓу високи политички и воени претставници; и 2) отворени средби и симетрични дијалози помеѓу сите засегнати страни во конфликтот, вклучувајќи ги и екстремистите. Ефектите од овие два модела се разгледуваат преку осветлување на три емпириски примера за асиметричен конфликт: Северна Ирска, Ирак по инвазијата на САД во 2003 година и САД/Западот наспроти талибанците/Ал Каеда во Авганистан/Пакистан. Авторот тврди дека во првите два случаја, медијацијата и преговорите претходеа на промената на ставовите на

завојуваните страни, особено на востаничките групи кои користеа терористичка тактика. Сепак, во третиот случај, речиси и да нема никаква индикација дека џихадистите би зеле учество во вистински дијалог. Консеквентно, еден ревидиран или трет модел на дијалог би требал да ги земе предвид следните прашања: „Може ли да дојде до вистински дијалог помеѓу луѓе кои многу се разликуваат не само во однос на моќта која ја поседуваат и во однос на улогата во конфликтот, туку и во поглед на ставовите спрема самиот дијалог како средство за комуникација?“ Текстот презентира трет модел за дијалог кој е втемелен во симетрични дијалози во рамки на пошироката структура на самиот конфликт.

**Клучни зборови:** тероризам, дијалог, војна, асиметричен конфликт, Ал Каеда

## 1. THE 'WAR ON TERROR(ISM)': NOT A SUCCESS STORY.

After 1990 the frequency, intensity and mortality of violent conflicts has been declining worldwide. There is one exception to this: *Terrorism, with the Middle East, North Africa and Central/South Asia as the hot-spots*. If we define terrorism as “the use of organized violence against civilians to create fear or terror for political or ideological goals” (Mack (ed.) 2010b: 36), or “the use of armed force by the government of a state, or by a formally organized group, against civilians” (Mack, 2007:2)<sup>1</sup>, and use the number of attacks and casualties as main indicators, the number of terrorist *attacks* and campaigns of one-sided violence tripled in the period 2000-2006 (Mack, 2006: fig 2.1, cf.fig.1.4)<sup>2 3</sup>, and the number of fatalities from terrorism were substantially higher in 2006 than in 1998 (Mack, 2007: fig 1.1).<sup>4</sup>

The surge in terrorist attacks and fatalities reached apex during 2007, as the tide of terrorism in Iraq culminated (Mack, 2007: fig1.2-1.3, p.14), but development since has been very uneven, it has partly moved to new hotspots in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and Mindanao, and there is no reliable reduction on the horizon.<sup>5 6</sup> The risks now appear to

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<sup>1</sup> I find this definition reasonable, as it delimits the concept of “terrorism” to *intentional attacks* on civilians, irrespective of whether the actor is an insurgents or a state. One-sided, state-based violence is included in the numbers, while collateral casualties as a consequence of armed clashes between belligerents or armed groups are excluded. However, genocides and politicides should be subtracted from the number: Despite the fact that terror is an important goal of such actions they are a qualitatively different phenomenon, and they inflate the number of casualties so that the problem of *terrorism in the true sense of the word* is exaggerated. After 2007 there have been no known major incidents of genocide and politicide. A wider definition including collateral casualties and attacks on compounds would make statistics more uncertain, numbers confounded, and discussion more confusing.

<sup>2</sup> Mack (ed.) 2005. *Factsheet*: <http://www.humansecurityreport.info/press/Terrorism-Factsheet.pdf>;

Mack (2006), fig2.1: <http://www.humansecuritybrief.info/2006/figures/Figure2.1.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> PRIO 2009 <http://www.prio.no/News/NewsItem/?oid=84112>

<sup>4</sup> Numbers and definitions are contested. However, even Mack (2007), who is very reluctant to accept that terrorism has been on the rise since 1998, admits that *including Iraq*, it has surged since 1998.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.humansecuritybrief.info/figures.html>; [http://www.humansecuritybrief.info/figures/Figure\\_1.4.jpg](http://www.humansecuritybrief.info/figures/Figure_1.4.jpg)

be related to the strength, motivation, and reach of international Jihadist Salafis (Kepel, 2006) such as Al-Qaeda & affiliates, as well as local and regional terrorist groups such as the Taliban, al Shabaab, Boko Haram, Mindanao Islamic Liberation Front etc. (Mack, 2007:14; Jones and Libicki, 2008). Al-Qaeda affiliated national jihadist groups like the Taliban appear to be energized in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, and possibly Nigeria, while Al-Qaeda claims to be stronger than ever in several places, as distinct from secular movements that apply terrorism as a guerrilla tactic (Jones and Libicki, 2008, Mack, 2007).

In a study on terrorism covering the period 1982-2007, Jones and Libicki conclude that the "war on terror", which was initiated *to wipe out Al-Qaida and their allied networks*, had so far "not significantly undermined its capabilities". Al-Qaida has been involved in "a wider geographical area" post 9/11 2001 than before, and "its organizational structure has also evolved" (Jones & Libicki, 2008: 139). Therefore organizations like Al-Qaeda would proliferate and grow until they were tracked down, uprooted, their leaders imprisoned or killed, and their organizations closed down. After 2008 this strategy has been intensified, but so far there is little evidence that it has been successful. This is alarming, since the main argument *for* a "war on terror" was that terrorist groups would interpret invitations to negotiations as a sign of weakness, which would encourage them to intensify their attacks. Only blood-letting and suffering would pull out their sting, and destroy their capacity and motivation to commit terror actions.

## 2. DIALOGUE AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO TERRORISM AND 'COUNTER-TERRORISM'

The alternatives to war and violent suppression of terrorism (such as war, counter-insurgency, 'counter-terrorism', targeted assassinations etc.) are some form of mediation or negotiation based on dialogue. Below, I shall present two models of communication, and test their applicability on cases of asymmetric conflict. The two models are: 1) an asymmetric, *top-down*, power-oriented model, and 2) a *symmetric, dialogue-oriented model*. Having discussed their applicability, and identified weaknesses in each of these models in the kind of asymmetric conflict we are currently observing in the Middle East and Central/South Asia, I shall present an alternative model, and investigate whether that model may be useful for the purpose of reducing or ending the waste of lives connected with the "war on terror".

Two alternative models for structuring communication in peace mediation are: 1) dialogues and/or mediation with *two* or a few political or military leaders involved in secret or open talks<sup>7</sup>, and 2) A model that brings all parties, interests, goals and stakeholders into

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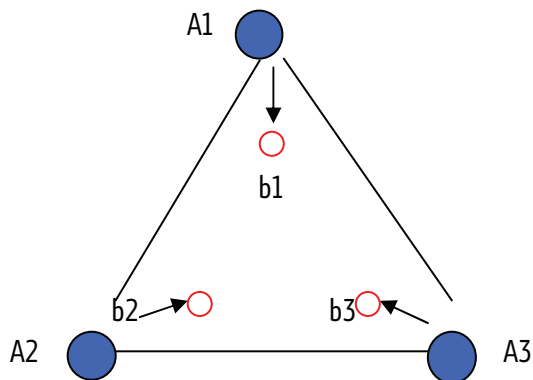
<sup>6</sup>[http://www.humansecuritybrief.info/figures/Figure\\_1.3.jpg](http://www.humansecuritybrief.info/figures/Figure_1.3.jpg)

<sup>7</sup> 'Open' here means 'known to the public'. The talks are always behind closed doors.

symmetric, empathic dialogues, and where wing parties, ('extremists', *potential spoilers*) have a place more-or-less on a par with others. I shall refer to that model as the Galtung Model.

## TWO MODELS OF DIALOGUE

*Model 1: Political communication: Two kinds of actors (Alpha and beta actors)*



**Fig 1:** The Alpha/beta model.

The term Alpha here signifies major/dominant actors, beta signify minor/dominated actors. Alphas talk, betas listen/ watch. In this model there are dialogues between Alphas, either two by two or many by many, as in international summit conferences. There is little or no communication among *betas*, and the best betas can hope for, is the role as *spectator*, e.g. when media are let into the summit to broadcast dialogues between Alphas.

Usually, betas will not see or hear the dialogue as it goes on; they will see a TV broadcast, a well-rigged "conversation" on a rigged stage with arranged scenes: Two or more Alphas, sitting in armchairs positioned so that the figures can talk, but not sitting opposite to each other (chairs are turned towards each other in an angle of 45 - 60°). Alternatively there are two speakers' platforms with microphones, so that the two Alphas can make their announcements to the world. The two Alphas shake hands and disappear from the screen until the next political performance. A more engaging form of meeting between Alphas, from the betas' point of view, would be the broadcasting of a real dialogue, discussion, debate (or *dispute*) between them. However, in international politics, this virtually never happens.

Critics of this model argue that the model excludes most stakeholders and creates distrust in the very process, and consequently they often discard the outcomes in advance. Therefore, openness, and an atmosphere of *confidence* among all parties is a precondition for creativity and willingness to try out new solutions, on which all problem-solving depends, and on which sustainable peace depends: Achieving sustainable peace is *problem solving with high complexity*. Good and reliable outcomes depend on new approaches and solutions to known problems, in order to untie Gordian knots and get past impasses. That cannot succeed in an atmosphere of distrust, fear, covert goals or suspicion thereof.

Talks between powerbrokers alone, and especially secret talks, also create distrust in the process, as well as in the motives of those who participate in the process, among those who are excluded from the talks. The latter are usually/always 1) most of the people, who are reduced to spectators; 2) those on the political wings who are most willing to *restart* or continue a conflict, and apply violence to achieve their goals. The latter especially may decide to make their voice heard anyway, and one terror attack may be sufficient to sidetrack a peace process and bring violence back on stage. Therefore, it is essential that the phase of problem solving is characterized by trust, a relaxed atmosphere, and participation of all parties who have a direct interest in the outcome.

### 3. DIALOGUE VERSION 2: SYMMETRIC DIALOGUES AMONG ALL STAKEHOLDERS

According to Johan Galtung, dialogue presupposes a minimum of *equality and symmetry among the involved parties*, and conflicts always have more than two parties. Therefore dialogues must be among all stake-holders in the conflict. They must also be characterized by settings which facilitate dialogues among many (or all), and especially so that actors at different levels can communicate across conflict lines/ borders. This can be illustrated thus:

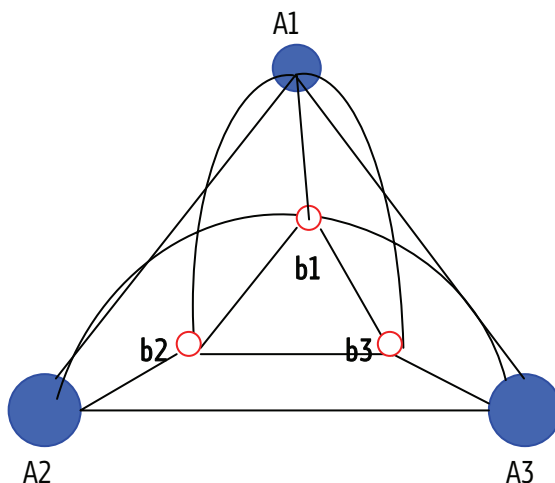


Figure 2: Multilateral, open, symmetric dialogues (symmetry among all participants). The numbers 1, 2 and 3 represent three (or in principle n) sides in, or perspectives on, a conflict. Alpha and beta represent major/dominant and minor/less powerful actors on each/both side of the conflict.

The motto for this kind of dialogue is: *Talks must be open, transparent and characterized by trust.* Only in such an atmosphere can thoughts flow freely, creativity blossom, and many suggestions be voiced and heard, so that *a surplus of proposals/solutions are available.* Motto: *Violence, not conflicts,* is the problem; many options are always better than few, and all who have a stake in the conflict must be invited to the dialogues. *The more suggestions, the more options, and the more options available, the better possibility that one of them can be cultivated and adapted, so that it can fit all.* This is a true Darwinian world of ideas, with mutations of ideas, surplus of ideas and *survival of the fittest idea(s).*

The goal of creativity is to discover or invent solutions nobody has thought of, or dared to voice before. The mediator/facilitator *especially* must have a great amount of, and a large space for, empathy: Often solutions have to be *invented, worked out and voiced* by the mediator, since the participants' positions and opinions are more or less pre-defined and fixed by their group and group loyalties. They are agents of larger collectives, and therefore have a narrow/restricted role-repertoire, and a tendency of self-censoring.<sup>8</sup> But even when the people in the negotiation room are agents of collective bodies, audacious ideas and suggestions can more easily be expressed in informal and relaxed circumstances than in formal negotiations. In informal conversations, representatives of collective bodies need not necessarily meet *in the capacity of representatives (or agents) of certain interests, programs, goals or values.* If they meet informally, and not as representatives or agents of collective bodies, solutions can be expressed informally, *as outlines/ideas to be explored.* Groups with 'extreme' viewpoints should be invited to informal dialogues, because they will make their voice heard anyway, e.g. in the form of violent actions when agreements between those who participate in the negotiations are in the process of being finalized.

Groups that have a stake in the conflict, but are excluded from negotiations, will often act as spoilers, acting in ways that are violent, destructive and demoralizing for all involved

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<sup>8</sup> During Camp David, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak reportedly warned Yasser Arafat: "If we don't finish the job now, at the next meeting I will no longer be prime minister." To which the Palestinian leader retorted: "If I give in on Jerusalem, I will be killed and then you will have to negotiate with Ahmad Yassin." (David Hirst: Camp David exposes 'final status' fallacy *Daily Star*, 28 July 2000:

<http://www.fromoccupiedpalestine.org/taxonomy/term/153?page=4>).

parties. Informal dialogues may also be a solution when some actors for various reasons cannot meet one another in public, which is the case with states and terrorist organizations.

#### 4. DOES THE MULTILATERAL, SYMMETRIC MODEL WORK?

There is a weighty argument against model no. 2: This kind of dialogue is only practicable, or sustainable, among friends and not among adversaries, even less among adversaries who deeply distrust each other, and certainly not among hardboiled warriors who have been involved in violent conflict, even terrorism and counter-terrorism, for decades. I shall discuss this objection below in the light of two empirical examples, before I present a revised model.

##### Two examples

###### *Example 1: Iraq 2007.*

The *surge* of soldiers in Iraq in 2007, supported by improved military intelligence, *is widely recognized as the decisive step that turned the tide of violence in Iraq in autumn 2007.* However, before this surge, numerous diplomats and mediators during spring and summer 2007 worked intensively with dialogue among different homegrown Iraqi groups, which were involved in the civil-war-like situation that developed from 2005 onwards.

For example, throughout the summer of 2007, John McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies (Massachusetts, USA), assisted by Martti Ahtisaari's Conflict Management Initiative (CMI) and experienced negotiators from the peace settlement in Northern Ireland and South Africa, brought together a broad spectrum of fighting groups from the internal divisions in Iraq, including active participants in the inter-group violence that had developed after the US invasion, in dialogue processes that lasted all summer. On September 3 2007, representatives of 16 groups published a joint agreement to work towards a robust framework for a lasting settlement and a set of recommendations to start negotiations with the aim of reaching national reconciliation.<sup>9</sup>

###### *The participants stated the following "urgent concerns" and principles:*

1. *Inclusivity*, power-sharing, abstaining from violence as a means of resolving political differences.

2. *Commitment* to the agreement by all parties:

All parties must *strictly observe* all principles in the agreement, briefly summarized in point 1 above.<sup>10</sup> This commits all parties, including US forces and Iraqi authorities, in their relation to the signatories to the agreement.

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<sup>9</sup> www.cmi.fi: Press Release Sept 3 2007

<sup>10</sup> Direct links to the press release and the full text by CMI:

<http://www.cmi.fi/?content=press&id=73>[http://www.cmi.fi/files/Helsinki\\_agreement\\_English.pdf](http://www.cmi.fi/files/Helsinki_agreement_English.pdf)

The implicit rule of game laid down in principle #2 is that “if one defects, all may defect.” This is a highly realistic approach, and there is little doubt that these talks contributed to de-legitimizing and isolating Al-Qaeda in Iraq and facilitated their defeat and partial expulsion/ex-filtration from Iraq. General Petraeus’ new tactics, decentralizing both power and responsibility for security to local groups like the Sunni “awakening councils”, may have been decisive in bringing down the number of terrorist attacks and casualties, but the political work which *prepared the ground for this tactics*, was done by mediators *before* the “surge”, and before the change in military tactics. There was a change in mood already early in 2007, characterized by war fatigue and a longing for “normalcy” among Iraqis. This change was reinforced by the above-mentioned mediation during the summer of 2007.<sup>11</sup> This fact indicates that even in counter-insurgency tactics, mediation may be a *precondition* for success, and may have to precede devolution or hand-over of military powers to local groups. This point has been almost entirely disregarded in public discussion and scientific reports on Iraq and other places where terrorism suddenly started to wane.<sup>12</sup>

## Example 2: Northern Ireland.

The peace process in Northern Ireland, leading to the Good Friday agreement and subsequent actions to ensure its implementation, was characterized by *a long list of measures* that were agreed on by all involved parties. The *process* that leads to peace in Northern Ireland was a drawn-out one that lasted for at least 2 decades<sup>13</sup>: It started with secret talks between Gary Adams and John Hume in the mid-1980s, and lasted for almost a decade before the signing of the joint Declaration on Peace (Major-Reynolds, 1993). It was then another five years before the Good Friday Agreement, and then another seven years before the IRA declaration in 2005, which formally ended IRA’s armed campaign, and committed the organization to democratic politics from then on. Since then, there was no recourse to the violence of the past, although some fringe groups still carry on.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Jones & Libicki (2008) give a detailed account of Petraeus’ measures, and their effects in Iraq. However, they also disregard the international mediators, such as the Ahtisaari group.

<sup>12</sup> Even Jones & Libicki (op.cit.), who show the effects of Petraeus’ counterinsurgency tactics, fail to show how the diplomacy by Iraqi and external mediators partly *preceded* the change in military counter-insurgency tactics, when the US started to mobilise the Iraqi “awakening councils.”

<sup>13</sup> From the perspective of Betty Williams and the Community of Peace People in Northern Ireland it took *three decades*. They started their campaign against violence in 1975.

<sup>14</sup> There have been incidents every year since 2005, but none of them have restarted the conflict. In January 2008, a bomb was found and dismantled outside a school in Belfast. According to the police, it was meant for a military installation, and the group behind the attack were former IRA-members who are dissatisfied with the peace process. However, just like the Omagh bomb, this further alienated the perpetrators from their constituencies, the Catholic majority in Northern Ireland, as well as the IRA/ Sinn Fein, who were now solidly planted on the peace track.



The issues focused on during these talks were a broad range of political problems requiring a solution: The constituencies of MPs, devolution of powers, police reform, how to deal with historical and actual/contemporary grievances of both communities, and how to rebuild trust among former adversaries.<sup>15</sup> A precondition for dealing seriously with the real stuff of the conflict was *trust*: First trust at the personal level between Adams and Hume, then trust between the larger political organizations, constituencies and communities that were involved in the conflict (the IRA/ Sinn Fein and the pro-British organizations and Protestant community in Northern Ireland), then between the British government and public, and finally trust *in their own ability to come up with workable solutions to the problems* that created the conflict.

### Example 3:

In an empirical investigation into how terrorism ends, Jones and Libicki (2008) show that in 40% of their cases, terrorism ends when the organizations or their leaders are accepted or integrated in a *political processes leading to some solution*.<sup>16</sup> In 10% of the cases terrorist organizations lay down arms or are dissolved because they are defeated militarily, in another 10% they lay down arms because they reach (some of) their political goals, and 40% end because leaders and cadres are arrested or killed due to efficient intelligence, local informers and local police investigation. *However, religious terrorist groups very seldom lay down arms due to such factors, or because of blood-letting*. These groups are in fact the least likely to lay down arms (Jones and Libicki, 2008). This is partly due to the fact that their political goals are wide, amorphous and non-negotiable. However, the fact that political goals may be amorphous or malleable does not reduce the ability of the mentioned organizations to make and adjust strategies, as well as to adjust to new situations tactically. All of this is evident in the cases of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda.

## 5. "DIALOGUE" IS THE ANSWER. WHAT IS THE QUESTION?

Taking into account the meagre success in the 'war on terror', as well as the fact that *one efficient spoiler alone can sometimes destroy a peace process although an overwhelming majority of the people wants peace*, three questions have to be formulated explicitly:

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<sup>15</sup>There were a number of actors involved; a separate, let alone *secret*, agreement between the two main actors, the British Government and IRA/Sinn Fein, would not have solved the conflict.

<sup>16</sup>Jones and Libicki (2008) count 102 such cases (Jones and Libicki, 2008, Appendix A: 14-186). The PLO and the IRA/UVF are two well-known examples.

1) Is it possible to win (all) hearts and minds in a struggle against terror/-ism by means of open dialogues?

*If the answer to question 1 is not affirmative*

2) Must we involve all stakeholders, or should participation in a peace process be qualified, and would-be participants *prioritized* according to some peace related criteria, *such as their willingness to make compromise and join the peace process?*

3) From a realistic perspective: Who can have meaningful dialogues with whom?

Terrorism (and state 'counter-terrorism') is a consciously chosen strategy by actors and groups who have abandoned or rejected other alternatives and have decided to start a cycle of violence by appealing to deep-seated "myths justifying hostility" (Kaufman, 2001: 210) which are also alive in their community and among their constituents. Therefore change will take the form of *a series of ideological and political "battles" among people of the same culture or civilization*. These battles will take place among people who share some interests, values, symbols, history, religion, culture, language, cosmology or other features of identity, but disagree deeply on other issues, such as the priority of *human rights, humanism, tolerance, empathy, violence, war as a means to an end (instrumental violence), jus in bello, prisoner treatment, universalism in ethics, democracy, freedom of impression and expression, economic order, justice, rationalism in politics and ethics, and limits to the exercise of political and military power in the name of religion, nation, ethnic group, democracy etc.*

In the conflicts with the highest intensity, the conflict of ideas within each side/on all sides of a conflict - i.e. among actors who are categorized as belonging to the same side of an ongoing conflict although they may not identify with either side - will be about what values we consider as 'holy', 'absolute' or 'key' *for our cultural identity*, civilization, community, ethnic group, nation, religion, political order etc. Even though actors may agree on a set of values, they may disagree on the priority of those values, about *absolutism in value issues*, which values should be considered absolute (e.g. religious values versus human rights) and *what means* we are prepared use to rescue or promote those values: Are we so sure of the righteousness of our own ideas and ideals that we will sacrifice our sons and daughters for these idea(l)s? Moral debates seldom reach the level where the very *idea of martyrdom* as a driver of war is brought up for discussion (Koenigsberg, 2009). If that is the case, the idea of martyrdom has to be confronted directly, not as a 'consequence' of conflict, but as one of the root causes of violent conflict. Both in the Western/'Christian' world and in the Islamic world we have a long history of cultivating the idea of martyrdom and the ultimate sacrifice: giving one's life in war as a heroic act.

Both in the Islamic and Western world we need a broad discussion about what principles are worth sacrificing for, whether the principles involved in the dispute are really principles, and if they are derived from holy (or basic, constitutional) works, are these fundamental/holy principles worth dying for? We have to discuss this, *as well as what our legacy of enlightenment*, democracy, freedom, equality and social responsibility mean to us, why and how much we value individual freedoms and the right to live in personal safety, what we mean by empathy or solidarity with the most needy, and whether we recognize the right of the individual to criticize traditions which are widely and broadly recognized in our own culture, religion and political life.

'We'/the West also have to find out how we relate to *theocratic regimes and theocratic social orders*, to the problem of *moral relativism* and ideas of economic, cultural and political supremacy in the Western/Christian civilization, as well as the problem of *taboos and absolutism*, and ideas of *moral supremacy* in the Middle Eastern/ Islamic civilization (and Christian fundamentalism). We also need to discuss the problem of ethnocentrism and double standards – open as well as latent ones - in both civilizations.

In the West there is a question that is different from the main issues in theocratic or autocratic states: Can and should we sacrifice (some of the) freedom of expression in text, pictures and other cultural utterances, liberal principles in our criminal law system, liberal/tolerant and “negotiating” childrearing practices, (some of the) individual freedoms for the young people generally, and girls especially, in experimenting and discovering their own way in life, or should we try to accommodate Islamic practices in order to integrate Muslims in our political life? Where are the limits to political flexibility and adaptability?<sup>17</sup>

The answers to these questions by the most belligerent actors on both sides are often surprisingly similar; despite differences in the way they formulate and legitimize their answers.<sup>18</sup> In addition, they also tend to *reject the legitimacy of the questions posed above*. One reason for the survival and proliferation of some terrorist groups may be the *spiritual dimension* to the kind of terrorism they perpetrate. This is probably underestimated by national as well as international secular powers that are fighting against them: These groups refer to a holy order and war as duty towards God, the religious community and fear

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<sup>17</sup>When Osama bin Laden said “Americans love life while *Muslims love death*.” he pointed, although in a morbid and twisted way, to deep-seated difference between the normative systems in a deeply religious culture and a secular culture. This difference may ring more dramatic, when expressed in bin Laden’s words, than it is in the everyday life of the two cultures. However, the difference may be important grounds on which belligerent actors recruit suicide bombers, and legitimize their actions. Therefore, such differences should be discussed in relaxed dialogues in order to avoid misunderstandings. That can happen only if we allow a moral discourse on violence and peace that *transcends the cultures in which the ideas of martyrdom and identity work*.

<sup>18</sup>In the case of Taliban and Al-Qaeda, the explicit verbal messages are, for example, extremely ethno-religious, despite their incantation of Ummah.

of/hopes for the afterlife. This makes such groups persevering and resistant to political arguments, as well as military ones, as it provides the perpetrators of such terrorism with legitimacy among a deeply religious constituency. Reilly describes the willingness to commit terror in the name of God as a “spiritual disorder”; a “perverted outcome of a search for meaning” among men who feel a loss of meaning in the modern/western/secular political order (Reilly, 2007).

Juergensmeyer describes terror justified by religion as an attempt at “symbolic empowerment”, which is especially important for marginalized men who feel alienated, but also disempowered by modern, secular development (Juergensmeyer, 2000: ix). These men resort to violence against what they perceive as a “world gone awry”. According to Kimmel, some of these men see contemporary development as the result of a conspiracy of evil forces, where (male) honour, justice, social order and clearly defined (gender, class/ caste, race etc.) roles and identities, to which they attach so much *meaning*, is about to break down. They *prefer meaning* over (modern) values like freedom, democracy, peace, and equality, and try to act to *project this conclusion* onto the rest of the world (Kimmel, 2009).

The combination of “myth-symbol complexes” and “opportunity to mobilize around them” (Kaufmann, 2001:212), often combined with excessive fear and ideas of being involved in a cosmic struggle between good and evil (Galtung, 1996)<sup>19</sup>, makes it extremely difficult to eliminate, or even successfully suppress religious terrorist groups by violent means: For the members of these groups, violent attacks confirm their worldview, and arguments from outsiders tend to have no impact. They combine the components of their worldview into a kind of *identity politics*, which feeds charismatic leaders with supporters and recruits with almost unbreakable bonds to their leaders.

## 6. QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS. PREMISES FOR DIALOGUE.

*Summing up the discussion above*, religious terrorists insist on submission to their will on the basis of myth-symbol complexes familiar to - and *meaningful* to - sections of the population to which terrorists appeal, sometimes even with support from secret state agencies, or the *deep-state* of a country (Rashid, 2008). These actors are as much at odds with ordinary, secular citizens (“infidels”) among their own constituency, as they are with “Westerners”. They perpetrate ruthless attacks on ordinary civilians who would otherwise be indifferent or negative to the “cause” of these men. Terrorist actions force neutrals to become attentive, obedient, silent and cautious. They want to attract media attention, achieve symbolic empowerment through media reach, and recruit supporters and cadres to their organizations. Terrorist actions work as recruitment adverts for their organizations,

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<sup>19</sup>Galtung (1996) calls this Manicheism.

and once the fear or expectation of violence is established, the rules of the game change in favour of violent actors on both sides of the conflict. This is common to all terrorism.

However, religious terrorists have an additional perspective: Eternity. From their perspective, they are engaged in a cosmic battle between two forces of a Manichean type (Galtung, 1996:16). They see the world around them, in culture, politics, economy etc., as a multifaceted, complex attack on the spiritual world order as God once created it, which was meant to last as it was *forever*. They feel humiliated and disempowered by *visible as well as invisible 'forces'* that encroach upon their world. Some of these men conclude that these forces are representatives of the Devil. They resort to terrorism to save or restore "God's order", "moral order", "purity" etc., the way they see it (Juergensmeyer 2000:184-195). Suicide bombers truly believe that they will achieve grace, redemption and reward for their deeds in the afterlife.

On this background, there is reason to see religious terrorism in a different light than secular terrorism, and also to review experiences from Northern Ireland and Iraq, before we apply them on religious terrorism. For example, the experience from Northern Ireland and Iraq apparently support Galtung's model of empathic, symmetric dialogues in all directions, among all parties and stakeholders. However, what the cases of Iraq as well as Northern Ireland *also* teach us is that we have to pay close attention to several decisive details and preconditions for successful talks, such as:

- *Who can talk to whom, from a realistic point of view?*

- *The possibility to have secluded talks:* Not all parts of the process can be open. As shown in both the above-mentioned cases, and as shown even more clearly by the Palestinian-Israeli talks in Oslo, there is a time for secluded talks, and a time for publication. On this point, the critique of the "Alpha approach" in model 1 is exaggerated.

- *Legitimacy* of the process among the belligerents "own" constituencies is crucial

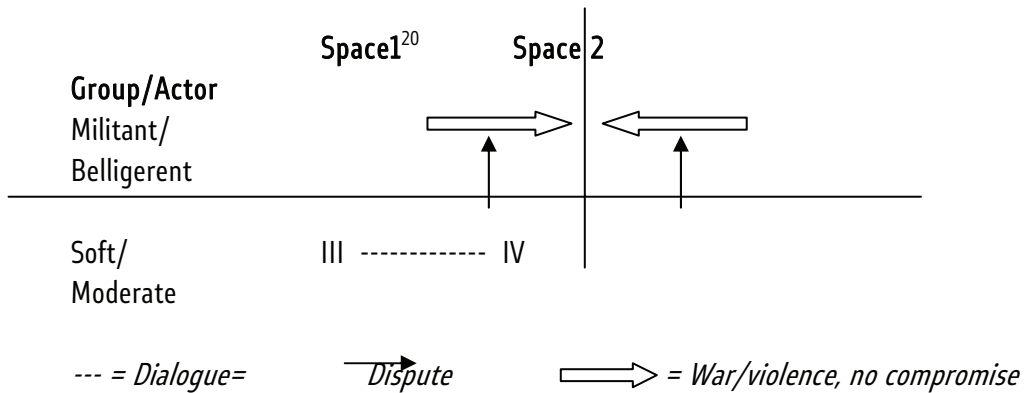
- *Timing*, not least of publicizing that talks are going on, and of results

- *Potential spoilers*, who must be involved in the peace process *somehow*. Spoilers can and often *will* try to revive violence if they are excluded from the peace talks.

- *The opportunity structure:* There are risks and possibilities involved in both pursuing/continuing a violent path, and in abandoning it. Although states as well as terrorist organizations claim to be fighting for long-term goals that cannot be traded off for short-term gains, they also need legitimacy and support among their political core supporters, as well as in the wider community to which they appeal and seek support, and from which they are recruiting cadres. The fact that the public may force the belligerents to the negotiation/mediation table is an underestimated factor.

On this background I will present a model which has been applied before, with success:

**Figure 3. Twospaces x two kinds of actors**



*Comments to figure 3:*

The Alpha actors in figure 2 are now called "Militants/Belligerents", and the betas are called "Soft/Moderate". "Groups" may be nations, communities, organized political or other groups within nations/communities or supra-state actors (NATO, UN etc.). The difference between figure 3 and figure 2 is: In figure 3, symmetric dialogue is considered a realistic option for only one type of actors, *those who recognize one another as equals, and are interested in dialogue*. In times of conflict, this means that *symmetric dialogues* are possible among moderates on both sides of the dividing line, but not between hardliners, and in reality also not between hardliners and "softliners", even though they are members of the same group, sharing important aspects of history, culture, language, nation, religion etc. (i.e., have a shared identity). The difference between models 1 and 3 is that in model 1 betas are passive *onlookers* to Alphas in action, or receivers to their announcements. In model 3 they are *active participants in political processes*, and claim to be heard and respected as political actors on a par with Alpha actors.

<sup>20</sup>In this figure, the concept of "identity" might be substituted for "space": The vertical dimension refers only to the fact that there are belligerent/militant as well as moderate/"soft" actors on both sides of a conflict line. "Soft" or "moderate" actors communicate with/against actors with whom they share many decisive identity markers, such as language, history etc., but they have different attitudes and opinions on war, violence and hence issues related to the ongoing conflict. However, the social space in which they communicate is "bounded" and apparently closed to people outside that space. Therefore it is difficult to communicate with likeminded on "the other side." This is partly due to the conflict itself, which creates imagined community of interests, as well as physical and psychological boundaries which are hard to overcome or perforate.

The lack of realism in carrying out genuine dialogues between “softliners” and “hardliners” is taken into consideration in model 3. This is exactly what model 2 disregards.<sup>21</sup>

Model 3 shows an important aspect of the communication that took place between two kinds of actors on *both sides of the iron curtain* during the cold war: While hawks on both sides dug deeper trenches and built higher walls between the camps, invested ever more in sophisticated military weaponry, thought they could *win* a nuclear (and star) war, and escalated their belligerent propaganda to ever new heights, peace movements in both camps *confronted the cold warriors on their own side*, the war profiteers in their “own” military-industrial-scientific complex, and the duplicity of the talk of “freedom” on the one side and “equality” on the other side. Influential groups of professionals and NGOs more and more explicitly expressed their loyalty to the cause of peace, and war lobbyists and the war industry in the east and west were confronted with the (un)ethical consequences of their ever-more sophisticated weapons. In the west, leaders of the peace movement were subject to surveillance and bullying by intelligence services, police and mass media. In the socialist camp the leaders of peace movements were treated even worse: Gagged, arrested, interrogated, put in house arrest or prison like enemies of the state. However, people on both sides resisted the pressure, visited and met with one another legally or illegally, supported and demonstrated for, and kept up the good dialogue with their peace partners on the other side. From this perspective, the peace movements came out of the cold war as the *winners over the cold war*. I shall now try to apply this model to the ‘war on terror/ism.’

## 7. CAN DIALOGUE WORK ON TERRORISM?

The global/warlike Jihadists have not been winning the battle of “the hearts and minds” of Muslims: An overwhelming majority of the world’s Muslims dissociate themselves from terrorism. Among Muslims who accept terrorism as a means of ‘just war’, most limit their support to *defensive* war, i.e. to local or national defense against states or powers which encroach upon Islamic territory, such as in Palestine or Afghanistan. Very few Muslims defend violence, let alone terror, as a means to expand Islam, or establish a new Khalifate (Esposito and Mogahed, 2007:95), and there is no evidence to support the idea that the

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<sup>21</sup> Imagine a symmetric, relaxed dialogue between Cheney and Al Zawahiri, or Livni/Perez of Israel and Mashaal/Haniyah of the Hamas, searching for a rational solution to their conflict. Possible? Theoretically maybe, but highly unlikely, and therefore excluded from the range of possibilities here. However, dialoguesymmetric encounters between peace actors from both sides of the divide in Israel – Palestine is a fact, and has been so for decades. Such contacts are possible also between peace actors from the West and Afghanistan or Pakistan, although this is limited by terrorism and war itself.

extremists are in a process of “winning” the hearts or respect of Muslims (Pew, 2010:3, 8). This does not imply that fundamentalist Islamist groups are entirely out of step with Muslim way of thinking, or have less support than Western belligerents, in the Muslim world. This is where the myth-symbol complex comes in: Many are prepared to defend their faith or the Prophet by the sword and not only by the tongue, and a minority of extremists may always appeal to, and mobilize on, deep-seated myths and fears of the other. It *does imply* however that there is a difference between defensive Jihadists and offensive ones, that this difference is important, and so is the difference between local, defensive Islamists and Jihadist Salafis (Kepel, 2006) like Al-Qaeda. The latter groups work to expand Islam by the sword, consider Western civilians as legitimate military targets, and hence use terror attacks against unsuspecting civilians worldwide, while groups like Hamas apply terror tactics locally against occupation of a territory they claim the right to. The latter type of groups refer to the right to self-defense according to international law.

But it is also a fact that alienated young Muslims are continuously being recruited in ever more countries, and that they are recruited to extremist organizations by means of two very typical western inventions: The “CNN” effect (immediate TV broadcasting of terrorist attacks) and *the internet*.<sup>22</sup>

In the West, repeated opinion polls have shown that an overwhelming majority among the public were not keen to participate in wars in other foreign countries unless the action were sanctioned by the UN.<sup>23</sup> This resulted in a continuous western majority against the war in Iraq, and also weak support of that in Afghanistan. However, the opinion on terrorists among local populations, such as the Taliban and Al-Qaeda among most groups of Afghans and Pakistanis, is often no more positive than their view of the West. Consequently, there is a potential for mobilization against terror(ism) among the Afghan and Pakistani peoples that has so far not been developed in the service of peace.

*Summing up the evidence*, it is clear enough that the ‘war on terror’ has had a limited effect on terrorism, and the groups it was designed to hunt down and destroy are capable of giving the USA more resistance locally now than in 2001. The total number of terrorist activities observable since 2007, does not (yet) indicate a sustainable reduction in terrorism. Religious guerrilla groups using terrorist tactics usually do not surrender, they can hardly – if at all - be eliminated by physical means (at least within the limits of *jus in*

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<sup>22</sup>A simple Google search provides 60 such sites in a few seconds (checked January 2009). However, the most belligerent sites are not easily available.

<sup>23</sup>In most West-European and even some East-European countries, as well as in most countries around the world, a majority (in many countries 60-90%) were against the invasion of Iraq, and continued to be against long after the invasion. Two exceptions to this were the USA and Israel, where a majority were in favour of the invasions, at least up to 2006. Since 2010, the support for the US war in Afghanistan has declined in the USA, and in 2011 the majority want troops brought home earlier than the determined date.



*bello* and international humanitarian law), and trying to exhaust their forces by blood-letting is a highly uncertain undertaking, which may easily backfire. Modern war history, from Vietnam to the Middle East and Central Asia, indicates that guerilla groups and terror(ist) groups can use pinprick actions successfully in campaigns to blood-let and exhaust a militarily superior enemy: This is because they have a much longer time-horizon than states/large armies, because their war is a lot cheaper in economic terms and because “counter-terror” tactics from a superior power tend to victimize civilians, which only serves to reinforce recruitment to guerrilla terrorist organizations, especially in areas where tribal or religiously motivated honor codes prevail.

This implies that military suppression does not work well against such groups. However, open, symmetric dialogues according to model two have not occurred so far and are not likely to: The identity gap and the gap between the worldviews of these actors are too wide: people with worldviews and perspectives as different as international jihadists and (e.g.) secular Westerners, however open-minded, will hardly find much common ground. Further, between parties/actors with such different identities, the question of *who you are* will easily overshadow the question of *what you think*.

However, large numbers of people, probably the majority on both sides, can find common ground on exactly one point: They want an end to war and belligerence *immediately*, and are prepared to sacrifice a lot to achieve it with non-violent means. Moderate people *can* join forces with moderate people on the other side of the dividing line. They can change their situation as passive onlookers and potential victims of violence, and become actors in the struggle to stop an ongoing madness. This implies that the battle for peace is a sharp battle over ideas *within* each of the religions, cultures or civilizations over which the belligerents are fighting. This is where model 3 may be a useful tool.

## 8. CONCLUDING REMARKS.

The decline in major conflicts and fatalities worldwide since 1990 can be partly explained by an escalation of third party mediation, and a strong escalation of international peace activism by NGOs, UN Organizations, UN peace making and peace keeping missions (Mack (ed.), 2005; PRIO, 2006; Mack, 2010, Jones & Libicki (Rand), 2008).<sup>24</sup> Such approaches have, so far, hardly been tried on the ongoing war between states and terrorist groups. However, there are some notable experiences that should not be overlooked.

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<sup>24</sup>Two other factors that have contributed substantially to this development, are 1) the establishment of international tribunals and trials for war crimes and violations of humanitarian law, culminating in the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC), and 2) the decline in the number and impact of authoritarian regimes (2 out of 3 have disappeared since 1970s). Despite their importance for the broader discussion to which this paper relates, those two factors are outside the scope and focus of this paper.

In Iraq, mediation led to agreements on division of territories, mutual respect, peaceful interaction and power balance among Iraqi groups that were fighting for control over territories in a situation, in which the state had virtually lost control over large sections of its territory. This resulted in de-escalation of what *might have resulted in a full-scale civil war*, and possibly further de-stabilization of the whole Middle East. So far, the wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which may be decisive for the future development of terrorism, have developed into a quagmire, rather like Iraq did in the period 2003-2007. This is partly due to the fact that terrorism in both places is inspired by religious convictions, and such terrorist groups can hardly be beaten by military means, as their goals are many, wide, amorphous, and often leaning towards the extreme. Although violence tends to subside when concrete political conflicts are solved, i.e. when a form of political settlement is found, *or* when insurgents using terrorist tactics are integrated into ordinary political processes, this is not necessarily the case with religious terrorism (Jones & Libicki, op. cit.). Rational choice models of conflict resolution or conflict settlement do not work well in such cases, because myth-symbol complexes feed fear and anger (Kaufmann, 2001, op.cit.). In other words, cultural codes partly shape the preferences on which the rational-choice models rely. The cultural and normative frames, in which choices and arguments are embedded, are best understood by people who share the same basic codes and identities as those who exploit these myth-symbol complexes for belligerent purposes. Hence, cultural insiders are the ones who can rock belligerent actors in such conflicts.

An often forgotten lesson from the cold war is the way NGOs, especially peace movements, women's movements, religious movements and environmental movements *on both sides of the iron curtain perforated and undermined the negative attitudes* that spurred, motivated and provided legitimacy and *popular support for the maintenance of the iron curtain* among the constituencies on both sides. If it were not for the work of the peace groups, *the mental iron curtain* might have foiled the fall of the political iron curtain, prolonged the life of the cultural and social iron curtain, and survived them both for a long time. This fact may have been underestimated by the protagonists of "Realpolitik". Dialogue combined with dispute, as shown in figure 3, can contribute to undermining the kind of blindness following on from "Realpolitik", by undermining the stereotypes, enemy images and (blind) fear on which the hawks feed.

Model three refers to experiences by peace movements during the cold war, to experiences that have led to an increasing number of negotiated settlements of hard conflicts, to methods that contribute to de-legitimizing violence and terror methods, and to de-legitimizing the *culture of impunity* that has been a companion of (civil) war and terror at all times until quite recently (Mack, 2005).

Whether this kind of approach can also contribute to bringing down global, violent Jihadist terrorism and (Western) state-/counter-terrorism, we will not know until religious leaders and others in the Muslim world who have an impact on potential recruits of Islamist terrorist organizations give an unambiguous message to these organizations. The message of Western electorates brought some of the main Western protagonists for war down from power. However, the hope for *change* that came with the US election in 2008 will be undermined if the threat-perceptions, especially fear of Islamist terrorist attacks, do not subside among the public in the West. The messages from Muslim-to-Muslim must be as unambiguous and clear-cut as the messages that were sent to the Western hawks by the Western electorates during recent years. If the threat-perceptions and images of Muslims as dangerous are re-invigorated by renewed terror campaigns, and especially if there is one more "big" attack in the West, peace actors all over the world can only hold their breath.

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