

The War on Terror: Results and Costs in Europe and Worldwide

19th ISODARCO Winter Course

January 8-15, 2006
Andalo, Trento, Italy

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Almost five years after the terrorist attack on New York in September 2001, which marked the start of what many refer to as the “War on Terror”, the 19th ISODARCO Winter Course was dedicated to the evaluation of the costs and results of the worldwide measures to limit terrorist violence. The 2006 course, which also coincided with the 40th anniversary of ISODARCO, was held in Andalo, Trento, Italy, and it was the sixth time an ISODARCO course addressed the problem of non-state violence.

The course offered more than 78 participants from 22 countries and 3 different continents the opportunity to discuss openly a range of topics related to international security. In particular these included an internationally acceptable definition of terrorism necessary as a basis for international law and conventions, adopted countermeasures for terrorism and their consequences for civil society, the issue of humanitarian aid provided by military forces, risks of nuclear terrorism and the nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan, the role of computers and the Internet in international terrorism and the role of international treaties and organisations.

Fourteen distinguished lecturers and panelists accepted the invitation and challenge to share their knowledge and views on the above mentioned topics with a highly motivated, multidisciplinary and international audience. Among them were Alexei Arbatov (Carnegie Moscow Center, Russia), Nadia Arbatova (Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Russia), Sergei Batsanov (Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, Switzerland), Reuben Brigety (George Mason University, USA), Francesco Calogero (University of Rome “La Sapienza”, Italy), David Carlton (University of Warwick, U.K.), Matthew Evangelista (Cornell University, USA), Giampiero Giacomello (University of Bologna, Italy), Catherine Kelleher (Brown University, USA), John King (Webster University, Switzerland), Zia Mian (Princeton University, USA), Alessandro Silj (Italian Social Science Council, Italy), Takao Takahara (Meijigakuin University/Hope College, Japan), Sharon Weiner (American University, USA).

The course was introduced by Matthew Evangelista explaining its main topics and themes. He addressed the development of a working definition of terrorism, different root

causes of terrorism and international conventions on terrorism. There is growing consensus over a working definition of terrorism that comprises both state and sub-state terrorism and that puts emphasis on the terrorization of a harmless population with the aim to make an organisation or a state do or not do certain things.

A following session addressed the West's road to 9/11 and the report by the 9/11 commission that primarily addresses the situation in the U.S. and in particular terrorism that is related to Al Qaeda. A further question addressed what would be the most appropriate response to terrorism: a military response or one of law enforcement. In particular religious terrorism has aspects that are difficult to deal with properly such as the fact that many faiths may be involved, that it has no territorial base and that it aims at establishing a divine rule of some form. These are all aspects that make negotiations with terrorist groups very complicated. On the other hand, terrorism also needs to be seen in perspective because the perception of threat is magnified by fear. The real number of casualties is on average relatively limited.

Several international conventions that have been adopted in Europe to counteract terrorism were discussed. Their introduction has had a direct impact on the Islamic communities in Europe. The conventions have led in several countries to the monitoring of speeches by imams, close surveillance of people from Muslim communities by police forces and deportation of people suspected of terrorist activity or the removal of their acquired citizenship. Although understandable from one point of view, these measures might be counterproductive when they lead to a general feeling among the Muslim community of being unwelcome. In the European Union the Muslim community forms ca. 5% of the population.

A further session addressed a new phenomenon in the "War on Terrorism" which is the involvement of the military in the distribution of humanitarian aid. This involvement sometimes gives the military a tactical advantage and helps in obtaining the good will of the local population. On the other hand, it also compromises the neutrality and impartiality of civilian aid workers and therefore may threaten the whole humanitarian enterprise. The latter is also reflected in an increasing number of civil aid workers who are been taken hostage both in Afghanistan and Iraq while being accused of providing information to the intelligence agencies of the occupying forces.

The potential cooperation between Europe and Russia on the reduction of terrorism was extensively discussed in a number of lectures. Many lessons can be learned from the approach followed in the Western Balkans and Turkey. This holds also for the military approach that has been adopted to tackle terrorism in Chechnia, Afghanistan and Iraq. A further session was dedicated to transatlantic cooperation, the role of NATO in the "War on Terror" and its adaptation to these new developments.

A topic of considerable discussion in the course was the conflict between India and Pakistan. In this region terrorism is not the only problem; the possession of nuclear weapons by both countries and the high tension between them concerning the Kashmir area are of very great concern. In the past 100 years the political heroes of the Muslim

world had mainly secular aims, but more recently political Islam has emerged in Pakistan, addressing poor people in urban cities while promoting strong nationalistic ideals. The film “Crossing the Lines: Kashmir, Pakistan and India (2004)” by Hoodboy and Mian, that was shown at the course, gave a very realistic perspective on the actual situation and how this is perceived and experienced by the population in the three areas.

The topic of nuclear arms raises also the question of the risks of their use by terrorist groups. A serious proposal to reduce such risk has been put forward and consists of a substantial reduction of the stocks of highly enriched uranium in particular in Russia and in the U.S. This is technically feasible and its implementation is mainly a matter of political will of the countries involved. Further efforts to reduce this risk and that of the use of biological and chemical weapons by terrorists were discussed in the context of the collaboration between the U.S. and Russia to increase the security of the storage of such weapons and material. The session on nuclear arms included a presentation on the status of non-proliferation regimes and the difficulties currently encountered. Some of these difficulties can be explained by the fact that the nuclear weapon states never demonstrated a real commitment to nuclear disarmament. This reduced the incentive of other states to adhere to the non-proliferation treaty.

The role of computers and the Internet in international terrorism was addressed in a session on cyber terrorism. Terrorist groups use the Internet mainly as a means for propaganda for their extreme ideas with the aim to reach, convince and instruct those people who are susceptible to their arguments, and, in the case of Islamist groups, willing to join what they see as a holy war against non-Muslims.

A special session was dedicated to the memory of Joseph Rotblat and Ruth Adams, both of whom have played such an important role in the Pugwash organisation of which ISODARCO forms the teaching arm. Joseph Rotblat was one of the founding members of the organisation and dedicated most of his life to convince politicians in the East and the West of the incredible risks of nuclear weapons. Ruth Adams, who, along with Rotblat, attended the first Pugwash meeting in 1957, became editor of the renowned “Bulletin of Atomic Scientists”, one of the few scientific journals that escaped censorship in the former U.S.S.R., and that made it possible for nuclear scientists from the East and the West to continue a discussion on the risks of such weapons. As a leading figure in the MacArthur Foundation, Adams also played a major role in fostering a new generation of scholars and policy experts to address problems of international peace and security. Together with many others Rotblat and Adams made a substantial contribution to moderate the conflict between the U.S. and the former U.S.S.R. and to prevent the use of nuclear weapons during the Cold War. Both passed away last year, but their aims are shared by many people who see it as their task to continue to work for the removal of all nuclear arms and, in the longer term, the abolition of war.

The closing session offered an interesting panel discussion by several participants who provided a stimulating set of new ideas and potential future themes for international courses such as ISODARCO. They highlighted the need for continuing international discussions between knowledgeable students and lecturers from a great variety of

countries, cultures and scientific disciplines.

In conclusion, this course covered many issues concerning the “War on Terror” from many different perspectives, in particular from a historical, political, and social perspective. It covered also a number of the technical aspects of risks and the likelihood of the use of nuclear and biochemical weapons by terrorists and the risks for human rights of the many countermeasures that have been introduced in many countries. As in previous years, the lively and well-informed participation of the international audience in the discussion sessions following each lecture and in the roundtable sessions formed a valuable contribution to the unique atmosphere in which these delicate topics could be openly discussed among students and professionals from so many different countries.