

The Global War on Terrorism in the Middle East ó Epistemological Questions for Peace and Conflict Studies*

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Abstract: The paper puts into focus the way terrorist and anti/counter-terrorist operations in the framework of the Global War on Terrorism (GwoT) in the Middle East (ME) fit into the theoretical provisions of peace and conflict studies. General conceptual and methodological capacities and deficits in the field are discussed. Specifically, the prevalent understanding of the concepts military conflict, conflict de-escalation, and nation-building (conflict transformation) is addressed. First, the territorial limits, immediate participation, and possible physical differentiation of combatants and non-combatants in the traditional military hostilities counters with the "non-territoriality", "invisibility" of the combat techniques and increasing amalgamation of civil and military elements on the battlefields of the GwoT. Second, the notion of military de-escalation, usually associated with "the moment of hurting stalemate", implicating temporality of conflicts, contrasts the ever-changing conflict dynamics and flexibility of combat strategies locally, regionally, and globally. Third, the policy of (neo-liberal) nation-building, enforced as an intended transformative conflict strategy under the banner of the GwoT in the ME, seems to have doubtful effect on the continuing self-bombing attacks/local insurgency or secret punishment operations thereafter. Examining these three established terms is to support us in our assessment of the ontological nature of contemporary wars and world hegemonies alike, heavily incorporated in the paradigm of "security" and "irregularity". Both the technical and political incentives for the participants in the GwoT have shown that the concepts of "protracted conflict" and "conflict resolution" from the traditional peace studies and of "structures of inequality and oppression" from the critical peace studies should be brought into the terrorism investigation in the discipline more explicitly. Critical IR, political theory and geography perspectives are namely to mediate in this effort. It should be more about conflict resolution, all-embracing disarmament, critical foreign policy, and global justice analysis.

Keywords: War and peace, terrorism, international conflict, theory of international relations, globalization;

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Introduction

The versatile phenomenon of international/inter-regional terrorism and the anti/counter-terrorism measures against it have been occupying a remarkable research space since September 11, 2001, dominated by the strategic security, traditional terrorism or international law studies. Nevertheless, the topic has gradually turned into a heuristic matter of survey in the peace and conflict studies. However, it still holds an enormous inquiry potential for the conceptual and methodological development in the realm.

The article, therefore, draws on the critical and traditional provisions in the field. Contrary to the prevalent methodologies in international law and security studies, the peace and conflict studies allow us to subject any military conflict to a complex sociological analysis and to take into account the power relations determining its evolution. Being trans-border in their implementation, demonstrative in their performance, and directed against regional or world power symbols (presence), the acts of international/inter-regional terrorism, such as those committed by al-Qaida, the Haqqani network, the Taliban etc., have been dialectically confronted by costly, massive, multinational military and intelligence operations across countries. It is in the light of this socio-political constellation that the character, the logic of unfolding and termination, and the systemic implications of the Global War on Terrorism in the Middle East have been addressed in the text.

Still, the exposition strives to reconstruct the project of the Global War on Terrorism in the Middle East as a specific analytical challenge for the peace and conflict studies in a globalizing era. It is its *perpetuity*, *de-territorialization*, and *post-sovereignty*, in particular, that have added new nuances to the global/international, regional, and local power allocations presupposing the international/inter-regional terrorist (local insurgency) and anti/counter-terrorist activities in the Middle East.

In this regard, the article pleads for further self-reflected epistemological enrichment of the peace and conflict studies through external reference points, including particular world politics¹, political theory², and critical geography³ contributions. This kind of theoretical grounding is not to divert us from the traditional problematic of war, more so in the face of its victims. It is to enable us to deconstruct its possible ideological prerequisites and address its militarizing consequences in and beyond the Middle East. Similarly, it is to encourage us to contemplate the character of current world and regional hegemonies, as an in-depth investigative necessity in the field.

This text should be considered first and foremost a theoretical endeavour. Existing theoretical potentials and research gaps in peace and conflict studies are to be pointed out. The main focus will be laid on the anti/counter-terrorism operations in Afghanistan due to their being the longest and broadest mission of the Global War on Terrorism in the Middle East.

The exposé opens with a general elaboration on the integral methodological competence within the peace and conflict studies in relation to international/inter-regional terrorism and anti/counter-terrorism interventions alike. Against the backdrop of predominant anti/counter-terrorism strategies in Afghanistan, epistemological as well as ontological questions with respect to the developed theoretical apparatus have been raised. The importance of particular traditional thinking (*protracted conflict*, *conflict resolution*, partly *conflict transformation*), as well as the critical theorizing about terrorism and anti/counter-terrorism in the discipline, have been underscored.

The article further goes on to suggest reasons why three of the most frequently applied terms to the empirical examination and theoretical classification of the terrorist and anti/counter-terrorist mobilizations in the peace and conflict studies - military conflict (operation), conflict de-escalation, and nation-building (conflict transformation) - could and should be reviewed in

connection with the above. Here, their most common usage in the subject area will serve as a starting point of the analysis.

In conclusion, an attempt has been embarked on to delineate certain broadly oriented discussion points in terms of the conceptual necessities in peace and conflict studies, in light of the Global War on Terrorism. Indeed, the intention of this exposition is not to offer an exhaustive terminological update for the domain with regard to terrorism and anti/counter-terrorism activities but to stimulate an agenda for future interdisciplinary critical debates on grounds of endogenous research paradigms.

Terrorism and anti/counter-terrorism in the theory of peace and conflict studies

As an important first step towards rethinking the theoretical capabilities of the peace and conflict studies in reference to the Global War on Terrorism in the Middle East, a brief overview of inherent expertise in the field thereon will be undertaken. In this sphere, the survey of terrorism's manifestations and anti/counter-terrorism measures has found place mostly in numerous regional/local empirical conflict case studies and has hardly been an explicit subject of theoretical research. Notably, in the available theoretical summaries, terrorism and anti/counter-terrorism have generally been equated with a (tactical) element of conflict behavior where (at least) two sides, state and non-state powers, are deemed relevant for investigation⁴. Under this (Weberian) defining perspective, terrorist (and anti/counter-terrorist) behavior has clearly been comprehended in coherence with a traceable, depictive, bilateral or multilateral, conflict situation, not as an arbitrary, irrational, individual or group conduct.

In that sense, terrorism and anti/counter-terrorism have also been perceived as only one among various, and possibly evolving, conflict strategies directed at the adversary, ranging from violent hostilities, through negotiations, diplomacy, and confidence-building measures to the initiation of integration processes between the warring parties. (Deep-rooted) conflicts, including those marked by terrorist and anti/counter-terrorist violence, are thus transformable and essentially resolvable ó an assumption that goes beyond the bifurcated legitimacy/non-legitimacy, state/non-state, victory/defeat debate over terrorist and anti/counter-terrorist activities prevailing in the strategic security, traditional terrorism or international law studies, the mainstream media or many official political stipulations. Consequently, many conflict and peace scholars doubt the effectiveness of suppressive or deterrent military anti/counter-terrorist sanctions to the detriment of the launch of a profound, long-lasting conflict modification extinguishing terrorism.

Nonetheless, although progressively gaining ground in the discipline in the aftermath of the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon in 2001 and the subsequently announced Global War on Terrorism, the exploration of the specific category of international/inter-regional terrorism and the nature of anti/counter-terrorist undertakings is still lagging behind in a considerable bulk of the writings in the realm. To a degree, it was the critical terrorism studies through their manifold approach towards the definition of terrorism and the exploration of its root causes, strongly relating to previous structural and identity-based conflict implications formulated in the peace and conflict studies that played a significant role in confronting such trends⁵.

Remarkably, the two central divisions of peace research, here broadly identified as traditional and critical, could well attribute different nuances to the ontological picture of international/inter-regional terrorism (origin, dynamic, cessation).

The traditional branch of peace studies is the one that has dominated the field at large since its inception in the 1950s and 1960s. To put it roughly, following Meyers⁶, it mainly focuses on the intra- and inter-societal conflict and peace relations of the actors on the international scene. Central for their conflict behavior turns out to be the subjective perception of their interests and their adversaries. The nature of the conflict is therefore symmetrical. The ultimate aim of conflict management processes consists either in reaching a cease-fire and/or a political agreement on the redistribution of resources (conflict settlement) or in the reciprocal adjustment of the interests of the conflict parties based on mutually recognized human needs and anxieties naturally

underpinning all forms of violence (structural, cultural, direct) in the (protracted) conflict constellations (conflict resolution)⁷.

The critical peace research, on the other hand, especially its older generation⁸, is more or less on the decline at the present time under gradually occurring radical deconstruction tendencies towards subjective relativization of meanings in the discipline⁹. Characteristically, the representatives of that generation have been very interested in the structural causes of international conflicts, no less than in class and world system paradigms. Objective class antagonisms and violent asymmetrical power structure configurations have been considered the main conflict-breeding rationale. Conflict solutions have been normatively sought in the overcoming of the inequalities of (global) social system structures that foster collective aggressiveness, in the abolition of war as a means of politics, and the removal of structural violence as a source of oppression and exploitation¹⁰.

Building to some extent on elements of both divisions of peace studies, the authors in the field occupied expressly with international terrorism may vary in their approaches. A considerable number among them sees the origins of activities of terrorist groups on the international scene through the prism of asymmetric, protracted, intra-state conflicts, where political solutions are to be advocated. The international and national policy-makers are considered the main actors in charge of combating terrorism whereas unarmed activists, civil society organizations, and political parties operating within the larger socio- or ethno-political constituency of the armed groups should have an assisting role in the peace-making processes. Activities ranging from engaging the non-state armed groups, through third-party mediation and facilitation, to fostering a culture of *soft power* communication and dialogue are recommended instead of the currently preferred securitizing anti/counter-terrorism policies¹¹.

A rather encompassing approach towards combating (international/inter-regional) terrorism contains the paradigm of cosmopolitan conflict resolution of Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall¹² based on the theoretical provisions of the analysis of deep-rooted intra-state conflicts. In essence, it stands for the integral redefining of those conflict features which result in international terrorist mobilizations. Local structural (power-sharing, development), perceptual and behavioral conflict elements are thus to be worked on in the course of a long-term conflict transformation. More precisely, the predominantly actor-oriented, (liberal) state reform prescribing components of this paradigm are systematized by its authors in four dimensions: prevention (reducing proneness to terrorism by means of strengthening the capacities of the states to avoid protracted armed conflict), persuasion (reducing motivation of terrorist active groups and support for them among the majority of the people), denial (defeating hardliners through military means), and coordination of the efforts between different international organizations and/or governments¹³.

Beyond the framing of protracted intra-state conflict, the model of cosmopolitan conflict resolution tends to draw attention explicitly, though with reservation, to the international/global influences in the instigation and/or conciliation of the assumed *global jihadism*¹⁴. At this point the authors refer to factors, such as foreign political and economic domination of one country by another, backed by corrupt local governments, the political marginalization of young unemployed people (e.g. the tendency to internationally disregard the results of democratically organized elections where Islamist parties receive seats in the national parliaments), the asymmetric positioning of Western countries with respect to countries in the Middle East¹⁵ or the relations between the diaspora, here culturalistically defined in generalizing terms, of national populations which perpetrators of terrorist acts are identified with, and the governments in the diaspora places¹⁶.

One of the rare steps towards transcending the inter/intra-state analytical perspective of international/inter-regional terrorism and the measures conducted in the course of the Global War on Terrorism is to be found in Simon Sottasø's thesis¹⁷ on the interlocking of local and global agendas for integration and segregation in the general context of an ongoing (neo-)liberal project for global hegemony by way of the religion factor. Working in the tradition of critical peace

studies, the author relates to systemic structural (hierarchical, economically underpinned structures between North and South) and sociocultural (hegemony-sustaining notions of order and institutions that mobilize consent through co-optation and not by means of direct coercion in line with Antonio Gramsci's thinking) paradigms from the international relations and political theory, respectively, in order to analyze terrorism/conflicts in a post-national world. Significantly, the post-national sociopolitical reality is understood as one that only selectively integrates parts of the national societies in the (neo-)liberal global system, be these societies Western or non-Western. The particularistic territorial components of that system are not to be completely ignored¹⁸.

In concrete terms, with the entering of the neo-conservative government of G.W. Bush into office, the attacks on September 11, 2001, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, ten years after the socialist bloc's crumbling and the ascent of liberal institutional governance and the introduction or reaffirmation of market regulation techniques in many countries, the image of a new global war (consensus) became leading for the political agenda: "the free world" against "the totalitarian Islam"¹⁹. On a global level, a liberal coalition has been formed in the "war against Islamic terrorism"²⁰. On a national level, rebel (terrorist) groups have been contained militarily by local elites connected to the leading states in the coalition. According to Sottas, Pakistan and Afghanistan are to be pointed out as one such example. Contrary to this trend, a religious project of a collective war of liberation against the "infidels" has apparently taken shape on a global level. In this framework, religiously advertising insurgent groups have been organized locally and regionally in order to fight local elites sharing the liberal consensus. Seen this way, global violent structures have been considered to be self-reproducing through the global liberal hegemony itself²¹.

Still, the theoretical horizon of international/inter-regional terrorism and anti/counter-terrorism is not systematically exhausted or fully taken into account into all divisions of peace and conflict studies. A comprehensive analytical framework, bringing together the traditional (protracted conflict; structural, behavioral, cultural violence; conflict resolution; conflict transformation) and critical (global, regional marginalization) approaches to terrorism is yet to be identified in the discipline in future discussions. Beyond that, closer attention should be paid to the dynamic of the (post-sovereign) political and social dialectics of terrorist and anti/counter-terrorist operations. In a post-Westphalian global era additional investigation of the consequences of the application of the neo-liberal top-down nation-building model as a conflict management technique is needed, favored in the official political circles.

Rethinking the notions of military conflict, conflict de-escalation and nation-building (conflict transformation)

Assuming the general theoretical provisions and demands formulated before, the article will continue by elaborating on the contents of three of the concrete terms utilized in the peace and conflict studies to dissect (international) military conflicts with reference to the projected format and the realities of the Global War on Terrorism.

Military conflict (operation)

Starting with the notion of military conflict (operation), it would be important to expand its conceptual framing following up on the affinity of a considerable part of the traditional section in the peace and conflict studies to depict inter- and intra-state skirmishes or violent competitions between state and non-state actors (asymmetrical wars) in objectified battlefield parameters. As an indication of this theoretical necessity, it should be noted that the territorial limitations, immediate human participation or the operation of international rules for conducting war in the shape of the Geneva conventions counter with the attributes of "de-territoriality, invisibility, and non-transparency of the opposing combat techniques on the terrain of the Global War on Terrorism after the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and of Iraq in 2003. Critical trans-national social and hegemony analytical facets are not to be ignored with regard to these new tendencies.

As for territoriality, in the theory of traditional military hostilities the term has been utilized in relation to several conflict aspects. These are: (1) the topographic expansion of a bilateral or multilateral military campaign (a fixed physical ground of a military engagement); (2) the formal political characteristics of the conflict parties (being state or non-state players, exercising or not sovereignty over a territory, performing rights and obligations under international law); (3) the geostrategic resources at the disposal of the warring sides (tactical field advantages, access to (locally) derived material or financial resources, neighbouring allies, etc.); (4) the issues at the heart of the dispute (goals of obtaining land or legal authority over the use of land)²². Typically, all four systematizations of territoriality have been assigned to the tangible coordinate system and maneuverable power structure of the conflict.

For its territorial scope, the Global War on Terrorism has lastingly and effectively spread out to many different (sovereign) areals. A few to mention are a center organized by the U.S. Joint Special Operations Command for targeting militants across the Potomac River, the Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti for covert operations across the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, drone strikes in Somalia and Pakistan²³, providing over flight, landing or basing rights in Central Asian states²⁴, shipping American ammunition and other supplies via rail from ports in Northern Europe to Central Asia²⁵ through Russian soil, the unprecedented level of international intelligence-sharing, the simultaneous introduction of biometric passports and drastic increase of funds for the modernization and reinforcement of the border control facilities in many different countries, etc. In response, locally and regionally based insurgency²⁶ and terrorist activities have sprawled over the Middle East and other states. We are thus witnessing a variation of the number and political nature of participants in the course of the current war against terrorism.

Signally, a particular focus has been put on non-territory-related conflict means, targeting citizens and non-citizens internally and trans-nationally. Some of these are the Military Order of November 13, 2001, of the U.S. President George W. Bush, The Patriot Act of October 26, 2001, of the U.S. Congress, the recently extended Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act by President Obama which sets the stage for the monitoring of domestic phone calls and emails as long as one of the parties in the communication is outside the United States²⁷, the renewal of the National Defense Authorization Act in the USA with its controversial last year's provision allowing the United States to detain suspects anywhere in the world without charge or trial²⁸, and the dubious internal surveillance programs introduced by other governments. The adversary has consequently been treated beyond the duality of state and non-state allegiance, but from the biopolitical perspective of showing loyalty/disloyalty to a certain political order of control. In addition, for the Coalition of the Willing, its regional allies and their organized armed opponents alike, the modern media technologies have turned out to play a crucial strategic role in conveying political messages beyond territorial limits as well.

In parallel to this, the Global War on Terrorism has been much less about an acquisition or subduing of a territory than about winning the hearts and minds of a population. Since no later than around 2006, an attempt has been undertaken to redirect the allied strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan towards the logic of counterinsurgency (COIN)²⁹. One of the most distinct expressions of this new doctrine is to be found in the Field Manual 3-24 of the U.S. Army/Marine Corps³⁰ which indicates the provision of political legitimacy as the primary objective for the presence of foreign troops in those two countries. Both military and non-military instruments were considered important for the systematical ascertainment of the population³¹. It was thought useful to perceive local insurgents as criminals, thereby enabling the local government, supported by foreign troops, to win a major legitimacy leap. Subsidiarily, a functioning judicial system was needed in accordance with domestic cultural values and practices³².

In effect, the implementation of COIN in Afghanistan has been accompanied by the dispatch of embedded anthropologists in the framework of the Human Terrain System of the U.S. Army. Here, the instrumental command over the verifiable, essentialized and orientalized variable culture is similar to the mechanics of a decoding process and has been treated as the outset of a safe transition to a manageable conflict environment. In its origin, such approach lays upon the logic that social adaptations can be externally conducted³³. Interestingly, in their strategic

response the Taliban in Afghanistan or Pakistan as well as other insurgent groups are decisively striving to intimidate and choreograph the local political and social order. Literally, their fighters are difficult to differentiate from the civil population in most cases³⁴.

Besides de-territoriality, the combat actions of the Global War on Terrorism tend to characterize themselves more and more through invisibility. Since the fall of 2001, the use of unnoticeable unmanned aircraft systems (UAS)/drones by the U.S. military, together with artificial intelligence technologies, has been growing resolutely³⁵. There is neither a direct physical connection between the drone and its ground operator, sitting in a container in the United States, nor can the unmanned machine operating at a height of thousands of kilometers be discernible for the ones who turn out to be under its attack.

In their own way, through intense reliance on the surprising effect of the use of improvised explosive devices, the insurgents' campaigns detach themselves from the guerilla, militia or warlord-tactics as classical military strategies. They function more like a potent psychological instrument of political violence³⁶.

By the same token, the flexibility and invisibility of the politics of the Global War on Terrorism incarnate grey zones within and grave contradictions to established international/national juridical rules. They produce a serious degree of non-transparency. It is a war where international laws of war have been suspended under the banner of military emergency for more than ten years, and internationally non-accountable (private) actors have been involved in military hostilities. It has been primarily fought at the individual discretion of the White House against individual suspects, categorized as detainees or enemies, not as civilians, combatants or criminals under the provisions of the reigning international or national law.

Beginning with the obscure interpretation and applying the status of the unlawful combatants to the detainees in Guantanamo and their treatment outside the international humanitarian law by President Bush, domestic (constitutional) law or human rights law³⁷, continuing with the extraordinary rendition programs under both Bush and Obama administrations³⁸, the confidential interrogation/torture techniques at Abu Ghraib, Bagram, Dark prisons or other places, and coming to the next-generation targeting list called the disposition matrix, containing the names of terrorist suspects on the basis of sealed indictments and clandestine operations³⁹, the legal status of the individuals, pursued or captured during the Global War on Terrorism, has been radically erased⁴⁰. They are the object of a pure de facto rule⁴¹, entirely removed from the law and from juridical oversight⁴².

The same treatment is extended to the abundantly deployed private military contractors at each stage and level of the anti/counter-terrorism measures, including for committing torture. Their only international regulation attempted to date has been the Montreux Document on pertinent international legal obligations and good practices for states related to operations of private military and security companies during armed conflict⁴³. The Document remains a voluntary kept set of recommendations with unclear effect. The use of unmanned aircraft vehicles (drones), for its part, falls under the terms of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), an informal political agreement among thirty-three countries. The MTCR is not a treaty and does not impose any legally binding obligations on the Partners. Export licensing decisions are primarily made by individual countries according to their national export control laws and regulations, and not as a group. The CIA's participation in most of the secret programs enumerated above falls under national, however doubtful, and not international scrutiny either.

Military de-escalation

Against this background, a review of the notion of military de-escalation is to be attempted as well. In the prevailing traditional section of peace and conflict literature the military de-escalation has been correlated with the moment of hurting stalemate. At such point in time alternative unilateral means of (rationally) achieving a satisfactory result are blocked and the parties feel that

they are in an uncomfortable and costly predicament⁴⁴. However, keeping in mind the already addressed trend towards öincognizabilityö of the anti/counter-terrorist and insurgency operations in the Middle East, the traditional theoretical interpretation of the military de-escalation as a defeat by military means appears to be elusive.

Tracing back the enforcement of the military intervention in Afghanistan, the initially attained military victory over the Taliban turned the presence of the foreign troops in the country into a non-exhaustive source of further military clashes. It led the warring parties to constantly re-organize and qualitatively re-formulate their strategies, always staying present on the battlefield. During the unfolding of the Afghanistan mission, COIN was introduced and civil-military components of control were added to the use of conventional military means. As illustrated above, extra jihadist cells and U.S. commando centers dispersed across the Middle East as well. There are four stages to be identified in the course of the Afghanistan intervention, in accordance with Schetter and Prinz⁴⁵.

After identifying the Taliban as a main ally of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida after September 11, 2001, the first phase of the intervention (2001-2002) was meant to overturn their rule by deploying combat air-raids. The Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) was initiated, gradually spilling over a number of territories. The local militias of the Northern Alliance were logistically supported and expected to take over the positions of the Taliban. At the beginning of November, 2001, the resistance of the Taliban broke down and they retreated to the inaccessible border regions to Pakistan and southern Afghanistan⁴⁶.

During the second phase of the intervention (2002-2003) a plurality of local warlords were expeditious in grabbing power in the power vacuum created in the country. Heterogenous military structures, objectives, and courses of action were developed. Two divergent military missions were put into effect. On the one hand, the political reconstruction of Afghanistan was to be militarily safeguarded in the shape of peacekeeping. The terrorists were to be defeated. In January 2002, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was launched by NATO to guard the work of the Afghani transition government, concentrating its presence chiefly on Kabul. The OEF, on the other hand, was little by little passing into a ground operation dominated by the American Special Forces. The South and South-East of Afghanistan were sifted through region by region. Because of poor cooperation with Afghan partners and Pakistani border officers, the difficulty in detecting the Taliban sympathizers, and the mounting discouragement among the civil population as a result of the many casualties, the Taliban were in a position to move to the Afghan-Pakistani border region and to re-organize themselves in the spring of 2002⁴⁷.

After the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the U.S. troops became bound to the military campaign there. NATO was put in charge of the ISAF command whereby a considerable part of the OEF troops were integrated into ISAF. In 2006, ISAF extended its mandate over Southern and Eastern Afghanistan as well. All this led to the tighter involvement of the ISAF troops in the battle against the insurgents. At that time, 30 000 to 40 000 ISAF troops and 12 000 OEF men had their presence on the ground. The limits between ISAF and OEF had already started to blur in 2004 with the establishment of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) over the whole country. In fact, under the collective term of öcivil-military cooperationö the PRTs were partially entrusted with civil tasks like school building, distribution of humanitarian aid, etc. In reality, the implementation and legitimation of such steps took ground only sporadically and not in a systematical manner, which produced extra frustration and disappointment among the population. Through intensified targeted attacks of the Taliban, including suicidal ones, such reconstruction plans came to a standstill first in the South- and Southeast of Afghanistan, and since 2007 in the rest of the territory as well. Under these circumstances, the USA increased their air strikes⁴⁸. Often, the Taliban were the ones to secure a minimal degree of security and judicial practices⁴⁹.

The doubtfulness of the theoretical bringing together of the notion of military de-escalation and military supremacy in light of the Global War on Terrorism comes to the fore also in its fourth phase. Upon taking office in 2009, the new President Barack Obama announced a

surge of the U.S. forces in Afghanistan of up to 50 000 troops. Around 130 000 ISAF/OEF soldiers plus 120 000 private security contractors were stationed in Afghanistan two years later. Currently, the full withdrawal of the American soldiers from Afghanistan in 2014 is being discussed among Washington and Kabul with several thousand soldiers remaining after that time. The surge was accompanied by the resolute orientation of the foreign strategy in Afghanistan towards COIN. One aspect of this transformation manifested itself in the more offensive treatment of insurgents. The targeted killing of Taliban middle level leaders gained prominence. Another focus was put on the training of the Afghan police forces and the adaptation of the operational culture of the foreign soldiers while interacting with the local population. Third, the installation and functioning of structures of governance was addressed. Many NATO soldiers and Afghan civilians lost their lives as a result of this strategically readjustment. The number of the Taliban attacks against representative targets in Kabul has grown as well as the number of cases of Taliban infiltration into the Afghan security forces. The developments in Afghanistan after 2006 were a clear sign of the uneasy cohabitation of military and civil intervention techniques (see below), more so against the background of the degree of foreign military control and occupation⁵⁰.

The dubious theoretical interpretation of the notion of de-escalation through the paradigm of a military solution to a conflict against the background of the Global War on Terrorism leaves the possibility for the assignment of temporality to (the violent phase of) conflicts of this type arbitrarily and theoretically short-sightedly. Such an unhistorical notion of temporality would definitely contrast the flexibility of local, regional and global strategies in the Middle East, illustrating the dynamism of global and regional hegemonic designs. The conclusion pulls all of this together to argue that the military logic of the battlefield is fast becoming the general spatial condition for the interaction between people and state⁵¹. This situation has been continuing in Iraq even after 2009, when the deadline for the withdrawal of the American combat troops from that country was announced by the White House.

Not least, the ever-changing dynamics of the Global War on Terrorism have been fed up by its militarizing consequences, reflected in domestic and foreign rearmament tendencies. For example, in 2011, the U.S. military had close to 7,000 unmanned aircraft, with 39 combat-air patrols flying over Iraq and Afghanistan constantly, expected to rise to ... 65 a day by 2013⁵². In 2010, there were some 32 nations developing hundreds of unmanned drones in a multi-billion dollar industry⁵³.

Indeed, the theoretical and practical conception of military de-escalation could only gain in persuasion if applied as a stage of a mutually coordinated and deep-going conflict transformation. So, critical methodological aspects could be further embraced in its analysis.

Nation-building as a conflict transformation strategy

Conflict transformation has been specified in the peace and conflict studies as:

a generic, comprehensive term referring to actions and processes which seek to alter the various characteristics and manifestations of conflict by addressing the root causes of a particular conflict over the long term. It aims to transform negative destructive conflict into positive constructive conflict and deals with structural, behavioral, and attitudinal aspects of conflict. The term refers to both the process and the completion of the process. As such, it incorporates the activities of processes such as Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution, and goes farther than conflict settlement or conflict management⁵⁴.

Essentially, for our analytical purposes, the pursuit of conflict transformation under the banner of the Global War on Terrorism has turned out to be conducted as a local, intra-state, functional-

structural anti-terrorism activity with presumed international effects. Its most articulated version in this context, in particular, and in the political practice of international relations in general, has been the nation-building. Nonetheless, so far no sufficient efforts have been devoted in the peace and conflict studies to critically elaborating on the regional and international/global power prerequisites and effects of the measures taken in this respect ó both concerning the analysis of the root causes of (the paradigm of õprotracted conflictö) and the subsequent regulation of structural, behavioral, and attitudinal aspects of tensions in the Middle East (the paradigm of õconflict resolutionö and õconflict transformationö). Being inflicted from the outside and striving to change the social fabric of the local societies in Afghanistan and Iraq from the inside, the implicit and explicit dialectics of the applied nation-building strategy in the course of the Global War on Terrorism still need to be theorized on and tested.

Specifically, nation-building has been conceptualized as a framed political, security sector, and market-oriented reform for democracy and participation, in compliance with the principles of subsidiarity and sustainable development⁵⁵. Practically speaking, its external, top-down imposition by military force, in favour of select governmental and bureaucratic circles and clan members in Afghanistan and Iraq turns it into, to say the least, an ambiguous neo-liberal, corrupt construct, opening new professional grounds for private military, construction, and service contractors and boosting primarily the contacts between domestic and foreign ruling elites. Here the conclusions of a report of the organization Integrity Watch Afghanistan from 2010:

□ The findings of this survey show that corruption threatens the legitimacy of state-building, badly affects state-society relations, feeds frustration and the support for the insurgency, leads to increasing inequality, impedes the rule of law according to Afghan standards, hinders access to basic public services, which impacts the poor most severely, and has a major negative effect on economic development⁵⁶.

Obviously, the recent history of applying the strategy of nation-building in Afghanistan and Iraq seems to have doubtful effect on the continuing self-bombing attacks or secret punishment operations thereafter and must, therefore, be reconsidered.

In the same spirit, a considerable part of the civil measures accompanying the military operations in Afghanistan in the framework of COIN, as an important component of the projected nation-building, have been confined to such infrastructure projects that turned out to be effectively more beneficial for the U.S. and NATO military presence than for the civil population. The real needs of the population were often neglected⁵⁷. Thus, COIN has largely been aimed at the engraftment of the governments in Afghanistan and Pakistan⁵⁸, and the undertaken reform steps ó at the accomplishment of the same objective. The essentially conservative character of COIN has shown that stability has recurrently gained the upper hand over the implementation of a deep-going and broad-based conflict transformation ó as an expression of the tension between security and imperial interests and the necessity for acquiring legitimacy among the local population⁵⁹.

It is the substance of the techniques of nation-building in Afghanistan which turned the practical significance of direct negotiations with the Taliban and other insurgents (conflict resolution) and the situation of women in Afghanistan into a secondary issues as well. It was not until the summer of 2010 that the formation of the Afghan High Peace Council for the conduct of direct talks with the Taliban was decided⁶⁰. The establishment of the body itself was announced in the autumn of the same year. In the beginning of 2012, parallel to the continuing military operations, secret contacts between Washington and the Taliban with regards to opening of a Taliban office in the Gulf state of Qatar became public knowledge⁶¹. Apart from that, strong political and military relations were upheld during the years with the political-military competitor

of the Taliban, the Northern Alliance. Neither of these endeavours could materialize into a vital security undertaking.

The nine women members of the High Peace Council themselves have regularly been sidelined from main consultations in the Council and were not involved in making major decisions. What is more, the Karzai government provoked outrage in February 2012 after certain recommendations from clerics were backed to segregate the sexes in the workplace. Another recommendation allowed husbands to beat wives under certain circumstances, reminiscent of the Taliban period⁶².

In fact, the goals of the contemporary asymmetric wars, including the skirmishes in the course of the Global War on Terrorism, remain difficult to equalize with well-defined outcomes. They are more about the bringing about a particular social condition in the country of the intervention that is to be artificially upheld on a longer-term basis, in order to finally make it function in a sustainable way. While earlier the defeat of the enemy troops or the conquest of a foreign capital were considered a sign of victory and the termination of war, today it appears quite intangible what exactly the weakening of a local insurgency or the stabilization of a land should mean and when it will end⁶³.

Again, unless preconceived in the critical paradigm of global, regional and local social (hegemony) analysis, the contents of the term 'conflict transformation' on the one hand and the so-performed strategy of state-building on the other, being advertised as a fundamental conflict transformation method in the Global War on Terrorism, lead either to illegitimate ruling mechanisms or make their foreseen instruments deficient, e.g. control of the spreading of small arms at the societal level. Moreover, the current execution of conflict transformation seems to stimulate easily the regional and international jihadism. To sum up, a stark fragmentation of political rationalities in Afghanistan, present before the intervention of 2001 and cemented after it, is on its way to downgrade any idea of forming a united, stable local community.

Regarding the complex parameters of the neo-liberal post-Westphalian age, the concept of the state as a form of political organization in the peace and conflict studies must be engaged in a much more broadly based identity debate, transcending the (neo-functional) state/non-state dualism or 'the circuitry between sovereign subject and (autonomous) sovereign state in the theory of liberalism'⁶⁴. It must not be forgotten that local and regional war economies can very well be connected to the mechanisms of the world market, profiting from the continuation of violence⁶⁵ and bringing profits for external war players. There should be conducted a debate about global governance, justice, and emancipation in accordance with the present phenomenon of waning state sovereignty and the idea of a long-lasting conflict prevention alike – not least, in the face of international terrorist networking.

Conclusion

The realities and ideological projections of the Global War on Terrorism in the Middle East raise substantive questions for the peace and conflict studies. These concern both conceptual and methodological problems in relation to the examination of the international/inter-regional terrorist and local insurgency activities and anti/counter-terrorist measures against them. In essence, the prevalent understandings of military conflict, conflict de-escalation, and nation-building (conflict transformation) in the discipline have been addressed.

With respect to the category of 'military conflict', its treatment as an external national or inter-group security dilemma⁶⁶ met by conventional military, diplomatic, and legal means, in the spirit of a large segment of traditional conflict and peace studies, has turned out to be incapable of comprehensively analyzing the strategies and tactics applied by the coalition forces during all four stages of the Global War on Terrorism and, for that matter, their regional and global political implications. It is a battleground the exact scope of which is difficult to delineate. It is a war intensely waged on the biopolitical front on all sides, at least as much as on the territorial-political one ('fight for the hearts and minds' of the civil population at the spot and around the world).

“Secrecy” came out as the keyword of the ongoing anti/counter-terrorism manoeuvres. Be it in New York, in the cells of Guantanamo, in the air or on the terrain of Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc., the increasing internationalization and amalgamation of civil and military elements in comparison to the possible national (communal) and physical differentiation of conflicting parties, conflict claims, combatants and non-combatants in traditional wars, makes the international/inter-regional terrorism, local insurgency and anti/counter-terrorism endeavour look even more like a siege the aim of which is to plunder, not to conquest sovereigns⁶⁷.

The same relates to the notions of “military de-escalation” and “conflict transformation”. Where the technical and physical rationalities of the warring parties have taken new shapes, and violence new forms, the infliction of military fatigue as a precondition for a military de-escalation looks even more obscure, as it could otherwise be, almost illusive. The already implied military presence of NATO troops in Afghanistan after 2014, not to mention the drone machines and secret agents, will undoubtedly collide with local resistance (jihadist) factions and power claims. In conformity with the concept of the Revolution in Military Affairs, a set of tactics has been put forward by the U.S. military for securing the future of warfare⁶⁸. And how do we transform the dynamics, the stretchy materialistic traits and structure of regionally and globally/internationally predestined conflict constellations in the Middle East? More than simply introducing top-down nation-building models, in a way conserving and feeding inherent political contradictions, a historical analytical approach is needed. Who and how is profiting on spot from such endeavors in real historical terms? Local, regional, and global structural dialectics are to be taken into consideration on a firm basis while problematizing on terrorist and anti/counter-terrorist mobilizations. Who is introducing and sustaining such conflict transformation techniques, which do not appear to be very self-sustainable on a longer run?

It is the political embodiment of the autonomy of the UAS that reveals basic hegemonic features of their “invisible” technical performance. “The primary relationship evoked in most discussions of drone warfare is between a drone and its battlefield of objectified targets, rather than the relationship between the team of technicians operating the drone as agents of American empire and the unsuspecting bodies surveilled and slaughtered on the ground”⁶⁹. It is a war based on social foundations “where those subject to the violence wrought by the coming robot army have little or no recourse, nationally or internationally”⁷⁰.

In this respect, the article has also sought to put forward the theoretical capacities already available in the field of peace and conflict studies for examining the international/inter-regional terrorism and the projections of the Global War on Terrorism in the Middle East. Clues from both traditional and critical divisions in the discipline were taken into account and critically re-evaluated, clearly suggesting that epistemologically, we are in a situation to question the functional, positivist perspective of the traditional strategic research in dealing with terrorism and anti/counter-terrorism. At the same time, the peace and conflict studies are exactly the area which allows us to critically inquire after the operations in the course of the Global War on Terrorism through the paradigm of war and the paradigm of prevention as its best long-standing settlement.

Being interdisciplinary in its character, the field lays ground for the complementary understanding of terrorism and anti/counter-terrorism as reflecting a certain conflict constellation. In accordance with the research results in the discipline hitherto, this conflict is to be traced through a range of structural, social, behavioral, and perceptual conflict aspects. Still, a further debate on terrorism and anti/counter-terrorism within and between the two branches in the area, traditional and critical, is needed. The possibility of elaborating on an overarching analytical framework should be investigated, especially in the face of the Global War on Terrorism.

The concepts of “protracted conflict” and “conflict resolution” from the traditional peace studies and the argument for the role of global and regional “structures of inequality and oppression” from the critical peace studies should be brought into the terrorism investigation in the field in a more explicit way. Moreover, they should be integrated in the notion and/or practice of “military conflict”, “military de-escalation”, and “conflict transformation” in a more convincing fashion. Such multidimensional exploration of the breeding terrorism rationales,

including the distribution of power and material resources, would theoretically enable the practical analysis of alternatives for a fully-fledged anti/counter-terrorism activities and conflict transformation techniques. It should be more about conflict resolution, all-embracing disarmament, critical foreign policy, and world production analysis.

In that sense, the technical and political incentives for the participants in the Global War on Terrorism have clearly shown that the current stand of the discussion in peace and conflict studies is not developed enough to thoroughly examine and critique the realities and ideological projections in the war zones in the Middle East. Critical international relations, political theory and geography perspectives, as illustrated in the different sections of the article above, are to be incorporated into the research practice of the field. For that matter, the international/global and grassroots social dimensions of the (counter)insurgency measures in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen or other places to come should not be taken for granted. The process of globalization and its complex post-sovereign manifestations have altered, de-territorialized, and de-temporalized the rationales and combat presence of the parties, including states and private actors, involved ó this under the banner of a very flexible, respectively equipped, still in a process of design, spreading over multiple countries in the world, hegemony, underpinned by the logic of unprecedented generalization of the paradigm of õsecurityö, õirregularityö or õstate of exceptionö⁷¹.

In an era of receding national sovereignty, questions are to be discussed in the peace and conflict studies in terms of the structure of the international/global social system today, the nature of the international actors and their ideological prerogatives, as well as the character of the social and political structures in the state, as a specifically addressed conflict termination asset. Because of terrorism's heavy reliance on (religious) grass-roots recruitment, emancipative bottom-up conflict transformation strategies should be considered as an alternative anti-terrorism (prevention) means. There could be suggested that the foundations of the international relations nowadays do transform not on the basis of conventional wars between states but through unconventional warfare between states and non-state actors⁷².

Notes

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