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Trends. Psychologies of Influencing Military Conflict and Terrorism

Editor

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Abstract: This article examines leadership and attempts to prevent or resolve episodes of military conflict and terrorism.

How does one decide on actions for preventing or resolving episodes of military conflict and terrorism? One can employ what one believes to be effective. One can employ what some authority recommends. One can employ something that seems to have worked in a past situation or certain past situations.

All these decision making approaches have their problems. What one believes can be wrong. So can recommendations from authorities. Past situations may be importantly different from the situation at hand. And even if one decides on the right action, a myriad of problems—political, logistical, and human factors among others—can pull defeat from the jaws of victory.

It is within this context of inadequate and even unknown epistemological moorings that one can appreciate the existential terror of being responsible for making policy in matters of military conflict and counterterrorism. This is the case whether the most uncommon or common actions are advocated. As to the former, one is only limited by imagination. As to the latter, beliefs such as the need to respond to (1) an initial attack with a measured or overwhelming response, (2) additional attacks with escalation possibly beyond the lethality of the last attack, and (3) treaty violations with forgiveness or revenge may be more projective than reflective of data-based reason.

But decisions still have to be made. Leaders still have to engage in political combat for approving options that may not merit the political—let alone the actual—spilling of blood. And so conflict within, between, and among allies, neutrals, and adversaries will continue. (See Bourne, L. E., Jr., Healy, A. F., & Beer, F. A. (2003). Military conflict and terrorism: General psychology informs international relations. *Review of General Psychology*, 7, 189-202; Davenport, C., & Ball, P. (2002). Views to a kill: Exploring the implications of source selection in the case of Guatemalan state terror, 1977-1995. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 46, 427-450; Maoz, I., & Ellis, D. G. (2001). Going to ground: Argument in Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian encounter groups. *Research on Language & Social Interaction*, 34, 399-419; Ross, M.H. (2000). "Good enough" isn't so bad: Thinking about success and failure in ethnic conflict management. *Peace & Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 6, 27-47.) (Keywords: Leadership, Military Conflict, Prevention, Resolution, Terrorism)