

A new approach to terrorism: military tactics are not the only option

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A University of Kent expert in International Conflict Analysis who investigates conflict resolution approaches to terrorism presents a new critique of the effectiveness of traditional counter terrorism measures, advising they are not the only option.

In a paper published by NATO's *Centre of Excellence*, Dr Harmonie Toros, a member of the University's Conflict Analysis Research Group, says countries could 'break out of the counter terrorism strait jacket' if they understood that terrorism should not be tackled as isolated forms of violence.

Currently mainstream counter terrorism incorporates military tactics and strategies, law enforcement and intelligence work to combat or prevent terrorism. Dr Toros recommends a broader approach of communication before groups turn to violence as well as examining the potential for negotiations once violence has started.

Dr Toros' research lies at the crossroad between [conflict resolution](#) and terrorism studies. She has published works examining the transformation of conflicts marked by terrorist violence, focusing in particular on Northern Ireland and on the southern Philippine province of Mindanao where the Moro Islamic Liberation Front has been fighting for independence for three decades.

Her findings suggest that:

- Conflict prevention can help avoid the turn to terrorist violence and can lead to a de-escalation of such violence or the marginalisation of violent groups among broader social movements
- Negotiation is an option that has successfully prevented conflicts in the past.
- Direct negotiations are unlikely to be adopted by NATO as they could potentially be a challenge to political, social, and economic positions of member states
- The Alliance can however ensure that its policies do not hinder the possibility of peacemaking by avoiding campaigns that vilify or demonise non-state armed groups
- A conflict resolution approach requires that NATO examines the effects of its counterterrorism strategy on the broader conflict to avoid exacerbation of underlying grievances or triggering a further escalation of violence
- NATO can ensure that its peacebuilding strategies are based on locally driven priorities and processes and do not lead to an increase in tensions due to opposition to a top-down Western-led approach
- Member states can adopt a conflict resolution approach to terrorist violence.
- Engaging in a conflict resolution approach does not guarantee an end to terrorist violence but neither will it automatically undermine the legitimacy of states or international organisations

Provided by University of Kent

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