



WATCHING BRIEF: MAKING PEACE IN EXTREME CONFLICTS

This is a summary of recent writings on peacemaking, especially at the national and international levels. It attempts to support Friends' peace concerns, and bring a greater focus on 'taking away the occasion of war'. It may also help Friends in conversations with others about current trends.

Address by Kevin Clements (Peace Centre, University of Otago, A/NZ) titled 'Overcoming the Politics of Fear'.

To become empowered citizens we must address our fears so we can be politically bold, critical and engaged. Fear engenders individual and social paralysis and is a bad motivator, yet it is the default position of our major political parties – in the absence of purpose and meaning they cultivate fear. Here is a way forward:

- Start with a reinvigorated humanistic vision in which people and communities strive to realize justice, peace, compassion and truth in their personal, social and political relationships.
- Make clear to our politicians whose interests we are promoting – the common rather than the private.
- Ask our leaders to address the root causes of poverty, inequality, underdevelopment, and poor governance.
- Seek spiritual strength to stand for union in the face of polarization, and healing in the face of suffering.

If we took this approach, we would "be realizing our own potential unencumbered by the fears of others and we would be creative change agents for a better world".

Article by Jan Oberg (Transnational Foundation) titled 'Instead of Bombing ISIS'.

The following points are designed to stimulate another way of thinking:

- Stop financing ISIS – oil fields should have been protected.
- Declare willingness to talk with representatives of ISIS.
- Recognise wrong deeds/brutalities of your own side and apologise.
- Consider the value of losing face to save humanity.
- Deploy a UN force to defensively protect people and infrastructure.
- Focus on humanitarian aid rather than bombs.
- Stop the arms trade to conflict regions.
- Support civil society's participation in negotiations for peace.
- Military use must be limited and with a clear exit point.
- Open your country to the conflict parties and host consultations.
- Create more independent research institutes focusing on conflict resolution and peacemaking.
- Demand that media balance coverage of violence with coverage of underlying conflicts.
- Think less in terms of states and more in terms of federations, confederations, autonomies, protectorates, shared territories, and home rule.
- Make the Middle East a zone free from weapons of mass destruction.
- Work for a moratorium on violence and warfare and a negotiation process over 3-5 years.

Article by Sumanto Al Qurtuby (Institute for Peace Studies at University of Notre Dame) titled 'Engaging Extremists Key to Peace'.

Rev Paulus Hartono, the pastor of a Mennonite church in Solo, Central Java, approached and befriended members of Hizbullah (an Islamist party). This followed a period of Muslim-Christian violence, and much hesitation from the commander of Hizbullah when the pastor first contacted him. Eventually the pastor and commander set up a new radio station, and people from the two groups have worked together for humanitarian services, post-disaster relief, inter-religious dialogue and peacemaking activities.

The 2004 tsunami led the pastor to invite the commander to Aceh, and the Hizbullah team joined the Mennonites in rebuilding work. The later earthquakes and volcanic eruptions in Central Java brought a similar combined effort to respond. The commander then acknowledged that the Christians were 'good infidels', and the co-operation has continued since.

Article by Jonathan Powell (CEO of Inter-Mediate) titled 'Negotiating with Terrorists'. He was a broker of the peace deal in Northern Ireland.

The British response to terrorism by the IRA was initially a military one which escalated the violence on both sides. "All our historical experience tells us that there can be no purely military solution to a political problem, and yet every time we confront a new terrorist group, we begin by insisting we will never talk to them". Yet throughout history, many former 'terrorists' have become political leaders and negotiated peace with former enemies.

I spent many years negotiating in secret with the leaders of the IRA, building up trust that eventually led to an agreement. I now see that civil wars are a great threat to humanitarian security and need to be ended to defeat starvation, disease and rape, and to stop the involvement of children as soldiers. My experience also tells me that constantly trying and re-trying the military approach (eg another 'surge') simply strengthens the resolve of the other side, costs more lives and delays peace. There is little alternative to talking to an armed group if we want them to stop fighting. Once negotiations begin, different outcomes than those publicly espoused by both sides are possible.

There is no such thing as an insoluble conflict with an armed group. Past failures do not mean an inevitable failure in the longer term. However "if people sit around waiting for a conflict to be 'ripe' for talks to start, or for the forces of history to solve it for them, then it will never be resolved. ...dealing effectively with the terrorist threat requires political leadership, patience and a refusal to take no for an answer. What we need are more political leaders who are capable of remembering what happened last time – and prepared to take the necessary risks".

Interview with Daniel Bar-Tal of Tel-Aviv University, by Geraldine Doogue (ABC-Radio National)

In societies that have lived with conflict for decades, the collective mind becomes like a closed parachute. It forgets how to open, alternative ways of living become difficult to imagine, and peace almost impossible to negotiate. The enemy is demonized, and the conflict is seen as a life and death struggle for identity. A narrative develops to justify aggression and atrocities and to sustain the attitudes that underpin the ongoing conflict.

Such societies have to see some kind of light at the end of the tunnel and get a positive image of peacemaking before they can change. The 'enemy' must be seen in a more personal way, and specific practical steps must become clear that will enable the painful compromises needed for peace. This will take years and conflict may continue even while peace moves are going on. A

courageous minority will usually emerge, building a constituency committed to peace, and this may be assisted by an outside 'third party'.

Report on Peace and Religion by the Institute for Economics and Peace.

The report presents research that goes beyond ideology and seeks to understand how religion interacts with peace. Using questions emerging from common themes discussed in media and communities, the research shows:

- Sectarian violence between different religious groups are undoubtedly a major feature of seemingly intractable conflicts in the Middle East, but focusing on extremes does not paint the full picture.
- Some of the greatest peace builders of the 20th century have been religious leaders such as Desmond Tutu, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King.
- All major religions have forms of nonviolence and peace as part of their religious tradition.
- Only 14% of conflicts in 2013 were motivated by religion alone, whereas two thirds of conflicts had as a main cause opposition to a particular economic, ideological, political or social system of a state.

“On the one hand religion has been a motivator of conflict, yet it has also been pivotal in developing key concepts of peace and nonviolence as well as creating peace”.

Book: *The Fog of Peace: The Human Face of Conflict Resolution*, by Gabrielle Rifkind and Giandomenico Picco

Simple humanity is the strongest way through the quagmire of conflict. “We believe we need to understand our own minds and our own potential for arrogance, vanity or puffed-up pride, and how for all of us our own ego may sit in the way of progress is not properly managed”.

Resolving conflict requires creative effort and a willingness to try something new. It also needs empathy and understanding of all those involved. Beneath the surface of extreme ideologies in the Middle East lies fear, humiliation and anxiety. The West does not have all the answers. What is needed is fewer drones and more diplomats.

Canberra
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Sources:

Kevin P. Clements: *Overcoming the Politics of Fear: Living Adventurously in Aotearoa-New Zealand* (NCPACS, University of Otago, 7 July 2014).

Jan Oberg: *Instead of Bombing ISIS* (Transnational Foundation, 7 October 2014).

Sumanto Al Qurtuby: *Engaging Extremists Key to Peace* (Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame, 29 January 2013).

Jonathan Powell: *Negotiating with Terrorists* (The Guardian, 7 October 2014).

Daniel Bar-Tal, Professor of Child Development at Tel-Aviv University, Israel, and Visiting Fellow at ANU, interview 1 November 2014.

Institute for Economics & Peace: *Peace and Religion* (October 2014).

Gabrielle Rifkind and Giandomenico Picco: *Fog of Peace: The Human Face of Conflict Resolution* (B.Tauris 2014).