

Abolish Deterrence in Defence Policy!

Thank you for inviting me to this deeply needed conference. I will stick to what I find most important to prevent war and to save the world from ultimate catastrophe – the thinking behind our actions, and deterrence particularly.

The assumption in international strategic policies is that you need to deter a party from aggression. However, the situation is different from let us say in 1939. We now have nuclear weapons to threaten us whether expressed in words or not. In the war in Ukraine nuclear powers stand against each other and the tension might any time reach explosion. Still, all parties blame the other one. Ukraine is used as a tile in a power game, and the society is polarised.

The other day there was a panel discussion on TV in our four Nordic countries (not Iceland) between Nordic ministers and some peace workers of different kinds. No one questioned deterrence as such. One of the peace workers pointed out a need for a balance between deterrence and détente (avspänning), but deterrence was not questioned. However, there is a main problem:

Let me explain the security dilemma also called security competition: A country, X, looks upon another country, Y, as aggressive. X regarding itself as defensive deny Y's worries. However Y thinks himself solely being in defence while X is the aggressive party. Thus, they have the same way of thinking and thereby attribute the blame exclusively to the other. Now, they both need to defend themselves through deterrence. Violence has to be CREDIBLE to be taken seriously by the other one. Therefore stakes are raised continuously.

This leads to a circle of violence and now we find ourselves in a chicken race. More and more resources are attributed to military budgets, planning, rhetoric... Retaliation is considered necessary to show strength and give credibility.

This might lead to nuclear explosion by mistake or intention. One explosion might lead us to a situation out of control, nuclear war. We in the peace movement have noticed that the respect of this situation is more or less lost. Nuclear winter is something not considered. Knowledge has weathered away among journalists, politicians and public: Denial of the risks is common. Strength means weapons. There is lack of belief that the warnings from the other side are serious. In short, a militarized and dangerous, hostile society emerge where the enemy image is predominant. Words change their meanings. Peace is war, and war is peace, peace activists are foreign agents.

Add human needs to this picture. People act according to needs, and fears are exploited by politicians and the war industry. Existential needs not being met, violence is used when other means are not considered.

The consequence of what I have said is that we all should utilize knowledge of conflicts to prevent escalation. There is an enormous amount of knowledge not used in international politics. With a few exceptions diplomacy is forgotten. Some examples: Threats lead to hostility and lack of cooperation, retaliation, tit-for-tat.

Conflicts need to be analysed in a just way, using the same standards for both sides. In a situation where the enemy is defined as evil, the chance to resolve a conflict is gone. Perspectives of all sides need to be considered. Consequences of actions must be taken into account. Use these rules on the Ukraine war! Add: build trust. Prevent fear in the other party as well as in your own.

Security cannot be built at the expense of another party. Unless all are secure none is. This means: Common Security should replace the ideology of deterrence which is not really more than a theory.

Peace by Peaceful means. Use the UN Charter!

Thank you!

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