

Counter-Terrorism in the Arabian Gulf Scenario A Global Conversation with Mitchell Belfer



In the Global conversation of the 20th of October, our guest speaker was Mitchell Belfer, Senior Lecturer at the Department of International Relations and European Studies at the University of Prague and Editor in Chief of the Central European Journal of International and Security Studies (CEJISS).

He holds a Ph.D. and an MPA in International Relations Theory and he is the president of the EGIC, the euro-gulf information center.

The title of his lecture was “Counter-terrorism in the Arabian Gulf scenario”. He started his talking giving us an idea of terrorism, which he defined as a matter of many factors extremism, radicalism and isolationism, and about the necessity to solve terrorism building platforms of understanding between countries.

He added the very relevant gap between the empowered person of extremism and radicalization and the person who gets the lesson of radicalization. It is well known that ideas and their following expression have to reach the cage of people's mind, so, in that process, they can be twisted and interpreted in uncountable colorful ways. Therefore terrorism has its birth and spreading, even if, as Mitchell Belfer had the pleasure to affirm, the number of radicalized people and terrorist are in very small amount regarding the large vastness of the Islamic community.

It is important, by the view of the guest, to analyze some theoretical aspects of terrorisms through a beautiful reference to Nietzsche's philosophy: the radicalized ideas didn't give birth to terrorism themselves, but, as the camel and the lion in the 19th century's philosopher, they had their path of growing (Camel) until they found their own freedom (Lion) and reached their final stage, the power stage (Baby). So it's now more possible to affirm that ideas if passed through someone else's mind, develop their own freedom and assume their own changes. (This happens frequently on the Shari'a). There are lots of radical ideas spreading in the world in this ages (Right wing extremists / The Jewish radicalized way of thinking), but only this had its development in such a violent way.

Our guest highlighted four waves of terrorism in the modern and contemporary world: The anarchist wave; a type of terrorism who had its spreading during the industrialization period. The anti-colonial wave; probably referring to the rejecting behavior of British colonies (Including North America). The Left-wing terrorism: terrorism meant to overthrow conservative or capitalist systems and replace them with Marxist-Leninist, socialist or anarchist societies. The Religious terrorism; referring to the Islamic one. It's important to recall the date which is 1979, or better, 1400 according to the Islamic calendar, that signs the end of the old world and the arrival of a new Messiah. Most importantly the Sunni and Shi'ites fission and its consequential Mecca attack.

It's worth to make another distinction into the fourth type of terrorism. As preface is due to introduce the birth of Al Qæda after the Soviet invasion into the holy land. The basic difference between the terrorism we are facing nowadays and the Al Qæda one is the target: the first one has his focus on very closed enemies, meanwhile, the second one had its focus on far objects (reminding of the Twin Tower attack in 2001). The terrorism that we are facing now is the one supported and performed by the Islamic state group and its influence is critically huge (even if we are talking about a minority), mostly in small villages. In 1999 we recall the Islamic state group took over of the city of Mosul and it's terrible effect on Iraq people.

Yet there are some Islamic countries who fight against the presence of Isis, yet some others provide money and support to those. Saudi Arabia is one of those refusing countries such they are one of the main targets of Isis (of course because of economic wealth and economic trades) they even issue some rehab procedures that are based on phycological washing that could probably change the mind of some terrorism activists. Qatar with its government (to be fair is no good to englobe its people), instead, are totally pro to the terrorist activity they even provide money and weapons to their leaders.

The very impressive and, unfortunately, waring thing about Isis is their outstanding way of communication: they use encrypted codes through online video games (GTA) so the intelligence has many struggles trying to catch them on their moves.

Belfer ended his speech by a very important statement: "The war against terrorism is not against the very people who play a part of it, but against the roots of the problem which are radicalized ideas". And he encouraged us to don't have fear because the fear is one of the main elements that "feeds" terrorism.

Question time had a prolific and fruitful ending. One, of the many questions that have been raised, was how to destroy the radicalized ideas and their spreading even through the internet, Mitchell Belfer answered, by fighting them on a local level even using good and strong communication networks between countries. He added that is quite impossible to destitute it on a global level, but involving qualified people on this task could be a great and useful resource; is important to delegitimize radical ideas even by a modernization and a reform on influential religious figures: The modernization of Imams and the changes on studying the Shari'a.

We were honored to meet Mitchell Belfer and his speech gave us a more clarified view about the issue of terrorism in our world.

Francesco Grobri and Agnese Giovannini