

Presentation to the Munich Security Conference

Munich Security Conference

**Presentation by
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Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Government of Germany and for the hosts and organisers of the 58th Munich Security Conference for taking the lead in bringing the world together to elicit dialogue in Munich.

It is indeed an important time to gather in order to find common ground in addressing some of the most challenging global threats that our planet is facing.

Our world is in a flux and the global threats and vulnerabilities are mounting. Not only are we faced with prospect of war on European soil, but terrorism remains an important **global** challenge. The need for global understanding and dialogue has never been greater.

It is my pleasure, as Director of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, to address this distinguished audience at this event which we have the honour of co-hosting with **the International Crisis Group**, an organization that I have deeply admired for many years, first as Head of Human Security Division of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs while assisting and supporting mediation services to more than half a dozen peace processes worldwide, and later as the Secretary-General of the OSCE, engaged in diplomatic efforts and supporting mediators in addressing emerging and protracted conflicts in the OSCE area. Our discussions today focus on an increasingly important topic:

"Talking to Terrorists? Rethinking the fight against Islamist militancy".

One of the most important take-aways I have learned during my career is we need to talk. We need dialogue.

That may seem self-evident, but relations between Russia and the West are so polarized at the moment that sometimes even suggesting dialogue is a taboo. And yet, without dialogue how can we understand each other? How can we overcome our differences and seek common ground? As Bishop Desmond Tutu said: "If you want peace, you don't talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies".

Speaking to one's opponent doesn't mean agreeing with or showing weakness. It means that one is willing to engage, to listen, and has the confidence to present and defend one's views.

This also means gain an opportunity to de-escalate tensions, engage in dialogue to overcome differences, and build clear and shared set of rules in order to find the path to peace.

But this approach is not without challenges and pitfalls. This panel will address, I hope, some of the most important challenges in opening up for dialogue with adversaries.

When should we talk to terrorists?

In the discussions that you will be having some questions might arise.

1. Whether engaging terrorists in some form of dialogue is likely to launch or advance a viable peace process, or impede the peace process, or even lead nowhere at all.
2. Whether initiating talks may make the group's wider constituency readier to contemplate a negotiated solution, or will it enhance its power and prestige and thus bolster its ability to obstruct any settlement.
3. By the same token, the decision not to talk may keep the violent non-state actors confined to the outer margins of mainstream political discourse, which might ensure that terrorist violence and the wider conflict will endure.

In this first step, mediators must seek to determine the potential benefits and risks of talking by assessing four elements;

1. The nature of the terrorist group and its attitude toward talking?
2. Will they approach the talks in 'good faith' or in 'bad faith'?
3. Is the time right for such an endeavour?
4. Is there sufficient international leverage over the terrorists and their adversaries?

The mediator's effort to secure concessions from a violent non-state actor is more likely to succeed if the mediator has the support of a wide range of international actors.

Finally, the most obvious and **profound benefit of talking to groups** that use terror is to hasten an **end to the violence and produce a sustainable peace**.

Talks should not be seen as a **"silver bullet"** but rather as a way to manage the violence in the hopes that in the long term it will lead to the decline of the groups or their demise.

Despite these potential benefits, talking to groups that use terror has many risks, ranging from political embarrassment to encouraging more violence and even strengthening the group's capacity for bloodshed. Not surprisingly, these concerns make officials leery of even considering the prospects of negotiations with terrorist groups.

However, given my experiences, opening the door to dialogue and taking small steps to build good faith and trust can be a first step towards peace.

I wish you all a very fruitful discussion and I hope to welcome you all one day to the Geneva Centre for Security Policy in Geneva.