

It is only a matter of time until terrorists have atomic weapons

Tagesanzeiger article on Nobel Peace
Prize laureate Mohamed ElBaradei

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Abstract

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Mohamed ElBaradei opened the 2015 UBS Forum for Economic Dialogue “The Economics of War and Peace” held at the “Zürcher Kaufleuten” in Zurich. In his keynote, he criticized the West sharply. This article was written by Markus Diem Meier and published in the Swiss newspaper *Tagesanzeiger* on 16 November 2015.

The UBS Center for Economics in Society had long planned an event with the title “The Economics of War and Peace”. However, the event gained an urgent relevance after the terrorist attacks in Paris. Mohamed ElBaradei, Nobel peace laureate and former Egyptian politician, was the introductory speaker at the event as a knowledgeable expert in current conflicts. ElBaradei is also well-known as the former director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, IAEA. In this function, he was aware of the diplomacy surrounding possible atomic weapon plans in Iraq, Iran, and North Korea.

The theme of his talk focused in particular on the failures of the world community: humanity is making amazing scientific progress and is even able to explore space more exactly. However, we remain far behind with respect to relationships with others on our planet.

He was particularly critical of the wealthy nations in the West. He accused them of ignoring the larger context in incidents such as that in Paris. The organization Islamic State (IS) – which was responsible for the attacks in Paris – is, according to ElBaradei, a direct consequence of the wars in Iraq.

The conflicts in all Arab nations and the resulting terrorism are the result of decade-long mismanagement in these nations and in international institutions. The West actively supported dictators in these nations in the name of stability – dictators who blatantly disregarded basic human rights. As a result, a deep mistrust of the West holds sway in the entire Middle East. The relevant view is: “They are not interested in how we are doing; they only want to use our resources.” Violent attacks in these nations cause no great echo in the western world – and the populace very aware of this.

Nothing is possible without troops on the ground

This fits together with statements by Europeans who do not want to have refugees here due to their religion. This is grist to the mill for the IS and other terror organizations. Finally, the Nobel laureate criticized the type of military intervention against the IS; these organizations cannot be beaten without troops on the ground. The West must also become credible to attain a victory of this type. Representatives of rich nations have not visited the Middle East in the past to support democracy and justice, but to sell weapons. That is the last thing the region needs, said ElBaradei.

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Many short-term measures to curb terrorism are now being discussed and implemented, but the G-20 nations will probably continue to ignore the greater global context. These nations must move on from their narrowly understood national interests; a focus on the global context would encourage security and stability for all. This is because when people in disadvantaged areas have the impression that the West does not care about their worries and dreams, they wonder why they should care about others.

In this sense, ElBaradei also criticized international organizations such as the UN sharply. They simply do not work and have far too few resources. The UN Security Council – that determines almost everything – has failed completely, which is the cause of many casualties. Not even the billion inhabitants of India have the right to participate there.

Democracy is not instant coffee

The regulations about human rights and international courts of law can ultimately only do little to fight the injustice, violence, and economic poverty. Very little is being done, despite all the great Sunday sermons by national leaders. The question is where rich nations set their priorities. Signals of true sympathy and convincing effort must come in order to remain credible among the populace of nations suffering from violence, suppression, and poverty. However, we see none of this.

In addition to the criticism and demands for a change in behavior in the rest of the world, the analysis of the concrete problems in the nations of the Middle East was sobering. What they need are political institutions that guarantee participation for all and cohesion, as well as a broadly shared understanding of the general rights and a reasonable form of government. However, there is no uniform understanding on this in the populace. Democracy is ultimately not a sort of instant coffee, but instead a long journey, and it requires much more than setting up ballot boxes. Even economic growth does not suffice. Egypt had a growth rate of seven percent in 2011, but neither unemployment nor the situation for the poorest part of society improved.

At the end of his talk, the former director of the International Atomic Energy Agency finally discussed the continued nuclear threat. It is unfathomable that there are still 16,000 atomic warheads, 2,000 of which are always combat-ready. It is naïve to believe that we can keep these weapons under control forever. It is only a matter of time until terrorist groups attain access to these weapons. ElBaradei called for true disarmament. The fact that we have not yet had a catastrophe with these weapons can be equally well attributed to pure luck as to targeted efforts to prevent this.

Source

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You can find a recording of ElBaradei's speech and other material on the topic on the Center's website: www.ubscenter.uzh.ch

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About the speaker



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