

NATO International School of Azerbaijan – Winter Session 2009

From January 25th to February 1st I had the privilege to participate in the 5th NATO International School of Azerbaijan Winter Session on New Warfare and Modern Conflicts in Azerbaijan's capital Baku, along with more than 40 participants from over 20 different countries.

During this well-organised event, the participants discussed the theoretical backgrounds of the history of war and the emergence of the nation state and engaged in a debate about conflict prevention and the effectiveness of military force in this regard. Conflicts in the Balkans, and genocidal campaigns on the African continent generated a shifting attitude within the international community with regard to the Westphalian principles of state sovereignty and non-intervention.

Dr. Mazin Qumsiyeh, Professor at Bethlehem University, guided the debate that emphasised perceptions in the conflict between Israel and Palestine that recently reached new peaks and remains unsolved. Lt. Col. V.E. Alonso engaged the participants in a debate on ISAF's role in the war in Afghanistan. 'Getting Afghanistan right' not only involves a comprehensive approach in Afghanistan but involves a long-term solution for Pakistan as well. Extensive attention was given to the still unresolved conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and to the crisis between Russia and Georgia that escalated into a violent conflict in August last year during another panel session.

Lieutenant-Commander (N) Chief F. Bora Uzer of the Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism in Ankara, Turkey, addressed the challenges posed to international stability and security by international terrorist organisations and the difficulties that the international community faces in addressing this daunting security challenge. The presence and rise of non-state actors on the global stage poses further challenges to the Westphalian order and necessitates adjustments to the Just War Tradition.

The participants were given an opportunity to experience the difficulties of conflict resolution in a simulation wherein the North Atlantic Council had to formulate a response to a rapidly developing crisis within the territorial boundaries of the invented country Raleigh. Conflicts seem to become more complex to solve. This is illustrated by difficulties within the conflict resolution process in the above-mentioned conflicts between Israel and Palestine, Georgia and Russia, the conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Nagorno-Karabakh, the war in Iraq and the fight against international terrorism. The process that Fareed Zakaria refers to as "the rise of the rest", that generates a situation wherein states try to exploit power vacuums caused by violent conflicts to further their own national interests, adds to the complexity of conflict resolution. Notwithstanding its increased complexity, violent conflicts may be resolved if addressed comprehensively by employing what Joseph S. Nye Jr. referred to as "smart power" – a balanced combination of both hard and soft power.

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