

Nonviolence in the controversy **« To go to war » or « Not to go to war »**

by Pat Patfoort

At one side there is violence, pain, suffering and war. At the other there is nonviolence, well-being, happiness and peace.

How can we actively work on the transition from violence and war towards nonviolence and peace? How can we transform conflicts? A very concrete way to do that in everyday situations, as well at the micro-level as at the macro-level, is using the MmE-method or Major-minor-Equivalency-method (¹). This method uses two basic models. First there is the Major-minor model, which is at the basis of violence, which represents the root of violence. And the Equivalency-model is at the basis of nonviolence, represents the root of nonviolence (see fig.1 & 2).

The tools used in and to build up both systems are completely different.

In the Major-minor system we use “arguments”, which are all possible ways -superficial instruments- with which we try to put ourselves in the Major-position and the opponent in the minor-position. We try to win and have the other one loose. We try to prove, to convince, we are right and the other one is wrong. We think and say we are the good guys, God is with us, and the other one is the bad one, the evil.

In the Equivalency-system we use something completely different : “foundations”. These are tools in depth. They make it possible that two different, contradictory points of view can co-exist without needing one to be right and the other to be wrong. They make it possible to respect both sides, both points of view, and to build up a process that leads to a nonviolent solution which really and deeply satisfies everyone.

Foundations are the answers to the question “Why?” someone has/people have a certain point of view. Foundations can be needs, feelings, values, habits, objectives, or interests of this person or group. Very important for foundations is the way they are formulated : they must be I-messages, and must be formulated following rigorous rules.

Foundations of the two points of view about going to war or not

During the week before March 17, 2003 (deadline given by the US-government to Iraq before starting the war), I was giving workshops in the US, with several different groups. As most groups were -quite understandably- extremely interested in applying the new learning's about nonviolent conflict management in the actual dramatic world crisis about an eventual war with Iraq, they decided to draft lists of foundations for the two contradictory points of view in this case. Below we find a compilation of the work made by the different groups (²), so two parallel lists of (possible) foundations for two opponents in this crisis and their two contradictory points of view.

Foundations are neither positive nor negative. They just are there. So please notice that if you judge any of them in some way, or laugh at any of them, or think it's not true, or anything similar, then you are not reading “foundations” anymore : you are transforming them into negative arguments, and so are going back into the Major-minor system.

¹ : To know more about this method, see Patfoort, Pat : Uprooting Violence, Building Nonviolence. Freeport, MA (US) : Cobblesmith pub., 1995.

² : The basic work of this exercise has been made by students of the INVST Community Studies Program of the University of Colorado in Boulder, Colorado.

Anti-war American citizens :
We don't want the US to go to war with Iraq

1. I believe the US government is motivated by oil and not human rights.
2. I think that foreign policy should be based on human rights.
3. I don't feel listened to by my government.
4. I am afraid that innocent people will be harmed/killed if we go to war.
5. I am devastated by the suffering in Iraq, and around the world.
6. I am convinced that it is wrong to kill innocent people unless it is obviously in self-defence.
7. I am afraid war will destabilize the region.
8. I don't believe war in Iraq can promote democracy in the Middle East.
9. I think there should be a clearer solution proposed for what to do after Saddam Hussein is removed.
10. I question whether Saddam Hussein needs to be removed.
11. I find it difficult to believe that the force is necessary.
12. I need to discuss all of the options/alternatives.
13. I have the feeling there are alternatives.
14. I can't believe in a pre-emptive war.
15. I fear that Iraqi people will be worse off if Saddam Hussein is forcefully removed.
16. I don't think we have the knowledge or wisdom to force or decide for another nation what is best for them.
17. I feel good when countries can be self-determinant.
18. I am uncomfortable with the US taking over responsibility of Iraq and its future.
19. I am uncomfortable with US's unilateralism.
20. I find it difficult to support sending troops into battle when the war is not fully supported.
21. I am afraid that US imperialism propagates our own racism.

President George W. Bush :
I want the US to go to war with Iraq

1. I am afraid Iraq will breed terrorists that will attack the US.
2. I feel that terrorism is a major threat and war will combat it.
3. I am afraid that our economic stability is threatened if we don't protect our oil investments.
4. I am afraid if I don't have control of the oil, we won't receive it.
5. I am trying to save the US economy.
6. I need to protect the US economic interests in the region.
7. I am afraid that the American standard of living will be lowered if we don't go to war.
8. I feel threatened by Saddam Hussein's attacks on my father's life.
9. I have the feeling I have a duty to protect my country against terrorist attacks.
10. I need to win the war on terrorism.
11. I fear what would happen if Saddam Hussein would provide chemical or biological weapons to terrorists.
12. I am trying to ensure that the US will be secure in its position as the primary world power.
13. I feel good when the US has influence in many regions.
14. I feel good spreading democracy.
15. I need our country to continue to be viewed as strong and the powerful entity.
16. I am afraid of being considered a failure as a president.
17. I need to be viewed as a powerful leader.
18. I would be afraid otherwise to be considered as weak.
19. I am afraid of losing face.
20. I have the feeling a war would be good for my career.
21. I have the feeling a war would be good for our economy.
22. I have the feeling it is my responsibility to challenge what I consider as evil.

22. I have the feeling that war is used as an excuse to violate civil liberties.
23. I am concerned about American civil liberties and rights being revoked in the name of freedom.
24. I find it difficult to believe that national security is the primary motivation for war.
25. I don't trust my government.
26. I have the feeling George Bush is acting out of his own personal agenda.
27. I feel embarrassed being American under this leader.
28. I am getting the feeling that my country isn't a democracy.
29. I feel ashamed, deceived and manipulated.
30. I am used to solving problems with nonviolent methods.
31. I am scared it will lead to further retaliations on the US, escalation of terrorism and more general anxiety.
32. I am afraid for my safety.
33. I am afraid that we don't know the hard facts about their weapons of mass destruction.
34. I find it difficult to face that we might lose our international allies.
35. I am concerned about the cost of the war and its effect on our economy.
36. I am fearful of anti-American sentiment internationally.
37. I am concerned about the environmental impacts of war.
38. I am afraid that the historical archaeological remains will be demolished.
39. I am concerned about the psychological and physical impact on soldiers.
40. I am concerned about hate-crimes and increased racism on Arab-Americans.
41. I am afraid we are creating a situation we can't manage.
42. I need America to reinvest its money within the country to solve local problems (homelessness, health insurance, ...)
43. I am afraid the credibility of the UN will be weakened.
23. I have the feeling our country is right and I need to be able to act without restraint.
24. I find it difficult to deal with Saddam Hussein's history of non-compliance.
25. I have the feeling that Saddam Hussein is untrustworthy.
26. I am used to relying on the expertise of my advisors.
27. I am used to having control over the use/availability of nuclear arms.
28. I believe that violence is a necessary evil.
29. I have the feeling that removing Saddam Hussein will help the Iraqi people.
30. I have the feeling Iraqi people are too weak to remove their own leader.
31. I am afraid Saddam Hussein will gain too much power in the Middle East.
32. I feel we must destroy their weapons before they destroy us.
33. I am afraid that if there is an attack on the US I will be held responsible if I don't do anything now.
34. I like to prove I'm the most powerful man in the world.
35. I feel good when I have lots of oil to fuel my military.
36. I have the feeling the Middle-Eastern oil supplies is critical to maintaining power and order.
37. I am afraid that if I back down, America will look weak.
38. I believe that if the US looks weak, we will encourage more terrorist attacks.
39. I need to fulfil God's will to free humanity from evil.
40. I am afraid the credibility of the UN will be weakened.

During the evaluation after having set up those two parallel lists of foundations, the principal finding in the groups was that in the reality both sides don't communicate with one another. They don't listen to one another. They don't talk or think about one another in such a way. Instead, they blame, insult, criticize or try to destroy one another. In both directions. Lots of arguments are used to try to get oneself into the Major-position. In the United Nations Security Council too. For instance, the US government tries to win with its point of view, by threatening Angola that 20 million dollars in annual humanitarian aid might be reduced, or Chile that there could be a delay in winning congressional approval of a pending free-trade agreement, or Guinea and Cameroon that the US might not push hard for loans those countries need from international lenders. Or Mr Blair claims a veto would be "unreasonable". Or France says Bulgaria is "irresponsible". All these are arguments, the tools of the Major-minor system. They often are not even related anymore to the topic. These arguments are completely different from foundations, the tools of the Equivalency-system, as listed in the two lists above.

It's because the Major-minor model and arguments are/have been used inside of the UN Security Council that now people talk about a "gap" inside of the Security Council, and consider it as something negative, a problem. The two sides are "against" one another. Each thinks : "If you don't think like me, you must be wrong." If foundations and the Equivalency-system would be/have been used in the UN Security Council, then we now just should be in a situation with different points of view, which is a constructive situation. The two sides would be in discussion "together with" one another, not "against" one another.

Building a nonviolent solution

With the Major-minor system one cannot get to solutions. One only can win and conquer the other one. The other one then feels defeated -put into a minor-position- and will start from then on to prepare and feed his "revenge", the next step of the escalation (see fig.2) : putting himself on his turn in the Major-position. This next step can sometimes take a long time to come or can happen in many small pieces. But it will happen at some point and in some way. With the Equivalency-system, on the other hand, one can get to real solutions. They are built up on basis of ALL foundations of the two sides involved (see fig.3). Most of the time they are not just one piece, but a creative construction of many different pieces, all together satisfying all foundations of both parties.

Below we find the result of brainstormings (³) on possible pieces for a creative construction of a nonviolent solution for this controversy :

- Celebrate that the threat of force is working to compel disarmament.
- Help President George Bush to save face so he can back down.
- President George Bush can be honoured for succeeding without needing to go to armed conflict. Offer him another way to be a hero.
- Not to need economic control anymore, make the US less reliant on foreign oil (renewables, education, fuel economy). Explore other -renewable- energy options. Bring people of different fields together to see how to look for other resources (innovators, educators, scientists). Put money into that. Shift from the oil to renewable energy. This can make the US the world leader in alternative energy (super power status).
- Bring people together to look for development of resources in other places. Take an opportunity to look into the great intelligence of the US-government, the great scientists and

³ : Still made by the same groups.

innovators, and put money into them, so they can make weapons of peace and environmental survival.

- Declare the success of sanctions : we have done what we needed to do and finally determined that President Saddam Hussein is no danger and has no weapons of mass destruction. Take off the sanctions.
- The opposition addresses President George Bush respectfully.
- Encourage citizens to think critically, but in a nonviolent way.
- Remove secret military tribunals.
- Transfer the military budget towards UN courts/domestic projects addressing social ills.
- Ask President Saddam Hussein, and also President George Bush, what it would take to feel secure.
- Allow all viewpoints to be expressed in the media. Allow those to press conferences with President George Bush.
- Provide the opportunity for President George Bush and President Saddam Hussein to get face to face together non-politically. Do this for citizens, and for groups of governmental officials on both sides (“a governmental exchange program”).
- Organise a face to face round-table of President George Bush and anti-war activists, in an Equivalent spirit, so that both sides feel heard and respected, and have the prove of it. So the people can trust their President and he feels trusted..
- Work on more religious understanding.
- Ask Desmond Tutu or Nelson Mandela or Thich Nhat Hanh to speak to a big group from both sides, or to facilitate meetings of both sides together.
- Use the US-soldiers –in a well publicized way- for rebuilding and for service of citizens, bring supplies to hospitals, food, help build sustainable agriculture, develop new energy possibilities (with funds we have saved by avoiding war).
- Use US-soldiers as UN peacekeepers in Iraq, for instance to make elections happen.
- Use the billions of dollars offered to Turkey for helping Iraq build a more safe, healthy, just state.
- President George Bush could support a nonviolent movement in Iraq, and help liberate the Iraqis on their own terms. He could be the great leader he wants to be and Americans could feel better about their government.
- Have a direct vote about going to war.
- Move toward short term or longer term direct democracy. Allow the people to be directly heard and have direct influence over issues (decision to go to war, what to do after (if) invasion, foreign policy in general, etc.).
- Look at other perspectives about leadership.

This brainstorming is only a beginning. But it shows how a nonviolent solution can be built as a product of an Equivalent process based on the analysis and use of foundations of both parties.