From Violence to Dialogue: Responding to Terrorism and the 'War on Terror'

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In what is now the vicious circle of violence that pits 'terrorist' and 'counter-terrorist' is there a place for dialogue? Can dialogue feasibly restrict the spread and intensity of violence? More ambitiously perhaps, can it set in train a process that might bring healing to the deep wounds that that have been festering for decades? To explore these questions this paper begins by clarifying the nature and scope of the problem as it has unfolded over time. It delineates the scope and modalities of the conflict: its historical roots, the way it has manifested itself in the politics of the Muslim world, the interests of the United States and its allies, and the tensions that have accompanied the rise of substantial Muslim minorities in several Western countries. The paper then goes on to consider the efforts made thus far to bring the philosophy and method of dialogue to bear on the Islam-West divide, and its offshoot the terrorism-counterterrorism dynamic. Reflecting on the lessons to be drawn from these earlier endeavours, the paper sets out the new conceptual and practical innovations that should inform the dialogue agenda in the years ahead.

Terrorism and the 'war on terror' are now integral to the difficult relationship between the West and the Muslim world. In a speech to the counter-extremism summit held in Washington a few weeks after the *Charlie Hebdo* killings in Paris (7-9 January 2015) President Obama attempted to portray the conflict as limited in its reach and rationale (White House 2015): 'We are not at war with Islam. We are at war with people who have perverted Islam.' However, this formula, variations of which are often used by Western governments to explain the conflict and their response to it, can do little to conceal the palpable tensions that now characterise relations as much within as between countries.

As this paper makes clear, we are not dealing here with a simple or single relationship but with an extraordinarily complex set of overlapping and intersecting relationships. Involved are states and their security and military establishments,

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great powers, their allies and clients, fragile and failed states, warlords and fiefdoms, terrorist organisations and networks, majority and minority communities within states, religious groupings with some operating locally, others nationally or transnationally, a bewildering array of political parties, and cultural societies, think-tanks, research centres, and intellectual networks that span virtually the entire ideological spectrum. To this long list must be added a great many business interests, not least those engaged in the oil, arms and narcotics industries, and a good number of intergovernmental bodies, including the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the European Union, the Arab League, and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. The upshot is a murky web of competing interests and perceptions, which even the well-informed observer can find difficult to disentangle, let alone comprehend. Given the long history of mutual suspicion and mistrust and deeply felt grievances that remain largely unaddressed, it is hardly surprising that opposing parties should periodically resort to force in order to prosecute their respective objectives and priorities.

The question arises: in what is now the vicious circle of violence that pits 'terrorist' and 'counter-terrorist' and inevitably kills and maims innocent civilians and destroys entire neighbourhoods and cities and does irreparable damage to societies and the world's cultural heritage is there a place for dialogue? Can dialogue feasibly restrict the spread and intensity of violence? More ambitiously perhaps, can it set in train a process that might bring healing to the deep wounds that have been festering for decades? To pose this question is to invite a number of more specific, often neglected yet crucial questions: what exactly does dialogue involve? Where and how might it begin? Who should be involved? What are desirable outcomes in the short to medium term? Who can exercise agency in initiating or facilitating the process? These and related questions are disarmingly simple, yet the answers are unavoidably complex and contentious.

The applicability of dialogue principles cannot be determined in the abstract. Such an examination presupposes an appropriate degree of contextualisation. We must first clarify the nature and scope of the problem as it has unfolded over time. We need to delineate, at least with a broad brush, the scope and modalities of the conflict: its historical roots, the way it manifests itself in the politics of the Muslim world, predominantly but not exclusively in the Middle East, the interests of the United States and its allies, and the tensions that have accompanied the rise of substantial Muslim minorities in several Western countries. Such a step will enable us to sketch the ground that dialogue needs to cover, and the obstacles it has to overcome along the way. Secondly, we must consider what efforts have thus far been made to bring the philosophy and method of dialogue to bear on the Islam-West divide, and its offshoot the terrorism-counterterrorism dynamic. We might then be

better placed to pose two critically important yet all too often neglected questions: What lessons, if any, can we draw from these efforts, limited though they have been in scope and outcome? And what fine-tuning and perhaps new conceptual and practical approaches might we profitably explore if the dialogue agenda is to move beyond the current impasse?

Rethinking the Terrorism-Counterterrorism Syndrome

Since 11 September 2001, terrorism and the 'war on terror' have been at the centre of national and international political discourse. Yet, the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, Bali, Madrid, London, Copenhagen and Paris, to name a few, cannot be considered a new phenomenon in international relations. In the 1992 Rwandan genocide some 800,000 people lost their lives in the space of ten to twelve weeks, to which could be added the tens of thousands killed in Bosnia, Kosovo, Darfur, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland and the Basque conflict in Spain. The use of terror as a political instrument has a long history. In its modern form it can be traced back to the French Revolution. During *le Règne de la Terreur* (which introduced 'terror' into the modern political vocabulary) more than 300,000 suspects were arrested and more than 17,000 were executed.

Even in the Islamist context, the use of violence against Western targets dates back to the 1970s. However, several factors converged in the late 1990s, and most dramatically in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks on the United States, to give the terrorist threat unprecedented prominence in Western media and make it a centrepiece of the security policies of Western governments. Modern technology coupled with increased cross-border mobility endowed terrorist groups with greater destructive capacity and geographical reach. They could now organise on a global scale, and even in the absence of an effective organisational structure could use social media to spread their message to a wider audience, and significantly enhance their recruiting potential. Centred initially on the Middle East, Islamists would soon transplant their operations to Africa, Asia and importantly to several Western countries. Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups made the strategic assessment that, given the awesome firepower arrayed against them, bombings, suicide attacks, hostage taking, hijackings and hoaxes, by concentrating on soft targets and exploiting the dramatic quality of the terrorist weapon, was the most effective way of spreading fear and anxiety, and exposing the vulnerability of the opponent (Camilleri 2008).

As for Western governments generally and US administrations in particular (White House 2011) the overriding objective has been to destroy the human and material infrastructure of terrorist organisations of Islamic provenance, and to inflict exemplary punishment on those who harboured, financed or in any way supported

them. The ensuing global war on Islamist terrorism, both on home soil and in Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Middle East, and other parts of Africa and Asia, though it has proven a costly campaign in both human and financial terms, shows little sign of stemming the tide of terrorist attacks. It is estimated that over the last 14 years there have been over 48,000 terrorist incidents claiming over 107,000 lives. The evidence suggests that since 2000 terrorist activity has increased at least fivefold. In 2013 terrorist attacks were carried out in 87 countries, with 24 of these experiencing at least 50 fatalities. The ten countries most affected were Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, Syria, Somalia, India, the Philippines, Yemen and Thailand (Global Terrorism Index 2014).

On assuming office President Obama indicated a commitment to winding down the US military presence in Iraq, quickening the pace of military withdrawal from Afghanistan and generally addressing the excesses of the 'war on terror' that had included widespread human rights abuses, use of torture in both Iraq and Guantanamo Bay, and the CIA program of 'extraordinary rendition' which enabled suspected terrorists to be secretly moved to foreign countries, where they could be indefinitely detained and interrogated without having to charge them with any crimes. Some six years later the US troop presence in Afghanistan was wound back from about 100,000 at the height of the war to 10,800, with all combat forces expected to leave by the end of 2016. However, about 4,000 special operations troops would continue to carry out raids against insurgents and assist the Afghan military with airstrikes, supplies and even ground forces in the event of a heightened terrorist threat (Mazzetti 2014). In Iraq the last US combat troops were pulled out in December 2011, but a year later about 1,500 troops were sent back to fight Islamic State militants that swept in from Syria and took control of large parts of the country. By 2014 the number of US troops had doubled with thousands more supporting the effort from multiple bases in the region. Under Obama the 'war on terror' rhetoric was toned down, but the securitisation of politics continued unabated (Hirsh & Oliphant 2014). Indeed, the counter-terrorism narrative, as articulated by political leaders and security agencies and supported by important media outlets, appears to have created the psychological and political conditions for steadily rising constraints on freedom and privacy in the United States as in other Western countries. Additionally, against a backdrop of fear, the counter-terrorist campaign has been feeding anti-Muslim hostility with the perpetrators of racial and religious vilification portraying themselves as defenders of liberal or Christian values.

As for the terrorists themselves, their profile remains elusive and at best ambiguous. To ask what makes the 'terrorist' tick is to pose an unanswerable question. There is no single 'terrorist' type. There are leaders and followers, each with clearly different

psychological profiles (Varvin 2003). There are those who dream of the resurgence of Islam or the birth of a new caliphate, others who feel that it is time to challenge the dominance and moral decadence of the West or to avenge the past misdeeds of infidels, others still who crave power and see in the current upheaval sweeping different parts of Islam, and in particular the Arab world, an opportunity to carve out fiefdoms for themselves (Gaffney 2003). There are those who feel it is an avenue for settling scores with local religious or political foes, others with violent pasts who think they can put to rewarding use their criminal skills, others who yearn for excitement and adventure and seek to bestow meaning and even nobility to their otherwise dreary or unsatisfying existence, and others still who see in martyrdom a once in a lifetime opportunity to earn the rewards of paradise. Binding these diverse and potentially conflicting psychological drives is the common language of Islam, though for most knowledge of the sacred texts is often patchy and command of the scholarly traditions of Islamic jurisprudence highly problematic.

How then does this heterogeneous cohort of Islamist adventurers relate to the wider Muslim Ummah? Few Muslim believers, it is true, have joined the ranks of militant Islamist organisations and seldom do terrorist tactics attract majority support. A Pew survey (Pew 2013a) found that 16 per cent of respondents in Turkey considered violence against civilian targets to be justified often or sometimes. For Indonesia, Pakistan and Jordan the proportion was 6 per cent, 3 per cent and 8 per cent respectively. Nevertheless, the grievances, objectives and demands as articulated by the leaders of these organisations and the sacrifices their followers were prepared to make appeared to strike a responsive chord in much of the Muslim world. Another Pew survey in the same year (Pew 2013b) found that in many Muslim countries a large number supported a significant role for Islam in politics (Jordan: 80 per cent; Malaysia: 82 per cent; Afghanistan: 82 per cent; Indonesia: 75 per cent; Egypt: 75 per cent; Palestinian Territories: 73 per cent).

The counter-terrorist strategies adopted by the security establishments of the United States and its allies may well have exacerbated rather than lessened or contained the terrorist threat, in part because they have been so preoccupied with removing the symptoms of the threat rather than addressing its underlying causes. At play here are two closely related dynamics: the ideological justification – part religious, part political – terrorists offer for their actions and the resonance which the sentiments they express have found with large Muslim audiences, even when the latter take issue with the targeting and killing of innocent civilians. The key to understanding this paradox lies in the troubled relationship between Islam and the West.

Historically, in spite of prolonged cultural, intellectual and commercial interaction bursts of co-operation have often alternated with conflict and even violence. For Muslims generally and Arabs in particular, the relatively recent past is associated

with European ascendancy, and though colonization and occupation have for the most part come to an end, they see few signs of a thorough-going reappraisal of the relationship. For many the West is still driven by a powerful, almost instinctive disposition to maintain its political and economic dominance at the expense of the Muslim 'other', and to make co-existence and collaboration dependent on Muslim acceptance of such dominance (Sayeed 1995).

Islamic hostility to the West is not reducible to a single explanation. The depth and basis of resentment have varied considerably with time and place. A number of recurring themes do, however, appear central to the Islamic critique of Western assumptions and objectives. Of these the first and most obvious is the widespread hostility to Western, and especially US economic, political and military support for Israel. In Arab eyes in particular successive US administrations and the security establishments on which they rely for policy advice and implementation have been firmly committed to the defence of Israel's security and its continued military supremacy in the Middle East. Apart from relatively mild and irregular criticisms of Israel's heavy-handed use of force and expanding settlements in Palestinian territories, the tendency has been to turn a blind eye to Israel's transgressions and to its nuclear weapons capability. The failure of the United States to use the immense diplomatic and military leverage at its disposal to press for the establishment of a Palestinian state is seen as evidence of its bias and duplicity.

Closer to home for many Muslims is the poor performance of their economies as reflected in widespread poverty, high unemployment and inadequate health care. The deep social discontent arising from these economic conditions was one of the powerful drivers of the Arab spring (Mulderig 2013, Cammet and Diwan, 2013). Internal political debates, especially among the younger generation, tended to focus on institutionalised forms of corruption, clientilism and mismanagement. For many the shortcomings in the political and economic fabric of their societies was attributable to the corrupt practices of authoritarian regimes that often relied for their survival on Western support, with bureaucratic, business and military elites serving as conduits for the preservation of Western interests. The regimes of Ben Ali in Tunisia, Mubarak in Egypt, Saleh in Yemen were among those that would in due course become casualties of rising public anger (Inbar 2013).

The contentious nexus between domestic and external factors was not, however, confined to the experience of economic hardship. Dependent on external sources of support, including military aid and large-scale arms transfers, many of the oil-rich Gulf states had been willing to provide the United States and its allies secure and cheap access to oil supplies and to act as a buffer against more radical Arab regimes inclined to adopt a less accommodating stance vis-à-vis US strategic and diplomatic priorities. Simply put, many in the Arab world were deeply critical of the failure of

Arab governments to challenge pro-Israel and other Western policies through more effective use of the oil weapon.

A more general source of discontent merits close attention. In Muslim eyes, much of Western practice and discourse constitutes an affront to religious sensibility. The tendency of the United States and its allies to embark on military interventions in Islamic countries with little or no prior consultation with the societies that are to bear the primary burden of war is widely regarded as insensitive and shortsighted. The willingness to use military force even during the Holy month of Ramadan has been interpreted as a calculated and provocative insult to the Islamic faith. Especially galling is the stationing of US military facilities and personnel on Islamic soil, which, in the case of Saudi Arabia, was equated by many with desecration of Islam's holiest places. In this highly charged atmosphere, in which multiple sources of discontent converge, a powerful undercurrent has developed across an otherwise religiously and politically divided Islamic world that views the West as contemptuous of the richness and creativity of the Islamic tradition, and bent on stereotyping and demonising the other.

The same mindset is said to colour not only relations with Islamic states but even attitudes to Muslim communities in seemingly pluralist, tolerant western societies. The decision taken in France to ban Islamic headscarves and other conspicuous signs of religious affiliation from French state schools in 2004 was followed by the introduction of the Burqa ban in 2011. A highly charged debate ensued on the place of Muslims in French society, accompanied by frequent attacks on Muslim women and increasingly vehement calls to curb expressions of Muslim faith, whether by refusing permits for the construction of mosques, bans on praying in the street or controls on the supply of halal meat. The depiction of the Prophet Mohammed in cartoons that have periodically appeared in Danish, French and other European newspapers and online news websites (The Telegraph 2015) has been viewed by Muslims everywhere as deeply offensive and provocative. Given such an unsympathetic, not to say hostile, environment, it is tragic but not altogether surprising that young men and increasingly young women and even girls should be intent on defending the Islamic cause by travelling to war zones in Syria and Iraq in order to join the Islamic State or other terrorist networks (Ramdani 2014).

These disquieting developments are but a further manifestation of the complex ways in which violent Islamism and the war on terror have become inextricably linked to the wider divide between Islam and the West. They point to the multiplicity of actors involved, the diverse and at times competing interests and priorities they are pursuing, the fluid and at times blurred religious, cultural and civilisational currents they represent, often with little understanding or mastery of the turbulent seas they have to navigate.

Tentative Steps to Dialogue

Given the current maelstrom of religious, political and ideological mistrust and hostility we have briefly surveyed, can dialogue play a part in establishing more effective lines of communication and in the process help to create relationships animated by a sharper sense of the value of diversity in its various settings?

Dialogue across cultural boundaries is not a new idea. Relations between and within the world's major religions and civilizations have fluctuated between enormously rich and creative intellectual and artistic encounters and bursts of outright hostility and even gruesome violence. Interreligious dialogue, an important subset of the of the dialogue enterprise, has itself has quite a long history, with several notable initiatives going as far back as the edicts on religious tolerance which Indian Emperor Ashoka issued at different times during his long reign (269-232 BCE). The most significant development in the Modern era was the World Parliament of Religions, convened in Chicago in September 1893, which marked the first global gathering of representatives of Eastern and Western spiritual traditions.

In the twentieth century two world wars, the horrors of the Holocaust, and more recently the conflicts that have devastated parts of the Middle East and Africa, Afghanistan, and the former Yugoslavia have provided renewed impetus to the advocacy of dialogue. However, it is only in the aftermath of Huntington's controversial *Clash of Civilizations* thesis (Huntington 1996) that both established and new organisations consciously set out to institutionalise dialogue processes aimed specifically at rebuilding trust between Islam and the West. The main thrust of Huntington's argument was that in the post-Cold War era international conflict would come to be defined by cultural and civilisational fault lines, notably between the dominant West on the one hand and the Sinic and Islamic worlds on the other. Though many questioned the conceptual and empirical validity of the Huntington thesis (Said 2001, Fox 2002, Russett 2000), the notion of a latent or emerging civilisational clash had considerable psychological and political resonance with conservative policy-making elites in the United States as well as with militant Islamic constituencies.

It was with a view to neutralising this potentially self-fulfilling and dangerous prophecy that Iranian president Mohammad Khatami sought to popularise in a series of eloquently crafted and highly influential speeches the countervailing notion of the *dialogue of* civilizations (Petito 2007). Having secured the endorsement of the concept by the Organisation of Islamic Conference in 1997, Khatami took the proposal to the UN General Assembly in November 1998, which adopted a resolution proclaiming the year 2001 as the *Year of Dialogue among Civilizations*. It also adopted the *Global Agenda for Dialogue among* Civilisations (United Nations

2001), which has in turn given rise to a great many governmental and non-governmental initiatives

The UNAOC initiative

In 2005, largely in response to September 11 and its aftermath, Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero launched in partnership with the Turkish prime minister the idea of an *Alliance of Civilizations*, which the UN subsequently endorsed. The United Nations Alliance for Civilizations (UNAOC) initiative was specifically designed to address the fault line that separates the Western and non-Western worlds, the Occident and the Orient, and merits therefore particular attention. As a first step UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed a High Level Group whose report released in November 2006 recommended that the roots of extremism should be addressed by promoting understanding, dialogue and empathy for different cultures, religions and civilizations through targeted interventions in four sectors: media, youth, education and migration (UNAOC 2006). In the initial implementation stage, the emphasis was on developing networks and partnerships with governments and other actors which accorded with UNAOC objectives and priorities, with a particular focus on relations between Islam and the West.

To assist with implementation of its agenda, the UNAOC formed the Group of Friends (a network of governments and international organisations). Membership of the Group grew from 44 in 2007 to 130 in 2011 (Camilleri and Martin 2014, 11). Projects undertaken have included (UNAOC 2015): *Entrepreneurs for Social Change* (a training program for aspiring young social entrepreneurs from the Euro-Med region), a *Fellowship Scheme* (a cultural exchange program for 15 emerging leaders from the Arab world and 15 from the Western world who meet and exchange ideas with decision makers, grassroots organizations, media, local communities and religious groups), *Intercultural Innovation Award* (provides monetary and in-kind support to innovative grassroots initiatives working to alleviate identity-based tensions and conflicts), *Intercultural Leaders (*skills and knowledge-sharing platform for addressing cross-cultural tensions), *PLURAL+* (a youth video festival and competition), a *Summer School (*one-week *training for youth to help address* global challenges within the context of cultural and religious diversity), *Youth Solidarity Fund* (provides seed funding to outstanding youth-led initiatives) and a range of projects for engaging media, especially around migration and other cross-border movements.

Perhaps the most visible element of the UNAOC program has been its Global Forums, the first of which was held in Madrid (January 2008), followed by Istanbul (April 2009), Rio (May 2010), Doha (December 2011), Vienna (February 2013) and Bali (August 2014). These were large gatherings attracting between 1000 and 2000 participants representing governments, intergovernmental and non-

governmental organizations, the media as well as the corporate sector. Accompanied by a number of side events, they attempted to showcase and acknowledge the contribution of a large number of projects, most of which were animated by civil society and conducted nationally or more often in regional or global settings. With the momentum generated by these forums and other high profile events and the prestige accorded to a UN initiative enthusiastically supported by the UN Secretary-General, the UNAOC was able to register a significant global media presence (Camilleri & Martin 2014, 12) enabling the "alliance of civilisations" to match and in some years surpass the media attention received by its antithesis the "clash of civilizations".

Notwithstanding its achievements over a relatively short period, this like many other UN initiatives has had serious shortcomings. Perhaps the least important of these is the choice of the word 'alliance', which, when placed in a geopolitical context, carries unfortunate connotations of conflict and the use of force. 'Dialogue' rather than 'alliance' would seem a far more effective discursive tool to expose the pitfalls of the 'clash of civilizations' thesis. Moreover, while UNAOC has been right to focus on the Islam-West divide, it has not been able to go far beyond the symptomatic dimensions of the problem and has been viewed by many as first and foremost an instrument Western governments can use to promote a particular interpretation of the terrorist phenomenon and a counter-terrorist narrative closely aligned to their strategic interests and priorities. Also problematic has been the uneasy marriage between the governmental and non-governmental wings of UNAOC – with most of the energy coming from civil society but key decisions remaining the prerogative of states, and the UN uneasily navigating between the two. The lack of enthusiasm or even interest shown by many governments, not least the United States, has been compounded by the internal wrangling often associated with the UN's arcane bureaucratic politics.

Other governmental and intergovernmental initiatives

The dialogical response to terrorism and the war on terror has involved a good deal more than UNAOC. It is worth remembering that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was founded as far back as November 1945 as a specialised UN agency, with the express purpose of creating conditions for genuine dialogue on the basis of respect for shared values and the dignity of each civilisation and culture. UNESCO and UNAOC did cooperate on a number of joint projects, including the creation of the UNESCO-UNAOC UNITWIN Global Chair on Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue. However, as a broad generalisation the opportunities for cooperation and complementarity on the one hand and the risks of overlap and duplication on the other were inadequately explored. In any case, in the aftermath of September 11 the

UN system directed much of its attention to the dual tasks of dissuading would-be terrorists from resorting to violent extremism and developing state capacity to defeat terrorism. To this end it channelled most of its energies through the United Nations Development Programme, the Peacebuilding Support Office, the Department of Political Affairs and the Secretary-General's special representatives and envoys.

Other key multilateral players were regional organisations or governments acting together in regional settings. The European Union placed much emphasis on widening its political dialogue with third countries to include counter-terrorist strategies and projects. Counter-terrorism dialogues aimed at creating more effective policy making and expert networks on both sides of the Mediterranean were conducted with governments in Arab countries, Israel and Turkey as well as with the Arab League, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the African Union. Over time attention turned increasingly to the foreign terrorist fighters phenomenon and to efforts needed to stem the tide of fighters travelling to conflict regions and managing their return.

A number of national governments in the West have also attempted, with varying degrees of commitment and insight, to develop channels of communication with their respective Muslim communities. But the processes of consultation have had at best mixed results. Governments have generally applied pressure on Muslim leaders to preach the virtues of moderation, and devised educational and other programs aimed principally at 'deradicalisation', without any corresponding willingness on their part to consider the deeper grievances held by members of these communities, let alone their implications for the formulation and execution of foreign and security policies (Laurence 2012, Angenendt 2007). As for Christian minorities in Muslim countries they have been subjected to mounting pressure in most parts of the Arab world and Christian churches, schools and homes have been the target of frequent Islamist attacks. Dialogical interventions in the sensitive area of Sunni-Shia relations have been few and far between. To some observers the religious dialogues initiated by the Yemeni Government in 2002 were a promising beginning, but they were conceived largely in the context of deradicalisation (ICPVTR 2010, Birk 2009). With government agencies offering little effective support and detainees subjected to arbitrary arrests, indefinite detentions, torture and other human rights violations, the project was discontinued in 2005.

In the case of Southeast Asia, the site of several terrorist attacks notably in Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia, a number of governments joined to convene regional interfaith dialogues, first in Indonesia (2004), followed by the Philippines (2006), New Zealand (2007), Cambodia (2008) and Australia (2009) and Indonesia (2012). A Regional Interfaith Network was launched in 2011. For their part, multilateral institutions, in particular the ASEAN Regional Forum and

the East Asian Summit, made periodic declarations of support for interfaith and intercultural dialogue (Camilleri 2013, 29-31). The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) made a more substantive contribution, with ASEM conferences setting priorities in the fields of education and training, cultural and intellectual exchanges, cultural tourism and protection of cultural resources. By 2015 the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF 2015), established by ASEM in February 1997 with a mandate to promote mutual understanding between the two continents, had implemented some 650 projects engaging some 17,000 participants. Intent on promoting the Malaysian brand, Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, in line with his notion of *Islam Hadari* (or *civilisational Islam*), hosted a series of international conferences during 2006-2009 under the theme 'Islam and the West: Bridging the Gap'. Speaking at the UN General Assembly in September 2010, his successor, Najib Razak, announced the establishment of the *Global Movement of Moderates* (GMM). At this and numerous other forums he presented the Malaysian initiative as a call to moderation, based on the Islamic concept of *Wasatiyyah* understood as the mid-point between two bad extremes. Moderates from different religious and national backgrounds were entreated to reclaim the centre stage and with moderation as their guide to respond to the global challenges of our age.

Interfaith Activism

Important as the contribution of governments and multilateral organisations has been, in many ways the rapid growth of the interfaith movement has been perhaps the most striking expression of the dialogical movement in the aftermath of September 11. The ground had been prepared by a series of initiatives in previous decades. Notable milestones included: the establishment of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (originally the Secretariat for Non-Christians), an official Catholic body set up in 1964 in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council; the World Conference of Religions for Peace (subsequently renamed Religions for Peace) which convened for the first time in Kyoto in October 1970 with the express purpose of bringing together people of faith to cooperate for peace; and the 'Declaration toward a Global Ethic' signed at the Parliament of the World's Religions gathering in 1993 by more than 200 leaders from some 40 different faith traditions and spiritual communities.

In the minds of many extremism couched and justified in religious terms called for a religiously framed response. Significant initiatives, including public pronouncements, prayer services, vigils, conferences, educational and other joint projects were launched by authoritative personalities and institutions, including Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis, Rowan Williams as Archbishop of Canterbury and his successor Justin Welby, the World Council of Churches, the Grand Muftis of Egypt and Syria, and Iran's Institute for Interreligious Dialogue, to name a few.

Complementing these high-level encounters has been the ongoing work of such international organisations and networks as Religions for Peace, Parliament of the World's Religions, the United Religions Initiative, the International Council of Christians and Jews, the Gülen (or Hizmet) movement and its large international network of dialogue societies, the Soka Gakkai International moment and the more recent Cordoba Initiative. But by far the most notable and somewhat unexpected development has been the proliferation of localised groups and initiatives primarily but not exclusively in the United States, Western Europe, the UK, Canada and Australia. These have been aptly described as 'a fluid network of people and organizations working to advance tolerance, understanding and genuine respect for the religious "other" (plural) and the positive appropriation of religious diversity.' (Heckman 2013) With the benefit of funding and logistical support provided by municipal and provincial governments, local and regional interfaith projects and groups were able to mount a wide ranging programme aimed at increasing knowledge and understanding of different faiths, that is, of their respective beliefs, texts and religious practices, including fasting and prayers. Interfaith activities have included visits to one another's places of worship and even homes, as well as joint prayer services, forums and discussions.

This cursory survey of religious and secular contributions to the dialogical groundswell of the last fifteen years points to a movement, which though fragmented and inchoate, was nevertheless widespread, sustained and able to resonate across diverse cultural and national settings.

The Dialogical Imperative: Future Possibilities

Though much has been accomplished under the general rubric of dialogue in response to the insecurities of the post-September 11 environment, not all initiatives have been equally helpful. Some have been little more than cosmetic exercises, with governments often appropriating the language of dialogue to conceal or embroider an agenda driven by quite different interests and objectives. But even those initiatives that can generally be described as genuine and constructive attempts to contain extremist discourse cannot be said to constitute, either individually or collectively, a coherent or comprehensive response to the fluid, often ambiguous yet pervasive challenge that confronts the international community.

The countless actions/reactions that have thus far punctuated the evolution of the terrorism-counterterrorism dynamic over the last twenty or more years now threaten to generate a potentially uncontrollable spiral of violence. If dialogue is to help contain and eventually reverse this spiral, then dialogical interventions need to be lucidly conceived, carefully prepared and patiently applied. This will necessarily be a multidimensional process that rests on the active participation

of diverse stakeholders, each having different priorities and pursuing different ambitions, each bringing different ideas and proposals to the table. Indeed, the shape of the table, the issues to be canvassed and the desired outcomes will vary substantially form dialogue to dialogue. It is neither feasible nor desirable that the dialogue be straitjacketed into some kind of uniform or all-encompassing format or structure. Much theorising on dialogue is defective in its inclination to generalise or to be more precise in its tendency to resort to abstraction where the complexity and untidiness of concrete situations can be conveniently swept under the carpet. Yet, attention to diversity or the uniqueness of each situation does not mean that the dialogical enterprise has to proceed without reference to dialogical values. It is these values that distinguish dialogue from notions of communication, negotiation, conflict resolution or dispute settlement. As the more profound dialogical thinkers have argued, dialogue is not just or even primarily a set of techniques that can be mastered over time; it is first and foremost a mindset that animates and sustains the enterprise (Buber 1947; Gadamer 1992; Bohm 1996). Three values are critical to the dialogical mindset: acceptance of difference, mutual listening and a readiness to revisit history.

Diversity or even sharp differences need not stand in the way of effective dialogue either within or between political, cultural or religious groupings. Dialogue stands to gain as much from diversity as form commonality. To engage in dialogue is not merely to recognise or tolerate cultural, religious or political difference, it is to acknowledge that no culture, religion, society or political grouping has a monopoly on wisdom. Dialogue thus becomes an encounter across cultural, religious, philosophical, ethical, civilisational or political boundaries, in which each participant listens to the other, becomes open, sensitive, even vulnerable to the other. Dialogue thus becomes an exercise in 'mutual listening' in which each participant engages in a journey of self-discovery as well as discovery of the 'other'. It follows that through dialogue participants are encouraged to hold their respective practices up to critical examination, and to consider ways of adapting them to new circumstances. Dialogue works best when it fosters soul-searching, at times painful, within as much as between faiths, cultures and political entities.

Dialogue, it must be said, is a difficult undertaking, and nowhere more so than in situations of conflict or tension. Whether it is in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Christian-Muslim divide, or any of the other deeply divisive conflicts in the Middle East, Afghanistan or parts of Africa, dialogue must somehow elicit the mental and emotional energies that make possible empathy and compassion for the 'other'. Long held fears and animosities must somehow be revisited. Communities in conflict situations have often suffered from past violence, and continue to suffer today. Yet, many of these same communities have

themselves inflicted violence on others. If dialogue is to move, however tentatively, towards reconciliation, the participants need to share their stories (Glover 2005), listen to one another's experience of pain, acknowledge past wrongs, as a prelude to accepting responsibility for righting the wrongs of the past.

A critical first step in the dialogical journey envisaged here is the deconstruction of the very terms 'terrorism' and 'counterterrorism'. Such a project can in principle engage anyone who is so inclined. In practice, it is critically important that such a dialogue be conducted in the West, in particular in the United States and its principal allies in the 'war on terror', and that it engage on the one hand policy-makers, military planners and security agencies and on the other important voices in civil society, including scholars, journalists, religious and community leaders, lawyers and public interest organisations. The aim here is twofold: first to clarify what we understand by terrorism, the diversity of motives, drivers and interests which it encompasses, and its relationship to the broad religious and political tent that is Islam; secondly, to explore appropriate national and international responses to the phenomenon in the light of the competing demands of security, peace, justice and liberty.[1] Placed against this unavoidably larger backdrop, dialogue offers an opportunity to ask often neglected questions that lie at the core of the West's understanding of itself and its place in the world. It also invites a far-reaching reassessment of the role of religion in the public sphere, the meaning of religious fundamentalism, and the need to revisit the relationship of religion to the secular order, a mainly Western construct developed in the aftermath of the European wars of religion (Camilleri 2012).

When it comes to the question of how to respond to the 'terrorist threat' posed by Islamist groups, there is a strong case for Western states that are the principal targets of such attacks to pursue dialogue in three other contexts, each of which involves overlapping domestic and international arenas and actors. The most obvious, often neglected yet pressing need is for these states, in particular their legislative and executive arms, to initiate a respectful and sustained dialogue with their Muslim minorities. Several considerations shed light on the strategic role of such dialogue, the issues to be canvassed and the communicative approach most likely to bear fruit. For Western societies, where different versions of secularism coexist with a Christian legacy of varying degrees of influence and visibility, this is a critical

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1   For an insightful deconstruction of the terms and their implications for dialogue see Habermas, Jurgen (2003) *Philosophy in a time of Terror: Dialogues with Jacques Derrida.* Chicago: Chicago University Press. Significantly, Habermas views terrorism as a unique modern phenomenon, and specifically as a symptom of the failure of dialogue, as a communicative pathology that leads through the spiral of uncontrolled violence to the breakdown of communication.

test case of their ability to construct a viable relationship with Islam. If such an outcome is not feasible within the United States, Canada, Germany, Britain, France or Australia, it is much less likely to be achieved in relations with Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran or Libya. Muslim minorities in the West are also crucial interlocutors by virtue of the fact that they retain strong family, professional, business and political links with their countries of origin, many of which are at the centre of the conflicts that have proven fertile breeding grounds for various forms of terrorist activity. Simply put, the input of Muslim minorities offers a rewarding pathway to a more sophisticated understanding of Arab and other Muslim societies and an invaluable source of advice on the formulation and execution of foreign policy goals. With appropriate acknowledgment of past mistakes and a willingness to refashion existing policies and discursive practices, Western governments could go a long way towards addressing the religious and political grievances and legitimate socio-economic aspirations of Muslim communities, thereby reducing the attraction for young Muslims of violent or extremist reactions usually born of a deep sense of victimhood, humiliation and severely constrained life chances.

In coming years the Western world will face another increasingly difficult dialogical challenge. The entire post-Cold War period has hitherto been characterised, especially on the part of the United States, by a tendency towards unilateralist policies, most markedly in the field of security policy. Nowhere has this tendency been more pronounced than in relations with the Middle East and more broadly with the Islamic world. The response to terrorism, even prior to the attacks on New York and Washington, was shaped by a policy making elite intent on retaining America's unchallenged military supremacy, and inclined to view friends and allies and even multilateral institutions, including the United Nations, as little more than appendages to US diplomacy. An open-ended and sustained dialogue that encompasses not only friends and allies but recalcitrant and even so-called 'rogue states' can help reverse the widely shared impression of a power unable to break with its imperial past. Effective and durable responses to the rise of IS in Iraq and Syria, Boko Haram in Nigeria, Al-Shabaab in Somalia or state failure in Yemen and Libya (in no small measure the result of ill-conceived Western policies) can be developed only in the context of patient dialogue between relevant stakeholders and the direct involvement of the United Nations and regional organisations viewed not as diplomatic sideshows but as significant spaces for mutual listening. Such a dialogue would necessity go beyond the symptomatic diagnosis of the problem that more often than not privileges military solutions and clandestine operations.

There is yet another arena where dialogue may prove especially relevant to conflict resolution, and which is of particular concern to non-governmental organisations conducting humanitarian and peace building operations. These are organisations

whose work is often severely impeded by the direct and indirect effects of counter-terrorism strategies. Counter-terrorism legislation in the United States, the UK and elsewhere has been especially troublesome in that it has severely restricted mediation and dialogue initiatives. Providing representatives of groups listed as 'terrorist' organisations with training in dialogue facilitation and negotiation or courses in international humanitarian law can carry the risk of prosecution. Proscription of this kind tends to undermine the prospects for dialogue and remove viable alternatives to violence, thereby strengthening the hard-line, extremist elements within a group. By limiting the documentation of peace processes, it can prevent the application of 'lessons learnt' from a given conflict to other comparable contexts.

Finally, a word about dialogue with terrorist organisations. To some this may seem an unthinkable option. Inviting or even allowing terrorists to participate in dialogue might well be used by them to enhance their legitimacy whether with a domestic or international constituency. Moreover, terrorist groups are notoriously difficult to locate, communicate with, and integrate into a reasonably structured dialogical encounter. It is also the case that, given the intent of terrorist organisations to wreak havoc and spread panic, authorities have a responsibility to deliver a measure of security and stability. Yet, there is another equally respectable argument that acknowledges the risks and sensitivities involved yet sees value in engaging armed groups in dialogue. With appropriate forethought and preparation such dialogue can open previously closed channels of communication and reduce isolation, suspicion and mistrust (CIIAN 2006). Mediation and dialogue activities can also be useful instruments in dissuading potential recruits from joining or supporting terrorist groups. Asked to comment on these as yet inadequately explored possibilities, Pope Francis, while firmly denouncing the evil of terrorism, offered the following perspective: 'I never count anything as lost. Never. Never close the door. It's difficult, you could say almost impossible, but the door is always open.' (Zaimov 2014). At some point in any conflict violence has to give way to a political solution, for which purpose dialogue becomes an unavoidable intervening step. In Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, Nigeria – countries with porous boundaries, devastated economies, large dislocated populations and deeply entrenched ethnic or religious tensions and hatreds – ideal conditions exist for the virus of terrorism to thrive and spread. Strategies that rely on the external use of force as the primary tool for the containment and eventual elimination of the virus are simply not plausible. As we have emphasised more than once, terrorism is the outward manifestation of a deeper ailment that afflicts the entire relationship between Islam and the West. If this is so, then attention must focus sharply on the socio-economic, cultural and political conditions that sustain the ailment and on appropriate remedies. While not offering a panacea for treating all the ills of terrorism and the 'war on terror', dialogue has, nonetheless, a critically important role to play.

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