

 **PAPER 4:****THE POLITICS OF FEAR: RELIGION(S),
CONFLICT AND DIPLOMACY****Paul Weller****Emeritus Professor, University of Derby and Research
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As historical phenomena, religions (as well as ideologies) have played varied and often ambiguous roles in the context of international relations, violent conflicts, peace-making and diplomacy (Ferguson, 1977; Haynes, 1988), and especially so at the interface between civilisations informed by Christianity and those informed by Islam (Armstrong, 1988; Partner, 1997). This paper focuses on aspects of those roles as the context for these has changed over the past half a century within the context of a broader setting shaped by what has come to be known as the “politics of fear” (Furedi, 2006), originally shaped by the threat of nuclear Mutually Assured Destruction

and now by the threat of global terror attacks.

In the earlier part of the 20th century, state parties had constituted the principal arenas for, and provided the key actors in, diplomacy as classically understood. But at the same time, and especially in the light of the development of international human rights law and mechanisms that followed the end of the Second World War, non-state actors from civil society groups, movements and organisations (including also those of a religious character or having a religious inspiration) came to play an increasingly important role alongside

the classical forms of diplomacy undertaken by state representatives.

This occurred in parallel with the emergence of new challenges that faced traditional inter-state diplomacy and that came to the fore with the development of armed liberation movements to achieve national independence in the context of an overall decolonization process, the legitimacy of which had broad international recognition. In these developments, matters of “internal” conflict increasingly came into interaction with external relations as can variously be seen in the examples of the African National Congress’ (ANC) struggle against the apartheid state of the Republic of South Africa; the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and Zimbabwe African People’s Union’s (ZAPU) struggle against the illegal 1965 unilateral declaration of independence of the former Southern Rhodesia colonial government; the South-West African People’s Organisation’s (SWAPO) struggle against the colonial inheritance and South African rule of South-West Africa; and the Palestinian Liberation

Organisation’s (PLO) struggle against Israeli occupation.

In these instances the movements either themselves achieved some degree of international recognition and/or international collective action in relation to at least the root causes of their struggles that involved violent action, often characterised by others as being “terrorist” in nature. Thus, in 1962, the United Nations Organisation’s (UNO) General Assembly called for sanctions against the Republic of South Africa and established a Special Committee Against Apartheid (Reddy, 2012); in 1966, UNO Security Council sanctions were invoked against Rhodesia and in 1972 SWAPO was recognized by the UNO General Assembly as the “sole legitimate representative” of the Namibia’s people (Nyangongi, 1985); and the PLO was recognized by the UNO General Assembly as “representative of the Palestinian people”, and the status of a UNO “non-member observer entity” (Gresh, 1988).

In the same period, revolutionary guerilla movements in South and Central America posed even further

questions and challenges to classical inter-state diplomatic practice such as Fidel Castro's 26th July Movement, which eventually came to power in Cuba 1959; and in Nicaragua, where the Sandinista National Liberation Front formed part of a Junta of National Reconstruction in 1979, and then consolidated power on its own from 1981 onwards; while in El Salvador the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front was locked in an ongoing war with the military and government of the country. In contrast to the case of the African liberation movements, the struggles of these movements did not take place within the more broadly recognized framework of direct and formal decolonization. However, in the case of El Salvador, the UNO became involved in peace negotiations in 1990 and, on January 16, 1992, the *Chapultepec Peace Agreement* was signed in Mexico City, formally ending the conflict.

Both the African liberation movements and the revolutionary movements of

Central and Latin America, of course, emerged within the broader context of the so-called "Cold War" conducted between the international social, political, economic and military forces of what was popularly called "Communism"⁵ and those of "Capitalism". The former were aligned particularly with the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) and its allies or with the People's Republic of China, while the latter were aligned with the United States of America (USA) and its allies. To a large extent, this broader alignment of forces shaped the parameters of the individual violent conflicts even where these had origins that were primarily internal – although the role of the so-called Non-Aligned Movement⁶ in this period should also not be overlooked (Köchler, 1988).

During the Cold War, and given its roots in Europe, in relation to the Christian Churches in particular there were, on the one hand, attempts from within the capitalist world to enlist believers into what was a broad anti-Communist

⁵ Albeit this should more properly be described as "really existing socialism", since Communism was the ideal to which those states aspired while building their understanding of socialism.

⁶ Which was the more commonly used name for the formally called Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries founded in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, in 1961.

(Milliband, Saville and Liebmann, 1984) front. This was on the basis of such figures as the US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, arguing that the states of “really existing socialism” were expressions of “godless terrorism” or, as it was more generally expressed, as part of the forces of atheistic materialism ranged against what was often called “Christian civilisation”, involving the destruction of Christendom culture, the appropriation of Church property, and at least restrictions on religious freedom if not in at least some settings and periods, the outright persecution of them. Thus Dulles, who also played a significant role in the World Council of Churches’ (WCC), Churches Commission on International Affairs (Hudson, 1969) tried, albeit without success, at its 1948 Amsterdam Assembly to enlist the (at that point largely Protestant) WCC into a Christian anti-Communism (Kuem, 2016: 120).

At the same time, there were also Christians and Marxists who had shared experiences in the resistance against Nazism (see Kreck, 1988). And there were also theologians such as Josef Hromádka (see Salajka, 1985;

Opočenský, 1990) of the Church of Czech Brethren who refused to accept co-optation into the anti-Communist discourse which figures such as Dulles sought to promote, arguing instead that believers living in both socialist and capitalist societies faced challenges to their Christian faithfulness and integrity. Indeed, it was following an intervention from Hromádka at the WCC Amsterdam Assembly, and which offered a biblically-informed critique of capitalist society, that the Assembly declined to take up an anti-Communist position, choosing instead to articulate a Christian vision of a “responsible society” as being of relevance to a state with any social system.

At the same time, among Communists and other supporters of “really existing socialism”, while there were some such as the Czech political philosopher, Milan Machovec (1976) who were ready to engage in Marxist-Christian dialogue, there were others who saw the Christian Churches as being aligned with the inheritance of ruling powers from the old aristocratic, monarchical and/or bourgeois capitalist social orders. Indeed, many of the leaders of the states of “really existing

socialism” feared that organized religions could potentially act as destabilizing fifth-columnists, and this was especially so in relation to the Roman Catholic Church, given its international structure and its relationship with the Vatican state (see Luxmoore and Babiuch, 1999).

But despite these challenges coming from both sides of the Cold War divide, and notwithstanding the internal contradictions within the Christian community, even the fact of the existence of ecclesial bodies in the same Christian tradition, but on different sides of the Iron Curtain (Chadwick, 1993), and of related supra-national organisational networks such as the European Baptist Federation (Green, 1999), helped to facilitate a sense of wider Christian and also European community. And in the context of what was an otherwise quite sharply divided continent where many of the supra-national forms of professional associations, trade unions and similar bodies were organised on a basis that reflected the political, economic and military lines of difference, supra-national ecumenical bodies such the World Council of

Churches, the Conference of European Churches and the Prague-based Christian Peace Conference (Wirth, 1988) had Protestant and Orthodox Church memberships that straddled the political and military blocs. Although this community thereby reflected and sustained was inevitably limited and constrained, it was something not entirely determined by the political, economic and military divisions of the continent. At the very least, it enabled communications across the blocs and in many ways contributed to the building of bridges and channels for wider diplomatic and societal confidence-building.

In addition, the facilitation of the possibility of mutual challenge also became possible, not least because the Churches and ecumenical bodies had contributed to the non-state initiatives that helped to lay the groundwork for the development and implementation of the stabilising framework for international relations that eventually became known as the *Helsinki Final Act* (Auswärtiges Amt, 1984) of 1975, within which the states parties concerned also signed up to a common commitment towards, and framework for, dealing

with matters of human rights, within which the Governments, civil society organisations and Churches were able to raise and pursue specific issues and cases of human rights. Although criticised by some for reifying overall spheres of influence and thus for de jure as well as de facto recognition of “Communist” rule in the countries of the East and Central Europe, by recognising state borders (a number of which had, for some countries, remained in question since the Second World War) Helsinki helped to facilitate a more stable environment for the further development of East-West diplomacy that, in due course, reduced the threat of nuclear escalation and Mutually Assured Destruction.

At the same time, this stabilization did not address other important (often internal) conflicts in Europe and in other parts of the world in relation to which, however, international level religious and religiously-inspired groups were often active, either within traditional diplomacy, alongside it, or as an alternative to it. Just as the existence of the Christian Churches on either side of the Iron Curtain created an opening for wider European diplomacy, so also in

global terms, religious communities, groups and their international networks and organisations stand at the intersection between the global and the local in a world that is both increasingly globalising and localising. They are simultaneously part of transnational communities of (often alternative) information and solidarity, while being rooted firmly within their wider local communities and civic societies of the state of which they are citizens. Among other things, the channels of communication that they open up between co-religionists in rich and powerful and poor and relatively powerless countries help those in the relatively rich and powerful countries to come to some understanding of why it is that, in the title of the book by Meic Pearse (2003), *Why The Rest Hates the West*.

In the earlier part of the period under review, the World Council of Churches offered such through its radical Programme to Combat Racism, which provided channels of information, communication and practical support relating to African liberation movements (Adler, 1974), as did also the development of the movement known

as liberation theology (Bonino, 1976). Also on an international level, but operating on a multi- and inter-religious basis, has been the activities of the organisations that is now called Religions for Peace, but which was originally known as the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) (see Jack, 1993), a body that has consultative status in the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), as well as with UNESCO and UNICEF.

As reflected in its name, Religions for Peace focuses on the contribution that religions can make to establishing, preserving and developing peace in the world, including through interreligious dialogue aimed at overcoming conflicts that are rooted in religious differences. Following its first meeting in Kyoto in 1970, it agreed to forward the impetus of its initiating conference through four key programmes that, since then, have continued to form the broad parameters for its work. This included: to create a climate for the peaceful resolution of disputes among and within nations without violence by initiating interreligious seminars and conferences at all levels; to develop an

interreligious presence at the United Nations and other international agencies and events, through which the influence of religion could be directly exerted to resolve conflicts; to encourage the further development of the science of interreligious dialogue for peace; and to encourage the establishment of national and regional committees for peace.

Today Religions for Peace holds a global Assembly every five years and has an extensive network of national affiliates and a number of regional bodies. A European Committee of the WCRP (now known as Religions for Peace, Europe) and a UK and Ireland Chapter (later separating out into a distinct UK Chapter and an Irish Chapter and today known as Religions for Peace, UK) were formed in 1975. Significantly, some of its most active, creative and productive work in relation to violent conflict has been precisely in relation to those “internal” contexts with implications for wider regions that traditional, state representative based diplomacy has found it most difficult to make progress. Thus, for example, Religions for Peace was very active in working towards the peace settlement

in Sierra Leone's brutal civil and regional war, and undertook notable initiatives in the context of the Balkan wars (Merdjanova and Brodeur, 2009).

As earlier noted, in the Two Thirds World, some of these "internal" conflicts became full scale wars, while within Europe others remained more of the nature of what the UK Army Brigadier Frank Kitson (1971) characterized as "low intensity" wars. One such example was the period of political violence known in the north of Ireland as "The Troubles" (Kelly, 1982) where, of course, religion itself was implicated due to sectarian communalisms espousing Christian traditions being woven into what is, however, more fundamentally a conflict between divergent national identities (Liechty and Clegg, eds., 2001). In this, Catholic and nationalist aspirations have been broadly aligned, while many northern Protestants tended towards unionism and some towards types of Loyalism that were informed by a strong anti-Catholicism. At the same time, as in the setting of the wider Cold War, in this context of this "hot" but "low intensity" war, the continuation of all-Irish ecclesial structures across the political

borders of Ireland's partition into the Irish Free State (and later the Republic of Ireland) and the UK province of Northern Ireland, also contributed to facilitating the back channels that eventually led to the Good Friday Peace agreement.

The majority of these "low intensity" wars, both in Europe and beyond, also entailed the use of terror (Guelke, 2006; Hoffman, 2006) tactics by one or more parties to the conflict that, for example, included the bombing of civilian infrastructure and of civilians. Especially among Palestinian armed groups the tools of hijack, kidnap and ransom, were common. In the Lebanon, following what had previously been a full scale civil war accompanied by the intervention of external powers, kidnap and ransom was frequently deployed by the various militias. In this context one of the most well-known of religiously based diplomatic interventions took place via the work of Terry Waite (1993). Waite was originally the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury's emissary to the Middle East who, after successfully working to free a number of hostages, himself eventually became a victim of kidnap

and was held as a hostage for several years. In illustration of just how complex and challenging for the religions and religious people themselves such religiously-based interventions can be and become, following his release Waite later found himself caught up in allegations of complicity, or at least of maintaining insufficient distance, from US interlocutors in relation to the role in the Middle East of Colonel Oliver North and the so-called Iran-Contra scandal. Similarly, the Christian Peace Conference had earlier found its religiously-based activities on behalf of peace and justice (Bassarak, 1972) being identified by the US Department of State (1985) as an example of “Soviet active measures”.

At the start of the 21st century, although there have been exceptions, the vast majority of terror actions have been associated with individuals and groups who have sought to justify their actions with reference to the religion of Islam. As the veteran British socialist politician, Tony Benn, put it at the start of the *The Satanic Verses* controversy which highlighted that, following the end of the Cold War an important

paradigm-shift for international conflict was underway:

“Now all of a sudden, arguments which had almost disappeared into the mists of time have come into sharp focus and are hotly contested across the world, involving diplomatic relations, trade arrangements and stretching into the heart of religious communities where people of different religious convictions have to live side by side.” (Benn, in *The Guardian*, 7.4.89)

With the disappearance of the ‘enemy others’ of Communism and Capitalism, a number of commentators began to debate new potential enemies on a global scale. Particularly influential in this was Samuel Huntington’s so-called “Clash of Civilizations” thesis. The thesis as Huntington first published it appeared in an article in the journal *Foreign Affairs* under the title “The Clash of Civilizations?” (Huntington, 1993). That was followed up by the book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of Global Order* (Huntington, 1997) in which the question mark of the original title had disappeared. Thus what had begun as set of questions had

evolved into a sharper thesis, which was taken up by many Neocons around the US government of the time (see Bonney, 2014), in particular in terms of its argument throughout that “Islam has bloody borders” (Huntington, 1993, 35), and later providing a communicable frame for US foreign policy and military interventions.

Over time, the groups appealing to Islam in their undertaking of violent actions have been variably called ‘radicals’ ‘Islamists’ and/or ‘Jihadists’. Initially emerging from US support for such groups in the campaign to defeat the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, the most prominent among these was Osama bin Laden’s Al-Qaeeda which, following US military intervention in the Gulf, later went on to plan and carry out the spectacular 9/11 attack on the USA in 2001, while claiming at least inspirational linkages of various sorts with the 2004 Madrid and 2005 (7/7) London bombings. More recently this form of terror violence has become associated with IS (Islamic State)/ISIS (Islamic State in Syria)/ISL (Islamic State in the Levant) – also known in Arabic by those who oppose it, as Daesh. The terror actions that Daesh

has conducted beyond its geographical heartlands in Iraq and Syria have ranged from bombings in Beirut, through the Paris shootings at the Charlie Hebdo magazine offices and the Bataclan concert venue, to the lorry attack on Bastille Day celebrants in Nice, France and the killing of a Roman Catholic priest and congregants in northern France.

The direct parties involved in such actions are neither generally recognized states nor (in contrast with earlier African and Palestinian movements, groups that have achieved some form of recognition within the international system of the UNO. However, just as during the Cold War, many states are indirectly involved with such groups and in their conflicts in terms of providing financial, logistical and other support, either openly, covertly, and/or through tolerating such support from private sources within their states. Thus, within the Syrian civil war, some groups have been proxies for either Saudi Arabia or Turkey, while other state parties – including the Syrian state itself, the USA and Russia, have all been variously directly involved in asymmetrical military engagement

alongside or against non-state groups such as the Free Syrian Army, various Kurish groups, Daeesh and others.

In the Cold War period the aims of militant groups generally focused on one or both the goals of national and/or socio-political change in relation to specific territorial boundaries. Today this is also the case with Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al-Shabaab in Somalia, while at its beginning, Al-Qeeda itself was also more defensively and reactively oriented to the military presence in Saudi Arabia of the USA and its allies, with the principal aim of Bin Laden's *Declaration of War* against America being to oust the USA from the territory of two of Islam's most holy places (Wright, 2006). But there are also important differences with earlier conflicts and groups. For example, while ready if necessary to pay the price of the loss of their lives in pursuit of their causes, the militants of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) or the German Bader Meinhof Group, while ready to deploy their individual lives to achieve political goals through the use of hunger strikes, did not generally undertake terror attacks on others in a deliberately planned way intended to

incorporate the giving up of their own lives.

However, just as post-9/11 there were those who argued that the world had changed and that something qualitatively different had emerged (see Lincoln, 2003), so also in relation to Daeesh there are many many who react to its barbarity by interpreting it as being more or less nihilistic and beyond the scope of diplomacy. Because of this it is important, as far as possible, to try to gain an understanding how the group sees itself (Saltman and Winter, 2014) because "nihilism" – which as a political concept had its origin among certain Russian groups of the mid-19th century - is not really an appropriate descriptor for groups that are actually far from being politically or morally nihilistic in terms of their having both a set of proximate temporal goals and also a very clearly articulated value system that informs their actions.

Thus, when in his "Message to America" that accompanied Daeesh's first hostage killing in the beheading of the American journalist James Foley, the so-called "Jihadi John" (Mohammed Emwazi) said: "You are no longer

fighting an insurgency. We are an Islamic army and a state” (quoted in Maher, 2015: 27), he was articulating that, in contrast to Al-Qaeda, Daesh understands itself as having a territory to defend and extend. Indeed, critical to Daesh’s self-understanding is its aspiration and claim to have recreated the Sunni Muslim ideal of the Caliphate, which it believes to be the only environment within which Muslims can lead fully Islamic lives. This is why Daesh is very much against Muslim refugees fleeing from territories that it is seeking to incorporate into its Caliphate and, by contrast, wants to encourage the *hijrah* (migration) of Muslims living in *darul-kufr* (the land of disbelief) to its Caliphate, understood as *darul-Islam* (the land of Islam). And it is precisely this invitation and opportunity to find personal and historic significance in contributing to the building of the Caliphate that can make Daesh’s message so attractive to young Muslims.

What is often described as ‘radicalisation’ has no single cause. For Muslims (and especially young Muslims) in Western societies who experience at least some degree of discrimination and disadvantage

(Weller, Purdam, Ghanea, and Cheruvallil-Contractor, 2013) and who see injustice in majority Muslim parts of the world, some reactive factors may be at work (Hussain, 2007). There are, of course, important and legitimate critiques that both can and should be made about the status quo in the world. But potentially more powerful and seductive is the idea that it might be possible to make an important and historic contribution to the creation of a completely new society (Keles and Sezgin, 2015). In combination with personal or immediate community experiences of discrimination and disadvantage, and/or awareness of that in relation to other co-religionists, a “nexus of vulnerability” can develop within which:

“individuals who are targeted for recruitment by ISIS and similar groups can start off by apparently discovering new forms of personal, social and religious significance in an unjust world. But through the use of psychological grooming, these ideals can be manipulated and channelled into what ends up as a readiness to justify, support and then commit to violent extremism and terror that appeals

to a religious justification.” (Harris, Bisset and Weller, 2015: 26)

Daeesh’s commitment to creating a Caliphate might be taken as an indication that, contrary to what many think, it could in principle be possible – albeit with great difficulty - to conduct negotiations with it on a rational self-interest basis just as it was possible to some extent to do with Taliban when they were in power in Afghanistan. However, it is critically important to understand that Daeesh *also* operates within a broader and more apocalyptic frame of reference in which the contingent and the eternal coincide not just in terms of a conviction about the absolute rightness of its cause, but also about its absolute significance within what it interprets to be an “end times” struggle between *haqq* (truth) and *batil* (falsehood) (see El-Badaway, Cromerford and Welby, 2015). Thus, when following the execution of 21 soldiers of the Syrian Arab Army, Daeesh went on to execute Abdul-Rahman (originally Peter) Kassig as its fifth western hostage, Jihadi John’s speech on that occasion took the opportunity to highlight that the

execution was taking place in the north-western Syrian town of Dabiq.

“To Obama, the dog of Rome, today we’re slaughtering the soldiers of Bashar and tomorrow we’ll be slaughtering your soldiers....We will break this last and final crusade....and here we are burying the first of your crusader army in Dabiq” (quoted in Maher, 2015: 29).

As noted by Maher (2015: 29), soon after Russia entered the conflict, a Dutch fighter called Yilmaz highlighted the eschatological prophecies concerning Greater Syria/the Levant by stating, “Read the many hadith regarding Bilad al Sham and the battles that are going to be fought on these grounds”. And in the light of this Maher (2015: 29) argues:

“Herein lies the power of Islamic State’s reasoning – its fighters, and the movement as a whole, draw huge succour from the religious importance of the sites around which they are fighting. It serves to convince them of the

righteousness of their cause and the nobility of their endeavours.”

It is because Daeesh ultimately operates within an apocalyptic framework that it is currently not possible to deal with it in terms of classical state representative diplomacy. But neither would it be wise statecraft to argue to leave Daeesh alone in its heartlands as primarily a problem for the Middle East. Leaving aside humanitarian concern for people living in Daeesh’s territory who do not fit its particular vision of Islam, and apart from the dangers it poses to world peace in terms further igniting and spreading conflict in its immediate region, in its English language magazine *Dabiq* it articulates a global strategic aim to remove what it calls the “grey-zone”. The aim of this is, through terror violence committed outside its geographical heartlands and the anticipated reaction to it of the authorities, security services and peoples of the countries concerned, that the Muslims of the world will be forced to make a binary choice between migrating to live in the Land of Islam or staying to live in the Land of Disbelief. As the Malian-French Amedy Coulibaly

(quoted in Maher 2015: 29) put it in a video explaining his participation in the Charlie Hebdo attacks on IS’s behalf, “The time had come for another event – magnified by the presence of the Caliphate on the global stage – to further bring division to the world and destroy the grayzone everywhere”. Thus as Maher (2015: 29) argues, for Daeesh, eschatology is an “important motivating principle” that “underwrites its remarkable self-assurance and certainty and at the same time fuels its barbarism.”

In some regards this echoes ‘end time’ narratives that one can find among Fundamentalist Christian circles inspired by the teaching and publications of the very widely sold book *The Late, Great Planet Earth*, by Hal Lindsey (1971). In this, via a Christian Zionism focus on Israel and its place in the ‘end times’, and with reference to imagery found in the biblical *Book of Revelation*, aspects of the Cold War situation of the 1970s were interpreted in terms of a predicted (and later adjusted to the 1980s and beyond) coming earthly and cosmic apocalyptic battle of “Armageddon” (Lindsey, 1980). And just as Daeesh

have identified Dabiq in Syria as a location for such a ‘last battle’ by reference to strands of Islamic interpretation of the Qur’an, so those influenced by the work of Hal Lindsey and others have also anticipated that a final conflict will take place in the Middle East, albeit within their understanding, to take place at Megiddo in Israel.

These resonances are potentially instructive for understanding the moral and epistemological orientations that shape current global terror actions of these kinds. At the same time, there is at least one important difference between those whose worldview has been shaped by Christian “dispensationalism”⁷ (see Halsell, 1999) of the kind promoted by Lindsey, and the vision held by followers of Daeesh. This is that, by and large, and as distinct from some earlier Christian millenarian groups (such as in Munster in the 16th century) who did seek to establish an earthly theocracy, by and large the 20th and 21st century Christians who have held an apocalyptic vision of a coming

Armageddon have not understood themselves to be under any particular obligation to initiate violent action towards it in their identity as Christians.

The resonance between Christian dispensationalism and Daeesh style apocalyptic brings into focus the possibility that, in contrast to Huntington’s thesis that there is a clash between civilizational blocs, one might more accurately argue that while there are civilizational, cultural and religious spheres of interest or spheres of influence, *within* each of these there is a much more complex, fluid situation and contested situation than any more solidified notion of a bloc. And this is arguably even more the case in the 21st century case of conflicts involving religions and cultures than in was in relation to the blocs of the Cold War, given that Christian Palestinians and Christian Arabs are an integral part of Middle Eastern history and reality, and that there are now millions of Muslims in the ‘West’, not least in the European Union and in the USA. Therefore, as argued by the German political

⁷ Dispensationalism teaches that a number of stages of history must occur before the Second Coming of Jesus. It is linked with the 19th century Plymouth Brother John

Darby and was popularised through the so-called Schofield Bible, which contained notes supporting the dispensationalist hermeneutic.

philosopher, Dieter Sengaas (2002) in his book *The Clash Within Civilizations: Coming to Terms with Cultural Conflicts*, the main cultural and religious fault-lines that *do* exist actually run *through*, between and *within* geopolitical and cultural groupings rather than *between* them.

If this is the case, and if it also the case that the religious roots and the eschatological orientation of Daesh are critical to understanding its activities, then this has profound implications for how the current wave of global terror should be tackled. In the first instance, it is difficult for classical diplomacy to be conducted (and especially from the ‘West’) in a way that would not lead to the charge of Islamophobic (Allen, 2010) orientations and actions. Secondly, the classical forms of diplomatic argument, negotiation and compromise that appeal to self-interest are, in this instance, unlikely to be successful because there are those at least within Daesh who at present see the Caliphate as being within compressed time frame leading into the coming future cosmic ‘end times’ battle with the Crusader armies. Such visions of the

world and their implications will not be defeated either by calls to self-interest alone, since that will be viewed as a betrayal of ultimate convictions. Also brute force and naked power alone will not be successful, as that will only reinforce the self-righteousness of those who experience it. But if it might be the case that little or nothing is likely to be achieved by classical state representative diplomacy, the question moves into focus of what might be possible to progress from within Islam and between Muslims themselves. Indeed, the present author argued in a previous book chapter on “Conspiracy Theories and the Incitement of Hatred” that: “On a governmental and societal level, preventative and remedial actions are important in combating conspiracy theories and incitement to hatred. Statements, guidelines, codes of practice and initiatives in inter-faith dialogue are also important. However, in the end, it is *also* crucial to engage with these issues from *within* each particular religious and ethnic group.” (Weller, 2007: 194-195)

It is argued again here that this is critical to understanding the origins and responses, and hence how to

challenge, the ideas of those who are attracted to the kind of vision of the world being projected by Daeesh and other groups. In other words, that where it may not be possible for engagement to take place through secular reasoning and the instruments of international law, there might be a possibility for engagement to be developed in articulation with the logic and the grammar of the religion concerned. And this is important, because there can be at least perceived to a tension between the secular registers in which human rights discourse international law operates and the values found in authentically religious perspectives (see Weller, 2006).

Within this it is also important to understand that the public shape of Islam is not the shape that Christianity has, by and large, taken in the modern world. Thus, while Islam contains many distinct and often competing traditions, movements and groups, it does not have the equivalent of Church organisations. And this is closely related to the question of religious leadership in the Muslim world which is not, generally speaking, of the hierarchical or bureaucratic kinds that

can more readily be found in Christianity. These two facts have a significant impact on expectations of how faith-based diplomacy can function when conducted from within the Muslim ummah or community, meaning that faith-based interventions based on Muslim religious identity are likely to be more informal and less official in character than if expected with reference to a Christian paradigm. Thus one should not expect so much in the way of, for example, agreed statements, organised initiatives, or authorised individuals acting on behalf of wider groups. Rather, the relevant initiatives that can offer religiously authentic, creative and corrective resources that can help contemporary Muslims to live in faithful, committed and peaceful ways in a religiously diverse world are likely to be much more informal and decentralised.

One example is of the vision of Islam offered by the Hizmet movement, inspired by the teaching and example of the Turkish Muslim classical scholar and peace activist Fehullah Gülen. In his op-ed in *Le Monde* following the Bataclan atrocities in France, and entitled “Muslims, we have to critically

review our understanding of Islam”, Fethullah Gülen (2015) argued that “We Muslims have a special responsibility to ...join hands with fellow human beings to save our world from the scourge of terrorism” as well as “to repair the tarnished image of our faith”. Gülen’s vision of Islam offers clear challenge as to why the appeals of Daeesh and other similar groups to Islam are a distortion. It also comes out of an experience of dialogical engagement both with, and within, the secular modernity as it impinged upon Turkish society, and also engagement with broader “Western” society as a whole. But at the same time, and of critical import, it is informed by a deep and authentic Islamic tradition, practice and vision. As Gülen’s *Le Monde* piece said, what is called for is not “a rupture from the cumulative Islamic tradition”, but rather, “an intelligent questioning” in which Muslims are called to “critically review our understanding and practice of Islam, in the light of the conditions and requirements of our age and the clarifications provided by our collective historic experiences” and in so doing to be engaged in “discrediting and marginalising the extremist interpretations of religious sources.”

Alternative narratives (Capan, 2004) of similar kinds, and the kind of actions necessary to implement them (Kalymanu, 2008) are in fact being created among Muslims throughout the world (Boase, 2005) who are also determined to make clear that the actions of violent terror perpetrated by some are done ‘not in our name’, including in those parts where Muslims are in a majority and societies are often in fundamental transition, of a very unstable and sometimes quite dangerous kind for all, including for Muslims themselves (Barton, Weller, and Yilmaz, eds. 2013).

Reflecting such approaches are a series of publications produced by the London-based Dialogue Society and which are aimed at challenging the particular development of Islamic thinking and ideology that undergirds the attractiveness of Daeesh to Muslims who have a strong sense of the wrongness of the present world order. Examples of this include *Deradicalisation by Default: The ‘Dialogue’ Approach to Rooting out Violent Extremism* (Dialogue Society, 2009) that argues for the importance of tackling the ideology of violent

extremism from within an Islamic frame of reference; *Dialogue in Islam: Qu’ran, Sunnah, History* (Dialogue Society, 2011) that engages with the challenge of some of the verses of the Qu’ran that are widely cited to justify violent extremism; while the related Centre for Hizmet Studies published Keles and Sezgin’s (2015) *A Hizmet Approach to Rooting out Violent Extremism*, which more explicitly and directly articulates an approach as informed by the teaching and example of Fethullah Gülen,⁸ and translated into action by the so-called Hizmet (or service) movement inspired by his teaching and life.

There are no easy answers here. But there are some actions which are both important and worthwhile to support and to try to facilitate. The difficulty with this is that this is not something that in itself is likely to facilitate dialogue with, or change among, those who are already committed to a Daeesh view of the world. Rather it is a ‘preventative’

activity that might be capable of ‘heading off’ the intellectual and emotional seductions of Daeesh and similar groups, and in this way to contribute to an attrition of Daeesh’s traction in the wider Muslim world. It is possible that this is the best that can realistically be hoped for in terms of any kind of diplomatic practice, whether faith-based or not, since it may not be without significance that the former Pakistani political figure Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, when asked about the kind of violence that later played a part in her own death, ventured the opinion that it could not be defeated, but only contained, and that it might in time, die out.

There are perhaps here some historical resonances here with the past of Christianity as it struggled to emerge from the bloody legacy of the European Wars of Religion and the use of the sword of the magistrate to try to enforce religious conformity (Ellerbe, 1995). So also, what might ultimately defeat this

⁸ Especially following the recent attempted coup in Turkey it needs to be acknowledged that Fethullah Gülen is a controversial figure whom, indeed, the current Turkish President and government accuse of being behind the recent coup attempt. Having acknowledged this, however, this is not

the place to go into this in detail, except to say that, from the perspective of the present author, such claims are not compatible with what is observable about the Fethullah Gülen himself, and the Hizmet movement inspired by him, in terms of public speech and act.

form of Islam may be a combination of weariness among the faithful, combined with the impact and influence of those co-religionists whose religious vision is one that affirms the dignity of the human above and beyond all interpretations of the Islamic. As argued by Gülen in *Le Monde*: “We must categorically condemn the ideology that terrorists propagate and instead promote a pluralistic mindset with clarity and confidence” in which “before our ethnic, national or religious identity comes our common humanity, which suffers a setback each time a barbaric act is committed.” And if the outworking of the apocalyptic vision of those who are already committed to it can, in the meantime, be sufficiently contained, it is historically observable that if millennial visions of this kind do not come to pass within a reasonable timescale, they can often lose their hold on the faithful and/or become reinterpreted to take account of the ‘end’ not having happened, thus potentially opening up the ground for more classical forms of diplomacy to make some future inroads.

Putting all of this within a wider context, as argued for by the present author (Weller,

2009: 205-206) originally in reflecting on the two decades on “The Other Side of Terror/War on Terror” following the inception of paradigm-shifting *The Satanic Verses* controversy, “six “points of challenge” were identified that I would also argue remain relevant:

1. Governments must learn from history that to combat terror with methods that undermine human rights will only strengthen those forces that use terror as a means of advancing their cause.
2. To ignore or deny the reasons that those who use terror to advance their cause give for their actions is unlikely to lead to a resolution of the problems caused by terror.
3. Terror in the name of religion is particularly dangerous both to the wider politic and to religions themselves, because it harnesses ultimate convictions and in its destructive service.
4. Attempts by the ‘powers that be’ artificially and externally to create a ‘liberal’ or ‘moderate’ Islam (or

indeed any any other religion) are likely to prove ineffective and may also backfire

5. Muslims (and indeed people of other religions) have to accept a greater responsibility for combating the dissemination and propagation of ‘enemy images’ among their faithful.

6. For multiculturalism to continue to have a future, governments and societies must acknowledge and tackle Islamophobia, and indeed all other forms of hatred and discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief.

The arguments of academics can be dismissed as setting too much store by the importance discourse and of narrative in a world that seems ultimately to be determined more by power and violence. But, as argued from a hard-nosed perspective one of the agencies charged with ensuring security and combatting terror actions, in its publication *Words Make Worlds: Terrorism and Language*, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police makes the case that it really is the case that “words make worlds” in the sense that from a policing and security perspective

in relation to (at the time it was written) Al-Quaeda type extremism - and therefore now by extension also to Daeesh:

The most effective long-term strategy against Al-Qai’da-type extremism, whether domestic or global, may be rooted in the construction of ‘alternative narratives’ designed to subvert extremist messaging (Royal Canadian Mounted Police: 2007, 3).

While not providing a quick fix in terms of results, in the long run such internal pre-diplomacy is likely to contribute to laying foundations for the most productive and long lasting potential for positive change.

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