

THE VALUE OF DIALOGUE IN TIMES OF HOSTILITY AND INSECURITY

A collection of essays and personal reflections

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FOREWORD

The best part of my job as Chief Executive of the British Council is the conversations: with students, with overseas artists, with government ministers, with colleagues. Best of all, with people whose lives don't resemble mine at all.

Conversation is dialogue at the micro scale. On a larger scale, dialogue is central to all those activities that come under the heading of cultural relations, soft power, or diplomacy. Dialogue, and the trust-building it implies, underpins the contribution the British Council makes – with our many partners – to help ensure the United Kingdom's prosperity, security and influence. This collection of essays by experts in on-the-ground dialogue – co-produced by the British Council and Global Strategy Forum – is very timely, given the number of places in the world where dialogue has ceased, to be replaced by less constructive forms of exchange.

I would like to thank Lord Lothian, GSF's Chairman, and the UK Chair of the British Council's Hammamet Conference, for having the original idea, and for his work in drawing together such a distinguished group of contributors – all expert witnesses to the power of dialogue. Since 2012, the Hammamet Conference has united established and emerging leaders from the UK and North Africa to share experience – and through dialogue to prepare for a better future.

Dialogue is central to creating 'friendly understanding between people and nations' – the phrase that I think best expresses the British Council's purpose, and which was first formulated in 1940, when the idea of a 'talking cure' for the world's ills might have been robustly dismissed. Dialogue is also about the determination to stay the course through bad times as well as good, as we have in countries like Burma.

The essays in this collection are informed by first-hand experience of negotiating tables in places that have become by-words for misunderstanding. More than one author makes the point that successful dialogue requires us to engage with those who are considered beyond the pale. It is the hard conversations, not the easy ones, that in the end make the difference. The writers also offer the kind of fascinating detail that only comes from direct experience – including the observation that success or failure in dialogue can come down to something as apparently minor as the kind of hotel in which your talks take place. That's a strange but all-too-human realisation – but this is a collection of essays about being human, and trying to be better humans, under some of the most demanding circumstances imaginable.

Making peace is a far less cinematic activity than making war. The pace of achievement can be glacially slow; but the prize is well worth the waiting. Sometimes, just keeping the conversation going is enough.



Sir Ciarán Devane
Chief Executive, British Council

THE CASE FOR JAW-JAW NOT WAR-WAR

Lord Lothian PC QC DL

Chairman of Global Strategy Forum; Co-chair of the Hammamet Conference; Shadow Foreign Secretary (2001-2005)

This essay is about talking to your enemies, and in particular talking to terrorist enemies. I can claim some qualification for writing about this because 22 years ago in Northern Ireland, despite continuing aggression, I opened talks with Sinn Féin/IRA. I was the first British Minister to do so for 25 years. These were not negotiations but talks, what I termed exploratory dialogue, 'getting to know you' conversations. Word of this so angered the Unionist parties that they declared me 'contaminated' and refused to talk to me for some time. Today however, as a direct result of those initial communications all those years ago, despite the challenges Northern Ireland continues to face, we now have the makings of a peaceful and prosperous future for that historically troubled province. Paisley has sat down with Adams. The cobra has sat down with the mongoose. After thirty years, jaw-jaw has proved better than war-war.

I don't like terrorists; I despise their activities. However, in working towards conflict resolution you do not have to like your enemy; on the other hand it helps to respect him, and exploratory dialogue is part of the creation of that respect. No conflict is the same as another, and drawing too-close analogies is dangerous. But there are similarities in each from which it is instructive to learn. There are no templates to emulate, but there are techniques which can be brought to bear.

I want briefly to set out my Northern Ireland experiences, from which I believe some lessons for the Middle East can be learned, particularly as the process we developed in pursuit of peace had largely to be constructed as it went along. When I arrived, violence was at a new peak: mass bombings, assassinations, sectarian violence, gun-running and outside interference. No one was talking to anyone: not governments, not parties, not insurgents. I was frequently

advised that the problem was intractable, and that the 'war' would have to go on until it was won.

We, however, made a different analysis. First, that the war could not be won. Secondly, that there could be no long-term solution to the problem we were confronting without the eventual involvement of those we were fighting. Thirdly that, even as the fighting continued, we needed to find a means of engaging them. And fourthly, that could only be done by opening dialogue.

The initial challenge was how to do so with those with whom you had no formal means of communication; although in the case of the Provisional IRA (PIRA) there were, as has now become known, certain back channel intelligence contacts. The first step therefore was carefully constructed language in speeches designed to resonate with PIRA. Eventually tentative contact was made. Meanwhile the terrorist bombings and assassinations continued, and our military response was commensurate and robust, and in no way compromised by the feelers being extended. What followed was vicarious dialogue through third parties seeking to identify language with which to build some confidence with the terrorists, without driving other necessary participants out of the ballpark.

The outcome of all this was the Downing Street Declaration of December 1993, which encompassed in general terms the aspirations and grievances of all the combatants sufficiently, without requiring any to sign up to the others' positions - but equally not to expostulate against them. Again this was neither preceded by nor dependent on a prior cessation of violence or any undertakings of recognition. It was a signal, ratified by two interested sovereign governments, aimed at persuading

participants that there was sufficient basis for moving to dialogue. It was an invitation to engage. It was designed to encourage the participation of those we needed to bring in. Thus the stage was set for a ceasefire.

Then the framework for dialogue began to be put in place. Any formal requirement for a permanent renunciation of violence and the decommissioning of illegally held weapons before formal negotiations was initially bypassed by informal discussions, and this was the exploratory dialogue which in my view is a crucial prerequisite to eventually bringing combatants around the negotiating table with a reasonable prospect of making genuine progress. There was never, either at this stage or later, a requirement made of Sinn Féin/IRA for de jure recognition of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. Such a precondition would have been a game-breaker. It was enough that they were tentatively seeking to treat with us.

In this way exploratory dialogue was established: 'getting to know you' sessions, hard and often uncompromising conversations without conditions or commitment. Some of our meetings were publicly known, others were not. The publicly known ones were on our territory, the others were in their areas. Instead of negotiating commitments, we were exploring boundaries, establishing lines in the sand beyond which they would not go. Narrow horizons suddenly began to broaden. The hitherto impossible suddenly became remotely possible. And there was a vital spin-off. If Sinn Féin/IRA could be persuaded to explore their lines in the sand, why not the democratic parties in the middle, and indeed the paramilitaries at the other extreme as well?

Thus exploratory dialogue spread organically until it encompassed all participants, each individually without commitment exploring these lines in the sand. Amazingly many of these lines overlapped, providing the launch pad for progress. These overlaps led to the now notorious Framework Document which

was disowned by all the participants, but which, because of the robustness of all the gathered lines in the sand, eventually became the basis of the Good Friday Agreement.

The lessons from all this are relatively simple. Dialogue can be entered even during conflict. Exploratory dialogue can overcome the need for preconditions, and can grindingly begin to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable, and to seek out the eventual compromises upon which any long-term settlement must inevitably be built. From all this there are further lessons to be learned.

First, conflict and insurgency can be contained by military action; but it cannot be defeated by it. Second, negotiation towards a settlement of conflict nearly always needs to be preceded by informal dialogue. Third, dialogue which is exploratory and non-committal can often make more progress than seeking commitments. Fourth, undeliverable preconditions or deadlines are an end rather than a beginning to dialogue. Fifth, exploratory dialogue should be as multilateral as possible to seek out potential areas of common ground. Sixth, low profile dialogue is more likely to succeed than that carried on in the spotlight of international publicity. Seventh, it is a better use of your time to talk to your enemies than your friends.

Since then I have held similar freelance talks with the leadership of both Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas, both of whom in my view are crucial to any future lasting settlement of the Israel/Palestine conflict. Again the extent of the lines in the sand uncovered by such conversations has been marginally encouraging. Here is a potentially fruitful area for exploratory dialogue by the participants in the Middle East Peace process. So far it remains largely unvisited. I continue to hope that this opportunity will eventually be taken up.

THE FRAYING EDGES OF BIG POWER DIALOGUE

Sir Jeremy Greenstock GCMG

Chairman of the UNA-UK Board of Directors; British Ambassador to the United Nations (1998-2003)

The end of the Cold War is now a quarter of a century behind us. You would not think it, as NATO aircraft scramble over the Baltic States and intensifying waves of criticism and apprehension break over Russia's behaviour in its immediate neighbourhood. Angry exchanges over deteriorating security in the Middle East and North Africa complement the picture.

That makes it a good time to assess the value of dialogue, and to interpret the rising difficulty of sustaining it in the geopolitical climate of this millennium's second decade. Seventy years on from the founding of the United Nations, and 45 years after Nixon's groundbreaking visit to China, relationships between the big powers are turning sour again. This is not just a matter for them: smaller communities, as the 20th century showed, get trodden on when the elephants fight.

It was only to be expected. Periods of history in which powerful states learn to live with each other, and place trade and economic development over territorial or political rivalry, can genuinely advance the cause of human progress. Such periods never last for long, however, because national priorities compete, resources are finite and institutionalised co-operation has a shelf life.

In the 21st century, war is unimaginably threatening because of the power of modern weaponry. Something unprecedented in human history has to happen if the growing competition between today's major powers is not to dissolve into outright conflict.

Put like that, the value of dialogue takes on a new meaning. It is not one that appears to have sunk into the consciousness of the world's leaderships. The Ukraine crisis has brought high-level discussion between Russia and Western powers to a modern-day low.

Regional conflict, especially in the Middle East, together with the spaces opening up for terrorism and other forms of asymmetric warfare, fill both the headlines and the main policy pronouncements in the foreign and defence fields. Escalation is easy to predict. The comforting concept of soft power seemed for a while to be taking over, but we can see how easy it is for hard power to trump it.

Let's look at the brighter side of the picture. The United Nations, formed to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, has not done a bad job. I found it inspiring, as UK Permanent Representative at the turn of the century, to soak in the atmosphere of global goodwill, courtesy and collective purpose at UN headquarters. True, regional and intra-state conflicts have been flaring up nastily since the attacks of September 2001. The Security Council's capacity to adapt its Charter responsibility for international peace and security to localised conflict has proved disappointing.

But the UN has, over its seven decades, instilled habits of debate and compromise amongst big powers that have a real value. The age of instant communication and the significant impact of the UN's delegitimisation of warfare raise the importance of the people's voice. Global public opinion, hard to define but increasingly concrete in its impact, thoroughly dislikes the use of force. Big powers cannot throw their weight about with impunity – and that was the principal purpose of having an organisation like the UN with virtually universal membership.

It would be hard to imagine any fresh attempt at constructing a global institution that was able to gather such an impressive collection of norms, standards and conventions as the UN now has. The problems come with implementation and enforcement, because the UN, from the start, relied on the need for

constant political compromises in specific situations as well as in the structure of the organisation itself. With a freer and more equal world comes a much stronger subjectivism in the decision-making of member states, most of whom regard the UN's main usefulness as lying in its protection of national sovereignty. The success of the UN in creating and preserving independent states out of the travesties of the imperial age has been to allow the luxury of independent choice to a hundred or more different cultures and identities. Given the tribal nature of most human beings, this was bound to generate problems of cohesion.

The 2003 invasion of Iraq has left a legacy. That was the moment in my diplomatic career where I saw attempts at compromise going most horribly wrong. It was a searing experience to stand in front of the news cameras on 17th March 2003 as the messenger telling the world that diplomacy had failed. We were on the edge of war when I knew that the possibilities of dialogue had not been exhausted. The United States, at that time still indisputably the single superpower, just did not believe that debating, listening and compromising formed a surer route to realising its strategic priorities than unilateral action. While blame must also land on others in the Iraq saga, and not least Saddam Hussein himself, the world's perceptions of the actions taken have undoubtedly meant consequences for the health of dialogue and understanding at the global level.

Can we expect political leaderships to change what appears to be their current direction? There are some straws of optimism in the wind, which I hope I am not being naive in mentioning. One of them is the professed commitment of China, through several leadership changes, to 'peaceful rise'. It could conceivably be interpreted as a Chinese wish for others not to reach for their weapons while China claims its 'rightful' place in the global

hierarchy. I see it as a statement of understanding that Chinese long-term interests will be better served by avoiding war as the economy grows in competitiveness, even though it needs verification by others at each step of the way.

Another straw is the Iran deal of July 2015, in which President Obama has taken risks both domestically and internationally, but which will testify to the true value of dialogue if it does survive the implementation stage. It is a puzzle to comprehend, except on short-term and narrowly conceived grounds, how anyone could believe that no deal would have made the region safer. Perhaps it is a lot to hope that, even beyond the possibility that Iran might become a semi-responsible player in its region, building on that dialogue in the Syrian, Iraqi and Ukrainian contexts might become feasible. But at least dialogue has opened the door to an opportunity that was not there earlier.

There is a lesson there that states involved in conflict at the regional or sub-regional level can teach the larger powers. They feel the miseries of war or state breakdown just as acutely, and yet they are not being heard. If the spread of sovereign responsibility through the UN has given smaller states greater freedom, they need to earn its continuation by pursuing their own opportunities for compromise in the local context. It would be heartening to see that happening across the waters of the Gulf or along the southern Mediterranean coastline. The fundamental point is that great power rivalry, and regional power distrust, have to be constrained by squeezing the last drop out of every possibility for dialogue. Avoiding conflict may be painful, but pain is relative. Retreating to the temporarily comfortable nest of immediate national interest is the refuge of politicians under pressure, but a longer-term disaster. Where are the leaders who will point us in the right direction?

DIALOGUE IS NOT AN EASY OPTION

Professor Rosemary Hollis

Professor of Middle East Policy Studies and Director of the Olive Tree Scholarship Programme at City University

The observations and insights offered here derive from experience of several cross-cultural and cross-conflict dialogue exercises undertaken between 1995 and 2015. These included encounters between Jordanians and Palestinians; Iranians and Americans; Palestinian refugees and Arab host-country nationals; and between Libyans, Americans and British nationals at the Track II level, as well as dialogues between Israelis and Palestinians at the civil society level.

There are basically three levels at which dialogue across cultural or conflict divides can be productive for the participants, depending on how well the possibilities and limitations are understood from the outset.

At the top level, cross-conflict dialogue between the official representatives of the protagonists is a necessary component of formal negotiations, but cannot by itself guarantee agreement between them.

At a secondary level, what is often dubbed 'Track II Diplomacy' can lay the ground for formal negotiations by identifying the main concerns and points of difference between the parties, the better to prepare decision-makers for what to expect.

At the broader societal level, Track III or so-called 'people-to-people' dialogue can serve to prepare members of civil society for what may or may not be achieved in formal negotiations. However, experience shows that dialogue at this grass-roots level can actually be counterproductive if better understanding and acceptance of 'the other' is not simultaneously sought or encouraged at the official or political leadership level. At any level an array of factors will determine the potential for success or failure. For example, the configuration of interlocutors around the room or table, the personalities of the individuals involved, the availability of

technical expertise, and the choice of venue, all play a role in determining the ultimate outcome. And even if agreement between the protagonists engaged in dialogue proves unattainable, there may still be benefits in terms of greater understanding of the contending parties and the issues.

At the official level it may not be possible to be highly selective about the choice of participants. By contrast, more discretion can be exercised in the preparation of a Track II dialogue. Ideally the opposing sides should be relatively well matched, not just in numbers but also in stature in their respective societies.

The inclusion of academics or experts knowledgeable in the subject matter, alongside individuals with experience in political office, either retired or temporarily out of office, makes for a good mix. Ideally the total number of participants should be limited to around thirty, to make the conversation manageable while ensuring all those present directly participate rather than simply observe.

An early objective should be to identify key issues for the group to explore, and a timetable agreed for addressing these. One-off meetings can achieve less than a series of meetings in which a core group of participants will always be present, the better to attain continuity and to establish an ongoing rapport. In the case of dialogue between two main protagonists, such as Americans and Iranians, or Americans and Libyans, for example, the inclusion of a small group of British or other European participants – a sympathetic 'third party' as it were – can help to leaven the mix and reduce polarisation.

In these cases also, the choice of a location for the meetings in the UK or another 'third

country' setting may be essential, for reasons to do with access and visas, and/or relative neutrality and seclusion. Indeed, in order to build a level of trust and shield the participants from potential criticism or censure 'at home', all those involved in the exercise have to agree to keep the proceedings confidential, except in so far as the essence of the meetings is, by mutual agreement, to be fed back to decision-makers on either side.

Further, not only the seclusion but also the relative comfort of the surroundings in which a dialogue takes place matters. A small country hotel or conference centre with well-appointed, though not necessarily sumptuous facilities, is optimal. The provision of good food is a must! I learned this from my co-facilitators in a Jordanian-Palestinian dialogue that I helped convene in the 1990s¹. Whereas the leader of the Palestinian delegation was vitally important in keeping everyone 'on task' during the working sessions, his Jordanian counterpart was equally instrumental by ensuring that every evening all the participants could relax and exchange jokes over enjoyable dinners. This combination proved key to completion of the exercise.

In this and similar instances, it proved more productive to engage the participants in a process of 'scenario-building', rather than focusing on reaching agreement. This meant that exploration of the issues could take place, notwithstanding seemingly irreconcilable differences between the parties. Thus the contending national groups, Jordanians and Palestinians, were enabled to think through the implications for each of them of alternative approaches to their mutual relations, ranging from rivalry (which would hand all the initiative to others, not least the Israelis) to co-operation (which

would necessarily entail compromise with each other but give them both more agency).

Another approach, that of 'narrative mediation', has proved useful in facilitating dialogue between young Israelis and Palestinians². In this case, it would have been futile to try to forge agreement on the major issues in contention between the protagonists. That could only set up the participants for frustration and disappointment.

Indeed, academic research has shown that cross-conflict dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian youth groups can all too easily descend into verbal conflict or endless rehearsals of their respective 'victim-perpetrator' narratives³. However, by inviting dialogue participants to put to one side their personal views and instead examine and explain to each other their respective mainstream national narratives about the genesis and history of their conflict, it has proved possible to help them arrive at a new understanding of what drives and perpetuates the conflict.

This approach recognises the importance of historical narratives in defining the identities of the two peoples. Embedded within each narrative is a sense of 'self' and 'other': the narratives valorise 'us' and demonise 'them'. Accordingly, the conflict is not reducible to pure material issues such as land and borders, important as these are; and crucially, the participants in the dialogue do not possess the power and authority to decide on material issues, even if they have views on the possibilities.

Consequently, in the absence of political leaderships committed to reaching agreement on the material issues, there is a price to pay for members of civil society who dare to talk to the enemy. They are at risk of attack from

¹ See the resulting work, published in both English and Arabic: Mustafa Hamarneh, Rosemary Hollis and Khalil Shikaki (1997), *Jordanian-Palestinian relations: Where To?* Chatham House, London, in association with the Palestinian Center for Research and Studies, Nablus and the Center for Strategic Studies, Amman.

² Under the auspices of the Olive Tree Programme at City University London: www.city.ac.uk/olive-tree.

³ See for example, Ifat Maoz (2011) *Does Contact Work In Protracted Asymmetrical Conflict? Appraising 20 Years Of Reconciliation-aimed Encounters Between Israeli Jews And Palestinians*, *Journal of Peace Research*, 48(1) pp.115-125.

within their own communities for 'normalising' with the enemy, betraying the cause and breaking ranks.

In conclusion, therefore, my sense is that those who extol the virtues of cross-conflict dialogue at the people-to-people level are all too often under the illusion that contact by itself will contribute to peace. Instead, in my experience, such dialogue can aid deeper understanding among the individuals directly involved and thence help those individuals to find greater self-confidence and 'agency' in their personal decision-making and careers.

However, to be transformative at a broader societal level, civil society dialogue has to be

accompanied by parallel engagements in dialogue at leadership levels.

AN INCLUSIVE DIALOGUE IS THE REQUISITE FOR ACHIEVING PEACE

Oliver McTernan

Director and Co-Founder, Forward Thinking

In the summer of 2012, Forward Thinking was invited by senior Tunisian politicians to establish a political dialogue aimed at helping the various political groups and key civil society organisations find a sufficient level of understanding and agreement that would enable them to work together for the common good of the country. The sudden ousting of the Ben Ali regime and the rush to democracy that followed created an atmosphere of suspicion and a deep mistrust that needed to be addressed, if the newly elected transitional government was to survive and meet the high expectations of the country.

Our immediate task was to prevent greater polarisation both between the secular and religious parties, and between the established political parties and the young self-styled rejectionists (who already felt their revolution had been stolen from them). Our goal was to foster a culture of dialogue that would allow the different political parties and interests to address the main social and economic challenges that risked destabilising the transition to a more democratic and inclusive process. To achieve this, we recognised that we had to engage in a fully inclusive dialogue. We began our work therefore by reaching out to all the political entities, including those associated with the former regime.

Funded by the EU Instrument for Stability, we began to facilitate regular cross-party meetings at which the participants set the agenda. At the first formal set of meetings that brought together representatives of secularist and religious parties, trade unionists and youth activists, there was an immediate and unanimous consensus that no one associated with Ben Ali's party could be part of the dialogue. Given that this was a Tunisian driven process, we were obliged to accept their decision and to limit participation in our initial meetings to the parties and trade unionists that had emerged post-revolution.

This did not prevent us, however, from maintaining regular bilateral meetings with senior members of the newly formed party of the right, Nidaa Tounes, which was perceived to have strong links with the old regime. We realised that although it would take time for representatives from Nidaa Tounes to be included in the process, the party had to be included if the process were to achieve the modest goal of reaching a sufficient level of consensus on dealing with the immediate challenges the country had to face. It took eight months before representatives of Nidaa Tounes were fully admitted to the dialogue.

Over the following 18 months, the regular inclusive dialogues undoubtedly helped to contribute to many of the positive developments we have witnessed at the political level. By providing an inclusive confidential space for senior politicians to hold robust debates, acknowledge their concerns, listen to the different perspectives from across the political spectrum and develop sufficient respect for the other, it helped to stabilise the process of transition and to witness the establishment of a coalition government that includes Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda, an unthinkable prospect two years previously.

In our evaluation of the process, based upon the feedback we received from the participants, we learnt how important it is for the mediator in such confidential dialogues to be perceived as independent and external to the political dynamics of the country. Virtually all groups and individuals within Tunisia were perceived, rightly or wrongly, as biased towards a certain movement or ideological trend. In contrast, because Forward Thinking was seen as an external actor, it was possible to gain the trust and confidence of all parties. Once these relationships of trust with the various participants had been developed, we found that they were willing to then enter the dialogue process and sit with political

rivals. We were in effect, at times, the glue that helped to hold the process together until the point was reached where participants had established their own relationships.

Such a process must aim to be inclusive of all political trends, but the mediator cannot dictate the speed of engagement. From the beginning, we made it clear that the principle of inclusivity was essential to success, but the pace of the process cannot be rushed or dictated, as this would only be counterproductive. Ultimately there is no substitute for intensive engagement over a sustained period of time to instil sufficient confidence in participants to both meet with their political rivals and have constructive conversations on contentious issues.

Dialogue must occur at multiple levels. Different stakeholders must be engaged if movement on key issues is to be achieved. This means engaging the party leadership, executive bureau, political bureau, youth and civil society. An agreement achieved between the leadership of parties will have little impact if it is opposed by the majority of mid-level leadership and the grassroots. Accordingly, ensuring that these stakeholders are engaged in the process and feel that their concerns are being listened to is vitally important, particularly as some might be prepared to engage at a time when others are not.

The dialogue must be sustained and patient. The fact that we were able to ensure there was the space for inclusive dialogue on a regular basis meant that the process could endure political crises. At any one time there are any number of reasons why a party may not be able to participate in a meeting. However, through our role as mediators we would be able to engage them on a bilateral level and ensure that they were aware of the content of the meeting, then reincorporate them back into roundtable workshops at an appropriate time. Indeed, at moments of political tension, having an established private space for dialogue can act as a means of conflict resolution. Individuals who find it politically impossible to meet publicly are often willing to do so privately, provided a

space exists to which they can turn. At moments of high political tension (such as summer-autumn 2013), the process offered one of the few avenues where senior leaders in the Troika and opposition could meet, away from the pressures brought by the media.

Flexibility is important. Within any structure, there must be flexibility to respond to developments in real time so that the process is alive to the political realities. A development in the political sphere may mean there is a sudden need for several roundtables that were not initially envisioned, while a crisis may force other activities to be delayed. The ability to respond to developments in a fluid political situation must be built into the programme.

Attitudes towards 'the other' develop slowly. Even at the end of the process, relations between participants from opposing ideological trends could still be marked by caution and suspicion. However, given enough time, contact between individuals from different parties did produce significant shifts in thinking. Participants who were initially hesitant to engage and would only do so in the private space of the process, began to meet publicly and develop genuine relationships. Discourses on exclusion generally disappeared and were replaced with a general consensus on the need for inclusion and co-operation. Even if trust remains fragile between Tunisia's political trends, there is now sufficient consensus between parties on addressing challenges through the country's political institutions and an ability to set aside ideological differences to focus on areas of shared concern.

The role of leadership is ultimately essential in overcoming ideological and political divides. While stakeholders must be engaged at multiple levels, the senior leadership has a special responsibility to 'lead its base' to a place where negotiation and compromise can occur. Without the role played by the leadership of Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes in particular, Tunisia's transition could have easily taken an alternative path in political deadlock and eventual conflict.

The principle of inclusivity is essential both in preventing potential conflicts and in resolving actual conflicts. A refusal to engage all the relevant parties, either out of the desire to manipulate a process towards a preconceived outcome, or just a simple fear of the unknown, can only lead to failure, as any agreement reached through such a process will undoubtedly fail to stand the test of time. Like any political process, a peace process needs the buy-in at multiple levels of people who have real constituency within the opposing factions. To attempt to bypass the inconvenient may achieve a short-lived success, but it will also unquestionably add to the complexities of finding a durable solution.

The international political community's record of conflict prevention and resolution is far from impressive. Its initiatives are frequently too late to prevent or to stop violence; and when it does get involved, the focus is almost entirely on the political elites or the so-called moderates, with whom we feel more comfortable. The failure to reach out, to engage, and genuinely to try to understand and address the aspirations, the grievances, prejudices, and fears of the conflicting parties, is to put them beyond diplomacy, and by so doing increase the risk of armed confrontation.

Peace cannot be fabricated in a 'bubble' created to fit the agendas of the international fixers. A peace process therefore that fails to take time to engage all the relevant local factions and the constituencies these represent, that fails to be flexible and responsive to emerging opportunities and difficulties, rapidly risks becoming a part of the problem and not the solution.

In his book, *The Missing Peace: The Inside Story Of The Fight For Middle East Peace*, Dennis Ross, the chief Middle East peace negotiator for both Presidents George HW Bush and Bill Clinton, captures for me the root of the problem. Ross approaches the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as if it were a 'technical' problem that can be resolved by those at the top, making the decisions and providing the resources and know-how needed to implement what has been decided.

His tireless efforts to resolve the conflict were unsuccessful, because both his analysis and his strategy failed to reflect the complex entanglement of grievance, belief and ideology that are the root of this conflict.

Engaging the elite, whilst ignoring key factions that represent a credible constituency on the ground, is like papering over cracks in the futile hope that the foundations upon which an agreement is based are solid. People who feel that their very identity, values and beliefs are under threat are not going to be receptive to dictates from above. They need to be recognised and engaged if they are to move beyond the boundaries of their own clan and to discover common ground with opposing factions. The failure of successive peace initiatives to reach out on the one side to the ultra-religious and ideological right parties in Israel, and on the other side to groups like Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine has led to the present impasse and the misguided belief that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is intractable.

For the past decade, Forward Thinking has worked with the various political and religious factions who have real constituency within both Israel and the Occupied Territories. Our engagement with the different factions does not mean that we either endorse or support their perspectives, ideologies or beliefs. It is a recognition that all of these groups need to be recognised and engaged in the search for a solution that will prove durable. To ring-fence negotiations from the narrative and perspectives of such groups will inevitably lead to the signing of agreements that are at best undeliverable, or at worst likely to lead to deeper divisions and violence.

Efforts to reach agreements with only those whom we designate as 'moderates', risk discrediting the whole concept of a peace process. It is too easy to get locked within a mindset that seeks the comfort of dealing with what is familiar and what we more easily understand than to reach out and be exposed to the challenges posed by entirely different perspectives. There can be no short cuts to a

peace that is rooted in a sense of fairness, justice and a recognition of the other and their rights. It can only be achieved through the commitment of time and a real effort to understand and to articulate the genuine grievances and fears of the other. Facilitators and organisations that work at this level of engagement must not expect to have their efforts fully understood or endorsed – especially not by those who genuinely believe that empowering the moderates is the right option.

I recall some years ago, whilst standing with my colleague William Sieghart outside the Knesset office of a senior member of Yisrael Beytenu, a party that was regarded as being on the extreme right of Israeli politics, being openly reprimanded by a prominent Israeli Labour politician, who at the time was in the forefront of his party's peace efforts. 'You can't go in there as they are fascists, and by engaging them you are giving them credibility', he argued. When we entered the office we were welcomed by Yuri Stern as being the first people to challenge his party to engage in the peace process. It was the beginning of a very useful, insightful and ongoing dialogue. We received a similar welcome when we travelled to Gaza the next day to meet with senior Hamas officials. Those meetings also marked the beginning of a useful and insightful ongoing dialogue, which at times has drawn similar condemnations from friends within the more secular Fatah movement.

It is understandable that moderates will feel irritated by the engagement of those whom

they frequently see as spoilers of processes aimed at achieving either a political consensus, as we witnessed in Tunisia, or agreements such as Oslo. But I cannot recall any successful political or peace process that has not operated upon the principle of inclusivity. Conflicts, political or armed, are frequently rooted in a deep sense of grievance or threat to identity, belief or ideology. The fear, and at times hatred, of the other is frequently the driving force that has to be addressed if there is to be a sufficient shift in mindset to reach a willingness to at least coexist without resorting to violence or coercion.

Policies aimed at isolating and disempowering the so-called extremists in an effort to do business with the moderates, are not only misguided, but are more likely to increase the determination to resist, making the possibility of achieving a real peace even more elusive. The 'proscribing' of movements like Hamas and Hezbollah, as a means of political coercion, makes it impossible for diplomats and officials to pursue meaningful dialogues that can lead to a level of understanding, which is essential in reaching agreements that will prove durable. Non-governmental organisations like Forward Thinking can keep a line of communication open, but this is no substitute for direct engagement by those officially empowered to prove that peace, even in such a troubled region as the Middle East, is not elusive. It can be achieved, if there is the political will to simply do what is required.

DIALOGUE AND CONFLICT: REFLECTIONS ON THE EXPERIENCE OF SUDAN

Alan Goulty

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The Sudanese are among the friendliest and most hospitable people in Africa. They rarely find it hard to talk to each other. They have seen impressive acts of reconciliation, notably that of Kerubino Kuanyin Bol, a southern warlord who waged war against his own people in Bahr el Ghazal for many years before reconciling with them in 1997.

Government is, however, a different matter. Sudan has been wracked by conflicts since independence in 1956. These have pitted southerners against northerners, Muslims against Christians, Africans against Arabs, the centre against the marginalised periphery, and tribes against each other.

Much ink has been devoted to analysis of the root causes of these conflicts. But all are essentially the product of a struggle among men for the fruits of office. The interests of the people, especially women, and the provision of education and health services, have played no part in leaders' calculations.

The late Nuba leader, Yousif Kuwa was an exception: at our first meeting in 1996 he asked not for political backing but for help in obtaining measles vaccine for Nuba children.

Such simple power struggles are not easy to resolve through dialogue. If one party gains, another must lose. Yet Sudan has seen examples, too often short-lived, of peace through dialogue.

In 1971, President Nimeiry had forfeited almost all his northern support and needed the South to help him retain power, whilst the southern rebels concluded that the half loaf of autonomy was better than no bread. The resulting Addis agreement broke down when Nimeiry reconciled with his northern opponents and the southern politicians fell to

quarrelling amongst themselves, thus allowing Khartoum to divide and rule. There have also been examples – the 1999 Wunlit Agreement between sections of the Dinka and Nuer tribes, and the Nuba Mountains Agreement of 2002 – where a truce has been brokered on the basis of the status quo and with pressure and help from outside mediators.

Perhaps more instructive is the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Both President Bashir and the late Dr John Garang told me in 1995 that they recognised no military victory was possible. In 2002 both men confirmed to British International Development Secretary Clare Short that they would settle for a 'one country, two systems' solution. And an additional incentive was the prospect of exploitation of the oil reserves in southern Sudan if the fighting were to stop.

All that held out the rare prospect in Sudan of enough common ground and, crucially, resources to satisfy all combatants. Even so it took 30 months of difficult negotiations, skilfully mediated by General Sumbeiywo of Kenya, to bring the government and the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) to agreement.

Some critics claim that the CPA was bound to fail because not all stakeholders took part in the talks. That ignores the reality that it was very hard to get two parties to agree: to have involved many more would have made agreement impossible as subsequent experience with Darfur negotiations confirms. More seriously, the parties, the mediators and the observers at the CPA talks were exhausted and reluctant to recognise that the peace agreement itself was only 5% of the task: 95% was implementation, a task they neglected.

The death of Dr Garang, six months after the Agreement was signed, removed the main southern advocate of unity of Sudan, the principle which made it possible to negotiate the CPA. The SPLM leadership, together with their supporters in Norway and the US, switched focus to the promised independence referendum and to securing if possible more gains for the South at Khartoum's expense: neither party, nor the foreign witnesses, to the agreement lived up to their joint commitment to make unity attractive.

There was no peace dividend for the long-suffering people of the South: foreign aid was slow to arrive and the authorities in the South devoted more time to personal enrichment than to providing for their people.

The CPA was not a total failure. It removed South Sudan from the northern yoke and offered the people of both countries a chance to govern themselves well. Both countries have flunked this challenge. In Sudan there are ongoing conflicts in Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile in all of which opponents and supporters of Khartoum are almost equally divided.

The need for compromise is clear. But leaders have yet to work out a basis for that, given that resources are limited: indeed persistent rebellion may strike many of them as economically preferable to the risks of a peace dialogue.

One rebel commander once asked me what he should do if peace came. I replied rather lamely that he should join the administration and run his home area. 'But I am doing that already,' he said, 'and I take all the women and cattle I want.' The opposition parties have no new ideas for sharing Sudan's limited resources and most are even refusing to take part in the proposed national dialogue.

In South Sudan there has been open civil war since December 2013, despite eight ceasefires to date, compounded by growing inter-tribal animosities and security services intolerant of any differing views from those of President Salva Kiir. Again, there are not enough government jobs and revenue to

satisfy the aspirations of the leaders: only one person after all can be president.

All these conflicts have attracted great international attention and attempts, so far unsuccessful, to mediate settlements. In Darfur the 2005-2006 peace talks suffered from too many international observers and mediators, who did not work effectively together and could not even persuade the Darfur factions to meet in the same place. Funds for the mediation were provided only grudgingly, a month at a time, which did not allow the mediators time to win over the Darfuris to compromise.

Lectures from visiting British and US ministers were clearly counterproductive, as indeed have been international statements on the conflicts in South Sudan more recently. Pressure from outside rarely works in Sudan.

Twenty years of US sanctions have had no effect beyond damaging the economy and financial system. International Criminal Court indictments merely encourage those affected not to compromise. UN travel and asset sanctions against a handful of South Sudanese commanders are laughably ineffective.

We need to recognise that international mediation demands great effort, combined with knowledge of the issues and those involved. Mediators must be patient and resourced for the long haul. They need to avoid taking sides: it is not for outsiders to say who should govern a country, though they may have a legitimate interest in *how* it is governed. Rather they should be prepared to talk to all parties, however unsavoury. One cannot hope to influence Khartoum by refusing to talk to President Bashir!

Mediators should encourage parties to look for solutions they can live with, rather than seek to achieve all their aims. The fundamental mistake in the Abyei provisions of the CPA was insisting on a referendum on the future of the territory in which only two answers were on offer – making a 'win/lose' outcome inevitable, though compromises

could have been devised to take account of the key interests of all parties.

International efforts should focus on encouraging the parties to work together, as the small international force did in the Nuba Mountains from 2002-2005, rather than imposing alien forces to 'keep the peace'.

Such efforts should be reinforced by active encouragement of grassroots dialogue, whether between tribes, adherents of different religions or amongst women.

This need not focus directly on peace: dialogues between Muslim and Christian women sponsored by the Women's Action Group in Khartoum in the 1990s, for example, focused on human needs and women's common experience of loss, thus helping to form a sense of commonality and community.

Nobody would claim that dialogue, even at multiple levels, can resolve all the problems of Sudan and South Sudan. But it must surely be preferable to try, rather than live with the suffering caused by continued conflicts.

THE VALUE OF DIALOGUE IN AN AGE OF SOFT POWER

Rt Rev Peter B Price

Chair of Conciliation Resources, former Bishop of Bath and Wells, peace activist, writer and broadcaster

“Whatever you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it.”

These words of Mahatma Gandhi accurately summarise the approach of anyone committed to the role of dialogue in the task of peace building and conflict resolution. Listening, learning and dialoguing are qualities that require humility, wisdom and discernment: the gift of knowing when to speak and when to keep silent. Equally such virtues require the grace of understanding that often there will be no evidence of movement, and even when there is, it will often be part of a process of facing much disappointment, let-down and betrayal. Often there will be a sense of ‘fighting the long defeat’, as physician Paul Farmer has put it, rather than achieving victories. Thus, holding on to Gandhi’s dictum in the work of peace-building is essential spiritual preparation for the wider task.

Like most people I stumbled into the work of peace-building. It began in my teens on a Saturday night when one of the notorious South London street gangs threatened to beat up a rather weedy looking young man. Almost unthinkingly I stepped in between the gang leader and the boy, and sought to disarm the situation. Quite how I have now forgotten, but the temperature cooled and I accompanied the lad back home. The following day I came across the gang again, they hailed me like an old friend and we laughed and joked together.

Hardly the stuff of peace treaties, it nevertheless provided something of a template for future activity. First there was risk. My intervention could have gone either way. Second, there was commitment. It could have been short-lived and cost me injury. Third, there was dialogue. Likewise it could have been fruitless, and one moment of irrationality could have resulted in a punch, or

worse, that would have rendered the intervention apparently futile.

It was in the early 1970s that I found myself facing a different kind of conflict on the streets of riot torn Belfast. Together with a relative who was a priest in one of the Loyalist enclaves, we would stand on the bridge that divided Loyalist from Republican communities. Through summer nights, groups of youths gathered with petrol bombs and other weaponry intent on mayhem. My priest friend knew his community, and quietly without any histrionics he would approach individuals, and tell them to go home.

Later he would return to the mean streets of his parish, often meeting up with the protagonists, and would share a joke and a smile, as well as being a presence to the wider community. Sure enough he would be back the next night, and the next, often chivvying the same youngsters, and though conflict regularly broke out, and his blandishments failed, a pattern was established that eventually led to dialogue and at least a temporary ending to the violence and intimidation.

Through the 1970s and into the early 1980s, I accompanied on occasions a number of small groups of courageous people from both sides of the divide who met to share their stories and experience. Over time the breakdown of historic mistrust, suspicion and fear was enabled, together with establishment of common ground and a discovery and celebration of each other’s humanity.

None of this came easily. Risk was considerable. Suspicion from within communities towards those reaching out was endemic. The erection of barricades and vigilante patrols frequently interrupted planned meetings. In addition, action by the authorities seeking interim ‘agreements’ was

often premature, though well intentioned, and led to resistance and clampdown by locally appointed paramilitary leaders. Despite such risks and privations, through the hidden years it was this kind of grass-roots dialogue and peace-building that provided the foundation of much of what was to emerge later in the formal peace processes and the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. For my own part, I built up a number of individual contacts with religious, political and community leaders through the years and regularly dialogued with them, both in quieter times and periods of crisis. None of it was dramatic, though there were moments of disclosure and breakthrough, apparently insignificant in themselves, but all of which contributed to a whole.

The Good Friday Agreement might be popularly conceived of as marking the end of the conflict. It was certainly a significant line in the sand. But realism indicates that the cessation of historic suspicion, fear and hatred – together with its accompanying violence – does not cease overnight. Within months of the Agreement, the notorious Omagh bomb planted by dissidents killed 29 people and injured hundreds more. It was at the gathering prior to the Memorial Service for those killed and injured in this atrocity that I had my first encounter with the former Provisional IRA Commander – by then the Sinn Féin Chief Negotiator – Martin McGuinness. He told me that nothing would put him off the search for peace, and offered the reflection that this atrocity was a defining moment, a ‘staring into the abyss.’

Over the years I have encountered and dialogued with representatives of all sides in the conflict. I have regarded such encounters as a privilege, even though some of those with whom I have had to do have colourful pasts, to say the least. None of this has been public; much if not all has been apparently insignificant; yet respecting the fundamental humanity that binds us, even when it is at its

most distorted, is essential if progress towards peacemaking is to be achieved.

One incident in the light of the Good Friday Agreement occurred three years or so ago, when with a friend I met with a group of former paramilitaries who had undertaken, at considerable risk to themselves, a programme of facilitating conciliation between previously warring groups. These groups included internecine disputes as well as across the political and religious divide. There had been a local flare-up, violence had been threatened. The morning of our visit, discussion raged as to whether the provocation was such that arms should be taken up again. Several hours of patient listening, the asking of gently probing questions, and the affirmation of the good work that this formerly dissident group had done, led to a cooling of ire, and albeit a little grudgingly, an acceptance that guns would not solve things.

My friend and I were both shaken by the experience. She spoke of ‘not having seen them like that before’, and warned of optimism over what she perceived as very unstable situation. Yet by the following week a measure of equilibrium and normality had returned, and the conciliation programme continued in preference to the rush to arms. Too often the perception of peace agreements is that their signing marks the magical end of all that has gone before. Only the most naive and optimistic could hold to such a view. Dialogue remains an essential ingredient for the foreseeable future in any peace process.

Whilst Northern Ireland has been a particular location for me in the past 40 or so years, working with groups in conflict in Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa, the principles intuited on the streets of South London remain valid. Equally the humility with which Gandhi bids us approach all our efforts serves as a sentinel against arrogance and pride.

THE GREEK-TURKISH FORUM: A PORTRAIT OF A TRACK 1.5 PEACE SUPPORT INITIATIVE

Dr James Ker-Lindsay

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One of the most exciting developments for those working on trying to resolve conflict has been the emergence of what is called Track 1.5 initiatives. Traditionally, efforts to resolve long-standing disputes between states would be managed by officials sitting across the table from each other in a very formal setting, either openly or in secret. Meanwhile, various non-governmental groups might try to contribute to peace by trying to pressure their governments or by attempting to build up wider public support for a conflict resolution process.

The problem was that these two elements rarely had much contact with each other. Diplomats and politicians felt constrained from acting outside the bounds of their official roles, fearing that they would commit their countries to certain positions. Meanwhile, civil society organisations were rarely accorded a real say in the process.

Track 1.5 efforts were deliberately designed to overcome the split between these two elements. The aim was to draw together people from society at large who were sufficiently well informed on an issue, and had the necessary standing to directly influence government, but who were not constrained by an official position. Such figures would therefore include politicians who did not hold a formal position in the administration: retired senior diplomats and military officers, business leaders, and other figures from the media and academia.

In 1998 I was enormously privileged to become involved with one of the most successful of these efforts: the Greek-Turkish Forum.

Looking back, it is easy to forget how bad relations were between Athens and Ankara at

that point. In the two decades that followed the Turkish military invasion of Cyprus in 1974, the two countries had come close to war on several occasions. The most recent flare-up of tensions had been in 1996, when the nations had come close to blows over a small, uninhabited islet in the eastern Aegean.

It was against this backdrop that a small British charity, the Roberts Centre, which was then being run by a former British diplomat, Jamie Bruce-Lockhart, decided that perhaps something could be done to improve relations. He set out to identify a number of people from the two countries of sufficiently high public standing who might be amenable to face-to-face discussions with a range of counterparts. The end product was an impressive array of figures, including a former deputy foreign minister of Greece, a retired commander of the Turkish Navy, MPs, top professors and some of the most recognisable journalists in both countries.

Having secured participants, the next task was to secure funding. We were enormously fortunate that both the Norwegian and British governments saw the value in this effort and both provided generous support. The next step was to provide a proper administrative basis for the group. I was hired to be the full time co-ordinator, based at the Royal United Services Institute in London. Meanwhile, the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) provided the necessary mediation expertise in the form of their then director, Dan Smith. All the while, Jamie Bruce-Lockhart worked behind the scenes with all the partners and participants to make sure it all ran smoothly.

Right from the start, we were fortunate that all the members realised the responsibility on their shoulders. Everyone wanted to make it

work. More to the point, the two governments were willing to throw their support behind it. Both the Greek and Turkish teams had a direct line of communication with political leaders in their respective countries. Everyone knew this, which in turn gave the whole process an air of added seriousness. Ideas generated around the table had a very good chance of falling on the desks of the Greek and Turkish prime ministers. Nevertheless, the members quickly identified some ground rules. The first was that discussions would be confined to bilateral Greek-Turkish issues. The subject of Cyprus would not be brought up. Apart from the fact that it was just too contentious and emotional a topic, it was also understood that the Cyprus Problem was a matter for the Greek and Turkish Cypriots, neither of which was represented in the room.

Secondly, it was also decided that the meetings should not be secret. Secrecy would give rise to accusations that the group was some sort of cabal of worthies seeking to impose solutions over the heads of democratically elected leaders. This was never the case. Equally, however, the group also understood that if it was to have any hope of success, its discussions would have to be confidential. It was therefore decided that the group would put out press releases after its meetings, but that it would not actively seek to appear in the media to discuss its activities in any detail.

Although the Forum got off to a very good start, within six months it faced a huge challenge. In February 1999, the leader of the PKK [Kurdistan Workers' Party] – which had been waging a terrorist campaign in Turkey for the past decade and a half – was arrested leaving the Greek Embassy in Kenya. This caused a huge crisis between the two countries. Once again, there was even talk of war. Even now, I remember those days very well. Practically every other group working towards Greek-Turkish reconciliation collapsed. It became just too politically

sensitive to be seen to be promoting peace. However, to their credit, the members of the Forum quickly decided to keep on going with their efforts. If anything, the crisis only served to underline the importance of what they were doing.

Obviously, things had to be managed particularly carefully over the next few months. But, in the end, the Forum's willingness to keep going paid off. By the end of summer that year, relations between Greece and Turkey entered a whole new positive phase following a series of natural disasters that led to an unprecedented outpouring of public goodwill. In this new environment, the Greek-Turkish Forum thrived. The fact that the members had held together through a period of heightened tension served to strengthen their sense of camaraderie and joint purpose. More to the point, it now started to produce more and more confidence building measures (CBMs) between the two countries, ranging from technical proposals to limit the danger of accidental engagements between military forces, through to efforts to promote contacts across a range of political, economic, social, cultural and educational fields.

So, where does the Greek-Turkish Forum stand today? I am pleased to say that it is still going, although my personal involvement ended many years ago. It is perhaps a sign of its standing and the trust built up amongst its members that it now discusses Cyprus, having brought on board participants from the island. Likewise, it no longer stands in the shadows. Its contribution to peace is now publicly recognised. In large part this is also a reflection of the almost unbelievable improvement in relations between Athens and Ankara. While the bilateral territorial problems still exist between the two countries, the level of interaction between the governments and the people is nothing short of extraordinary. I am proud to say that the Greek-Turkish Forum can take some credit for this state of affairs.

DIALOGUE WITH NUCLEAR WEAPONS DECISION-MAKERS

Dr Scilla Elworthy

Peace activist, Founder of the Oxford Research Group and Peace Direct; three times Nobel Peace Prize nominee

When working for the UN in the early 1980s, it became clear to me that the dangers of accidental nuclear war were mounting, and that on an issue affecting the future of humanity, the decision-making process was neither reliable nor accountable. For example, on 26th September 1983, the nuclear early warning system of the Soviet Union twice reported the launch of American Minuteman ICBMs from bases in the United States. Luckily for all of humanity, an officer of the Soviet Air Defence Forces⁴ correctly identified them as a false alarm. His alertness prevented a retaliatory nuclear attack on the United States and its NATO allies, which would have resulted in the deaths of millions of people. Investigation of the satellite warning system later confirmed that the system had malfunctioned.

Becoming acutely aware of these dangers, I decided to leave my job and to start a research group to begin the task of mapping the entire decision-making process on nuclear weapons in the US, the UK, the USSR, France, and China. In 1983 we started working round my kitchen table, and to begin with I paid my fellow researchers out of my savings. I was reliably informed that the task we were undertaking was impossible.

This task meant understanding who provided the intelligence, who designed the warheads, who built the submarines and aircraft, who provided the data for targeting and deployment, who had authority to sign the cheques, and who ultimately gave the orders. In order to find out who actually makes

decisions, it is necessary first to identify the important organisations (ministries, design labs, military strategy units, defence companies and intelligence committees) and the key groups within them. We never used any classified material, but we were fortunate to be guided by scholars and librarians in official institutes.

Four years later we published our first book, entitled simply *How Nuclear Weapons Decisions Are Made*⁵. That was the first of more than 80 books and reports over three decades.

By this time, we knew enough about the possibility of accidental nuclear war – and the numbers of nuclear warheads that had gone missing – to realise the urgency of talking with those in authority. My doctoral thesis, undertaken at that time, involved in-depth interviews with a number of senior policy makers: ministers, civil servants, military leaders, warhead designers and weapons contractors. I listened to them talk for several hours and then drew cognitive maps of their thought patterns, which we then discussed. This allowed us to understand each other's thought processes; speaking to them in a straightforward manner helped to develop trust.

With some trust established, it was possible to invite them or their colleagues to spend two days in a medieval manor house near Oxford to talk with opposite numbers from other countries, as well as with their most knowledgeable critics, on key issues of nuclear weapons policy. For example, we

⁴ Now identified as Stanislav Yevgrafovich Petrov.

⁵ Scilla Elworthy (then McLean) ed. (1986) *How Nuclear Weapons Decisions Are Made*.

would bring together a leading warhead designer from the Los Alamos National Laboratory in the US with a physicist who had quit his senior post at Aldermaston (the UK warhead lab) to become director of an internationally respected peace research institute in Stockholm. The subject under discussion might, for example, be a No First Use policy – a pledge that a country would not use nuclear weapons unless it had been attacked with nuclear weapons – or control of fissile materials.

It took about 15 years to get to this point. One key ingredient was complete confidentiality: there were no press releases, no communiqués, and nothing of these meetings was ever reported in the media. Building trust between participants was essential. The same is true of the nuclear dialogues conducted by my colleagues at the Oxford Research Group today⁶: after the initial suspicion and mistrust has subsided, participants begin to see each other as human beings, and after a while can usually be found rolling up their sleeves and thrashing out possible terms for treaties.

We learned gradually – by making countless mistakes – how to engage in real dialogue with these policymakers. To do this we had to create a very safe environment. Initially we briefed invitees fully on what to expect, should they accept our invitation. We learned that only about one in four of those invited would agree to attend, but that a recommendation from a colleague who knew us would prove persuasive.

As we continued organising these meetings, I had begun to understand the value of meditation and had become a Quaker. Moreover, I had had the opportunity to know a number of extremely wise people, including my beloved mentor, Professor Adam Curle, who really knew how to meditate. I invited

some of them to be “Standing Stones” for the meetings, meditating all day in the library underneath the room where the talks were taking place.

One day, in the beamed hall where the group was deliberating, one of the US State Department negotiators said to me:

“This is a very special room.”

“Yes, it was built in 1360.”

“No, it’s really special.”

“I agree. It may be because many good things have happened in this room.”

“No, I mean there’s something coming up through the floorboards.”

I explained that the meeting was being supported by meditation, taking place in the library below. He said, “You have to be kidding. . . .” and looked so shocked that I knew our reputation was at stake.

So the only thing was to refer him to the source. “You know those older people who serve you your lunch? Ask them. They sit in the library meditating while we are talking in this room above.”

After lunch he came back smiling.

Over the past 10 years I have learned more about dialogue, working through Peace Direct⁷ with those tackling hot conflict at the sharp end. Their experience – in Somalia, Sudan, Pakistan, Zimbabwe, DRC, Sri Lanka, Nepal – demonstrates to me how few people adequately understand the nature of our prejudices and of our effect on others. We fall into traps of framing the world in terms of good guys (us) and bad guys (them), failing to realise that others find it just as easy to do the reverse.

⁶ http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/middle_east/avoiding_military_confrontation_iran

⁷ I founded Peace Direct in 2002 (<http://www.peacedirect.org/uk/>).

In all our research over the past 35 years on armed violence, we discover again and again that humiliation is the most powerful driver of violence. We also discover that the best antidote to humiliation is respect. So in mediation it is important to demonstrate your respect for the other person.

Here is a true story.

In 2003, shortly after the invasion of Iraq, US Lieutenant Colonel Chris Hughes was leading his men down a street in Najaf, when suddenly people came pouring out of the houses that lined the street and surrounded the troops. They were furiously angry, screaming, and waving their fists. The soldiers, who were mainly about 19 years old and spoke no Arabic, had no idea what was happening, and were terrified.

Chris Hughes strode into the middle of it, raised his rifle above his head – pointing the barrel at the ground – and said to his men, “Kneel.” The bewildered troops, burdened by their heavy body armour, wobbled to the ground and also pointed their rifles into the sand.

The crowd quieted in disbelief, and there was absolute stillness for some two minutes. And then the crowd dispersed⁸.

This gesture of respect averted a bloodbath: no weapons were needed, no shots were fired, no revenge cycle was initiated.

With regard to international conflict, the immediate question remains how we can stand up to a bully without the threat of nuclear war spiralling out of control with horrific consequences. Actually, I believe the relevant question is how we avoid being a bully ourselves, or being seen to be a bully. The most immediate challenge is to develop

strong positive relations with other states so that no one has the temptation to become a bully. In relation to Russia today, for example, we are called not to give in, nor to accept Russia's control of neighbouring states, nor to threaten catastrophe if Putin does not give in, but rather to give Russia some significant stake in the governance of a wider Europe ... possibly a partnership in a strengthened OSCE [Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe] based upon shared values and conflict resolution.

The most effective teacher of conflict transformation in my experience is Nelson Mandela. Working with him and Archbishop Tutu in setting up The Elders⁹, I experienced the tangible energy of integrity that he developed over 27 years on Robben Island with his fellow prisoners. They honed the patience, forbearance and understanding needed to negotiate and undertake the transition from one of the world's most oppressive regimes to democratic elections – and to manage this largely without violence, avoiding the civil war that many observers had feared would slaughter millions.

We are now faced with challenges demanding similar courage and integrity. Nuclear deterrence doctrine emerged to freeze power structures after 1945 and to contain the ideological ambitions of ‘the other’. Now it is not only outdated, but undermines the international cohesion and co-operation essential for managing the growing strategic threats to our way of life. By bolstering an image of the West having overpowering force at its disposal, and being seen to be using deterrence to enforce the current world order, it may actually contribute to driving the terrorism we face today. We have much work to do.

⁸ The full story is told by Dan Baum, ‘Battle Lessons: What the Generals Don’t Know’, The New Yorker, 17th January 2005 (www.newyorker.com/archive/2005/01/17/050117).

⁹ Chaired by Kofi Annan, The Elders is an independent group of global leaders who work together for peace and human rights (<http://theelders.org/about>).

GIVING YOUNG TUNISIANS A VOICE

Sirine Ben Brahim

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Dialogue as a concept, and not as a culture, was not unknown in pre-Revolution Tunisia – though only if we understand dialogue as an exchange and discussion between two or more people about plain and mundane apolitical subject matters. Tunisians were well aware that they lived in a Panopticon, where they were constantly watched and supervised. Hence, their dialogues were restricted to what would please Tunisia's Big Brother, the regime of President Ben Ali.

However, in the post-Revolution years dialogue has become an essential element of Tunisia's internal stability and well-being. With the amalgam of different nascent voices here and there bearing the world views, social plans, and political aspirations of the people, a national dialogue seemed to be a necessity whereby different sides could meet around a table and lead the transitional phase towards unity and stability. The importance and achievement of dialogue in Tunisia has been heralded and acclaimed in the international arena by awarding Tunisia's National Dialogue Quartet the Nobel Prize for Peace, for their concerted efforts in leading the country to democracy and order. This victory has brought pride to all Tunisians, in particular its youth.

Tunisia's young people played a tremendous role in bringing about the Jasmine Revolution and whistling up a political wind of change across the country. And since then civil society, where youth is highly active, has played a leading role in limiting the chaos and disorder which at times has threatened to derail the democratic transition.

Since the overthrow of the Ben Ali regime the Tunisian people have been able to have their say through a range of means, for example through free and fair elections, and increased freedom of speech both in the media and social media. Similarly, public debate and

dialogue around key issues for the country has increasingly featured in national television programmes.

Dialogue has also flourished at grassroots level, where young Tunisians have formed coalitions to establish and lead their own dialogues. One such example is the development of the British Council's Young Arab Voices (YAV) programme, which has established communities of debaters in high schools, universities and civil society organisations. I am proud to have been closely involved in this programme, first as a debater, then as a trainer, and now as a trainer of trainers, with the aim of hugely increasing the number of debating clubs around the country.

I see Young Arab Voices as a pioneer programme in the Arab region and in Tunisia. Its vision of debating is emancipatory: it gives young people a voice in which to sing their songs. The programme fosters an understanding of the foundations on which constructive interactions take place. Launched in 2011 with the aim of spreading a culture of debate in a region where dictatorial regimes have for decades attempted to stifle dissonant points of view, YAV provided a space for young debaters to gain knowledge of community concerns and have an equal share in addressing them. Debating and dialogue become in this sense inextricably intertwined.

Debate is no more than a moderated and well-structured form of dialogue, through which serious ideas and community related themes are discussed and studied. In fact, the Young Arab Voices programme is one of the spaces in which young Tunisians, myself included, are able to envisage a different Tunisia and articulate this vision. Acting under the banner of YAV, young debaters can acquire a whole new set of skills and

techniques which support effective dialogue, and also equip them for the world of work and active citizenship. YAV training works first on personal skills, touching on critical thinking strategies, effective communication and public speaking. Taking part in debates helps to foster among young people an intrinsic willingness and desire to question the status quo, and to critique new legislation, policies and societal plans. This in turn creates a willingness and ability to effect real change. These are skills which are vital for leaders and change-makers, and through YAV I believe we are helping to ensure the effectiveness of our next generation of leaders.

YAVers are trained to listen to old ideas and consider how they might deconstruct them and build new ones instead. Throughout this process, debaters test their policies and the extent to which they are robust and plausible. They learn to appreciate the merits of different sides, and a 'good' debater becomes the one who seeks not so much to win but rather to convince the 'adversaries' to let their propositions stand, either on their own or combined with other ideas. What happens in debating clubs is a precursor to a bigger and more impactful collective activity. Through developing a complex set of enabling skills, debaters achieve a confidence in their ability to articulate a point of view and take part in discussions on key social issues. Today's debater, who publicly debates advocates for a certain policy on a heated topic, and defends the strategies it necessitates, becomes endowed with new and innovative methods and abilities to detect flaws and consequently to provide resolutions.

A democratic and open society is one that acknowledges the primary and complementary role that civil society and

youth play in its development. Tunisia's future as a successful democracy is predicated on the political will to integrate those voices, ideas and plans in its upcoming policy making. Any tendency to mute young voices once more risks a return to dictatorship.

I know all this from my own experience. I joined YAV in 2012 when I was an undergraduate student majoring in English language and civilisation. Today, after three years, I am a teacher, a debater, debate trainer, and active within two youth-led NGOs in Tunisia. Apart from developing my (inter)personal skills, what I have learnt during these three years has affected my professional career as well.

I remember the first debate I ever took part in. It was a Friday evening and I had to defend something that flew in the face of my own convictions. So I did, and impressed myself by doing such a good job that my team won. That was my trigger. I kept on attending the club and was eager to debate, whatever the motion and whatever position I had to take. I found that challenging and I came to learn that what runs contrary to my beliefs also has its own, solid justification. I learnt to listen well to others so that I could give back a plausible answer. But above all, I understood that a culture of debating should be part of everyone's education.

Now, as a teacher of young people, I make sure to hold debates in my classrooms. I teach my pupils how to express their thoughts in an articulate manner; and also how to listen to and respect the view of others.

I believe that what Tunisia needs most today is a population bred in a culture of dialogue and debating: a people who can decide their own path, through understanding what they need and how to attain it.

DIALOGUE AND SOFT POWER IN DANGEROUS TIMES

The Rt Hon the Lord Howell of Guildford

Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2010-2012); Chair, House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power

Begin with that word 'dialogue'. Somehow it does not seem quite right any more. The Oxford English Dictionary states that a 'dialogue' is between 'two or more persons'. But the point is that the 'more' is now millions, or even billions. In the age of hyper-connectivity, and of the still fast-unfolding communications revolution, the participating 'audience' has swollen to unimaginable global numbers of people with an unimaginable variety of perspectives. We are dealing not with 'dialogue' but with 'polylogue' or 'multiloquy'— communication and crowd-funded debate at a level and intensity, and with a reach and targeted precision, hitherto inconceivable, and demanding completely new techniques of handling and management.

This changes all the rules. It means that in the international game of persuasion and influence, in the defusing of tension and conflict, indeed in the actual exercise (and preservation) of power, winning on a narrow diplomatic front, or with single groups of interlocutors, no longer suffices. Nor does military force any longer succeed or settle things. Indeed it may further unsettle them. Conclusive victory is never established and defeat never conceded. It is the broad narrative that has to be won, and won with multiple audiences by multiple methods. It is what China today calls the 'discourse war' (and spends gargantuan sums seeking to promote). The story has to prevail both in terms of practicality and, if possible, on the higher ground of morality and in the demanding court of international opinion. In turn, this requires an enormous change in national priorities and in the ways that a country's instruments of both protection (its security) and promotion (its interests) are deployed. Apply this to the position of the UK in the second decade of the 21st century and some startling shifts in the allocation and

configuration of resources become an urgent necessity.

Begin from where we are now in the UK. The three major departments of state traditionally associated with the UK's external interests are the Foreign and Commonwealth (FCO), the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the Department for International Development (DFID). The annual resource distribution (2015) is £43bn to defence, £12bn to development, and £1.3bn to diplomacy and foreign policy. Something odd there straightaway. If diplomacy and 'polylogue' are the new battlegrounds, then surely, however limited overall resources may be, the spread ought to be more even, with far greater weight being given to the public kinds of diplomacy now demanded.

Set these three budgets side by side and it looks suspiciously as though the diplomacy and communication side, the very area where resources and energies should be concentrated, is still regarded as marginal. This just cannot be right. In an age when the new and powerful instruments of soft power have to work alongside, or in some instances ahead of, the harder and traditional power deployments, and when entirely new audiences have to be addressed and connected to, in an ever-swelling variety of methods and terms, the old pattern begs for change.

It is indeed a new game and it looks as though we are using old dispositions to play it. One would have expected the chief instruments and organisations of soft power to have been brought to the forefront in the resource share-out, instead of being left at the margins. It gets more complicated than that. The storytelling and promotional part of British national strategy is not confined to the three departments mentioned. Every department of state, and dozens of

surrounding agencies, all have their international faces and their own global networks to guard, feed and nourish. Areas seen in the past as totally inward-facing and domestic turn out to have a crucial external dimension. Health, Education, Social Security, Work and Pensions, Housing, Local Government – all are directly enmeshed with international aspects, all demand intense engagement and networking with ‘others’.

This is not just because of the obvious point that the UK is a very open nation depending for its prosperity – and security – on successful international business. And not just because an unhealthy and destabilised international economic climate can drag the country down, however well things are being managed at home. It is because all these areas, so distinct in the past, are now globally CONNECTED – and that means not occasionally but continuously, hourly, operationally and interactively. So the national requirement becomes one of co-ordination across the entire field of government and its agencies – an ongoing strategic task of fiendish complexity.

Thus, for example, domestic health policies are woven in with international health standards and a vast global system of health co-operation and exchange. Schools and universities now operate on a basis of global reach and in an immense global education ‘market’. Labour laws are internationalised. Regional and local government interacts across national boundaries. Detailed environmental issues reach across the world landscape. International police and security co-operation overarches national programmes and activities. International laws and regulations mingle at every point with domestic arrangements. The central issue of national security and prosperity becomes how to contribute, how to exercise power and stabilising influence, how to melt hostility, establish trust – in short, how to prevail in this dense swirl of connectivity.

On the international economic front the new demands of the digital age on the UK are especially pressing. Trust and familiarity were

always important in export success and attracting inward investment. But with radically changing world trade chains and patterns, and with the actual physical nature of international transactions involving increasing emphasis on services of every kind and on knowledge-intensive products, the need for mutual understanding and appreciation of cultural context becomes 10 times more essential.

In intensely competitive conditions the new global markets opening up need to be ‘known’ and understood at every level as never before. A nation’s reputation has to be consolidated as never before. Trust has to be built up as never before – to prepare for a future in which, as one slogan puts it only slightly fancifully, products will come to be transmitted rather than exported. Vastly wide communication channels are poised to become the container vessels of future commerce, with computer screens the digital dockyards and berths. These are the conditions in which conversation (dialogue, ‘polylogue’, call it what you will) on a global scale, although tailored and toned to every local circumstance, becomes the spearhead of national purpose. No link in the network, no country or society, small or large, can be neglected or excluded. A new and subtle combination of soft power and harder power pressures has to be woven together and utilised with agility.

For the British, the almost universal use of English as the key working language gives an undoubted advantage. So does the Commonwealth network. So does London’s central position in the global information web. But that is not enough. The most effective communicating agencies have to be moved into the front line and resourced to fill their fast-expanding roles, as icebreakers, persuaders, tone-setters, door openers, relationship-builders. We are talking about nothing less than the need for a grand repositioning of the UK in a world utterly transformed by the digital age. Are our policy strategists, our resource planners, our budget allocators, our thought leaders ready to bring that about.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Sirine Ben Brahim is a 23-year-old English teacher and MA researcher majoring in Diasporic Literature and International Relations. She has

been a debater and debate trainer for three years with Young Arab Voices Tunisia, and has taken part in regional training-of-trainers and national tournaments as a trainer and adjudicator. She is also an alumna of the American Middle Eastern Network for Dialogue at Stanford, where she delivered a speech on the importance of debating and dialogue in the Middle East. She is a former vice-president of Weyouth Tunisia, a youth-led NGO encouraging youth participation in decision making and civic engagement; and treasurer to a teachers' association.



Scilla Elworthy PhD founded the Oxford Research Group in 1982 to develop effective dialogue between nuclear weapons policy-

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Alan Gouly took a BA (Hons) in Modern History from the University of Oxford in 1968, and MA in 1971. He retired in 2008



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Sir Jeremy Greenstock GCMG has been Chairman of the UNA-UK Board of Directors since February 2011. He was



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Rt Hon the Lord Howell of Guildford is a former Secretary of State for Energy and recently Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth

Office with special responsibilities for the Commonwealth and for international energy issues. He was Chairman of the House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and British Overseas Influence, and is currently Chairman of the Windsor Energy Group, President of the Royal Commonwealth Society, President of the Energy Industries Council and Adviser to the British Chambers of Commerce. Between 2002-2010 he was Deputy Leader of the Conservative Party in the

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Lord Lothian PC QC DL was first elected to Parliament in 1974 and served as a Conservative Member of Parliament (as Michael Ancram) until

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Rt Rev Peter B Price is Chair of Conciliation Resources, former Bishop of Bath and Wells, a peace activist, writer and broadcaster. After teacher training,

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