

## **Terrorism, Islamism, and Western Liberal Democracies: Prospects for Nonviolent, Proactive Countermeasures to Terror**



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### **Abstract**

This article outlines some prospects for nonviolent, proactive countermeasures to terrorism, essentially interreligious dialogue, with the aim and intention of incorporating multidisciplinary approaches to understanding associated phenomena and innovating appropriate dialogue projects. These projects would be intended to facilitate better understanding and improved relations between communities. This improved understanding and better relations would be the end goal of attempting to address some of the root causes of terrorism and to attempt to ameliorate some of the damaging effects of terrorism.

### ***Biography***

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Since September 11, 2001, terrorism has been a heightened concern to many residents of Western liberal democracies, especially to the residents of the United States.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of writing this article is to assess some important salient aspects of the phenomenon of terrorism as it affects Westerners generally and to suggest some implications and prospects for addressing a selection of certain root causes of terrorism, utilizing nonviolent, proactive methods as countermeasures.<sup>2</sup> This proposal of proactive responses includes utilizing interfaith or interreligious dialogue as part of an integral strategy for addressing some of the root causes of terrorism and ameliorating some of the effects of terrorism in multiple communities.<sup>3</sup> It should be noted at this point that more areas of inquiry will be exposed where further research will be needed to assess feasibility and effectiveness: it is within the intended purpose of this article to direct more attention to areas of potential inquiry and research.

It becomes rapidly apparent in talking with North Americans with only a cursory knowledge of terrorism and Islamism that Islamism and terrorism are often popularly but mistakenly perceived to be necessarily coterminous.<sup>4</sup> They are often seen as being a real threat to the Western way of life as lived in Western liberal democracies.<sup>5</sup> Before embarking on an examination of terrorism, some explanation of the term “Islamism” would be in order.

Martin Kramer traces the use of the term, “Islamism,” to the point where the use of the inexact term of “fundamentalism” has given way to a new use of the term,

“Islamism,” originally by way of French literature.<sup>6</sup> This was, by the mid-1980s, no longer simply or even primarily a synonym for the religion of Islam in contemporary French usage.<sup>7</sup> Graham Fuller argued in 1991 for the use of the term “Islamism” as opposed to “fundamentalism” to be used in many contexts as the phenomenon as it is not so much a theology as an ideology whose implications are not at all old fashioned but thoroughly modern.<sup>8</sup> He gives a further explication of his definition of the term Islamism in his 2003 work, The Future of Political Islam.<sup>9</sup> This would appear to include any Muslims who have a political agenda.

Fuller’s perspective would appear to be similar to those statements of the Ameri-



can Assistant Secretary of State, Robert Pelletreau, Jr. in 1994; essentially that the term "Islamists" should describe Muslims with political goals and that this is an analytical term and not necessarily sinister.<sup>10</sup> The term "Islamists" can then be used to describe many legitimate, socially responsible Muslim groups with political goals and these are different from those who operate outside the law, whom Pelletreau termed, "extremists."<sup>11</sup> If we accept that the term Islamist is widely in use and accepted as legitimate and not by itself pejorative, it can be used analytically to describe a wide grouping of people who can be engaged in dialogue with, these being Muslims who generally who have political goals.

The position taken in this article is that the vast majority of Muslims and Islamists are, in reality, people who do not support the killing of innocent civilians as the terrorists do: the group of radicals who support the killing of civilians is much smaller than the moderates.<sup>12</sup> However, attitudes exist amongst moderates in Muslim countries that have a negative or unfavorable view of the United States.<sup>13</sup> This means that only a small minority of Islamists, by the wider definition, are radicalized and are not approachable for dialogue. In theory, the majority of moderates are not radicalized and most probably never will be. Still, however, they may have attitudes of the type that nonviolent approaches to inter-religious dialogue may seek to overcome for improved relations. A clearer understanding and perspective of this reality may help more residents of Western democracies to prepare better strategies for

more effectively targeting certain of the root causes of terrorism and for ameliorating the damaging effects of terrorism.

Part of this strategy can include, for example, formulating different choices of encountering the non-violent majority of Islamists with a selection of options amongst various genres of inter-religious dialog and encounter. This encounter can yield certain outcomes and strategic options that are in the interest of residents of Western liberal democracies and others elsewhere, with the objective of overcoming prejudices and bigotries affecting multiple groups domestically and multi-domestically.

We can pursue certain areas of inquiry in understanding both terrorism and Islamism, following the observations and recommendations of experts in various disciplines, including psychiatry, psychology, social psychology, law enforcement, social work, journalism and religious studies. Taken as a whole, the sum of these different resultant observations can be considered along with some of the aspects of existing scholarship to form an understanding of these two phenomena. This understanding is relevant for the purpose of guiding inquiry into the prospects for nonviolent proactive countermeasures to terrorism. Amongst the possibilities of nonviolent proactive measures, there is the prospect of dialogue and peace-building across communities, these options approaching the healing of the emotional effects of grievances, including healing the aftereffects of previous terror attacks. Establishing mutual understanding, respect, and acceptance can begin to

overcome some root causes of enmity.

## **Methodology**

This paper interprets the implications of a selection of observations and conclusions of existing research and scholarship in multiple disciplines and different fields relevant to the subjects terrorism and Islamism. The observations and information gleaned from the research projects and opinions of selected experts are relevant to formulating strategies for nonviolent proactive countermeasures to terrorism. These are brought together to suggest a strategic scope for nonviolent proactive countermeasures, such as interreligious dialogue, as either part of an augmenting factor to a portfolio of countermeasures to terror or independently thereof. The final conclusions rely on extant research and propose certain avenues for further research and inquiry relevant to nonviolent proactive countermeasures.

In discussing the methodology of this paper and any other proposals for further research or strategy formulation derived from it, it may be wise to follow the advice of Moghaddam, who notes that psychological research on terrorism suffers from two main weaknesses, both of which arise from weaknesses in mainstream psychology.<sup>14</sup> The weakness identified by Moghaddam, is that of a lack of powerful conceptual frameworks and a reductionist-positivist reliance on data gathering on the assumption that data will allow us to mimic the success of the "real sciences."<sup>15</sup> In this paper, this assumption of utilizing the game-theory framework also assumes making use of statistical re-

search analyzing attitudes in the Muslim world. Multidisciplinary qualitative research can also be used within game-theory analysis to overcome the lack of a powerful conceptual framework.

The other tendency, mentioned by Moghaddam and borrowing from mainstream psychology, is for researchers to split into dispositional and contextual camps.<sup>16</sup> In this paper, variability in aspects of both dispositional factors and contextual factors are described for use within the Enders and Sandler game-theory framework, thence utilizing a variable selection of dialogue genres. This presents a better alternative arriving upon a more accurate viewpoint of treating the role of dispositional and contextual factors as being variable rather than fixed.

The disposition of terrorists and others who are possibly sympathetic to terrorists can be described from expert perspectives including those of psychiatry. Both the context and disposition of terrorists can be considered when formulating strategy. The qualitative analyses of dispositions involved and context is undertaken in formulating a portfolio of choices within the game theory framework and associated quantitative analysis as described by Enders and Sandler.<sup>17</sup> This utilization of game theory as a methodology is the starting point for discerning and describing a proper timing and place for the choice of nonviolent, proactive countermeasures. This method of game theory and quantitative analysis requires that a proper strategic assessment be made of context and be included in strategic modeling and programming.

It must be noted that any choice of violent/military options as proactive measures are a matter for officially authorized policy-makers and planners in government and are beyond the scope of this article. The author of this article makes no statement whatsoever on their applicability in any context. The important assumption in this article is that there is a wider field of possibilities for nonviolent, proactive countermeasures to the root causes of terror if analysis for prospects of intervention are extended beyond the narrow field of violent extremists to the moderate majority of nonviolent Islamists.

More can be said about the importance of taking context into consideration. Palmer notes that terrorist threats should be contextualized, as the risks are small and to live in their thrall is to help them to achieve their aims.<sup>18</sup> According to Stevens, it can be noted that psychological approaches to understanding, studying, and preventing terrorism must also draw on paradigms that link the individual to economics, history, law, politics, religion, and culture: a multidisciplinary approach to preparing nonviolent, proactive countermeasures that will facilitate much-needed cooperation between experts in various disciplines.<sup>19</sup>

The analysis associated with the game-theory approach can integrate information from these. A multidisciplinary approach to formulating nonviolent, proactive options to respond to terrorism and/or to ameliorate its damage can be contextualized in preparations for strategy formulation, understanding the role and context of the selected nonviolent, proac-

tive options (for example, interreligious dialogue) and the dispositions of involved parties (for example, persons emotionally affected but amenable to peace-building.) The lesson that can be learned from the observation of weaknesses in research hitherto performed is that anyone using any of the nonviolent proactive strategic options suggested in this article should be savvy about dispositions of the persons involved and about the context in which they are located. Any research and publication about these projects should not



September 11th terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, NYC  
Photo | Courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division,  
*Library of Congress*

repeat the two weaknesses described above by Moghaddam. These weaknesses can be overcome to some extent by understanding the psychological dispositions of prospective participants and by planning and matching, more optimally, a choice of genres of dialogue to the needs of all participants and the surrounding contexts.

### **Why is Terrorism a Concern for Residents of Liberal Democracies?**

There are many reasons why Western liberal democracies are specifically vulner-

able to terrorism. Liberal democracies are especially vulnerable to terrorist attacks.<sup>20</sup> Liberal democracies face a dilemma as many of the protections guaranteed to citizens of liberal democracies are exploited by terrorists, remaining an open society allows terrorists to work while too harsh a response can curb popular support and create support for these terrorists.<sup>21</sup> If we assume that terrorism is a phenomenon that is here to stay as noted by Enders and Sandler,<sup>22</sup> and Marvasti,<sup>23</sup> as long as there are persons with grievances who will choose to use this as a cost-effective tactic for fighting, residents of Western liberal democracies must be concerned about it. Understanding the phenomenon of terrorism, strategies may be devised for dealing with terrorism as a perennial recurring phenomenon and therefore as a concern to residents of Western Liberal democracies.

### **The Effects of Terrorism are a Human Concern**

It is generally true that terrorism is a human concern. It may also be seen to be a concern of the many and diverse residents of western liberal democracies.<sup>24</sup> This can be observed widely and it is common knowledge for anyone privy to the discourse taking place in the public sphere of the United States after September 11, 2001.<sup>25</sup> Terrorism may be defined in different ways, and the label itself is often controversial.<sup>26</sup> One definition of terrorism is offered by Enders and Sandler: being “the premeditated use or threat to use violence by individuals or subnational groups in order to obtain a political or social objective through the

intimidation of a large audience beyond that of the immediate victims.”<sup>27</sup> This necessarily entails a political or social motive. Other definitions exist, for example a United Nations definition and a US

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Government definition.<sup>28</sup> With all definitions, what is important for our purposes is the recognition that terrorism has physical and psychological victims and that psychological damage is also associated with it. Associated with this injustice and damage in multiple communities are subsequent needs for healing and reconciliation.

The direct and indirect effects of terrorism on particular countries and on particular sectors can be sizeable, the indirect costs of foregone output, increased security costs and increased risk premiums can be cumulative, and it is difficult to measure these various costs precisely.<sup>29</sup> Enders and Sandler conclude that terror-

ism is here to stay...as long as there are grievances there will be conflict and that terrorism will be a cost-effective tactic of the weaker side associated with these conflicts.<sup>30</sup> Marvasti is similar in his opinion to Enders and Sandler in seeing that suicide bombing will continue as long as there are life situations in which people feel that this type of violence is the only way to change their world and to improve their nation or their tribe's status quo.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the problem of terrorism will not go away on its own.

Parallel with the suffering caused by terrorism within the general population of liberal Western democracies, the minority Muslim communities in these countries are also often forced to carry a psychological burden. Popular thinking about terrorism has often been associated with the term "radicalization." As Githens-Mazer and Lambert note, the current "wisdom" on radicalization is a failed discourse.<sup>32</sup> Policy-makers and the media have come to rely increasingly on a 'conventional wisdom' of radicalization... radicalization is a research topic plagued by assumption and intuition, unhappily dominated by 'conventional wisdom' rather than systematic scientific and empirically based research.<sup>33</sup> This is where the potential of Enders and Sandler's approach offers a solution, pointing to these more scientific approaches to understanding and dealing with the whole problem of terrorism. Their game-theory approach can be made multidisciplinary, combining with other scientific methods to facilitate plans to ameliorate the damaging effects of terrorism. These could be better focused on where the real problems and

damaging effects are taking place in the communities, as opposed to naively creating injustices for minority Muslims or others.

An example of this need for a better approach can be seen where Githens-Mazer and Lambert further opine that, "Conventional wisdom on radicalization has sapped this term of scientific value, so that the label of 'radicalization' has become instead a tool of power exercised by the state and non-Muslim communities against, and to control, Muslim communities."<sup>34</sup> If this is true, the approach by Enders and Sandler is a much better alternative to the amateurishness of accepting unsupported assumptions and partisan prescriptions which can end up oppressing the wrong choice of people in one or more communities. Nonetheless, because this injustice towards minority Muslims occurs, there is a need and an opportunity domestically to engage in a selection of nonviolent, proactive methods for engaging these communities that will be designed to ameliorate the damage and heal the communities involved.

### **Why Ordinary People Become Terrorists**

The literature on the psychology of terrorists is too vast to systematically describe here and a selection must be made. For the purposes of this article, addressing some of the root causes of terrorism, individual dispositions, i.e. typical patterns of individual motivations of terrorists can often be understood as providing some insight into the root causes of terrorism that can be addressed and also





proposing where dialogue should be avoided. The motivational factors in terms of disposition and context are varied and complex but a psychological pattern or set of patterns can often be discerned in nonviolent moderates to which nonviolent proactive measures can be addressed. These negative attitudes cannot be addressed in extremists but rather can be addressed more broadly in the wider population of moderates.

Palmer notes that, terrorism becomes morally polarized and politically manipulated, causing debate and understanding to thus be required if terrorism is to be managed.<sup>35</sup> While Palmer is most likely advocating a debate about a narrow topic of terrorism, his mention of “understanding” may be followed and extended to a broader context of the phenomenon including its root causes. In terms of this wider focus of inquiry and discussion, a choice could be made to include nonviolent, proactive measures that

include dialogue leading to understanding beyond such a narrow focus on terrorists that can potentially include all persons emotionally affected. For planning these nonviolent, proactive measures, an understanding of disposition is necessary to better differentiate where dialogue is and is not practicable.

Multiple perspectives on motives exist and there are perspectives that terrorists are psychologically sick and that their motivations are sick.<sup>36</sup> Palmer notes that, it is possible that terrorists, leaders perhaps more than their actors, may have issues in the realms of personality, describing them as sometimes hardened individuals.<sup>37</sup> Arena and Arrigo describe a contention that identity plays a role in the commission of terrorism, prior research relying on psychological assertions that individuals are searching for identity, this leading to conclusions that something is profoundly wrong or abnormal with terrorists.<sup>38</sup> In frightening contrast to the com-



mon notion that terrorists are necessarily sick and that this psychology explains their behavior, Arena and Arrigo identify



Great Mosque, Saint Petersburg, Russia

an alternative notion as a possibility that terrorists are essentially normal individuals: more explanation from a social-psychological context, especially in terms of the impact of identity on extremist violence, is needed.<sup>39</sup> Post et al. note convincingly that suicide terror groups screen out mentally ill individuals.<sup>40</sup>

Whether terrorists are sick or not, the effects of terrorism are manifest and remain. Palmer notes that terrorist acts create moral revulsion, indignation, and righteousness and stimulate the drive for moral justification by all parties involved.<sup>41</sup> The deep emotions engendered are generally not conducive to under-

standing and dialogue.<sup>42</sup> This presence of deep emotions is an obstacle to dialogue apparent and familiar to anyone experienced in the field. This obstacle is not absolutely insurmountable, however, as Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Western countries are variegated and not monolithic, multiple genres of dialogue have been identified.<sup>43</sup> Understanding this variegation of communities and also the options of different genres of dialogue expands the range of possibilities for matching a genre of dialogue well with the needs of the community in context. The generally negative attitudes seen in a wider population of Muslim moderates described previously by Esposito and Mogahed are relevant in this respect as they show a larger prospect pool for dialogue.<sup>44</sup>

Post et al. provide various psychological models, individual and group models that may contribute to the explanation of suicide bombing, and they also look at various areas where psychiatry may be able to contribute to the interdisciplinary understanding of this phenomenon.<sup>45</sup> Within the context of these descriptions, factors described by Marvasti begin to look consistent with these descriptions of group and individual models. In explaining part of the psychological makeup of suicide bombers, Marvasti describes PTSD, caused by years of trauma, homelessness, displacement, humiliation, and loss of family and friends in conflict with the occupying army as partly explaining the proliferation of suicide bombers.<sup>46</sup> Marvasti also identifies elements of rage and revenge, psychic trauma and dissociation, the element of religion, the element of

group process, support and bonding, poverty, the element of perceived injustice, humiliation, shame and despair, cultural support, and remuneration as factors in the motivation for suicide bombers.<sup>47</sup> Post et al.'s description of the need for a multi-disciplinary approach can be seen in addressing the individual factors that are embedded in the development of a suicide terrorist.<sup>48</sup> Post opines that, the immediate consequence of this framework is that efforts to prevent suicide terrorism must be directed at all the necessary but insufficient factors that result in suicide terrorism....cross-disciplinary collaboration appears warranted, and indeed is required.<sup>49</sup>

### **Strategic Alternatives/Proactive Measures For Addressing The Root Causes of Terrorism**

To follow the rationale and logic of Enders and Sandler's game theory framework for understanding terrorism, the factors and individual reasons for why ordinary people become terrorists may be assessed as the root causes to be addressed within these certain nonviolent options.<sup>50</sup> The selection of these options should take into consideration the psychological dispositions of different persons inclined to be sympathetic to terrorists and their pursuits. Some persons can be engaged in dialogue and others cannot be engaged. Understanding these aspects of the psychological disposition of community members as prospective dialogue partners is useful for understanding the purpose, scope and choice of nonviolent, proactive countermeasures.

Marvasti provides some useful insight into the psychology of terrorists which yields information on the root causes of this terrorism and suggests some different possibilities for addressing these causes.<sup>51</sup> Marvasti outlines the alleviation of trauma and the support for moderate activists and policies as a crucial factor.<sup>52</sup> While the selection of options, defensive and proactive, is most often best done by authorized parties of the state, the option of nonviolent proactive measures can be of particular interest to concerned residents of Western liberal democracies. As Liakatali Takim describes, this is a new experience for Muslims in America, a paradigm shift away from their attempts at converting others, to conversation with others.<sup>53</sup> The openness of Western democracies provides venues and opportunities in contrast to an often very different reality elsewhere. This can be seen described according to Takim as, "Muslims did not, generally speaking, feel the need to dialogue or converse with the other....hence, engaging in dialogue with non-Muslims is a relatively new experience for most Muslims, since many of them are accustomed to preaching Islam and to refuting the beliefs of the other."<sup>54</sup> This openness of Western liberal democracies also has the potential to foster this paradigm shift over to an interesting encounter with plurality, fostering a pluralistic discourse which has often been neglected.

Rather than merely following the conventional wisdom and developing strategies with undesirable effects as criticized earlier by Githens-Mazer and Lambert, Enders' and Sandler's rationale of using

game theory and statistical analysis provides an approach to formulating strategies for dealing with terrorism, which can draw on multidisciplinary competencies. Within the portfolio of options that this utilization of game theory generates, there is an option of dialogue, which is both nonviolent and proactive.

The author of this article accepts that there are people for and with whom dialogue is quite obviously not an option: they are simply too psychologically and politically radicalized due to the severities of their own personal histories. This reality should be clear for anybody who understands the personalities involved with terror movements such as Al-Qaeda.<sup>55</sup> It would be naïve to assume that members of these movements can be approached for interreligious dialogue. However, the majority of persons in Western liberal democracies and in the Muslim world are not within that category of psychological and political radicalization and extreme thought. Therefore opportunities do exist. Enders and Sandler do address the possibility of getting at the roots of terrorism, one option being addressing the grievances of the terrorists and eliminating the rationale for violence.<sup>56</sup> However, problems can arise following this course of action. The problems and tradeoffs encountered by government in deciding whether or not to dialogue with terrorists are described by Enders and Sandler.<sup>57</sup> The prospects and decisions of these options to dialogue directly with terrorists are best left to authorized members of government and military, and not to ordinary citizens. Dialogue with non-extremist moderates may however be an

option.

Within this game-theory framework and statistical analysis suggested by Enders and Sandler the choices generated can include defensive and nonviolent proactive options to deal with terrorism. To begin to address some of the root causes

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of terrorism, the experimental work of Mark R. Dixon, Kimberly M. Zlomke, & Ruth Anne Rehfeldt (2006) may have certain implications for the possible benefits of the options of inter-religious dialog between Muslims and others.

These authors conducted two experiments relying on the application of relational frame theory. They concluded that Americans' nonequivalent frames of "terrorism" and "America" can be partially reconstructed via a matching to sample procedure; their two experiments provide data suggesting that prejudice is not human nature and that it need not be accepted as such.<sup>58</sup> The authors describe that the dismantling of pre-existing rela-

tional frames of sameness and opposition can occur in part through the introduction of additional stimuli from another stimulus network that may provide an overarching transfer of function through an existing stimulus network.<sup>59</sup> More analysis would be needed but the results of this work could tend to suggest that the frameworks and stimuli provided in venues where different genres of interreligious dialog are being carried out should be studied to assess their impact for dismantling prejudices and for improving relations across communities. Contrary to the notion that dialogue is a waste of time or that it accomplishes nothing, the research taking place might help to explain if dialogue provides a frame in which prejudices can be dismantled, negative attitudes can be changed, and understanding can be facilitated. In other words, despite whatever apparent content is on the agenda of the interreligious dialogue, a psychological change could be happening in the participants and audience, that makes way for better relations.

The harsh reality of the context surrounding dialogue in the West is worthy of note as Palmer opines that, whether or not terrorists have personality or mental disorders, if they have the capacity, they must face the due legal sanctions for their actions.<sup>60</sup> Palmer opines that we should be careful not to elevate terrorists or those who espouse terror to the level of freedom fighter, politician or hero.<sup>61</sup> This attitude towards terrorists being held responsible can be expected to be ubiquitous in Western liberal democracies. Therefore his advice of avoiding any romanticizing of terrorism, and certainly NOT facilitat-

ing terrorist agendas in any way, is sage advice for anyone planning on engaging in any real dialogue. It is also realistic advice for realizing that there are some individuals who are simply too hardened and radicalized to be approached for nonviolent proactive countermeasures such as dialogue, even if they are rational actors.<sup>62</sup> The scope of interreligious dialogue should be directed to take place with the community in general, not with radicalized and extreme individuals. Participants will also need to be savvy of any legal considerations relevant to dialogue.

Before embarking on a discussion of interreligious dialogue, it can be noted that alleviating the effects of terrorism and minimizing or controlling its damage has been one of the responses of govern-



ments to terrorism.<sup>63</sup> Some wisdom might be gleaned here from the British psychiatrist, Ian Palmer, who stresses the need for contextualization of acts of terror, their perpetrators, their effects on populations and individuals, and attention to the psychology of groups.<sup>64</sup> Palmer also suggests that mental health commentators should endeavor to learn more about group behavior and the predisposing, precipitating, perpetuating and protective factors that take place in the manifestation of fear and fear-related conditions in society.<sup>65</sup> Post et al. maintain that we cannot prevent suicide terrorism in the absolute sense but efforts towards reducing this phenomenon are obviously of the highest importance and these efforts must derive from understanding the phenomenon itself.<sup>66</sup> This expert psychiatric call for more research in this area may be extended to the effects of dialogue within and upon such conditions. Research could be made into the effects of interreligious dialogue on attitudes of participant groups and their individual members, especially to see if it changes the stereotypes and bigotries present in societies and improves relations.

### **Inter-Religious Dialogue as a Countermeasure to the Root Causes of Terrorism**

There is another aspect of interreligious dialogue that can be interesting: dialogue as a coping mechanism, ameliorating the effects of terrorism. Evidence exists for the utility of some spiritual approaches to ameliorating the psychological effects of terrorism. In one study by Meisenhelder and Marcum, the success and spectrum of

coping strategies of one group of Americans in managing posttraumatic stress following a major terrorist attack was demonstrated: in certain sampled groups, positive spiritual coping strategies were strongly related to positive spiritual outcomes.<sup>67</sup> Spiritual measures such as, seeking comfort from God, prayer, and attending faith services, are common behaviors in the broader Christian community and beyond.<sup>68</sup> Although the sample consists of certain church members, similar reactions among participants in other faith communities are a possibility that warrants further investigation.<sup>69</sup> The use of spiritual approaches would appear to be evidenced as helpful in some situations and cases. These findings may suggest that dialogue has benefits. Despite the possible limitations of the research, being that some people are predisposed to spiritual solutions, this research overall could point to the utility of interreligious dialogue as a spiritual approach to healing and reconciliation between non-radicalized but nonetheless affected persons.

It should be stated at this point that the evidence for the benefits of interreligious dialogue for addressing the above mentioned root causes of terrorism is mostly anecdotal and there is a need for further inquiry and research into the effects of interreligious dialogue on the attitudes and well-being of involved groups. It has been the observation of the author within a Nordic context that sessions of interreligious dialogue have had a positive impact on the attitudes of members of Muslim communities faced with feelings of humiliation and rage when shown genu-

ine respect by their Christian dialogue partners.<sup>70</sup> The implications generally would be to assess the utility of such dialogue for all groups affected by terror, Muslim, Christian, and others. More scientific research into the benefits of such interreligious dialogue would be necessary to be able to assess accurately what benefits may proceed from such activities.

An approach to planning the content of nonviolent, proactive countermeasures to terror in the form of interreligious dialogue could be researched in a multidisciplinary way taking into consideration the disposition and context of the events that have taken place and overcoming the weaknesses of research identified by Moghaddam. Perhaps the earlier suggestion of Palmer, that we must become more knowledgeable of groups and should engage in dialogue, could be extended with good effects to this kind of group also (not to terrorists but to peace-builders).<sup>71</sup>

In terms of process, dialogue in the interest of peace-building can be expected to happen upon hermeneutical obstacles. This dialogue would also be a good test of the claim by Pratt concerning non-apodicticity in Christian-Muslim dialogue, that unless participants are willing to be flexible on truth claims in scripture, dialogue will lead to disappointing results.<sup>72</sup> Appearing to touch on the same issue as Pratt mentions, Liakat Ali Takim opines of a need for Muslims to more clearly differentiate between sacred scripture and later exegesis: differentiation can be made between the Qur'anic vision and the socio-political context in which that vision was

interpreted and articulated by classical and medieval exegetes.<sup>73</sup> In a sense similar to the kind of openness in interpretation as described by Liakatali Takim, Pratt's observations may and perhaps also ought to be taken into consideration when planning dialogue. Pratt and Takim both mention the issue of hermeneutics, discussing their own perspectives on how obstacles might be overcome.

However, in another sense, this realm of obstacles associated with scriptural hermeneutics and apodicticity or non-apodicticity are arguably not the whole story of interreligious dialogue as, even if there is inflexibility concerning certain truth claims, the psychology and attitudes of persons and communities involved in dialogue may change in a positive way if respect and acceptance is sincerely demonstrated and this should be researched further, regardless of obstacles. It should also be noted especially in this respect that multiple genres of dialogue exist which are not necessarily impeded by inflexibility in truth claims regarding scripture. This plurality of dialogue genres can also offer a response to overcome certain issues or obstacles that may be associated with identity affecting people's participation in interreligious dialogue.<sup>74</sup> Multiple genres of interreligious dialogue exist and can be considered as alternatives, expanding in some cases the applicability of such approaches vis a vis heretofore resistant members of certain identity groups. Inflexibility in truth claims can also at times be side-stepped in dialogue and community building by choice of dialogue genre, if necessary.



To provide some of the framework for planning and carrying out dialogue in terms of the end results of dialogue, Ayoub's suggestion of theoretical goals and obstacles of Christian-Muslim dialog can be considered.<sup>75</sup> The potential of interreligious dialogue for addressing certain root causes of terrorism at the level of individual disposition and at the level of community can be expressed in these end results. This is important for the content of dialogue and the initial intentions of involved parties. Ayoub opines that Muslims and Christians must accept each other as friends and partners in the quest for social and political justice...this demanding genuine and sincere respect of the faith of the other, including their beliefs, ethical principles, social values and political aspirations.<sup>76</sup> Ayoub hopes for accepting each other as equal partners, not opponents in dialogue, meaning equality in humanity and dignity, and equality in the claim for religious authenticity.<sup>77</sup> This hoped-for outcome would be something very different from the damage and grievances seen by experts in the field of psychiatry in the disposition of terrorists and people who are sympathetic to them.

Within this context of goals for interreligious dialogue suggested by Ayoub, we can hearken back to and reference some of the factors and motivations of the root causes of suicide bombers as identified earlier by Marvasti as being the "elements of rage and revenge, psychic trauma and dissociation, the element of religion, the element of group process, support and bonding, poverty, the element of perceived injustice, humiliation, shame and

despair, cultural support, and remuneration as parts of the motivation for suicide bombers."<sup>78</sup> What interreligious dialogue begins to address is many of these same root causes. This is done by demonstrating mutual acceptance and respect as described by Ayoub. There can be multiple genres of dialogue and multiple venues chosen for this purpose of demonstrating sincere mutual respect and acceptance. The question might also be asked if Pratt's observation could be helpful in this respect, that, "the recognition of non-apodicticity applies across all revelatory scripture... ameliorating the effects of difference by discerning of a deeper truth or revelation transcending the differences..."<sup>79</sup> Inquiry might well be made into Pratt's observations about whether or not the mutual respect and partnership that Ayoub talks about might be better facilitated with Pratt's approach and suggestions. If Muslims and Christians would be more open to exploring truth together, would the demonstration of respect and acceptance not be even more effectively facilitated? We could hope for a venue of healing analogous to what was found to be taking place by Meisenhelder and Marcum. This being the case, the ultimate analysis has to be made, asking if any of this dialogue effort makes any positive and meaningful difference in the long run.

A more specific differentiating process between peaceful and militant strains of Islam can also be taken up directly in preparations for dialogue. Takim opines that, "the tension between the peaceful and militant strains of Islam can be resolved only through reexamining the specific contexts of the rulings and the ways

in which they were conditioned by the times...this re-interpretive task demands that Muslims re-evaluate the classical and medieval juridical corpus.”<sup>80</sup> This activity may be useful for Muslims who are intellectually equipped to maintain the integrity and moral fiber of the tradition but who also would like to pursue a fruitful discourse with non-Muslims leading to respect, acceptance and cooperation. This effort can be with the intention to begin to ameliorate some of the negative after-effects of terrorism and address the root

causes as described by Marvasti. This has little potential with extremists but, in theory, a larger population of moderates can be involved, being self-differentiated from the militants.

Although this may be beneficial at the individual level, what can be seen at the level of the group and community is that the practical programming and planning of dialogue is a matter requiring more complex expertise, vision and a set of necessary skills. For planning this dialogue, the portfolio of different genres of interreligious dialogue described by Jane I. Smith can be considered as possible options, these being described in more detail in the suggested materials on interreligious and inter-Muslim dialogue.<sup>81</sup> A methodology for strategy formulation in planning interreligious dialogue between Christians and Muslims using these genres of dialogue was also proposed by Argon.<sup>82</sup> Formulating strategies for utilizing different genres of dialogue requires having knowledge of different pre-existing religious institutions engaging in dialogue and their dialogue projects.

To take into consideration some of the observations of Moghaddam’s critique of psychological research, interreligious dialogue is always within a communal context, in addition to individual dispositions. Possibilities for programming approaches to a dialogue across communities which may begin to address some of these root causes in communal context is described by different authors. Examples of Christian perspectives on interfaith dialogue can be found in the work edited by Rev. Bud Heckman and Rori Picker Neiss, *In-*



Busy street in Cairo

teractive Faith: The Essentials Interreligious Community Handbook.<sup>83</sup> An example of a contemporary theoretical framework from a Muslim perspective on community and multi-religious peace-building may be found in Abu-Nimer's Nonviolence and Peacebuilding in Islam.<sup>84</sup> Christian or Muslim, the intention expressed in these works is for dialogue to benevolently affect a community, not to be reduced to individual dispositions. These proposed models of dialogue might be able to provide venues of effectuating change such as dismantling prejudices as suggested in the findings of research described earlier by Mark R. Dixon, Kimberly M. Zlomke, & Ruth Anne Rehfeldt (2006).

Dialogue between Christians and Muslims has had an extensive history in the twentieth century and is not a new project.<sup>85</sup> It should be noted that there is not only a demonstrated willingness to dialogue and a history of doing so, but also an extant infrastructure for dialogue. Some examples can be cited to demonstrate this reality, although this listing must not be seen as comprehensive or exclusive. A representative sampling of major and minor Islamic organizations in North America can be seen to engage in dialogue: the Islamic Society of North America has an active dialogue unit.<sup>86</sup> The Vatican has engaged in interreligious dialogue, expanding and developing its dialogue, especially since the Second Vatican Council from 1962-1965.<sup>87</sup> The World Council of Churches also has a history of fostering dialogue.<sup>88</sup> Institutions and infrastructure for dialogue have decades of presence internationally. All of these Islamic insti-

tutions in North America will be privy to or affected by the presence of the "A Common Word" initiative.<sup>89</sup> What can be seen of the signatories to the Common Word document is that a large number of intellectuals and institutions in the Muslim world are interested in pursuing better relations with Christians. This would suggest at least willingness towards dialogue by individuals and institutions across the Muslim world and in minority communities in Western liberal democracies.

At the broader level of dialogue across communities, Islamists in different institutions can be considered as part of the solution in dialogue in addressing the root causes of terrorism.<sup>90</sup> This is often the case as those revival movements and Islamic institutions that exist in North America and throughout the Muslim world as a whole are often willing and able to carry on interreligious dialogue. The main point is that multiple institutions in the Muslim world and within Western minority Muslim communities are concerned about the future of Islam and Muslims and are often interested to carry on with interreligious dialogue and have programs for doing so. Some of them have an ideology for creating an Islamic state with the end goal of establishing an Islamic society. Others have no ideology of creating an Islamic state yet are nonetheless sincerely concerned for the future of Muslims and society in general. Both categories can be engaged. This plurality of Islamists also suggests the diversity in dispositions and a field of opportunities for dialogue, outlining a scope for diversified content and different genres of interreligious dialogue.

## **Conclusion**

It would appear that the group of persons affected by terror is indeed a large part of the population in Western liberal democracies and also a large part of populations in other countries. There may be certain desirable outcomes of dialogue to be reasonably expected, extending to Muslims, Christians and others in dialogue and to any others affected by terrorism. More research will be necessary to discern what, if any, benefits of dialogue exist in ameliorating the effects of terrorism. More research will be needed in exploring the effects of dialogue beyond the anecdotal evidence of participants. However, there are definitely promising avenues for further inquiry and research. A multidisciplinary approach can be seen to be called for by experts as referenced in this article.

Interested persons may know that, with nonviolent, proactive approaches to addressing root causes of terror, they have certain abilities to rely on the work of experts in multiple fields and disciplines to strive to achieve a common good. With this multidisciplinary approach and research, including that of other specialists in religion and interreligious dialogue, we might hope that the “fundamental requirement of honest and constructive dialogue” becomes more of a reality as opposed to remaining an “ideal hope.”<sup>91</sup> This dialogue could be made more of a reality, bringing persons in multiple communities to a place of mutual respect, acceptance and hopefully even to a more globalized peace.

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## Endnotes:

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2. Throughout this article, the assumption is taken that terrorism is most often in a marginalized position relative to the position of Islamism generally. For more information on Muslim attitudes see John L. Esposito & Dalia Mogahed, Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think, (New York, NY: Gallup Press, 2007).
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23. Jamshid A. Marvasti, "What Motivates the Suicide Bomber?" in Psycho-Political Aspects of Suicide Warriors, Terrorism and Martyrdom, (Springfield, IL: Charles Thomas Publishers, 2008) p52.
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