TRANSFORMING ISLAMIC-WESTERN IDENTITY CONFLICT: A FRAMEWORK FOR STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

Recent years have witnessed an unsettling polarization, politicization, and securitization of cultural and religious identities linked to "Islam" and "the West." Political and military conflicts between the United States and various Middle Eastern states and movements have begun to feed a larger dynamic of identity conflict, in which partisans perceive their cultural values or religious identity – and not merely their state or nation – to be under attack. Drawing on insights gleaned from interdisciplinary conflict analysis as well as from constructivism and identity theory, the present study outlines a number of policy-relevant principles that Western leaders and activists might apply in efforts to deescalate Islamic-Western conflict and stimulate cooperative efforts to advance an inclusive, human security agenda.

An Atmosphere of Growing Polarization

Studies of public opinion in the Arab world and in the United States since September 2001 suggest that, in recent years, alienation between Arab-Islamic and North American solitudes has become painfully acute. Throughout the Middle East, views of the United States in particular have gone from bad to worse. In April 2002, 76% of Egyptians claimed to hold the U.S. in low regard, whereas by July 2004, 98% expressed a negative opinion. In Morocco the trend was much the same, moving from 61% negative in 2002 to 88% negative in 2004 (Linzer, 2004). The event that is generally held responsible for this deterioration – the decision to invade Iraq in March 2003 – also reinforced beliefs that the "War on Terror" is really a U.S.-led "War on Islam." Incidentally, surveys of Muslim population groups indicate that this perception that Islam itself has come under attack is the most significant predictor (not social class, gender, or level of education) of willingness to justify suicide bombings and other attacks against civilian targets (Fair, 2006).

The data from North American polls is also troubling. As the years have passed since 2001, increasing numbers of U.S. citizens have reported that, in their view, Islam is an inherently violent religion (Deane and Fears, 2006). After September 11, many

Americans concluded, with President George W. Bush, that the shocking terrorist attacks on New York and Washington were intended as an onslaught against freedom itself – and were not, as outsiders perceived, politically motivated attacks on symbols of American economic and military predominance. Insofar as such views ascribe conflict to values and identities without noting more mundane problems linked to interests and policies, they are not without consequence. They appear quite unsettling when considered in light of a December 2006 poll by the University of Maryland's Program on International Public Attitudes. According to this poll, Americans are significantly *less* likely than citizens in several of the world's most populous Muslim-majority countries to categorically condemn "bombing and other attacks intentionally aimed at civilians" (Ballen, 2007).

Trends in public opinion, of course, can be highly volatile and are responsive to immediate events. Whereas 9/11 sparked a creeping outrage within an American society that had little knowledge of or exposure to Islam, the U.S. invasion of Iraq prompted a sharp spike in anti-American (and in some cases, anti-Western) attitudes throughout a world that distrusted American unilateralism. More recent U.S. efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to Indonesia and Pakistan, however, appear to have generated significant dividends in the domain of public opinion (Ballen, 2007). Fatalism is both unwarranted and premature – yet insofar as empowered political actors in the West and radicalized networks in the Muslim world embrace worldviews positing irreconcilable cultural and religious differences, the danger of escalating identity conflict between "Islam" and the "West" remains acute. Ongoing political violence in Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel-Palestine, and Somalia, combined with the threat of a new confrontation between the United States and Iran, provides ready plausibility to simple, "us versus them" narratives that explain conflict by invoking undesirable values and characteristics of "the other" (Funk and Said, 2004).

There is a great need for scholarly analyses that clearly diagnose the sources of growing "Islamic-Western" identity polarization, and that offer practical prescriptions for lifting the fog of overheated rhetoric and overextended symbolism that threatens to exacerbate intercultural and interreligious tensions. Drawing insights from constructivism as well as identity theory, the present study seeks to develop a policy-relevant understanding of contemporary conflict dynamics that 1) avoids static, over-generalized assertions about innate cultural differences, 2) warns against the dangers of self-fulfilling prophecy, and 3) invites prospective thinking about how present tensions might gradually be transformed through a program that is different in both content and character from the present framework advanced by the most influential U.S. policy thinkers. In particular, this exploratory paper seeks a way forward in Western-Islamic relations, beyond the present impasse in the "war on terrorism" and toward an active program of intercultural peacemaking. Within the proposed framework, the war on terrorism is no longer conceived as an open-ended (and tragically counter-productive) call to arms, and international law enforcement efforts gain increased traction through

robust initiatives to foster collaboration and norm construction on matters relating to human security and international peace.

Reconceptualizing Islamic-Western Conflict

Differences in values and cultures are no more fundamental to the genesis of most conflicts than competing material claims. Virtually all of the world's armed conflicts require comprehensive frameworks to account for the full range of factors that drive them (Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, 1997). Insofar as "communal content" (for example, ethnic or religious rivalry) is present in a large majority of contemporary armed conflicts, so, too, are problems linked to governance, international intervention, underdevelopment, and threatened human needs (Azar, 1990).

In the contemporary world, economic and technological globalization is proceeding more rapidly than globalization of awareness and identity, and the eclipse of Cold War patterns of ideological contestation (capitalism versus communism) is encouraging the emergence of new conflict constellations in which ethnoreligious and cultural identities play a powerful role (Gurr, 1993; Holsti, 1996; Lapid and Kratochwil, 1996; Petito and Hatzopoulos, 2003; Rothman, 1997; Thomas, 2005). These conflict constellations are multifaceted, fluid, and complex, and cannot be fully encapsulated either by the concepts of traditional international relations theory or by the newer language of "clashing civilizations" (Huntington, 1993; Huntington, 1996). Contestation over cultural differences is indeed part of our current conflict equation, but reductionistic and over-simplified analyses of cultural and religious factors have the dubious distinction of reinforcing the very phenomena they purport to describe, encouraging competitive cultural and religious geopolitics (Lapid and Kratochwil, 1996, p. 8). As globalization analysts have noted, a "collapse of distance" has brought the world's diverse peoples into closer contact with one another than ever before, resulting in an accelerated mixing of peoples and heightened exposure to markedly different convictions and ways of life (Robertson, 1992). All too often, communities lack the "context" and historical knowledge to make sense of the cultural and political differences they encounter, and are unable to sustain dialogue long enough to discover shared values, examine differences in worldviews, and build trust (LeBaron, 2003; Schirch, 2001).

This dynamic is very much at play in contemporary Islamic-Western relations. In the absence of substantive political disagreements about conflicts in Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Afghanistan, Kashmir, the Balkans, and Chechnya – not to mention controversies surrounding perceived Western complicity in the maintenance of "oil monarchies" and authoritarian regimes – cultural and religious differences between Muslims and Westerners might well be manageable (Gerges, 1999). The persistence of such conflicts, however, has sharpened internal divisions within Muslim communities, and has encouraged the politicization of religious and cultural identities among those who object

to Western influence. Although the diversity of "Islamic" and "Western" views of international relations should not be understated, the existence of vast differences between "mainstream" Muslim and Western conflict perceptions attests to the deep sense of alienation that many on both sides of the divide experience. Inquiries into the *meaning* of contemporary conflict patterns – and into the manner in which emergent macro-level hostilities have been *constructed* – appears essential if we are to make sense of strife, clarify what is at stake for rival factions, and formulate viable prescriptions for reconciliation.

When integrated with theoretical insights from peace and conflict resolution studies, constructivist analysis of international conflict reveals the powerful role that identity plays in ongoing rivalries (Goff and Dunn, 2004), and enables researchers to develop nuanced accounts of processes through which relations among competing factions (including states and cultural groupings as well as transnational social movements and non-state actors) constitute and transform narratives and worldviews. Such an approach deepens analysis of interactions among self-described "Islamic" and "Western" actors without presuming that meanings associated with these labels are uniform or unalterable.

At the most basic level, identity can be defined as "an interrelated set of beliefs that constitute a relatively stable sense of self and the relationship of the self to the world" (Northrup, 1997, p. 239). Socially acquired and historically developed formulations of collective identity mediate human perceptions of group belonging as well as intergroup competition. Acquiring a collective identity is, in many respects, an entry point into collaboration with in-group members and competition with members of out-groups. Conditions of amity and enmity are by no means constant, however, and the interpretive lenses associated with a collective identity in one era may differ profoundly from commonsense perceptions in another, as the post-World War II and post-Cold War transformations of Europe attest.

Identity constructions can predispose groups to conflict or to peace, providing both points of connection with "others" and potential bases for rivalry. In situations of distress, participants in conflict often choose to highlight and reinforce sharply particularistic cultural identity categories while downplaying other possible definitions of self-identity, including those which might bind them to adversaries (Schirch, 2001). Exclusionary choices, in turn, tend to reinforce the pursuit of competitive and domination-based strategies for conflict management. Identity is not a deterministic concept, however, and reflective social agents are capable of reconsidering identity definitions that lock them in destructive conflict with others, so as to rediscover cultural values, narratives, and elements of common humanity that encourage peaceful coexistence.

To understand what is now driving Islamic-Western tensions, consideration of identity-based perceptions and attitudes permits a more penetrating diagnosis of contemporary insecurities than historical or political analysis alone. Awareness of intersubjective aspects of conflict and of dynamics linked to identity clarifies the context

within which Westerners and Muslims are making choices, and selecting strategies to advance perceived interests and values. Such awareness, particularly when grounded in actual experiences of intercultural or interfaith dialogue, also creates new bases for responding to the needs, interests, fears, and concerns of adversaries in ways that permit conflict transformation and identity redefinition. The following five analytical propositions help to illuminate what has been "going wrong" in Islamic-Western relations, and suggest ways in which intellectual retooling can support more positive forms of conflict transformation:

- 1) The Logic of Escalation Is Transforming Islamic-Western Relations
- 2) Threatened Identity Is Now at the Core of the Conflict
- 3) Radicalization – Not "Fundamentalism" – Is the Problem
- 4) Monolithic Images Are Both Inaccurate and Dangerous
- 5) Narrated Histories Are Privileging Conflict over Coexistence

1) The Logic of Escalation Is Transforming Islamic-Western Relations

In many respects, recent intensifications of Islamic-Western identity conflict follow the classic logic of conflict escalation as understood by scholars and practitioners of conflict resolution (see Table 1). According to influential conceptualizations of the escalation process (Fisher, 1990; Lederach, 1996; Rubin, Pruitt, and Kim, 1994), the first sign of trouble in a relationship (at micro-,

Table 1: Processes of Escalation: Social Transformations of Conflict
7. Polarization reduces scope for neutrality, creating changes in social organization — *Destructive conflict*
6. Hostility and mistrust intensify
5. Reciprocal causation develops, with "eye for eye" interaction patterns
4. Triangles form, as parties draw others into the conflict
3. Issues proliferate and become more general; communication deteriorates
2. Antagonism develops, as the other party's *character* is seen as the problem
1. Disagreement, with a shared problem — *Constructive conflict*
Adapted from Lederach (1996, p. 46)

meso-, or macro- levels of human social organization) occurs when disputants can no longer communicate clearly about the problem that separates them. Instead of regarding the problem as something distinct from their counterpart's personality or collective identity, the "other" begins to become the problem. If the conflict continues to fester without adequate redress, issues begin to proliferate, and disputants frame their overarching predicament in ever-more-general terms. Soon disputants begin to speak *at* or *about* each other rather than *to* or *with* each other, and they engage in efforts to draw other parties into their conflict by way of triangulation (in international relations, this process is referred to as alliance formation). If the process is not checked, minor offenses can give way to "eye for eye" cycles of escalating retaliation; these processes are

governed by "reciprocal causation" and a perceived need to appear strong and decisive rather than vulnerable and weak. Increased hostility and violence increase social distance and segregation among parties, and the expanded, deepened nature of the conflict makes it more difficult to address underlying contradictions that originally put the principal disputants at odds with each other.

When examined in relation to interdisciplinary knowledge about conflict escalation processes, widespread journalistic fascination with the idea of a "clash of civilizations" between "Islam" and "the West" appears more symptomatic than diagnostic in nature. Over time, unresolved political and economic conflicts have gradually transformed limited rivalries into broader configurations of conflict. Among the most important root causes of contemporary Islamic-Western tension is an incompatibility between the foreign policy of most powerful Western society, the United States, and the aspirations of Arab Muslims in the Middle East – historically the most influential identity group within a larger, transnational Islamic community. Efforts on the part of the United States to fill a Middle Eastern power vacuum following the withdrawal of colonial powers, combined with strong U.S. influence on outcomes in the deeply tragic, symbolically charged Israeli-Palestinian confrontation, have been among the more potent determinants of Muslim disaffection in the modern era. These developments, followed by wars with Iraq and the escalation of Muslim conflicts with Western powers in Afghanistan, the Balkans, and Chechnya, have fed radicalization among young Muslims seeking to advance revisionist political objectives that various state actors have been unable to fulfill.

Through a "conflict escalation" lens, "clash of civilizations" discourse reveals less about the cultures in question than it does about the level of escalation that has been achieved since the end of the Cold War. By invoking Islamic solidarity, radicalized Muslims seek to multiply forces in the face of objectively more powerful adversaries. Appeals to Western identity, in turn, serve a similar political function, as U.S. leaders seek to solidify past Cold War alliances while also pursuing various forms of collaboration with Russia and with former Soviet Bloc countries – "new Europe." As the overall level of violence has increased, hostilities related to collective identity have sharpened, producing deeper threat perceptions and calls for broader mobilization.

Though partisans of a narrowly interest-based approach to political analysis would argue that these competitive invocations of Western or Islamic identity are purely instrumental in nature or are of little consequence in relation to underlying drivers of conflict, theorists who underscore the interpretive, identity-related dimension of intergroup conflict caution that "us versus them" dynamics of confrontation can easily develop autonomous dynamism (Northrup, 1989). Once symbols of collective identity and belonging are transformed into recruiting tools and banners of war, what began as a poorly managed dispute over discrete economic and political objectives becomes a more enduring and deep-rooted conflict. Without keen awareness of the dynamics involved, the logic of strategic escalation and the logic of identity conflict can become mutually

reinforcing, making dialogue with the degraded "other" appear tantamount to betrayal of communal loyalties. The nature of political speech changes qualitatively, strengthening those who believe collective interests can be advanced through confrontation.

2) Threatened Identity Is Now at the Core of the Conflict

The grand scale of Islamic-Western identity conflict tends either to invite either sweeping overgeneralizations about cultural differences or efforts to discount cultural analysis altogether. Both "broad-brushstrokes" and "culture-blind" approaches are inadequate, however. The existence of real patterns of cultural difference increases the degree of "opacity" in Islamic-Western relations, heightening risks of miscommunication, misattribution of motives, and psychological projection. As important as it is to analyze these differences (e.g., individualism versus collectivism, gender norms, conceptions of legitimate authority, role of religion in the public sphere, forms of communication and emotional expression), careful attention to the internal diversity of cultures and *the politics of culture* is equally vital. Within a context of ongoing political conflict with the "cultural other" (be it Western or Islamic), competition for political leadership inevitably involves strategic manipulation of "authentic culture" and its symbols. Troubled historical relations between groups also add to the potential for polarization and for demagogic calls to purge aspects of "alien" culture within a given milieu; competitors for in-group leadership tend to draw upon their own, culture-specific historical narratives to selectively represent the past in ways that support rivalry and defensiveness.

There is a very real danger that Islamic-Western ideological contestation is replacing the oppositions of the Cold War era, and that complex, diverse societies around the world are becoming enmeshed in a clash of symbols (Funk and Said, 2004, pp. 20-21). Within this symbolic clash, multifarious interests are competing for resources and for the claim to cultural and political leadership; far too often, relatively coarse emotions and motives are masquerading as sublime and noble sentiments. As in other intense intergroup conflicts, symbols and images projected by *others* (in the North American case, Islamic symbols, and in the Islamic world, Western symbols) are becoming reservoirs for in-group fear, loathing, and insecurity. Powerful symbols of cherished in-group values, in turn, become harnessed to the cause of conflict. In the U.S. context, this has reinforced a strong surge of religious nationalism; in the Middle East and other regions of the Muslim world, Islamic revivalism has received additional amplification.

All too easily, symbols for sacred values and moral growth can become emblems to carry forward into combat (Appleby, 2000). So also can symbols of wholesome national aspirations (including frequently invoked values like "democracy" and "freedom") become battle flags, even as the resources of society become diverted more and more to causes that have little do with traditional measures of national betterment. Taken together, recent setbacks in Islamic-Western relations graphically illustrate the charged symbolic nature of contemporary identity conflict. In addition to 9/11 and the

invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq – themselves powerfully symbolic events that prompted political mobilizations far beyond the borders of the affected lands – emotionally intense controversies surrounding offensive Danish cartoons, Pope Benedict's Regensburg address, and a disturbingly provocative Holocaust cartoon contest in Iran indicate that intercultural and interreligious relations have become highly volatile.

The increasing centrality of culture and religion in contemporary manifestations of international and intrasocietal conflict is a matter of grave concern. Whenever intergroup conflict is perceived in existential terms, as a struggle over "ultimate ends" such as the fate of religions or civilizations, there is a risk that the traditions in question can quickly become "hollowed out" with respect to their essential moral content. What means can one forego in the defense of one's deepest identity, in the face of an implacable (and evil) foe? With notable exceptions (as in the case of firm religious pacifists willing to accept martyrdom as a means of achieving redemptive purposes), the moral restraints built into religions and cultures become increasingly tenuous when partisans seek to "defend" these traditions from onslaught by the "other."

For complex psychological reasons, many people in this world are willing to risk or even embrace martyrdom if they deem it necessary to redeem what they value most, especially to save an assaulted or humiliated core identity. Such conflict behaviors may arise most readily within disadvantaged and traumatized communities such as Sri Lankan Tamils and Palestinian Muslims, but the use of violence to defend a "sacred" sense of identity is not a rare phenomenon. Political desperation, when combined with a deep sense of fear or an "existential" condition of disempowerment, can easily give way to violence. Analyzing behaviors and conditions that evoke this sense of "existential threat" – both in Western and Islamic contexts – should be a top priority of contemporary conflict resolution efforts.

3) Radicalization – Not "Fundamentalism" – Is the Problem

There are many common errors in analysis of conflicts with strong intercultural or religious dimensions, but one of the more unhelpful approaches involves a reductionistic tendency to posit "fundamentalism" as the root cause of conflict. Though this is a barrier to more comprehensive understanding (during a recent trip to Cairo, the author was struck by the number of books on Christian fundamentalism and America's Christian right lining the shelves of bookstores in Cairo), moving beyond the "fundamentalism" frame is especially important for North American analysts seeking ways to prevent or reverse radicalization processes in the Muslim world.

Scholars and policymakers need to exercise great discernment when analyzing and diagnosing religiously justified conflict behaviors such as those of the al-Qaeda network. To be sure, "fundamentalist" religion – if by "fundamentalist" is meant "intolerant" and "authoritarian" – is indeed a problem. For the sake of conceptual clarity as well as analytical nuance, however, there is a need to differentiate between fundamentalism and

revivalism, on the one hand, and extremism and terrorism, on the other. There is also a need to acknowledge the potential for non-religious fundamentalism. At its core, the "fundamentalist" impulse is a tendency to take a rich and varied cultural and intellectual tradition and pare it down to a narrow subset of principles that can be used for political purposes, as a means of sealing off or repelling outsiders who are perceived as threatening or subversive.

In the context of Islamic-Western relations, the fundamentalist tendency is visible not only among Muslims who feel wronged by Western policies and overwhelmed by external cultural influences, but also among Westerners who insist that dialogue with Muslims must have a predetermined outcome or inflexible agenda, such as conversion of Muslims to a secularist worldview, or support for particular foreign and domestic policies. It is arguable that many contemporary Western writings – and not only Muslim religious tracts – exhibit such tendencies (Harris, 2004; Fallaci, 2006).

In the context of deeply fractured societies such as Afghanistan and Iraq, attributing ongoing political violence primarily to "fundamentalism" has limited analytical utility. After decades of war and violence fuelled by external intervention and internal divisiveness, a majority of Afghans and Iraqis have redoubled their commitments to conservative strains of religious thought. Many can quite fairly be classified as "revivalists" who are seeking to reassert key tenets of a religious belief system, as a means salvaging meaning and existential security from the situation in which they find themselves. Among those who are currently in rebellion against their respective, coalition-supported governments, many are less rigid in their religious commitments than those who now hold major government portfolios. Religion undoubtedly plays a powerful role in the motivation of core constituencies (leaders of the Taliban in Afghanistan and of various Sunni factions in Iraq), yet this motivation arises not from "fundamentalism" as such, but rather from a particular strain of fundamentalist thought that has become conjoined with ethnic loyalties and a highly combative worldview. It is the conflict narratives that animate the Taliban and the Sunni resistance – and not merely religious beliefs – that make these movements prone to extremism and supportive of groups such as al-Qaeda.

To understand why the darkest and most confrontational conflict narratives sometimes prevail over less deeply polarizing possibilities, there is a need to comprehend ethno-religious radicalization as an ongoing process. Both in Islamic-Western relations and in other conflict environments, ethno-religious radicalization can be explained without resorting to reductionistic simplifications. Analyses of radicalization have to be sophisticated and multidimensional, allowing us to 1) see extremism and terrorism in the multiple contexts that shape them, and 2) understand the complex processes that lead adherents of particular cultural and religious systems to believe that their identities and sacred values are under attack. We have to ask "What went wrong?" – not only with radicalized groups, but in the relations of these groups with their adversaries.

Let us briefly apply the first principle – analysis of multiple contexts – to explain the appeal of religiously justified conflict behavior among many contemporary Muslims. First, we need to address the historical context. Current problems did not develop overnight. And yes, there is a long history of rivalry that is selectively remembered on both sides of the Islamic-Western divide. But we need not go back all the way to the early Islamic conquests or to the Crusades. Starting with the modern colonial and Cold War experiences gives us problems that we can still try to address constructively.

Second, there are cultural contexts. Despite the increasingly transnational and synchronous nature of Islamic intellectual deliberations, facilitated as they are by the internet, we need to understand the cultural background of various Islamic movements, be they Wahhabi-Salafi or Sufi. Islam in Saudi Arabia differs in significant ways from Islam in Syria or Kashmir, and so on. Islam in Afghanistan and Iraq is not all of one piece, and Islam itself is contested by members of multiple "cultures of interpretation" within each major Muslim community. These cultures of interpretation include Muslim secularists, progressive Islamic reformists, mainstream Islamic revivalists, radical Islamists, and neo-traditionalists (see Table 2).

Contemporary Muslim debates over the role of religion in society are not only debates about modernity and tradition, but also contests between advocates of greater secularity and proponents of religious revival. There are indeed strong traditionalist establishments in the Muslim world, with state backing, but currents of popular religiosity are heavily laden with revivalist sentiments, mixed with frustrated nationalism and an intensely felt desire for authenticity and dignity – for a cultural and political identity that is distinct from that of the West.

Third, there are political contexts. It is not an exaggeration to state that, in most contemporary Muslim communities, a thick web of political problems and unresolved conflicts creates a deep sense of powerlessness and humiliation. The popularity of conspiracy theories attests to the deep disempowerment that is born of domestic authoritarianism, unaccountable security agencies, and inability to change unpopular Western foreign policies. In addition, it is worth pointing out that while some grievances of Islamic movements are widely shared, others are localized. We should not repeat the errors of the Cold War, by painting all movements with the same brush or adopting a totalizing agenda of ideological confrontation. Instead, the goal should be to address local conflicts and thereby reduce the appeal of transnational extremism.

Finally, there are economic and existential contexts. Unemployment and underemployment are grave problems for young men in much of the Muslim world, and they can have a profoundly damaging impact. They reinforce despair and hopelessness. When social services and economic empowerment come through participation in radical movements, the appeal of combative ideas becomes stronger.

Table 2: Cultures of Islamic Interpretation and Attitudes Toward the West

	Perspective on Islam and Its Present Status	Attitude Toward the West
Muslim Secularist	Varying attitudes – Islam as cultural and civilizational heritage, and as a private set of values ("religion is a personal matter"); little difference between Islamic and Western norms; perceived threat from reactionary "fundamentalists"	Western culture viewed with favor as modern and progressive; varying attitudes toward Western policies vis-à-vis Muslim immigrant populations and Muslim-majority countries (assimilationist/conformist perspectives and alienated/disaffected perspectives both present)
Progressive Islamic Reformist	Islam as a dynamic set of principles embedded in the Qur'an; need to give new life to principles in changing historical contexts; need for self-critical Muslim thought and scope for fresh interpretations (liberal approach to *ijtihad*); diversity within Islam viewed as a potential resource	Western achievements taken very seriously; democracy and free inquiry seen as authentically Islamic; criticisms of Western culture/politics comparable to internal "self-critiques" of Western religious communities; lack of Western sensitivity to Islam partially (but not entirely) to blame for ineffective policies and Muslim radicalization
Mainstream Islamic Revivalist ("moderate" Islamist or Salafi; "populist" Islam)	Islam as a pure set of forms and principles embodied in the Qur'an and Hadith literature; traditional interpreters subject to critique for subservience to rulers, and/or failure to apply Islamic principles vigorously to social, political, and economic problems; reformists criticized for trying to imitate the West, lack of authenticity	Technological and scientific aspects of Western culture acceptable; cultural and political aspects of the Western experience should be critically reappraised and corrected; Western policies intended to control Muslim peoples and extract their resources but most Westerners uninformed; Western prejudices against Muslims (and ignorance of Islam) permit harmful policies
Radical Islamist	Islam as a pure and unchangeable set of forms and principles embodied in the Qur'an and Hadith literature; traditional interpreters subject to harsh critique for quietism, subservience to rulers, and/or failure to impose Islamic principles in all spheres of life; reformers viewed as agents of imperialism; practice of uncorrupted Islam depends on righteous leadership and "authentic" Islamic state; diversity within Islam categorically rejected (extreme sectarianism)	Technological aspects of Western culture acceptable; cultural and political aspects of the Western experience must be categorically rejected; Western policies intended to subordinate and humiliate Muslim peoples, extract their resources, and destroy Islam; West as enemy and agent of corruption; most Muslim political leaders complicit with the enemy
Neo-traditionalist	Islam as a pure set of forms and principles derived from the ●ur'an and Hadith and interpreted by qualified, authoritative scholars; proper application of Islamic values depends on knowledge of both sources and traditional syntheses; true Islam now threatened both by overly politicized Muslims without proper training and by cultural Westernization	Varying attitudes; some Western technologies and practices compatible with Islam, while others are clearly not (socio-moral concerns); Western society suffering malaise from lack of religious knowledge and displacement of traditional religious frameworks; Western policies generally based on ignorance of Islam and historical biases

When we consider the multiple contexts that can drive members of an ethnic or cultural group to embrace religion as a pathway to political salvation, it becomes apparent

that many of the motivations behind "religious" conflict are not particularly spiritual in nature. Yet insofar as religion is invoked as a galvanizing and justifying force, and insofar as specifically religious values are perceived to be at stake, we have no choice but to engage the religious dimension of conflict, and to attempt to direct it toward the ends of peacebuilding and conflict transformation (see Table 3). No religious tradition is monolithic with respect to conflict and peace issues; the existence of a religious dimension of conflict in no way precludes efforts to elicit religious teachings and interpretations that are supportive of peace.

Table 3: Religion in Conflict and Peacemaking

WAYS RELIGION ENTERS POLITICS	WAYS RELIGION CAN ACCELERATE CONFLICT	WAYS RELIGION CAN CONTRIBUTE TO PEACEMAKING
Religiously engaged actors (individuals and groups)	Actors using religion as "power tool," "force multiplier," or barrier	Actors using religion as a bridge or as a source of empowerment for peaceful change
Religious symbols, identities, and narratives	Competitive polarization of identities and narratives of rivalry/victimization ("us" vs. "them")	Open religious identities and narratives with positive role for the "stranger"
Religious cultures and values	Exclusive understandings of goodness and virtue; strong in-group/out-group biases	Inclusive understanding of spiritual values; commitment to social justice, nonviolence, and reconciliation
Religious texts and interpretations	Cutting off dialogue about interpretation; authoritarianism; emphasis on righteous or purifying violence	Affirmation of transcendent divine mystery, of immanent human responsibilities, and of open-ended quest for understanding

4) Monolithic Images Are Both Inaccurate and Dangerous

Representing dynamics of Islamic-Western conflict is a perilous task, intellectually as well as politically. Given the extent to which culture and religion have become "securitized," it would appear undeniable that analysis of contemporary dynamics in international relations requires effort to weigh the significance of large-scale

patterns of cultural difference. In this respect, it is important to note that Samuel Huntington was neither the first nor the last commentator to broach the subject of "civilizations" in world politics (Bozeman, 1960; Galtung, 1996; Havel, 1998; Segesvary, 2000; Tehranian and Chappell, 2002). Whereas Huntington's framework begins and ends its analysis of culture with traditional military security concerns (and, indeed, represents external and internal cultural diversity as the new security threat to Western democracies), other frameworks, such as Galtung's and Havel's, manifest a more optimistic preoccupation with the challenge of fostering global solidarities in the face of shared humanitarian concerns. Galtung (1996) explores ways in which "cosmologies" attributed to different civilizations (including Western civilization) can manifest different degrees of openness to the "other"; Havel (1998) articulates confidence in the possibility of identifying common spiritual values and superordinate goals.

If there is to be a prospect of breaking some of the negative cycles associated with Western-Islamic identity conflict [I deliberately refrain from describing such conflict as civilizational rivalry], a middle way will no doubt have to be found between Huntington's problematically over-generalized, primordialist vision of human macro-cultures – a vision that captures the growing polarization of identity conflict far better than the rich textures of cultural reality – and those analyses that seek to evade macro-cultural phenomena entirely. Although it is arguable that constructivist approaches to these phenomena can appear to trivialize deep-rooted religious and cultural traditions that have constituted social practice for generations (Thomas, 2005, pp. 80-96), the constructivist lens nonetheless offers valuable insights into patterns of cultural and political identification, without presuming to "fix," essentialize, or reify richly variegated and intrinsically dynamic systems of meaning, belief, and value. Empirical investigations of Huntington's thesis have demonstrated that civilizational identity is but one of many possible determinants of state and human behavior (Fox and Sandler, 2004, pp. 118-125); there may well be greater merit to Havel's proposition that all of humanity now inhabits a single, "thin" global civilization defined by technology and pop culture, with multifarious subcultures seeking to express or revive themselves within this shrinking global context (Capps, 1997).

In any case, both academic discourse and policymaking are likely to benefit from analyses that highlight the inability of civilizations to act as coherent political actors, as well as the absence of fixed, invariant characteristics that determine the destiny of a given human collectivity. To borrow a term from Benedict Anderson (1983), civilizations are "imagined communities," not monolithic or homogeneous entities. To do justice to the richly varied cosmologies and historical narratives that give texture and meaning to our pluralistic world, analysts who seek to "bring culture back in" need to differentiate between the sweeping generalizations activated by escalating identity conflict and the far more complex realities that jingoistic language conceals.

5) Narrated Histories Have Privileged Conflict over Coexistence

The history of Islamic relations with the West is far too often represented in simplistic, deterministic terms. The assumption has been that Islam and the West are perennial rivals, with incompatible values. According to influential Western narratives, contemporary disaffection among Muslims is simply anger at the West for surpassing the Islamic world in the race for global cultural and political leadership. Comparable beliefs concerning an unreasonable and inflexible Western hostility to Islam are also commonplace in Muslim communities.

To be sure, the rise of the West during the age of imperial expansion presented a profound and unexpected challenge to traditional Muslims. Colonization, in particular, presented a grave shock to religious identity and cultural pride. Subordination to non-Muslim powers did indeed contradict the prevailing understanding of Islam as God's intended moral template for human civilization. Some observers characterize contemporary ferment in the Islamic world as a troubled – and at times destructively misdirected – effort to "re-enter history" after centuries of declining fortunes.

Though historical rivalries have no doubt obstructed understanding and cooperation among Muslims and Westerners, it would nonetheless be misleading to view present alienation as an inevitable outcome of past events. *Remembered* and *narrated* history – not "History" in itself – is what shapes the future, and at any given there are multiple narratives competing for influence. While narratives of confrontation are more influential, narratives highlighting instances of cooperation and coexistence are also in circulation (Funk and Said, 2004). The choice to privilege one type of narrative over another is highly consequential. Zachary Karabell (2007, p. 7) offers an important reminder:

> Like any prejudice, the mutual animosity between Islam and the West is fueled by ignorance and selective memory. If we emphasize hate, scorn, war, and conquest, we are unlikely to perceive that any other path is viable. If we assume that religion is the primary source of conflict, we are unlikely to address factors that had nothing to do with religion.

The story we narrate is, to a considerable extent, the story we enact in our collective political behavior.

During the last two hundred centuries, Muslim reactions to Western influences have not consisted solely of efforts to "turn the tables" or restore Muslim greatness. Responses to Western politics and culture have varied significantly; cultural change within the Muslim world has resulted in a remarkable proliferation of voices claiming to speak for Islam, and recognizing differences among these voices is essential for a thoughtful policy of engagement with Muslim societies (see Table 2).

In recent decades, Muslims attitudes toward the West have been marked by a powerful sense of ambivalence. On the one hand, Western economic and scientific

accomplishments have often generated respect and admiration as well as envy. On the other hand, asymmetrical relationships in international political and economic affairs have generated considerable chaffing. Despite the cultural and sectarian diversity of Muslim communities, Muslims have often experienced strong feelings of emotional solidarity in instances of escalating conflict with Western states. Muslim identities have a strong transnational component, and unresolved violent conflicts in which particular groups of Muslims become victims have the effect of feeding widespread deep feelings of powerlessness and humiliation. Violent conflicts in Iraq (the former heartland of the Abbasid Empire and more recently a dynamic center of Arab nationalism) and Israel-Palestine have an especially strong emotional impact on Muslim communities. In debates between progressive Muslim reformers and more populist or radical forces, the character of Western involvement in these conflicts tends to tilt the scales toward those who seek to redefine Islam in ways that underscore confrontation and puritanism.

"The West" enters debates over Islamic interpretation within the context of a potent "love/hate" dynamic. There is disputation over whether the West should be reflected, respected, or rejected. Insofar as contemporary political dynamics bring back strong memories of the colonial era and evoke casual (and often poorly constructed) comparisons to the era of the Crusades, "reflect" is becoming an increasingly disfavored option. The decisive debate now is over whether the West should be *respected* or *rejected*. In other words, should Islamic modernity be defined as an integrated cultural and political system that is *in dialogue* with the West, or as an essentially anti-Western construct?

Rami Khouri, a noted Jordanian journalist who now resides in Lebanon as an editor and writer for the Daily Star, has argued that most Arabs (and more generally, Muslims) do not naturally hate the West; insofar as there is anger, it is because Arabs feel like "jilted lovers," particularly in their relationship with the United States (Perlez, 2002). In my own experience living in Damascus, Syria and traveling in many Middle Eastern countries, there is genuine validity in this statement. I have been repeatedly surprised by the fluency of educated young Muslims with Western pop culture (including movies, television shows, music, and sports), and by what appears to be a strong desire for inclusion, international justice, and respect. This desire for inclusion, international justice, and respect includes an intense need to be heard on matters of political concern, and to be recognized for historical as well as contemporary contributions to Western and global culture. Popular understandings of international justice or fairness differ markedly from "commonsense" Western perceptions, and the sharp disjunction between commonplace Western and Islamic perspectives has far too often been treated as am impediment to dialogue rather than an impetus.

Avoiding a New "Thirty Years War"

As U.S. intelligence agencies have acknowledged, the "war on terrorism" (and particularly the choice to invade Iraq) has increased the appeal of radicalism in many parts of the Muslim world (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2006). Overconfidence in the utility of military force in resolving contemporary problems of non-state political violence has brought increasing turbulence not only to the Middle East, but also to Western multicultural societies. War appears highly ineffective for destroying the "taproot" of terrorism, particularly insofar as it reinforces the "us versus them" dynamics of contemporary identity conflict and gives an unmerited advantage to historical narratives that grant exclusive weight to Islamic-Western rivalry. It is simply not possible to impose upon the Islamic world a set of political, cultural, and economic solutions that are viewed as 1) inauthentic, and 2) humiliating. The resort to military force feeds perceptions of confrontation and injustice, and is ultimately self-defeating. Because of the transnational character of Islamic identity, the escalation of conflict overseas also has negative consequences for interreligious relations in North America and Europe.

Those who favor escalating conflict and the pursuit of a decisive cultural or religious "victory" view Islamic-Western conflict as an unalterable fact of history, an outcome of incompatible doctrines and values. Those who reject this analysis as dangerously superficial offer a different image – an image of two compatible, interdependent human cultural systems, each with the capability to follow a generally progressive trajectory of political, economic, and social development. From the latter standpoint, talk of an imminent or inevitable "clash of civilizations" obscures the causes of contemporary conflict that we can respond to: frustrated aspirations for dignity and change in Islamic societies, and a pattern of asymmetrical, antagonistic relations between Western and Islamic peoples. Such thinking also increases the risk of highly undesirable future scenarios, such as a postmodern, intercultural "Thirty Years War."

In a world that has become far too polarized, there is a profound need for strong voices of sanity – voices that offer "other ways" to fulfill the values and protect the identities that are invoked by extremists. To amplify these "voices of sanity," we cannot afford to remain in traditional comfort zones as scholars, citizens, or practitioners in the field of international affairs. We need to find ways to directly engage the religious and cultural dimensions of conflict in ways that transform the role they play in contemporary politics. Over the long term, one of the most important tasks for peacebuilding is depriving violent extremism of legitimacy. The United States, Canada, and other countries that support international peacebuilding can help to advance this objective by becoming more proactive in their efforts to foster religiously and culturally informed approaches to conflict resolution, within as well as between societies.

Since Muslim support for political violence often correlates with the belief that Islam is under attack, it makes sense to seriously reconsider policies that feed this

perception, while also building alliances in the struggle for reconciliation with "moderate" and progressive Muslims – especially with Muslims who have achieved a positive integration of values in their own lives (modern, democratic, Muslim) and who have the credibility in their own communities that comes with "multiple critique." Such Muslims are broadly affirmative of the role Islam plays in their own identities, respectful but not uncritical in their attitudes toward the West, and capable of critiquing actions taken in the name of both Islam and the West. Actively engaging reformist Muslims as well as "moderates" representing diverse interpretive tendencies prevents extremists from controlling the agenda and opens channels for respectful communication, cooperation, and information exchange (Lynch, 2003).

A similar logic can be applied in North American and European contexts within Christian, Jewish, and secularist communities. In the present atmosphere of conflict, Western political commentators all too often juxtapose their own religious values or civic traditions against those of an essentialized, regressive formulation of Islamic culture, while ignoring historically decisive contributions of Muslims to Western civilization. In the West, too, there is a need for multiple critique – for attitudes of healthy self-respect and confidence that are capable of bearing self-criticism and affirming "others." Such magnanimity would seem particularly desirably given the fact that, compared to contemporary Muslim societies, the West still enjoys widespread security and prosperity.

At a time of profound tension, it is crucial to underscore common values shared by opposing groups, among the most significant of which is a desire to live in peace. This desire to live in peace, however, is expressed in multiple ways. In many respects the most important conflicts in the world today are being played out *within* rather than between civilizations, among divergent ways of articulating what "peace" actually *means* (Said, Funk, and Kadayifci, 2001). Most cultural and religious traditions include multiple definitions of peace. Some historical narratives and textual interpretations support the notion that peace is only to be experienced by a limited group of people, primarily as an absence of war secured by military strength – for example, through the extension of hegemonic control or through adherence to militaristic struggle. Other interpretations understand peace as a presence of justice, human dignity, ecological wholeness, and other conditions that can only be secured through cooperation with internal and external "others." The question of which concept of peace will prevail and what means will be chosen to advance it depends both on the imagination and energy of the people within each of our major world cultures, and on the extent to which common ground is sought and established between groups whose dominant historical narratives speak of competition.

Prescriptions

To transform conflict scenarios in which Islamic and Western identities play a prominent role, we need to seek new and creative options. Drawing upon the analytical premises outlined above to demystify ways in which religion and culture enter politics is an important first step; discovering alternative modes of culturally and religiously informed action is a vital second. By working with a sophisticated awareness of realities linked to Western and Islamic identity, we can demonstrate that mythologies of confrontation are not only selective and self-fulfilling but also unnecessary, and that peaceful coexistence can be achieved through a sustained process involving geopolitical restraint and commitment to consensus building as well as intercultural dialogue and rapprochement.

Without a comprehensive vision of how Western-Islamic coexistence might be achieved, the power of existing cultural mythologies is likely to overwhelm piecemeal cooperative efforts. The suggestions outlined below are primarily towards Western policy intellectuals and activists. They are in no way definitive, and though based on the conflict analysis outlined in this paper they are neither unprecedented nor entirely novel. They are offered, however, with the hope that a broader range of scholars and policymakers will engage with the important intellectual task of positive "scenario building" for a more hopeful and secure future.

1) Adopting a Human Security Framework

The events of recent years demonstrate that the United States, Canada and other Western countries have an interest in working through United Nations institutions whenever possible to advance key security concerns. Abstention from both involvement in and rhetorical support for military activities that have not received UN approval would be a wise and prudential policy for combating the sense of international lawlessness that feeds radicalization and supports terrorist recruitment.

A multilateral approach to international security based on the empowerment of international institutions can be greatly enriched by applying an integrative "human security" approach to the problems of terrorism and political violence. This framework has a number of virtues: it recognizes that radicalization festers in situations of repression and unresolved conflict; it places a strong emphasis on law enforcement, development, and protection of civilian populations rather than on large-scale (and deeply polarizing) military campaigns; and it affirms the importance of efforts to work towards a uniform standard of human rights, understood to include not only civil and political but also economic, social, and cultural rights. It redirects policy from a narrow focus on empowering state security and military apparatus, toward a more proactive concern with the protection of individual human beings to harm and deprivation.

In the search for common ground on issues of international security, Western politicians should take particular care to resist polarizing discourse (e.g., "war for civilization," "axis of evil," combat against "the enemies of democracy," demonization of Islamic movements and parties). The stances taken by U.S. and Canadian leaders on the tragically counterproductive Israel-Hizbullah war of 2006, like their perceived hypocrisy with respect to Hamas' victory in the Palestinian elections, have resulted in further loss of political capital (not to mention credibility for democracy) in the Middle East. When engaging painful conflicts within the Middle East and other regions of the Muslim world, Western policymakers should attempt to act in ways that members of more than one side can recognize as principled. International human rights monitoring organizations may be able to provide helpful guidance in this regard.

2) Privileging Conflict Transformation over Conflict Escalation

In recent years, over-militarization of the "war on terror" has contributed more to the destabilization of the Muslim world than to the cultivation of a basis for sustainable peace. The result has been an incoherent policy that enjoins democracy on the one hand, while collaborating with (and indeed participating in) practices of state-sponsored torture on the other. Though many democratic reformers in Muslim initially took heart at U.S. President George Bush's acknowledgement of past U.S. complicity with oppressive states, turbulence created by the Iraq war has made genuine transformation a more distant goal.

For better results, U.S. and Western leaders could derive considerable benefit from policies that actively seek to de-escalate and transform conflicts between states and Islamic or ethno-religious movements. Refusing to give "radical" groups a chance to develop a stake in the political process serves no useful purpose. Working to integrate religious movements into negotiation processes in no way precludes the expression of strong criticisms with respect to past actions taken by members of revisionist groups. Criticisms that this amounts to "compromise with extremists" could be met with honest acknowledgement that, during the Reformation era, many Western churches and religious leaders were deeply engaged in passionate political controversy. Yet these churches and the visions of their leaders have evolved into powerful, "mainline" vehicles for the expression of humane religious sentiments. Humility and historical perspective are vital commodities as Western leaders seek collaborative responses to internationally salient conflicts.

Should Western leaders embrace this path of dialogue and bridgebuilding, there are a number of positive steps that could be taken to enhance cross-cultural diplomatic capacity. A higher priority could be placed on cultural and religious literacy in the diplomatic corps, with professional education programs designed to provide deeper historical context for current events, as well as information about multiple voices and political currents in the Islamic world. Mini-courses for diplomatic personnel could make use of excellent video resources such as the series, *When the World Spoke Arabic:*

The Golden Age of Arab Civilization (2001). Diplomatic discourse could give renewed emphasis to cultural and religious pluralism, multilateralism, conflict resolution, respectful dialogue, consensus-building, reciprocity, and inclusion. To communicate respect, new emphasis could be given to the idea of an emergent "global ethic" (forged through interreligious and intercultural dialogue) and to the many (past and present) Islamic contributions to Western culture. By granting greater weight to these themes, Western diplomacy could more effectively convey a vision that people in many parts of the Muslim world can relate to and affirm. Connecting policy principles to a search for shared values might also prove useful in relating national interest to key world order concerns.

3) Strengthening Western Support for Multiculturalism

Because diaspora links are strong, a visitor to Muslim-majority countries should not be surprised to meet taxi drivers, businessmen, and middle class professionals with relatives in Toronto or Chicago, and who may well have developed a positive view of North America insofar as relatives abroad have encountered economic and educational opportunity, rule of law, and freedom of religious expression more consistently than prejudice, exclusion, or corruption. Though U.S. (and increasingly Canadian) foreign policies are a source of grievance and concern, the importance of immigrant experiences in shaping Muslim perceptions of the West should not be underestimated. In light of this transnational dynamic, new steps could be taken to ensure the health and vibrancy of Western multicultural societies. Special efforts could be made to utilize the resources of university systems, and to encourage multifaith projects that express shared religious values in the public sphere.

The United States, Canada, and other countries within the Western cultural sphere have a strong interest in encouraging active intercultural dialogue – and in seeing to it that their own domestic experiments with cultural and religious diversity provide a solid grounding for their political discourse on topics such as democracy and human rights. The status of the United States and Canada as immigrant societies gives these countries unique assets in the effort to engage Muslim publics; there is a need, however, to ensure that the commitment to pluralism continues, and is not diverted toward understandings of liberalism that are infused with anti-Islamic or Western exclusivist rigidities. To prevent moves toward retrenchment, advocates of multiculturalism need to be articulate about the values upon which their efforts are based. Multiculturalism entails a principled openness to others and engaged commitment to coexistence through mutual recognition and respectful dialogue. Respect for the "other" permits a more truly democratic approach to cultural and political differences, and in no way negates the pursuit of common standards.

4) *Transforming the Role of Culture and Religion*

Given the intensity of perceived identity threats among contemporary Muslim and Judeo-Christian populations, it appears unlikely that the traditional Western formula of secularization and church-state separation can defuse present tensions. Any viable intercultural peace in the twenty-first century will have to include a religious dimension. Fortunately, religious cultures provide broad repertoires of historical experiences, narratives, and symbols, and are by no means static or closed. Careful examination of historical experiences in almost any conflict zone reveals that narratives of confrontation draw on narrowly selected encounters and experiences. Drawing attention to this selectivity, as well as to distorted and misleading uses of history, is an essential basis for peacebuilding activity. So, too, are efforts to "demystify" symbolic conflict by pointing to dynamics that are not strictly cultural or religious in nature.

One of the most important challenges for any intercultural peacebuilding effort is the development of religious and cultural literacy. This means acquiring fluency in essential religious precepts, and developing an understanding of the many ways in which these precepts have been interpreted and applied historically. In this regard, it is important to recognize that religion is expressed and lived through cultural activity; what is essentially religious to one subgroup or faction may reflect a historical synthesis or inflection that another subgroup rejects.

To empower religious peacebuilding efforts, scholars and practitioners can provide vital support by taking inventory of religious peace resources. A non-governmental organization (NGO) team involved with peacebuilding and development work in Afghanistan or Lebanon, for example, would be well-served if its foreign members were familiar with different "Islamic peace paradigms," as well as with local practices and traditions that, though not explicitly rooted in Islamic sources, are implemented through use of an Islamic idiom. Traditional modes of decision-making and conflict resolution, including *shuras* and *jirgas* (Afghanistan) and *musalaha* (Arab world), would have to be included in this inventory – not merely because they are still in use, but also because their symbolism and principles might possibly be adapted in the service of *salam* (peace). Peaceworkers and development professionals might also wish to become acquainted with Islamic exemplars of right conduct and reconciliation. Peacebuilding in most regions of the Islamic world must involve respect for principles from the Qur'an and from the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (*Hadith*). Conversance with the achievements and beliefs of modern figures who are nonetheless recognized as Muslim peacemakers, such as the Pashtun's great nonviolent leader, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, would also be useful (Easwaran, 1999). Working to establish complementarity between etic and emic frameworks for peacebuilding is one of the most essential bases for empowering local actors and helping them develop effective, culturally legitimate practices. International NGOs and UN personnel working to support conflict resolution in the Gaza Strip, for example, found it useful to partner with local change agents who made imaginative

linkages between Western notions of "peer mediation" and traditional Arab roles such as that of the village headman (*mukhtar*). The result was a significant educational program that gave expression to traditional values in an innovative (and some would say, gently counter-cultural) manner. The Lebanese Conflict Resolution Network (LCRN), a multi-confessional alliance of trainers based in a variety of NGOs, has engaged in similar efforts to adapt Western concepts and draw upon existing local resources.

Locally grounded, culturally competent approaches to peacebuilding in zones of religious conflict are likely to face significant challenges as they work to identify and amplify suppressed peace resources and narratives. Protagonists of change may also find themselves toggling back and forth between the primary religious language of one group and that of another, or between a primary religious language and a second-order language that is shared (for example, the language of human rights). Special care should be taken in choosing local partners who are prepared to address local conflicts at the grassroots level, while also working to foster engagement at higher levels of religious and national organization.

Producing culturally appropriate peace education materials is vitally important for sustained peacebuilding efforts – ideally materials that make use of both traditional and innovative concepts, and that can be integrated in the curricula of primary, secondary, and post-secondary educational institutions. These materials can also be used to explain the rationale for religious peacebuilding to sceptical parties, to inform readers about past instances of peace and coexistence, and to promote awareness of current peacemaking activities through various local and national media. Particularly important contributions to social discourse can often be made through the dissemination of religiously informed rationales for tolerance, coexistence, peacemaking, political pluralism, and the defence of human rights. Given current trends, religious groups in both North America and in traditionally Islamic countries can be encouraged to produce high-quality study documents on these themes.

5) Supporting "Change from Within" in the Islamic World

Fostering incremental "change from within" in the Islamic world is among the most vital tasks in the effort to create new possibilities in Islamic-Western relations. The United States, Canada, and other Western countries can best support positive internal developments in the Islamic world by promoting political participation within structures appropriate to the needs and culture of the people, and not by rigidly insisting on the transplantation of Western models or supporting authoritarian regimes. Despite their differing cultural and religious heritage, industrialized nations can indeed support Muslim efforts to develop authentic democratic forms, rediscover the life-affirming side of Islamic precepts, and develop structures that promise a cultural future (and not merely a technological future that negates essential values). By acknowledging the popular appeal

of this agenda, the West can "partner" in the reconstruction of an Islamic world that is nonviolent, stable, and productive.

Western policy toward the Islamic world should not target Islamic revivalism (which, like Reformation-era movements in the West, is experienced as a process of internal renewal) or Islamic fundamentalist reactions to perceived external threats. Instead, Western policy toward should call for multilateral efforts to redress some of the grievances used to justify terrorism – for example, the suffering of the Palestinians and Iraqis, the maldistribution of resources, and the absence of legitimate and genuinely participatory political authority. The exclusion of Muslim majorities from active participation in political life undermines political stability in the Middle East and the larger Islamic world, and threatens Western interests.

By shaping the conditions within which internal Muslim debates proceed, Western policies have a profound impact on the future of democracy in the Muslim world. Traditionally, Western policies have inadvertently helped to create conditions that are favorable to anti-liberal, reactive Muslim discourse, through policies that aggravated identity-related grievances and cemented alliances with repressive regimes. More recent policies – despite long-awaited and truthful acknowledgements of past complicity with anti-democratic forces – have been even more problematic, fostering the impression that "democracy" is a Trojan horse for Western subversion and political manipulation. This impression is quite damaging, as the only viable democratic projects in Muslim countries are those that take root in local soil, and that are nourished by the aspirations of citizens for a more hopeful future. Though these democratic projects may derive important ideas and insights from Western practices of democracy, their language and forms of expression will reflect Islamic culture and values, shorn of traditional as well as modern baggage that is no longer experienced as life-giving. By becoming sensitized to the "pulse" of public life in Muslim-majority countries, Western policymakers stand a much better chance of finding means to strategically nourish "change from within."

6) Strengthening Transnational, Intercultural Connectivity

The ultimate aim of most religiously and culturally competent peacebuilding initiatives is to foster movement towards reconciliation, albeit in incremental motions, through the construction of alliances and networks. In some cases peacebuilding networks may be largely monocultural and religiously homogeneous, while in other cases they may be intercultural and interreligious. A long-term goal of religious peacebuilding is to develop a constituency for peace; short-term goals include confidence-building, conflict prevention, and the resolution of local disputes that might otherwise escalate. Active, grassroots religious peacebuilding is itself an effort to prefigure the possibility of peace.

Even as polarizing use of religious symbolism can divide, so too can religious peacebuilding measures be used to symbolically affirm possibilities for coexistence.

With respect to macro-level Islamic-Western conflict, the existence of Muslims in the West and of Western influences in the Islamic world is perceived by many to be a threat to cultural and religious purity. Drawing attention to ways in which each cultural area has been enriched by the other, however, can provide a powerful counterpoint to fear-predicated narratives. Likewise, giving greater media prominence to cultural exchanges and coexistence projects could be helpful to efforts to promote alternative readings of intercultural relations, within which difference becomes a source of complementarity and not solely a security threat (Funk and Said, 2004).

In addition to its symbolic benefits, active dialogical engagement can do much to help Islamic and Western communities immunize themselves from the seduction of misappropriated symbols. Despite polarization caused by cultural symbolism, sustained and active Western-Islamic engagement can make it possible for each side to gain a more profound understanding of how it is reacting to the other without deep knowledge of meanings associated with cultural artifacts and political actions. Given the fact that Westerners still possess significantly more objective and existential security than most inhabitants of majority-Muslim countries, it is vitally important for representatives of the West to take the initiative in efforts to understand the "other." Western demonstrations of respect for Islamic symbolism (as opposed to reflexive discomfort) can help to ease Muslim perceptions of security threat. Calls to address the root causes of conflict without being distracted by manipulated images are also essential if pathology and anti-Western extremism are not to be mistaken for the essence of the second-largest world religion. Through their choices, Westerners have the power to respond to Islam in ways that either mobilize anti-Western sentiment or bolster the cause of moderation and mutual adjustment.   Peaceful management of current tensions surrounding Iran's nuclear program is essential in this regard.

Only through active engagement is it possible to gain an authentic "feel" for other cultures, and a taste for how authentic expressions of human religious sentiment differ from extremist manipulations. The familiarity that comes with dialogue obviates the need for defensiveness, and makes frank, self-critical discourse about bridging the gap between symbol and substance possible. As capacity to discern between mature religiosity and manipulative use of symbolism increases, insight into underlying sources of confrontation also grows, preventing entrapment in a conflict system that still possesses potential for higher levels of escalation. A process of de-escalation also becomes conceivable, through which mutual fears are recognized and each side begins to articulate ways in which it can assist the other through confidence-building measures that address basic human needs for dignity, security, and a hopeful future.

Visible partnerships across cultural, religious, and political divides are not a panacea, but they are an invaluable corrective for the sort of groupthink that led to damaging and counter-productive post-9/11 policies in the U.S., and their mere existence helps to undermine the "us versus them" logic that threatens to shred the fabric of contemporary societies, with their deep-rooted cultural, ethnic, and religious pluralism.

To advance such bridge-building efforts, Western governments should consider lending support to interreligious dialogue, multifaith, and coexistence initiatives – initiatives that provide positive roles for religion in public life, but that do not favor any one particular religious tradition or undermine pluralist democratic principles. It is not enough simply to condemn radical religion; people need positive examples that channel their faith towards hopeful alternative visions (given the popularity of the *Left Behind* series [books by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins] in some North American quarters, this applies to Christians as well as to Muslims). Such initiatives can open channels of communication that would not otherwise exist.

7) Finding New Roles for Universities

As policymakers consider ways of reviving public diplomacy and expediting "people-to-people" linkages, scholars and university administrators should consider ways in which research and education can be directed towards goals of interreligious and intercultural peace. Promoting university-to-university partnerships may prove useful in this regard, as might resource centers and centers of excellence in interfaith dialogue and public policy, or in interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding. Such programs would underscore the importance of intercultural communication and consensus building in a world that needs principled bases for action by members of diverse groups.

With their diverse and highly international student bodies, universities are living laboratories for intercultural dialogue and experiential learning. In addition to their functions in the domain of research and knowledge dissemination, universities have the potential to become resource centers for Islamic-Western peacebuilding efforts, as well as forums for convening policy dialogues and fostering skill development. Universities have a vital role to play in contemporary peace efforts, both as centers for domestic and transnational dialogue and as institutions that equip future professionals with the tools they need to engage interculturally and interreligiously as they pursue career paths in development, conflict resolution, public policy, and diplomacy.

There may be a valuable niche in peacebuilding and development policy for initiatives that link universities and other civil society institutions (NGOs, professional organizations in areas such as law and journalism), for research and intercultural engagement on issues pertaining to world order values (e.g., human security, peaceful conflict resolution, international justice, ecological sustainability, and human rights). Efforts to support the field of conflict resolution in regions such as the Middle East and South Asia through university-to-university partnerships may bear more fruit than those sponsored directly by government affiliated foundations.

Conclusion

Since September 2001, it has become commonplace for analysts to suggest that Islamic-Western relations have reached a point of crisis: a time of great danger, and yet also of opportunity. On the one hand, the momentum of current events appears to be leading towards increasing conflict, violence, and mutual incomprehension. Each action based on fear or hostility appears capable of eliciting a more severe act of retaliation, reinforcing a spiral of intensifying identity conflict. On the other hand, the threat of escalating confrontation is bringing forth new energy among those who seek to avert further regression to the worst prejudices of the past, by transforming attitudes formed in mutual ignorance and challenging practices that foster a heightened sense of grievance.

In our present context, the field of peace research has much to offer. Synthetic frameworks for analyzing conflict escalation and the dynamics of identity conflict can provide richer diagnoses than popular as well as academic formulations of the "clash of civilizations" thesis, and can offer guidance for interventions at multiple levels of identity conflict, from interpersonal to international. Although the sources of Islamic-Western conflict are not exclusively cultural or religious in nature, policies and projects informed by a sophisticated understanding of modern history and identity politics can play an important role in reducing polarization and generating new dynamics that favor peacemaking.

Without question, the resistance to new beginnings is considerable, both in Western and Islamic contexts. Threat perceptions have become acute, and protagonists of confrontation have accumulated considerable influence. No single policy initiative is likely to dissipate culturally charged political antagonisms that have been "in the making" for many years. Nonetheless, analysts should not refrain from attempting to reframe these tensions, or from formulating comprehensive strategies premised on conciliation and common standards rather than coercion. Many creative options are available – options that can make modest yet important contributions to the task of bridging cultural and religious solitudes. By addressing themselves to the driving forces within our contemporary predicament and formulating diverse strategies for mending the breach, scholars, public intellectuals, social activists, and reflective policymakers can make very real contributions to intercultural peace.

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