

COMBATING THE RELIGIONIZATION OF TERRORISM:

GOVERNMENTAL, INTER-GOVERNMENTAL, AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL PERSPECTIVES



JUNE 2022

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In view of the current Russian-Ukraine war as well as the escalating theological-inspired state and non-state terror activities globally, can inter-faith efforts dampen the passions of conflict and violence, thereby advancing the cause of peace with justice? An invited inter-disciplinary panel of practitioners and scholars discussed past lessons and future prospects on governmental, inter-governmental, and non-governmental levels.

Video of the full conference may be found here:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/2jlxifxjc50mrvj/2022-IUCTS-Combating-Religionization_May-25.mp4?dl=0

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<u>TABLE OF CONTENTS</u>		<u>PAGE</u>
I. PREFACE:	Professor Yonah Alexander Professor Don Wallace, Jr.	4
II. SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS:		6
III. CONTRIBUTORS' PRESENTATIONS:	Dr. Andrew Sorokowski Professor Mohammad Faghfoory Ambassador Javid Ahmad	9
IV. QUESTION AND ANSWER DISCUSSION		17
V. ABOUT THE EDITORS		24
VI. ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS		24

I. PREFACE

PROFESSOR YONAH ALEXANDER AND PROFESSOR DON WALLACE, JR.

EDITORS

The history of mankind from time immemorial to the modern era consists of overwhelming evidence that multiple dogmas of religious denominations have contained various manifestations of hatred and violence towards other perceived antagonistic believers. For instance, in the 1990s religious self-righteousness and within and among nations around the globe.¹

Suffice to mention, the exploitation of religious symbols and concepts to advance radical political agendas in places such as Northern Ireland, Nigeria, and India.

Furthermore, the informal and formal network among different sub-state and state-sponsors has created a structure to promote terrorism on national, regional, and global levels. This modern political framework has consisted of many forms: theological alliances; organizational assistance; propaganda and psychological warfare; financial help; recruitment support; intelligence systems; supply of weapons; training; coordinated operational missions; and sanctuary availability.

To be sure, other various disciplinary factors have also directly and indirectly contributed to seemingly endless cases of brutality and bloodshed. These elements include, inter alia, ethnic, racial, and tribal intolerance and violence; extreme nationalism and separatism; regional and inter-regional conflicts that defy easy solutions; intensification of criminal activity; population explosion, migration expansion, and rising poverty; the widening economic gap between North and South; environmental challenges; expanding health security concerns; and proliferation of modern weapon technologies.

And yet, as we have entered the 21st century, a promising contemporary trend of inter-faith relations has envisioned a renewed ecumenical trend, reflecting the minimization of religious confrontations and maximizing cross-theological cooperative efforts. For instance, a Millennium World Peace Summit held in New York formed an organizational structure of religious leaders to advise the United Nations on preventing and settling political disputes stemming from traditional religious animosities.

Alas, this and other similar hopeful efforts have been derailed by the tragedy of 9/11 and the continued rise of theological-inspired state and non-state terrorism, insurgencies, and wars during the past two decades.

In view of the current Russian invasion of Ukraine, a key question is whether any potential inter-faith initiatives can contribute, however modestly, in the search for peace with justice regionally and globally?

At this stage of deepening security uncertainties, two encouraging flickering lights in the “fog of war” should be noted for future analytical considerations. The first is a May 2022 gathering of world religious leaders in Saudi Arabia that uniquely demonstrated a major inter-faith effort.

The Muslim World League organized the first-ever “Forum on Common Values among Religious Followers” in Riyadh. Invited delegates from Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and other religious denominations participated in establishing and outlining fundamental agreements in advancing the cause of peace.

A communique issued by the Saudi organizers stated that, “the Forum’s collective objectives were to reach a universal consensus between global spiritual leaders, leverage their commonalities by placing them at the forefront of human values, effectively support efforts to advance tolerance and peace, and set rational intellectual-frameworks to immunize against the dangers of extremist ideology and behavior regardless of its source.”²

The communique also included areas of agreements for religious policy that were reached at the gathering, including the fundamental role of religion in society, the spiritual basis for basic human rights, and a rejection of an “inevitable civilizational clash” among religions. Notably, the Archbishop of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine Ivan Zoria also attended this event.

In this context, it is also noteworthy that several years earlier in February 2019 Pope Francis visited the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to promote inter-faith cooperation and goodwill among followers of the world's religions. What is even more remarkable is that the Pontiff joined the Grand Imam of al-Azhar in signing the Human Fraternity document for building the Abrahamic family house in Abu Dhabi.³

In view of the continuing Russian-Ukrainian hostilities, the International University Center for Terrorism Studies (IUCTS) in cooperation with the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies (PIPS) and the International Law Institute (ILI) organized a special Forum on "Combating the Religionization of Terrorism: Governmental, Inter-Governmental, and Non-Governmental Perspectives" that was held May 25, 2022. This virtual Forum began with opening remarks by Professor Don Wallace, Jr. (Chairman, International Law Institute) and was moderated by Professor Yonah Alexander (Director of the International Center for Terrorism Studies and Senior Fellow at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies). The following distinguished panel of scholars and practitioners gave presentations and subsequent discussion; Dr. Andrew Sorokowski (Attorney and Historian; Former Managing Editor of the scholarly journal "Harvard Ukrainian Studies"); Professor Mohammad Faghfoory (Director, Graduate Program in Islamic Studies, The George Washington University); Ambassador (Ret.) Javid Ahmad (Nonresident senior fellow with the Atlantic Council's South Asia Center; Formerly Afghanistan's Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The editors acknowledge the contributors' outstanding intellectual remarks with the hope that their insights will stimulate further research.

Professor Alexander wishes to express his deep appreciation for the decades-long academic and professional partnerships with PIPS and the ILI. He is most grateful to PIPS's Dr. Jennifer Buss (CEO), General Al Gray (USMC (Ret.), Chairman of the Board), and Gail Clifford (VP for Financial Management & CFO) for their inspiration and support. Likewise, he values the guidance and assistance of the ILI's Professor Don Wallace, Jr. (Chairman), Robert Sargin (Executive Director), Roan Daily (Intern from University of Illinois, Champaign).

Finally, the internship program of the IUCTS, that is coordinated by Kevin Harrington, has provided research and administrative support for this publication. The IUCTS interns include: Adrik Bagdasarian (James Madison University), Steven Bergin (Mercyhurst University), Benjamin Bermann (University of Chicago), William Brooks (George Washington University), Louisa Burch (American University), Matthew Dahan (the American University), Riley Graham (William & Mary), Joshua Isaiah Horton (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Harrison Kopitsch (American University), Elizabeth Miller (George Washington University), Avgustina Peycheva (Moscow State Institute of International Relations, PhD), Evan Rohe (University of Kent), Evan Talit (George Washington University).

END NOTES:

¹ Research Notes: The published and unpublished interdisciplinary knowledge-base on the role of religion in world affairs is infinite. For a birds-eye view into a modest institutional and personal academic participation related to this ongoing effort, please see the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies International Center for Terrorism Studies website here: [Link](#), International Law Institute website here: [Link](#), and Yonah Alexander's Terrorism Collection housed at the Stanford University Hoover Institution Archives here: [Link](#).

² Nerozzi, T. H. J. (2022, May 12). "Muslim Scholars, Bishops, Rabbis and Hindu Leaders Meet in Saudi Arabian Religious Conference." Fox News.

³ Sherwood, H. (2019, February 4). "Pope and Grand Imam Sign Historic Pledge of Fraternity in UAE." The Guardian.

II. SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS [DRAWN FROM THE FORUM'S PARTICIPANTS]

1. Violence is a threat found in multifarious places and the loss of childrens' lives at the recent school shooting in Texas is a shocking reminder of this.
2. The country must do something about guns, even if only symbolically, because the morale is incredibly demoralizing to so many people.
3. Religious denominations certainly have different views of religious function.
4. In the wake of the shooting at Uvalde elementary school, many world leaders and politicians are asking "Where is God?" and religious leaders such as Pope Francis have expressed their condolences.
5. In the context of the ongoing situation in Ukraine and the distortion of the Holocaust, is the slogan "Never Again" becoming useless?
6. Interfaith events and dialogues are happening presently around the world in Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia. Are these useful activities? Or useless?
7. Today, in the Russo-Ukrainian war, Moscow has sought to distort religion in the historical, propagandistic, and political sense to legitimize its invasion of Ukraine.
8. In the historical sense, Moscow asserts that its claim over the legitimacy of the ancient medieval kingdom of Kyivan Rus' supersedes the claims made by Ukraine and Belarus.
9. In the propagandistic sense, Moscow has sought to use religion to legitimize its invasion by claiming that Russia is fighting a "holy war" against Western, democratic norms in Ukraine whose political leadership are Nazis.
10. In the political sense, due to Russian Orthodoxy's subservience to the Russian state, the church justifies and supports the war in Ukraine.
11. In contrast to the diverse religious society of Ukraine, Russia continues to persecute minority groups of Christians and Muslims in Russia and Russian-occupied lands.
12. The main divide in Ukraine's Christian history is in the divide during the 16th century between adherents to the Roman Catholic faith and non-adherents.
13. In 2014, the broader religious society in Ukraine united in the Revolution of Dignity.
14. A religiously pluralistic society is arguably more durable and robust due to its reliability and adaptability.
15. For inter-religious dialogue to end war, religious leaders must be committed to peace, there must be exclusive religious representation, and leaders must be capable of shaping events.
16. Within Russia, the current outlook is not optimistic regarding the role of Russian Orthodoxy in ending the war in Ukraine. However, by supporting religious groups and anti-war organizations in Russia, the international community could help bring about some form of peace.
17. "Religionization of Terrorism" and "Terrorism of Religion" are two processes that cannot be separated from one another, given that both inevitably lead to one another. They are indeed two sides of the same coin.
18. Regarding Islam, the ideologization of religion means that Islam is degraded to a political ideology, which can then be used to justify and legitimize any type of action.
19. The origin of the ideologization of Islam begins with theologian Ibn Taymiyyah.
20. Within the last hundred years, there has been a significant change in the composition of the religious and clerical communities, going from educated theologians and scholars to lower-level clergy and lay intellectuals with very little religious knowledge.
21. Most terrorist activities in the 1960s and 70s were carried out by left-leaning "vanguard groups," which focused on secular objectives, but beginning in the late 70s, both Sunni and Shia clergy radicalized, leading to religious terrorism being used as violent strategies to appeal to the masses.

22. The religionization of terrorism has led to the disintegration of authority, legitimacy, and the people's faith, leading many people in the Muslim world to distance themselves from what has been deemed as a politically corrupt, violent, and oppressive movement in the name of religion.
23. Interfaith efforts can theoretically dampen passion for conflict due to Qur'anic evidence for religious tolerance; however, this depends on who it takes place with.
24. Interfaith efforts won't work on some people, as there are many extremists who believe they have the absolute truth and focus only on jurisprudence without context, leading to the rise of unimaginable violence.
25. The impact of interfaith efforts is somewhat unknown due to the variety of people involved in the dialogue.
26. It is more important to focus on dialogue within each religion first, and then bring in outside forces that directly impact the religionization of terrorism.
27. Currently, there is no shared regional definition of terrorism or terrorist acts, as well as what role religion plays in it.
28. Beyond Pakistan and Afghanistan, some countries in the broader region have managed to "effectively commercialize" jihadi militancy.
29. The ability of many Jihadist groups to remain in the public eye and their growing ability to influence local actions is a 'wild card' that has stunted interfaith dialogue.
30. Several countries in the South Asian region appear to be going through their Arab Spring moment, where the present democratic forces believe that the US has abandoned them.
31. In the region, some states prefer partnerships with Islamists like the Taliban because they've been able to remain militarily and politically relevant for so long, which provides longer term predictability for future partnerships.
32. There is a growing sentiment in Afghanistan, promoted by the Taliban, which paints all non-Taliban leaders and those associated with the West as corrupt and as not a part of the new vision for Afghanistan.
33. The Taliban believe Afghan society is not sufficiently Islamic and seeks to re-Islamize the Afghan people to make Afghanistan "great again" from their ideological perspective.
34. Leadership in the Taliban are trying to establish and legitimize themselves as the true Islamic leaders and modern-day reformists.
35. The Taliban is seeking to intertwine Afghan nationalism with their religious ideology to create a religious nationalism, a toxic blend which transcends the borders of Afghanistan.
36. There is a conglomerate of foreign jihadists and unaffiliated fighters who romanticize the Taliban's takeover and seek to emulate the Taliban's victory as a template for their own jihadi activities.
37. Atrocities repeat themselves; it is important to be educated on the history of violent conflict.
38. Besides using WWII nationalism as propaganda, the Russians began to dehumanize the Ukrainian people to prepare for the invasion. This set the groundwork for atrocities committed against Ukrainian civilians in Bucha and Mariupol.
39. By understanding these manipulation tactics and educating people on their use, it is possible to sway minds away from it.
40. Today, countries can modernize without adopting Western norms such as secularism.
41. Governments can exploit interfaith dialogue for private interests and political purposes.
42. Governments can claim to understand the dialogue of different religions but fail to respect basic minimum rights in their own territories, especially in relation to diverse opinions and religious minorities.

43. Interfaith dialogues should take place in a neutral environment where there is a vested interest in implementing practical political steps.
44. The most dangerous component of the religionization of terrorism is when terrorist organizations realize that terrorism pays and is rewarded.
45. The Terrorist groups are skilled in destroying an existing order; people are very good at organizing, going against the government to remove the government, and carrying on the revolution.
46. Most terrorist groups do not have the skill to transform themselves from terroristic organizations into efficient governments.
47. Regional terror does not take place in a vacuum; there are profound social, economic, and cultural backgrounds that affect the conflict.
48. Interfaith dialogue groups best appeal to the general public when addressing legitimate grievances in their countries.
49. Many people in the Islamic countries are fascinated with everything that goes on in the West and attempt to copy and mimic it; however, some of these things are not copyable in the context of Islamic civilization.
50. Muslim intellectuals living in the West are crucial for establishing a dynamic communication between the Islamic world and elsewhere.
51. While modernization is seemingly inevitable, modernity does not necessarily have to mean secularization.
52. U.S. engagement with the clerical class in Afghanistan and the broader region has been limited and mostly non-existent, which presents a challenge if there is going to be a sustained, effective interfaith dialogue.
53. Western countries should diversify and expand their approach to include learning from religious clerics like those in the Taliban to gain a greater understanding of their thought processes, internal deliberations, policy formulations, decision making, and other critical elements.
54. There is a need for a strong counter-narrative, which could be used to unite the broader moderate and secular society and counter the Taliban and others' regional Islamists' vision.
55. The militant version of Islam that the Taliban and their ideological siblings are promoting – which is uncompromising, actionable, and provides a sense of belonging – is likely going to become more appealing among populations across Central and Southeast Asia.
56. There needs to be a “Lutheran-esque” reformation of Islam that is indigenous and emerges from within Islamic societies and which is compatible with moderation and modernization.
57. One word that can sum up the occurring internationally is the term, “modernization.” Ukraine is modernizing; the Russian Federation is slowing down in its modernization; the Middle East is confused about its modernization and Afghanistan is resisting it due to the Taliban rule.
58. A reform of Islam within the youth can only be found from within. It must be expressed to be understood and religious opinion should be shared, but all while being respectful, since freedom of speech is not freedom to insult, discriminate against or express opinion that can be misread as hate speech.
59. The West has not lived up to expectations on the topic of religious freedom and the control over the freedom of speech.
60. Moving forward in the spirit of interfaith relations in advancing the cause of peace with justice, we reflect on the serenity prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr, a U.S. theologian, “God grant us the serenity to accept the things that I cannot change – courage to change the things I can – and wisdom to know the difference.”

III. CONTRIBUTORS' PRESENTATIONS

This section of the Report consists of presentations made by the contributors at the Special Forum: "Combating the Religionization of Terrorism: Governmental, Inter-Governmental, and Non-Governmental Perspectives" that was held on May 25th, 2022 via Zoom conferencing. Some updates and revisions were made by the invited participants.

DR. ANDREW SOROKOWSKI

Attorney and Historian; Former Managing Editor of the scholarly journal "Harvard Ukrainian Studies"

I would like to briefly discuss three types of abuse of religion in the current Russo-Ukrainian war. I will then contrast them with one key aspect of religion in Ukraine. Finally, I would like to offer my view on inter-religious dialogue as a way to end the war.

The first type of abuse of religion is historical. Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia all claim descent from the medieval state known as Kyivan Rus', as do their churches. But today, Russia asserts that only its claim is valid. Its spokesmen deny not only the legitimacy of the Ukrainian state, but the very existence of the Ukrainian people. Moreover, they deny the legitimacy of Ukraine's independent Orthodox Church, whose origins date to the establishment of the Kyivan Metropolitanate in the eleventh century.

The second type of abuse is propagandistic. Russian politicians claim that they are fighting a defensive war against NATO and the US, which allegedly are using Ukraine as a puppet governed by Nazis (its Jewish president being, presumably, the chief Nazi). Russian churchmen justify this as a "holy war" against Western immorality, claiming, for instance, that Ukraine is being forced to hold "gay parades." (As a democratic state with freedom of speech, press, and assembly, Ukraine freely permits all kinds of parades, from gay pride to World War II Red Army veterans). Thus, in Russia religion is enlisted in state propaganda campaigns that are as incoherent as they are false.

The third type of abuse of religion is political. For centuries, the Russian Orthodox Church has been a handmaiden of the state - first of Muscovy, then the Russian Empire, then the Soviet Union and now the Russian Federation. In the eighteenth century, Peter the Great abolished the Moscow Patriarchate and subjected the Russian church to the imperial state. In the twentieth century, Joseph Stalin, having nearly destroyed the Russian Orthodox Church, revived it as an instrument of Russification at home and Soviet foreign policy abroad. Today, Patriarch Kirill and other leading churchmen continue to publicly support an unprovoked and unjustified war in which Orthodox Christians slaughter Orthodox Christians for no coherent reason. The Moscow Patriarchate has evidently lost its ability to "speak truth to power." It has scandalized and divided the Orthodox Christian world. To their credit, a number of Russian Orthodox priests have spoken out against the war, and the Moscow Patriarchate's Metropolitan in Ukraine, Onufriy, and some of his bishops have done likewise.

Meanwhile, Russia continues to persecute Christian and Muslim minorities on its own territory and in the occupied Crimea and Donbas.

Ukraine's religious tradition is different. It is highly diverse. This is not only because of governmental policies. It is a result of Ukraine's complex history. It is true that this history has involved inter-religious conflict and violence. We naturally remember such events. But we overlook the centuries of peaceful co-existence, comity, and cooperation.

Ukraine's predecessor state of Rus' was Christianized at Kyiv in the tenth century. But well before this, Jewish and Muslim, as well as Christian communities, appeared on what came to be known as the Ukrainian lands. Later, Muslim Tatars lived in the Crimea for nearly five centuries before the Soviet regime deported them during World War II. Welcomed back by independent Ukraine after 1991, they have now again suffered exile and persecution under renewed Russian rule. Jewish communities inhabited Ukraine for over a millennium before the Holocaust, producing eminent religious, cultural, and political leaders. They have revived, and continue to cultivate, their traditions.

Ukraine's Orthodox Christians were divided from the sixteenth century between those who accepted and those who rejected union with the Roman Catholic Church. Today, both the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church flourish. Roman (Latin-Rite) Catholics have been a small but influential presence for over six centuries. Various Protestant and Evangelical communities were active in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Ukraine and remain so in the twenty-first. Despite the fact that some of its members have supported Russia's war, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate is free to fulfill its religious mission - though many parishes and parishioners have transferred to the independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

In independent Ukraine, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim groups cooperate in the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. Representatives of all these faiths supported the Maidan, or "Revolution of Dignity," in 2014 and Ukraine's defense against Russian aggression that began in that year. Some would argue that a religiously monolithic society is more durable than a diverse one. But a monolithic society can also be brittle. Given tolerance and cooperation, a religiously pluralistic society is arguably more resilient. Its variety and flexibility can better absorb the shocks and strains of modernity, as well as the adversity of war. This bodes well for Ukraine's resistance to the Russian invasion - and for its success as a modern society nourished by faith.

Can inter-religious dialogue help end the war in Ukraine? I believe there are three conditions for success. First, the parties must be committed to peace. Second, they must represent exclusively religious, not political, entities. Third, they must be capable of substantially influencing the course of events. I do not believe that the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate meets these criteria. Therefore, I cannot be optimistic about dialogue with it.

I do believe, however, that by supporting religious groups and individuals in Russia that oppose the war, the international community could help bring about peace with justice and freedom.

PROFESSOR MOHAMMAD FAGHFOORY

Director, Graduate Program in Islamic Studies, The George Washington University

Thank you very much, and thank you for your kind invitation. I am going to go directly to the topic of our discussion—that is— the *Religionization of Terrorism*—which in my view is the other side of the coin of terrorization of religion. These two processes go hand in hand because one leads definitely to the other.

Since my discussion is more centered on the Islamic world in particular, I should mention that *religionization of terrorism* did not appear overnight as it is the natural outcome of certain fundamental changes in attitude toward religion in general and therefore it is important to take its historical background and context into account.

I believe that the origin of this occurrence that we call the *religionization of terrorism* itself is a consequence of something else that emerged early on sometime in the middle of 13th century in Islamic history, the process that I call the beginning of the process of *ideologization of religion*, that is to say, reducing Islam to the low level of a political ideology and using it for political purposes. Once religion becomes a political ideology, it can justify and legitimize any type of action, behavior, or policy including terroristic activities without any concern for ethics, human rights, national interest, religious orthodoxy and the like. All these are carried out in the name of religion without any consideration to the clear injunctions of the faith, even though many organizations involved in the process may pay lip service to all these values. Suicide bombing and beheading of innocent individuals in the hands of groups like ISIS and ISIL are done with the chanting of Allah-u-Akbar.

The origin of this *ideologization of religion* in the Islamic world goes back to 13th century when a prominent theologian, Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328) presented the most exclusivist interpretation of Islamic tradition by denying the legitimacy of interpretation of not only other traditions but also even within Islam, to the extent that he called the Sufis, the Shi'ites and even followers of Sunni schools of law as "*infidels*" and rejected all except the Hanbali school that he followed. This was the foundation step as in the process of the *ideologization of Islam* as a political tool, a school that today is known as the Fundamentalist school.

The 7th/13 century—the era of Ibn Taymiyyah—marked the beginning of the decline of Islamic political power, but Islamic civilization was still intellectually very rich and vibrant and therefore Ibn Taymiyyah's writing did not receive much attention until much later. Interestingly, sometime from the last quarter of the 19th century but mostly in the 20th century Ibn Taymiyyah was reborn and received attention among certain groups revivalist groups who perhaps were frustrated with the prevailing political conditions and especially with the presence of colonial powers in countries like Egypt and Syria. A number of scholars-activist and “reformer” such as Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792), Sayyid Jamal al-Din Asadabadi known as Afghani (1838-1897), Rashid Rida (1865-1935), Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949), and Sayyid Qutb in Egypt, and Shaykh Fazullah Noori and Navvab Safavi (1924-1956) in Iran appeared whose ideas culminated in the Islamic political movements like *Salafism* and organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Muslimin*) in Egypt, and the devotees of Islam (*Fidayan Islam*) in Iran. Thus, whereas Islamic politics in previous centuries was the domain of the political elite, these developments marked the birth of mass politics and Islamist movement.

The Muslim Brotherhood, even though it started as a network of co-ops, did not really claim any desire for political power initially but later on started driving to gain political power in Egypt. Also in Iran, the *Fidayan Islam* that proclaimed their objective to establish an Islamic government used terroristic activities as a means of gaining political power. In its short-lived history, members of the *Fidayan* assassinated a couple prime ministers, a court minister, a very prominent historian and also reportedly carried out an assassination attempt on the life of the Shah.

In the time closer to our time, two people especially were very important in this process. One was of course Ayatollah Khomeini (1902-1989). He was a prominent theologian who expressed opposition to the Shah and eventually led the Islamic revolution of 1978-1979 and established a theocratic government in Iran. His political views, however, took shape in the context of Shi'a doctrine of *Imamate* and advocated the establishment of a Shi'a state hoping to pave the way for the return of the 12th Imam who is believed to be in occultation since 941. The other example is Dr. Ali Shari'ati (1933-1977), a modern and French educated sociologist who openly spoke of Islam as a *political ideology*. In the context of Islamic movement in Iran however, both advocated mass politics but neither promoted terroristic activities at least initially.

Along with these developments certain changes took place within the composition of the religious and clerical communities both in the Sunni and the Shi'a world. Until the mid-1920s, there were a handful of highly respected and widely recognized religious scholars (*'ulama*) both in the Sunni and the Shiite world who attracted attention and their words were the religious law of their homeland. Just before WWII, gradual transformation began in the composition of the religious community from highly educated and accomplished scholars to less educated and unknown preachers mostly drawn from the lower echelons of their communities. Along with this process there also appeared a number of non-clerical Islamist activists who were not from among theologians and jurists but from lay intellectual, graduates of engineering and science schools. It is important to remember that Usamah Bin Laden was a civil engineer and that 13 of the terrorists who were involved in the destruction of the twin towers in New York in 2001 were graduates of schools of engineering. These changes in fact accelerated the radicalization of the lower echelons of the clerical community as well. While secular activists voiced legitimate concerns and grievances of the people in their societies, opposed of authoritarian governments and imperialism and advocated democratic governments, the new organizations complained about being marginalized, frustrated by economic injustice, penetration by Western cultural norms and practices, the weakening of the influence of religion, they advocated the establishment of an Islamic government as they envisioned hoping that such a state would be able to establish the rule of God on earth. In their views democracy and freedom became pejorative terms.

These developments resulted in the change of definition and nature of terrorism. In the 1960s and 1970s most terroristic activities were carried on by the so called “vanguard groups,” most of the time on the model of Algeria, Cuba or Vietnam and idolized Jamilah Bu Pasha, Che Guevara, and Ho Chi Minh. They were led mostly by disillusioned intellectuals leaning towards the left and used terroristic activities as tactics in order to send messages to the establishment and also attract the attention and support of the people. These were non-state actors whose objectives were mostly secular: libertarian, democratic institutions and governments, economic justice, gender equality, rule of law, equality of all followers of all religions, and an end to colonial domination.

But sometime in the 1970s with the radicalization of religious forces and the clergy both in the Shia and Sunni worlds, we see this situation began to change. With the changing composition of religious community leaders and activists, the nature of terroristic organizations and their activities also begin to change from single sporadic and selected acts of terrorism to new patterns.

In the new pattern, terrorist activities were transformed from tactic to strategy and from single and sporadic acts to mass based and very violent activities appealing to the religious belief of the masses. Religion became the channel through which economic grievances and political demands began to be expressed. The new pattern spread quickly especially after the success of religious forces in the Iranian revolution of 1978. The objective of these new groups was not bringing democracy or democratic institutions but to establish what they call the “true Islamic government.” Their main slogan was “O Muslims of the world unite to establish God’s government on the earth!” Their appeal was addressed and found much support among a wider population than the terroristic groups of the 1960s and 1970s. No longer did these groups talk about the nation, the people, the fatherland, or anything else to sacrifice one’s life for, but spoke of the *umma* and the Islamic government as they envisioned. Killing and violence in the name of God became the order of the day as demonstrated by atrocities committed by the Taliban in Afghanistan, ISIS and ISIL in Syria and Iraq, and Boko Haram in Africa. This is the process that can be rightly called *the religionization of terrorism*, the end result of which has been the *terrorization of religion*. It is not surprising that many people including high government officials in many Muslim majority countries—from Pakistan to North Africa and everywhere in between openly complain about the public especially the youth turning their back to religion, a manifestation of which is very low attendance in the mosques. Many authorities complain that the mosques have been deserted.

Many leading religious figures both in the Sunni and Shiá world have often opposed politicization of religion. They maintain that the status of religion is far too exalted to and the function of religious scholars far too noble to get involved in the political establishment. They argue that when religion and politics mix together they easily and quickly corrupt each other. They also acknowledge that the *religionization of terrorism* has resulted in the *terrorization of religion* itself. These conflicting attitudes are the main source of tension in the Islamic world today, a situation that naturally results in instability, unrest, and uncertainty, a situation that in turn leads to further expansion of terrorism and the growth of terrorist groups.

AMBASSADOR JAVID AHMAD

Nonresident senior fellow with the Atlantic Council’s South Asia Center; Formerly Afghanistan’s Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates

Thank you very much, Professor Alexander. Thanks to Professor Wallace and to the Potomac Institute, of course, for having me. It’s great to be here. Unfortunately, I do not have a PowerPoint presentation, so I’ll speak from my notes. Our two esteemed professors spoke very compellingly about the broader historical or structural aspects about the religionization of terrorism or the terrorization of religion. For my part, I will try to speak a little bit about how this phenomenon or epiphenomenon is seen from the perspective of a practitioner. I’ll make a few observations about the broader militant and terrorism landscape, as well as the ecosystem of terrorism and its relationship with the ideology or belief- or religion-driven actions. And then, I’ll say a few words about the shifting nature of terrorism challenge in the broader context of “America in retreat” as, unfortunately, witnessed today in a post-American Afghanistan, and how that has perhaps strengthened the ideology-inspired state and non-state terror activities.

First, let me start by saying that I come from a region, a South Asian region, where the fundamental challenge with respect to terrorism and the proliferation of these jihadist enterprises and jihadist franchises remains to be definitional. And why I say this to be a definitional issue as someone who comes from a country – Afghanistan – where terror groups today are in the country’s leadership and hold senior roles in the country’s governing ranks. So, based on our own decades-long struggle and experience with not just this group but the broader problem they represent, I will submit to you that the region never quite managed to reach a consensus on a common definition of what terrorism looks like and how and what part religion plays in it. Unfortunately, we couldn’t manage to reach that consensus with the regional neighbors. We also could not manage that with the non-regional forces. Now, we have dealt with contiguous neighbors – i.e., from Iran to Pakistan, both of whom today are arguably the region’s leading sponsors of terrorism. Through their sprawling network of militant groups and their expendable forces – which has served them quite well, to be frank. But it’s also

hurting them badly now. Now the Pakistani establishment that we dealt with, which treated Afghanistan, for example, as a half state, mastered the use of militancy and jihadi terrorism as a cheaper, expendable force, and it provided them with plausible deniability. They believed in, and imposed upon us, that the Pakistani enemy should be Afghanistan's enemy, but not the other way around. Now, even though Pakistan and their establishment today realize that - and so does Iran and other non-regional forces -- that, at the end of the day, you cannot find a better Muslim than an Afghan. They cleverly managed to mainstream extremist groups, militant groups, and extremist religious parties. And, they effectively commercialized this jihadi militancy to fight for their own very perverse version of what I would call "commercial Islam." So, if a state or a non-state actor doesn't recognize the fact that what they're doing is in fact terrorism or terrorism-like, then how could you change their internal political or military calculus towards you? Toward you as a state, toward you as a government, toward you as a people? For us, it was a Herculean task, but it's a task that remains largely unmitigated and under-examined as well. Now, the sad part is that most of the region and non-regional countries have realized that as patrons of jihadists terrorism, it's not easy to find common ground with such groups that, at the end, are driven and motivated by ideology -- from transnational groups like al Qaeda or ISIS and their local offshoots in the region to more regional or more indigenous groups like the Taliban themselves, as was discussed by Professor Faghfoory.

And so, it has created a different problem, and today that problem is that there isn't much consensus or a shared political or military, or economic understanding for that matter among the regional and non-regional forces on the way forward. And even if, by some miracle, such a shared regional understanding does develop, the "undefined enemy" still gets a vote, even though all sides know all too well that this is an enemy who doesn't really believe in a vote, per se. So, this is a fundamental challenge for the way forward, and I think because the belief system through which these jihadist groups operate - and most importantly, stay relevant to the scene - is a fundamental wild card in its own right that remains largely underexamined. So, on the one hand, we, for example, from our own ivory towers here, could develop a shared practical, realistic formula to manage this changing threat. But then you have these vastly different ideological groups on the ground who could say, look, we don't agree with your formula, so we don't buy it, and then everything comes back to square one. So, from my vantage point as I see it, we're standing on the opposite sides of the river. Not all of these ideological groups believe in a dialogue, and some of those indigenous groups that I spoke of that have shown that willingness or openness to engage in dialogue, still believe that talks or negotiations go much slower compared to the language of a gun, which works. At the same time, they have also not socialized peace or tolerance or coexistence, religious or otherwise, among their own ranks. So, I find this to be the most significant challenge in that we're not dealing with a force of moderation, or a force of modernization, so finding a secret sauce to reach some kind of a compromise, which won't be perfect for either side, should be a job one for all of us to do.

My second point is that I think several countries in South Asia are going through their own Arab Spring moment, as we have seen in recent months and weeks. I think some of the democratic forces in the region believe that the United States is abandoning them and is aligning with these Islamist forces, a misperception that remains largely unmitigated. And I think the Afghan and Pakistani cases, as referred to in passing, are good and prime examples. I think there are also some democratic countries in the region who are kind of straddling between keeping up with their democratic norms but are also becoming increasingly ideological and religious, perhaps in response to the local demands. Beyond the region, we are seeing a similar feeling among our Arab Gulf partners. I believe you could say this, for example, about Saudi Arabians, the UAE, Egypt, and others who I think believe that the United States was embracing ideologues, like in Iran, through a renewed JCPOA at the expense of Gulf security. Consequently, in many ways, the broader region continues to live in the shadow of the Cold War. They're thinking west, but they're acting East. And this kind of goes on from Afghanistan, Pakistan, all the way through the Arab and non-Arab Gulf states. It's an important issue that remains to be tackled.

The other point is that I think the region makes a very clear distinction between who their preferred partners are and who their necessary partners are. I think what's troubling is that there is a growing number of countries who want longer-term predictability in their political, military, even economic and commercial relationships and partnerships. These countries believe that Islamists can provide that longer-term predictability in partnerships. It's mainly because it is these Islamists, (jihadists or otherwise), who have long maintained their relevance-politically, militarily, and otherwise; who are uncompromising in their belief systems, whose fundamental cause of fighting for God, as was discussed earlier, is unimpeachable and in many ways, they are also quite ruthless in defense of those principles. It's also these Islamists that weather all kinds of military and political pressures,

who continue to command greater legitimacy and control at the local level, and who I think, arguably, also have a greater staying power, a tactical staying power. So, if I am a state or non-state actor, as a preferred or necessary partner, these Islamists are now seen as an attractive alternative to the status quo.

Now, the best example is the Taliban. I can tell you that since their founding in September 1994, the Taliban – as a group, as a unit, however desperate – have impressively maintained the ideological promise they made about 28 years ago, which was that they wanted to take over the country and the political system of that country and then fundamentally remold it to the version that they desire. And I think the broader contours of the Taliban's promise at that time, the Taliban's ideological promise at that time, were very simple in which they said that look, we are devout Muslims who fight the corrupt leaders. And those corrupt leaders, whether they are the Afghan Communists or the former Communists, or whether they're the Afghan jihadi leaders that fought against the Soviets, or whether you are an educated technocrat who came from the United States or North America or Europe, and they treated and painted everyone with the same brush. They also believed in and had an alternative vision for a new Afghanistan. And I think the Taliban's brilliance has been, just like any other militant group in that region and beyond now, is that they have refused to veer off their ideological promise and weathered, as I said, all kinds of pressures. They also avoided any kind of ideological compromise on their basic principles. So, the remarkable consistency of this kind in ensuring their ideological promise or objectives really distinguishes them from all other Afghan or regional political and Islamic groups. And I think that's precisely why a lot of groups, militant jihadist groups, who may not have their own territory at the moment in that region or in any specific country, are increasingly romanticizing the Taliban's victory narrative-telling each other that 'If they [the Taliban] can do it, we can do it as well.' The Taliban's founder understood very well that unless this basic promise was preserved, the Taliban, as a unit, would effectively become irrelevant, and that is where they brought in the indispensable role that religion plays to force a fundamental political change in that country. They increasingly became, at first, more Islamist from within, and now they're becoming increasingly pan-Islamist. I think in many ways, as we've seen it in recent weeks and months, is that they have become internally repressive, but externally they're becoming more aggressive. And they are unapologetic in their application of their ideology, principally because they believed that "God has entrusted them with that system, with that government, and that the people have sacrificed for their narrative, so they are accountable to God, not the people." How do you argue with that? That God has entrusted them with that system, with that government and whatever you call it, and that people have sacrificed for this narrative. So, they are accountable to God, not to the people. Now, how do you argue with that? Most importantly, the question is: A lot of the other groups are getting their own inspiration from some of the things that the Taliban are doing, so how do you deal with it?

Locally, what the Taliban are doing is putting together the skeleton of their new ideological religion-driven state. They're engaging in three closely intertwined ideological initiatives in order to cement and solidify their rule. They are, first of all, fleshing out their state and religious ideology – the "Talibanism," for example, which is a hybrid code that informs the Taliban's worldview and through which they see the Afghan and the Muslim society in the broader region to be as a competition between godliness and worldliness. The Taliban believe that the Afghan society is not sufficiently Islamic or that they're not Muslim enough, so they're using this hybrid Talibanism to re-Islamize them in order to make Afghanistan, and Afghans in general, great again.

The second thing that they're doing is that these very rulers are burnishing their originalist religious credentials. Through their originalist and Textualist religious credentials, they are essentially revalidating themselves as the vanguard for true Islamic leadership of Afghanistan – a true Islamic leadership that Afghanistan, in their view, never really had. In this respect, what they're doing is that they are following and pursuing the very approaches of other Islamic revivalists, like Sayyid Qutb, for example, which was a pioneer behind introducing violent political jihadism, or Egypt's Hassan al-Banna, the founder of Muslim Brotherhood, or what Maududi did, for example, who founded Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan and effectively introduced this notion of vanguardism to Islam. This is how they're burnishing their religious credentials to essentially revalidate themselves to be the pioneer or vanguard for true Islamic leadership.

And the third thing they're doing, which is very, very important, is channeling Afghan nationalism and Afghan patriotism – at times quite fake – into religious nationalism. They're doing this by reengineering the principles of Afghan nationalism or local nationalism to effectively comport with Islamic nationalism because they very much believe that Afghan nationalism, based on history, once combined with this "Islamic nationalism" with a majority of Afghans being Muslim it's going to be a deadly combo. So, for the Taliban and all the militant groups across the board, the Taliban's ideological siblings that transcend beyond the Afghan borders, this is a twilight

struggle. This war or this conflict, or this competition that they engaged in, is increasingly civilizational. If you're a Talib right now, which they call themselves a "mujahid", [a mujahid] has effectively become its own ethnic group, its own ethnicity. It's a language; you're either a Talib or not. And if you're not, then it's an issue in today's Afghanistan. So being a mujahid is also a qualification, a criterion for all kinds of privileges, jobs, employment, and whatnot. So, I think the biggest trick that these militant jihadist groups are playing right now is to effectively appeal to the mercurial street and what they're doing is that they want to invoke the fake nationalism and patriotism and effectively weaponize it. And in many ways, if you are not playing along, they will strip off you that "Afghan-ness" or the "Pakistani-ness" or whatever you call it, any kind with a "-ness" throwaway, particularly if you disagree. I think each of these initiatives that the Taliban has engaged in right – e.g., the hybrid ideology, the validation of themselves as a vanguard of true Islamic leadership, and the merging of local nationalism with Islamic nationalism – has effectively served as force multipliers.

This brings me to my third point - my last point: how is this changing the ecosystem of terrorism in that region? I think there is an emerging very dangerous blend of shifting terrorism trends, much of which is, unfortunately, taking place in the backdrop of America's exit from Afghanistan. We were seeing a wide variety of jihadist groups to have come together to consult, to reorganize, and to decide on their future mission spaces. And we're also seeing different variants of non-Afghan jihadist groups, who are patiently reorganizing to perhaps tactically reorient themselves to other theaters, but with one foot in Afghanistan for obvious reasons because of their very close ideological and symbiotic relationship with the Taliban or elements within the Taliban. There are now compartmented cells of all kinds of good, bad, old, new groups and armed fighters, unaffiliated fighters, fundraisers, propaganda folks, people who do recruitment, and they effectively serve as a triangle of sorts that feeds off one another. And I think in this space what's missing from public debates is a discussion on unaffiliated fighters. So, if you're not a Talib, or if you're not a Pakistani Talib, you're not al-Qaeda or ISIS or a Central Asian group like IMU or ETIM, then you got to ask where these fighters belong. There are thousands of them. Who are these unaffiliated [fighters]? And, they have increasingly used their frequent flyer miles to travel to Afghanistan. They're pouring into that country in droves. And these are the very people who are best for establishing tactical terror partnerships. Because these people are not in any kind of monogamous relationship with the Taliban, this is something that we really need to pay closer attention to. And of course, on top of this, there's a web of foreign jihadists who romanticize the Taliban's victory, and that very much includes al Qaeda. They're still there; they're keeping a low profile, some of them are Central Asian militants. Other Central Asian militants have started to become a bit more anxious and concerned about what the Taliban will do, mainly because of their own counterterrorism commitments that they made with respect to some of those groups in the U.S.-Taliban Doha agreement. They're trying to see if they could form some of those tactical terror partnerships with other groups in order to remain relevant and continue with their cause. So, the larger threat or the concern here is that how might these kinds of tactical partnerships spew new dangers of Takfiri jihadism because these groups are ideologically quite different from one another. And that includes, of course, ISIS-K or the ISIS local branch in Afghanistan as well, which have effectively locked horns with not just the Taliban but also with other Salafist groups.

So, this is the broader outlook on the Afghani side. But, still, beyond Afghanistan, on the Pakistani side, the Pakistani Taliban have picked up their operations against the Pakistani state and are targeting them on a regular basis. There are multiple spinoff groups now, some of which have come together. However, others are still operating in silos, perhaps through loose transactional alliances with groups like al Qaeda and ISIS-K with a foot in their original parent organizations. And then there are some groups, kind of nationalist insurgencies in Pakistan (like the Baloch groups), who are asking for their own state in Baluchistan province as well. So, they have really picked up their activities.

So, this is the overall outlook. I know that this went a little longer than I expected, but the last point I wanted to make before we get into a discussion is that I think broadly, at the regional level, we are witnessing a disruptive change across the board in the region, which has increasingly taken over the status quo. Unfortunately, the status quo has not been acceptable to Islamists or their like-minded ideological siblings, and they appealed to the local population to tell them that look: disruptive change is required both on the political side but also on the military side in order to shift the status quo to what the Islamists' constituency desired. And I think this has put the broader regional order at an inflection point. Because disruption at the moment is demanded when the status quo reaches a point where it does not really produce the desired results that the people or these groups with huge militant constituents really want. And I think this type of change occurs when the status quo for certain people and certain groups gets disrupted. But it's not an isolated issue. It's definitely part of a pattern because we've seen it across the board. In South Asia, I think disruptive change will define the regional context

going forward, and that disruptive change will also inform the interaction of those countries and systems and actors with the international system and the world. The region will not be defined by mere geography after this but by the interrelations between the broad chains of actions and reactions. So, whether a disruptive change assumes the character of a predictable system or it changes into something more destructive, then it's an open question at this point. From the counterterrorism perspective, how we see it is that the responses of jihadist groups will remain quite consistent in whatever they're doing because it works. Still, they're also likely to become much more creative about it, much more multidimensional, much more simultaneous, multi-country, and of course, sequential as well. So, in order for us to be ahead of the curve, I believe our responses should be equally creative and preemptive, which must involve not shying away from testing old assumptions and maybe taking smart risks.

IV. QUESTION AND ANSWER DISCUSSION

Selected comments by the contributors to this report during the discussion following the presentations. Some of the invited attendees from the United States and internationally participated during this segment.

PROFESSOR YONAH ALEXANDER

My question relates to what you mentioned about the Holocaust distortion. Is the slogan or the message of “never again,” becoming irrelevant in the context of what's happening now in the Ukraine?

DR. ANDREW SOROKOWSKI

I suppose one could argue in both ways. On one level, some say it's irrelevant because these atrocities repeat themselves; always a little differently, but they repeat themselves. But I think in moral terms, the slogan is all the more important and we need to constantly be reminded of the dangers of this kind of atrocity: of ethnic cleansing and genocide. The thing that is pronounced most disturbing, of course, is how political actors can manipulate concepts like fascism, genocide, ethnic cleansing and so on, and how in the information war, and we are in the midst of an information war, they are able to confuse the issues or turn them around in various ways.

The Russian leaders are presenting this war against Ukraine as a war against Nazis and yet, Babi Yar, a Ukrainian memorial, was hit by one of their shells and damage was done. They are reliving or reviving the various myths of WWII. By myths, I do not mean something that never happened, but rather their legends of popular notions about WWII: the Russian struggle against fascist Germany, against Nazi Germany. And yet, themselves (Russians) using genocidal techniques which the Ukrainians are very reminiscent of precisely what the German army did do in WWII. So, there is a kind of topsy-turvy effect; taking notions and concepts and turning them upside down and using them against the very moral basis that engendered them. It is very discouraging the way propaganda manipulates such concepts as genocide, fascism and so on. So yes, it is discouraging but I think it is all the more reason why we should continue to say ‘never again’ because there is always hope that somehow consciousness will be raised, and that people will have second thoughts before targeting ethnic or religious groups.

I think one encouraging development is the internet; the liquidity of information. We saw how the statements made by certain political leaders in Russia about the Ukrainians were preparing the ground for genocide. As we know from the history of the Holocaust, one of the ways in which the ground is prepared for the destruction of a group, whether its ethnic, religious, or national; is caricature, demeaning, or portraying. Remember the Nazi publications in the twenties and thirties depicted Jews as sub-human or semi-human, like animals almost. That was preparing the ideological, psychological ground for German soldiers to go out and destroy Jews because if they are dehumanized in their imaginations, they can be treated as sub-human. We saw similar statements by Russian politicians about Ukrainians: very demeaning kinds of phrases were used and sure enough, a few weeks later, you have situations like what happened in Bucha and Mariupol where there was mass killings of civilians. If we learn about the techniques of genocide and learn more about the manipulation of stereotypes (ethnic and religious stereotypes), and if we disseminate that information through the internet and information space, perhaps there will be less inclination to repeat these atrocities. Let's hope so.

PROFESSOR YONAH ALEXANDER

The question that this panel raises is “Can interfaith efforts dampen the passion for conflict and violence?”

PROFESSOR MOHAMMAD FAGHFOORY

My answer to this is not one, but three. YES, NO, & WE DON'T KNOW

I. The first answer is yes. Here, there are two dimensions to this question and the first is theoretical. If one wants to seek answer to this question in the Qur'an or tradition of the Prophet there are many injunctions and guidelines on the proper attitude toward followers of other religions or toward different types of interpretation within Islam itself. Based on the injunctions of the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet, Islam accepts the multiplicity of religions and diverse interpretations within each religious universe as articulated, for example in (16:93((11: 118), (49:13), (5:44), 5: 46, (22:17), (5: 47), 2: 112, (2: 62) (5: 69), (29: 46), and in numerous ahadith of the Prophet, too many to mention here.

These sources, like sacred texts in any other religion, lend themselves to different interpretations and Islamic tradition is not an exception. The interpretations can be absolute and exclusive or inclusive. The point is that who is in charge of interpretation of these injunctions at the time that we live?

Historically speaking, the fact that Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism have survived in the Islamic world for 14 centuries is evidence that those principles and guidelines were taken very seriously. It is not accidental that sizable Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian communities are still present in many Muslim majority countries and their presence is a proof to substantiate this claim. Indeed, one of the oldest churches still functioning is located in northwestern Azerbaijan in Iran and until recently the oldest Jewish community outside Jerusalem lived and prospered in Persia are further evidence. *Religionization of terrorism* has resulted in turning churches, synagogues in Cairo and Shi'a mosques in India and Pakistan into targets of terrorist attacks. The result has been mass migration of followers of these communities to Canada, the United States and European countries. Therefore, the first answer to this question theoretically is clearly YES: It is possible that interfaith dialogue can in fact dampen the desire for violence, but again it depends on who this dialogue takes place with.

However, I believe that it is much easier to come to a consensus on a theoretical level than in the realm of practice. In fact there have been many efforts during the last twenty year on the part of prominent religious leaders in the East and the West that have addressed and resolved many controversial questions. Whenever they could not come to a consensus, in a civilized way they have agreed to disagree. What is neglected is the need to bring in politicians into the interfaith dialogue so that all recommendations and decisions can be translated into meaningful and constructive political decisions and policies. Otherwise, having more dialogue and meetings among religious scholars and intellectuals would not produce any tangible and fruitful results. When practical decisions are needed to heal the pain of the victims of terrorism and prevent future terroristic activities, thoughts and prayers would not accomplish much.

II. The second part of my answer to this question is categorically NO.

The leaders of most terrorist organizations who claim to represent Islam or present themselves as potential partners in any interfaith dialogue are neither scholars of religion nor do they understand the spirit of religion and especially the spirit of Islam. How could a religion that comes from God who is pure good be so violent, brutal, and ugly? A tradition of the Prophet answers this question once and for all: *"Nothing but good is found in God. As to the evil, ugliness, and darkness, they come solely from our own souls."* How can one justify violence and killing of innocent people in the name of a religion whose message starts with "Peace" and "Knowledge"? When a Muslim encounters a person of any faith he greets him with message of peace (peace be upon you/*as-Salam-u- alaikum*). As we mentioned before, like sacred texts in any other religion the Qur'an lends itself to different interpretations. To prevent textual reading or misunderstanding one of the earliest sciences that developed in the Islamic world was the science of interpreting the sacred text.

One of the reasons the terrorist groups commit acts of violence in the name of the Qur'an is because of their textual reading of the text without regard to many different interpretations that every single verse can have. Therefore, when they commit terrible crimes they recite verses of the Qur'an. Every suicide bombing or explosion is preceded by the chanting *Allah-u-Akbar* (God is the Greatest). It is obvious that they do not acknowledge the authenticity of the views of other Muslims scholars except their own, let alone the sanctity of other revealed religions and they are not shy to openly proclaim that. The question is how can one speak of

“interfaith dialogue” with people with such a mindset and attitude who claim to hold the key to the absolute truth? When a group of people are convinced that only they have the key for absolute truth and everybody else is wrong they do not see any reason to talk. That is the reason that despite many pieces of evidence in the Quran and tradition of the Prophet about the authenticity of revealed religions they easily call Christians, Jews, Shi’ites and Sufis as infidels (*Kafir*) whose blood is permissible to shed.

III. The third part of my answer is “WE DO NOT KNOW.”

We do not know if interfaith dialogue would in fact dampen the desire for violence among terrorist groups because there are more than one or two players in such a dialogue. On the level of intellectuals or religious scholars, it is not so difficult and in fact in the last 25 years there have been so many steps taken by individuals and organizations to bring about dialogue between Christians, Jews, and Muslims. But, very few steps, if any, have been within different branches such as the Shi’ites, Sunnis and other branches and Islamist organizations and groups. The sporadic efforts have been mostly on the level of religious scholars or intellectuals with only good intention. However, those efforts have rarely been translated into political action or policy. That is the reason that despite all the good intentions and hard work by advocates of interfaith dialogue, we still see crimes committed by terrorist groups. There seems to be no end in sight as long as other players, especially political actors are brought in for meaningful dialogue. By other actors I am talking about forces within or out of governments—western or Islamic-- that play an important role in the process of *religionization of terrorism*. Nobody is asking where the Taliban, al-Qa ‘idah, ISIS, and other groups receive so many sophisticated weapons, where they are trained, and who finances them.

These and many other relevant questions have to be addressed and connected to any serious interfaith dialogue to make meaningful efforts that aim at ending *religionization of terrorism* fruitful and put an end to the means and resources that make terrorist activities possible in the first place.

In light of the three possible answer to the question raised in this panel I believe that religious leaders, educators, scholars, and journalists must expand the scope of their activities and bring in political leaders in any interfaith dialogue because it is only political leaders who can make decisions to translate their recommendations and decisions into tangible policies to end terrorism.

Otherwise, we are going to continue turning in a vicious circle, having conferences, meetings among religious scholars and intellectuals without really any results and at the end. Simple expression of sympathy with the victims of terrorism, thoughts and prayers do not do much to stop violence of any kind including the rising number of mass shooting that we have observed.

PROFESSOR YONAH ALEXANDER

Ambassador Javid Ahmad would you like to respond to that?

AMBASSADOR JAVID AHMAD

Well, of course, I could not agree more. You're absolutely right, Professor [Faghfoory] that is so much easier to do damage than to build. And so, we saw it first-hand [in Afghanistan] with what we dealt with this very perverse group that, unfortunately, now leads Afghanistan, and has effectively condemned the broader segment of the Afghan society, including women that you spoke of, to a life in prison. But, if you look at it from a broader perspective, the techniques and the tactics employed by groups like that, or even countries that have historically served as their patrons and will continue to, will change. I think it [the techniques/tactics] will [change]. It will also become much more creative. It will range from anything such as subversion to sabotage, where the goal is not necessarily going to be victory, per se, but the prevention of orderly changes to those internal systems, including on the militants’ side. There will be a kind of the subversion [that] will become a tactic to prevent orderly changes to asymmetric warfare or even terrorism, which will involve targeting civilians, public places, and institutions. And I think this will largely provide, at least here in Western capitals, the breaking news. My concern is that the field of contention will [not only] be defined by the emerging ecosystem

of relationships between states, but also between the networks of these jihadists, which are vastly different ideological groups. So, we need to kind of look at it as an ecosystem and that's very important.

On the interfaith, I couldn't agree more on the interfaith or inter-religious dialogues and its seminal role. It's critical to listen to the desires for violence. But, we're also operating, as Professor Mohammad just said, we're also operating in some ways in a vacuum, and there are challenges to those [wanting to] engage in elaborate, longer-term, consistent, effective, and meaningfully effective, interfaith dialogues and discussions. I think from my vantage point, what I see is missing is that, one: there is a clear absence of key interlocutors between the two or multiple sides. I haven't seen a discussion – and I come from a country where mullahs and imams are basically patting themselves with being the good Muslims – we haven't seen those kinds of dialogues happening between them and other religious groups in that region, including in temples in India, or churches or monasteries elsewhere. The other problem is that no one can speak for them, as was discussed. No one can speak for them, or on their behalf, but themselves. And I think if I am, for example, a Talib, I wouldn't allow anyone else to speak for me in any meaningful way. But also, no sane Afghan will speak for them [the Taliban] as well or on their behalf in any meaningful way, including on platforms like this. So, the problem here is that the Taliban, or groups like the Taliban, political or otherwise, are speaking and promoting their own, perverse version of commercial Islam, mainly because they own it and they treat it as their brand – a brand that has effectively elevated them to victory.

The second thing is, I think, the second challenge of the interfaith dialogue is how our own engagement, on a country-level, with the clerical class of these countries is negligible, or arguably, quite limited, or even non-existent. When was the last time we dealt with the Taliban's ideologues closely? You know, for the United States and other [likeminded] countries, it was really hard to go, [find], and sit with the ideologically pure Taliban leaders. But, we sat with their so-called pragmatists because they saw that we could potentially reach some kind of a compromise or a political solution. So, in this case, we need to diversify our outreach to, perhaps, learn from some of these people [the originalist Taliban] as to what they're thinking, how they deliberate, how they arrive at decisions, or what they see as points of compromise that could be discussed. The other [challenge] is that we're missing counter-narratives and alternative narratives from our end - and I'm speaking as a Muslim here – [a narrative] which one could coalesce or unite the broader secular society around. You know, they [Islamists] have that narrative. And they have that remarkable consistency and sticking to that narrative, and they've done it. Our narratives have consistently changed, so we need to have that narrative in order to kind of unite the broader segment of the society. And [this must be] a narrative that is not in clash with itself, but also not with the other faiths. And most importantly, it has to be moderate, functional, realistic, and practical – and all of that is [currently] missing.

And, lastly, I think the militant Islam, the kind of Islam that the Taliban are pursuing has in many ways much stronger appeal and much stronger street value among the mercurial street in that broader region. We're not talking only about Afghanistan, but [also] about Pakistan; we're talking about parts of India, and Central Asia as well. And because again, it's [militant Islam] disruptive, it's disruptive because it opposes any moderate status quo, and that [status quo] includes moderate Islam. So perhaps, I mean, I don't want to sound contentious here, and Professor Mohammad would know a lot more about this, but perhaps Islam needs some kind of a Lutheran reformation of sorts. And, as was discussed earlier, [it has to be] one that emerges from within, one that's indigenous, and one that's consistent in its approaches and application.

PROFESSOR DON WALLACE, JR.

First, you all are so knowledgeable and I am a secular person. Is there a common threat? I am not sure. I think one word I would use is “modernization.” Ukraine is modernizing. Russia is slowing down in its modernization. The Middle East, I exclude Afghanistan for a moment, is thoroughly confused about where it is going with modernization. I'll turn to Turkey in a moment, where I have lived. Afghanistan, under the Taliban of course, are resisting.

Now, two further points: the withdrawal of the United States, which the Ambassador mentioned, the Mexicans always say, “Why is the United States so near and God so far?” Now apparently in the Middle East, one could have them say it is closer possibly. In Turkey, I have a friend, a woman, who has written a book about “Muslimism.” She's a Muslim of course and really she is addressing the very question that the Ambassador asks, reform of Islam, but not from mullahs, but from within young individuals. How can they live in the modern world

and remain high as Muslims? I think that is really the key, and please don't look to the West for any inspiration because we are so thoroughly confused about these issues of religion versus the secular, certainly, the United States with all of this energy. People have pointed out about the United States, that in some ways, it has been one of the most rational societies in history and one of the most religious. But I do think the point that was made by the Ambassador, and it has been well noted, even if we are religious or profoundly secular people, to think that American diplomats could engage within their professional role with theologically minded, religiously minded people, we are not good at it, we never have been. The West is bad, look at Denmark and the insult to the Prophet. The West will believe, self-righteously, that in the name of pluralism and freedom of speech, we can say whatever the hell we want. Now a lot of Westerners, a lot of us do not like that anyway, but we do it. And how can we then, how can we understand when Muslims become violently indignant, that the Prophet has been made fun of? I think the answers will not come from the outside, the answers will come from the inside. I've lived in Turkey; I have traveled a lot to Iran and I've never been to Afghanistan. I don't think I have ever been to Ukraine; I've been to Russia a lot. I think it's not renewal, it's something different.

Since the war, we have often talked about modernizing the world, and I think America has been very useful. Clearly we have come up against some walls and it has to be people like Ambassador Ahmad. I picked him because he's young. Faghfoory is not as young, I am older. Ahmad is here, at the Atlantic Council and a member of it and it will come from people such as him, who will have to internalize the balance, the "Muslimism" of this young woman I know. I don't think we should be pessimistic because what is modernism all about? Really, it is a search for an individual, not a kind of Americanized autonomy and self-righteous individualism, but for some effort to exercise one's personality and one's soul in somewhat a free way. I think that is a great thing and I think it will come, but with the Taliban, they could either fall on their faces as Professor Faghfoory suggested they might. I don't think they are going to change that much internally that quickly because they are young. They are on a roll. But you know, you're just going to have to keep the faith in all these things.

PROFESSOR FAGHFOORY

May I make a comment in response to Professor Wallace's point here?

What we are discussing has always been present in the Islamic world, and in our time, even much more so. Islam doctrinally itself allows a diversity of views. This is why there is not one single school of law and a single school of theology, but multiple schools of law and multiple schools of theology.

One thing that is not happening in many Islamic countries, even in those that are very modernized, is the legal system. With some exceptions legal system works in accordance with legal injunctions that were written over a thousand years ago. That flexibility and possibility of different interpretations that were once practiced during the time that Islamic governments and when the Islamic world were at the peak of its strength are no longer there. During the 9th century, there were centers of scholarship in cities like Baghdad and Neyshabur that hired many many non-Muslim scholars. Maimonides (ibn Maymn) was one of the most important translators in the city of Baghdad who translated works from Hebrew and Latin into Arabic. That kind of environment was the reason that Islamic civilization became so rich. In our time, members of Islamic scholarly communities (the *'ulama*), still have their mindsets fixed in the 7th, and 8th centuries. In reaction to this many Muslim intellectuals choose to forget the achievements of Islamic civilization and many of them are so fascinated with Western culture. Some of us became so fascinated with everything that comes from the West that we began to copy and mimic whatever we were seeing, without realizing that many of those things, as good as they may be, are not applicable to an Islamic environment. The result has been constant tension between tradition and modernity and intellectual stagnation. Why is it that Islamic civilization has not been able to produce another Ibn Sina (Avicenna) or Omar Khayyam, or Rumi for over seven centuries?

Whether a *Luther* is necessary in the Islamic world or not, we do not know. There have been many Muslim intellectuals and religious "reformers" since the 1850s in the Muslim world. Nearly all of them failed partly because of governmental suppression and partly because they tried to disconnect from the Islamic past. Any attempt in this direction must have a foot in the past, live in the present, and look to the future. This may mean an end to the monopoly of conservative traditional religious scholars (the *'ulama*) and create a space for free expression of ideas and view by clerical and non-clerical scholars. In the process *Lutherism* may emerge without a *Luther*.

Such a transformation takes time to change the mindset that has been formed over 1400 years. Terrorist organizations are not able to accept any kind of change and are totally convinced that what they know and say is the absolute truth of Islam and everybody else is wrong. We can see what kind of result will come out when we give guns into the hands of people with such a mindset. Clearly, the result will be groups like Jihadists and the Taliban.

I was in Afghanistan upon the invitation of Mr. Abdullah Abdullah when he was minister of foreign affairs for a one week conference. I gave a talk every day on different topics such as human rights and Islam, Islam and the West, and women's rights. There were 300 scholars from different provinces of Afghanistan. The free environment during that gathering impressed every participant who freely shared diverse views with the audience. At the end they all expressed hope to continue this kind of dialogue. Interestingly there were many female scholars, *imams* and *mujtahids* among the participants.

DR. ANDREW SOROKOWSKI

Russia and Ukraine, for example, have dealt with two questions which I think are generally applicable to other cultures. The first question is: what is modernism? The two sub questions are: does modernization mean becoming western? Of course western may mean something slightly different for the Slavic world but it does refer to Western Europe and America. The second question is: does modernization mean secularization? For a long time, the answer to both of those seemed to be yes. That's what modernization means. You become like the West, and you become secular but more recently some scholars and thinkers, certainly in Poland and Ukraine, have been saying that actually the answer to both those questions is no. There is a kind of modernization which is not exactly western. It obviously borrows many things from the West but it does not imitate the West; it does not become a clone of the West. Something which of course Russia is accusing Ukraine of doing. The Russian reaction has been a conservative reaction which is to simply reject modernization, but as I say some scholars have asserted that you can within your own culture, modernize, borrow from the West, and yet still remain yourself. The more difficult question for us is: does westernization have to mean secularization? Of course, I cannot speak for the Islamic world, but certainly in the churches of Ukraine the Greek Catholic Church and certainly now the independent Orthodox Church, the answer is: no, you can modernize and still remain religious. You can remain true to your religious traditions. It takes a great deal of creativity but there is a kind of modernization which is not secular.

AMBASSADOR JAVID AHMAD

On the question of modernism, in the Afghan context, perhaps a context I can speak a bit more authoritatively about, is that there hasn't been any consensus, a pan-Afghan consensus on what modernism or a modern Afghanistan should look like, or what degree of modernization and moderation would be acceptable broadly. And more broadly speaking, to what degree of moderate Islam is [to be] accepted or what Afghan Islam should be, should look like, and should be applied. And there isn't any consensus on this, unfortunately, not among the Afghan people or their factional leadership or the Afghan religious class, including the ulemas. So, in this case, unfortunately, whatever kind of modernism or modernization you put in place – and we had it for the last 20 or 21 years of Western engagement – it is all reversible. And 20 or 21 years is a long time. Our other major problem or challenge is that we are a society that is in a clash with itself, and so how do you change that? Professor Mohammad spoke about the ulemas, we engaged the ulemas [in Afghanistan], but it did not yield the kind of results that we wanted, mainly because of these kinds of lack of consensus or the absence of consensus issues. And maybe that's the Afghan problem that needs to be tackled, mainly because for every two Afghan you get five opinions and that creates an issue. But, more fundamentally, and this was spoken to in earlier comments by one of the speakers as well, is that there is a social space for these kinds of ideas to take root and become normal or the new normal. Now, in the Afghan context, we are seeing a persistent struggle, a persistent competition between cultural religiosity and modernism or modernization and this has provided this kind of new "Talibanism" with the space to exploit. If those [Islamist] actions were principle-driven actions, then in a country like Afghanistan, which is survival society, it works like a contagion. So, today we have a baggage, our own societal baggage, where there's a broad streak of political Islamism that pervades Afghan society, unfortunately. The formative education in madrassas is routine. It continues unregulated and there are thousands of madrassas across the country. Most of them operate under accidental or reactionary mullahs.

There is an unnatural fascination with martyrdom. Think about that. And if you're fascinated with martyrdom, then you need somebody [a group] to find you an enemy that you can fight. And in this case, this is a societal issue. This is a problem at the Taliban level now, as well in that they have those kinds of people that are fascinated with martyrdom. You know, they need to find them an enemy. But, where did these people hail from? They hail from that society. And here, in their own right, Talibanism offers them that sense of belonging with the license for direct action.

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VII. ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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