

***Akbar Ahmed and Brian Forst:  
After Terror: Promoting Dialogue Among Civilizations***

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*“...there is only one good, knowledge, and only one evil, ignorance...”*

(Socrates)

“After Terror” is a compilation of 28 essays composed by the world’s prominent thinkers and activists, put together with the kind initiative of Akbar Ahmed and Brian Forst. Mr. Ahmed is a prominent Pakistani expert on Islamic studies and Mr. Forst is a Professor of Justice, Law and Society at the School of Public Affairs at Washington D.C. The book is a reaction to the events that were set in train by the 9/11 bombings and its goal is to convince its readers that terrorism is surmountable without having to open the Pandora’s box of clashing civilizations. The book is divided into three sections, the first, concerning “The Nature and the Source of the Problem”, the second, concerning “Pathways to dialogue” and finally the last section, “From Concern to Action”. The essays range from objective scholarly analysis to subjective argumentative reasoning. In sum, the book seeks to solve the most pressing problem of international terrorism so that one day we may indeed reach the point “after terror”.

In the first essay of the first section called “The Nature and the Source of the Problem”, Zbigniew Brzezinski gives us his ideas concerning the problem at hand. Being a former National Security Adviser to the White House, Mr. Brzezinski gives his insights into the so-called “power of weakness”.<sup>1</sup> Here he reflects on the changing nature of international relations where realist hard power is no longer in monopoly, since the game is no longer only played among rational-egoistic nation states. Transnational actors are more flexible than their nation state counterparts. The US therefore, according to Mr. Brzezinski, has to mobilize its natural advantages such as its ability to attract support and to lead. In sum, the US should no longer seek to dominate international relations but is should try to consensually lead them. In many regards Mr. Brzezinski adopts the view similar to J. N. Nye.

In a following essay, Rajmohan Gandhi tells us that the “answer to terrorism is a greater goal than the war on terrorism”.<sup>2</sup> Concerning international terrorism, Mr. Gandhi blames the US for not attacking the root causes of the problem. As a model for the future he gives the example of the Indian President Vaj Payee who has recently went to great effort to promote dialogue between India and Pakistan. Mr. Gandhi calls on the US to stay faithful to the legacy of Benjamin Franklin who promoted unity through understanding. This idea is later picked up in the essay by Walter Isaacson. Like Mr. Gandhi, he suggests that the US should take an example from the teachings of one of its most religiously tolerant presidents, in order to counter the underlying causes of international terrorism.

Following on from that is the essay by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. According to Mr. Tutu “Human beings are worshipping animals”<sup>3</sup> and “religion has the capacity to produce saints or rogues”.<sup>4</sup> In another essay contributed by Dianna L. Eck, it is suggested that saints and rogues are determined by governmental actions such as the 2002 Patriot Act. Tutu however doesn’t blame governments or politics per se. For him the source of the problem is “injustice, hunger, oppression, poverty, disease and ignorance”.<sup>5</sup>

The first essay of the second section called “Pathways to Dialogue and Understanding” is written by Shashi Tharoor. He suggests that communication is one of the most important pathways to understanding and preventing the clash of civilizations. He reminds us that Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights marks free media as one of the most essential human needs. He however warns that communication can be counterproductive with the sprout of the so-called “hate media” following 9/11, not only in Asia, but also in the US. He therefore proposes that the US should listen to advice given by the International Council of Human Rights Policy (2002), when it told it should put more effort to cover hate crimes against Muslims in the West. He also warns us that there is a serious “digital divide” where the rich West enjoys almost unlimited internet access and the poor Third World remains in ignorance. Finally he suggests that the US should seek to promote “preventive journalism”, which would act as an “early warning of human rights abuses”<sup>6</sup> by making such abuses public before they become serious. All this could help prevent international terrorism.

Picking up from that point is the contribution by Dame Marilyn Strathern and by Edward O’ Wilson. They both point out that division, social or religious, is natural to human species, hence suggesting that by compelling uniformity, we are actually going against a natural human instinct inculcated within us since the very beginning. Hence it should be via understanding and dialogue that we should fight against the forces of terrorism, since from first principles of cultural homogenisation cannot work.

The ensuing contribution is made by Lord George Carey. Lord Carey reminds us that Islam is a religion hijacked by religious fundamentalists. He refers to the Holy Koran (Surah 5, 8) where it is written that “the nearest to you in love wilt thou find those who say ‘we are Christians’”. He also outlines the major contours of contempt between Christians and Muslims: from one side that the US treats Arabic countries unfairly, and from the other, that Muslim leaders aren’t doing enough to prevent religious fundamentalism. Lord Carey calls on all religious clerics to preach moderation and understanding.

Following on from there, the next contribution is made by President Seyed Mohammed Khatami. He suggests that only by a *mélange* of ethics and politics can we succeed at elevating civilization above the barbarity of terrorist attacks. A similar point is made in the later essay by Amitai Etzioni. However, unlike Mr. Khatami who seeks solace in ancient Middle Eastern ethical philosophy, Mr. Etzioni introduces the more general idea of “transnational moral dialogue” which according to him “occurs when a

group of people engage in processes of sorting out the values that should guide their lives".<sup>7</sup> This view is however contested by Sergio Vieira de Mello and Jean Bethke Elshtain in their respective two contributed essays. They imply that neither general transnational moral dialogues nor ancient Arabic ethical philosophy are a sufficient path to creating understanding among the cultures. They suggest that Universal Human Rights and the Just War Thesis<sup>8</sup> are "inherently civilising",<sup>9</sup> and so it is only via these Kantian principles that we can "keep alive and open the possibility of... negotiation along the way".<sup>10</sup> In the later essay written by Jody Williams we come to realise that ever since the 1990's this would be harder than initially believed. But as Ms Williams suggests, "almost anything is possible when there is sufficient will".<sup>11</sup> This determination is also picked up in the later essays by Tamara Sonn, Judea Pearl and Jonathan Sacks.

The final group of contributions is made by Queen Norah of Jordan, Kofi Annan, Prince El Hassan bin Talal who is the former Crown Prince of Jordan, and Sir Ravi Shankar who is a renowned Asian musician. This set of writers put a great deal of stress on education. They all point out that what also matters is what type of education is provided because it could otherwise be counterproductive. Mr. Shankar suggests that musical education could provide a unifying language that would bring the world together.

The first essay of the last section called "From Concern to Action" is made by James D. Wolfenson. He makes the point that action has to be taken against the world's income gap. He suggests that the means for this are available since rich countries spend around USD 700 bn on defence, USD 300 bn on food subsidies, whilst only USD 68 mil on official development aid. He therefore suggests that Western officials try harder to fill in the poverty gap that provides terrorism with fertile ground.

The second contribution is made by the well-known Joseph S. Nye. Nye makes the distinction between "Hard Power" and "Soft Power", where the former is military and economic, and the latter means "getting others to want the outcomes you want".<sup>12</sup> Soft Power is the attractiveness of culture, political values and the ability to lead. Most importantly, it solidifies legitimacy in the eyes of international relations actors. Nye suggests that Soft Power is becoming more important in international relations than Hard Power. Hard Power is ineffective because for example only a quarter of Al-Qaeda training camps were eliminated by the war in Afghanistan. It is also ineffective because it cannot be adequately mobilised. In the age of globalisation and the privatisation of war, there is no set enemy. More importantly, Hard Power cannot guarantee that if one terrorist cell is eliminated, another cell doesn't sprout in its place. Hence, Mr. Nye suggests that US Soft Power is the way forward. He gives particular attention to cultural and educational exchanges "that will develop a richer and more open civil society in Middle Eastern countries".<sup>13</sup>

The third contribution is made by Benjamin R. Barber. He suggests that international terrorism is a form of "malevolent NGO's", which can be countered only if nation states become more interdependent – eventually forming global governance. Mr. Barber does admit that "there must first be a

global civil society and a global citizenry”<sup>14</sup> before this is possible. However, he makes the point that if the US stops posing as a “stubborn loner”,<sup>15</sup> the world may soon come to the stage where it is jointly combating international terrorism, both its causes and symptoms.

The final contribution to the book is made by William L. Ury. He introduces the concept of the “third side” which is “the emergent will of the community”, as a means to combat international terrorism. Ury adopts a stance particular to “Natural Law” lawyers that see Kantian morality as something fixed in international relations. He suggests that the “third side” was often mobilised, but in order for it to be a global force against international terrorism, it will take a lot of effort.

In conclusion, *After Terror* is an interesting read that carries a lot of pertinence to current international relations debates. Its strengths are numerous. Firstly there is the plethora of contributions by high profile individuals which gives the book an air of argumentative legitimacy, whilst making it diverse in viewpoints. It is particularly interesting to see how the problem of international terrorism is viewed by politicians and clerics from the West, and then comparing it with the way it is viewed by their counterparts in the Arab world. It is also good to see that the majority of authors managed to agree on a series of solutions to international terrorism, amongst which understanding via transnational moral dialogue was the strongest of all points. On the other hand, the book also has its weaknesses. It often contains contributions that are mere reflections of personal views and consequently of minute merit to the objective currents of international relations discourse. Also, some essays are short and lack corroborated argument – secondary literature is used only rarely. Finally, with the basic arguments about international terrorism being already outlined in the first part of the book, the rest of the read are just variations of those same arguments, hence becoming a little repetitive. Nevertheless, despite these shortcomings the book is a valuable asset to anyone interested in the possible strategies that could be used to combat the threats of international terrorism and of clashing civilizations.

*Petr Urbánek*

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ahmad, Akbar and Forst, Brian (2005). *After Terror: Promoting Dialogue Among Civilizations*. London: Polity Press, 2005, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., P. 79.

<sup>8</sup> According to her, the a war is just only when a) combatants are distinguished from non-combatants, b) force is proportional, c) an that those in need are actually helped.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 175. Note: by avoiding international treaties such as Kyoto, ICC, ABMT etc.