The Rome Dialogues

Identity
Formation
in an
Age of
Terrorism

Contents

Introduction to the EGIC

The Euro-Gulf Information Centre (EGIC) is an initiative that aims to build social, political, strategic, cultural and economic bridges between the people of Europe and the Arabian Gulf.

While the EGIC was only formed on 01 October 2015 as a legal association in Rome, Italy, it draws on the expertise of a multitude of scholars, policy makers, economists and members of European and Gulf civil societies to enhance inter-regional relations.

The EGIC has tasked itself with five activities over the short, medium and long terms:

Publishing Hub—the first objective of the Centre is to act as a publishing hub on information related to the wider Arabian Gulf. This entails the launching of a new journal (re: The Arabian Gulf), book series, policy papers and newsletters. Literature will be made available in several languages (Arabic, English, Italian, German, French and several of the Slavonic languages) and be done in both hard and soft copy formats.

Seminars, Conferences and Roundtables—in order to continue to attract attention for the Centre, a series of seminars, conferences and roundtable discussions will take place on a regular basis.

Specialised Certificate, Internships and Scholarship Programmes—the EGIC will begin a targeted certificate

programme for university-ages students, run as Spring Schools. Themes will vary, but stay related to European-Arabian Gulf dynamics. Also, the EGIC will also offer a three month internship based on the European ERASMUS Programme. This programme will focus on building the skill-set required of a socio-political organisation and includes: organisational, writing, presentation and innovative thinking skills. Finally, the EGIC will offer monthly and annual scholarships for research on Arabian Gulf-related topics.

Cultural Events—the EGIC strives to offer a comprehensive cultural platform to expose the peoples of Europe and the Gulf to each other's cultural rites, rituals, festivals and writings. From book launches, poetry readings, talks, films and cookery, the EGIC aims to bring people together.

Web and Tech—the ECGs has adopted a tech-savvy approach that entails the use of high-tech platforms to generate an interactive platform beyond the physical boundaries of the EGIC headquarters. All EGIC research and events will be made Open Access and the deployed technologies will reflect this approach.

Introduction to
Rome Dialogue II

While this round of the Rome Dialogues was focused on how identities are being affected – around the world – by a seemingly never-ending war on terrorism it quickly expanded to include discussions on political and social ethics, the struggle to retain political liberty in contexts of securitisation and, importantly, specific elements of current discourses, narratives and actors that typically fall below the radar. Instead of a formal conference or round-table setting, the Rome Dialogues act as an open forum for debate and discussion—a space where speakers and the audience are able to bounce ideas off one another for the purpose of moving the debate forward. In this Dialogue, the composition of the panel assembled also helped to produce a dynamic atmosphere and the goal of covering important ground in understanding the impact on identities terrorism and the war against it are producing. From personal stories and experiences to recounting policy failures and successes this Dialogue was, by all accounts, an important step forward.

Members of the Dialogue
15 January 2016

Shaista Aziz—is a freelance journalist specialising on gender, race, identity and Pakistan. Shaista is a former BBC and Aljazeera journalist and has written regularly for The Guardian on issues impacting Muslim women and the politics of identity. Shaista has spent more fifteen years working across the Middle East and Pakistan.

Michael Driessen—is Assistant Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at John Cabot University in Rome where he teaches courses on Religion and Politics, Middle East Studies and War, Peace and Conflict Resolution. Driessen is the author of many works, books and articles.

Jason Ireland—holds a Masters in Terrorism, Security and Society from the War Studies Department at King's College London. He is a former member of the British Army and has considerable experience in private security operations across the Middle East and Afghanistan. He has worked in Iraq through key periods of time; prior to the US withdrawal in Iraq in 2011 and through to the emergence of the so-called Islamic State.

Layelle Saad—is the GCC and Middle East Editor for Gulf News in Dubai. She has a Masters Degree from George Washington University in Middle East Studies and a BA in Journalism from the University of South Florida. She has been working in her field for over ten years and makes regular appearances on Arabic News Channels.

Abubakar Siddique—is a journalist specialising in coverage of Afghanistan and Pakistan. He now edits RFE/RL's "Gandhara (http://gandhara.rferl.org)" website. He has spent the past fifteen years researching and writing about security, political, humanitarian and cultural issues in Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Pashtun heartland where he was born. In addition to his reporting, Siddique has spoken at Western think tanks and has contributed articles, chapters and research papers to a range of publications. Siddique's unique expertise is brought to bear in The Pashtun Question: The Unresolved Key to the Future of Pakistan and Afghanistan, London: Hurst and Company, 2014.

Dialogue Moderators

Mitchell Belfer—is President of the Euro-Gulf Information Centre, Head of the Department of International Relations and European Studies and the Editor in Chief of the Central European Journal of International and Security Studies at the Metropolitan University Prague in the Czech Republic. He holds a Ph.D. and an MPA in International Relations Theory and his academic interests gravitate around: alliance theory, small states, dangerous regions, the international relations of the Arabian Gulf

and Middle East, asymmetrical violence and general security-related issues. Mitchell frequently contributes to news media and academic research. His last monograph – Small State, Dangerous Region: A Strategic Assessment of Bahrain – was published in 2014 by Peter Lang, Frankfurt, Germany.

Cinzia Bianco—is an Analyst and Programme Manager at the Euro-Gulf Information Centre. Previously she carried on a 6-months-long Research Fellowship in the Gulf region (Oman, Qatar, UAE, Kuwait), for the European Commission's "Sharaka" project, researching on EU-GCC relations. She also worked as an Analyst for the NATO Defence College Foundation. Cinzia obtained a Master's degree in Middle East and Mediterranean Studies from King's College London. Her research interests and expertise include: EU-GCC relations, Foreign Policy and Politics of the Gulf countries.

Part I

Cinzia Bianco: We are lucky today to have such a diverse table with experts from different backgrounds and of different fields. I would like to ask the speakers to introduce themselves and give us their look on how they see the theme of identity formation in the age of terror.

Abubakar Siddique: I am a journalist, but previously I was an aspiring anthropologist. I was born in Waziristan, which is a tribal area between Afghanistan and Pakistan, one of the last remaining tribal societies. If you go by the anthropological definition, a tribal society is a segmentary lineage society where society is based on patrilineal descent and that means that the economy and politics of the society is controlled by what we call the tribes. I had this unique opportunity of basically living in two different worlds: first in Waziristan, where I was born and grew up, and then in the West, as I have lived and worked in the Czech Republic. I basically cover Afghanistan and Pakistan and you are all welcome to visit the website I write for: gandhara.rferl.org.

My career is largely related to this whole issue of terrorism. When I first graduated as an anthropologist, back in

1999, I discovered that there were no jobs in anthropology in my country and there were only a few people who even understood what anthropology is all about. I was told that anthropology is a study of ants or something. I remember that I was very bored as a student of anthropology by the complexity of academic writings. At the same time I was always fascinated by journalism because I thought that the journalistic writing – the Western one – was a great way to introduce people to each other and write about cultures and people so that they can understand each other better. You can learn a lot about one place or particular issue even without being there, or seeing it with your eyes. So that's how I ended up being a journalist. And that's how I have covered the issue of terrorism in relation to identities from both sides in a way.

I think in my case identity has been mainly local and changed with I went and what I did. When I was in Waziristan my identity was being a member of a tribe or a clan, but that changed into an ethnic identity when I moved to the capital – Islamabad – because I was a Pashtun. Pashtuns are the second largest ethnic group in Pakistan, and they are in my view victims of a very complicated Pakistani strategic game, which didn't end but intensified with the advent of the "War on Terrorism." This is what my research is about—the Pashtuns have become the worst victims of all kinds of stereotypes. The Pashtuns are also one of the worst victims among the Muslim peoples of colonial states and colonial boundaries because they were divided into two different state systems – India and Afghanistan – by the British. This border demarcated in 1893 was named the Durand Line after a diplomat in British India, Sir Mortimer Durand. So it is still all an open wound in a sense.

Moreover, this issue added to the complexity of the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan in which, for the first time, states, I think deliberately, decided to sponsor asymmetric warfare in the form of Afghan mujahidin—where we saw the birth of Al Qaeda. The pioneering Arab members of Al-Qaeda were mostly prisoners in their own particular countries; either very radical extremist clerics or sometimes low level criminals who were rotting in these prisons, sent to Afghanistan by governments who were trying to get rid of them. In fact, a lot of people were inspired and they sent their relatives and kids to Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden being the most notable example. And then there was in a sense the formation of a global jihadist movement. The Afghan war provided these people with the opportunity to network. One example could be 1998 when Osama bin Laden and Al Zawahiri announced the formation of modern Al-Qaeda. Their press conference was held in a small town called Khost in Afghanistan and most of the journalists who covered that conference came from Pakistan, because there was no press in Afghanistan at that time. They declared war on the West, on the Christians and the Jews. While this attracted significant global attention what got no attention is that none of the leaders of Al-Qaeda at that time was Pashtun. And yet nobody asked the people about why and how they were using the Pashtun region as a base, to plan 9/11 as well as many more attacks. They were all traced back to this region, to the region where I come from, where I grew up and that I could intimately understand. That's where we journalists have done an awful job: we oversimplify things, we don't do what we are required to do, which is good reporting, finding reliable source to dig out facts—and we begin stereotyping.

In Pakistan before 9/11 there was no issue with being from the tribal areas because people of tribal areas, although they might be economically poor, or have lower education levels compared to the rest of Pakistan, have a lot of pride in their origins. So there was for example no problem with buying property in Islamabad, or doing business, but after 9/11 things changed, because tribal area within Pakistan was seen as this epicentre of terrorism. When the United States (us) started its war in Afghanistan and Al-Qaeda was forced to leave Afghanistan, they all came to tribal areas, primarily Waziristan. By 2003 Waziristan was the headquarters of Al-Qaeda and allied jihadist movements such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. How many local people were with Al Qaeda? There were a few. A lot of locals were recruited: like in any society there were some radicalised people, but other people were recruited because Al Qaeda gave them money, rented their houses and supported them. And the state here is the main problem because states are using these militias on a very opportunistic basis, not on a strategic basis.

The Pakistani state denied this problem for a very long time and then when they started addressing the problem, in 2004, three years after Al-Qaeda was already in Pakistan, they did it absolutely wrong. Up until 2004 all Pakistani leaders denied that there was Al-Qaeda in Pakistan. Then in 2004, when they were forced to admit the problem, they launched a military campaign. But military force is not an answer to radicalisation in a society. You need to have comprehensive strategies. You need to first contain terrorist violence and then gradually resolve radicalisation. And in the case of tribal areas it was very easy. There was a myth

in the rest of Pakistan and in the world that tribal areas are inaccessible and anybody can hide there. This is not true. Because everybody in a tribal society knows everybody; hence if you go to a village as a guest the first question that people will ask your host – and you have to have a host – who is your guest. And then they will come and greet the guest and ask about the guest's name, origin, family. There are no secrets in tribal societies because they know each other from generations. We are a very close tightly knit community. In urban places people have associations based on class, or occupation, socialisation and things like that. In tribal society it is the kind of society based on blood line so it is not possible to hide anything.

But the Pakistani government was denying that anybody was hiding there. And in the meanwhile what happened was that this "War on Terrorism" thing became a business. The Pakistani government was receiving a lot of money from the Americans for combatting Al-Qaeda. The continuous flow of that money was closely tied to instability and fears so terrorism was never defeated. Washington perhaps had the right security objectives because there were the attacks in London and they were traced back to Al-Qaeda in the tribal areas. So the Americans had to do something about it. But my point here is that the solution to terrorism was not a comprehensive one and it failed to achieve de-radicalisation.

In 2005 I received a scholarship and I went to New York. This was the first time that I felt that being a Muslim was part of my identity. Because when I was in a Muslim society, Islam was never an issue for me because everybody was a Muslim. Everybody around me was predominantly

Sunni so it was not my primary identity. But then I am in NYU, I am a working journalist, I am graduate student, so I am among grown-ups and I heard some very simplistic notions about Islam and terrorism.

But in my society the people that I grew up with or was inspired by...they were extremely secular, in spirit and in their politics. For example, a great reformer among the Pashtuns, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, leader of perhaps the biggest nonviolent Muslim movement in the 20th century. He died in 1988 and there is still a political party that brings his legacy forward. But how many people in the West have written about it? Have held him as an example for practicing Muslims who are not violent, who would genuinely believe in reforming their societies? Abdul Ghaffar Khan was born in a relative underdeveloped village in Charsadda, close to Peshawar, were he stood against the British Empire. Its policies were so cruel and there was a law for which the British detained anyone without any serious reason: they would punish a whole tribe or the whole community for the alleged crimes of one person, they would regularly raid people's houses. And Abdul Ghaffar Khan stood up against this. Has he ever won a Nobel peace prize? No. Is he known among in the West? Has anybody done research about him, as an example of non-violent activist of this clan or something like this? Very few have written about him.

And the last point I want to make is that I feel that there is generally a greater degree of understanding because Islam, Muslims societies, are really diverse. Even Arabs are not one people because, although they speak the same language, or roughly the same language, there are a lot of differences based on national features. So there is a great need of places like the Euro-Gulf Information Centre that work

on strengthening mutual understanding. Good scholarship and particularly good journalism is rare. I feel that in the West, Islam and Muslims have become in a sense like punching bags, you can blame anything on them. All these people who are coming from Syria, most of them are fleeing war and oppression. And because of the terrorists involved in the Paris attacks left a Syrian passport, refugees are facing all sorts of problems in this continent. Security approaches, built without deep understanding, are based on some kind of fancy notions. Fancy notion number one is that it is sufficient to tighten border controls. In reality you have to address the issue where it is - unless you resolve the complex conflict in Afghanistan, Afghanistan will always be prone to become a base for international terrorism as it happened in the 1990s and now might happen with the Islamic State. So unless you strengthen Afghan institutions, the Taliban and the Afghans cannot negotiate peace and there cannot be a peaceful transition. Unless Afghanistan is taken as a stable country, capable of defending its territory you will have this terrorism problem. So the problem of terrorism in the West has to be addressed by continuous engagement and there will have to be a serious debate. Is it effective to have drone strikes? Or do you have to engage in terms of education, health care, and, the most important thing, support to moderate voices? I don't necessarily mean pro-Western; I mean moderate voices who have roots in their societies.

Bianco: Thank you, Abubakar. Jason, do you think that Iraq needs more engagement from Western countries, the kind of engagement that Abubakar just described as a way to help the country to go through this difficult stage?

Jason Ireland: So my background is a mixture of military, British army specifically, and also private security. I have worked across the Middle East and also I have spent some time in Afghanistan. My interest in Iraq stemmed partly from working there but also through my research interest at King's College London. I have a very strong interest in private security operations and how they intensified and changed throughout the time in Iraq. My interest also focuses on the Surge strategy and the various armed non-state groups in Iraq. I have investigated the Sunni tribal areas and what kind of support they received from the us military and the Iraqi government during the Surge but also what kind of commitment they had to give at the time, leading to the problems they allowed themselves to get into when the Americans withdrew in 2011, leaving themselves open to reprisals and reduction of power by the Shia-led government. I spent time in Iraq prior to the us withdrawal, leading up to the end of 2014. Then the Americans left the country to the mainly Shia government and that had ramifications to what we are seeing today. Since 2014 I have seen huge shifts concerning the Iraqi population in terms of how events developed, of course this has also been a consequence of the conflict in Syria. I believe that it is a very topical discussion within the wider debate concerning the global War on Terrorism, chiefly; How Shia groups working between Iraq and Syria have become allies and have filled a security vacuum when the Iraqi security forces have fallen apart and also again the ramifications; or how popular mobilisation led to an Iraq that was filled by inter-tribal violence and criminal gangs.

To answer your question, I feel that engagement from the West can be very self-focused and lacking in historical

context, despite the British having a very long history of being in Iraq through numerous periods of time. I believe we still make the same mistakes and really haven't grasped Iraqi culture or wider Arab culture. That's why the West has, for instance, for a long time, struggled to have Iraqi experts. When the Americans first invaded Iraq, the us military were found lacking Arab specialists; specifically Iraq specialists and interpreters and this just showed what kind of problems they would come across in the future. On the other side, the Iranian involvement, regardless of how destructive it can become, it is of course debatable at the moment. They have vested interests because of the reaction of the Shia population in Iraq towards Iran. Turkey has also had a lot of influence and it can be quite critical. Saudi Arabia is also a central actor.

I think, at the end of the day, they have still vested interest in Iraq's stabilisation but that actually could come only from the Iraqis themselves, however I'm well aware of the overly optimistic nature of that statement. When the Americans empowered their city tribes in places like Ramadi, Anbar, to stand up against jihadist groups, Al-Qaeda in Iraq or the Islamic State in Iraq, initially it was a success because Shia violence had started to taper off, partly because of the ceasefire that was adhered to by a number of Shia armed groups, most notably Moqtadr As-Sadr's men. Funding was given to Sunni tribes but also there was a rejection to jihadists from within the Sunni tribes because the particular version of enforced version of Islam that the jihadist groups were preaching was rejected by the tribes. It took some time to do that and hopefully we can learn some lessons moving forward, looking for leverage against this modern day phenomenon called Islamic State. The

problems came when the funding stopped and meanwhile there had been huge shifts in tribal structures, so groups like Al-Qaeda in Iraq had empowered the younger members of some of these tribes who didn't follow tribal hierarchy. These people were pushed away from the tribes and empowered themselves with American support. So when Americans support was eventually reduced in readiness for when they left the country, the only actors that held the power at the Iraqi government level were Shia militias in tandem with various special police and military units, both of which were intertwined with Shia militia groups. I feel that these parties – the Iraqi government, Shia militias – regardless if supported by Iran or not, have side-lined the Sunni tribes disproportionately and pushed them towards extremist groups.

Bianco: Thank you, Jason. You mentioned a very tricky point which is the regional engagement in Iraq and what might be the vested interests of the regional powers to stabilise or destabilise the country.

Layelle, do you think that the vested interests of the regional powers are more towards stabilisation or destabilisation of the country, at this moment in time?

Layelle Saad: Interesting question. I am a journalist, based in Dubai; I work for Gulf News. I focus on the Gulf and European relations. Prior to that, I grew up in the States [us] and I was working for Al Jazeera on us politics for the Middle Eastern audience. I got my Masters degree in Washington, focusing on Middle Eastern studies. My background is interesting because my father is Lebanese and I consider myself part of the regional politics and his-

tory because he fled the Lebanese civil war and we went to Paris and then the us. My mother is an American. So I grew up in America and I always, like most Arabs living abroad, were extremely interested in our home countries and the politics. If you go into an Arab home, as soon as you get into the door, they bring you coffee and people start smoking and talking about politics. So from my young age I was interested in it. And growing up in the city it was very interesting because I really didn't feel different from my other friends that I went to school with.

But things changed. Around the time of the Iraq war I was at university. So at that moment I started to really pick up quickly on how powerful the media is. Because you have the Arabs who are trying to understand Americans and the way the media in the Arab world portrays America is that they are aggressive and imperialistic. And as I was growing up in America, I knew that the majority of people were just kind people, very understanding. Maybe they are not much exposed to the outside world, but once you talk to them and tell them your side they are very receptive. So I would be frustrated to defend Americans to the Arabs in the Middle East, but, on the other side, there is a lot of misinformation about the Arab world in America.

So around the time of the Iraq war I saw that there were people who said no, we don't want to go to war. And then you just go to war, and for what? At the end of the day there were no weapons of mass destruction, and you can make the claim that Iraq now is actually a product of what happened back then. From the Middle Eastern and Gulf perspective on what is happening to the country, I unfortunately feel like there is the tendency towards destabilising Iraq. It is mostly coming from the Iranian side. And

this is a view shared by a lot of people in the Arab world. Specifically in the Gulf countries, they believe that Iran has – since the 1979 revolution – a vested interest in desta-bilising the region and now, more than ever, with the Sau-di-Iran crisis. And this has reached a boiling point where Gulf Arabs and Arabs in general, feel that the American disengagement in the region will have very negative effects. As Jason was mentioning in Iraq there was a power vacu-um. You had Saddam Hussein's party ruling for decades and all of a sudden that was eliminated and obviously the strongest regional power – Iraq's neighbour, Iran – would swoop in. American policy was a bit short-sighted on this and now we are seeing the results, the birth of the very ex-tremist organisations Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. As Jason said, this was largely rejected by the Islamists, but what happened was that they were running out of options. Marginalisation of Sunni tribes in Iraq made people more open to such extremist groups. After many joined is they have realised, very quickly on, that this was not what they have signed up for, and not what Islam preaches, so there was a large pull-back. But unfortunately in the media, as I mentioned earlier, this is not reported. So as a journalist I try to make sure to get that point across to Western eyes – that whatever you read in the media needs to be turned around, thought about, because if you watch what is hap-pening in the media on both sides, we would all think the other side it is crazy. But that is the power of media to turn everything around.

Bianco: Thank you, Layelle. Shaista, is there still some space in the society, or in the political scene—for the

kind of reformist ideas of Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the leader Abubakar mentioned? Is there still space for peaceful reformism?

Shaista Aziz: I am a British Pakistani. I am British and European. And I am also Pakistani. I am a Muslim, I choose to wear a hijab and I am a woman. So the world has been talking about my type of people for a very, very long time.

I was very interested in being here today, thank you very much for the invitation. The subject we are trying to deconstruct matters and it is really great to be here in such a diverse group of people. I am a journalist; I have been working in journalism for a long time. I worked in BBC for 10 years as a producer in the UK, for Al Jazeera, I have travelled a lot across the Middle East region, and I have also been working for a lot of international organisations. So I have travelled across the region, from Yemen to Gaza, Iran, spent a lot of time in Iraq, and places like that, and guess what. What you see on the ground doesn't necessarily match with what you see on television and as a journalist I am very interested in why is this.

My special interest is in identity. What does it mean to be more than one thing. The world is changing very quickly and I think people are still quite uncomfortable if they come across someone that is more than one thing. I think it is becoming tricky to navigate and find space and to basically be who you are, If you are more than one thing. I think this is the thing that people are finding difficult to get their heads around. Particularly politicians, government, people with agendas and vested interests. I spent a lot of time

at looking at these issues and deconstructing it. Last year I spent a lot of time in France, I was asked by BBC to make a documentary about Charlie Hebdo, and I was looking at what it means to be a young French Muslim after Charlie Hebdo. So I went to Paris in February and I spent there between 4 and 6 weeks travelling around. I have interviewed some very interesting people. We got amazing access: we have interviewed former Charlie Hebdo staff members and lots of high profile people who are responsible for formulating this so-called debate in France around issues of identity [...] Talking about European Muslims, their realities were so far remote from what I think most people realities are. It was really interesting and the main stories that were kind of coming out where people feeling rejected. They said they didn't feel like they could be French. That France has rejected them as being French. They said they have been born in France, they speak French and they have gone through the entire French school system and they said they feel rejected by the country. So the response to this documentary is really interesting. What I basically found as a result of getting this amazing access was that young Muslims feel rejected by the country they live in. Every time they step out of the door the issue of identity is up in their face. French people are asking you what your origin is...every single day. When I was in France I was asked this question two or three times a day. Nobody could actually just accept that I am who I am. This issue of origin, or identity, is absolutely key to everything.

I went to the French parliament to interview Marie Le Pen and I was told by the receptionist that a hijab was not allowed. I kept quiet to hear what she had to say and then I said to her, 'I am British.' She looked horrified, and I said

to her, 'I am as British as Fish and Chips, so what do you do now?' And she just didn't know what to do. She said, 'Ok, well you are not French,' and I said: 'No, no,' and she said, 'Well you can come in.' Wow. So that was my experience to enter the democratic French parliament. On the opposite side what has happened in a lot of European countries, particularly among young people who are not Muslim, is that there is a crisis of identity. Henceforth you will see there is growing numbers of people, under 30, supporting far right extremist groups. And this is happening in France, it is happening in the UK, it is happening in the whole European context. So I think this is all around the issue of national identity and it is fuelling extremism across borders. I am very interested in this issue. Very few things are black and white. There are many shades in between. Sadly, what we have seen in mass media is a lot of labelling, and the middle ground is vanishing. This is not just in Pakistan: it is across Europe. We keep talking about free speech but is there a free speech? I am not so sure. So the space for reformists, to connect to your question, is shrinking. To me, as I travel a lot, I think the space has started shrinking as fast as possible and this is what I find very dangerous.

When I was growing up, at school, I was called a Paki. I was never called a Muslim. My nephew, 10 years old, British, speaks better English than a white child perhaps. He was in a park with his friends. All of a sudden people between 16-17 years old surrounded him and his friends, who were mixed group of boys and he said, 'Which one of you is a Muslim?' And his friends were watching him. So they actually wanted to know which one is a Muslim, because they still want to know which one of these identities is there. So my nephew stood up for himself and started

having some kind of a rational debate on the boys and I thought that was very revealing. And I think that's what's happening. For a lot of young people their only kind of rational point for who in the world they are is 9/11. When I was growing up, at the time of the Salman Rushdie affair and book burning going on, the world was different from what we see now. Now what we are seeing is a whole generation of people who are British, or European.

On one level they are being told you need to feel proud of who you are, you need to belong to this country. On the other side they are being told, 'Can you please prove loyalty to your country?' This is very difficult for young people. It is very hard to actually negotiate these whole issues around identity and there are a very few people they can talk to and people that they can go to that could actually advise them and understand them. In the UK for example if you go to a doctor, to your general practitioner, he can actually report you as potentially being an extremist. If you are talking to your practitioner about having mental health issues, and not being able to cope with what's going on, you can be reported. If you send your child to school and your child starts talking to a teacher about Gaza or something that has been going on in the world that child can be reported, or the family, as that there might be potentially extremism going on. So this space to talk about things and to examine things is shrinking and it is actually becoming very dangerous.

When I was growing up nobody cared if I was Sunni or Shia. I grew up in a very nice area, I was raised by very good parents. My father was 16 when he came to the UK, so now he would be a dirty economic migrant coming to take our

jobs. I went to Church of England when at school, every Wednesday we were going to a church, there was no problem and I didn't have any attacks on me or anything like that. And after school I went to a mosque. This is how I was raised. And I have travelled into lots of different parts of world and when white European people talk to me a few of them thought I was making this up. But this is how I was raised. And now as an adult I am frequently being asked 'Are you Sunni or Shia?' I am asked this quite a lot and I find it amazing that this question keeps coming up. I refuse to answer this question. I worked for international human rights organisation and one of my directors one day randomly said: 'You know I was wondering if you were a Sunni or a Shia.' And I said, 'I am wondering whether you are homosexual or heterosexual.' She was horrified. And I said, 'Does it matter? Is it anybody's business?' And she said, 'No.' And I said, 'So why did you want to know if I am Sunni or Shia?' She had nothing to say.

I think media definitely – mass media – is fuelling this. We are living in a time where we have more information than in any other point in the history. We can access information any time, day or night. We have lots of noise and no understanding. And there is little analysis, there is just a lot of noise. And hysteria. And this I think needs to be solved collectively the people who are concerned by this issue. Like you said, everything is oversimplified. These are not simple issues. The biggest problem that Europe is facing is, around this issue of identity, people are being demonised and it needs to stop. What we have seen in the last 14 years in the so called War on Terror has been a horrific blur. And what we see now I think is the reaction.

Bianco: The fact that you have been talking about how the media portrays Islam, makes me think about a big question. Michael, we have seen that political Islam and Islamist groups that are interested in participating in political processes, have been portrayed very differently in the past years. So for example at the beginning of 2011 groups like the Muslim Brotherhood had been identified as a possible alternative, perhaps even a legitimate alternative, and there was a lot more discourse on how groups like the Muslim Brotherhood were different from extremist groups. But, as the times goes by, the two dimensions got mixed up especially in the media, but not only. So I was wondering what is your take on that.

Michael Driessen: Thank you for that question; it is a very good question. I am a professor, scholar and I work on religion and politics. I am interested in comparisons and I am interested in studying Islam through the lens of other religions as well. I try to think about political movements of Islam, and what the history and current evolutions of political movements in other religions tell us about them. We learn a lot about political Islam by examining political movements from other religious traditions. I work a lot on what the media and scholarship, over the past five years, have said, in particular, on links between religious identity formation and religiously expressed violence and extremism. So mostly when I teach we talk about why and how religious identities move to religious violence, religious war. I think you cannot understand this religious violence without looking at the non-violent religious movements and I think when we only focus on religious violence we miss that there are really important shifts that have been

happening over long run in the non-violent religious polit-
ical movements in Islam. And as a scholar I take the long
run, the longer historical lens. When I think of religious
democracy, and democratic expressions of political Islam,
what I see happening are new ways of thinking. I am work-
ing on a book on interreligious dialogue and politics and
on how interreligious dialogue seems to be capturing new
ways of talking about religious political projects and new
understandings of what religion does within the political
state. So this is what I work on.

Now to your question. Has the West portrayed these po-
litical religious groups as a legitimate alternative? I don't
think that was really the case. Scholars did certainly see
the groups as having at least some sort of legitimacy to en-
ter into the democratic politics of the region. To me this
was the big question posed by the Arab Spring—a ques-
tion that hasn't really made it big in the media but it has
been discussed at length in scholarship. There has been a
lot of scholarship over the last 10-15 years, a very big body
of research which has focused on these democratic evolu-
tions within modern politics. That scholarship really had
this idea that there was this change going on at the level of
politics and the level of ideology among Muslim political
movements, and that democracy had became something
which was seen and accepted as good for Muslim politics.
Political movements which had formerly been considered
anti-democratic now became labelled as Muslim demo-
cratic politics. That scholarship which had formulated this
evolution of Islamist politics towards what was then called
political "moderation" or Muslim democracy has totally
disappeared. And I think that is a real problem, because
I think that we have to understand and explore the fur-

ther evolution of these non-violent movements – some of which are more radical than others – during this period of violent Islamic politics. Some of my colleagues call this research the period of Islamism in the age of isis.

I think that while it is true that isis has captured some of the political spectrum and constituents that these Muslim democratic movements formerly appealed to, isis has also forced what we might call the non-violent democratic Muslim tradition towards a much more articulate and clear embrace of democratic, Islamically informed politics. This articulation is hidden and it doesn't come out in the media but you see it very clearly from people in the North Africa and the Middle East, religious and youth leaders, talking in very specific terms about democracy from a very clear religious expression of it. This is actually one of the main trends, which is really in long run going to be the crucial one: tracking what happens as Islamic political ideology move towards a more clear embrace of democratic politics.

Saad: Michael, you mentioned that the scholarship on the modern model of Islamist organisations has disappeared over the last years. Can you explain why do you think that is?

Driessen: There was this moment, during the Arab Spring, when a lot of people were working on their scholarship and they saw that the majority of Muslims and many of the explicitly religious political movements were somehow moving towards democratic politics. So, many saw the Arab Spring as a combination of that. What do Muslims want in the Middle East? They want democracy! Not just Muslim individuals but also Muslim clerics. Fun-

damentally they were moving towards a more democratic vision. Now the failures of the Arab Spring have caused many of these scholars and policy-makers to rethink their positions, particularly with regards to the Muslim Brotherhood. Never have I seen scholars so torn apart than by the discussion on the Muslim Brotherhood. The period of transition from Morsi to Sisi in Egypt was a remarkable one and was a very important moments within the academic community that really touched a lot of scholars who openly said that for the sake of liberalism we need to, for now at least, support authoritarianism. That position was voiced by many within what was generally a very liberal American scholarship. Something happened in the course of Egypt's revolution that triggered this reaction.

Bianco: Thank you very much to all the speakers. Now the floor is open for questions.

Paolo Quercia: I am an independent political analyst in Rome, mostly touching the issues of International Relations and Security, I work for a think tank called CENASS.

Shaista before you mentioned about asking the identity of somebody. If you are Muslim or not, or if you are a Sunni or Shia, asked with negative implications or with a negative attitude from the person who inquires these things—often the questions are asked in a defensive way, and probably the interlocutor will act diversely according to what the answer is. Questions such as these represent a way to understand, to investigate about the identity of a person that is not known to everybody, only to some people. But this, of course, looks very discriminatory and it breaks the unity of a society. Today you have a consistent

part of the population who has to face this dilemma every day, in daily life, and that goes for those who are questioning and those who need to answer. This is not too different from what was mentioned with regards to what happens in the tribal areas, where everybody knows everything and when the first thing that you have to answer when you enter is who you are, where are you coming from, where are you staying.

Aziz: That's if you are an outsider.

Quercia: If you are an outsider. That is the point; that is my point. This makes me think. The kind of questioning Shaista was referring to can be considered as labelled as outsiders inside the same society, but the anthropological mechanism can be very similar to the tribal one. In this I see similarities between pre-modernism and post-modernism. Do you find any similarity?

Siddique: I think that is simply an unintended consequence of the age of globalisation. One of the major dilemmas of the West is that somehow people are still thinking that integration today can be like 18th century or 19th century. Back then, even if you were immigrant, for example to the US, you would be quickly assimilated into the American culture. Regardless of where you came from, once you went to live, for example, in Brooklyn or New York you became an American because travel and contact with your original culture was limited if not impossible at all.

But those who arrive today are just not just Americans but they are part of a specific heritage or culture. Things today, and in Europe, are different. In the 21st century for

example, if a Pakistani Muslim goes to Oxford or elsewhere, first of all, they would be keen on maintaining their culture, language, and they keep a very close association with their extended and community. This is possible because of Internet, of satellite tv, because of frequent travel. I have met Afghan refugees, migrants who became German citizens. But if you go to Munich they still live as if they are still in Afghanistan. Their children speak a perfect Kandahari dialect of Pashto. So I think that in a sense the American model is better, it doesn't force you to adopt a stereotype of who you would like to be: America is proudly diverse and it has always been. But things are changing there too. In the 19th century integration was easier in the United States because of a specific kind of migration—it was a European migration and people would come from Germany, Ireland, Britain and they would be, somehow, of similar culture. As time passed by, immigration to the United States started to become increasingly diverse and immigrants' started coming from so many parts of world, that the usual assimilation process became more difficult.

Coming back to being an outsider in tribal areas, I think it's important to highlight a few differences between Afghan and Pakistani societies and their approaches to modernity. Let me begin by talking about King Amanullah Khan. He was one of the first Muslim rulers who attempted to create a modern state at the height of European imperialism in the 20th century. He wore Western dress, and forced everybody related to the government and the court to wear Western dress—even tribal people. He also initiated a number of democratic reforms: he made the first constitution, which granted equal citizenship rights to all the Afghans regardless of their race and religion. While the

King's attempt to rapidly industrialise Afghanistan didn't succeed, still among the Afghan elite, modernity is associated with dress—Western dress. If you go to an Afghan gathering today in Kabul you will see people dressed in suits. Obviously it is not traditional dress but this is something they associate with being modern, upper class etc.

In Pakistan on the other hand, or within the Pakistani political elite, the dress is not strictly related to modernity, or being liberal. For example, if you go to Baluchistan you will see all the politicians in traditional clothing, like in India. People sitting on the ground, talking, making a show out of it. Perhaps they want to say that they are the same people like the average citizen, and not like some upper class, or different Western people. So the same is true for people here, as Shaista said.

I mean, being part of a Western society or in line with Western mentality means that you should dress Western? And is there such a thing as a Western mentality? I have to point out that there is nothing universal Western that people can be expected to follow. For example there were a couple of Pashtun politicians who were invited by the US government in 2006 and they were from a liberal and secular party. Liberalism was part of their political manifesto. So when they went there – during the Bush administration – and they started telling everyone from inside and outside the State Department that they are a liberal party. Their hosts tolerated it for two or three days and on the third day they very politely said: 'Look please don't say liberal, we are the conservative party here and you are making a problem for us.' So the first, important thing we should do in dealing with our discussion here would be to question our own stereotype.

Aziz: Paolo, I would like to get back to your question, especially focusing on what happens if you are questioned about your identity but you're not an outsider. I think that for a lot of European Muslims that is a wound. If we take into consideration the whole social spectrum – from someone secular to someone who chooses to wear a hijab like me – we all increasingly made to feel like outsiders, because we are constantly being questioned. Not only about our identity but about whether we actually feel we belong to the country where we were born. I don't understand how we are trying to create a modern citizen if you keep constant questioning citizens on what their origin is. So the identity by association is your reality and this is becoming dangerous.

For me, in these regards, there was a shocking outcome from making that documentary in France. During that time I met in Paris a young woman, 21 years old, and she was completely covered up – head to toe. She wears the face veil, she wears gloves. Her mother is French – a white French woman – and her father is a Muslim. She sat in a park in Paris and told me that she wants to move to Saudi Arabia. And I asked her why she wants to do that: 'Because I would have more freedom to be a practicing Muslim in Saudi Arabia than I do in France.' I asked her if she had ever been to Saudi Arabia, and she said no, but her husband was from Saudi Arabia. So I said: 'I don't actually think you will have more freedom to be a practicing Muslim in Saudi Arabia than in France. As a woman actually you will face further restrictions.' But this is what this woman was telling me. I think that this is a big problem. And the other problem is that in Europe traditionally, in places like UK, you don't think or talk about religion gen-

erally. This is considered a private affair because the state wants to be secular. There is extreme secularism but there are extreme religious identities emerging at the same time. So deconstructing the issue of who is an outsider or not, is critical to this debate.

Mitchell Belfer: Thank you everybody for the discussion and for coming today, it has been fantastic so far. My question is of a comparative nature. I liked when you said that there is a lot of noise and nobody is really listening to each other. And that is actually true. My question is whether anybody know of any comparative literature between the times we live in now and the 1950s – when Muslim immigration was even at a higher rate for example in Germany, and first waves of immigration from India and Pakistan as well as Algeria were coming to France and, in general, different parts of the Muslim world were moving to Europe? I am wondering if there is any comparative literature in terms of how these people – their identities – were being formed in the 1950s vis-à-vis the identities being formed now. And we also faced slightly a war on terrorism in the 1950s in France. There was Algerian nationalist terrorism in the 1960s and 1970s and again in the 1990s. I remember reading once that it is like you wake up and we were all born yesterday – forgetting that there is this deeper heritage to many of the issues that we are facing. So I am just wondering if anybody has come across any literature whatsoever for the comparison between the two.

Bianco: That is a very good question, and even if you don't have the literature references, you could maybe

elaborate on your views regarding the differences between those periods Mitchell mentioned?

Siddique: It is a good question but not easy to answer. It is a good way to stimulate research.

Saad: I think basically the times of the Iraq war led us to having more of these black-and-white views.

Aziz: I think it is a reaction. There are more reactionary voices. I think that because of the nature of how we are communicating, the speed of communication, there is just a lot of reaction. People are not thinking; it is just noise coming out.

Belfer: There is a narrative in Britain – I don't know if it is also in Italy, or in another parts of Europe – but in the UK there is a narrative that many of the movements or groups of people that we deem to be more radical, have their roots of the rejection not only of forces driving them towards Westernisation but also in a generational problem. The radical narrative says that the generation that first came, the grandparents' generation, and in some cases the parents' generation were secular and that they gave in and lost a lot of the values they were bringing with them, a lot of the identity platforms came with them, from the old countries so to speak. And it is not just Muslims I have to say. Also when the Jews were leaving Eastern Europe and moving to the UK, or when Polish communities were moving to the UK also in the 1960s and 1970s, there was also this kind of generational tension between the migrants who said we will

do everything possible on earth to become British and we will try to raise our children to be British but then all of the sudden the next generation says we are trying to rediscover who we were. I am wondering if there is validity to that and especially I am wondering to what extent it is true in Italy.

Siddique: I believe it is a failure of journalism today that sometimes we are not able to tell the right story or not able to tell it the right way to grab people's attention. The media's failure is one of the things I have seen particularly. Today this is very much a European problem and now people, young people from Europe, are calling for the establishment of the Caliphate and fighting for isis. There is this generational tension you mentioned and events – like the terrorist attacks in Paris – are the direct consequence. The European Muslim communities are resorting to the extremes. I have seen Muslims who have basically left Islam, they have converted to any number of religion. Because the idea is that: yes everything is wrong here, because we face discrimination, we are questioned, our loyalty is questioned and maybe things in Pakistan are ideal, there is an ideal Islamic society, let's go and try in Pakistan, let's go and try the is as they creating the ideal society, or at least this is said in the media. I think, people are now trying to reconnect to their own origin. So they are no longer being informed that this is the reality. For example, in Germany – Germany is now spending some money, in Afghanistan where they have projects, big information campaigns telling people not to come to Germany because life is not full of roses and flowers in Germany but the reality is different and they are discouraging people. Afghans are one of the biggest migrant communities in Germany. So that kind of

initiative I think should happen on the ground level. And at the same time in the West there are also problems of misinformation. What kind of a general expertise is there about terrorism? We are in the business of selling phobias and stereotypes when our first job really is to investigate and inform.

Enrico Molinaro: Thank you for the invitation, I work in Euro-Mediterranean affairs. My name is Enrico Molinaro I am the chairman of Mediterranean Perspectives, a research centre set up in Jerusalem in 2000. I am also the coordinator of the Security Committee of the Italian Office for Euro-Mediterranean Dialogues and the Anna Lindht Foundation funded by the European Commission. I think this topic is very important for us. The work of our association in the research centre is based on collective identity – every project we do starts with the word 'identity' and something. So it is the right time now to put on the table the issue not only when it comes to the formulation of identity but also the development of identity for the lucky groups who were the previous to enjoy some continuity in their collective identity. And also identity transformations often times based on inputs that come from the outside. From this perspective, the research we develop all the years makes an anthropological difference between orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

What do I mean by this? All the ancient collective identities are based on daily life, rituals, way of life, way of eating, dressing, we spoke about clothes etc. In the way you organise your daily life during the week. This is the basis of human life. The revolution came from the West. We invented orthodoxy; if you belong to a community, if you decide to

sign a document, or to be baptised, this is the new model of identity that was exported from the West into the Mediterranean and the Middle East. And the impression I got is that there are basically two main models of identity that are created by the West and exported into the Middle East and the Southern Mediterranean. The state model of collective identity, what we call the silent model of the state identity, which makes the border, the boundary of the state a coincidence of the boundary of the identity of the group. This is the model that was exported by Napoleon in Egypt and then spread over the Middle East. For instance Syria started using the Code Napoleon as its civil code and, even today, the Ba'ath party is a party that is basically secular. And the idea of the state of the two Assads, father and son, are not based on a globalist idea. On the contrary the British, their Indian officers, exported later an opposite model that we call localist or transnational identity.

When it comes to especially studies on Jerusalem, I think they are relevant because they created the idea of the three main basic religions in that city. Now everybody is familiar with this term but one century ago, or two centuries ago nobody would speak about three basic religions. Nobody would make such a perfect comparison in between the three religions. My impression is that Islam, or rather the Islamic faithful were influenced by the West in these two directions and that's why I agree with the speakers about the transformation of Islam—Islamic values, attitudes, not only local, but also in immigrants. And I think it is very interesting to develop research in this perspective to see how the transformation of Islamic groups from orthodoxy changed between the first waves of immigration in the 1950s and today. I would say that there is a trend

which was from the anthropological point of view, from orthopraxy towards orthodoxy. So today there is even more attitude to develop an idea of identity which is more subtle, less rooted than before.

We spoke about the effect of media but also social media makes a difference too, the social networks that are running very fast and make communities. In Facebook in the time of one day you have a community that has an identity. This is certainly a difference too. Another thing that was also raised today about the perception of the immigrants, the Polish from Poland to England as well as Muslims and we experienced this in Italy, even the Italian immigration from the south to the north. The thing is the more you are rooted in your identity, the more you are open to welcome newcomers. Everybody in Italy knows for example about the Iliad and the Odyssey, because the identity in the past was very deeply rooted. The less you feel this security of your identity the more you develop the phenomenon of xenophobia and on the other side the external, the foreigner perceives the environment as hostile and potentially he becomes hostile too. So I would like to put this on the table, this two phenomena on the dioramic point of view – the change of orthodoxy towards orthopraxy. As you saw the movie 'Dance with the Wolf' – what you do makes what you are. Basically your thoughts, your values, your situation is your interest and that can make your identity. And on the synchronic level we have the two basic models coming from the West focusing obsessively on the territory and boundaries of the state and on the other side the idea of globalism that also influences Islam. Take for example the case of Iran which was mentioned today. You have the diversity inside Iran from the idea of the old ancient Persia

that somehow is kind of the idea of patriotic identity and yet the Shiite globalist Iran has the idea that its form of Islam could and has to be spread all over the world. So there is also the other directive. It can be applied to any case.

Silvia Colombo: I am a research fellow at the International Affairs Institute in Rome. Abubakar, you said that identities are eminently local and so my question is moving from identities, connecting it to terrorism. How do we make sense of the fact that identities, multiple identities, are eminently local with the fact that terrorism is more and more portrayed as a global, international phenomenon? Do you think that there is some kind of theory nowadays, within Islamic terrorism, that appeals to the different local identities and what is this? Or it is impossible to talk about terrorism as a global phenomenon and instead we really have to look at individual local/ domestic context? This is also related to how the media influence this debate: I get this impression that there is a tendency to collapse everything in Islamic terrorism while these are very different phenomenon that have to do with local identities.

Saad: You find that you are always being questioned in the Arab world and Western world and it reaches a point where it is practically insulting to us. Why is it that we always have to be the spokesperson for people who claim to be Muslim? And the media has been very bad in portraying it, and the fact is that the most of the victims of terrorism are Muslims. It is happening in Arab countries, just before Paris attacks there was an isis bombing in Beirut. Of course after the Paris attacks the Facebook profile pictures changed and we were very supportive of France which

was meant to be. But there are daily attacks on Muslims. And despite that fact we have to always defend ourselves. Which is frustrating.

Aziz: As a Muslim you have to prove your instincts. You have to prove that you are against these fanatics. What you have just said about localism—in France the problem is home grown French radicalism. There are a lot of people coming from Pakistan, but these are people born and raised in France. These are people that are citizens of the country. So definitely it is local. I think people don't understand that majority of the victims are Muslims, people living in Muslim-majority countries. In Pakistan more than 50000 people have been killed since the War on Terror started...people going to banks, bakeries, and there is no news about this. Why? This is all feeding into this belief by some of these people who are carrying out these atrocities that their lives don't matter. That Muslims lives don't matter as much as life in a Western society matters. This narrative is becoming more acceptable in Muslim circles and the media is definitely fuelling it and is responsible for a lot of this mess by not actually questioning what is really going on. Particularly in the UK, I heard from mainstream organisations, including the BBC that nobody would talk to them. And that's a peculiar situation to be in when there is a complete lack of trust.

Siddique: I would just like to give an example to understand the problem of localism versus globalism. I think one of the things that we have is that there are a lot of local conflicts and this whole War on Terrorism we are dealing with somehow makes them into the same thing. There is

a great tendency to create models and then replicate them. You have crisis in Haiti or Palestine and you have seen an intervention in Iraq and the same kind in Pakistan and in Afghanistan and that's all on a different level. The American surge in Iraq was somewhat successful with the Sunnis and we are re trying to do the same in Afghanistan, hoping that it might have had the same result. When I started researching my book, one of the things that I made sure was for me to go back to the extremist literature. You have to understand why these guys are violent. What are they doing? My research was in Afghanistan and Pakistan and a lot of it was about the Taliban. And there are two types of Taliban – Pakistani Taliban, Afghan Taliban. Now within two months I discovered that these are somewhat different entities. The Afghan Taliban literature exhibits a clear understanding of who they are, they are an Afghan Islamist movement. They have been engaged in violence as a strategy of grabbing power, and they have done it in 1990s. And their literature was very clear—they said no to global ambitions etc.

But the Pakistani Taliban on the other hand doesn't even have a political identity. They never talk about tribal areas, only they talked about the oppression of Arabs or Uzbeks and others hiding in tribal areas. So they had no local ties. But Afghan Taliban on the other hand has local ambitions. And that is what happened. In Afghanistan eventually the Americans realised that one way of ending the conflict in Afghanistan is to talk to these guys. And that's why in have the Qatar office for Afghan Taliban and you don't have any office for Pakistani Taliban, anywhere. In some cases some of these networks are completely killed to a man, or imprisoned to a man. And the Afghan Taliban on the other

hand had this kind of political interest. There is still hope that maybe they can be talked to.

   Bianco: Thank you everyone. We will have a short coffee break and will return to our discussion later.

Part II

Belfer: In our audience we have two guests from Slovakia, and they grew up when, at the time of 9/11, they were basically children. Maybe something we could also incorporate into our discussion could be that the upcoming generation is not living under a cloud of 9/11 as something new that happened. Just now we have this agreement that 9/11 feels like it was yesterday. But for people who grew up with it, there was no other world, only the world defined by 9/11. In some ways, they don't share our reactions to it and don't understand many of the intended and unintended consequences of 9/11. One of the things that we maybe have to remember as well is that there is a generation gap that we also need to acknowledge that as we are trying to analyse and assess the impact on our identity, because the identity we know in principle are our identities, but it is almost impossible for us to impose ourselves to the generations that haven't been exposed to in this way because we haven't been raised up under the cloud of the war in terror, and the sociological impacts that there are going to be. We basically lived and understand the world before 9/11 and the world after 9/11. I suggest we reflect on what September 11

meant for us individually in terms of our personal identities, whether or not they were precisely affected by 9/11 and how our social interaction as a result changed because of 9/11, because we have been imposed to the grief and the post 9/11 world order is somehow situated in those frames.

Ireland: My first time in the military was in 2000, so the British army was quieting down Northern Ireland, and suddenly we were told about Afghanistan, many family members didn't even know where the country was. So I think there have been huge changes since then. In the structure of Western militaries both in conflicts and also a valid point, I think, is mentioning the children who were growing up in the UK in this highly militarised landscape with this constant conflict going on against Muslim community. I believe that it must have been a very difficult thing for British Muslim with these identity issues to not fell like their identities in their countries had to be hidden. So I think we need to come together and try to understand children; from the British perspective. Because we don't understand. I have been volunteering with an organisation who run programmes to help draw young people away from extremist narratives in the UK and I try to always do my best to understand people's mind-sets, but it's not always easy. I think we have got a real issue here, these children around 15, 16 years old and growing up in such conflict of identity and beliefs, that this is the last chance to grab this generation of kids growing up and work with them.

Siddique: I have had real opportunities to see some of these developments in the 1990s, when the Taliban moved and captured Kabul in 1996, one of their first acts was to

hang the last socialist President, who for many outsiders was just this communist but to many in Afghanistan was a real hero. He fought against the mujahedin, and the entire coalition supporting the insurgents. But he was a very perceptive Afghan nationalist leader. He initiated the policy of national reconciliation. The country is now coming back to these policies and visions of peace between Afghans are being supported by different international actors. He was the leader, albeit a communist, who emphasised regional cooperation as a way to resolve conflicts and we are talking about a former communist leader in one of the most under developed countries in the world.

So he was never properly understood in the West. In the end when the Taliban were entering Kabul, these anti-Taliban guys were told him to leave with them. But he said: 'If I run away with you' – he was in the UN compound for 3 years – 'you will kill me in a cave or throw me into the river and I will be nobody in this world. I want to die here as a patriot.' And he did. So at the time when the Taliban grabbed power, I was a student and trying to become a professional. By 1998, 1999, I graduated and already by then there was this entire international conglomerate of terrorist groups or extremist groups, Al-Qaeda, and the Taliban. There were at least 40 or 50 of known camps of foreign militants, ranging from central Asians, to people from Philippines, and all Arab nations in Afghanistan. There was a perception that this is a major threat for everybody. Everybody was saying that these guys are threatening the West and there are attacks, they have attacked US naval ships near Yemen, embassy bombings in 1999, so there was already this perception that something is going to happen. Some Afghan leaders wanted the US help to fight against the Taliban.

And then 9/11 happened and the US, and its allies, intervened. I can see that the majority of Afghans were relieved when the Taliban government was removed from power. I remember conversations with a lot of anti-Taliban Afghan people, who hoped they would represent the Afghan nation eventually. I remember this perception in refugee camps in Pakistan that after 9/11 the Afghans had this hope that things would be different now when the world has woken up to our problems because they now know who is to blame and how to go about it. But in Pakistan there was this perception, and it still exists to the day, that the Taliban is somehow capable of ending all problems of Afghanistan. They don't really try to understand what the real problems in Afghanistan are. And then in December 2001 the Taliban government fell and the new government was formed and this entire War on Terrorism unfolded, which to some critics was just about punishing or eliminating or arresting and killing a certain number of individuals. Instead of stabilising the countries and societies that were most affected by terrorism, which was Afghanistan. Giving the benefit of doubt, I think maybe there is something bigger to it.

The more I researched it, the more I travelled I discovered more layers of complexity. I went to Central Asia, to Tajikistan, Uzbekistan. There were some Uzbek militants in Pakistan by then. One of the things that I discovered in Uzbekistan was that there was no religious freedom. The moment you kept a beard – and this was in a predominantly Muslim society – the moment the woman veiled herself, if you were a member of any Sunni organisation – just a preaching organisation, nothing to do with violence – you were thrown into prisons. There were extreme pun-

ishments, boiling people alive to death, and that kind of things happening in the prisons of Uzbekistan, under Islam Karimov. And then I understood that to some of these folks this extreme radical version of Islam is maybe their only hope, their only way to organise themselves. I am not trying to defend them but one has to understand that in this country there is so much repression against Islamic communities, although the society is predominantly Muslim. There were, of course, regional failures. I felt there was a very little attention being paid, for example, initially after 9/11, there was no consensus on even discussion of what the political future of this region should be like. There was a consensus in the West and they organised the Bonn conference [that established the Afghan government] but they didn't find a regional consensus whereby India, Central Asia, Russia, should have joined NATO and between us and China. We want a certain degree of religious freedom in Uzbekistan; instead in 2005 there was a new massacre in Uzbekistan. And that prompted another exodus to tribal areas and the problems continued.

Belfer: Is this a reflection of September 11 policy changes in Uzbekistan? Generally has the government become more oppressive after 9/11?

Siddique: Not only more oppressive but also able to move forward with it without accountability.

Aziz: And not just there, not just in the –stans.

Siddique: Of course because they have been told that now they have a free hand. I remember the conversation with

a woman, a Human Rights Watch researcher in Uzbekistan, and I was in Uzbekistan for example in 2002, and we talked about the religious oppression. To me, coming from a Muslim society, it was shocking that you can be put into prison just because you offered your prayer, or you go to the mosque, or you have a beard and they got away with it, they faced no repercussions on that. There was no and there still is no attempt to come up with a policy formulation which would address those issues. There was a lot of emphasis on the private security—by 2010 there were 150000 uniformed soldiers and I think nearly as many or more than that private security contractors in Afghanistan. Basically they were all doing the same kind of jobs.

There is a case of one bounty hunter, he was later arrested by the Afghan intelligence and imprisoned. He used to kidnap people on his own. He once took an Afghan judge and declared him to be Al-Qaeda because he had a very long beard. These kind of things happened, and there was no larger dialogue on addressing these issues. Particularly one issue, and that issue still remains a problem in the region...regional cooperation. There are conflicts but there is no dialogue.

Belfer: And what about in Britain? Where were you on September 11?

Aziz: I had actually been to New York just before it happened. During my lunch break, I was working at the BBC as a journalist, and I walked into the reception and I saw the first Twin Tower burning, trying to understand what is going on. I asked the receptionist what has happened. She said: 'I don't know.' And as I walked into the room, my

news editor turned around – I don't believe he did this intentionally, but this is what happened – he turned around and said: 'Islamic extremists!' And I thought alright that's interesting and then very soon, within 20 minutes of happenings I was starting to see breaking news showing the Palestinian celebrations of the attacks. And Palestine was shown very distinctively, quickly. And I thought, that's interesting. My family was in Pakistan so I called them, trying to track them down, as well as my colleagues in New York and beyond that it has just been a complete total disaster.

The horrific event was not turned into an opportunity. The opportunity disappeared very quickly. And what has happened since then is that there is no trust, there is a massive trust deficit between the Middle East and the West. In my opinion this is being used as an excuse to terrorise all by laws, laws that are supposed to protect you but instead sanction persecution. Basically protecting from terrorism has been used as an excuse. All localised conflicts in Russia and Chechnya are internationalised. Everything is being branded as a case of terrorism. Every single conflict is becoming internationalised. When it comes to human rights, there are actually debates going on, in civilised Westerns society on a personal level.

Jason mentioned the impact on young Muslims. I think the impact definitely is on young Muslims and beyond that so anyone is impacted perhaps. Laws are being created as a guard of protection, security and some people fell for it and then very slowly started seeing that actually these laws are being misused. After the recent attacks in Paris, what happened is that they prevented people from demonstrations – because of security issues. You have an emer-

gency law passed, the French declared state of emergency in France. But what is happening is that it actually affects every citizen, but because they tell us it is not you, it is them. And so slowly they allow civil liberties being taken away, issues around the so called free speech, internet, and information access. Lots of space is contracted and to me personally, but also other British Muslims as well, it has become painful. It has been very very painful to see that everything about it becomes a question mark. You have to prove your innocence and that you are not against your country, British way of life, British values. It is not given that you are not against British values.

Belfer: What I think is that there is a bigger issue, and something that needs to be talked about, is that there has always been a struggle between the forces of globalisation and the State. The State as an entity has been opposed to globalisation since globalisation became public. States have done different things, both in Syria and Iraq, during the height of Saddam's power, when the rest of the world was trying to globalise and he was slowing down internet connections, or not allowing everybody to have it or not allowing information to come freely into the country. What has changed is that the forces of globalisation have in some cases surpassed the power the State has to control it. I think that when there is an attack like 9/11 or the Charlie Hebdo attacks or when there are events like in Paris recently, what the State tries to do is to reassert its authority over this and try to suppress and regain control. All they need to do is to tap into people's fears and to exasperate it a little bit and people are ready to accept it, ready to be in the environment where their freedom of expression is

being curtailed. Because the countries certainly know how to exploit these events to regain the control of the things that they may have lost.

Aziz: I would like to share this short story. I was going from Amman, Jordan, to Iraq and then back to the UK. On the flight back to London, these big buys, big body-guards, they looked to me, one of them was Polish. They were very loud, sitting behind me, they were not trying to blend in, they were talking about how many properties they have bought, one was about to buy a boat etc. So I was sitting on my hands, thinking these guys should just shut up, because they are so shameless talking about how they are benefiting, and how much they are making. So I decided to turn around to see and one had a t-shirt on that said: "Baghdad Golf Club." It is like a playground to make a lot of money. This trust deficit it could have been and it should have been reversed but it is not being reversed.

I spent a lot of time in Pakistan, in some of the tribal areas and some stories I have heard, very moving stories, they don't necessary have to be connected to the aftermath of 9/11 but in some of the tribal areas some of the people I met they said to me: 'You know, the biggest disaster is not necessarily the drones, it is how our society has changed.' I asked how did that happen. They said: 'We cannot trust each other anymore.' They said in families, brothers don't trust their own mother; the lack of trust has destroyed our bonds and our generational bonds. That trust is something that we lost and that is a pretty devastating thing, you cannot reverse that I think. This 15 years impact did happen, but 9/11 didn't just happen, there are things that led up to it...it didn't just happen.

There is sort of a culture, or language, museums that are being destroyed. It is not just about a war. It is about an assault on an entire culture, on way of life. The destruction of architecture, monuments, those are all part of it.

Belfer: This is also where you get back to what Abubakar was talking about—the national interest. Because actually lots of what you see are frictions between regional and international powers seeking national interests. And it reminds me of the city of Mosul. Now we talk about Mosul because it is in a phase as being a city that has been under occupation from ISIS, and now in my opinion Turkey is going to try reach for it in this political vacuum which is going to open up.

Many people forget that the group that was formed by Al Zarqawi, the founder of ISIS basically, took the city of Mosul and 500 KM2 around Mosul in 1999 – 2 years before 9/11. Because the Iraqi government was under tremendous pressure because of Operation Desert Fox, Britain and America opposed to ISIL in the north and the Iranians continued to eat away at Saddam's power basically allowed Zarqawi to take refuge in Iran and then try to extend more influence using Zarqawi and his guys into northern Iraq. Because we contextualise the situation in post-September 11 we forget the years leading up to 9/11. The conflict in Mosul is not from now, not from 2014 it is a long standing conflict that involves the Kurds, it involves the Iranians and Iraqis and of course the Turks. And with their backers from outside there is an international discourse that produces events like September 11 which then has these after-shocks that are new and it affects all elements of our political and social resistance.

Aziz: The war on terror is also used as an excuse to liberate the Muslim world. Let's not forget this. This agenda component really comes into this. You have this situation now where there is mass numbers of young men in Afghanistan prisons just because they pose a problem to an international agenda. This agenda is something that is part of this component of the War on Terror and I think that our industries build around that.

Saad: Well I grew up in America and when 9/11 happened I was in undergraduate studies, I still didn't know what to do with my life. I wasn't decided. For the most part I lived a typical American life, I watched FRIENDS, I did all American things, I watched sports etc. After 9/11 we were forced into defending ourselves and our religion, before that it was never an issue. So I had found myself needing to read up really quickly on that, just to be able to defend myself. I didn't really know what my religion was. The media coverage in general, how it used 9/11 to invade a country for example and all of the lies made me feel like that was a big need for journalists, I was very idealistic thinking I will change it, I will become a journalist. So that did change me, because I did become a journalist and I did further studies on the Middle East and religion. Later on we could see, in the War on Terror, that all of the horrific things cannot be justified as a response to 9/11. It was a horrific thing but all the conflicts which happened long time ago, still continue to happen, and I started to be very critical of US politics in general because there are a lot of international geopolitical considerations involved. So that's also why I am in journalism.

Siddique: One thing that we should definitely talk about is that after 9/11 journalism has changed. People are not interested in reading the facts. People just want more spicy stories, spicy War on Terror stories. I have seen this with my own eyes and in places like Pakistan, a lot of journalists, mainly local journalists, just became journalist accidently because they were hired by foreign journalists as their fixers or translators initially and then they decided they will go for it because there weren't many employment opportunities. These journalists have never been trained as journalists, and they have never done serious reporting. All they do is trying to contact Western media and sell the story of the "most dangerous" narrative. In Pakistan the most dangerous place was FATA [Federally Administered Tribal Areas]. I remember there was very little information about FATA. In 2006, a book was published, called *The Most Dangerous Place*. In this book there are also profiles of some tribes within FATA – like 15-20 major Pashtun tribes and some of these are as large as 1 million people – and in one of the profiles of the tribes the author says: 'They are all known for bravery' and are known engaging in smuggling and similar activities. So all kinds of offensive stereotypes were presented as facts.

When I first wrote my first paper on FATA called "Resolving the Afghanistan Pakistan Stalemate," and it was published in 2006 and still there was no real understanding about FATA, no understanding of what the tribal area is, how to resolve the conflict there, how you address the grievances, what is the draconian FCR (Frontier Crimes Regulations), the local law. So there were just stereotypes that people were talking about and all that everybody

wanted to do was some kind of military operation to get rid of those bad guys.

I have also seen a lot of Western journalists particularly looking for fixers or someone to help them set up meetings with some anonymous militant who covers his face and who will say: 'I will go and blow up Washington.' And they use to do it from some rundown place, in a remote region such as Baluchistan. They should have asked. 'How is he going to go to Washington and blow it up?' But these kinds of interviews become headline news on all the major networks.

Belfer: This also reminds at the time when I was in Bahrain and Karel Schwarzenberg, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, went for a visit there. He managed to see both – the leader of the opposition as well as members of the government. And he brought with him – and the Czech Republic paid for it – journalists to cover the meetings he was going to have. And this was very interesting, because the opposition argues that they don't get publicity, they don't get to talk to the outsiders – it is a false narrative. And here is a Foreign Minister, who met Ali Salman, he sits down at a private meeting with him. And the very first question he asks Ali Salman is: 'What do you want?' But it wasn't recorded, because where were all the journalists that we paid from our taxes that he took over so they could cover the story of what is happening in Bahrain's chapter of the Arab Spring? They were all in the streets watching people set tyres on fire. And when you look at the Czech press the next day, it had nothing to do with Schwarzenberg's discussion with Ali Salman, but it had only to do with demonstrators burning tyres and

the police. So the narrative in Western eye, this time in the Czech eyes, the narrative was that Bahrain is a violent country and the other narrative – not having publicity or being able to speak, it persists. So in this way, yes, it is kind of an austerity that you find within journalism.

Not necessarily everything is financial. It is almost like an ethical austerity: there is no longer two sides – you know your audience and what it wants to see and you know what your newspaper wants you to produce. In the case of the Czech Republic – firebombs and battles with police officers, not the dry, but more important, political dynamics that take place there. I think that in the Gulf context this has become an issue in most of the countries—one of the things that 9/11 produced there. If you think it is difficult to be in Europe and having to defend yourself, if you are from countries like Bahrain, Kuwait, which are more inclusive, more open, there are many more dialogues and all of the sudden everything that is happening post-September 11 environment has to do with the Gulf. They say there is a corruption in Islam and the corruption comes from Saudi Arabia.

One of the main narratives in these days is that Saudi Arabia is the reason for the birth of isis, which is fundamentally wrong. isis and Saudi Arabia are opposed to one another. Just like Saudi Arabia and Al-Qaeda they are fighting mortal war with one another much more than anybody in the West is fighting against Al-Qaeda and/or isis. And if you know the Arabian Gulf you will find that the people honestly and legitimately believe that the truth will eventually come out. And they just think that they don't need to defend themselves, 'everybody should know that we are not connected to Al-Qaeda' is a typical way of

thinking for example. But the world doesn't know and people's narratives produce like a harmony to the opposition. My suspicion is that one of the reasons why the West is now reaching out to Iran is that many people in the West believe that Gulf Arabs are the sponsors of Al-Qaeda and isis and they don't see the hand of Iranians in the context of the rise of the Shia militias; there should be also some kind of understanding of that. Jason, having done a lot of research on this problematic could you maybe elaborate more on that?

Ireland: Iraq has been a great example where international interest waned and nobody was really reporting on the troubles that continued after the Americans left in 2011. There has been continuous between government troops and Sunni militants both during and after the us left Iraq in 2011. These places have remained very hostile to the Shia-led military and police units' heavy-handedness, which has ultimately aided the spread of support for the jihadist groups who found themselves back on the international communities' radar Because of this Iran has managed to maintain a very sectarian Iraq and continued to fund and train some of these Shia groups. I left Iraq in 2012 and when I returned a mere ten months later, the Syrian conflict was very intense, very fragmented, and the Shia communities, especially around Southern Iraq had become very radicalised, because Iranians were helping to push their narrative that jihadist groups would evaporate the existence of Shia Islam, empowering the Shia identity further. This led to many Shia males of fighting age to would go to Iran and join some of the Shia militias who also shared key personalities within these groups. There

are Shia militias who have transnational links between Iran, Iraq and Syria, so there was a cross over and networking of individuals and sharing skills and tactics but also ideologies. When I returned to Iraq I found again that Shiite community became radicalised because families were sending their sons to Syria to fight the jihadists and not all of them were coming back. The high tide marks of radicalisation was apparent through increasingly hostile behaviour towards non-Shia (specifically anti-Sunni) aggression and violence.

When I travelled through towns and villages, there was a number of billboards and posters with pictures of dead Shia fighters, killing fighting in Syria to protect the Saida Zeinab shrine. This all fostered a very unhealthy feeling in the context of trust and so the majority of my employees in Iraq were Shia with a small minority of Sunnis. The Sunni minority started to find themselves pushed out from the villages in southern Iraq, with threatening graffiti on the walls and doors, with overt threats and again it was another indicator of the spiralling of peace within Iraqi society. And then in northern Iraq we were starting to see the non-violent Sunni protests in these tribal regions. A Sunni tribal spokesperson, by the name of Dulaym spoke out but the country already was militarised and the Iraqi army made it look as the protests had been much more violent in order to allow a more robust response to these protesters. To me this was a real turning point; it must have been a very tough environment to be in, with the security forces fanning the flames of insecurity and pushing civilians towards the arms of jihadist groups. So very shortly after we saw these groups, like isis, prospering at the expense of the Sunni civilian population and Iraqi society as a whole.

When the US military left Iraq in 2011, I witnessed the Iraqi security forces become suddenly aware of their own power and influence. So at that point they were dealing with the private security which had a very dark issues dealing with Iraqis in the past. So since 2011 onwards in Iraq it was very difficult to carry on my work, but it was very understandable considering the legacy issues in the past concerning private security companies in Iraq. . And that can also be relevant when assessing the Shia mind-set who see themselves as being oppressed in Iraq for many, many years, that suddenly they find themselves in possession of power; it is very hard for some to control themselves and I think it is even harder for certain segments of society to disarm the capable and well-trained militias.

The militias now have been leading the assault against ISIS and what we can see online is a very strong propaganda platform. We have loads of international experts now on ISIS and the recruitment methods, we don't see the same kind of exposure with the Iranian proxies, I think it is quite problem because the whole ISIS issue, jihadist terrorism is much more popular within international media and academic research circles, but now we are starting to see pop-up experts talking about Iranian proxy groups. I have done a lot of research on Iraq myself but again, it is a very difficult situation to be able to monitor and understand these groups and the trends we see when there's a lack of in-depth study being done on these groups. As we go forward with Iraq, let's say we start to deal with the jihadist problem now, what do we do with the well trained Shia militias and also the Iranian proxies? Because the infrastructure in the Iraqi security policies doesn't really exist and doesn't really hold the power we also find that it's easy to fighters moving

away from the region. I saw inter-tribal violence, which is again huge issue. People continue to be killed every day. If we have an Iraqi security forces group that don't secure the state, then we have the huge body of Shia militias who carry out atrocities and this is very hard to reconcile between the various religious and ethnic groups

Saad: I find that very interesting. In the sense of the media, I don't think it is a coincidence that we are hearing about isis and that we see the videos; they are like Hollywood productions. I don't think it is an accident that we are hearing about this and that we are not hearing about the Shia militias. Because if the us or the West were interested in looking the situation objectively it would be a parallel [to isis]. But there are small swings and I think isis is being used as a small wing to draw the world attention away from some atrocities that are happening. The massive attacks that have happened by hands of the Shia militias are atrocious, a lot of hatred and sectarian language is being used; it is just as bad as isis. But the Shia militias are not making these big production videos so we are not hearing about it. But it is our job to make sure we understand it and research it to make sure we get this information because everything that is in context makes much more sense.

Aziz: Also if you look at the situation in Syria, recently there has been a survey, the majority said that they actually fear the power bonds and the daily atrocities of the regime more than they fear isis. This is the message we don't want to hear because we made isis big because they have threatened our way of life in the West. And everything is about that, everything is about the West and not about what is

happening in these countries. But in these countries every day people's lives are being destroyed. And when it comes to the media I think there is a new journalist phenomenon which when/where did it start, I don't know. But I am sure it started before the War on Terror has started but has become a phenomenon and there are times when it is very hard to actually understand if the journalist is part of the military or not.

I remember watching a story, run on BBC where the corresponded was running around a tank, and he kept referring to the people there as 'we' and I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I was shocked by the terminology of his report. And there was one particular incident when he was with the US military and you couldn't see them but you could hear them, they were all shouting 'Allahu Akbar' and he said: 'They are here, we can hear them.' And I was thinking: 'Well we don't know who these people are. Anyone could say that, right?' So I was asking at the BBC about his terminology of referring to 'We,' and they told me that we refers to 'we' as in the BBC. I think this is why a lot of journalism has come under fire. Journalist have come under fire as well. Journalists are not seen any more as being independent or as trying to tell the story. They are just the extension of the military or other actors that are on the ground. So I think not knowing the boundaries is very dangerous. All this has become very murky, mostly since the 9/11 and becoming murkier. Once upon a time journalists didn't come under attack as much as they do now. So this has all become very murky and dangerous, the biggest problem to me is usually traditionally there were rules and limits. The time I spent in Iraq I knew that actually in the front line someone is aiming at me, in the front line there

is no escaping. You cannot escape the issues. The context is everywhere. You cannot be safe. It is just impossible and that is one of the most shocking phenomenon that has come out of this chaos.

Belfer: Is this the Arab World War? In wwii there was not a single German city, or British city that did not feeling the pinch of the war, not to mention the rest of the continent. And I am wondering if what we are seeing is really a process. Britain and France were traditionally rivalry countries. Traditionally. And the larger sways of the continent, giving rise to all kinds of political movements – Communism eating half of the continent, Nazism eating great percentage of the continent as well – these grand ideologies, one country influencing the rest, causing a lot of struggle, having to be pushed back. And we developed all kinds of mechanisms of resistance. Interesting thing about European history is that if you look at 200 years ago you go from having these heterogeneous empires – The Austro-Hungarian, for instance, with 7 languages, currencies, and from there we get to these nice ethno nationalist religious units—clean. wwi created a wave of nation states over many of the dead empires; wwii cleansed those nation states – gone were the Jews, gone were many of the Romani communities. If there was a minority in one country, it went into another country. If there was a German minority, after wwii they went to Germany. So you had a long process in Europe – ethnic cleansing, genocide, all this before you could create a nation state.

I wonder if in the Middle East that is what we are seeing. Is it there that a nation state is being born? And basically there is an ethnic cleansing and I think the West has its

interest, and other countries too, China, India, Russia they all have their interests which is one side of the story but the other side is that the local actors have their interests. As Jason said before, tribal conflicts these days are not invented, many of them go back for very long periods of time. And the wars in the Middle East go back for a very long period of time when the US wasn't even a country yet and the Persian and Ottoman empires were in war with each other. We should not neglect history in the sense that in some cases there is historical rivalry that comes up again and again, century after century, generation after generation which is why I am not surprised that Russia and Turkey have tensions, they have had tensions for 400 years. And they take a generation off, and then they are back at it. Then they take another generation off, and they are back at it again. So it is unsurprising to me that these conflicts keep emerging but the question is within the globalised environment even more.

Aziz: Do we know more? It is tragic how we are increasingly being told that the Palestinians and the Israelis have ancient hatred. Is it so? Actually it is about occupation of land and many other things beyond the ancient hatred. So this whole Sunni – Shia thing, people still carry on into marrying each other, yet there were tribes having warfare, having wars, killing each other, they still do marry, they still have family relations and the killings are still going on. The danger is completely subscribed to this that they stopped falling into this chaos, that's what it is – you know the ancient hatred. Every time you talk about the Middle East as a region this is a really ridiculous how narrow rang-

ing this mythology about ancient hatred and mystical cultures is.

Saad: If you look back at the modern history of the Arab world, you see actually consistent policies, Western policies, typically American policies which is they don't want one power as the political leader. So in the beginning it was Saudi Arabia and Iran, one against the other. None of this of course was discussed, when debating whether or not to invade Iraq; that was irrelevant. But these things are relevant, these things are extremely relevant because it shows you that there is some overall punching divine on the Middle East. And if you are interested in conspiracy theories, and even if you do not believe in them, the more you follow this on a daily basis you start noticing a bit of a coincidence I can say. And it makes you ask a lot of questions. So hopefully it won't be a wwii situation but it doesn't mean that the regional Vienna consensus of assisting couldn't take place.

Aziz: In the context you work in, how is the censorship, the way information is given to the population? How has that been affected by the September 11 in the Gulf context?

Saad: I am not so sure, I come across issues of copyright on a daily basis, basically Westerners writing about Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, about the region and what I have noticed a lot, what I have to edit out a lot, is that references and the language they are using – Sunni, Shia – in every single sentence. I mean we get the point if you say Sunni/Shia in the first sentence. Just to make it clear but if you

are constantly saying Sunni in Saudi Arabia and Shia in Iran and rivalry and all this terminology makes you think well these people don't know a lot. These people, it is just in their culture, they hate each other. Which is not true, even in my father's generation there were families in Lebanon there were half Sunni and half Shia and nobody really cared. Nobody asked. And we are only seeing this in the past two to three years. We are seeing that Western media likes to play with it, the audience wants it. But for our audience, in the countries like the UAE we do not want these stereotypes, we do not want these references. Because we don't view it as a Sunni-Shia problem, we see that these people have problem at a government level, but it doesn't mean that it is a Sunni-Shia problem.

Belfer: Just to clarify what I meant. We stopped breaking up Europe with nationalism and we stopped bringing up what the nation wants as part of our regular discourse. Then that is going to reproduce things that existed in the past. Probably the best example is Iran's behaviour vis-a-vis Bahrain. Because there is a slight Shia majority in Bahrain about 52%-48% but that's enough for Iran to claim that it was the 14th province (historically) of Iran. And if it is the 14th province of Iran and there is this 52% majority of Shia in that country then – according to Iranian propaganda – of course Bahrain has to come back under Iranian territorial control. So it is not that the narratives are completely dead but they get reformulated for another context. Because, if the Iranians were honest in this case they would want to revert the whole society back to the way how it was years ago and we know that it is a revolutionary, impulsive one. Now the Iranians would think that for everybody else

but not them. For them, they will take that little piece of history and claim that it is a historical right and, of course, the Shah of Iran is something that Iranian clerics are completely opposed to, they are opposed to everything that regime stood for—except national territorial enclaves in Bahrain. So those things are ok according to their national stories. Let's shift from issues that are kind of negative to more positive sides. Of course there are terrible things that need to be resolved, the internal political and the sociological nature and we are not obviously relying on our histories whether we are in the Middle East or whether we are in Europe. As we wind down the session maybe it is important also for the context of today's event to think about solutions. Because there are different models, models that we can look into to solve the problems that are unfolding, not only on a geopolitical level but also within European societies and how to better deal with it to stop radicalisation – and I don't mean only Islamic radicalisation but also the right wing, like Pegida in Germany. Because we are being pulled in a direction – either to the extreme right, or to the extreme left – and in some ways one of the worst things that could possibly happen now is when you have radical ideologies that are suppressive of everyone, not just of the minority but even of the majority and the thing is that we are not unfamiliar with these issues in Europe. In some parts of Europe, Belarus for example, and Russia, and not least in places in Central Europe, with Orban, or Poland, people know very well about it. Even in the Czech Republic there is an attitude now that is going to empower the government more to do things that are against the interest of the citizens in the country. I think it is important for us as scholars, people from the media as well as civil society

also to state some kind of solutions if there are some, to try to reform the public which you can present with analysis and to inform them with solutions of these problems.

Saad: It is just a very simple answer to this, all it takes is information. I cannot say that there is a solution beyond that but I think that this is what it takes.

Aziz: To understand what is going on in there, I think it is a mismatch as you said, and it is up to each of us to critically examine what we are looking at, question why it is coming to us and where it is coming from. Beyond that I think there has been a lot of pushback on social media. We saw all that there are issues around the social media – how to use it, quick reactions but then there is the other side to it as well … [interrupted transcript].

Ireland: I will focus on Iraq, I have seen changes there in such a small amount of time and it would be very hard to get back to how Iraqi society was before. But we can learn from mistakes. In terms of engagement we can see countless mistakes in Iraq in the past 100 years. We could start by not repeating the same mistakes while we try to layout plans to engage constructively in post-war Iraq.

Belfer: Any last points?

Siddique: My only point is the question of how to present ourselves in simple terms and what can we do as journalists to inform and perhaps educate the society at large. One thing I have noticed on social media platforms is that people think that when they have more radical opinions

that means they are right and everybody else is wrong. This is how the social media works. For example I have seen in the discussions on terrorism that secular Muslims often broad-brush and blame all Wahhabis but there is no debate or even accurate information about how these Salafis are also struggling with radicalism. It is true that they sponsor schools in which some of the theories and dogmas they teach are used by some of the modern jihadist movements but predominantly Salafi countries such as Saudi Arabia has also struggled with radical Takfiri interpretations of their beliefs.

The other thing that is missing is that after 9/11 all conflicts are internationalised, especially in Muslim countries. Particularly in all these countries you have to find grounds for regional cooperation to resolve conflicts. So if we can have for example that kind of model in the Gulf region or South Asia, or any parts of the world I think we can have a solution of these complicated problems of economic stagnation and so on. Societies that are in conflict today in Afghanistan or in other Muslim countries could be linked by this economic bridge to Central Asia. Connecting Muslim societies with a post-communist region, or linking them to India, will transform their economies in an unprecedented manner.

Belfer: Perfect. Are there any questions?

Roberto Cigliano: I agree that one of the main issues is the lack of cohesion within communities and the divide between tribal and national identity. How about establishing some kind of national or international court to reach out to all the different tribes and national groups? That could

be something that could happen, similar to the court the European community has, that these societies could refer to. It should be recognised by states but also by different groups. This could be an idea for a solution.

Belfer: Or to use these wonderful courts we already have and use them properly. We have these courts filled with judges and lawyers and administration but they are so politicised. The icc for example: just think of the duty and jurisdiction of the icc and then look at the countries that are not signed up to it – the usa, Russia, Iran, North Korea – and then you can see where the conflict of interests is. These countries are countries with problematic human rights records. Especially North Korea, the country that is one of the worst violators of everything what we are talking about, engaging in torture, and all kinds of political violence. So how do you get the icc to answer to its mandate properly? But I think that you are 100% right when you say that we need to stimulate the energies of those institutions.

As Shaiza said earlier the key to this is that there is no trust. So the reason that many states don't trust international institutions enough, is the fear of manipulation. Which is why universal jurisdiction that was something that was very popular in Europe has been retracted due to suspicions of manipulation by national government on the basis of national agendas. Because of this almost global lack of trust, all these institutions have become paralysed and again maybe that is where our energy should go, because we have created those legal programmes.

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We certainly have posed more problems and question than we addressed. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you and see you at one of upcoming events!