

BAKU DIALOGUES

POLICY PERSPECTIVES ON THE SILK ROAD REGION

Vol. 5 | No. 3 | Spring 2022

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The crisis over Ukraine reinforces the view that, despite progress in many areas on the international agenda in recent years, the number of people affected by conflict and violence keeps growing. In the past 20 years, the number of forcibly displaced people has doubled, reaching over 80 million. According to United Nations data, over 60 percent of conflicts have relapsed in the last decade, a staggering figure that testifies of the difficulty of conflict resolution in this context. More than 80 percent of conflicts over the past 30 years involve militias and non-state actors, while the more recent rise in transnational violent extremist groups has increased the challenges for conflict resolution. Civil wars

are leading to more protracted conflicts with ethno-cultural components, which complicate the traditional political approach. Existing multilateral mechanisms and diplomatic negotiations are increasingly ineffective, and a new toolbox for conflict resolution is more urgent than ever.

The combination of great power competition, regional struggles for hegemony, and the proliferation of non-state actors create interlocking and multi-layered conflicts that impact international peace and stability. At the same time, these elements are challenging the traditional approaches whilst further putting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

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at risk, as recognized inter alia by the latest Strategic Plan of the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.

The international multilateral order is being questioned from many different quarters, while the wave of global protests shows the exhaustion of existing economic and political models, as well as the need for a new social contract. The impact of the pandemic and the measures taken to control it are also having a profound impact on these new political and economic dynamics, laying bare the growing inequalities of the new digital economy as well as the weakening of solidarity and common action.

The increasingly intricate fabric of peace and conflict and the multiplicity of actors involved have made conflict resolution more complex, as stated in the December 2020 Concept on EU Peace Mediation. Terrorism and radicalization have become a more imminent security threat and tensions related to environmental degradation, irregular migration and forced displacement, are affecting the social fabric in fragile states in unprecedented manners.

Today, Artificial Intelligence (AI), data processing and the new digital technologies are defining the power relations of our time, emerging as the defining factor in politics, society, and the economy—an influence which ultimately stretches to international and diplomatic relations. In response to AI's widely acknowledged impact on global diplomacy, awareness must be raised about what has been defined as tech diplomacy, as well as AI's influence

on mediation, peacemaking, and conflict resolution. AI is increasingly used in the conduct of warfare, intelligence, and disinformation operations, but it could also become a powerful instrument for monitoring the ef-

fect of those campaigns that have turned social media into the new battlefield of our time. The definition of technological governance will be critical for the future of the international system.

In its efforts to address the multifaceted challenges that conflict resolution and crisis management pose to us, the European Union External Action Service (EEAS) has included cultural heritage,

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together with environmental peacebuilding, new technologies and interfaith dialogue as some of the new priorities in its mediation strategy. Its December 2020 Concept on EU Peace Mediation states that

cultural heritage can constitute an important asset in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and mediation, considering in particular its strong symbolic importance for local communities. It offers multiple points for intervention along the conflict cycle. Cultural heritage is key to restoring the social fabric that sustains peace agreements and reconciliation.

The traditional concepts of intercultural and interfaith dialogue are evolving rapidly in the changing landscape of the conflicts of twenty-first century. The way that cultural heritage can play a positive role in efforts to resolve conflict, reconcile, and build peace may not be straightforward to identify in the traditional interpretation of conflict resolution, but it is now informing the new trends and narratives.

For the most part, the way the issue of cultural heritage in time of conflict reg-

isters is in relation to its destruction. Issues of cultural heritage can be among the most important signifiers of identity; they are potent symbolically and politically. If the issues of cultural heritage are not understood as opportunities to build respect for difference and a culture of tolerance, that space is taken by a consolidated narrative of difference and exclusion.

Recent analysis of lessons learned on these issues suggest at least three key lessons. *First*, the emphasis must be on local ownership and locally driven efforts. Anything that seems to be imposed from outside is likely to be resented. *Second*, discussions on and use of cultural heritage should seek to have multiple perspectives, allowing for other voices to participate. *Third*, emphasis should be on the process—dialogue that seeks to discover the thoughts and

ideas that cultural heritage awakens in people rather than presenting them passively and statically.

While the role that cultural heritage can play in the commemoration of historical events and building

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collective memory is fairly clear; it depends for its success on allowing it to be seen as a legitimate area for debate and dialogue if it is going to lead to the promotion of respect and tolerance.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres recently requested urgent action by member states to address the interconnected crisis of climate change, environmental degradation and growing economic and social inequalities, which has been compounded by the impact of the pandemic. This call could not be in more stark contrast with the summit that launched the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015. The combination of these systemic crisis with the proliferation of armed conflicts and big power confrontation is the most important threat to the multilateral system in decades.

The international peacebuilding and security architecture that a renewed UN requires must build new international alliances, embrace new technologies, AI and technological diplomacy, and incorporate new international

actors in a more effective way. The new “Agenda for Peace” to be adopted at what Guterres is calling a “Summit for the Future” that may take place in 2023 will, it is hoped, open the way for a stronger multilateral system.

Guterres’ dramatic message is not just a reason for alarm: it is a call for collective action. At the heart of his proposal for a common agenda is a new security architecture and peacebuilding instruments. Conflicts are increasingly complex and difficult to resolve. In 2021, the two main organs of the UN—the General Assembly and the Security Council—each adopted resolutions that set in motion the third review of the UN security architecture. This is an opportunity we must seize to address the daunting challenges at hand.

The triple crisis mentioned by the UN Secretary General is affecting disproportionately those most vulnerable, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it will be a conflict multiplier. Competition for more scarce resources, food insecurity

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or decaying public services will have an impact on migration flows and international stability. The UN Alliance of Civilizations can become one of the leading actors in the process to define the aforementioned “Agenda for Peace” that is to be adopted at the “Summit for the Future” proposed by the UN Secretary-General.

New Challenges for Mediation and Conflict Prevention

The Alliance of Civilizations was born to respond to the growing polarization and the challenges of increasing sectarian and ethno-cultural rooted conflicts at the turn of the century. It was formally established by Spain and Turkey in 2005 as an initiative of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. It was in truth the brainchild of two Spanish statesmen: José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, prime minister at the time, and Miguel Ángel Moratinos Cuyaubé, who was then foreign minister and is now, as it happens, the High Representative of the Alliance of Civilizations (he had previously served as the EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process). Zapatero made his proposal public for the first time in September 2004

in his address to the UN General Assembly, as part of Spain’s efforts to come to terms with the Madrid terror attacks of March 2004.

Much has happened since its establishment, when the “clash of civilizations” and the U.S.-led “war on terror” dominated the security agenda and international debates, bringing criticism on the supposedly naïve vision and optimistic voluntarism of the project. Nevertheless, events in Iraq and Afghanistan—just to pick on the best-known examples of that strategy—will for long remind us of its complete failure and the need to have instruments to address the deep-rooted causes of conflict. The “war on terror” created a perverse mechanism to justify its military interventions, imposing a parallel reality that few dared to question. That lesson should not be forgotten lest we buy again in the fallacy that the failure was the result of lack of resolve and commitment not on the complete disregard for conflict resolution initiatives.

In December 2019, *Washington Post* journalist Craig Whitlock published a long research article on the Afghan war entitled “At War with Truth.” This landmark investigation brought to light the endless orchestrated manipulation of facts, media messaging, and

concocted statistics to justify the continuation of a military intervention doomed to fail.

The reports that formed the basis of his investigation were not written by antiwar activists or foreign agents bent on undermining the Western war effort but, rather, by the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. The over \$2 trillion invested until then showed a dismal result of incompetence, corruption, and continuous deterioration of the military and security situation. Still five years had to pass until U.S. President Joe Biden put an end to that expensive and tragic farce, amid fierce criticism of a large part of the security establishment, that had been part and parcel of the massive cover-up of the disaster in Afghanistan.

Since 2005, the Alliance of Civilizations has become a platform for intercultural dialogue, understanding, and cooperation. It has connected governments, religious leaders, civil society organizations, the media, and other actors committed to promoting understanding across cultural and political divides. Since that time, the Alliance has become solidly anchored in the UN system and remains a useful tool of preventive diplomacy, with great potential to contribute to

conflict resolution and become an important part of the UN’s new “Agenda for Peace.”

As part of the overall redefinition of the role and practices of the UN in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, the Alliance’s “action plan” for 2019-2023 aims to turn the organization into a relevant actor in conflict prevention and mediation through intercultural and interfaith dialogue. The priorities of the Alliance in education, youth, migration, and media, together with their cross-cutting gender approach, address some of the most important challenges for today’s international agenda and show the foresight of this initiative.

Addressing the fight against violent extremism through education, interfaith dialogue, protection of places of worship and other programs, the Alliance is making important contributions to international peace and stability. Nevertheless, its new objectives are much more ambitious and far reaching. In order to achieve them, the Alliance has to leave behind complacency for both its past achievements and its own lofty goals and become a relevant factor of change on the ground in a much more challenging environment, with operational initiatives as a global player in mediation and conflict resolution.

Conflict prevention and conflict resolution endeavors of the next decade must be more holistic, comprehensive, and culturally sensitive. Incorporating lessons learnt and addressing the challenges that AI and digital platforms pose is not a choice anymore—it has become a necessity. The question of environmental peacebuilding is also being integrated now more comprehensively in interfaith dialogue initiatives, and we have witnessed the increased engagement of religious leaders in the international climate, peace, and security agenda.

Besides, the requirements to incorporate women more fully into the process of mediation and peacebuilding is now recognized as part of the agenda to fully empower women and achieve real gender equality. The Alliance of Civilizations has incorporated many of these principles in its aforementioned “action plan,” but it needs operational instruments and resources to implement such goals. A platform that would be designed to implement such programs, design projects, and create networks directed

at the new lines for international mediation and conflict resolution, is needed. The welcome announcement in mid-March 2022 by Moratinos that the Alliance will open a dedicated Mediation Center in Istanbul by the end of the year, is an excellent step in the right direction.

One of the main value-added interventions of the Alliance of Civilizations will be in conflict prevention, a role that few institutions can approach as effectively. The prevention of violent conflict is fundamental in addressing the security challenges in the global stage. At the same time, it enables long-term political and social advancement and human security, creating some of the conditions for the Sustainable Development Goals to be implemented. Preventive diplomacy serves to prevent conflict from arising between parties and to avoid the escalation and spread of conflict once it breaks out. Mediated processes and dialogue can become key pathways to peace by addressing emerging crises and conflicts at an early stage. They also have the merit

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of handling tensions before positions have become entrenched. Preventing conflict is one of the most difficult aspects of mediation, because it requires a certain degree of foresight and anticipation, while its success is even more elusive to measure.

Tensions around cultural issues are a good indication of impending conflict, frequently becoming the catalyst for underlying conflicts to burst into the open. Conflict weakens the cultural infrastructure of countries and the capacity of states, communities, and peoples to address cultural collapse. It ruptures and disconnects people from the environment in which they live as well as fractures society, causing instability, internal displacement, and deteriorated local economies and livelihoods. The destruction and weaponization of cultural heritage is an outcome of the changed politics in conflict zones.

Spain has been discussing joint initiatives with Turkey to give the Alliance of Civilizations a more prominent role in the

new peace and security agenda of the United Nations. The foreign ministers of Spain and Turkey (José Manuel Albares and Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, respectively) have held several trilateral meetings with Moratinos in New York, Geneva, and elsewhere in the past several months. In the midst of these ministerials, a Turkish-Spanish Summit was held in Ankara on 17 November 2021 between the President of Turkey and the Prime

Minister of Spain. At its conclusion, the two leaders expressed a shared commitment to support Moratinos’ vision of the Alliance of Civilizations as a relevant international actor in mediation and conflict resolution. Moratinos’

recent announcement that the Alliance will open a Mediation Center in Istanbul by the end of 2022 should be read in that light, as it will ensure the agreed principles of promoting conflict prevention and resolution through inter-cultural and interfaith dialogue will be put into action in the time ahead. Spain’s commitment to this endeavor comes as a result of a long-term engagement with intercultural and interfaith

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dialogue, which is strongly linked to our transition to democracy nearly 50 years ago.

The Role of Spain

The December 2020 Concept on EU Peace Mediation is a groundbreaking conceptual framework for the future of the European Union's conflict resolution initiatives. By adopting new thematic lines such as environmental peacebuilding, addressing the challenges of IT and digital platforms, supporting the international agenda for women in the context of peace and security, and incorporating cultural heritage and interfaith dialogue as an effective point of entry in the conflict cycle, the EEAS has now placed itself at the cutting edge of a more holistic and comprehensive mediation handbook. As I have argued above, cultural heritage and interfaith dialogue have taken a new dimension in the digital age we are entering, where redefinition of identity lines and mass forming messaging are taking

unprecedented dimensions. Art and culture have the potential for interconnecting the diversity of human civilization into a creative cross-fertilization, instead of a clash of opposing world views.

As Spain actively participated in this process of defining the new EU mediation strategy, these elements have been also incorporated in the conceptual framework developed by the Spanish Foreign Ministry, from the Handbook of Feminist Foreign Policy to the multilateral and humanitarian diplomacy strategies. As one of the countries that has taken the peaceful resolution of conflicts as the core of its foreign policy strategy, Spain has an important role to play in the integrated approach that defines

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Besides the increased numbers of refugees and displaced people it creates, the economic disruption of conflict has had considerable social and financial

costs. Spain has expressed a political engagement with the drama of forced displacement through the Global Compact on Refugees, which was adopted in December 2018 by the UN General Assembly. Investing in conflict prevention and resolution is certainly the wisest investment, as the cost of the conflict over Ukraine unfolding now painfully reminds us. Other ongoing conflicts, such as the war in Yemen, the Syrian quagmire, and the Sahel imbroglio are a source of international instability and human suffering that will eventually reach our Western doorsteps, as well. Unresolved yet decades-old conflicts compete with new ones for attention on our television screens.

Moreover, Spain is a country particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and we have taken a determined position regarding the implementation of our engagements in this area. Our National Adaptation Plan to Climate Change 2021-2030 incorporates the peace and security dimension as well as cross border cooperation. Both our National Security Strategy and our Foreign Policy Strategy—both adopted in 2021—also focus on environmental priorities. In the wake of a presentation made by Minister Albares to the

UN Security Council on the topic of “climate, peace, and security” at the Greentree retreat in June 2021, Sevilla played host to an international workshop on climate, peace, and security on 9-10 December 2021 to promote coordinated action among scientists, diplomats, and mediation actors on an EU-wide initiative for environmental peacebuilding.

A new European Union agenda based on the convergence of heritage and peacebuilding, conflict prevention, mediation, and dialogue can underpin international support to help rebuild societies. A cultural heritage approach to peacebuilding should bring otherwise disparate themes, projects, and tools within the guiding framework to inform the EU's engagement in both conflict prevention and resolution, further supporting the multilateral agenda in these fields. With a unique capacity to connect different cultural systems for its own multilayered historical background, Spain can play a key role in innovative mediation initiatives.

All those initiatives and the political capital deriving thereof remain relevant and offer important assets for Spain to redefine its role in the new context of mediation, conflict prevention, and conflict resolution.

After the transition to democracy in 1976, Spain built its foreign policy around the principles of the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the promotion of democratic values and political dialogue. Using its ability to connect across cultural and geographical divides, Spanish diplomacy broke with decades of isolation and defensiveness to become an influential actor in peace processes in Central America, supported the Arab-Israeli negotiations, and promoted a space of cooperation in the Mediterranean.

This could be seen in the 1991 Madrid Conference that kick-started the Middle East Peace Process, the launching of the Ibero-American Project in 1992, the Euro-Mediterranean Summit of Barcelona in 1995 that created a space for regional cooperation, and the signing of the Guatemala Peace Agreement in 1996 that signaled the beginning of the end of one of the most cruel and bloody wars in Central America. In 2004, the Centro Internacional Toledo

para la Paz became one of the leading international organizations in mediation and private diplomacy—the same year that, as noted above, Spain first went public with the idea of launching the Alliance of Civilizations as a way to bridge the growing cultural divide.

Spain has a long track record in the promotion of inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue. The Three Cultures Foundation, created in 1998 by Morocco and Spain with the participation of the Peres Center for Peace in Israel and the Palestinian National Authority, became a rallying point for those in favor of reviving the spirit of tolerance and cross fertilization between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim

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civilizations that created one of the most brilliant cultural phenomena in modern history. The Barenboin-Said foundation was another landmark project that the Andalusian regional government and the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported in 2004, based on the idea of Daniel Barenboin and Edward Said to use music

as a bridge between Arabs and Israelis to build a new partnership that filled the gaps in the political process and promoted understanding and cooperation. The King Abdallah Center for Inter-religious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID), established in 2012, was an initiative of Saudi Arabia, Austria, and Spain to promote dialogue and foster peace based on inter-faith dialogue and understanding.

The transformation of cultural heritage, including historic buildings, monuments, archaeological heritage, and intangible practices, as well as social relationships, is an outcome of shifting politics and conflict. Cultural heritage is relational and therefore exposes the ways in which power and structures in society take shape. The truth is that even when institutions collapse, the sense of identity and community cohesion based on both material and intangible heritage survive. Communities that had been dispossessed, exiled, or even had atrocities committed against them cling to their cultural heritage as their most precious possession.

The digital revolution is affecting our conceptions of cultural heritage as well as the political and

socioeconomic dynamics, with both amazing possibilities and uncharted risks.

Spanish initiatives in the field of cultural heritage in mediation, as follow ups to recent steps taken by EEAS and UNESCO, would be an opportunity to discuss the ways in which the role of cultural heritage can be better understood in the prevention and resolution of conflict, and the challenges and opportunities it represents to build trust between parties to conflict. Building on the EU's experience in Iraq as a case study, a report elaborated by the EEAS in 2020 analyses the main components of a possible EU strategic approach to cultural heritage protection and enhancement as a tool for conflict prevention, peace building, dialogue, and mediation in the Middle East and beyond. This new approach requires the development of a methodological framework, the establishment of partnerships between heritage experts and mediation practitioners, the refinement of the tools to operate on the ground, and the identification of specific initiatives to support the process in the long run.

The internal transformation of Spain has also been inspirational for many international actors, who felt

that the Spanish political transition to democracy offers a useful model to find political solutions and achieve social consensus for creative change. All the post-1991 initiatives mentioned in this essay, together with the political capital they created, remain relevant and offer important assets for Spain to redefine its role in the new context of mediation, conflict prevention, and conflict resolution.

Mediation is certainly in a process of deep transformation, and both the UN and the EU are adapting their tools and strategies

to the new reality of more complex and protracted conflicts described above. Spain certainly is taking note of the need to join those efforts and participate in the new alliances that are required to push for a renewed and invigorated multilateral system with conflict resolution at its core. The new initiative for establishing an Alliance of Civilization mediation and conflict resolution center in Istanbul, which would tap into the huge potential of intercultural and interfaith dialogue, is certainly an important contribution to that aim. **BD**

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BREAKING GROUND ON THE NEW ITALY-AZERBAIJAN UNIVERSITY

ADA University Partners with Five Leading Italian Universities



As part of a shared commitment to deepen the multidimensional strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and Italy, Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio was joined on 2 April 2022 by his Azerbaijani counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov, together with Energy Minister Parviz Shahbazov and Education Minister Emin Amrullayev, to officially break ground on the construction of the Italy-Azerbaijan University on ADA University's campus.

ADA University will partner with Luiss University, Bologna University, Politecnico di Milano, Politecnico di Torino, and Sapienza University of Rome. The new university will serve as an intellectual basecamp for the transfer of knowledge, know-how, and technology in globally-acknowledged fields of Italian excellence, including:

- Agriculture and Food Science
- Engineering
- Architecture and Urban Planning
- Interior and Industrial Design
- Management, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship

The ceremony coincided with celebrations marking the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two states and was followed by a conference hosted by ADA University featuring keynote addresses by the two foreign ministers.

