The Alliance of Civilizations: Possibilities of Conflict Resolution at the Civilizational Level

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the possible contributions of the critical perspectives and conceptual frameworks of the Conflict Resolution field to address “civilizational level” conflicts. The possibilities and limitations of dialogue processes at the civilizational level are critically examined. While recognizing the main assumptions and contributions of dialogue processes to deal with cultural/civilizational conflicts, this study puts forward an alternative and more practical vision: that of creating Spheres of Dialogic Interaction (SODI). In the second part of the study, the social and political backgrounds, practical contributions, and limitations of two recent projects the “Dialogue among Civilizations” (DaC) and the “Alliance of Civilizations” (AoC) are analyzed. It is argued that with its action-oriented agenda and the practical environment conducive to flexible, interactive and reflexive interaction, the ongoing AoC project is an important venue for creating SODI.

Certain common misunderstandings related to the characteristics of “civilizational conflicts” prevent the development of practical models to address the challenge they pose. Before getting into the details of the discussion it is important to clarify some of these misunderstandings. The debates surrounding the “Clash of Civilizations,” “Dialogue among Civilizations” and “Alliance of Civilizations” all attribute an agency to ‘civilizations,’ which is a misleading approach. There are no institutional or legal representatives of ‘civilizations’ although some actors may wish to be considered in this light.1 Individuals, groups and institutions claiming to represent civilizations and their ideas can clash and come to agreement physically and verbally but

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The language of interaction at both inter-cultural and inter-civilizational levels is historically shaped and institutionalized along dialectic lines, where the broader category of the cultural, religious, ethnic and racial “other” becomes systematically de-legitimized for particular material and non-material goals. “Eurocentrism,” “Orientalism,” “Occidentalism,” “Anti-Semitism,” “Islamophobia,” “religious intolerance,” and “fundamentalism” are just a few of the dialectic discourses that helped to legitimize certain practices of violence and discrimination against the categories of “cultural other.” The economic and political exploitation of and discrimination against the “other,” the propagation of fundamentalist ideas that de-legitimize the category of “cultural/religious other,” and forms of religious and cultural desecration can all be considered dimensions of civilizational conflicts, although none of those can alone define the domain. “Clashes of civilizations,” “clashes of religions” or “clashes of cultures” are phrases used to describe a cu-
mulative record of wide-ranging conflicts that may be experienced in religious, symbolic, aesthetic, ethical and perceptual dimensions.

**Is Dialogue a Panacea for “Civilizational Conflicts”?**

Dialectic interactions begin with the categories of “self” and “other,” and exclude the reality of “the between.” In contrast, dialogic relationships recognize differences between “self” and “other” while eschewing simple agreement or unanimity. On every level of inter-cultural, inter-religious and inter-civilizational interaction, dialogic projects, if properly actualized, can provide an effective way to create dialogic relationships. In conflict resolution, initiating and maintaining dialogue is a practical process that mitigates cultural hostilities and facilitates better understanding. Ideally, dialogue is a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn; few conversations attain this ideal. Martin Buber classifies dialogue into three categories: genuine dialogue, technical dialogue and monologue. Only genuine dialogue can be considered truly dialogic:

- **Genuine dialogue:** no matter whether speaking or silent... each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing living mutual relation between himself and them.

Conversations, talks or other forms of verbal interactions do not necessarily ensure a dialogue; in some cases conversation may not even involve dialogue:

- He who lives in monologue is never aware of the other as something that is absolutely not himself and at the same time something with which he nevertheless communicates. Disguised as dialogue, in which two or more men, meeting in space, speak each with himself in strangely tortuous and circuitous ways and yet imagine they have escaped the torment of being thrown back their own resources.

True dialogue systematically establishes substantial issues and problems as secondary items on the agenda and focuses on the underlying relationships that cause these problems. The unique premise of a dialogue process is that “serious problems are unlikely to be resolved in the long term by practical agreements... [rather,] they will be resolved only as deeply conflictual relationships, misunderstandings and misconceptions are transformed.” The expected outcome of a dialogue is to create new human and political capacities to understand and solve complicated problems. Dialogue thus changes relationships in ways that create new ground for mutual respect and collaboration.
Dialogue is primarily directed towards increasing understanding and building trust among participants with some eventual positive effects on public opinion, rather than the creation of specific alternative solutions to conflicts at the policy levels. Still, agreements, negotiations and even alliances can be accomplished within the background of a dialogue process. It is expected that, in dialogue, both parties’ minds open to absorb new views, enlarge perspectives, rethink assumptions and modify judgments. Thus dialogue is more than simple exchange of ideas; it is a genuine openness of each to the concerns of the other. According to Martin Buber, dialogue is a way of being which requires participants to reveal to others their deepest interests, hopes and fears. Dialogue sometimes requires a participant to give up important human defenses that define her or his own identity as it appears to contrast to the identity of the other. Since identities, cultural and religious values and interests are involved in the relationships of the actors that are supposed to represent civilizations, it seems hard to change these relationships without a genuine dialogue.

In the practical domain, dialogue is considered a conflict resolution technique like mediation, negotiation, alternative dispute resolution (ADR) or problem-solving workshops. It is a technique especially suited to deal with “normatively divisive controversial issues,” i.e. for conflicts involving deeply held values or contentious issues of morality – abortion, capital punishment, gay rights – and even in some land use and development disputes. One advantage of dialogue is that it is neither a top-down, nor a bottom up approach; it is rather an aggregate or multiplicity of activities which may be conducted at various parallel levels. Yet this can also be a disadvantage, a consideration we will turn to now.

**Limitations of Dialogue Processes for “Civilizational Conflicts”**

There are certain limitations to the effectiveness of dialogue processes as conflict resolution mechanisms at the civilizational level. As discussed above, “civilization” is a broad term. Thus dialogue among religious leaders, artists or youth may have limited direct impact in the political domain. The critical issues, contradictions, and potential for constructive vocabulary in each discourse community will likely be quite different. Terms of agreement and disagreement are also likely to vary at different levels. For example, an academic dialogue among historians and philosophers of different cultures and civilizations may create a common vocabulary, although the same vocabulary may not transfer to conversations.
among businesspeople or religious leaders. Moreover, when some of the parties and groups benefit from the power and information asymmetry it is difficult to convince those actors to accept alternative or more neutral modes of interaction. Powerful parties may prefer to state their views monologically or to define the limits of a language of communication rather than to create dialogue. As Avruch notes, the main challenge to dialogue and many other conflict resolution processes is to confront the established power relations:

The challenge for dialogue is to confront power. It is hard to imagine such imbalances not intruding on "civilizational dialogue," since power asymmetry is intrinsic to the structure of the international system of states, as well as central to the conflict dynamic of Huntington’s theory of civilizations. “Latin America” or “Africa” (to speak momentarily in Huntington’s coagulating voice) certainly would not feel they could enter a dialogue with North Americans as equals. “Islam” and “China” both feel the iron grip of imperial and colonial history degradingly around their throats. It would be difficult, in any case, to keep power or the histories of oppression outside the dialogue room.

In short, it is difficult to challenge the established or institutionalized power asymmetries that provide the conditions for an ideal speech situation. As Avruch states, it is unrealistic to expect dialogue to change the "systems of inequality:"

Dialogue is about talk and exchange of ideas, mutual learning and the sharing of understanding. This is no small thing, but it seems some distance from conceptions of conflict resolution or transformation that imply changing existing structures of disparities and inequities, resource extraction or distribution, capital and human flows.

Within the context of existing structures of power, dialogue risks failing to become genuine, sometimes with devastating consequences. For example, presentation of the “cultural/ civilizational other” in derogative forms within ‘dialogue’ may help legitimize discriminatory practices against immigrant communities or help maintain exclusionary institutions.

The question “who will be the partners of dialogue processes?” is another important concern. Who represents Islamic, Western or Chinese civilization is an issue of serious debate. Academics, politicians, religious leaders, businessmen or grassroots level people have different and sometimes contradictory views on the “cultural other.” Leadership profiles may differ from one culture or nation state to another. And while public discourses about cultural “others” are undoubtedly shaped by diverse institutions, intervention at the academic level may have a lim-
Effective and sustainable dialogue processes should include as many diverse layers of societies as possible. High level meetings are insufficient to reflect and represent the feelings and discourses at the grassroots level. Leadership change and political transformations may also halt the dialogue process. Therefore, high level meetings may not always bring about the expected outcomes. Establishing dialogue at the civilizational level must entail the inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives from within the ‘same’ culture, which is no small task.

This question returns us to the limitations of the idea of “civilization” as a useful category with which to approach conflict resolution. After all, who represents Islamic, Western or Chinese civilization? Any person or organization that claims this position will be questioned and criticized by the parties that are not included within the dialogue process. This may be the weakest point about the use of ‘civilization’ as a practical category, especially when the concern is about conflict, dialogue and alliance. In any given context some groups of people will be excluded from the process, and this concern grows more relevant when the scale of the dialogue is wide, as it must be in order to occur ‘between civilizations’ or ‘between religions.’

Yet before we dispense with the idea of dialogue as a useful mechanism at the broad, civilizational level, it is important to note that the parties who oppose the idea of resolution use the question of representation to de-legitimize the activities that are planned under the rubric of “dialogue of civilizations.” One possible answer to these criticisms is to design comprehensive models of a dialogue process that would include actors from multiple levels, such youth, politicians, bureaucrats, religious leaders and civil society activists.

Harmonizing such an effort would require massive scale coordination and commitment, yet it offers tremendous potential for true progress in understanding on the widest possible scale. After all, youth groups may have completely different ways of understanding or misunderstanding each other. A comprehensive dialogue process could first be conducted among political leaders, religious or community leaders, academicians, scholars, among youth, representatives of civil society organizations, ordinary citizens; and then expanded to intra-cultural groups. Effective and sustainable dialogue processes should include as many diverse layers of societies as possible. Conversations conducted solely at the political and elite levels will not have the expected impact and contribution. Given the necessity of such a scale, the expected positive outcomes of the dialogue processes may indeed be long term.
Yet despite the potentially lengthy and cumbersome aspects of establishing genuine dialogue, intra-group, or intra cultural/civilizational diversity can not simply be avoided for the sake of ‘practical’ concerns such as expediency. Controversial issues and challenges vary across the borders and different segments of societies. It is crucial to include diverse voices and perspectives from same the culture and civilizations; because the feedback of inter and intra civilizational dialogues will sometimes undermine each other, the failure of the category of a unified civilizational ‘self’ becomes productively evident. Incorporating the diverse views and recognizing the different voices within the categories of cultural/civilizational “in-group” and “out-group” is one key to improving the legitimacy of dialogue and alliance activities, a crucial feature of any comprehensive dialogue process.

Clearly, genuine dialogic interactions offer great potential over the long term. Yet because of their nature and philosophical assumptions, practical issues and immediate clashes are not given priority in dialogue processes. Joint actions and working to overcome a common challenge or resolve an issue of common concern can be much more educative than trying to reach a common understanding among all segments of two diverse societies.

Creating Spheres of Dialogic Interaction

Considering all the practical limitations of dialogue processes at the transnational/ civilizational levels to deal with the problem of dialectic visions of “self” and “other,” this paper proposes a more practical alternative conflict resolution vision, which is conceptualized as “Spheres of Dialogic Interaction” (SODI). Contemporary experiences of peaceful coexistence are prevalent even within the most confrontational inter-cultural and inter-civilizational contexts. There are also many historical experiences of successful coexistence that can provide models for future dialogues. In most cases, those experiences bear the status of isolated local instances and are not turned into broader models that could help deal with high
SODI consists of the set of practical activities and domains that will nurture the culture of dialogic engagement among people from different cultures and civilizations.

The idea of “spheres of dialogic interaction” takes inspiration from two main sources: the concept of “zones of peace” and the dialogic philosophies of Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin. The abstract and philosophical notions of dialogic thought belonging to Buber and Bakhtin have been practically conceptualized in the method of “dialogic teaching,” a method whose features will be highlighted here. The designation “zones of peace” refers to agreed-upon regions where “fighting should cease or where certain people would be immune from attack or from the other damaging effects of being at war.”

In a zone of peace, the idea is to create, either based on custom or agreement, accepted rules for establishing a zone where certain “things” are not permitted (compared to outside the zone) and other things are encouraged. The “things” can be material – such as arms, uniforms, and propaganda pamphlets, which might be forbidden, or food, medicine and other humanitarian relief, which might be encouraged. Or (more usually) the “things” can be behavioral – such as violence, threatening behavior and preparing the next battle, which might be forbidden; or education, voter registration, and immunization and other medical treatment, which might be encouraged.

Dialogic teaching is usually practiced in primary education, where dialogue between teacher and pupils and between pupils themselves is encouraged. “Dialogic teaching is distinct from the question-answer and listen-tell routines of mainstream teaching, aiming to be more consistently searching, reciprocal and extended.” Five principles of the dialogic education, reciprocity, cumulation, cooperation and collectivity, supportiveness and purpose, are key for developing models for spheres of dialogic interaction.

The pedagogy underpinning this approach to teaching places an emphasis on five principles: reciprocity, or the sharing of ideas between teacher and pupils; cumulation, or the careful building of arguments or lines of enquiry by linking the ideas of all those contributing to the dialogue; cooperation and collectivity, with pupils working together with the teacher or in groups; supportiveness, which encourages all to feel accepted and included; and purpose, in that the dialogue is intended to achieve specific educational goals.
These principles are key for developing models for spheres of dialogic interaction.

SODI consists of the set of practical activities and domains that will nurture the culture of dialogic engagement among people from different cultures and civilizations. Thus it is a step ahead of coexistence practice. In SODI there are common goals and modes of practical interaction and the outcomes of these interactions are co-produced by various actors. The contents of the goals are less important than the practical collective efforts and cooperative activities to reach those goals. Dialogic interactions among academics, religious leaders, youth groups, aid organizations and the experiences of dialogic interactions of particular cities or zones may be a model for other contexts. Peace, or at least a comprehensive process of dialogic dialogue, is the cumulative result of activities on a multiplicity of levels.

Consistent with its theoretical roots, SODI has several important features to note at the civilizational level:

- The process is action- and common goal-oriented. Its main objective is to enable people from diverse and contradictory identity positions to work on a joint set of goals with the assumption that joint actions and shared projects teach and improve understanding better than conversations.

- SODI’s sustainable, dynamic, and flexible processes can adapt to rapid social and political transformations.

- They are designed to be immune to elite level leadership changes.

- They try to incorporate different segments of society including youth, women, political actors, and grassroots level people as opposed to high level leaders or Tract II people.

- They try to create reflexive learning environments. Rather than trying to superimpose a superficial common language or symbols, a common culture of communication is expected to emerge during the dialogic encounters.

- The intra-civilization dimension is incorporated into the process.

- Technologically advanced media and new communication environments are used instrumentally.

- Many of the practical tasks are delegated to local NGOs and organizations by IGOs, governments, and other political institutions.
In the contemporary context, these practical principles and features are getting increasingly more important in order to address the challenges that are referred as “civilizational conflicts”.

“Dialogue among Civilizations”: An Interrupted Project

The idea of Dialogue among Civilizations was first discussed in the UN General Assembly meeting in 1998. In the 53rd meeting of the UN General Assembly, year 2001 was designated as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. Iran’s reformist president Mohammed Khatami was the initiator of the idea. At the time the idea was very well received and acclaimed, because of the growing discourse of the “Clash of Civilizations.” UN Resolution A/56/6 (…), which was accepted on November 21 2001 proposed a very comprehensive frame for a “Dialogue among Civilizations” (DaC). The main objective of the idea was defined as follows:

Dialogue among civilizations is a process between and within civilizations, founded on inclusion, and a collective desire to learn, uncover and examine assumptions, unfold shared meaning and core values and integrate multiple perspectives through dialogue.30

The initiative was an important public diplomacy opportunity for Iran as well. Iran’s president Mohammed Khatami wanted to make some constructive moves to transform the image of Iran in the international community and within the Muslim World. The agenda of the dialogue included both intra- and inter-civilizational dimensions. It was a significant project in the sense that it tried to create a common language for reaching a mutual understanding. With this initiative, the Islamic Republic of Iran tried to mitigate the revolutionary discourse of total denial of “the West.”

Because of the changing context of international affairs after the 9/11 attacks, potential partners in the dialogue were more willing to get into arguments than constructive talk. Khatami’s efforts were not effective in preventing Iran’s inclusion in the list of “rogue states” and the “axis of evil” during George W. Bush’s presidency (2001-2009). The idea of DaC did remain within the lexicon of international politics, just like the concept of “Clash of Civilizations,” which in itself should be considered as a significant step. Still, it may be disappointing to examine the record of practical accomplishments that have been achieved within DaC’s frame. The September 11 2001 attacks and the Madrid, Istanbul, Bali and London bombings shifted the hegemonic discourse in international relations from democratization, protection of human rights and conflict prevention, to the global “war
on terror,” weapons of mass destruction and conventional security issues.

The occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, the Danish cartoon crisis, Pope Benedict XVI’s insulting comments on Islam, issues related to immigrant rights, and torture photos from Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib prisons revived traumatic memories of the colonial era for many Muslims. The visual media played a significant role in the spread of graphic images and derogatory discourses. It may be an overgeneralization to emphasize just Islam/West relations or the political dimensions of the “Global War on Terrorism”, but it represents a significant change in the framing of relations. The discursive change is very important, as it organizes the dimensions of relations in other domains as well.

DaC had been initiated as a macro-scale conflict resolution project to address the cluster of inter-cultural and inter-civilizational challenges. The DaC project represents an example of a comprehensive dialogue process. The project was well-designed and publicized but it suffered from the weaknesses of dialogue processes explicated above. Transformations in global politics in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks also led to the failure of the project.

From Dialogue to Alliance: New Context, New Concept

The idea of an “Alliance of Civilizations” was put forward during the interregnum period of the post-9/11 world. Security issues started to dominate the agenda of international relations, and this trend led to a deterioration in relations between Islamic and Western civilizations. Increasing levels of xenophobia, and especially Islamophobia, within western societies created a reaction among the Muslims and other immigrants who had been living in Western states. The issue of xenophobia was viewed as a challenge to Western values by some of the moderate European leaders, whose responses to violent acts sometimes led to maltreatment of their own citizens with different cultural backgrounds. In response, the call for an Alliance of Civilizations was initiated by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero during the 59th General Assembly of the United Nations. It is considered an alliance against the prejudice, misunderstanding and hatred that had been heightened in the post-9/11 era:

The initiative is intended to respond to the need for a committed effort by the international community... to bridge divides and overcome prejudice, misconceptions,
misperceptions, and polarization, which potentially threaten world peace. The Alliance will aim to address emerging threats emanating from hostile perceptions that foment violence, and to bring about cooperation among various efforts to heal such divisions... Events of recent years have heightened the sense of a widening gap and lack of mutual understanding between Islamic and Western societies – an environment that has been exploited and exacerbated by extremists in all societies. The Alliance of Civilizations is intended as a coalition against such forces...35

The “The Alliance of Civilizations” (AoC) project differs significantly from the DaC project. As opposed to the elite level dialogue model, the AoC project offers a comprehensive practical agenda that tries to deal with the sensitive issues of immigration, peace education, media and youth.36 As of summer 2009, four high level meetings, four ministerial meetings and two major forums had been held. Besides the dialogues and meetings of the high level groups, the practical projects initiated under the umbrella of AoC constitute the best examples for creating SODI. Thousands of documents have been published and many activities and scores of international and multilateral organizations, local NGOs and associations have become involved in the project.37 More importantly, creative projects related to the priority areas of youth, immigration, media, education and world history are being developed within an environment of reflexive learning and practice.

In terms of formulating the abstract goals of the project,38 planning and agenda setting the project of “Dialogue among Civilizations” was a well planned one as well. It was unable to provide the expected outcomes because of the changing global political context. Security oriented agenda of the post-911 era curbed the efforts that tried to create dialogue process. For many politicians in the United States and Europe, Muslims all over the world, especially Muslim diasporas have been considered as an enemy or “malignant other” that should be contained, rather than possible dialogue partners. The idea of “Dialogue among Civilizations” was associated with the former Iranian president Khatami; especially American politicians were unwilling to acknowledge Iran for such a constructive agenda.

“The Alliance of Civilizations” project was proposed by two new authorities, the Spanish and Turkish prime ministers, within a new context in international relations. Both Turkey and Spain were hurt by the bombings in Istanbul and Madrid, respectively. The proposal was part of Zapatero’s policy to distance himself from his predecessor, the rightist prime-minister José Maria Aznar.
Zapatero wanted to make Spain the central actor within the dialogue camp and keep Spain out of the coalition that occupied Iraq. For Turkey, the project was expected to make a positive contribution to the EU accession negotiations. The project came as part of Turkey’s new foreign policy paradigm which sought transform Turkey into a more influential regional actor. Aside from these motivating factors for the proposing countries, the general purpose of the “Alliance” project was – like DaC – to create a common understanding and peaceful cultural coexistence, but this time more practical means were employed.

The Alliance will aim to address emerging threats emanating from hostile perceptions that foment violence, and to bring about cooperation among various efforts to heal such divisions. An environment that has been exploited and exacerbated by extremists in all societies. The Alliance of Civilizations is intended as a coalition against such forces, as a movement to advance mutual respect for religious beliefs and traditions, and as a reaffirmation of humankind’s increasing interdependence in all areas – from the environment to health, from economic and social development to peace and security.

Unlike the comprehensive dialogue process portrayed above, the AoC project has a primarily practical agenda. Former Iranian president Khatami even criticized the project because of its action-oriented practicality, claiming, “An alliance of civilizations will be meaningless without dialogue among civilizations.”

In the official documents as well as the forums, the initiative was indeed described as a practical and action-oriented one:

The Alliance’s focus on concrete initiatives was reinforced and consolidated at the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum, which was hosted by the Government of Spain on 15-16 January 2008. The Forum was a high-profile, action-oriented event which brought together a powerful network of political leaders, governments, international organizations, civil society groups, religious communities, as well as media and corporate leaders.

The same practical and project-based approach for transcending cultural divides and building peace was emphasized in the second forum, which was held in Istanbul on April 6-7, 2009:

[This] forum will be firmly action-oriented, with an emphasis on delivering concrete projects and practical outcomes...
– An international platform for participants to develop joint initiatives and launch new programs.

– A range of project-specific working sessions, which will provide an interactive, inclusive convening space for policy-makers, international organizations and civil society groups to share lessons on best practices and develop joint work platforms.

– A unique ‘Marketplace of Ideas’ that will showcase some of the most innovative and successful grassroots projects with the purpose of transcending cultural divides and building peace.

Each project, program or accomplishment of the AoC can be a subject of separate study and analysis. This study rather seeks to highlight the contributions of these projects to the emergence of a culture of dialogic intercultural/inter-civilizational interactions. The list of projects that are mentioned in the marketplace of ideas provides important elements of creative practice and reflexive learning. The currently active project list mentioned below brings together the best practices of SODI and the conflict resolution practices that are explicated in the previous section:

– The Global Youth Employment Initiative (Silatech)
– The Alliance of Civilizational Media Fund
– National and regional strategies of cross-cultural dialogue
– Policymaking discussions
– Partnerships with multilateral organizations and agencies such as UNESCO, The League of Arab States, ISESCO, ALESCO and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)
– An AoC clearing house and media literacy education
– The launch of a Rapid Response Media Mechanism
– The establishment of a Youth Solidarity Fund
– the creation of a global network of philanthropic foundations and private funding sources
– The establishment of an Alliance network of good-will ambassadors
– Publication of the best practices of the public sector
– An action-oriented statement of solidarity and joint commitment by diverse religious leaders

Thousands of people, hundreds of organizations and high-level political and religious leaders representing different countries and communities have already
become involved in the project through shared goals. Highly advanced technological instruments and media resources such as the online clearing house and media fund have been employed. The project has created synergy among people with different social and cultural backgrounds. The UN and the initiators of the project, Turkey and Spain, continue to pioneer the activities of the forum and contribute to the organization and harmonization of the activities. Clearly, the scope of the project is grand and the number of the partners is rapidly increasing.

**Conclusion**

Acknowledging and expressing emotions through non-violent channels, legitimizing the category of “other,” integrating inter-group and collective identities and an emphasis on transforming the conflict relationship from adversarial to cooperative are the basic principles of all conflict resolution practices. Both the DaC and AoC projects were designed taking these basic assumptions into consideration. However, the practical assumptions and the political contexts of these two projects were different. DaC was a comprehensive and multi-layered dialogue process whereas AoC can be considered a project that tries to create SODI.

Changes in the global political context and leadership profile define the fate of dialogue processes at the intercultural/inter-civilizational levels. DaC project was one of the victims of 9/11 terrorist attacks as well. The necessity of the dialogic spheres to address the challenges of different forms of extremisms has been duly emphasized by prudent leaders and scholars. Taking into consideration the weaknesses of the previous failed dialogue attempts, the AoC project was formulated as a new, practical agenda with distinctive assumptions which are summarized in the features of SODI.

With its action-oriented agenda and the practical environment conducive to flexible, interactive and reflexive interaction, the ongoing AoC project is an important venue for creating SODI. Evaluating the activities and successes of the AoC project would be the subject of different study, but so far remarkable, visible accomplishments have been achieved within the frame of this umbrella project supported by so many world leaders. The successful elements and features of the AoC project can be adapted to other practical conflict resolution projects as well.
Endnotes


12. Saunders, A public peace process: Sustained dialogue to transform racial and ethnic conflicts.

13. For many years dialogue processes and problem solving workshops have been conducted among the intellectuals, journalists, religious leaders, politicians and young people that experience Palestine-Israeli Conflict, Balkan Conflicts, Cyprus, Northern Ireland and Tajikistan conflicts. In many cases these workshops and dialogue processes had not brought concrete outcomes yet created a common space and opened new channels for better communication and understanding.


28. R. J. Alexander, Education as dialogue: Moral and pedagogical choices for a runaway world (Hong Kong Institute of Education; Dialogos UK, 2006).


31. On September 30 2005, the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten published twelve editorial cartoons, most of which depicted the prophet Muhammed in a pejorative way. These derogatory cartoons created public unrest in Muslim world, recalling the legacy of Eurocentric discrimination.

32. In his lecture delivered on 12 September 2006 at the University of Regensburg in Germany, Pope Benedict XVI quoted the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II, saying “Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached”. BBC News Article: Pope sorry for offending Muslims, last accessed September 17, 2006, BBC Article. In quotes: Muslim reaction to Pope last accessed September 17, 2006. Those comments disturbed Muslims all over world; Muslim politicians, religious leaders and others registered protests against the insult to Islam.

33. The September 11 2001 attacks and the Madrid and London bombings in particular increased Islamophobia, xenophobia and racism in many western societies. Institutions such as the UK-based Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism (FAIR) and the Vienna-based European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), try to monitor and combat Islamophobia. Nonetheless, Islamophobic discourse has continued to spread very quickly due to the irresponsible and discriminatory speeches of some politicians and religious elite in the US and Europe.


37. For the list of partner organizations; http://www.unaoc.org/content/view/227/217/lang,english/.


39. According to mentor of this new foreign policy paradigm Turkish Minister of Foreign Affair Ahmet Davutoğlu, Turkey's geographical, historical and cultural “depth” or richness gives Turkey
certain responsibilities and provides Turkey unique opportunities as a partner in such a project. Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001); Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Turkey’s Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007,” *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 1 (2008), p. 77-96

44. The detailed summary of the list can be found in the summary report of the Madrid forum http://www.unaoc.org/images/aoc%20forum%20report%20madrid%20complete.pdf, and the UN-AOC website http://www.unaoc.org
45. 83 countries and 17 international organizations are currently the members (Group of Friends) of the project. For the list of countries http://www.unaoc.org/content/view/115/174/lang.english/
47. For the details of the media strategy http://www.unaoc.org/repository/thematic_media.pdf