

children about their racial/religious heritage. The first, a Jamaican girl, beamingly told the hackette how proud she was of her West Indian culture. The second girl, a Muslim, proudly proclaimed her Islamic background. The third, a little English boy, when asked where he came from looked utterly bewildered. After a baffled silence he finally replied 'I don't know. I don't really come from anywhere.' Whip hand. Heart-rending. Tragedy. Ongoing.

Enoch, as they say, was right. But he was also wrong – although not quite in the way our Quisling class

would bludgeon us into believing. He never imagined the monumental, civilisational ending scale of future immigration. He never imagined mono-cultural, supremacist Islam would feature so heavily. And finally, he simply could not have imagined – because at that time it was truly unimaginable – the chilling extent to which the Quisling British establishment would facilitate the non-English whip wielder.

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Can There be Honour in Talking With Dishonourable Men?

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With our Prime Minister's fulsome apology (in early May 2018) to Abdel Hakim Belhaj for our government's role in his rendition to Libya and subsequent torture, a line of sorts was drawn under the relationship that had existed with Muammar Gaddafi's regime. From that perspective, the relationship could be characterised as simply a regrettable mistake.

But to do so would be to miss the relationship's silver lining. After all, the clandestine dialogue between British envoys and Gaddafi's officials led to the end of the Libyan Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) programmes and of the state-sponsored terrorism that had killed many Europeans and Americans. The secret dialogue eventually became public, as symbolised by the much-photographed embrace between Prime Minister Tony Blair and Muammar Gaddafi in the desert – an embrace which heralded lucrative oil and business deals, and which opened the door to many Libyans who wanted a Western education.

On one level, it is easy to decry all this as a cynical relationship built on sand. After all, if Gaddafi had been sincere about his change of direction, why did senior members of his regime subsequently – and so flagrantly – ignore human rights in their persecution of dissidents and protesters in Benghazi? This abuse led to Gaddafi's loss of power and ultimately to his death. The leopard had clearly not changed his spots and, so the argument goes, our government had either been duped or had wittingly ignored reality in exchange for hubris and cash. As a result, few tears were shed in the West when Gaddafi was killed.

But on another level, efforts to talk with dishonourable men can themselves be honourable and lead to lasting peace. And where they failed – Neville Chamberlain's meeting with Hitler is a classic example rather than castigate the negotiators on our side for their lack of judgment and their gullibility, it is better to acknowledge a sincere effort to have tried everything short of war, which then truly becomes the weapon of last resort when all else fails. Thus, the error is not in talking, but rather in not thinking through and preparing for the possibility that the talking does not bear fruit. In other words, there must always be a Plan B.

Even during the darkest days of the Northern Ireland conflict, when the violence seemed endless, a 'telephone line' was always kept open to the IRA. The embarrassment suffered by our government when secret talks were publicised did not deter its continuing efforts to communicate behind the scenes. While it is true that talks would not have borne fruit had each side not learned through bitter experience that they could not 'win' by force, there had to be a willingness to talk in order to reap the benefits of that experience. In other words, without the persistence of key people on all sides in engaging with each other, 'The Troubles' would not have ended when they did.

More recently, there have been failures by our government to exploit channels of communication as a means of conflict reduction and resolution. In the case of Syria, a well-known British MP told me that Prime Minister Cameron and the Conservative whips had ordered him to sever his personal communication with President Assad because it was embarrassing to

the party. Assad and the British MP had a long-standing friendship and the MP had maintained his contact after Syria imploded into civil war so that he might try to persuade him to deal with dissidents and protesters less violently. The reputation of the Conservatives was apparently more important to our prime minister than the possibility that a back-channel to Assad might have done some good. And in the case of Iran, whose President Rouhani completed a master's degree and then a doctorate under the auspices of a Scottish university, there has been no indication that our government searched for British friends that Rouhani had made during his visits to Scotland who might have served as valuable communication channels to the Iranian president.

Other examples include our government's unwillingness to talk with Hamas and Hezbollah, despite Hezbollah being part of the Lebanese body politic. On Hamas, the Quartet Principles require that it renounce violence and recognise the state of Israel as a precondition for talks. The British government abides by those principles – and yet there is a valid argument that talks will not happen unless fulfilment of these principles is seen as a desired outcome of the talks, rather than as a precondition.

Closer to home, discussions concerning whether the British government should engage with Sinn Fein or not continued for many years before high level meetings took place. The arguments revolved around Sinn Fein's links with the IRA. The situation in Northern Ireland eventually got to a point where reasons for talking were stronger than the reasons for not talking. In the meantime, Sinn Fein had overtaken

the SDLP in national elections to become the most popular nationalist party. Opinion polls suggested that most first-time voters for Sinn Fein saw themselves as 'voters for peace' and in no way supported the use of violence for political ends. By then, the British government clearly had no choice but to talk to Sinn Fein.

As with Sinn Fein in the last years of 'The Troubles', so with Hamas, in that many of the latter are moderates. But when I lived in Palestine's West Bank, the one argument with Israeli officials on which I found it difficult to get accepted was that they should consider talking to Hamas moderates. The purpose would be to bring Hamas moderates who had influence to the negotiating table and, in so doing, further isolate the hardliners. The response was typical: 'No, John, you are wrong. Hamas are all terrorists – once a terrorist, always a terrorist. No point in talking to any of them.' I believe that one of the unstated concerns on the Israeli side was that engagement with Hamas moderates and the possibility of a political *rapprochement* between Hamas and Fatah – which many Palestinians desire – would have removed the Israeli claim that they had no negotiating partner. That attitude continues today. In other words, if you are a hardliner, you will want to maintain divisions amongst those you regard as hostile, to avoid the possibility of meaningful talks. In the meantime, demonised organisations such as Sinn Fein, Hamas and even Al-Shabaab cleverly exploit their positions to meet many of the needs of the people. They thereby consolidate their positions while governments dither and delay engagement.

Mercifully, there are exceptions. President Trump's

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engagement with the North Korean leader could yield positive results, assuming Trump listens as well as imposes demands and deadlines – and that he is not already considering an outcome that enables him to ‘prove’ that the North Koreans remain as untrustworthy as they always were. President Nixon’s and US National Security Advisor Kissinger’s overtures to Communist China, using secret third-party channels to arrange their meetings in China in the early 1970s, are a lasting example of successful efforts to engage with the other, notwithstanding the very considerable reputational and political risks. To justify his efforts in seeking some sort of *rapprochement* and agreement with Communist China, President Nixon remarked that he did not want the Chinese to continue to live ‘in angry isolation’. That aspiration can and should continue to be applied to other ostensibly hostile entities where it is appropriate.

However, there will always be those who will have not the slightest inclination to come in from the cold and who will remain irredeemably committed to hostile action. Therefore, a useful objective of efforts to communicate is to flush out those who will never be interested in talking. Where applicable and legally justifiable, military means can then be deployed against them.

When talking against a backdrop of conflict, all such conversations are hard work, both emotionally and intellectually. Successful negotiations require emotional resilience, self-control, great patience and an unswerving aspiration for sustainable peace. Anger, prejudice and hatred need to be kept at bay. Talks can seem frustrating, lame and boring, because the

emotional upheaval associated with conflict creates a strong impulse for revenge. Yet insincerity on either side guarantees failure. And finally, talks require an institutional structure, so that they can be conducted through third parties, or government to government, as appropriate – which is why, in this era of conflict, it seems particularly counter-intuitive that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been cut back.

In conclusion, those of us who have been involved at both ends of the spectrum – whether in enabling talks, participating in talks, or when talking has failed, as instruments of legal violence – will attest to the importance of communication. After all, without first having made every effort to engage by other means, how can the use of force be truly a last resort?

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