Poetic Engagement with Afghanistan, Caucasus and Iran

an unexplored strategic opportunity?

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Introduction

This exploration is in response to strategic challenges in the region named. It is a development of earlier studies of the interface between strategy and poetry (Poetry-making and Policy-making: arranging a marriage between Beauty and the Beast, 1993; Ensuring Strategic Resilience through Haiku Patterns: reframing the scope of the "martial arts" in response to strategic threats, 2006) as well as in relation to the role of music and song (A Singable Earth Charter, EU Constitution or Global Ethic? 2006; Reframing the EU Reform Process -- through Song responding to the Irish challenge to the Lisbon Treaty, 2008).

The original version of this document arose as a response to an invitation to make a presentation in a session on Caucasus Future Challenges at the Wilton Park Conference on Caucasus 2020: the Future of European Security (January 2009). Wilton Park (Sussex, UK) arranges conferences on international affairs for politicians, officials, academics and others from around the world. In their initial form the notes were communicated to the organizers. Being unable to attend, the focus in that response was on how the challenge of the Caucasus might nevertheless be more fruitfully reframed.

Preamble: Aesthetics and the military

It is not widely recognized in the cultures beyond the direct influence of Islam the extent to which aesthetics is valued there, whether in the form of poetry or song. The "clash of civilizations" is readily framed by the West as implying a direct physical threat between cultures. Aside from conventional diplomatic dialogue, no other vehicle is considered appropriate to the engagement between worldviews so framed. It is of course the case that there is a long history of such physical conflict between such cultures.

Michael Bibby (Hearts and Minds: poetry and resistance in the Vietnam Era, 1996) introduces his compilation of poetry of resistance
On May 4, 1965, Lyndon B. Johnson told a meeting of the Texas Electric Cooperatives, Inc.: "We must be ready to fight in Vietnam, but the ultimate victory will depend on the hearts and minds of the people who actually live there." Coming on the heels of the first mass deployment of U.S. troops to Vietnam, this speech marks one of the earliest uses of the phrase "hearts and minds" in relation to the Vietnam War.... The U.S. policy of "pacification" was often referred to as "winning hearts and minds," which meant that it sought to win the emotional and political support of the rural South Vietnamese...

In his extensive discussion of the phrase and its subsequent significance, Bibby notes that more poetry was published in the USA after 1960 than in any previous historical period. However, he notes much of this anti-war, activist poetry vanished without trace in the following twenty years. The topic is also discussed by Lorrie Goldensohn (Dismantling Glory: twentieth-century soldier poetry, 2003).

Eleanor Wilner (Poetry and the Pentagon: Unholy Alliance? Poetry Magazine, October 2004) describes an initiative of the US National Endowment for the Arts, in collaboration with the US Department of Defense, named Operation Homecoming: Writing the War Experience. Launched in April 2004, it was designed as a project to help soldiers write about their experiences in war, notably by bringing writers to military bases to conduct workshops for soldiers returning from combat. It would seem to have been both an effort to pre-empt the problematic soldier poetry of the Vietnam era as well as to provide a form of therapy for potentially traumatized combatants. The first product contained a mix of writings, including some poetry (Andrew Carroll, Operation Homecoming: Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Home Front, in the Words of U.S. Troops and Their Families, 2006).

With respect to the Vietnam war, there is also little trace of any strategic importance attached to understanding the poetry that sustained the "hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese. Its importance is indicated by the remarks of Fred Marchant (War Poets From Viet Nam. Humanities, 1998):

There is a Vietnamese legend that in times of distress the nation will be blessed with the arrival of a child poet. During the years of the American war, in what Americans then called North Viet Nam, there was such a young poet. His name was Tran Dang Khoa.... When Khoa brought me... to Nguyen Trai's mountain hermitage, I think he was ... tacitly claiming his poetic lineage, and teaching us how poetry had always been inherently important to the Vietnamese people. Any schoolchild might know a score of poems by heart, and ordinary adults who had nothing to do with writing or publishing poems, would at least remember a few and could recite them.

Literacy had been an essential virtue of the centuries' long anticolonial struggle. ... As with Nguyen Trai, it was not at all uncommon for leaders of the anticolonial struggle to be themselves accomplished literary people. Reading, writing, recitation, and performance had for centuries been one of the ways to forge a national identity.... As I said good-bye to Khoa and other writers I realized that I had just spent a week in a society where poetry and poets were considered national treasures. In the twentieth century, certainly the poet who drew directly on the model provided by Nguyen Trai was Nguyen Ai Quoc, more commonly known as Ho Chi Minh.

However, it would appear that the strategists of current conflicts have learnt nothing from poet-strategists such as Nguyen Trai and Ho Chi Minh. In addition to Operation Homecoming, the Pentagon has tended to frame its use of aesthetics in the tradition of direct support to military engagement, whether in providing supportive music to its soldiers, enabling them to listen to music whilst operating combat vehicles on search and destroy missions, or as an adjunct to interrogation (notably through sleep deprivation). An exception of relevance to this exploration is the mnemonic value in the US military of rhythmically chanting, or even singing, roll calls or preflight checklists (Bradd Shore, Culture in Mind: cognition, culture, and the problem of meaning, 1996).

It is far less clear to what extent such aesthetics have been used to engage opponents -- on terms meaningful to them -- in any effort to win "hearts and minds". This is very curious given the deliberate effort by Elizabeth Samet to teach poetry to military cadets, as described by Marjorie Kehe (Soldier's Heart: why we ask West Point cadets to wrestle with poetry, 2007) and through an interview.

By contrast, the Communication Initiative Network reproduces a report for the UK government on a region of Afghanistan by Gordon Adam (Winning Hearts and Minds in Helmand, 2008). This notes the critical need for an emphasis on participation -- not propaganda. In that respect it notes how little Pashto language media was reaching rural Afghans in the conflict areas. It recommended a professional news service closely attuned to local events, and entertainment in the form of music, local poetry, and literature and drama. By contrast, as reported by the International Crisis Group in 2008, the Islamist militia was making making a violent comeback, particularly in that area -- making sophisticated use of media with many messages coming as songs, religious chants and poetry (Herbert A. Friedman, Psychological Operations in Afghanistan, 2008).

There would appear to be no trace of any attempt at strategic engagement through poetry with cultures that value that medium -- even, notably, as a function of PSYOPS (Psychological Operations). Ironically the US Defense Secretary responsible for the initiation of intervention in the Middle East was a known source of "poetry" in that period (Slate, Rummy's Ruminations: the collected poetry of Donald Rumsfeld, 2006) of which one such poem has continued to be of strategic significance (Unknown Undoing: challenge of incomprehensibility of systemic neglect, 2008).

The danger of such aesthetic negligence in any "hearts and minds" exercise can perhaps be succinctly stated in the form of a well-known question relating to World War II, namely why it was that the Germans "had the best tunes", and why that conclusion was associated with their demonization.

The challenge would appear to be to understand why poetry is valued in cultures with which effective engagement has been...
frustrated over many years and to determine what are the fruitful rules of engagement within that framework. No attention would seem to have been given to this possibility. However the possibility should not be treated simplistically, as helpfully concluded by Ramsey Nast (Poetry and Engagement, 2004):

To avert a misunderstanding: I'm not saying that poets should get on the first flight to Iraq or Afghanistan. Let them stay indoors. Pamphlets are not what we need, not for "the cause", or anything.... What to do with living people in a nonsensical world? Is it possible to allow engagement in poetry without corroding that very poetry? I'm convinced it is as long as you're talented enough and steer clear of ready solutions.... Engagement is not about choosing for or against a party, engagement in simply about life, taking part in it. If need be, only through words; through language.

However missing from this comment is the strategic challenge of how one engages with another through poetry -- where the aesthetic values may be radically different. What then are the rules of engagement? The challenge may be highlighted by the following juxtaposed images

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Images indicative of the paradoxes of contrasting aesthetic worldviews</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the image on the left might be understood as how &quot;Islamic terrorists&quot; are perceived by those holding the &quot;civilized worldview&quot; on the right; however the image on the left could also be understood as how the &quot;hedonistic West&quot; is understood from within the aesthetic purity of Islam, suggested by the image on the right.</td>
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If aesthetic harmony (notably musical lyrics) offers a way forward, possibilities might include:
- A Singable Earth Charter, EU Constitution or Global Ethic?
- All Blacks of Davos vs All Greens of Porto Alegre: reframing global strategic discord through polyphony?
- Reframing the EU Reform Process -- through Song: responding to the Irish challenge to the Lisbon Treaty
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Aside from insights from the reference above to the relevance of haiku to military strategy (Ensuring Strategic Resilience through Haiku, Patterns, 2006), it is appropriate to note that Morhei Ueshiba, the Japanese founder of a more recent martial art, aikido, articulated insights relevant to its practice in poetic form (Doka: The Poems of Ueshiba Morhei -- Insights for a Modern Way of Life. Furyu: The Budo Journal, Winter 1996). Five of the principles articulated have been incorporated into regular training by Seidokan Aikido. It remains unclear whether such insights could be used in poetic engagement with a potentially hostile opponent. Nevertheless some have argued that aikido is poetry.

**Poetry in other strategic contexts**

**Poetry in the corporate world** In contrast to the failure to explore the value of poetry to military and diplomatic engagement, the Financial Times notes the role of poetry in the corporate boardroom (David Honigmann, Vision in verse from the bard of of the boardroom, 17 March 2009). This describes the work of poet David Whyte who works over a period of days with senior management, seeking to recognize "an uncomfortable and unspoken truth" which poetry can help to articulate. As he says"

All these organisations are like Shakespearean plays writ large, with the nobles telling their truths from the podium while the gravediggers are telling it like it really is in the bathroom. And every epoch ends with a lot of blood on the floor.

The titles of his prose reflections on the context for these explorations point to the relevance of extending such work to engagement of policy-makers with regions such as Afghanistan, Caucasus and Iran (The Three Marriages: Reimagining Work, Self and Relationship, 2009; Crossing the Unknown Sea: Work as a Pilgrimage of Identity, 2001; The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America, 1994). Arguably such initiatives are specifically relevant to the issue of "hearts and minds".

**Poetry and Islam** Most striking, in contrast with the West, is perhaps the role of poetry in Islamic cultures. A notable feature is the use of *saj* -- a form of rhymed, rhythmic prose characteristic of Arabic literature and diction to which the Arabic language lends itself because of its structure, the mathematical precision of its manifold formations and the essential assonance of numerous derivatives from the same root supplying the connexion between the sound and signification of words. As such it has been valued for its mnemonic qualities. It was notably used in pre-Islamic times as a mode of dignified discourse. Because of its association with these pagan practices its use in the early days of Islam is said to have been forbidden by Muhammad with the phrase: "Avoid ye the rhyming prose of the soothsayers or diviners."

And yet, in introducing his study of Arab culture, Vicente Cantarino (Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age, 1975) notes:
There are few, if any, cultural achievements of mankind accompanied by such a clear and distinct feeling of their own value as the poetic literature of the Arabs. Arab writers often characterize civilizations and peoples by their special skills. Poetry and poetic accomplishments are always cited by them as their own most important characteristic and one that distinguishes them from all other peoples. This evaluation is corroborated by the extraordinary influence exerted by Arabic poetry in form and content on all the poetic literatures which came in contact with it: Persian, Turkish, Indo-Aryan, and, indirectly, the Georgians, are deeply influenced by Arabic poetry; medieval Hebrew poetry shows its influence; and even in the West it left its traces in the beginnings of the poetry of the Romance languages.

The importance and strength of Arabic in this respect is noted by Muhammed I. Ayish (Communication Research in the Arab World: a new perspective, The Public, 5, 1998, 1, pp. 33-57):

Arabs’ appreciation of eloquence was intrinsically derived from the versatility and musical beauty of Arabic... One of the main characteristics of Arabic is the morphological structure of its root patterns. In addition to its high derivative potential, Arabic also possesses an elaborate system of affixes which allows the language to be both rhythmic and rhythmical, making it strongly conducive to poetry and rhymed utterances. It also consists of numerous stylistic variations drawing on rhetorical devices capable of delivering precise shades of meanings, be it praise, derogation, emphasis, or simple descriptive utterances. Throughout the history of the Arabic peoples, language has been central to the definition of their collective identity. By virtue of the musical beauty of Arabic language, Arab culture has been characterised as highly oral. In the Jahiliya period (up to 622), tribal and inter-tribal poetic and oratory contests were commonplace, attracting crowds of anxious people, some coming from remote places.

The strength of the arguments of Mohammed was recognized in part because of his oral skills -- within a tribal context in which poetic expression was highly valued in the encounter between tribes -- typically through a degree of poetic jousting. Cantarino indicates with respect to Arabic tribes:

It should suffice to point out that the terms sayyid and amir, commonly used to designate the tribe’s chief and leader, seem to have been used also as appellatives of the orator able to defend successfully in a dispute the rights of his tribe. Often the leader received the names of khatib (orator) and za'im (spokesman) because his personal eloquence was one of his most needed and highly appreciated virtues, more important even than his personal bravery. The elected sayyid lacked any coercive means to impose his authority and thus has to rely on his natural gift of eloquence to influence and convince people. The eloquence referred to by historians and literary critics is mostly in poetic form.

The Arabic poets, especially those of pre-Islamic times, were too realistic to conceive of poetry in an abstract way. Their role in society forced them more often than not to center their compositions on concrete events and problems. Moreover, the social aims the poet is expected to serve required him too cultivate the poetic genres more appropriate to those aims, namely the panegyric and diatribe.... Rhythmic meter and rhyme, which at this time had already attained a remarkable degree of sophistication, were considered as mnemonic means to achieve more durable remembrance and rapid dissemination. Scorn was often expressed for those who did not have a poetic voice in their midst. (p. 21-3)

The poetic qualities of the Qur'an, for example, continue to be much admired by those persuaded of the merits of that culture. The repeated media presentations of the body language of students engaged in rote learning in madrasahs fail completely to indicate that to a significant degree they are learning “poetry” -- and doing so willingly. Should madrasahs be better understood as the schools of “poetry” of that culture?

However, even though the musical-poetic nature is a key to appreciating the Qur’an, paradoxically Islam believes it totally inappropriate to consider it poetry -- because poetry is held by its teachings to be intrinsically human rather than divine. The sacred text of the Qur’an is therefore not poetry. Islamic theologians formally refuse to admit the existence of any poetic character to the Qur’anic text, although the precise significance of this refusal has been much debated (as helpfully summarized by Cantarino).

This complex situation is partially clarified, by citations, by Abul Kasem (Islam and Poetry, Islam Watch, 27 May 2002). Another comment is provided by Asad Seif (Islam and poetry in Iran). An authorized view is provided by Mufti Bilaal Cassim (Islam and Poetry, Albalagh, 15 September 2002). Arab historians in fact report that Mohammed made use of poets very much in the same way as other tribal leaders who were not poets themselves, even though he condemned pagan Arab poetry and its poets. This is confirmed by M. M. Badawi (’Abbassid Poetry and its Antecedents, 1990) arguing: The view once widely held that Mohammed and Islam discouraged poetry and poets is now generally discredited.... (p. 147).

Despite any such reservations, Cantarino cites a frequently quoted definition of poetry by Ibn Qutaiba (’Uyun al-akhbar, 1964, vol. 11, p. 185):

Poetry is the mine of knowledge of the Arabs and the book of their wisdom, the archives of their history, the reservoir of their epic days, the wall that defends their exploits, the impassable trench that preserves their glories, the impartial witness for the day of judgment. Whoever cannot offer even a single verse in defense of his honor and the noble virtues and praiseworthy actions that he claims for his ancestry will exert himself in vain, even if they were gigantic. But he who bound them together with the rhyme of a poem, reinforced them with its rhythm, and made them famous with a rare verse, a popular proverb, and a fine concept, delivered them from unbelief, and put them above the deceptions of enemies and made the envious lower his eyes in
Ironically, in a war-torn country, the Somalis of today are famous for their skills as poets -- being almost as important to that culture as the Islamic faith. Poems may be put to political use by the government or in criticism of politicians and warlords. This has even led Ali M. Ahad to explore the question Could Poetry Define Nationhood? the case of Somali oral poetry and the nation (Journal of Historical and European Studies, 2007).

With respect to Yemen, according to Steven C. Caton (Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University):

> Every day in the Middle Eastern country of Yemen, battles are being waged that don't involve bombs, guns or even a raised fist. Rather in Yemen, where physical violence is considered an inferior form of honor-conflict, poetry is one of the preferred weapons of choice.

A colleague, Jim Wilce, reports that:

> The skills of poetic improvisation are intimately related to Islamic piety in Yemen. What would understanding such things do to our perceptions of the Middle East and various conflicts there?

A more extensive account, situating practices in Yemen within Arab culture, is provided by Rachel Galvin (Of Poets, Prophets, and Politics. Humanities, 2002). She records comments by Arab observers that poetry remains a central part of Arab culture.

**Poetry and warlords:** As reported by the San Francisco Chronicle, since 2005 the Talib'an's web site, Al Emarah, or The Emirate, has featured poetry glorifying their resistance, in addition to religious commentary and battlefield updates.

Of relevance is the keynote speech given by John Paul Lederach (Tajikistan: Talking Poetry With the Warlord, 2005) at the Association for Conflict Resolution's Annual Conference (Sacramento, CA, 2004) -- reproduced in his The Moral Imagination: the art and soul of building peace (2005). This is a factor presumably considered irrelevant to the need to dispatch a further 17,000 troops to bring order to a region perceived as highly dangerous.. It might be asked, as in the case of poetry, whether there are not a range of understandings of "order".

There are many web references to warlords and their poetry. A long-term Colombian warlord is recognized for his poetry (Toby Muse, Requiem for a Warlord, Slate, 2004). In Europe, warrior-poets have played a central role in Icelandic culture (Diana Whaley, Sagas of Warrior-Poets, 2002). [Adenkönd: Coverage has been given to the critical studies of Elisabeth Kendall, a senior research fellow in Arabic and Islamic Studies at Oxford University and arguably the world's foremost expert on jihadist poetry. (Why I became a jihadist poetry critic, BBC News, 29 August 2017; Oxford to Yemen: from literary scholar to tribal adviser, Times Higher Education, 31 July 2014)]

**Poetry and Afghanistan:** It is even less well-recognized that this poetic tradition has a role in Afghanistan where the warlords are indeed valued for their poetic competence. It has only recently been recognized that Osama bin Laden is a skilled poet (Michael Hirst, Analysing Bin Laden's jihadi poetry, BBC News, 24 September 2008). As noted by Coleman Burks (Rumi's American Popularizer Tours Afghan Poet's Homeland, America.gov, 22 April 2005):

> The most startling observation that comes to me, as a practicing American poet, involves the vital role that poetry plays in the lives of Afghan men... This discovery, of course, is part of a blindness I have, that we have in this country, and in the West in general, to things Islamic. It is a long-standing and pervasive condition.... Their Afghan poet has been the most-read poet in the United States during the last ten years!

Steve Coll (Restoring Poetry to Afghanistan, NPR, 24 January 2005) reported on the publication of a set of poems of a former Afghan poet laureate Khalilullah Khalili, collected by his son, currently Afghan ambassador to Turkey (Masood Khalili and Whitney Arroy, An Assembly of Moths: selected poems of Khalilullah Khalili, 2004). The book's introduction includes remarks on the role of poetry in the midst of chaos:

> Many Afghans internalize segments off the great Persian classical poets, philosopher-mystics whose verse rises above daily hustle and bustle.

> The result is something no longer valued in the modern, literate West: a memorized reservoir of poetic wisdom. Inherited from the great poets and internalized from early childhood onwards, this material serves Afghans as psycho-spiritual ballast -- a buffer against misfortune, and a reminder, when times are good, the luck seldom lasts...

> The importance of shared poetic legacy is evident in day-to-day conversations across Afghanistan. People use the prefix 'Sha'er mega' ("The poet says") to substantiate argument. An Afghan provided this example: "If you go to a strange village and say, 'Two plus two equals four,' the villagers will challenge your authority. But tell them that 'The poet says' that two plus two equals five, and they'll accept what you say immediately."

An alternative use of poetry is made through improvisation of Pashtu landays, notably by women (Sayd Bahodine Majrouh, Songs of Love and War: Afghan Women's Poetry, 2003; Rahmat Shah, Tappa). A landay or tappa is an unrhymed couplet of nine syllables in the first hemistich and thirteen in the second. This is one of the oldest poetic and sung styles of that culture. It is a mixture between a
singing duet and a poetic jousting match (Zarsanga: Songs of the Pashtu). As noted by Abdulhadi Hairan (Tappa, world's shortest poem, 25 September 2008):

I think Tappa is the only genre of poetry in the world that is oldest in history, shortest in form, sweetest in melody, easiest in learn, appealing in singing and covering all subjects of life despite the fact that it has no particular poet or author. There are hundreds of thousands of Tappas in Pashto, yet no one can claim he has authored them. However, it is believed that Tappas are the voice of Pashtoon women and girls because most of the Tappas are related to their issues and are said by them:....

Tappa's popularity could be judged by the fact that every Pashtoon, whether they are a boy or a girl, a man or a woman, rich or poor, mullah or politician, educated or uneducated, shopkeeper or farmer, knows some Tappas. This short but concise poem covers every subject related to human life

Tappa is commonly found in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and North West Frontier Province -- precisely the area considered the most challenging by NATO's. Un-manorted International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). They are generally sung on the occasion of weddings, possibly as a two-person duet, and deal with any topic: love, passion, anger, hate, wars, history, heroes and villains. To what extent do foreign coalition forces engage with the people of Afghanistan through poetry?

A problematic assessment of the engagement in Afghanistan has been articulated in poetic form by a British soldier, Andy McFarlane (British soldier's scathing poem attacks politicians over the war in Afghanistan - as death toll reaches 204, Daily Mail, 17 August 2009; Poetry Surges from the Front Line Again, Daily Express, 17 September 2009). This contrasts with the question regarding the Iraq-Afghanistan conflict zone of Daniel D'Arezzo (Where Have All the War Poems Gone?, The Conversation).

Poetry and Kazakhstan: As noted by Marat Yermukanov (Kazakh Folk Poetry Slams Corrupt Establishment, 21 February 2007) of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, folk poets (aipay) give vent at weekly festivals (aitys), engaging in contests that are a national focus of attention via television. They publicly lambaste social ills, such as deep-rooted corruption, mismanagement, disrespect for national interests and missteps in foreign policy. In a society with limited press freedom and rigid codes of social behavior imposed from above, the aitys is the most available and a safe way to give vent to public feelings.

Satirical verses of poets often target the inefficient legislative system. The traditional folk poetry is a unique form in the poetic culture of Central Asia, is recognized as a manifestation of the reshaped ethnic consciousness of Kazahs.

Poetry and the Caucasus: The Caucasus became a romantic region for Russian poetry owing to its natural contrasts, as well as the original and somewhat hostile culture of its tribes people. Nature and history have combined to make Georgia a land of poetry, so recognized by its peoples (Peter Nasmyth, Georgia: in the mountains of poetry, 2006).

Mugham is a unique phenomenon of Azerbaijani folk music heritage that perfectly reflects the national way of thinking; the vocal form in an organic harmony of music and poetry which may involve the alternation of changing and constant elements, of improvised and concentrated episodes.

Poetry and the Middle East: It is curious that this conflict takes place in the midst of an Arab world much influenced by poetry, notably that of Al-Mutanabbi (11th century, Baghdad), considered a master of Arab poetry. Mahmoud Darwish, repeatedly named for a Nobel Prize, is considered the poetic voice of Palestine -- engaging himself in poetic dialogue with Israel.

Is there no scope for negotiation with Israel through poetic forms that would give rise to an agreement of a new kind -- expressed in (epic) poetic form? Who would be opposed to such an exploration and why? One step in that direction has been a recent film. There is an active literature on Palestine-Israel issues from a poetic perspective.

Poetic leadership: More striking perhaps, as a matter of history, is the fact that Joseph Stalin, as a Georgian, was notably appreciated for his poetic and singing skills -- in a culture which values song in ways unsuspected elsewhere. This is true of other such leaders, including Mao Tse-Tung and Ho Chi Minh (as noted above) -- whether or not their leadership was commensurate with their aesthetic insights or skills. Although claiming to be an artist rather than a poet, the possibility of Adolf Hitler being a poet is a continuing matter of debate (The Hitler Question - Poets vs. Poetry, Asian-American Poetry, 2005). There is the ironic possibility that the "clash of civilizations" between the values acquainted by the "West" and those cultures by which it is most challenged is in part reflected in the proportion of leaders opposing those values who make some claim to be poets. A current example is that of Hugo Chávez.

It is not clear how many leaders of "Western" countries are new celebrated as poets -- as opposed to the number that have been praised or satirized in poems. Dag Hammarskjold, as Secretary-General of the United Nations, may be an exception as was Winston Churchill (Collected Poems, 1981). A website has been created by Peter Armenti (Presidents as Poets: Poetry Written by United States Presidents) providing links to the poetry of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Quincy Adams, John Tyler, Abraham Lincoln, Jimmy Carter (Always a Reckoning, 1995), and Barack Obama. The latter has also been widely appreciated for his "poetic" rhetoric and even organized a "poetry jam", claiming he was fond of poetry (Ewen MacAskill, Obama to host poetry party at White House, The Guardian, 12 May 2009).

Poetic protest: It is also of relevance to note a corresponding role that music, song, and poetry (as indicated in relation to Vietnam) have played in the recent articulation of Western popular cultural values -- especially amongst those alienated from conventional approaches to governance. Such cultural products have been widely appreciated around the world -- although not necessarily in those parts upholding Islamic values and opposed to their Western vehicles.

Prosasrk dialogue: It is relevant to note the widespread recognition of the very limited number of Arabic or native speakers available to the intelligence services in the lead up to intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan. Whilst "interpreters" may have subsequently become available, questions could usefully be asked about their competence in the poetic traditions of those cultures. "Poets” have an unusually
problematic status in the West, as does their poetry. The aesthetics of poetry are not as widely appreciated as in Islamic cultures -- by all classes.

It is highly improbable that the "interpreters" sought in support of any strategic conflict would now be selected or appreciated for their poetic insights. This imposes an unnecessary constraint on strategic opportunities. Western discourse with such cultures would then be appreciated as "prosaic" at best -- and, as such, viewed with a degree of disdain as lacking any appropriate "voice" for their values.

**Indicative possibilities of reframing strategic engagement**

1. Negotiations are typically framed as a "war of words" -- "jaw jaw" instead of "war war". The question here is whether any such "war of words" might be "upgraded" from the binary logic by which it is currently informed. An indication is offered by Frederick Sommer: Poetic logic is the sensuous apprehension of what we do not yet understand in the presence of reality (1984). This is arguably worthy of further investigation given the apparent inadequacies of current negotiation logic.

2. A significant outcome of any poetic exploration might well be the highlighting of more fruitful metaphors within which future interactions could be articulated. These might rise about the limitations of binary logic and its framing of a "clash of civilizations" (In Quest of Uncommon Ground: beyond impoverished metaphor and the impotence of words of power, 1997; Innovative Global Management through Metaphor, 1989)

3. Dialogue through poetry, lyrics and folk tales in many cultures makes extensive use of metaphor. A question as yet to be explored is whether dialogue between extreme positions can be conducted through metaphor -- in contrast to making occasional use of it. This notably applies to "interfaith dialogue" which is what is typically implicit in the dialogue between clashing worldviews (Guidelines towards Dialogue through Metaphor, 1993; Guidelines for Critical Dialogue between Worldviews, 2006)

4. There is a case for the United Nations, perhaps through UNESCO, to give greater visibility to the strategic implications of dialogue with, and between, cultures through such an appreciation of aesthetics and the metaphors that it engenders. A little known publication perhaps justifies this argument (Wit and Wisdom of the United Nations, 1961). Is it the case that Islam is, to some degree, aesthetically offended by the aesthetics of the West? Is the "clash of civilizations" primarily a clash of aesthetics -- to be compared within the Western culture with that between the musical classics and pop?

5. There would seem to be a strong case for an historical review of the manner in which poetry (and song) had influenced policy-making, notably through its appreciation by negotiating leaders -- or in relation to their followers (Poetry-making and Policy-making: arranging a marriage between Beauty and the Beast, 1993). A more specific case is made with respect to the widely appreciated Japanese poetic form (Ensuring Strategic Resilience through Haiku Patterns: reframing the scope of the "martial arts" in response to strategic threats, 2006).

6. A case for the potential role of any aesthetic reframing in governance has been argued speculatively in Aesthetics of Governance in the Year 2490 (1990).

7. The specific role of song in the articulation of agreements arising from any negotiation has been argued, with precedents, in A Singable Earth Charter, EU Constitution or Global Ethic? (2006). The case for the relevance of such reframing with respect to the Irish crisis over the Lisbon vote was made subsequently (Reframing the EU Reform Process -- through Song responding to the Irish challenge to the Lisbon Treaty, 2008) -- calling upon the merits of Carla Bruni

8. With respect to the aesthetics of the religions reinforcing the clash of civilizations, one approach is to review the styles favoured for the collective celebration of individual religions -- and the manner in which these may pose problems for their appreciation by others (Aesthetic Challenge of Interfaith Dialogue as Exemplified by Meditation, 1997).

9. Efforts are made to celebrate inaugural events, whether the opening sessions of a conference or the visit of a leader, through poetry (or song). This has been done with appreciation even in the USA. Potentially of equal, if not greater, interest is the possibility of celebrating the closure of any conference or negotiation with a poetic (or sung) adaptation of the conclusions -- if only to enhance media diffusion and popular comprehension. A striking example of this is the eminent economist and peace activist Kenneth Boulding, author of a number of collections of poetry, who was wont to summarize the debates of academic conferences he attended in precisely this way -- the poem being included in the conference proceedings.

10. In preparing these notes from the land of the All Blacks, renowned for their much-publicized introductory haka -- one is readily reminded of the role of that dance of engagement in encounters between Maori tribes. Their approach points to another possibility of contemporary relevance, if only as a metaphor (All Blacks of Davos vs All Greens of Porto Alegre: reframing global strategic discord through polyphony? 2007)

11. From these perspectives, it is appropriate to recognize the huge importance attached to song in the Caucusus and its cultures -- and the impressive capacity for it there. The question is how to use that capacity between competing cultures. Competing choral "voices" engendering a larger polyphony?

12. In a world weary of conventional negotiations and the language of proposals, there are many provocative initiatives to reframe strategic approaches -- some of them with an aesthetic dimension (Liberating Provocations use of negative and paradoxical
strategies, 2005). For example, reports were recently circulated of a "breakaway republic" -- the Ghetto Republic of Uganja -- in one of the slums in Uganda's capital, complete with a full set of "cabinet ministers". It was formed around a politically influential dancehall.

13. Negotiations are typically about controversial issues on which opposing views are strongly held. This is ideal thematic material to be processed (even competitively) by poets (singers, musicians) to explore modes of their harmonious integration -- perhaps using the discordant elements to enhance the "colour" of the work. Such contributions, occasional made for light relief at conferences, could be taken more seriously in offering complementary insights to negotiators and their constituencies.

14. Of related potential, in many Islamic cultures, is the appreciation for the tales of Nasruddin. These raise the possibility of strategic dialogue through the wisdom of such folk tales. Recognized as "teaching stories", there is a tradition of their use in dialogue between opposing perspectives.

15. Of particular interest are widespread assumptions about the structure, nature and communicability of the outcomes of negotiations between one or more opposing perspectives. In a world characterized by "innovation" in every domain, the structure of binding declarations and agreements has varied little over centuries. As indicated above with respect to "singable" declarations, there are other possibilities that merit consideration in order to invite respect and popular engagement (Structure of Declarations: challenging traditional patterns, 1992, Structuring Mnemonic Encoding of Development Plans and Ethical Charters using Musical Leitmotivs, 2001). The purpose of such initiatives is to embed mnemonic resonances between the elements of the structure -- reflective of feedback loops vital to their viability and sustainability.

16. Whilst potential agreement might be fruitfully scoped out -- perhaps as competing drafts -- of greater interest is the possibility of designing the outcome in "epic form". The proposed EU Lisbon Reform Treaty (of 300 pages of text) might be considered as an epic struggling to be born and to elicit appeal from the citizens of Europe. It has no aesthetic value at present and no consideration has been given to the possible merit of framing it to give a primary role to the aesthetics that would render it memorable. The challenge of the Western engagement with islamic cultures might be fruitfully seen in the same light. It is the epic form that holds the resonances that sustain credibility, memorability and long-term viability. Briefly, if it cannot be "sung", does it hold sufficient significance to be worthy of communicating to the next generation?

17. In term of epics on a grander scale, it was noted elsewhere (Happiness and Unhappiness through Naysign and Nescience: comprehending the essence of sustainability? ) that in relation to the Caucasus that the Nart Sagas are a set of folk tales originating from regions of the North Caucasus -- currently of great political sensitivity, namely the Ossetians and the Circassian peoples, closely followed by the related Abkhaz and Abazin people. Nart Sagas are also present in Karachay-Balkar and Chechen-Ingush folklore. Some motifs in these sagas are shared by Greek mythology. It has also been speculated that many aspects of the much-valued Arthurian legends are derived from those sagas. Clearly there are common imaginative roots to be explored.

Clarification of Islamic views

Given the challenge of Islamic reservations regarding poetry, fundamental to the possibility of poetic debate, valuable clarification is provided by Patrick Colm Hogan (Philosophical Approaches to the Study of Literature, 2000):

... the crucial concept for the Arabic Aristotelians is moral imitation toward moral ends. More exactly, in the view of these writers, the poet need not tell the literal truth. However, any poetic representation must present an image of possible moral or immoral action, and it must do so in such a way as to encourage people to emulate the former and avoid the latter. The problem with the poetry condemned in the Qur'an is not so much that it lies about facts as that it lies about morals -- or, rather, that it fails to foster (Islamic) virtue and to diminish vice. (p. 29)

Hogan then continues:

...Arabic writers almost universally follow Aristotle in distinguishing moral levels of agents: those who are better than we are, those who are worse, and those who are the same. Incorporating this into their own framework, they conclude that the proper function of poetry is to praise the first and condemn the second, eulogize goodness and satirize evil...Later theorists adopted the same view. For example, al-Qartajanni (1211-85 ce) wrote that poetry "has the function of making [actions] attractive or repugnant to the human spirit".

The relation between poetry and rhetoric in this scheme should be clear. Indeed, the limitation of poetry to praise and blame makes it parallel certain forms of oratory. However, the Arabic writers emphasize differences as well. Specifically, rhetoric appeals to thought... Poetry, in contrast, operates on feeling.... it inspires feelings conducive toward virtue and away from vice, primarily the feelings of mercy and piety....(p. 30)

Of particular relevance are Hogan's comments on the Islamic understanding of the manner in which poetic discourse should cultivate an image:

... the writer inspires virtuous feelings through an imitative, but imaginative creation. This creation is structured around implicit or explicit approbation or derogation, sometimes called "embellishment" and "defacement"... this imitative and imaginative
creation must engage the audience members, absorb them, immerse them, for it is in that engagement, absorption, immersion, that audience members begin to feel attraction to virtue or aversion to vice... The crucial Arabic term here is "takhyil". Takhyil is a mimetic imaginative creation (a notion that is far more in keeping with the spirit of Aristotle's theories than are most European conceptions of mimesis...). Takhyil functions to capture the audience so that they forget reality and accept the creation, granting it what is sometimes called "imaginative assent"... Al-Jurjani defines takhyil as "that process in which the poet presents as existing an object which actually does not exist, and makes a statement for which there is no possibility of a scientific presentation, and uses an expression which he himself makes up, and shows himself as seeing what he does not see".

Takhyil is the focus of a more recent commentary annotating classical texts (Geert Jan van Gelder, et al., Takhyil: the imaginary in classical Arabic poetic, 2008). This focus enables Hogan to clarify Islamic concern about poetry:

As Ibn Sina wrote: "The imaginative is the speech to which the soul yields, accepting and rejecting matters without pondering, reasoning or choice".... Indeed, "human beings are more amenable to imaginative representation than to [rational or reflective] conviction"... -- which is precisely what makes it so valuable, but also makes it so dangerous, and thus open to Qur'anic condemnation when immoral.


If poetry in which the beliefs or acts of the leaders of a particular socio-political system are supported or opposed can be defined as political poetry, there is no doubt that this type of verse flourished in Arabia well before Islam. Indeed, whatever the subject treated, the ultimate aim of the sizeable surviving body of pre-Islamic poetry was the glorification or criticism of the tribe, the nucleus of the system on which the contemporary social structure was based.... The advent of Islam impelled a change in these types of political poetry. The Prophet recognized the important political function of poetry, and employed poets to respond in kinds to the attacks of the pagan poets... the weapons were still those of fakhr [glorification, self-praise] and hija' [satire, lampoon, invective], but the new way of life gave far greater prominence to the religious element... (p. 185).

Improvisation in poetic debate
Presented in an annex with the following sections:
- Poetic discourse as a lost art
- Poetic engagement
- Lost archetype?
- Medieval Europe
- Dialogue in Islamic cultures

Examples of poetic interaction
Presented in an annex with the following sections:
- Improvisation in oral poetry
- Inveective poetry
- Folk traditions
- Interactive dialogue projects
- Framework for clarification of "poetic debate"

Towards an imaginative reflection on possible "Rules of Poetic Engagement"
Presented in an annex with the following sections:
- Collaborative aesthetics
- Collaborative creativity
- Practical concerns
- Characteristics of possible "rules"

Conclusion
Presented in an annex with the following sections:
- Rhythm and rhyme
- Autopoiesis
- Clarification of debate
- Poetic justice

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<th>Relevant strategic implications of Japanese warlord poetry</th>
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<td>(Sengoku-jidia, 1467-1600)</td>
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<td>When Japan was churning in continuous, contagious arson and killing among warlords from the 16th century</td>
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onwards, there were three samurai leaders who would lay the foundations for modern Japan today -- the first whose vision of the country was of one nation-state. They were to rule Japan in succession.

The three samurai leaders tried to unify the country: Nobunaga was known for his cruelty, Hideyoshi for his impetuosity, Tokugawa for his patience. A poetic parable (now learnt by all Japanese school children) was told about them.

There was a little bird who wouldn’t sing, they were asked by a Zen master what they would do:

Nobunaga said, "little bird, if you won’t sing, I'll kill you"
Hideyoshi said, "little bird, if you won’t sing, I'll make you sing"
Tokugawa said, "little bird, if you won’t sing, I'll wait for you to sing."

Tokugawa became Shogun (leader of Japan) in 1603, and his dynasty ruled until 1867.

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Voices above the chaos: female war poets from the Middle East
(Ed Vulliamy, The Observer, 4 September 2016)

And it comes in the verses of two female poets, part of an emergent school of verse, much of it written by women: Bejan Matur and Maram al-Masri -- Kurdish and Syrian respectively. Matur and Masri are the two most illustrious and cogent of this new generation of female poets; their verse combines to create a devastating but richly composed verbal landscape that it is at once epic and intensely human. Raw and lyrical, of the moment but seeped in the memories of their people, immediate and for ever.

References

Because of the number and range of relevant references, these have been placed in a separate document: Strategic Dialogue through Poetic Improvisation: web resources and bibliography

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