

The CENTER UPDATE

“Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”

- Margaret Mead

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

In our last Update we discussed the consequences of continued religious-based conflict, namely the damage this conflict does to our basic human and cultural beliefs when we ignore it. Actually, to civilization itself. In this Update we explain the other side of that sequence, that is what religious-based conflict has *caused* and does *cause*.

Religious-based conflict is, arguably, the most important of the family of causes of war, which include intolerance, persecution, religious conflict itself, antisemitism, and economics among others. Because history tells us that war is the most devastating event in terms of loss of life, injury, destruction of homes, cities, and even cultures, neither its importance, nor its causes, can be ignored.

While economics as a cause of war cannot be minimized - and certainly has its place high up on the scale of causes - it is not the most important single cause. Nor are religious conflict and antisemitism which are, themselves the *result* of religious-based conflict, which, as we know, is caused by the continuing overemphasis of religious differences together with the *underemphasis* of their similarities. Likewise, persecution and intolerance are not the principal causes of war. When all of the niceties are removed, it is religious-based conflict itself which is and has been the primary cause of war and its misery.

Religious-based conflict has caused hundreds of millions to lose their lives. Religious-based conflict has caused many, many more bodily injuries. Religious-based conflict has caused hundreds of millions of

refugees to flee their homes and villages. Religious-based conflict has caused the loss of complete countries and even cultures.

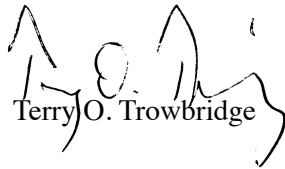
This *raison d'être* for wars has occurred throughout the centuries without our understanding its significance or often even realizing its existence. The power of religious-based conflict can never be underestimated. Without this overemphasis of religious differences most of the wars in our history would never have occurred. The resulting loss of lives, devastation and “collateral damage” would never have been written in our history books. Yet, today this problem of religious-based conflict is not a subject on the table of priorities by our political leaders - and most do not even realize it exists.

So, as we now can see, religious-based conflict is not just a current problem with actors such as ISIS taking the stage. It is, and has been, an important long-term problem, never really appreciated or properly attacked. We cannot continue to ignore it. The time has come to act. However, there are some good signs, for instance the recent agreements between Israel and several Arab countries to, for the first time in history, work together economically, politically and even socially. But this is only a small beginning and not nearly enough.

We must open our eyes to the problem of religious-based conflict and accept its existence as an extremely serious and unique event - and the most significant single cause of war. We need to work not only to control it but to reduce it in order to avoid the clearly predictable consequences. Almost all of our political leaders, with their usual lack of foresight, must expand their views of the “important” to include, as a high priority, this problem - and seek solutions to causes rather than only

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reactions to current events. An imposing requirement. But we now know the consequences of not doing it.



HOTSPOTS

Atyrau, Kazakhstan

In early September, secret police raided the homes of Sarsen Netekov and Nurlan Atalykov, seizing 150 religious books and accusing them of membership of the banned Muslim missionary movement called Tabligh Jamaat. An Atyrau court handed them one-year restricted freedom terms, bringing to 75 the number of alleged Tabligh Jamaat members known to have been criminally convicted since 2015. It also ordered the books destroyed. Another case of overemphasizing religious differences.

Kazakhstan is a Muslim country which borders Russia to the north, China to the east and is home to some 130 different ethnic groups. It is, in many ways, a showpiece of its foreign policy as well as a reflection of its own multicultural and multiethnic population, and has long been touted as a crossroads between East and West. Yet, even there, its problem of religious-based conflict remains.

Minsk, Belarus

The Minsk City Administration and local police have warned the New Life Pentecostal Church that meetings for worship in the church car park are illegal and have threatened to legally close down the Church. Liquidation would make any exercise of freedom of religion or belief illegal and punishable with up to a two-year jail term. The Church had normally met each Sunday in the car park after City officials had evicted it from the church building itself in February, 2021. A property earlier purchased in 2002. ■

POTPOURRI

(What you may not have read or heard in the news)

The Emirates (UAE)

It is a fact, as most of us know, that education and environment - in most instances - shape a person's mind causing him to either overemphasize religious differences, or not. Astoundingly, The Emirates, that little Arab country bordering Saudi Arabia and across the Strait of Hormuz from Iran, is now a leader in changing their environment to opening people's minds towards accepting and de-emphasizing religious differences.

The UAE is the first Muslim country to open business, social, cultural and diplomatic relations with Jewish Israel. They allow Christian churches and Jewish synagogues as well as their own Muslim mosques in their country. They have changed their calendar week to fix weekends as Saturday and Sunday, rather than Friday and Saturday - the only Muslim country to do this. The UAE and Israel universities now collaborate in research on artificial intelligence. Just to mention a few. They are a shining example for the world, leading the way towards the reduction of the overemphasis of religious differences. ■

COSTS

There are at least three kinds of costs to individuals, businesses and governments from religious-based conflict and violence namely financial, economic and hidden. As an example of the latter, it has been shown from studies in Spain which have determined that exposure of expectant mothers to violence, especially terrorism, has detrimental effects on birth outcomes - in terms of average birth weight (lower), prevalence of low birth weight (higher) and number of "normal" babies born (lower). Due to space limitations, however, below we describe only actual and potentially calculable financial costs.

In the past we have described the financial costs to the United States alone of the Iraq and Afghan conflicts as they continued to accrue. Since the USA has removed most of its troops from Iraq and has completed the removal of its forces in Afghanistan those costs, while still increasing, will now reflect the cost of advisory support of local forces as well as other indirect costs as they incur. However, additional costs are now being incurred because of the threat by ISIS in Iraq, Syria, again in Afghanistan and other parts of the Middle East and Africa as well.

In Afghanistan the US military and civilian forces have, after 20+ years now completely left that country. Total costs for their period of stay are estimated to be circa \$1 trillion. This figure does not include the yet to be

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calculated costs of the final withdrawal fiasco August, 2021 where some 3 times the number of the remaining military troops had to, at the eleventh hour, be sent back there to rescue some 2,500 military forces and over 15,000 stranded US citizens and their families. The approximately \$1 trillion 20+ year cost substantially increased the interest on the national debt during that period as well. Total costs since 2001 for this debt alone are approximately an additional \$2+ trillion.

In Iraq costs are again increasing due to the recent and new insertion of “non-combat” troops, advisors and their support, as well as the initiation of more and more air activity and humanitarian aid. Costs since 2003 total \$2.6+ trillion with an additional cost of \$610+ billion in benefits owed Iraq war veterans. Add to this circa \$4+ trillion of interest on expenses for the war since 2003.

The costs of confronting ISIS alone, (not the only instigator of religious-based conflict and violence) and not including Afghanistan, Syria or African countries, are \$50+ billion a year and are increasing dramatically each month.

Finally, total costs for combating religious-based conflict to the USA alone since 2001 are more than \$8+ trillion, not including the ensuing interest on US debt because of these expenditures of an additional \$1+ trillion.

Some may disagree with these totals or the way they are calculated, but it is fair to say that they continue to be astonishing. While they cannot be 100% accurate, they do at least, generally reflect the costs generated by these religious-based conflicts as borne by the United States. Note that these financial costs are for attacking the *effects* of religious-based conflict alone. None of these costs are associated with attacking its *cause*. ■

ABOUT THE CENTER

What the Center, as a totally independent NGO, does is unique. No other such organization has as its sole goal the reduction of religious-based conflict through a practical and specific approach which goes beyond tolerance. We believe this problem is larger than religions themselves, not within their total control, and

one which cannot be solved by them alone. They need our help. Non-believers and governments alike must work to support them in this effort.

In this respect, the Center’s primary mission is education. To educate, we must first publicize the problem of religious-based conflict and show how it affects all of us - either directly or indirectly; either physically or financially - and in many instances, both. We then educate by offering an approach towards its reduction not heretofore recognized, showing how we must go beyond tolerance, the current mantra for its so-called resolution, if we are to succeed. We describe this step in practical, realistic, not altruistic terms.

The Center does not purport to be able to *resolve* this problem; rather we show how the people and their governments can approach it and eventually cause change in the direction of its reduction. Since humans are imperfect, we cannot expect to totally resolve the problem of religious-based conflict, but we can, through this method, substantially reduce it to at least manageable proportions.

You can help reduce religious-based conflict in the world – probably more than you think you can. Even though individuals have limited power when acting alone, when they act as part of a group with a common purpose, this power increases geometrically. By supporting the Center - morally, actively or financially, you do just that - have more impact. For those of you who provide your moral support, we thank you. For those who either as formal Volunteers or as individuals discuss with others the Center’s work, we cannot be more appreciative. For those who have the financial means and make charitable contributions to support our efforts, we are forever grateful to you.

Our cause is unique. Our message is spreading daily to more and more people and governments throughout the world. Our work continues to receive praise from those who know of it.

But we must reach more people and more governments in order to increase our impact. And in this process, we must not only publicize the problem of religious-based conflict, as well as its astonishing and growing costs to us all; but we must also explain why tolerance is not the answer to this problem. And, finally, we are leading the way towards *educating* the people and their governments, showing them *how* to attain this goal with a practical and realistic plan. ■



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