

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

In Our 22^d Year

Now read in more than 44 countries throughout the world

Vol. XXII No. 2

Spring, 2022

FROM THE DIRECTOR

IS RELIGIOUS-BASED CONFLICT REALLY IMPORTANT?

Religious-based conflict evidences itself in various forms. On the continents of Europe and the Americas and on the islands of Great Britain it is found in subtle ways in the form of the withholding of legal rights, or more overtly in individual violence against people, churches, mosques and synagogues. In the USA one sees a vehicle intentionally being driven into a crowd of pedestrians causing death and chaos; in Great Britain knife attacks in public places; in Europe personal violence on their streets done usually by individuals or small groups. More often than not against those with different religious beliefs.

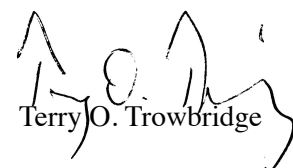
On the other hand, in Africa, the Middle East, the East and other parts of the world, one finds a different kind of religious-based conflict. There it generally takes the form of a group, rather than individual, violence - often military in form. This kind gains more publicity because it causes larger numbers - deaths, injuries, homes and families destroyed and so forth. Though more noticeable, it is no more important than the former.

The common cause of both is the belief that differences - in this case religious differences - are wrong. They cannot be tolerated. There is only one correct belief - my belief. Any other must be obliterated. In sum, these differences are overemphasized to the point of bringing conflict and violence to the world.

Whether this conflict takes place in the West or in other parts it is equally insidious and dangerous, and cannot be ignored. The number of casualties is only one measurement of its significance, and probably not even the most important statistic - except for the short term. Much more important is the damage this conflict does to our basic human and cultural beliefs when we ignore it. Even to civilization itself. It is probably the most important single event which impedes human social and cultural progress, which is necessary for civilization to continue.

Current events such as the recent corona virus pandemic, though serious, are temporary and often even increase scientific progress because they force scientists to find cures which often lead to development of many other physical safety improvements, among other things. Viruses and sickness come and go, and will always be with us, and are not caused by humans (though they may be exacerbated by them). Religious-based conflict - an “historic sickness” remains with us continuously but IS caused by humans. Accordingly, it can be resolved by humans.

There are currently many attempts to resolve this problem - not only our Center’s unique efforts. The historic breakthrough in the Middle East allowing Jewish Israel and several Muslim countries, including the UAE, to emphasize less their differences and more their common similarities and interests is only one example. However, it must be a continuing effort and must take more forms. But it is an important beginning.


Terry O. Trowbridge



HOTSPOTS

Great Britain

Violent crimes in England and Wales reached more than 1.77 million offenses, according to police recorded crime statistics, a huge increase of more than 1.1 million when compared with 2012/13, when there were just 601 thousand violent offenses. More than 40% of this violence was religious-based.

The Community Security Trust (CST) recorded 2,255 antisemitic incidents alone in the United Kingdom in 2021 — the highest total in recent years anywhere in Europe. It is also the highest total ever reported in a single calendar year. The CST report published in February found an increase of antisemitic incidents of 34%, up from 1,684 incidents recorded in 2020. The 2021 tally is 24% higher than the previous record of 1,813 incidents reported in 2019.

Nigeria

A Baptist school in Ijagbo, Kwara State, North Central Nigeria, was shut down by the state government after a breakdown of law and order in the school. The decision to close Oyun Baptist High School, Ijagbo, was announced Feb. 3 after a fracas broke out in the school's domain over the wearing of hijab, a Muslim veil, which the school does not approve. Unhappy with the policy, some parents of Muslim students at the school staged a protest that resulted in them clashing with Christians, who saw nothing wrong with the directive.

The confrontation led to violence, injuries and the reported death of one person. It was the latest violence in the state involving Christians and Muslims over the wearing of hijab by Muslim students in Christian-run schools like Oyun Baptist High School. Previous concerns or disturbances led to the closure of some schools by the state government as well as burning of worship centers by aggrieved persons.

China

The Chinese Communist Party's persecution of Christians has taken a disturbing new turn. According to a recent Radio Free Asia report, Chinese Christians are being detained at secretive "brainwashing camps."

Writing under the pseudonym of Li Yuese, a Chinese Christian detailed the conditions of his detention in a "transformation facility" where he was held for 10 months after the CCP raided his house church in Sichuan province. Most of the prisoners held in these mobile facilities, operated by the United Front Work Department in collaboration with the state security police, have been taken from house churches that operate outside of state approval. Imprisoned in a windowless room without ventilation, Li was subjected to verbal and physical abuse. United Front officials use intimidation, threats, and beatings to force detainees to renounce their faith. The repression was so brutal that Li testified, "After you've been in there a week, death starts to look better than staying there." At his release, Li was in very poor health. He remains haunted by his experience.

Imprisoning Christians in brainwashing camps is another step in the CCP's intensifying crackdown on religion. The CCP believes independent religious practice threatens its power. Under President Xi Jinping's policy of "Sinicization," the party seeks to conform religion to its political goals. Religious groups deemed to "disrupt public order" face severe monitoring and persecution.

The CCP's persecution of Christians has also involved demolishing churches and arresting leaders like Pastor Wang Yi of Early Rain Covenant Church, who had been sentenced to nine years in prison. ■

POTPOURRI

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

The USA

Good news for those donors to the Center who do not itemize their tax returns. Previously, one who didn't itemize his tax returns could not take a tax deduction for his charitable donation to the Center. This has now changed. Note a September, 2021 ruling by the IRS: s

Tax Deduction for You when you don't itemize

Usually taxpayers who take the standard deduction cannot deduct their charitable contributions. The new law now permits taxpayers to claim a limited deduction on their 2021, and presumably subsequent, federal income tax returns for cash contributions they made to certain qualifying charitable organizations. These taxpayers,



including married individuals filing separate returns, can claim a deduction of up to \$300 for cash contributions to qualifying charities. The maximum deduction is \$600 for married individuals filing joint returns.

You should check with your tax advisor to assure this rule remains in effect for the 2022 and following tax years. ■

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 (lower). Due to space limitations, however, below we describe only 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 calculated costs of the final withdrawal fiasco last August 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 \$2.4+ 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 \$5.5+ trillion, not including the ensuing interest on US debt because of these expenditures of an additional \$848+ million.

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 *causes*. ■

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.



PLEASE CHECK BELOW. WE'VE MADE IT EASIER FOR YOU TO DONATE TO THE CENTER

Yes, I want to support the Center!

www.center2000.org

To donate now to either the Center's Operational Fund or to its Endowment Fund account using your credit card or online bank check, go to:

<https://www.networkforgood.org/donation/ExpressDonation.aspx?ORGID2=656319302>

Or, for our US readers, you can DONATE WITHOUT DONATING!

When you shop at Amazon

go to: <https://smile.amazon.com/ch/65-6319302>

(Same Website as Amazon.com)

And, every time you buy, Amazon makes a donation to the Center.
(Their prices remain the same - even with their donation!)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Center For Reduction of Religious-Based Conflict
649 Fifth Avenue South, Suite 201
Naples, Florida 34102, USA
Telephone: (239) 821-4850; Email: centerrel@center2000.org