

# 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 24th Year

Now read in more than 45 countries throughout the world

Vol. XXIV No. 1

Winter 2022/2023

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

**H**ave you ever wondered why “important” news is seen and heard for a limited period of time and then, all of a sudden, it seems to lose its importance? It's almost as if that “important” news had disappeared. A year ago the news was dominated by COVID. Today it is inflation and the Russian/Ukraine war. And, tomorrow? But isn't there other significant news we should be learning about as well? With the exception of local news we will strain to find out about what was important yesterday but, for some reason, not today - though the activity which was “important” itself continues to exist and with the same intensity. Many of us realize that others, “smarter” and in more important positions than us, determine what is important and what is not important.

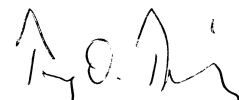
**B**ut, what is the impact of their decisions? The impact is this: What is determined important and so emphasized on the news we receive also determines what governments and leaders do with our money and how they decide how to act financially, socially, politically and internationally. The news, more often than not, actually *determines* their priorities!

**M**ost of us do not have a large reservoir of sources to get the news - for one reason or another. And, too often our choice boils down to TV or the local newspaper. This, even though most of us know that the TV news channels or the local newspaper we choose have their biases and priorities. Clearly the “news” we receive is edited by those who have such priorities. So, more often than not, we don't really know or understand what is *really* happening in the world around us.

**T**his lack of actual knowledge can only have a negative result. If we don't really know what is happening how can we - not only personally, but as nations - do the right thing, take the right steps, make the right decisions? How can we take the necessary and appropriate steps to attack the real problem, to change what really needs to be changed, to solve the problems that badly need to be solved, or for their existence at least be acknowledged?

**T**oday, while inflation and the Russian/Ukraine war are important issues, there continues to be many other important problems that need our attention, not the least of which is the enormous amount of religious-based conflict going on in our world. But, because of the obvious problems of inflation and the Russian/Ukraine war, we seldom hear about that. When you visit it, you will find on our website a list of the more than twenty Hotspots of religious-based conflict now active. There are, additionally, minor hotspots as well. These issues don't go away simply because they are not reported by most of the news sources for which you normally have access.

**W**hich is why our Center is so important. It gives you the news - which you won't easily, if at all, find elsewhere - through our website, our brochures, our articles and Op-Eds as well as in this Update. We report, analyze, discuss and provide answers on this important theme which you won't get on the regular “news”.



Terry O. Trowbridge



## HOTSPOTS

### United States

In a number of American universities antisemitic threats to Jewish students doubled on their campuses in 2021, the latest year of such statistics. These threats came from not only other, non-jewish students and anti-jewish faculty members but from outside sources as well. Such people had categorically rejected the globally accepted definition of antisemitism, which holds that attempts to demonize or delegitimize them are clear signs of hate against the Jewish people. And, accordingly, they felt they had the full right to criticize through hate messages and even bring violence.

### Azerbaijan

There have been multiple prosecutions and fines of Sunni Muslims who in Quba in northeast Azerbaijan, Agdash in the center of the country, and in Oquz and Zaqatala in the northwest, in homes for Sunni Islamic worship without state permission. Those Muslims have been routinely fined following police and State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations raids on their homes. An unusual but not uncommon kind of religious-based conflict. Essentially what this means is that Muslims who are not Shia Muslims (the predominant religion there) are prohibited from having the same rights of worship without following special bureaucratic procedures not required of Shia Muslims.

### Ukraine

Rustem Asanov, a Crimean Tatar, was Imam of the Muslim Birlık (Unity) Mosque community in the village of Shchastlivtseve in Henichesk District in Ukraine's Kherson Region. He was in Henichesk District at the time of the renewed Russian invasion of Ukraine, and was detained and tortured in a basement by Russian occupation forces. After he was released, Russian occupation forces came to inspect the Mosque's contents. With them was a Muslim apparently from the (Russian) North Caucasus, probably from Dagestan and working for them. He looked through all the books and confiscated those that he deemed 'not correct'. He had no list of literature with him, and was obviously identifying books (to confiscate) from memory. Asanov estimated that the unidentified man took about one third of the mosque's books. ■

## POTPOURRI

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

### The Sahel

The religious-based violence in the Sahel (specifically Burkina Faso, Mali, and western Niger) in 2021 represents a 70% increase over the previous year and remains a disturbing trend since its recent beginning in 2015. The estimated 4,839 fatalities linked to these violent events in the Sahel in 2021 were 17 percent higher than the previous year. And, this follows a 57 percent expansion in numbers as reported in 2020. Frighteningly, more than 2.4 million people were displaced in Burkina Faso during this period alone.

### Somalia

In this shattered country there was a 17-percent increase last year in religious-based violence involving al Shabaab, or "the Youth," an Islamist insurgent group which is based in Somalia. This is a surge from 1,771 in the year before to 2,072, marking a steady increase of nearly double from the then 1,080 number of violence events reported in 2015. ■

## 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.

**I**n 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 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.

**I**n 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.

**T**he 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.

**F**inally, total costs for combating religious-based conflict to the USA alone since 2001 are more than \$8,2+ trillion, not including the ensuing interest on US debt because of these expenditures of an additional \$1,1+ trillion.

**S**ome 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* only its *effects*.

## ABOUT THE CENTER

**W**hat 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.

**I**n 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.

**T**he 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.

**Y**ou 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.



**O**ur 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.

**B**ut 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.



## **Yes, I want to support the Center!**

[www.center2000.org](http://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>

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

**And, 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 content as in 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