

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

THOUGH the October Israel/Hamas War in the Middle East was not directly a religious-based war, it will have had a significant effect on worldwide religious-based conflict itself. Clearly that centuries-old conflict has many grounds other than religious - beginning before Hamas' religion of Islam was even founded. But the effect of this War will be long-lasting outside its narrow premises.

What it has exemplified is that a small group of highly motivated attackers can cause incredible damage and death against a militarily superior power - even though that power felt it was clearly prepared to defend against major border aggressions. What apparently was not taken into account was the enduring mentality of (at least) the Hamas military wing of Palestine. It is reported that Israel felt that if it was just moderate and not overly aggressive in its defense of the continuing Hamas air and ground probes, Hamas would eventually come around and change its personality from one of hate to one of “reality” and be willing to negotiate politically with it. They were wrong.

Over a half century ago America tried to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people in that war and failed, finally learning the lesson that the changing, by an outside force, of the hearts and minds (that is changing ingrained perceptions) was not something that could easily or quickly be accomplished, if ever. Israel has now re-learned the same lesson.

The impact of this War on our perceptions hopefully will change. No longer should we believe that we can change the “hearts and minds” of those who want to reap death and violence on us as they use religion as the basis for their purpose. History shows the very real difficulty in that approach. No longer can we smugly feel safe from them simply because we are militarily stronger or because they are far away from those of us in, say, the West.

Ultimately, the only way to reduce religious-based conflict and violence is not to change the perceptions of those who would bring that violence to us, but to - by education, training and government assistance - bring about a reduction in their *emphasis* of religious differences and instead diligently work to bring an increased emphasis on those similarities which all religions and peoples have. A long term but necessary approach. Ingrained perceptions are very difficult to change - as we have seen - but their *emphasis* can be reduced. We see that being done almost daily by, for instance, scientists, intellectuals and even politicians.

As we have stated many times, this process of changing emphasis must have the full and wholehearted support of major free world governments led by the US Government and/or the European Union to succeed. The Center continues to us all its energies to bring about this end.



Terry O. Trowbridge



HOTSPOTS

The Middle East

Below find a four-minute video that is well worth watching. In this video the CEO Nuseir Yassin, of the NAS company located in Dubai, talks specifically about the October War between Hamas and Israel which, as stated above, is basically a political conflict rather than a religious-based conflict. But the mantra they follow is strikingly similar to the Center's approach for reducing religious-based conflict (i.e. "Jews and Muslims are more similar than they are different"). And, they put into practice what they preach. Kudos to them!



The World

There has been an unusual resurgence of antisemitic incidents and rhetoric in the European Union and worldwide: Molotov cocktails thrown on a synagogue in Germany (see below), stars of David sprayed on residential buildings in France, a Jewish cemetery desecrated in Austria, Jewish stores and synagogues attacked in Spain, demonstrators chanting hate slogans against Jews. This spike of antisemitic incidents (not only) across Europe has reached extraordinary levels since the Hamas/Israeli October war began, reminiscent of some of the darkest times in history. European - and worldwide - Jews today are again living in fear.

Germany

The Federal Association of Departments for Research and Information on Antisemitism (RIAS), which records incidents of antisemitism in Germany, released its [latest report](#) in November documenting nearly 1,000 cases of aggression toward Jews in the country since the [Hamas](#) terror attack on Israel on October 7. Overall, the occurrence of such incidents has risen 320% year-on-year compared to the same period in 2022. RIAS says during that period it looked at 994 verified cases — including three cases of [extreme violence](#), 29 attacks, 72 incidents of targeted property destruction, 32 threats, 4 antisemitic mass mailings and 854 cases of injurious behavior. ■

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

United States

In many states there were increases in each major category of antisemitism — harassment, vandalism and assault. The ADL Center on Extremism found that harassment climbed 29% over 2021 to 2,298 incidents; vandalism jumped by 51% to 1,288 events; and physical assaults went up 26% to 111. The assaults were defined as physical attacks on Jewish people, or those perceived to be Jewish, alongside evidence of antisemitism. Orthodox Jews, who are usually more recognizably Jewish, were



disproportionately targeted, accounting for 53% of the victims, and close to 60% of the attacks took place in New York City, mostly the borough of Brooklyn.

There was one fatality — Arizona professor, Thomas Meixner, who was targeted by an antisemitic attacker who believed Meixner was Jewish, even though he wasn't. The states with the most incidents were those with large Jewish populations, led by New York with 580 instances, followed by California, New Jersey, Florida and Texas.

Antisemitic incidents at colleges and non-Jewish schools increased by 40%. The school incidents included the use of swastikas, such as drawing the hate symbol on paper and handing it to a Jewish student, as well as verbal antisemitic bullying and racist jokes. There was also vandalism including the messages "kill all Jews," "Hitler was right," and "Jews not welcome."

Jewish institutions including synagogues were targeted in 589 incidents, mostly in the form of harassment, a 12% increase over the previous year. The most high-profile attack was the hostage crisis earlier this year at Colleyville, Texas. There were 91 bomb threats against Jewish institutions. ■

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 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 \$2.8+ trillion with an additional cost of \$610+ billion in benefits owed Iraq war veterans. Add to this circa \$4.1+ 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 \$53+ 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 \$8,4+ 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 *causes* only its *effects*. ■

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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THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

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