Faith-Based Diplomacy and Interfaith-dialogues for Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution
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Conflicts that engender due to differences in cultural-identities have proven to be intractable especially when faith is at the center of it. These intricate faith-based conflicts such as Kashmir, Ireland, Israel-Palestine are especially difficult to resolve as there is an immense amount of history and suffering involved which has devastated the communities in the middle of it. The traditional peacemaking efforts, where representatives from the conflicting factions would be delegated to negotiate a resolution, have been largely futile to solve conflicts of such kind. This need for a more non-traditional method, which keeps the faith, dialogue, and relationship-building at the grassroots level, gave rise to a new approach to peacemaking: Faith-Based Diplomacy (FBD). The FBD centered organizations employ an eclectic mix of tools such as back-channels, shuttle diplomacy, religious/spiritualistic activities, and dialogues to reconcile the conflicting factions. It is found that the Faith-Based Diplomacy is a potent movement which has proved to not only foster reconciliation but also healing on a grassroots level across the factions in an intractable identity-based conflict. It is necessary to understand the successful elements of this approach to gauge their efficacy in resolving some of the contemporary conflicts which have triggered some of the worst humanitarian crisis. Through this study, it is aimed to understand the efforts of motivated third-party organizations at utilizing the strategies of Faith-Based Diplomacy which integrate politics, faith and religion, and other conflict resolution methods aimed at the grassroots and civil level organizations. The success of FBD around the globe can be understood and applied to numerous intractable identity-based conflicts of the past, present, and the future; at both the micro and macro levels of our global society.

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Introduction

In the past century our world has witnessed immense human suffering and harrowing episodes of humanitarian crisis due to wars and conflicts. A lot of those spewed out of differences in religion, ideologies, culture, beliefs; or in one word — Identity. These conflicts between disparate cultural, social, or religious identities are highly intractable due to enormous history, suffering, hatred, and distrust; hence called intractable identity-based conflicts.

Religion or faith is one of those identities to which people have the strongest association as it provides one with the reason, rationale, and purpose of existence. Affiliation with a particular religion gives also gives one a strong sense of belongingness with the fellow followers who share one's religion. This high sense of belongingness to a religion, also causes conception of the "other"; the faction which does not associate with the religion. This strong sentiment of commitment, loyalty and devotion moves one toward protecting and preserving one's own religion, even if it means going to extreme extents and causing hostility towards the "other." We have witnessed a number of conflicts with religion at its center, which have prolonged for years perpetuating the animosity, pain, and suffering for years; such as Kashmir, Israel-Palestine and the likes.

The traditional form of diplomacy has failed to provide a long-lasting resolution for such conflicts, which calls for the need of a better approach that would help to not only strike peace accords on paper, but foster long-term peace, reconciliation, and healing on grassroots level in the communities involved in the conflict. That approach that came to be known as Faith-Based Diplomacy, co-discovered by Reverend Canon Brian Cox, is described in detail

along escapades and case studies as depicted in "Faith-Based Diplomacy: The work of the Prophets." (Cox, 2015)

Literature review

In the book, Faith-Based Diplomacy: The Work of the Prophets (Cox 2015), Reverend Brian Cox describes his international missions of Faith-Based Diplomacy, it's principles and methodologies, after he joined forces with Dr. Douglas Johnston of Center of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and founded International Center for Religion and Diplomacy.

Faith-Based Diplomacy is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional approach to peacemaking and reconciliation between warring factions. As the name suggests, the Faith-Based Diplomacy keeps religious sentiment at the center of peacemaking and reconciliation efforts, while integrating it with the politics to make maximum impact. It aims at not just creating peace on paper, but reconciliation and overall healing on the grassroots level; amongst the population actually besotted by the conflict.

Reverend Cox explains the concept of Faith-Based Diplomacy with the following core principles of the approach —

Principles

Faith Based Diplomacy:

1. **Religion + politics + conflict resolution + international context = Faith-Based Diplomacy**

   Cox has described Faith-Based Diplomacy as a multi-faceted approach which integrates faith with politics to devise long lasting resolutions and implements them in an international context. All the elements are equally important for the peace to prevail, and reconciliation and healing to occur. Where religion acts as the bridge that addresses the emotional sentiment to bring people together; the peacemaking process is incomplete without the political support of authorities and leadership. Faith-Based Diplomacy also entails the employment of sophisticated alternate dispute resolution and conflict resolution tactics such as shuttle diplomacy and creating back-channels to mediate conflicts.

   In one of the ICRD missions in Iraq and Kurdistan, two conflicting political parties — PYD (Kurdish Democratic Union) and Kurdish Democratic Party —would not even see each other in the eye, yet it is was very important to reconcile the parties for peace in the region. Both the parties had a sound and trusting relationship with Reverend Cox and his associate, Bassam; and coincidentally both the parties approached to see ICRD at the same time at the same hotel. Reverend Cox and Bassam employed shuttle diplomacy, keeping both the parties in different rooms while Cox and Bassam went back and forth between rooms to mediate the conflict. This allowed ICRD to make a wave of reconciliation without causing any civil discord.

In another instance, Deputy Chief of mission from Yugoslav embassy approached Reverend Cox and repeatedly iterated that "My president and my government would appreciate it if you would speak to former secretary James Baker about serving as a third-party intermediary in our conflict with the Kosovar Albanians." (Cox, 2015) This was an attempt by the Yugoslavian government to create a back-channel through ICRD, in order to communicate a message and unofficially seek interference in a regional conflict. This allowed Yugoslav to avoid any political repercussions that might have come along with seeking direct and official interference in the international political arena.

This also depicts the nature and characteristics of Faith-Based actors, without which the peacemaking efforts might be rendered ineffective. The faith-based actors must be perceived as — and actually be — neutral intermediaries without any ulterior or hidden agenda, and who solely work for peace and reconciliation in the community.

2. Is a Track-Two Diplomacy

Track-one or traditional diplomacy, only, has not proved to be an effective and long-lasting resolution to an intricate identity-based conflict. In track-one diplomacy, representatives from the conflicting factions come together and try to devise a peace accord or a treaty; without any participation from the people actually living in the middle of the conflict. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to implement a resolution that is not approved or agreed upon by the members of the communities in conflict. Even if it is implemented, by wielding the power of authority, the resolution will not last since the communities in the middle of the conflict cannot just jettison a years old

vendetta overnight because of a paper signed by unconcerned representatives. That calls for a peace process which involves the perceived victims and perpetrators in the process for a long-lasting solution.

Faith-Based Diplomacy is that Track-Two or multi-track diplomacy which seeks to involve the grassroot population into the peace process so that they can derive to their own conclusion, resolution, and social contracts so that peace is long-lasting and prospering. Although not easy, it is achieved by addressing and involving the civil level organizations and leaders of the local community; such as professionals, businesses, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and religious institutions and leaders.

These civic leaders of the society have the power to not only set and influence the sentiment of the grassroot population, but also influence the official authorities, governments and elected officials. Track-Two diplomacy also understands that political support and accord between the authorities and governments is also necessary and that peace among the conflicting communities will not be long-lasting without the validation and the financial, political, and diplomatic support of the elected national and local governments and leaders. Cox asserts that track-one and track-two diplomatic efforts should be employed closely to ensure long-lasting peace in the conflicting communities.

3. **Focuses on Intractable Identity-Based Conflicts**

Faith-Based Diplomacy focuses on the conflicts where traditional diplomatic efforts fail due to the complexity of identity-based conflicts. Communities in the

middle of these conflicts have strong affiliations with their complex communal identities; which can be a complex matrix of gender, language, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, political ideologies etc. When the individuals living in these communities affiliate (inherit or acquire) with these identities, they also affiliate and associate with the history of the identity; the past suffering, perception of injustice, hostility and animosity toward the perceived "other," making the conflict intractable. According to Cox, other factors that contribute to the intractability of religious identity-based conflicts are —

a. Clash between core values

b. Perceived stain of injustice

c. History of suffering

d. A cultivated culture of conflict

e. Interests of third-parties in the prolongation of the conflicts

f. Absence of zone of agreement

g. Historical wounds and distrust between communities due to past events

h. Intense feeling hostility, animosity, hatred and unforgiveness

These intractable identity-based conflicts cannot be resolved with the traditional diplomacy and therefore the track-two Faith-Based Diplomacy proves to be a successful tool to mediate such conflicts. Faith-Based Diplomacy can help foster dialogues at the grassroots level and help conflicting communities; talk about past sufferings, let go of them, apologize, forgive, and work together for a better and more peaceful future of the communities.

4. **Regards the religious element which seeks divine intervention, orientation, and worldview**

This is one of the most important elements of the Faith-Based Diplomacy as this is what causes the change of hearts in the people of the community, which moves them from hostility and hatred toward forgiveness and peace. There are multiple facets of the religious and divine element that are equally important in successful peacemaking in the community.

Faith-Based Diplomacy encourages and organizes interfaith dialogues or spiritual conversations between the religious leaders as well as the grassroot population from the communities in conflict. The spiritual conversations — such as recital of sacred texts — allow the conflicting parties to look beyond the differences in their faiths and focus on the commonalities, ultimately bridging the gap between them. Through the medium of these conversations, the communities also share with each other their pain and sufferings — both inflicted upon them and by them. These conversations are ensued by the admission of wrongdoings, apologies for each other's pain and suffering, and words of forgiveness; or in other words, a total change of heart which is necessary for peace to prevail and spread all across the matrix.

The religious element also means religious or spiritual rituals which are at the core of the Faith-Based Diplomacy. According to Reverend Cox, each Faith-Based Seminar or a diplomatic mission is supported by prayer groups who fast and pray devotedly for the success of the mission. Reverend Cox has narrated one of the incidents where he witnessed an instant change of heart during one of the rituals. It had been two years since Kashmiri Militants invaded Bashir Mir's home in Kashmir

and killed his brother, his father, and shot Bashir in his face. After nine surgeries and months of special care, the only thing that was keeping him alive was vengeance; until that one Faith-Based seminar by Cox. In that seminar, Reverend Cox went around the room in a circle, kept his hand on the shoulder of each individual, and quietly prayed for them. When Reverend Cox did the same with Bashir, he felt a lightning bolt in his body and instantly uttered in Urdu "God Allah, I forgive those men from my heart, please help my unforgiveness." (Cox 2015)

The word of this spread quickly into the entire community, while Bashir himself became the agent and supporter of Faith-Based reconciliation efforts in his community. These spiritual and religious feats are not possible without the Faith-Based Actors like Reverend Cox who have a religious or spiritual worldview which assumes that all the individuals and communities are not only needed to be guided by strong moral visions and principles, but also that they are submitted to God's will without whose divine intervention no movement in diplomatic efforts is possible.

5. Assumes centrality of reconciliation

Faith-Based Diplomacy does not focus on dictating the terms of social justice, or accords for conflict resolution, but it focuses on fostering reconciliation and healing in the community for a better future. All the preaching and practices of Faith-Based Diplomacy aim at helping the communities look beyond the past and work together with a vision of reconciliation and healing in the community.

Heart to heart conversations between the members of the community help them to reach a common understanding that both the parties in the conflict have

suffered enough and to prolong the conflict will only mean more suffering. This understanding helps them overcome the past, build trusting relationships among the disrupted communities, and help them finally reach their own peace agreement and social contract for a peaceful future.

Methodology

Reverend Cox has addressed several methods aligned directly with the core principles that they employ on the field while exercising Faith-Based Diplomacy (Cox 2015):

1. Fostering change of hearts

2. Imparting vision of reconciliation and influencing worldview

3. Leveraging civil society to make an impact at both grassroots and leadership level

4. Leveraging personal relationships with indigenous leaders

5. Striking spiritual conversations

6. Encouraging and practicing prayer and fasting for the peace

7. Exercising religious/spiritual rituals for reconciliation

8. Mobilizing religious leaders as champions of Faith-Based Reconciliation

9. Initiating civilizational dialogues among communities

10. Mobilizing trusted envoys in the community as peacemakers

Lessons

Having years of extensive on-field peacemaking experience in different parts of the world, Reverend Cox touches on important pitfalls and lessons to be noted when exercising Faith-Based Diplomacy (Cox 2015). It is important to understand that Faith-Based Diplomacy does not operate in a total vacuum, but in a complex societal matrix that involves

the civil society, civic and governmental leaders, diplomatic leaders and journalists, national and international intelligence and national security agencies and officials, militants, extremists, and adversaries of faith-based or any kind of peacemaking. Therefore, it is important for Faith-Based Diplomats to operate in a way that brings them support from all the aforementioned interest groups, and not impediments to faith-based reconciliation.

It is important for Faith-Based actors to build and win the trust of all the parties and stakeholders of the community, without which it is impossible to even be heard by the people, let alone influencing people to participate in the Faith-Based Reconciliation process. Initially, it is quite likely for faith-based diplomats to be misperceived as intelligence operatives with ulterior agendas. The first step would be to overcome such misinterpretation; by cultivating genuine relationship within the community and winning their trusts. Even if one succeeds in winning the trust of the community and communicating the purity of one's intentions; it will only help one to be heard by the people and no more.

There are a lot of organizations who have good intentions but are inexperienced, undetermined, un-resourceful, naïve, and ignorant and incapable of understanding and dealing with the complexities of intractable identity-based conflicts. These are the kind of organizations that communities — and especially potential indigenous partners who share the same mission — dissuade and try to ignore as they believe them to be temporary movements which will cease to exist as soon as the situation gets complex. Therefore, it is important for the Faith-Based organization to maintain and communicate its credibility, determination, knowledge of the complexity of the situation, and experience in the realm in order to be taken seriously by the community and the indigenous leaders so that the message of Faith-Based reconciliation could be furthered.

Due to the nature of work Faith-Based Diplomats perform, it does affect the sociopolitical climate of the region which warrants a close monitoring and even interference by the intelligence, security and government officials to keep a check. These officials can be a great resource as well as great impediments. It is to be assumed that the agencies perceive Faith-Based Organizations and its efforts as malevolent until proven otherwise.

To ensure that the agencies do not interfere and impede faith-based objectives, it is important to cultivate relationships with these agencies, be transparent and keep an open channel for communication. This helps in gaining the coveted confidence and trust in the faith-based organizations which can be advantageous to the peace mission. With open channels of communication, agencies can give important tips and address "red lines" in the conflict that faith-based organizations should carefully consider to avoid trouble.

Similarly, civil-leaders can be very important resources for getting valuable advice, suggestions, their appraisals and perspective of the conflict and possible solutions. As discussed above, these leaders can be very helpful in influencing individuals at both grassroots as well as governmental level. Cultivating relationships with civil-level leaders as well as keeping them in a loop about major progressions could go a long way and contribute toward the success of the faith-based missions.

Initially, it is of utmost importance to talk to as many people — from all conflicting sides at all levels — as possible to gauge the full picture of the conflict before choosing a strategy, or a side, or before partnering with a particular indigenous leader. Talking to the grassroot population can help a faith-based diplomat to assess the true picture and impacts of

the conflict on the community. This not only helps one with a better understanding of the conflict, but also with establishing strong relationships with the community, which can foster a better understanding of faith-based reconciliation and healing amongst people.

There are myriad of cultural and social differences — especially between the western and non-western countries — that must be minded to preserve one's credibility and strengthen trust. In most parts of the world, relationships are more important than outcomes; therefore, it is important for faith-based diplomats to pay more attention toward maintaining healthy relationships. When a faith-based organization partners with an indigenous leader, it inherits its resources and contacts, but also its enemies. Any action by the faith-based diplomat can bring repercussions for the indigenous partner. Therefore, it is all the more important for the faith-based actor to maintain its integrity and awareness when faced with such situations, so that it could preserve its trust and credibility which is vital for the success of a faith-based mission.

It is also important to be mindful when communicating with the media. Especially in authoritarian regimes, it is likely for the regime to control the stories in media and put a spin on it to further its personal agendas. A faith-based diplomat should be wary of this and make sure it stays on topic and not divagate in a direction that could cause negative consequences for the mission. It is also important for a faith-based diplomat to be instinctive and cautious about its personal security pertaining to the dangers of operating in a conflict zone.

Lessons from the case studies

Northern Ireland

Ireland faced years of suffering due to age-old identity-based conflict between Protestants and Catholics, Unionists and Nationalists which had been largely intractable even after years of efforts. The Belfast Agreement or the Good-Friday Accord of 1998 was a very important achievement, a political settlement which depicted the power share agreements between the conflicting parties for a fairer control of the state. But, the prevailing state of peace and harmony, and almost transparent borders would not have been possible without years of community dialogues. Through the years, tons of community dialogues, reconciliation seminars, youth events etc. had been organized all around the state to encourage conflicting communities to engage with each other. The dialogue serious and such events and seminars gave the members of the communities a chance to share their pain, apologize, forgive; leading to a sociopolitical healing and reconciliation in the state.

Mozambique

Mozambique had been ravaged due to a civil war as a result of the identity-based conflict between pro-communism FRELIMO party and pro-capitalism RENAMO party. As FRELIMO party started oppressing religious practices and traditions in the country, RENAMO became an automatic defender of all religions. The Community of Sant'Egidio, a Rome-based Catholic lay cultivated and leveraged personal relationships with members, leaders, and constituents of both the parties. They help organize dialogues, meeting and other channels of communication between the conflicting parties, and finally called in the international actors and helped end the years-long civil war. . In this case, although the religion was not a part of the problem, it was a crucial element to its solution.

Syria

ICRD led a lot of faith-based missions in Syria and had seen a lot of significant improvements in the relationship between the conflicting parties. Syriac Kurds and Syriac Christians from the Al-Hassake region, for years, had been the main cause of each other's sufferings. ICRD facilitated a lot of faith-based reconciliation seminars between the parties which moved the parties to finally admit to the sufferings they had caused to each other, apologize, forgive and finally together toward healing and reconciliation for a better future. The progression of the Syrian civil war into an international proxy war which ravaged the area made it unsafe for any peacemaking organization to thrive and hence any such efforts were thwarted.

The above cases confer that only faith-based efforts or only political settlements and support cannot ensure peace in the community; but both track-one (political support) as well as track-two (faith-based non-traditional efforts) methods should be closely employed for long-lasting peace in the community.

Other constructs and conflicts where this approach can have made a difference

Refugee flux

The world has witnessed the largest flux of refugees in the past few years; whether it has been due to the intractable identity-based conflicts in the middle east, or due to gang violence in the Americas. These refugees bring along a diverse set of experiences, cultures, religions and ideologies with them to the countries they are given refuge in. This can cause unease and feelings of hostility among natives of the countries they migrate to. Therefore, Faith-Based Diplomacy would be a very potent force that can help forge new social contracts and harmonious relationships among the communities.

Controversies in universities and free-speech

Today, the United States is beleaguered by the hyper-partisan political environment today where people with conflicting/opposing ideologies cannot even listen to each other. Speakers and students with conflicting ideologies are protested against and deterred to speak their minds in an open space. This can cause people to suppress their thoughts leading to dormant resentment; that will someday come out. Harrowing events such as Charlottesville are a result of such dormant resentments. The right thing to do is to employ Faith-Based Diplomacy and engage students, citizen, individuals in civil conversations so that each can better grasp a factual and holistic understanding of the issue.

Conclusion

Faith-Based Diplomacy is a potent solution to the intricate-identity based conflicts that we currently face in the society. Political stability and support are absolutely necessary along the efforts of Faith-Based actors to ensure a long-lasting peace in the society. Faith-Based Diplomacy moves individuals and communities to look beyond past as it imparts a vision of reconciliation and healing in the communities; a vision which is far more powerful and coveted than suffering in the name of social justice and living in vengeance. Faith-Based Diplomacy is not just a promising cure to complex conflicts, but also a compelling foundation for understanding and renovating social contracts in the fast-growing global societies.

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