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## Ex-Navy officer plans to enlist religion in world of diplomacy

By Larry Witham  
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A former Navy officer turned diplomatic strategist plans to set up an interfaith peacemaking team to travel the world and help solve ethnic and political conflicts through religious contacts close to those in power.

Douglas M. Johnston, executive vice president of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), will resign that post to open the Center for Religion and Diplomacy this summer, he said yesterday.

"The notion of religious reconciliation juxtaposed to diplomacy is something that's capturing a lot of attention," said Mr. Johnston, a former submarine commander.

In many conflicts around the world, he said, "no diplomatic or military solution could break the cycle of revenge."

But other lines of communication may be established by religion, which usually is a factor in the lives of leaders or groups involved in civil wars or ethnic clashes, he said.

While the ideas of conflict res-

olution, interreligious dialogue and "Track II diplomacy"—meaning behind-the-scenes work by neutral parties—are not new, Mr. Johnston's center hopes to refine and focus these methods.

Mr. Johnston spurred the recent look at religion's role in hardball international politics with his 1994 book, "Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft."

The book is in its seventh printing and has become required reading at the U.S. Foreign Service Institute. The book documents seven cases since World War II in which low-key religious mediators resolved political conflicts.

Mr. Johnston's current favorite example is how a civil war between blacks in South Africa was avoided after the dismantling of apartheid.

Kenyan diplomat Washington Okumu had become friends with Zulu leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi after meeting at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington.

As a result, Mr. Okumu's mediation as a fellow Christian averted a conflict between the Zulus and the African National Congress, led by Nelson Mandela.

Since joining CSIS in the late

1980s, Mr. Johnston built up the connections to found a Religion and Conflict Resolution Project. In 1995, it sent a team to Serbia and Croatia to provide conflict-resolution training with Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim groups.

"I have no problem with having a strong defense to keep the peace," he said. Still, he added, the ethnic roots of wars are "beyond the reach of classic diplomacy."

The new nonprofit center, which has a prestigious board of directors and advisory council, will open offices in Washington. It has a fund-raising goal of \$7 million for its first three years of projects.

Its immediate objectives, Mr. Johnston said, are to persuade policy makers to encourage religious mediation and to build an "action-oriented" peacemaking network.

In this, Mr. Johnston said, the center will assist religious workers already in place around the world with expertise and money when a circumstance arises and quiet diplomacy can help.

This "preventive work" is the priority, he said, but does not rule out deploying assistance to an existing conflict.