



Excerpt from “Understanding Apocalyptic Terrorism: Countering the Radical Mindset”, Flannery, Frances L. (New York, Routledge 2016), pp. 254-256

Hundreds of thousands of excellent NGO’s, grassroots organizations, and faith- based humanitarian organizations struggle in a live or die cycle of grant writing and procurement and the solicitation of donations. Americans are generous – altogether we gave \$335.17 billion to charities in 2013 (NPT 2015). By contrast, annual spending for the US military is still well over 600 billion per year despite a recent drop due to drawdown in the Middle East (Walker 2014). I grew up in a military family. I feel a great deal of respect and admiration for the military and the men and women who dedicate their very lives to protecting national interests. If I were convinced that terrorism could be solved through military intervention, I would not in principle have an objection to this vast military spending. However, as I have shown in this book, hunting terrorists potentially exacerbates the radical apocalyptic ideology that fuels much of terrorism.

Hence, I am convinced that a broad-based, humanitarian approach to social justice causes around the world must be a part of a comprehensive national strategy of counter-terrorism. For this reason, I would advocate shifting some funds from military spending to humanitarian efforts, including those of NGOs, grass-roots organizations, and faith- based humanitarian organizations. This paradigm shift simply envisions that a happy, well-cared-for, educated child with a bright future in a stable and resilient community will very likely never become an extremist.

One example of an NGO doing stellar work in preventing extremism, even though they do not necessarily think of it in that way, is the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD). Based in Washington DC, the ICRD understands that facilitating a better understanding of religion lies at the heart of resolving many conflicts around the world. Recently, ICRD has begun working with a local NGO in Yemen to facilitate conflict resolution training amongst Yemeni tribal leaders, training "local peacebuilders to work across religious, ethnic, and tribal identities to meet basic social service and infrastructure needs, thus diminishing the influence of violent extremist groups who otherwise seek to take advantage of desperate conditions for their own ends" (ICRD 2015).

In another of its many programs, ICRD worked for eight years to reform the madrasas (religious schools) in Pakistan, including those that gave birth to the Taliban. Its goals in doing so were to expand the curriculums to include the physical and social sciences, with a strong emphasis on religious tolerance and human rights (especially women's rights), and to transform the pedagogy to promote critical thinking skills among the students. During that period, it engaged more than 2,700 leaders from 1,600 madrasas in the most radical areas of the country — a successful track record that stands in marked contrast to the failed attempts of others, including the government of Pakistan.

ICRD's approach is an exemplary model to emulate. The success of the madrasa program was a function of conducting the project in such a way that the madrasa leaders felt it was their own reform effort, not something imposed from the outside. This gave them significant ownership of the change process. Working within the religious and cultural framework of the madrasas, ICRD inspired them by appealing to their own history as institutions of higher learning formerly without peer in the medieval world.

Most importantly, ICRD grounded all suggested changes in Islamic principles, so that madrasa leaders engaged in the program could genuinely feel they were becoming better Muslims. ICRD has since turned the project over to an indigenous NGO. The total number of madrasa leaders who have been engaged in this process has now reached more than 4,500.

The value of the peacebuilding that results from their innovative programs in the most challenging regions is patently obvious. As noted by ICRD's President, Douglas Johnston, "by dealing with the ideas behind the guns, the work we have done with the madrasas is every bit as strategic as anything else that has taken place either on or off the battlefield. Bombs and bullets have their place, but more often than not, they spawn more terrorists. Respectful engagement, on the other hand, becomes contagious" (Johnston 2015). Yet when I asked him to name their greatest challenge in trying to implement programs around the world, he simply replied, "securing the necessary resources to support our efforts".