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The Solution to Middle East Chaos

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http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tala-haikal/the-solution-to-middle-ea_b_5614685.ht... [1]

The Solution to Middle East Chaos

Aggression and war insidiously and savagely consume the hearts of humanity. Huge amounts of energy, ingenuity, resources, and sacrifice are continuously wasted as people fight in the name of freedom, self-defense, self-determination, God, righteous conquest, justice, national security, and power, typically to no avail.

The specter of vicious but pointless conflict is today most evident in the Middle East, where extremism is on the rise and antagonisms are often fierce. Such dynamics make history, to paraphrase a line from James

Joyce's *Ulysses*, a nightmare from which we are trying to awake. The record of human suffering there is long,

and in many ways it is getting worse.

Gaza, Syria, and Iraq are pained by that same disease of extremism and conflict. Civilians, more specifically children and women, are bearing the brunt of the injustices. In today's Middle East, we have sacrificed a generation to the flames of rage.

The ongoing hostilities between Hamas and Israel, the third outbreak of such violence since 2008, is tragic. Fear grips both Israelis and Palestinians and as innocents die or are wounded, with the majority being the elderly, women, and children. The Palestinian death toll, as of July 23, 2014, has reached over 680 and the

This is not to mention the destruction of homes, schools, hospitals and basic infrastructure.

Hamas and other militants in Gaza have fired over 2,160 rockets and other unguided projectiles into all parts of Israel and even some areas of the occupied West Bank. Unlike the Palestinian inhabitants in Gaza, most Israelis have the benefit of sirens, shelters, and the Iron Dome defense. Therefore, Israeli civilian casualties number just two, but with 32 soldiers killed as of this writing.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict demonstrates how much effort both sides have put into dehumanizing each other. Many Palestinians and Israelis have lost their empathy and trust. Both sides see themselves as perpetual victims and the other side as victimizers. Hatred is further entrenched through every eruption of the conflict.

A far more bloody, although much more recent, tragedy is happening in Syria as an outcome of its civil war. The government of President Bashar al-Assad is responsible for most of the violence, as his forces have been fighting against various rebel groupings, many of which are also at odds with extremists of the Islamic State.

According to the *Washington Post*, three Syrians become [refugees](#) ^[3] abroad every minute, eight children

inside Syria are forced to flee their homes every two minutes, and one person dies every 10 minutes. The death toll in the three-year-old conflict stands at above 170,000. Millions more are refugees or internally displaced.

A similar sectarian conflict is engulfing Iraq. So far, in 2014 alone, violence there has killed more than

[5,500 civilians](#) ^[4]. This year, more than 1.2 million Iraqis were also forced to leave their homes. The recent

terrifying surge of Islamic State fighters and their allies out of Syria and sweeping through many Sunni areas of Iraq is taking place against a growing backdrop of anger against the sectarian policies of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Kurdish groups appear to be moving closer to breaking away from Iraq as its Arab regions fragment along sectarian lines.

There does not appear to be a sustainable balance between established authorities and opposition groups that can allow for regional stability. In the battle for ideas, power, and survival, force is being emphasized at the expense of human rights and the common good. "My group or country, right or wrong," supersedes any other loyalty.

A problematic issue is the ease with which aggression is initiated and violence committed. Even though

international norms regarding the right to go to war (*jus ad bellum*) and the legitimate conduct in war (*jus in*

bello) are extensive and well-established, the indiscriminate killing of innocents and noncombatants

continues. Violations of the laws of war, international humanitarian law and international human rights law are evident but little is being done to address them. Even the mechanisms for such accountability are not in place. Ethics and diplomacy are dying on the altar of illusory and narrow-minded understandings of self-interest and power politics.

Whatever the sources of our values may be (e.g., God-given, the legacy of the Enlightenment, individual intuition or reason, folkways and mores, etc), we have an equal obligation toward all others, not only those similar to us or with whom we identify. Yearning to eliminate "the other," let alone actually doing so, is both illegal and immoral. It runs counter to our ethical, religious, and spiritual values.

We have an obligation to move beyond violence. We must become part of a new culture of peace that celebrates people, rather than dehumanizing and repressing them. This is an essential part of upholding the principle of compassion which, according to the Charter for Compassion, "impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the center of our world and put another there, and to honor the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity, and respect."

Will the power of compassion and love ever replace the love of envy and power? If not, surely the dictates of

genuine, rational self-interest demand an end to this chaos and bloodshed that costs everyone, in the long-run, and benefits no one.

Will human security be able to release itself from the clutch of brute force? Again, if compassion isn't sufficient to compel people to move beyond violence surely the logic of self-protection must. As long as all we can rely on to secure our interests is violence, or what amounts to violence by other means, genuine security will be an illusion.

We must recognize that our deepening interdependence has collapsed the boundaries between the logic of self-preservation and the logic of empathy. The latter is still a higher and more noble value to be strived towards, but the former, in practice, leads us to a very similar place: moving past war and towards peace. If peace is our destination, then peace must be our path.

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[2] <http://www.timesofisrael.com/un-more-than-100000-palestinians-displaced-in-gaza/>

[3] http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/03/14/3-grim-statistics-from-3-years-of-conflict-in-syria/?wprss=rss_world

[4] <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/18/iraqi-civilian-death-toll-5500-2014-isis>