Writing Sample from Peace Global Security & Conflict Resolution – "Focusing on the Youth for a Stable Middle East"

In a region where 65% of the population is under the age of 30, it is shocking that there has not been enough focus devoted to a demographic that has the power to ultimately stabilize the area (Dhillon). It is clear that we are failing to combat the instability in the region which has arguably made the issue worse. As a result of the instability felt among most of the region, many of the youth have searched for a place of stability and belonging. Unfortunately, terrorist recruiters see this desire for belonging and stability as a recruitment tactic. As a result of the naivety adolescence brings, the youth of the Middle East region are all the more at risk and vulnerable to radicalization (Wood 200). The shift in focusing on the youth in order to prevent terrorist radicalization could serve as a key tactic in finally bringing stability. Since military force only has a 7% success rate in terminating terrorist organizations the need for a better strategy is clear (Jones). In terms of ways to apply a focus on the youth in stabilizing the Middle East, we must understand the complexity of the issue and create solutions for each stage of the conflict. The three stages of the conflict each have their own individual solutions which are broken up by prevention through education reforms, crisis management through implementation of mentorship programs, and peace building through the international community.

The preventative phase in the conflict is by far the most important and has the potential to be the most effective. As Malala Yousafzai once said, "with guns you can kill terrorists, with education you can kill terrorism." One main tactic we can use in prevention is by simply educating the youth of the region. Education in the region has the potential to propel the youth into a direction of peace and stability (Lakey). The implementation of educational reforms can create more jobs in the region, which in turn will lead to a lower unemployment rate. The reforms that can take place in order to make higher education more accessible to the youth include free education, transfer programs, and encouragement of higher education. Due to the overwhelming unemployment rate reaching almost 25% of the population in between the ages of 15-29, higher education has become something that is not even an option for most youth (Healey). The expenses are much too high for most families to even begin to afford. International involvement from the UN could help fund free education which would stimulate economic growth for the region. In addition to free higher education, transfer or abroad opportunities should become available for students. The broadening of a horizon of ideologies can provide intellectual awakening triggered by exposure to other countries and cultures. This intellectual trigger can encourage the youth to gain more knowledge and become aware of the issues going on in their homes which could potentially spark a change. Employment and education go hand in hand in this region. The unemployment rate is often a key component in why radicalization occurs so in order to combat that, education reform is needed (Venhaus 9). Education has the potential to alleviate the frustration that comes along with unemployment that leads to radicalization as seen in the *Faces of the Enemy* film (Keen). Employment through more educational opportunities will not only prevent frustration that leads to radicalization but will also bring for economic stimulation which in long term can lead to economic stability through the region.

In the crisis management phase of the conflict, one solution is to provide mentorship programs. Bombing terrorists may kill them but it will absolutely not kill the ideology behind the organization. However, mentorship programs have the ability to steer the youth in a peaceful direction. As mentioned in the first part of this analysis, adolescents need at least five key adult figures as mentors in their lives to fully succeed. The United States strategic use in mentorship programs such as the Boys and Girls Clubs of America has prevented kids in inner cities from becoming involved in illegal activities as well as providing mentors for these kids to look up to. A strategy like this could be implemented in the Middle East region in an almost identical manner. An important and key component of this solution is that these programs need to come from the international community as opposed to one specific nation. Western ideologies are often shunned by members of these communities so the mentors who would be involved in these programs need to model a similar role as the neutrality that those involved in PBI missions do (Wien 112). The neutrality the mentors will possess will be a neutrality in peace ideologies that do not solely promote western thinking but rather try to use as much cultural peace tactics specific to the community in which they are placed to serve in. While presenting peace strategies specific to the culture of the community, these mentors would also utilize religious influences - something recruiters try to manipulate into radicalization (Wood 165). The use of religious peace practices that mentors can bring up in conversation can allow for personal transformation and the overall promotion of peace (Wood 173). PBI also serves as a model for the mentorship program in a sense that, the mentors should be careful in only operating in communities in which they were invited to, a similar tactic that PBI utilizes (Wien 112). In addition to only operating on an invite only base in the international community, the mentors need to not only live within the community but also become apart of the community and establish trust. The use of mentorship programs is something that has already been initiated in the region and something that the international community can help fund and become apart of which will contribute to the youth of the region and generations to come (Williams). While in the crisis management phase of this operation, the use of the media in order to combat terrorism would be useful. Media has the potential to really transform and push a conflict in a certain direction depending on the way it is presented to the public. In order to dwindle the amount of success recruiters or terrorist organizations gain, intelligence agencies can see what areas are most effected and use peaceful tactics in exposing the dangers and reality of a life of terror. The use of media in essentially exposing the realities of this type of lifestyle can immediately deter the youth from wanting to engage in such organizations.

In the final phase of the conflict, peace building requires international involvement. Ultimately, the instability from the Middle East has consequently affected not only surrounding nations but many others as well. The constant instability has resulted in sanctions, unstable relationships, wars, and even attacks. The international community must come together to try and help our brothers and sisters in the region. International organizations must constantly provide resources needed to the Middle East whether it be in mentorship programs or the advancement of education or even the stimulation of the economy through trade. Bringing stability to the Middle East is not simply a one man job, rather a job that requires much time and effort from the international community as a whole. The UN has the potential to be a great mediator in instituting mentorship programs and education reforms. Other international organizations can help in constructing mediation, negotiation, and other conflict resolution

approaches workshops for those chosen as mentors for the youth. Overall, in order to achieve stability through the youth, the international community must stand together in attempting to solve a conflict that has impacted the globe.

In switching the focus toward the youth of the Middle East, peace practitioners are faced with some strategic difficulties. Perhaps the biggest obstacle is the fact that all the strategies proposed require time and funding. Typically the international community will fund an operation on a trial run and if they see immediate results will continue to do so, however, with operations such as these that could require years to reap benefits for may not be an investment international organizations would want to make. In fact, the lack of immediate results could deter funding altogether and could be seen as a waste of monetary commitment. Another obstacle that will be faced would be the reluctance to Western ideals, which is something that could be combatted through utilizing native peace strategies rather than implementing Western ideology. In addition to this, the mentors who will be involved in the mentorship program will need to establish trust before they can truly be effective in the community, which again will take a good amount of time.

Regardless of the time and monetary commitment required from the international community in switching the focus of instability in the Middle East toward the youth of the region, it is important to remember that this ideology will reap long term benefits. Tackling the issue in relation to which stage of the conflict curve it is in is imperative in order to bring stability into the region. As mentioned, the youth make up a large amount of the population in the region and are extremely impressionable. If this large demographic is led in the direction of peace, there is no doubt that a stable Middle East is attainable. The only issue that lies here is wether or not the international community is ready for this long term project. If the international community does choose to come together in focusing on the youth of this region and strategizing based on the stage of the conflict, stability can finally return to this region.

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