

# CULTURAL DIPLOMACY ANALECTS

*by Mark Donfried*



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# CULTURAL DIPLOMACY ANNALECTS



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1.

# ***THE FUTURE OF AFGHANISTAN UNDER THE TALIBAN***

11.02.2022

By Ali Ahmad Jalali and Mark C. Donfried

[\*Read the Original Article »\*](#)

# THE FUTURE OF AFGHANISTAN UNDER THE TALIBAN

by Ali Ahmad Jalali and MARK C. DONFRIED

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The return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan brings monumental changes in the context of regional security. While the country faces deepening economic and humanitarian crises, outsiders are concerned about whether the Taliban government is able, and willing, to avert instability and the renascent threat of terrorism in the region.

Six months after the Taliban's takeover of Kabul, "Afghanistan is hanging by a thread," Antonio Guterres, the secretary-general of the UN, said during a meeting of the Security Council on Jan. 26, 2022. "Afghans are now in the grips of a brutal winter, many huddling in makeshift tents under plastic sheets," he continued. "Ambulances and hospital power generators are running dry because of skyrocketing fuel prices, while civilians are suffering from COVID-19 alongside preventable diseases such as measles and polio. "Education and social services are on the brink of collapse and millions of children — especially girls — are out of school. Over half of all Afghans also face extreme hunger as the country experiences its worst drought in two decades, pushing nine million people closer to famine." Guterres warned of an imminent danger that the country could "go into a free fall" and lose "30 percent of its gross domestic product within the year." As the Afghan economy declines at great speed, the human rights situation is quickly worsening, with women and girls "once again shut off outside offices and classrooms, and years of steady progress lost in the blink of an eye."

**DOMESTIC AND REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS** In Afghanistan, the Taliban takeover has been marked by periods of relative calm punctuated by spectacular terror attacks, mostly claimed by an assertive Islamic State Khorasan Province. The breakdown of state institutions and the lack of the Taliban's capacity to govern has created a deepening economic and humanitarian crisis. According to a recent United Nations Development Program report, 97 percent of the country's population of 38 million is at risk of sinking into poverty, while about 23 million people are in desperate need of food<sup>1</sup>. The country is faced with human insecurity and threats to sustainable peace. Daily, thousands of people are leaving the country or planning to leave<sup>2</sup>. Regionally, the Taliban victory has not only emboldened violent extremist groups in the region but also invigorated the Islamist agenda across diverse sociopolitical contexts. Continued instability and loss of foreign aid could promote an illegal economy and illicit drug trade, and drive refugees across the region. The level of such regional fallout is linked to the Taliban's ideological vision, which defines their strategic behavior domestically as well as in their relationship with the outside world. Although the Taliban has shown some symbolic changes<sup>3</sup> in its behavior, the shifts are disproportionate to the changes that had taken place during the past two decades in Afghanistan<sup>4</sup>. Months after their return to power the Taliban is yet to deliver on its rhetoric to form an inclusive government, respect human rights and reign in extremist groups<sup>5</sup>. The Taliban's interim government is exclusively composed of ethnic Pashtun Taliban officials<sup>6</sup>, dominated by loyal Pakistani extremist Haqani network

leaders. The more independent Taliban elements, and those who spearheaded the peace negotiations, are marginalized. Yet the Taliban claims that the current cabinet meets the requirements of an inclusive government<sup>8</sup>. During the past several months, at half a dozen international gatherings, neighboring states plus the US, Russia and China have called on the Taliban to work with other groups to build an inclusive government that respects the rights of all Afghans, and to give equal rights to women and girls for participation in all levels of society<sup>9</sup>. Other international demands include that the Taliban upholds international legal obligations, including the universally accepted principles of international law and human rights, and protects the security and legitimate rights of foreign nationals and institutions in Afghanistan. The question is whether the Taliban government is able and willing to respond to these demands and prevent jihadist groups from using Afghan territory to launch attacks in the region and beyond. There are certain constraints that influence the Taliban's ability to address emerging issues such as ideological commitments, deep ties with global jihadists, the pressing need to control many actual and potential opposition forces, and placating its ideologically inspired base, in addition to internal ideological, political and regional differences<sup>11</sup>. Taliban fighters come from various parts of the country, each beholden to their immediate commanders, allowing ISIS-K12 to stage attacks easily. If these constraints continue to influence Taliban behavior, it will be hard to stabilize the country and prevent violent extremist groups from extending their activities across the border. So far, the Taliban government has failed to contain ISIS-K13. Public discontent might create additional resistance groups or reinforce existing ones. There are unconfirmed reports that some former government soldiers, who found themselves unemployed overnight when the Taliban seized power, and other aggrieved groups are being recruited by ISIS-K. This reminds us of the consequences of the deBaathification of the Iraqi army in 2003.

**THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE** No country, including its all-seasons patron Pakistan, has recognized the Taliban government, pending signs of responsible behavior in its domestic politics and foreign relations<sup>14</sup>. However, international donors are delivering emergency aid to the desperate Afghan population through UN agencies and other humanitarian and nongovernmental organizations<sup>15</sup>. The Taliban seeks international recognition not only to ease sanctions and receive financial assistance, but also to help its domestic legitimacy and consolidation of power<sup>16</sup>. The front-line nations, in other words Afghanistan's near and regional neighbors, have displayed greater urgency in engaging the Taliban than other international stakeholders, for obvious reasons: The presence of regional terrorist groups in Afghanistan that might target neighboring countries plus regional trade and economic ties. The World Bank said that "Afghanistan's biggest economic challenge is finding sustainable sources of growth." To date, the World Bank has committed more than \$5.3 billion for development projects in the country; however, all funding is now frozen<sup>17</sup>. If the Taliban continues to lead Afghanistan into further international isolation, the country is likely to face depreciation of its currency, inflation, and shortages of critical household goods, including food and fuel (about 80 percent of electricity, between 20 and 40 percent of wheat, and nearly all fuel oil is imported). According the World Bank: "Ten million Afghans are vulnerable to falling into poverty, living with incomes between one and 1.5 times the poverty line (about \$0.94 per person per day).<sup>18</sup>" During a UN Security Council meeting on Jan. 26, 2022, China's representative called for an "end to all unilateral sanctions," which he said have "frozen \$9 billion and severely hindered Afghanistan's access to financing." He urged the international community to explore further options to inject liquidity. Iran, Pakistan, Russia and countries in Central Asia

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have called for the world to engage with the Taliban 19 and unfreeze Afghan funds in US and other international institutions to help Afghanistan overcome a pending disaster and instability. Pakistan persistently insists that engagement with the Taliban government would help to promote peace, sustainable economic development and constrain the space for terrorist outfits in the country 20. International recognition and the lifting of sanctions, they argue, can encourage the Taliban to moderate. The question is whether withholding official recognition and aid should be used as leverage to force change, or a gradual behavioral shift should be sought through recognition and engagement with the Taliban government. Using leverage will help only, as US Special Representative for Afghanistan Thomas West put it, if the international community “speak with one voice and act with common purpose 21.” Otherwise, the Taliban might seek to separate different stake holders.

**THE FUTURE FOR AFGHANISTAN** As things stand, the Taliban is isolated from the international community, the majority of the members of its cabinet have specific sanctions imposed on them, no international recognition exists and all foreign aid has been cut. The Taliban therefore has two main strategies to choose between to move forward: It can either try to gain the acceptance of the international community or continue to rule alone but risk falling into a deep economic crisis. There is therefore an opportunity for the international community to convince the Taliban that even if intentions and motives are different, its best option in any scenario is to be a responsible government and choose the first option. The Taliban must create an inclusive government representative of all parts of Afghanistan and all Afghan communities, and ensure all groups are included in policy decisions. It must protect and uphold women’s rights and human rights. It must take action against terrorist groups only with the support of the local population. If the Taliban rejects this and chooses the second option, Afghanistan will surely fall into a deep economic crisis that will spiral the country into a humanitarian disaster affecting millions of people, including one million children, the prime minister of Norway, Jonas Gahr Støre, told reporters on Jan. 26, 2022, ahead of the 8,954th meeting of the UN Security Council on the situation in Afghanistan 22. Without any significant action from the international community, the situation in Afghanistan might deteriorate, the terrorist attacks that followed the takeover by the Taliban will not end, boundaries will be crossed, malnutrition will increase, the economic crisis will affect the purchasing capabilities of Afghan people, and human rights will not be respected. What the international community should do is maintain foreign humanitarian aid and increase the amounts in specific areas to support the Afghan population. It should set up a fundraising campaign to help nongovernmental organizations, who need resources to provide sufficient aid and carry out existing and new projects. In the future, the international community could send teams to rural regions to inspect the improvements that have been made and report back on them.

**THE NEED TO REVIVE THE BROKEN PEACE PROCESS** The complexities of the situation in Afghanistan require that a new, internationally supported peace process be launched to achieve reconciliation among the Afghans and encourage a stable government that can withstand the current economic crisis and gain domestic legitimacy. The process should also aim to contain violent extremist groups through the establishment of a regional support mechanism for peace and stability in Afghanistan. During the US and NATO presence in Afghanistan, international forces took the lead in counterterrorism operations, with regional actors in a supporting role. In the aftermath of the US withdrawal, these roles might have to reverse — the region leading while the US supports. This means that regional powers, including Pakistan, China, Iran, Russia, and the Gulf States, would have to do the heavy lifting to ensure that Afghanistan does not regress into a global militant sanctuary, destabilizing the region as well as itself. Moreover, the international community must come to an agreement that will lead to concrete negotiations. The recent meeting between Western diplomats and Taliban delegations in Oslo in late January 2022 marked the beginning of a new chapter and the start of a meaningful dialogue for the Taliban to understand the needs of the international community 23. International gatherings must continue to be organized in response to the evolution of the situation in Afghanistan, and to ensure that the Taliban is still making efforts to maintain a supportive government for the development, prosperity and safety of the Afghan people.

*The Taliban can either try to gain the acceptance of the international community or continue to rule alone but risk falling into a deep economic crisis.*

*Mark C. Donfried*

2.

***MIDLIFE CRISIS IN GLOBAL RELATIONS  
EXPOSED BY COVID-19***

23.07.21

By Mark C. Donfried

***Read the Original Article »***

# MIDLIFE CRISIS IN GLOBAL RELATIONS

## EXPOSED BY COVID-19

by MARK C. DONFRIED

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Since the emergence of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the world has begun to realize that any organization or country that would like to harm another can simply create a virus such as this one and immediately paralyze the entire planet. This means governments worldwide have woken up to a new reality, in which they are totally unprotected against this form of global threat. This is why health security should become one of the highest priorities for security and defense policies around the world, parallel in importance to terrorism and arms control.

As one reflects on the national and global responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that the leading powers have all created their own vaccines. In addition, we can observe that global organizations are supporting some strategies and agendas for local, national, regional and global leaders. However, this is a very quiet and timid response to such a massive threat.

When we observe the US, the world's leading power, for example, one can see that, with the exception of the public announcements regarding the vaccination plan, the Biden administration is not leading any kind of noteworthy global solutions campaign. It is also not dealing with the question of how the world can prepare for the next pandemic. The same goes for the EU. The world is waiting for some vision or suggestions regarding what we can do to increase global preparedness and avoid or tackle similar threats in the future.

In the first instance, this seems to be very negligent of the global leaders and it leaves people everywhere extremely vulnerable, especially while the question of the precise origin of the virus remains unanswered. On this issue, only partial evidence has been attained and we are yet to know the answer to the burning question of whether the creation of COVID-19 was perhaps intentional.

Global cooperation seems to be at an all-time low. For example, there are enormous inequalities in the availability of vaccines in poor countries compared to rich countries. The US and EU are internally divided, while the historical problem of a lack of cooperation between the superpowers — China and Russia on the one hand and the EU and the US on the other — is still there and is even growing.

For better or worse, there is a connection between good political and economic cooperation and efforts to find solutions to global health issues. It is clear that countries with close economic and political ties cooperate more with each other on a greater variety of issues — and the opposite is also true. Indeed, once you have problems in the fields of economics and politics, cooperation in the field of global health suffers. The growing tensions between China

and the US make cooperation on issues such as COVID-19 an unfulfilled dream. This is one of the main reasons why the global governance institutions are failing to ensure the world's preparedness plans for the next pandemic.

The last resort of kings has traditionally been war, while the first resort of leaders today should always be diplomacy and cooperation. This is especially the case now, when conflicts are dominating the international agenda and fragmentation is deepening within the countries of the West. Rifts between progressives and conservatives are weakening Western societies, while the growing power of Russia and China is adding to the precariousness of the current situation.

The world is once again facing the beginnings of a bipolar world and all its associated dangers. The problems of the past are influencing new issues, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of cooperating, defense agencies are very suspicious of other countries and feel that “the other side” is using global health as a weapon to influence others. Therefore, cooperation in this field is suffering.

The billions of dollars that Western societies are now paying out because of the pandemic is still just a fraction of what they will need to invest in the future to avoid similar cases. The cost of such investments is also much higher than the cost of programs that could have been initiated a long time ago to support sustainable development in Africa and other under-developed regions of the world, as well as programs that could bring Russia closer to the West.

The West is now in a vulnerable situation, with China emerging as the global superpower and Western nations seemingly at a loss as to how to respond. It won't help to have another cold war between Russia and the US. It won't help for the Democrats and Republicans to fight each other and block each other's policies.

COVID-19 has revealed a midlife crisis in international relations, and the lesson learned is the same now as it was 20 or even 2,000 years ago: Cooperation and diplomacy are the cheapest and fastest solutions to every global challenge. In the current situation, where so many grave mistakes have been made and so many trillions lost, collaboration is the only way. The alternative is too damaging and too expensive to contemplate.

The biggest challenge today is to find some kind of sustainable way to bring together countries that have different political and societal systems and different cultures. Global health issues can serve as a basis for this cooperation — in other words, it can all start here.

*“The lack of significant cooperation on issues related to global health is worrying and dangerously damaging.”*

*Mark C. Donfried*

3.

# ***THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN TURBOLENT TIMES***

12.04.21

By Mark C. Donfried

[\*Read the Original Article »\*](#)



# THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN TURBOLENT TIMES

by MARK C. DONFRIED

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On July 24, 2008, students and friends of the Academy for Cultural Diplomacy in Berlin went with thousands of other enthusiastic Berliners to watch Barack Obama make his memorable 2008 election speech in the city. On that summer day, the events of the Sept. 11 attacks and the era of President George W. Bush's war on terror seemed very far away. Those who witnessed the speech were buoyed by a sense of positivity and an expectation that improved relations between states, groups and individuals would follow. In those days we found ourselves caught up in the positive energy of the process of globalization, the EU was in a strong and growing position, the world was still impressed by the strengthening growth of year looked solvable. Many people shared a belief that ahead of us lay a glowing future. For the Academy for Cultural Diplomacy in particular, the election of an African American as US president, soon after his speech in Berlin, symbolized the optimism of the time.

It seemed to offer proof that the world was adapting to, and accepting, diversity and increasingly embracing elements of cultural understanding, along with greater dialogue between states and peoples. During the early days of the Obama administration, many individuals and institutions were under the impression that, very soon, cultural diplomacy would become the common currency for international relations and for citizens around the world, and that the work of the Academy for Cultural Diplomacy would soon no longer be necessary. Regrettably, the positive feeling and this assumption turned out to be wrong.

Only 12 years have passed since the inauguration of President Obama, and we now find ourselves facing a very challenging global situation, with countless pressing challenges. The greatest threat: the global health crisis, the lack of international cooperation to cope with environmental issues, or the rapid deterioration of relations between the superpowers. The winds of war can already be sensed stirring the air around us, while at the same time the world is witnessing unimaginable levels of cruelty from terrorist groups such as Daesh and Boko Haram, among others.

One can debate which is more dangerous: the COVID-19 pandemic that continues to spread and has already claimed close to 3 million lives globally, the environmental changes that are causing disasters around the world, or the risk that the new cold war between the superpowers could deteriorate into the real thing. When one analyzes the history of wars in Europe over the past two centuries it is instructive to consider the Franco-Prussian war 150 years ago. It led to the defeat of Napoleon III and the end of the French Empire, and paved the way for the unification of the German states and the rise of the German Empire.

The war effectively ended with the Prussians victory at the battle of Sedan in September 1870. France was left in a disastrous situation, its territory occupied and facing the burden of heavy

reparations. The defeat, accompanied by the loss of the Alsace-Lorraine region, was a devastating blow to French pride.

In the decades that followed, France did not forget this humiliation. In 1914, this was one of the factors that contributed to the willingness and the motivation of the French people to resist German aggression during the First World War.

After the victory over Germany in 1918, it was then the turn of the French government to annex territories from Germany and impose heavy compensation demands on the German people. These factors in turn paved the way for the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis in Germany and, ultimately, the Second World War. Hypothetically, had Napoleon III — as an alternative, or in addition, to the hard power he exercised — practiced soft power and cultural diplomacy during the years leading up to the Franco-Prussian war, he might have faced a less harsh outcome in defeat, sparing the French nation much suffering. If cultural-diplomacy strategies had been applied and maintained consistently from the very beginning of the dispute, it might also have spared the suffering of the German people after their defeat in the First World War and decreased the motivation that led to the rise of the Nazis and the tragedy of the Second World War.

We cannot, of course, be certain that the use of cultural diplomacy would have prevented those events, but most certainly it could have contributed to better outcomes. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed the principle very clearly in a 2019 speech he gave in South Korea: "Replace hate with harmony, destruction with development, and transform the landscape of violence and vendetta into a postcard for peace." Employing the same rationale, we can travel even further back, 80 years before the Battle of Sedan, when the world was astonished to witness the overthrow of monarchy and aristocracy by the French Revolution. In addition to financial and democratic inequalities, the primary causes of the uprising included factors such as arrogance, humiliation, revenge and the refusal of the authorities to understand and develop closer ties with their people.

The famous, if possibly apocryphal, response of Marie-Antoinette, the last queen of France, to the appeals of her citizens for bread — "Let them eat cake" — symbolizes the failure of domestic diplomacy that was at the heart of the motivation for the French Revolution. If Louis XVI had possessed the wisdom to exercise cultural diplomacy, he might not have lost his throne — or his head. In the Cold War era that began after the Second World War and ended in the early 1990s, the major powers had already started to recognize the value of cultural diplomacy. Again, we cannot state categorically that its use prevented an escalation of the Cold War, but it doubtlessly contributed to its end.

Throughout history, one can easily identify cycles of war and peace repeating themselves and, just as one needs to be ill to fully appreciate good health, it seems, sad to say, that the human race needs to experience war to appreciate the benefits of peace. The effect of the strategies and policies cultural diplomacy is impossible to measure and to anticipate, but its contribution to improving relations, opinions and image is enormous and crucial. It is simply human nature that people will not take hard revenge against others who have been kind to them. They might still take their land and money within the framework of a conflict, but the motivation for revenge is much diminished in cases where cultural diplomacy has

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by MARK C. DONFRIED

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been practiced and experienced. It follows, therefore, that its use could have spared the lives of many people in past centuries and saved the expenditure of untold amounts of national resources. Despite the fact that the strategies of cultural diplomacy are much cheaper than their hard-power alternatives, in most cases they are ignored or not maintained in a consistent way. And if cultural diplomacy is not maintained for an extended period of

time, new generations emerge into different world devoid of it, which creates a more dangerous environment and more precarious relations.

Cultural diplomacy must, therefore, always be a part of the agenda and implemented by all at the macro and micro levels, from national governments and global-governance institutions to civil-society organizations, corporations, groups and even families. One must never forget the inefficiency and harm of the alternative to cultural diplomacy.

The challenges facing the world of today have already become dangerous. After the genocide of the Jewish people during the Second World War the world said "never again." However, crimes against humanity are happening in many places right now — the crises affecting Rohingya and Uighur peoples are just two examples. Extreme poverty, including lack of access to food, medicine and housing, is the reality for many people around the world. Climate-change disasters are pushing more people into poverty, and the lack of international cooperation over climate change is threatening to tip the world past the point of no return.

Large and small conflicts are flaring up and becoming the norm. Disputes that range from the Russian invasion of Georgia and Ukraine, following allegations of Western meddling, to China's interference in Hong Kong and its threats against Taiwan, with the increasing use of ever-stronger language, challenge a world peace that is being tested and threatened by the day.

The Iranian interference and promotion of aggressive disputes in other countries, such as the war in Yemen. The wars in Libya, Syria and Nagorno-Karabakh.

The crises engulfing many states in Africa, such as Mozambique, Ethiopia, Uganda, Nigeria, Niger and Congo. The coup d'état in Myanmar. All of these flashpoints are symbols of an era characterized by lack of harmony and escalating disputes.

At the same time, in the free world and Western societies the dialogue between political groups is deteriorating and becoming more violent in nature. Cultural diplomacy alone cannot solve these issues; however, in them the results of the absence of cultural diplomacy can easily be seen. Definitely, disputes would be less extreme and less drawn-out if cultural diplomacy was being more widely practiced and implemented. Cultural diplomacy is much

more important now, against the backdrop of these turbulent times, as it currently represents the only remedy we have to relieve the growing symptoms of violence and disputes between peoples, nations and groups around the world. Cultural diplomacy is much more important at times such as these than it is in times of peace - there is little point offering medicine to a healthy person.

But when our relationships are sick, cultural diplomacy can help to slow a deterioration of conditions until real solutions can be found. What tools do we have now to halt, for example, the deterioration in relations between China and the US? More nuclear weapons will not help. More sanctions will not help — quite the reverse; such policies will just inspire both sides to prepare for war. However, displays of mutual respect between cultures, alongside continuing dialogue including the use of cultural diplomacy, can only help to ease the tensions that can result in conflict.

Now is the time to search and reach for successful models of cultural engagement and cultural openness to halt the deterioration of relations. The international community should look to the example of a country that is using cultural diplomacy in a modern way to spare the world all kinds of horrors, and learn from it. Germany invaded France in 1871 and took the world into two global wars, but now serves as a model for the successful use of cultural diplomacy. The nation exports cultural diplomacy in every policy and strategy, and for decades has dedicated a major portion of the governmental budget to support this.

It is ironic that at the end, after all Germany, yes, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, was the main campaigner to demonstrate cultural openness and allow in 2015 the entrance of Millions of refugees to Germany and Europe while risking of cultural conflicts, losing her career and political conflicts with other members of the EU who rejected these policies.

"Wir schaffen das," Merkel said at the time, meaning "we can make it." One can only imagine what might have happened to those Syrian refugees had Germany closed its borders to them. The world should cherish the country's heroic action and adopt similar approaches to counter the challenges of today.

Now is the time to return to the spirit of an era, during the Cold War, when the American government tried to alter international perceptions of the US by sending "jazz ambassadors" out into the world. Now is the four decades, US cinema was utilized as a cultural diplomacy initiative to do battle with international communism.

It doesn't take much effort to recognize and understand the immense power of cultural diplomacy. Simply watch, for example, American filmmaker Oliver Stone's 2017 television documentary series "The Putin Interviews" — and in particular a scene in which Stone and the Russian president together watch the film "Dr. Strangelove," Stanley Kubrick's acclaimed 1964 black comedy that satirizes Cold War fears of nuclear war.

4.

***COVID-19 CRISIS SHOWS THE TIME  
FOR GLOBAL COOPERATION IS NOW***

16.03.21

By Mark C. Donfried

[\*\*\*Read the Original Article »\*\*\*](#)

# COVID-19 CRISIS SHOWS THE TIME FOR GLOBAL COOPERATION IS NOW

by MARK C. DONFRIED

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*A year has now passed since the mass outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) at a global level. Now that we are in the second year of the pandemic, it is obvious that the worldwide vaccination effort is essential to decreasing the magnitude of COVID-19's impact on all aspects of our lives, including our economies, social lives and international policies. Currently, only a fraction of the world's population has been vaccinated and the task of expanding this effort is becoming a truly global challenge — one that has only just begun.*

*Vaccine research, development and production have been a high priority for developed countries. Ever since the first outbreak of COVID-19, the world's great powers, including Asia, Russia, the EU and the US, have used their scientific, technological and industrial capabilities and infrastructure to work on the first vaccines and quickly set up and develop distribution infrastructures. Even though the task is an enormous one, there has already been significant news about the successful distribution and administration of the vaccination process in a select group of countries.*

*During the research and development process, however, authorities and institutions around the world have been raising questions about the reliability of the vaccines, problems in implementing their distribution, pricing, patents, and the challenge of enabling vaccinations for all. At the same time, discussions about anti-vaccination movements and campaigns have been taking center stage in public and private debate. Western institutions in particular are working with high standards of quality and control, making it even more difficult to deliver the vaccine to large numbers of citizens in a short period of time. At the same time, in the eyes of Western scientific institutions, questions over the reliability and quality of, for example, the Russian and Chinese vaccines have been strongly argued.*

*In this period of global disorder regarding cohesive policies and solutions for the COVID-19 crisis, the world needs sincere cooperation between Western countries, Russia, China and multilateral governance organizations in order to cope with the virus' challenges and keep up with the demand for vaccinations.*

*This grave situation enables a key opportunity: The possibility of real global cooperation in order to offer joint solutions for vaccine development, production and distribution, as well as COVID-19 prevention measures and academic research. The disease offers a special occasion to bring together countries that are currently experiencing political tensions or opposition toward a common goal of immunizing the entire human population against a common enemy. "The enemy of my enemy is my friend," as the ancient proverb tells us; so let us identify COVID-19 as this enemy, which we must all work together against.*

*Global cooperation using cultural diplomacy strategies might actually be the most urgent foreign policy priority of the nation state in the year 2021. Which global risk is currently greater? Which enemy is currently taking the lives of more humans? The main question is which countries will be first to step up to the challenge of bringing their greatest minds together for this common purpose? Cultural diplomacy can be used to break this international standstill — a cold war between economic and scientific communities. The walls of silence and competition need to be torn down and we must immediately initiate cultural diplomacy initiatives and platforms to serve as hosts for discussion, exchange and debate between the greatest minds in the world. The next generation of cultural diplomacy will not be a jazz concert in Moscow or an art exhibition in China, but rather the exchange of scientific knowledge and theories related to COVID-19 that will help to bring real solutions to real problems that are affecting every human being in the world.*

*One of the greatest assets of cultural diplomacy is the ability to sensitively and smartly adapt to the situation at hand. It can be used where other traditional forms of diplomacy are of limited use. As martial artist Bruce Lee once famously put it: "Be as water, my friend." Lee explained how water always adapts to the situation it is put in. If you put it in a glass, water takes the form of the glass. If you put it in a bottle, it takes the form of the bottle.*

*Water can be gently poured or come crashing down with incredible power. Cultural diplomacy acts exactly like water and can be adapted accordingly — specifically for the crisis at hand, in this case the lack of international cooperation when it comes to COVID-19.*

*Cultural diplomacy practices can also be used to create a positive dialogue to counteract vaccine skepticism among institutions and citizens, convincing them of the necessity of vaccination. These groups are becoming a real threat to a successful global vaccination and, therefore, their claims need to be addressed in cultural diplomacy terms. Cultural diplomacy, which in general is accepted as being positive and constructive in nature, has proven itself over the years as capable of bringing solutions to hard disputes that normal means were not able to reach and resolve.*

*As it looks now, the move of global health to the top of the world's agenda will probably not end when COVID-19 is defeated. We predict that global health will stay on the agenda for decades to come. The billions of dollars spent on fighting the pandemic will make sure that Western countries and their institutions will keep global health as a top priority. The development of issues surrounding it will only increase as it poses existential risks from all directions: Health, security, economic and social.*

*So now is the time for cooperation at all levels of society, and across all borders, in order to improve the global health situation. Cultural diplomacy can help to establish cooperation — this is a proven fact. Every minute we lose now, more people are dying, generations of financial savings are being burned, and our quality of life is gradually deteriorating. The time for cooperation is now, not tomorrow or next week. It is, therefore, vital that great positive changes and improvements in the relationships between the superpowers emerge from this disaster.*

5.

***A NEW FREE WORLD IS LOCKED  
IN OUTDATED 20th-CENTURY SYSTEM***

09.11.20

By Mark C. Donfried

[\*\*\*Read the Original Article »\*\*\*](#)

# A NEW FREE WORLD IS LOCKED IN OUTDATED 20th-CENTURY SYSTEMS

by MARK C. DONFRIED  
NOVEMBER 09, 2020

Published by Arab News

[Read the Original Article »](#)

*It was clear already from the middle of the 18th century that the US was going to be a much larger power than many of the existing empires of that time, built on the principles of freedom and the basic human incentive for wealth acquisition in three steps: Initiate, work, earn. This month's presidential election proved once again that this spirit is still beating in the heart of the "Nation of Freedom."*

*It is worth noting that Republicans were once considered the Industrial Capitalist Party, but since that time the economy has substantially changed and, with it, the party demographics as a whole.*

*The Democrats, who have become a kind of social-revolutionary party planning to bring about a centralized revolution of a planned economy and a tax increase, are supported by big multinational corporations. The Republicans under Donald Trump, however, are increasingly supported by the lower class of whites and blue-collar workers.*

*Although Joe Biden was elected, the final results of the election have not yet been called. However, it is already clear that it does not resemble the opinion polls. The polling companies made a serious mistake; the pollsters were wrong, very wrong. Almost all the professional institutes that conducted scientific polls missed the election results by a large margin. Hopes for a "blue Democratic wave" shattered off the coast of Florida. There was almost a draw. In seven states, the gap consists of thousands of votes at most. In those states, there are allegations of improper handling of ballot papers, and perhaps even forgeries, in Biden's favor. In any case, it is a very narrow victory.*

*Unfortunately, both sides were relying on a similar strategy. Trump and Biden were relying on friends from their respective parties within the swing states to avoid exercises that will help the opponent in the count and perhaps lend a hand to exercises that will help them. In Arizona and Georgia, Trump's campaign relied on the governors' support to at least prevent forgeries in Biden's favor. In Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Michigan, Biden's campaign was backed by Democratic governors and state secretaries working to increase the number of votes in favor of their party.*

*And at least in the case of Pennsylvania, the secretary of state (the trust for the approval of the election results) issued announcements on the eve of the election giving the impression that he was settling matters in Biden's favor. On Tuesday night, the governor issued a similar statement.*

*Both sides claim the opponent is trying to steal the election. The only difference is that Biden*

*does not have to say it himself because the media is mobilized to attack Trump for him. Trump, on the other hand, needs to run his own media campaign in person. In doing so, we actually see the continued mobilization of the media for Biden and against Trump.*

*The American media attacked Trump when he declared victory on Wednesday morning and blamed Biden's campaign for deception. Yet no one had a word of criticism when Biden's campaign declared victory and accused Trump of trying to undermine the results.*

*But it is not over until it is over, and as these lines are being written Trump is determined to fight, with the results indicating not very large gaps. His legacy, "Trumpism," is guaranteed in any scenario. Even if he does not win at the end of the road, the legacy he built in his first term is guaranteed. Republicans will take care to preserve his achievements.*

*If Biden becomes the 46th president, even his supporters will admit that this is because half of America mobilized with unprecedented intensity against Trump, in part due to the negative image attached to the latter by the establishment and the media. This despite the fact that masses of voters actually expressed support for Trump's economic conduct.*

*We have witnessed the most dramatic US election, but this did not happen by accident. If we analyze our lives in the new free world, we quickly learn that we all operate in a very logical way that is dictated by the framework of outdated 20th-century systems on one hand, and by new innovations and technologies on the other.*

*For example, we live under a constitution, but it is what the judges say it is. An old street joke says: "What's the difference between a good lawyer and a great lawyer? A good lawyer knows the law. A great lawyer knows/appoints the judge."*

*This joke is unfortunately not funny. And as appears from endless research and proposals for judicial reforms, the structure of 21st-century judiciaries in most Western countries enables serious gaps, defaults and inequalities. Those inequalities push those who suffer to a long list of reactions, including violence and crime, and further divide nation states into tribal societies that are then used by opportunistic politicians to gain power, and so the chaos continues.*

*Biden proudly announced that he will govern as an American even though he belongs to the Democratic Party, and he called for "a time of healing." This rhetoric summarizes the most important issue of the election.*

# A NEW FREE WORLD IS LOCKED IN OUTDATED 20th-CENTURY SYSTEMS

by MARK C. DONFRIED

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The US and the free world need a president who serves the interests of all Americans and citizens of the world. The US and the world need a president who listens to all and creates systems that support advancement toward greater equalities. Citizens who work in the oil industry in Pennsylvania cannot be discarded like a bottle cap that is not needed anymore, and the system must care for their needs and challenges.

At the same time, programs and clear legislation must be implemented in order to support the advancement of poor African Americans, and to create further opportunities for women who feel discriminated against and mistreated. Such legislation should not hurt men or the "other," but rather create a systematic framework that better equalizes opportunities for all citizens.

Politicians who would like to use diplomatic means and language ("political correctness") should do that, but without attacking politicians who see it as a waste of time and resources and prefer more practical solutions to problems.

Controversial issues such as abortion or gun control should be debated and checked within a framework of special mutual committees that will be able to find proper compromises to satisfy those who either support or oppose these policies.

Proper legislation should be put in place to update many of the frameworks of systems of operational daily life in the US, which can then be followed by other countries in order to enable all citizens of the world to understand these compromises and what is allowed and not allowed.

Only then will citizens of the US and the free world be able to see a clearer path that leads to a more united society. These inequalities that have existed in society for centuries must be corrected in order to decrease tribalism.

Looking at history, every time society has chosen a compromise it leads its people toward prosperity and peace, but allowing inequalities to deepen and divide for too long without a proper remedy has led to bloody conflicts and destruction, which we hope can be avoided in the US.

America has been living in an evolving tribal society of inequalities for too long, and the West has been observing this devolution decade by decade. Let us put a stop to this and, as Biden calls for, enter "a time of healing."

*"It is not over until it is over, and as these lines are being written Trump is determined to fight, with the results indicating not very large gaps. His legacy, 'Trumpism,' is guaranteed in any scenario."*

*Mark C. Donfried*

6.

***NATIONAL HEALTH SECURITY***  
***A POST-PANDEMIC PRIORITY***

03.05.20

By Mark C. Donfried

***Read the Original Article »***



# NATIONAL HEALTH SECURITY A POST-PANDEMIC PRIORITY

by MARK C. DONFRIED

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MAY 03, 2020

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*The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has taken multiple assets from the world and forced its people to feel vulnerable. The world is now living in greater fear and citizens are concerned for their safety. People are afraid of using public transport and, if one thought airport security was intense before, just imagine how much more complicated it will be in the post-COVID-19 environment, with all the additional health checks that will be required.*

*The comfort zone that citizens enjoyed before the pandemic, where perhaps their greatest distant fear was the rare possibility of a terrorist attack, has been ended. Civilians are now scared to enter their local supermarket without wearing a mask and they wipe down their shopping trolleys with a sterilized cloth. People are trying to avoid getting close to others in stores and are purchasing their items as quickly as possible.*

*However, the post COVID-19 world also has many positive opportunities. The pandemic has shown us that what we thought was almost impossible for human beings — the possibility of quickly changing our fundamental behaviors and cultural traditions — is not only possible, but actually easy.*

*Now more than ever it is clear that anything is possible and many of our long-standing dreams can actually come true. Perhaps we can now also change the behaviors that are causing the environment to be destroyed. Most likely, we can change the way the human race treats animals and nature, and be more humble, modest and moderate to consume less of the world's resources. This could also save money that, in time, could be used to save lives.*

*We can change our habits to reduce the amount of pollution and waste that we each produce daily. Perhaps we could have new and more effective global governance policies; by creating new ones and improving those we already have. We could then, for example, improve opportunities for all human beings by securing increased budgets to allow for real global health security in countries with failed health systems, while at the same time creating many new jobs in the health industry.*

*Similar to the context of war, which brings people together to fight against a common enemy, the battle against COVID-19 has brought human beings from all cultural, ethnic and national backgrounds closer. The feeling is that we have a common enemy that is not of the human race. We all share the same risks and the same suffering. From people*

*dancing on their balconies in major cities to those volunteering to support those at great risk and others sharing in the mutual grief of lost loved ones — COVID-19 has actually brought us, at a micro and a macro level, closer together.*

*However, in order to make sure that the lessons learned are applied and the proper measures taken in order to protect societies from future pandemics, we need a comprehensive legislative process. Relevant legislation will need to be proposed and passed in parliaments at the national, regional and global levels, otherwise all of the opportunities that have presented themselves in the context of the coronavirus pandemic will simply be forgotten.*

*The legislative process should be guided by the leaders who have learned from the COVID-19 crisis and who are creative and courageous enough to break from old cultural habits and adopt new and innovative strategies. The necessary budgets must be secured in order to fund new institutions and measures. New jobs and professions must be created and secured in order to better manage and defeat the next pandemic.*

*After COVID-19, the world will be forced to reanalyze and check the process of globalization in order to avoid the uncertainties that have come about with this pandemic and to optimize its benefits for all citizens. There must be analysis of every factor related to the process of globalization that failed in preventing the spread of the coronavirus, as well as a pin-pointing of the successes and correct measures that were taken and applied.*

*The post-COVID-19 period will definitely be characterized by increased governmental efforts to address global health issues, heightened suspicion of possible virus carriers, and more aggressive foreign policies by nation states.*

*In fact, we must assess the possible need for a new Ministry for National Health Security in each country, whose responsibilities would be similar to homeland security but with a focus on health, in order to provide the necessary research, analysis, investigation and enforcement. The risk of a new global pandemic such as COVID-19 is now far greater than any single military or terrorist attack.*

*The coming era offers a chance for the younger generations to take action and seize the opportunities presented to them. They can create the appropriate positions and establish new institutions that will make the reforms needed for a stronger tomorrow. The politicians will have to cooperate with them, no doubt, as it is clear that those politicians who stick to old habits will soon find themselves without electoral support.*

*The youth, which is so interested in more pro-nature solutions, will soon find out that parliamentarians suddenly understand that. Similar to the period after the Second World War, if the right actions are taken and the right legislation passed, we have the possibility to regain — and more — all that we lost during a period of unprecedented global change.*

7.

***CORONAVIRUS TO PROMPT  
WORLDWIDE CULTURAL CHANGES***

19.04.20

By Mark C. Donfried

[\*Read the Original Article »\*](#)

# CORONAVIRUS TO PROMPT WORLDWIDE CULTURAL CHANGES

by MARK C. DONFRIED

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*Not too long ago, smoking cigarettes was a very common habit within private houses, offices and public spaces. Older readers might even remember long-distance flights with people smoking in their seats, with the smell and health hazards of the smoke spreading throughout the cabin. Many nonsmokers had to suffer the serious health hazards of smoke in bars, restaurants, their offices and beyond. However, starting in the 1970s in the US and then accelerating in a massive way in the 1990s, movements to ban smoking in public spaces managed to get legislation passed in America and many other countries. The end result of these campaigns is that smokers in many places, such as in Europe, have to go to the balcony or outside of their office, restaurant or bar to smoke. Most hotels have completely forbidden smoking in their rooms and car rental companies have followed the same strategy. As a result, the culture of smoking has changed and become more sensitive to nonsmokers.*

*In recent decades, we have observed many other cultural behaviors that have significantly changed. For example, the #MeToo movement changed the culture of sexual advances in business and shone the light on sexual harassment and assault. The movement has totally changed the culture of sexual freedom, which had existed for decades. It only took a few Twitter posts and some well-reported court cases against leaders in the film industry to send a powerful message to the entire world that this culture has changed.*

*Despite these major changes in concepts and behaviors, humanity still has a range of controversial cultural habits that are dividing societies and groups. One example is the culture of food that focuses on the eating of meat and fish, thanks in part to famous television chefs. Recently, however, the meat and fish industries have been confronted with many objections and philosophical questions about our relationship with animals and nature.*

*One can observe similar evolutions with regards to the relationship between humans and trees, plants and soil, which are now being reconsidered. The culture of respecting the planet and its environment is becoming more and more popular among young people internationally. At the forefront of these debates about the well-being of the Earth is the challenge of climate change. Climate change is increasingly present in our international debates and, for many, it looks like it is impossible to come to a suitable understanding or global agreement due to conflicts of interest.*

*The ongoing coronavirus crisis, with its disastrous results in both health and financial terms,*

*has taught us two important lessons about cultural change and our options for the future.*

*The first lesson is that it was easier than we thought to coordinate a globally united policy on social distancing and it did not take much to convince the entire world to march in the same direction. We all thought it would be impossible to unite the cultures of the world and come to a mutual understanding. However, looking at the reaction of countries all around the world, we have seen that, almost instantaneously, a mutual understanding was agreed upon and all of the obstacles and cultural differences fell like dominoes to allow for the new culture of social distancing.*

*The second lesson we have learned is that, whether we want this or not, a cultural change toward nature, animals and other vital issues must be achieved in order to avoid the next crisis. In the last 12 months, we have lurched from one crisis to the next. Just when we thought the fires in Australia had been extinguished and we could breathe a sigh of relief, the coronavirus crisis arrived. We have learned that it is no longer in the hands of humanity to maintain the culture of old practices because, if we do that, the next crisis will cause us to change — and each time in bigger leaps. It is therefore likely that the current crisis, which has already cost the world tens of thousands of lives, trillions of dollars in financial losses and growing unemployment, will be the cause of the next major crisis.*

*The list of changes we need to make in our cultural habits is long but, as we learn from the coronavirus, they can be done. For example, if we check the capacity of hospitals in much of the Arab world and Africa, one can easily see that a major change needs to take place in order to be ready and avoid major losses. It is clear that some health systems in these regions are not ready to deal with serious pandemic issues and, if a stronger virus ever appeared, the results would be catastrophic.*

*It is therefore vital that the main issues on the agenda for the next generation — which will have to prepare the world to deal better with issues such as pandemics — will have to focus, firstly, on the many changes required in our culture and habits and, secondly, to change our policy and budget priorities into a different hierarchy. The younger generations of today should start to think differently, prepare themselves to engage with issues that, until now, were lower on the agenda, and qualify themselves to become officers for cultural change.*

8.

***GLOBALIZATION UNSTOPPABLE  
DESPITE ITS CONTRIBUTION TO VIRUS SPREAD***

12.04.20

By Mark C. Donfried

[\*Read the Original Article »\*](#)

# GLOBALIZATION UNSTOPPABLE DESPITE ITS CONTRIBUTION TO VIRUS SPREAD

by MARK C. DONFRIED  
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*The worldwide coronavirus crisis can be compared to a volcanic eruption that came after a long boiling process, which was accelerated by decades of unrestrained globalization. Once the volcano is quiet again, nature usually takes over and life gradually comes back to normal, however slowly, and with a different order and shape to things. Indeed, before the coronavirus crisis is even over, governments all around the world are already looking — both alone and together — for practices that will enable normal life to return and citizens to socialize again. Some of the most popular issues up for discussion are the timings and what the new normality will look like, from issues such as borders, traveling and older people to wider issues like investments in health systems, the future economy, international relations and global cooperation.*

*At this point, it is important to ask some simple questions about the widespread and global distribution of the pandemic — and here the consequences of globalization cannot be ignored. There is no doubt that a similar epidemic 30 years ago would not have spread so rapidly, efficiently and to such an extent. The changes in life patterns around the world in the last generation are not the cause of the epidemic, but they have brought about the incredible global scale of its distribution. Globalization has many positive aspects: It has greatly contributed to raising the standard of living of broad strata, the removal of border barriers, and cheap flights that are within the reach of tens of millions, allowing mass tourism — all of which have become widely accepted. But there are no free meals. Analysis of the first few people infected in many countries shows that most of them had just returned to their home nations from abroad, and it is clear they contracted the virus while they were away.*

*The process of globalization, which was most popular in the late 1990s and early this millennium, has been seriously criticized in recent years. It has lost its absolute acceptance and is widely attributed to the rise of right-wing movements around the world. From the “America First” of the Trump administration to the Brexit process inspired by Nigel Farage and the establishment of the Alternative for Germany party, one can easily see the side-effects of the process of globalization. The word “globalization,” which was previously used positively in many speeches and policies, is not in use anymore. The word that led the international affairs agenda for years has simply vanished — nobody is mentioning it and nobody is using it to build policies. It has almost become a dirty word.*

*The problem, however, is that the process of globalization is continuing and even gets stronger year after year. There will be no return to the Stone Age or walled cities and there is no room for outdated systems; only real and modern interdependence. Governments and the people of the world would not accept such a retreat. American corporations Google and Facebook need the people of the world, just like Germany’s auto and machinery industries do.*

*The people of the world need each other for protection (just imagine what would happen under dictatorships without any international outcry) and global health can be ensured by international pharmaceutical corporations. “No man is an island,” wrote John Donne, while Aristotle summed up this essential human affinity for other people by saying, “Man is by nature a social animal.” Karl Marx put it as: “Man is a species-being.” They are all right, as we all need each other.*

*In the Bible, Ecclesiastes 1:9 states: “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.” Does this all mean that the process of globalization will continue and our world will look like it did before? Probably yes, but with changes, and we will all need to contribute to and support its healing and further development. Each of us must understand that we probably can have our life back, but we need to contribute to the healing process.*

*Our governments and institutions must come together and use their might in order to find the origin of this pandemic. They need to make sure that further similar instances will be avoided and that global issues will be addressed. From climate change, freedom for all people, equality and global justice to cultural habits (food, drink, travel, hobbies, etc.), they all need to move to the top of the global dialogue. Our role, as always, is to make sure that the continuation of a positive path is secured.*

*And what about the current crisis? I predict that, in the medium term, a vaccine and medicine will be found and provided, our defensive practices to avoid mass contagion will prevail, and the origin of the virus will be found.*

9.

***PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS***  
***A NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUE***

26.03.20

By Mark C. Donfried

***Read the Original Article »***

# PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS A NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUE

by MARK C. DONFRIED

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[Read the Original Article »](#)

*In an instant, out of the blue, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has arrived and has brought 21st century civilization — with all of its might — to its knees, leaving its leaders and citizens wounded, paralyzed and with no real direction, concrete answers or solutions. Total shutdowns and curfews have been imposed and states of emergency introduced, while astronomical budgets (that have been saved by countries for decades) have been assigned to support the efforts to cope with the pandemic, enable the economy to survive, and the people to be able to finance themselves.*

*Lessons from previous pandemics, warnings by institutions engaged in pandemic issues, as well as books and the calls of organizations and experts about the possibility of future pandemics were systematically ignored in recent years and most countries were not at all prepared to deal with such a crisis. Had the leaders handled this risk in a different way, many lives and budgets could have been saved. It is now too late, as the virus has hit societies and there is a real need to react.*

*However, even if the actions that have now been taken around the world do prevail, it is very clear to everyone that a second virus or similar pandemic could come at any time — but then governments would have empty budgets and would not be able to properly defend their societies. Governments around the world usually spend heavily on security issues, ranging from weapons to human resources, in order to be prepared for violent conflicts and terrorism. The coronavirus has clearly proven that pandemics need to be immediately included under security measures, and in a very high priority position.*

*Every violent organization is now aware of the fragile situation in terms of handling issues such as pandemics. It would be quite easy for terrorist organizations, for example, to get their hands on the next virus and cause a similar pandemic. Whether from wild animals or from another source, it is therefore extremely important for the international community to get accurate information about the source of the virus and how accessible such viruses are to violent organizations.*

*From what we have learned from the initial testimonials, patients inform us that the coronavirus is stronger than a regular flu and the recovery time is longer. This makes the observer suspicious about whether or not it is the result of a normal evolutionary mutation. The strength of the virus, which is a dream of every violent organization, shows an evolutionary turn that raises suspicion. Just to compare, the entire world was amazed to see how the famous runner Usain Bolt was able to improve the world record in the 100 meters sprint from 9.69 seconds to 9.58 in his best race. Once we compare the virus's evolution to human*

*evolution, one can see how suspicious the qualities of this “supervirus” look, as it is equal to the example that suddenly, in one day, a new sprinter improves the 100 meters record from 9.58 seconds to only 6 seconds. Such an improvement does not happen in such a short time, just as this so-called evolutionary mutation of a virus wouldn't happen by itself. This mutation can of course happen in nature, but the importance of an unbiased, inclusive international investigation team examining this is of the highest importance.*

*If the results of this investigation show human intervention, the world will enter a new order, which will change the life of every human being. Even if it is not possible to determine that there was no human intervention, this crisis will lead the world to immediately changing its priorities, putting pandemics and similar instances at the top of their agenda in order to better prepare for the next crisis and avoid any security failures.*

*In order to be sure that violent organizations are not able to get involved in the spread of viruses, there needs to be a serious plan regarding how to prepare for — or even prevent — the next crisis. It is, therefore, important that we get answers to the many questions we have, such as how to secure the world in this new reality.*

*We may never know the true origin of the coronavirus, but one thing is certain: The world that will come after this crisis will be completely different to the one we knew before.*

*“Every violent organization is now aware of the fragile situation in terms of handling issues such as pandemics.”*

*Mark C. Donfried*

10.

***SAUDI ARABIA CONTINUING ITS LONG  
TRADITION OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY***

03.01.19

By Mark C. Donfried

[\*\*\*Read the Original Article »\*\*\*](#)



# SAUDI ARABIA CONTINUING ITS LONG TRADITION OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

by MARK C. DONFRIED

JANUARY 03, 2019

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[Read the Original Article »](#)

*The practice of cultural diplomacy is not a new one for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, but its engagement and evolution is developing at a rapid pace.*

*The Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, based in Berlin, Germany, would say that the essence of cultural diplomacy is “to educate, enhance and sustain relations in order to build dialogue, understanding and trust between all peoples.” So one could argue that Saudi Arabia began its cultural diplomacy long before the French created the Alliance Francaise in 1883, the UK the British Council in 1934 or the Germans the Goethe-Institut in 1951, with the tradition of the Hajj, the Islamic pilgrimage to Makkah that dates back to the 7th century. In this powerful religious pilgrimage, Muslims of every nationality, race and ethnicity, every culture, and both men and women, pray on the same mats, drink from the same cups and participate in in total peace, harmony and respect every year.*

*The annual participation in the Hajj is massive and growing every year. In 2018, 2.4 million pilgrims participated, which is perhaps the biggest target audience reached by any cultural diplomacy initiative worldwide. The Hajj creates a framework in which all Muslims can get to know each other and build understanding and trust in the context of peace and respect. The Goethe-Institut, with offices in 98 countries worldwide, would be extremely pleased if it could reach a target audience of 2.4 million; however, only 246,000 people take part in its courses each year.*

*Despite the great leap forward in the liberties and opportunities that have recently been afforded to Saudi women — not least the celebrated lifting of the driving ban in June — the tradition of cultural diplomacy with women in the Kingdom was started in 2003, when the field of women and sports as cultural diplomacy was unofficially launched by Lina Khaled Almaeena. She founded Jeddah United Sports Co. as the first private sports company in Saudi Arabia to train girls and boys in team sports, including basketball, volleyball and soccer, and promote the culture of sport in the Kingdom. At the time, the government did not license female gyms or clubs, and only a few elite private schools offered sports for girls. The team’s players faced a backlash from disapproving family members, texted threats, and harassment by the religious police, Saudi Arabia’s official enforcers of strict social mores.*

*But today, after a long campaign to change attitudes toward women’s athletics, the*

*Saudi government has written them into Vision 2030, its economic development plan to improve infrastructure, encourage community sports and support elite competitors. In 2012, Saudi Arabia sent its first women to the Olympic Games. In 2016, another football team was founded: The United Eagles, comprised of 21 women aged 18 to 22 years. The next year, Saudi women attended the official event to celebrate the 87th National Day of Saudi Arabia in Riyadh; an event that had traditionally only been for men.*

*In October 2017, history was made when Princess Reema bint Bandar was named as the first woman to lead a federation covering sporting activities for men and women, as she was made president of the Saudi Federation for Community Sports.*

*The development of women and sports as cultural diplomacy continued to rapidly evolve when, in March 2018, female teachers joined sports training programs in three major Saudi cities. Then, in October, the first Saudi female hockey team was founded, which was swiftly followed by the first Women Bowling Championship and the first women’s martial arts tournament.*

*We are also witnessing the development of cultural diplomacy in the fields of entertainment, tourism and the arts. In 2017, it was announced that the 35-year ban on public cinemas in Saudi Arabia was finally to be lifted, opening up a domestic market of more than 32 million people, with some 300 cinemas and 2,000 screens anticipated to open across the Kingdom by 2030.*

*The last year also witnessed the first female-only concert, with the event “Riyadh Nights” featuring Emirati singer Shamma Hamdan and Saudi Arabia’s Dalia Mubarak. Meanwhile, rapper Nelly and renowned Greek musician Yanni were among the first international artists to hold concerts in the Kingdom. In December, Saudi Arabia made headlines as thousands of people made their way to the Formula E race in Riyadh, which was followed by a massive concert. Thousands of young men and women stood next to each other, singing along to famous songs by international singers and DJs such as David Guetta, Enrique Iglesias, The Black Eyed Peas, Jason Derulo, One Republic and popular Arabic singer Amr Diab.*

*Saudi Arabia is also making sincere efforts to facilitate greater and easier access for*

# SAUDI ARABIA CONTINUING ITS LONG TRADITION OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

by MARK C. DONFRIED

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cultural diplomacy to take place through international tourism. For example, in December it was announced that citizens of the 26 Schengen member countries will no longer need to apply for a regular visa to travel to Saudi Arabia. Instead, they will only need to apply online for an e-visa, thus avoiding the time-consuming process for obtaining a visa.

As an example of the recent tourism boom, over the last two years both Riyadh and Jeddah have been drawing more hotel groups and brands — both local and international — on the back of major infrastructure projects and easing visa requirements.

According to Colliers International, Riyadh's hotel inventory includes 119 properties comprising 16,441 rooms, while Jeddah's stands at 92 hotels with 11,276 rooms. This number is set to increase, particularly in Riyadh, which is currently leading the hotel boom in Saudi Arabia, with 48 projects in the pipeline, followed closely by Jeddah. The growth is reflected elsewhere too. Nearly 60 percent of the Kingdom's construction pipeline of 143 hotels (as of February) was forecast to open in 2018, according to a Saudi Arabia Hotel Construction Overview report by TopHotelProjects. Riyadh and Jeddah continue to rank highly in the Middle East's top 10 most active cities for hospitality development, sitting third and fourth respectively, the report revealed.

In the arts, women have always stood on equal if not possibly higher ground than men. In fact, women have been huge trailblazers in the arts and culture sector of Saudi Arabia, not just as artists but as art professionals and as powerful patrons of the arts. For example, artists Safeya Binzagr and Mounira Mously jointly held the first public art exhibition in Saudi Arabia in 1968; Shadia and Raja Alem were the first artists to represent Saudi Arabia at the Venice Biennale in 2011; Princess Jawaher bint Majid bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud established in 1990 the Almansouria Foundation, the first art foundation of its kind to support Saudi creativity; and Effat Fadag and Zahra Al-Ghamdi introduced novel and unconventional notions of conceptual art to the King Abdulaziz University arts programs.

Another powerful example of recent Saudi cultural diplomacy saw a strengthening of Saudi-Lebanese relations with the Winter at Tantora festival in Al-Ula last month. This

event saw the Lebanese soprano Majida El-Roumi perform in the Kingdom for the first time. Amid the background of tense political and diplomatic relations between the two countries over the past year, the Kingdom's recently appointed Minister of Culture, Prince Badr Al-Farhan, decided to invite El-Roumi and more than 100 other Lebanese, including former presidents and prime ministers, officials, representatives of all sects, beauty queens, singers and prominent journalists and intellectuals. The event turned out to be a great success of cultural diplomacy, as both the Saudi hosts and Lebanese guests experienced a beautiful cultural experience, bringing their two cultures together in harmony and peace.

Therefore it is quite impressive to see the rapid development of a long-held tradition of Saudi cultural diplomacy. If the Kingdom continues to push the development of cultural diplomacy at both national and international levels, it is bound to see many benefits in terms of increased tourism, international investment, and international PR in general.

*“ We are also witnessing the development of Cultural Diplomacy in the fields of entertainment, tourism and the arts.”*

*Mark C. Donfried*

11.

***CULTURE OF DEFAMATION MEANS  
MEDIA IS GLOBALLY MISUSED***

19.10.18

By Mark C. Donfried

[\*Read the Original Article »\*](#)

# CULTURE OF DEFAMATION MEANS MEDIA IS GLOBALLY MISUSED

by MARK C. DONFRIED

OCTOBER 19, 2018

Published by Arab News

[Read the Original Article »](#)

*The disappearance of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi reflects the dangerous working environment for journalists and the media worldwide. We will probably never know the exact circumstances that caused this disappearance or what happened in other similar cases around the world. The crimes committed against members of the media, which are on the rise, are happening at a time when we hear daily about “fake news” or “media wars,” which are often used by professionals in order to harm and damage individuals, companies and governments. In addition, anonymous individuals often create an atmosphere of uneasiness or suspicion in order to establish conspiracy theories with the intention of harming individuals or entities, which is very easy to do thanks to Internet anonymity. All these activities escalate the relations among individuals, organizations and governments and lead to dangerous outbreaks of violence.*

*These activities, which can be described as a “culture of defamation and slander,” have been developed in recent decades and are becoming more and more widespread and violent. Cultural diplomacy was widely used in the past to do and practice exactly the opposite of this defamation and, rather, to try to bring different entities into a dialogue, despite at times very wide differences of opinion or belief. Today, any entity or individual can harm another with anonymous defamation without facing any consequences, as it is often very difficult to find the anonymous authors, while judiciaries are overwhelmed with too many other cases. This situation is causing those who want to harm others to increase their activities as they see that there is no consequence or punishment for their actions, and they are able to get the results they want by defaming others.*

*For example, the Khashoggi case was used by the Turkish media (which is controlled by the government) to harm Saudi Arabia’s image and interests in the world. This is absurd, and comes as a complete hypocrisy since Turkey, following the attempted coup d’etat in 2016 and even before, has jailed many journalists and, as we can learn from reliable sources, has also dismantled any possibility of a real political opposition to exist and operate in the country.*

*Many questions are raised in the current context as the main source of information is this government-controlled media, which has a political conflict with Saudi Arabia. Turkey’s Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gul has, in fact, rightfully called on the public to ignore any leaked information in the case of the missing Saudi journalist, while Foreign Minister*

*Mevlut Cavusoglu denied sharing any audio recordings with US officials. Also, how can the world ignore the fact that hundreds of journalists have been jailed in Turkey, which claims to be a democracy and is still an active member of NATO? How can NATO remain silent in the face of this complete double standard, dishonesty and hypocrisy? The attempts of Turkey and others to try to use the current event in order to make political and economic gains at the expense of Saudi Arabia is of course wrong.*

*Similar events have happened in other countries, but were almost totally ignored by the general public, allowing those countries to continue to hold political, cultural and economic relations with the West without any sanctions. There must be a call for new practices of cultural dialogue on these issues and there must be a major effort in order to re-establish international trust both within and between countries.*

*We have to utilize cultural diplomacy to unite the world’s cultures before hard power takes the lead. We are calling on the international community to work together with global governance organizations, judiciaries and lawmakers in order to tackle these problems of defamation and intentional misuse of the media. This will mean that the public will always be able to get an accurate and unbiased overview of the news and that instances of hypocrisy, insincerity, dishonesty and double standards will be kept to a minimum.*

*“ How can the world ignore the fact that hundred of journalists have been jailed in Turkey, which claims to be a democracy and is still an active member of NATO? ”*

*Mark C. Donfried*

12.

*HOW FAITH  
CAN FIGHT EXTREMISM*

03.03.18

By Mark C. Donfried

[\*Read the Original Article »\*](#)

# HOW FAITH CAN FIGHT EXTREMISM

by MARK C. DONFRIED

MARCH 03, 2018

Published by Arab News

[Read the Original Article »](#)

*During a recent trip to Washington, Mohammed Abdul Karim Al-Issa, secretary-general of the Muslim World League, made an amazing statement to a group of US counter-extremism officials: "The answer lies in the true values of Islam, which call for coexistence, tolerance and peace." This is absolutely true, but of all the major world religions.*

*This statement in this context is a historic development that needs to be taken seriously and followed by all people who care about limiting extremism and fostering cooperation. At a time when global citizens are overwhelmed by daily news broadcasts, fake news, social media and information overload, important calls such as Al-Issa's are overlooked, so we need to amplify his voice and message.*

*Political and cultural spheres are becoming increasingly fragmented locally, nationally and internationally, and discontent with moderate political parties is fostering a rise in extremism at home and abroad. So a crucial challenge is to combat extremism, violence and hatred committed in the name of religion, among other ideologies.*

*The Institute for Cultural Diplomacy believes that all the major world religions can serve as a major bridge to foster cultural diplomacy. As soon as such interfaith dialogue is fostered in a sustained way, and as soon as we give youths access to a viable future, extremist organizations will become irrelevant.*

*A good example of religion serving as a bridge is Hajj, which every year brings together in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, millions of Muslims from around the world — and from different nations, cultures and political identities — in peace. This pilgrimage serves as a powerful reminder of Islam's true values, and as only one example of its many peaceful traditions, and of how Saudi Arabia is successfully engaging in cultural diplomacy globally. The more aware and interconnected people of different cultures and identities are, the more difficult it will be for extremism to spread. So now is the time for a global series of research, advisory and governance initiatives to explore religion's role and potential in cultural diplomacy. Such endeavors will search for ways to deepen understanding of what is meant by religion.*

*It is also necessary to generate new research on the role of religion in its various and complex dimensions in the 21st century's global context. This will help eradicate the neglect and ambiguities that this subject has generated to date, and support innovative and*

*collaborative approaches and policies for conflict prevention, management and transformation.*

*The exploration of religion's role in cultural diplomacy is intended to foster deeper dialogue, understanding and trust between different cultures — often in conflict with one another — by exploring in specific nations the multifaceted and intricate global religious situations of the 21st century. As such, clarifying and interpreting religion's function in diverse cultures, and overcoming its neglect and radical misunderstandings of it, are necessary and urgent.*

*Since religion is both central and normative in human affairs, it drives the thought and behavior of people and governments in ways that are often subtle yet undeniably compelling and determinative. Religion, similar to economic and political forces, is frequently associated with social identity, ethnicity and nationality, and so can serve as a multiplier of both destructive and constructive actions and conduct.*

*Religion must, therefore, be viewed as a key component for analyzing and comprehending cultures. Unless its presence and power are taken with utmost seriousness, the creation of constructive and sustainable relationships and policies that prevent misunderstandings and improve communication and cooperation — and thus help reduce sociocultural conflicts — will be gravely hindered.*

*In order to foster this deeper dialogue between cultures, a number of factors must be addressed: How one defines cultural diplomacy in this context; the various definitions of religion and secularization, and the impact of globalization; the necessity to distinguish between secularism as a statecraft doctrine and as an ideology; illustrating questions of definition by analyzing the religious situation in specific nation states; what is meant by religious freedom, and its relationship with violent religious extremism; and whether religious activists dismiss contemporary secular nationalism because it is fundamentally bereft of moral and transcendent values.*

*There should be a greater focus today on religion as a possible source of solutions to extremism and other global challenges, rather than as only a cause of extremism. There is a need for more programs to foster cultural and religious exchanges. The more such programs are developed and promoted, the more difficult it will be for extremism to rise. It is the responsibility of global leaders to come together and stop extremism of all kinds by supporting and developing such programs. The underlying issue of inequality must be simultaneously addressed. As long as fundamental inequalities exist between peoples, it will be impossible to sustain global peace.*

13.

***HOW SAUDI ARABIA IS BUILDING  
A NEW NATIONAL BRAND***

13.01.18

By Mark C. Donfried

[\*Read the Original Article »\*](#)

# HOW SAUDI ARABIA IS BUILDING A NEW NATIONAL BRAND

by MARK C. DONFRIED

JANUARY 13, 2018

Published by Arab News

[Read the Original Article »](#)

*Recent decisions in Saudi Arabia with regard to good governance and tax reforms, women's rights and new opportunities for its people, as well as the continued efforts of the Saudi government to tackle international terrorism, have been positively received both domestically and internationally and have significantly contributed to the Saudi national brand image, indicating that more positive changes are on the horizon.*

*The Saudi government is signalling to its citizens and to the world that the Saudi national brand of the 21st century will include many more possibilities than in previous centuries. In general, world democracies and their people have reacted immensely positively to these changes, which will surely bring considerable long-term benefits to Saudi citizens and the Saudi state. It is therefore important that this improvement in the Saudi national brand will continue to be further developed, and more initiatives and programs presented, in order to bring lasting, long-term sustainable benefits.*

*The emergence and development in recent years of the concept of nation branding, as a result of the process of globalization and the digital revolution, has presented countries with an efficient instrument to use in order to improve their image abroad and thus promote trade, tourism and direct investment.*

*In the past few decades, the growing importance of nation branding has become a crucial element for countries worldwide interested in expanding their economic, scientific and trading capabilities globally. Indeed, every state seeking to sustainably improve tourism, international trade and foreign investment, and the availability of international credit in general, can benefit greatly from a positive national reputation, and therefore the success of the state is very much dependent on the success of the state's national brand. In contrast, a negative reputation of the national brand can hinder large numbers of tourists and discourage favorable trade conditions and foreign investment, as well as engendering unwillingness from other countries to cooperate in academic and scientific affairs. The aim of nation branding is to build, manage and improve a country's image. Nation branding is designed to make a nation politically, economically and culturally more competitive in the world. In addition to those three key goals, nation branding can also increase currency stability; help restore international credibility and investor confidence; reverse international ratings downgrades; increase international political influence; and stimulate stronger international partnerships and enhance nation building by nourishing confidence, pride, harmony, ambition and national identity.*

*This can be done, for example, through tourism campaigns and placing symbolic value on export products and services in order to encourage foreign direct investment, trade, tourism and political alliances. These popular exports and tourist attractions become key features each country is known for, allowing for each nation to hone in on its strengths and portray them in a positive light.*

*Nation branding programs and initiatives are usually cost effective, as normally they consist of activities such as research, publications, conferences, exhibitions, fairs, academic and scientific exchange, youth programs and beyond. These programs, compared to other budgets of a state, such as defense, are only a fraction of the cost and therefore the return on investment is high. Furthermore, the positive influence of these programs and initiatives can be seen additionally in many aspects of states' internal and external affairs, ranging from state security, innovation and development to the improvement of its' citizens standard of living.*

*At the same time, issues such as intercultural understanding, sustainable development, poverty and inequalities, youth advancement, women's rights, global peace and environmental responsibility are becoming increasingly significant topics within the global community; concurrently these global challenges dominate the agendas of global governance organizations and governments. Successful future state nation branding programs therefore must be established and based on or connected to the actual state support for the community to solve and ease its major challenges. Such a strategy will create and bring crucial and significant benefits and opportunities for Saudi Arabia in the 21st century.*

*“In the globalized world of the 21st century, a country's international image is crucial for developing trade, tourism and investment.”*

*Mark C. Donfried*



14.

***NEW NATION-BRANDING PLAN  
NEEDED FOR ARAB WORLD***

14.05.17

By Mark C. Donfried

***Read the Original Article »***

# NEW NATION-BRANDING PLAN NEEDED FOR ARAB WORLD

by MARK C. DONFRIED

Published by Arab News

MAY 14, 2017

[Read the Original Article »](#)

*It is crucial for the Arab world to put together a committee of the best experts and partners to create programs and initiatives that will promote Arab culture globally. An Arab News poll conducted from March 17-22 proved the negative perception of the Arab world, especially in the US, and the urgent need for new nation-branding initiatives.*

*The poll results were published and announced on May 2 at the Arab Media Forum in Dubai during an Arab News panel discussion on "The Arab Image in the West," which focused on the media's role in addressing the region's perception problem.*

*The panellists — Faisal J. Abbas, Arab News editor in chief; Hadley Gamble, CNBC reporter and anchor; Nathan Tek, US State Department spokesman in the Middle East, and yours truly — agreed that there is an urgent need for Arab countries to launch a new and modern nation-branding plan to correct this image problem and strengthen their relations with the West and beyond.*

*In the last few decades, nation-branding has become crucial for countries interested in expanding their economic, science and trade capabilities globally. Every state seeking to sustainably improve tourism, international trade and foreign investment, and its possibility of getting international credit, can benefit greatly from a positive national reputation. So the success of the state is very much dependent on the success of its national brand.*

*In contrast, a negative reputation hinders tourism, favorable trade conditions and foreign investment, and engenders unwillingness from other countries to cooperate in academic and scientific affairs.*

*Nation-branding programs normally consist of activities such as research, publications, conferences, exhibitions, fairs, academic and scientific exchange and youth programs. These programs, compared to other state budgets such as defense, are only a fraction of the cost, so the return on investment is very high.*

*This is because their positive influence can be seen in many aspects of states' internal and external affairs, ranging from security, innovation and development to citizens' living standard. For example, the mammoth Milan Expo 2015 brought a huge amount of attention to Italy, ranging from almost all world heads of state and hundreds of thousands of visitors, to vast and widespread coverage in international media outlets.*

*Even nation-branding campaigns that include paid advertising, which can be quite expensive, are still inexpensive compared to defense budgets. At the same time, nation-branding campaigns sustainably support stronger relations between countries, decreasing the chances of armed conflict and thereby enabling the gradual reduction of defense budgets year by year.*

*Reallocating even a fraction of the exorbitant defense spending by some states to nation-branding projects would set a positive example that national security can be increased by building and strengthening cultural ties and understanding. For example, serious cultural and economic bridges between the US and Iraq could have made the 2003 war far harder to start.*

*Not only security, trade and tourism, but also other fields such as education and science are dependent on national image. The better a country's brand, the more attractive it will be for students to study there and for researchers to be based there. So more educational and scientific innovation will take place in the country, which will boost the economy.*

*States' dependence on a positive national reputation can be presented in the example that no financial creditor will ever give credit to an entity with a bad name or reputation. All these are just segments of the growing importance and dependency of states on nation-branding.*

*Even non-state actors, such as religious groups or political parties, understand well that their perception among their target audiences is crucial, so they are applying branding strategies to attract new members and supporters. Even Daesh and the Taliban have begun employing advanced propaganda strategies to disseminate their message and promote a certain image to increase their following.*

*The latest Arab News poll indicates that 81 percent of Americans cannot identify the Arab world on a map. This alarming news shows that a significant and comprehensive nation-branding plan should be put into action by Arab countries collectively as well as individually. These programs should be conclusive and use all traditional and modern components, media and strategies of nation-branding and cultural diplomacy.*

*They should involve as many organizations and institutions as possible to immediately attract attention to the rich history, culture and achievements of the Arab world. Those plans should focus initially on the West, starting with the US and Europe, where perhaps the image problem is greatest, then gradually include developing countries from Asia to Latin America.*

*Unfortunately, the traditional methods of applying nation-branding programs have become less and less effective due to the digital developments of the last 20 years, and their effect on the transfer and storage of information. More and more countries and cultural groups have recognized the importance of these developments, and are working relentlessly to promote their national brands beyond their state borders and to foreigners inside those borders.*

*Successful nation-branding programs cannot be imitated. A program that works for one country might not work for another since it has a different history, culture, identity and geopolitical situation. So each nation-branding strategy should be carefully tailor-made for a specific country, and for the specific relationship between that country and another.*

*Nation-branding programs should be initiated by Arab leaders, then implemented in a public-private partnership. A good example of leadership being shown in this field is the UAE, which created a Soft Power Council in April to research the best way the country can implement effective soft power and nation-branding in its foreign policy.*

*It is important that nation-branding programs apply further measures to encourage Arab societies to learn more about their neighbors, because cooperation will be necessary in order to create cultural bridges. Such initiatives, if applied successfully, can result in significant economic, political and strategic gain for Arab nations.*

15.

***THE ISLAMIC WORLD IS  
TOO BIG TO GENERALIZE***

02.05.17

By Frank Kane

[\*\*\*Read the Original Article »\*\*\*](#)

# THE ISLAMIC WORLD IS TOO BIG TO GENERALIZE

by FRANK KANE

MAY 02, 2017

Published by Arab News

[Read the Original Article »](#)

DUBAI: Mark Donfried, founder and director general of the Berlin-based Institute for Cultural Diplomacy (ICD), is not surprised at the comparatively low level of knowledge in the US about the Arab world, as revealed in a recent YouGov/Arab News survey.

*“Between 70 and 80 percent of Americans don’t have passports and so don’t go abroad. Most of the ones who do go to Canada and Mexico, some to Europe, but few of them make it to the Middle East,” he said.*

*The poll, conducted from March 17-21, found that 65 percent of respondents admitted to knowing little about the Arab world, with 30 percent having no interest in understanding the region further. Over three quarters of the respondents said they would not consider traveling to the Arab world, with 39 percent saying the whole region is too dangerous to visit.*

*Donfried said that, while Americans have the best educational and university facilities in the world, they did not really expose themselves to wider news sources, outside US news networks and social media.*

*“I don’t think the sentiment behind ‘Make America Great Again’ is particularly new. The US has always viewed itself as something of an island. But in the past its leaders have worked with its international partners and that isn’t the case anymore,” he said.*

*The US-born Donfried founded the ICD in 2001 and has since made it into one of the biggest non-profit organizations dedicated to the exchange of views between international communities.*

*He is due to speak at an Arab News panel discussion on “The Arab Image in the West,” which is set to be held today, the second and concluding day of the Arab Media Forum in Dubai.*

*Nathan Tek, US State Department spokesman in the Middle East, and Hadley Gamble, a reporter and anchor for CNBC covering the Middle East, Africa and US politics, will also speak on the panel. Faisal J. Abbas, editor in chief of Arab News, will moderate the session.*

*Donfried said it was important for the Arab world to answer three questions in deciding*

*how to evaluate its international image: how it is presented, how it is perceived, and what is the reality?*

*“How do they define identity? It is not just an Arab issue, all countries and peoples have to work out how they define themselves. But they have to answer the question: what does it mean to be an Emirati, or a Qatari?”*

*He warned against generalizations. “There is a tendency to generalize in the US; they talk of ‘Islamic civilization.’ But really the Islamic world is too big to generalize like that... there is a big difference between Muslims in Tunisia, New York City and Indonesia,” he said.*

*“I think it is as wrong to talk of Islamic civilization as it is to generalize about Western civilization,” he added.*

*Exchange and dialogue are essential if there is to be a greater understanding between the US and Arab world. “Both sides just have to get to know as many citizens from other countries as possible, via tourism or exchange programs for students, journalists and anybody interested in other cultures. You cannot overestimate the benefit of education and comparative religious studies in this process.*

*“Once people begin to understand another culture, it makes it difficult for any extremist — a Trump or a Bin Laden — to generalize about other people,” he added.*

*He said that it was not the job of media in the Arab world to persuade others to take a different view. “Arabs should do the best they can to let others know the strengths as well as weaknesses, but I would advise to try not to persuade. There is a reason why we have two ears but only one mouth — we should listen more and talk less.”*

*Donfried said it was difficult to imagine international standards being imposed on Arab media. “It is difficult to impose universal human rights, and I think it would be difficult to impose universal media standards on local media culture. It is hard to come up with one system that suits all. Consumers of media should embrace all inputs — social media, mainstream media and official media — but treat them skeptically.*

*“Even then, as the case of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq showed, it’s difficult to be entirely sure what is going on,” he added.*

16.

***THE MODERN VEHICLE ON  
THE GLOBAL SECURITY ROAD***

25.02.17

By Mark C. Donfried

[\*Read the Original Article »\*](#)

# THE MODERN VEHICLE ON THE GLOBAL SECURITY ROAD

by MARK C. DONFRIED

FEBRUARY 25, 2017

Published by Arab News

[Read the Original Article »](#)

*Over the past five decades, the Munich Security Conference (MSC) has established itself as an important international platform for exchanging views on global security. Yet this year's conference was nothing like those before it. Wolfgang Ischinger, MSC chairman, described it as "the most anticipated" in years, and one with "massive uncertainty." It seems the global security climate is more volatile now than ever since 1945.*

*When considering ongoing instability in Syria and the Middle East, the growing involvement and influence of Russia in the region, Brexit, complex US-EU-Russia relations and the rise of far-right populism, it is painfully obvious that the international status quo has been thrown into flux.*

*For example, even before the conference had begun, German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen announced an extensive rearmament of the armed forces in response to US President Donald Trump's idea to withdraw from NATO if European allies did not issue a significant increase in military budget.*

*As the new US administration seemingly drives Germany toward a massive military build-up by committing to the 2 percent target, significant cuts would have to be made in all areas of social spending. It is almost fair to say then that during the MSC this year, Europe realized the US cannot be relied on alone.*

*Military might — also known as "hard power" — which was exercised intensively in the last century, is not and cannot be the primary, if not the only, tool in achieving global security in the 21st century without causing even greater horrors than humanity witnessed during the two world wars. So what can be?*

*Cultural diplomacy theories and practices can be the answer to our security question, and must be a growing permanent element used to influence global security. It is defined as "a course of actions, which are based on and utilize the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation, promote national interests and beyond."*

*It is noteworthy that cultural diplomacy, a form of "soft power," is still a type of power, in fact a mighty national power as it demonstrates to foreign audiences every characteristic of its culture. Just as importantly, cultural diplomacy can help create an environment in*

*which an action is received by the audience exactly as intended by establishing understanding of foreign cultures.*

*It has the potential to avoid situations in which an action is perceived in a negative light purely due to lack of cultural awareness and appreciation. In the grander scheme of things, cultural diplomacy functions as a vehicle to aid in interpreting intelligence and general information, assembling support abroad and enhancing a nation's stature on the global field, all of which are fundamental factors in establishing national, and therefore global, security.*

*Perhaps Bono, cofounder of the ONE campaign, put it best during the MSC: "Our fate is a shared fate, but which fate will it be?" Global security is a long and bumpy road; hard power is a heavy lorry that requires stopping every other mile. Cultural diplomacy is a bike: Basic yet personal, a vehicle we have long been equipped with, one that glides along the road with fluidity and grace, and that might get us to our destination.*

*"The Munich Security Conference (MSC) has established itself as an important international platform for exchanging views on global security."*

*Mark C. Donfried*

17.

***ARABS AND THE BERLIN ATTACK:  
ONE MONTH LATER***

24.01.17

By Mark C. Donfried

***Read the Original Article »***

# ARABS AND THE BERLIN ATTACK: ONE MONTH LATER

by MARK C. DONFRIED

JANUARY 24, 2017

Published by Arab News

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*On Jan. 19, a 30-day memorial ceremony was held in the German Parliament to reflect on the horrible events of Dec. 19, when a truck was deliberately driven into the Christmas market beside Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church at Breitscheidplatz in Berlin, taking the lives of 12 people and leaving 56 wounded.*

*During the speeches and discussions that took place in the framework of the memorial event in Parliament, and during the many TV interviews, the consequences of the attack appear to be that there is a need for further serious measures to be taken in Germany in order to be sure that such activities will not be repeated.*

*The need for extra security measures that must be immediately executed in full is rational and clear. Nevertheless, the importance of additional special plans, which need to be put in place in order to avoid this type of tragedy from happening again, is also crucial. It is important to take other special measures in the fields of economics, society and culture.*

*Security measures that are taken within a country have limited potential as they are appropriate to a certain degree, but when they are applied in too extreme a way they run the risk of changing the nature of the country into a "security state," and creating significant additional financial burden while posing limitation limitations.*

*Throughout history, one can easily learn that when countries started to increase their military and security activities, it many times ended up resulting in war or other forms of violent conflict both within and between countries.*

*The presence of Muslims, particularly Arab Muslims, in Europe has grown in recent years to an impressive level, and is predicted to rapidly increase in the coming years. Many have either already become European citizens, or are able to legally stay and work in Europe. The number of refugees and asylum-seekers is also increasing in a way that Europe has never seen before.*

*Luckily, the security challenge today is not with big groups of Arab Muslims, but with small numbers of individuals within these communities that can be seen as a risk. We need to remember that most Muslim Arabs are not engaged in violent activity, and are fully integrated as constructive parts of European and Western societies.*

*It is thus important, particularly these days, to keep these communities positively engaged, and not alienate parts of them or go against them. This can be done by taking certain measures and initiatives to come closer to Arab Muslims and build solutions with them. With this in mind, programs involving elements that can economically benefit those communities, and programs promoting further engagement between the Arab community and Europeans, are now more vital than ever. At the same time, programs that will build bridges*

*between Western and Arab countries are important, and will support state efforts to achieve sustainable calm and security.*

*These activities will help take the sting out of the deconstructive ideology and narratives that are being promoted by both sides within and outside Europe, calling for segregation as opposed to bridge-building.*

*The challenge with conducting such programs that are building economic and cultural bridges between groups is primarily financial. Decision-makers often cannot see the immediate benefit or clear result, and so prefer to use their budgets and time on security measures that tend to have clearer definitions and more concrete short-term results.*

*For example, by initiating a military attack on a city, very often it is possible to acquire control over the city or region. Or by installing sophisticated systems of closed-circuit video cameras across cities such as London, one can prove a greater degree of control over crime and the movement of individuals.*

*Another challenge in building cultural and economic bridges is that target audiences are very often segments within communities that are not interested to learn about the "other" group or cooperate with them.*

*For example, within any society or country one can find groups of people that can be considered "city people" and those that can be considered "village people," groups that are more conservative and those that are more socially sensitive, and groups that are more religious and those that are more secular.*

*If all these factors, especially the strong heterogeneity of these communities, are not taken into account, it will be more challenging to achieve better results. Despite the challenges in initiating and conducting these programs, the challenges facing a society that does not conduct such programs will be much bigger, as these issues will simply grow and come back to haunt us in even greater ways in the future.*

*"Cultural diplomacy practices" have a long tradition of using elements of culture in order to build cultural bridges, and should be the first choice of decision-makers and those in positions of power. Now is the time to develop powerful programs and activities to assure greater cultural diplomacy between and within the Arab world and the West.*

*It is time to engage more people in positions of power in the Arab world and Europe in cultural diplomacy programs. It is time for Western societies to apply cultural diplomacy programs in their communities. Cultural diplomacy is no longer an optional activity to be done on the side, but a high-priority strategic vehicle that must be applied immediately and constantly at every level of our societies.*





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# CULTURAL DIPLOMACY ANALECTS

PHONE

+49 (0) 30 2360 7680

OFFICE

*Academy for Cultural Diplomacy  
Soltau Str. 18-22, 13509  
Berlin, Germany*

EMAIL

*info@culturaldiplomacy.org*

WEBSITE

*www.culturaldiplomacy.org*