Forum: General Assembly First Committee

Issue: The question of threats to national stability caused by religious intolerance

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Position: Chair

Introduction

Referring to a country’s ability to protect itself from threat or attack, national security is a must have and ties in closely to national stability. In order to provide a good environment for the population a country must have national stability. Within that, there can be many sub sections. National stability includes order and constancy in all sectors of a national institution.

For instance, in order to be stable, a country’s economic sector must be stable. This is subject to the effect of variables such as inflation, supply shortages, and international exchange rates. The reason that this affects National instability is because a nation’s economy ends up being the backbone to support any other factor. If a country finds itself in a recession, the first thing to be affected will be the domestic market. Although in comparison to other variables of a country this may not seem equally as important it is important to consider the effects that will branch off from a simple economic set back. With a shrinkage in the domestic market, there will be a spike in unemployment rates not included in the NRU (Natural Rate of Unemployment). With this, quality of life is likely to diminish, and thus further the gap between socioeconomic classes in the long run. Additionally, experiencing a loss in the market, companies and businesses will be discouraged to provide goods and services, which may lead to supply shortage in the future. With this, a country may become overly dependent on imports, spending more money acting as leakages of the monetary flow, but not seeing the same returns as injections into the economy.

Moreover, the country must also have political stability. Political stability may be considered a harder issue to address seeing as it deals with human interaction, unlike economic stability which can be addressed almost entirely numerically. There are many things in a country that can affect its political stability, for instance the government system being employed, as well as the populations compliance to abide by it. In the modern age, the most common political structure is based on democratic ideals. However, this also brings a lot of controversy into the discussion seeing as corrupt or injust democracies are very volatile and prone to threats to national stability.
This is where the question of Religious intolerance arises as a threat to national stability. Even in secular states, the presence of religious practices can be considerably prominent. Moreover, there are concentrations of religious groups in certain regions of the world, creating a higher propensity for religious intolerance. As one religious group becomes dominant in a society, others begin to be pushed aside as minorities. The problem with religious intolerance relating to national stability is the safety of the citizens. Religious organizations can be prone to uprising and public backlash if they consider to be oppressed. Thus, the threat of religious oppression is a big one when considering national stability. Additionally, it all ties back to the living conditions of the population. With conflicting religious ideals in a country, it is very likely that groups have internal conflicts, that decrease the feeling of personal security.

Moreover, with a decreased sense of personal security, the population is more likely to be dissatisfied with the government, creating conflict in the political sphere. It is evident that all factors of national stability affect each other, and religion being a big part of many individuals lives, is a variable that can shift conflicts drastically in a short amount of time. Affecting political stability, and possible reflecting economically later on.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**National Security**

A country’s ability to protect itself from threat or attack. All countries rely on their own national security to provide a livable environment for their citizens.

**National Stability**

A country’s ability to remain stable and self sufficient in all sectors of national affairs.

**Secular states**

Where state and church are to be completely separated, thus a government should not yield any bonds to religious organization in a secular state. Secular states are relevant to the issue because problems of religious intolerance can still arise, but it would not be from direct government oppression, instead it would be dependent on the citizens and residents of the nation itself. A religious problem in a secular state is a public affair instead of a political one, which is why it can become harder to handle for governments since they cant directly intervene depending on the circumstance.

**Segregation**
The action of setting someone, or a group of individuals, apart. Most times, these can be due to differences prominent in society. Segregation is most often applied onto minorities, as a form of oppression imposed by the larger percentage of a population.

**Discrimination**

Discrimination is the act of treating an individual or group based on prejudice against them. Similar to segregation, these are based on differences, and most common within minorities. However, discrimination is based off the preliminary requirement of unjust treatment and not exclusion. Discrimination may take the form of hate crimes, but it can also be manifested as offensive comments or assumptions when interacting with someone.

**Hate Crime**

A typically violent crime motivated by prejudice against an individual. This prejudice can be based off race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc. In this issue, a hate crime is relevant because a very prominent cause for the incidents is recurrently based on religious prejudice.

**Background Information**

**Banning of religious practices**

In some cases, authorities hope to control religious contradictions through prevention. This often takes the form of some sort of banning or restrictions on specific religious practices or symbols. Seeing the threat that uprising of religious groups may bring to their country, nations often use banning as a form of first response. Banning can be identified as the primary reaction to fear, and although it can result inefficient in many cases, seems to be the fastest solution to put in place. However, instances like these are also prone to major backlash, especially considering the modern age movements striving towards inclusivity. Banning of religious practices is a common form of religious oppression and the reaction to such an event can threaten national security. However, it is a closed cycle, because the banning of such practices may not be unprovoked, it could result as a response to the threat posed by a religious entity. So it is hard to balance the consequences of a ban in comparison to the target aim to protect a nation.

There are currently many countries implementing bans on religious practices. One of the most well known bans is the ban on face veils. Face veils, ranging from burqas to hijabs, are popularly associated with Islam culture, pertaining to the muslim religion. Because of recent terrorist attacks associated with extremist religious groups, there is a prominent prejudice against the muslim population. This hasn’t come solely from individuals, but even from governments, which responded with bans against the entire religious organization, without recognizing that religion is a form of faith and is not taken to extremist actions by the majority of the population.
The Veil Ban in 2011

France began fighting against demonstration of Muslim religion since 2004, with students in state run schools displaying any sort of religious symbol. In 2011, the government ensued an official ban on face veils, most commonly known as burqas, stating that these were not welcome in their country. There was a large wave of backlash, claiming discrimination and cultural segregation. The reason this ban was put into place is commonly speculated to be the rise in terrorist attacks in that time, at the peak of ISIS terror. ISIS’ looming threat on European countries as became well known became a threat to national stability. The government’s response was to prevent this by banning displays of religion. However, despite the backlash and claims of discrimination, many European nations followed in France’s footsteps and implemented the ban themselves.

In turn, many nations followed in the footsteps of the French. The full face veil was banned in Chad in 2015, which was said to be a response to suicide bombings of terrorist organizations. Niger is currently also implementing the full face veil, after being attacked by Boko Haram. Additionally, Niger is considering a further ban on the hijab and headscarf. The Netherlands is also currently implementing a full veil ban.

If these bans are all in response to violent threats, why do they receive so much backlash? Are they truly effective? The problem with these bans is that they are implemented as a response to violent threats on the most part. But this takes into account a generalization of a whole demographic group based on their religious beliefs. If a ban like this were to be imposed on a race or ethnicity, it would be considered discrimination. However, religious middle ground is still undebated, and boundaries have not been set firmly yet. Are bans based on prejudice more effective than they are harmful?

Freedom of Conscience

Along with many national constitutions, comes a clause stating that citizens are entitled to freedom of conscience. Especially in secular states, the clause may even more specifically state freedom of conscience and religion. Well, what does a clause like this mean? What classifies an individual as having freedom of conscience and religion? Clauses stating ‘freedom of religion’ are more straightforward than most. It implies that an individual cannot be judged or convicted based on faith, and that any religious following, thought, or practice, is to be accepted by the state as well as by those surrounding them. In a more literal sense, it aims for disregard of religious belief in any political manner, and that a Christian, a Jew, and a Muslim can all be in a room at the same time and should be considered equal by all means.

So how does this differ from freedom of conscience? In essence, they outline the same ideals, but in countries where only freedom of conscience is part of the constitution, religious practice may still be prosecuted if necessary. Fundamentally, these differ because freedom of conscience relied on moral obligations, and behaviour based on personal and individual thought. However, freedom of religion, is based on the practice of ideals set by a third party organization, which some states may consider a threat to their political sovereignty, as it is bringing on another figure of authority that can be seen as a priority for individuals.

Hate Crimes
As defined in the key terms section, a hate crime is an act of violence driven by prejudice. According to British statistics as stated by the BBC, most hate crimes are against Muslim individuals, thus proving that hate crimes are largely driven by differences in religion. Moreover, this isn’t the case only in England, but many countries in the world follow this same pattern.

Hate crimes affect National security in a more discrete scale. Part of National security has to do with safety statistics, and with how safe an individual feels in their own home. This is all tied to personal security, an important branch that affects the lifestyle of a nation’s population. Because hate crimes are targeted at specific groups, even scarce, they can bring mass effect onto the community. Hate crimes often spread warning bells to other individuals in a minority, which can cause fear or histeria. Only by being part of a certain religious group, and individual can be considered a target for a hate crime, so it is prominent that they will feel unsafe in their country.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Indonesia

Indonesia’s population is overwhelmingly Muslim, counting with many minorities of groups having different interpretations of Islam. Due to these differences, the religious climate in Indonesia has remained tense for many years now, but escalated gaining international attention in 2016. The religious tension in Indonesia was brought to the attention of the public eye when a political candidate was accused of using the Quranic verses to influence voting. Moreover, Indonesia’s education system is known to be influenced by Saudi Arabia, which donates facilities and funds to improve the lifestyle of the Indonesian population, but ends up affecting the social climate, especially through the implementation of religious schools, which contributes to the homogenization of the interpretation of Islamic practices. However, the Indonesian government remains institutionally secular, which is why government action towards these conflicts has been limited.

France

France has become a major party in the question of religious intolerance following the veil ban in 2011. After this event, France has received backlash from the international community in support of religious individuals living in France, but also support from others who believe that this ban helps ensure safety. Being one of the first countries to implement a veil ban, France brought forth a new controversial
discussion, sparking debate on efficient population control and the ethics behind limiting religious practices.

**United States of America**

The united states in a secular state, but with a recent change of administration, has been recently involved in debates involving religious bias. In 2017, the United States passed a travel ban, which was targeted mainly at muslim majority countries, with the exception of Venezuela and North Korea, which are speculated to have been placed under the ban due to institutional political differences. The muslim majority countries affected by this ban are Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen. This ban came into effect after trump stated more than once in his presidential campaign that he would ban all muslims from entering the country, which is why this travel ban is often refered to as the “muslim ban” in media outlets. However, american politicians have spoken against this ban and how it “goes against the country’s moral and philosophical foundation” as stated by House Judiciary Chairman Jerry Nadler.

**Timeline of Events**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>The ku klux klan re emerges, now preaching anti-semitism and anti-catholic ideals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 1, 1939</td>
<td>Marks the begining of world war II, where minorities were ostrasized and prosecuted, many of which revolved around the jewish population in nazi germany.</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 2, 1945</td>
<td>End of World War II</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>John F kennedy, the first catholic president of the USA, was elected.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Demonstrating the ability to include individuals of different religions in secular states.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 1967</td>
<td>The Roman Catholic church issues a decree of religious freedom. (dignitatis humanae)</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 1967</td>
<td>The six day war: a war between Israel and the neighboring Egyptian States to determine possession of the Gaza Strip, which was gained by Israel at the end of the war.</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 11, 2001</td>
<td>Al’Quaedea, this was one of the first mass events that pointed and insighted a biased prejudice against a religious group based on the actions of extremists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2002</td>
<td>The Catholic Church abuse scandal brought forth questions upon many religious entities, and speculations on the nature of true faith.</td>
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2009 USA congress passes a Hate Crime Prevention Act.
March 2011 UN resolution on religious intolerance is adopted by consensus

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- UN resolution 16/18

This resolution outlines a global framework to combat religious intolerance in the form of stigmatisation, discrimination, and acts of violence. The resolution was adopted in March 2011.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Most of the solutions to the ‘threat of religion’ on national stability comes in the form of controversial policies such as the travel bans or veil bans discussed in the general overview. This brings in another branch of the issue, it is not the threat of religion towards a country, but the threat of intolerance itself. One of the most common attempts to solve issues of religious intolerance is legal framework regarding hate crimes. First established in the USA in 1968, hate crimes were legally defined and deemed against the law. Regardless of enforcement difficulties and time lags of the policy, this was the first step to essentially outlawing religious intolerance, along with other types of discrimination.

Possible Solutions

So how should countries effectively tackle the threat of national instability posed by religious intolerance? First off, it would have to depend on the standpoint of the nation, preferably the easiest way to avoid religious intolerance is to effectively employ freedom of religion in all states. The first step leading up to such a consensus would be to have all states be secular, thus no institutional religious ties would affect policy making, decreasing propensity of religious bias. However, this would incite a debate regarding the sovereignty of religious states.

The first step towards diminishing religious intolerance should be framed within the education system. If populations are properly educated on religious practices, they are less likely to assume and form prejudice based on bias as is dictated in mass media. Moreover, in the long run, the media wouldn’t rely on circulating biased stories seeing as is would be a common consensus to understand, accept, and tolerate different religions in common environments.

Bibliography


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