

# Trust: The Ultimate Concern

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On April 13, 2023, Norway expelled 15 Russian diplomats for alleged espionage, as reported by multiple news sources, including the BBC. About two weeks earlier, US journalist Evan Gershkovich was arrested in Russia on espionage charges. Before that incident, Iran had sentenced a Belgian aid worker to 40 years in prison on espionage charges as was reported by Reuters on January 10, 2023.

Espionage is the act of gathering secret or confidential information from a government or organization without authorization, typically by covert methods. Every country considers espionage a serious offense and imposes severe penalties, including imprisonment and fines.

Why do countries resort to espionage? Why don't they just ask the country concerned for the information they are looking for? Imagine this scenario: Country A asks Country B, "Please let us know how many hypersonic missiles you have acquired secretly". Country B answers, "We have stockpiled only 20 hypersonic missiles. Thanks for asking." See! It's so easy, there is no need for espionage! You can always ask for the information directly and get the answer. But wait, what's the guarantee that Country B has given the right information? Maybe it has actually 100 hypersonic missiles in its possession, or maybe it doesn't have any at all, it is just making it up to frighten Country A and gain some bargaining power over it. How can Country A trust Country B? Yes, trust is the ultimate concern in building understanding and relationships. When trust is absent, there is skepticism, suspicion, and doubt. If governments could trust each other, there wouldn't be any need for espionage; there wouldn't be any hostility between nations.

There is a famous quote from James Jesus Angleton. Angleton was the chief of the Counterintelligence Staff of the CIA from 1954 to 1975. The quote is, "Deception is a state of mind and the mind of the state." We can define deception as the act of deliberately misleading or manipulating people or organizations

by presenting false information, hiding the truth, twisting the facts, etc. in order to influence their beliefs or behavior. Angleton had seen a lot of government activities and behaviors in the cold war period so his words could be accepted as authentic. If deception is the mind of the state, then there cannot be trust among the governments. When trust is broken through deception, it can be difficult to repair it and it can have long-term effects on relationships and interactions between the governments concerned. If governments adopt and maintain consistent, transparent, and ethical policies towards each other and do not indulge in clandestine activities, espionage, decep-

tion, etc. then they can eventually build trust and bring peace on earth. The cost of distrust and suspicion among governments is huge. Every year countries are spending billions of dollars on military build-up, arms race, weapons development, etc. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) estimated the global military expenditure in 2022 as \$2.24 trillion. That's a staggering amount!

Trust is also essential at individual levels. Without trust relationships and bonding cannot grow among individuals. Trust is fundamental to human relationships and interactions. It stimulates communication and cooperation

and establishes mutual respect and understanding. One has to possess certain virtues like reliability, integrity, and honesty to attain trust. Trust is a prerequisite for friendship.

The importance of trust in conjugal life can't be overemphasized. Trust brings conjugal partners closer to each other and strengthens love, empathy, and respect between them. Couples with mutual trust live a healthy and fulfilling conjugal life. But if they don't trust each other or the trust is broken by one of them, their relationship will be fraught with conflicts and confrontations, and it will fall apart and eventually end. Or, they may continue to live together for the sake of their

and success. Warren Bennis, who was a Professor at the University of Southern California and an Organizational Consultant once said, "Trust is the lubrication that makes it possible for organizations to work." Indeed, mutual trust among employees and between bosses and subordinates can create a working environment conducive to higher productivity, creativity, and growth. Trust between management and employees can make employees loyal and dedicated to the organization.

If there is more than one human in some place, trust needs to be there. The presence of trust fosters mutual understanding, respect, peace, and harmony. Trust among people, societies, and nations can "Make our earth an Eden, Like the heaven above," borrowing the words of American poet Julia A. Carney, from her famous poem "The Little Things".

Families and societies cannot become truly functional, and people cannot live in peace and harmony and flourish in excellence without mutual trust. Trust needs to be promoted everywhere. The UN observes many international days to educate and create awareness among the general public and mobilize political will on various issues of concern and global problems. There are days like International Day of Human Fraternity, International Day of Living Together in Peace, and International Day of Friendship. In fact, the United Nations currently observes 173 such days in a year. However, there is no International Day of Trust on the list. In 2019, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring 2021 as the International Year of Peace and Trust to promote peace and trust among nations. That was a one-off observance with partial emphasis on trust. Given the significance, value, and importance of trust in the personal, family, societal, and national contexts, isn't it both pertinent and imperative that there should be an International Day of Trust?

*The writer is a former Corporate Professional and Academic*

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