

# **RSOG Seminar**

## **Large Group Psychology and Political Leaders**

with

**Emeritus Professor Vamik D. Volkan**

- When** : 8 September 2015  
**Where** : Razak School of Government  
**Speakers** : Emeritus Professor Vamik D. Volkan

### **About the Seminar**

In this seminar, Professor Volkan discusses his findings based on his observation and research on the various patterns and psychology that influence a person's sense of belonging, belief and ideology. In his study, he noted that existing conditions and external environment influence children to be part of a large group of belongingness. Major events that took place in a country or continent such as war and terrorism, will influence a person's perception of their environment and inevitably lead to support for their leader, to safeguard their large-group. With reference to historical events and political leaders, this seminar presents an interesting perspective on what influences the identity of a person and their perception of other cultures, religion and nations. It delves on the intricate human relations since the existence of mankind and how it has developed over the years.

### **Summary**

Professor Volkan is an expert on psychology and has travelled the world to study about the patterns of human behaviour that influence the thinking and emotions of a person through research and observation. In this seminar, he spoke extensively about his findings and the key concepts that relates to his perspective on Large-Group Identity. He explained that a traumatic incident such as war, conflicts or poverty will influence the mental representation of a group and it will evolve as a significant large-group marker. Large-Group Psychology involves shared characteristics, beliefs, and values among group members.

He added that the Large-Group Psychology rallies behind their leader. If the leader cannot maintain basic trust, severe splits and fragmentation occur within the large group. The large group's shared morality or belief system becomes increasingly absolutist punitive toward those perceived to be in conflict with it.

The large-group regression include the fact that the large group tend to focus on minor differences between itself and enemy groups. The physical border between nations becomes the boundary of the large-group's identity. For example the tension and conflict between Israel and Palestine in the Middle East. On the other hand, the large-group progression include behavioural traits that bind the group members. Family, clan and professional ties become more important in daily life that ties with political or religious ideologies and the personality of the political leader. One of the important element include raising new generations of children with good "basic trust" and maintaining existing traditional basic structures becomes possible.

In conclusion, Professor Volkan spoke about two types of leader which is the Transformational and Transactional Leader. A transformational leader responds to fundamental human needs and wants, hopes and expectations. A transactional leader thrives upon bargaining, manipulating, accommodating and compromising within a given system.

### **Issues Raises**

- Existing conditions in the environment will influence the behaviour and thinking of children which inevitably develop their large group identity.
- Some chosen trauma are difficult to connect because they are not connected to one well-recognised historical event.
- Important events that can influence a person's psychology include independence, trauma at the hands of another person/country, ousting of a dictator and identity fragmentation.
- South and North Koreans are essentially of the same race but generally divided into two Large Group Identities. In adulthood, it is difficult to develop and replace an existing identity. After the cold war, the people of South and North Korea have been influenced by the respective ideology that has been indoctrinate in them for many generations. Hence for them to change perception will require more time and effort.

- The speed and reach of social media make them influential in shaping Large Group Psychology.
- When two countries are at war, it is important for both sides to select a representative to meet regularly to sort out contradicting issues – a form of mediation.

### **About the Speaker**

Emeritus Professor Vam?k D. Volkan is a Turkish Cypriot Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, the Senior Erik Erikson Scholar at the Erikson Institute of Education and Research of the Austen Riggs Centre, Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and an Emeritus Training and Supervising Analyst at the Washington Psychoanalytic Institute, Washington, D.C. He is the President of International Dialogue Initiative (IDI). For nearly three decades, Volkan has led interdisciplinary teams to various trouble spots around the world and has brought high-level "enemy" representatives together for years-long unofficial dialogues. His work in the field has resulted in his developing new theories about large-group behaviour in times of peace and war.

### **Contact**

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