

## U.S.–EU Partnership and the Muslim World: How Transatlantic Cooperation Will Enhance Engagement

Emile Nakhleh

Engaging the Muslim world through tangible initiatives that affect people’s daily lives is a global challenge and therefore must be addressed through global partnerships. Because of expertise, experience, and capacity across government, the transatlantic community, including NATO and EU countries, provides a logical context for such partnerships. Engaging mainstream Muslim communities not only empowers these groups to lift their societies upward; it also serves the national interest of the countries involved. As transatlantic partnerships are forged, they are likely to face several key challenges, including capacity building across government; identifying the right groups to engage with; specific initiatives to pursue; and resolving foreign policy differences among the partnering states.

*“I have come here to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world; one based upon mutual interest and mutual respect; and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive, and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap, and share common principles—principles of justice and progress; tolerance and the dignity of all human beings.”*

—President Barack Obama, June 4, 2009.<sup>1</sup>

*“Fortunately, the United States is in a position to engage credible and legitimate indigenous groups that are doing good work based on their religious beliefs. These include women’s organizations, civil society associations, professional organizations, religious political parties, clerical centers, environmental groups, educational institutions, and grade school and high school teacher groups. The United States must continue to find ways to engage these groups constructively...Engaging religious communities from below on a wide range of issues, some of which are apolitical, will in the aggregate make members of those communities more active citizens in their own societies.”*

—The Chicago Council on Global Affairs,  
*Engaging Religious Communities Abroad: A New Imperative for U.S. Foreign Policy.*<sup>2</sup>

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*Emile Nakhleh served as a senior intelligence service officer and director of the Political Islam Strategic Analysis Program at the Central Intelligence Agency until his retirement in 2006. Prior to joining the CIA, Dr. Nakhleh was professor and department chair at Mount St. Mary’s University, a senior Fulbright research scholar in Bahrain and Jerusalem, and a Woodrow Wilson guest scholar. He is a lifetime member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the author of *A Necessary Engagement: Reinventing America’s Relations with the Muslim World* (2009).*

The two quotes above recognize that religious communities have emerged all over the world as active participants in public policy in their societies and that if the United States and other Western countries plan to pursue initiatives to help improve those societies, they must engage religious communities. The president's Cairo speech went a step further than that premise by calling for a new beginning in relations with the Muslim world based on the principles of justice and mutual trust. As Obama and his senior counterterrorism advisor, John Brennan, have said before and since the Christmas Day 2009 and the Times Square 2010 failed terrorist plots, U.S. national interest dictates that the United States engage broader segments of Muslim societies in an effort to delegitimize the radical paradigm and undercut the extremist message of al Qaeda and its regional affiliates. Such engagement should involve Muslim communities and centers in many areas that are not political—for example, energy, entrepreneurship, education, and health—and in the aggregate will contribute to the improvement of society as a whole. The proposed engagement strategy is neither designed to privilege one group over another nor to promote a specific political agenda, though some groups may unintentionally become more empowered in their respective areas.

The paper also recognizes that foreign policy differences exist between the governments of Western countries—particularly the United States—and indigenous groups across Muslim countries. These policy differences, however, should not prevent partners from engaging on non-political issues in a way that will result in improvements to education, job creation, and health and personal security. A key component of this argument is that engagement is primarily done by the private sector—nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), civil society groups, and social advocacy movements—with minimal direct help or participation from governments.

The phrase “Muslim world” is used in this paper as a shorthand description of many diverse Muslim societies—there is no monolithic “Muslim world,” a “Muslim culture,” a “Muslim commu-

nity,” or a “Muslim view” of nearly any issue. Cultural experiences and historical narratives of Indonesia, for example, are different from those of Egypt, Morocco, or Uzbekistan. Therefore, the proposed engagement strategies and programs will by necessity be tailored to different societies and target audiences.

The paper argues that the challenge of empowering indigenous Muslim communities is global and therefore must be addressed through global partnerships. The focus at this stage is to expand U.S.–European cooperation and integrate a few thoughtfully selected Muslim countries in the process. Because of their experience and expertise, European NGOs and civil society institutions can potentially be strong partners with their American counterparts in engaging Muslim communities. The presence of politically and socially active Muslim minorities in European countries renders European involvement in the process both logical and necessary. At least three factors underpin the argument for a transatlantic partnership. First, Europe's Muslim populations hail from different countries, regions, and cultures. Such cultural diversity should serve European Muslims and NGOs well in their contacts with Muslim communities around the world. Second, EU countries have a long-established civilian capacity across governments and civil society institutions, which helps legitimize their involvement in community projects in the eyes of their potential Muslim community partners. Third, European global NGOs do not bear the brunt of negative perceptions that many Muslims have of U.S. foreign policy and military operations in Muslim lands. Involving Europe's Muslims in global engagement would parallel the role of American Muslims, whose role in the process has continued to increase. The recent appointment of Rashad Hussain, an American Muslim attorney, as special envoy to the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) is but one example of American Muslims' involvement in engaging Muslim communities abroad.

The surplus civilian capacity and the entrepreneurial tradition that exist in the EU allow European countries to take a whole of government approach

toward engagement. The United States, on the other hand, is still in the process of expanding its civilian capacity through the involvement of numerous government departments in Muslim world engagement under the strategic direction of the National Security Council. Traditionally, the U.S. Agency for International Development and the U.S. State Department have been the main—and often sole—players in American global developmental projects. But, building an approach that involves the whole government would mean that other cabinet-level departments, such as Commerce, Education, Energy, Labor, and Justice, could positively contribute to developmental projects on issues ranging from education to micro-investment, entrepreneurship, energy, and good governance.

The resurgence of Islamization and the consequent spread of radicalization in recent decades not only in Muslim majority but also Muslim minority countries, including Western Europe, make it imperative that mainstream religious groups be involved in reforming their societies and improving the quality of life for Muslim communities. Beyond the transatlantic partnership, engagement could also involve modernizing Muslim countries such as Indonesia and Turkey, two of the largest Muslim democracies. European NGOs and civil society institutions have had ongoing contacts with Turkey as a member of NATO and as an aspirant to EU membership. Dutch and other NGOs also have experience working with Indonesian Islamic NGOs. Accordingly, the United States and Europe could engage these two large Muslim countries, known for their relatively tolerant views on Islam and on relations between Muslim societies and the West, and encourage them to serve as examples for the greater Muslim world.

## Transatlantic Partnership on Engagement

The EU and its many NGOs have a long history of experience in implementing development projects with Muslim countries, institutions, and NGOs, particularly in the Middle East, the Mediterranean basin, and Africa.<sup>3</sup> As a component of transatlan-

tic cooperation, Muslim communities will likely welcome active European participation in engagement as distinct from U.S. development efforts, which they often perceive to be an extension of U.S. counterterrorism policy. Nor will European engagement be viewed, as many U.S. efforts have been, as a quick fix to win the “hearts and minds” of Muslims. Indeed, many Muslim groups have had relatively positive experiences working with European NGOs for the betterment of their societies. These successes should motivate American organizations, working in cooperation with or independently from the U.S. government, to engage their European counterparts as partners in engagement efforts in order to gain legitimacy in the eyes of Muslim communities. As transatlantic NGOs proceed with implementing some of the principles enunciated by Obama in his Cairo speech, they will have to find ways to convince reluctant Muslim regimes that their security will be enhanced, not undermined, in the long run by the empowerment of civil society institutions and nonstate actors in their societies—even if it encourages democratic dissent. If people in a particular country have the right to choose their government freely, they will be more invested in social peace and political stability, which in the long run will likely reduce the tensions between state and society. Although some authoritarian regimes might object to such a broad effort by the United States and the EU, policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic, together with the few partnering Islamic states, will have to find ways to convince skeptical regimes that engaging their nongovernmental institutions does not promote a specific political ideology or undermine the country’s stability.

Empowering civil society from below through programs that encourage entrepreneurship and improve access to basic needs like clean water, food, education, and healthcare is the first step in the process of building a participatory culture conducive to good governance, the rule of law, and freedoms of expression, association, and religion. Additionally, western and other NGOs could find common ground with Islamic parties and begin to engage with their legislative representatives. To be

credible and accepted, the engagement of Muslim communities cannot exclude Islamic parties and movements in those societies where they garner broad public support. In fact, European NGOs already maintain relations with several Islamist political parties, including Hamas and Hezbollah, despite the pariah status of these two parties under U.S. law. American and European policymakers will have to demonstrate to their respective citizens and to the global community that engaging Muslim communities serves the national interests of Western and Muslim countries alike; that the process might not show results for several years; and that it requires deep expertise and resources. Long-term engagement, if done smartly, selectively, and consistently, will help erode violent extremism and discredit the recruiters of suicide bombers and the preachers of hate and terrorism.

A key challenge facing transatlantic cooperation is that some European global NGOs might be reticent to collaborate with U.S.-Muslim world engagement initiatives. They may likely assert that because of the low standing of the United States in many Muslim countries, partnering with the United States might taint their relations with Arab and Muslim regimes, undermine their status, and even threaten their physical presence in those societies. A review of the record of European engagement, however, shows that the European approach has not adequately responded to the realities on the ground, nor have European NGOs been successful in eradicating the massive socioeconomic problems that plague those societies. European initiatives to engage political Islam have been disparate and “vary widely based on individual states’ interests,” according to a 2010 Friedrich Ebert Stiftung report titled “Strategies for Engaging Political Islam.”<sup>4</sup> The report outlines how states with relatively large Muslim populations, such as Germany and the United Kingdom, have taken the lead on this issue. The track record of European efforts, however, indicates that much of the European rhetoric on empowering moderate Muslim groups, organizations, and political parties has not yet been translated into tangible global engagement initiatives beyond their territorial bor-

ders. Addressing the pressing social and economic realities as they are defined by credible indigenous communities and civil society institutions, including Islamic political parties and movements, would be best served through a transatlantic partnership and a strengthened U.S.–EU civilian capacity. Joining European expertise with the burgeoning U.S. approach to engagement would be productive and would serve the mutual self-interests of Europe and the United States. A move away from regimes to “communities,” as Obama envisioned in Cairo, would help empower those indigenous communities, which in turn could propel Muslim societies toward a better quality of life. In the long run, this comprehensive approach has the potential to generate healthier relations between the Muslim world and the transatlantic community.

## Arguments for Engagement

The central argument in this paper is that transatlantic engagement of Muslim communities would: 1) serve the national interests of the countries involved; 2) give credible mainstream Islamic organizations a stake in the future of their societies; and 3) empower mainstream Muslims to face down the narrow, intolerant worldview of extremists and offer a more inclusive vision as an alternative. An effective global strategy of engagement must, by necessity, involve a partnership between European and American NGOs, with the support of or alongside their respective governments, as well as involve Muslim communities worldwide. Muslim governments and regimes that accept the value of such engagement initiatives and are willing to be part of the process could play a positive role in empowering their indigenous civil society institutions to become more active players in the development of their societies. As a first step, these groups could be called upon to help define their immediate needs and the most efficient approach to such needs—whether in education, energy resources, science and technology, or small investment projects.

Engaging Muslim communities is part of a broader strategy of engagement with religious organizations and groups. According to The Chicago

Council on Global Affairs Task Force report, *Engaging Religious Communities Abroad: A New Imperative for U.S. Foreign Policy*, there has been significant growth in the number and influence of religious actors all over the world. Religious groups worldwide are starting, or influential in, women's organizations, civil society associations, professional organizations, environmental groups, educational institutions, political parties and clerical centers. These religious groups—many of which are indigenous, credible, and influential—are already involved in a myriad of activities and institutions at the local level that touch peoples' daily lives, including schools, hospitals, relief programs, and social services. According to the Chicago Council report, "Religion should not be viewed only as a problem, but also as a source of creativity, inspiration, and commitment to human flourishing that can and often does provide enormous opportunities."<sup>5</sup> The report identifies a wide range of activities through which engagement could be undertaken: in education ("to enhance the teaching of computer technology, math, and the sciences"); in medicine ("to advance public health, hygiene, and the reduction and elimination of diseases"); in energy ("to increase the availability of clean water and combat diseases that are associated with polluted water"); in democracy promotion ("to enhance the growth of a democratic culture"); and in law ("to advance the rule of law and strengthen an independent judiciary").<sup>6</sup> European and American educators, medical experts, environmental scientists, legal professionals, and other specialists could be recruited through NGOs to work with their counterparts in Muslim countries to advance the strategic objectives of engagement.

The bottom line argument for engagement is that the fight against terrorism and extremism cannot be won by narrow counterterrorism policies alone. To undermine the extremist ideology, the proposed U.S.–EU approach must encompass economic development and promote job creation, modern employment-based education, economic growth, and community-based investment projects.

## Recent Developments Driving Engagement

Many important recent developments in the Muslim world have heightened the need to engage Muslim communities. First, in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, and in response to growing internal demands for economic, educational, political, and social justice in Muslim societies, numerous Islamic political parties and movements have become more active in the political process through elections. This "Islamization" of politics has been borne out at all levels of governance, in many different parts of the world.

Second, religious-nationalist ideology is driving Islamic politics at the state level in most Muslim states. In fact, religion at the local level has become an ideological force motivating action by, and defining interests of, states and nonstate actors. The weakening of al Qaeda and its failure to dissuade Islamic political movements from participating in "man-made" national elections have inadvertently increased the influence of national Islamic political parties as the most credible local political institutions.

Third, global political religious trends have been driven largely by the failure of secular nationalist ideologies to sustain public support, the increase of demographic and economic stresses, the advent of globalization and the communications revolution, the existence of entrenched authoritarianism in many Muslim countries, and a weak identification with the state. Religions and religious affiliation have become drivers of political processes globally, affecting Brazil, India, Nigeria, Russia, and Turkey to name a few.

Fourth, because of diminishing regime legitimacy and a weak identification with the state, Islam and local Islamic institutions have become an identity anchor for millions of Muslims. Religious programs broadcast on global satellite television networks are able to carry the "sacred word" from Mecca and other religious centers of Islam to the most remote villages in West Africa, Central Asia, the Indus Valley, and Western China.

Fifth, Islamic political religious activism is highly diverse and complex, and espouses varied historical narratives. Such diversity—cultural, demographic, economic, historical, political, and religious—dictates that before transatlantic engagement initiatives get underway, Western actors must understand the diverse narratives driving religious groups, their indigenous, country-specific agendas, and their behavior in the political arena. Above all, American and European NGOs must also collaborate with local groups in order to identify the socioeconomic needs of their communities and explore practical ways to address such needs.

Sixth, most mainstream Islamic political parties are territorially focused and committed to an indigenous agenda and do not share the global jihadist ideology of al Qaeda and its affiliates. The strategic goal of their political activism and struggle is primarily to liberate their territory from occupation—as in Palestine, for example—or to gain territorial autonomy from the central government—as in China and the Philippines—in order to safeguard the economic, political, and security status of their people. In fact, Islamic political parties and movements—including the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Palestinian Hamas, the Moroccan Justice and Development Party, among others—were severely criticized by al Qaeda’s deputy leader Ayman al Zawahiri for participating in national elections.<sup>7</sup> They have openly and forcefully rejected al Qaeda’s criticism and pursued active participation in national elections.

Seventh, Islamic parties’ disagreements with the United States and other Western powers in recent years have been driven by specific policies, not by an aversion to the fundamental values inherent to a Western conception of good governance. Public opinion polls have clearly shown that majorities of Muslims endorse fair and free elections, transparent and accountable government, a free press, an independent judiciary, and the rule of law.<sup>8</sup>

Eighth, mainstream Islamic political parties have fought the rise of the new Salafi ideology because of its conservative, intolerant, and exclusivist bent. This Salafi ideology is grounded

in a narrow reading of religious texts, preaches an extremist version of Wahhabi Islam, and calls for the establishment of a strict version of Islamic law that separates the sexes, restricts women’s participation in business culture and education, and imposes a rigid moral code on society. Engaging mainstream political parties will likely empower them to fight the rising extremist Salafi trend in Muslim societies in Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, and elsewhere. The bloody conflict between Hamas and the Salafi Jund Ansar Allah group in Gaza in August 2009, which occurred during the attack on the Ibn Taymiyya mosque in Rafah and the killing of the Salafi leader Shaykh Abu Mousa, illustrates the threat that mainstream Islamic parties across the Middle East are facing from the rise of the Salafi trend.

Finally, as more and more Islamic groups and activists question the arguments of al Qaeda and its radical affiliates, internal debates among Muslims have become more energized and more public. These debates air frequently on Islamic blogs and in both print and electronic media. The debates have focused on at least four themes: 1) the future vision of Islam that Muslims should pursue and whether such a vision should be limited to the moral or normative dictates of the faith, or if it should be expanded to the political and social realm; 2) whether Islamic political parties should continue to participate in the political process through elections even under regimes that actively undermine the democratic process, or whether they should reject politics and go back to their core mission of *da’wa*, or proselytization; 3) whether Islamic political parties, which have traditionally been committed to the implementation of *sharia* or Islamic law, can equally have a long-term commitment to democracy and pluralism as the terms are understood in the West and other parts of the world; and 4) whether Islamic groups can provide for the economic wellbeing of their constituents, especially the unemployed, alienated, and inadequately educated youth.

## Engagement and Islamic Law: Pragmatism and Social Justice

Proposals to engage Islamic political parties as indigenous organizations in Muslim societies have generated questions about whether Islamic political parties that espouse *sharia* in their charters could be credible engagement partners, and whether they could equally have a long-term commitment to democracy and pluralism as the terms are understood in secular societies. A common question is whether the commitment of these parties to democracy and gradual political reform is a short-term tactic to get to power or a long-term strategy to effect political change through the electoral process. For the most part, nationalist Islamic parties are territorially focused and committed to a pragmatic political and social agenda and do not share the global jihadist ideology of al Qaeda and its affiliates. Neither do they adhere to a purist and restrictive definition of the role of Islamic law in society. The strategic goal of their political activism and struggle is to liberate their territory from occupation, to gain territorial autonomy, or to safeguard the economic, political, and security circumstances of their people.

Since the rise of political Islam over the past few decades, *sharia* has been invoked by mainstream Islamic activists, political parties and movements, nonstate actors and civil society institutions, televangelists and satellite television preachers, Wahhabi proselytizers, Islamic NGOs, Islamic universities, and Muslim leaders. Additionally, radical and terrorist organizations, such as al Qaeda, Jama'a Islamiyya, Hizb al Tahrir, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan have drawn heavily upon *sharia* to justify their activities. Over these years several Islamic regimes came into being in the name of *sharia*, including two Shia states—the Islamic Republic of Iran and the post-Saddam Iraq—and three Sunni regimes lasting several years each—Sudan from 1983-1989 (and again later in the north), the Taliban in Afghanistan from 1994-2001, and Somalia at different points throughout this decade.

Generally, realization of *sharia* has evolved in recent years along two broad paths—a tolerant mainstream path and a radical violent path, each of which breaks down into two more strands. The first path encompasses some regimes, governments, “establishment” Islam, Islamic groups and political parties working to change their political societies from within, primarily via lawful means. Regimes, especially in the Arab world and parts of South Asia, use *sharia* to bolster their legitimacy and call on their clerical leadership to endorse their role as Muslim leaders and to preach against substantial popular challenges to their regimes. In their view, political dissent causes domestic dissension (*fitna*) and therefore should not be tolerated. Other Muslim regimes, especially in Turkey, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Balkans for the most part adhere to a pragmatic mixture of secular political ideology and religion that is managed from the top. These regimes do use *sharia* selectively, in order to energize a political base or differentiate themselves from other, “secular,” groups.

Islamic groups within these societies use *sharia* to demand economic, political, and social justice; a transparent and accountable government; elimination of corruption and repression from the regime; and the right to participate in the political process through open and free elections. Most Islamic groups advance indigenous agendas that advocate better education, economic growth, job creation, and freedoms of expression and political association. Since anti-regime political parties in many Arab and Muslim states are not allowed to organize freely, the mosque becomes the organizing vehicle for many Islamic groups. Conflict frequently occurs between regimes and grassroots Islamic movements because regimes have maintained an authoritarian form of government where dissent, religious or secular, is not possible. The discussion of *sharia* outside the Muslim world might appear academic and somewhat esoteric, but for Muslims the discussion is a crucial one. It has implications for the future of democracy, state-society relations, the ability to dissent, gender equality, the general quality of life for average Muslims, relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, the life of

Muslims in non-Muslim societies, conflict and conflict resolution, and the proliferation of *jihad* and terrorism. Most debates within Muslim communities today are not between secularism and Islam or disbelief and piety. Rather, the debates focus on how Muslim states and societies can democratize their governments in the context of Islamic law and practice and in accordance with the *ulama's* interpretation of what is permissible and what is forbidden under *sharia*.

In this context, Indonesia and Turkey can serve as examples. Both have shown that Islam and Western notions of democracy and good governance can be compatible. Indonesia has the Muslim world's two largest Islamic NGOs, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama. These two NGOs have focused on societal issues and have adopted an ideologically mainstream position on Islam and society. Turkey's resurgence as a key player in the Middle East could be a positive factor in promoting tolerance and moderation in Arab and Muslim countries. Recent polling data from several Arab countries shows that majorities of respondents feel that Turkey is playing a constructive role in regional politics.<sup>9</sup> In education, business, and civil society, Turkey provides tangible evidence of the compatibility of Islam and democracy. As such, it could work with indigenous Islamic NGOs to promote a more tolerant and modernizing vision of Islam. Turkey has also been portrayed as the proverbial bridge between Europe and the Muslim world, and therefore could contribute immensely to the transatlantic community's engagement with Muslim societies. Both Indonesia and Turkey also have a lengthy experience with Islamic political parties—several Indonesian Islamic parties have participated in multiple national and local elections. The Islam-based Justice and Development (AK) Party has been in power in Turkey for several years, counting both the president and prime minister among its members. Similarly, for decades the Turkish NGO Fethullah Gulen has been working in several Muslim countries in Central Asia, focusing on education and school curricula.

Diverse and often vague definitions of *sharia* as interpreted by different schools of jurisprudence,

scholars, *mujtahids*, and *marja's* have rendered reconciling modern government, based on universally acceptable notions of democratic and representative government, and the dictates of *sharia*, a daunting task. How this process will evolve will have important implications for Islamic nation states, for the rising number of Islamic political parties, for domestic stability and civic peace, and for the U.S. policy of engaging Muslim communities through credible indigenous organizations and groups. The good news is that most Muslim states and mainstream Islamic groups have taken a pragmatic view toward *sharia* in its relationship to the economic and political life of the community. Demands of daily life—employment, education, food security, professional and economic development, affordable housing, and the provision of clean drinking water and electricity—tend to trump religious doctrine and *sharia*.

## Transatlantic Partnership and the Way Forward: Key Challenges

European NGOs from France, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, and Sweden have worked with indigenous communities in several Middle Eastern, African, and South Asian countries while Indonesian and Turkish NGOs have also worked with Muslim groups across parts of the Muslim world. Of course, foreign NGOs face daunting challenges and real security threats in conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, and countries in the African Sahel. In some cases, because of daily bombings and explosions, Western NGOs have been forced to cease operations.

Effective engagement must be based on a shared strategic vision of what groups to engage, how to engage them, and for what ends. Such a vision must be coordinated by the United States and the EU as a first-tier partnership, perhaps in concert with Indonesia, Morocco, and Turkey as a second tier partnership. Community groups and NGOs from the three broad partners—the United States, EU, and Muslim countries—could define

the strategic goals and the modalities of engagement while keeping in mind that engagement is not a goal in itself but a means to empowering Muslim communities to help better secure the socioeconomic conditions in their societies. For this to succeed, engagement must also include working with Islamic political parties across the Muslim world, including Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, Palestine's Hamas, Lebanon's Hezbollah, Turkey's AKP, Morocco's Justice and Development Party, Jordan's Islamic Action Front, Kuwait's Islamic Constitutional Movement, Bahrain's al-Wifaq, Yemen's Islah Party, Malaysia's PAS, Indonesia's PKS, and Kenya's Islamic Party. Engaging these parties as part of the broader engagement strategy should focus on pragmatic societal issues including clean water, education, economic investment, energy, health, labor conditions, and the rule of law. Since his inauguration, Obama has reached out to Muslim countries by emphasizing that the United States is not at war with Islam and that the relationship between Islam and the United States should be based on mutual trust, fairness, and common interests. The Cairo speech, which called for a "new beginning," was perhaps the loftiest statement of these goals. Rhetoric alone, however, is no guarantee for effective engagement. Some key questions emerge: What does engagement look like? Who should be engaged and how? What are the boundaries of the "Muslim world?" What short-term and long-term challenges does the Obama administration face in attaining the goals enunciated in the Cairo speech? Finally, how can a transatlantic-Muslim partnership on this issue be built?

Advocates of comprehensive engagement partnerships are likely to face several key challenges:

## 1. Forming Global Partnerships

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Religious communities have emerged all over the world as active participants in the shaping of public policy in their societies. Thus, if the United States and other Western countries plan to pursue initiatives to help those societies improve themselves, they must engage religious commu-

nities. The challenge of empowering indigenous Muslim communities is global and therefore must be addressed through global partnerships. U.S.–European cooperation faces two critical problems. First, there is no unified EU position on Muslim world engagement; different EU countries have adopted different approaches to engagement depending on their domestic situation, financial position, and their experiences with Islamic activism and extremism both domestically and externally. Second, most EU countries, particularly Great Britain, pursue engagement on the domestic front with the ultimate goal of preventing terrorism at home. These countries view deradicalization as a domestic policy directed at their Muslim communities. For the United States, however, deradicalization is a global foreign policy issue. Because of limited financial resources, some EU countries may not be interested in joining U.S. efforts to combat radicalization globally. Beyond the transatlantic partnership, engagement must also involve modernizing Muslim countries, particularly the two large Muslim democracies—Indonesia and Turkey—and possibly Morocco.

## 2. Engaging Credible, Indigenous "Communities" Including Political Parties: "Communities" not "Regimes"

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Empowering communities from below is the first step in the process of building a communal culture conducive to economic progress, job creation at the local level, good governance, the rule of law, and freedoms of expression, association, and religion. To be credible, engagement must include working with Islamic political parties in different Muslim countries. Although some authoritarian regimes might object to such a broad effort by the United States and the EU, policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic and the few partnering moderate Islamic states will have to find ways to convince such regimes that engaging their nongovernmental institutions will not necessarily undermine the country's stability.

### 3. Engaging for the Common Good—and for the National Interests of the Countries Involved

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The implementation of tangible engagement strategies will also require policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic to demonstrate to the global community that extremism threatens Muslim and non-Muslim countries alike; that engaging Muslim communities serves U.S. and European national interests; that the process might not show results for several years; and that it requires deep expertise and resources. Long-term engagement, if done smartly, selectively, and consistently, will help erode radicalism and discredit the recruiters of suicide bombers and the preachers of hate and terrorism.

### 4. Building Civil Capacity Across Government

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Although the use of “soft power” as an effective tool of engagement applies both to the United States and European countries, capacity across government is much more developed in Europe than in the United States. Furthermore, the United States has pursued a more vigorous military-driven counter terrorism policy than European countries in attempt to route out extremists and win the “hearts and minds” of Muslims. Of course, the fight against extremist groups cannot be won by narrow counterterrorism policies alone. The United States, therefore, needs to expand its civilian capacity through the involvement of numerous government departments in engaging the Muslim world, under the strategic direction of the National Security Council. In contrast, if the United States expands its civilian capacity across other areas of the government, outsiders could see engagement as an involving a broad-based government effort rather than a solely NGO-driven initiative.

### 5. Easing Effect of Historical Policy Differences

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In recent years, differences between the United States and the Muslim world have focused on policies geared to external relations, not values of good governance. These include Afghanistan,

the Guantánamo prison, Iran, Iraq, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, Syria, and others. Recently, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has dominated the news, especially with the prospects of a new round of peace talks. It is unclear, however, how engagement can move ahead while such serious differences remain over the most vexing policy questions. Media reports from across the Muslim world, including the recent 22-country poll conducted by the Pew Research Center,<sup>10</sup> indicate that Muslims are losing faith in Obama, that the enthusiasm created by the Cairo speech has all but faded, and that despite the president’s commitment to democracy, he is perceived by some Muslim journalists as supportive of despots and autocrats.<sup>11</sup> The perceived timidity of the U.S. government in its response to the Israeli military attack on the Gaza flotilla has angered many Muslims, according to media reports from the region.

A U.S.–EU partnership to engage Muslim communities is a logical step after Obama’s speech in Cairo. European and American national interests dictate that 1.4 billion Muslims, living in over one hundred Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority countries, cannot be ignored. Over 50 million Muslims live in Western countries alone. The abhorrent use of religion to justify acts of terrorism has affected many in both the West and the Muslim world. Therefore, confronting the radical minority of Muslims and engaging the mainstream majority of Muslims requires international cooperation, particularly between the United States and the EU. Time is propitious for such partnership because more and more Muslims are espousing ideas of tolerance, inclusion, and participation, and are rejecting al Qaeda’s paradigm of wanton violence and killing in the name of Islam. Al Qaeda seems to be losing the moral argument among Muslims, and the emergence of a few franchise terrorist organizations—including al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, al Shabab in Somalia, and al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb—does not mask the waning influence of al Qaeda and its growing isolation among Muslims. While al Qaeda continues to target Western countries and recruit potential “jihadists” from those countries, the most effective way

to face down such a threat and ultimately defeat it is by reaching out to the vast majorities of Muslims across the globe. Obama's speech in Cairo in June 2009 and his recent appointment of a distinguished American Muslim as a special envoy to the OIC reflect his belief that terrorism cannot be defeated by the force of arms alone. Helping Muslim communities attain their potential and empowering them to serve their societies through tangible initiatives promises to be a strong defense against hate and a promoter of domestic stability and good governance.

## About the Project

The Transatlantic Paper Series is a product of The Chicago Council on Global Affairs' project on "The Future of the Transatlantic Alliance in a Changing Strategic Environment." The project seeks to identify ways in which the United States and Europe can deepen cooperation and maintain collective influence as the geopolitical center of gravity moves toward Asia and the Middle East. In addition to the paper series, the project includes a final report entitled "The Transatlantic Alliance in a Multipolar World," authored by Thomas Wright and Richard Weitz. Over the past year, project activities have included workshops, conferences in the United States and Europe, and research trips to Asia and Europe. The project was made possible by generous funding from the Robert Bosch Stiftung, the McCormick Foundation, and the Adenauer Fund at The Chicago Council on Global Affairs. All views and opinions expressed in the papers are those solely of the authors. The Chicago Council takes no institutional position on policy issues and has no affiliation with the U.S. government. All statements of fact and expressions of opinion contained in this paper are the sole responsibility of the author and may not reflect the views of his respective organization or the project funders.

## Notes

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332 South Michigan Avenue  
Suite 1100  
Chicago, Illinois 60604-4416  
T 312.726.3860  
F 312.821.7555  
[thechicagocouncil.org](http://thechicagocouncil.org)