

Promoting Religious Freedom During the Campaign Against Terrorism": Georges A. Fauriol Prepared Testimony

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The War on Terrorism and Freedom of Religion

The war on terrorism comprises a four-track strategy: Military, diplomatic, economic, and a track concerning an ongoing battle of values. I am confident that our strategy will bring the war on terrorism to a successful conclusion. The most difficult aspect in this war, however, is the one concerning values. Freedom of religion is a less certain and more complex arena of conflict but it is at the heart of the battle of values. Freedom of religion addresses terrorism's root causes, not solely its symptoms. It also underscores the often misunderstood reality that questions of power should not be confused with questions of faith, despite the terrorists' attempts to mesh the two into a theological-practical whole. In a free society, religious freedom and moral principles associated with it are fundamental measurements of societal conduct. Yet, their practical application is often caught in crisis. September 11 events are a dramatic manifestation of such crisis.

Thinking Strategically

First, let me clarify what I mean by freedom of religion. A defining characteristic is that it entails individual, personal belief. It is a fundamental right. It is not a right imposed by the state, whether secular or one defined by religion. When such a freedom is taken collectively, in the form of religious communities, it can be the subject of suppression. It is society's weaker segment. When religious freedom is suppressed, it in turn becomes more difficult to renew. It is therefore a mistake to suppose that a generic attention to human rights concerns necessarily improves freedom of religion. This sequencing of interests -- from human rights to religious freedom -- may not protect or enhance expression of religious freedom. Indeed, there can be, and often is, increased persecution. One example may be the persecution of Christian Copts in Egypt. This has at times acquired the elements of an attack on the existence of that community.

Second, post September 11, the United States needs to re-define its priorities. There is a need for new tools in combination with tested tools to deal with the growing religious authoritarianism, which acquire at times forms of religious fascism. This is particularly true in portions of the Islamic world, although the rest of the world is not immune from such a challenge. A starting point for U.S. strategy should be an intellectual basis that excludes cultural relativism. The fact of the matter is that not all ideas are the same. Another element of strategy is that it must have a long-term, pro-active, outlook. Effective strategy implies going beyond dramatic descriptions of religious persecution.

(1) Religious reconciliation. (2) Institutional engagement.

Religious reconciliation is a desirable tool in certain circumstances, but in practice it is not applicable on a large scale. Historical experience suggests identifiable criteria. Usually one side must capitulate and/or the objectives of the conflict become very unpopular before reconciliation acquires a practical and "negotiable" appeal. Another criterion for success may be a reconciliation imposed from the outside. This implies the establishment of a stringent implementation framework that cannot be changed by circumstances. A secular expression of this deep form of reconciliation may be the evolving post-World War II Franco-German relationship. For its part, institutional engagement stems from the fundamental democratic principle that government should not, and does not have inherent preference in one faith over another. The principle interest is in the mechanism that allows the multiplicity of value sets to grow and coexist. A democratic system thus protects multiple sets of faiths, as well as the non-faithful or atheists. Our own Republic is based on a series of specific values, but it fully allows the participation of people with differing values. In the war on terrorism our values may be under duress, but we are confident of them. The most troubling permutation in the new environment is that the terrorists' religious extremism twists the notion of values-based, let alone faith-based, governance. For example, outside of the Taliban's faith-based government, there is no viable governance. Outside of their asphyxiating views of governance, there is no freedom of expression. Embodied in their notion of limits on freedom of expression is a zeal to restrict alternative and individual expressions of faith. The product of such a restricting environment devoid of freedom is conflict.

Political Parties as Effective Institutions for Engagement

Effective institutional engagement ought to seek to bring about a change in political culture. This implies much more than what can be described as a nominal change in civil society. Freedom of religion does provide the basis for freedom of assembly. That in turn leads to the expansion of other freedoms, including the freedom of political organization and, specifically, political party building. The International Republican Institute's (IRI) experience is anchored by the simple idea that political parties are a very effective vehicle for channeling societal needs. Yet, effective parties need to have an internally democratic structures to promote externally democratic rule. An even more direct application of some of IRI's political party engagement brings out functional or operational and programmatic "subsets", most notably: governance, youth education, and women and governance. These have a direct bearing on the war on terrorism, and overlap with concerns for religious freedom. IRI believes it is important to involve Islamist parties in the democratic debate. In Turkey for example, IRI has engaged and is actively working with the largest Islamist party and its constituencies in addition to our work with other parties. IRI has provided training, organization, political communication, party platform, leadership training, and other key activities. One of IRI's post-September 11 challenges is to engage an expanded community of Islamist parties in less-secular Islamic societies than Turkey. Yet another challenge of engagement is the possibility for political party building in Afghanistan. IRI's work in Cambodia helped produce viable political parties out of warring factions. Cambodia shows that a society faced with war, communism, and genocide can regenerate far quicker than many expected. However, in a post-conflict environment, at least three sources of resistance ought to be expected: from the ruling government; from the circle of clerics or often self-selected religious leaders; and from competing economic sectors that may be threatened by greater competition and eventually greater transparency brought by political parties. IRI's experience with political party engagement suggests a set of criteria helpful to U.S. policy-makers also looking for applications to the promotion of religious freedoms: A strategic political party dialogue with diverse segments of the political community has significant payoffs; There is a need for a long-term understanding of the societal interests political parties are likely to sustain; In some special circumstances, political

party engagement ensures a residual interest in, or protection of, issues or constituencies in countries viewed by Washington as constituting troubling relationships; Changing public opinion through democratic political party development positively impacts attitudes towards fundamental rights and thus the stability, legitimacy, and integrity of the democratic system, among other key issues; Sustained engagement might ensure increased credibility and a future brokering role as a goodwill gesture. An even more direct application of some of IRI's political party engagement brings out functional or operational and programmatic "subsets", most notably: governance, youth education, and women and governance. These have a direct bearing on the war on terrorism, and overlap with concerns for religious freedom. The Challenges Ahead As America's values have become almost universally ascendant in the post-Cold War era, the United States has failed to bolster the democratic capabilities of Islamic countries. This is now most evident and relevant to the current war effort. Sustained engagement in democratic governance is the antidote to terrorist grievances and authoritarian tendencies. The quality and effectiveness of governance is at issue when tensions develop in the balance between the governed and governments. In Islamic or quasi-secular Muslim countries - some of which are Washington allies -- the state acts by partially interpreting its traditional understanding of the law through Islamic law. However, in Islamic authoritarian theocracies, religious authoritarianism reigns, and the state plays a more secondary role to religion. The fact of the matter is that neither case is truly democratic. Addressing these challenges underscores a tool box of creative combinations ensuing from the IRI experience. They include: grassroots organization and training; management assessment of parties, ministries, or other political or governmental organizations; effective governance through building effective coalitions; political communications training; spokespeople and other party or government representatives' training; evaluation of party or government infrastructure and reform agendas; accountability, transparency, and the rule of law; as well as legal, electoral, and governance reforms. IRI is a leader in political party development, but is also at the forefront of training the leaders of tomorrow. Experience shows that engagement should include education of religious leaders because they have an overwhelming of influence in Islamic societies. In Burma for example, IRI organized a training program specifically tailored for Buddhist monks. This advanced the cause of democracy together with other segments of society. In conclusion, "democratic beachheads" in the war on terrorism will be secured if the issue of religious freedom is well centered in policy terms. Islamist societies can be most comprehensively engaged by assisting political party and civil society development. The challenge is to link political and religious freedom through development of political parties that most optimally channel religious communities' and minorities' needs. True religious freedom in the Islamic world will be achieved when Christian and other minority communities are able to participate fully in the political system. While the development of political parties and civil society requires a delicate balance and cannot end all religious persecution, it nevertheless provides a foundation in protecting freedom of religious expression. IRI looks forward to using its expertise in institutional engagement to promote freedom in Islamic societies.¹ Dr. Georges Fauriol is Vice President - Strategic Planning of the International Republican Institute. Zlatko Kovach, Senior Manager for Strategic Planning, assisted in the research and preparation of this document. The views expressed here are only those of the author of this statement