

Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group



ENSURING THE OPPORTUNITY FOR MUTUAL COUNSEL AND COLLABORATION

A White Paper of the Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group of the
Secretary of State's Strategic Dialogue with Civil Society
October 16, 2012

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

The civil society representatives of the Working Group present four recommendations to the U.S. Secretary of State through the Federal Advisory Committee on the Strategic Dialogue with Civil Society:

1. Urge that a National Capacity be Created to Guide on this Issue.

Advise that a mechanism, preferably seated at the National Security Council, be created to:

- Design a national strategy for religious engagement;
- Interface with various U.S. government agencies and civil society organizations at home and abroad, assisting the interagency in its capacity to assess, analyze, and advise on religious engagement;
- Coordinate a real-time “reach-back” resource for immediate and long-term issues and situations facing the U.S. government;
- Direct the development of awareness, training, and education classes, including simulation exercises;
- Steward relationships worldwide with key religious leaders, ensuring sustained dialogue and the possibility of mutual insight; and,
- Develop and oversee the vetting process for U.S. government-wide consideration of advisors or partners on religion-related issues.

2. Direct the State Department to Develop Products for Improved Engagement with Religion.

Instruct that key products be developed, in collaboration with faith-based civil society or religion experts, to assist in improved engagement with religious communities and understanding of religious dynamics. These include:

- Guidelines for civil society on complying with the Establishment Clause;
- Improved training modules, to include the establishment of a religious engagement competency among core competencies required of all foreign and civil service officers;

- A review of opportunities for improved engagement with women, including how better to understand and partner with women religious leaders as necessary to sustainable solutions;
- Creation and engagement of international fora to bring together governments and faith-based civil society;
- The development of specific “toolkits” and “roadmaps” toward sustainable religious freedom in particular contexts;
- A review of counterterrorism requirements including the Partner Vetting System, to determine how to satisfy security requirements without weakening the effectiveness of private voluntary organizations in carrying out vital relief, development and conflict mitigation activities;
- Strategies and tools for engaging religious leaders and communities in conflict mitigation; and,
- A compilation of best practices and lessons learned resources on engagement with religion in foreign policy.

3. Establish an Official Mechanism Within State.

Create an institutionalized mechanism through which the State Department and religious communities worldwide might better communicate and potentially collaborate, and that will improve understanding of religious dynamics relevant to foreign policy. The White Paper outlines several bureaucratic options for this mechanism, to be evaluated on the extent to which they can integrate across the State Department, provide for appropriate access, address all relevant issues, incorporate religious freedom, and prove cost-effective. Primary functions are to:

- Record, advise on, and integrate all State Department religious engagement;
- Oversee religious engagement education and training;
- Manage the process of vetting religious organizations with which the State Department will partner;
- Connect government officials with relevant advisors from a standing pool of faith-based civil society experts in order to develop real-time solutions to specific issues and situations, both in Washington and at posts overseas;
- Catalyze, when appropriate, collaborative partnerships; and,
- Promote the establishment of religion and foreign policy working groups in other countries.

4. Institutionalize the Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group.

Continue the group as a non-partisan, religiously diverse advisory committee in order to:

- Provide a flexible and safe space to further discuss, develop, and implement the above recommendations; and,
- Serve as a model for—and, as requested, an advisory body on—the creation of similar mechanisms worldwide.



I. Purpose

To present recommendations for the U.S. State Department in response to its expressed need for improved engagement with religious communities and understanding of religious dynamics worldwide. In particular, those recommendations include options for an institutionalized mechanism that would enable regular consultation and collaboration with faith-based civil society, in support of conflict prevention and mitigation, development and humanitarian assistance, and the promotion of religious freedom.

II. Background and Rationale

In many places around the world, understanding religion is imperative to understanding the local civil society. Gallup polls show that four out of five people on the planet believe in something greater than themselves, often viewing all sectors of life through the prism of faith. Religious faith and adherence is often a source of conflict that contributes to global instability and undermines long term U.S. interests. However, those same forces of faith contribute much good to civil society, and when properly engaged can promote human progress and peaceful coexistence on a global scale. To ignore those religious impulses, or minimize their role because we are uncomfortable with them, or do not have time or interest to understand them in context, is no longer an option for U.S. policy. Comprehensively engaging the role of religion and religious communities worldwide is therefore often critical to an effective U.S. foreign policy.

Given her longstanding experience with this reality, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton took the unprecedented step of establishing a Strategic Dialogue with Civil Society that specifically included a Religion & Foreign Policy Working Group. The Working Group was further composed of sub-groups on: Religious Engagement and Conflict Prevention/Mitigation; International Religious Freedom, Stability and Democracy; and Faith-Based Groups and Development and Humanitarian Assistance. The group as a whole has primarily focused on the question of how best to build a practical platform through which the U.S. government and religious communities could share lessons learned and best practices, and collaborate in ways that respect the identities and interests of each group. The need for such a mechanism, further outlined later in this paper, has been confirmed through the multiple meetings and continuing conversations of Working Group members.

The Working Group has already served an important function. The State Department has gained valuable outside perspective on these issues, while civil society members have had the opportunity to provide regular, practical input into U.S. foreign policy. For example, in May

2012, the Working Group submitted two concrete recommendations via the Federal Advisory Committee, which were approved by the Secretary of State. The first recommendation, now being enacted, called for an increase in Department “literacy” about religion, religious freedom, and religious engagement through training. The second recommendation sought guidance for Foreign and Civil Service Officers on the applicability of the Establishment Clause to diplomatic engagement with and support for religious actors and activities overseas. By October 24, 2012, the Office of the Legal Adviser will make this guidance available to State Department officials.

Still, the Working Group has faced limitations. It is not a permanent feature of the State Department, and it does not have programming capabilities or a dedicated staff or budget (e.g., the travel of all civil society members has been pro bono). There is not a clear point of engagement within the State Department. There is therefore a need to establish a permanent mechanism through which the Department and religious organizations might provide mutual counsel, learn from one another, and be positioned for collaboration when appropriate.

This White Paper begins the intentional consideration of how that permanent mechanism might be designed. The paper includes a cursory survey of current capacities within the State Department; a description of the remaining challenges and needs both for the U.S. government and civil society; and consideration of four broad action steps for improved engagement with religion.

III. Existing State Department Capacities

While the White House and 12 executive branch U.S. Government departments have offices for faith-based engagement, the Department of State does not. The Department does have a number of special envoys tasked with religious engagement, including: the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism; the Special Envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC); the Special Representative to Muslim Communities; and the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues.

The Office of International Religious Freedom in the Bureau of Human Rights Democracy and Labor (DRL/IRF) and the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom are heavily involved in religious engagement, even though their Congressional mandate is narrower.¹

¹ The Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism develops and implements policies and projects to support efforts to combat anti-Semitism. The Special Envoy to the OIC seeks to deepen and expand the partnerships the United States has pursued with Muslims and to advocate for the rights of both Muslims minorities and other religious minorities in Muslim majority countries. The Special Representative to Muslim Communities is responsible for executing Secretary Clinton’s vision for engagement with Muslims around the world on a people-to-people and organizational level. The Special Envoy for Holocaust issues develops and implements U.S. policy with respect to the return of Holocaust-era assets to their rightful owners, compensation for wrongs committed during the Holocaust, and Holocaust remembrance. The IRF Act of 1998 established DRL/IRF and the position of Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom. The ambassador serves as principal religious freedom advisor to the President and Secretary of State. The Act also mandated the Annual Report on International Religious Freedom; the designation of Countries of Particular Concern (CPC) for “systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom” (providing the president a menu of options, once designated); and the training of U.S. diplomats to effectively promote religious freedom around the world.

In particular, DRL/IRF produces annual reports on 199 countries and territories and works with embassies, geographical bureaus, desks, and across the interagency. It also liaisons with Congress and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (also mandated by the 1998 IRF Act) and coordinates with third-country governments to track and advocate for individual religious freedom cases and broader religious freedom issues. The office also contributes to Foreign Service Institute (FSI) courses; manages Human Rights and Democracy Funds to support religious freedom programming around the world; and (in coordination with S/SACSED, S/P, J, the White House, USAID, and other USG agencies) collaborates with civil society through its participation in, and support for, the Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group to advocate for religious freedom and related human rights. DRL/IRF also engages inter-religious and multi-faith organizations and networks to advance religious freedom, foster respect for religious diversity, and mitigate sectarian tensions and violence.

Beyond these examples, several State Department bureaus and offices, as well as many posts, actively engage religious leaders and communities on an ad hoc basis on a range of issues. These issues include religious freedom and other human rights, development and humanitarian assistances, conflict prevention and mitigation, countering violent extremism, narcotics and law enforcement, and trafficking in persons. For example, the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations assesses religious dynamics of conflict and engages relevant religious leaders in its efforts to lessen violence.

IV. Remaining Challenges and Needs

While existing State Department offices and initiatives are significant, they continue to face three broad challenges:

- 1. Concerns remain about engaging religion.** The culture of the State Department is not always conducive to serious engagement with matters involving religion. While there are legitimate concerns about violating the 1st Amendment, there seems to be a cultural view that religion is anachronistic, and that it is a source of conflict and division. Therefore, religion is often not seen as a force for peace, human rights, democracy, and development. As a result of this culture, existing efforts related to religion are often not easily integrated across the State Department.
- 2. Civil society actors are not fully engaged.** Insufficient engagement with religious leaders and communities is part of a broader need for increased engagement of civil society. In some countries the U.S. ambassador and the country team have mapped out these local actors and engaged in a robust kind of dialogue and relationship building—through aid programs, cultural exchanges etc. But in most they have not. Encouraging and equipping ambassadors to think and act in this manner not only helps to strengthen civil societies and stable states, it can also help with anticipating and responding to crises or conflicts.
- 3. No coordinating structure exists.** There is no mandate for systematizing and coordinating religious engagement across the Department. The Working Group has partially filled this gap, but, as mentioned above, it is limited in its mandate and capacity. Under this Secretary of State, the Office of Policy Planning has played an increasing role in coordinating Department-wide religious engagement, but it is not tasked with, nor equipped to carry out this mandate. Indeed, at

present, there is no office, taskforce or other structure within the Department that possesses the resources or the mandate necessary to effectively coordinate religious engagement across the State Department.

Government and Civil Society Needs

These challenges suggest a number of needs still to be met on this issue, not only at State, but also across the interagency and civil society:

State

At an operational level, State officials have expressed a need for an improved understanding of religious dynamics relevant to foreign policy, including development, diplomacy and security. Demand exists for general awareness training, as well as access to country-specific expertise, lessons learned and best practices. There is specific need for a mechanism to vet and then connect experts in faith-based organizations and academic institutions as consultants and/or partners with the State Department.

On the ground, officials sometimes need assistance identifying appropriate local religious groups, particularly where those communities are in geographic areas inaccessible to diplomats. In certain places, officials need improved systems for learning from and working with influential religious actors and organizations (including less traditional ones). They also need processes for assessing and addressing how U.S. actors are perceived on religion-related factors in each case.

Interagency

At the interagency level, the Working Group members' experience with government officials suggests that there is a need for top-down guidance on this issue. This includes high-level government acknowledgement of the importance of religion in foreign policy, increased influence for religion-related initiatives, and clarification of legal guidelines surrounding engagement with religious actors. Officials increasingly recognize the potential benefit of a central bureaucratic location with the resources to coordinate efforts at the intersection of religion and human rights, civil rights, security and counterterrorism. This coordination could help to balance the focus in some agencies on religion-related threats with more comprehensive analysis of religion's many roles in societies, and methods for engaging religious potential for contributing to development and conflict prevention and mitigation.

Civil Society

In their work, civil society organizations at the intersection of religion and foreign policy often need improved interaction with government efforts. Civil society activities can frequently be amplified by USG publicity or support; in other cases government approaches have hindered civil society initiatives. Faith-based civil society groups therefore often seek to advise on and inform USG activities in this space, as well as to work in partnership with particular government programs. Groups that hope to collaborate with USG officials have voiced need for greater legal clarification regarding engagement, as well as an accessible USG entry-point on this issue.

V. Recommendations

Given the above existing capacities, and the remaining challenges and needs, this White Paper proposes structures and products that could assist the State Department, the interagency and faith-based civil society in improving engagement with religion worldwide. The Working Group suggests that four recommendations be proposed to the Secretary through the Federal Advisory Committee on the Strategic Dialogue with Civil Society:

1. Urge that a National Capacity be Created to Guide on this Issue.
2. Direct the State Department to Develop Products for Improved Engagement with Religion.
3. Establish an Official Mechanism Within State.
4. Institutionalize the Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group.

1. Urge that a National Capacity be Created to Guide on this Issue.

The issues surrounding religion and foreign policy are larger than the State Department alone, demanding the sustained attention of other U.S. agencies. There is need for a national capacity—preferably seated at the National Security Council, the only agency with requisite authority and capacity—to convene and maintain a standing group of governmental and non-governmental leaders and experts. While the precise format of this national capacity is beyond the mandate of this Working Group, its members recommend that the Secretary urge that an interagency mechanism be created to lead on the issue of engagement with religious factors and actors. The key functions of such a structure could be, but are not limited to:

- Design a national strategy for religious engagement, advising U.S. agencies on implementation (e.g., discussing/developing a religious engagement appendix to the combatant commander's theater engagement plan);
- Interface with various USG agencies, NGOs, academic institutions, and other related working groups in Washington, D.C., across America, and worldwide, assisting the interagency in its capacity to assess, analyze, and advise on religious engagement;
- Coordinate a real-time “reach-back” resource for immediate and long-term issues and situations facing the U.S. government;
- Direct the development of awareness, training, and education classes, including simulation exercises;
- Steward relationships worldwide with key religious leaders, ensuring sustained dialogue and the possibility of mutual insight; and,
- Develop and oversee the vetting process for U.S. government-wide consideration of advisors or partners on religion-related issues.

2. Direct the State Department to Develop Products for Improved Engagement with Religion.

Whether through existing offices or through a permanent interagency or State Department mechanism, the Working Group recommends the development of a number of key products to

assist in improved government engagement with religious communities and understanding of religious dynamics. Wherever possible, these products may be strengthened by being developed in collaboration with faith-based civil society, especially where civil society has already begun efforts. These products include:

1. *Guidelines on Complying with the Establishment Clause.* Secretary Clinton accepted the Working Group's May recommendation to create guidance for diplomats on the implications of the Establishment Clause for their work abroad. Based on this legal guidance, messaging should also be created that would help inform civil society organizations that hope to advise or collaborate with the State Department. As it develops this messaging, the State Department should engage in meaningful consultation with the Working Group. In particular, high priority should be given to a better understanding of issues related to proselytism, the misunderstanding of which can cause tension.
2. *Improved Training Modules.* A religious engagement competency should be established among the core competencies required of all foreign and civil service officers. Toward that end, the Foreign Service Institute's optional four-day course on religion and foreign policy should be made mandatory, with modules incorporated into area focus courses, as well as classes/courses for new Foreign Service Officers and ambassadors. Per the Working Group's May recommendation, online courses should be available to every post overseas, based on specific assessments of cultural competency needs for that country. As the training deepens and expands, creative incentives—both “carrots” and “sticks”—should be institutionalized to ensure participation.
3. *Review of Opportunities for Improved Engagement with Women.* The Department should immediately review and consider the "female face of faith" in all of its engagements, beginning with the National Action Plan on "Women, Peace, & Security," making recommendations about how better to understand and partner with women religious leaders as not only normal, but necessary, to sustainable solutions. Opportunities should also be explored for improved engagement with other non-traditional religious leaders, particularly youth religious leaders.
4. *Creation and Engagement of International Fora that Bring Together Governments and Faith-Based Civil Society.* Given the global newness of governments (track 1) and faith-based civil society (track 2) working together comprehensively, it is vital that this “Track 1.5” approach be considered comparatively so that common principles, best practices, and greater opportunity for partnership can develop. For example, building on the success of the September 28, 2012, meeting on the margins of the U.N. General Assembly—“Strategic Dialogues with Faith-Based Civil Society: Track 1.5 Diplomacy for Peace & Prosperity”—another meeting might be held on the occasion of the World Assembly of Religions for Peace in Morocco in June 2013.
5. *Roadmaps Toward Sustainable Religious Freedom.* Together with civil society and host nation governments, the State Department should enhance its “toolkits” for particular countries, creating mutually agreed upon roadmaps toward sustainable religious freedom. These roadmaps might prevent CPC designation or help to remove it. Burma might serve

as an important pilot country for this effort.

6. *Review of Counterterrorism Requirements.* Together with civil society, the State Department and other relevant agencies should review counterterrorism requirements, including the Partner Vetting System, to determine whether reasonable compromises might satisfy security requirements without weakening the effectiveness of faith-based and other organizations in carrying out vital relief and development activities. This review should be completed prior to the rollout of a global partner vetting system or vetting systems in non-pilot countries. Despite a specific recommendation by the President’s Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships two years ago, this issue has not been addressed.
7. *Strategies and Tools for Engaging Religious Leaders and Communities in Conflict Mitigation.* Religious leaders and networks should be incorporated into conflict prevention frameworks and strategies. In particular, appropriate faith-based civil society groups should be engaged in the conflict analysis stage, so that religious factors are integrated into both “analysis” and “response.” Tools might include using indicators of religious freedom violations as an early warning system of ensuing conflict; building inter-religious networks and coalitions for collective action promoting peace and addressing both religious and non-religious causes of destabilizing violence; and encouraging opportunities for community-based learning and study to increase religious literacy across divides and influence conflict dynamics in local congregations and communities.
8. *Compilation of Best Practices and Lessons Learned Resources on Engagement with Religion in Foreign Policy.* These resources might include: a list of previous recommendations on this issue; a standing catalogue of missed and future opportunities; lessons learned; and a bibliography of current syllabi, training curricula, and other relevant resources.

3. Establish an Official Mechanism Within State.

In support of—or as a precursor to—a national capacity, the Working Group suggests five possible options for an institutionalized mechanism through which the State Department and religious communities worldwide might better communicate and potentially collaborate, and that will improve understanding of religious dynamics relevant to foreign policy. Primary functions of this mechanism could include, but are not limited to:

- Record, advise on, and integrate all State Department religious engagement;
- Oversee religious engagement education and training;
- Manage the process of vetting religious organizations with which the State Department will partner;
- Connect government officials with relevant advisors from a standing pool of faith-based civil society experts in order to develop real-time solutions to specific issues and situations, both in Washington and at posts overseas;
- Catalyze, when appropriate, collaborative partnerships; and,

- Promote the establishment of religion and foreign policy working groups in other countries.

Criteria for Evaluating Mechanism Options

While the Working Group does not feel that it is within its mandate to recommend a particular structural solution, it presents several options to help catalyze conversation. The Working Group suggests that these options be evaluated on the extent to which they can:

- 1) *Integrate Across the Department.* Priority should be given to that structure that would least likely be marginalized or “stovepiped” within the State Department bureaucracy.
- 2) *Provide for Appropriate Access.* Given the pervasive influence of religion worldwide, the office, taskforce or other structure responsible for this effort should have regular and direct access to high-level Department officials, including, when appropriate, the Secretary.
- 3) *Address All Relevant Issues.* Options that would, explicitly or implicitly, limit religious engagement to particular issue areas, such as democracy or human rights, should be avoided. Important cross-cutting issues include the roles of women and youth.
- 4) *Incorporate Religious Freedom.* While the mandate of the Office of International Religious Freedom is much narrower than what is needed, it would be unhelpful for that office to be disconnected from, or not in close communication with, any new entity with a broader mandate.
- 5) *Be Cost-Effective.* In an age of austerity, priority must be given to those initiatives of profound multiplier effect. At the same time, an effective office would need sufficient and qualified staff, as well as web and data management support.

Options for an Institutionalized Mechanism

Option 1: Expand the mandate and capacities of the existing Office of International Religious Freedom Office.

Pros:

- This office is already the de facto point-of-contact, with much in-house experience.

Cons:

- If religious freedom is conflated with religious engagement, both issues might suffer.
- The issues that need to be addressed are broader in scope than DRL’s mandate.
- Such a plus-up would inherently rub against the Congressional mandate for the IRF office, requiring either amendment of the Congressional mandate or structuring in such a way to ensure that the Congressional mandate and new functions could be fulfilled.
- As a sub-office of DRL, this office would have a lower profile than other options set forth below.

Option 2: Create an Office for Religious Engagement under the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights, that includes the functions of the current IRF office as well as a religious engagement function.

Pros:

- The “J” family is designed to address key global issues across regions and bureaus.
- A new office means a new culture and approach, especially if funded and with an empowered director or Ambassador at Large who has access to the Under Secretary.
- Constant exposure to J family issues will encourage the director to be holistic, while providing input into discrete portfolios that might not otherwise consider the religious element.

Cons:

- Unless constantly supported at the highest level or by Congress, new offices take time to integrate into and be supported by the organization’s culture, as seen with the DRL/IRF office.
- This option would also rub against the Congressional mandate for the IRF office, requiring either amendment of the Congressional mandate or structuring in such a way to ensure that the Congressional mandate and new functions could be fulfilled.
- There might be internal resistance to relocation of the IRF office.

Option 3: Develop a Center of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the State Department, located within the S bureau, and associated with the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

Pros:

- This type of center would connect to an existing network, institutionalized across the executive branch agencies. Thirteen other federal agencies, including USAID, have such centers.
- Connection with the White House office could provide even more credibility and access.

Cons:

- Other than at USAID, the traditional focus of this type of center is domestic.
- This option would separate the religious engagement function from the IRF office.

Option 4: Create an Office of Non-Governmental Engagement and Partnerships, within the S bureau, merging the functions of the Office for the Global Partnership Initiative and the civil society component of the Senior Advisor for Civil Society and Emerging Democracies.

Pros:

- The Secretary has frequently spoken of democracy as a three-legged stool, with governments, civil society, and the private sector forming equal legs. This option would consolidate outreach to and engagement with the two non-governmental legs.

- This option would facilitate not only collaboration and engagement with faith-based groups, but collaboration between faith-based groups, secular civil society organizations, and the private sector.
- This option could serve as a coordinating and knowledge hub for regional and functional bureaus.
- It would not require relocation of the IRF function, which could stay within DRL.

Cons:

- Consolidation of diverse mandates under one office could create more confusion.
- The importance of religious engagement could receive less attention in a broader civil society context.

Option 5: Assign religious engagement to the Undersecretary for Political Affairs. This position would be supported by Deputy Assistant Secretaries in each of the regional bureaus whose responsibilities would include assessment and engagement of major religions practiced in their assigned regions. In U.S. Missions where religion has particular salience, a new “Religion Attache” position might be established within the political section of the embassy, similar to the way that Political/Military officers are assigned to selected embassies.

Pros:

- This option would provide the level of gravitas necessary to be taken seriously within the policy process—and by foreign governments and actors.
- This option could integrate religious expertise and religious engagement across the State Department and would provide bureaus and embassies with a comprehensive capability for dealing with complex religious issues that are intrinsically interrelated to geo-political concerns.

Cons:

- Of the five options, this one would require the most significant change in mindset and commitment of new staff and resources, especially in education and training.

4. Institutionalize the Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group.

The group—at least its civil society members—should continue as a non-partisan, religiously diverse advisory committee in support of the appropriate U.S. State Department office(s). This group would serve two important functions:

- First, the Working Group would provide a flexible and safe space to further discuss, develop, and implement the above recommendations.
- Second, the group could serve as a model for—and, as requested, an advisory body on—the creation of similar mechanisms worldwide. Other countries and their ambassadors have shown significant interest in this initiative. Among other approaches, the State Department can promote this by co-convening with states, intergovernmental bodies and faith-based civil society a series of forums for shared principles, best practices, and

partnership opportunities. One platform for such a forum would be on the occasion of the Religions for Peace World Assembly in Morocco in June 2013.

Renewing the charter of the Secretary's Federal Advisory Committee for another two years would allow the Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group to continue. Based on lessons learned from the past year, this group would be most effective with a defined mandate, developed with civil society, with clear protocols for processing within the group, and between the group and the Department.

VI. Toward a New Partnership

The challenge of incorporating religious engagement as an effective component of U.S. foreign policy clearly transcends any single office within the State Department. Indeed, appropriate consideration of religion's influence should be integrated across the entire Department (and other U.S. agencies as well).

That task exceeds the mandate of this Working Group, but implementing a critical first step along the lines of the above noted candidate options, would provide an initial State Department capability to communicate and collaborate with religious communities worldwide. Until an appropriate option can be institutionalized, it is strongly recommended that this Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group be maintained as an interim capability.

In the meantime, we continue to live in a world in which 80 percent of people believe in something greater than themselves, while, per the Pew Forum, 75 percent of those believers are restricted in their capacity to freely practice their faith. This issue is not going away, and indeed this is a time of opportunity for the United States to be strategically involved in engaging civil society in this important matter. The U.S. government can continue to take the lead and be engaged in and help shape these times and trends, or be shaped by them. We hope that the above ideas contribute to the former.