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From: McHale, Judith A <McHaleJA@state.gov>
Sent: Saturday, February 13, 2010 9:47 AM
To: H
Subject: FW: Muslim engagement ---- framing the narrative; CVE --- a possible new approach

I'm sorry we were not able to get together this week so I could fill you in on my trip to India and Bangladesh and share some thoughts I have been developing about how we communicate about Muslim engagement as well as ideas I have about our CVE and counter-radicalization efforts. I heard when I got back that you are heading to Doha this weekend so I thought I would send this email to give you a sense of the direction I am heading. I've talked a bit about this to Dan Benjamin and have begun informal discussions with others as well. My apologies upfront for the informal nature of this memo. Please consider it as a concept paper and/or food for thought. I'm not sure where it will all lead or, indeed, if it will lead anywhere at all but I hope to have something more concrete for you within the next couple of weeks.

Muslim engagement

We all know that in today's media centric, information saturated environment it is critically important to shape the narrative of whatever story we are trying to tell or information we are trying to convey. Joe Nye made the same point in the article I sent you earlier. To date this has not been our government's strong suit and we are paying the price as we try to catch up on a number of fronts. Perhaps nowhere is this more important than in our relationships with Muslims around the world. Now, as we affirmatively address this issue, I worry that we may be creating a "narrative" that is too defensive and that tends to focus too much on the negative ---- that we have done something wrong; been negligent in our behavior; done much which we must defend or for which we must apologize; or otherwise failed massively in our relations with all Muslims. As you well know, the facts are more complex and tell a far different story.

If you look at the global distribution of Muslim populations, 60 to 70% of Muslims live in countries with which the United States has normal to excellent relations --- Indonesia; India; Bangladesh; Malaysia; Nigeria; Tanzania; the Philippines; etc. Do they like everything we do? No. Do we have areas of serious disagreement? Yes, but then the same holds true in our relations with most other countries as well. The reality is that we have a long history of strong and consistent engagement with Muslim populations everywhere. This is not something new. Thousands have participated in our exchange programs; we have provided billions of dollars in development assistance; our disaster response to earthquakes, tsunamis and cyclones has been unparalleled; and, our private sector has invested billions of dollars in Muslim businesses. This is a largely positive story and we must do a better job of telling it.

That is not to say that we have not made mistakes or at times been arrogant in our attitudes and behavior. We have and we need to acknowledge that and move forward in a spirit of partnership and mutual respect. In sum, it is a matter of balance. We must take credit for things we have done well and assume responsibility when we err. If we fail to achieve this balance, if we are too defensive, then the positive side of the story gets lost and our adversaries use our very words and actions against us to create a negative narrative which overtime comes to define us. We saw what happened in Haiti and we saw what happened when we fought back.

So how do we do this? I think it will take a carefully crafted and nuanced approach. If we are too heavy handed or focus too much on the positive we risk being perceived ----again---- as arrogant and self-centered. I hope to come back to you with a series of ideas and initiatives after some more thought. In the meantime I think we can begin the process by ensuring that whenever we address this issue we frame it in terms of the full historic perspective and avoid appearing as if Muslim engagement were something we just thought of. The new programs and resources dedicated to this area are things we can and should be proud of but they are only a part of the picture. There is indeed a "new beginning" but one built on a strong foundation of consistent engagement.

Countering Violent Extremism and Counter-radicalization

I have a number of ideas about some different approaches to this critical area. For obvious reasons I would prefer to discuss this with you when we meet in person. I saw an innovative US/AID program when I was in Dhaka which I think has some possibility if we can get it to scale. I have asked for a copy of their presentation and hope to have it by next week. I also am trying to get a copy of a videotape of a meeting I had with a group of students at a Madrassa which I think you will find interesting. Finally I'd like to fill you in on my conversations with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, Ambassador Moriarty and others.

Hope the trip goes well. Look forward to getting together when you return.

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