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Strong Society, Weak State

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Strong Society, Weak State

By A. LAWRENCE CHICKERING
AND P. EDWARD HALEY

MOST OF THE new threats to U.S. and international security are arising in countries with weak or illegitimate governments and strong societies, presenting very different challenges from those of the strong states that were adversaries in the past. While a traditional foreign policy of relying on state-to-state relations may be effective with strong states, it lacks the information, resources, and agility to penetrate the local scene and influence the direction of events in weak states. The knowledge challenge here is to obtain information about the complex relationships and

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realities of state and nonstate actors as they compete for power. The resource challenge is to build relationships and support from the larger non-governmental circles of influence whose support is often crucial to accomplishing change in the policies of weak governments as well as in what is commonly referred to as “culture.”

Lacking knowledge and penetration, governments of strong states often conclude they have no other way to achieve security than by the use of force, as in Iraq and Lebanon. But using force against weak states brings into play a variety of issues that mock the realist’s belief in realism’s utility, for what weakens a strong state will often strengthen a weak state, provoking increased resistance. Thus, Hezbollah emerged stronger in Lebanon after losing every battle and bringing wholesale destruction to the country. In the same manner, the Bush administration’s threats against Syria and Iran — combined with its attempts to isolate them — have tended to strengthen support for these governments from the Arab and Muslim “street.”

Strong states often conclude they have no other way to achieve security than by the use of force.

These and dozens of other paradoxes of state, society, and security contribute to one grand paradox: It is impossible for the United States and its allies to achieve security unless today’s weak states become strong. But that is impossible as long as their societies remain dominant.

In this paper, we argue that in dealing with weak states, foreign-policymakers must expand their intellectual horizons and attempt to influence societies and cultures. This means formulating two separate policies, one for states and one for societies — with conventional foreign policy addressing the *objective* interests of states and the other addressing the largely *subjective* challenges of societies and cultures.

Failure to address the separate, often largely subjective challenges of societies explains the enormous fatalism that marks the current debate on foreign policy. At a time when technology, media, and economic progress are empowering nonstate actors, empowering the “street,” and amplifying the power of public opinion — all at the expense of governments — failure to engage nonstate actors and societies leaves policymakers with unhappy and highly limited alternatives. On the one side are the administration’s “tough” policies, avoiding or greatly limiting contact with unfriendly regimes (Palestine, Syria, Iran) and significant nonstate actors that are in conflict with friendly regimes (Hezbollah, Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, various groups in Iraq) and that may also have significant influence on unfriendly ones (in Palestine, Syria, and Iran). On the other side is the Democrats’ and some Republicans’ “soft” eagerness to negotiate with unfriendly regimes (Syria, Iran) without understanding their constraints as weak states.

In our book, *Strategic Foreign Assistance: Civil Society in International*

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Security, we outline a strategy for working with civil society organizations to promote economic, social and political reform in developing countries. Some of the initiatives aim at promoting certain kinds of government policies (economic policy reform and property rights for the poor), while others aim at promoting changes in society and culture (educating girls and programs to recruit citizens in promoting democracy and peace).

Carrying out these recommendations will be enormously difficult for foreign-policymakers and for the foreign policy community generally. The training and the government institutions devoted to foreign affairs were designed for very different challenges. Today, problems in what the Pentagon has called the Long War come primarily from a multitude of unknown, often invisible, nonstate actors — ethnic, religious, terrorist, and criminal — and from weak states. The impulse of conservatives and liberals alike is to act in ways that would be appropriate for dealing with strong state adversaries. When taken against weak states, these actions can produce large unintended consequences, weakening our security or missing an opportunity to strengthen it. The Iraq Study Group proposed negotiations with Iran and Syria in an effort to enlist their support in reducing conflict in Iraq. The Bush administration has remained committed to a confrontational approach to those countries. Both positions overstate the power of these weak states and fail to prepare for formal negotiations through informal contacts with civil society, which would expand the possibilities for positive outcomes of formal negotiations while limiting the risks associated with them.

Training and institutions devoted to foreign affairs were designed for very different challenges.

Developing policies for societies means working with civil society organizations to promote reform of government policies and to change social and cultural attitudes. Ultimately, however, these initiatives must be directed toward influencing states as well, because even when the objective is to change society and culture, active government cooperation is essential to accomplishing anything on strategic scales.

At present, civil society organizations (CSOs)¹ and policies toward societies and cultures have no significant role in the larger debate on international relations and foreign policy.² Part of the reason is a lack of understanding about the strategic significance of civil society and a limited understanding

¹ CSOs are involved in legal reform initiatives, legal aid, environmental research and advocacy, moderate Islamic associations, business and labor associations, public health, educational associations, conflict resolution, sports, community organizations, religious groups, and so forth.

² One can read a year of issues of leading foreign policy journals — *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, the *National Interest*, *Orbis* — without seeing a single positive article on civil society. Nor can one find discussion of its potential uses in these and other journals on any major foreign policy challenge: in the Middle East, in South Asia, in Sub-Saharan Africa — anywhere.

of what is possible. The foreign policy community takes a fatalistic view of cultures, assuming there is little or nothing it can do to affect them, and limiting its analyses to *observation* without any prescription for corrective action. Raising the banner of culture, for most people, means there is little you can do but wait and hope.

These are classic Burkean conservative warnings, now ironically expressed by liberals, critiquing the Bush administration's ambitious plans to promote democracy in the developing world. Yet the warnings are exaggerated. Our proposals are based on a considerable body of knowledge about and experience with models of civil society action in many countries that have demonstrated feasibility, potential scale, and costs consistent with powerful strategic impacts.

In sketching our policy recommendations we start with the most problematic, which are those dealing with culture: first, promoting social trust as an essential underpinning of democracy and, second, enhancing education for girls by developing a sense of responsibility by rural fathers for girls' education.

Social trust in weak states

ONE OF THE most important attributes of democracies is a strong sense of social trust among citizens. Trust is important both in persuading minority groups that the elected majority will respect their rights and in helping people resolve conflicts informally and even avoid conflict before it starts. Social trust is important to peace, and it is also, less obviously, important to market economies, allowing market actors — when combined with property rights — to enter into impersonal transactions, which are crucial for the growth of enterprises.

One of the major characteristics of weak states is a lack of social trust among communities, religions, and tribes. Weak states cannot transcend these other, more powerful loyalties. Lack of trust is in turn linked to a lack of political cohesion and consensus, both essential to democracy. To promote democracy in weak states, therefore, a major priority must be the promotion of social trust.

The conflict between Palestinians and Israelis provides a good illustration of the importance of society-based initiatives to promoting trust. All peace initiatives in the region have been about states, even as it has been clear that important elements of society have retarded formal peace negotiations on both sides. Examples are the settler movement on the Israeli side and the "Arab street" on the Palestinian side. Despite these powerful influences, little separate attention has been given to recruiting citizens and CSOs as partners in promoting trust and a culture of peace in support of formal peace negotiations. President Clinton's Middle East peace negotiator Dennis Ross now concedes that this was the great missing piece in the

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failed peace process of the Clinton years.

The need to encourage trust through civil society initiatives is also important to democracy. The current administration's efforts to promote democracy in the region are failing because they are focused on states, on creating the formal institutions associated with democracies without promoting the social and cultural preconditions essential to democracy, especially trust. Civil society has been seen only as an advocate for democracy's formal institutions: a means to change states by advocacy of rights. Other, crucial roles that would help change society and culture in support of democracy have been overlooked.

The current strategy has produced some modest improvements in some formal institutions, but in important cases it has elicited serious governmental reactions against CSOs, curtailing their activities and sometimes imprisoning their leaders. In Egypt, for example, the Mubarak government has clamped down on CSOs promoting democracy and inhibited freedom of the press while imprisoning the country's principal secular democrat, Amr Noor. Similarly, the government of Vladimir Putin in Russia has imposed numerous restraints on civil society organizations and their funding.

When governments crack down on civil society, they crack down on the promotion of rights that officials believe threaten the government. State-to-state foreign policy efforts to promote democracy will continue to founder until we understand that democracy is more than just the formal state institutions of voting, transparent governance, and an independent judiciary. Democracy also depends on informal, subjective qualities of social trust, consensus and cohesion — including social and cultural attitudes that facilitate informal accommodation and solution of conflicts. Without informal institutions promoting consensus, trust, and conflict reduction, societies will place intolerable burdens on formal democratic institutions.

Social trust, forged by encouraging people to communicate across loyalties — including political loyalties — is an important factor in spurring any government to broaden participation in a political system. When governments crack down on CSOs and their advocacy of rights, it is often because they fear uncontrolled, convulsive change driven by groups they do not trust.

In his book *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, which looks at religious conflict in India between Hindus and Muslims, Ashutosh Varshney sets about to explain why some communities managed to maintain relative peace over long periods of time while others erupted periodically into violence.³ Reviewing all reported incidents of violence between Hindus and Muslims in India between 1950 and 1995, Varshney reveals the most powerful influence on social trust: personal engagement and contact.

Civic engagement and the trust it makes possible led to the 1998 signing

³ Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life* (Yale University Press, 2002), 9.

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of a reasonably stable peace in Northern Ireland between Catholics and Protestants. Supporting the formal negotiations were a multitude of informal, “Track Two” mediation initiatives sponsored by community mediators, academics, churches, business, trade unions, and — in some ways most important — women.⁴ Many hundreds of these initiatives focused on facilitating contacts between disputants and politicians, between the paramilitaries and governments, and between politicians and civil society. The central purpose was to build trust and, eventually, a culture of peace among these societies in conflict. These programs sought to create safe spaces for politicians to consider issues of common interest apart from the conflict: social issues, the economy, and conflicts elsewhere. They generally avoided issues related to the conflict, leaving those to the formal negotiations.

The central purpose was to build trust and eventually a culture of peace among these societies in conflict.

In addition, thousands of people were involved in promoting dialogues among communities. These dialogues increased significantly in the early 1990s. Many organizations sponsored training programs for them, and hundreds of local workshops brought together people from all sectors to discuss a wide variety of issues, with political options, for their future together. Other initiatives aimed to stimulate dialogue through drama, music, and art programs. Many observers of the conflict in Northern Ireland believe that but for these Track Two, society-based initiatives, the so-called Good Friday Agreement, which was finally signed on April 10, 1998, would never have been concluded.

South Africa provides an example of governments — both the old and the new — too hobbled by fear and distrust to be effective facilitators of peace after the end of apartheid. In the period between 1991 and 1994, initiatives by nonstate actors — religious groups, CSOs, businesses, and trade unions — promoted communication all over the country and helped South Africa avoid the bloodbath that many had predicted.⁵ They built a foundation of trust and peace that kept the country together until the first elections were held in April 1994.

In Greece and Turkey, intense citizen diplomacy brought the long conflict over Cyprus under control. In Burundi, CSOs used media to promote peace between the majority Hutus and minority Tutsis to prevent the genocide that killed more than 500,000 people next door in Rwanda. The examples go on and on, all featuring strong society-based initiatives to build cultures of

⁴ For an excellent summary of these informal, Track Two initiatives, see Mari Fitzduff, “Provoking Dialogue — the Northern Ireland Experience,” in Luc Reyhler and Thania Paffenholz, eds., *Peacebuilding: A Field Guide* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000).

⁵ Susan Collin Marks, *Watching the Wind* (United States Institute of Peace Press, 2000).

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peace supporting official negotiations.

How far can this approach go? Can it work in places torn by violence? It is common to hear even practitioners of conflict resolution say it cannot work where there is substantial strife, as in Iraq or Palestine. We take issue with statements like this. First, the experiences of Northern Ireland, South Africa, and Palestine suggest it *can* be effective, even in the face of considerable conflict. A more important and deeper point, however, is that there is an absence of serious research and evidence on this subject. Few question the Pentagon's spending tens of billions of dollars a year on R&D, because weapons are widely seen to have strategic importance. We are arguing that civil society initiatives addressing "soft," subjective issues of culture can also have great strategic value, and we need to commit to researching and evaluating them accordingly.

We believe these experiences offer powerful lessons for reducing conflicts even in the most difficult places and for promoting the trust that is crucial to successful democracies. They connect citizens beyond ethnic, religious, or tribal identity to larger, expanded identities. The fragile states that have become national security problems are still tribal in ethnic and religious terms (*societies* independent of states). Institutionalizing connection and engagement of citizens across loyalties can provide a powerful antidote to tribalism, encouraging an expanded national consciousness, which is an essential part of nation-building. However, accomplishing these effects requires that they be undertaken with a seriousness and on a scale — as in Northern Ireland and South Africa — that has never been attempted in the quest for Middle East peace. Neither has it happened there or elsewhere as part of an initiative to promote democracy.

Perhaps the most important question to ask skeptics is this: What else has worked to reduce conflict and promote trust in these tribal societies that have become the principal concerns of foreign and national security policy? Pessimism and the need for retreat hang over much of the debate on what to do, especially in Iraq, but also in Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, and elsewhere. Active promotion of democracy has been downgraded as a foreign policy priority. The reason given is *realism*: Critics of Bush 111 say the administration has awakened to what is possible. We would say it has confronted the limits of traditional statecraft in dealing with weak states and the limits of democracy-promotion restricted to the formal institutions.

Democracy remains a vital long-term objective. But to promote it in weak states requires addressing its informal as well as its formal requirements, going beyond promotion of voting and transparent institutions to promotion of social trust and institutionalizing communication across loyalties.

These experiences offer powerful lessons for reducing conflicts in the most difficult places.

Educating girls

PROGRAMS THAT ALTER societies address both the objective and subjective conditions that foster terrorism and include enhancing economic and political development. Programs promoting education for girls are among the most important examples. On the subjective side, educating girls and empowering adult women addresses the challenge of connection: bringing women as peacemakers into prominent view in societies, reducing the isolation of many young men who have little contact with women, and increasing the place of the feminine in society. Economically, each additional year of schooling increases a girl's income 15–25 percent.

Programs that successfully promote girls' education in male-dominated societies rest on the foundation of community engagement and ownership — the same basic model that promotes social trust for peace and democracy. While there is clearly no silver bullet for poverty reduction, many would argue that educating girls comes close.⁶

Educated women have fewer children, provide better nutrition and health for their families, experience significantly lower child mortality, generate more income, and are far more likely to educate their children than women with little or no schooling, creating a virtuous cycle for the community and the country. Many people also argue that where women are empowered, they will play an important role in reducing religious conflict and promoting peace.

Educating girls has substantial long-term benefits. Studies from many regions of the world show that increasing a mother's schooling has a significantly larger positive impact on the next generation than does adding to a father's schooling by the same number of years. Educated mothers, more so than fathers, lead to better birth outcomes (e.g., higher birth weights), better child nutrition, lower child mortality, and earlier and more years of schooling for the children.

Girls' education also leads to reduced fertility, which is important for countries trying to improve per capita income. Better-educated women bear fewer children than less-educated women because they marry later and have fewer years of childbearing. They also know more about how to control fertility; they have more confidence to make decisions regarding reproduction, and they have other life options. A three-year increase in the average education level of women is associated with as much as one less child per woman. Studies from India now show that girls' education has a stronger correlation with declining fertility than family-planning initiatives.

The regions of the world that have achieved the most economic and social progress in the last half-century — East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Latin

⁶ Lawrence Summers, as chief economist of the World Bank, concluded that investing in girls' education may be the highest-return investment available in the developing world.

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America — are those that have most successfully closed their gender gaps in education. Those that have lagged behind in their growth — notably South Asia, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa — have lagged badly in their relative investments in girls' schooling, limiting women's contribution to progress. Adult female illiteracy today is highest in South Asia (55 percent), followed by the Arab world (51 percent) and sub-Saharan Africa (45 percent). Simulation analyses suggest that had these three regions closed their gender gaps in education at the rate achieved by East Asia between 1960 and 1992, their income per capita could have grown by up to a full percentage point more per year.

While efforts to promote girls' education have failed in a number of countries, the common underlying cause is not a lack of demand but a *lack of community ownership*. There are many examples of communities — even the most deeply conservative and traditional communities — that have embraced girls' education, albeit on their own terms, and achieved remarkable results. When structured appropriately, demand is there, among men as well as women.

Most current aid-supported girls' education programs are highly expensive pilot projects costing \$60–\$90 per child per year. These programs are too expensive ever to be strategic. Realizing large-scale increases in girls' enrollments requires developing strategies for reforming government schools, which serve the great majority of children. Interesting examples exist in many places, some of them operating at large scales and low cost.⁷

Economic reform and property rights

WE NOW MOVE to the roles of civil society in more traditional areas of foreign policy, focusing on two general areas: promoting economic policy reform and a strategy for promoting property rights to empower the poor. We then explore possible uses of civil society to facilitate communication with both states and nonstate actors that have become threats to U.S. security.

In *Strategic Foreign Assistance* (SFA), we reviewed the extraordinary record of the International Center for Economic Growth (ICEG), which supported economists in all global regions to promote economic policy reform. A venture in South-South learning, ICEG was run by U.S.-trained Latin American economists living in Latin America; it played a significant role in promoting major reforms in more than 50 countries over a ten-year period before USAID failed to renew its core budget, which never exceeded \$2.5 million.

⁷ Examples include the UNICEF Girls' Community Schools in Upper Egypt, World Bank-financed schools in Baluchistan (southwest Pakistan), and schools sponsored by Educate Girls Globally (EGG) working through SBMA, a local partner, in northern India.

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A key to ICEG's success was its ability to achieve "local ownership" of international ideas: When the studies are done by economists in Mexico or Indonesia or India — rather than by USAID or the World Bank — local policymakers will often take note and implement reforms. When the advice comes from "outside," developing-country policymakers are often not interested. Another key was a long-term commitment, especially by USAID and the Ford Foundation, to finance graduate economics training for students from other countries. The most famous of these were the Chicago Boys in Chile and the Berkeley Mafia in Indonesia. Unfortunately, USAID and the major foundations are no longer financing such training, and the lack of technical capacity has become a major impediment to improving economic performance, particularly in Arab and Muslim countries and those of sub-Saharan Africa.

The Center for International Private Enterprise, a major grantee of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), continues the work of promoting institutional and policy reform; but as with ICEG, investments in reform do not begin to equal its strategic value.

Hernando de Soto and his *Instituto Libertad y Democracia*, based in Lima, Peru, are well known for promoting property rights for the poor. De Soto's is the only group that has gone head-to-head with a terrorist group — the brutal Maoist *Sendero Luminoso* — and prevailed. Despite repeated attempts to assassinate him, de Soto saw rural peasants who received secure title to their property starting to cooperate with authorities to speed *Sendero's* collapse.

Although de Soto developed his program with primary support from USAID, in 2003 the agency decided against renewing his core funding, and only a strong bipartisan response saved his organization. While he has substantial support among foreign-policymakers, there is almost no cooperation with him in the priority countries from Indonesia to northwest Africa. Today he is operating under a direct appropriation from Congress, but — as with many other programs — investments in his work do not begin to reflect their strategic value.

Citizen diplomacy in weak states

THE DISCUSSION TO this point has focused on the need to develop society-based initiatives for economic, social, and political change in countries from Indonesia to Somalia with weak or illegitimate states and strong societies. This task is difficult enough. But there is a complication that makes it even more challenging. The United States and its allies face growing hostility and instability in a region in which the U.S. has few strong relationships or none at all with many of the principal actors. Some of these are states and leaders of states (Iran, Hamas, Syria); others are nonstate actors (Hezbollah, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt). In most

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cases, U.S. nonrecognition is a result of conscious policy choices; in some, it is a response to opposition by a friendly government (e.g., the Egyptian government's outlawing the Muslim Brotherhood).

The policy of withholding recognition and relations with weak states and hostile nonstate actors is carried over from our dealings with strong states. The object of using "carrots and sticks," incentives and punishments, is to weaken them, to put pressure on them to change their behavior so they will become better global citizens. It is not clear, however, that this is productive with weak states and nonstate actors. There is a need for serious debate about the consequences of this policy and about the possible role civil society organizations might play in correcting it and reducing its unintended consequences.

We want here to set forth some observations as background for such a debate. First, the number of significant parties able to play constructive roles is greatly multiplied in weak states with limited control over their societies. The combination of scale and subtleties makes it difficult to imagine that relations could all be managed by official U.S. government entities. Nongovernmental intermediaries, or CSOs, would have important parts to play.

A second observation relates to the effects of withholding relations with an extremely diverse group of potentially constructive actors (states and a large variety of CSOs, political parties, religious groups, etc.). One effect is to lose opportunities to appeal to Arab and Muslim publics, leaving the field to extremist religious and terrorist groups. In the case of countries with nondemocratic systems, such as Egypt, maintaining relations only with the government has the unintended effect of uniting parties and groups that are opposed to the government as well as to the United States. Noncommunication deprives us and them of a space in which to try to develop positive relations, strengthen our friends, and weaken our enemies.

Although it may be appropriate to continue official nonrecognition of hostile state and nonstate actors, such as Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon, we think it is important to consider encouraging CSOs to establish relationships with them as part of an effort to improve relations with a variety of actors in that region with the goal of strengthening parties that want good relations with the U.S. and weakening parties that do not.

Financing local civil society initiatives to promote social trust has important implications for the issue of communications with the whole range of actors, both state and nonstate, throughout the Arab and Muslim world. Our proposal depends on developing relationships with as many of them as we can.

Many observers of the Arab-Israeli conflict, especially those on the Israeli side, assert that Arab hostility toward Israel is in substantial part driven by

Weak states and nonstate actors may not respond to "carrots and sticks" by changing their behavior.

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conflicts *within* the Arab and Muslim worlds: conflicts between radical and moderate Muslims, conflicts between Sunnis and Shiites, and conflicts among various states — often influenced by religious and tribal issues — and conflicts between tribes and other sub-groupings. While there are good reasons for seeing that these and other conflicts will inflame extremism in some instances, they provide a much more important *opportunity* to use society-based initiatives to promote trust and reduce conflict as a strategy for pacifying many parts of the region.

Recruiting citizens as partners in peace empowers them and mitigates self-perceptions as powerless “victims,” bringing disputants together under conditions in which they honor and respect each other. Connecting people in

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building cultures of trust and peace also reduces the sense of rootlessness. These generalizations about citizens and peace also hold for civil society strategies in postconflict societies as they connect, engage, and empower people. Connection is important for all human beings, and in healthy societies people’s connections are manifold and complex — personal, artistic, recreational, religious, political. Multiple connections limit the danger that one — political or religious, for example — will become obsessive and extreme. As Richard Haass, president of the Council

on Foreign Relations, has said, it is important that the mosque not be the only mediating institution outside the family in Muslim countries. Multiple connections through multiple civil society organizations enrich people’s lives and represent a crucial institutional foundation for societies searching for democracy. All programs that facilitate civic engagement and build trust mitigate religious hatred.

Finally, where community mobilization is used to promote girls’ education — or any other social reform — it has been shown to open traditional fathers’ sense of possibility for their daughters and to effect profound changes in (formerly fundamentalist) attitudes toward their patriarchal norms.⁸ Before UNICEF installed its Girls’ Community Schools around the city of Asyut in Upper Egypt, many fathers would not let their girls out of their homes. Today many of them will allow their daughters to go to Cairo to college.⁹

Changing how people think often requires showing it is possible to change how they live. Mobilizing and training people to solve their own

⁸ These include education for girls (in many countries); institutional, judicial, and legal reform (in Pakistan); micro-finance programs (in Bangladesh); voter surveys and education (in Afghanistan and Indonesia); “peoples’ assemblies” as quasi-constitutional conventions (in Pakistan); and many others.

⁹ This reported change is based on interviews with Malak Zaalouk, director of education programs for UNICEF in Egypt, about the impact of the Girls’ Community Schools around the city of Asyut in Upper Egypt and also with Carol Morris of the British Council for many schools in northwest Pakistan. It is also based on an interview with Greg Mortensen on Pakistan.

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problems multiplies the impact of reforms and operates at high scales and low cost. Some of the programs and issue areas we have selected focus on achieving rather conventional objectives of public policy reform, such as economic policy reform accomplished through central government action. Others involve more unconventional objectives, especially in the areas of cultural transformation and political reform, including empowerment of women through grass-roots community mobilization and recruitment of citizens in the search for peace.

Building civil society has not been a high priority of U.S. development assistance policy planning. In practice, however, USAID missions have implemented many of their programs through international CSOs, which in turn typically work through local partners. Local civil society organizations, as a result, have burgeoned in the past two decades, undertaking a wide variety of economic, legal, social, and political activities. In some countries they have promoted significant, positive changes that have been aligned with U.S. foreign policy objectives.

Despite the breadth of CSO activity and influence in many countries, it does not begin to achieve the policy toward societies that we need in weak states. We believe the U.S. foreign policy community and, above all, senior foreign-policymakers need to increase their understanding of how policy toward societies and CSOs can help achieve U.S. foreign policy objectives.¹⁰ Currently, CSOs do not figure substantially in the larger debate on foreign policy. The major reason is a lack of clarity about the strategic roles of civil society as demonstrated in real experiences. In addition, because of their limited interest in the issue, foreign-policymakers tend to regard policy in this area as involving development alone and leave it, therefore, largely to USAID. Although USAID has a vital role to play in designing and implementing a new approach, it lacks the political and bureaucratic clout to win approval of investments on a scale capable of accomplishing the objectives at issue. It also lacks the strategic vision to expand civil society activities beyond traditional understandings of foreign aid into other, larger objectives. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, in strong recent statements emphasizing the importance of civil society, has indicated a keen awareness of the issue — suggesting a major commitment to change past policy.¹¹ However, real change is slow in happening.¹² As a result, CSOs have not

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¹⁰ Although CSOs play almost no role either in policy planning or in the deliberations of the foreign policy community at the working levels of the State Department, ambassadors and embassies maintain much closer contact and cooperation with CSOs than the larger debate would suggest.

¹¹ Jim Lehrer interview with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, *NewsHour* (March 4, 2005).

¹² A good example of the discrepancy between policymakers' emphasis on civil society and the govern-

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begun to play the role they could play in a new policy toward societies, in mitigating the conditions that promote terrorists and terrorism, and in promoting sustainable development.

One of the great virtues of society-based initiatives is that they can be used not just in countries “friendly” to the United States, such as Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Colombia, and Uganda; they can also be used — or start to be used — in countries like Syria, Iran, Palestine, and possibly even North Korea. They can also provide an opening to progress in societies that are emerging from civil or ethnic conflict in Africa and Latin America, as well as in many countries still caught up in conflict.

Giving priority to society-based initiatives will add crucial economic, political, and cultural instruments to foreign-policy-making. Without these instruments, and limited to state-based interventions, the United States and its allies will face choices between extreme positions and diminished possibilities for success. The sterile dance between Europe and the United States over what to do about Iran’s nuclear program is a perfect example of what happens when there are only “good cop/bad cop,” state-focused choices.

The sterile dance between the U.S. and Europe over Iran is what happens when there are only “good cop/bad cop,” choices.

One of our major concerns in making these proposals is that it is not clear the government currently has the *capacity* to do what we are proposing. Part of the problem is embedded in the institutional culture of USAID. Part of the problem is a lack of leadership from senior foreign policy officials in the government. And a very important reason is that it is hard for governments to innovate. For these reasons, strong experimentation and assistance from nongovernmental organizations may be necessary to do what we are proposing. In understanding that foreign assistance programs can make strategic contributions to foreign policy, it will also be important to initiate a major research and development effort aimed at improving models of intervention, especially those that can win local political support, which is crucial to success.

ment’s implementation of the new policy is USAID’s Fragile States Strategy, which was published in December 2004. The strategy focuses almost entirely on repairing fragile *states* and barely mentions the separate challenge of reforming *societies* in fragile states. Its central concern is with “governance,” but it is clear that this word refers only to states and governments and not to nonstate institutions. This emphasis on states leads naturally to the conclusion that it is impossible to work in some states. Thus, “Not all fragile states provide opportunities for constructive USAID engagement. . . . Outsiders [meaning USAID] are far better equipped to address effectiveness deficits than promote legitimacy.” This is only true, as in the case of the strategy, if one focuses entirely on states and has no strategy for civil society. Outsiders *can* support civil society, with enormous implications for promoting legitimacy of governance understood not only of civil society but even (to some degree and in some instances) of governments.

USAID’s Conflict Management and Mitigation Program provides another example of a major, important USAID initiative that professes commitment to communicating best practices between USAID programs and offices without mentioning the powerful role that civil society organizations can play in managing and mitigating conflicts.

Civil society as a strategic resource

CSOs THAT DO this kind of work jealously guard their independence and cannot be “recruited” as partners in or “used” to promote U.S. foreign policy. If this is true of U.S. CSOs, it is even truer of organizations based in other countries.

Our argument is not that foreign policy should try to pull CSOs away from their missions, but that it should embrace and support key CSO objectives. Where the objectives of a CSO and U.S. foreign policy overlap, foreign-policymakers should support them. Some CSOs will refuse to join in a strategic development program initiated by the U.S. government. Others will join after making sure they will be able to maintain their independence. It is in the government’s interest to respect their independence, as well as the *perception* of their independence, which is their greatest asset and the essential catalyst for the success of their endeavors everywhere. This is especially true, again, for organizations based in other countries.

In designing policies for societies — as distinct from states — it is important to be clear about the challenges policy must address. Because terrorism is so much on our minds, we want to say a few words about its causes. This will help define objectives.

We believe that terrorism has both objective and subjective causes. The objective problems of poverty, unemployment and political disempowerment are obvious enough. We want to focus here on the subjective causes of alienation and humiliation. These are less obvious and need to be illustrated.

All recent proposals for Middle East peace provide examples in focusing on the objective concerns of land for peace. While these objective issues are important, none of them addresses the Palestinians’ subjective feelings of humiliation and victimhood and their demand for honor and respect. Many people close to the conflict insist these subjective needs represent their overriding concerns. Accepting the importance of these subjective needs leads to a very different understanding of the challenge of peace in the region.

The problem of alienation and rootlessness was evident among the terrorists who hijacked the planes on 9/11. Although many of them lived in the West, they had never integrated into the societies in which they found themselves. Instead, they gravitated toward clerics on the fringes of the Muslim community who preached hatred of the West and the United States. Most were also without stable long-term connections to women and girls, both in their countries of origin and in the West.

The remedies for the objective challenges are economic and political development. The remedies for the subjective challenges are empowerment and connection (which is also empowering). Unlike governments, which specialize in providing for objective public needs, CSOs specialize in empower-

ing and connecting citizens. Many communities participating in the World Bank's initiative promoting community "ownership" of schools in Baluchistan (Pakistan) in the 1990s consistently resisted and opposed religious fundamentalism.¹³ This has also been true for the two largest Muslim organizations in Indonesia, which are working with the Asia Foundation (TAF) to build a moderate, tolerant Islamic democracy in that country.¹⁴ CSOs address the subjective causes of terrorism in powerful ways while also addressing problems of poverty and education.

CSOs mediate between individuals and the state, often providing protection against authoritarian and totalitarian regimes and often challenging them. They play a similar role in relation to religion and religious authorities, especially in Muslim countries. CSOs often provide the most powerful means of effecting economic, political, and social change in developing countries. They can strengthen democratic institutions and culture by facilitating citizen self-governance in helping address a wide range of economic, social, and political issues. Perhaps most important, they can strengthen democratic values by advancing communication across loyalties, thus promoting the social trust that is crucial to democracy.

When CSOs work with governments, they can often produce strategically important accomplishments in addressing economic or political issues. In any area of public policy — economic policy reform, institutional and legal reform, voter registration and education, early childhood and formal education, environmental and health policy, and formal peace negotiations — CSOs can play crucial roles in encouraging governments to "own" a reform proposal. On other issues, especially those involving community mobilization and empowerment, CSOs can play the dominant role in empowering and connecting people, with little initial government involvement. However, the pace of reform and change can greatly accelerate when CSOs work with government ministry staffs to help facilitate and encourage community mobilization to strengthen civil society.

Local ownership

POSITIVE CHANGE OCCURS best and becomes sustainable when there is local ownership — when people and governments are committed to it. Local ownership means different things in different issue areas. In the case of economic policy reform, the ownership that is important is by government policymakers and by the larger circle of economic and political community leadership groups that influence govern-

¹³ Interview with Barbara Herz, who worked at the World Bank from 1981 to 1999, where she launched the Women in Development division and then headed another division covering education, health and population in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

¹⁴ Interview with William P. Fuller, president of the Asia Foundation from 1989–2004.

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ments. In the case of girls' education and women's empowerment, authority figures — typically fathers but also local tribal leaders in traditional, rural areas — must accept and “own” the ideas. In educational reform, ownership must be embraced by provincial ministerial offices of education, by local CSOs, by teachers, communities, and parents as well as by national ministries of education and finance.

Leadership by local CSOs in all of these areas helps assure local ownership. This has been shown in society-based initiatives on economic policy reform and on legal and regulatory reform, in strategies promoting girls' education and the empowerment of women, and in recruiting citizens as partners in the search for democracy and peace. This is true even in the most “difficult” countries, in the most resistant cultures, and even during civil strife. These changes have included basic shifts in attitudes toward women in highly traditional regions of Arab countries and greatly reduced hostility toward enemies in conflicts marked by hatred and fear. In every case, the key was successful promotion by local CSOs of local ownership of the need to change.

One of the keys to promoting local ownership is avoiding foreign authorship — especially the U.S. government. Local civil society is often the most powerful avenue to local ownership, even if it is government officials who need to “own” a commitment to change. Typically, however, government officials alone cannot achieve the needed results; other nongovernmental leadership groups — larger circles of influence — can also be important to strengthen and sustain the commitment to change, especially when control over governments changes hands.

Although there are many documented strategies for building local ownership of education reform, for example, sometimes these are forgotten or ignored, especially where there is high-level political support for action. A case in point is state-to-state U.S. efforts to promote education reform in Arab countries. These efforts are foundering, principally because insufficient attention has been given to civil society and its potential for generating local ownership of the need for change.

It is commonly asked how it is possible to implement programs that are both *strategic* — in the sense of supporting U.S. foreign policy — and *locally owned*. What if people decide to pursue (own) policies that are antithetical to U.S. interests? One of our underlying assumptions is that people want to adopt the universal values associated with economic, social, and political development. Our challenge is to support local civil society organizations that promote those values in ways that ensure they are “locally owned.” Experiences in all regions of the world show that the objectives we believe are strategic — economic development, educating girls and empowering women, recruiting citizens in promoting democracy and peace — *are* universal values. Pursuing them can thus be about *them* and need not be about *us* — yet still be strategic for us.

Other uses of civil society

THERE IS NO space here to describe individual project ideas in any detail. However, to communicate the range of possibilities, we want to sketch some promising ideas. These ideas either have been developed by people in the Middle East or have strong support from people living there who could help make them happen.

Arab and Muslim Forum. This idea was developed by a group of Arab intellectuals to provide a place for dialogue among a new generation of Arab and Muslim intellectuals, and also between Arabs/Muslims and Americans. The dialogues would focus on economics, history, religion, and culture in order to point the way toward economic, political, and social progress for the Arab and Muslim countries, which are struggling with how to reconcile modernity with traditional institutions and values. The Forum might also take on the subject of Arab interest in and responsibility for Iraq — for creating Arab initiatives that might help promote a positive outcome there.

Interfaith dialogues. In December 2004 the Institute for Middle East Peace and Development initiated a program of interfaith dialogues bringing together the highest-level institutions and leaders of Christianity, Judaism, and Sunni Islam. The dialogues, which took place in the U.S., involved visits to leading seminaries of these three Abrahamic faiths and included interfaith blessings.

The second phase of this project will focus on filling the communications gap between American religious leaders and the Shiite Muslim leadership, especially that between the U.S. and key Shiite seminaries at Najaf, Karbala, Qom, and Beirut. The institute has established close relationships in all of these places for this purpose.

The third phase will focus on creation of a new institution for novice and intermediate religious professionals from the three faiths to expand the training of men and women educated in particular religious traditions in leading seminaries. These students will have the opportunity to meet their counterparts in the other faiths and to teach them basics of their own religious traditions and sacred texts prior to entering their professional religious vocations. This will allow students entering religious vocations to see practitioners of other faiths as real persons of faith who are worthy of human respect and of God's love. Furthermore, their professional preaching and teaching will refer to the other religions with positive curiosity and faithful respect rather than continuing the tradition of intergroup contempt and stereotype.

This project will help produce an agenda for interfaith peace efforts to lower tensions between the U.S. and the Arab-Muslim worlds and among their religious leaders and followers.

Other possible projects. Other projects, which are in various stages of

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development, include public dialogues to promote trust and democratic values between groups in conflict and modeled on dialogue initiatives in Northern Ireland and South Africa; a project, developed by Arab intellectuals and activists in the Middle East, to develop contacts and understanding of movements of opposition throughout the Arab world, including Islamic movements (full development of this project would depend on senior U.S. foreign-policymakers seeing value in informal contacts with groups now cut off from contact); a project bringing together large numbers of Arab-American and American Muslim youth to work together with youth in Arab and Muslim countries on public service projects, modeled on the Peace Corps; and for all of these projects, sustained efforts to communicate news of inter-group engagements and connections to mass audiences in the Arab and Muslim “street.”

Recommendations

TO IMPLEMENT THE proposals presented here, we make the following recommendations:

Select four to five priority countries to focus on initially and prepare Country Strategic Plans for each. Focus on five or six strategic objectives that would accomplish significant economic, educational, political, and social change in these nations. We suggest economic policy reform, legal and regulatory reform, women’s empowerment and girls’ education, and recruiting citizens in promoting peace and democracy, but other ideas should also be considered. The priority should be to develop plans that will really make a difference, with emphasis on promoting *perceptions* of change with serious communications programs. Defense of the budgets will follow presentation of strategic impacts. (We are assuming that the total budget produced from aiming at strategic impacts will be “worth it.” If not, it will be necessary to modify the proposals, including possibly researching cheaper alternative strategies.)

Create a Special Strategic Development Fund that will finance the Strategic Country Plans as well as R&D. Decisions on funding should give priority to financing country plans through local or national civil society organizations, as well as plans that include communication strategies to impart results of interventions to priority audiences.

Create a special fund to promote development of civil society. The Department of State should establish a semi-autonomous institute similar to the United States Institute of Peace, plus a large central Special Fund for CSO Development. Since funding cannot be perceived as promoting U.S. foreign policy, it is important that the funding agency be autonomous — and, more important, be *perceived* as autonomous. The institute would develop the civil society program, collaborate with USAID, provide large “seed grants” to national CSOs, implement streamlined contracting systems to invest effec-

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tively in national CSO strategies, conduct effective monitoring and evaluation activities, and undertake research and policy analysis projects.

Develop a strategy and incentives to transfer knowledge and share lessons about models and strategies that are effective and cost-effective. Sharing lessons learned is essential to maximizing the strategic potential of our proposals. Unfortunately, the nonprofit/donor capital markets at present have weak to nonexistent mechanisms for managing and sharing knowledge across national boundaries. In the current nonprofit/donor world, funding is rarely available to transfer knowledge about programs and practices that work to other countries.

We propose two reforms to correct this problem. The first is to include in the funding guidelines of the Special Fund an emphasis on financing the cultural adaptation and replication of components of successful reform models in specific strategic areas. This would reward missions and CSOs for replicating effective models. A second reform would reward the creators of successful models by awarding them special grants as discretionary funding for projects they judge to be priorities. This would provide funding for innovation, research, evaluation, and communicating and using knowledge about what works. (If incentives are sufficient, it will be unnecessary to provide for special funding for R&D and communications as called for above. We propose experimenting with both at the beginning and then fine-tuning the combination to optimize between them.)

These proposals, taken together, would provide incentives for the major actors in financing and producing social initiatives to be innovative and entrepreneurial. Such programs need not involve great amounts of money. Well designed, they should greatly increase the return on investment in social innovations while also helping encourage the nonprofit/donor world to emphasize entrepreneurship and innovation.

The issue of cost. One of the key elements in strategic investments is cost. Many USAID programs cannot have broad cumulative effects because, as currently designed, they are too costly to carry out on a national or multinational scale. However, the activities we are advocating here — promotion of institutional, economic, and political reform, empowerment of people, engagement of citizens as partners in development, peacemaking and nation-building during and after conflicts — are all relatively inexpensive compared to other parts of a development budget.

Because cost is so important, we want to present a sketch of some general estimates of the costs associated with a hypothetical country plan for Pakistan. For economic growth: \$15 million for fellowships supporting 40 Ph.D.s and 40 Masters spread over six years; support for economic policy research: \$5 million per year. (This program would be greatly strengthened by creation of an organization like ICEG, working in all regions of the world and facilitating South-South networking and learning: at \$10 million per year for a global program.) Property rights: \$20 million over five years (\$3 million the first year, \$3 million the second year, \$4 million the third year,

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and \$5 million the fourth and fifth years). Community mobilization for girls' education, community health projects, and (where appropriate) conflict reduction and related communications program: \$100 million to \$125 million per year. The total for a strategic aid policy for Pakistan, then, would be in the range of \$120 million to \$150 million per year.

The numbers are not large for a very large country like Pakistan (population 160 million) compared to what we are already spending. And as Pakistan is the largest of the countries we have suggested as priorities after Indonesia, the budgets necessary for most countries would be less than this.

The problem of cost raises a final issue about the importance of committing to a serious program of research and development. R&D is no less important in political and social interventions than it is in weapons development. The United States government spends billions of dollars in researching and developing new weapons. As we come to see these society-based economic, educational, and political initiatives as strategic, it will be obvious that we need to invest just as seriously in developing and testing new models for these initiatives. This is especially true in developing political strategies for promoting economic, social and political reforms. And it is also, finally, important in developing approaches to reduce costs so that interventions can be mounted on scales that are strategic.

The need for new habits

THE EMERGENCE OF the societies, cultures, and nonstate actors of other countries as threats to security presents large challenges to U.S. foreign policy. We have argued that to increase both understanding and feasible, strategically effective responses, the United States must strengthen civil society organizations as an important end of policy in other countries and then must partner with those organizations to promote economic, social, and political development in them.

Organizing and managing effective intelligence in regard to states is difficult enough. It is enormously more difficult in relation to societies and the invisible adversaries they shelter. Existing foreign policy and intelligence agencies struggle to address the new reality for precisely the same reason that planned and centralized economies are helpless to operate complex, modern economies. As Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman argued, limited economic knowledge about the market created the need for hundreds of millions of market participant-planners in a market economy. Collectivist approaches that relied on thousands of central planners were overwhelmed and unable to acquire enough knowledge to act effectively. Similar limits of knowledge in the new world of foreign policy require the recruitment of masses of new recruits within troubled societies who alone have the capacity to understand the new realities they and their countrymen face.

Beyond understanding, formal state actions provide severely limited

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options to promote change even in relation to other states. In relation to societies and nonstate actors, state actions alone provide very few options for effective engagement of complex and even invisible theaters. States need instruments to act informally. Social trust is a crucial component of this new engagement with civil society because informal relationships depend on trust. While this is a complicated subject in an age of rampant distrust, our proposal cuts across traditional political and ideological conflicts within the United States, creating an important venue for cooperation and trust between parties locked in conflict on other issues.

If they are to increase both understanding and effective instruments of engagement in the new, informal world of societies and nonstate actors, foreign-policymakers must recruit citizens and citizen-based organizations in other countries as partners in addressing multiple challenges. Approached in this way, local civil society organizations in other countries will become the most important partners of the United States in the new environment with their advantages of language, culture, sensibility, ethnicity, relationships, and trust.

Despite the powerful logic underlying support for civil society initiatives to promote strategic change, we are aware that many senior foreign-policymakers and many in the foreign policy community generally will resist our proposals. One reason is that they will add great complexity to the challenge of making and implementing policy. Policy toward states is a relatively simple matter involving relatively few variables. Expanding policy to address (subjective) issues of culture and society and partnering with civil society organizations will add great complexity for policymakers.

Beyond this, recruiting civil society partners may create a fear about control — that with partners, foreign-policymakers will lose control over policy. But the loss of control is more apparent than real: There is only the illusion of control in societies that American policy often leaves unchanged. If U.S. policymakers were to begin supporting programs of the kind we have described, the impact would be so great as to make the old style of formal control irrelevant.

There is one deeper reason why policymakers and intellectuals may resist our proposals: They conflict with the mechanistic assumptions that underlie Western habits of thought. Those assumptions contribute powerfully to the belief that states are the only significant actors in international affairs, and they inhibit the appreciation that engaged citizen initiatives, supported by governments, can promote powerful social and political change.

The ultimate objective here, obviously, is effective policy — policy that can influence the world in positive ways. Current policies are not working because they are not addressing challenges presented by strong, independent societies. Until foreign-policymakers really come to grips with these new challenges, their efforts will continue to founder.