Should the United States Support Religious Education in the Islamic World?

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The United States and its allies are involved in changing schooling in several Islamic countries, especially Iraq and Afghanistan, but also Pakistan and elsewhere. Specifically, the United States promotes and provides resources for changes in textbooks, teacher preparations, selection of school administrators, and general educational policy. One can strongly oppose such an American role; however, as long as it occurs, the question stands: What is the appropriate role for the United States as far as the religious content of education overseas is concerned?

This essay examines legal, normative, and educational arguments that have been made on the question of America’s role in educational development throughout the Islamic world. Should the United States insist that only secular school programs receive its funds, in accordance with the First Amendment? Or should citizens of the countries involved be accorded the freedom to choose the ways they prefer to employ American resources, even if these resources are used to promote religious extremism and anti-Americanism? Or should the United States promote a moderate religious education and agitate against religious extremism, often called fundamentalism? Similar questions are also faced by European countries as they move to re-examine the Christian education given in their public schools and consider supporting separate so-called Koran schools, in which Islam is

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taught and its tenets guide educational policy.

As with many other matters concerning education, the issues involved are much broader than what books children read and what teachers share with them during classes. The key questions are which values (if any) ought to be part of public education and what kind of society educators seek to advance—a secular one, one in which religion is relegated to the private sphere, one in which moderate but no fundamentalist religion is promoted, but not one in which whatever the community favors is supported, even if it is an extremist version of the religion at issue.

We first examine the legal arguments surrounding the application of the First Amendment overseas. It is then important to study the need (in the societies at issue) for a core of shared moral values and the sources from which these may be derived, particularly the role that public education might play in nurturing such values (a role that is sometimes referred to as value or character education). The essay concludes by offering a distinct policy that is the outgrowth of the communitarian Diversity within Unity model which the author has previously advanced.

**DOES THE FIRST AMENDMENT APPLY OVERSEAS?**

Some American legal experts argue that it is a violation of the First Amendment to use American taxpayers' money to fund religious education in other nations, just as it is in the United States. This position was struck by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which stated that it will “fund only ‘neutral,’ apolitical and areligious’ [educational] materials because the U.S. constitution prohibit[s] proselytizing with U.S. government money.” In the case of Iraq, although USAID holds that all education initiatives must be Iraqi-led, it also confirms that “guidelines exist not to fund school materials that violate the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which prohibits using government funds to promote religion.” According to Jessica Jordan, chief of the USAID program in Baghdad, “Before we use taxpayer money to print textbooks we need to ensure that we are not infringing on separation of church and state and the First Amendment.” Christina Asquith reports in *Education Week*, “While U.S. officials don’t want to be seen as meddling in what Iraqis learn, they don’t want the possible alternative: funding textbooks that are anti-Semitic, anti-

1. See the website: [http://www.gwu.edu/uccps/](http://www.gwu.edu/uccps/).
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
American, or radically religious, particularly given the strict separation of church and state-sponsored schools in the US.\textsuperscript{5}

Shannon Meehan, of Creative Associates International Inc., the company retained by USAID to help Iraq reform its educational system, explains, "If there is a sentence such as 'Praise be to God' in a grammar textbook, we will have a discussion about revising or changing that to a different sentence. We do not remove the lesson from the textbook, we simply change the sentence."\textsuperscript{6} Frank Method, who directs RTI International, one of Creative Associate's subcontractors in Iraq, is even more open-ended:

There are questions as to whether you simply permit religion or require it. There are questions about whether it is taught by government-paid religious instructors or religious educators who aren't paid publicly. . . . In some cases, you [may] have religion [in the schools], but it's very ecumenical. It's kind of a values education, in which you are really teaching issues of tolerance and respect, rather than any content of any of the particular religions.\textsuperscript{7}

Charles Haynes, a leading legal authority in this area and senior scholar at the Freedom Forum's First Amendment Center, argues that it is a violation of the U.S. Constitution to use federal money to print religious textbooks in Afghanistan. He writes, "It really would not matter where it was in the world because it is a violation of conscience for the United States government to use tax dollars to support religion."\textsuperscript{8} Indeed, in the most germane court case to date, the court agreed, a point to which I will return later.

Although statements such as those just cited point to a coherent, official policy, to the extent that one can determine what is happening in chaotic and insecure Iraq and Afghanistan, the principle that no U.S. taxpayer's money will be used for religious education is not completely observed.\textsuperscript{9} U.S. foreign aid workers, for instance, purged all references to rifles and killing from some textbooks in Afghanistan, but they left the Koranic verses and Muslim tenets.\textsuperscript{10} USAID officials have explained that

\textsuperscript{6} Clover, "Education Minister Hits at USAID over Textbook Policy," 8.
\textsuperscript{7} Mary Ann Zehr, "Religious Study Confronts U.S. in Iraq," \textit{Education Week}, 11 June 2003, 1.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{9} According to Chris Brown, head of book revision for AID's Central Asia Task Force, 18 of the 200 titles the United States is republishing are primarily Islamic instruction books, used in what agency officials refer to as "civics" courses. These include teachings on how to live and "be a good Muslim." Joe Stephens & David B. Ottaway, "From U.S., the ABC's of Jihad: Violent Soviet-Era Textbooks Complicate Afghan Education Efforts," \textit{Washington Post}, 23 March 2002, A1.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
they left some Islamic materials intact in Afghanistan because they feared Afghan educators would reject books "lacking a strong element of Muslim thought." The agency did remove its logo and any mention of the U.S. government from the religious texts, USAID spokeswoman Kathryn Stratos said, as if this solves the issue at hand.  

The issue was somewhat mitigated in 2004 by an in-house USAID rule entitled Participation by Religious Organizations in USAID. Although the regulations specifically stipulate that any USAID support for faith-based organizations overseas cannot be used for "inherently religious activities," section 7 "permits the Secretary of State to waive all or any part of the rule, on a case-by-case basis, where the Secretary determines that such waiver is necessary to further the national security or foreign policy interests of the United States." Indeed, USAID now provides some modest funds to radio programs on Islamic tolerance in Indonesia, the construction of Islamic elementary schools in Uganda, the preservation of mosques and Islamic manuscripts in numerous Muslim countries, and many other "inherently religious activities."  

One may wonder whether the entire U.S. Constitution applies in our dealings abroad, or just the Establishment Clause. No such application is accorded, for instance, to the Fourth Amendment. The Supreme Court's most thorough exegesis on the extraterritorial application of the Fourth Amendment was delivered in United States v. Verdugo-Urgüiz (1990), in which the Court held that "the Fourth Amendment does not apply to a search and seizure by United States officials of property that is owned by a nonresident alien and located in a foreign country." Indeed, United States forces regularly, and with legal impunity (at least as far as American law is concerned), search the communications and records of millions of people overseas, under various surveillance programs. It should be noted, however, that U.S. obligations under international treaties often demand similar or stricter requirements than those stipulated in the U.S. constitution on matters concerning, for instance, privacy.

11. Ibid.  
12. Ibid.  
There seems to be only one case that deals specifically with the application of the Establishment Clause overseas. It is a case Americans for Religious Liberty, Inc. brought against Alan Woods, director of USAID (an arm of the U.S. State Department) and David Santos, director of the American Schools and Hospitals Abroad (ASHA) Office in Lamont v. Schultz (1988). The plaintiffs (Americans for Religious Liberty, Inc) challenged the defendants’ funding of twenty foreign religious schools that had received one or more grants from USAID and ASHA. The defendants in turn argued that the Establishment Clause does not apply to government activities abroad. Judge Leonard B. Sand, of the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York, ruled that “domestic Establishment Clause standards are applicable to the ASHA program,” but any ruling on the matter would contain “controlling questions of law as to which there is substantial ground for difference of opinion” and should therefore be certified by a higher court. In Lamont v. Woods, the Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit concurred with the district court’s decision that ASHA grants “are not immune from Establishment Clause strictures.”

It is important to note that this case deals with grants given to American organizations (for work to be carried out overseas) and not directly to non-Americans working outside the United States. Moreover, the ruling was never tested in the Supreme Court, nor have parallel cases been tried before other courts. Hence, this one ruling is a very thin reed on which to hang such a major policy decision, one of considerable importance for U.S. interests overseas, and one that has a direct impact on the people in the many nations to which the United States makes educational grants or otherwise participates in the reformulation of their educational policies.

Although USAID states that it must adhere to the Establishment Clause in its dealings with non-Americans abroad, when dealing with American citizens in the United States, Congress, the Courts, and the executive branch have punched several very sizable holes in the wall separating state and religious activities since Lamont v. Woods in 1991. Together they amount to such a change in the legal positions of the courts, led by the Supreme Court, that one may wonder if another case like Lamont v. Woods were to come up today, whether it might not

run the other way around, allowing funding of religious activities in other nations.

Moreover, the fact is that taxpayer funds have long been used, and increasingly so, to fund religious activities in the U.S. Many of these instances concern the allotment of taxpayer money to religious welfare and health care service providers; educational support is less frequent but far from unknown. Taxpayer funds have been used to build Catholic and Jewish hospitals under the Hill-Burton Act of 1946; the federal government has paid for 75 percent of the funding for the Jewish Board of Family and Children;\(^{19}\) Catholic Charities' programs have received about 66 percent of their funding from government grants and contracts;\(^ {20} \) and Lutheran Services in America has gained more than 33 percent of its annual budget from government funds.\(^ {21} \) Medicare and Medicaid patients take their federal and state dollars to hospitals owned and run by various religious groups. Students take their federal scholarships to religiously-affiliated colleges.

Religious groups frequently make use of public school facilities, and there exists an extensive court history examining the constitutionality of this issue.\(^ {22} \) Another ongoing issue that has gained a fair amount of court attention is the issuance of education vouchers. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2002 that a Cleveland program allowing parents to use publicly funded vouchers to pay tuition at private schools—including religious schools—did not violate the U.S. Constitution and left it to states to further rule on this matter.\(^ {23} \) A provision of the 1996 welfare bill, which came to be known as Charitable Choice, allows state governments to contract with religious social service organizations when they use federal welfare funds. Specifically, it allows government funds to be used for social services carried out in places of worship, where religious imagery or iconography may be present, and gives religious organizations receiving funds the right to discriminate in their hiring based on religious beliefs. The funds, however, cannot be used to directly support

22. In an often-cited case on the issue of religious organizations' access to public facilities, Good News Club v. Milford Central School, the Supreme Court ruled on 11 June 2001, that a community religious club offering prayer and Bible instruction could not be prevented from holding after-school meetings when other community organizations were permitted access to school grounds. See Good News Club v. Milford Central School, No. 99-2036, 2001 U.S. LEXIS 4312 (U.S. 11 June 2001).
“sectarian worship, instruction, or proselytization.” President Bush has expanded Charitable Choice to cover nearly all federal programs and has created a White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, as well as similar offices in ten cabinet departments, to facilitate government support for faith-based social services. In the 2004 fiscal year, faith-based organizations received more than $2 billion in federal funds.

The formulas that legalize these transactions vary. They have often been examined; however, re-examining them herein would require expanding this essay into at least one sizable volume. A few instances are listed to illustrate the ways the courts and other branches of government have justified the use of taxpayer funds to support religious organizations, including educational institutions, in the United States. My main focus is to find which formulas, if any, can be applied overseas. In some cases, the support for religious organizations is deemed as not violating the First Amendment because it is indirect (as when public funds are allotted to individuals in the form of Medicare reimbursements or school vouchers rather than direct payments to religious institutions). This was the principal argument made by the U.S. Supreme Court in its decision to uphold Cleveland’s voucher program. Chief Justice Rehnquist, in his majority opinion, wrote that the “Ohio program is entirely neutral with respect to religion” because “It provides benefits directly to a wide spectrum of individuals... It permits such individuals to exercise genuine choice among options public and private, secular and religious.” Though public funds are spent on religious activities under the voucher program, the court argued that government itself does not advance or inhibit religion.


because it has no direct contact with the religious organizations.

In other instances of government support for faith-based organizations, the assumption is that government funds can be used for non-religious social service provisions carried out by religious organizations, such as churches feeding the homeless. This is the reasoning behind the Charitable Choice provision in the 1996 welfare reform bill, President Bush's executive orders on faith-based and community initiatives, and numerous earlier court cases.29 (Some churches set up separate 501 (c)(3) corporations for these non-religious activities and these entities are expected to follow various federal rules. Religious groups, as noted above, are exempt from various employment discrimination regulations, but these entities must adhere to them.) However, it must be obvious to anyone who took Accounting 101 that if the government reimburses you for an activity you previously had to pay for (e.g. feeding the poor), you will have more funds available for other activities (e.g. proselytizing).

Moreover, in some cases funding is allowed for activities by religious entities because these activities are not "inherently religious" or are "pervasively sectarian,"30 and most recently, even if they are religious but are needed for their non-religious purposes. Major examples of these latter activities include the many drug treatment programs with a religious component.31 In his 2003 State of the Union Speech, President Bush announced a new three-year, $600 million federal drug treatment initiative, Access to Recovery. Under this plan, individuals will be able to use federal vouchers to obtain help at all effective treatment organizations, including faith-based organizations where religious activities are part of the treatment.32


30. "Inherently religious" is the terminology used by the White House Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives for activities that the government is barred from supporting. See President Bush's 2002 Executive Order 13279: Equal Protection of the Laws for Faith-based and Community Organizations. "Pervasively sectarian" has, until recently, been the test by which to judge whether or not a faith-based institution is eligible for government support. See Hunt v. McNair (1973), Roemer v. Board of Public Works (1976), Lemon v. Kurtzman (1971). Since Mitchell v. Helms (2000), however, the Court has significantly diluted the applicability of the "pervasively sectarian" test in favor of judgments based on government neutrality in the distribution of funds and the private choice rationale, by which individual aid recipients may choose to use public funds at religious or secular institutions.

31. For example, Teen Challenge is a national faith-based drug treatment program that has been praised by President Bush. See www.teenchallengeusa.com.

U.S. AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN ISLAMIC WORLD

As already indicated, there is no need to examine here in detail these very considerable exemptions from the Establishment Clause (or changes in the ways it has been interpreted), and the rationales given for them. Merely listing several of them leaves little doubt that the position that funding overseas religious education violates the constitution is overblown. And even if one fully accepted that the U.S. Constitution, at least the First Amendment, applies in U.S. dealings with non-Americans in their homelands—as long as American taxpayers’ funds are involved (something the U.S. military, CIA, and FBI surely have not heard about)—still some of the formulas used in the United States to fund religious activities with taxpayers’ monies might be made to work abroad as well. The main issue, therefore, is whether there are compelling reasons to support religious schooling overseas. And if the answer is in the affirmative, what kinds of religious teaching should be supported and promoted outside the United States?

The Need for Reform

One major reason to consider American support for education overseas is that in several Muslim countries, albeit certainly not in all of them, a large number of pupils are enrolled in madrasas, which many consider to be breeding grounds for terrorists. The education given in many of these schools is a strict version of Islam; it is discriminatory against women, abusive to non-believers, and supportive of terrorist activities. In addition, madrasas and many other Islamic schools are often criticized for being counter-productive in their teaching methods, relying heavily on rote memorization and hectoring. Also, religious education in these schools is the main subject; little room is provided for subjects such as math and science, use

33. The Arabic word “madrasa” literally means “school.” Its secondary meaning is an educational institution offering instruction in Islamic subjects. See also: Febe Armanios, “Islamic Religious Schools, Madrasas: Background,” CRS Report for Congress RS21654 (2003); Zehr, “Religious Study Confronts U.S. in Iraq.”


35. Some writers have implied that all madrasas are harbors of militancy. See, for example, Jessica Stern, “Preparing for a War on Terrorism,” Current History 100 (2001): 355-57; and Alan Richards, “At War with Utopian Fanatics,” Middle East Policy 8 (2001). See also: Armanios, “Islamic Religious Schools, Madrasas: Background.”
of computers, and civics, not to mention the teaching of English, which is increasingly becoming an essential skill. In short, there is little room for preparation to live in the modern world.

In India, for instance, “both the Hindu-dominated Indian government and secular-minded Muslims have pressed for curriculum reform and modernization in an effort to curb the isolation, poverty and social conservatism they believe are bred by the schools. . . . If Muslims are to overcome their social disadvantages, many hold, they will have to move beyond the madrasas.” Indian madrasas studies are largely limited to the Koran, the Hadith, and Islamic philosophy and jurisprudence. Past government attempts to incorporate science, math, and English into the schools have essentially failed. The same holds true for madrasas in other countries, Pakistan for instance, and is likely to be the case in post-war Afghanistan and Iraq. In short, many madrasas are locking the graduates out of modern economic and political development.

The United States has a legitimate interest in educational reform, but of what kind? Though one may grant that numerous madrasas promote extremist values and behavior, both directly (by the content of the education they provide) and indirectly (by locking their graduates out of modern economies, societies, and polities), one may still ask whether the United States (or other Western nations) should be involved in changing these schools and hence the ways many millions of Muslims are educated. Indeed, the argument that it ought to be left up to the citizens of the nations involved to select which education they prefer for their children may at first seem persuasive. However, citizens of other nations have a strong and legitimate interest in discouraging education that predisposes graduates to hate, terrorism, and violations of human rights. The United States, other Western nations, moderate Muslim nations, and indeed the entire global community (to the extent that it is evolving), have a strong interest that people in all nations are raised to respect rights, are prepared to participate in democratic politics, and are able to function in a modern economy. The main reason has been often cited: Such people are much less likely to bring war on one another and oppress their own people.

This key observation does not give the United States or other powers the license to impose their educational preferences by

37. Ibid.
sending troops or even imposing economic sanctions on nations that have other preferences, that do not wish to modernize, or whose people prefer traditional ways of life. However, to the extent that these nations seek and are willing to accept foreign aid, including aid for education, the United States and other nations seem justified in using peaceful means to promote an educational system that is compatible with that nation's economic and political development.

Also, if one accepts the moral rule that rich nations ought to provide foreign aid, few would disagree that the nations (or for that matter individuals or foundations) that provide grants, are entitled to decide what they wish to fund. A typical Madrasas, at least as constituted, are most likely unsuitable as a beneficiary of American aid. The policy question that needs to be addressed is whether educational aid may be used only for secular education in the countries at hand or whether the resources involved may also be used for some kinds of religious education, and which kinds. The issue, of course, runs much deeper than who obtains which funds, or even what the content of textbooks, curricula, and teacher education ought to be. The question is what kind of society (if any) the United States should promote, by peaceful means, in Muslim nations in which strict interpretations of Islam are rampant and which are predisposing their citizens to extremism at home and abroad?

The Need for New Values

One major reason that replacing madrasa education with value-free education—one that focuses on teaching math, science, English, and modern skills—is the wrong policy option is that all the nations involved have been until recently, or still are, subject to police state regimes. This was the case for Iraqis under Saddam, for Afghans under the Taliban, and remains the case for Saudis (and to a somewhat lesser extent Pakistanis). When the United States and its allies remove these regimes (or when they collapse under their own weight as they have in the former Soviet Union) there is an explosive growth in practically all forms of antisocial behavior, including violent crime, white collar crime, inter-group violence, drug abuse, alcoholism, child abandonment, and behavior that leads to the spread of HIV/AIDS. These severe antisocial trends are not, as is often implicitly assumed, self-correcting or reversed by the introduction of free markets and elections. What these societies need are the kinds of informal moral codes that undergird the pro-social behavior found in civil societies and that underlie the kind of informal social controls that work in free societies to promote a good part of the social order and minimize the need to rely on the state. (To further
highlight this essential sociological thesis, I note that even in free societies, if and when these informal moral codes wane, there is an increase in antisocial behavior and a need to restore it, a major communitarian observation that needs not be rehashed here.\textsuperscript{40}

To put it more succinctly, (a) social order is not self-sustaining; (b) it is either provided by a police state (albeit at great human costs) or by a firm social fabric which entails a shared a moral code.

One Way to Proceed: Value Education

One major way to introduce informal moral codes, whether they are absent or have been weakened, is through the education of the next generation. Teaching only math, science, English, and other such normative-neutral subjects does not provide the needed education for weaving or restoring a social fabric.

This issue is symbolized by the fact that when the pictures of Saddam and the statements that glorify his regime, Iraqi nationalism and the hatred of others were torn out of Iraq's old textbooks, they were replaced with nothing. The same has been reported by teachers. U.S. officials recruited Fuad Hussein, a former Iraqi professor and Middle Eastern scholar, to assist with the delicate task of reviewing textbooks. Mr. Hussein visited Baghdad schools and chose 67 teachers to make up a textbook revision team. Meeting at UNESCO and UNICEF offices, they were initially tasked with "de-Ba'athifying" the textbooks, but faced many challenges when teachers, wishing to remove Ba'ath party propaganda, did not know what to replace it with.\textsuperscript{41}

What is at issue is not merely introducing better ways of teaching math or English, although, of course, these are needed. The question is which values should be promoted through the various tools of education, including the content of textbooks, the content of the curricula and the training and selection of teachers.

Many an educator's first response to such an agenda is that value education should take place at home, in places of worship,


or should be provided by other private civic entities, and that public schools should not be involved in what is called moral, value, or character education. However, one must take into account that in nations that have long-standing police regimes, whether of a fundamentalist or secular nature, these private civic entities are often unavailable. They either never existed (e.g., voluntary associations), have been weakened (e.g., communal bonds), have been mobilized to support the state (e.g., favored ethnic groupings), or themselves support one form of authoritarianism or another (e.g., various war lords or sectarian leaders). Hence, there is a need to assist with the development of a new, post-totalitarian core of shared values through public education. Otherwise, the normative vacuum will lead to social anarchy that, in turn, will lead the populations to favor the restoration of a strong-leader regime, as we see in Russia, in large parts of Afghanistan, and as we shall most likely see in Iraq.

The thesis that these newly liberated societies need new sets of values and that public education is a major way to promote them should be less surprising given that, despite frequent claims to the contrary, even in long-established free societies public education is far from normatively neutral. It is hard to imagine how, for instance, an American educator could teach about the civil war, the civil rights movement, the Holocaust, the treatment of Native Americans and most historical topics in a normatively neutral way. The same holds true for much of literature, social studies, civics, and geography. Moreover, aside from their inclusion in the curricula, values are also promoted in the ways pupils are expected to treat one another, if they are of different races, genders, or sexual orientations, and how they are taught to deal with conflicts. The same holds for teaching respect for authority figures and rules. I shall refer to all these values jointly as civic ethics.

The analysis up to this point could be read as if it suggests that the United States should support the same kind of education overseas that it provides in most Americans public secular schools: secular albeit rich in sub rosa civic ethics. The question though, stands: In the very different contexts in the countries at issue, would such education suffice to provide the informal moral

42. For more see: Thomas Lickona, Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Responsibility and Respect (New York: Bantam, 1992).
43. A report by the Center on Education Policy highlights the role of public schools in teaching children about democratic responsibilities and good citizenship. The report suggests that in addition to teaching students civic values and skills, racial, ethnic, and religious diversity in the public school system helps to foster tolerance and respect for people of different backgrounds. Center on Education Policy, Public Schools and Citizenship, July 1998.
order that is essential to significant improvements in the levels of economic and political development?

Educational Options

Theoretically, it is conceivable for the United States to try to replace a fundamentalist school system with a fully secular one, albeit one with a rich normative content of the civic ethics variety. However, forming a civic ethics education program in the countries at issue entails much more than taking out totalitarian and fundamentalist parts of textbooks and curricula and retraining teachers not to follow these lines of moral education. It would require writing new histories, say for Iraq, that would replace the glorification of Saddam with narratives about courageous Iraqis who died trying to unseat him and civic leaders who served their nation before Saddam, and so on. It would entail scanning Iraqi and other Arabic and Islamic literature for novels that provide students with empathy for people of different social backgrounds and political leanings, and adapting civics classes to draw on examples from Arab (and other) histories. Teachers would have to be helped, not only to unlearn the old ways, for instance teaching by memorization, but also to adopt new methods of student participation, and, of course, use of the new texts. Principals and superintendents would also have to be found to support such civic education. I am not implying that they would have to start from ground zero or that there is nothing in the current materials that could be salvaged. However, after twenty-four years of Saddam’s highly oppressive and tyrannical regime in Iraq, there is relatively little that would not have to be recast. While in Iraq’s case some material might be revived from the pre-Saddam era, in the case of Afghanistan, given the poverty of public education in the pre-Taliban era, much of their civic ethics education curriculum would have to be created. All in all, a gigantic task and one that would take many years to advance.

Moreover, while some parents in the Muslim world, especially in the larger cities, would send their children to secular, public schools, in large parts of these countries, in which most everyone is religiously devout, such education would be rejected out of hand. This is true for most Shia in the southermost areas of Iraq, most Afghans and Saudis, and many Pakistanis, especially in the regions bordering on Afghanistan. It follows, therefore, that if the goal is to reach most of the population, and especially those now hostile to economic and political development and inclined to religious extremism, some kind of religious schooling must be provided.

This observation should not come as a surprise to Americans
considering that nearly 10 percent of American children attend religiously-affiliated schools. True, some parents send their children to these institutions merely to gain a quality education at a lower cost than provided by secular private schools, or because such private secular schools are not available in the parts of the cities where they live. However, a significant subset of these parents strongly hold that their children’s religious beliefs should be reinforced at school. The only difference between the United States and several key Muslim nations in this regard is that large majorities in Muslim nations hold this view. Hence, either most children will be educated in private schools, in which religious education—often of the madrasa kind—will prevail, or public schools will have to provide some religious education. (Logically a third option exists, but it seems well outside the range of realistic options and would surely raise more First Amendment questions: The United States could support a variety of private denominational schools.)

People who study the specific situation in Iraq have made related arguments. “If religion is desirable, which I imagine it is by the parents [in Iraq], it is best controlled in the curriculum in the public school system, rather than to give the freedom to the mosques and different factions,” according to Mona Habib, an American educational consultant. Iraqi expatriate Dr. Ali Al-Attar agrees that teaching religion in Iraqi public schools would help control extremist impulses:

To prevent students from getting the wrong source of information from radical people, you should give them the basics in the school, which is under supervision that is acceptable to the community. . . You will avoid that private clergy type of schooling that is going to produce brainwashed children with certain ideas that are very dangerous to the society.

Dr. Al-Attar, half Sunni and half Shiites by birth, believes that every Muslim student in Iraq should take a regular class in Islam which focuses on ethics while avoiding extremism.

The Enlightenment still guides the reflexive response of many enlightened or progressive educators to the question of whether religion may be taught in public schools. In the wake of the rise of the age of reason, rationality and science were glorified, and religion was considered a relic of the past, of the dark ages. It was expected that religion would be replaced by secular thinking. And, indeed, for generations it seemed that secularization was spreading over ever-larger parts of the world as people gave up religion or became less-strongly religious. Secularization acquired

45. Zehr, “Religious Study Confronts U.S. in Iraq.”
46. Ibid.
the aura of being on the side of the march of history—only the uninformed or the bigoted would resist such progress. But, as they say, all this is, or ought to be, “history” by now. Religion continues to be a major source of ethical and spiritual guidance for billions of people. And other hundreds of millions, especially in the former Soviet Republics and China, but also in secularized places like Turkey (and Israel), are returning to embrace religious beliefs, precisely to fill the vacuum left when values previously promoted—say communism or consumerism—wane or are found not truly fulfilling and are not replaced.

Considering its implication for those nations that are now in the grip of religious fundamentalism (especially of the Islamic variety), it is crucial not to treat all religious beliefs and education as if they were cut from one cloth, as Enlightenment thinkers did and many scholars and policymakers still do. The main fault line, relevant to analysis and policymaking for Western nations and new civic groups that are arising in the nations involved, lies not between religion and secularism but between fundamentalism on the one side and moderate religion and secularism on the other.47 The main reason is as basic as it is important: It is not religion that is incompatible with human rights and democratic societies, and tolerance of others, domestic and foreign—it is fundamentalism. In 2002, I was the guest of the reformers in Iran at a meeting organized by the Center for the Dialogue of Civilizations. The reformers stressed that they did not fight for a secular civic society but a religious one, one in which people would be free and encouraged to pray but not forced to pray, where modesty for men and women would be favored but not imposed by moral squads, and so on.

There is no need to travel far to see the point. The debate on whether Catholicism could be compatible with a free society was similarly misframed. The proper question is what kind of Catholicism? The kind that leaves political choices to the voters and seeks to persuade its adherents rather than force them is very much compatible (for example, urging people not to divorce, helping make marriages stronger through various forms of counseling and premarital preparations—rather than banning divorce); the kind of Catholicism that led churches to support the Inquisition, the Nazis, and the Argentine generals is not. The same fault line that separates the persuasive versions of religion from the coercive ones is found in Judaism between, for instance, the Reform Jews and some ultra Orthodox groups, and between fundamentalist forms of Islam and more moderate varieties, as practiced by most Muslims in Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh,

47. For more discussion see: Etzioni, From Empire to Community, ch. 5.
Mali, and Kyrgyzstan.48

It is here that the principled and practical lines of reasoning converge. As already indicated, one must take for granted that it is utterly inconceivable that the overwhelming majority of Shia in Iraq, most Afghans, Saudis, and Pakistanis, among others, would send their children to public schools that teach only normatively neutral subjects or provide only secular civic and moral education. It is enough to truly take in the views represented by the following statements by Iraqis to gain an insight into the emotions evoked by any such considerations.

Sheikh Abdul Settar Jabber, head of the Muslim Awareness Association, a leading Sunni group, feels the entire role of the schools should be changed to one that trains students in Islamic law and in how to be good Muslims. He opposes any American involvement in the schools. “We are in Islamic society and this is part of the attempt by Americans to break Iraqi identity.”49

There was talk [from Iraqi religious groups] that the Americans are trying to Westernize the curriculum and move it far from Islamic values. . . . One religious leader asked me, ‘is it not possible to abolish history class and just teach religion?’

And there is no principled reason to impose on other nations the model mainly followed by the United States and France, to oppose any and all religious teaching in public schools. Clearly, moderate religious versions are not only compatible with free societies but a major source of precisely the informal moral codes so essential for free societies.50 This essay next examines how to ensure that religious education is of the persuasive-moderate and not the coercive-fundamentalist kind, that parents who prefer secular education will be able to find it, and that pupils of different religions will find their educational home.

**INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF DIVERSITY WITHIN UNITY (DWU)**

**The Two and Three Track Options**

A major European response to the preceding questions is to continue de facto to teach Christian values in public schools but provide taxpayers’ support to segregated schools for Catholics, Jews, and now increasingly for Muslims. (The latter are sometimes referred to as Koran schools.) I refer to this as the

49. Asquith, “A New History of Iraq.”
50. Ibid.
52. World Council of Churches, *Religious Education in Plural Societies: An Inter-religious
two-track system. Another variant is to provide public funds for both secular and religious private schools. In both cases, a major difference is the extent of state supervision over the content of the education and the quality of teachers. At one extreme, if the supervision is lax and the respective religious communities select the teachers, the state could, in effect, end up supporting madrasas. At the other extreme, if the supervision is strict and teachers are selected in a highly professional way, the private religious schools would be less prone to teach extremist values. I was unable to locate reliable comparative evidence on where various European schools systems fall on this continuum. Informal interviews suggest that the schools in at least some of these nations are fairly close to the extremist madrasa end of the continuum. In any event, this two-track system is, in principle at least, open to such a development.

Such an approach is followed in Indonesia. Indonesians between the ages of seven and twelve are required to attend six years of primary school. They are given a choice between state-run, non-sectarian public schools supervised by the Department of Education and Culture, or private or semi-private religious (usually Islamic) schools, supervised and financed by the Department of Religious Affairs. Although 85 percent of the Indonesian population was registered as Muslim (according to the 1990 census), less than 15 percent chose to attend religious schools. I was unable to determine how effective government supervision is of the religious schools.

A different variant of this approach has been suggested by a study conducted for USAID by Sharon Benoliel. She concludes, “The best educational strategies in Muslim countries encourage both public and moderate Islamic school systems to complement each other to reach all learners with enriched content.” She adds, “The Agency should support improvements in both secular and religious institutions—but only those that foster a respect for universal human values of dignity, compassion, and tolerance.” That is, support should be given only to some kinds of religious private schools but denied to others. And, she argues, these schools “must provide a quality education with a content similar to what is provided in public

55. Ibid., 4.
schools." The report cites Malaysia as an example of this approach. In Malaysia, every Islamic school is registered, regulated, and inspected by government ministries. The Department of Islamic and Moral Education ensures that these schools are organized, taught, and assessed according to national standards. In accordance with the president's stringent, zero-tolerance policy regarding any extremist activity, schools where an extremist element has been witnessed are reported to be swiftly closed.56

This three-track approach divides education among madrasas, secular schools, and moderate religious schools. Here too, the extent and nature of state supervision over the schools is an issue, as it faces the challenge of determining which schools are promoting extremist vs. moderate values. Moreover, in both the two and three-track approaches, children go through their whole school experience, without ever mixing with children of different social, cultural and religious backgrounds. (A number of these schools have turned into madrasas right in the heart of democratic Europe and even the United States.57)

Diversity Within Unity

This author favors a rather different approach based on the principle of diversity with unity.58 This basic principle states that all members of society are expected to honor some values (such as human rights, democratic ways of life, mutual tolerance—those involved in acquiring a shared moral language) while on other values they are free to be diverse (such as which country of origin they are involved with, what sub-cultures they seek to learn, and what religion, if any, to follow). The division between the unity and diversity sides of the national ledger can itself be recast, along with the elements each side contains, but the basic division stands. The image of a mosaic illustrates this approach; its beauty is enhanced by its various parts not being all of one color and shape, but it still has a framework, which, although it can be recast overtime, holds the pieces together. Applying this concept to schooling creates what might be called a single-track system that contains sub-options. Basically, all children would be

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56. Ibid.
58. I first laid out the basic Diversity within Unity approach in Etzioni, The New Golden Rule, ch. 7. I then invited forty public intellectuals and elected officials to develop a policy statement based on this approach. For full text and endorsements, see http://www2.gwu.edu/~ccps/dwu/_endorse.html.
expected to attend public schools, and receive the elements of both modern education and civic ethics, but they could opt to take electives that help nurture their religious or other sub-cultural preferences (or those of their parents), as long as these preferences are not of the extreme variety. Specifically this entails that:

(a) All children should be taught some subjects that have normative content. (For example, civics, in which they learn to embrace democratic values and practices, to respect basic human rights and responsibilities, mutual tolerance, the value of peaceful conflict resolution, and so on.) The content of literature and history should further undergird these normative teachings. In other words, all children should be introduced to the elements of civic ethics.

(b) All children should attend classes in math and science and other classes that provide the pupils with the skills they need to live in and contribute to the modern economy and society.

(c) While 80 to 85 percent of the total curricula may be shared by all students (representing unity), the remaining classes would be electives divided according to religious or other preferences of the parents and pupils (representing the diversity element). One of these diversity divisions would be secular, for those who prefer to gain only secular education, although it would still include instruction in civic ethics. In a given religious track, say Muslim, students would spend several hours each week studying the Koran, Muslim literature and history, and other subjects of unique interest to their traditions. All students would mix, not merely in the majority of the curriculum and classes devoted to shared subjects (unity element), but also in assemblies and other such shared activities, although participation in activities that offend any religious or secular students, such as certain gym classes (many Muslims object to girls in swim suits in gym classes), would not be required.

Qatar has moved somewhat in this direction. At the invitation of Qatar’s Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, a team of experts from the American Rand Corporation reviewed the entire primary and secondary school system in 2001, “with an eye toward massive change.” The team concluded that there was too little emphasis on science, English much on memorization and teacher control. They suggested revamping the whole system, basically along the lines of USAID’s secular, non-normative model. In January of 2003, the Emir moved toward adopting the RAND plan.59 Although the schools

U.S. AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN ISLAMIC WORLD

do provide classes only on Islam, in contrast to the DWU model only one track is given. More importantly, given that there are few non-Muslims in Qatar, the content of the religious classes is the salient issue, a point that is further elaborated shortly.

(d) If, under the DWU plan, the number of students who have a given preference is small and does not justify setting up separate classes, the students involved may have to be bussed to another school in which the preferred classes are offered, or, if the number of students is very small, students may be provided with appropriate tutorials in the school library. When this approach was suggested to Europeans, some of their officials—not keen to allow for Koran schools or tracks—responded that Muslims cannot agree with one another on what to teach their children. If and when this is the case, there may be more than one Muslim (or Christian, Jewish, etc) set of classes as long as there is enough enrollment for each, and, if not, tutorials might be made available. To reiterate, all this track teaching would amount to, say, five hours out of a 35-hour week; most classes would be shared by all students, both content-wise and socially.

(e) A crucial detail concerns the selection of teachers and teaching materials for the various elective classes. Some have suggested that these be left to the discretion of the respective religious communities and their functionaries—priests, rabbis, and mullahs—who teach the classes. This opens the door to extremist teachings, often opposed by segments of the very same religious communities, and goes against public interest and the well being of the students involved. Hence, the selection of teachers should be done by the same educational authorities that select all other teachers. The same holds true for the selection of textbooks and other teaching materials and the composition of specialized curricula. They would all have rich religious and sub-cultural content, but it would not be of a coercive kind.

This position is implied by the following statement made at the Second National Seminar on Strategies and Curriculum Reform of the New Education System, hosted by Iraq's Ministry of Education in March 2004. The Ministry cited the following as a primary principle in reviewing and modernizing the curriculum:

All decisions concerning reform of the curriculum must be strictly Iraqi and in line with Iraqi values and culture. This would include enlightened religious upbringing, the establishment of and appreciation for the values of democracy, free speech, human rights, justice, equality, and tolerance. It would also discourage sectarianism and racism...

CONCLUSION

The question of whether American tax dollars should support religious education overseas is wrongly framed. First, it implies a constitutional limitation through an alleged violation of the Establishment Clause—a violation that either does not exist or can be readily accommodated. Second, the issue ought not to be “religious education” per se, but rather the distinction between extremist education provided by many madrasas, which are said to breed terrorists and lock their graduates out of modern economics and democratic politics, and moderate religious education that does neither. The first should be discouraged; the second deserves consideration.

Finally, the question is much too narrowly cast. What is at issue is the normative vacuum that is engendered when totalitarian regimes of the Taliban, Saddam, or Communist kind collapse. Explosive increases in antisocial behavior follow. New sources of social order must be found. These are best centered on a civic ethic—a sense of responsibility that members of communities have for one another and for the common good. Values education in schools is one major way to help form and promote such an ethic. Hence the critical issue is how to use education in the construction of civil societies where police states formerly prevailed.

In American public schools, values education is far from absent; however, it is essentially secular. In many parts of the Islamic world, parents would not send their children to public schools that provide only secular education. The options then are: (a) provide state-funded religious schools for those who seek them; (b) provide two tracks within public schools—religious and secular. Both of these tracks segregate the religious students from all others; both need close supervision to ensure that they will provide a sufficiently modern and moderate education; or (c) the preferred option requires that all students attend mainly the same classes, in public schools, but also sets aside about 15 to 20 percent of the class time and curricula for electives on religious subjects. This approach is based on the Diversity within Unity principle, which ensures that students of different backgrounds mix socially and learn many of the same core materials and values, but which also enables them to nurture their subculture and religious beliefs. The selection of teachers and teaching materials for the electives must follow the same procedures as those employed for other classes. By promoting such school systems, the United States can, through education, help other nations (that seek assistance) build up the moral foundations of their social order, without violating the U.S. constitution or offending the strongly-held beliefs of the very citizens that the
United States is seeking to help.