

“Engaging With the World After 9/11”

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Germany is one of Europe’s most important countries. It has been for decades a key strategic ally of the United States, an ally in the war against totalitarianism and a bulwark in the support for democracy. I have had the pleasure of coming to Germany quite a bit in the last year and feel very much at home here.

During the Cold War Germany was a frontline state. In fact, it was *the* front line state. There were many armed confrontations during the Cold War—famously Korea and Vietnam—but they didn’t make the Cold War turn hot. If it had, that chemical combustion most probably would have taken place over the plains of Germany. NATO, indeed, was an organization designed expressly to counter a Warsaw Pact invasion of Germany. And Germany was the nation that benefited the most from the successful conclusion of the Cold War, from our victory in it. You were able to reunite, to be one nation again. The East portion of your country has ceased to be a dictatorship; the Chancellor of all of Germany is a woman who came from the wrong side of the Iron Curtain, and she got to where she is today because that line no longer exists.

Germany remains that strategic country. It remains Europe’s economic Wunderkind, to be sure, and it certainly gratifying to see that Germany’s economy is showing signs of recovery. But Germany also plays a central role in the new strategic contests of our time. From the positive and negative effects of globalization to the search for a solution to energy dependence and global warming to the challenges and rewards related to immigration, Germany remains at the center. Nothing, or not much, will happen in Europe without Germany, nothing ever has and it is difficult to believe that it ever will. Here the Reformation started, here the peace of Westphalia was signed, starting the state-based international system that has stood the test of time, and here the three big wars of the 20th century, two hot, one cold, took place.

And Germany is playing a major role in the defining struggle of our times, the one between democracies who want to live in an open society and extremists afraid of freedom who want to impose their will on us all. Just as the fall of the Berlin Wall tolled the ending of the 20th century, historically if not calendar-wise, the attacks of 9/11 signaled the beginning of the new century. And in this new reality, Germany remains a battle ground. More than ever, it is vulnerable to the enemies of an open society.

We well know that many of the extremists who have gone out to terrorize the rest of the world—including some of the plotters of the events we commemorated just a few days ago—have used Germany as a base. They abused Germany’s hospitality. But Germany’s government has taken the battle to them, and has met with some spectacular successes. Just last week we saw the government foil a major terrorist plot that could have resulted in attacks causing hundreds of deaths. And this is not the first success your government has scored in the war against terrorism.

Not surprisingly, German recognition of the threats to our civilization has risen significantly. One of the most interesting findings reported in the German Marshall Fund’s Transatlantic Trends survey released last week was the very significant rise in German threat perceptions.

For example, the percentage of respondents who said they expected Islamic fundamentalism to affect their lives has risen to 57% from only 29% two years ago. And, when the question was international terrorism, the barometer rose from a mere 39% in 2005 to 70% today. These were the biggest jumps of any of the many countries surveyed.

I think it is fair to say that Germans are not living a fool's paradise. You are aware that there are threats out there against our way of life.

All that is well and good, but we should be very careful not to conflate matters. It is very important to be aware of the threats out there. It is important because that ensures the survival of the society we want—a democratic, open society with freedom of thought and choice, where the people decide their future. Recognition of the problem is the first step.

But it is just as important to realize that to be aware of the threat posed by terrorism and by extremism does, and cannot, translate into a rejection of Islam or of religion or of Arabs who may be Muslim. We will lose if we let “fear of the other” become our default position. This second step, this rejection of the temptation to reject Islam, must be a corollary of the first. These are the issues I have come to discuss with you today.

One of the reasons Germany is so important is that it has one of the Continent's largest Muslim populations in Europe. I have been extremely fortunate to be able to meet with Muslim communities all over the country including Berlin, Munich, Dusseldorf, and Cologne. They are important to Germany, and let me assure you, they are important to us in the United States. We don't look past the Muslim communities of Germany; we look at them as part of the mosaic that Germany is today.

It is important that we communicate these views to you. The risk with a close relationship is that sometimes you feel that you don't have to explain yourself all the time. That's obviously a mistake, whether it's a personal relationship or one between states. For all these reasons I have enumerated above, and above all because Germany is a good friend, we have to continue to communicate with Germany, share our experiences and hear about yours.

Let me assure you that the U.S. understands it needs to communicate, that it needs to consult close allies such as Germany, seek their opinion and explain its views. We need to talk with friends, not simply to friends and above all not at them. This just as much the case after September 11 as it was before. Partners don't always have identical views, even in the closest of relationships, but it is important to let each other know that their views are valued, even in disagreement.

The President's first visit in 2005 was to Brussels. And Secretary Rice has practically moved to Europe. She has visited 65 countries as Secretary of State, 42 of which have been in Europe or the Caucasus. Of her 32 months in office she has spent two months in Europe.

And then there's me. The Bureau for European and Eurasian Affairs is particularly interested in building stronger relationships with Muslims in Europe, which is one of the reasons I was appointed this year as Senior Advisor for Muslim Engagement to Assistant Secretary Daniel Fried. As such I work with officials in Washington and our embassies overseas to seek the best ways to engage Muslim communities in Europe – to build stronger bridges and to learn more about Muslim communities in this part of the world.

I am honored to do my part in bridging the gap of understanding between the Muslim world and my country. I started out three years ago as Director for Middle East Regional Initiatives at the National Security Council, and my job now concentrates on the outreach I think is necessary.

I can't overemphasize how important it is to maintain the open lines of communication. Somehow, the perception has been created here and there that America wants a war with Islam, or that the Bush Administration has been pursuing such a course, or both. This is at best misinformed and at worst pernicious. It misunderstands America's purpose and America's nature. It also misunderstands our history. If there are two messages I'd want you to take away from our encounter today, they would be the following two:

The first is that we're not at war with Islam. Islam is too important a component of our shared world civilization, of our common human inheritance, to be forgotten or ignored. The U.S. is a country without an established religion, a homeland equally for Muslims, Jews and Christians (or, indeed, non-believers), so for the U.S. to be at war with Islam would be for the U.S. to be at war with itself.

The second point follows directly from the first, and it is that, on the contrary, we want to be allied with Muslims who fight against Islamic extremism, against corrupters of this great religion. Without this alliance, the U.S. is sure to lose its fight against those who seek to destroy us. Let me start with the myth that America is at war with Islam. As a Muslim American, this one especially gets my goat.

The success that millions of American Muslims have achieved in my country is a daily rebuke to those who try to drive a wedge between my nation and my religion. One thing many people may not understand is that Muslims are not new in the U.S. We are not a new experience. Many Muslim Americans have been here for generations and are completely immersed in the American way of life.

We're just like the millions of previous immigrants—Irish, Italians, Chinese or those who came in the Mayflower. We hold garage sales, go to PTA meetings and try to make the family budget stretch. We are also teachers, doctors, computer scientists, artists and athletes. A friend of mine in Maryland told me that his dentist, his doctor and his son's best friend were Muslim, something that seemed to him as mundane and unworthy of note as if they all had been Catholic. The individuals involved belonged to the same professional background as my friend and shared the same social context and points of reference.

We are not just a few hundreds, we are millions. According to Newsweek, there are 2.35 million Muslims in the U.S. Countries of origin is varied, with no single country predominating. For example, Iran, the country that accounts for the largest proportion, only accounts for 12% of American Muslims. (For the record, I was born in Kashmir, India, and came to the U.S. as a baby.) In terms of professional achievement, Muslims pretty much track the U.S. national average. For example, 17% of the U.S. population has a salary of over \$100,000. Sixteen percent of Muslim Americans do.

As for how well they have integrated and are received, Pew Research said in a recent poll that though 65% of Muslims in the United States are foreign born, they are "decidedly American in their outlook."

As for how non-Muslim Americans look at Muslims, on an issue that is controversial in Europe, 69% told a Newsweek poll that Muslims should have the right to wear headscarves to school. America can no more be at war with Islam than it can be at war with itself.

From the beginning, President Bush has gone out of his way to make sure that the tragedy of September 11 did not engender a further tragedy of anti-Islamic violence in the United States. He made it clear in many ways that the US values the millions of Americans that are also Muslims. He has said that America is not at war with Islam. He has consistently underscored the fact that the United States understands that violent extremists are not speaking on behalf of the peaceful religion of Islam when they carry out their dark and murderous actions.

He has invited Muslims to talk with him about the challenges we all face in a post 9/11 world, and he values those discussions deeply. In his annual White House Iftar dinners, especially since 9/11, he has made it clear that Islam is part of the fabric of America. In fact, in 2005 he became the first President of the United States to place a copy of the Quran in the White House Library. Last year, he honored American Muslims serving in our government.

This summer, when he went to the Islamic Center in Washington to mark the 50th anniversary of its opening, he said: “We live in a time when there are questions about America and her intentions. For those who seek a true understanding of our country, they need look no farther than here. This Muslim center sits quietly down the road from a synagogue ... a Lutheran church ... a Catholic parish ... a Greek Orthodox chapel... and a Buddhist temple – each with faithful followers who practice their deeply held beliefs and live side by side in peace.”

And it isn't just George W. Bush that recognizes that religious tolerance is one of our pinnacles, and that this pinnacle supports also our Islamic community. The President who opened the Center, another Republican, Dwight D. Eisenhower, also had words worth quoting. He said 50 years ago:

“It is fitting that we re-dedicate ourselves to the peaceful progress of all men under one God. And I should like to assure you, my Islamic friends, that under the American Constitution, under American tradition, and in American hearts, this Center, this place of worship, is just as welcome as could be a similar edifice of any other religion. Indeed, America would fight with her whole strength for your right to have here your own church and worship according to your own conscience. This concept is indeed a part of America, and without that concept we would be something else than what we are.”

I served in his father's administration in the early 1990s and am proudly serving our nation again now under very different circumstances. What has changed most critically is the need – more than ever – to engage with Muslims around the world – to push back against the myths that exist about America, to tell our story of pluralism, freedom of religion and respect for all. As we find ways to talk with others, we also learn more about the similarities of spirit.

We in the United States do not have an established religion, though we may have our own individual religions, just like the President is a Methodist and I am a Muslim. But the U.S. government can and does appreciate the incredible contributions that Islamic civilizations have made to our common global patrimony.

As I said, it is nothing less than a slur to say that America is at war with Islam. It is a canard propagated by those who oppose our policies.

I suppose at the origin of this myth lies the fact that we are presently at war in Afghanistan and Iraq, two countries that are majority Muslim. Interestingly, when we were at war in Germany, Japan or Korea it did not occur to anyone to suggest we were at war with Lutheranism, Shintoism or Buddhism.

With regards to Afghanistan or Iraq, I find it perverse that people say that in either of these cases we are fighting Islam. In fact, we are supporting fledgling democracies in both. There are problems in both countries, to be sure. But before U.S. involvement they were ruled by, respectively, the Taliban and Saddam Hussein, the first an obscurantist regime that killed women and little girls, and banned centuries-old Afghan culture, and the latter one of the worst dictators ever to tyrannize Muslims.

Whatever one feels about U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, we can at least agree that these conflicts are not about Islam. In Afghanistan, the follow-on stabilization force includes Muslim countries such as Turkey, a country that is also giving us aid in our mission in Iraq. I need not remind you that this is a government led by a party that is identifiably Islamic.

And this is my second point, which is simply that we rely on the support and the alliance of Muslims who resist al Qaeda. Notice I am not saying “moderate” Muslims. We also want the alliance and friendship of Muslims who deeply believe in their religion, whose faith informs their views. These Muslims have just as much at stake in defeating those who corrupt their religion as others.

An example very much in the news these days is the revolt against al Qaeda we are currently seeing in Iraq. This uprising started in Anbar Province but it has now spread, and according to David Kilcullen, a former State Department official with first hand experience with events on the ground in Iraq, it now encompasses 40% of Iraq. This bottoms-up revolt has spread to Baghdad and includes both Shia and Sunnis. Local Muslim tribes reached the conclusion that al Qaeda wanted to introduce a lifestyle that was contrary to theirs, and asked for our help.

We are under no illusion that can win any struggle without friends, without our European friends, without our Arab friends and without our Muslim friends.

My friends, I started my talk today saying that America understands the need to communicate with our allies, and this is what we intend to do. Hopefully, this is what I've done here today. One thing I've tried to communicate is that we are not at war with Islam. We wouldn't want to be. Another is that we understand that we are in common struggle, fighting alongside Muslims, against violent extremists.

Thank you for your attention, you have been a great audience, and I will be delighted to take your questions now. As I said, communication is a two-way thing.