

# **MADRASA ENHANCEMENT AND GLOBAL SECURITY**



## **A Model for Faith-Based Engagement**

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## Executive Summary

It is critical that Pakistan not slide into the status of a failed state with nuclear weapons. This is of paramount importance to the United States, to the people of Pakistan, and to international peace and security. There are many actions that are essential to preventing this dire outcome, but it is clear that broad educational reform in Pakistan—particularly among the estimated 20,000 to 25,000 madrasas—is chief among them.

Previous efforts at madrasa reform have met with little success owing, in part, to a lack of will on the part of the Government of Pakistan, inadequate funding, and a sentiment of suspicion and resistance within the madrasa community. Perceived threats to the madrasas' identity, or to Islam more generally, have only fostered a sense of urgency to build more madrasas and have contributed directly to their explosive growth.

Over the years, there have been few serious attempts to engage the madrasas in a reform process. The work of the International Center for Religion & Diplomacy (ICRD) is the latest of these; but contrary to past experience, it has thus far been meeting with considerable success. Over the past four years, ICRD has worked with more than 2000 madrasa administrators and teachers from more than 1300 madrasas to:

1. encourage expansion of the madrasa curriculums to include the scientific and social disciplines, with a special emphasis on religious tolerance and human rights,
2. encourage the adoption of pedagogical techniques that promote critical thinking skills among the students,
3. convey conflict resolution (and dialogue-facilitation) skills, and
4. equip selected workshop graduates with the skills to train other previously uninvolved madrasa leaders in these same areas.

This monograph describes in detail the entirety of ICRD's madrasa enhancement project, including the results of an independent third party evaluation, and provides a prototypical model for madrasa engagement going forward. The model is based on a set of proven principles which include (1) developing personal relationships with madrasa leaders based on trust, (2) demonstrating respect for madrasa leaders, their culture and religion, (3) grounding all project activities in Islamic religious principles, (4) drawing upon Islam's historic educational accomplishments, and (5) encouraging madrasa leaders to take ownership of the enhancement process.

The ICRD engagement model is based on a highly interactive workshop format that provides training for key madrasa administrators and teachers. From those who go through the initial 6-10 day workshop, a smaller number are selected to receive follow-on training that equips them to train others. To further institutionalize the program, work is currently underway to create a Madrasa Teacher Training Institute that will be co-located with and supported by key Pakistani universities.

Madrasas, by and large, are supported by their local communities because they answer real human needs; providing education, food, and shelter to many children who would otherwise go without. They have a long and rich history (from the Middle Ages through the sixteenth century,

they were without peer as institutions of higher learning), and they will not disappear anytime soon. Rather than attempting to marginalize them as some have suggested, it would be far wiser to engage them in the larger effort to create a better future for the youth of Pakistan. The good news is that, with internally-motivated reform, madrasas can also play a powerful role in countering extremism. The hearts and minds of those who commit acts of terror in the name of Islam are best changed not by persuading them to become less pious Muslims, but by helping them to understand the peaceful intent of their own theology.

In other words, the best way to fight bad theology is with good theology. This monograph describes our efforts to do precisely that in one of the most complicated and least-understood conflict zones in the world. These efforts have extended to madrasas from all four provinces of Pakistan, including a number in the most radical areas. It is hoped that this model of engagement and its demonstrable track record of success can point the way forward not only throughout Pakistan, but in other parts of the world where similar tensions exist.