



U.S.-ISLAMIC WORLD FORUM

DOHA, QATAR



February 18-20, 2006

Press Release:

February 20, 2006

Leaders Effect Change at the 2006 U.S.-Islamic World Forum

One of the greatest challenges in global politics today is the dangerous tension that has grown between the United States and the world's Muslim states and communities. This deepening divide is not just tragic, but is also a critical impediment to cooperation on a breadth of vital issues of joint concern, ranging from terrorism and radicalism to human development and freedom.

The U.S.-Islamic World Forum brought together leaders in the realms of politics, business, media, academia, and civil society from across the Islamic world (including Muslim communities in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East) and the United States. The Forum seeks to serve as 1) a *convening* body for leaders to seize back the dialogue from radicalization and stereotyping on both sides of the divide and 2) a *catalyst* for positive action by leaders to shape positive change. Therefore, its focus was not on dialogue just for dialogue's sake, but on developing actionable agendas for government, civil society, and the private sector.

The leaders concluded that the need for an institutionalized dialogue was an urgent necessity, in order to help prevent a permanent fault line from forming between the U.S. and the Islamic world. The meeting also established the need for the dialogue to 1) be held on a global level, bringing together not only Americans and Arab leaders, but also with leaders from the wide range of Muslim states and communities, and 2) bring together not merely experts, but the wider range of policymakers and opinion-shapers in the broadest sense.

The 2006 U.S.-Islamic World Forum had 173 participants from 38 countries and diverse background, including political, business, arts, civil society, technology, and minority leaders. The Forum brought together six former heads of states, 16 current or former government ministers. In addition, 19 universities were represented at the Forum as well as 22 businesses and 25 civil society organizations. As an example of the global reach of Forum participants, they have combined "Google" citations numbering 192,964,558, have sold 26,000,000 records, have achieved 302 degrees and have written 324 books. The issues discussed were wide-ranging and important, including the situation in Iraq and Palestine, the Danish cartoon controversy, women and leadership, and faith in an age of globalization.

The discussions were focused around three key areas: security, governance and reform, youth and development. A task force of leaders for each of these subjects convened to come up with proposals and initiatives.

The security task focused on:

- The key security issues today (including conflict in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, the southern Philippines, and the Israeli Palestinian conflict) and also what are the challenges that will need to be solved in the next five years.
- The models and examples of agreements and alliances that might bolster security.
- The prerequisites for better dealing with the security challenges presented by internal conflicts, especially how to better aid failed or failing states.
- The pending crises in trans-border issues that can be identified over the horizon and must be solved to avoid greater dangers. There was particular concern at developments in Baluchistan province of Pakistan, and the Iranian nuclear issue and its ramifications.
- The actions that the leaders at the Forum can take to spur the creation of a security relationship that is more conducive to the forces of progress than the forces of radicalism.

The governance and reform task force tackled the following issues:

- The role of governments and outsiders in reform; in general, there was a range of opinion about the role of outside forces in promoting reform.
- The lines of agreement and disagreement in the various reform visions.
- A focus was on the role of Islamist political parties in reform efforts, in particular parties such as Hizbollah and Hamas, and whether inclusion or exclusion in the political process would lead to moderation. Countries where Islamist parties are now participating in democratic politics, such as Jordan, Indonesia, and Morocco, were examined as potential models.
- Looking ahead, the group focused the challenges in reform that must be solved in five years from now.

The youth and development task force addressed the following issues:

- The various visions for solving youth, development and employment concerns in the five years ahead. The task force identified a key concern as the coming “youth bulge” and the political and economic pressures especially heightened by demographic change, such as the 100 million additional Muslim youth in the next generation who will need jobs.
- The prerequisites required to create a positive environment for investment.
- The education reforms needed to produce a skilled workforce capable of meeting the needs of global business and how business can leverage its strength to push for real reform. Methods to adapt higher education according to the demands of the job market were examined.

- Public-private partnerships and examples of reform available to facilitate such positive change. Education leaders in particular discussed how to widen and deepen access to the education system for the female population without alienating young males.

The Forum served as an organizing body for a wide range of agreements, initiatives and cooperative programs between U.S. and Muslim world leaders and organizations. Among the many new initiatives coming out of the 2006 U.S.-Islamic World Forum are:

- Two regional conferences, one to be held in Europe and the other in South East Asia, which will bring together U.S. and Muslim leaders in these areas with their Arab partner leaders and focus on such issues as security, Islamophobia, and globalization.
- The opening of a Brookings-Doha office, a joint initiative of the Institution's Saban Center for Middle East Policy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The office will be the first branch of the Brookings Institution, which celebrates its 90th year in 2006, to open outside of the United States and introduce the international model of independent think tanks to the region.
- A 10-point action plan developed by science and technology leaders, that will begin in May 2006, focusing on enhancing technology partnership between the United States and the Muslim world to help solve joint problems.
- A new initiative on public and private partnerships to aid youth and development, which will lead to expanded vocational schools across the Muslim world.
- An American media organization developed a partnership with TV channels in the Arab world and Pakistan.
- Research on the need for benchmarks that clarify the reform process and democratic processes.
- An initiative on how to make interfaith dialogue more effective and enhance mutual respect for each other's faith.
- Linkages between American and Muslim arts and culture leaders, who agreed to launch follow-up arts festivals, seminars for catalytic funding, and workshops in Hollywood and Washington to widen the discussion and better link it to policymakers.

Youth outreach sessions were also held that brought together the leaders with universities in Qatar, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Cote d'Ivoire, and the United States.

The theme of the conference was "Leaders Effect Change." Dr. Peter W. Singer, Director, Project on U.S. Policy Towards the Islamic World, Saban Center at Brookings, United States recalled during the final session the tragedy of September 11, 2001, and said: "For me 9-11 was about change. It was about those that could not accept change trying to fight change, to bring back the dark ages rather than accept the 21st century. But you cannot defeat change." After listing the achievements of the Forum, the new initiatives that came out of the Forum and the positive results of dialogue, Singer concluded by saying that: "Change is inspiring."

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For more on the U.S.-Islamic World Forum:

<http://www.us-islamicworldforum.org/>

For more on the Brookings Islamic World Project:

<http://www.brookings.edu/fp/research/projects/islam/islam.htm>