

منتدى أمريكا والعالم الإسلامي

U.S.–ISLAMIC WORLD FORUM

DOHA, QATAR

Opening Address By

Ambassador

ZALMAY KHALILZAD

United States Permanent Representative
United Nations

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1775 Massachusetts Avenue, NW • Washington, DC 20036 • Phone: 202-797-6462, Fax: 202-797-2481
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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

In reflecting on the theme of this conference, I came to see the topic both in personal and policy terms.

At the personal level, I have a deep connection to both the United States and the Muslim world, and I care about this region.

At the policy level, the future of this region is critical for the future of the world.

The history of this region and of the broader Islamic world includes many periods of greatness, and many Islamic countries can point to significant discoveries in the sciences and great advances in philosophy, government, or other fields that are part of their historical legacies – advances that were often made in periods when their societies were characterized by diversity, openness, and tolerance. Yet, for too many of these countries and their citizens, the contemporary record is disappointing. Still, there is potential for great success within the Islamic world.

While it is the responsibility and privilege of this region's own leaders to bring about the needed transformation for success, I believe the United States can be a friend and a partner in these endeavours.

I do not see the challenges of Western relations with the countries of the broader Middle East, or the Muslim world as a whole, in predominantly religious terms. I do not see a “clash of civilizations”. There is no conflict between the West or the United States and Muslim-majority countries that arises from Islam as a religion. And together we must be vigilant in resisting irresponsible “agitprop” that seeks to foster such a clash.

Instead, I see three interrelated challenges:

- One, overcoming extremism and terror;
- Two, preventing hegemony and destabilizing regional conflicts and rivalries; and
- Three, dealing with globalization and overcoming obstacles that stand in the way of Islamic societies succeeding in the modern world.

Success in dealing with these challenges will require a partnership between the West – including the United States – and likeminded Islamic peoples and leaders.

First, overcoming extremism and terror. Terrorists and their extremist supporters are the common enemies of Muslims and the West. Overcoming this challenge should be a pillar of a global partnership involving Islamic countries, the West, and the rest of the world.



The Islamic world, especially the broader Middle East, is experiencing a wave of political extremism and is under attack by groups that use terror. In truth, Muslims were the first and may be the greatest victims of such extremism.

I have seen myself what extremists did – and are doing – in Afghanistan and in Iraq. Al-Qaeda murdered nearly 3,000 innocent people on America's home soil, and some of the victims that day were Muslims.

These extremists are a minority phenomenon in the Islamic world – but they tarnish the image of this great religion and give Islam a bad name – leading to fear and hostility towards Islam and Muslims among some in the West, including in the United States.

The current struggle in the Islamic world against extremism is not unique to history. Fascism and Nazism in Europe and militarism in Japan were extremist interpretations of nationalism; communism in the former Soviet Union and China were extremist movements grounded in class warfare; and Mao's Cultural Revolution was an extremist version of communism.

Defeating extremism in the countries of the broader Middle East requires non-extremist political forces, inside and outside of government, to move toward a coalition or united front against extremism. This is a political and ideological struggle that is taking place within Muslim countries, that moderates have to join in and win, but one in which the United States and other friends can play an important supportive role.

Besides security measures against terrorists, it is essential to open up the political process and create space for moderate forces.

There is progress on this front in many countries:

- Kuwait, where women achieved full suffrage in 2006 and stood for election for the first time;
- Bahrain, where opposition parties participated in elections for the first time in 2006;
- Yemen, where the first multi-candidate presidential elections were held in 2006;
- the UAE, which held elections in December 2006 for the Federal National Council; and
- Lebanon, where the first transparent parliamentary elections in a quarter century were conducted in 2005.

Afghanistan and Iraq have also had important achievements.

The path to progress will be different in every state, and needs to be pursued with sophistication. It will require step-by-step political progress and an understanding that



change cannot come all at once or at the risk to stability; but at the same time, it must be credible and be seen as such.

The challenge for the West is to be supportive without undermining moderates. This will require analysis and conversations with supporters of positive change in the region, including its political and social leaders. This will enable us to identify courses of action that achieve progress while preserving stability.

In the longer term, I believe that this path will lead to democratization – but with systems of representative government grounded in the cultures and traditions of the region.

I recognize that some people – including some in the United States – believe it is a mistake to support democratic freedom in the broader Middle East. They say that the Arab people or Muslims are not "capable" of democracy. They are wrong.

This same argument was made about the Japanese after World War II. Fortunately, America rejected this advice, kept its faith in freedom, and stood with the people of Japan. The results are now in. Today, the people of Japan have a working democracy and have preserved their cultural and religious traditions, including the hereditary monarch.

This transformation may not have been possible without America's support and perseverance over many decades. And just as our commitment to Asia helped people there secure their freedom and prosperity, our commitment to the Middle East can assist in the same outcome.

The second challenge involves addressing regional instability. Preventing regional hegemony and mitigating regional rivalries and conflicts should be the second pillar of Western partnership with the countries of the broader Middle East. Conflicts and rivalries are playing out in the Gulf, in Lebanon, between Israel and the Palestinians, along the mountainous borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and in northern Iraq. In particular, the support of extremists by state actors for reasons of regional rivalries and ambitions has been enormously costly in human lives and stability, and must stop. And there cannot be impunity for those involved in political assassinations and those involved in massive human rights violations such as in Darfur.

Again, other regions have experienced similar problems. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Europe was the source of most of the world's security problems, resulting in two world wars, imperial competition around the globe, and the Cold War. Franco-German rapprochement, European integration, the establishment of NATO, and the end of the Cold War all fundamentally transformed the region. In East Asia, the same effect was produced by bilateral and multilateral security arrangements, successful state building in post-colonial countries, and the reform and opening of China to the world.



Regional challenges will require collective action to deal with threats from Iran. Tehran's leaders are choosing a confrontational path on the issue of their nuclear activities, and are undermining a number of their neighbors. Though we do not seek conflict with Iran, we will take the necessary actions to protect our interests and those of our friends.

It is possible to come to terms with Iran as a country, which has a reasonable definition of its national interests. But as long as Iran pursues regional hegemony, supports violent extremist groups, and violates UN Security Council resolutions with regards to its nuclear program, we have to work together to contain it.

The Gulf Cooperation Council provides a key forum needed to manage challenges from Iran, and our long-standing security assistance relationships, as well as our recent initiatives to strengthen defense capabilities in the region, demonstrate our commitment to our friends and partners.

Another aspect of our diplomatic collaboration entails dealing with destabilizing conflicts.

The Israeli-Palestinian issue is one such challenge, and the Annapolis process aims at addressing it by achieving a two-state solution. The United States has also sought to ensure that Turkey and Iraq work together on diminishing the threat of terrorism. And we have encouraged Afghanistan and Pakistan to work towards a more productive and stable bilateral relationship.

Our joint efforts should focus on using our respective influence to advance the peace process; help the Lebanese government extend its control throughout its territory; strengthen ties between Iraq and the rest of the region; and support needed efforts to help stabilize Afghanistan.

The third challenge is globalization, and how to overcome obstacles that stand in the way of Islamic societies succeeding in the modern world.

I understand that there is fear of globalization and concern that it will undermine cherished traditions and identities. I sincerely believe that this fear is misplaced. I encourage Muslim countries to take their appropriate place in the emerging world with self-confidence. I advise the leaders of Muslim countries to seek more – not less – engagement with the international community; to unleash the skills and talents of their people, both men and women; and to protect the rights of religious and ethnic minorities in their midst.

Open and just societies create opportunities for their citizens. This opportunity begins with economic growth. Oil accounts for much of the economic growth in many countries in this region. I'm pleased that most are now investing in their people, building infrastructure, and opening the door to foreign trade and investment. Trade and



investment are the keys to the future. Part of the approach has to be the opening of markets between the United States, other Western countries, and the states of this region.

In the last few years, the nations of this region have made great progress. The World Bank reports that economic growth is strong and it is rising. Qatar has opened its doors to the world economy. And Qatar is building a nation where the people have an opportunity to build a better future for themselves and their families. Saudi Arabia has joined the World Trade Organization. Jordan, Oman, Bahrain, and Morocco have signed free trade agreements with the United States. The states of the broader Middle East are attracting more foreign investment. In any society, the greatest resources are the skills and talents of the people. Across this region, there is an abundance of human capital. I applaud Qatar's attention to strengthening its education system and opening its economy to unlock the people's potential, importantly including Qatari women. Education City – where several American institutions of higher learning have opened branches to serve the young people of this region – is a brilliant initiative. Similar steps are being taken in a number of other countries that could potentially create vibrant and entrepreneurial societies.

In closing, I would just re-emphasize my three basic messages:

- One, the Islamic world needs to embrace modernity and globalization with self-confidence.
- Two, the challenges faced by the Islamic world are not unique. Other great civilizations have faced similar challenges. They have gone through them, and have emerged stronger than before.
- And three, success has been achieved by partnership with others, especially the United States.

The future of this region is geopolitically the defining issue of our time and the United States will partner with like-minded countries in this great enterprise. As progress is achieved, the broader Middle East will be transformed – and it will find its place alongside North America, Europe and East Asia as a region characterized by stability, freedom, and prosperity.

Thank you.

