

منتدى أمريكا والعالم الإسلامي

U.S.–ISLAMIC WORLD FORUM

DOHA, QATAR

## Remarks before the U.S.-Islamic World Forum in Doha, Qatar

Senator John F. Kerry  
February 13, 2010

*As salaam alaikum.* Thank you for the kind introduction. I want to thank the Brookings Project for convening this important discussion. I'm grateful to His Excellency Prime Minister Hamad bin Jasim, Strobe Talbott, Martin Indyk, and all those involved in putting this Forum together. And I am pleased to be here with Prime Minister Erdogan of Turkey. There are an extraordinary number of thoughtful, experienced leaders from many different walks of life assembled here, and I am privileged to share my thoughts with you.

We gather at a time when many have serious doubts about whether real progress has been made since President Obama's historic speech in Cairo. We can't speak honestly at a Forum like this without recognizing the widespread frustration many people feel. Much of it is justified. Some of it is not.

But it is important to remember where we began. For a decade, our relationship was framed by trauma and terrorism, by two ongoing wars and political conflict—and the fallout only polarized us further. Many Muslims perceived the United States as an aggressor – projecting its power solely to protect its own security and economic interests, usually at the expense of Muslim countries. Too many in western societies implicitly, and at times explicitly, blamed an entire religion for the unholy violence of a few. This left many Muslims angry and alienated and complicated the task for leaders in the region.

At the same time, suicide bombers and extremists dominated the daily news. While credible and respected Muslim voices did publicly condemn the fanaticism and violence, their actions received little attention from the media and policymakers. Too often, the extremists defined an “us versus them” discourse, and all of us suffered for it.

Since President Obama took office, we have witnessed a dramatic shift. While expectations were perhaps too high that the world would change overnight, we know that his words and our subsequent actions were just the beginning of a long road.

Major challenges remain for all of us in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen. We also have to collectively address poverty and stand up for democratic values and human rights. It is especially important that we remain united in preventing Iran's nuclear program from setting off an arms race in the region. Make no mistake. Iran is not being singled out -- it has chosen to defy an international nonproliferation regime that is in all of our interests to enforce. President Obama has joined many others in calling for a



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world free of nuclear weapons. Believe me, the road to zero does not run through a nuclear-armed Tehran.

Undoubtedly the most crucial and most vexing of all issues is how we can revitalize a Mideast peace process that delivers peace—not just process—because if we don't do it now, the door may well shut forever. And no one can overstate the dangers of another generation growing up knowing only conflict.

The truth is we have in these past months taken some important steps. Today, we are in a fundamentally better place than we were a year ago. Quiet accomplishments and new attitudes and policies have put our partnerships on firmer footing.

Let me be specific. First, America is striving to think and talk differently about Islam. We reject—publicly and categorically—the demonization of a religion and recognize our need for deeper understanding. Our values and our history remind us constantly that religious bigotry – whether it is anti-Semitism or Islamophobia – has no place in our public life. America was founded by those seeking freedom of religion, and all Western countries need to recognize that banning *burqas* or minarets is contrary to our shared values. It builds unnecessary walls between Muslims and the rest of society. It's insulting, and it only exacerbates tensions.

Second, we must acknowledge that a serious debate is now underway within Muslim communities over how best to address extremism and combat prejudice. This is an important development because ultimately, it is those communities that are best positioned to find solutions that resonate. I want to commend His Majesty King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia for promoting Muslim-Christian dialogue through his innovative program, A Common Word, which attracts more signatories every day. We should recognize His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan for his signature work in promoting interfaith harmony through conversations among faiths and cultures. And of course, the Qataris deserve great credit for hosting dialogues like this one.

Third, the United States is reaching out to the next generation and cultivating people-to-people relationships. President Obama has created new science envoys and exchange programs. Our space program, NASA, is welcoming Muslim students from around the world and financing a research program in the Gulf. And Secretary of State Clinton has appointed a Special Representative to Muslim Communities who is focused on people-to-people engagement, Farah Pandith, who is here with us today. All of these initiatives add up to a different attitude and a different approach.

Let me share with you a story that embodies one important aspect of this new partnership. Before last year's Hajj, there were warnings of a potential pandemic outbreak of H1N1 flu. So the United States sent Dr. Osama Ibrahim, an Egyptian-American public health expert at our Centers for Disease Control, and four other Muslim-American doctors to Mecca. His

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team worked with their Saudi hosts on a cutting-edge program to contain the flu using smart-phones for real-time disease mapping. And guess what? It worked. Defying the odds, there was no spike in H1N1 flu cases after the Hajj. Dr. Ibrahim's hosts were so moved that they invited him and his colleagues to stand in the holy places and perform the Hajj themselves.

And this kind of outreach goes in both directions. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Islamic Relief charity delivered aid to 60,000 people in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. Just last month, the Red Crescent and other humanitarian groups from Muslim-majority countries again rushed to deliver aid to Haitians in desperate need. I want to extend a special thanks to Prime Minister Erdogan for sending Turkey's excellent search and rescue teams to Haiti – a 7-year-old girl and many other Haitians owe their lives to those Turkish efforts.

So all of these are concrete actions, which individually may seem insignificant to some, when taken together, make a tangible difference. They point a way forward, and we need to create more partnerships just like them. I know in your working groups you will be doing just that.

For my part, I intend to work to create a new, long-term exchange program between the United States and Muslim-majority countries. This will involve public-private partnerships—funded jointly by governments and companies so that Americans and citizens from Muslim-majority countries can work together in fields like science, journalism, business, arts, and culture. This idea is in the early stages, and I welcome your expertise and support in defining it as we go forward.

That's one small step in building bridges. But ultimately, and particularly if local leaders do the right thing, our relationship will not be defined in religious terms nor should it be. It will be defined by our success in tackling the traditional issues we all face – how to put people to work, how to provide healthcare, and how to educate our youth.

Nothing will be more crucial in this effort than addressing the demographic explosion of young people across the broader Middle East. This “youth bulge” will inevitably drive change in Muslim societies, and ought to drive our policy and partnership as well. When people see their governments fail to address their basic needs, when they see no hope for escaping from poverty and improving their lives, seemingly intractable problems will become truly insurmountable.

On the other hand, if we find ways to work together—to improve governance, to help create worthwhile jobs, and to do a better job of integrating youth socially, politically and economically—then a new generation can also be a new opportunity for both sides to redefine our relationship. That's why we should commend the U.N. Alliance of Civilizations in partnership with the State of Qatar for launching Silatech, a creative

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initiative that addresses young people's critical and growing need for jobs and economic opportunity.

But for societies to harness their full potential, we also need to address the aspirations of women. Countries cannot expect to be competitive if half the workforce is economically marginalized or denied rights and opportunities. While this effort sometimes runs hard up against cultures and traditions, as we in America learned with the election of our first African-American president, once a barrier has been broken, we wonder how it could ever have stood for so long.

To fundamentally change the dynamic, however, we must address the one issue that has been at the emotional core of America's relations with the world's Muslims throughout my public life. We all know what it is: The need for lasting peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. And we all know that a two-state solution remains the only workable solution, and the only just solution—and America cannot and will not stop fighting for it.

I recognize that many here are particularly frustrated with the lack of progress over the past year, as we are in America. I know the failure to achieve a complete settlement freeze in the last months has profoundly disappointed many in the Arab world. Let me make it clear: The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements. But we are where we are, and we simply cannot allow this issue to become an excuse to point fingers or derail final status negotiations. Because as elusive as significant progress sometimes seems, the truth is we all know where the finish line is. All that is needed is the will and the leadership to get there.

Remember that it was not so long ago, at the end of the Clinton Administration, when Israelis and Palestinians came closer than ever to defining a comprehensive peace agreement. Based on his intensive personal involvement, Bill Clinton set forth parameters that included tough sacrifices on both sides—and a compromise that was fair to all: A contiguous Palestinian state based on 1967 borders with land swaps; security guarantees for Israel; a capital for both states in Jerusalem; and significant compensation for refugees, with a right of return to Palestine and any resettlement in Israel subject to negotiation.

Then in 2002, the Arab Peace Initiative, since endorsed by every Arab country, provided another key piece to the final puzzle: The promise for Israel that a comprehensive peace agreement would bring normalized relations with the Arab world.

While new leaders have emerged, I believe the Clinton parameters and the Arab Peace Initiative still provide the only realistic basis for lasting peace and security – and I'm confident that deep down, most of the Israeli and Palestinian people understand this as well.

Ultimately, it is the Israelis and the Palestinians who must reach an agreement, and live with the results. But America has a vital role to play as an effective broker, and we must

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remain deeply involved with a sense of urgency. Israel is one of our closest allies and always will be, but Israel is most secure when America is actively engaged. And I commend Senator Mitchell and this Administration for staying committed and refusing to cede the initiative to the extremists.

To move forward, America must help the parties progress as rapidly as possible from proximity talks to direct negotiations with all of the issues on the table. Personally, I suspect that progress can be made most easily on the borders first, and significantly, this will help to resolve the issue of West Bank settlements and lay the groundwork for reaching agreement on other issues.

And while America's role is vital, let's be clear: We must all be partners in this effort.

First, Gulf States and the entire region must do more to support Palestinian state building. Prime Minister Fayyad has laid out a detailed plan for strengthening Palestinian institutions. This effort needs greater Arab support, and I urge you to find ways to deliver it.

Second, the Arab world cannot simply wait for Israeli-Palestinian peace before improving relations with Israel. Building trust must be a step-by-step process, and the region must recognize Israel's desire for acceptance and its fundamental need for security. And perhaps most importantly, the leading voices in the Arab world have a vital role to play with their people in creating the atmosphere for lasting peace with Israel.

Finally, we must address the dire humanitarian conditions in Gaza. One year ago, I saw firsthand the devastation there – and it is a tragedy that so little has been rebuilt since then. In southern Israel, I also saw the toll that Hamas rockets had inflicted in a barrage that no country would endure interminably. But our grievance is not with the people of Gaza. We will all benefit by finding ways to allow them to rebuild their homes and their lives without empowering those who seek violence.

I know that everyone here understands the urgent need for peace. But peace alone will not solve all the region's problems. Ask yourselves: If peace were delivered tomorrow, would it meet the job needs of the entire region? How many more children would it send to school? Who really believes that Iran would suddenly abandon its nuclear ambitions? So we know that Israel/Palestine is central but we must develop a much more practical partnership that extends well beyond regional conflicts.

Out of this conference must come a broader commitment to the day to day challenges of the region. That is how we are ultimately going to define our relationships, not by the distinctions between religions, but by our common humanity, not by the Osama Bin Ladens of the world who are seeking to destroy, but by the Osama Ibrahims who are working to heal.



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Today we are all neighbors with more in common than could possibly separate us. We have a duty to engage with each other. The Abrahamic faiths—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam-- have to find new meaning in the old notion of our shared descent. The good news I see is that, for all the challenges our differences present, all of the major religions do have a sense of universal values—a moral truth based on the dignity of all human beings.

Gandhi called the world’s religions “beautiful flowers from the same garden.” Every religion embraces a form of the Golden Rule, and the supreme importance of charity, compassion, and human improvement.

And if we remember those common principles, if we respect each other and work hard to bridge our differences then—*inshallah*, god willing—that is kind of partnership we can build.

Thank you.