

منتدى أمريكا والعالم الإسلامي

U.S.-ISLAMIC WORLD FORUM

DOHA, QATAR

Opening Address By

The Honorable

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Former Secretary of State
United States

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THE BROOKINGS PROJECT ON U.S. RELATIONS WITH THE ISLAMIC WORLD
THE SABAN CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY AT BROOKINGS

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I begin by thanking everyone connected with this Forum. To act wisely, we need to know as much as possible about others and also about ourselves; one path to such knowledge is dialogue.

In that quest, we convene this year at a moment of great anticipation. Arab-Israeli peace talks have recommenced. In Iraq, signs of hope are visible amid ongoing strife. In Pakistan, pivotal elections are scheduled this week. And in November, the United States will choose a new president.

America's next leader will have a chance to alter the tone and substance of U.S. foreign policy in ways that could enhance mutual confidence between my country and the people of this region.

He or she will arrive in office not with a magic wand, but with the possibilities for an improved climate plainly evident. If I were in a position to advise the new president, I would point out the following.

First, it is a mistake to conceive of this region or the world as divided between people who do no wrong and those who do no right; between moderates and extremists, secular and religious, evil and good. A simplistic and triumphal mindset cannot guide us through a complicated reality. Blame for past mistakes and current disputes must be widely shared; and answers will not be found unless all legitimate interests are taken into account.

Second, America's enemy is not Islam, nor any subset of Islam. Nor is it Islamic terrorism, for terrorism is by its nature un-Islamic. In the fight against Al-Qaeda, Americans of every faith and faithful Muslims of every description are on the same side.

Third, neither America nor any other country can be considered above the law. Every nation is obliged to respect human rights, observe global conventions, and abide by UN Security Council resolutions. Power unhinged from law lacks legitimacy and will inevitably be opposed.

Finally, America must pursue peace in a determined way. No U.S. president will waver in supporting the survival and security of Israel. Every U.S. president should respect the dignity and legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. Together, we must strive for agreements that enable all who desire peace to live as neighbors. For that to happen, we must not only talk of the need for security and justice; we must move toward a common definition of what those terms mean.

As an observer of world affairs, I readily acknowledge that the United States must think more deeply than it has in the past about why its intentions have been misunderstood. True dialogue is incompatible with ignorance, hypocrisy, and condescension, nor can it be based



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on the premise that one people or civilization is superior to another. America has a responsibility to learn more and lecture less.

Dialogue, however, is not a solo act.

In earlier editions of this forum, Muslim leaders have claimed that Western media are biased against Muslims, and there is some truth to this. But where is the balance within Arab media?

The United States has been accused of having double standards, not always without justification, but many Arabs and Muslims have double standards, as well. If there were a Christian government in Khartoum, this hall would ring with demands for intervention to halt the killing of Muslims in Darfur.

Americans are blamed for perpetuating stereotypes, and this criticism has validity. But the image of the United States that is widespread in many Muslim societies is also distorted. Though America has made mistakes, it is hardly the sole (or even primary) source of violence, inequality, and suffering in this region. It may be convenient for some leaders to deflect popular frustration caused by their own insecurities and selfishness, but it is not honest.

America is criticized for not doing enough to bring peace between Israelis and Palestinians and perhaps this is fair; but where are the Arab leaders who will truly reach out to Israel and say, "Enough of missiles and bombs, enough of incitement and hate, enough of killing and sorrow – let us agree on a realistic formula for permanent and comprehensive peace?" In this context, it is not sufficient simply to restate old positions; peace requires new modes of thinking and the courage to make history.

If we are to build bridges that will truly narrow the divide that confronts us, we must first recognize both our shared interest in finding solutions and our shared responsibility for resolving differences. Neither America nor any other government can or should try to impose remedies. All can and must pursue progress in a cooperative spirit.

By progress, I mean a genuinely viable two state solution in the Middle East; an Iraq that is united, stable and at peace both with itself and its neighbors; an Iran – and a United States – that respect the right to self-governance of other lands; a region united against Al-Qaeda and its offshoots and allies; and a future where children of all backgrounds and faiths can grow up without fear.

To these purposes, let us reason and act together, while also heeding the lessons we have learned together. From the New Testament: "Blessed are the peacemakers." From the Hebrew Bible: "Swords into ploughshares." And from the noble Qur'an: "Enter into peace one and all."

Thank you.



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