

منتدى أمريكا والعالم الإسلامي

U.S.-ISLAMIC WORLD FORUM

DOHA, QATAR

Keynote Address By

His Excellency

**HAMID KARZAI**

President

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

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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:

Assalamualikum, and good evening. It is a great honor to be here tonight and to address such a distinguished forum.

The relationship between the United States and the Muslim world is one of the most pertinent issues of our time. Therefore, I congratulate the conveners of the U.S.-Islamic World Forum for being rightfully concerned about it, and for taking a step in trying to address it.

As you all know, Islam has made a significant contribution toward enriching civilizations and has produced great scholars, thinkers and poets. In fact, the experience of Al-Andalusia speaks volumes about an era of great co-existence between different cultures and beliefs. In addition, there exists a great body of research points out that Muslims were not only responsible for the revival of Classical Greek thinking, but also began what is referred to as the “European Renaissance”.

As a Muslim, I am greatly pained to see that, in contrast to the glory of our forebears, today we Muslims live in rather troubled times. It is unfortunate that many of the most violent conflicts today are taking place in our countries; or that, despite our immeasurable resources, too many of us are afflicted by poverty. It is painful to see that we make up one-fifth of the world’s population, but only five percent of the world’s economy. While the injunctions of our great faith are totally consistent with our duties as citizens of a single world which we share with the West, sometimes we do seem to have difficulty reconciling the two.

Make no mistake, much of the predominant perceptions about the Muslim world today are wrong, exaggerated and unjustified. However, for me, our own continued vulnerabilities are as much unacceptable as any unjustified treatment they receive from the Western world. At the same time as we engage constructively with the United States and the West in trying to find remedies for the many genuine grievances that our people hold, we must silence the few discordant voices that preach hatred and division on both sides.



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Once again, as a Muslim, I think it is time we do better with the basic tenets of our great faith, Islam, and relive its glorious tradition of tolerance and progress. Fourteen hundred years ago, the benevolent God ordained to his Messenger Muhammad (PBUH) in the Holy Qur'an that "all humans are equal in the sight of God," and that humans are born into different tribes and distinctions not to despise one another, but to know one another better. This Qur'anic verse is the earliest assertion ever about our shared humanity and about the basic elements we hold in common as members of a single human race. As Muslims, we must live up to the eminence of this divine truth.

And then, more than a millennium after the Holy Qur'an spoke about equality in the eyes of God Almighty, the founding fathers of what is today the United States of America adhered to the same principles as they set about founding a new great nation: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal," they declared. The United States Constitution begins with "We the People..." – a telling reminder of Islam's emphasis on the basic bondage of mankind.

Thanks to the exemplary vision of its founding fathers, America today is a true beacon of prosperity, hope and success. The American ideals of freedom, democracy, equality and respect for the rights of the individual have inspired people around the world. I would say it is these ideals, much more than military prowess, that makes America attractive.

However power, be it moral or material, entails responsibility. Power also brings justified expectations from others, which must be addressed responsibly. Thus, it was justified for the Afghan people to expect the United States to help us in our rightful desire to liberate ourselves from the Al-Qaeda-dominated regime and a vicious cycle of violence. It was justified for the people of Kuwait to seek help from the United States against an occupying force and to regain control of their own destiny. It was justified when the United States intervened in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo to prevent ethnic cleansing and assist in ensuring peace and stability in the region. It is also justified for the Palestinian people to



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expect the United States to help them in the long-denied aspiration to have a state of their own, where they can live peacefully with Israel. As a beacon of freedom, America is expected to aid the quest for freedom and self-determination wherever these are denied.

The United States has also been one of the most successful nations in the world in terms of embracing and accepting multiplicity of religions and changing it to a social reality. Today, in the United States, Muslims live in peace and harmony with the followers of other religions, enjoying protection and full rights as citizens of that nation.

Ladies and gentlemen, we must work together to educate and inform ourselves and our populations about the differences and commonalities of our cultures. I reject the notion that we are facing a “clash of civilizations”. We are instead confronting a world that seems to have shrunk in size by the forces of globalization. What is not understood is labelled and feared. Globalization has made isolation impossible. We should appeal to our media to educate and build bridges between our cultures, rather than equating differences with incompatibility, threat and fear. We should approach the diversity of our cultures as having given our world its colourful and vibrant beauty.

I am often struck by the way in which at times press coverage both in the United States and the Muslim world casts the other as having opposing interests. Indeed the United States represents a composite of varying perspectives, interests and priorities. Equally the Muslim world represents a mosaic of orientations and interests. What is important is that, in a number of significant ways, our interests converge.

Today, no matter how divergent the views and interests of the United States and the Muslim world may appear on surface, fundamentally, we aspire to the same ideals of freedom, peace and prosperity. We are intricately connected through the global market, our mass media, global communications and the fragility of the environment. However, to the extent that there appear to be misperceptions between us, the solution lies not only in trying to correct



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them, but also in recognizing our common interests and fighting together to safeguard them when they are threatened.

Foremost, ladies and gentlemen, our common interests are highlighted today by the threat that we all face from terrorism. In the Western press, Al-Qaeda and other extremists are all lumped together, very wrongly, as “Muslim extremists”, while in fact these criminal elements are, first, the enemies of Islam, for we Muslims were the first victims. Before they attacked the United States on September 11, 2001, terrorists were killing thousands of innocent Muslims in my own country. Even today, many more Muslims around the world are the victims of terrible deaths, beheadings, suicide bombings and violent attacks carried out by these extremist elements. Therefore, terrorism is a threat to both Muslims and non-Muslims around the world.

Indeed it is the failure to recognize this common threat and the definition of our interests in narrow terms that weaken our resolve to defeat it. The world already witnessed the mistake of abandoning Afghanistan when it no longer fit with misperceived Western interests after the Cold War. The decision to leave Afghanistan to intervention and extremism made it a safe haven for terrorists. So on the tragedy of September 11, we learned that a threat to one of us, is a threat to all of us.

Today, as the world’s common front against terrorism, our region must succeed at any cost. We must be concerned about the wildfire spread of extremism and terrorism in the broader region as a menacing development. Despite the “War on Terror”, Al-Qaeda and its allies are still able to kill and maim in our region and beyond. We must ask why. We must take seriously the continued existence and functionality of terrorist sanctuaries and infrastructure where ever they may be, and question the intention of those that tolerate their existence. We must confront our challenges with sincerity and go beyond rhetoric.

To prevail against such threats, the Muslim world, the United States, and indeed the entire international community have no way but to come together and cooperate. Afghanistan over



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the last six years has been a powerful case for the prospect of a genuine international cooperation led by the United States, aimed at fighting a common enemy and achieving common goals. This has been a rewarding experience, as much success has been achieved through a combination of the Afghan people's desire and the help we received from the United States and the international community.

And there is more to it: consider the participation of various countries in building the Ring Road, starting from the eastern part of Afghanistan to the west:

Torkham-Jalalabad Road built by Pakistan;

Jalalabad-Kabul Road built by the European Union;

Zaranj-Delaram Road built by India;

Islamqalah-Herat Road built by Iran;

Kabul-Mazar Road by the World Bank and the Arab Development Bank;

Kabul-Herat Road built jointly by Saudi Arabia, Japan and the United States;

When these countries from far-flung corners of the world, representing different civilizations, come together to cooperate, there is much hope to have for the future no matter what common challenges there might be. Indeed, our future in a peaceful world lies in the extent to which cooperation among civilizations, as exemplified in Afghanistan, can become the *rule*, and not the exception.

Thank You.



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