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LEADERS ROUNDTABLE ON
"POLICY, FAITH AND CHANGE IN AN AGE OF GLOBALIZATION"

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I. Dangers of Perennial Conflict: The "Long War"

Our primary purpose at this forum is to establish where we have come since 9/11 and ask ourselves where we can go. Since that fateful day, the world has entered a hard security paradigm which is now the dominant concept in international relations.

Clausewitz famously described war as the continuation of politics by other means. But now, it seems, this maxim has been inverted. Following on from the "war on terror", we are now confronted with the prospect of a "Long War" which will last decades and affect all of humanity. The law of war now seems to be the default state of human relations; we have as yet no law of peace.

And so, after 45 years of Cold War – or more accurately "proxy war" – 9/11 was in retrospect the spark that ignited the "Long War", as the Pentagon now frames it. The basic idea seems to be that trans-national terrorism is the new –ism that replaces the fallen ideologies of communism and fascism, and may take just as long to defeat.

One real danger here is lending specious legitimacy to fragmented and disparate groups with little more than violent tactics in common. If we elevate terrorism from *modus operandi* to ideology, we actually risk perpetuating and increasing the threat. A war without conceivable end may well end up acting as the most effective jihad recruiting agent there could be. In that case, is this war against an abstract enemy really winnable in any final sense?

This dangerously open-ended rebranding of the global contest shows us that the "war on terror" is now seen not as the exception but as the rule. But meeting here in Qatar this weekend, as so-called American and Muslim leaders, we must ask ourselves: have we returned to some primordial state of perennial conflict, and if so, what are the consequences for our shared human environment?

Some say that this war is really just a campaign against Islam and Muslims. That is not my position. The perceived divide in this world is not between Muslims and the rest, but between *inclusion and exclusion*. It is by merely attempting to keep the lid on the simmering discontent of those excluded from the benefits of globalization, rather than dealing with the underlying issues, that we are fuelling this long-term conflict.

If we continue to view East-West relations through the prism of hard security, our attempts at reconciliation and mutual understanding stand little hope of success. Soft security – helping the poor and vulnerable to live with human dignity and hope – is essential in today's world. If we can integrate the necessity for hard security with the wisdom of soft security, then we can create a win-win situation for all.

The "Long War" doctrine does show that lessons have been learned, such as the need for greater understanding of different cultures and societies. And of course, we do need to think in a coherent, long-term way about strategy and security. But that depends on what we mean by these terms. That is why my focus is on *human security* as the key to better relations.

II. Human Security: The Key to Better Relations

The challenge before us all is to ensure that the effects of technological development, social change and globalization do not disenfranchise sections of our societies. I believe we must face this challenge with unity and cohesion, drawing strength from our faith and shared values. If we succeed, then we will isolate and defeat those self-interested privatisers of religion and war who claim to represent the oppressed.

Our future wellbeing depends on an integrated approach to humanity and security, which necessarily includes the voiceless victims, or the "silenced majority". Some would call this viewpoint idealistic; I would call it necessary.

Intimate involvement of peoples in their own futures is a must. Only by making citizens into stakeholders in their environment can we give concepts like "civil society", "democratization" and "good governance" real meaning. Moreover, good governance not only within states, but also between states and within regions, provides the key to unlocking human and environmental development potential.

Disenfranchised Muslims ask whether there is one law for them and another for everyone else, or whether we are all equal citizens. But whether Muslim or non-Muslim, the human being is fundamentally the agent of change. We must allow the power of ideas to prevail over vested interests.

The Helsinki Process and the Barcelona Process of Euro-Mediterranean Dialogue may not have proved unqualified successes, but they did usefully delineate three interconnected categories of human relations: security (basic and current), economy, and culture. I believe we should try to integrate these three categories into a coherent strategy in which culture is not merely an afterthought but is recognized as increasingly significant.

When it comes to economy, are we simply talking about short-term, profit-making investment, or can we take a human-centric approach to improving the social quality of life by providing opportunities for public participation? Do we just want to build a new generation of shining skyscrapers across this region, or do we want to use our immense natural resources to build a fund for future generations, as the Norwegians – the blue-eyed oil sheikhs – are doing?

Regionally, we have to ask ourselves: what has investment done so far in West Asia? Can we not have investment in the context of partnerships, promoting the common good, and a contract of generations? There are around a trillion dollars sitting in this region's bank accounts, yet there is hardly any investment in people, hardly any vision for the future of our human and natural environment. How are we going to deal with the 2005 World Bank Report's warning of the need for a 100 million job opportunities across MENA over the next two decades? I need hardly remind you that, aside from being a human tragedy, millions of unemployed and disillusioned people are a major security threat.

It is in that context that I have been supporting proposals like the Global Marshall Plan Initiative (GMPI) as a way out of this quandary. We have to establish global commons and regional commons in order to develop policies that transcend our various brand names and work towards supranational objectives.

In a neighbourhood where states deal unilaterally with the global superpower, there is a clear lack of institutional responsibility and regional coherence. Before we embark on ties with the WTO, for example, what about improving ties with each other? The radius of conflict in the East Mediterranean involving five different nations is a mere 70km. Isn't it time to forget our bilateral squabbles and forge a meaningful regional identity?

III. Democracy and Islam after Hamas

I agree absolutely with Nathan Sharansky when he says that the Arab world needs democracy. But the question is: will this be democracy top-down or bottom-up? It is not a commodity that can simply be imported. Change has to come organically from within the region itself, not be dictated from outside.

In that sense, the Hamas victory may indicate progress rather than impasse. Whatever we think of Hamas' current position – and there are signs it may eventually soften – the recent Palestinian elections are further evidence, if it were needed, that Arabs want to embrace democracy.

In the context of the strange mix of autocracy and ideological extremism that contributed to 9/11 and other atrocities, the United States faces a tough choice. It can side with authoritarianism and risk losing further credibility among the millions who want to believe that it means what it says about democracy, or it can try to win round fairly-elected governments whose agendas may very well contradict United States' interests.

There is no ideal short-term solution to the question of Islamist victories at the ballot box. But I think there remains a potential win-win scenario here. After all, only through genuine participation will radical organizations ever become moderate enough to understand the political realities of dialogue and compromise. If "Islam is the solution", we should put it to the test. Postponing democracy will only fuel more radical strains who are the first to benefit from the inevitable outbreaks of anger and violence.

But lest we forget, democracy is about far more than winning elections. It is at bottom a political culture of understanding and negotiation which must resonate at a grassroots level. At this time, populism is on the rise and secularism is on the retreat. Nevertheless, movements like the Middle East Citizens' Assembly, modelled on the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly that helped end the Cold War, are emerging. If these transitions are managed wisely and supported in an engaged and constructive manner, we might begin to see the rise of moderate Muslim democrats like their Christian democrat counterparts in Europe and the United States. I welcome Karen Hughes' "4Es" – education, empowerment, engagement and exchange – but we must be careful that this does not turn into a monologue about the need for dialogue.

I call, then, for deeper non-governmental and civil society networking in order to understand each others' soft power. Our societies' think-tanks and institutes should establish joint projects and agreements to share their expertise. Media organizations,

too, should exchange more good-quality opinions across national and continental boundaries, as well as invite reporters and editors to take up visiting appointments.

We hope to see West Asia/Africa getting closer to South and East Asia through a process of joint effort so that relations develop not only on the basis of oil, but also the rich cultural heritage – the federation of cultures – in our regions. This approach should expand the space for resolving urgent issues like environmental security, the Palestinian-Israeli peace process and the reconstruction of Iraq.

IV. Globalization of Media and the Caricaturing of Communities

The age-old rule for the coexistence of civilizations – "When in Rome, do as the Romans do" – no longer applies. For where or who actually is Rome? The global process of interaction, with mass migration and the information revolution, means there is no longer a separate Rome, London or Doha as there once might have been. Peoples and cultures are profoundly interwoven and a new "glocal" hyper-culture is emerging.

As competing cultures vie to promote their norms, we realize that familiarity does not always breed respect. In the media these norms become foreshortened and caricatured. Democracy becomes associated with war, and Islam becomes tainted with the image of the mad mullah.

The stable *modus vivendi* of traditional mixed societies, who lived and worked side by side without external pressures, is history. In its place comes a fragile process of mobile, fast-paced interaction. Such a reality requires robust and versatile education schemes that teach both shared values and the value of difference.

That is why my proposals include a call for deeper educational links between Western and Islamic countries, perhaps along the lines of the Socrates, Erasmus and Minerva exchange programs. The most effective way to create an appreciation for shared humanity regardless of race or creed is to provide the individual with experience of common thinking and feeling, as well as an appreciation that difference does not preclude co-operation towards shared goals. Student and cultural exchanges proved their worth during the Cold War, and should now be supported by a fund combining government and private donations.

The irony is that despite the free flow of information, or perhaps because of it, our communities remain poorly informed about other creeds and peoples. Today's instant communication is both a blessing and a curse. It allows us greater freedom, greater potential for interaction and awareness, yet it also spreads hatred and misunderstanding like wildfire. Conversely, trust and mutual security can only be built on a clearly non-violent morality combined with a personal certainty that basic agreements are shared with the other.

In this global information blogosphere, words and images take on uncontrollable lives of their own. Latent tensions are instantly inflamed through networked transfer from one cultural context to another, simply because discrete entities like culture and nation no longer exist. Once messages of hate are published, they are part of a global free-for-all, open to manipulation by any number of interpretations and agendas.

In this dangerous context the offensive and irresponsible Danish cartoons ignited the fuse of Muslim indignity. The cartoon offence, and the reactions it provoked, must be understood in light of the increasingly tense atmosphere in our region. The ignominy of the Iraqi and Palestinian occupations and the humiliation of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo are ever-present additions to the myriad of social and economic issues facing Muslim peoples today. This was a provocation too far.

At the same time, the furore was clearly exaggerated and exploited by some regional leaders in order to serve their own agendas. It was a timely occasion to display an opportunist brand of Islamic legitimacy and cultivate a sense of populist solidarity with their indignant publics.

In fact, the cartoon issue is not a debate between polar opposites of Islam and freedom of expression. The cartoons were not about free speech; they were about facile stereotyping and name-calling. In short, they were confirmation that the hate industry is still in good health.

I'm sure my Muslim friends and colleagues here today will agree that freedom, exercised responsibly, is a core value of our faith, just as it is an essential principle in any democracy. But freedom is not a static value; it has to evolve just as the world around us is changing. It is certainly not illiberal in such a context to subject media output to consistent review.

So how do we balance free speech and mutual respect in this confused world? First of all, not by fighting fire with fire. How easily the basic rule that two wrongs do not make a right is forgotten. The vicious circle of incitement, anger and reprisal stands before us, with hardliners and extremists on all sides locked in a strange alliance. It is up to the so-called moderates – perhaps the real radicals – to steal back the initiative.

What we need is civilized platforms, particularly through the media, on which Muslims can debate not only with non-Muslims, but also with their fellow Muslims. I am a Muslim, and so, allegedly, is Osama bin Laden, but what do we have in common? Where is the civilized framework for disagreement? Where is the recognition that most Muslims are just as angry with jihadist *agents provocateurs* as they are with the Danish cartoonists?

Suddenly people are once again talking about interfaith and cultural dialogue, as if these were new concepts. Clearly we are more in need of such dialogues than ever. Right now, however, they are suffering from being too removed from people's feelings. Dialogues can all too easily move along one way while waves of mass popular sentiments move the other.

We need cultural affinity both between and within cultures. On a BBC phone-in show on the cartoon issue a few days ago I had to remind an irate Afghan caller that when the Taliban decided to dynamite the Bamiyan Buddhas, the UN did not send religious authorities such as the Sheikh of al-Azhar, but European and Japanese diplomats, who had almost no cultural affinity. "But the Taliban were not Muslims", he insisted. "That's not how it appeared to the rest of the world", I said.

The real dividing line is not between Muslims and non-Muslims, but between moderates and extremists on both sides, between those who believe in the "Ethics of Sharing", as

the Declaration of European Muslims – and my thanks and respect to Mustafa Ceric – calls it, and those who hold on to outdated exclusionist beliefs. The men and women of reasoned dialogue have no difficulty getting on; it is the purveyors of hatred who must be taken on and defeated on their own specious terms.

If reason prevails, it will be because Muslims prevail over their own extremists and privatisers of religion. Non-Muslims have a vital role to play here. Whether through more consistent foreign policies in Iraq, Iran and Israel/Palestine, or through wiser domestic policies on immigration, education and employment, the key factor of cultural sensitivity can be harnessed to mutual benefit. And there is absolutely no need to compromise on the essentials of free societies.

I'm well aware that the United States suffers from an image problem in the Islamic world – Professor Telhami's statistical studies attest to that. But the same studies, and others, also show that Muslims overwhelmingly believe in modern, democratic values. They do not object to what the United States is, merely to what it is doing in the Islamic world. Public diplomacy strategies are important, but they cannot mask a deeper problem of understanding; it is *policies* themselves that are important. We have to work to narrow the gap between rhetoric and reality. That said, the Islamic world is clearly in need of a better public diplomacy strategy, as a counterweight to the continued misinformation and distortions that are so easily available today.

V. The role of faith

The main issues, then, are political, but the religious dimension cannot be ignored. Many people today see faith as inescapably part of the problem rather than the solution. But in such a complex and ambiguous time, do we not need the voices of reason and faith to complement each other and help us to make sense of our world? I hope this is a point on which we can all agree, whether we are American Christians or Arab Muslims, or for that matter American Muslims and Arab Christians, or none of the above.

But we must be realistic. What we see today is an unprecedented challenge to traditional religious values – not just in Islam but in all our inherited traditions. Moderate Islam must respond to this challenge in a strong and positive way without undermining its own enlightened premises, in the same way that political leaders face the daunting task of maintaining security without compromising human values. The line between religion and politics is becoming increasingly blurred; it is in everyone's best interests to elevate our cherished religious values above the mundane sphere of politics.

The self-appointed cyber-sheikhs of the virtual jihad are exploiting the benefits of modernity to undermine legitimate authority. It is a strange paradox that this development is sometimes viewed as a democratization of Islam. But let me be clear: there is nothing democratic – or indeed Islamic – about beaming gruesome executions live around the world on obscure websites. This is not the kind of equal opportunity that we are striving for.

So what can we do? First of all, we urgently need to re-establish moral authority before it is too late. We must not stumble out of the Cold War only to fall into a "cold jihad". Kissinger once asked what the address of Europe was. Well, the address of Islam is Mecca, birthplace of Islam and centre of the four schools of Sunni orthodoxy. The centre of moral authority for Shiite Islam is Najaf; and the holy city of Jerusalem is the

touchstone of our shared Abrahamic tradition. So I ask you: isn't it time to hold conferences in Mecca and in Najaf to establish for the 21st century what is Islamic and what is not, in order to reaffirm the legitimate space to reject terrorism as utterly anathema to our faiths?