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"Leaders Effect Change"

REMARKS BY

EKMELEDDIN IHSANOGLU

Secretary General, the Organization of the
Islamic Conference

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. INDYK: Mr. Secretary General, welcome, and the floor is yours.

MR. IHSANOGLU: Thank you. Your Excellency, Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I deem it a privilege for me to address this important forum of distinguished policy makers and opinion shapers. I would like at the outset to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation for His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, the Emir of the State of Qatar for his patronage of this important forum. Also to His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim, for his kind invitation and hospitality.

I would like also to express my thanks and appreciation to the Brookings Institute and Saban Center for Middle East Policy for organizing this important meeting which brings together America and Islamic world leaders in various fields.

Ladies and gentlemen, the state of U.S.-Muslim world relations is a very complex issue. It is a state of admiration, friendship and esteem, but it's also at the same time a state of bitterness,

injustice and complaint. For Muslims the world over, the United States was perceived as a paradise, El Dorado, or supreme showcase of prosperity and the good life. It epitomized the land of genuine civil liberties, abundance, progress, and in one word, the land of the American Dream. At least this was the case for my generation.

Having no colonial past in the Islamic world, no hegemonic tendencies outside its frontiers, based on President Monroe's doctrine, endowed with an advanced legal system and governed by true democratic political institutions, the United States captured the admiration and earned warm feelings in all Muslim countries until after the Second World War.

The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 marked a turning point in United States-Muslim world relations because of the injuries inflicted on the Palestinian people and the humiliation suffered by Muslim masses. But despite this development, the sentiments prevailing in the Muslim world towards the United States of American remained rather cordial. This feeling was fostered by the neutral

and positive stand adopted by Washington during the Suez War against Egypt through a combined assault by forces from Israel, the United Kingdom and France in 1956.

It was only after the 1967 War that the sentiments of the Muslim world towards the United States started to become bitter. The American policy started to be perceived in this part of the world to be an inclination to the demands of Israel to the detriment of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

The Muslim stood and fought with the United States and Western Europe against communism during the Cold War era only to be rewarded right after the fall of the Berlin Wall by being declared the new potential enemy of the West, while still a wave of denigration and hate was unleashed against Islam and its adherents through venomous falsehoods disseminated by some circles.

As the just causes and grievances of the Muslims continued to be rebuffed over the decades especially in Palestine, a sense of helplessness, despair and injustice started to creep into the

psyche of many Muslims. This anguish and distress, compounded with the socioeconomic backwardness and lack of the benefits of modern life in some parts of the Muslim world, some of them thought that their salvation resides in returning back to their religion which brought to their ancestors a glorious past. It is in this environment of despair that ultra fanatic groups flourished and took advantage of these sentiments by luring scores of young Muslims to their radical and deviant threats.

September 11, 2001, was shocking, evil and criminal. Muslims throughout the world met this vile and horrible terrorist attack with up-front, swift and unanimous condemnations. These feelings were genuine and sincere, and they were not tardy or hypocritical as some alleged. The voices of good are not always silent, but the voices of hate and bigotry are often louder and bolder. Though I see which I have the honor to present here issued the same day a strong statement by my predecessor, a strong statement expressing our utter condemnation and indignation, as such deeds stood disavowed and denounced by the teachings of Islam. From the

outset, many Muslims saw in these appalling events a pitfall to drag them to a potential harm and cause them more distress, hardship and denial of their rights.

Muslims around the world saw themselves as the big losers. The Muslim world with its hundreds of millions was subjected to pay for the crime of a few disoriented fanatics. The war on terror was used by some to demonize Islam and make Muslims the focus of irrational anger and hate.

This situation over association of guilt and stereotyping was unfair and deeply wounded the sentiments of the Muslims all over the world, not to mention loyal and hard-working Muslim citizens of the United States of America. Today we are following the ramifications of this unfortunate trend in Europe, especially after the terrorist attacks in London, Madrid, and the murder of a Dutch film director by a fanatic in the Netherlands. But we need to remember that these same attacks happened in the Muslim world, in Turkey, in Egypt, in Jordan and Indonesia.

The Palestinians were also the losers of the American-led war on terror, as the necessary context was so easily made up to defame the whole nation which is trying to survive, as a bunch of terrorists. On the other hand, the frequent use of the veto right by the United States to block Security Council decisions which reflected the international community's consensus with regard to the question of Palestine had already constituted for the Muslim world an example of the perceived biased policies of the United States. Civilian casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq occurring in the towns and the villages as the collateral damage of the bombardments fortified negative sentiments in the Muslim world.

Besides the massive destruction of Iraqi infrastructure and institutions by the heavy bombardment before and during that war, the Abu Ghraib incident also deeply hurt the sentiments. Such incidents apparently also involving the desecration of the Muslim's Holy Book, the Qur'an, had inflicted a deep scar in the consciences of Muslims, and its negative effects are still

persisting in their minds. Therefore, the recently released photographs will certainly not be helpful. In general in the Muslim world, the United States' foreign policies are perceived by many to be based on premises of a double-standard and not on the principle of international law, justice and equality.

Ladies and gentlemen, I know I have depicted a gloomy picture, but if we want to leave the past behind and make a new start, we have to be in full grip of the overwhelming perceptions prevailing in the streets of the Muslim world. Actually, when we turn this page, we can see that it is not too difficult to salvage the state of affairs between the Muslim world and the United States. Fortunately, all the complaints I mentioned focus only on one sector of the complex relations between the United States and Islam, mainly, the domain of foreign policy. This chasm of understanding should and can be bridged. Serious efforts to that end should be exerted.

I deeply believe that this entails inter-area achieving a just and lasting settlement to the

Palestinian question, as well as a peaceful and stable state of affairs in Iraq which will ensure the restoration of full sovereignty to the Iraqi people and safeguarding national unity and the territorial integrity of Iraq, besides the withdrawal of all foreign troops.

Solutions to the problems I referred to should be sought in a spirit of justice and compromise which leads to appease and assuage the feelings of prejudice and unfairness and to bring about a climate of peace, hope and cooperation to the Muslim world in general, and the Middle East region in particular. Heavy responsibilities lie on the decision makers, intellectuals and policy shapers. Some of them are present with us today.

Ladies and gentlemen, to conclude my statement on a positive note, I would like to inform you that on our part in the Muslim world, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the largest regional intergovernmental organization at the international level as well as the flagship organization of the Muslim world with its membership of 57 states is leading a massive effort, a leap

forward to disseminate messages of modernization and moderation in the Muslim world and a dialogue with the West in total rejection of extremism, violence and intolerance. As some careful observers have already noted, the recent extraordinary Islamic Summit which was held in Mecca in December of last year will be registered in the history the turning or actually starting point of crucial movement in this direction of modernity and modernization.

The task in front of us is immense. We need to work hard, we need to cooperate. The positive messages and steps of policy makers in Washington will facilitate our task. In turn, with the gradual success of our reform agenda, we will be able to assist the policy makers to find a more conducive atmosphere in the Islamic world.

We are fortunate and optimistic because the relations between the Muslim world and the United States have never reached the point of no return. I would like to repeat, we are fortunate and optimistic because the relations between the Muslim world and the United States have never reached the point of no return. There is a large reservoir of

good-will and ardor on both sides to heal the wounds and to engage in a constructive dialogue with the aim of reaching to practical and just solutions. This remains in the domain of the possible and we look for the day when this ardent wish could become a reality through your reconciliatory efforts leading to peaceful and stable Middle East in its entirety, and contributing to the world's peace. I thank you for your attention.

MR. INDYK: Thank you, Mr. Secretary General.

As I look through my notes from all of these presentations tonight, I'm struck by the common themes that keep on repeating themselves, whether it be from the American side or from the representatives of the Islamic world that we have up here tonight, tolerance, justice, freedom, nonviolence, respect, the avoidance of double-standards, reform. It's as if after 5 years of trying to deal with the problems that the terrorist attacks on 9/11 revealed, we have come to a fairly common understanding of the problems, the diagnosis, and even the solutions or at least some of the

solutions, yet 5 years later we seem further apart than ever. That word "chasm" seemed to keep on reappearing in the presentations tonight.

So we now have the challenge over the next two days, the challenge that is being presented to us this evening by our opening speakers, to try to build on this basis of understanding to see how we can develop actionable plans that will really try to reverse this widening gap and put us on a path to greater understanding. That's a challenge that we will take up in our discussions.

I want to ask you to join me in expressing very sincere thanks to all of our speakers this evening for what I think is a really excellent start to our dialogue. Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

MR. INDYK: We are going to move now all the way around to the other hall where we will have dinner. We ask you all to join us for dinner there. His Excellency Sheikh Hamad would like to greet the participants in the forum, so we'll ask you to follow the protocol officer's lead so you have a chance to meet with him. Thank you very much.

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