بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Speech

by

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At

the Opening Session of The US-Islamic World Forum

On

"How to Avoid the Conflict between Civilizations"

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H.E. Mr. Martin Indyk the Director of Saban Center for Middle Eat Policy at Brookings Institution

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome in Doha to all of you. It is a pleasure to open the workings of this forum in our country for the fourth time. And it seems to me from the items of the agenda that there is a tendency to discuss the various issues that hamper the efforts to build bridges between the USA and the Islamic world in various fields. In this context I would like to recall with you that last year when discussions generally focused on the varied visualizations of what would become of the Middle East in five years, I presented my vision on the persistence of the drawbacks and failures in the foreseeable future. I said then that these drawbacks and failures might become worse unless effective and sincere actions were taken in line with what we have been calling for to cure - though to a relatively reasonable level - the ailments that the region has been suffering from. You all know that during the past year we witnessed more escalation in the intensity of the crises that the region suffered from with the emergence of new conflicts that had aggravated the already explosive situation.

Distinguished Guests,

On our part, we have in several occasions referred to the wide scale criticism directed to the theory of the conflict between civilizations. We have rejected the theory, and presented our argument against its logic of considering the Islamic civilization the most dangerous threat to the heart of modern civilization represented by the West. Without going into the theoretical and academic details I would like to say that this theory represents a specific political trend and that the choice of all of us should be the "dialogue between civilizations" so as to isolate every theoretical or material inclination to provoke a conflict between the peoples on the platform of separating them along illusory lines of civilization.

Distinguished Guests,

We think that the international community has finally reached an understanding of the basics of peaceful coexistence – a condition that gives answers to the problems facing the nations and societies of the world. Such understanding is based on dialogue and cooperation in service of the common best interests of all parties. Here, I would like to point out that I opted in my speech in front of you last year to pose the question about the required actions to be taken to consolidate the relations between the USA and the Islamic world. I presented some of the policies that might help in bringing about an atmosphere of mutual understanding through open dialogue and continuous consultation. I don't find any harm in referring to these points along side with other points that may come up as developments evolve. Despite the fact that we have different analyses and diagnosis of the ailments, it is of vital importance that we focus on some of the following relevant points:

1. To sincerely be committed to the provisions of the UN charter, the international law, the International Declaration of Human Rrights and the other human rights conventions, foremost of which the conventions catering for the political, cultural, religious, social and economic rights. In other words, we should give due respect to the value of plurality and mutual respect in international relations. In this way law supremacy rather than power supremacy would prevail.

2. Regarding the relations between the USA and the Islamic world, we have to accept the realities that constitute the basis for the public opinion in the Islamic world. Thus, we have to pay optimum attention to settle the Palestinian cause and other conflicts in the Middle East. Here is where the major challenge lies. The Palestinian cause was and remains to be the main source of unrest and distrust between the concerned parties and eventually between the two worlds to which they belong. In addition, there is the conflict in Iraq that threatens the Arab and Islamic world with the most dangerous consequences.

3. We have to pay more attention to the awareness programs aiming to familiarize our societies with each other, promote mutual respect and appreciation of the peculiarities of each party and disseminate the culture of positive coexistence. This is where the special responsibility of the political and public opinion leaders for enhancing the understanding between the cultures and the mutual respect of religious and cultural beliefs gains its importance.

4. It is essential to start implementing the political reform and democracy building policies with due consideration to the peculiarities of various societies. Individuals should be given the chance to participate in the management of their affairs in accordance with the provisions of the law and through the constitutional and legal channels and establishments in order to dispel the deep feelings of marginalization and injustice that prevail in various societies in the Islamic world.

5. Political development alone is not going to be useful unless it is accompanied by sincere economic development programs. Poverty and joblessness problems, which have worsened to a great extent are a major source of the feeling of frustration and injustice and, as such, they lead to violence. No doubt the realization of the desired objectives of development largely depends on the availability of material resources alongside with the intellectual capacity to guide these resources to achieve the best interests of the whole members of the society without discrimination.

6. Giving considerable care to working out educational programs in the technical and general senses so that they target the desired diversity that is acceptable to society and promoting knowledge needed for advancement. Here lies the importance of not neglecting addressing world issues connected with humankind's common destiny.

7. Giving care to issues of youth, who really represent future generations. Within this context, we should be concerned with the implementation of policies that promote creation of job opportunities and empowering the youth politically, economically and socially. Indeed, this would ensure reduction of tensions that fuel conflict and violence.

8. Laying out practical and effective plans to propagate and promote objective and accountable media. Within this context, media leaders may formulate a voluntary and binding code of conduct.

9. We should all be aware that in the contemporary world there is a complex set of phenomena which make it lack balance. The widening gap between the powerful and the weak, the rich and the poor, the educated and the ignorant needs to be bridged, because otherwise it could lead to desperation and frustration as well as to mutual suspicions and incitement of conflict and violence.

10. Building bridges between societies and promotion of dialogue and understanding help create the political will that ensures resolution of conflicts and disputes through negotiations.

11. Poverty eradication, because if poverty persists, it will cause desperation, a feeling of injustice and alienation, sentiments that will definitely lead to extremism and violence when they are associated with political grievances.

12. To redress terrorism with policies that investigate underlying causes behind its perpetration so that acts of terror are fought by means that ensure dealing with it. Means of addressing terrorism are not necessarily military. In this respect, focus should be laid on "The World Strategy for Combating Terrorism" launched by the United Nations on 19 September 2006.

Distinguished Guests,

While speaking of the means that ensure averting conflict of civilizations, it is important to recall the Report of the High-level Committee on the Dialogue of Civilizations submitted on 13 November 2006 and unofficially discussed at the General Assembly Session on 18 December 2006. The above report contained a set of political analyses and significant diagnoses and at which numerous proposals were introduced that deserve study and consideration together with the policies needed to implement them.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight an extremely important point. We all call for reform, democratization and development at the domestic level in the Islamic world. We should also acknowledge the importance of this call at the international relations level, where special care should be given to international organizations and propagation of the democratic spirit within them through adherence, in good faith, to the commitments pledged by all. This is our only path for striking a balance between conflicting interests. If monopoly of power is unacceptable at the internal level, it is even more important that policies based on power monopoly should come to an end in the international arena and also the associated policies of double standards, lack of transparency, selfishness and use of force. We need to understand one another, respect our divergent viewpoints and actively act to settle our disputes through patience, tolerance and recourse to peaceful means on the basis of mutual convictions. Indeed, the destiny of humankind is the same on this planet and it is imperative that we coexist in the interest of all sides.

We also need to acknowledge that serious implementation of the above means and others in the same direction requires solidarity among members of the international community in order to shoulder burdens. Countries and societies are not unilaterally capable of doing this.