

Welcoming Remarks  
Doha Forum, Feb17, 2007

His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jaber Al Thani, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the conveners of the U.S.-Islamic World Forum (Shibley Telhami, Peter Singer, Stephen Grand, Bruce Riedel, and Hady Amr) and on behalf of our partners at the MOFA of Qatar led by Assistant Foreign Min Mohamed Al-Rumaihi, I would like to welcome you all to the Fourth Doha Forum on U.S.-Islamic World Relations.

Inspired by the vision of the His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani, the Emir of Qatar, and made possible by the generous and steadfast support of the His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem, we have brought together an amazing assembly of leaders from across the Islamic World, including Muslim communities in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East, to meet with leaders from the United States. This year we have made a special effort to diversify our assembly with leaders from the arts and cultural, religious, scientific, and business communities. We are grateful to all of you for making the effort to join us here in Doha.

We meet at a time of great dangers and complexities, when the divisions between the U.S. and the Islamic World seem to be deepening and new sectarian divisions are opening up within the Islamic World. We watch with horror the scenes of carnage in Iraq, war in Lebanon, civil strife in Gaza, and genocide in Darfur. At times it feels as if the gates of hell are opening before our very eyes. And when we lift our eyes to the horizon, instead of a future of peace and harmony, we sense the potential for civil wars and nuclear arms races.

Therefore our deliberations could not be more urgent. I say this not because I imagine that what we discuss here over the next two days is likely to have a direct impact on decisions made in Washington, Teheran or Baghdad. I say it rather because at a time when things feel like they are falling apart, it is absolutely essential to find ways to strengthen the center -- that place of moderation and tolerance that we here assembled inhabit.

We can only do that by "confronting what divides us." That's what we have entitled this year's Doha Forum: Confronting What Divides Us. We have done so out of a belief that candid conversations about our differences are the necessary precursors to developing a vision based on our common humanity -- a vision of peace and harmony and respect. That is what the Doha Forum is

about: building bridges of understanding between diverse peoples. For four years now, we have been struggling against the tide that threatens to become a tsunami fuelled by anger and the shedding of the blood of innocents. In such a hostile environment, just keeping open the doors to dialogue between the United States and the Islamic World is challenge enough. But over the four years since our first Forum, we have been able to do more than that, fostering special exchanges between scientists, special programs for youth development, and now an arts and culture initiative that we hope will generate programs that can reach beyond the leaders assembled here to millions of Americans and Muslims around the world.

To support these efforts, in the coming months we will open "Brookings-Doha" a project of the Saban Center at Brookings and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Qatar. The idea for this was first conceived by His Highness the Emir at our first Doha Forum, three years ago. On January 1, 2007, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem and Strobe Talbott, the President of Brookings, signed the formal agreement. We have now appointed Hady Amr as the director of the Brookings-Doha Center and expect to open the doors of the center here in Doha by September. This partnership between the oldest and most influential think tank in Washington and the visionary Muslim state of Qatar will work to cement relations between the U.S and the Islamic World. By hosting leading scholars as visiting fellows to conduct independent research on the socio-economic and geopolitical challenges facing the Muslim World, by organizing programs to support the public policy debate on these issues, and by supporting the work of the Doha Forum, Brookings-Doha will do pioneering work of lasting import.

We have one man to thank above all for the implementation of the Emir's vision in this regard. He is our opening speaker tonight. Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jaber al-Thani is the first deputy prime minister and foreign minister of the State of Qatar. He has served as his nation's foreign minister since 1992. For fifteen years he has carried the burden of these responsibilities with energy, creativity and determination to protect and promote not only his nation's interests but the interests of the Arab and Islamic Worlds. At the same time he has served as a member of the Supreme Defense Council, the permanent constitution committee, the Ruling Family Council, the Supreme Council for the Reserves of the State, and the head of the Permanent Cttee for the support of Al Quds. I don't know how he manages to shoulder all these responsibilities and still manage to keep a smile on his face and a sense of perspective. But all those Americans who have had the opportunity to work with him, and I count myself among them, have found him to be a true friend of the United States

and a true representative of the Islamic World. Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome...

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