



THE BROOKINGS PROJECT ON U.S. RELATIONS
WITH THE ISLAMIC WORLD

THE DOHA COMPACT

NEW DIRECTIONS: AMERICA AND
THE MUSLIM WORLD



at BROOKINGS

October 2008



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Relations between the United States and the Muslim world have deteriorated dramatically since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The reasons for this deterioration are deep-seated and complex, but both the United States and Muslim-majority states and communities have a profound interest in getting this important relationship right. The upcoming election of a new American president presents a moment of great opportunity for the United States and leaders from the Muslim world to recast their mutual relations in a new, more constructive and cooperative direction.

There is much to be gained from such a shift. The United States and the Muslim world together face a number of critical challenges that are best addressed in partnership. The United States cannot hope to counter—much less defeat—terrorist groups like Al Qaeda without the support of Muslim communities across the globe, which more often than not are the primary targets and innocent victims of these extremists' attacks. To accomplish this, U.S. foreign policy must change.

Likewise, many Muslim-majority states must reform if they are to address the profound socioeconomic and political challenges confronting their societies. They could benefit from having an engaged American partner in helping them address these challenges. The needs and priorities of Muslim-majority states and communities are as diverse as the Muslim world itself (even the term "Muslim world" can be problematic, connoting a commonality of interests and perspectives that belies the very rich diversity of Islamic practices and cultures found around the globe.) But many Muslim-majority countries do share the common challenge of governing effectively in a suddenly globalized world. Weakened governments struggle, often unsuccessfully, to meet the needs and rising expectations of swelling and quite youthful populations. Neither the United States nor the Muslim world has an interest in seeing more failed states in the region. Similarly, neither has an interest in seeing persist the kind of animus that has often defined relations since 9/11.

Repairing the rift between the United States and the Muslim world must begin with respect. Lack of mutual respect has been an important driver behind the deterioration of relations between the United States and the Muslim world since 9/11. We do not know enough about each other—our respective religions, values, intentions, and ways of life—and such ignorance has often fueled mutual suspicion and distrust. A new relationship must begin with greater education, understanding, and empathy.

Any new partnership between the United States and the Muslim world also must be built upon shared interests, not just the particular concerns of one side or political leader. To succeed, such a partnership should begin by addressing together the concerns of ordinary citizens in the Muslim world—their economic, social, and political needs and rights, as well as their ability to pursue their own individual fulfillment through religion, work, and community building. By helping advance human development in the Muslim world, the United States will over the long-term improve materially the security of its own citizens.

The next U.S. administration—whether Democratic or Republican—must make it an urgent priority to set this complicated relationship on a better path. On February 16-18, 2008, the Brookings Institution and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar convened approximately 200 American and Muslim world leaders at the 5th annual U.S.-Islamic World Forum, to explore how to chart a new direction in the relationship. The policy recommendations that emerged from this discussion can be grouped around four basic themes.



AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

The often-asked question in the United States of “Why do they hate us?” is misplaced. The attitudes of most Muslims living in Muslim-majority countries are generally more nuanced. They often find much to admire about Americans: their scientific and technological know-how, their entrepreneurial spirit, their cultural achievements in music and film, and their freedoms. What they tend to resent is the perceived heavy-handed way in which America’s foreign policies intrude into their lives and those of other Muslims, and the perceived double standards and injustices inherent in these policies. Many in the region have come to view the United States as yet another imperial power that has come to impose its will upon the region, as the British, French, Italians, and Dutch did so brutally before. They recognize—and some even welcome—the fact that the United States is likely to be a major global player for some time to come, but they are looking for a new style of leadership from this superpower. They would like to see an America that is less focused on an “axis of evil” and more focused on building “partnerships of equals” to address shared challenges.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ◆ **America should live up to the values for which it has long been admired around the world.**
 - It should close down the detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, which has unfortunately become a symbol of American excesses and extralegal maneuvers in the war on terror.
 - It should ban the use of torture in the interrogation of terrorist suspects. Even if such techniques as waterboarding are successful in extracting information from high-value targets—a claim open to dispute—such methods have badly undermined American prestige and credibility around the world and, perhaps most critically, badly alienated the global Muslim community.
- ◆ **America should rebuild the trust it has squandered over the years with citizens of the Muslim world.**
 - The next American president should travel to the region early in his or her term, meeting not only with leaders, but also visiting mosques and engaging in dialogue with ordinary people. And he should pledge to adopt a new policy of listening to the concerns of the

Muslim world. For this purpose, the next American president should appoint a special high-level U.S. envoy to the region as a whole.

- The United States needs to be more present in the Muslim world and in more effective ways. The United States should create numerous American centers throughout the region, some as simple as internet cafes.

◆ **America needs to demonstrate that it has no imperial designs on the region.**

- It should signal that it is not interested in keeping a permanent military presence in the region. It should reiterate its interest in withdrawing from Iraq and bases elsewhere in the region just as soon as security conditions permit.
- It should recommit itself to international institutions and international law. It should demonstrate through its actions that it is willing to abide by international law, out of recognition that this is the best way over the long-term to advance U.S. interests and the rule of law globally.
- As it works with other nations to reform these institutions to reflect the changing realities and demands of the 21st century, it should seek ways to increase the representation of Muslim-majority countries in these bodies. For example, following the recommendations of the U.N. high-level task force, it should consider semi-permanent Security Council membership for one or more large, moderate Muslim-majority states.

◆ **America should back off its heavy-handed approach to democratization, but not abandon its support for those endeavoring to expand freedoms in the Muslim world.**

- The United States must recognize that democracy has rarely ever been imposed successfully by force. With the notable exceptions of Germany and Japan, American interventions across the twentieth century rarely succeeded in implanting enduring democratic institutions.

- Because of its invasion of Iraq and inconsistent record in pushing for reform in the region, the United States should redefine its strategy. This should include recognizing that its credibility has been severely undermined as a champion of democracy in the region and that it needs to take a step back and be more modest in its ambition and rhetoric.
 - In the end, domestic pressure from within for reform is more likely to induce change than any kind of suasion from without. U.S. foreign assistance policy should be built upon the recognition that democratization must come from within and have a strong indigenous base. In lieu of emphasizing democracy and elections, the United States may have greater success if it focuses its efforts more narrowly—on the pragmatic promotion of human needs and rights, the rule of law, independent judiciaries and civil society institutions.
 - At the same time, the United States needs to be careful about becoming identified with unpopular, authoritarian leaders who serve its temporary interests.
- ◆ **At the same time, Muslim-majority governments should stop using America (and Israel) as an excuse to address much needed reforms in their own societies.**
- Too often anti-Americanism has been used as an excuse by weak regimes to maintain their hold on power, while postponing much-needed political and economic reforms. If relations between the United States and the Muslim world are to improve, this anti-American propaganda needs to stop.
 - The media, educational, and religious institutions in Muslim-majority countries should provide their citizens with more accurate and nuanced portrayals of the United States. The same is true of portrayals of Israel—governments must prepare their publics for a peaceful coexistence with Israel by ceasing to demonize that country.



ADDRESSING TOGETHER
the
CONFLICTS
that
DIVIDE
Us

One reason for the tensions that have emerged between the United States and the Muslim world is that we have often found ourselves in recent years on opposing sides of the major conflicts that have roiled the region. Muslims have perceived the United States to favor Israel in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process and to place its interests above the needs and human suffering of the Palestinian people. While few in the Muslim world had much sympathy for Saddam Hussein toward the end of his brutal rule, the unilateral and often incompetent manner in which the American invasion and subsequent occupation were handled alienated most of the Muslim world. Likewise, the latest American confrontation with Iran over its nuclear program has been viewed by many in the region through this same lens of an arrogant American superpower trying to impose its will on yet another Muslim-majority state. (If America can live with Israel and India possessing nuclear weapons, the argument goes, what's so wrong with a Muslim state acquiring the same?)

Despite these past differences, the United States and the Muslim world have a shared interest in working together to resolve these conflicts peacefully. A satisfactory resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict would significantly reduce the influence of extremist groups in the region. The United States requires the assistance of Iraq's neighbors to stabilize that country; such stability would redound to the benefit of all in the region. And few in the region have an interest in seeing the current Iranian leadership obtain a nuclear capability.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

◆ Mideast Peace Process

- The broad contours of a Middle East peace agreement are known to all: an independent Palestinian state on contiguous territory coexisting with a secure and recognized Jewish state, a return by Israel to the 1967 borders with territorial compensation negotiated for any lands not returned, Jerusalem as the capital of both states, with special arrangements for the holy sites and an agreed resolution of the refugee issue.
- The United States needs to work actively with the states in the region, who demonstrated by their presence at Annapolis their shared commitment to peace, to find a final resolution to this conflict. All parties should work to bring an immediate halt to the violence between Palestinians and Israelis.

- The United States and Muslim-majority states, along with Europe and Japan, need to provide robust international economic support to build a viable Palestinian state. On the economic side, this should not be limited to aid but include investment strategies designed to provide the infrastructure and access to world markets necessary to ensure a vibrant Palestinian economy over the long term.
- On the security side, this should include revamping the new Palestinian state's security forces and finding creative ways the international community can assist in enhancing Israel's security. Many worthy ideas have been advanced in this regard, ranging from traditional peacekeeping and military and police training, to more ambitious concepts such as temporary security trusteeship for the Palestinians under the auspices of the U.N. (implemented by foreign troops, including a mix of Americans, Europeans, and Muslim-majority state forces).

◆ Darfur

- Because the violence in Darfur is Muslim-on-Muslim, the slow-motion genocide there is a critical test for U.S.-Muslim world relations. But even more, it is an unspeakable tragedy for the people of Darfur. The United States and Muslim-majority countries should impose tougher sanctions on Khartoum, to include not only restricting the assets and travel rights of key regime members but also freezing dollar-denominated oil transactions until progress occurs.
- They should also support efforts to unify the rebel groups and negotiate a durable ceasefire and political agreement to end the conflict.
- They should endeavor to speed the deployment of the UN-AU force by training, equipping, airlifting, and otherwise supporting the rapid deployment of UN battalions.
- They should consider contributing specialized capabilities and equipment—such as helicopters, night vision capability, command, control, communications, and intelligence (C3I) capabilities—to support the UN mission in Darfur.

◆ Iraq

- While the debate over the legitimacy and the character of the U.S. led invasion of Iraq will continue, the international community needs to look forward and strengthen regional dialogue on ensuring stability in Iraq. An international conference that includes all stakeholders should be considered, perhaps under the auspices of the United Nations, to push toward political reconciliation within Iraq and enhanced security in the broader region—while respecting the sovereign rights of the existing democratically elected Iraqi government.
- As the United States begins to withdraw from Iraq, it should do so with as much care as possible, according to a formula reached in consultation with Iraq's government. A precipitous U.S. withdrawal would undermine the fragile security improvements that have been achieved in Iraq.
- Political leaders in Iraq, who have made some progress of late towards compromise across sectarian lines, should intensify their efforts. Key issues to be addressed include an oil revenue-sharing agreement, the status of Kirkuk, the proper implementation of de-Baathification laws, the return of refugees and internally displaced persons, economic recovery, and the continued purging of extremist elements from the police and security forces.
- Iraq's neighbors also have a key role to play. For Sunni-majority states, it includes the need to accept the likelihood of a Shia-majority government, while pushing for stronger protections for the rights of minorities. They should also encourage investment to jumpstart the Iraqi economy, by private citizens in Iraq, from the region and the international community more generally.
- Iran should also have an interest in a stable and prosperous Iraq and has a clear responsibility to stem weapons flows and the training of terrorists.
- Iraq's neighbors and the broader international community have a responsibility to ensure that any American withdrawal does not leave behind a security vacuum. While many countries have declined to contribute to the current U.S.-led military mission, they should remain open to providing peacekeeping forces in the future, especially if such contributions can hasten the departure of the U.S. military.

◆ Iran

- Iran is a critical actor in the Middle East and in the broader dynamics within the Muslim world, as well as between Muslim-majority states and the West. Iran has much to contribute—including a vibrant history and culture, a well-educated population, and a diverse resource base—to cultivating a better future for the region.
- Iran has an important role to play in enhancing security in the Gulf and the broader Middle East, and must be encouraged to use this influence in a constructive fashion, particularly in arenas of conflict such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Gaza. Support for violent extremists will not advance Iran's long-term interests in living in peace with all of its neighbors.
- Uncertainties surrounding Iran's nuclear program justifiably concern both the region and the broader international community. Diplomacy should be the vehicle for resolving these concerns in a way that strengthens confidence among all stakeholders that Iran's nuclear activities will not be used for military purposes. Further multilateral sanctions should be considered if Iran does not make progress on IAEA requirements.
- Three decades of tension between Washington and Tehran have contributed to insecurity in the region and a broader climate of mutual distrust and friction between the Muslim world and the United States. The United States and Iran should engage in dialogue on the full range of regional security issues in which they both have a stake.

◆ Pakistan

- The United States needs to refocus its efforts and policy regarding Pakistan. Pakistan is central to our struggle against Al Qaeda and to building a stable and free Afghanistan. Pakistan is the Muslim world's only nuclear weapons power and has fought four wars with India.
- The United States should publicly and privately support a peaceful transition to democracy in Pakistan. Any transition should emphasize the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, and a free press. Civil-military relations need to be restored on the basis of civilian control of the military and the army's return to a strictly national security role.

- The United States should assist Pakistan in rebuilding its educational system by leading a global effort to combat illiteracy in Pakistan and develop assistance programs for the young. Today Pakistan faces a growing radicalization, especially among its youth. It has a deteriorating and poorly performing educational system that is stratified along socio-economic and often gender lines. More and more young people are being pulled towards extremist agendas as a consequence. This, coupled with a growing Al Qaeda network, poses a recipe for disaster, for Pakistan and the world at large. Senator Biden's proposal for a multi-year, multi-billion assistance program with a democracy bonus should be supported and enacted by Congress.
- The United States needs to work with Pakistan and Afghanistan to eliminate safe havens for terror along their border and to normalize the border itself, which remains a source of dispute.
- The United States should assist India and Pakistan in their bilateral efforts to end their differences, including over Kashmir, and enhance trade and development throughout South Asia. Kashmir should not be another conflict that divides the world from Islam. The next President should take an active interest in advancing the Indo-Pakistan dialogue.

◆ Afghanistan

- The United States and the Muslim world can not allow Afghanistan to become the forgotten war again.
- As President Karzai eloquently reminded participants in the U.S.-Islamic World Forum, the needs of his country demand urgent attention. The United States, NATO and the U.N. must not fail in Afghanistan. The immediate challenges include countering extremism, rebuilding infrastructure, and halting drug production. The next U.S. president needs to provide the resources—diplomatic, economic and military—to aid Afghanistan.
- He should consult early and effectively with NATO allies on how to get the resources needed. Muslim-majority states, especially Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, should be consulted to help stabilize Afghanistan and rebuild its economy. Infrastructure, especially transportation and education, must be high priorities.



UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE of Islam in the Muslim World

After 9/11, Americans came to know a lot about extremist groups, but far less about the true faith of Islam, a peaceful religion practiced by some 1.4 billion people. If we are to successfully bridge the divide between the United States and the Muslim world and together combat the scourge of terrorism, Americans need to do a better job of differentiating the faithful from the fanatical. Americans need to understand both the diverse beliefs and practices that represent mainstream religious thinking within Islam, and how extremist groups have hijacked elements of this peace loving faith to justify their own radical political agendas. One of the problems deepening divisions between the United States and the Muslim world has been “how Muslims perceive how the West perceives them.” Misunderstanding and a demonstrated lack of respect for Islam only heighten the Muslim world’s frustration with the United States and the West more generally.

Americans need to recognize that Islam provides an important and often very positive source of identity in the Muslim world, particularly where state boundaries have been drawn arbitrarily and many ethnic groups and tribes are intermixed. Americans need to recognize that religion and politics will always be closely intertwined in the Muslim world (perhaps by first acknowledging the important role religion plays in the public sphere in America as well).

The United States needs to be prepared to embrace the faithful, as well as religious-based movements and parties that demonstrate unambiguously that they are prepared to live by the democratic rules of the game.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

- U.S. policy makers need to be better informed about the diverse mosaic of beliefs and practices that make up Islam, the world’s fastest growing religion. They need to understand the different religious schools of thought within mainstream Islam, as well as the more radical, heterodox offshoots that have emerged outside this mainstream in response to the experience of colonialism and the challenges of modernization.
- U.S. policy makers need to demonstrate more respect for Islam as a religion by visiting mosques and meeting with religious leaders on an ongoing basis.
- U.S. policy makers need to be more careful in the language they use not to lump together the faithful with the fanatical. Ill-considered terms

like “Islamofascism,” “Islamic terrorism,” and “Islamic jihadist” tend to alienate potential friends, while implicitly endorsing the worldview of extremists like bin Laden by suggesting they are true Muslims, engaged in a civilizational clash with the West and conducting their violent acts in the name of Islam. Alternate terms like “violent extremists from the Muslim world” or “Muslim extremists” are preferred because it decouples religion and politics.

- Greater effort needs to be made to educate Americans about Muslims, Islam and the complex dynamics now underway in the Muslim world as these societies grapple with the challenges of globalization. Arts and culture hold the potential to help eliminate stereotypes, promote better mutual understanding and build bridges across societies. Hollywood should take the lead in ensuring that American television and film, which have a global reach, incorporate more nuanced and accurate portrayals of Muslims and Islam. TV and film producers from the Muslim world should exercise the same leadership in how they portray Americans and the United States.
- The United States should be more willing to reach out to Islamist parties that genuinely demonstrate their readiness to embrace the democratic rules of the game and reject violence. The U.S. may potentially share with these groups a common interest in advancing reform and marginalizing extremists.
- At the same time, Islamist parties need to demonstrate through their actions and not just their rhetoric that they are committed to the democratic non-violent rules of the game, willing to respect the political rights of religious minorities, and prepared to allow women an equal role in governing their societies.



EDUCATING
and
INVESTING
in PEOPLE

Even if the many conflicts roiling the region were satisfactorily resolved, the Muslim world would still face the fundamental challenge of governance in a globalizing world. With the end of the Cold War and advances in transportation and communications technology, many closed and traditional societies were suddenly opened to the world. The challenges these countries face begin with poverty, lack of education, and gender inequality—all of which affect the quality of governance in the region. To meet the needs of their citizens, governments in the region need to move from government-dominated, often resource-based, economies to more knowledge-based societies. Governments need to be able to unleash the full talents and potential of their citizens. A citizenry capable of thinking critically and acting independently is fundamental to success in the global economy and toward establishing effective, accountable governance. Both Muslim-majority governments and the United States have a fundamental interest in seeing such advances in human development in the region.

Creating knowledge societies is not a simple task. It requires not only a change in governance—from a state that commands to one that enables and nurtures innovation and creativity—but also a change in the habits of a citizenry long accustomed to being told what to do. The opportunity exists for a real partnership to develop between the United States and the Muslim world focused on human development. The shared challenge is to help citizens accustomed to working within a hierarchical system grow more accustomed to, and develop the skills and patterns of behavior necessary for, operating in a more horizontal, globalized world. This will require a “great engagement” between the Muslim world, the United States and the West more generally focused on educating the next generation to be competitive in the global economy, through improvements in educational institutions, exchanges, and science and technology partnerships.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

◆ Strengthening educational institutions in the region:

The United States should be a partner in helping create indigenous educational institutions in the Muslim world capable of providing world-class education to their citizens. There are many educational institutions in the region that already provide top-quality technical education. What is often lacking is the kind of liberal arts curricula and pedagogy focused on active learning that promote critical thinking, teamwork, and creativity—the soft skills essential to success in the global economy and to creating engaged citizens.

- Many resource-rich Gulf countries, like Qatar and the UAE, have begun to address the gap by hiring top-rate universities in the United States to set up campuses locally. These efforts should be broadened, to ensure that local universities are also strengthened and the benefits flow to more than just a select few, as well as downward to the primary and secondary levels.
- The United States and the Gulf countries should assist other countries in the Muslim world that lack the financial resources to do the same.
- The United States and Europe can assist in this upgrading of the region's educational institutions by providing their best universities' expertise, their best teachers, and educational exchange opportunities for the region's best students. Such an effort needs to be undertaken in a systematic and comprehensive fashion aimed at stemming the brain drain from the region and strengthening local educational institutions so that they quickly become more capable of providing their citizens with world class educations.
- In any revamping of education in the region, the madrassas should not be neglected. In many countries they provide the poor with the only access to education. In most cases, the right approach to dealing with madrassas is not to close them, but to improve them. The goal should be to improve their technical and knowledge-based curricula even as their traditional function of providing religious education (if not hateful or chauvinistic) are respected and also supported. The United States should invest at least \$10 billion dollars into such a project.

◆ **Using Science and Technology Engagement as a Tool for Helping Build Knowledge Societies**

- Education is just one part of building a knowledge society. The culture of scientific inquiry and innovation for which the Muslim world was once renowned must also be revived. Scientific research needs to be enhanced, links between universities and the technology sector strengthened, and more emphasis placed on commercializing scientific innovations.
- The United States can play an important role in helping build such knowledge societies through science and technology engagement

with the Muslim world. Here the private sector and the numerous diaspora communities living in the United States can make important contributions. Already major corporations like Cisco, Boeing, Microsoft, and Google have innovative technology partnerships underway in the Muslim world, while the U.S. government funds a broad range of scientific exchange programs.

- Innovative ways need to be found to develop robust public-private sector technology partnerships with the Muslim world. NEPAD (The New Partnership for Africa's Development), a large consortium of donors supporting the improvement of higher education institutions, particularly in the sciences, in Africa, provides one model. Partnerships could include areas like energy security and the development of alternative energy sources.

◆ **Promoting Society Exchanges between the United States and the Muslim World**

- The United States and Muslim-majority countries have profound interests in engaging with each other at all levels of society rather than hiding behind fences. Exchanges provide a relatively inexpensive and effective way of allowing for such interaction. The United States should expand markedly, on the order of \$5 to \$10 billion per year, the funding for exchange programs between the United States and Muslim-majority countries.
- In seeking to build knowledge-based societies, Muslim-majority countries have much to gain from such exchanges. From the experience of living abroad or having an American teaching in their midst, citizens observe alternative patterns of behavior and learn new methods of navigating a more horizontal world.
- The United States stands to benefit equally from such exchanges. Americans do not know enough about Muslims and the Muslim world. They would benefit from being exposed to the rich and diverse historical and cultural traditions that define the Muslim world. Only through such interaction will Americans cease to see Muslims as "the other" and begin to understand our common interest in foreign partnerships that redound to the benefit of the United States and the Muslim world.

- To promote better understanding between leaders and societies in the United States and the Muslim world, events such as the U.S.-Islamic World Forum should be but the tip of a large iceberg. Much as the United States and Europe did after World War II, we need to create a dense network of young leaders programs, citizen dialogues, policy conferences, and leaders exchanges that help ensure that the next generation of policy makers and opinion leaders from the United States and the Muslim world know and understand one another better.

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