Peacemaking between America and the Muslim World: A New Beginning?*

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ABSTRACT

The arrival of the Obama administration has created opportunities for positive and enduring change in U.S. relations with the Muslim world. Although early attempts to replace confrontation and ideological inflexibility with a more circumspect approach rooted in conciliatory gestures and "enlightened" political realism are encouraging, more substantial shifts in U.S.-Islamic relations will require commitment to a strategy of active peacemaking that moves beyond the standard repertoire of concepts and practices associated with the Cold War's dominant international relations paradigm. Such a strategy would seek to grasp the potential inherent in President Obama's stated commitment to founding relations upon "mutual interest and mutual respect," breaking the present impasse in U.S.-Islamic relations through principles and prescriptions derived from academic studies of peacemaking as well as from a critical re-evaluation of past U.S. policies.

The advent of the Obama administration has opened a window of opportunity for improving U.S.-Islamic relations. After years of deepening antagonism between the United States and the Muslim world and decades of drift and deterioration, there is an opportunity to advance new strategic approaches to the many vexing problems that beset the relationship. Although there is much resistance to change — cultures of policymaking, conceptions of national interest, and images of the other cannot be transformed overnight — the opening that has emerged invites bold and creative thinking. Years of destructive conflict cannot simply be wished away, yet the meaning of past events is subject to change if political leaders pursue a strategy of active and persistent peacemaking.

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Finding the political courage for such a strategy will not be easy. Particularly at a time of economic crisis and domestic reconstruction, there is a temptation to preserve political capital and adopt a cautious approach rooted in precedents and practices that are widely believed to have "worked" during the Cold War and immediate post–Cold War eras. Such approaches, although preferable to a confrontational and ideological preoccupation with regime change and politically selective invocation of human rights norms, cannot deliver "the change we need" in U.S.-Islamic relations. To write — or, better yet, coauthor — a new chapter in relations with the Muslim world, the United States will need to move beyond the standard repertoire of practices associated with foreign policy realism and with past Middle East policy.

In the absence of a strategy underpinned by principles of conflict resolution, democratic change, and restorative justice, the promise of the present moment is likely to go unfulfilled, giving way to an uncomfortable and unsteady new status quo. If, however, American leaders can transcend the temptation to simply repackage traditional formulas for "stability" and can instead make a more serious effort to engage the backstory to U.S. tensions with the Muslim world, genuine opportunities for transforming political and identity conflict (not only interstate but intersocietal and intercultural) are likely to emerge.

Symbolic Gestures

That U.S.-Islamic relations are a priority for the Obama administration has been evident since Inauguration Day. In his January 20 address, President Obama sounded a welcome note when he stated, "To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect."[1] Two days later, he indicated an intent to engage the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by appointing George Mitchell as his special envoy to the Middle East, and on January 26 he granted his first formal interview as president to the Arabic-language satellite channel Al-Arabiya. These gestures were accompanied by executive orders to close the Guantanamo Bay detention facility and ban the use of torture. An Iranian Nowruz message soon followed on March 20, then an address on U.S.-Turkish as well as Muslim-American relations in Ankara on April 6. On June 4, Obama delivered a landmark foreign policy speech in Cairo, calling for "A New Beginning" in U.S.-Islamic relations.

Taken together, these words and deeds communicate an aspiration to depart from the policies and the over-all tone of the Bush administration, and reinforce the symbolism of change that Obama himself represents. While Middle Eastern commentators have detected many areas of continuity with Bush administration policies, particularly on Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, many Muslims remain hopeful that America's first black president — a president with Muslim relatives, life experience in Indonesia, impressive communication skills, and a presumed capacity to identify with people struggling for justice and equality in many parts of the world — will provide substantively different policies than those formulated by George Bush's policy team. There is a hope that he will adopt a humbler policy that is more inclined to listen and negotiate than to dictate and polarize.

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Although not necessarily new, affirmations that the United States is not and will never be the enemy of Islam are welcome and salutary, particularly when repeated.[2] Overall, Obama's personal approach has been positive and his words constructive. Given the extremely low popularity of the United States in the Middle East in the years since 9/11, even modest improvements are welcome.[3] Nonetheless, the warming to America is still tentative and fragile, and will only prove to be an enduring phenomenon if Obama can succeed in transforming symbolic gestures into dynamic processes of cooperation and reciprocity.

Initial Iranian critiques of Obama's initiatives, though more nuanced than North American media outlets have suggested, underscore the challenge.[4] While Mahmoud Ahmadinejad did not speak for all Iranians when responding to Obama's overtures with a rather blunt call for a U.S. apology, the controversial Iranian president nonetheless spoke for many Middle Eastern Muslims when he stated, "change should be fundamental, not tactical."[5] A range of Iranian leaders, from Supreme Leader Sayyid 'Ali Khamene'i to 'Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, called for more explicit recognition of rights (Iranian as well as Palestinian), a suspension of threats and "carrot and stick" language, and broader attitude changes in the direction of respect, equality, and fairness.[6]

Arab commentators echoed such themes, with many reiterating the substantive changes they would have to see before believing that genuine change had

come to Washington. Well before inauguration day, President-elect Obama's prolonged silence concerning Israel's 22-day offensive (December 27, 2008 to January 17, 2009) against Hamas in Gaza had already created an opening for al-Qaʻida, which sought to reinforce its longstanding characterization of America as the leader of a "Zionist-crusader coalition."[7] While such criticism could be expected of al-Qaʻida, more principled and even-handed Arab and Muslim commentators have made it clear that there is "a history of disappointment" in the Middle East. People are keenly watching to see what America will actually do to effect change in Israeli-Palestinian relations, to advance Iraqi self-determination, to prevent a quagmire in Afghanistan, to adopt a less instrumentalized and inconsistent approach to democratization issues, and to avoid a devastating clash over Iran's nuclear program.[8]

Clearly, navigating such challenges in U.S.-Middle Eastern and U.S.-Islamic relations will require attention to both style and substance. Supportive words and deeds from Muslim leaders will be essential, as President Obama cannot sell sweeping change to distrustful constituencies without pointing to encouraging signs. Only by engaging skeptical voices can the new administration discover the points of leverage that might be used to effect a genuine shift in Islamic-Western relations.

Roots of Conflict

Admittedly, the Bush administration did not get everything wrong in its intellectual response to 9/11. The new (albeit temporary) emphasis on democracy, for example, was a potentially positive development, as was acknowledgment of past support for narrowly based regimes. Serious failures at the level of policy, however, demonstrate the perils of relying on a very narrow circle of advisors and pundits, while screening out input from outside sources to preserve an incomplete, self-referential, and in no small part self-serving interpretation of U.S.-Islamic relations. Administration officials and spokespersons were far too quick to subsume the new conflict within comfortably familiar parameters of nationalistic narratives and "American exceptionalist" thinking, and to portray the struggle as yet another episode in an epic confrontation between grand principles of freedom and tyranny.[9]

Academically based critics, of course, have offered scathing and often perceptive critiques of such thinking. Richard Jackson, for example, argues that such discourse on terrorism obscures more than it reveals, preventing an understanding of the tragically destructive conflict spiral in which the West and its adversar-

ies have become entwined. By accentuating the religious and ideological rhetoric of violent groups while effectively ignoring their extensive catalogues of political grievances, much terrorism discourse "depoliticizes, decontextualizes and dehistoricizes... thereby de-linking the motives of terrorists from the policies of Western states or their allies."[10] While it is undeniable that groups such as al-Qaʻida are indeed dangerous and unlikely to be assuaged by anything short of a sea change in U.S. foreign policy, broad statements concerning "Islamic terrorism" offer little insight into concrete political and economic issues that contribute to radicalization and terrorist recruitment. By placing a cloud of suspicion over all who invoke Islam in their pursuit of political objectives, such discourse lumps together those whom Muqtedar Khan refers to as "rogue Islamists" with democratic Muslims seeking electoral empowerment.[11]

More useful insights into the grievances that motivate political violence in the Muslim world can be found in Robert Pape's *Dying to Win*.[12] Based on his comprehensive study of suicide terrorism between 1980 and 2003, Pape concludes that, though instrumentalized religious beliefs can play an enabling role, this form of political violence has an underlying secular logic: "to compel a democratic state to withdraw combat forces that terrorists either consider to be their homeland or prize greatly."[13] In Pape's view, events such as 9/11 demand political rather than ideological explanations, and are linked to Muslim indignation vis-à-vis the American military presence in the Arabian peninsula (especially but not exclusively Saudi Arabia) that became established after the first U.S.-Iraq War.

Although Pape's comparative empirical analysis constructively illuminates circumstances that have motivated suicide terrorism in multiple contexts, questions remain. For example, the United States has combat forces in many parts of the world, and not everywhere are these forces perceived as occupation forces that must be resisted at all costs. As American security analyst Anthony Cordesman argues, regionally specific political and cultural factors need to be taken into account. The U.S. image problem in Muslim lands, he suggests, is linked to "tangible issues like the U.S. role in the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Iraq War, and other U.S. policies in the Middle East." Significantly, anger against the United States has little to do with American values or democracy. Rather, it "is shaped by the perception that the U.S. reaction to 9/11 has gone beyond counterterrorism to a broad hostility to Islam and Arabs."[14]

Broad surveys of Muslim public opinion, such as those discussed in Esposito and Mogahed's *Who Speaks for Islam?*, suggest a similar conclusion.[15] According

to Gallup polls, both politically moderate and radicalized Muslims admire many aspects of American and Western culture, including political freedoms, technological innovation, and a work ethic that has led to prosperity. Their dislikes with respect to America and the West concern not just the diffusion of a culture they regard as permissive, but also the impact of external political influences on their own self-determination. A key difference between radicals and moderates, Esposito and Mogahed argue, is not the degree of religious commitment, but rather the greater pessimism of radicals with respect to prospects for real change to a situation they regard as humiliating and "unacceptable."[16] Within this context, politically engaged individuals are inclined to turn to Islam as a language of solidarity and mobilization, and as a basis for critiquing unjust authority. Campaigns for instituting *shari'a* become a framework for cultural as well as political self-determination and legitimacy, based on indigenous rather than externally imposed values and standards.

As U.S. intelligence agencies have acknowledged, expansively militarized conceptions of the "war on terrorism" feed the very perceptions that inspire recruitment into radical Islamist groups.[17] Overconfidence in the utility of military force in resolving contemporary problems of non-state political violence has brought increasing turbulence to the Middle East, and also threatens the integrity of increasingly diverse Western societies. Contrary to the arguments of Podhoretz and related thinkers, war appears highly ineffective at eliminating terrorism, particularly insofar as it reinforces an "us versus them" dynamic of identity conflict and gives an undeserved advantage to rhetoric stressing the "ancient origins" of present strife.

Because the resort to military force feeds perceptions of confrontation and injustice and legitimizes popular resistance, war is an ultimately self-defeating mechanism for overcoming Middle Eastern radicalism.[18] It is simply not possible to impose upon the Islamic world a set of political, cultural, and economic solutions that are viewed as inauthentic and humiliating. Attempts to do so have negative consequences not only for nonviolent democratization projects in the Middle East, but also for interreligious and intercultural relations in North America and Europe. The transnational character of Islamic identity ensures that at least some members of diaspora communities will view distant conflicts through Middle Eastern lenses, an outcome nurtured in no small part by the climate of fear and suspicion that war engenders.

Fortunately, the Obama administration appears to have recognized the inefficacy of the "War on Terror" framework. Nonetheless, current U.S. leaders would

be wise to attend carefully to analyses of Muslim grievances such as those reviewed above, particularly in light of temptations to return to a traditional "realist" framework for managing state-to-state relations and for taming, co-opting, or repressing Islamic movements.

A Return to Political Realism?

After setbacks experienced by U.S. military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, the pendulum of elite American opinion has begun to swing from neoconservatism back toward political realism, a school of thought in international relations that eschews excessive preoccupation with ideology and argues that statecraft must be conducted in accordance with principles of national interest and prudence. Though welcome in some respects as a corrective to arguments for open-ended war and political confrontation to transform Muslim societies, the "realist" philosophy is also implicated in historical policies that have contributed to the present impasse.

Both the strengths and limitations of realism are evident in *Ethical Realism: A Vision for America's Role in the World*, by Anatol Lieven and John Hulsman.[19] Though written in the latter years of the Bush presidency, this unusually bipartisan book (the product of collaboration between a senior fellow at the New America Foundation and a former senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation), reflects an emerging mood among policy intellectuals that has been embraced by many Obama advisors. Reacting to the crusading excesses of the Bush's post-9/11 foreign policy, Lieven and Hulsman seek to restate and reconstruct what they consider to be perennial insights of the realist foreign policy tradition, as practiced by American statesmen in the early years of the Cold War. Using the painful experience of the Iraq war as call to sobriety and humility, the book begins with a call to reject the belief that it is in the U.S. national interest to pursue an aggressively moralistic foreign policy.[20] In the post-9/11 era as in the Vietnam era, Lieven and Hulsman propose, key U.S. strategic thinkers and policymakers lost their way. By adopting a "for us or against us" drive for security through imperial ventures, they forgot one of the chief lessons of Vietnam — that others may perceive a contradiction between U.S. strategies and their own "national pride and national aspirations."[21]

Lieven and Hulsman's call for a less ideological and presumptuous foreign policy emphasizes precautionary principles inherent in the realist school of thought, particularly prudence, consideration of potentially negative consequences of well-intentioned policies, willingness to accommodate views and interests of other

states, and recognition of limits to U.S. power and virtue.[22] Foreign policy, they assert, must be based on a careful study of the world's moral and political complexity, as well as on an ability to differentiate between essential objectives that must be advanced forcefully and conditions that must be accepted — and worked with — as they are. With respect to the politics of the Middle East and other Muslim-majority regions, the authors wisely counsel against lumping all Islamic movements together or tarring them all with a "totalitarian" brush so as to more parsimoniously divide the world into "pro-terrorist" and "pro-American" camps.[23] Quite rightly, they observe that neoconservatives and liberal hawks alike have failed to appreciate the significance of multiple ideological cleavages in Muslim politics between Arab nationalism and Islamism, or between Sunni and Shi'a radicalism.

Although *Ethical Realism* was published in 2006, many of its themes are now closely aligned with priorities articulated by Obama and by members of his foreign policy team. When describing his foreign policy principles, Obama has sought to relate himself to the American realist tradition by voicing admiration for such historic figures as Dean Acheson, George Kennan and Reinhold Niebuhr, and sympathy for the policies of George H. W. Bush.[24] In an analysis published in July 2008, Fareed Zakaria observed many "realist" themes in Obama's foreign policy discourse:

> He sees countries and even extremist groups as complex, motivated by power, greed and fear as much as by pure ideology. His interest in diplomacy seems motivated by the sense that one can probe, learn and possibly divide and influence countries and movements precisely because they are not monoliths. When speaking to me about Islamic extremism, for example, he repeatedly emphasized the diversity within the Islamic world, speaking of Arabs, Persians, Africans, Southeast Asians, Shiites and Sunnis, all of whom have their own interests and agendas.[25]

A number of early critics of the Obama administration's foreign policy — some of them defenders of Bush's more confrontational policies toward countries like Iran, Syria, and North Korea — have similarly characterized the new direction as "realist,"[26] and self-defining realists such as Stephen Walt have perceived in Obama's policies "some encouraging hints of realism."[27]

At a minimum, the new Obama administration would appear to have embraced the pragmatic underpinnings of the realist tradition, while also finding strategic utility in realist conceptions of national interest and arguments against ideologically driven foreign policy. This creates scope for policies that accord with key recommendations of Lieven and Hulsman, including respect for "the expression of Islam in political movements,"[28] a more even-handed approach to the Israeli-

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Palestinian conflict, and a more focused and realistic Iran policy. Nonetheless, there are valid reasons for concern about the new enthusiasm for realism — reasons that are related to both the intellectual substance and practical implications of the realist position.

As a guiding framework, the realist tradition draws upon such historical notions as *raison d'état* to establish national interest as a virtually autonomous principle for political action. While Lieven and Hulsman follow the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr in their attempt to differentiate an "ethical" variant of realism from the more amoral tradition of "classical" realism, the mainstream realist tradition remains wedded to a foundational scepticism concerning the role of morality in foreign policy, to a state-centric conception of the political world, and to an intense preoccupation with the military dimension of national security challenges. Although an attitude of nationalist exceptionalism may favour the notion that serving the national interest necessarily advances the general good of humanity, the actual history of great power policymaking raises profound questions about the likely outcomes of embracing realism as a compass — questions that are

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not fully addressed by Lieven and Hulsman, or indeed by others who have identified realism as the only genuine alternative to neoconservative crusading. In many respects, realism is implicated in key problems of American relations with Islamic and Southern nations — problems that have emerged from a historical tendency to work comfortably with repressive leaders (often to the detriment of popular social justice and self-determination movements) and to prioritize access to resources and markets over the well-being of people.[29] An intellectually rigorous realism might well have kept America out of Vietnam or Iraq, yet traditional realist criteria for policy choice offer (at best) limited insight into how the United States might navigate the complex global politics of the twenty-first century and pursue reconciliation with former adversaries.

A Strategy of Active Peacemaking

To improve U.S.-Islamic relations, U.S. leaders need policy input from thinkers who are less concerned with reconstructing Cold War frameworks than with crafting operative principles appropriate to the current era. These thinkers should be preoccupied not so much with the "containment" or defeat of adversaries[30] as with the de-escalation and ultimate transformation of the many conflicts that affect the quality of life in Muslim-majority nations. Given the limitations of realist prescriptions deriving from a vision of competing nation-states and neoconservative prescriptions emanating from a vision of broader, ideological and intercultural rivalries, there is a profound need for individuals familiar with peace research and world order studies to engage the current policy debate. Their prescriptions should re-situate Islamic-Western relations within a global context of interdependence and "distant proximities,"[31] and should place particular emphasis on legitimate Muslim aspirations for self-determination, political autonomy, popular participation, development, and social justice.

Without a vision of how coexistence might be achieved, existing geopolitical dynamics and cultural mythologies are likely to overwhelm piecemeal cooperative efforts. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a comprehensive program for change, the following list of recommendations has been formulated to prompt fresh thinking about how U.S. policies and initiatives might help overcome a troubled historical legacy. These policies and initiatives would be designed with the intention of amending strategies that have heightened conflict and polar-

ization, while also supporting incremental "change from within" in Middle Eastern states and societies.

1) Listen carefully to various Muslim accounts of the "backstory" behind present tensions.

In the United States after 9/11, one of the more immediate concerns — beyond the tightening of security measures and the formulation of a military strategy — was to ensure that public diplomacy efforts were adequate to "sell" the United States and its policies overseas. This concern for marketing, however, was not accompanied by a comparable interest in the marketability of the foreign policy product.

While Middle Eastern publics are not without their biases and blind spots vis-à-vis the United States, they tend to be much better informed than many suspect. As Esposito and Mogahed's data suggests, starkly negative opinions of the United States often have less to do with stereotypical judgments about licentiousness in American culture than with genuine political disagreements. There is no substitute for addressing these disagreements head on.

At its best, public diplomacy is a valuable instrument which nations can use to open channels of two-way communication. An effective public diplomacy strategy starts with actively listening[32] — not only to words and ideas, but also to emotions and experiences behind words and ideas. Active listening, an invaluable skill for conflict resolution and the cultivation of sustained dialogue, can also be an indispensable tool of analysis. In listening, the United States and other Western countries may begin to appreciate why their intentions have often been doubted by Muslims, and discover ways of signalling a commitment to reconciliation.

2) Embrace conflict de-escalation as an overarching strategy for marginalizing extremists and "draining the swamp" of mutual enmity.

Because radicalism feeds on unresolved conflict, patient efforts to bridge divides are a necessity if more moderate political dynamics are to have a chance of succeeding in the Middle East, as well as in other regions such as South Asia. The relevance of conflict resolution has been amply demonstrated by the results of neglecting conflict resolution practice during the Bush administration. It can hardly be argued, for example, that U.S. disengagement from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict benefited Israelis and Palestinians, or that efforts to isolate Syria brought enhanced regional security. The application of military force in a range of theatres — directly and by proxy — contributed to a more fractured and ultimately insecure world order.

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Strategizing to transform conflicts in the Islamic world will require greater American and Western involvements in regional conflict resolution efforts than has been the case in recent years, together with willingness to engage with Islamic movements seeking a stake in the political process. Working to integrate revisionist movements into negotiation frameworks does not preclude the expression of strong criticism with respect to past actions taken by these groups. It does, however, require patience, humility, and historical perspective.[33]

By actively practicing dialogue and negotiation, the United States will be in a much better position to advise Middle Eastern governments on the need to seek accommodation with opposition movements and reduce reliance on repressive measures. Creative Western policies might also include efforts to enhance regional conflict resolution capacity, by encouraging the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference to devote institutional resources to mediation training and to the development of improved mechanisms for dispute resolution and conciliation. Constructive initiatives emanating from the region, such as Turkish mediation in the Arab-Israeli conflict and the 2002 Saudi and Arab League peace initiative, merit diplomatic encouragement. By working together on such proposals and nurturing an interreligious "second track" for dialogue and negotiation, Western and Islamic leaders might make significant contributions to peace by reframing the conflict over Israel-Palestine as a feud within the Abrahamic family rather than as an interreligious collision, "crusade" (as seen by Muslims), or "defence of democracy" (as seen by Washington).

Given that Americans still possess significantly more existential security than most inhabitants of majority-Muslim countries, it is vitally important for the United States to persist in efforts to convey peaceful intentions. Willingness to engage with Islamic movements and adversary states can give enhanced credibility to demonstrations of respect such as Obama's Cairo address, and can help to ease Muslim perceptions of security threat. Calls to address the root causes of conflict and include all major stakeholders are essential. In addition, it is worth pointing out that while some grievances of Islamic movements are widely shared, choices to engage in violence or pursue justice non-violently are made on a local basis.

Rather than imagine that conflicts in Israel-Palestine or Lebanon will somehow be resolved through changes in Tehran, the goal should be to disaggregate and address the multiple contributing factors that shape the situation on the ground. Though the U.S. government is likely to persist in publicly arguing that dialogue

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with "hard core" armed groups is unacceptable (dialogue being an option reserved for "moderate" irregulars challenging governments in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other regional states), negotiation with insurgent forces is often the only way to put an end to civil and regional wars. Denying "radical" groups a chance to develop a stake in the political process can make things worse, not better.

U.S. and Western policy toward the Middle East should not target Islamic revivalism (which, like Reformation-era movements in the West, is experienced as a process of internal renewal) or Islamic fundamentalist reactions to perceived external threats. Rather than seek to manipulate intraregional rivalries such as the Arab-Persian and Sunni-Shi'a divides, Western policy might generate more lasting contributions to security by calling for collaborative efforts to redress grievances used to justify terrorism — for example, the suffering of Palestinians and Iraqis, the maldistribution of resources, and the absence of legitimate and genuinely participatory political authority.

3) Consistently convey respect for Islam, while simultaneously inviting dialogue about bases for peaceable relations.

To date, President Obama's efforts to convey respect for Islam have been impressive and valuable. Although wider societal attitudes in the United States have not been transformed and many Muslims have opted to "wait and see" rather than undertake their own communicative initiatives, a significant precedent has been set.

At the present juncture there is a need for broader and more sustained contact across cultural and religious lines, conducted in a spirit of mutual learning and partnership. In addition to public diplomacy and greater effort on the part of diplomats in the field to make contact with social leaders, governments and non-governmental groups can promote youth exchanges, intercontinentally linked classrooms, and even sister city programs. The establishment of Western and Middle Eastern endowments to fund cultural events that use visual and performing arts to

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celebrate coexistence would also be welcome. By engaging Islamic identity and ideals in a wide range of forums, from political speech and diplomacy to civil society dialogues, Americans have the potential to reduce anxieties surrounding the perceived need to defend Islam. They can also help build sufficient trust for more wide-ranging discussions of how Islamic values play a role in peacemaking, coexistence, and nonviolent social justice advocacy.[34]

Given the importance of domestic example for relations with predominantly Muslim societies, new steps should be taken to ensure inclusion of Muslims in the United States and other Western societies. Special efforts could be made to utilize the resources of university systems, and to encourage multifaith projects that express shared religious values in the public sphere. The status of the United States and Canada as immigrant societies gives these countries unique assets in the effort to engage Muslim societies; there is a need, however, to counteract widespread "Islam anxiety"[35] and ignorance about Islam. [36]

The need for greater consensus on internationally legitimate norms and standards is also at the core of U.S.-Islamic and Islamic-Western rapprochement. The events of recent years demonstrate that the United States and other Western countries have an interest in working harmoniously with United Nations institutions to address security concerns. A multilateral approach to international security based on respect for international institutions can be greatly enriched by applying an integrative "human security" approach to the problems of terrorism and political violence. This framework has a number of virtues: it recognizes that radicalization festers in situations of repression and protracted conflict; it places a strong emphasis on law enforcement, development, and protection of civilian populations rather than on deeply polarizing military campaigns; and it affirms the importance of efforts to work towards consistent standards on human rights. Whether the problem is Arab-Israeli conflict, treatment of detainees in counterterrorism operations, or repression and counter-violence between Arab governments and opposition movements, working to cultivate international consensus on "fair" standards is far more desirable than staking out positions that may appear arbitrary or hostile to regional stakeholders.

4) Draw upon restorative justice principles to formulate diplomatic messages that signal commitment to genuine change in hitherto troubled historical relationships.

To help clear the way for such developments, America and its Muslim counterparts would do well to explore the vital importance of "restorative" conceptions of justice during peace processes and periods of political transition. Often framed as an alternative to politically unrealistic and morally problematic notions of retributive justice (justice as revenge or punishment of offenders, who in situations of civil conflict are dauntingly numerous) and blanket amnesties (forgiveness without a sense of accountability or a guarantee of reform), restorative justice endeavours to integrate frequently conflicting values of forgiveness and accountability. Often but not always understood in religious terms, restorative justice challenges former enemies — government and opposition, or societies in conflict — to rehumanize the adversary, acknowledge responsibility for misdeeds and excesses, and (whenever possible) utilize symbolic gestures as well as various forms of reparation to signal desire for a new relationship. Restorative justice is predicated on the notion that profound shifts in human relations are possible, and that former enemies can become allies or friends. In the context of Western-Islamic relations, it provides a potential basis for simultaneously addressing deeply felt needs for justice and hope for new beginnings, in a way that might potentially set a virtuous cycle in motion.

Much rhetoric about American-Islamic relations is preoccupied with affixing blame for real as well as perceived injustices and offences. Given that publics have grown accustomed to confrontation, efforts to achieve significant changes in relations can be politically risky, and will need to be preceded by forms of discourse that enlarge the moral imagination of citizens in ways that make coexistence appear more realistic and desirable. Often, this will require a delicate balancing act, in which respect is paid to existing, selective national memories of relations with adversaries, while also introducing new information and perspectives that prepare the ground for change. There is a need here for oratorical skill of the quality displayed in the past by Barack Obama in his multi-perspectival "honest talk" on race — discourse that simultaneously honors and challenges multiple perspectives and experiences. Particularly risky but potentially high-payoff options, in-

Americans have a responsibility to take the initiative, yet genuine improvements will depend on the generation of a virtuous cycle of reciprocal confidence-building measures

> Positive engagement between Americans and Muslims has become an essential and indispensable prerequisite for the creation of a more secure and equitable world order

cluding political apology, can be used at strategic moments to break an impasse, if possible after preparatory track-two consultations and scenario-building for reciprocal measures.

If there is to be a new beginning, efforts will be required of all parties. Within the West, there is a need to acknowledge that great powers such as England, France, and now the United States have often used their influence in ways that have reduced the capacity of Middle Eastern Muslims to control their own cultural and political destiny. Becoming more cognizant of such issues through Western cultural empathy is vital for international peace. However, sobriety, humility, and magnanimity are vital watchwords for Westerners and Muslims alike as they seek to develop intercultural confidence-building measures.

5) Develop a more genuinely "democratic" set of guidelines for supporting democratic "change from within" in Muslim-majority societies.

Middle Eastern Muslims today find themselves engaged in a profound struggle at a crucial juncture in their history. Many feel cut off from the past, and faced with a present characterized by authoritarianism, poverty and humiliation. In this regard, it is critical to recognize that democracy remains a word with positive association for a majority of the world's Muslims — particularly when the word is not narrowly associated with a specific set of American policies or prescriptions, or with the notion that democracy is good only so long as the "right side" wins. At the grassroots level, there is strong demand for more accountable and participatory government institutions, and for safeguards guaranteeing rights to political dissent. What is needed is not an aggressive approach to democratization or the selective invocation of democracy as a tool for undermining specific adversaries. When conjoined with other policies, such as a proactive approach to conflict resolution, an even-handed and long-term commitment to democratic principles and the opening of political space could produce further gains in American-Islamic relations.

The United States and other Western countries can best support positive internal developments by promoting political participation within structures appropriate to the needs and cultures of Muslim peoples, and not by unreflectively promoting the transplantation of Western models or supporting authoritarian regimes. The only viable democratic projects in Muslim countries are those that

take root in local soil and are nourished by the aspirations of citizens for a more hopeful future. As Jeremy Jones has argued in *Negotiating Change*, democratic change will stand the best chance of success in the Middle East if it is conceived as a genuinely indigenous enterprise:

> Democracy in the Middle East may not only be possible, it may already be under construction. In the diverse institutions and conversations, the traditions and experiments with which the people of the region conduct their daily lives, manage their social relations and organize their politics there might be all kinds of practices that ought to be recognized as democratic in nature. It may be these practices, rather than those that have developed in the West… that will form the foundations for the further development of democratic political institutions….[37]

By becoming sensitized to ongoing experiments with democratic change in Middle Eastern countries, American policymakers stand a much better chance of finding means to strategically nourish positive dynamics and address underlying conflicts that have created the current atmosphere of repression, violence, and anger.

Conclusion

This paper has been written with the conviction that constructive change in U.S.-Islamic relations is achievable, despite familiar dangers and obstacles. Positive American initiatives, of course, will need support and encouragement from civic and political leaders in Muslim-majority states. Americans have a responsibility to take the initiative, yet genuine improvements will depend on the generation of a virtuous cycle of reciprocal confidence-building measures. Many questions therefore remain: Will Americans and Muslims seek to transcend their immediate, emotional reactions to violent and painful events, or will they withdraw into ethnocentric and aggrieved frames of reference? Will leaders successfully navigate a series of daunting conflict scenarios — from war in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq to the Israeli-Palestinian impasse and the Iranian nuclear puzzle — by gaining more authentic knowledge about their counterparts' concerns and aspirations, or will they allow protagonists of division and polarization to set the agenda? Fresh American overtures have provided grounds for optimism concerning the possibility of a "new foundation" for Muslim-American relations, yet the work that lies ahead will not be easy.

Despite the apparent complexity of current policy challenges, simple truths are worth repeating. Positive engagement between Americans and Muslims has become an essential and indispensable prerequisite for the creation of a more secure and equitable world order. Muslims and Americans have the opportunity to foster

a new narrative, but can only do so if they move beyond scripts that have explicitly or implicitly dismissed the possibility of relations founded on reciprocity, circumspection, and genuine respect. Given this need for new beginnings, leaders should not take too much comfort in familiar habits from the past. For the sake of future generations, they have an obligation to draw upon the best principles in their own traditions — including principles of reinvention and reform — and to discover how these principles speak to the traditions, historical experiences, and current aspirations of others. If Americans can now find the vision required to begin such a conversation and the courage to persist, then there is hope for a genuinely new chapter in U.S.-Islamic relations.

Endnotes

1. "Barack Obama's Inaugural Address," *New York Times*, January 20, 2009, accessed at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/20/us/politics/20text-obama.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all on May 3, 2009.

2. Summarizing polling data, blogger-academic Juan Cole notes that "publics in the Middle East did see positive changes in U.S. policy, with about 40 percent praising the changes." See Juan Cole, "Obama's First Hundred Days in the Greater Middle East," *Informed Comment* blog, April 28, 2009, accessed at http://www.juancole.com/ on May 2, 2009.

3. Throughout the Middle East, views of the United States went from bad to worse in the years after 9/11 and the Iraq War. In April 2002, 76 percent of Egyptians claimed to hold the U.S. in low regard, whereas by July 2004, 98 percent expressed a negative opinion. In Morocco the trend was much the same, moving from 61 percent negative in 2002 to 88 percent negative in 2004. Dafna Linzer, "Poll Shows Growing Arab Rancor at U.S.," *Washington Post*, July 23, 2004.

4. Juan Cole characterizes the overall response as a hedged, "wait and see" position. See Cole, "Obama's First Hundred Days in the Greater Middle East."

5. Nazila Fathi and David E. Sanger, "Iran Offers 'Dialogue with Respect' with U.S.," *New York Times*, February 11, 2009.

6. For comments by Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, see "Iran Cleric to Obama: Don't Repeat Bush's Warnings," *Reuters*, January 30, 2009.

7. "Qaeda's Zawahri dismisses Obama, U.S. still enemy," *Reuters*, February 3, 2009.

8. Salah ad-Din Al-Jourchi, "Candid Words for a Candid President," Web Commentary, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 8, 2008, accessed at http://carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=print&id=22509 on February 12, 2009.

9. Many familiar elements of the previous administration's misdiagnosis of Muslim radicalism are evident in Norman Podhoretz's tract, *World War IV: The Long Struggle Against Islamofascism* (New York: Random House, 2008).

10. Richard Jackson, "Constructing Enemies: 'Islamic Terrorism' in Political and Academic Discourse," *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 42, No 3, p. 421.

11. M. A. Muqtedar Khan, "Radical Islam, Liberal Islam," in *Current History* 102, no. 668 (December, 2003): 417-421.

12. Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005).

13. Robert Pape, in Douglas Macgregor, Marvin Weinbaum, Abdullah Ansary, and Robert Pape, "The 'Global War on Terror': What Has Been Learned," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Winter 2008), p. 12.

14. Anthony H. Cordesman, "Winning the 'War on Terrorism': A Fundamentally Different Strategy," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Fall 2006), p. 102.

15. John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007).

16. Esposito and Mogahed, "Battle for Muslim Hearts and Minds: The Road Not (Yet) Taken," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Spring 2007), pp. 37-39.

17. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2006.

18. Jackson, "Constructing Enemies," p. 424.

19. Anatol Lieven and John Hulsman, *Ethical Realism: A Vision for America's Role in the World* (New York: Random House, 2006).

20. Lieven and Hulsman, *Ethical Realism: A Vision for America's Role in the World,* p. xi.

21. Lieven and Hulsman, *Ethical Realism: A Vision for America's Role in the World*., p. xiii.

22. Lieven and Hulsman, *Ethical Realism: A Vision for America's Role in the World,* p. xvii.

23. Lieven and Hulsman, *Ethical Realism: A Vision for America's Role in the World,* p. 39.

24. Zakaria, "Obama, Foreign Policy Realist," *PostGlobal*, posted 21 July 2008, accessed at http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/postglobal/fareed_zakaria/2008/07/obama_foreign_policy_realist.html on 4 October 2009.

25. Zakaria, "Obama, Foreign Policy Realist"

26. See, for example, Aaron Friedberg, "Should We Fear Obama's 'Realism'?" *Foreign Policy*, posted 3 March 2009, accessed at http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/03/09/should_we_fear_obamas_realism on 4 October 2009.

27. Stephen M. Walt, "Hints of Realism?" *Foreign Policy*, posted 9 March 2009, accessed at http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/03/09/hints_of_realism on 4 October 2009.

28. Lieven and Hulsman, *Ethical Realism*, p. 123.

29. In their efforts to differentiate "ethical realism" from the more amoral tradition of "classical realism," for example, Lieven and Hulsman fall back on the American Cold War narrative, portraying Truman and Eisenhower as exemplars of a tough and pragmatic yet ultimately principled foreign policy. The authors do not, however, acknowledge the bitter fruit of Eisenhower-era interventions in Guatemala and Iran at the expense of the democratically elected leaders Jacobo Arbenz Guzman and Mohammed Mossadegh, respectively. In light of the past implication of political realism in these and other suppressions of democracy and self-determination in developing nations, the silence is disconcerting.

30. Some recent U.S. proposals to revive or recalibrate a Cold War realist or "containment" framework presuppose a distanced relationship between the United States and the conflicts that motivate extreme Muslim political groups and movements. See NicholasThompson, "A War Best Served Cold," *New York Times*, July 31, 2007; Shapiro, *Containment*, 2007.

31. James Rosenau, *Distant Proximities: Dynamics Beyond Globalization* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

32. Center for Strategic and International Studies, *Mixed Blessings: U.S. Government Engagement with Religion in Conflict-Prone Settings* (Washington, DC: CSIS, 2007), p. 17.

33. Critics who argue that this amounts to "compromise with extremists" could be answered by recalling that, however distant the Reformation era may seem now, mainstream Protestant religious movements began with passionate involvement in political controversy. The revolutionary religious and political projects pursued by Oliver Cromwell and the English Puritans are a case in point. See Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (New York: Atheneum, 1969).

34. Nathan Funk and Abdul Aziz Said, *Islam and Peacemaking in the Middle East*, pp. 232-237, 268-273.

35. Juan Cole, *Engaging the Muslim World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 4-5.

36. "Majorities of Muslims — both politically radicalized and moderates — say they know and admire the West's technology, freedom of speech, and value system of hard work. Meanwhile, Americans asked what they know about Muslims predominantly offer two responses: 'Nothing' and 'I don't know.'" Esposito and Mogahed, "Battle for Muslim Hearts and Minds," p. 41.

37. Jeremy Jones, *Negotiating Change: The New Politics of the Middle East* (New York: Tauris, 2007), pp. 5-6.