



Changing Course

A New Direction for U.S. Relations with the Muslim World

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DESCRIPTION

The U.S.-Muslim Engagement Project (USME) just released its groundbreaking report, *Changing Course: A New Direction for U.S. Relations with the Muslim World*. It sets out a coherent, broad-based strategy to enhance international security by improving U.S.-Muslim relations. The report represents the consensus-building efforts of a senior, bipartisan, inter-faith group of American leaders – including Madeline Albright, Richard Armitage, and two former U.S. Representatives – and has been described by some as the third installment in a trilogy along with the *9/11 Commission* and the *Iraq Study Group*. The October 14th forum provided an opportunity for policymakers and conflict resolution practitioners to dynamically interact with the content and architects of this report, help develop next action steps, and work to implement recommendations that could shift U.S. public opinion and contribute to vital policy changes.

SUMMARY

Daniel Brumberg

This report could not have come at a more timely moment. Its content is important and pertinent to the current international and domestic political situations. I read the report last night and it is extremely comprehensive given the recommendations of its four pillars. The focus for the panelists will be to highlight aspects of the report and then answer questions about implementation of these pillars and the direction of future foreign policy regarding U.S.-Muslim relations.

Rob Fersh

Thank you all for being here. We appreciate your interest. As you many have heard there are many people integral to this project, including Paula Gutlove and Tom Dunne. We are trying to not just produce a report, but to undertake a major educational effort. I hope people take advantage of the website. (<http://www.usmuslimengagement.org>)

My job is to paint a context for how this report came together. First, the report is a full and complete partnership between Search for Common Ground (SFCG) and the Consensus Building Institute (CBI). It is a wonderful example of how collaboration can lead to higher results. We are very pleased to have worked with the Consensus Building Institute. People with varying skills and approaches can help create strong, bipartisan policy that helps move the nation forward. For this project, we brought people with opposing views to the same table, not to attack each other, but to attack the problem. We are pleased and proud to complete this project. We have an advisory group, including Steve Bartlett and Dennis Ross. It was founded by former Governor Mark Rosco and former Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman in effort to utilize this methodology of interchanging problem-solving to achieve the highest result.

This project was started over three years ago. The Consensus Building Institute and Search For Common Ground were working in parallel with a similar idea and we decided to join forces. Our thinking was as follows: in wake of the military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan there was a deep concern about whether the United States was on the right track in the long run. A former Republican Congressman, who was a fervent supporter of the invasion of Iraq, expressed his concern to me that our actions might be creating more terrorists then we can deal with. It was time to look for a new approach. The U.S.-Muslim Engagement Project spent a year doing research and speaking to hundreds of people to ascertain how to conduct such a dialogue. We spoke with people across the experiential and political spectrum. There was a unanimous feeling that the United States was on the wrong path, no one was undertaking a project like ours and that there was a great need for it. The project began with the generous support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Hewlett Foundation, and George Russell. The goals of the report were to:

1. Create a coherent, broad-based and bipartisan strategy and set of recommendations to improve relations between the U.S. and the Muslim world;
2. Communicate and advocate this strategy in ways that shift U.S. public opinion and contribute to changes in U.S. policies, and public and private action.

We think that this project is unique for several reasons. One unique aspect was the diversity of the Leadership Group. It included not just foreign policy experts, but leaders from the religious, military, business, psychological, and public opinion sectors. Eleven out of the thirty-four members were Muslim. A second unique aspect was our attempt to bring the public voice to the project. Both through exhaustive review of polling data – we worked very closely with Gallup – and through three eight-hour dialogue sessions of citizens to help them understand the issues and to arrive at some conclusions about what would be wise policy. The main result after two years of deliberation is the report. While SFCG and CBI are very proud of this report and David Fairman is the principle architect, the report is the reflection of the views of the Leadership Group. All thirty-four members have embraced the report enthusiastically.

This report calls for the reframing of our relationship with the Muslim world. It focuses on what is in the control of the United States, and also calls for reciprocal actions in the Muslim world to curb extremism, promote democratic governance, and partner with the United States and our allies. The report makes clear that the primary causes of conflict lies in policies and actions, not in a clash

of civilizations. We are taking a series of actions now, and future actions must be pursued, to ensure that this report does not sit on the shelf. Efforts have been made to circulate the report to the House and Senate and the presidential campaigns. It has been well-received by all. We have continued our ongoing media and public education efforts. We want to spawn widespread citizen engagement with these issues. Let me conclude my remarks with the quotation that opens the report from Dwight Eisenhower. It captures the most underlying assumption of this report and reads as follows:

If we are to have partners for peace, then we must first be partners in sympathetic recognition that all mankind possesses in common like aspirations and hungers, like ideals and appetites, like purposes and frailties, a like demand for economic advancement. The divisions between us are artificial and transient. Our common humanity is God-made and enduring.

David Fairman

Thank you to everyone for coming and to our colleagues for staying the course with the report. I want to reinforce Rob's points about the process of the report. This was extraordinary privilege in so many ways, the most extraordinary privilege being the diversity in the Leadership Group, the depth of engagement they had with each other over the course of this project, and the extent to which peoples' views changed as a product of dialogue. As presented in the report, this project is both a challenge and opportunity in its hope for the United States and the Muslim world. This project is a testament as to what Americans can do collectively when we decide to come together to tackle a difficult issue and put in the time to reach consensus.

I want to spend a few minutes to discuss the core points of the report and a few puzzles that we hope to explore further in this setting. The core premise of the report is that the United States has both a responsibility and an opportunity to change its course of relations with the Muslim world and to do so in partnership with Muslims around the world who are like-minded. "We" and "they" have shared interests in peace and security, in improvements in governance, in overcoming misconceptions that separate us, and in recognizing common values while acknowledging differences across the Muslim world and in the United States—issues that have been framed as polarizing divides that are irreconcilable.

Some of the puzzles about the implementation of the report are highlighted within the four main pillars of the report. The pillars of the report are:

1. Elevate diplomacy as the primary tool for resolving key conflicts involving Muslim countries, engaging both allies and adversaries in dialogue.

- We focus in the report on Iran, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iraq and Afghanistan. Each one is a major foreign policy issue. We argue that they should be tackled individually but also in concert for geo-strategic realities and for the potential of positive leverage. Iran, in particular, is a pivotal player in the region in relation to its neighbors. One immediate issue for the next president is how to change the United States' dynamic with Iran.

- The *first implementation puzzle* of the report is how to straddle and integrate the message that the United States can and should take the initiative to change the course of relations and to equally emphasize that the change cannot happen without reciprocity. The report focuses on the first steps the United States can take and it makes a case for what Muslim counterparts can and should do reciprocally. How do we create and frame this reciprocal message?

2. Support efforts to improve governance and promote civic participation in Muslim countries, and advocate for principles rather than parties in their internal political contests.

- This is a more appropriate direction given high degree of sensitivity in the Muslim World about the United States interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. This is a dilemma for the United States given that it still does matter for us who comes out on top in political power struggles within Muslim countries.

- The *second implementation puzzle* is how to effectively work on the foundations of governance while also acknowledging that the United States does have an interest in the outcome of internal power struggles. We need to focus on the process of non-violent and pluralist politics with reasonably fair competition.

3. Help catalyze job-creating growth in Muslim countries to benefit both the U.S. and Muslim countries' economies.

- Economic development challenges are uneven across the Muslim world. With the current economic crisis, the sovereign wealth funds of oil-producing Muslim states actually are being looked to as major investors to bail out U.S. financial institutions. Going forward, they will be important sources of capital for the world as a whole. We call for some investment of that capital within the Muslim world, particularly in the Middle East, because the youth bulge and the lack of job creation is dramatic there.

- The *third implementation puzzle* is how such funds and other private investors can effectively invest capital in Middle East markets while the world's other financial markets need that money just as badly.

4. Improve mutual respect and understanding between Americans and Muslims around the world.

- Perhaps the most ambitious part of the report is the call on civil society organizations, religious organizations, philanthropy, educators to engage more directly and more deeply in helping to improve understanding among students, among faith communities, and among people watching television about our shared interests and values.

- There is the question of whether and how there should be a government should have role in promoting this kind of dialogue and exchange. Governmental involvement tends to politicize and to skew the people-to-people dynamic and efforts that could otherwise go forward.

Daniel Brumberg

You laid out a number of really interesting puzzles and I will reiterate them. The puzzles of: Partnership, Diplomacy, Governance, Economic Development, and Civil Society. What is also striking about this report is how to bring these things together. In some sense, should there be a prioritizing? Where do you want to put your emphasis? Maybe there are certain things that should be done first to make other things possible later on. Perhaps the attempt to do these things simultaneously might be counterproductive? It is difficult for the Washington bureaucracy to gear up behind any sort of consistent project and pull it off. It is an extraordinary mission that the report has posed for civil society and government officials.

Nadia Bilbassy-Charters

This report is spot on in its analysis of how to engage the Middle East and the Muslim world at large. I hope that the next administration will take the report seriously whether it is Obama or McCain. We need to turn a new page about how to actively engage the Arab and Muslim world.

Yesterday I was talking to a friend of mine and I said that I really liked the concept of public service. I said I wanted to run on the municipal level in Gaza or Ramallah in a few years. The idea of serving people was quite appealing to me. I was advised by my friend to stay away from anything that will connect me to America because I will lose automatically. I was thinking about what he said and that it is such a sad state of affairs. This is one of the greatest democracies in the

world. This is a country pioneering in every field and yet it is radioactive. I have to stay away from anything that connects me to America. The question is all about credibility. To be credible I do not have to be Anti-American, but I have to stay away from anything that can link me to America. As stated by the report, this fact derives from American policies.

My first policy suggestion is to find a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It must be a just solution, not just any solution—not merely on Israeli terms or American terms. It must be an agreeable solution for both parties—the Israelis and the Palestinians. The United States is a very close friend of Israel and therefore must help to find a solution that is just. Justice needs to be emphasized and everyone knows that Israel's security cannot happen without justice to address the Palestinian issue. I think that is the heart of the matter. I traveled with Karen Hughes, the former Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy, four years ago on her first trip to the Middle East. It was a fact-finding mission in terms of listening to people to find out what they want. It was during the height of the Iraq War, we went to Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Everywhere she went, everybody said the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the heart of the matter. If you are seriously going to resolve it, you have to invest in it. You have to have a special envoy and not wait until the last year of an administration. If you leave it unsolved, the conflict becomes worse than the day before. Over the course of this year, Hamas has obtained complete control of Gaza so that even Fatah cannot go there. American policy has been to isolate Hamas or undermine it. Maybe Israel is waiting to see if it is going to punish Hamas militarily or punish the Palestinians in Gaza collectively to show that Hamas is not worthy of governing. I think that this is a very simple way of looking at things and the next president needs to look at it from a completely different approach.

The policy of engagement is vital now. You have to speak with Iran and Syria, not because you approve of their policies, but because they are major players—Iran to a large extent and Syria to a lesser one. If you look at the Middle East, everything is happening in terms of a proxy war between the United States and Iran via the satellites. The United States needs to engage Iran and Syria because you will have a better outcome in Iraq and in Israel-Palestine. It will not solve all of the problems, we are not naïve, but it will help tremendously if you are able to engage these two parties.

The second issue is credibility and why the Arab and Muslim publics are distrustful of America's position. Muslims won't believe United States is a great country because of the practices on in the ground. The problem is that I can talk to a Palestinian child in the Gaza Strip and tell him that the United States is the highest contributor to humanitarian relief in Gaza through the UN relief organization, UNRWA. He will say no. What really matters to him is that when the Israelis use an Apache helicopter to target a Hamas leader, they kill 20-30 people in the process and no one accounts for them. These people have names and families and the United States media never even mentions them. What happens on the ground determines the perception of how people think, and it shapes their public opinion of America.

The other question is democracies. This administration started down the right track and completely diverted. If I tell people in the Middle East that the United States really is a democracy and really wants you to be free and to enjoy liberty and to have an accountable government, they won't believe me. Because what happened to Ayman Noor after Condoleezza Rice delivered that speech at the American University in Cairo? As far as I am concerned, he is still in jail. Thousands of other Arab journalists and political activities are rotting in jail and no one talks about them. Now if something happens in Iran, then everyone will come to his or her rescue. This should also happen everywhere else because when it comes to justice and freedom, you cannot pick and choose.

You cannot fool people in terms of democracies and for those in the Middle East there are always two choices posed: an authoritarian regime or the Islamist movement. Why not a third choice? The problem is that the authoritarian regimes have been using the Islamists as a fear-mongering tactic. The bottom line is that the choice is always between these two kinds of people. The United States always comes to the rescue of the authoritarian regimes because of stability or oil. For example, originally you encourage free elections in Gaza, one of the most transparent elections in the Middle East, and then you won't accept the results. You are trying to undermine the winning party. Hamas would probably suck at governing, and will be voted out in the next election. You won't give them the chance, and then they use your action against you. They will say the United States is trying to deprive us from the opportunity of governing. You don't deal with them as a responsible party. If you want to be engaged in the political process, make them responsible. Make them responsible when they fire a rocket on an Israeli town and kill a poor, innocent Israeli woman. The Palestinian population will have to withstand the mighty power of the Israeli military hitting back and killing 20 people in the process. Palestinians will have to question these policies and evaluate. You must put them on the spot. But when you play against them and try to boycott and undermine them, it is so easy for them to say, "Well, we have never had the chance to govern."

The other factor is America's image in terms of torture. Abu Ghraib and the pictures of torture have replaced the Statue of Liberty as the symbol of the United States. If you want to preach to people about freedom, you better not have a house of glass. This does not mean that people in Abu Grab and Guantanamo Bay are not guilty, but instead bring them to trial and make them accountable in a court of law. An accountable institution in which to try people is the difference between dictatorship and democracy.

Sally Quinn

I would like to talk about the importance of religion. I have a site on the *Washington Post/Newsweek* website called *On Faith* that was started two years ago. I am the co-moderator along with *Newsweek* editor, John Meacham. The purpose of *On Faith* is to help people understand each others' religions and to create a dialogue on the web. We feel that most people in this country know very little about religion. It has become clearer to me over the past couple of years that you cannot be an informed and educated person in this country if you do not understand religion. The scary thing is that most people do not even understand their own religion, much less the religions of other people.

The religion that seems to be least understood is Islam. As Madeline Albright stated, "We have to have an understanding of religion in order to deal with people." It is absolutely essential that Americans understand Islam and the Muslim world. There are 1.3 billion Muslims and that is one third of the world's population. We don't have a clue. Fifty percent of us think that Muslims are terrorists. As stated in the fourth pillar of the report, "Improve mutual respect and understanding between Americans and Muslims around the world." The only way that is going to happen is through education. I spoke at Harvard last week and it has no religion major or department. Harvard is putting out the future leaders of the world and the graduates don't have a clear understanding of religion and particularly Islam.

This has been acutely represented with the current presidential race. Understanding religion will be a huge issue for whoever is the next president. I have been particularly concerned about what is going on in the McCain campaign. It started six months ago when McCain stated that he would be uncomfortable voting for someone who was Muslim because he was a Christian and would feel better about voting for someone who was Christian. He then adopted the Rev. Rob Parsley as his spiritual advisor and this man has said absolutely vile things about Islam. It was only after McCain was called out about Parsley's anti-Muslim statements that McCain pulled away from him. There is

also an issue of Barack Obama being called Muslim. I think that 11 percent of people in this country think Obama is Muslim. I saw this thing on TV recently where a reporter was interviewing someone in a coffee shop and she said, "Well I could never vote for Obama because he is a Muslim." The reporter corrected her and said that Obama was a Christian. She retorted, "I don't care he is still a Muslim to me." This woman clearly had no idea what it meant to be Muslim, but in her mind it was a bad thing. This has put Obama in the most untenable position. A Muslim friend of mine has said that a lot of his family were Republicans but they were feeling completely disenfranchised by the Republican Party by this anti-Muslim theme running through it, but worse, his friends who are Democrats and supporting Obama fear to speak out in support of him because they are afraid that it will hurt him. This puts a terrible onus on any Muslim. Obama is in an awkward position to say, "I am not a Muslim, I am a Christian, but not that there is not anything wrong with it." There is the subliminal message from the McCain campaign that being Muslim is a bad thing.

My feeling is that Muslims, particularly Muslims in this country, often stick together for fear that if they integrate then they will assimilate. Somehow you cannot be a part of this country without losing your culture. Obviously that is not true, but you have to learn that. Something that Muslims in this country can do is try to do a better job with PR. I am speaking now as a journalist. There are very few Muslims in journalism schools and very few working on newspapers and in television. In the old days, media outlets were hiring women and blacks for their opinions to have a pluralistic view. If a media outlet, such as *The Washington Post*, wants a pluralistic view we just don't have that many Muslims that can play that role in American journalism. More Muslims need to go into journalism, but I also think that there needs to be a huge PR effort. For example, last year on our website, *On Faith*, we devoted ten days to Islam. I got 22 Imams from all over the world, some of them quite radical, to write for the website. We had every kind of Muslim voice and point of view you could imagine. People could look at the website and say, "When you say Muslim, what does that mean?" 1.3 billion people in the world do not all think alike. There are many different forms of Islam and many different ways of practicing Islam. The small, tiny handful of terrorists who want to destroy not only America but the rest of the world don't represent Islam. But that is the perception that comes across in the media. I even thought of a PR campaign. There are the TV commercials about diabetics where a man states, "I'm John, I play this post, and by the way, I am a diabetic." You could do something like that with Muslims. For example, "I'm Harry, my kids and I are going to a soccer game and barbeque, and by the way we're Muslim."

The way you do this in this country is to educate Americans. I am worried if John McCain is elected that the Muslim world will look out and say this is a person, he represents the United States, and he has said that he could not vote for someone who is Muslim. He has talked about terrorists and he has embraced someone who is anti-Islam and his followers are anti-Islam. I am not making a choice here, but whoever is the next president must have a pluralistic view of religion and understand, and ensure that everyone in his administration, understands Islam. It should absolutely be a priority to understand that not all Muslims are the same, as not all Christians are the same. They really must understand the differences between kinds of Muslims and Islam around the world. I think many Americans would be surprised to know that many Muslims respect Jesus Christ as a great prophet and would say peace be with him. Additionally, most Americans would be stunned to hear that the Koran states, "Let there not be compulsion in religion." There are so many beautiful things about Islam that Americans don't know or understand and I think that there needs to be a huge effort in the next administration to educate people in this country about this religion.

Question and Answer

Paula Gutlove, Project Manager, U.S.-Muslim Engagement Project

We wanted to talk about what the implementation of the project was going to be. I think fantastic issues have been raised on the floor. I will just add a few things about implementation. We have a three-part plan to implement the project.

1. Continue to work with presidential campaigns, hopefully transition teams, and the next Congress.
2. Initiate and catalyze initiatives that are in keeping with our recommendations from the report. Particularly, initiatives that draw on economic cooperation to create jobs.
3. Build respect and understanding through educational opportunities. We do undertake massive educational campaigns. In our citizen dialogues, we had forty randomly selected participants in Phoenix, Cleveland, and Alexandria, VA. In each place, we made a concerted effort to bring in more Muslims than represented in population. Sitting in dialogue in an interfaith context is one of the best ways to break through stereotypes. As participants were sitting there, Muslim participants said, "I play tennis and eat broccoli, by the way I am a Muslim." Sitting in the context of this group, people were saying, "I don't believe it. Prove it!" It was a great experience. We are developing a citizen dialogue kit and I would be happy to talk to anyone who might want to use it to promote dialogue with your organization or through your organization to the public.

Sahar Aziz

I am a civil right litigator here in Washington, DC and pro-bono counsel for Muslim Advocates. Thank you for this presentation and I have a few questions. You talked about credibility issues in the Middle East and Ms. Quinn talked about credibility issues in the United States. The problem that we face, those of us who seek to be the leaders through Muslim institutions and organizations, is that our credibility based upon very tenuous allegations is attacked quickly by association with terrorism. There are not many mainstream, non-Muslim organizations that come to our defense and hold pundits accountable for these allegations. We have noticed that no one is coming to our defense and the onus is placed on us in this context of stereotypes. What do you think the role of non-Muslim organizations that are in coalition and in alliance with Muslims, what can they do? Just make note: the Civil Rights Movement was a success, not just because of the African-American movement, but because white liberals – the elite – supported them. I don't think change will come in this situation without those types of coalitions.

Nadia Bilbassy-Charters

I think that the credibility issue is a two-way street and engagement on both sides is needed. Outright, I don't like to identify myself as a Muslim because nationality comes before my religion. I think that religion should be a private matter. But when I feel my religion being attacked, I find myself identifying more with being a Muslim. There is the question of where the biggest struggle is occurring—is it in the Middle East or in America? I agree that a major educational campaign must happen to educate Americans about the difference between "Muslim" and "Arab". Additionally, the phrases "War on Terror" and "Islamic Fascism" need to be eliminated from the American media and public dialogue.

Raymond Mas

I am with the Middle East Peace Initiative; we engage with interfaith diplomacy, reconciliation and dialogue. We bring faith leaders from here to Palestine and Israel. In our work, we have discovered that the U.S. government, State Department, and any official organ of the United States wants to keep very distant from engaging and understanding religion as an important component of peace in the Middle East. Somehow religion is posed as a problem to avoid and they don't want to speak or engage with religious leaders. Our feelings are that if you look at Iraq and other parts of the world, not seeing the role of religion has created a blind spot and U.S. foreign policy cannot

correctly engage with that region. What can be done to change the approach of the U.S. government to religion?

Sally Quinn

Madeline Albright addressed this in her book when she talked about the State Department's fear of engaging in religious dialogue. I remember thirty years ago when the Shah of Iran was still in power and I went over there to cover a 250th anniversary party of Persia. I got taken to an underground meeting of journalists who were talking about how the fundamentalists would overthrow the Shah. I remember one of our foreign correspondents came to Tehran and when I told him this, he said, "Oh darling, don't be ridiculous. Cover your parties and I'll take care of the foreign policy." The State Department had no idea about what was going on in Iran because no one understood religion. If they did have a religion expert, they would have seen that the Shah was going to be overthrown by the fundamentalists. Now we had the same problem going into Iraq. No one did or does understand differences between the Sunnis and the Shiites. The U.S. government and the State Department should have a religion department or a religious affairs expert whose job it is to understand what is going on in places such as Pakistan, Tibet, Serbia and Turkey. We have to recognize that a lack of religious understanding is an issue for our foreign policy that we cannot back away from.

David Fairman

In the report we say two things relevant to the question. One, the U.S. government needs a more sophisticated understanding of what the political movements we call "Islamist" actually stand for and represent. Additionally, exploring the extent to which they might be forces for positive change while recognizing that there might be risks as well. I think Nadia rightly pointed out there is polarization between authoritarian regimes and Islamist movements, and not all authoritarian regimes and Islamist movements are created equal. Second, citizens at all levels of society must critically understand what is at stake for Muslims' perceptions from around the world of the United States. As I have a great respect for the role of religion in conflict, I also think that it is important to note how religion and ethnicity are intertwined. We need a sophisticated understanding of how religious identity becomes mobilized in conflict. The conflict is absolutely about religion, but more specifically about religion in context, and it is the context that we need to understand as well.

Edward Alden

I have a question related to visitors and student exchanges from Muslim and Arab countries. If you look at visa statistics after 9/11, they went down sharply from across the world and since then they have started to recover from everywhere else. But if you look at statistics from the Muslim world, they remain at half their pre-9/11 level. I think there is a reason for that. If you speak to students from Muslim countries, they are routinely humiliated when they come to the United States. For people that come from these countries, especially influential visitors, this is a tremendously important issue that is not being addressed.

Nadia Bilbassy-Charters

The other day, I said that I wish I could fly 1.3 billion Muslims to America for a weekend just for them to see what life is like here. These cultural exchange programs are important and vital, but from my experience the students that I have seen granted visas have always been selected from an elite, educated, pro-West class. You need to target the least advantaged, the poor, and the people that live in the refugee camps in Jordan, Syria, and Gaza. Stop recruiting from the American University in Cairo and instead go to Cairo University. These are the people that need to see what America is about. There is a huge hunger and interest in the Middle East to learn about the United States. The last time I visited the region, the second question I got after how were my kids, was, "What is it like to live in America?" Everyone wants to come and live here despite America's

foreign policy. You still have people on your side because everyone views America as the ideal place and you need to capitalize on this sentiment.

Shelly Deane

On page 44 of the report, you talk about the need for an envoy for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and you mention George Mitchell and his success in Northern Ireland. Concerning Senator Mitchell's efforts with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I noticed that the biggest difficulty he had was not with civil society and Muslim organizations, but with the Israeli government assisted by the schisms between Powell and Cheney and Scooter Libby. When it comes to the search for common ground, an important factor for commonality is home instead of abroad, so what do you plan to about that in terms of implementation?

David Fairman

For American diplomacy, I think it would be a very good thing to have a high level of coherence in our approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One of the things about Senator Mitchell's role in Northern Ireland was the extent to which he truly was the center, the coordinator, and the decider on critical strategy issues for those negotiations. We call for something parallel. The pressure on a special envoy for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is always intense. It will be especially intense if an administration prioritizes that issue from the onset and says that it is determined to achieve a permanent resolution. Whether and how that resolution succeeds has to do with the combination of the chosen individual and the extent to which the President of the United States himself is directly involved. We say that the involvement at the presidential level is essential.

Joe Montville

I want to pick up a point Sally and Nadia made focusing on the domestic needs for this country. Ignorance has become pathology and seeped into the political culture clearly reflected in the presidential campaign. My project is called, *Toward the Abrahamic Family Reunion*, and it focuses on shared pro-social values between the three traditions that society has a responsibility for those the least among us. This value moves directly from the Hebrew Bible through the Gospels and the Koran. The pathology is rooted in both the anxiety about Israel's survival and the role that *Amalec* plays in the Jewish tradition in terms of the tribe that is always trying to destroy the Jewish state. The Arab and Muslim world has become *Amalec* and, for fundamentalist Christians, the Muslim world is the Antichrist. We must draw Jews and Christians into a greater understanding of what we share in common.

Question

I am a medical scientist and involved with politics. Nadia said that for her nationality comes first, but for me my profession comes first. I happen to be born a Muslim and I happen to be an Iranian citizen. I would like to quote Pope John Paul II as he said, "If you want peace, you have to work on justice." In order to obtain justice in conflict resolution, we must have the involvement of professionals regardless of religion or nationality. There is a distinctive lack of Muslims in Congress in relation to the number of Muslims in America and justice would be much easier to obtain if there was more representation of Muslims in the government.

Question

I want to ask about the fourth pillar of the report regarding mutual respect and understanding. I have a couple of concerns. Rob Fresh quoted Eisenhower and I take great exception with the line "...divisions between us are artificial and transient..." I am very concerned that you would promote an idea that insinuates we are three Abrahamic faiths, we are all the same, and the differences are superficial. The differences are deep and not superficial. The level of respect that the Muslim world would want from the United States is in some ways un-American. We don't

show that level of deference or respect for Judaism or Christianity in this country. In terms of understanding, in the Koran there are some beautiful lines, but there are also some horrible lines. I would be interested if the kit produced by the USME Project would not merely be Muslim's greatest hits, but something that would accurately represent the controversy.

Rob Fersh

One should not be sweeping differences under the rug. There are serious religious and cultural differences that exist in the world. I don't think that the Eisenhower quotation or anyone involved in the Project thinks that it will be easy or can dismiss those differences. I think the larger point beneath it all is that if we work hard enough at it, people can live peaceably despite their differences. There are countless examples in history, the Civil Rights Movement in the United States or South Africa. There are all sorts of reconciliation and abilities that enable people to live peaceably. I guess that it can come down to your own personal belief system. Fundamentally, what do you think is possible in terms of human relationships? Do you believe that we are all a part of a sum united system, whether it is God or common humanity? I think that if you work long and hard enough at it, you have a chance to overcome differences. We need to use all of our skills to do so. Abraham Lincoln once said, "I don't like that man, I must get to know him better." I think that is underlying a lot of what we are saying. There is a philosophical bias at Search for Common Ground that human contact makes all the difference in the world. For example, in the Leadership Group, there was tremendous trepidation for some about being in the same room with other certain people. Some of the closest working partnerships emerged despite policy differences. We need to take efforts to the utmost degree to bring knowledge and to build personal relationships, which make it more difficult for people to see each other as enemies.

One more thing, concerning a previous question, I agree that other groups need to stand up. I am very disturbed that Muslim groups under false attack are not being defended. Here is my question to you. Who are you reaching out to and who are you building relationships with? Once people know people, it is going to get better. I believe greatly in the power of putting people in positions where they get to know each other deeply. This makes it more difficult to treat each other truly as enemies and adversaries.

Sally Quinn

There are a lot of horrible and wonderful things in the Bible. People of all religions are part of the secular process. There are good Muslims and bad Muslims; good Christians and bad Christians. It does not make a lot of sense to say that there are a lot of bad things about Islam, because there are a lot of bad things in every religion. There also are a lot of wonderful things in every religion.

Patrick Nor

In the report, you seem to pit the *Clash of Civilizations* against American policies and actions. I am wondering if that is a fair dichotomy. Perhaps someone could define the conditional understanding of the *Clash of Civilizations*. Also in regards to the American-Muslim community and their helping to solve the conflict, could someone please voice specific recommendations?

David Fairman

The thesis of *Clash of Civilizations* is that the religious and ideological beliefs held by the majority of Muslims on the one hand and held by Westerners on the other hand prevent us from living together in peace. We have fundamentally different worldviews. The caricature of the Muslim worldview is an expansionist and aggressive worldview seeking to recreate a caliphate; the caricature of the American worldview is the worldview that capitalism must reign triumphant over the world. When you oppose those views starkly against each other, it is difficult to see how coexistence can be achieved.

The Leadership Group used empirical data based on public opinion in the United States and across the Muslim world to reveal that the *Clash of Civilizations* thesis is much too polarizing to be credible given the diversity and complexity of interests within each group. Instead, we must look at factors of mutual interest to arrive at a different set of relations.

In regards to the role of the Muslim-American community, we were privileged to have eleven remarkable Muslim- Americans in our Leadership Group. Additionally, we worked with a group called One Nation that seeks to raise the voice of Muslim-American leaders in the American political discourse. We think that the most important thing the Muslim-American community can do is to provide greater insight about the diversity of Muslims in this country and the world, about their concerns regarding American foreign policy, and about possibilities for more mutually beneficial and constructive sets of relationships. There is a broad set of opportunities for the Muslim-American community through the media, professional associations, and policy dialogue.