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**Jim Luce**

Thought Leaders and Global Citizens

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## One Year After Cairo Speech: The U.S.-Muslim Engagement Initiative

Barack Obama's speech to the Muslim world at Cairo University in Egypt one year ago was ground-breaking and transformational. While its impact was anticipated and predicted, and still being felt, what is unknown is that many of the ideas in the speech reflect the recommendations of *Changing Course: A New Direction for U.S. Relations with the Muslim World*, a bipartisan consensus document published in the fall of 2008, before his election, by the U.S.-Muslim Engagement Project.

I have spoken extensively to the project manager of the U.S.-Muslim Engagement Project, Dr. Paula Gutlove. Through her, I have learned the inside story on how the Washington-based Search for Common Ground and Cambridge-based Consensus Building Institute brought together the diverse group of thought leaders and global citizens necessary to compile such an important publication that has impacted our world so greatly.

*Barack Obama spoke in Cairo in June 2009, expanding his thoughts from his Inaugural Address.*

In this nuclear-charged age, any violent extremism is dangerous to humanity, and violent extremism in the name of Islam poses a serious security threat to the United States. Yet, diverse U.S. leaders believe, the much-publicized divide between the U.S. and the Muslim world is not as deep or irreconcilable as many believe.

The contributors to *Changing Course* are a veritable Who's Who of intellectual elite, including former U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright, former U.S. congressman and chair of the National Endowment for Democracy, Vin Weber, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, Stephen Heintz of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and Dr Robert Jay Lifton at Harvard, the American psychiatrist and author who is known for his studies of the psychological causes and effects of war and political violence.

*Barack Obama delivered his Inaugural Address to a worldwide audience from the steps of the U.S. Capitol after taking the oath of office in Washington, D.C., Jan. 20, 2009.*

Barack Obama stated in his Inaugural Address, "To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect." He expanded this theme in Cairo (speech). The results are that the U.S. moved relations with Islamic leaders and followers ahead light years.

All ideologies are capable of producing extremism. In the 1980's, I co-founded Fundamentalist Anonymous specifically to fight the Fundamentalist Mindset and political agenda. In this country, Fundamentalism is predominantly Christian.

*Every Muslim I know, from India to Indonesia to Indiana, were overwhelmed by the Cairo speech.*

Religion when taken to the extreme, like sex and alcohol, can become explosive and evil. Anyone - whether Christian, Muslim, Hindu, even peace-loving Buddhist - can become extreme under the right circumstances.

Having visited Indonesia extensively, the world's most populous Muslim nation and our former of our President's earliest impressions, I can attest that the average Muslim is as ordinary as the average American. In fact, many of my more knowledgeable friends are convinced that Islam embraces peace and social justice more so than any other great faith.

*Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright, appointed by Bill Clinton, now serves as a Professor of International Relations at Georgetown University.*

Changing Course provides important guidance for the new direction being followed by the president to create improved relations with the Muslim world. Madeline Albright states:

**Few challenges matter more than reducing distrust and misunderstanding between the United States and people living in Muslim majority states. This timely report is a groundbreaking, stereotype-shattering and thought-provoking contribution to that essential cause.**

U.S. Senator Dick Lugar, Republican of Indiana, ranking minority member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, has said:

**This report offers a thoughtful analysis of the current state of America's relations with the Muslim world and constructive recommendations on how we can approach this pressing concern in a bipartisan framework.**

Former Clinton Chief-of-Staff Leon Panetta, a former Congressman and now active member of the Iraq Study Group, explains:

**This report gives the next administration specific action items to immediately improve U.S. relations with the Muslim world and greatly increase U.S. and global security. It is a strong complement to the report of the Iraq Study Group.**

The Rev. Dr. Jim Forbes, Jr., President of Healing of the Nations Foundation and formerly pastor at Riverside Church in New York, states:

**The benefit of the 'change of course' commended by the report is not only the prospect of improved security, but the promise of spiritual and cultural enrichment which is the fruit of mutual respect, and the willingness to hear the heartbeats of fellow human beings who drink from other wells of wisdom.**

Moving forward, the U.S.-Muslim Engagement Project has joined with the Howard Gilman Foundation's Leaders Project to create the U.S.-Muslim Engagement Initiative. The initiative is launching a multi-year effort to overcome vacuums and create strong new partnerships among established and emerging leaders in US and Muslim societies.

*Changing Course: A New Direction for U.S. Relations with the Muslim World* is an integral tool for conflict resolution and required reading for many senior White House and State Department staffers. Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton were at war on the campaign trail but are now united in the need to re-position America on the world stage and repair the damage from American Islam-bashing since 9/11.

All ideologies, like all technologies, can be used against humanity. Luckily, they also may be harnessed to empower us to become better people. The U.S.-Muslim Engagement Initiative must be commended for its ongoing efforts to make peace possible.

*Dr. Paula Gutlove is a member of the Leadership Team of the U.S. Muslim Engagement Initiative and Deputy Director of the Institute for Resource and Security Studies. Paula has over 25 years of experience working with people of diverse perspectives and interests to improve communication, build understanding, resolve conflicts and promote cooperation. In 1996, she founded the Health Bridges for Peace project, which links health care with the prevention and resolution of inter-communal conflict in the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and elsewhere.*

*Paula is also a founding board member and board chair of the Alliance for Peacebuilding, an Associate of the MIT-Harvard Public Disputes Program, and a consultant to numerous international organizations. She holds a D.M.D. from Boston University and a B.S. from Cornell University, and has had post-doctoral fellowships in peace and conflict studies at Harvard University and the Australian National University.*

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