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An Arab – American Relationship for the 21st Century

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Middle East Institute in Washington and Al Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo share a common conviction that, much can be done to redirect Arab-American relations into a positive and constructive path despite the strains and problems that plague our relations today. Accordingly, they decided to engage in a process of dialogue to examine the problems and possible ways to ameliorate them.

With the al Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, terrorism became the driving force of American foreign policy toward the region. Americans became increasingly unsympathetic to what they saw as the tendency of some Arab states and many Arabs to deny responsibility for terrorism and to avoid steps such as economic and political reform that might reduce the attraction of radical fundamentalism.

American and the Arab participants in this dialogue had different takes on what caused terrorism and on how to deal with it. Arab participants felt that Americans had a false understanding of Islamic fundamentalism. The real re-birth of Islamic fundamentalism and particularly terrorism, according to Arab participants, was tied to the defeat in 1967 war which showed the failure of Arab regimes to confront Israel and regain Palestinian rights. The frustration caused by this failure has been accelerated by the United States’ policy, in Arab eyes, of identification with Israel. In fact, according to Arab participants, a great deal of the current negative view of America in the region is directly attributable to America turning its back on the Palestinian problem and embracing Israel. When the United States was actively engaged in the peace process, up until 2000, America’s stock in the Arab world was significantly higher.

The participants fully agreed that the US must project a serious and active concern at the highest level for the fate of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples by acting vigorously for just, comprehensive and lasting peace.

The participants were concerned that the “war on terrorism” relied too heavily on direct military action. While very few would rule out the need for the instruments of force, the war on terrorism has to be understood as the employment of a politically, economically and socially comprehensive strategy to defeat and dry up sources of terrorism and fanaticism. In this sense, defeating Arab and Muslim terrorism must start with asking the question why they manage to appeal to Arab and Muslim youth.

The Arab feeling of injustice is one factor attracting young people to fundamentalism. A second component is the assumption that America is bent on the destruction of Islamic religion and
Arab culture and tradition in ways that challenge a lifestyle and privilege that has been built up over centuries. The challenge is magnified by the perception of many Arabs that their societies are failing to compete in the modern world. The question “what is wrong with us” leads to the answer that “we are not true to our religion or our roots.” “Islam is the answer.”

American participants identified a number of abstractions such as a backlash to modernity as contributing to the pressures on Arab youth. But they also pointed out the impact of 25% unemployment rates as contributing to the frustration level. According to a number of American participants, it is the dismal performance of Arab regimes that leads to frustration among the youth who turn to fundamentalism as an answer.

The region needs to introduce substantial and radical economic reforms so that it can develop beneficial relations with the outside world, including the United States. Privatization and transition to market forces need to be vastly enhanced and better managed so as to unleash peoples’ creativity. However, many still confuse their concern for the poor with counterproductive subsidy and welfare policies. The international community, including the United States, needs to understand the region’s concern for social justice.

Democratisation of the Arab World is also a crucial aspect of its own political and cultural development. Arab countries experimented with a variety of approaches for dealing with reform. But the limited measures, which were not a part of a comprehensive approach to change, at times encouraged extremists to take over large sectors of society, particularly in the fields of education and religion.

There is no uniform way to resolve these problems because each country in the region has its own unique bundle of social and economic problems to deal with. On the other hand, progress felt by people for the people on the road to democracy, social justice, and efficient economies is the only means through which extremism can be eradicated.

Historically, Arab American relations have been troubled by an excess of expectations of each other. America is seen by many Arabs today as the only super power. It can write its own ticket in world politics. The corollary for many Arabs becomes that if the United States does not do something it is a matter of volition. Virtually every Arab believes that if the United States wanted to it could bend Israel to its will. Americans for their part have a tendency to focus on the “leader” and to exaggerate his ability to dictate solutions to problems. They forget that he has constituencies and public opinion that he must answer to.

If expectations have been inflated on both sides and thus disappointed, it is also true that popular stereotypes have colored the relationship. The popular image of the US in the Arab region is that Americans are arrogant, paternalistic, decadent, unfair, cruel and uncaring, and driven by lust for power and wealth. While the Americans tend to see the Arabs through the optic of terrorism, the Arabs see America through the optic of Zionism. In much of the Arab world it is an article of faith that American foreign policy in the region is ‘dictated’ by Israel or Zionists. Most Americans would describe Arab states as dictatorships; women’s rights as non-existent; corruption as pervasive; the legal and economic systems as unjust; and the leaderships incapable of or disinter-
ested in change. Lumping Arab regimes together as defined by the worst characteristics of individual states creates a distorted picture and leads to distorted policies.

With most stereotypes, there is a kernel of truth in them, which people can play on and exaggerate for their own purposes. And there is no question but that there are individuals and forces on both sides that have a vested interest in tearing down the relationship between America and the Arab world.

Throughout our discussions, the Iraq factor kept pulling us to current events. All participants agreed that the military intervention in Iraq entailed dangers, including the disintegration of the country. And, it could also destabilize this region. Arab participants felt that the theory that Iraq once occupied would be transformed into a model of democracy is over-simplistic. American participants largely agreed.

Arab participants warned that the war was being seen as motivated by the US thirst for oil and to secure Israel. Given these motivations, the war was likely to enhance the appeal of Al Qaeda and further exacerbate Arab suspicions of the US. The invasion also reinforced the belief that the US intended to knock down Arab countries one by one.

The participants agreed that no matter what the motivations and mistakes of the past, it was in no one’s interest to see the situation deteriorate further. Neighbouring Arab states are frightened of the likelihood of total break-down of the Iraqi state, the consequences of which are unfathomable. Accordingly, the Arab participants were wary of a sudden pull out of American troops before a viable Iraqi state is constructed.

The participants are agreed that in order to bring greater understanding, Arabs and Americans need to learn from their mistakes and from one another. Arabs need to learn that the status quo is not in their best interests. Existing achievements in the social and economic realms are inadequate to keep pace with other regions of the world. Arab states also have to recognize that the problem with the United States is much deeper than the Bush administration.

Americans, for their part, have to learn that ignoring the feelings of peoples in the Arab world and their striving for justice and dignity can only lead to expanding the pool of terrorists, rather than drying it up. The continued frustration of the Palestinian national aspirations is a fundamental cause of extremism and terrorism in the whole region.

In the course of our discussions a number of observations, conclusions and recommendations were put forward on each of the substantive issues we considered. They are contained in each section of the main report.
AN ARAB – AMERICAN RELATIONSHIP FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Report of the Middle East Institute and the Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo with the support and participation of the Ford Foundation
June 2004

PREFACE

United by the common concern over the direction of Arab American relations particularly since September 11, 2001 the Middle East institute in Washington and Al Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic studies in Cairo decided to engage in a process of dialogue. The launching pad of this dialogue was the common conviction that much can be done to redirect Arab-American relations into a positive and constructive path recognizing that we have practical differences on policy based on our interests and perspectives. Our differences should not be allowed to destroy the progress, uneven though it may have been, that we have achieved through a long history of interaction.

The dialogue aimed to achieve three main objectives:

1) Identifying the problems, gaps and misperceptions which have caused serious deterioration in Arab American relations.

2) Determining the approaches which serve our common interests and the aspirations of both sides without assuming full identity of interests and visions.

3) Putting forward a set of recommendations which could be applied to enhance understanding and improve relations.

For this purpose, the Middle East institute and the Centre for Political and Strategic Studies submitted a joint proposal to Ford Foundation for a grant to fund three rounds of face-to-face dialogue and one video conference during the period from December 2003 to June 2004. Once the Ford Foundation approved the proposal, the process of dialogue started. Certain rules were agreed.

First, the dialogue should involve scholars and experts who are joined by a commitment to a better future for Arab American relations.
Second, it was agreed that both parties would be allowed to express their views in full regardless of agreement or disagreement. We also agreed that the report on our efforts would be published in the name of the two organizations and not in the names of the individual participants, who as individuals might not agree with all the content or the conclusions. When views diverged among the individuals who took part in the dialogue, we would allow the expression of two, or more, parallel views, leaving to future discussions the task of proving or disproving the truth or wisdom of the views expressed.

Third, it was also agreed that the report would not be tailored to fit any specific event, however significant, including the American elections. Nonetheless, we hope that the report will influence the debate on future directions of policy making on both sides.

Fourth, it was agreed that while all aspects of our relations should be dealt with, including grievances, criticisms and complaints, focus should be placed on problem solving. Therefore, the report on the dialogue and the dialogue itself should not be constructed as an academic exercise, but as thought provoking and as practical as possible without sacrificing depth and lucid understanding of the problems or their prospects.

The present report is the result of the three rounds of dialogue held in Cairo, Alexandria and Washington D.C. and one video conference session.

Conduct of this dialog was complex and, at times difficult. The ground was shifting beneath our feet as changing circumstances in Iraq and over the Palestinian issue cast their shadows on our relations and our dialogue. This complexity is reflected in the report. Given the rules of the game approved at the beginning and re-stated before writing this report the reader should look at this report as a complex whole that carries variations and dissent as much as commonalities and consensus. No one individual is bound by the report in its particulars or its conclusions.

The report consists of an introduction, conclusion and two basic sections. The first section looks at grievances, concerns, and criticisms held by Arabs and Americans toward each other. The second includes a brief survey of issue-areas in Arab-American relations. The project outline focused on six aspects or issue areas in Arab-American relations. These are: the Arab Israeli conflict, Iraq, Terrorism and Extreme Fundamentalism, Economic and Social Reconstruction, Democratization and Cultural Development, and Regionalism.

A set of general observations and conclusions are spelled out at the end of each section specific to the six issue areas. Moreover, the report has also made some specific institutional recommendations at the end.

While we had participation from other Arab countries, substantial contributions came from the Egyptian non-governmental community. In this sense, the product may have a bias toward Egyptian views. We do not pretend that it represents the views of the broad Arab world or the substantial differences that exist between Arab states. We certainly do not suggest that the report represents the views of any one Arab government any more than it represents the views of the US government.
The authors of the report would like to express their most sincere thanks to Ford Foundation office in Cairo which made this endeavour possible. The enthusiasm and wisdom of Dr. Basma Kodmany was essential for the meeting of hearts and minds in the two institutions on making the idea of dialogue a success. The commitment of both ambassador Edward Walker, the President of the Middle East institute in Washington and Dr. Abdel Moneim Said, the director of Al Ahram centre for political and strategic studies to Arab American relations was the driving force behind the completion of such a difficult and complex process.

INTRODUCTION

It is essential to start this report by asserting the main premise from which the dialogue was launched. The project proposal emphasized the fact that, with all the gaps and problems, the United States has managed to work closely with many Arab countries on many, but not necessarily all issues most of the time. This work has been beneficial to both sides whether we view it from the perspective of short term interests or from the view of the long standing evolution of our societies. Our relations have never been free of tension regardless of whether these tensions were the results of unwarranted mismanagement and misperceptions or real contradictions and clashes of interests. However, neither side would profit by letting these forces go unchecked. And relations between the US and the Arab world must continue to grow if we are to maximize the realization of our mutual interests. This balanced view is essential for freeing our relations from the threat of fanatics on both sides.

However, there is no doubt that presently we face a very deep crisis in the relations between the United States and many Arab states. Basic elements of this crisis have their roots in a long history. The cataclysm of September 11 only revealed and aggravated these elements, and made it possible for some to characterize the negative aspects of Arab-American relations in a way that suggests a rupture or even a complete clash of civilizations. Furthermore, actual developments since that tragic day have further driven us apart. In fact, powerful forces operating on both sides are exerting extreme pressure to push our relations to the point of collapse. The most disturbing prognosis is that some ‘objective’ contradictions can make the ‘theory of conflict of civilisations’ or ‘the theory of religious wars’ a self-fulfilling prophecy.

As shown by public opinion surveys on a world-wide scale, negative feelings towards the way the United States postures itself globally are prevalent in many parts of the world, not only in the Arab region. On the other hand, violent Islamist currents are causing sharp deterioration of the image of Arabs and Muslims in regions as close to them as South Asia, Russia and parts of sub-Saharan Africa, not just in the United States or Western Europe.

Since September 11, the rise of religious extremism which supports terrorism has assumed priority over many other global concerns. This same force is partly behind the souring of relations between the United States and the Arab world. It has been relatively easy for hostile fundamentalist forces, on both sides, to make use of problems in our relations, contradictions in our policies, and ignorance and misunderstandings whether in the realm of Arab American relations or globally to
add stress and irritation to our relations.

The threat of these destructive factors should induce us to come together and mobilize in defence of peace and mutual understanding. The call for action should be strongest when it comes to relations between the United States and the Arab world where centripetal forces on both sides are actively pulling us apart.

Advocates of Arab-American relations can point to many common elements of strength. The quest for global peace is not eroding within our societies. The rise of a global civil society can make valuable contributions to improving understanding among nations, including between Arabs and Americans. And, the people of the two regions while not free of bitterness toward one another are in no mood for a rupture in Arab-American relations. Forces of moderation are taking seriously their mission and obligation to defend common interest in a brighter future. To assist in this mission, it is necessary for us to find creative solutions to deal with issues of contention and our disagreements so that our worst instincts can be avoided and our best intentions be realized.

We start, therefore, from a frank discussion of those areas of contention and disagreement in order to determine where we should look for creative solutions and compromises. A detailed discussion of the specific issue areas selected will follow.

**PART I: PERCEPTIONS**

**A Question of Perception**

While Arab-American relations appear to both Americans and Arabs alike to be at a low point today, the relationship has always been multi-faceted, and could never be reduced to a simple positive or negative equation. Our Arab interlocutors felt that the history of Arab-American relations started with a significant measure of good faith and positive expectations on the part of the Arab people if not their governments. Arabs during their own colonial era looked to the United States to implement the principles of justice and freedom declared by a number of American presidents. It was values such as those embodied in the declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the bill of rights, which were seen to be the true expression of America. Wilson’s 14 points stood out in the pre-liberation Arab world as America’s expression of its anti-colonialist policy, which directly impacted on the Arab world and promised freedom. And Eisenhower’s willingness to stand up to the Europeans and Israelis in 1956 appeared to Arabs to further these values. By contrast, the American participants were not so sure that these sentiments prevailed and recalled the period of Nasserism after 1954 until Sadat’s emergence, as a period when many Arabs were hostile toward America and American values.

As the global struggle between the US and the USSR began to dominate policies on both sides, Americans saw conservative Arab values and their religious beliefs, as consistent with their own interests because they upheld stability and were antithetical to communism. The Americans sought to build common cause with willing Arab States in the confrontation with communism
which was the overarching principle of American Foreign policy. On the other hand, Americans saw Arab regimes that tied themselves or appeared to tie themselves to the Soviet Union as part of the global strategic threat and treated them accordingly. What the Americans of those days failed to understand was that those Arab “friends” of the Soviets were not focused on the confrontation between democracy and communism.

Some of our Arab participants claimed that fanatics in the region evolved through the anti-communist drive of America’s Middle East and foreign policies. Therefore they emphasized America’s responsibility for the rise of fundamentalism in the region. They believed that this was essential for understanding the present situation. While there may well be roots in the colonial and Ottoman past for the problem of extremists, the Americans rejected the idea that the US bore responsibility for the rise of extremism. They cited the growth of the Muslim Brotherhood and fundamentalist strains of Islam over the protracted modern history of the area, well before there was a significant American presence or influence in the region and even before there was a close Israeli-American relationship.

Nowhere is the difference in perception more acute than in the case of Israel. Americans have never thought of Israel as an aggressive country or as bent on hegemony in the region – Arabs have and do. The fact that Israel has nuclear weapons does not bother many Americans. The presumption is that Israel will never use such weapons except in extremis and then only in self defence in case of hostile action against Israel. Arabs tend to be less sanguine and consider the American policy to advocate a double standard – its ok for Israel, not ok for Arabs. The concept of a double standard permeates the Arab approach toward American policy but Americans can’t or don’t want to see it. Arabs ask what guarantees are there that Israel will use its WMD arsenal only in self defence rather than for strategic blackmail? And if America is incapable of persuading Israel to end its occupation of Arab land, how could it possibly make sure that WMD are not used to threaten Arab states?

Many Arabs understand what many American presidents have constantly repeated that Americans and Israelis are united by their common experience as migrant communities, fleeing persecution, and aspiring for freedom. They demand, however, that the Americans and Israelis also look at how the indigenous populations feel, and particularly those Palestinians whose lives have been destroyed.

The US saw the repeated wars and possibility of the Super Powers being dragged in as a potential trigger to nuclear holocaust. While most Americans, based on their understanding of Arab statements and positions, saw the Arabs as the principal aggressor in all their wars against Israel, the Arabs saw their own shores as being threatened by Israel and saw Israel as the principal aggressor in 1956 and 1967. According to this view, Nasser had no intention of attacking Israel in 1967 and was confounded when Israel initiated hostilities. 1973 was a matter of trying to undo the results of 1967.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US position evolved over the decade of the nineties to focus more narrowly on the destabilizing effects of the Palestinian issue but with a lot less at stake. There was a certain amount of momentum from previous efforts to resolve the Middle East
problem, even though there no longer appeared to be the driving force of US vital interests at stake. There were those who argued that the Palestinian problem could so sour US-Arab relations that US interests, particularly in securing cheap energy, could be affected, but these voices did not materially affect US attitudes. The US efforts culminated in failure of the Camp David negotiations of 2000. From that point on, the American threat perception began to change.

The new American administration was focused on Iraq and the threat of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and it was convinced by the failure of Clinton and Camp David that the Palestinians were not inclined to make peace. In view of the overriding threat of terrorism, and the longer term threats of weapons of mass destruction, the Administration did not see the Palestinian problem as a priority. Accordingly, it did not believe that this problem required concentrated efforts and certainly not at the Presidential level. Thus, with a few nods toward the Palestinian problem, the new administration focused its attention elsewhere.

For the Arab world, the events of the past few years were particularly harsh. Traditional fragmentation in the Arab regional system made it harder to achieve consensus on the burning issues. Economic and social conditions were negatively influenced by recession in the global economy and mounting problems of adjustment internally. The resulting impoverishment of some areas of the region added to their fragility and their inability to sustain the multiple and immense strains under which the Arab region was placed.

With the al Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, American attitudes toward the region changed. Terrorism and its roots became the driving force of American foreign policy toward the region. The scars of the September 11 attacks have not faded but have rather deepened. A downturn in the business cycle, after the long boom of 1990s, further undermined confidence in the future which is only now being restored. The continued threat of terrorist attacks and the Administration’s emphasis on that threat has maintained an aggravated and protracted sense of vulnerability for the first time in decades. All this was naturally focused on the Middle East. Americans became increasingly unsympathetic to the tendency of some Arab states and many Arabs to deny responsibility for the growth of terrorism and to avoid steps such as economic and political reform that might reduce the attraction of radical solutions and terrorism. Americans became particularly incensed at the tendency among some in the region to blame Zionism, Israel and the United States for all their problems. In short, the gap between us has grown and deepened.

Misperceptions

The American and the Arab participants in this dialogue had very different takes on what had caused the terrorism that was threatening Arab states as well as America. Thus they also had very different ideas as to how to deal with the problem. As viewed by the Arab and American participants in the dialogue, a number of general themes in American and Arab political discourse distort reality and lead to wrong or exaggerated responses. The primary disconnect comes about the roots of fundamentalism and the part played by the Palestinian problem, religion and domestic policy. These distortions are further accentuated by existing stereotypes and misinformation.

*The Question of Palestine*
According to the Arab participants, Americans have a false understanding of Islamic fundamentalism and fanaticism in the Arab world. From the viewpoint of Arab participants, these phenomena are the result of pervasive feelings of injustice done to the Arab world starting with the colonial period and then through the rise of Israel and its current treatment of the Palestinian people. For a long-while, the Arab response to what they perceived to be a grave injustice took a secular nationalist form. This response was the outcome of a long history of struggle against colonialism guided by a discourse that was highly influenced by Western “enlightenment”.

However, the real re-birth of Islamic fundamentalism and particularly terrorism, according to Arab participants, was tied to defeat in 1967 war which showed the failure of Arab secular regimes to confront the Israeli policies of aggression and territorial expansion and to regain Palestinian rights. It is this frustration that leads young Arabs to join the ranks of terrorists. Arabs do not understand why neither American policy makers nor American scholars have understood or come to grips with the immense influence of the Palestinian tragedy on Arab political consciousness.

Furthermore, young generations in the Arab world have come to conclude that the Arab nation and its culture are a target for American discrimination and possibly destruction and they cite as evidenced what they perceive to be as consistent identification by the United States with Israel for religious, cultural, political and historical reasons. The drift to religious fundamentalism, although it has existed for some time, has strengthened in recent years for reasons which are not only related particularly to purely domestic factors. The Arabs believe that the United States must also take a part of the blame for this drift.

The American participants identified a number of abstractions such as identity crisis and a backlash to modernity and Western culture as contributing to the pressures on Arab youth. But they also pointed out the impact of 25% unemployment rates, and in particular, the difficulty young university graduates have in finding jobs as contributing to the frustration level. These problems are predominantly self-inflicted due to problems of governance that persist in the Arab world. The Americans felt there was a need for greater introspection in the Arab world. They worried about the possibility of defeating radicalism and terrorism so long as the temptation to blame others for their problems persisted. The Americans also felt that there had been a history of regime manipulation of the issue to take the spotlight off of regime failings. Finally, the Americans felt that the Arabs, and particularly the Palestinians, had missed historic opportunities to resolve the very issues they complained most about.

The Role of Religion

American reaction to 9-11 through the Patriot Act, the comments of some religious and political leaders, including some in the Administration, and some excesses toward Moslem-Americans have led to an image in the region of American hostility toward Islam. Continuing attacks on Islam and Arab culture in the United States and some statements by fundamentalist Christian leaders sustain the fear in the region that it is targeted for a crusade. It is a crusade that may be waged in the name of “democracy” but which has far darker underpinnings of prejudice and intolerance.

The Arabs believe that the American fear that the region is a captive of the fundamentalist wave is still rampant. In this regard, Arab participants in the dialogue have expressed their astonish-
ment that the American discourse on September 11 simply ignored the share of the US in the responsibility for the systematic rise of fundamentalism and terrorism in the region. American policy, according to this view, was inherited from British colonialism and held the belief that ‘religion’ can and should be used in the region either for sustaining the traditional ‘indirect’ rule, or for use in combating communism and radical nationalism. The United States consistently and purposefully used ‘Islam’ in the same way. The last episode in this long policy of using religion for foreign policy purposes saw large scale mobilization, on religious basis, of Arab youth for fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan. The perpetrators of September 11 attacks are the graduates of this school of politics jointly engineered by certain Arab regimes and the United States.

To the Americans, this seemed to be a rewrite of history. For one thing Egypt and Saudi Arabia encouraged their citizens to become directly involved in the fight against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and these governments supported the fighters including the fundamentalist Taliban. The Americans saw US policy in terms of the strategic balance which had nothing to do with religion. Indeed, if there is an American fear of the fundamentalist impact in the region, it is because it is constantly being reinforced by the sermons that are preached from the Mosques and by comments of various Arab pundits and intellectuals. If there is a fear of “crusade” in the Arab world it is matched in America directly by the Arab calls for “Jihad”.

The Failure of Arab Regimes

According to a number of American participants, it is the dismal performance of Arab regimes that leads to frustration among the youth who turn to fundamentalism as an answer to their expectations and hopes. The Arab region is a stagnant region that fails to generate jobs and the promise of a better future. It resists reform and change from within in the interest of perpetuating existing regimes. The feeling is that Arabs tend to blame all their problems on their colonial past or on others, especially the United States and Israel. The American participants in the dialogue feel that Arab intellectuals are complicit in furthering these escapist views, which are seen by Americans as a clear deflection of responsibility for providing an honest account of the ills in Arab political, economic and social life.

From the vantage point of Arab participants, this American perception misses the point. Negative feelings about American and Israeli policies are not the product of Arab regime propaganda or of efforts to deflect attention from local problems. By shifting the blame to Arab regimes, Americans make a mockery of the great material and moral suffering of the people of the region whose striving for justice has been ignored by the international system and more specifically by the United States. The logical consequences of shifting the blame is that American policy makers will continue to ignore the problems of peace and justice in the region, and that in turn reinforces the general impression in the region that the United States is indifferent to the real issues confronting the region.

The Americans counter that the fact that the Arab region is thus far immune from a global trend toward representative government and economic and social reform cannot be explained by external factors such as a colonial past, Zionism or the Arab-Israel problem. Achievement in the social and economic realm in the Arab world are among the lowest world-wide even though Arabs are better endowed with natural resources than other, more successful, regions. The American reac-
tion is one of frustration and the feeling that the Arabs should “get over it.”

The desire for reform particularly among governing regimes is not adequately displayed in the region. And, Arab thought is far from clear on the image of society which it holds for the future. Some of the most flagrant abuses of human rights, including women’s rights, are ‘justified’ in the name of ‘religion’ and ‘tradition’. The rest of the world needs to be clear on what Arabs themselves want. Do they want to live under despotic regimes, or to have functioning democracy? Do they want to keep women in lower status or free them from the biases of the past in the name of culture or tradition? And, when it comes to economic policies, have Arabs learnt from the experiences of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet-block to liberalize their economies or do they want to continue living with irrational economic policies or structures that favour a few and disadvantage the many?

The Arab participants point to Americans, including those in the Administration, who have made their views clear that if left alone, the region will continue to generate intolerance, terror and other social and political diseases which lead it to sink ever deeper into violence and stagnation. The responsibility of the United States and the whole world is to make sure that the region is salvaged from its own stagnation and chaos by ridding it from dictatorial regimes and fanaticism. This responsibility is not driven by moral commitment alone. The events of September 11 make such an intervention all the more necessary. Otherwise, terrorists who are systematically produced by bankrupt systems on an increasingly large larger scale will continue to exploit the vulnerability and tolerance of democratic societies with the aim of destroying Western civilization. The sense conveyed, according to our Arab participants, is that the Americans seek to obliterate Arab culture and identity and to dominate their societies through any means possible, including military. Arab participants fear that American policy is moving the region toward the clash of civilizations predicted by authors such as Samuel Huntington. Arab participants have made the argument that wars of invasion and external pressures will not solve the problems of the region. As shown by the experience of Iraq since March 2003 invasion, wars and external pressures will aggravate those problems. The region needs a highly sensitive approach to encourage internal forces of change while reducing external pressures through just peace and creative conflict resolution. On both sides the expectations of the other have turned seriously negative.

**Expectations**

Historically, Arab American relations have been troubled by an excess of expectations of each other. America is seen by many Arabs today as the only super power. It can write its own ticket in world politics. This is a perception that has been accentuated in the Bush Administration by its emphasis on unilateral policies and its go it alone attitude. The corollary for many Arabs becomes, however, that if the United States does not do something it is a matter of volition. Virtually every Arab believes that if the United States wanted to it could bend Israel to its will. Israel is seen to be totally dependent on America for its position in the region and its survival. Saddam Hussein survived as long as he did because America found it convenient to keep him in power as an excuse to maintain its military presence and hegemony in the oil rich Arab/Persian Gulf.

American participants were perplexed by the naivety and simplicity of these Arab arguments
which many sophisticated Arab scholars may deny but which are at the heart of Arab attitudes toward the United States. The Americans felt that the Arabs attribute far too much capacity and capability to the American bureaucracy. They found little understanding of the American political system which is alien and therefore beyond comprehension to most of the governments in the region. And they were surprised by the absence of major American studies programs in the Arab world despite the premise that America is the world’s only super-power.

Arab participants felt that Americans had virtually no comprehension of the region or the constraints that bind Arab governments. The Arab participants believe that American behaviour in Iraq has demonstrated over and over again the profound lack of understanding that the Americans have of the Iraqi people, its pride, its nationalism, or its history. The feeling is that Americans dismiss Arab governments as dictatorships and therefore focus on the “leader” forgetting that he has constituencies and public opinion that he must answer to. It surprised Arab participants that America has so many scholars focused on the Arab world who have so little impact on American policy or governance. Where were the scholars in the preamble to the Iraq war and how did neo-conservative ideology win out over scholarship?

Because of its simplistic take on Arab societies, American politicians expect that Arab leaders can do whatever they want and that when they operate against American interests it is because of wilful opposition rather than a reaction to political reality. Neither side is living up to the inflated expectations that each has of the other. This has led to a new and heavily negative image of the Arab world in the American society which has further dealt a blow to American trust and confidence in existing regional states and their policies. Whereas, Americans had been tolerant of, or at least ignorant of cultural, political, and historical diversity before, this tolerance evaporated after 9-11.

Americans expected immediate and categorical responses from the countries of the region against terrorism and support for the United States. Arabs felt they had made such a response while Americans saw the television shots of rejoicing in Palestinian streets and felt the Arab world had been reluctant and slow to recognize domestic aspects of the problem. The Americans, contrary to the Arab view, felt that some Arab countries refused real cooperation in critical areas such as terrorist financing until they themselves were attacked by the terrorists. The Arab participants said that Arabs were surprised to find out that their cooperation with the U.S in the anti-terrorism drive was rewarded by more pressures, threats and by ignoring their problems, particularly the Arab Israeli conflict. Arabs, seeing the linkage between terrorism and the Palestinian issue, expected renewed American efforts to breathe life into the peace process and greater willingness on the American part to put pressure on the Israelis. What they got was just the opposite.

**Stereotypes**

If expectations have been inflated on both sides and thus disappointed, it is also true that popular misperceptions and stereotypes have colored the relationship. For the most part Americans are ignorant of the region and its religions and therefore tend to identify the complexity of the region in relatively simplistic terms which are accentuated by graphic examples in certain countries. Most Americans would describe Arab states as dictatorships; women’s rights as non-existent; corruption as pervasive; the legal and economic systems as unjust; and the leaderships incapable of
or disinterested in change. The tendency to lump Arab regimes together as defined by the worst characteristics of individual states creates a totally distorted picture and leads to distorted policies.

Arabs are equally ignorant of America and of its complex political system. The popular image of the US in the Arab region is that Americans are arrogant, paternalistic, decadent, unfair, cruel and uncaring, and driven by lust for power, sex and wealth. While the Americans tend to see the Arabs through the optic of terrorism, the Arabs see America through the optic of Zionism. In much of the Arab world it is an article of faith that American foreign policy in the region is ‘dictated’ by Israel or Zionists. There is virtually no understanding that American foreign policy is the result of many forces at play and is not the product of Israeli or Jewish dictates. Because of this, the closer America gets to the ruling Israeli government, and particularly in the case of Prime Minister Sharon, the more entrenched the view becomes in the Arab world that America answers to Israel and not the converse. This leads to immense complications in our relations as America’s policy, recommendations and advice become suspect. America loses leverage and even positive initiatives are contaminated by the stereotype to the point that they become unacceptable.

Americans have been victims of terrorism for many years going back to the Palestinian hijackings and other terrorist acts in the early 70s and it has been this victimization of Americans that has been played up by the American media and popular literature and films. At the same time, Arabs have formed their impressions of America through Arab media, much of it government controlled, which, in American eyes, acts to whip up Arab passions over Israel and Palestine and makes reaching understanding and agreement far more unlikely.

Stereotypes have been a part of our relations with the Arab world for many years, yet, while their negative impact can hardly be denied, it is doubtful that this phenomenon adequately explains the development of Arab-American relations. It is quite likely that such stereotypes irritate an already negative situation but they would not derail relations which are based on a firm consonance of objectives and values. Thus, stereotypes become more important in times of discord than in times of agreement.

**Ideology**

With most stereotypes, there is a kernel of truth in them, which people can play on and exaggerate for their own purposes. And there is no question but that there are individuals and forces on both sides that have a vested interest in tearing down the relationship between America and the Arab world. Arab participants pointed to some Christian Fundamentalists who see Islam, and particularly fundamentalist Islam, as antithetical to Christianity while American participants cited considerable evidence of Islamic fundamentalists who see Christians and Jews as the inherent enemy.

Strong advocates of the political right wing in the US, often associated with the Israeli right, also tend to see American relations in the Middle East as a zero sum game. Any improvement in relations with Arab regimes is a threat to the solidarity of America with Israel. But a more important ideological and intellectual component of this aspect of the American political landscape is that America’s interests in the region will be far more secure when democracy prevails as the
guiding principle of governance in the region. American support for non-democratic regimes, therefore, works against long term American best interests. The theory that democracies do not wage war on democracies and that democracies do not resort to the use of terrorism or weapons of mass destruction has taken hold in significant parts of the American electorate. These theorists do not explain why, if the stakes were perceived to be significant, and popular anger was aroused, a democracy would not wage war on another democracy. Certainly, democracies have no hesitation about waging war on non-democratic regimes.

On the Arab side, religious fundamentalism has overtaken other hostile forces in the Arab world that have traditionally challenged America – Nasserism, Arab Nationalism, Communism, etc – are all a pale shadow of their former selves. But radical fundamentalism has taken their place with a vengeance. This same force is behind attempts to sour relations between the United States and the Arab world. In fact, it has been relatively easy for radical fundamentalist forces to make use of policy divisions and contradictions in America itself to blacken the name of America and challenge regimes that strive to maintain relations.

The voices of disruption on both sides are amplified in direct proportion to the fear factor on both sides. America’s fear of terrorism, fundamentalism, Islam, and Arabs has grown significantly since September 11. Arab fear of American colonialism, military intervention and conquest, and of a neo-crusade designed to obliterate Arab traditions and culture has been generated by the perception of America’s actions in the region. Today the fear factor is at peak amplitude. The psychology of fear and vulnerability brings a positive outlook neither to personal life nor to national experiences. Yielding to this psychological drive has led to the failure of both parties to pull themselves out of a chain of negative responses to what could have been at least partially constructive initiatives. Americans have overlooked the rush by Arab states to cooperate in the war on terrorism. The call by President Mubarak for an international conference ending with an international treaty for combating terrorism met deaf ears on the part of the US. There was no effort even to explore the possible opening. On the Arab side, the initiative known as “The Broader Middle East Initiative” has been seen with suspicion and was largely rejected when it was first broached.

The reasons for mutual fears and distrust are embedded in the ‘atmosphere of relationship’. The two sides should recognize the fact that very little progress can be achieved with these feelings. A very strong intervention is needed to reverse the present attitudes. And, the two sides can do much better in relation to one another by drawing on the practical elements of cooperation that have defined much of the history of our relations and our work on the issues that confront us.

PART II: CONVERGENCE

Issues

Strains on American Arab relations are substantial and seemingly running deep. There is no way to deny the existence of the many problems that exist between us. However, it is this fact that should drive both sides towards dialogue and forward looking strategies to work together for improved relations through problem solving. If the current signs and omens are sobering for both
sides, it should be remembered that what was best achieved until now on issues of mutual concern was due to creative solutions worked out patiently by participants in official and unofficial dialogues. And, when we failed, it was often due to distrust, mutual suspicion, and blocked communication. This fact remains essential to the future of Arab-American relations. Simply, neither side can achieve much with the present levels of distrust and fear. The United States cannot achieve its goals in the war on terrorism without the active collaboration of Arab states and societies. It can hardly construct a viable security regime in the region without the explicit consent of Arab states. At the same time, Arab states cannot fulfill the needs of their own people for economic regrowth and reform, which is necessary to sustain their own fight against terrorism, without support and investment from the United States and the West. And without the United States, the Arabs cannot achieve a just solution for the Palestinians. In fact, no single strategic goal or target in the region can be realized without vastly improved American-Arab understanding and cooperation.

While discussion of the past is important to understanding the genesis and reality of our differences, it is the present and future that has to be the focus of our attention. The two sides in this dialogue agreed that, to the extent that it is possible, a fresh start in Arab American relations would support the national interests of both the Arab world and the United States. Is the present situation conducive to a fresh start? Given the state of the region, and the anger that US and Arab policies have generated in each population, it may be premature to look for a fresh start. However, the question is whether or not we can afford to wait before embarking on a fresh policy, which, under any circumstances will take time to develop and engage. Arab and American participants in this dialogue call for the working of political will, forward looking and constructive intervention to make the balance work for the improvement of relations and enhanced odds of problem solving.

An integrated and powerful problem-solving approach to the region is essential and urgent. It is only logical that the region is replete with problems. The real danger is that these problems will be left to decay because of fear and distrust on both sides. It is now absolutely necessary to start working on the region’s problems simultaneously, promptly and with a clear sense of mission. Dialogue is the key to this constructive problem solving approach. It must be conducted at all levels: cultural, economic, and political. However, we shall turn our attention to the political dimension of dialogue because it seems to be the most urgent.

The present problems in Arab American relations need to be addressed simultaneously simply because they are highly correlated. With this in mind, six major issue-areas are addressed below.

**The Arab Israeli Conflict**

Since 1947, Arab-Israeli conflict has been a main source of frustration and crises in Arab American relations. In fact, much of the current negative view of America in the region is directly attributable to America turning its back on the Palestinian problem and embracing Israel. When the United States has been actively engaged in the peace process, up until 2000, America’s stock in the Arab world was significantly higher. While frustrations existed before, they have peaked under the Bush Administration.

Arab scholars are stunned with the idea which circulates widely in American media that pan-
Arab popular concern for the suffering of the Palestinian people is the product of regime manipulation. The fact of the matter is that popular attitudes are far more militant against the Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza than most Arab governments. While that may be true, the Americans pointed to a long history of Arab leaders invoking the Palestinian problem in their own interest. Both sides, however, recognized that popular unease is genuine and runs very deep in culture and psyche. And while some of the anger can be attributed to Arab television and media coverage and commentary on the issue, the depth of opinion goes far deeper than would be the case if this were only a contrived media or governmental campaign. In fact, in general, Arab regimes, with some notable exceptions, have sought to reduce popular frustrations with the situation for fear of the accumulated anger flowing over to the regimes themselves. Correcting popular perceptions of American policies cannot be achieved through mechanisms of public relations, unless coupled with a genuine treatment of the real issues and the concerns of the Arab world.

Arab participants also disputed the relevance of the claim that peace can be attained only when Arab regimes, including the Palestinians, are democratised. Democracy in the Arab world is needed for its own sake. But, in fact, truly democratic governments in the Arab world would be more intensely engaged with the Palestinian problem and with Israel because of public opinion than the current regimes are.

Arab participants expressed their opinion that resolving this conflict is crucial for closing the springs of wrath, among Arabs and Muslims, from which extremism and terrorism draw energy. It is also essential for establishing a sense of amity and trust with Western civilization more generally and the United States specifically. Relations between nations involve much more than the calculus of power. Amity and affinity are also involved. And, while Arabs may understand the sense of affinity which binds the United States and Israel very few, if any outside the United States, do comprehend why this was not used in the support for peace and reconciliation in the region. The Arab participants could understand if the United States were to use its special relationship with Israel to bring peace to the region, but not when it uses it to reinforce rigid Israeli policies and destruction of Palestinian individuals and communities.

American participants agreed with these observations in their generalities although not in all the particulars. Nevertheless, they united with their Arab counterparts behind the following theme. The US must project a serious and active concern at the highest level for the fate of the Palestinian people by acting vigorously for just, comprehensive and lasting peace. This is a principal policy vehicle that can establish real amity between Americans and Arabs. At the same time, regional stability will never be restored without a clear commitment to these internationally agreed principles, no matter how much force can be marshalled. In general, the participants agreed to cite the following although individual reservations were expressed on virtually every point.

§ The participants agreed that the Palestinian issue should be the first order of business after the US election, regardless of who wins.

§ They agreed that the objective should be to pursue the goal of a just, comprehensive and lasting end to Arab-Israeli conflict although interim steps could form part of or a path toward the comprehensive solution.
§ They also agreed that a comprehensive solution has to be based on negotiations between the parties.

§ The formula of the ‘quartet’ is suitable as an expression of international legitimacy as well as for a way to provide flexibility in the form and procedural aspects of peace making. This formula needs to be pursued in a systematic manner, without prejudicing direct negotiations.

§ In all circumstances, the international community should encourage direct negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis at the level of experts on technical issues like water, transportation, security, resettlement, legal structures, etc., so that a clearer sets of alternatives may be taken by political negotiators when conditions for a breakthrough are ripe.

§ The participants believe that Arab governments, along side of the United States and other interested factors, must play a critical part in supporting negotiations between the parties and in giving the Palestinians confidence that their decisions will be supported in the Arab and Islamic world. This is particularly true on issues that have broader regional impact such as water, security, Jerusalem, and refugees.

On a number of points there was limited or no agreement both between delegations and within delegations.

§ Arab participants felt that the American position had become confused and was no longer clear. Therefore it should be restated to bring it back in line with international resolutions and with America’s own historical positions on issues of contention namely, Palestinian statehood, Jerusalem, borders, water and refugees. The Americans felt that the broad outlines of the American position had been made clear through repeated Presidential statements and that the issues of security and violence had to be added to the Arab list.

§ The Arabs also felt that we should be rejecting unilateral solutions and, in particular the Sharon plan for Gaza. They felt that the plan as supported by President Bush would, in the longer run, increase rather than decrease the level of violence between Palestinians and Israelis and magnify distrust between Arabs and Americans. Most Americans did not agree and saw in the Sharon approach a positive precedent and a way to break the impasse.

§ The Arabs felt that the present situation did not lend itself to continuation of a step-by-step approach and that agreement should be sought from the outset on a comprehensive or package deal for a solution although implementation could be carried out in stages. Although the Americans agreed that we needed to give people a sense of the ultimate outcome to restore hope, they were not prepared to commit to such a program at this time and felt that more probing of the parties would be necessary to determine the best approach which the parties themselves would have to embrace.

§ Finally, the Arabs stressed the importance of engaging Syria in the peace process. They felt that delaying Israeli-Syrian peace is a bad policy and that activating this side of the equation simul-
taneously with the Palestinian track would be the best option. The Americans were divided on this issue.

§ Some Americans believed that preparing the ground for peace was as important to success as the negotiations themselves. They believed that all parties must make a concerted effort to terminate the politics of confrontation and incitement.

§ The Americans also believed that the Palestinians must make clear the nature of the state they seek to found. It is important for the Palestinians first to decide what they want before someone seeks to decide it for them.

§ Finally, the Americans felt than no one can work for peace while violence prevails. Palestinians, Arabs, and Israelis should be clear on this point. The Palestinians will not gain their rights through armed struggle and the Israelis will not secure their future through military might.

**Iraq**

The issue of Iraq was the most difficult for participants to hold a rational or intelligent discussion. A number of Arab participants were highly suspicious of the US intervention in Iraq even though the United State has received practical support from many Arab governments. Scholars raised the academic arguments that the war infringed on fundamental principles of international law such as sovereignty, peaceful resolution of disputes, the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs of independent nations, and the right to self-determination. They were hard pressed, however, to explain how the citizens of a country under a repressive dictatorship by a minority regime retained the right to self-determination. Arab scholars also felt the war contradicted the obligations of the US as a permanent member of the UNSC whose mandate is to defend international peace and security.

Some Arab and American participants questioned the doctrine of ‘pre-emptive strike’ as being dubious and asserted that it has little basis in international law and norms. According to Arab critics, it violates the charter of the United Nations. It also sets a precedence which other countries can use to justify aggression. In this perspective, its destructive consequences can hardly be limited, particularly when it is launched without the direct consent of the United Nations Security Council.

All participants agreed that the military intervention in Iraq entailed dangers, including the disintegration of the country. And, it could also destabilize this region known for its complex problems by upsetting critical balances. Arab participants felt that the theory that Iraq once occupied will be transformed into a model of democracy for the region is over-simplistic. American participants largely agreed. But there was no agreement that the most likely scenario would be protracted violence and instability which would harm the United States interests and the region as a whole. American participants felt that this would depend on American, Iraqi and other states’ actions in the future.

Arab participants feared that the region would understand that the war was motivated either by
the US thirst for energy or by a desire to secure Israel. And if these were motivating factors than the war was much more likely to have the opposite effect of further exacerbating Arab suspicions of the US calling into question its relations with oil producing states and making prospects of Israel’s acceptance in the region remote at best.

According to many Arab participants, the invasion of Iraq reinforced the belief that the United States intended to knock down Arab countries one by one. The Arabs feared that the geopolitics of the region will be re-engineered for the second time in less than a century, this time by American colonialism. (The invasion of Iraq is grasped in the region as another Sykes-Picot agreement - an accord among major colonial powers to split the region and divide it among themselves. The accord proved to be very detrimental to Arab aspirations for independence, unity and stability).

The Iraq experience, far from acting against terrorism is enhancing its appeal and may even bring Arab-American relations dangerously close to the theory of cultural or religious wars; something which could enhance the position and arguments of fanatic Qaeda elements and operatives. The war will by all means increase the influence and power of religious fundamentalism in the region. These arguments explain the reluctance of the region to cooperate with the United States in the post-invasion period. In fact, Arab states have many reasons for distancing themselves from the American policies in Iraq.

A year after the invasion, the situation in Iraq is filled with ambiguities and uncertainties. Omens of failure far exceed these of hope for the establishment of a democratic and functioning state in Iraq. The Arab population in Iraq has turned in numbers against the occupation. Armed operations against American troops and all sorts of Iraqi and non-Iraqi targets have been substantially more effective as time passes. And, there seems to be no adequate reason to believe that the professed aims of the invasion will be achieved.

While it seem to Arab participants that the Bush administration was very close to losing its bid on Iraq, the participants agreed that no matter what the motivations and mistakes of the past, it was in no one’s interest to see the situation deteriorate further. Possibilities for cooperation are built into the present situation in Iraq. Neighbouring Arab states are frightened by the likelihood of a total break-down of the Iraqi state, the consequences of which are unfathomable. Accordingly, the Arab participants were wary of a sudden pull-out of American troops before a viable Iraqi state is constructed. It was generally agreed that a US pullout would be at the risk of an uncontrolled civil war. And civil war in Iraq, given its sectarian nature is likely to inflame violence in the whole region from Turkey, to Iran all the way through the Gulf and beyond.

Convergence of interests can be obtained if the American administration begins to understand the depth of its problems in Iraq, and Arab states understand that it is not in their interest to be passive bystanders. A solution needs to be found whereby the United States can get a decent exit strategy and Iraq can be assured of a democratic and integral future. Both Arab and American participants agreed that this was a reasonable objective. Despite their differing perspectives on Iraq, participants suggested the following measures:

§ Most participants agreed that withdrawal of American forces should be phased according to
the development of alternative forces to fill the security gap and/or the decision of a legitimate Iraqi government based on elections in January 2005.

§ The participants recognized that while Iraq’s own forces would have to take over security in the long run, preparation of an adequate force would take 18 months or longer. In the interim, the transitional Iraqi government should have the authority to recruit, under its authority, interim forces from the United Nations, NATO, the Arab League, or from individual countries at its discretion.

§ Arab participants recommended that all foreign forces be placed under a UN authority to guarantee objectivity and unity of command. Americans reiterated our long standing objections to placing the lives of our forces under UN auspices.

§ The participants felt that the problem of security would be greatly reduced when Iraqis are certain that their country will have its independence restored on a clear path which is not subject to an American veto.

§ They also agreed that when fair elections for the new democratic institutions are held a new political momentum will attract other major segments of Iraqi society particularly if political equilibrium among different sectors of Iraqi society is assured, through constitutional and political arrangements.

§ The parties agreed that a great deal more transparency was needed in terms of the American approach as the transition to full Iraqi sovereignty takes place. The US commitment to take its hands off of Iraqi affairs and turn over real authority to the Iraqis in the transitional period has to be demonstrated by clear evidence of Iraqi decision making without US interference.

§ The participants felt that the economic reconstruction of Iraq is a vital dimension of the establishment of a democratic and functioning state in the country. A new approach is needed to revitalize the economic health of Iraq depending on the energy and creativity of its own people, not just on its oil. American assistance, like all other reconstruction assistance, which is not directly related to security should be funnelled to and through the Iraqi authority with proper safeguards on transparency and contracting.

**Terrorism and Extreme Fundamentalism**

For obvious reasons, the United States has a very high stake in promoting moderation and fighting extremism in the region. The fight against extremism and terrorism must not be reduced to a simple security question, as it is indeed a vital dimension of international peace and a part of the constructive vision for the future of humanity. Precisely in this sense, the United States must take no exception to the needed struggle against all forms of extremism and terrorism. Terrorists using their own fanatic interpretation of Islam may represent an immediate and high priority threat, at this point of time in world history. But they do not monopolize terrorism and certainly not fanaticism or organized violence. Extremism and fanaticism exist in all cultures and all major regions and political systems in the world including the United States.
The participants were concerned that the “war on terrorism” relied too heavily on direct military action. While very few would rule out the need for the instruments of force, the war on terrorism has to be understood metaphorically as the employment of a politically, economically and socially comprehensive and profound strategy to defeat and dry up sources of terrorism and fanaticism. In this sense, defeating Arab and Muslim terrorism must start by asking the question why they manage to appeal to Arab and Muslim youth. Arabs and Americans need to look with respect to the findings of a mountain of sociological and political science research on the question of extremism in the Arab world.

We have already discussed the Arab feeling of injustice stemming from the occupation of the Palestinian people their land by Israel. But a second and possibly just as important component of attracting young people to fundamentalism and terror is the assumption that the West and America in particular, is bent on the destruction of Arab and Islamic religion, culture and tradition. Western values and culture and the global information revolution challenge the lifestyle and privilege that has been built up over centuries in the region. And the challenge is magnified by the perception of many Arabs that their societies are failing to compete in the modern world. The question “what is wrong with us” leads to the answer that “we are not true to our religion or our roots.” “Islam is the answer.” And not only Islam, but a puritan form of the religion that is subject to perversion and excess. Globally, religious fundamentalism and extremism draw energy from the crisis of modernity and the Western brand of culture. This dimension is much more pronounced in Arab culture and Muslim societies than any other region in the world.

To understand this problem we have to delve deeper into the reasons which drew Arab cultural development away from the enlightenment of the 19th and early 20th centuries and more towards totalitarian, closed and static ideologies. One prime reason for this drift is the continued failure of Arab and Muslim societies to creatively re-construct themselves along with culturally authentic and economically and socially effective visions of the future. Arab and Muslim societies must be encouraged to dry up sources of fanaticism and extremism through unleashing creativity and drawing on their own cultural heritage for the wisdom and moderation needed to pull young people towards achieving self-realization through peaceful means. This is indeed the essence of the much cited UNDP second report on ‘human development’ in the Arab region. It is the need for self-realization that the Americans seem to miss and which leads them to culturally insensitive interventions, which may actually prove counter-productive.

External environment is by no means the only factor behind the rise of extremism and terrorism in the Arab and Islamic world. Most of the existing social literature emphasizes poverty, unemployment, growing inequalities and disparities, corruption and blocked participation, as the most important factors accountable for the problem. However, the symbolic dimensions play no less important role.

A more profound and comprehensive approach to fundamentalism and terror does not diminish the security dimension. Almost all Arab states have rushed to cooperate with the United States in the war against terrorism before and immediately after September 11. Having harped on this problem for years to the Americans with little impact except where Israelis were concerned, they were shocked by American attacks on the Arab and Islamic states for having been responsible for
this terrorism. Nevertheless, the Arab participants felt that, in any honest assessment, the Arab states cannot be freed from some blame for the phenomenon. However, the undeniable fact is that these states themselves were and still are prime victims of terrorism launched in the name of Islam or other cultural or political edicts. At the same time, both sides agreed that the Arab and Islamic states had to bear the main responsibility for fighting this form of religious based terrorism. The following were the main conclusions of these discussions:

§ The parties agreed that Islamic fundamentalism and its radical offshoots that embrace terrorism are primarily an Islamic problem. Arab participants felt that intervention by the United States or other non-Islamic states tended to exacerbate the problem, not ameliorate it. The Americans pointed out that while this observation may be true, no state will take a hands-off attitude toward threats and actions against its citizens.

§ The Arab parties felt that an Islamic forum like the OIC was one vehicle that could be used to discredit radical strains of Islam which perverted the religion. They agreed that it was incumbent on the Arab and Islamic states at the highest religious levels to take the lead in deligitimizing terrorism in the name of Islam.

§ The Americans felt that the United States may have been too dismissive of Arab proposals in the past to take the question of terrorism into a broader international forum such as the United Nations where international conventions and treaties could be consolidated or reinforced to speed up and make more profoundly effective, international cooperation against terrorism.

§ The Americans warned however against the problem of definition of terrorism which had prevented agreement in the international community in the past.

§ They felt it would be worthwhile to reconsider the idea of an international treaty on combating all forms of terrorism provided a narrow definition could be agreed in advance. Such a treaty must place this combat within the larger goal of reasserting the rule of law at all levels. It should also avoid charged political squabbles for its purpose to be achieved.

§ They agreed that international terrorism must be regarded as a crime against humanity and international terrorists must be tried by the international criminal court if they could not be brought to justice under the jurisdictions of the victims of their crimes.

§ They felt that the United Nations Secretary General should act more forcefully towards more effective implementation of UN declarations and covenants on the suppression of intolerance, xenophobia, hate speech and racism. Practical measures should be implemented in all countries and cultures to promote understanding, and develop a peace culture.

§ They felt that consideration should be given to the possibility of establishing a mechanism or a department within the United Nations for combating terrorism, monitoring member states’ implementation of their commitment to combat terrorism and facilitating international cooperation for the suppression of the crime of international terrorism without prejudice to fundamental human rights.
§ They agreed that the issue of terrorism could not be divorced from issues like the Palestinian and Iraq issues and that one effect of these problems was to enhance the stature of and recruiting capability of terrorists.

§ They warned against the fight taking on characteristics of behaviour which denied the principals of universal human rights and they agreed that states in the region and outside had to temper the tools used against terrorists to exclude torture, indiscriminate detention, and summary justice.

§ In addition, the Arab participants felt that Arab states must initiate the processes of comprehensive reform necessary to expand levels of political and economic inclusion and to raise levels of economic growth. They should enhance the process of democratic transition and show complete respect for fundamental human rights.

§ Finally, they sought ways to enhance the role of religion in maintaining international peace and mutual understanding among nations and cultures. Dialogue must also be encouraged to combat the manipulation of religion for political purposes through the use of terror or other national or international crimes and crimes against humanity.

Economic and Social Reconstruction in the Region

There is indeed an almost complete consensus among the participants on the idea that the Arab region has failed to keep pace with the economic growth of the rest of the international community. Arab states can do a lot more and a lot better. However, careful scrutiny of the roots of the region’s failure in the social and economic field is indicated since superficial information often leads to distorted economic answers. In historical terms, the region was acutely aware of its need to catch up with the developed and industrial nations in this field. Living standards in many countries during early 1950s were in fact lower than those prevalent in Europe during late Middle Ages.

The political situation in the region and globally also imposed a very high cost. The negative consequences of two world wars during the 20th century on the economies of many countries in the region were very high. Protracted conflicts in the region drained many countries economies immediately after independence. For these reasons, the post-colonial states had to bear great social development responsibilities through very costly programs. Politically, many states in the region underwent radical social and political experiments characteristic to post-colonial age. And in their effort to compensate for their lag in institutional development, many such states constructed huge and over-pressured bureaucracies to administer complex processes of transition to modernity without necessarily possessing the resources, human and material, necessary for de-constructing and reconstructing modernity in a way conducive to authentic and creative solutions to their prolonged problems at all levels.

When the oil revolution took place in mid-1970s, aggravated problems of random social evolution could have hardly been controlled. This revolution helped states to fund fantastic growth in many fields, such as education, health and public utilities and services. However, oil economy had also many negative consequences, as well established by social science research. Politically, it
reinforced authoritarian states based on rentier income. Economically, it manifested the ills of what is known as 'the Dutch disease’, as productivity in other non-oil sector was discouraged. Socially, it substantially increased inequalities.

One of the main problems of the region’s economies is their limited international competitiveness in non-oil related sectors. This explains the negligible results of trade-centered growth and international cooperation strategies. Even in the case of Europe, where trade is much more active and sizeable, a trade delimited approach to economic cooperation has resulted in limited positive spin-off for the region’s economy. Hence, it is questionable whether or not the proposed free trade agreements between the United States and the countries of the region will have any better results. While these agreements may be good for some countries, like Jordan and Egypt, they may not be productive for others. For the United States to expedite the process of economic development in the region, a much more creative and comprehensive approach than cooperation in the field of trade needs to be constructed. And, in the final analysis, unless the countries themselves take the lead in designing their own reforms, it is unlikely that any outside assistance or intervention will be effective.

In reality, the region itself needs to introduce substantial and radical economic reforms so that it can construct beneficial relations with the outside world, including the United States. Most countries in the region have already embarked on economic reforms. However, many still confuse their concern for the poor with their old fashioned subsidy and welfare policies. The international community, including the United States, needs to understand the region’s concern for an adequate level of social justice, and for the role of the state in providing individual economic security. The states in the region should, in turn, draw on international experiences relevant for economic growth and social development in devising reform packages.

Liberalization seems to be an essential component in these packages. Privatization and transition to market forces need to be vastly enhanced and better managed so as to unleash peoples’ creativity. But this is not adequate for responding to all problems of economic growth and social development. The state needs to shift emphasis from traditional to innovative roles. Experiences of this kind in the region itself are very inspiring, e.g. Dubai. In looking at the potential areas for concern and action, participants highlighted the following:

§ The participants agreed that the principal responsibility for economic, social and political reform belonged with the Arab states themselves.

§ They felt that the international community could work with each state in the region, independently, to develop its own formula for reform. This is all the more necessary given the fact that micro-economic management seems to be the real bottleneck in many Arab countries.

§ Economic empowerment, partially through liberalization and privatization, can play a formidable role in restoring economic health away from the standard formula.

§ Economic reforms coupled with social responsibility should show an accentuated interest in reducing the problem of unemployment in the region which aggravates economic despair and
alienation.

§ Arab economies should not have to rely on low productivity jobs to provide employment. In fact, high tech can play a crucial role in economic take-off and job creation in Arab states as demonstrated by the experiences of South East Asian countries.

§ One way to introduce technological dynamism to many Arab economies, is to promote the R&D sector by picking on two or more ‘priority sectors’ (informatics, medical and bio-engineering research in agriculture) for fast and effective growth in the context of innovative forms of economic cooperation with the region.

§ Arab participants warned about the American tendency to emphasize the Washington Troika (the IMF, World Bank and Treasury) formulas for development which did not answer the political realities of many countries in the region.

§ They noted that if reforms create unemployment, they will be rejected by countries already plagued by high levels of unemployment.

§ The Americans and the IFI’s need to help come up with answers that compensate for the past errors of Arab economies and take into account the need for social responsibility - even if those answers are less tidy, less efficient and take longer to implement.

§ Approaches for economic cooperation with the region should not be limited to trade. In fact, the American economic experience is a living testimony to the centrality of technological innovation, better work organization and reliance on systematic increases in productivity.

§ Human development will continue to be the main vehicle of economic growth in the region. For this purpose, the United States can and should resume and strengthen its educational cooperation with the region, possibly through innovative institutional approaches, e.g. expanding American education in the region itself, and expanding labor relations with graduates and faculties within the region.

§ The region also needs to draw on some of the traditional points of strength in the American development experience particularly in the institutional and legislative fields. It is important to note that good legislation is needed for economic reforms. Many Arab states are lagging far behind on issues such as consumer protection, anti-dumping, anti-trust, money laundering, and anti-corruption legislations.

§ American participants pointed to the absence of risk capital in the region and the problems that some countries were having with their banking systems as particular points of concern. Micro businesses are given no incentives to grow. This put a cap on the growth of the Middle Class which is the foundation of a modern economy.

§ None of the participants thought that massive US AID programs had done much to help the reform problem.
**Democratisation and Cultural Development**

The democratisation of the Arab World and the Middle East generally is a crucial aspect of its own political and cultural development. The region had some liberal and democratic traditions which go back, in some cases, to 1860s. In Egypt, the representative consultative Council was established in 1866, and was rapidly transformed into a true and powerful parliament. The constitution of 1881 was the first major expression of the striving for a national democratic government. The constitution of 1923 was promulgated with the aim of building a liberal democratic state. Liberal politics survived for almost a century, but not without setbacks and some political turmoil. Some of these traditions also existed in Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Syria and even Iraq until late 1950s. Arab political liberalism was constrained and eventually curtailed.

At the most profound level of analysis, the region failed to carry out its own industrial revolution in the context of the colonial age. Hence, the economic foundations of democracy continued to be lacking, until now. Rigidities in social structures limited real enjoyment of political and social rights to landed aristocracy and a small sector of a new middle classes. The most important reason behind the collapse of Arab liberalism was precisely the need to speed up the process of economic take off and social modernization. This was thought to be more easily achieved by a strong, centralized, populist state.

The whole region, on the other hand, was dominated by nationalism. The process of nation building started, in most cases, from a very low point on the scale of social and economic development. The Gulf, for example, had to make the transition directly from tribal to ‘modern’ polities. A similar situation prevailed in many other Arab countries such as Libya, Sudan, and in parts of Iraq. Each society had to engage in the process of state building, economic development and functional modernization simultaneously in the context of vast social dislocations internally and great turmoil in the regional and international arenas. It was natural that each society would work out its own formulae, depending on its own conditions.

Some Arab countries tried to re-liberalize their political structures after sensing the failure of populist experiences. Egypt, for example, started this process in 1971 when a new and less authoritarian constitution was introduced. In 1976, party pluralism was recognized, almost a full decade before Gorbachev’s failed experiment in the former Soviet Union, and also before the so called third wave of democratisation. However, large-scale social dislocations, the rise of extremism and terrorism, and sluggish economic growth worked against reform. The breakdown of the Soviet Union, the protracted civil strife in Algeria and the chaotic situation in the Balkans deepened fears among leaders of a political breakdown generated by overly ambitious experiments with economic and political reform.

Those fears were more than material in many Arab countries because of turbulent security situations which resulted from the exponential growth in the power of extremist political Islamist forces. The drift to terror was a dangerous part of the extremists’ growth. Arab countries experimented with a variety of approaches for taming or re-educating religious extremists. After the assassination of late president Sadat in 1981, Egypt embarked on a political reform package which
aimed at reducing the tension in the country and answering the challenge posed by religious extremists by carefully expanding the political arena. However, lenient measures, applied in 1980s, which were not a part of a comprehensive approach to change, actually encouraged extremists to take over large sectors of society, particularly in the fields of education and religion.

In brief, while cautious approaches to political liberalization and democratisation may have not been the best answer to these challenges, problems facing democratisation can not simply be wished away. These problems have to be resolved carefully and successfully for democracy not to defeat itself through social decay or political violence.

There is no uniform way to resolve these problems because each country in the region has its own unique bundle of social and economic problems and relies on varying legacies and traditions. On the other hand, we should never lose sight on the fact that political and economic development is the most fully meaningful answer to the growing challenges of the day. Progress felt by people for the people is the only means through which extremism can be eradicated. This is as true to progress in peace making as to progress in carving roads to democracy, social justice, and efficient economies internally.

In this context the participants noted that:

§ Political and civil society leaders in the region must suggest their own powerful visions for political and economic reforms to give their societies a clear sense of direction and purpose. While democracy can be misused or abused by dictatorial, fanatic, and extremist forces, it can empower societies and allow them a greater role in self development and self-defence against domestic and foreign enemies.

§ Leaders in the region must initiate their visions and develop programs for political and cultural reforms in collaboration with civil society and moderate political forces. The full mobilization of forces of moderation is an essential aspect of winning the battle against extremism and terrorism.

§ Political reforms should start by empowering these civil society forces through appropriate legislation and by allowing them a role in vigorous and progressive transformation of societies.

§ The leaders of the international community can help speed the process of democratisation through consistent, patient and workable programs which aim to reduce strains on the Middle East region, ease transitions, and encourage forces of moderation and reconciliation.

§ American efforts to “take charge” or “take the lead” in or “take credit for” reform efforts will be largely counterproductive. The American Administration should efface itself and not allow the American propensity to take action and take charge overwhelm the efforts of local leaders and civil society to change their own societies.

§ Region wide discourse, fora and programs will be of limited value if they are not the product of the vision, programs and reforms initiated on the state level.
§ Reform visions should include ideas relevant to bringing power closer to the people as organized communities and social bodies. The fabric of societies can and must be strengthened through empowering local communities, trade unions, syndicates, non-governmental organizations, and intellectual forums. Participation in the processes of decision making at all levels is an important key to a brighter future of democracy in the region.

§ State-society partnership must be reshaped and enhanced through legislative reforms which reduce excessive bureaucratisation while expanding the capabilities of civil and traditional communities for self-development.

§ The world community should welcome the development of reform visions and programs emanating from within involving an equal partnership between civil society and the moderate leaders of traditional communities to steer their countries towards political, economic, and social progress.

§ Human development strategies pursued in the region must be enhanced and promoted as an important aspect of political and economic development. Human development strategies must also be enriched by emphasizing democratic skills and universal human values.

§ The fullest possible respect for human rights at all levels is the best approach to democracy in the region. For this purpose, vulnerable groups in society, such as women and children, minorities, handicapped, and other disadvantaged groups must be protected and empowered in their own interests and in the interest of the progressive development of societies at large.

§ State structures should also be reformed as this can be done in a variety of ways and in a more or less gradual fashion to make the state more representative, more efficient, more equitable, smarter and better capable to lead social and economic development of societies.

§ Adequate resources should be mobilized from within and through the channels of international cooperation to achieve the above visions and goals.

§ Middle Eastern countries are also encouraged to revive and present their own progressive and humanist cultural heritage and bring the maximum light to the lives of their own people and to rationalize their own development in the political and economic spheres.

§ The contribution of great religions to the moral, social and economic development of Middle Eastern countries must be encouraged. Tolerance, solidarity and fraternity of all peoples are all vital religious values which help to overcome extremism, bridge gaps and resolve conflicts.

§ This should also be carried out on the international scale. The peoples of the region call on all relevant actors to ensure that the war on terrorism and the call for democracy are conducted in a spirit of respect for all religions and religious traditions and on the basis of universally and legally agreed principles. Ending terrorism and allowing the rise of the best possible circumstances for participatory politics can and should be achieved through enhancing cultural cooperation and understanding. The language of force and coercion is very detrimental to these aims and goals.
Regionalism

The United States has traditionally favoured the bilateral approach in interacting with the region. And, the Arab region itself seems to have failed to generate adequate momentum toward the cohesive and powerful regionalism it has pursued since the formation of the Arab League in 1945. However, with this record of failure, Arab states never ceased to aspire for a better performing regional institution. The United States occasionally embarked on building sub-regional or regional arrangements in response to certain challenges. Clashing concepts of regionalism caused the two sides friction at certain moments. While Arab states, particularly Egypt, thought of regionalism in national terms, the United States focused on bringing the region into closer conformity with its own security or political interests.

Clashing concepts of regionalism partially explain the continued fragmentation in the region. During the cold war, the United States managed to construct working strategic and economic alliances with certain individual Arab states. But, all attempts to construct multi-lateral or collective alliances failed because the US was seen to ignore the region’s own self-defined collective interest in a just and lasting resolution of the conflict with Israel. In the post-cold war era, American interests shifted to focus on two prime objectives: integrating Israel in the region at least economically, and to establish working and flexible security arrangements against non-conventional threats or threats from within the region. Throughout the history of the Arab League, the Americans have seen the organization as being hostile to US efforts to promote peace between Israel and the Arab world. The US approach to the Arab League was based on its reputation of being an organization that never failed to reach the lowest common denominator in its decisions and pronouncements. Unlike the UN and other international institutions, the Arab League’s requirement for consensus destroyed its effectiveness and isolated it from the international mainstream.

The full record of thinking on regionalism, whether during the cold war or in the post-cold war era, demonstrates that the United States, with all its influence and power in the region can impede the formation of a cohesive regionalism built on the notion of pan-Arabism and lowest common denominator consensus which favored rejectionism. At the same time, individual Arab states can and have prevented the establishment of functioning regional or even sub regional security and economic frameworks to oversee its own political and strategic interests.

Equilibrium of interests is a crucial condition for building a viable regional system. Alternatives are both costly and ineffective. The present American experience in Iraq demonstrates the difficulties of direct control of the region by military means. For the same reasons, given what we know about the American inclination to take charge and take credit, we can safely conclude that the ‘greater Middle East initiative’ will have very limited chances for success. Simply, neither side can afford to ignore the basic interests of the other.

At the same time, both sides stand to lose much from existing approaches which ignore the other side’s interest and concerns. The United States can hardly achieve major goals such as combating terrorism, safeguarding stability and promoting American economic interests without some form of collective regional cooperation. Recognizing that neither side can go it alone or without
adequate accommodation for the basic interests of the other is a necessary pre-condition for constructing durable and long term regional arrangements in both fields of security and economic cooperation. Such arrangements will also be crucial for the democratisation of Arab states.

The participants noted the following:

§ It is time for the United States to re-consider its suspicion of the Arab League system. It can start implementing a fresh approach by supporting the current endeavour to reform the Arab League system to incorporate a majority based decision making process. In return, Arab states must show greater willingness to work for internal democratic reform. Long term trends can and should start with good signals at the present.

§ Regionalism which accommodates both sides’ interests can only start when both sides manage to establish understanding and compromise on the most urgent problems in the region, particularly the Arab Israeli conflict, the issue of Iraq, and the question of reform.

§ Both sides need to engage in dialogue over these issues. A fresh beginning can be explored through dialogue between the United States on the one hand and the leading states in the region, particularly including those where the United States has the greatest degree of policy differences such as Syria and Iran.

§ In the context of such a dialogue all major issues of contention including the Arab Israeli conflict and the future place of Israel relative to the region must be discussed proactively and positively with a view on long term re-construction of the region.

§ A broader Middle East regionalism is particularly needed to handle the chronic economic and trade problems of the region and to advance the cause of peace, and development. A broader Middle East regionalism should be tailored to respond to long term challenges and be formed into a number of viable functional programs, in fields such as security, water, environment and economic development.

§ While the Arab League will continue to reflect the common identity of Arab societies, Arab states must reinforce their firm commitment to accept and integrate Israel in a broader Middle East regionalism once a lasting peace deal is concluded.

§ To this end, Israel may be invited to participate in regional efforts to deal with the functional areas of concern through whatever mechanism, even indirectly, that can be made available given existing political constraints of the moment.

§ The United States can and should play a supportive role in this direction. But should avoid any effort to represent Israel or take charge or lead the development by Arab moderates of their regional organizations.

§ Hence, the U.S. should adopt a framework of economic cooperation in the region based on collective regional approach similar to the one initiated by Europe in Barcelona process.
CONCLUSION

There is no way to deny the existence of many of the problems that Americans and Arabs face in their relations. The existing signs and omens are sobering to both sides. However, what has been achieved until now on issues of mutual concern has been owing to creative solutions worked out patiently by visionaries in official and non-official capacities. This fact should drive both sides towards dialogue and forward looking strategies so that they can work together for improved relations through problem solving. What we have been unable to achieve has been due, in part, to distrust, mutual suspicion, and blocked communication. It has not only been a question of differing interests and perspectives. This fact remains essential to the future of Arab American relations. Simply, neither side can achieve its objectives based on the present levels of distrust and fear.

The United States cannot achieve its goals of terminating the threat of terrorism without the active collaboration of Arab states and societies. It can hardly construct a viable security regime in the region without the explicit consent of Arab states. In fact, no single strategic goal or target in the region can be realized without vastly improved American Arab understanding. The participants are agreed that in order to bring greater understanding, Arabs and Americans need to update and learn from their mistakes and from one another.

Arabs need to learn that the status quo is not in their best interests. It is also indefensible and damaging. Existing achievements in the social and economic realms are inadequate for Arabs to keep pace with other regions of the world. Expanding and legalizing pluralism in the political arenas is essential for restricting the growth of religious and other forms of extremism. A bold approach to problem solving actually pays off internationally (better share in foreign direct investment flows, technology, markets, prestige and respect), and nationally (greater legitimacy and communication between peoples and rulers, citizens and elites, growth rates, stability and internal peace).

Fortunately and in spite of current grievances, the dominant view in the Arab world continues to place hopes on the United States for bringing a just solution to Arab-Israeli conflict. In addition, Arab economic and social development can be greatly promoted by constructing a working partnership with the United States. And Arab states have an equally strong incentive to stop terrorism.

Arabs also need to learn realism. Towards this end, Arabs have to come to grips with a number of important issues and facts. In the first place, all modes of international politics involve painful compromises and need flexibility and creativity. Secondly, Arab states need to address civil societies and other informal forces not just governments and officials. Lastly, they have to come to grips with the fact that the problem with the United States is much deeper than the Bush administration, and it cannot be wished away with a change of administration. In fact, most Americans have difficulty understanding certain phenomena such as rampant violations of human rights, the treatment of women in a number of Arab countries, and the failure to fully tap the energies of citizens. Arab states need to address these questions.

Americans, on their part, have to learn that ignoring the feelings of peoples in the Arab world
and their striving for justice and dignity can only lead to expanding the pool of terrorists, rather
than drying it up. The continued frustration of the Palestinian national aspirations is a fundamental
cause of extremism and terrorism in the whole region. The US cannot afford to lose the good faith
of tested and old allies in the region. This is not to say that the United States should stop calling for
democracy and reform in the region. A better approach could be based on constant and friendly
engagement on all issues of concern. The fundamental problem which faces the US in the region at
the present is that it is seen to be forcing its own prism on all issues, and allowing no reasonable
room for Arabs’ own interests and perspectives.

In fact this is also seen as the history-long malady in Arab American relations. Arabs complain
that the United States has chronically looked to the region purely from its own prism without much
regard to the region’s own needs or world views. Americans are viewed as caring only for their own
ideas, approaches, agendas and interests without paying much attention to these of their Arab part-
ners and allies. Americans may listen but they don’t hear.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

In order to improve the discourse and turn the corner in Arab American relations the partici-
pants has proposed the following ten practical steps to better understanding that the United States
and Arab states can take:

1) The Administration and key Arab states should establish a “Leader’s Forum” reporting to
the President of the United States and the leaders of key Arab states. The Forum would meet
biannually and be made up of academics, politicians, and non-governmental individuals in each
society who have credibility and credentials in the Arab world and the United States. Their role
would be to examine the existing state of relations in both general and on the basis of state-to-
state relations and to make recommendations to the US and Arab leaders.

2) The United States, building out of the Policy Planning Council of the State Department,
should establish a non-governmental Middle East Diplomatic Advisory Council as a “red team”
forum of leading academics, experts and non governmental leaders to challenge in private Admin-
istration policy on the Middle East and its approach to Arab and Islamic governments.

3) Arab governments should establish similar institutions compatible to their structures to
challenge their policies vis a vis the United States.

4) The United States should take the lead in actively working with and helping to establish,
and fund where necessary, Arab Universities to set up effective American Studies courses at the
graduate and undergraduate level. Support should be proffered through US Universities.

5) Arab and American Universities should expand exchange agreements between them.

6) American and Arab think tanks specialized in the Middle East should establish formal ex-
change agreements to undertake joint studies, publish each others work, exchange contacts and
make common presentations.

7) American and Arab media, through the auspices of existing organizations, should develop practical exchange agreements to publish reciprocally, on a case by case basis, high quality articles and op-eds from leading commentators from the other society.

8) American and Arab media should examine media-to-media exchanges for qualified reporters and editors to examine and participate in the others media environment.

9) The American and Arab entertainment industries, under the auspices of US and Arab governments, should establish a high level professional committee of practitioners to examine the prevalence of stereotypes in their respective entertainment industries.

10) Christian, Jewish and Islamic moderates should establish a religious forum made up of high reputation clerics and religious leaders and thinkers to examine the problems that separate them and possible areas of common effort to educate their respective constituencies on the other faiths.