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AMERICA AND THE MUSLIM WORLD

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Introduction

The relation between the U.S. and the Muslim world needs to be thoroughly examined from different angles. It is a relation that dates back to the post WWII era, when the American presence started to be strongly felt in the Arab and Muslim region from the Atlantic to the Pacific, following a retreat of European powers that kept the upper hand over that region until the 20th century. The study of this relation should allow us to unravel its nature, as well as the factors that influenced and still influence it to date.

The arrival of a new American Administration heralded a new chapter in this relation, as was clearly outlined in the speech addressed to the Muslim world from Cairo on 4 June 2009 by U.S. President Barack Obama. This landmark speech announced the new path the U.S. Administration has decided to tread to gain the confidence of the Muslim world, improve the image of the U.S., which suffered a great deal during the previous Administration, and unleash a new period of cooperation based on mutual respect, the pursuit of common interest and commitment to international law.

During the First World War, the U.S. emerged as a great military and economic power on the international scene. And with the outbreak of the Second World War, the U.S. played a leading role among other allied powers. Its political and technological weight was crucial for the victory of the Allied and the defeat of the Axis. It emerged from the war as a deterrent force with far-reaching influence that enabled it to withstand the socialist camp led by the then Soviet Union, throughout the Cold War period which ended with the victory of the U.S.-led Capitalist camp and the collapse of the Berlin Wall which epitomised a dark chapter of authoritarian regimes subjugating peoples to their hegemony.

In the early years of the 20th century, the U.S. was seen in the Muslim world as an inspiring nation that espouses the lofty values and principles enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. In the eyes of Arab and Muslim beholders, the U.S. once conjured up truly shining and vivid images. The U.S. was perceived as a magnet of liberty, a beacon for democracy, and a melting pot which wonderfully combines various ethnicities, cultures and doctrines to form the American citizenship. However, this shining image was blemished because of the U.S. attitude to the Palestinian cause. The Palestinian people whose land was usurped because of the Belfour Declaration have endured untold suffering and ordeals; their rights are violated; and bloodshed still costs the lives of thousands of innocent Palestinians. In the face of this bloody record, since the inception of Israel in 1948, and for more than sixty years, the U.S. or other super powers did not lift a finger to support the Palestinian people, thus emboldening Israel to carry out further aggression and crimes punishable under the international law, with scant regard for the relevant international resolutions recognizing the legitimate and national rights of the Palestinian people.

Other events unfolded but the U.S. continued to adopt stands that undermine the supreme interests of the Muslim world, especially after the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, and sometimes under the cover of the United Nations. While the Arab and Muslim public opinion could not understand why the super powers led by the U.S. continue to have their grip on the Iraqi and Afghan peoples throughout all these years, the image of the super power is bound to suffer irretrievably.

This is perhaps why the new policy outlined by the Obama Administration towards the Muslim world was greeted with a sigh of relief among large chunks of the Arab and Muslim public opinion. I was among those who welcomed this much-awaited change. I published many articles in Al-Hayat newspaper, a widely-circulated Arab newspaper based in London, on the relation between the U.S. and the Muslim world. In these articles which are re-published in English in

this book, I attempted to analyse the dimensions of this relation, building on an intimate diagnosis of the current state of affairs and the future horizons, in order to highlight the deep meaning of that relation which constitutes a driving force for positive and fruitful cooperation between the two sides as part of mutual respect and preservation of common interests.

The lessons learnt from the wealth of experience accumulated for more than seven decades point to the important fact that the improvement of the image of the U.S. in the Muslim world, nay in the world at large, depends to a large extent on the commitment of the U.S. Administration to the letter and spirit of the Declaration of Independence, the principles of the U.S. Constitution, and the UN Charter, especially when it comes to dealing with developing countries, including the 57 OIC Member States, which all aspire for American support for their development action. Therein lies the surest way for the U.S. to assume its humane civilizational role in disseminating peace, security and stability in international relations, and establishing firm foundations for a bright, prosperous future.

There is much in common between the Muslim values and principles and the spirit of the U.S. Declaration of Independence and Constitution. This is already strong enough to move ahead the relation between the U.S. and the Muslim world.

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How will America's new president deal with our issues?

The victory of the Democratic candidate Barack Obama in the U.S. presidential election poses many questions regarding the future of international relations, on the one hand, and the new roadmap that the United States will follow in the next phase, on the other hand, considering that Obama's victory is, by all democratic, historical, intellectual and cultural standards, a remarkable event that transcended the local scale to the global scale. Therefore, it has become an international event in the full sense of the word that will have repercussions on international politics, given that the White House, which Obama will enter next 20 January, holds control over the international community and can influence global politics at this stage of human history.

As the British veteran journalist Patrick Seale wrote in an article published in this newspaper on 7 November 2008, “the U.S. president-elect should reinvent America's image abroad and rebuild its battered reputation.” However, can Obama make the expected change happen, amidst the tensions and conflicts that prevail in many parts of the world? Is the U.S. president-elect able to get rid of the legacy of the policy that the neo-conservatives followed throughout the past eight years?

Beyond the emotional response towards this event, which actually arouses excitement, when we consider the issue quietly and away from any political influences or human feelings, we conclude that U.S. policy in its general framework, essence and depth, is not conceived by the U.S. administration nor by the White House occupant; rather, it is the work of many other actors whose interests sometimes transcend the supreme interests of the United States. This is what justifies the great

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mystery surrounding U.S. foreign policy, which opens the door to interpretations and speculations, of different levels, that do not always reveal the truth sufficiently.

During the era of the neoconservatives who exercised control over President George W. Bush, international relations deteriorated markedly, as a result of the unwise decisions taken by the U.S. administration, which led to disastrous consequences, severe problems, complex situations, worsening crises and a growing climate of tension that will seemingly persist in the short run.

Undoubtedly, reality and the lessons of recent history show us that the position of the American administration towards Israel, or more precisely towards the Arab-Israeli conflict, has been characterized by some sort of stability and continuity in all stages and phases that the United States has experienced. In fact, differences, and not contradictions, do not exist, except for some tiny unimportant details. Total and costly loyalty to Israel is a constant principle of the successive U.S. administrations, and absolute support for Israel is an objective of the American foreign policy. Nevertheless, the neoconservatives went too far in their extremism, trading on the outbreak of crises in some parts of the Arab Islamic world to entangle the United States therein, their goal being to serve Israeli interests in the first place, which they consider as more important than the interests of their homeland.

The main line of conduct of the U.S. administration, whether the president is Republican or Democratic, does not deviate from this trend. Does the president-elect have a firm political will to change this line of conduct and lead his country to a new phase free of the vestiges and restrictions of the past in order to spare it the serious repercussions of the latter on security and economy now and in the future?

Since the start of the U.S. election campaign, we have noticed a fierce attack by the neoconservatives on the U.S. president-elect, which particularly targets his private life and his past, levels accusations at him and casts doubt on his ability to lead the country. If this attack against the

president-elect is an “internal affair”, according to the common expression, it is on the other hand “a matter of concern to the whole world”. It does not matter the United States alone, because the goals of this campaign go beyond the narrow national scope to a wider global dimension.

The question now, for us in this part of the world, is: “How will the Islamic world be in the era of president-elect Barack Obama? Will this change which he made the slogan of his campaign involve the position of the United States about the deteriorating and worrying situation in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia? Will the new president adopt a fair, balanced and judicious policy towards the issues of the Islamic world? Will the U.S. president-elect completely or in part withstand the tremendous pressure exercised, at various levels, by pro-Israel hard-line neoconservatives? Will President Obama abide by the Charter of the United Nations, the rules of international law and his ethical principles when he is face to face with the problems and crises that hit the Islamic world, weaken it and threaten its future?

The first appointments made by the president-elect, especially for the post of the White House Chief of Staff, where he appointed Rahm Emanuel, who holds Israeli citizenship and has already served in the Israeli army, and information that has leaked out so far about appointments in other important positions, such as the Secretary of the Treasury, to which he nominated Lawrence Summers, a Likudni, and Timothy Geithner, a Jewish disciple of Summers, indicate that nothing will change with regard to the relationship between Israel and the United States. These are unpleasant signs, but we will wait and see until the president-elect takes office and starts the application of his vision to U.S. policy.

Whatever the case may be, the Muslim world is required to improve its internal conditions, resolve its differences and overcome its problems in the framework of Islamic solidarity. Only then will it become not dependent on the U.S. elections or other changes in the world, provided it is willing to enhance its standing and respect in the international arena.

A new American policy towards the Muslim world: Is it possible?

On 16 November 2008, I published in Al-Hayat newspaper an article entitled '**We are required to come to terms with our conditions and defuse our conflicts: how the new American President would deal with our issues?**' In this article I asked how the Muslim world would be like under President-elect Barak Obama, and whether the new president would follow a balanced, fair and wise policy in his dealing with the issues of the Muslim world. My conclusion as I pointed out in this article was that it was up to the Muslim world to come to terms with its own conditions, overcome its conflicts and find answers to its problems within the spirit of Islamic solidarity.

In his inauguration speech, President Obama spelled out the presumably new attitude of U.S. Administration towards the Muslim world by saying: "To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect".

In fact, these positive signals sent by Obama in his speech were acclaimed with cheers in every part of the Muslim world. I myself addressed a letter to President Obama in which I stated: "The Muslim world appreciates your keenness to reach out to it based on mutual interest and mutual respect. It subscribes to this highly commendable gesture and will contribute all its potentials and expertise to set it into motion."

Also in the capacity under which I act within the Islamic joint action, I reaffirmed to Mr Obama that "We at the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), which includes fifty of the Muslim world's States and has fruitful cooperation with tens of

international and regional organizations and bodies, greet your investiture with great optimism and wish you every success in your lofty missions in addressing acute problems and tough challenges that befall today's world. These include wars, aggression on peoples' rights and dignity, economic recession, poverty and other scourges that require concerted, continuous global action to find a remedy thereto."

Finally I wrote to Mr Obama that "I confirm to Your Excellency that ISESCO, within its competence and through its network of special relations with its Member States as well as with international and regional organizations, is keen to pursue its efforts to translate this constructive move into concrete action."

There is no doubt that we are presented today with a new discourse with a new language framing the policy that the new U.S. Administration intends to follow in tackling the issues of the Muslim world. This policy is resting on two basic rules: common interest and mutual respect. Common interest between the U.S. and the countries of the Islamic world may be pursued at various areas, most notably of which is finding a final settlement of the Palestinian question, as part of the international legality which implies ending Israeli occupation in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, the Syrian Golan, and Lebanese Shabaa Farms, as well as establishing an independent Palestinian State having Eastern Al-Quds as its capital. Then come other interests in the economic, industrial, scientific, technological, political, security and military spheres, to achieve common objectives within mutual respect. Taken from its linguistic, legal and moral acceptance, the concept of mutual respect is readily apparent and simply means that the U.S. Administration should return the respect the States of Islamic world has for its sovereignty, independence, choices, as well as spiritual, cultural and civilizational specificities. This kind of reciprocal respect is the practical implementation of dialogue between cultures and civilizations.

One of the most telling parts of Obama's inauguration speech was that: "our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must

play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.” This is indeed an invitation for hope and optimism. However, while we totally agree with and favourably respond to Obama's invitation, we consider that it is time to say that the wounds suffered by humanity in the Palestinian territories cannot be healed unless the Israeli occupation is lifted, and the Palestinian people restores its usurped rights to self-determination and to the establishment of its free, independent State on its national territory. Only then this strategic goal can be fulfilled and humanity can “reveal itself”. The U.S. is the sole party that possesses the objective requirements to find a final settlement of the Palestinian cause, and put an end to terrorism which we all condemn categorically, and which thrives only when its causes are overlooked or not seriously tackled-maybe to keep it as a “scarecrow” to intimidate some countries.

The Muslim world expects from Obama to implement a new policy that matches his own words when he said “America is a friend of each nation, and every man, woman and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity. And we are ready to lead once more.” Will the new America be a friend of Palestinian children who are subjected to killing and aggression? Or will it be a friend of the Muslim Arab Ummah suffering a plethora of problems due to the shifting balance of international justice and the American silence in the face of the crimes against humanity perpetrated by Israel in Palestine and by American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan?

The Muslim world looks forward to a fresh American policy towards its just causes, and wants the U.S. to assume its responsibilities towards peace and security in the world - indeed, a great responsibility that none of the successive U.S. Administrations could fulfil with success.

Between Pope's current visit and U.S. President's expected visit to the region

Pope Benedict XVI is on a visit to the Arab region; a visit that is described as being “religious”. The fact is that the Pontiff holds a worldly position: he is the Head of the State of the Vatican, and he ex officio has power both as religious and political leader over Catholic Christians in the world. Meanwhile, President Barack Obama is planning a visit in the first week of the next month to the Arab Republic of Egypt. It is reported that the Great Nations' head of state will send a message from Egypt to the Muslim world. Early last April the U.S. president visited Turkey, wherein he delivered a speech from the Turkish Parliament. He also met Turkish students in Istanbul and explored with them various subjects. We have acclaimed the words with which President Obama spoke to the Muslim world from the Turkish parliament as being 'highly significant and praiseworthy', for they have a positive bearing that reflects the fresh trend in the policy of the U.S. Administration.

There is much of a connection between the Pope's visit to Jordan, the Palestinian territories and the occupied city of Al-Quds, and the U.S. President's visit to Egypt. They are similar in the influence that both the Vatican and America can exert on Israel to bring the Arab-Israeli conflict to a just resolution on the basis of international legality, the Two-State Solution as well as the principles of the international Quartet and the Arab Peace Initiative. Whatever the arrogance that marks the Israeli policy under the current extremist right-wing government, the United States could, if it so wills, bring its leverage over Israel to bear in pressing for a shift in the Israeli government's policy towards a strict adherence to the principles of international legality, and engaging on serious and purposeful negotiations with the Palestinian National Authority.

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Equally, the Vatican has no less profound an influence in international politics. It is obvious that the Vatican is in a position where it could use its leverage to put pressure on Israel to reach a positive outcome.

But the core problem is that USA and the State of the Vatican, led by Pope Benedict XVI, seem not to tread that path. They do not exert any kind of pressure on Israel to deflect it from persisting in its aggressive policy against the Palestinian people.

The lines of the new U.S. Administration's policy have become reasonably clear, at least from what we have gathered in President Barack Obama's inauguration speech, and in the speech he delivered at the Turkish Parliament, most notably as regards his emphasis on the need that America's relationship with the Muslim community be grounded on a broader engagement based on mutual interest and mutual respect. I met America's President at the reception held in Istanbul on 6 April on the occasion of the Second International Forum for the Alliance of Civilizations, and I seized that opportunity to reaffirm to him that "ISESCO is making keen efforts, as part of joint Islamic action, to spread the culture of mutual respect and promote the values of justice, peace and dialogue." I had previously addressed a letter to President Obama following his historic inauguration speech. I wrote him, "The Muslim world highly appreciates the words you have spoken in your inauguration speech concerning the desire to deal with it in the context of mutual respect and mutual interests. This is exactly what we are striving to achieve using all our capabilities and expertise."

I wonder today: what else can the U.S. President say in the speech he will address to the Muslim world from Egypt, apart from what he has said so far? Will he say exactly the same before, without translating his words into a principled stand and a practical policy? Will Mr Obama continue stressing that "America's relationship with the Muslim world should be grounded on mutual interest and mutual respect," without his words having any real impact?

Time has come when the initiatives announced by the U.S. President, and which we have welcomed, are to be put into practice.

The situation in the Palestinian territories is not to be addressed with fancy slogans and fine rhetoric. Rather, the situation cries for a prompt intervention to stop Israeli aggression on the Palestinian people, restore Palestinian peoples' usurped rights, and put into effect relevant international resolutions. Only with such realistic policy which the Muslim world today expects from the USA can the situation in the region be changed for the better, by helping the Palestinian cause come out from such long and dark tunnel, towards a peaceful and just settlement. One could even say that translating President Barack Obama's words about his country's relationship with the Muslim world into real facts on the ground is to serve the United States' national interests. It will certainly improve its image in the Muslim world; an image that has been so much tainted by the previous Administration's reckless, biased policy.

On the other hand, the Vatican still maintains an ambivalent attitude to the Palestinian cause. Either way, the Vatican seems to be loath to have Al Quds as a capital of the Palestinian State, the more so as this would mean that the city would return to the Arab Islamic sovereignty - which, as it is argued, would be contrary to the Vatican's interests. Therefore, what is required of Pope Benedict XVI is to clarify his position on the Arab-Israeli conflict, and to abide by the principles and religious moral values preached by all revealed religions, on top of which are the condemnation of injustice, aggression and violation of human rights, and the rejection of foreign occupation of the national territory of a people. By clearly pledging his attachment to such principles and values, the Vatican would be taking the first step towards achieving justice for the Palestinian people.

So will the Vatican act within the framework of religious principles? And will the United States act in line with the statements made by President Barack Obama in his inauguration speech, and under the dome of the Turkish Parliament?

This is exactly what we expect to happen. For it is the just path to resolve this long-standing crisis which would have ended were it not for the unjust attitude of the West and the weak position of Arabs and Muslims.

Barack Obama: A new era that needs insurance to be sustained

It is a coincidence of historical significance that when U.S. President Barack Obama was addressing the Muslim world from the Grand Hall of Cairo University, the International Conference on Dialogue among Civilizations and Cultural Diversity adopted the **“Kairouan Declaration on Fostering Dialogue among Civilizations and Respect for Cultural Diversity”**. At the close of the Kairouan conference, held in cooperation between ISESCO and the International Organization of la Francophonie, I made a speech wherein I highly commended the position taken by the U.S. president, and supported his pledging a new beginning between the USA and Muslims around the world on the basis of mutual interest and mutual respect.

At a time when the U.S. President was making it clear that America is not at war with Islam, the Kairouan conference declared that the world's religions and cultures are more than ever required to sustain dialogue and enhance coexistence for the common benefit of all; while casting away the causes of contention and disdain, on the basis of the universal values and principles that should be promoted and instilled in peoples' minds and acts as a common heritage of humanity. Dialogue's contribution to the path of human civilization is indispensable, given its role in consolidating cooperation, coexistence, peace, love, tolerance and cross-cultural bonds among peoples and nations. The conference also stressed that dialogue among civilizations should build on the points of convergence not divergence, within the framework of fair judgement and respect for the Other. Also, at just the time when President Obama was stating that his country's partnership with the

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Muslim world should draw on the core and true essence of Islam, considering it part of his responsibility as president of the United States of America to “fight against negative stereotypes of Islam wherever they appear”, the Kairouan conference called for keeping from distorting the image of others, or showing disrespect for them and their religions, beliefs, religious symbols, or transgressing on their cultural and civilizational specificities. This, the Kairouan Declaration goes on, postulates the need to abandon stereotypes, generalizations and preconceptions, and refrain from associating crimes committed by individuals or small groups with an entire people or an entire religion. It was also stressed in the Kairouan conference that the dialogue of civilizations, as we perceive it and work towards anchoring its principles in reality, should rest on common human values, abide by the principles of justice and respect for human rights, as well as on tolerance, citizenship and democracy and open wider perspectives for understanding between peoples and communities in a way that favours rapprochement and cross-fertilization of civilizations.

President Barack Obama, in his speech, addressed some of the most consequential issues engrossing public opinion in the world at this point in history. But the most important part of his speech was when he praised the Muslim civilization, and argued that Islam is innocent of the many suspicious and charges raised against it by Western extremists. As well as highlighting his country's sound attitude to Islam and Muslims around the world, Mr Obama stressed the right of the Palestinian people to establish their independent state, and affirmed that his country does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements.

It is no doubt that Mr Obama's words, regarding America's attitude to Islam and Islamic culture and Islamic civilization, move in the direction of promoting dialogue among civilizations and respect for cultural diversity of peoples. But cultural diversity can only be protected and promoted, as stated in the kairouan Declaration, if human rights and fundamental freedoms are guaranteed and the sovereign right of States

to adopt policies and measures they deem appropriate for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions on their territory is ensured. Besides, the protection and promotion of cultural diversity presuppose that equal dignity of and respect for all cultures be recognised, that international cooperation and solidarity between developing and rich countries be enhanced, that complementarity of economic and cultural aspects of development be promoted, and that equitable access to different forms of cultural expression within the framework of openness to other cultures of the world be guaranteed to all. It is sad, however, to see that peoples in the lands of Islam suffer the most from human rights' violations, and from transgression on their spiritual, cultural and civilizational specificities.

The U.S. President's stance on revealed religions was in accordance with the Kairouan Declaration in which participants stressed that all revealed religions advocate human brotherliness, dialogue, tolerance and moderation and proscribe all forms of violence, extremism and zealotry. Such values have contributed to the human civilization, particularly in relation to enhancing cooperation, coexistence, peace, brotherly love and cultural cross-fertilisation. The Kairouan Declaration also stressed that ensuring peoples' right to a decent free life and to sustainable comprehensive development through combating poverty, exclusion, injustice, violence, extremism, terrorism, double-standard policy and hegemonic theories is a moral responsibility incumbent on the entire humanity. It is, the Declaration goes on, a joint moral duty that requires the adoption of fair measures and the devising of appropriate strategies likely to help provide an environment favouring balanced human relations. The Muslim world is victim to such policies that undermine peoples' right to justice and equality, and the United States of America is found to be involved in such policies, at least so far.

President Barack Obama stressed in his address to the Muslim world that America is not at war with Islam, and that “America and Islam overlap, and share common principles - principles of justice and progress; tolerance and the dignity of all human beings.” President

Obama went on to explain that his speech from Cairo “came at a time of tension between the United States and Muslims around the world - tension rooted in historical forces that go beyond any current policy debate. The relationship between Islam and the west, he added, includes centuries of co-existence and co-operation, but also conflict and religious wars.” These are living examples of inter-relation between the Islamic and Western civilizations, and one of the ways of cross-fertilization between both civilizations.

President Obama further explained that “such tension has been fed by colonialism that denied rights and opportunities to many Muslims, and a cold war in which Muslim-majority countries were too often treated as proxies without regard to their own aspirations.” He added, “the sweeping change brought by modernity and globalization led many Muslims to view the west as hostile to the traditions of Islam.” However, history has it that such events are, in the main, responsible for many a tension spot in various parts of the Muslim world as a result of the colonial policies planting Israel in the region. President Obama went on to stress that change in America's relationship with the Muslim world cannot happen overnight. He explained, “I am convinced that in order to move forward, we must say openly the things we hold in our hearts, and that too often are said only behind closed doors. There must be a sustained effort to listen to each other; to learn from each other; to respect one another; and to seek common ground.” We believe the U.S. President's speech to be a mutually accepted formula to achieve our common goals, and a first step towards building confidence between the Muslim and Western worlds.

It is true that Barack Obama's speech is by all standards a historical document, and a milestone in Muslim world's relations with the West in general, and not only with the United States of America. It is also true that the ideas and positions expressed in this speech command respect and appreciation, with a few exceptions and a slight reservation. Indeed, in Obama's speech lie great hopes for the future. However, we cannot deny the fact that a change, so bluntly and courageously spoken,

in attitudes and policies cannot be effectively made unless such stances and policies are translated into concrete and practical initiatives and resolutions. This is how to ensure that with this new era the causes of tension will be eliminated, and future generations will be able to live in peace and security, reconciliation and tolerance.

Mr Obama's highly commendable ideas, which totally differ from those of the previous American Administration, present us with an excellent opportunity to establish the independent State of Palestine. Meanwhile, we Arabs and Muslims need to unite and show stronger solidarity; especially the Palestinians who have to resolve their internal conflict and close ranks.

Islamic presence in the West: A civilizational bloc for world peace

Dalia Mogahed, the Executive Director of the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, who also serves on President Obama's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and directs the Muslim-West Facts Initiative, declared in an interview that the clash between the United States and the Muslim world is not based on religious or cultural motives. Muslims aren't filled with blind hatred for the West. Rather, they don't approve of some of its policies. A most recent poll carried out by the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies - a summary of which was published by the Egyptian magazine "October"- revealed that there is no relationship between violence and religiosity, i.e. religious individuals don't necessarily have increased propensity to violence and terrorism, and that true religion advocates peace, tolerance and cooperation among all human beings. The poll also revealed that acts of extremism, violence and terrorism are rejected by all peoples. It further showed that some Muslim peoples reject violence more than the American people and that some Muslims are more fearful of terrorism than the American people.

These findings were also mentioned in Jehan Sadat's book "My Hope for Peace" whose Arabic translation was recently released by Dar Al Shorouk in Cairo. The author reported Dalia Mogahed's words that the results of the poll conducted by the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies stressed that "the conflict that does exist right now between the United States and Muslim majority countries is based on policies and not on a clash of principles."

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Dalia Mogahed who is of Egyptian extraction was selected by U.S. President Barack Obama as White House advisor on Muslim affairs. The ideas and stances contained in the two speeches delivered by President Obama at the Turkish parliament in Ankara and at Cairo University unmistakably bear her imprint.

Interest in exploring the trends of Islamic public opinion in the West has considerably increased over the last eight years. In 2006, for instance, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) conducted a poll on Muslim American voters. The findings demonstrated that the majority of American Muslims favour political participation: 89% of the respondents said they vote regularly; 86% said they celebrate the Fourth of July; 42% said they volunteer for institutions serving the public and they consider that their religious beliefs don't contradict those of their peer citizens; and 84% said Muslims should strongly emphasize shared values with Christians and Jews. Also, the Washington-based Pew Research Center, which provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world, carried out a poll in 2006 on Muslims in the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Spain. The findings revealed that Muslims adopt positive stances vis-à-vis the countries in which they live. The respondents in this poll have strong feelings about their Islamic identity and expressed their willingness to adapt to the host countries' culture and traditions.

This, indeed, is one of the distinctive features of the Islamic presence in the West. In this regard, the Supreme Council for Education, Science and Culture for Muslims outside the Islamic World which includes nine heads of Islamic cultural centres and associations in Europe, South-East Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean and operates under the aegis of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), recently held its meeting to examine Muslims' educational and cultural condition in these areas. The presentations made and the discussions held during this meeting highlighted the fact that Muslims, whether they constitute citizen minorities or resident communities, integrate into the societies

where they live while maintaining their feeling of Islamic belonging and identity as well as their spiritual, cultural and civilizational specificities since they constitute a part of the Muslim Ummah and an extension of the Islamic world. In addition, the Council pointed out that Muslims in all continents have a noteworthy presence which is characterized, in most cases, by positive contribution, high efficiency and active participation in social motion and public life. Moreover, the Council members stressed that Muslim communities in which they are active firmly reject violence and terrorism. But they also denounce, through legal means, all forms of racial discrimination, hatred and defamation against religious beliefs and sacred symbols.

In fact, Muslims in the West, in its more comprehensive acceptance and not in the purely geographical concept - which includes Muslims outside the Member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, constitute a civilizational bloc for peace, security, cooperation and development. In spite of the vicious racist campaigns mounted against them in some media, political and cultural circles, the Islamic faith enjoins Muslims to align themselves against violence and terrorism and adhere to peace, entente and understanding in the societies where they live. That's why the smear campaigns orchestrated against Muslims in the West convey a false image on the Islamic presence. Such is the stereotype which has been spread nowadays and has adversely influenced the decisions, attitudes and opinions voiced by some political, media, academic and religious leaderships.

Since the creation of the Supreme Council for Education, Science and Culture for Muslims outside the Islamic World as part of the Strategy for Islamic Cultural Action outside the Islamic World which was adopted by the 9th Islamic Summit Conference held in Doha in 2000, I have been keen, in the meetings held by the Council and in which I take part, on directing the heads of Islamic cultural centres and associations in the West to work in the locations where they are operating towards encouraging integration into Muslims' host societies, promoting full respect for local laws, highlighting the brilliant image of

Islamic culture and civilization in their daily life and conduct with non-Muslims. I also urge them to focus on delivering educational services to Muslim children through setting up Arabic Islamic schools, teaching the Arabic language and Islamic education and shedding light on the Islamic civilization. In this way, the new generations will be imbued with the Islamic ideals and values which call for tolerance and respect for the beliefs of non-Muslims. This will ultimately maintain the strong Islamic presence in the West. It is worth mentioning that civilizational excellence is the opposite of racial discrimination. Therefore, the mission that should be assigned to the wise and prudent of the world as well as the intellectual, cultural and media elite consists in enhancing the civilizational excellence which doesn't impede dialogue and alliance of civilizations, and combating all forms of racial discrimination, the aim being to bring about security and peace in the world as a whole. Muslims from all parts of the world undoubtedly have a major role to play in stepping up the efforts of the international community in this regard.

The declared Israeli position: A threat to the American national security

In his intriguing and controversial book titled “**A world of troubles**”, American author Patrick Tyler urges U.S. President Barack Obama to seize this historic favourable opportunity to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and not to commit the deadly mistakes of his predecessors in order “to do better in the future.” The book of which Asharq Al Awsat Newspaper published a short review in issue of 11 June 2009 points out that if U.S. President Obama “ends his first term without registering some considerable success in the Middle East, the last chance for a moderate order in that region may pass.”

This calls to mind the resounding words of President Barack Obama's speech addressed to the Muslim world from Cairo University in which he undertook to resolve the Palestinian problem. In this connection, President Obama stated that doing justice to the Palestinian people through establishing its independent state and bringing about peace in the Middle East region are a supreme American interest required by the national security of the United States of America. These highly significant expressions which can be considered, to some extent, as a commitment on the part of the American president in front of the world to engage all the power and influence of the United States of America in bringing peace to the region as part of the Two State solution and in accordance with the Road Map, the international quartet's plan, the Arab Peace Initiative, UN relevant resolutions and the international legality.

- 25/6/2009

However, the Israeli policy tends towards the opposite direction; it not only goes against the will of the American president, but it also runs counter to the international legality and every sound logic. This tendency undermines all endeavours being made over the last years towards finding a just and peaceful settlement to the deteriorating crisis in the region. The stance adopted by the Israeli Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, in his speech of 14 July 2009 diminished all possibilities for an earnest attempt towards the final resolution of this problem which has lingered unsolved for more than sixty years. In fact, this shows a flagrant contradiction between the position of the Israeli government and the content of President Barack Obama's speech. It can further be said that the Israeli stance conveyed by the head of the Israeli government puts President Obama's words to the test. This extremist position is a strong challenge to the American Administration and, accordingly, constitutes an explicit threat to the interests of the United States. A careful reading of President Obama's speech leads to the assumption that Israel's opposition to the view of two states having equal sovereignty and rights and enjoying the basic components of the modern state according to the provisions of the international law threatens the national security of the United States of America. This indeed signals such an increased level of risk that we cannot figure out how the American Administration will cope with.

The astonishing part is that the American president expressed his satisfaction with the purport of Netanyahu's speech with regard to the Palestinian state though this latter, according to the Israeli prime minister's point of view, is a mythical entity and a virtual state devoid of the attributes of sovereignty. This is the first apparent contradiction in the stance of the new American Administration vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue.

Against this bleak and dark backdrop, and given the barriers put up by Israel to thwart the international peace efforts, the whole attention is directed to the Palestinian internal scene which is witnessing increased conflicts amid a welter of accusations and counter-accusations among

Palestinian parties. The persistence of this situation in complete indifference to the supreme interests of the Palestinian people who have waged a steadfast struggle and showed great resistance and endurance, will only lead to further disunity and weaken the Palestinian position. Therefore, it is high time this people enjoyed its full legitimate rights in establishing its national independent state.

The tragic situation suffered by the Palestinian people which is one of the major remnants of the internal conflict among brothers of the same homeland plays in Israel's hands. Progress can by no means be achieved towards a just political settlement as long as Palestinian conflicts rage acutely despite the efforts being made by some Arab parties to bring about a national reconciliation between Palestinian factions. The Palestinian issue will remain a core unsolved problem as long as Palestinians are divided among themselves, failing to assimilate the international changes which require a realistic treatment as well as political responsibility and awareness in order to preserve the supreme interests of the Palestinian people.

There are two positions which should cohere into one framework at this juncture. First, the Palestinian position should be unified; it should also be forged on firm foundations while advancing the Palestinian national interests. Second, the Arab Islamic position should reflect more coherence and solidarity and should also preserve the consensus reached over the Arab Peace Initiative which has been endorsed by both the Arab Summit and the Islamic Summit. This position cries for concerted efforts to eliminate all shortcomings and strengthen unity of ranks around a common goal: to put an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, the Golan and Shebaa Farms, and to establish the independent Palestinian state enjoying full sovereignty.

Palestinian reconciliation which is the solid basis of Palestinian national unity constitutes the convenient way to address the repercussions of the present Israeli attitude. Arab entente and Islamic solidarity represent the effective means to curb the Israeli arrogance and to

address the flat contradiction into which the American Administration has fallen by approving, to some extent, of the Israeli prime minister's speech which denies the right of the Palestinian people to establish its independent state with full sovereignty. The same speech insists on excluding Al Quds from negotiations, maintains that it is the eternal and unified capital of the State of Israel and opposes the return of Palestinian refugees to their usurped homeland.

America and the Muslim world: How to break the barrier?

Commissioned by the U.S. State Department, the Chargé d'Affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Rabat, Mr. Robert Jackson, accompanied by the Embassy's information and cultural officers, paid me a visit in my office, as part of a mission to collect opinions on possible ways to translate the ideas expressed in President Barack Obama's address to the Muslim world (Cairo University, 4 June 2009) into concrete terms in the relations between America and the Muslim world. The meeting also tackled the role of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural organization (ISESCO) in promoting the true image of Islam and Islamic culture in America. On that occasion, I explained to the American officials the standpoint of ISESCO and highlighted its consistency with the respective resolutions of the Islamic Summit conferences and the Council of the Foreign Ministers of the OIC Member States. The core of the issue, as I explained to them, is the pro-Israeli stance of the previous American Administrations despite Israel crimes against the Palestinian people, and despite its blatant violations of international law and the damage all this has caused to the American interests. In the same vein, I reiterated our support, as Muslims, for the fair attitude expressed in the President's address, for his call for balanced U.S. relations with the Muslim world based on mutual respect and for his positive view of Islam and its rich contribution to the human civilization. I also said that ISESCO, which represents the Muslim world's cultural conscience, endeavors to promote the culture of justice and peace, seeks to disseminate in America a true image of Islam and the Islamic civilization and aspires for stronger relations between the Muslim world and the American people.

- 4/8/2009

On the eve of that meeting, I happened to read in *Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi Magazine* (Issue 365, July 2009) a comprehensive summary of the results of an opinion poll of Americans' attitudes towards Islam that was conducted by *ABC News* and the *Washington Post*.

The poll, which caught the attention of observers and whose publication was well timed, showed that 41% to 48% of the respondents expressed an unfavorable view of Islam and 29% of them believed mainstream Islam encourages violence against non-Muslims. 55% of those polled said they are without a good basic understanding of Islam, and 53% said they do not personally know anyone who is Muslim. Conversely, people who professed an understanding of Islam, or know a Muslim, have positive views of the religion. Furthermore, an overwhelming 81% of the respondents called it important for President Barack Obama to try to improve U.S. relations with Muslim peoples, while 46% said it is “very important.”

While these figures reflect one part of the image, many other aspects need to be considered more amply. Actually, the other side of the coin is the interconnection between the prevailing feeling of antipathy, anger or disaffection which characterizes relations between the USA and the Muslim world, on the one hand, and the American administration's position with regard to the so called Arab-Israeli conflict which is but a euphemism for Israel's occupation of the Palestinian and Arab territories, its non-compliance with the relevant international instruments, its continuous violation of Palestinians' rights for more than 60 years now, and its war crimes and crimes humanity perpetrated across the Palestinian territories, either in Gaza or in the West Bank, on the other hand. This impartial pro-Israel position stands as the major cause of the tarnished image held about America in the Muslim world and explains the discontent Arabs and Muslims show to American policies in the region.

Let's suppose that the American Administration has fulfilled its moral and constitutional duty as laid out in the Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution, and that it has accordingly pressured Israel into abiding by the international legality, found an immediate fair and just solution to the “Arab-Israeli Conflict”, enabled

the Palestinian people to establish their independent State with East Al-Quds as its capital and put an end to the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan and the Lebanese Shebaa Farms. Let's also imagine America has withdrawn its troops from Iraq and Afghanistan and NATO its forces from Afghanistan and see then what the Muslim world's reaction to such hypothetical new American policy would have been. Will Muslims and all peoples across the world continue to perceive the U.S. as they do now, or will they simply develop a new perception of America as an economically, industrially, scientifically and technologically advanced country worthy of respect and esteem?

Redressing the image of the USA in the Muslim world could not be fulfilled the way the American Administration wishes unless the same Administration takes the path leading to a just comprehensive solution to the Palestinian problem. This solution must have as foundations the restoration of the usurped rights of the Palestinian people to their owners, the end of the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, the rule of international law, and prioritization of the strategic interests of the American people over those of Israel.

For materializing the ideas contained in the abovementioned address of President Obama, America is required, first of all, to use its weight to impose observance of international law, put an end to Israel's arrogance and defiance of international legality, redress the course of international relations by abandoning its double-standard policy and stopping to turn a blind eye to Israel's arrogance in the region and continuous aggressions against the Palestinian people. A new policy has to be adopted which should be based on the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the respective relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council and the General Assembly and the decision of the International Court of Justice concerning the racist Separation Wall erected by Israel in the Palestinian territories.

That would be a good start towards finding a way out of the tunnel into which the Bush Administration had driven the USA. This will certainly assert America's role as a leading nation worthy of its name as a

peace broker, guarantor of the rule of law and advocator of nations' progress and prosperity.

It is important to recognize America has responsibilities with regard to solving the world's problems, settling the crises threatening world peace and security which are being endured by peoples deprived of freedom, autonomy and dignity. But most important is to realize that America's major obligations in this regard arise from its status as a superpower founded on the basis of those same ideals of freedom, autonomy and dignity.

Up to the first half of the 20th Century, Arabs and Muslims used to look at America with esteem and admiration because the USA was not among the colonial powers having coercively subjected the Muslim and Arab worlds to their dominion against the will of the peoples of the region.

However that positive view witnessed a diametric shift by the end of the first half of the 20th Century as a different American policy began to take shape when Washington started implementing its fill-the-vacuum strategy to supersede France and Britain which were the two dominant colonial powers in the region. The beginning of that U-turn was the position taken by the USA and the former USSR with regard to the establishment of the State of Israel on the occasion of a resolution of the UN General Assembly in November 1947. That policy had taken full shape throughout the 1950s and 1960s, thus evolving into a strategic alliance with Israel which seized this opportunity to inflict its aggression on the Palestinian people.

Such was the beginning of a process which culminated in the tarnished image engraved today in the Arab and Muslim psyche. Any initiative to build balanced USA-Muslim relations based on mutual respect and mutual interests should therefore start from that point. All Muslims are asking from the USA is to enforce its founding ideals. This will help safeguard its interests and protect world peace and security against all potential offenders on top of which are the hard-line Zionists and their Far Right allies.

America and the Muslim World

The U.S. President Barack Obama named the Muslim Indian-American lawyer Rashad Hussain as his special envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). The announcement was made in a video address to the **U.S.-Islamic World Forum** in Doha. “I’m proud to announce today that I am appointing my Special Envoy to the OIC-Rashad Hussain,” Mr. Obama said. He asserted his “personal commitment to building efficient partnerships between the United States and the Muslim world, towards a life filled with hope for a better future for our children and for cooperation rather than conflict.”

He added, “We still have much to do, but we laid the foundations to turn words into deeds”. He emphasized that “education and knowledge are the currency of the twenty-first century, and dialogue moves ahead to achieve the sought goals.” I can say that the decision of the U.S. President is a practical step towards implementing the policy he announced in his famous speech to the Islamic World at the Cairo University on 4 June, 2009, and before that in the speech he delivered in Istanbul on 7 April, 2009 during his visit to Turkey, the first Muslim country he visited upon his investiture.

Will the United States one day become an observer member in the OIC, like the Russian Federation which is already an observer member of the OIC and ISESCO?

According to Article 4 of the OIC Charter, “Decision on granting Observer status to a State, member of the United Nations, shall be taken by the Council of Foreign Ministers by consensus only and on the basis of the agreed criteria by the Council of Foreign Ministers.”

If the United States applies for membership to the OIC as an observer member, it will have to join the OIC's objectives, including "the strive to achieve good governance at the international level and the democratization of the international relations based on the principles of equality and mutual respect among States and non-interference in matters which are within their domestic jurisdiction."

This is a highly important issue because the U.S. interference in Islamic world matters is one of the reasons why the image of America among the Muslim people is associated with arrogance and unflinching support for Israel's aggression on the Palestinian people and continued occupation of Arab territories.

The Freedoms Committee of the U.S. Congress, for example, exercises blatant interference in the internal affairs of the OIC member states. The committee does not do this task alone, but together with other U.S. committees, organizations and bodies, all backed by the 1994 Religious Freedom Act, which gives the United States the right to interfere in the internal affairs of states, under the pretext of preparing an annual report on religious freedom in the world, which is submitted to the Congress.

Recently, I have read an excellent article by Mr. Ragab Al-Banna on this subject in **Al-Ahram** newspaper of 31 January, entitled "**The hidden agenda of the U.S. committee and its sisters**", in which he uncovers many of the facts relating to this issue.

Last July, I received in my office Mr. Robert Jackson, the Chargé d'Affaires of the U.S. Embassy in Rabat, accompanied by the Embassy's Information Officer and Cultural Affairs Officer. We discussed the implementation of the contents of President Obama's address to the Muslim world from the Cairo University. Talks also focused on the role of ISESCO in presenting the true image of Islam and Muslims in the United States. I explained to the Chargé d'Affaires and his colleagues the objectives of ISESCO and the programmes it implements to enhance dialogue between cultures and the alliance of civilizations,

spread the peace culture and the values of tolerance and coexistence among people, and correct misconceptions about Islam and the Islamic civilization in the West.

I told the U.S. diplomats that ISESCO, as the cultural conscience of the Islamic world, works to promote the culture of justice and peace, and is keen to contribute to presenting the correct image of Islam and Islamic civilization in America as well as to strengthening relations between the Islamic world and the American people. I underlined that the position of ISESCO is consistent with the decisions of OIC Islamic summits and Council of Foreign Ministers. A visit was arranged for me to the United States to hold talks with U.S. officials in Washington on these issues, and give lectures at a number of prestigious universities.

The general orientations and main ideas of President Barack Obama's address to the U.S.-Islamic World Forum complete, in certain respects, the speech he gave at Cairo University. In an article I published in this newspaper last 9 June, I said, "It is true that the speech of the U.S. President Barack Obama is, by all standards, an historic document and a milestone in the relations of the Islamic world not only with the United States but with the West in general. It is true that the ideas and attitudes contained in this speech deserve respect and appreciation, with little exception and reservation, which lays the foundations for a new era. However, it is also true that such a spectacular and courageous change in positions and policies cannot be effective and influential unless it is translated into concrete initiatives and decisions that are implemented on the ground, so that we can offer to this new era the opportunity to continue eliminating the causes of tension and enable future generations to live in security, peace, reconciliation and tolerance".

Today, I reiterate this same opinion and confirm what I said early last summer, especially as nothing practical and useful has happened so far. Indeed, Israel continues to defy the U.S. administration and refuses to comply with UN resolutions, the situation in Iraq remains unstable, and Afghanistan is still fraught with fighting and chaos.

Therefore, the announcement of the United States' determination to join the OIC club will serve as a litmus test of the policy that the U.S. administration will adopt towards the Islamic world, most particularly on the Palestinian cause, the settlement of which depends on an explicit, enforceable and strong American position that does not bow to Israeli pressures but takes into consideration in the first place the interests of the American people and global peace and stability.

On Route to Washington

As I prepare for a working visit to the U.S. at an official invitation, I cast my memory back to my seven-year stay in this great country, which I left in 1982 upon completion of my higher studies at the University of Oregon.

My stay in the State of Oregon was very rewarding and instructive in many respects. I learnt new sciences, opened up on modern academic curricula, and had the chance to meet various components of the American people, especially University professors and students and the intellectual and cultural elite. I was also actively engaged in student action and within the Muslim community in the city of Eugene, where the University is located. America is associated in my memory with the years of higher academic studies, which offered many an opportunity for me and for other Arab and Muslim students to learn about the life-style in this vast country, which constitutes a dream of those who aspire for a new life and for learning about the fantastic features of American civilization, its scientific and technological progress and its vibrant cultural life.

From my seven-year stay in America, I came to the conclusion that looking at this great country only through the lens of the stands and policies taken by the U.S. Administration does not necessarily reflect the truth on the ground. I realized that most of the American people seem to be aloof and detached from the intricacies of the policies implemented by the U.S. Administration, in as much as they care less about what is going on in the world. Such was the trend especially before the 9/11 events. The American people is a blend of peoples hailing from different cultures and civilizations. It is difficult to tell whether this hybrid nature of the American people serves or undermines the interests of America.

- 13/3/2010

But I know from experience that diversity, like the one enjoyed by the American people, is a source of strength, vitality, excellence in scientific, technological, literary and artistic fields as well as supremacy in economic progress, industrial prowess and trade prosperity.

The image of America from within differs from the way it is seen from the outside world. Generally a Muslim or Arab who visits the United States summons up the image he formed about it, which is anyway incomplete or even disturbing. He might find it difficult to admit that the image of America from within differs from the way it is perceived from the outside. For the entrenched image of an American policy that is unbalanced and pursuing an immoral and illegal pattern of double standards is more dominant. For an Arab and Muslim outsider, the most defining aspect of America's image is that of an arrogant State which treats international laws with defying contempt. The beneficiary party of this American double-standards policy is Israel, which practices State terror and commits war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In my opinion, the fact that the U.S. takes for granted the ideas and perceptions provided by the Centers for Strategic Studies on the situation of the Arab and Muslim world, without verification of facts on the ground, often leads to the entrenching of misconceptions about Muslim and Arab peoples, Islamic concepts and beliefs, the nature of Islamic civilization and its centuries-long values. It is no secret that these Centers are dominated by ultra-conservatives, who are mostly pro-Israel Jews.

As result of these policies pursued by the U.S. Administration in the past, especially under the Junior Bush's era, the United States has come into a conflict situation and confrontation with the following parties:

- The Arab and Muslim world. Indeed, this confrontation is poised to extend to other parties.
- The international organizations, which call on the United States to observe diplomatic norms and international conventions.
- The U.S. allies who are embarrassed by the U.S. Administration policies.

- American opponents to the right-wing conservative policy, both from the Democratic Party and from other quarters wishing to see new regulations on military and government expenditure.

As Syrian strategic researcher Dr Shahir Ismail Shahir puts it clearly in a book on «U.S. foreign policy priorities after the 9/11», the international order has become like a pyramid with the United States posing at its apex as the sole pole of present time; the U.S. policy appears to be targeted at remodeling the world, while others seem to be in state of surrender. This current state of affairs is definitely at odds with the three landmark documents which underlie the American system: the Declaration of Independence, the American Constitution and President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, which ushered the U.S intervention in the international arena as a deterrent force, in the aftermath of First World War (8January 1918).

More serious is that the policies pursued by the U.S. Administration, particularly as regards its position towards the Israeli repetitive aggression against the Palestinian people contradicts even «The National Security Strategy» announced by the former President Bush on 20/9/2002, that is one year after the 9/11 events. The document states that the United States “must defend liberty and justice”. There is no doubt that the continuous aggressions perpetrated by the Israeli occupation forces in Palestinian territories constitute attacks on freedom and justice.

Now that the Bush era ended, the change Obama promised to introduce to the American foreign policy has yet to materialize through practical attitudes and concrete initiatives on the ground, especially with regard to the situation in the Palestinian occupied territories. Obama seems to be reluctant to enforce his initiatives amid the strong resistance exerted by conservatives through Congress and pro-Israel lobbies, who mislead the American people about the objectives of the Obama policy, and put Israel's interest above the interests of the United States.

During my upcoming visit to America, I will deliver two lectures on dialogue of civilizations and cultural diversity, and on ISESCO and its

civilizational message, at the University of Michigan and Georgetown University. I will also meet some American political officials, and visit a number of NGO's concerned with America's relations with the Islamic world. I am anxious to candidly highlight to my hosts the reasons for the existence of a psychological barrier between Muslims and the U.S. Administration's policies on Arab and Islamic issues, just as I did in this article.

In the final analysis, I believe that it would be in the interest of the United States to pay heed to some views which might displease some opinion leaders and decision makers. This would be particularly useful for it to understand the truth about its problems, not only in the Islamic world, but in the world as a whole.

Impressions from America

I have just arrived from the United States of America, where I was on an official visit for the first time in ten years. During this visit, I delivered two lectures: the first at the University of Michigan Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies (CMENAS), and the second at the Georgetown University Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding. This visit gave me the opportunity to meet several senior officials from the State Department, the White House and the Education Department. I also had the chance to meet Minnesota's Muslim Congressman, Mr Keith Ellison, at the Congress. I also visited the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), and the Washington-based Arab American Center for Translation and Research (AACT).

The meetings and activities I undertook during this visit left me with deep impressions. The first of these impressions is that the security officials at U.S. airports are still obsessed with fear, and are very rude to Muslim passengers in particular. Arab Muslim travelers undergo thorough security scrutinizing processes, including full body scan and frisking. Worse even, many a Muslim traveler needs to fill out application forms other than those that were presented to them by American embassies and consulates when applying for visa. What is more intolerable is that scrutiny does not exclude the elderly and diplomats.

If only the OIC Member States, whose citizens are subject to such procedures, were to apply the same scrutiny to American passengers; this might help put an end to such selective, unfair procedures.

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The second impression I gathered was that a more pronounced, consistent Arab Muslim presence in the USA is needed to contribute to correcting stereotypes and misconceptions about Arabs and Muslims. It is only fair to mention that immense efforts are being exerted in this regard by such serious institutions as CAIR, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), AACT and others. However, these efforts need to be sustained to face the extremist right-wing and Zionists using tremendous financial and media clout to damage the image of Arabs and Muslims.

I was also impressed by the great empathy among American intellectuals and politicians for Muslim world causes. This, I believe, should prompt us to reach out to such personalities to explain to them that this fair stance and moral integrity, amid a strong Zionist and right-wing bias, has generated such a positive response among Muslims in the world.

A large number of these leading figures do not receive due attention from Arab and Muslim countries. More than that, some of these countries seek the assistance of some American quarters which may have no sympathy for the Islamic world, in order to contract advertising and public relations services.

The fourth impression, mixed with astonishment, relates to the American Administration's stance vis-à-vis the Israeli decision to resume the building of settlements in Al-Quds. This position is in apparent contradiction with the official declarations and media statements. As a matter of fact, there is a major flaw in the American approach to the Palestinian issue and the Arab Israeli conflict in general. One of the objectives the American Administration pursues is termed as "rebuilding confidence" between Palestinians and Israelis. This indeed is an unrealistic concept, for confidence has always been lacking from the outset. The crux of the problem lies in the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, the expulsion of the Palestinian people from its homeland, the siege laid on those who remain steadfast on their land, and the judaization of Islamic sanctities. So how can confidence come about? It seems that the Zionist and extreme right-wing pressures keep ramping up on these flawed positions.

The new American administration brought in a glimmer of hope. A new impulse was given by the momentous speech of President Barack Obama to the Muslim world on 4 July 2009 at Cairo University. Though the American Administration has been noticeably slow to honour the commitments made on this occasion, the speech remains a highly important historical and political document which clearly states the new orientation the American administration has decided to adopt in order to win back the trust of the Muslim world, improve the image of the United States of America which was severely damaged during the term of the previous Administration, and begin a new phase of cooperation between the two parties while promoting mutual respect, preserving common interests and sticking to the principles of the international law.

That's why the new policy of President Obama's Administration with regard to the issues of the Islamic world was received with immense satisfaction among large segments of Arab-Muslim public opinion. Indeed, I was one of those who responded favourably to this new trend which signals the approach of the long-awaited change. I published numerous articles in this newspaper on the relation between the United States of America and the Muslim world whereby I analyzed the various dimensions of this relation based on current data and future prospects. I also laid emphasis on its profound meaning which constitutes a strong impetus for fruitful cooperation in a spirit of mutual respect and with consideration for common interests.

The lessons drawn from the experiences accumulated over more than seven decades demonstrate that an improved image of the United States in the Muslim world and in the world as a whole largely hinges on the extent to which the American administration abides by the spirit of the Declaration of Independence and the principles enshrined in the American constitution. It also depends on America's adherence to the Charter of the United Nations in the sphere of international relations, particularly in its relations with developing countries which seek to firmly uphold their sovereignty and the dignity of their citizens. Besides, these countries, including the OIC 57 Muslim states, expect America to step up

their efforts in development and progress. It is in this way that the United States of America will perform a major civilizational role in spreading security, peace and stability in international relations and building the firm foundations for a just and prosperous future.

There is much in common between the Muslim values and principles and the spirit of the U.S. Declaration of Independence and Constitution. This is already strong enough to move ahead the relation between the U.S. and the Muslim world. I met several American officials who share this feeling of the need to strengthen scientific and cultural cooperation between America and the Muslim world through ISESCO and through bilateral agreements. There is need, we agreed, to work together to support President Obama, who is coming under intense pressure from within, especially from pro-Israel constituents and from his rivals in the Republican Party. This should prompt the Muslim world countries to earnestly work to support Obama's efforts and assist Muslim and Arab communities in the United States of America in developing their capacities and using their potential to effectively participate in the cultural and political arena in the USA, and redress misconceptions about the Muslim world among the American public opinion. The litmus test would be to work, in a coordinated and open manner, towards concretizing such initiatives.

I was fascinated by the great works and innovative ideas of Muslim and Arab communities living in Michigan and Washington-DC, which deserve support from rich Muslim countries in particular. And I am sure that there are equally wonderful examples of Muslim and Arab genius in other parts of the USA. Will we then seize this historic opportunity or miss it as we did with so many opportunities in the past?

There are indeed larger areas in the USA into which we can operate. What we need is to support and encourage Muslim and Arab communities there, in order to make a real difference in American policies.

Letter to President Barack Obama

The world opinion is following with keen interest the present conditions in Palestine and the latest developments in the US Administration's position on Israel's obdurate policy aimed at obstructing peace regardless of international law. The situation is only worsening, with Israel obstinately refusing to subscribe to the course of action taken by the US Administration, thus putting the interests of the entire world at risk. I therefore found it necessary to address this open letter to US President Mr Barack Obama, through the widely circulated "Al Hayat" newspaper:

"Mr President,

I have no doubt whatsoever that you are sincere in wanting to make peace a reality in the Middle East, establish full right for the Palestinians to erect their independent State with Eastern Jerusalem as its capital, and relieve the pain and suffering they have long endured. The initiative you have enunciated in this sense and the steps that have been taken to push it through are there to prove it. Israel, not seeming to be happy with all this, is expanding its settlements into Eastern Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank; while threatening to attack Syria, Lebanon and Iran. Not only is Israel pursuing excavations, considered illegal under international law, at Al Aqsa Mosque, but it is also intensifying efforts to judaize Al Quds, in utter defiance of the international community's firm will to completely resolve this problem.

It is unfortunate that a number of US congressmen, pandering to the Jewish lobby in the United States, have taken up a stance contrary to the US Administration's mainstream in favour of a just, comprehensive

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settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Not only does this encourage the Israeli government to perpetuate its policies regardless of international law, but it also dashes every hope to see justice and peace reign supreme in the region, and prevent tensions from escalating any further, which could be seriously detrimental to the whole world.

America has plenty of vital interests in the Islamic world. It will not therefore be wise to sacrifice them by choosing to play in the hands of a group of extremists in Israel who are averse to peace and peace efforts.

The Islamic world, in its keen effort to find a viable solution to this acute problem, has adopted the Arab Peace Initiative, which was flatly rejected and hampered by Israel. Clearly, Israel is goading Jewish forces in the United States of America and the world over against your Administration's policy. And as if this is not enough, Israel is capitalizing on famous Jewish personalities, such as Elie Wiesel, who falsely declare themselves as advocates of peace, in order to exert pressure on you, through Jewish media leverage, and mislead Americans and the international public opinion as to the unpalatable truth about the hard-line attitude taken by Israel.

As both an Arab and a Muslim and as someone who is actively engaged in promoting dialogue of cultures and alliance of civilizations, and the culture of justice, peace and coexistence between peoples, I invite you Mr President to remain steadfast in your endeavour to make this dream of establishing peace in the region come true. For you will, by applying your stated policy in the Middle East, be remembered for eternity as the architect of justice and peace in this holy part of the world. This would certainly be a major achievement in world politics and a source of pride both for you and for the American people.

Mr President, let the Americans know that their interests come before those of Israel's pawns in the United States of America. It hardly needs to be added that playing in the hands of an aggressive, occupying state hostile to peace would amount to perpetuating the dreadful ordeal to which the Palestinian people have been subjected under unfair occu-

pation. It is sad that the world does not see how horrible are the crimes committed against the Palestinians, because of the mostly biased media coverage of what is happening in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Mr President, we are a nation whose religion calls for peace and condemns aggression, oppression and injustice. It is, therefore, not in the interest of the United States of America to follow in the footsteps of warmongers, haters and racists, who deny people their legitimate right to freedom and dignity.

You are not without knowing that equitable peace in Palestine will be a great shift to a better, united world where terrorism, extremism, aggression and occupation do not exist. You have an historic, great opportunity to bring about peace in the region. I urge you to seize that opportunity.

Yours sincerely,"

Such was the letter I, believing in my duty both as an individual and as an intellectual dedicated to humanity, addressed to President Barack Obama, whom I am sure is sincere in wanting to bring about a fair solution to the Palestinian question, based on international legality.

For more than three scores of years, Israel has been standing against the will of the American people, thus hazarding the US supreme interests. And, today, it is blatantly ignoring President Barack Obama's appeal to find a just and immediate solution to the Palestinian question. It is abundantly clear that Israel stubbornly refuses to positively respond to the American President's stance regarding the dangerous situation in the Middle East.

Even worse, by flouting the UN resolutions relative to the crisis in the Middle East and persisting in its aggressive policy in total disrespect for international law, the Israeli government is seriously undermining the interests not only of the United States of America but also of the whole world.

I have in my mind's eye the historic speech of President Obama to the Muslim world from Cairo University, and my meeting with him in Istanbul last spring, on the sidelines of the Alliance of Civilizations Forum 2009. For this reason, I deemed it necessary to extend this open letter to President Barack Obama, who is under pressure from pro-Israeli quarters bent both on diverting attention away from Israel's ongoing crimes in Palestine and on aborting the peace process in the Middle East.