

Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would first like to thank my brother Shaikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al Thani for inviting me to this notable event where leading policymakers and thinkers from around the world will convene to discuss one of the greatest challenges in world politics today.

The objective of this forum, essentially, is twofold: as Muslims we need to rethink how we view ourselves in order to instigate the United States to change its attitude and perception of us. In turn, we can mend our relationship and work on areas of joint concern maintaining mutual respect at all times.

The present reality is that the United States is and has always been a salient actor in the region. Whatever the United States chooses to do, which includes choosing not to do anything at all, will have profound consequences on the region. This is why we should focus on fostering a partnership between the US and the Muslim World to achieve long term goals.

Now let us take a historical perspective to examine the developments that helped shape where we are today and gain some insight in our effort to re-evaluate ourselves.

The Islamic Empire dominated the world for five centuries. On the Eastern flank, its capital Baghdad was the center of education and culture. It was the world's richest and most intellectual city; a city of museums, libraries, hospitals and mosques. Scholars from all over the world congregated in Bayt Al Hikmah, House of Wisdom, one of the most prominent centers of learning at the time, to study and translate works of Aristotle, Plato, Euclid, Pythagoras thus preserving principle features of the Greek and Roman cultures.

Similarly, on the Western flank, Andalusia (Al Andulus) in Southern Spain also flourished as a center for learning, knowledge and outstanding **tolerance** under the Islamic Empire. It was a period of social stability and intellectual fertility where Muslims, Jews and Christians all lived

together in relative peace and harmony. Many Jews and Christians, alongside Muslims, entered the fields of government, science, medicine and literature. In fact, during this time, Andalusia gave rise to many great Scholars both Muslims and non-Muslims alike that made significant contributions to the sciences, the humanities and the Arts. Intellectuals such as: Ibn Rushd (Averroes), the great Muslim philosopher that reconciled reason with religion and the renowned Jewish philosopher and physician Musa Ibn Maymun (Maimonides) were all educated in Andalusia.

In effect, the environment that the Islamic world cultivated in cities like Baghdad and Cordoba was the main threshold behind the European Renaissance. The great works and ideas that were produced during this time were the predecessors that built modern Western thinking.

Essentially, the Islamic Empire served not only as a link, just like other empires have been, to help sustain the civilization we all belong to by *preserving* the past whilst *adding* its own contributions, it was an **integral** layer in the orderly development of modern thinking. A theme, rather, a reality we must keep in mind at all times: that we are all but **one** civilization. In the most intrinsic and in the broadest context of how we perceive what our identity is, we should consciously and consistently pay allegiance to the evolution of this civilization.

Unfortunately, the way in which many contemporary Muslims perceive what identity means is distorted. We all cherish the idea of belonging to a national community or a religious community for that matter. They are important to us because they give us a sense of security especially at a day and age where individualism is prevalent and communities are on the wane. However this notion of identity should not induce segregation and exacerbate differences amongst each other.

To our dismay, this is what we are facing nowadays with the surge of Islamic sectarianism everywhere. And this is what we must work together to avoid. On the one hand, it is a culprit for national fragmentation weakening the whole region. On the other hand, it can be adopted as a pretext by certain countries to achieve national ambitions. Fundamentally, it is incompatible with the essence of Islam specifically and the unity of our one civilization generally.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Arab-Israeli conflict will always be a significant point of contention between the US and the Islamic World until peace in the region prevails. Extremists, in particular, take this a step further. They tend to exploit this issue in particular amongst others such as Guantanamo, in order to hinder any efforts to bridge the rifts between us. We must keep this in mind.

The rise of Islamic extremist organizations throughout the Muslim World is partly due to a void that the state is not filling at present. This is a reality which governments need to acknowledge and work towards resolving. It is imperative for government institutions to be more accessible and receptive to their people and grant more autonomy to civil society and NGOs. In the meantime, establishing a dialogue with these organizations and engaging them in the democratic process is crucial.

We must strive to educate our youth and fight sectarianism and extremism. This will change the way we look at ourselves and how we assess our goals. Inevitably this will project a more constructive image to the West and prompt a new level of engagement with the US.

Distinguished Guests,

It is imperative that we collaborate together to untangle the web of assumptions linking terrorism with religious extremism and linking terrorism with the absence of democracy. Both links are contingent but exaggerated. In effect, they have set a militaristic tone which projects an egotistical image of the US, a strategy to *conquer* rather than *win* the minds and the hearts of Muslims, which in the long run will be counterproductive.

In contrast, the US must join forces with the Islamic nations and drive for political reform and democratization in the region for its **own** sake and not as an extension of its war efforts in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

Also, it is a dire misconception that tyrannical and backward regimes are pervasive throughout the Islamic world and this needs to be rectified. To the contrary, many countries within the Muslim World already have the underpinnings of modernity such as good governance, the rule of law, transparency, and respect for human rights. Many benefit from free market policies and some rank highly on the Human Development Index. With the help of the US, these aspects can be enhanced further.

Distinguished Friends,

We are not here to reinvent the wheel; rather, we want to maintain the advancement of our civilization in a peaceful and prosperous way. Effectively, we need to cooperate with the US as well as with other countries politically, economically and culturally.

Bahrain is a testament to this. The Bahraini people established direct ties with the American people over a century ago when American missionaries began itinerant medical work in 1893. These ties endured and strengthened from then onward. In fact formal ties, were established much later when Bahrain became independent in 1971.

I myself, like many other non-Americans here have close ties with America and its people. I lived there, I studied there, I worked there, embracing the American dream. They truly were formative years for me that I look back on with such fondness. Therefore, the 11th of September was to me, like many others, a very sad day.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Recently, Bahrain has joined countries like Jordan, Morocco and Oman in signing free trade agreements with the US. Steps like these are indispensable as they encourage economic reform which has diverse repercussions politically, socially and culturally. Other countries should follow suit.

This is merely the first step. Cultural and educational collaborations between the Islamic World and the US are vital and have been under-exploited and I am delighted that a "Leaders Seminar" is devoted to addressing these topics. Cross-cultural art exhibitions and academic exchanges are effective means to examine ideas and change perceptions with people and civil society directly. They are much closer to home and reverberate across the board. **THIS IS THE WAY FORWARD.**

Effectively, these efforts will engage women as well as the youth which comprise 50-60% of the region's population, in order to help them cultivate their own ideas and leadership skills whilst diverting them from extremist tendencies. This will ultimately enhance the productivity and efficacy of these important players within society.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Brookings Institution especially Professor Stephen Cohen, Dr. Peter Singer, Ambassador Martin Indyk, and Professor Shibley Telhami for their significant contributions as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar for hosting this important forum.

This forum confirms the need to examine and address the problems and shortcomings the Muslim World and America face in this region. Bahrain is fully committed to tackle these issues. Let us come together and confront these challenges that lie ahead in a frank, open, and direct manner.

Thank you.