

U.S.-ISLAMIC WORLD FORUM

## Closing Address

by William J. Clinton

Thank you very much. Your Excellency, thank you for your warm welcome and your fine speech.

I want to thank all of those responsible for convening the Forum: Ambassador Martin Indyk, I'm glad to see him in a job where he gets less criticism than he did when he worked for me, Peter Singer, Shibley Telhami, and Steven Cohen, thank you for your work.

I also want to acknowledge His Highness, the Emir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, for his support of this endeavor, the Ford Foundation, and the Saban Center of the Brookings Institution, and my friend, Haim Saban, for supporting this dialogue.

I have come a long way to spend a short time here because I believe that this is an important meeting, being held in the proper place. Your Excellency, I have just come, as you know, at your request from a visit to your Education City, where I had a meeting in the Cornell Medical Center Building with students from all parts of the university complex there. And I was a little late because the students made the mistake of opening the floor to questions. And there were still 20 or 30 people with their hands up when I walked out, and I did my best to answer the questions, even though they asked me some questions I did not really want to answer.

I say that because I hope what I just saw there is the future not just of Qatar but of the entire Middle East.

The defining feature of the modern world is not terror, nor is it trade nor technology, although terror, trade, and technology are manifestations of the defining feature of the modern world, which is its interdependence—a word I far prefer to “globalization,” the more common word, because for most people globalization has a largely economic meaning. “Interdependence” is a broader word. It simply means we cannot escape each other. And our relationships go far beyond economics.

The main point I would like to make about the interdependent world that applies to the relationships between the United States and the Islamic world is that the interdependence we enjoy has been of great benefit to some of us, but it is unequal, unstable, and unsustainable.

For example, if you take economic interdependence, in the last 20 years global trade has lifted more people out of poverty than in any comparable period in all of human history. But that progress has not kept up with population growth or been manifest in countries that are either poorly run or otherwise deficient in indigenous economic growth. So that half the people in the world today are living on less than \$2 a day, a billion people living on less than \$1 a day, a sobering thought here in this country that will soon have the highest per capita income in the world.

If you take the globalization of knowledge through technology, it's been unbelievable. In America—let's take a rich country—ever since the 1990 census we have known that our young people who have at least two years of post-high school education, university education, are likely to get a job with a growing income. But even in America, young people with less than two years of post-high school education are likely to have jobs, all right, but their incomes won't keep up with the cost of living.

Around the world, the benefits of even basic education are much greater. In a poor country, one year of schooling tends to add 10 to 15 percent a year to the earning capacity of the children who get it, boys and girls, in countries open to the education and employment of girls and women. But 130 million young people in the world never

go to school a single day, and that understates the problem because there are many places where nominally go to school, but their education is not particularly useful.

If you take health care—and I just came from that marvelous Cornell medical facility here—I spent a lot of money, the American people's tax money, on biomedical research, specifically on sequencing the human genome and on trying to merge medical research with hightechnology research through nanotechnology, super-micro technology that will with the sequencing of the genome and its practical applications soon give us diagnostic mechanisms that will make virtually all cancers detectable at submicroscopic levels and will give young women sometime in the next several years the prospect of giving birth to babies that will have life expectancies of 90 years or so in countries with strong health systems.

But, this year, 10 million children will die of completely preventable childhood diseases. One in four of all the people who perish on Earth this year from all causes will die of AIDS—100 percent preventable—where there is medicine that turns it from a death sentence to a chronic illness; TB, malaria—treatable with medicine; and infections related to diarrhea, most of them are little children who never got a single clean glass of water in their lives. They, too, are part of interdependence.

We are more culturally interdependent than ever before. America is a lot more interesting country than it was 30 years ago. We have people from every race and religion and ethnic group on Earth. After the tragic events of September 11, 2001, my wife and I went to visit a school in Lower Manhattan in New York where the children had been forced to vacate the school because the debris from the collapse of the World Trade Center had destroyed their building. So we visited this school, an elementary school. There were 600 children in this school in one neighborhood in New York City from over 80 different countries. It was marvelous. It was fascinating.

Islam is the fastest-growing religion in America. We have now 6 million-plus Muslims in the United States. This tapestry of ours is growing richer, and it makes us more interesting. But it is ironic that at a time when we have tried to accommodate more diversity, and you are a symbol of the reconciliation of Islam with the modern world and with people of different backgrounds around the world that you have brought here to educate your young people with you, that the world is absolutely beset still by conflicts rooted in hatred of those of difference, whether by religion, race, tribe, or ethnic group.

So this is a paradoxical world we live in. We cannot understand U.S.-Islamic relationships unless we understand the sweeping scope of the interdependent world, its enormous benefits and its persistent inequalities and instabilities. Because it isn't fair to say that every single element of our relationship, good and bad, is just a function of who happens to be in power or what the political issue of the day is. You have to see it against the large backdrop of this moment in history.

Now, the United States has enjoyed good relationships with Qatar under Republican and Democratic administrations. In good and bad times, you have been our friend, and I am grateful. Our relationships with the rest of the Islamic world, both in the Middle East and elsewhere, are not all that good. Sometimes they're good and sometimes they're not so good. Why? Well, there are differences. There are deep historical wounds. There are honest and perplexing misunderstandings. That's why this meeting's a good thing. Serious good people of good will can get a long way just by having honest conversations. So I have been asked to come here to participate in that conversation, and I would offer four observations:

We need to do more to understand how the two major players here understand each other.

We need, secondly, to improve our capacity for self-criticism.

Third, we need to identify our common interests.

And, fourth, we need to build the habits of mind and heart necessary to end the habit of demonizing those who are different from us.

Striving to understand how each other views the world requires at least knowing that our attitudes toward one another are born of history, faith, circumstance, national interest, and collective psychology as well. Too many Americans know too little about the Islamic world, and much of what they know they learned after September the 11th through the narrow lens of terror. It is important but not sufficient, because what people do out of anger, pain, and fear both darkens and distorts reality.

If people in the United States better understood the glorious paths that Islam took in its early centuries, they might better understand the frustrations of many people in the Muslim world today as well as their dreams for a better future.

In the golden age of the Caliphate, Mamun the Great collected scholars, sought all the great works from abroad, brought translators to put works from Greek, Syriac, Persian, and Sanskrit into Arabic. In the year 800, paper was being made for Harun al-Rashid in Baghdad. The Arabs brought it to Byzantium, then to Spain, from which it spread across Europe, and ultimately made possible inventions like the printing press.

Engineers and builders had to construct mosques that, wherever they were, faced Mecca, requiring them to produce a diagram from which the sacred directions could be deduced no matter where they were needed within the reach of the empire.

This led Muslim scientists and engineers to improve on Ptolemy's figure for longitude and latitude, and that is why the kings of Europe in turn commissioned maps from Arab geographers.

Al-Hazzan (ph), the great student of light and vision, laid the foundation for modern optics and, more important, for the modern scientific method, for he—not a Western scientist—was the first to teach that science should be based on experiment as well as philosophical argument, laying the basis for an infusion of knowledge that spread from the Arab world through Spain and ultimately helped to fuel the entire European Renaissance and the scientific revolution there.

Therefore, those in the West who tend to see Islam only through the specter of terror and to identify a faith with a history this rich only with the darkest moments of its recent past would be well served by knowing more of the whole history.

I thought the best thing President Bush did in the immediate aftermath of September the 11th was to go to a mosque and meet with American Muslim leaders and say to the world, "Our fight is not and never has been with Islam. It is with terror."

But we have sometimes forgotten that.

I would say one other thing, however. What worked then will work now and is working in Qatar. And that brings me to my second point.

I think it is important that the Muslim world try to understand the United States. Sometimes I feel that our country here is judged by many Muslims based on how they think the Middle East peace process is going and whether they think we're doing enough to try to give the Palestinians a state and a decent future. I myself don't mind being judged by that standard because I worked for it for eight years.

But that is not the only standard. I said President Bush went to a mosque and met with Muslim leaders shortly after September the 11th. I was the first President to observe every year the feast of 'Id al-Fitr at the end of Ramadan; to bring large numbers of Muslims into the White House on a wide range of issues; to address the Palestinian National Council in Gaza. And I did try until my last day in office to get a just and lasting peace in the Middle East that would give a state to the Palestinians, a capital in Jerusalem, protect the religious sites on the Haram al-Sharif, and provide fair treatment of refugees.

America's support for Israel is not rooted in hostility to the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians. Our support for Israel is rooted in several things. Yes, partly what happened in the Holocaust, partly by the presence of so many Jewish Americans in our country, but also let us not forget, as we always cite UN Resolutions 242 and 338, Israel was also created by an act of the UN.

I never thought my support for Israel's existence and right to live in peace with its neighbors was inconsistent with my support for a Palestinian state and decent treatment from the Palestinians, whom I believe have been abused by just about everybody who had a chance to abuse them for a long time, including their own leaders and a lot of their neighbors besides Israel. They have provided a convenient football. I will say more about that in a moment.

The only point I want to make today is: People in the Islamic world should not look at America solely through the prism of the current state of the Middle East peace talks. It's okay, if you don't think we're doing the right things, for you to criticize us. But if we're failing, it doesn't mean that we're hostile to the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians. President Bush has said he wants a Palestinian state.

If we're failing, we may just have made a mistake. It may not be that we're anti-Muslim at all. We're human. We don't always know what the right thing to do is. And if this were an easy problem, someone would have solved it long ago. I personally believe that we can do more, and I'll say more about that in a moment.

Again, I remind you that Islam is in the United States. When the terrorists killed 3,100 people in America on September the 11th, 2001, a few hundred of those people were Muslims, American Muslims and our guests and friends from Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Jordan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Turkey, and Yemen.

During my Presidency, the United States used its military power in Bosnia and Kosovo to protect Muslims against Mr. Milosevic, who represented an orthodox Christian culture. And what he did to the Bosnian Muslims and the Kosovar Muslims that Mr. Holbrooke there helped me to stop was as big a violation

Was as big a violation of Christianity as what happened on September the 11th, 2001, was an affront to Islam.

A lot of people remember that 18 Americans died in a fire fight in Somalia in 1993, and their deaths were memorialized in a movie called "Black Hawk Down." It was one of the three or four worst days of my Presidency. But I would like the Islamic world to remember why those men died. Two hundred fifty thousand Somalis had died of starvation; a million more were at risk because armed gangs wouldn't let relief workers deliver food to starving people. President Bush first sent the troops there, and I supported him and kept them there. They were on a humanitarian mission, subsequently part of the United Nationsanctioned mission.

But the American soldiers died because they were trying to arrest General Aidid—for doing what? For murdering 22 Pakistani Muslim United Nations peacekeepers.

In addition to Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, the United States has sided with Muslims in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union, in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia against Saddam. Often we sided during the Cold War with Pakistan in disputes with India, with Turkey in disputes with Greece.

I ask only this: America should be judged on our full record. We make mistakes. We're human. And if you make enough big decisions, you'll make a mistake now and then. I made my fair share, and I suppose every other President has. But I believe that the terrorist view that America is anti-Islam is a false view.

Just recently, President Bush and Tony Blair announced that they had reached an accord with Muammar Qaddafi, even. I never thought I'd live to see that.

And, in fairness to him, Mr. Qaddafi's been hawking this deal for two or three years now, as a lot of you know. And I applaud the President and Prime Minister Blair for doing it. They had to see the situation with new eyes.

So the first thing we have to do is to see each other without distortion. Once you do that, it becomes a little easier to stop blaming someone else for every problem and to engage in constructive self-criticism.

Crown Prince Abdullah told a meeting of Gulf leaders after September the 11th, and I quote, "Catastrophes are, in fact, opportunities that make it incumbent upon us

to conduct self-scrutiny, review our attitudes, and repair errors. The real and deadly risk is to face crises with hands folded and to blame others instead of confronting the crises and taking responsibility for our role.”

Terrorism, indeed all political extremism in all countries, never accepts any responsibility for any problem. They always blame the others. It’s always their fault. Blaming outsiders, as all of us who have been in office knows, can be very good politics in the short run. It’s always nice to convince your people that you can demonize someone else. The problem is in the long run. Blaming outsiders is a path to powerlessness. By contrast, assuming responsibility to build a different future is empowering. Witness our host. Look at what is being done in Qatar to build a different future.

Look at what is being done in other Gulf states and, indeed, around the world. I want to come back to this in a minute, but I will say again: If one’s life is dominated by blaming someone else for your own problems, even if they are to blame, even if there really is someone to blame, in the end you make yourself powerless; whereas, if you assume responsibility for doing what can be done about your own problems, you make yourself powerful.

I was profoundly moved by the highly insightful self-criticism in the United Nations Arab Human Development Report last year where Islamic authors said reform from within based on rigorous self-criticism is a far more proper and sustainable alternative in contrast to efforts to restructure the region from outside.

The report revealed that under 2 percent of the Arab population has access to the Internet; that only one in 20 university students in the Arab world study science; that with 5 percent of the world’s population, you publish only a little over 1 percent of the world’s books. This is good news. Why? Because all these things are something you can easily do something about.

I just went to Education City today. I saw you doing something about it. This is something that does not require even a great deal of thought. It requires some money, maybe some from the region, some from without. But you can do something about it.

We in America would like the Islamic world to ask themselves, even as we ask ourselves, exactly what inspired their hatred of our country and what can we do together to defuse it, to prevent more September the 11th’s, not only in the West but in the Islamic world, for we have learned in recent months that no nation is safe from the fire of terrorism.

I think what stunned us in America on September the 11th more than the method of the attack was the depth of hatred and cold calculation behind it. And let me say in that context, one of the things that I think has to be examined is the kind of education offered by Education City here as opposed to that which concentrates on a highly selective reading of the Koran in a religion-only education, designed to blame other people for current problems.

I respect religious education. When I was a boy, I went to a Catholic school for a couple of years. I respect families’ rights to send their children to any religious schools they want. But I think it is important that even schools that are religious at their base both teach science and arts and not teach hatred and dehumanization.

Now, let me say, having said all this, I think the United States needs to engage in a little more self-criticism. We’ve never been a perfect country. We were born in slavery. When we first started having elections, only white male property owners could vote. The author of our Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, said when he thought of slavery—and he held slaves all his life. He said, “I tremble to think God is just.” In other words, he knew better and did it anyway.

So we’re hardly perfect. We’re still burdened with our haters and our dividers who use religion sometimes as an excuse to get and keep political power. We still are prone to be blinded by self-interest. Sometimes we’re heedless of the feelings and views of others. And I think for a country as wealthy as ours to run a \$500 billion government deficit is

unconscionable because we're taking the money out of the global economy that ought to be used to invest in the poor countries of the world. So we're not perfect.

Before September the 11th, the worst terrorist act in our history was an American citizen blowing up the federal building in Oklahoma City.

On the other hand, for more than 200 years now, America has become the longest-lasting democracy in human history because we kept stumbling in the right direction.

When our Constitution was written, what did our Founding Fathers say they were doing? They said: We're not creating a perfect country. We are creating a system that will produce, and I quote, "a more perfect union." What did that mean? We'll never be perfect, but we can always do better.

How can we do better? We can do better by extending freedom, by extending opportunity, by widening the circle of community. How do we do it? Well, we had a system that built in self-criticism. One of our Founding Fathers, Benjamin Franklin, said, and I quote, "Our critics are our friends, for they show us our faults." I think it's fair to say that if that's the definition, I had more friends than any President in modern history.

But we got away from criticism a little bit after September the 11th, but we're getting over it now. We're getting back to normal. And we need to know that.

One problem you need to understand about America is that before September the 11th, huge numbers of my fellow citizens didn't—they weren't hostile toward you. They didn't think about you one way or the other. And a lot of what they knew was wrong. And we were wrong in that. But if you want to criticize us, know what we really did wrong. We bore you no ill will. We had no hostility to the Palestinians. We didn't want the Islamic world to be disrespected in any way. We had a lot of people who never thought about it and who didn't even know what their own government's policy was.

A couple of years ago, we had a poll where we asked the American people—I didn't. The University of Maryland said: Well, how much do you think your country spends on foreign aid? The biggest number, 15 percent. Well, how much should your country spend on foreign aid? Only 3 to 5 percent.

I agreed with them. The problem is America spends less than 1 percent of our budget on foreign aid, the smallest of any wealthy country in the world, and my fellow citizens don't know it.

So if you want to be mad at us, be mad at us for being ignorant, not malicious, and say to America 9/11 showed you have to know more about the rest of the world and care more about it.

We have done a lot in my country's history to ease the suffering and pain of the world, but we have to do more. And that brings me to the third point, and maybe the most important one. The real way for people to overcome misunderstanding is to do things together. Just to do things together, to identify common interests. We've already identified one in a better dialogue and more understanding. We need more people-to-people dialogue. I'm glad AlJazeera's covering this, but I've probably been seen before in the Muslim world.

What if we covered in the United States and throughout the region a real people-to-people dialogue as the Public Diplomacy Group recommended? What if everybody entered the dialogue with a goal of listen and understand instead of discredit and defeat in an argument? I think it can make a difference.

What else—what are our other common interests? Let me just mention a couple. Whether you think America did the right thing in Iraq or not, I think we all now share an interest in a free, independent, stable, representative government in Iraq, strong enough to defend its borders, not able to threaten its neighbors, prosperous enough to deny a foothold to al Qaeda or any other terrorist group.

I thank Qatar for their contribution to the reconstruction of Iraq. That wasn't for America. It was for the people of Iraq and the people of the region.

The same thing is true in Afghanistan. We dare not make the mistake in Afghanistan the United States made in the early '80s where, as soon as the Soviet Union was gone, we were out the back door, forgetting their sacrifice and leaving them to the tender mercies of those who took over.

The same thing is true in building a worldwide partnership to track terrorists, intercept communications, cut off the financing, and do all the things that we have to do, and stopping the appeal of weapons of mass destruction. We have a common interest in all those things.

And, finally, we have a common interest in building a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. I saw Yasser Abed Rabbo and Amnon Lipkin-Shahak last night. I see Mohammed Dhalan, who spent many sleepless nights with me in the negotiations. But I just want to say a couple things about this.

Everybody knows I think that it was a mistake for the Palestinians not to take the deal I put on the table at Taba. But they didn't and we are where we are. I also think that it's been a mistake to have three years without a resolution. The interesting thing about this Geneva Accord that Belin, Rabbo, and everybody else that was involved in the accord, is not so much the details. It is that it proves that people of good will on both sides can make an honorable settlement that is mutually beneficial.

I was actually surprised by some of the details. Some of them were a little more favorable to Israel than I had been thinking about. Some of them were a little more favorable to the Palestinians than I had been thinking about. But they were innovative. They thought it up and they did it.

Now, here's what I want to say about this, and this is where I think you can hold my country accountable. We can't impose a settlement on the parties. But we know when we're involved, fewer people die. What we have now is ever since 2000, we've known within three or four degrees one way or the other what the final settlement was going to be. And we can go on the way it is for five years, ten years, or a hundred years, but the facts are not going to change, except the Palestinians will get more numerous, younger, poorer, and angrier. And we'll help the Israelis to survive because we must, but it'll be more expensive, and they'll have to have more weapons, and it'll be a more miserable life for them, too.

In this intifada, you had 1,900 dead Palestinians, average age about 18; 900 dead Israelis, average age about 24. And a handful of politicians who won't do what has to be done, average age, a heck of a lot older than that.

So the deal here is: How long are old guys like me going to sit around and let young guys like them die because we're too darned proud to make the changes that have to be made when we know what the deal is?

Now, if the United States doesn't do anything but just remind everybody of that reality and try to keep people from killing each other and making it worse, doing things that are provocative and making it worse, that is time and effort worth spending.

But you have a responsibility, too. If you come from a more prosperous, more peaceful Islamic state, I think you have to ask yourself what are your responsibilities to help the young Palestinians get education, to understand they have different options, to reach out to Israel and tell them there is a secure, friendly future in the Middle East, to create the conditions on both side that will enable older people who've been living with the circumstances so long they can't imagine making the compromises to do what's right to stop younger people from dying, for God's sakes.

This is something we need your help on. Everybody. You can't ask America to do this alone. The Arab states have to help here.

We have got to create a climate to do what we know has to be done. Look at the Geneva agreement. It doesn't matter if it's the right details. The fact is it can be done. And we have a common interest.

If you think we're laying down on the job and we're not pushing this, reprimand us.

By all means, tell us, get over here and go back to work and stop so many people from dying. But you need to ask yourself what you can do, too.

We have to find a home for these refugees. We have to find jobs for people. We have to find education for people. There has to be an alternative future. And it bothers me—you know, I've reached the age now where the thing that bothers me most in life is somebody younger than me dying. I've had a good life. I've lived my dreams. I am sick and tired of children dying. And we've now had a three-year intifada where young people are dying because older people won't do what needs to be done. And it's not acceptable. But we can't do this alone. We need your help, too. Both with the Palestinians and with the Israelis, we can do it.

Now, let me just make one other point. We have a common interest not just in stopping bad things from happening, but in making good things happen. You can teach—look at Qatar again. Let's just take Qatar. There's 130 million children in this world who never go to school. A lot of them are Muslim, and a lot of them are girls. Sixty percent of the people who never go to school are girls. It doesn't cost much money to put all of them in school and give them a pretty decent education. It's something we ought to do together so no one would think we were trying to violate Islam or the religious and cultural traditions of any country, of any faith, on any continent. We have a common interest in that.

We have a common interest in basic health systems. We have a common interest in teaching people to have more indigenous economic growth. The only Muslim country I know of today working in what I think of as the most important basic economic growth program, that of Hernando de Soto, the great Peruvian economist, is Egypt, where they're trying to establish basic rules for giving title to property and cutting through government red tape so that people can have title in their homes, their businesses, their farms, and be able to get credit for it. We need to do more things like this.

The final point I want to make is this: We can find common interests, we can be selfcritical, we can understand where each other are coming from—and we will all fail unless we honestly believe that our common humanity is more important than our interesting differences.

So I'll just close with a totally non-political, non-economic observation. Every person in this room, whatever your religion, whatever your country, whatever your native language—learned from infancy to organize reality into categories so that you could think and speak and communicate: women and men, tall and short, time and distance, colors and shapes, wood and stone and steel. If there were no categories, we couldn't make sense of one another.

The problem comes, especially in matters of religion, when people believe their categories contain the whole truth. Because if you believe you have the whole truth, then whoever disagrees with you is not as human as you are and not entitled to the same humanity and treatment. And there will never be a reconciliation of the United States and the Islamic world as long as that is the dominant way of thinking. You have to dehumanize someone if you think you've got the whole truth.

This is not just a Muslim problem. When I was President, a very prominent fundamentalist minister, whom I like very much personally, came to see me to reprimand me for my sins—not my personal sins, my political sins.

I think he figured everybody was a personal sinner, but you didn't have to be a political sinner. That was somehow a matter of choice.

So this fellow looked at me over—this is a true story. He looked at me over breakfast one day, and he was a very powerful person. He said, "I want you to answer this question yes or no. Don't give me some fancy political answer. Yes or no. Do you believe our Bible is literally true? Yes or no."

Now, listen to this. We're all laughing, but you listen. I'm dead serious. I said, "I believe it is completely true. But I do not believe you or I are smart enough to understand



it completely.”

Why does the Koran say, “Allah put different people on the Earth not that they might despise one another but that they might come to know one another and love one another”? Why does the Torah say, “He who turns aside a stranger might as well turn aside from the most high God”? Why does the Christian Bible say, “Love your neighbor as yourself”? This is the crux of this whole thing.

Now, you know I’m a Christian. The most important Christian theologian was St. Paul, who wrote an interesting commentary on paradise. And since Muslims believe in paradise, I think I will give you the commentary, and the conclusion of the commentary about what our values should be.

St. Paul was talking about life today and life in paradise, and this is what he said: “For now, I see through a glass darkly, but then, face to face. Now I know in part, but then, I shall know even as I am known, by God,” parenthesis. “And now abideth faith, hope, and love, these three, but the greatest of these is love.”

How in the world could love be greater than faith? Because I see through a glass darkly and I know in part. Oh, I know we’ve got all the television in the world. We’ve got instantaneous communications. We’ve got science. We’ve sequenced the human genome. And we’ve got all these smart politicians. I’m telling you, in the end it all comes down to that. As long as you’re prepared to admit you don’t have the whole truth and somebody else might know something you need to know, we’re going to do just fine. We just need to work at it.

Thank you very much.