

Talking Points for Dr. Saeb 2010 U.S.-Islamic World Forum, Doha, 13-15 February, 2010

- Ambassador Indyk, our distinguished host, has characterized President Obama's 4 June speech at Al-Azhar University speech as:

“. . . a dramatic and persuasive American manifesto for a new relationship with the Muslim world. President Obama stood his ground on American values and interests but presented them in a package that should be attractive to his Muslim audience."

Welcome and *attractive* as President Obama's *message* may have been to Muslim and international audiences, the failure to swiftly follow such a bold "American Manifesto" with similarly bold "American *deeds*" risks undermining President Obama's well-intentioned efforts.

- **I will address two broad themes that President Obama eloquently addressed in Cairo and highlight key implications that I believe flow from them:**
 - o **FIRST:** President Obama described an "*intolerable*" situation for the Palestinian people and represented that "*America will not turn our backs on the legitimate Palestinian aspiration for dignity, opportunity, and a state of their own*". He reaffirmed that "*the only resolution is for the aspirations of both sides to be met through two states, where Israelis and Palestinians each live in peace and security*" and he concluded that the two-state outcome "*is in Israel's interest, Palestine's interest, America's interest, and the world's interest.*"
 - o **THE SECOND, DIRECTLY RELATED, ISSUE PRESIDENT OBAMA RAISED IS** the need "*to confront violent extremism in all of its forms*" (I will also touch on his statements that "*we must never alter our principles*" and his intention "*to use diplomacy and build international consensus to resolve our problems whenever possible*")
- President Obama opened his 4 June Al-Azhar University speech in Cairo with a frank assessment that it is "*a time of tension between the United States and Muslims around the world*".
- **Crucially and accurately, he acknowledged that "*violent extremists have exploited these tensions in a small but potent minority of Muslims.*"**
- He also clearly stated a noble purpose: "*to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world; one based upon mutual interest and mutual respect; and one based upon . . . [shared] principles of justice and progress; tolerance and the dignity of all human beings.*"
- **Especially notable to his audience in the Muslim world, was that President Obama stressed that "*words alone cannot meet the needs of our people . . .*" and that "*these needs will be met only if we act boldly in the years ahead . . . if we understand that the challenges we face are shared, and our failure to meet them will hurt us all.*"**
- **Perhaps most importantly of all, President Obama unequivocally stated that "*we must face these tensions squarely*".**
- President Obama was correct, and prescient, in stating that words alone are not enough and that the region's tensions must be faced squarely. Accordingly, he pointed out that "*[t]he obligations that the parties have agreed to under the Road Map are clear. For peace to come, it is time for them – and all of us – to live up to our responsibilities.*"
- President Obama pointed out that violence is a dead end. President Abbas, Prime Minister Fayyad and the Palestinian Authority have done everything within their collective means to

maintain stability and a peaceful and secure environment. We have succeeded in this difficult task and the international community, including the United States, has recognized our unwavering efforts. We will continue to do everything in our power toward this end while we simultaneously continue to develop our governance and institutional capacity.

- Turning to Israel, President Obama stated that “*Israelis must acknowledge that just as Israel's right to exist cannot be denied, neither can Palestine's.*” He specifically reaffirmed that “[t]he United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements” and that this continuing activity “*violates previous agreements and undermines efforts to achieve peace.* In his own words: “***It is time for these settlements to stop.***”

- **It is time for the United States of America to match words with deeds.** If, as President Obama claimed in Cairo, “*America will align our policies with those who pursue peace*”, then, logically, the Obama Administration should demonstrate to the Netanyahu government that bald provocation and outright defiance of both the President of the United States and of Israel’s Road Map obligations does not come cost free. Thus, the United States must, with its Quartet partners, work to impose a cost on Israel; the Obama Administration can either “*align [its] policies with those who support peace*”, as President Obama proclaimed it would do, or it will face not only the Muslim world’s conclusion, but the wider international community’s conclusion, that the United States of America is “talking the talk”, but in reality willfully enabling a recalcitrant and belligerent Israel. It is difficult to conjure more ripe material for extremist propaganda than the clear contradiction between President Obama’s words in Cairo and subsequent American inaction.

- **In closing, it is a moment of truth.** In Cairo, President Obama quoted Thomas Jefferson’s hope “*. . . that our wisdom will grow with our power, and teach us that the less we use our power the greater it will be.*”
 - Nowhere in the current circumstances is it apparent that America’s power, whether regionally or otherwise, can or will increase by enabling Israel’s unabashedly defiant posture and incendiary policies on the ground.
 - On the contrary, while it may be true, as President Obama stated in Cairo, that the United States “*cannot impose peace*”, neither can the United States fail to match its words with actions without fueling the very extremist forces that President Obama vows to defeat.
 - More fundamentally, the US approach since June deviates from President Obama’s own stated principles of justice and progress and increasingly discredits the international diplomatic consensus to secure a two-state solution.