Enlisting the Muslin World in the Peace Process

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In discussing the main challenges that Israel is facing today, I would like to try to be optimistic. Naturally, many people could question the reasons behind such optimism. Specifically, one could ask: "How can someone who spent so much time at the UN be that optimistic?" – especially someone who represented Israel at the UN for nearly six years, and who lives in this very tough neighborhood and in this very dangerous world, with terror stretching from Istanbul to Islamabad, from Cairo to Calcutta, and with rogue regimes and terror organizations proliferating. All these elements make this world truly one of the most ominous and dangerous we have lived in since World War II, or maybe even more dangerous, because at least during World War II one was able to identify clearly who the enemy was, and the confrontations and hostilities took place between states. Today, rogue regimes, terror organizations, and non-state groups make our world an extremely dangerous one.

I would suggest that precisely because of these dangers – precisely because of the very dark clouds on the Israeli horizon – maybe Israel, more than most other states, could have a chance to see a settlement in 2010. It is legitimate to wonder how can this be, considering that Israel now faces, maybe for the first time since its creation, truly existential dangers and not just tactical ones.

Israel is in effect already fighting Iran on its border: it did so during the summer of 2006 by confronting Hizbollah, and in December 2008 in the course of the hostilities with Hamas. On these occasions, Israel was not just fighting terror organizations, rather the bloody fingers of the extreme and fundamentalist regime in Iran, a state led by a person who promises

to wipe Israel off the face of the map and who denies the Holocaust while preparing very diligently for its recurrence.

The reason why there is room for some optimism is that Israel is not the only country facing these dangers. Moreover, we are not the only ones who realize how dangerous this world is and who understand that the real threat to world security does not stem from Israel. Much of the world watched what happened in Gaza and Lebanon and realized that what they were witnessing was only a preview. They realized that these episodes were more than a confrontation between Israel and local terror organizations. In fact, they represented the first world war of the 21st century between a secular democracy and an autocratic, extreme, and fundamentalist regime, namely Iran.

But the realization, or awakening, that was most impressive was that of the moderate Arab and Muslim world. For a long time the most eerie reality that I found difficult to grasp was the silence of the Arab and Muslim world with respect to what was happening to the Arab and Muslim world itself. In fact, today we no longer live in what Samuel Huntington defined as the clash of civilizations. Rather, we are witnessing a true clash within the Islamic civilization, since most of the violence, most of the horror, most of the terror, and most of the bloodshed are actually happening within Islam. Every day hundreds of Muslims are slain by Muslims throughout the Muslim world. Moreover, we do not see a single Muslim leader – religious, academic, or political – get up and say: "Enough is enough. What are we doing? We are killing each other."

I think Muslims are indeed starting to care, and we are witnessing signs of this gradual shift. For example, we have seen forty Muslim and Arab countries coming together in Annapolis, defying Iran, and forming what will hopefully turn out to be a coalition of the moderates to face Iran. We have also seen the king of Saudi Arabia convene an interfaith meeting at the United Nations, trying to bring people together.

And I believe that all these episodes were not motivated by an increased love for Israel, rather by the fear factor. They – the Saudis, the Gulf states, the Egyptians, and other Arab and Muslim countries – realized at last that Israel is not the problem, and that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict does not represent the core problem. They understood that the real threat and the

real danger to them, to their regimes, to their society, and to Islam as they conceive it, is coming from Iran.

If all these countries can be brought together to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in pragmatic and realistic terms and to legitimize and support a Palestinian leader who will accept a pragmatic solution, they will then be able to align themselves against the real danger represented by the fundamentalist and imperialist designs of the Persians over the Arabs.

I believe that the president of the United States – who went to Cairo to deliver a speech to the Muslim world and gain its trust – can rely on this existing goodwill, coupled with fear, in order to bring the Arab countries on board to legitimize and support the peace process. I believe that if this happens, we will finally reach a point that to me is even more important than a two-state solution, and that is basically a twenty-three state solution. In other words, this could bring peace, recognition, and normalization between Israel and an Arab world that realizes that at the end of the day, Israel can be an ally rather than a threat. At the same time, having eased Arab-Israeli relations, all these countries can align themselves against the real danger, which is fundamentalism, terrorism, and extremism stemming from Iran. I believe that in the American administration and in Barack Obama we have someone who is capable of accomplishing this task. The entire world will be supporting his efforts to accomplish this task, and I very much hope that in 2010 we will actually see him succeed.