

MERIA

THINKING ABOUT ARAB-AMERICAN RELATIONS: A NEW PERSPECTIVE

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The relationship between Arabs and the United States must be seen as part of a wider challenge to Arab political rethinking. This article suggests that a new approach to Arab-American relations must come through internal political restructuring more than an analysis of specific issues. Such a change cannot happen as long as Arab debate is dominated by "slogans" who apply predetermined ideologies and conclusions to this question.

To understand properly Arab-American relations requires a complex analysis that is contrary to the traditionalist belief and its reliance on slogans and illusions. Those who embrace it are forced to swim against the current and bear harsh criticism.

For Arabs, considering this issue requires also confronting a number of other issues. Interpretation depends on the intellectual background of the interpreter, as Immanuel Kant pointed out long ago. More recently, Professor Fouad Ajami, a Lebanese-American who is director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, emphasized that the Arab dilemma, regarding this and other questions, depends primarily on an intellectual and cultural mode of thinking.(1)

There are many in the Arab world who understand this challenge to find a new way of thinking, like the Lebanese writer Ali Harb when he said:

If the crisis is the exhaustion of the conceptual framework and work methods, and the confrontation of the challenges and problems, the first task of whoever takes the intellectual concern and epistemological fate is to deeply

review the employed intellectual tools for managing identities, merits, the construction of life and the production of facts. He who confronts such a task does not have any option other than to swim against the current, by stripping the priorities that engage his mind and by adopting ontological ventures, in order to practice his free criticism of axioms. Alternatively, he must think differently from what is pervading and dominating the way of viewing and contemplating occurrences and destinies. Without that, there is no way for us to understand and diagnose crises or to mind and manage the defeats and debacles in the Arab world or worldwide.(2)

Those who reject a rethinking about Arab views regarding the United States, like Professor Hassan Naf'a, Head of the Political Science Department at the Faculty of Economics and Political Science of Cairo University, often take the historical relationship between the two parties out of context.(3) Such argumentation, which dominates Arab discourse about this issue, confirms the statement of French philosopher Jean Francois Revel, "The

ideologist twists the neck of reality to suit his ideologies, whilst the seeker of truth gives up his ideologies to understand reality."

To understand this phenomenon better, I have coined the word "sloganist" to describe someone who believes and repeats what has always been said, and is popular among the Arabs, without examining the evidence or distorting it to a remarkable degree. Illusions thus come to dominate reality, an approach which fits with the slogans and ideologies such as those that have been used by Arab governments and some organized nationalist and religious fundamentalist organizations for the past half-century in order to blind the Arab people from seeing their internal problems.

Archaic slogans and illusions have made the Arabs live daydreams of their own making. These cocoons, which take different masks in the forms of Arab nationalism, one Arab nation, Arab unity, and Palestine being the first cause among Arabs, have little basis or occurrence in reality. Despite being the aspirations of all Arabs, they are closer to dreams than reality. One can liken them to the ambition of someone who is trying to build a pyramid starting from its summit, against the laws of physics. Those aspirations turned to dreams because of the Arabs' inverted schedule of priorities, tending to accept slogans and symbols, despite their terrible consequences.

The slogan of Palestine being the priority cause among Arabs has distracted them from their internal issues and problems. This practice has become harmful to the Palestinians themselves because they are deluded by it into believing that the Arab nation--which, as previously stated, is itself an illusion--is standing with them in deed and word despite a half-century of only words and no deeds.

The United Nations Development Program's Arab Human Development

Report for 2002, which was prepared by a team of top Arab intellectuals, shows without a doubt that the Arabs are no better off than are the Palestinians. The only difference is that the Palestinians are resisting oppression, deprivation, and injustice, and as a price for their resistance, are being trampled by Sharon's tanks and their houses demolished by his bulldozers.

Poverty, deprivation, illiteracy, lack of freedom, injustice, female oppression and disregard for human rights are predominant in the entire Arab world. These problems are imposed on the Arab world by its own tyrannical and oppressive governments. Were they to resist, it would result in the same fate as that of the Palestinians, except the actions would be carried out by the tanks and bulldozers of the Arabs' own despots.

The examples are plenty. For example, there was the demonstration of almost one hundred thousand people in Cairo Stadium two weeks before the war with Iraq began. This was arranged by sloganists, chanting anti-war in Iraq slogans and pro-Palestine slogans; yet, they remained silent about the extension of Egypt's emergency law by three years. This despite the law having already been imposed for the last twenty-two years, and despite the tyranny, abuse, indignity and disrespect for their human rights which the Egyptian people have suffered as a result. These abuses are detailed by Dr. Mohammed Abbas in his book I See the King Naked,⁽⁴⁾ a book whose contents are extremely depressing. Or one could cite the recent incident in which the Tunisian police attacked authorized demonstrators because their chants changed from authorized slogans to a cry for genuine domestic reform.

As if Arab nationalism, one Arab nation, and united Arabs slogans were not enough for sloganists, they constantly espouse new slogans that are even more mythical than the previous ones. Specifically, the Organization of Islamic

Countries (OIC) and the phantom scheme of one Islamic nation and one Islamic world. These slogans suppose that Muslims are united under one sect of Islam and possess any of the common attributes that other peoples share in order to achieve prosperity, development, freedom, and dignity.

In line with my previous statements, I will follow Ali Harb's recommendations and swim against the current by introducing a new intellectual platform which is more realistic and does not depend on archaic slogans or illusions but rather on the logic of an epistemological understanding of reality as elucidated by the present signs and indicators. It is an interpretation which hopefully will not be taken as being biased toward America in particular, or the West in general, but as a personal endeavor to swim against the current and to think outside the box.

The intellectual foundations that I intend to lean upon comprise three major concepts that have shaped my view:

First, the way in which we view history. History can be viewed in two different ways. One is the classical view that considers daily events and news as history. The second is the view of history that encompasses a much longer and wider series of events. The great Arab philosopher and scholar Ibn Khaldun discusses this view of history in his Al-Muqaddimah (an introduction to the philosophy of history), where he refers to this as "trends."⁽⁵⁾

These two different ways of viewing history give us completely different interpretations. The first way, which looks at and takes daily events and news as history, does not reflect the whole picture of what is taking place in the world. It only reflects a fragmented and simplified picture that is limited by space and time. Relying on such a view always leads to wrong conclusions and negative reactions. It is similar to the old classical Newtonian

scientific view that considers the universe as being a giant machine made up of small parts. To understand it requires taking it apart and studying the parts in isolation, independent of each other, and without any regard to their environment. That view, which has been proven a failure, has caused many of the world's environmental, social, and economic problems.

This classical view has been replaced by an inclusive and holistic view, which considers everything in the universe as interrelated and entangled systems which cannot be understood unless looked at holistically. This new view, when applied to history, considers daily events and news as parts of the historical processes that either support or oppose the trend of history; affecting it positively or negatively, being part of the process that systems tend to go through in order to be holistic. They are the constituents of the soup but not the soup.

Second, the way in which we look at ourselves. It is my deep belief that I am a human first, Qatari second, a Gulf citizen third, and an Arab last--contrary to what the sloganists would have us believe. It also leans on my desire to live with the world and not only in the world. Only animals have no choice but to live in the world and not with the world.

Third, the System Theory view of the world. System theory, with overwhelming evidence, has shown that everything in this universe should be looked at and viewed as a system or a combination of systems, from the smallest quarks to super-clusters of galaxies. These systems, from the big bang to the present and into the future, have been evolving by amalgamating and combining to form bigger and more complex systems, moving to unity but not uniformity.

In my analysis of Arab-American relations, I will use these three concepts as the platform and background of my intellectual interpretations by considering

that relationship from the following three perspectives:

1. The dominant trend that is conquering the world, its structure and constituents, is global, but with a Western flavor. Yet globalization still torments and alienates Westerners as much as everyone else in the world.

2. The non-viability of domination and empire-building in today's world.

3. The nature of current and future conflicts in the world.

This analysis requires, in addition to the new intellectual platform mentioned above, getting rid of the xenophobia that has been used by Arabs in general and intellectuals in particular, as a hanger on which to put all their problems and backwardness. Arab intellectuals, during the last half-century, have found it easier to believe in slogans and to use xenophobia. The motives may include personal interest and blowing off steam without annoying or clashing with their despots--thus avoiding their prison cells and whips--instead of coming forth with the truth. Even though I genuinely realize the difficulty in getting rid of this complex, I could not proceed without making it a condition for understanding my analysis, since it blinds the vision and constrains the mind from understanding any new interpretation.

THE DOMINANT TREND THAT IS CONQUERING THE WORLD

Today, the trend that is dominating the world is what Professor Michael Mandelbaum, in his latest book The Ideas that Conquered the World has called "The Liberal Theory of History (LTH)." (6) This theory has three pillars: free trade, peace, and democracy. These three pillars are the same ideas that U.S. President Woodrow Wilson called for at the 1919 Paris Conference, subsequently becoming known as "Wilsonianism," though they were rejected by the U.S. Congress at that time

and have sometimes been ridiculed since then.

These three pillars of LTH are interconnected and constantly affect each other. Free trade requires peace, and peace in turn requires democracy, since democratic countries do not go to war, as the historical record shows. (7)

The dominant power of this trend asserted itself through the collapse of the Soviet Union without a single shot being fired. It gained further momentum afterward and has become evident in many areas.

For example, from the perspective of free trade: there was the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the boom in world markets, and 75 percent growth in the gross domestic products (GDP) of countries across the world.

On the peace front: there has been the spread of regional agreements which have worked to prevent war among European, East Asian, and Latin American countries in areas once beset by unrestrained conflict and violence.

From a democratic perspective: in 1900 there was not a single country in the world with unrestricted democracy, but by the mid-twentieth century there were 22 democratic countries with 31 percent of the world population, and by the end of that century there were 119 democracies, containing 58.2 percent of the world population, out of 192 existing countries. At least 85 of those countries, representing 38 percent of the global population, are regarded as having democratic policies that respect basic human rights and the rule of law. (8) It is really sad and shameful that not one Arab country is among those.

To understand what is taking place in the world, we should proceed by grasping this theory and this trend. Yet even today most people still think traditionally and view events only through the veil that has been placed over their eyes during war and

conflict-filled centuries, as tools for domination and influence, to satisfy greed.

People do not realize that the conflict is mostly within them, between their conscious and unconscious wants and desires, between the local and the global, between progress and regression, between development and stagnation, between changing and joining the dominant and beneficial trend or stagnating and keeping the status quo. They are afraid of losing the particular characteristics of their identities if they become part of progress in the world and do not realize that their fear is not warranted or justified, as can be seen by what has happened elsewhere in the world and is explained by System Theory.

Oxygen and hydrogen do not lose their characteristics when they combine to make water. A man does not lose his identity when he gets married and has family or when a citizen becomes part of a society.⁽⁹⁾ Similarly, by making beneficial changes and joining an international system which is interactive and not dominating, Arabs and Muslims would not lose their identity or special characteristics either.

But most of them reject this trend because of the following:

1. Its feared effects on their culture, traditions and customs and their unjustified worry about losing them.
2. The conflict of the requirements of this trend, such as freedom of religion, pluralism, individualism, women's freedom, and a reduced role for the state, with the status quo.
3. This trend's real negative aspects; for example, the triumph of the global market and its free trade pillar often brings excessive consumption and corporate greed, which harms the environment and degrades human values which evolved throughout centuries.

Religious revivalism among the people of the world is an important aspect of this conflict from within. It is the only truly individualistic form of resistance available to those wishing to fight the negative aspects of this trend. If viewed dialectically, the LTH trend can be considered the thesis and religious revivalism as the antithesis. In other words, the world does not inevitably have to be stuck in this phase. On the contrary, a turbulent transition period eventually will produce a synthesis that will lead to a better world. But currently, of course, the world is going through a difficult and agonizing "rebirth" because of this process.

This resentment of (and conflict with) the trend from within has been reinforced by the ambivalent policies of the current U.S. administration. The administration appears to have no clear vision on how to reinforce it, even though the Americans themselves initiated it and--as the most economically and militarily powerful nation in the world--are the most capable to strengthen and sustain it. The isolationist and parochial policy which the Bush administration adopted before September 11, 2001, was reflected in its withdrawal from the Kyoto protocol and ABM treaty, its imposition of trade barriers to protect several U.S. products, and its post-9/11 arrogant behavior, as lucidly explained by Fareed Zakaria in his Newsweek special report "Why America Scares the World and What to Do About it."⁽¹⁰⁾

However, it is important to keep in mind that America is democratic and the next administration might follow a different path and adopt a different attitude, one which supports this trend with a clear vision, as the Clinton administration almost did. It is also important to understand the values that underpin the American strategic policy, which was best demonstrated by the answer President Harry Truman gave when Henry Kissinger asked him how he wished to be remembered. Truman answered: "We

completely defeated our enemies and made them surrender. Then we helped them to recover, to become democratic, and to rejoin the community of nations. Only America could have done that."(11)

Naturally, these dramatic changes are not mere products of American will and policy but are products of far broader and longer-term trends. Many of these are involved with shifts in technology. The digital revolution, which is the third major human revolution (after the agricultural and industrial ones), requires new political, economic, and social arrangements, as did the previous two, in order to better foster human progress and avoid a breakdown phase of this human revolution. These revolutions are really macroshifts in human development.

Historically, such shifts in technology and human society have shared common characteristics. They go through four phases, with each one shorter than its predecessor. These phases are:

1. The Trigger Phase: Innovations in "hard" technologies (tools, machines, operational systems) bring about greater efficiency in the manipulation of nature for human ends.

2. The Transformation Phase: Hard technology innovations irreversibly change social and environmental relations and bring about, successively:

- a higher level of resource production
- a faster growth of population
- a greater social complexity, and
- a growing impact on the social and the natural environments.

3. The Critical (or "Chaos") Phase: Changed social and environmental relations put pressure on the established culture, putting into question time-honored values and worldviews and the ethics and ambitions associated with them. Society becomes chaotic in the Chaos Theory sense of the term. Society does not lack order but exhibits a subtle order that is extremely sensitive to fluctuations. The evolution of

the dominant culture and consciousness--the way people's values and ethics respond and change--determines the outcome of the system's chaos leap (the way its development trajectory forks off).

4A. The Possible Breakdown Phase: At first, the values, worldviews, and ethics of a critical mass of people in society are resistant to change, or change too slowly, and the established institutions are too rigid to allow for timely transformation. Social complexity, coupled with a degenerating environment, creates unmanageable stresses. The social order is exposed to a series of crises that degenerate into conflict and violence.

4B. The Possible Breakdown Phase: the mindset of a critical mass of people evolves over time, shifting the culture of society towards a better-adapted mode. As these changes take hold, the improved social order--governed by more adapted values, worldviews, and associated ethics--establishes itself. The social system stabilizes itself in its changed conditions.(12)

Most people in the world are still struggling with Phase 3, and some are either beginning to go through Phase 4B, or fighting to avoid Phase 4A. There is no doubt that this trend is a major part of that macroshift, because most people desire it, consciously or unconsciously. They all surely desire peace, democracy, and the ability to prosper through a free trade that is just and is controlled by the rules of law, as represented by globalization.

But transitional resistance is sparked by the fact, for example, that free trade does not seem to be fair or just and is biased towards the rich countries of the world as a consequence of the greed and domination of market fundamentalists and the temptation of power. This domination will eventually be ended by the people of the world, supported by their values--including a genuine belief in the essence of religion, and not merely in dogma--which will

undercut the materialistic nature of globalization. The rising number of local and global NGO's will surely be one factor that plays a big role in reducing the injustice of globalization.

The Arabs, especially after the war in Iraq, are at the bifurcation point of Phase 4. Either they can take advantage of this turning point in history and break through, or reject it and break down. Deciding to travel one of these roads or the other is very important at this time, especially for the Palestinians.

If the Palestinians had understood this trend and abandoned the one Arab nation, Arab nationalism, and Palestine the first Arab cause slogans, especially after Oslo, they would not have fallen into Sharon's trap when he visited the Al-Aqsa Mosque, igniting the second Intifada, which unified the Israelis against peace. Sharon was well aware that Israel would disintegrate because its nature is such that it does not concord with this trend. Israel, although democratic, is a state built on ethnic and religious principals, which surely make it a racist and a bigoted state. And unless it changes its principles to coincide with LTH, it surely will not be able to survive its forces.

THE NON-VIABILITY OF DOMINATION AND EMPIRE-BUILDING

In this age, domination and empire building are no longer pursued for many reasons. As Rousseau said, "Beware of listening to the imposter. You are lost if you forget that the fruits of the earth belong to everyone and that the earth itself belongs to no one!"(13)

These traditional concepts of domination and empire building go against the pillars of this new trend of history. Free trade requires peace, and peace in turn requires freedom and democracy. It provides a more viable way of achieving common and mutual interest than seizing

resources from other countries. Adopting a win-win strategy is less costly in terms of loss of human lives and material costs. This is especially true at this time and age from the perspective of the West in general, and America in particular, when one considers their advances in technologies, efficient management, and other tools for gaining competitive advantage. This strategy can guarantee sustainable common interests while domination cannot. Japan and Germany are the best examples from the past, and Qatar and Kuwait from the present. The traditionalists conclude that since America has established military bases in these countries, the intention is domination and control of their resources, while reality reflects exactly the opposite and confirms at least a partial application of the Liberal Theory of History.

In Qatar's case, the Americans do not have a monopoly over Qatar's most important resources, oil and gas. There are other non-American companies working in that field in Qatar, such as Maersk (Danish), Total-Fina-Elf (French), Philips (Dutch), and, in the near future, Shell and other companies from Canada and Australia. Qatar also has the Japanese and others as partners for developing its huge gas reserve. The same applies to Qatar's capital projects. Although Qatar has allocated more than 10 billion Riyals (\$2.75 billion) for capital projects for the year 2003, the American share of that is nil because of the absence of their companies in that field. The same could be said about trade. The amount of trade between Qatar and the U.S. is not the highest on Qatar's trade chart.

In the case of Kuwait, despite the presence of American military forces since liberation, and the special relations that have existed since that time, America has not gained any favorable economical status. On the contrary, the Kuwaiti parliament refused to grant any oil production concessions for its northern oil

fields to any foreign companies, including Americans, or sign any production sharing agreements as Qatar did. The same applies to the Kuwaiti market for power generation and equipment, which is mainly controlled by Japanese and European firms.

For whom would a president, who is democratically elected for only a limited period, build an empire? This illusion stems from our mistaken view of history and our belief in the immortality of our oppressors. Empire-building requires an oppressor who can conscript whomsoever he wishes to fight for him in order to increase his wealth and satisfy his greed. Democratically ruled countries do not sacrifice their sons for the sake of their president's ambitions or ideologies, as the protests that ultimately forced the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam showed.

The American "empire" already exists and the sun does not set over it. It is a new kind of empire that is represented by companies like McDonald's, Microsoft, General Motors and similar ones, none of which require military dominance for their growth and sustainability. These companies also welcome and thrive on competition, contrary to the belief of traditionalists who perceive competition as a reason for domination.

The danger of the terrorism that is used nowadays to fight and oppose dominations is that it is too high a price to pay. Terrorist acts such as that of September 11 and other incidents around the world prove beyond any doubt that terrorism is very difficult to predict or fight. It is also worth noting that terrorism is no longer restricted to acts of violence. A computer hacker sitting in front of his home computer a world away could create havoc in another country's military or financial systems, especially in a country highly dependent on the digital revolution to run its systems like the United States.

The rest of the world owns \$6.5 trillion worth of American companies, which, based on traditional thinking, are supposed

to be the hidden hands behind America's desire for "domination" and "empire building." This is surely paradoxical since American companies have become multi-nationals which would not belong to a single empire even if such an empire existed.

Advanced economies no longer depend on the raw materials which were once the main object for domination, imperialism and empire-building. Advanced economies such as America's depend mostly on the service sectors, which constitute up to 80 percent of their GDPs. Companies like Microsoft, Sun, and McDonald's are the main constituents of the American economy. Raw material is no longer the biggest share of the value of manufactured goods as before. The raw material value of a car such as a BMW is very small indeed. Its value is mainly in its engineering, which requires more brains and technology than material: brains and technology that do not require military domination.

It follows that advanced capitalist economies desire and opt for bigger markets with strong purchasing powers to help them grow and prosper. It is in their interest to see the rest of the world's economies become healthier and not dependent on aid that comes mainly from those advanced economies themselves. This attitude is in alignment with the spirit of capitalism and not against it.

THE NATURE OF CURRENT AND FUTURE CONFLICTS

Many theories and scenarios show unawareness of the extent to which the current conflict is played out along ontological and epistemological lines within the individual, be he Westerner or Easterner, poor or rich, Christian or Muslim, or of any other religion or ethnic origin. The world has become a small village where everyone can reach, influence, and communicate with everyone else. As a result, everyone is faced with an

internal conflict to find one's identity, which has been torn apart by the speed and shock of change of the digital revolution, the entanglement and mixing of cultures and traditions, and shortened distances.

In this context, most Arab intellectuals and analysts rely on their perceptions of an outdated, classical, traditional intellectual platform and shabby culture (politically, economically, and socially) when analyzing Arab-American relations or their relations with each other or with the rest of the world. Because of that outdated mode of thinking, they invariably conclude, incorrectly, that the objective of the Americans is domination, control, neo-imperialism, and empire-building. Hence, they have only taken, out of all of the many theories developed regarding the present situation, Samuel Huntington's theory of the clash of civilizations and upgraded it into a prophecy. They have accepted it, believe in it, and work hard to convince their people to see the West through it.

If there were to be any serious conflict, it would surely not be between the strong Americans and the weak Arabs or Muslims, because the weak cannot threaten or compete with the strong. Muslims in general and Arabs in particular are weak politically, economically, technologically, socially, and most important, militarily. Rather, it would be between America and other rising power centers such as Europe and China.

It is highly logical to conclude that it is in no one's interest for the Arab or Muslim worlds to be backward and left behind, contaminated by repression, poverty, and illiteracy for the following reasons:

1. Poverty, ignorance, and repression give birth to terrorism, especially among those infected with xenophobia.
2. Migration to search for food and freedom is an enormous problem facing the West and which can only be stopped if people's conditions

are improved in their own localities. No country wants 300 million poor and impoverished people as its neighbors or as additional residents.

3. It is in the spirit of capitalism, which depends on creating and sustaining consumer societies with strong purchasing powers, to make them grow instead of allowing them to become needy societies, always dependent on aid and charities.

Instead of the Arabs ridding themselves of that outdated way of thinking which is only making them fall behind in progress and development, we still find them twisting the neck of truth to suit their ideologies and slogans. At the same time, they tend to accuse whoever tries to forget his ideologies in order to understand the truth and live with reality, as a traitor or a servant of the American prince.

It is not then difficult to understand the cause of those who harshly attack the smaller countries of the Gulf for having American military bases on their soil. Those countries relied on Saudi Arabia for a long time to defend them and discovered the fallacy of that belief after Saddam invaded Kuwait. This discovery made them turn, logically, to the strong to help them defend themselves against aggression from neighbors who either already have weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or strive to have them. These countries realized that their oil and gas wealth makes them vulnerable and a focus of greed. They face demographic problems as a result of that wealth, and they cannot build strong military forces even if they unite. They are very wise not to listen to or accept the sloganists' call to rely on slogans and myth.

The sloganists' claim that the West hates Arabs and Muslims has no foundation whatsoever. If that were the case, France would not have over 1500 mosques, Britain over 2000, and a similar number in America. The West would not have established so many centers specializing in

Middle Eastern studies, in an effort to understand its people's problems and help them find solutions. It is also worth mentioning that the first and strongest opposition to a war against Iraq came from the Catholic Church and the Church of England.

Based on all the above ideas, I strongly believe that the American intention beyond invading Iraq and freeing its people from Saddam's repression is to bring peace, stability, and prosperity to the area. However, I do have my doubts that they can bring democracy to the area because democracy is a human value that can only flourish if the people embrace it. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the Americans can initiate the right environment for it.

I view the war with Iraq as a coin, both faces of which are for the good of the Iraqis. One face can be seen to reflect Americans as liberators. The other face reflects Americans as occupiers--a situation which would be easier for the Iraqis to resist and defeat later. It is always easier to fight a foreign enemy than to fight an enemy that is from within. A man can fight a vicious tiger but he is incapable of fighting even the smallest cancer from within. This metaphor can also be used to illustrate my belief that the entire Arab world has become so weak and sickly because of those tumors from within that it is no longer able to help itself.

The United States is in tune with many of the requirements of the contemporary world, and if there is going to be any leading power at all, it is the best qualified to play that role. Any such state must be democratic, law-abiding and sometimes needs to utilize force to implement that law. Only the United States with its strong economy, technology, and military power has that capability and the will to sacrifice.

By the same token, though, it is the task of others as members of the world society to make sure that it follows and applies

democratic process, not only from within but also internationally, and to restrict it from unilateralism. We have to reinforce the principles of common interests and common securities by offering our support to that leader instead of resenting it. To encourage the United States to be isolationist or unilateralist, as some traditionalists inside and outside America preach, would be a heinous act. A bipolar or multi-polar world will only lead to more conflicts that are more dangerous and could have a critical impact on the survival of humanity. The twentieth century stands as witness to the horror of that kind of world.

It is time for us to trust the world and learn how to live with it and not only in it. It is also time to give those who are trying to help us a chance and deal with them not on the presumption of "Everyone is guilty until proven innocent," as we presume when we deal with each other within the Arab world and beyond. We have to change our own minds and societies and open them up, because as long as they remain closed they will decay. This is in accordance with the universal second law of thermodynamics, which says that every closed system will eventually decay.

Our civilization reached its apex when it opened its doors to other cultures, translated their books, and took the benefit from their intellect and philosophy. It flourished by participating in the development and progress of humanity and not by rejecting new ideas because they did not come from us. We should not reject everything that is not originally Arabic or try to twist it to look or sound Arabic as the Moroccan philosopher Taha Abdurrahman did when he claimed that Descartes' famous conclusion "I think, therefore I am" came from the Arab saying "Look and you shall find." This sort of attitude does not help us participate in the human voyage of progress and development as did some of our great scholars such as Averroes, Avicenna, Ibn Khaldun, Al-Farabi, and

many others; those for whom the West has great respect and whose part in history it does not deny--as we do their ideas and values.

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NOTES

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