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America-Islam relations



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A few steps implemented with sincerity by your administration will go a long way in rebuilding this important but badly strained relationship.

The invasion of Iraq was and remains a sore point in much of the Islamic world, and especially on the Arab street. Bringing the war to a closure and pulling out American combat troops in an orderly manner at the earliest schedule will be a giant step in improving the battered image of the US amongst Muslims at home and abroad.

Support the elected government of Afghanistan against Taliban, but do this in a manner that immediately benefits the average Afghan. If the US launches a mini Marshall plan to build schools, hospitals, roads and highways, and institutions of democracy -- this will have an enormous positive impact on Muslims across the world. In Three Cups of Tea, Greg Mortenson, an American mountaineer who has built many schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan, makes this point with enormous credibility.

Rapidly shut down Guantanamo Bay prison, end torture, extra-judicial incarceration and the policy of subcontracting out torture or "extraordinary rendition," instituted by the Bush administration. Secretary Gates is the right person to close what many con-

It will take time to regain the trust and correct the negative perceptions on both sides. Mr. Obama's election as the 44th president of the United States itself is the first giant step towards potential reconciliation. His election with strong support of the American Muslims has already healed some of the wounds at home and abroad. The reaction on the Muslim street across the globe is one of pleasant surprise and enhanced expectations that perhaps the Islamic world and US will now have an opportunity to turn the page in their relationship.

sider a shameful chapter in the US war against terror.

In the domestic front, stop overt and covert racial profiling of Arabs, Muslims, and other racial minorities. Since September 11, the assault on the Muslim community in America has been persistent and relentless. For example, in an attempt to shut down channels of funding, many reputable Islamic charities were falsely targeted. This should end.

The new administration will do well to listen to a diverse group of citizens on how to combat terrorism. The new administration should actively recruit Muslims for the FBI, the CIA, the army, and law enforcement agencies.

The new administration should earnestly enlist members of the American Muslim community in the fight against global terror. Global terrorism is the common enemy of America as well as the peace loving Muslims at home and abroad. There are significantly more areas of cooperation and partnerships between the Islamic world and the West than there are conflicts. The idea of a perpetual and inevitable clash of civilisations is somewhat self-fulfilling. Only by joining forces, can the extremist ideology

be defeated.

In the Justice Department there is a special division for Muslim civil rights issue -- actively pursuing hate crimes where Muslims are targeted specifically. Appoint a senior respected Muslim leader to head this division. Similarly, appoint leaders from the Muslim American community as ambassadors and senior diplomats. President Sarkozy has appointed Rachida Dati whose parents emigrated from North Africa as France's justice minister.

The new administration should engage all parties -- friends and foes -- in conversations to further peace. During the campaign, with great courage and in the face of repeated attacks and distortions, he defended the position that the doors of unconditional dialogue should remain open in the cause of peace. The model used to reboot relations with Libya should be used to open dialogue with Iran.

The mother of all conflicts in the world that has deeply troubled the global Muslim community and has fueled much anger is the decades old Israel-Palestine conflict. The latest manifestation is recent invasion of

Gaza. The loss of life and property of innocent civilians is deeply disturbing to people of goodwill across the world.

The only way to achieve peace is for moderates to come together with the will to sacrifice for peace. This cannot be done without the leadership of the United States playing the role of honest broker. On this issue, the new administration has an opportunity to take a giant step in gaining the respect and goodwill of the Islamic world.

In a speech given at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee Policy Forum on March 2, 2007, Mr. Obama said: "We can and we should help Israelis and Palestinians both fulfill their national goals: two states living side by side in peace and security."

Both the Israeli and Palestinian people have suffered from the failure to achieve this goal. The United States should leave no stone unturned in working to make that goal a reality.

Less than a week into his administration, the new president appointed former Senator George Mitchell as the US envoy to the Middle East: "It will be the policy of my administration to actively and aggressively seek a lasting

peace between Israel and the Palestinians as well as Israel and its Arab neighbours." Further, unlike his predecessor, the incoming president expressed his deep concern at the loss of civilian lives and by the suffering in Gaza. He said his heart "goes out to civilians who are going without food, water or medical care."

On the first day as president, he called four leaders in the Middle East, three of whom lead Muslim countries -- this was a powerful symbolic step, one that was urgently called for. The invitation to Dr. Ingrid Mattison the first woman and the first convert to Islam to have become the president of the Islamic Society of America (ISNA) to participate in the National Day of Prayers with other religious leaders was another important symbolic step towards rebuilding relations with millions of American Muslims who voted for him in overwhelming numbers.

To further undermine the cause of the extremists and those who would use violence, the Obama-Biden administration should take a page from Secretary Colin Powell's comments made just prior to the elections on October 19, 2008. He argued forcefully that American people must put an end to the notion that we do not fully trust Muslim citizens in America.

If the new administration teams up with its Muslim citizens in the global war on terrorism and religious extremism, it will find that the American Muslim community eager to turn the page and build a healthy relationship based on trust and mutual respect. This will go a long way in changing the negative perception of the United States many in the Muslim world hold today.

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