



PROJECT *on* Middle East Democracy

www.pomed.org ♦ P.O. Box 25533 ♦ Washington, DC 20027-8533

Brookings Institution

“The Doha Compact: New Directions for the United States and Muslim World”

1775 Massachusetts Ave, NW, 12 December, 2008, 11am

The Brookings Institution hosted **Saad Eddin Ibrahim**, Chairman of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies in Cairo; **Stephen Grand**, Fellow and Director of the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World at Brookings; and **Ahmed Younis**, Analyst at the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, to discuss the 2008 Doha Compact report and the future of U.S. relations with the Muslim world. The event was moderated by **Jackson Diehl**, Deputy Editorial Page Editor at the *Washington Post*.

Stephen Grand began by outlining the Doha Compact, which calls for the adoption of a new style of American foreign policy that addresses in partnership the conflicts that divide us. He said Muslim populations resent what they perceive as an inherent double standards in U.S. foreign policy, and view the U.S. as an imperial power seeking to impose its hegemony in the region. The compact calls for the U.S. to live up to its ideals and work to rebuild the trust of Muslim populations. It then offers substantive policy recommendations for all bilateral and regional conflicts and grievances.

Stephen Grand said that the first priority is the realization that style, symbolism, and respect are critical. The U.S. must signal that it doesn't intend to have a permanent military presence in region. After that, the issue of governance remains, and the U.S. should help support human and economic development in the region to foster the conditions for democracy.

Saad Eddin Ibrahim said the U.S. should deemphasize the importance of elections in democracy promotion and focus on human rights and rule of law. In Egypt, he said the administration was not nearly heavy-handed enough, and its attempts to pressure the Mubarak regime in 2005 was a slap on the wrist followed by an immediate retreat. **He said if we had focused on advancing the rule of law, free media, education, and economic development, we would have created the necessary conditions for democratization.** He called for the U.S. to use “imaginative conditionality” in Egypt: Helsinki-style provisions linking economic assistance and expanded trade relations to specific human rights conditions.

He cautioned against Barack Obama visiting Cairo for his first regional trip. **He said a high-profile Obama visit is a valuable commodity and should not be wasted by rewarding Arab regimes that have backtracked on political reform and human rights.** He instead suggested Indonesia or Turkey, genuine emerging democracies that the U.S. should support.

Ahmed Younis noted that what Muslims admire most about the U.S. are the same things Americans admire: freedom, opportunity, science, arts. **The problem is that the U.S.-Muslim relationship is defined by the perception of U.S. political domination, lack of respect, and**

the feeling that the U.S. is complicit in their oppression. The lack of domestic political freedom, economic development, and opportunity leads to the negative perception of the U.S. **He said it is not hegemonic to articulate and advance those U.S. values that Muslim populations most respect and admire.**

Younis said that resolving the acute regional conflicts is important, but more important is Muslim day-to-day livelihoods and quality of life. **We cannot allow the acute conflicts—Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan—to dominate the conversation, as Muslim populations don't view our relations primarily through that prism.**

Saad Eddin Ibrahim discussed the U.S. double standard on human rights, and said it would have more credibility on issues like Darfur if it first closed Guantanamo, ended torture, and signed all international human rights accords. **He called for the establishment of a nonpartisan Truth and Reconciliation Commission to address Middle East grievances over the last several years and regain the moral high ground to become a credible champion of human rights.**

Ahmed Younis said Muslim religious leaders have an imperative from the Koran to address issues of human rights, terrorism, and extremism in the region.

Saad Eddin Ibrahim noted that there are many different varieties of Islam, and every community can have its own interpretation. **The problem is those who use Islam as a slogan to attain another political agenda, to dominate, and to resist.** When the political space doesn't allow for legitimate avenues of participation or discourse, everyone turns to the language of Islam as their governing and organizing ideology. However, **he said the U.S. cannot afford to ignore any credible actor in the region, particularly Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood.** He said we have nothing to lose by engaging.

He said that friendly tyrants have deep experience in using skillful tradeoffs to forestall political reform. In Egypt, Mubarak claims he is needed to bring about economic development and expand the peace with Israel, but he hasn't done anything on either for 28 years in office.

He said the best U.S. commodity has always been education, and there remains a huge demand and respect for American education in the region. **He said the grievance is with American foreign policy, not its education, its lifestyle, technology, business, or popular culture.**