



**Women's Foreign Policy Group
The Faces of Contemporary Islam: Practice, Theory, and Foreign Policy
A Conference with Carnegie Scholars
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Luncheon Keynote Address: The US and the Muslim World

H.E. Dr. Hussein Hassouna
Ambassador of the League of Arab States to the US

Moderator: **Judy Woodruff**, Senior Correspondent, The News Hour with Jim Lehrer

Patricia Ellis: Good afternoon, everyone. I hope you had a chance to enjoy your lunch. We're about to start the last part of this absolutely wonderful conference. For those of you who just came in, I'm Patricia Ellis, President of the Women's Foreign Policy Group. On behalf of our entire organization, and our Board, a number of whom are with us, Diana Negroponte, Donna Constantinople Susan Rappaport, and Gail Kitch, we want to welcome all of you. Thank you for your participation; I'm glad that you could all join us. This is a very special conference, and it really has been an amazing morning. I also want to once again thank The Carnegie Corporation of New York and especially Patricia Rosenfield, Hilary Weisner, who are here with us, for their enormous support. It's just been a great joint project and such a pleasure working with them and working with the scholars. This conference came out of our program series that which included individual programs with the scholars who were all so wonderful. I just got the idea that since they have so much in common that they should be talking to each other, so that's how we developed the concept of the conference. And they just exceeded everybody's expectations because the presentations were so wonderful and the discussions were so rich and there were lots of questions.

We also are very pleased to be joined by a number of ambassadors and diplomats; we have our speaker, the ambassador of the Arab League. We have the Ambassador of Croatia, the Deputy Chief of Mission from Lebanon, and a representative of the British Embassy. In case I missed anyone, I think all the diplomats should stand and let's just give them a warm welcome. We work very closely with the diplomatic community and it's really fantastic. Before I go any further, I just wanted to thank the staff. Kim, Sara, and all the interns and volunteers, we would not be here without them.

Now to conclude the conference, we're so fortunate to have as our luncheon speaker Ambassador Hussein Hassouna. He's the Arab League's Ambassador to the US, and he's

going to speak to us about the US and the Muslim world. We're also extremely fortunate to have my good friend and former colleague Judy Woodruff with us to moderate the event and have a conversation with the Ambassador. She is a very busy woman, particularly coming off the election season, and it's just really special and means so much to the WFPG and also to Carnegie, where she was a Board Member, that she could join us today. She's now a senior correspondent and the 2008 political editor of *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer*. I now will turn the podium over to Judy.

Judy Woodruff: Thank you Pat, very much. I'm just thrilled to be here. I just want to say how thrilled I am to be anywhere after this never-ending election that finally did end. And yes, we're excited that it's over, but what an interesting time we are in right now as this transition gets under way, as we watch the drama – or, I guess, no drama – of the change of one administration to another. It's such an interesting time to be here in the nation's capital. The only place that might be a little more electric is Chicago. I was there yesterday and I can report to you that the excitement level is up to here. Of course, they all plan to come to Washington – either to visit on January the 20th for Inauguration or to stay. So it's an exciting time across the country, and especially in these two cities that we like so much.

And I'm so pleased to be here working with the Women's Foreign Policy Group and with my dear friend and former colleague, Pat Ellis. I want to say a word of congratulations to Pat, because you've done such an extraordinary job with this group over the years, so let's give Pat a hand for the great work you've done. It is also very special as Pat mentioned for me to be involved with this initiative promoted by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, promoting better understanding of Islam. I'm so pleased that Pat and Hilary are here. I did, as Pat said, serve on the Carnegie Corporation board for six years, so I know first hand the genuine commitment that Carnegie and its leaders – at the very top, Vartan Gregorian – have to increasing understanding of the diversity of thought and culture and history in Islam and Muslim societies and Muslim states around the world, and certainly the US engagement with these societies and states. And it is now my privilege and pleasure to introduce today's speaker. He is Dr. Hussein Hassouna. He is a native of Egypt, and he has had a distinguished career in diplomacy and in international law. He has served as the Ambassador of the League of Arab States to the US since July 2002. He previously served as Ambassador of the League of Arab States to the United Nations, and Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt for International Legal Affairs and Treaties. He's also served as the Ambassador of Egypt to Morocco and to Yugoslavia. He served as director of the cabinet to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs in Egypt, and as Director of the Egyptian Press and Information Bureau in Paris. He has also served on Egyptian delegations to Middle East peace negotiations, leading to the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. So please join me in welcoming Ambassador Hassouna, who will discuss the US and the Muslim world. Then we'll have a conversation for ten minutes or so, and then we'll open it up to questions from all of you. So please join me in welcoming Ambassador Hassouna

Hussein Hassouna: Good afternoon everyone. When I was first approached by the Ambassador of Yemen, Abd al-Wahab Abdallah al-Hajri, my good friend who I believe

is a member of this group, suggesting that I should be a speaker at the conference, I said “Why me?” I mean there are so many prominent women ambassadors of the Muslim world in Washington who can much better represent the Muslim world, but he said no, no, they want you. I’ve been in touch with your president, Patricia Ellis and she insisted that I should come and talk to you. So here I am.

I think the topic of this conference and the topic of my talk on US-Muslim relations is of critical importance today. It is of importance because we all live in the United States or the Western World, and many of us belong to the Muslim world. And we see this lack of understanding between the United States and the Muslim world in general. We see that Muslims are sometimes stereotyped. There is a misinterpretation of even the holy texts of the Quran. Muslims sometimes have been profiled and I would say sometimes even demonized in this society, and in Western society. Sometimes I think this is out of ignorance, and sometimes I think that it’s out of hate. So I think this takes place – I will talk about how I see the reasons for that – but this takes place in spite of the fact that the Muslim people represent 1.3 billion people in the world; in spite of the fact that there are 57 independent Muslim states belonging to the Organization of Islamic Conference; in spite of the fact that the Muslim civilization was a great civilization that was a very enriching factor in the Western civilization; in spite of the fact also that the Muslim religion is the fastest-growing religion, in this country and in many others – that it sometimes beats the Mormons.

But what is the key to understanding the Muslim world? I think this is the beginning: people in the United States and in the West have to understand that the Muslim world is a mosaic, is a diversity of people. They might have some common affinities, they are linked by a Muslim identity, by their faith, but otherwise they are very different. They have different institutions, different histories, they are Arabs and Muslims and they are not alike. Not all Arabs are Muslims. Many Arabs are Christians and Jews. And not all Muslims are Arabs. The largest Muslim country is not an Arab country, it is Indonesia. Iran is not an Arab country, and I find many Americans who think that Iran is a Muslim country belonging to the Arab League. It is not. So I think to understand this diversity, one also has to understand the ongoing clash that exists today, unfortunately, in the Muslim world, between conservatives and between modernists, between different sects. And I think that one sad feature also is that many of these differences in religion or in sectarianism are exploited by politicians for political purposes. I know this very well. I know it from my experience in Iraq, for instance today. I also lived in Yugoslavia, we have the Ambassador of Croatia here, and it was often the case that these differences in religion were exploited by politicians for their own political agenda. And this is sometimes the difficulty in finding solutions to these problems, because when politicians use religion, it is a very emotional issue, and it can really divide people. So my advice to the United States is not to exploit these differences, but to be a unifying power, and not to back one side against the other, which has happened.

What is the role of the United States today vis-à-vis the Muslim world? The United States has always been an open society, a tolerant society, a melting pot of all different backgrounds, and this was the greatness of the United States. I lived in Europe many

years, in France and Britain and so on, but I always said that the US is the only country in the world where no one feels like a stranger, because they all come from different backgrounds. The US was also perceived in the Muslim world as the country that is always supporting freedom, self-determination, and the famous Wilson principles. The country that was a peacemaker, between Egypt and Israel, between Jordan and Israel, and so on, and is still involved in finding a solution to the Palestinian problem. So people looked at the United States as different from the colonial powers that were Britain and France and Italy, for instance, in our part of the region, in the Middle East.

But what happened: September 11 had a devastating effect on the relations between the United States and the Muslim world. It raised a series of questions and notions, first of all Americans started to ask, “Why do the Muslims hate us?” Well the answer is that the Muslims love America. They respect America: their lifestyle, their education, their democracy. There only problem that they don’t agree with, and which they question very often is the policies of the United States and the fairness of those policies. Secondly, September 11 unleashed a notion that there is a clash between our two cultures. Our two religions, the Muslim religions and the Christian and Jewish religion; a clash between the Muslim civilization and Western civilization. Does this exist? It doesn’t. That’s wrong again. What does exist is that there is a clash between extremists on both sides, but the mainstream – in the Muslim world, in the United States and the Western world – are people who want to co-exist and live together, they are moderate people. And Islam is calling for moderation. Islam is a religion that accepts and recognizes Christianity and Judaism, and it calls for people to live together. The people who are not Muslims in Islam – in true Islam – are called the “People of the Book.” They have their own holy books and they are respected by the Muslims. This is what Islam stands for. So another unfortunate feature of September 11 is that in the United States and in the West sometimes there was a tendency to generalize Muslims. That there was no focus on the guilty ones, on the terrorists who attacked not only the United States on September 11 but attacked also the Muslim societies, and they’re still doing it. And there is no way to confront them but to work together and defeat them. But there is a tendency to talk about Muslim terrorism, about the culture of the Muslims that generates violence, and this is a very unfortunate factor, because it is a way of accusing the Muslim world in a way as almost a collective guilt: that these people are collectively responsible for what is happening, and they are not. So these are the notions that I think emerged from September 11, and it is very unfortunate. But if something good came out of September 11 it is in my view that it was a wake-up call. It was an occasion for people to try to understand better what Islam is, what the root causes are of this crisis, and how we can overcome this and work together, and promote a better understanding between the western world and the Muslim world.

I think that we are now of course facing a new administration, and this is the subject to which we are all discussing. Washington is full of rumors, analyses, expectations. I think that it is a new beginning, maybe now, our relation. It doesn’t mean that all these expectations will be fulfilled, in my view. I also think that it might be an occasion to try to bring about a change in US policies. And what does the Muslim world expect from the new administration? First of all, I think the Muslim world expects the new administration

to engage the Muslim world more, to try to listen to their concerns and aspirations, to try and help them more. Especially in these difficult times, when the Muslim world, which is mainly representing the developing world, are facing huge problems. Food prices are rocketing, the financial crisis is affecting everyone, and the Muslim world has no means of bailout like the US and the rich western world. So I think they need attention and they need help from the United States. I also think that one thing which the administration should do is to get involved with difficult problems facing the Muslim world.

First and foremost, one problem which lies deep in the conscience of the Muslim world is the Palestinian issue. And I think that the new administration should get involved from the first year of this administration in finding a just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian issue and of the Arab-Israeli problem. And this is urgent because it's a long-standing problem, and it's a problem that's affecting so many others, and it's really a cause of great concern in the whole Muslim world. So we do hope that a new administration will do this, and I hear from some advisors of the coming president that they intend to do some because they understand that this is one of the core issues in the Middle East region and the Muslim world in general. The other issue of course is Iraq, which is a very important issue because the war in Iraq was always perceived as unjust and I hope that sooner or later the coalition forces will withdraw, and I was happy to see that yesterday there was an agreement between the US and the Iraqi government on finding a solution and certain timelines: by 2011 they have decided that US forces will withdraw from Iraq. Other issues of course are there: Afghanistan, Kashmir, a lot of issues of great concern to the Muslim world. And I hope the US issues can focus on those issues and bring about a just solution.

I think also that we expect from a new administration to work more through multilateral approaches, and not unilateral approaches. To work more through the United Nations. To see that the United Nations is the forum where all global issues are discussed, and I think Mrs. Negroponte who was with us at the United Nations many years ago knows this, and her husband did a great job representing the United States at the United Nations. And I think we have to see that the United States also tries to abide by international law, because I think this has also, through the perception of the outside world, been a source that has affected the image of the United States, that the United States was not abiding by international treaties, that Guantanamo was against international law, that non-respect of the Geneva conventions was against international law, that the United States has so far – and I know this as an international lawyer – never joined the Law of the Sea conventions, the International Criminal Court, the Kyoto agreement, so many – even the Convention on the Protection of the Child. This has given the impression to the world that the United States doesn't care about international law, only about its own policies and interests. And I think the next administration should try to change this perception. I think finally that the US should also try to help the Muslim world in supporting democracy – this was an issue that was discussed today – but not to try to impose its own notion of democracy on the Muslim world. Democracy has to emerge from the societies according to their own pace and development. Yes, it has to be encouraged, but it cannot be imposed as an outside model, it will not work. And always I think you have to acknowledge and respect the

cultural and religious heritage of these societies, and not to impose their own values on Muslim societies. So this is extremely important in my view.

Finally, let me say something about President-Elect Obama. I think the fact that he was elected gave hope not only to the United States but to the world, that there will be a change in policies, that there will be a change in style also, in the discourse used by the administration. And to be honest with you, the Muslim world cannot overlook the fact that that President Mubarak has some Muslim roots – President Obama, sorry. His father was a Muslim; he lived for a long time in Indonesia, a Muslim country. So there is a kind of sympathy among Muslims, I think, towards him. And of course, he has a Muslim name: Hussein, which is my name, by the way. I think this is also a reason for people to hope for a better relationship with the next administration. We've seen during the campaign that sometimes this was used against him, and this was unfortunate, in my view. And according to some perceptions among Muslims, he felt obliged to distance himself from the fact that he related to the Muslims. But then he reasserted himself, saying "I am the president of all Americans, whoever they are." And I think we needed a courageous voice like the one of Colin Powell to say, "Obama is a Christian. But what about if he was a Muslim? Don't Muslim Americans also have the right to become presidents of this country? Don't Muslim Americans also go and fight for the United States and die for our country?" So this was, of course, a courageous stand by Colin Powell.

Let me finally finish by saying that, in spite of these problems, I believe there should be a number of initiatives and concrete steps undertaken to promote a better understanding, to repair what has been done by September 11. And there are many. The first one is the most logical one: to have more dialogue and contact, not only between governments, but between people; people to people contact is so important, civil society, groups like yours, exchange of students, business relations between the United States and the Muslim world. And I'm happy to say that I myself have been involved in organizing a big economic congress between the United States and the Arab world that took place in May of this year. And then there are many initiatives that can be undertaken. For instance, initiatives on inter-faith and here I would point to the initiative of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia who called for a meeting at the United Nations last week that focused on interfaith, that focused on a dialogue between the three main religions, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, and that focused on the common values we have together. This was a way to stand up to the critical, to the extremists, the radicals all over the world, by saying, "We belong to different religions, but we have common values and we have to work together and understand each other more." So this was a very positive initiative. And then I think we have to focus on education. Education is the key for the Muslim world, for everyone. Because education opens up the mind, education makes people more tolerant towards each other. And I think the founder of Carnegie was the one, I think President Ellis mentioned it yesterday, who was calling for knowledge, the dissemination of knowledge is extremely important.

So we have to focus, in the Arab world, education has become a priority, according to the latest meeting of heads of states of the Arab League. And they have concentrated the next

decade on education: reforming it, improving it, spending more money on it. And then there is culture. Culture is so important in this world. We all belong to one universal culture. And culture is a way of getting people closer to each other, understanding each other more. Again here I am involved personally in an initiative, together with the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, we are organizing the first Arab cultural and artistic festival in February of this year, I hope you will all come attend. The 22 countries of the Arab League will be represented by their best artists, in every way – in music, dance, costumes, paintings, literature – and for three weeks you will have beautiful performances at the Kennedy Center. And what is the aim of that? It is to show another face of the Arab and that Muslim world, that we have a great culture and civilization.

To conclude, I just want to say that there are many challenges facing US-Muslim relations, but many opportunities. And I think if we try to promote a better understanding, if we work together, we can succeed in overcoming the challenges, and certainly we'll have a better world. Thank you.

Judy Woodruff: Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador. There's so many things that we're all interested in. I'm going to ask a few questions of the Ambassador, then open it up to all of you. There are so many things we could talk about, but I'll begin with the toughest, and that's the Israeli-Palestinian issue. You touched on that. So many American administrations, going back – well, a long time but – to the first president I covered which was Jimmy Carter, have worked on this issue. And a little bit of progress had been made, and then we've moved back. There's been failure, disappointment, and then progress, and then failure. What makes you believe – or let me be more specific – what exactly, practically, can this administration do that other administrations haven't already tried? And do you think that the climate right now between Israelis and Palestinians is ripe, or will be better a year from now? The timing, and what's needed?

Hussein Hassouna: I must say, I can claim to have some experience in that field. I was involved in the peace process for many years; I even went with President Sadat to Jerusalem in 1977. So I saw the beginning of peace emerging between Israel and Egypt. And then when I was in the Embassy in Washington as political counselor in the 1970s, I was involved in peace negotiations. I know it's tough. But I think that, from a historic perspective, we've achieved a lot. The difficulty we are facing now is that we are focusing on the core last issues in the conflict, which is mainly the Palestinian issue. There are always problems between Israel, Syria, and Lebanon, but the issue is not so difficult as settling the Palestinian issue. And the Palestinian issue is, of course, complex, but, again, I think there can be a solution because everyone knows what the solution should be. Even – there was an Annapolis meeting a year ago – and there was an agreement to deal with all the issues, and since then the two sides have been dealing with even some issues that at one point were considered by the Israelis as taboo, like Jerusalem or the refugee problem. They have talked about it because we know what the solution should be, a fair and balanced solution. So what do we expect from the next administration? We expect the administration to be involved in the beginning; in its first year it has to be, when there's still a honeymoon between the American people and the rest of the world and the new president. And it has to be involved in a very active way. It

has to also be involved in a way, as we call it, as an honest broker. It should not be perceived as taking sides. We know the ties between the United States and Israel, but in order to succeed, to be credible, it has to adopt a balanced and fair approach.

Judy Woodruff: And you're saying that has not been there?

Hussein Hassouna: Well to be honest the Bush Administration has not been as engaged from the beginning. Maybe from fear of failure, or thought it would be too difficult. So for the first year, it didn't get involved. And I can say the same about the Clinton Administration. It only got involved in the very last year of its administration because it's such a difficult problem. But I think the next administration should get involved, play a balanced role, find fair solutions, and it also shouldn't be afraid of proclaiming what it sees as a fair solution. It is not to impose a settlement, but to help the parties reach a compromise on these issues. And I think this is not only my view; I attended a conference the other day, a very interesting meeting at the Aspen Institute where the former National Security Advisor of Carter, Brezinski and the former National Security Advisor of Ford, Scowcroft, took the same view: that it's about time for the United States to get involved forcefully and actively from the very beginning in trying to promote peace between Israeli and Palestinians.

There is a problem, of course: I don't think it can be done immediately because we have to wait for the results of the Israeli election. We also have to wait for the Palestinians to overcome their internal problems between Fatah and Hamas. But I also think that if the Palestinian president representing Fatah can see some progress, and show it to his people, that he can bring about a just peace, he can show to his people that the Palestinian prisoners will be released for instance, that the settlement policy will be discontinued and so on, even the hardliners in the Palestinian movement I think will rally around him. This is my view.

Judy Woodruff: Do you think that this is something that requires the highest levels of involvement, the President himself, or could this be a specially appointed emissary? Or does it matter?

Hussein Hassouna: I think for many, well it depends on the President but I think three people might be involved in that: a special envoy, who might be sent to the region, and might even stay there in the region, shuttling between the two sides, the Secretary of State, of course, has to get involved, but eventually the President has to give full backing to these efforts. Without the presidential involvement and strong support, I don't think it can be done. We've seen this in the past. Peace between Egypt and Israel wouldn't have been achieved without President Carter being personally involved. You said you were there at this time; and at the time I was negotiating with the Israelis in Blair House when I was political consul at the Embassy, and President Carter used to come and join us in the meetings with a pencil, asking "What's your view? What's yours? This is a compromise I'm presenting to you." And this is the way we achieved results. President Clinton, I think, did the same at Camp David, when he tried to bring peace between the Palestinians

and Israelis, and then he presented his famous parameters of peace, which in my view still represents a good framework.

And then we had the Arab peace initiative that sometimes is forgotten. This is a very important Arab initiative that was adopted at the summit meeting of the Arab League in Beirut in 2002. It was reaffirmed again at the Riyadh Summit meeting two years ago, and it contains the framework of a balanced settlement between the two based on land for peace: that the Arabs ready to recognize Israel, to grant it full security, to restore diplomatic relations with it, provided that the Israelis on their part withdraw to the 1967 borders, settle the Palestinian refugee problem, and accept the Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. So it is a very balanced proposition and lately we have heard, for instance from the United Nations last week that the President of Israel, Peres said that the Arab Peace Initiative is an interesting document. But we need more than just saying it's interesting, we need to have it implemented and respected.

Judy Woodruff: Do you any early inkling or hint of how much of a priority this will be for President-elect Obama, or is it just too early to say?

Hussein Hassouna: From what I have heard, the administration looks at this problem not only because it might bring a solution to the Arab-Israeli problem, but it could also affect the image of the United States in the Arab and the Muslim world; that it could improve relations in general with the Arab and the Muslim worlds. And, that because of the relationship of problems – economic and political – this is crucial. So I think he will focus on this. It doesn't mean of course that he won't focus on the top priority, which is the financial crisis and economic situation, but at the same time I don't think he can neglect this problem if we can have a better relationship between the United States and the Muslim world.

Judy Woodruff: One other thing that gets a lot of attention in this country is “What is happening with extremist groups around the world and the recruitment of young – I guess mostly men but – men and women to these groups? How concerned are you that with the economic downturn here and globally that that is a problem that will grow worse, stay the same; do you see the Obama administration having any effect on that? How do you see that?”

Hussein Hassouna: It is a worrying problem for our societies, there's not doubt about it. And that is why I was saying that the next administration should get more involved in trying to help Muslim societies in overcoming their problem. What is the breeding ground for these young terrorists? It's poverty, illiteracy, despair; it's not settling the big crisis that they're confronting; also, the lack of democracy. So these are the reasons, and I think you need to address these issues, and the next administration can do this by helping those countries by helping them in education and in reforms in general, but I think it remains a problem. But, for instance, I believe that if the Palestinian issue finds a solution, if Iraqi problem comes to an end, it will already be a big step toward depriving those who want to recruit the young people from very important grounds. They've been exploiting all that, because of these problems, they're recruiting people, and these people

many of them are ignorant people, they're desperate people, they're unemployed, they're poor, so it's very easy to recruit them. So let's focus on finding solutions and let's focus on helping those societies to rebuild themselves and to prosper.

Judy Woodruff: Before we open it up to questions, I have one last question, and that is: a lot of speculation, discussion about how serious the President-elect is about naming Hillary Clinton to be Secretary of State. And we don't know whether this will happen, we read from reliable news sources that they're seriously vetting the finances and business dealings of former President Clinton. And my question to you is: how would the Arab world, how would the Muslim world, look upon a Secretary of State Hillary Clinton?

Hussein Hassouna: Well let me tell you first, I was asked the other day – you know, I'm a professional diplomat, I grew up as a young diplomat until I became an ambassador and then a minister and now I represent the Arab League – someone asked me, do you think it's better to have as the head of the State Department a professional diplomat or a politician? And I'll tell you what I think personally, and I might be wrong. I think for most countries, it is better to have a professional diplomat, because they – without offense to anyone in this room – understand the issues better, they know the people, the challenges facing diplomats, and the diplomatic world trains them better and so on. But for the United States, I think you need a political figure, because the United States is the leading country in the world and in order to deal with the rest of the world and all these difficult problems, I think you need a personality of high profile. So whoever it is – if it's Hillary Clinton or Sarah Palin or whoever – I think it would be a good thing, and it would be accepted. I mean whoever the United States decides to appoint will be accepted by the rest of the world but I think we will look more to the kinds of policies adopted than the people who implement them.

Judy Woodruff: Answered like a diplomat. Okay, we have almost fifteen minutes for Q & A, so please raise your hand and pose a question for the ambassador. Who is first?

Diana Negroponte: Diana Negroponte, the Brookings Institution. First, thank you for your very kind remarks about John, I appreciate that. If, on November the 4th, a majority of Americans chose an Afro-American and proved that we could overcome old thinking, where in the Arab world – which you represent in general – might we find that same willingness to see beyond the traditional barriers, particularly the barrier against women, and be prepared to place in a position of significant influence a woman in government?

Hussein Hassouna: Well, let me tell you first that I have been talking about the Arab and Muslim perceptions towards the United States and its policies and what we expect from the administration. But I can also talk a long time about what I expect from the Arab world, in terms of democracy, in terms of empowering women, in terms of changing the discourse, even the religious discourse. I can say a lot because this is a fact, and I am, as a person, I have strong views on this, though maybe I don't always voice them as a diplomat. But personally, I do. The Arab woman has been given a role as of late. It is changing. Many societies in the Arab world are still very traditional societies, especially in some countries in the Gulf region, and tradition sometimes has been perceived by the

West as impairing the progress of women and they have relied on saying this is because of Islam. But Islam has nothing to do with it: it's part of the tradition of these societies.

So the Arab woman has been empowered in different countries. In Tunisia, already in the 60s under Bourguiba, the Tunisian woman was a lot of rights. In Morocco lately they have changed the statute on personal relations and the woman was given a lot of rights. In Egypt also we have a number of women there today who are members of parliament, ambassadors, and so on. So you cannot generalize, even in the Gulf States. In Washington today you have an ambassador from Oman and an ambassador from Bahrain who are women. So I think that there's a lot of progress going on. In the Muslim world in general there were prime ministers and heads of state. Don't forget Benazir Bhutto and others who became heads of state and prime ministers. So as I said there's a great diversity, but the trend is for empowering women. We have to encourage this trend. Women have been more prominent in certain sectors than others, for instance, in the field of education, they have been very active, even in the media you have now anchors – if you turn on Al Jazeera, all these channels, you find there are all these women presenting the news, moderating discussions. So the women have started to play an important role. Maybe in political participation, not so much yet, but I think it will come, and again I think it needs encouragement.

Question: Hi I'm Suzanne Bennison and I'm interested in your comments on education. How could the United States assist the Muslim world in education, particularly in primary and secondary education without confronting the more radical Islamic traditions in education?

Hussein Hassouna: I think that in many ways, as I said, there could be an exchange of students. Sometimes you can provide your expertise in many ways. Improving the curriculums, in know-how and maybe bringing in more technology, the use of computers and modern technology. There are many American schools now and universities throughout the Arab world. It's amazing. A few years ago, the only universities I knew of growing up were the American University in Beirut and the American University in Cairo. Today, you have American universities in Doha, in the Emirates, in Morocco; they're all over the Arab world. They are sending academics from here to teach there. I know many of them. Lots of students go to these universities. There are also schools, secondary schools in many countries. So there are many ways I think Americans can help with education. But again we have to be careful to respect laws, traditions, cultural heritage, and so on, and not to impose your own concepts and values on those societies. But I think that it's an immense progress that this kind of collaboration that there is between the Muslim world and the United States.

Question: Pat Rosenfield. Thank you so much, Mr. Ambassador and Judy for your excellent presentation and the excellent questions and answers. Because of the clarity of your responses and your presentation, and the way that you were really able to make extremely compelling the developments in the Arab world, I wanted to ask about your first comments about the lack of understanding, misrepresentation, misinterpretation, and stereotyping, and demonizing of the Arab world and Muslims in the United States. The

raison d'être of the Carnegie Scholars Program on Islam is to really work toward changing those misperceptions, misunderstandings, demonizations and the mythologizing about the Muslim world. I'm sure you speak to many audiences around the US. It would be so helpful to know what you find is the most effective way of presenting a different picture about the Arab world and about Muslim societies that reaches Americans, because we're constantly seeking: what is the right approach to changing those misrepresentations? So it would be so helpful to hear from you what are the lessons you're taking away from your tenure both from the Arab League and also as ambassador in many different capacities about how to really change the understandings of Americans about this important part of the world.

Hussein Hassouna: Thank you. Well yes, this is an important issue. I think that there are many roles to be played. First of all there are roles to be played by Arabs and Muslims, officials like me. We have to go on meeting people, to talk, to have access to the media, to explain things, because Americans – I've been in America now for many years, whether as an Egyptian diplomat or Arab League diplomat – and I find it's an open society and that it is listening to everything. And people are convinced, if you talk sense with them, if you tell them the facts, you can convince them. We as Arabs complain sometimes, you know, there are strong lobbies who work against us and so on, but it's about times to have our own lobby. One important factor I think should be the Arab-Americans or the Muslims living in this country. People say that there are about three million Arab-Americans and six million Muslims, they should become more active and try to express their views, to stand up when somebody criticizes Islam, to respond. So this is another role and it is for these communities.

Then for Americans who know the Middle East, who've lived in the Middle East, the business community, who have been received in the Middle East or the Muslim world, who have gone to homes, who have seen the hospitality, how people love the United States, as people, not as policies, as I said. They also have to stand up and talk loudly and so on, including academics. So I think there's a role for everyone today. But I am hopeful that slowly I think the impact of September 11 with time will erode, with time people will realize that we live in an interrelated, interconnected world. We have common interest and we have to work together.

Judy Woodruff: We have about two minutes left, so one short question. Right here. Donna.

Question: Donna Constantinople. I have a quick question. I think our new President clearly sees the need for our country to develop energy independence. And I wondered, in light of that, that might mean our finally getting resolve about getting away from a dependence on oil and I wonder what impact you see that having on our relationship with the countries that really are the source of that oil.

Hussein Hassouna: The question of energy is an old ritual. I lived in this country in the seventies and I was here when there was the oil crisis and I heard about diversifying the sources of energy, about adopting new policies. I haven't seen anything yet so let me say,

honestly I'm a bit skeptical about that, and we hear this whenever the price of oil goes up. When the price of oil goes down, people become more relaxed and life continues as usual. But it is a long-term policy of the new administration. I don't think it will be realized soon. I think the United States will continue to rely on oil from the Middle East where the largest reserves are, and the Middle East will continue to help in stabilizing the prices whenever it can. It's a question of offer and demand; it's not a question of the Middle East countries wanting the prices to go up for their own benefit only. When there is was booming economy in the world, especially because of India and China and their very high growth rates, the prices went up. Now that there is a recession almost everywhere, the prices are going down. So I think we have to, again, work together to help each other, and I hope that one day the United States will be self-sufficient in energy, but I can't foresee this in the near future.

I also want to tell you that the Arab world is very sensitive to the needs of the United States. For instance, many financial institutions face difficult problems, what you heard about the sovereign funds were ready to help out these institutions in difficult times. Also when the United States had national disasters like Katrina a couple of years ago, many of the Arab states came in and helped the victims of those disasters. So there is today an interconnection between – not only the Arab world and the United States – but between the world in general and we need to work together to overcome these challenges.

Judy Woodruff: Mr. Ambassador, thank you very much for your presentation and for speaking, I think, from not only your head but from your heart about these issues that matter so much to all of us, especially as we embark on a new administration and what may be a new policy direction. We'll see. Thank you very much.