

**The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy  
Tufts University**

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Good Evening.

Can I be honest? I am getting a horrid sense that somehow the world is upside down. I am supposed to be sitting in the chairs you occupy listening to a guest speaker talk to me about an important issue of our day. I don't know how time has passed so quickly – 15 years since I was you – seems like just a second ago. Though the Hall of Flags has changed – it is better designed and no longer has a bucket to capture the drops of rain that leaked from the roof – some things at Fletcher have not.

In the 15 years since I was here, the quality of the students and the exceptional vibrancy of the faculty continue to make this special place a world leader in producing the leaders of our time. I congratulate each of you for being part of this important place of learning, and place of action. The ideas you generate here, and the way you go forward when you leave is making a difference to the planet. I see that every day.

Fletcher is everywhere – and certainly we have more than our share of senior leadership at the Department of State that are graduates of Fletcher – including the Assistant Secretary for the Near East Bureau, Jeff Feltman, Scot Marciel, Ambassador for ASEAN Affairs and Deputy Assistant Secretary in the East Asia Bureau, Jim Foley, our Ambassador to Croatia, and Steve Bosworth, the Special Representative for North Korea Policy. There are dozens more. Bottom line – we are everywhere. And, well, that is the way it should be!

As students here you have the privilege to be able to think deeply about today's most pressing global challenges, and to imagine— without false boundaries— how you can work to solve them. And a word to the faculty... I need to be clear – okay

I am just going to say it – to the faculty at the best school of international affairs on the planet – you are in fact shaping the future of our world.

One of my favorite colleagues at State now is from your ranks, Professor Vali Nasr. His insights and counsel and understanding the issues I deal with are critical. I know first-hand the impact of this faculty as I think about the pivotal roles Leila Fawaz, Andrew Hess and Dick Schultz made to the way I thought about issues and in fact, how I could make a difference to issues I cared about then and care about now.

I came to Fletcher in the fall of 1993. When I applied to Fletcher, I was working at the US Agency for International Development and thought that when I was at Fletcher I would take a lot of classes on development and then return to that field. That is what I wrote in my application. That is what I believed. That is what the Fletcher Admissions Committee believed I would do.

Now, I didn't lie. I did THINK that that is what I was going to do. But then life happened.

In the spring of 1993 two members of my family were killed in Kashmir –one by a militant group and the other in a random firing at the funeral procession of my assassinated relative. If you recall, the insurgency in Kashmir was robust and dangerous at that time. General Anthony Zinni came to Fletcher in 1994 I think and told us that the most dangerous spot on the planet was on the Indian-Pakistani Line of Control. And at that time, it was.

But the deaths of my relatives greatly affected my Fletcher experience because Dick Schultz and Sugata Bose who was part of the faculty then took me aside separately and said “you are interested in national security issues; you have demonstrated your interest in issues concerning extremism, and you are the perfect person to look at this issue more closely.” At the time, few Americans were allowed in. But in the summer of 1994 I went to Kashmir to do field research on the insurgency and got to experience up close how foreign ideologies impact a local community and in fact, how others use regional grievances for larger global action. It was my introduction to violent extremist ideology.

It was my “James Bond” summer –interviewing militants and very high level members of the Indian government. I also turned down a meeting with Benazir Bhutto –and I will tell that story if you wish later. But my point is that I learned a lot first hand –things that helped me build a foundation to explore ideas with this

exceptional faculty and surrounded by classmates who helped me understand how different regions understand the same event differently.

Another thing happened in 1993... Samuel Huntington at Harvard wrote his piece “The Clash of Civilizations.”

His theory on “the clash” was all everyone talked about. In particular, the questions being raised by my classmates in every class were:

- Is there something wrong with the religion of Islam?
- Are Muslims different from humans in the rest of the world
- Do we have the right to define the world into categories of “us and them”
- What is the future of the Muslim demographic and what will the non-“Muslim world” do when “they” outnumber “us.”

We had very loud and important conversations in our classes about his piece. The framework of his theory and the questions it raised have shaped the last 17 years of the global narrative – especially after 9/11. The interest in government and civil society on understand the “Muslim World” has overtaken rational minds and has sometimes lead to irrational assumptions.

I should say, for the record, that I completely reject his theory. I do not believe in an “us” and “them”. The nuances that exist within Muslim communities around the world demand that we accept reality versus hypothesis. All these years later, in a very different capacity than a student at Fletcher reading about a famous academic and his philosophy of the “western” versus quote “Muslim world” unquote, I see the danger of setting up this framework for policy makers and regular world citizens.

I was on the staff of the National Security Council when the Danish Cartoon crisis happened and the global gurus were running around in every paper and TV program saying “look! Evidence that “the west is against Islam.” And I spent the last two years before this job focusing on Western Europe and the Muslims that are part of it. The discourse that is taking place is troubling and directly impacts the way a young person who is Muslim thinks about his or her future. This affects all of us.

Huntington’s theory is still alive and well in many parts of the world including Europe, and in fact, with some entities, who are not our friends. Many use the premise of an “us” and “them” to define the world and its future.

America does not accept this framework. We understand the complexity and diversity of Muslims around the world and that respect is the central part of how you engage with anyone. So if you are a Muslim living as a minority in a community or a Muslim in country that is majority Muslim, we know that your experience, perspective and ideas are important.

We are stepping forward into a new framework – a framework built on engagement with Muslims around the world in earnest – and with respect and dignity.

Nearly a year ago President Obama was sworn in as President. In his inaugural speech, for the first time in U.S. history he spoke directly to Muslims. Several months later, he gave an important speech in Ankara. And shortly after he gave a longer more detailed speech which he delivered in Cairo. Importantly, he laid out a new foundation for the way he wanted to engage with Muslims around the world. He said he wanted to build a way forward based on “mutual interest and mutual respect.”

In the weeks that followed, Secretary Clinton created the Office of the Special Representative to Muslim Communities precisely because she envisioned engaging with Muslims around the world through this new paradigm, and building new partnerships from the grassroots up.

She created this new Office for the first time in U.S. History to help advise her on Muslim engagement and to create initiatives through our embassies that focus on reaching the next generation and building networks of like-minded thinkers.

While we must always be open and honest about the very real challenges that confront us, we must also recognize that by working together in true partnership with Muslims around the world, we can build new relationships and partnerships that inspire and promote peace, prosperity, dignity, and hope.

I will tell you much more about my role as the Special Representative and the work we are doing as a government to engage Muslims through partnerships, but first let me just say a few words on my own background, because it has so shaped my perspective and my sense of optimism in the possibility of this new relationship.

I am an American Muslim. I was born in Srinagar in Kashmir, India and came to America with my mother on July 4, 1969, when I was just 18 months old. I grew up in Braintree and Milton —not all that far from here— and I was privileged to

have a strong, well-educated mother who raised my brother and me to have a deep appreciation for the many gifts we had here: the freedom to explore and create and discover, the luxury of the best education in the world, the richness of a community that had every faith, ethnicity and tradition, and a country that gave every citizen—no matter what their religion or race or gender – equal rights under the law.

The small mosque I attended in Quincy is one of the oldest in America. It was founded by dock workers who originally came from Syria and Lebanon and needed a place to pray. Over the years the community grew to include Muslims from dozens of different ethnicities and heritages. And like the story of our country, and many other immigrant communities, this diversity made the community even stronger.

I grew up knowing there was no contradiction between being a Muslim and being an American. For me, it was simply normal. Indeed, in this land of 1200 mosques and nearly 7 million Muslims, Islam is part of the American story. When I meet Muslims from around the world, I take great pride in answering their questions about America and dispelling some of their myths about being Muslim in America.

And because I understood the gifts that had been given to me, the idea of giving back—which is a central tenet of both America and Islam — has always been a part of me. This concept that every problem must have a solution, every one of us can take responsibility, and there is no time like the present—has framed my worldview and has made it impossible for me to just watch from afar as the world grapples with some of the most pressing issues of our age.

The challenges that need to be confronted by Muslim communities today are very real. They include: lack of opportunities and jobs, especially for young people, illiteracy and poor education systems, countering violent extremism, the navigation of identity in a globalized world, and empowering women to attain their full and equal role in society. These challenges are front and center in every conversation I have with Muslims whether in Dusseldorf or Dhaka.

In order to tap into the potential for excellence in these communities and to work with them to address the challenges we are all facing, I see my job in three interlocking ways:

First, I am putting a face to Secretary Clinton’s desire for new partnerships with Muslim communities. Muslims need to know that we are sincere in our desire for

a way forward built on mutual interest and mutual respect. When I meet with Muslims around the world, I seek to listen to their concerns, and talk to them about the vision laid out by the President and the Secretary of State, not only so they can better understand that we are sincere, but so I can also take what I hear from them back to Washington and help better shape our policies.

In short, we are taking concrete action to follow-up on the President's vision of a new beginning, because we realize that a new tone is not enough—dialogue must be matched with action and that action must improve people's lives in meaningful ways. The only way we can do that is through partnerships with people who understand that there is no "us versus them".

The second part of my job relates to a pernicious and delicate problem. We have to be honest that we are facing a serious challenge of radicalization among some young Muslims. One of the most serious issues facing Muslim youth is their struggle with identity issues. What does it mean to be Muslim in 2010? Faced with sometimes deafening or dangerous voices online, on the street or in local neighborhoods, many Muslim youth are struggling to come to grips with their identity in a positive way.

There are endless questions that compound the normal questions of growing up: who am I, what are my values, what do I want to do when I grow up, how can I be both Muslim and modern, how should I should dress, what language should I speak, or what is the difference between culture and religion? But when you are struggling with identity and the only answers you get that seem to make sense are from a narrative that tells you you will never belong, you are drawn into a dangerous place.

I have found that the issues with identity face Muslims as minorities as well as Muslims in Muslim majority nations. These questions are just as important for a young person in Indonesia—which has more Muslims than any other country in the world— as they are for a young Muslim growing up outside London.

And these questions ignore education levels and economic status. One of the most prevalent myths out there is that young people become vulnerable to radicalization because they lack other opportunities. Certainly this is true in some cases: some suicide bombers, as we all know, choose that path because the people exploiting them have vowed to take care of their families and promise paradise for eternity.

In these cases if you are a young man or woman with a future that feels hopeless, it is tempting to believe that violence is your only shot at a better life. But if you also look at some of the most recent cases in the news---the young man who allegedly attempted to blow up a plane on Christmas day, the five Americans arrested in Pakistan this fall... these were well-educated young men who had great opportunities—so this myth does not hold up to scrutiny.

One of the things that most disturbs me is that a small minority of extremists in the name of Islam can influence some young minds.

How can we provide positive alternatives, so that a young person searching for answers in person or online on things like, for example: for information on what it means to Muslim, and how he or she should live in accordance with their beliefs—and even what they should believe—is able to find support from those who will guide them down a non violent path which allows for pluralism, respect for others' views, and engage in their communities in a positive way.

A lot of attention has been focused on the potential for radicalization over the internet in the aftermath of the Ft. Hood shooting in Texas and the attempted bombing of the airline on Christmas day. Both suspects had had contact with a radical cleric who may have contributed to their desire to end the lives of others. It is hard to know precisely how this process occurred.

Were they already driven to such acts prior to finding someone who would support that desire? Did the internet serve as an anteroom to radicalization? Or did they reach out looking for answers and get led down the wrong path? These are questions to which we do not have answers right now. But what is certain is that we need to make sure that in the marketplace of ideas, there is a greater amount of positive information on Islam for young people, so that when they go searching for answers about their own identity, they will see the many tolerant schools of thought in Islam; they will see the diversity of practices of Islam around the world; and they will see that there is not one exclusive way to be a “good” Muslim defined by violent extremists. Let me be clear: our role is not to give religious decrees but we can help others who are credible with young people on these issues in ways that are localized and respectful.

There has been a lot of discussion in editorials and op-eds recently crying out for Muslims to do more to rise up against violent extremism. I would like to dispel one myth: the majority of Muslims are not sitting idly on the sidelines watching extremism take root in young people without caring. And certainly, as we all

know – the vast, vast majority of the 1.4 billion Muslims on this planet reject violent extremism.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference, or OIC, which represents the majority view of 57 member nations, has repeatedly condemned terrorism in all its forms and said the killing of innocent civilians is unjustifiable. In December 2005, as part of the Dhakar declaration, the OIC committed itself to “Condemn[ing] extremism in all its forms and manifestations, as it contradicts Islamic and human values.”

American Muslim organizations and individuals have expressed their own outrage and call on each other to confront radicalization, and they are taking action.

For example:

Just two days ago I met with a group of Somali refugees from Columbus, Ohio, who are urgently working with both law enforcement officials in Ohio and with the refugee camps in Kenya to prevent young people from becoming radicalized and recruited by Al Shabaab. Eboo Patel, who founded the Interfaith Youth Core in Chicago, is bringing together hundreds of young people to create positive change through interfaith service. And Zahed and Shahed Amanullah have created amazing online spaces for Muslims to engage in a positive environment. But all of this is difficult work that takes time, and it takes courage.

Attention to this problem is growing, and there are ways that we can address it. My office is working in partnership with others both inside and outside government to help provide positive alternatives to young people searching for answers.

We are engaging the brightest tech-savvy minds to create web spaces that are appealing to young people, connecting them with other young people who are similarly searching for answers, and creating the space for them to have honest discussions on what it means to be Muslim right now.

In so doing, we are seeking to find and amplify the most compelling Muslims voices who reject the distortion of Islam for violent purposes and who can inspire the young to do something positive. I think it is one of the most exciting, challenging, and rewarding things we can do.

My third focus is trying to develop innovative ways to help harness the power of the world's Muslim population—which is nearly one quarter of the world's population— to address common challenges. There is a wonderful and healthy diversity among the world's 1.4 billion Muslims. It is a population slightly greater than either China or India.

Within these communities, though, there remains a reservoir of untapped potential for excellence. We must work to not only find talent, but to cultivate it, and especially look to members of the next generation to make positive changes in their communities.

As Secretary Clinton said at my swearing in: “The challenges of poverty, hunger, climate change, corruption are not unique to any part of the world, to any people, and certainly not to any faith. But they do require all of us, whoever we might be, to find an active role in forging solutions that will fulfill our obligations as people of faith – to those who are the least, the last, and the lost among us -- to reach out and create that common bond.”

Many countries with significant Muslim populations are facing a tremendous youth bulge. This presents both challenges and opportunities. The challenge is that it is difficult for their own economies to grow at the same pace that young people are seeking opportunity, so it is easy for young people to feel disenfranchised.

But on the positive side, young people have tremendous enthusiasm and ideas. By listening to these young people and encouraging them to be part of the global conversation about our planet's challenges, we are taking the first step to harnessing their power.

The next step must be encouraging them to act to change their society in a positive way. Young people around the world are telling me their frustrations with their neighborhoods, their governments, and their tenuous futures. But in many places their culture does not support a spirit of volunteerism and social entrepreneurship, so young people do not feel empowered to take action.

So where young people ARE doing good things, we need to use technology to connect them to each other and to mentors, and we must shine light on their actions to inspire other young people to create positive change at the local level. After all, many young people working to create positive change at the local level— even if it seems small, can together add up to something quite large.

As Muhammed Yunus, the Bangladeshi economist and social entrepreneur who developed microcredit said in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech: “Tackling big problems does not always have to be through giant actions, or global initiatives or big businesses. It can start as a tiny little action. If you shape it the right way, it can grow into a global action in no time. Even the biggest problem can be cracked by a small well-designed intervention.” That’s exactly the type of spirit that we are seeking to help cultivate among the young people of the world, so that they can see too that their interventions have a big impact.

So how do we do this difficult task of addressing these 3 seemingly daunting challenges? Well what is so exciting about my position is that my office is working in a way that has never been done before, because Secretary Clinton has asked me to engage on a people-to-people level.

As you all know from your study of diplomacy here at Fletcher, this is different from the typical government-to-government relationship that we normally engage in at the Department of State. Although, of course, I talk to other government officials— this is the Department of State after all—my focus is on civil society.

When I travel, I spend the majority of my time meeting leaders from the grassroots and civil society, particularly youth and women. I meet with students, academics, social and technology entrepreneurs, religious leaders, and journalists. We know what governments are saying and how they are addressing their problems. What I want to know is how we can use the power of civil society to change the world.

To be clear, this is not about how the U.S. government can make change FOR someone, somewhere. This is about how the U.S. government can partner WITH someone to create change together.

To do this, we seek to use our power to convene the best and brightest minds and get the right partners in the room, where we challenge them to be honest about obstacles and opportunities, and brainstorm together about actions they and we can take as partners together.

We are especially seeking to facilitate connections between young leaders--- whether by using technology, or by bringing them together in one place for a Summit focused on addressing common challenges; and we can use social media and technology to connect young people.

Through all of our efforts, we know that there is no need to re-create the wheel. Many people are already taking amazing actions to make their communities more prosperous and resilient—we are seeking out these people and their programs so that by connecting them to others and partnering with them, we may amplify the effect of their actions.

Clearly this is not a job to be done alone, and our Embassies around the world are our force multipliers. For years, our embassies have been involved in educational exchanges and public diplomacy programs to create greater understanding.

What I am concentrating on now is working with all parts of the Embassy— not just the public diplomacy office, because this requires the talents of many different agencies— to socialize this concept among our diplomats of engaging with Muslims via partnership to address our common challenges.

The challenges are real: how to empower women and girls in particular who feel isolated and marginalized, how to address questions of what it means to be Muslim in today's world, how a young person finds his or her place in the world, and how we can create opportunity while countering violent extremism. Ultimately, how can we make sure that Muslims around the world feel they have a seat at the table and feel they are part of the conversation about the planet's challenges?

While we might not know the answers to all these questions, what I do know is that the power to change the world is in the hands of individuals. Going back to my time at Fletcher, I know that as you are listening to this, you are thinking about how this relates to your classes, your assignments, and perhaps your next steps after you graduate.

As Fletcherites, I urge you all to think out of the box – not just about the about the ways that governments can act in traditional ways, but the way governments must – in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – be adept at using all the tools available to them to get results that result in positive action on the ground.

One the greatest things our government can do – especially on my issues – is to act as a convener, facilitator, and intellectual partner. Through diversity of thought and skill sets we can move ideas forward to inspire change and generate action. You will be part of this effort. I can't wait to work with you.

End

