

## Forward Forum

### A Thought for Musharraf

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Dialogue between Jews and Muslims is a necessary step toward easing world tension, and therefore we are pleased that Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf will address the American Jewish Congress this weekend in New York. As we have been actively involved in such dialogue over the last two years, we believe that Musharraf can benefit from our findings and experience.

We therefore offer several suggestions as co-explorers of the difficult trails of Muslim-Jewish dialogue.

Reflecting the issues of deepest concern in our respective communities, there are several points that Jews would like to hear about from a Muslim leader and others that they need to hear.

First, Jews would like an unambiguous statement condemning antisemitism. Muslim leaders need to take a clear moral stand regarding antisemitism whatever their feelings about the politics of the Middle East. Also, they must ensure that the current surge in antisemitism is acknowledged, checked and fought back at the highest levels of government.

Second, Musharraf needs to convey to his Jewish audience that the cultural and religious basis for such a fight is deeply entrenched in the Islamic civilization. He needs to point out the many and strong bonds that exist between the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as the respect Muslims have for the great shared biblical figures such as Abraham, Isaac, Moses, and for many rituals and values.

Third, his Jewish audience would like to hear that Muslim education and Muslim media are prepared to portray modern Jews as heirs to, and equal carriers of, the Abrahamic tradition.

Fourth, Jews would like to hear an explanation of Islam's attitudes toward and practice of democracy, human rights and civil liberties. Here the example of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan revered by Pakistanis as the *Quaid-i-Azam*, or "Great Leader," would be extremely illuminating. Jinnah was the embodiment of parliamentary democracy and believed in human rights and respect for the law. In 1947 he achieved the creation of Pakistan, then the largest Muslim nation on earth, without ever having broken the law or going to jail.

Fifth, Muslim leaders need to give a clear direction regarding relations with Israel. Reaction to Israel is complicated by the strong feeling Muslims have for Palestinians, whom they see as a people oppressed. Muslim leaders also need to understand and

appreciate Jewish history and the national aspirations of the Jewish people.

A double narrative — of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples — needs to be heard in both the Muslim and the Jewish media. Muslim leaders need to work toward the creation of two states both living in security, peace and hopefully harmony. Framing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a clash between *two legitimate national movements* is a crucial first step toward resolving the conflict. We hope Musharraf takes this historical step in his September 17 address.

Sixth, Musharraf has to point out that there is a growing sense of Islamophobia in the West that allows the prophet of Islam and the religion itself to be attacked with impunity. This Islamophobia encourages the perception that the loss of Muslim lives is of little concern to the rest of the world, and further feeds into the sense of anger, desperation and injustice that strengthens people of violence.

Unfortunately, many Muslims perceive the Islamophobia as being fomented by Jews. Also, the Muslim world has a conspiracy-theory mindset that tends to blame the Jews for its ills. Jewish leaders must be more active and visible in the fight against Islamophobia, and Muslims leaders, in turn, must help dispel unfounded conspiracy theories.

Seventh, on the issue of terrorism, Jewish audiences would like to hear Muslim leaders take an unequivocal moral stance, not merely against the perpetrators of terrorist acts but also against the ideologues and legitimizers of such acts — in particular, suicide bombings against Israelis. The red lines against the targeting of innocent lives cannot be crossed for any grievance.

Finally, in order to overcome the chasm of misunderstanding and bad history that exists between our respective communities, an active long-term, ongoing public dialogue of the Abrahamic faiths needs to be supported throughout the Muslim world. This dialogue needs to include every shade of political opinion, religious leadership and gender. It is a dialogue not only of civilizations but also for the future of mankind.

Perhaps the most powerful gesture that Musharraf can make — both for purposes of bridge-building and for pointing the direction to the future — is to announce a meaningful memorial to the late Daniel Pearl, the Wall Street Journal reporter who was so tragically murdered in Pakistan. We believe that if Musharraf were to build a Daniel Pearl Center for Abrahamic Dialogue in Karachi, where he lost his life, he would be creating a spiritual and moral campus that can bring people together and at the same time be a strong gesture of healing and compassion.

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