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# **To Win the War on Terror**

A Discussion With

**The Honorable Jim Turner**

And

**Members of the Arab and Muslim Diplomatic  
Communities**

Moderated by

**Tim Roemer**

*September 8, 2004*

*Summary prepared by*

**Alexis Albion**

## ***About the Event***

This event is part of a series of discussions being organized by the Center for National Policy to help reframe the debate on the War on Terrorism. CNP seeks to deepen both the public's and elected officials' understanding of the complex issues involved in the growth and spread of radical Islam, and to increase awareness of initiatives that promise to advance moderation and constructive reform.

To accomplish these goals, CNP organizes small group discussions that bring together prominent policy experts, elected officials, and public opinion specialists to explore new strategies to address both immediate and long-term threats. CNP drafts summaries of these conversations and makes them available to lawmakers on Capitol Hill and policy-makers in the Executive Branch, as well as academics, journalists, and the public at large.

## ***About CNP***

The Center for National Policy (CNP) is a non-profit, non-partisan public policy organization located in Washington, DC. Founded in 1981, the Center's mission is to engage national leaders with new policy options and innovative programs designed to advance progressive ideas in the interest of all Americans.

The goal of the Center is to promote the transfer of ideas and information from experts to public officials, and therefore better serve American citizens and the public interest.

Working with a small core staff, CNP brings together policy-makers and experts from a range of organizations, including other think tanks, business, labor and academia, to encourage new thinking, promote public awareness and catalyze action.

The Center uses public opinion research, as well as substantive and political analysis, to frame options and make recommendations. The Center's programs include active media outreach and extensive use of the web as well as more traditional methods of dissemination.

In October 2003, Timothy J. Roemer was named President of CNP. Formerly a seven-term member of Congress from Indiana, he most recently has served as a member of the bipartisan 9-11 Commission. His predecessors as president include Madeleine K. Albright, prior to her service as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations; the late Kirk O'Donnell, who was chief counsel to the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, and Maureen S. Steinbruner, currently serving as CNP Vice President and Senior Policy Advisor.

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## To Win the War on Terror

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*On September 8, 2004, the Center for National Policy (CNP) held a roundtable discussion on initiatives put forward by U.S. Representative Jim Turner in a report titled "Winning the War on Terror." In this report, Rep. Turner, Ranking Member of the Select Committee on Homeland Security, argued that the United States has three distinct but related missions to carry out in today's struggle against the terrorist challenge: a military mission, to attack terrorists and the infrastructure that supports them; a homeland security mission; and a mission to prevent the rise of future terrorists by building bridges to the Arab and Muslim worlds. It is this last mission that the roundtable addressed. Turner's report stated: "To win the war on terror we must prevail in the battle of ideas. Ironically, it is on this background that the terrorists are at their weakest, but it is also where we are losing ground the most quickly."*

*Representative Turner brought his initiatives to the CNP roundtable to serve as the starting point for a discussion of how the United States, in partnership with its allies in Europe and the Muslim world, should be fighting this "battle of ideas." Participants included three ambassadors to the United States from the region under discussion, and representatives from two other Middle Eastern embassies and the European Commission. The discussion was off the record, except as noted herein and all participants spoke on a personal basis. CNP President Tim Roemer chaired the discussion.*

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### Introduction

It has been clear for some time that winning the war on terror is not only a military and security challenge. With numerous al Qaeda leaders captured or killed, the threat is now more diffuse but just as deadly. Increasingly the question is, are we taking more terrorists out of the picture than are being created every day in the streets and madrassas all over the Arab and Muslim worlds?

The United States needs a strategy for winning the war that both deals with today's terrorists but also, most importantly, works to deter and suppress the growth and power of tomorrow's. U.S. Representative Jim Turner, Ranking Member of the Select Committee on Homeland Security, put forward a series of initiatives to accomplish this, in his report, "Winning the War on Terror." At the invitation of the Center for National Policy, he joined three ambassadors to the U.S. from Muslim nations, and representatives

from two other Middle Eastern embassies and the European Commission, for a discussion of his initiatives and related issues.

After an introduction by Congressman Turner framing the questions, CNP President Tim Roemer moderated a discussion. The session was off the record, except for the comments cited here.

### Supporting Voices of Moderation in the Middle East

Representative Turner stressed the fact that in fighting the war on terrorism the United States needs to look beyond targeting active terrorists and securing the homeland, to supporting voices of moderation in the Middle East as well as those advocating positive change. His report addresses the question of how to prevent the rise of future terrorists through a number of important initiatives.

These include:

- Building bridges to the Arab and Muslim world, which must involve not only diplomacy programs but also fully engaging in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict;
- Improving education for Arab children;
- Stimulating economic development;
- Stabilizing operations in Afghanistan and Iraq; and
- Promoting political reform in the Middle East and moving toward greater democracy.

Representative Turner pointed out, however, that if these types of initiatives are to be successful, it will require a tremendous political effort both at home and abroad. He noted that ten of the 9-11 Commission's 41 recommendations are geared toward preventing the rise of future terrorists—but these have received little public attention. Meanwhile, polling indicates that the U.S. image abroad—not only in the Middle East, but across the globe—has declined dramatically in the past two years. It is essential that Americans understand why this is so, and what needs to be done to change it.

The war on terror, Turner affirmed, is not a war on Islam. But the United States needs to find ways to communicate its intentions much more effectively. Finally, the United States must engage in a partnership with its allies in the Middle East and in Europe if any of the ideas he and others have put on the table are to be effective.

### **A Battle of Ideas:**

Participants generally agreed with the spirit of Representative Turner's remarks, and that fighting the war on terror must involve a battle to win the minds of those in the Arab

and Muslim worlds. In the short-term, we must confront the immediate, day-to-day threats from those who participate in acts of terrorism, rooting out known terrorist groups and their leadership, and preventing wherever possible the emergence of new groups of activists. This is primarily a security issue, which involves the U.S. engaging with security and intelligence services internationally. As one participant observed, it is important to understand that "threats don't stop at anyone's borders."

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But the United States must also have the patience to confront what participants see as a significant generational challenge within the Islamic world. Fully eliminating the terrorist threat is a task that will take perhaps ten or twenty years. If the United States is to be effective over the long-term, it must have some patience, and focus on accurately defining terrorism—and identifying exactly who the enemy is—in the minds of both Americans and Middle Easterners.

Participants pointed out that the number of people in the Middle East – and Muslims specifically – who actively support terrorism is in actuality very small—perhaps only a few thousand. But as recent polling shows, the numbers who are angry at the United States is much greater. The false assumption on the part of Americans that these two groups are one and the same needs to change if the U.S. image abroad is to change. The 9-11 report, for example, made it very clear that the problem of terrorism is not about faith, yet this issue has not been reflected in the current debate in the U.S. about the Commission report. It is important to distinguish between those who support terrorism and those who are angry at America because the solutions to dealing with both problems are very different.

As one participant observed, it is the people in the middle—in the Middle East as well as in the United States—who need to have their minds changed about the nature of the war on terrorism. The war on terror is not only America’s problem. If the U.S. wants to find support for partnership with the Arab and Muslim world, it will have to begin by showing the benefits of such a partnership to the people in the middle-center on both sides of the relationship.

More forceful policy initiatives and efforts on the part of the U.S. will make an immediate impression. Participants agreed that a commitment by the United States to seriously engage with the Israeli-Arab conflict is absolutely necessary. An ambassador said that the shift of public opinion against the US in Turkey is attributable to two factors: What is happening in Iraq; and what is not happening in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Another Ambassador said, “You have to seriously address the problem in Israeli-Palestinian conflict—not necessarily solve it.”

In addition, actions to support economic development in the Middle East, such as providing economic assistance and scholarships, supporting WTO accession, and other steps to enhance job opportunities could show tangible benefits and demonstrate an American commitment to a broader, positive Middle East agenda. This should be the core of the argument to convince the U.S. Congress and American people that such proposals are part of the solution and that military action is not the only tool to use against the terrorist threat.

### **Homegrown Reform**

Participants echoed Representative Turner’s argument that it is essential that the U.S. support moderate forces in the Arab world, to ensure that they prevail over extremists. As another participant pointed out, some of the extremists’ arguments on

important issues such as women’s rights are very weak, and they have no agenda of their own. Tim Roemer noted the recent op-ed by President Musharraf of Pakistan calling for “enlightened moderation” makes exactly this case.

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Responding to Turner’s ideas for promoting political, economic, and educational reform in the Middle East, participants agreed that any of these proposals would be beneficial. But they urged that the U.S. not try to lump together the whole region but recognize that different approaches are needed for different countries. Participants emphasized the importance of homegrown reform. “It’s very hard to address the problem [of terrorism] by lumping together the entire region and imposing reforms on them.” It was also noted, for example, that a U.S.-Jordanian partnership to increase exports from Jordan to the U.S. has been highly successful, doubling household income in poorer areas of the country and creating over 22,000 job opportunities mostly in poverty areas, 85% of which have been for women. It was pointed out, however, that such a program would not necessarily be right elsewhere. Regionally-generated initiatives, perhaps assisted by foreign aid, may meet with more success than unilateral efforts created thousands of miles away.

Several participants stressed that the U.S. must avoid the appearance of imposing its own reforms on other countries. They pointed out that media audiences in the Middle East closely watch the American political process. The recent Democratic and

Republic National Conventions received far more airtime from television stations in the Middle East than in the United States. The point was made that extremists are watching, and they will certainly exploit the perception that “the Americans are telling us what to do” to oppose reform initiatives.

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*“This is a conflict within Islam. We must support reason and try to assure that this wins—not terrorism.”*

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It was noted that the particularly sensitive issue of educational reform in Saudi Arabia, for example, was unable to find support in the Kingdom once the U.S. Congress vociferously supported it. “Secular” education in particular was characterized as a ‘non-starter’: the very word “secular” can be a form of insult in the Kingdom. Similarly, the word “democracy,” per se, has some negative connotations in the Middle East—though this is not the case for many of its specific attributes, such as transparency, civic participation, free elections, and so on. One diplomat said, “This is a conflict within Islam. We must support reason and try to assure that this wins—not terrorism.”

“America has become an excuse for our problems,” as one participant noted. But this is a cultural reality that the U.S. must understand if it wants its reform efforts to be effective.

### **The European Perspective**

It was noted that European nations have been engaged with the Middle East for almost 50 years. More recently, the European Union has been working with the United States specifically on the problem of extremism in the Arab and Muslim world,

both through direct E.U.-U.S. dialogue and on the G8 track. The European Union endorses the general argument that solutions must come from within the region, but with attention to regional differences. It is the EU point of view that there can be no “one size fits all” solution. It was suggested that Representative Turner’s proposals largely fit into the European interpretation, with its emphasis on building bridges, fostering educational improvements and cultural exchange, but the point was made that regional cooperation is also necessary. Where the U.S. is still focused only on bilateral trade agreements in the Middle East, for example, the E.U. is trying to negotiate regional trade agreements. The E.U. also sees accession to the World Trade Organization by nations in the Middle East as important, and as in itself a way to promote reform.

On the whole, the European Union view is that it has been listened to by its U.S. counterparts, but there is still some frustration that long-time European efforts and investments of human and financial capital in the Middle East have not been recognized.

Although fresh ideas are appreciated, it is important to the E.U. that no initiatives are introduced into the region that will either distract from or complicate those programs already in place. Instead, new initiatives need to be streamlined and coordinated with existing projects. The Israeli-Arab peace process, for example, was described as at the heart of these efforts.

Speaking from a European perspective, it was observed that the U.S. should recognize that it has the power to put issues on the table—but a fine balance needs to be maintained between acting with haste and acting too slowly. “Like a bowl of soup,” one participant observed, “if you eat it too fast, it burns you; if you let it go cold, it’s tasteless.”

## How and Where to Begin?

Some participants noted the need for the U.S. to be sensitive to the fact that countries have their own timetables for reform. Americans too often look for quick-fix solutions to problems, and think only in short-term, two-year cycles, whereas reformers in the Middle East are willing to work for generational change. Yet it was also noted that external prodding can sometimes be important and even vital for bringing much needed reform. Turkey, for example, has had to accelerate the process of reform in order to meet European Union requirements. One participant remarked, "Cultural and religious sensitivities should not be an excuse for not doing what needs to be done."

But where exactly should the longer-term battle against extremism begin? Participants presented differing views. Education was acknowledged to be clearly a key factor in winning the battle of ideas, and school systems may therefore be the most sensible point to start any initiative that aims to prevent the rise of future terrorists. One diplomat said, "You must support the voices of moderation and reason...they must prevail. When you introduce the sensitive issue of education reform, it must be seen as a national homegrown plan and not U.S.-inspired." But this is a long-term effort which will have results only over the longer term. The need for judicial reform was also cited as important to promoting confidence in the rule of law.

Most participants advised putting economic reform slightly ahead of political reform in the Middle East. The point was made that political reform can be achieved in part by motivating people to use the political

options that they already have. Creating job opportunities, however, and providing people with immediate and tangible benefits, can foster participation by providing hope that reform is a better way to move forward than revenge. As one Senior Middle East diplomat put it, "Economic reform must come first because we need to give people hope that this way is the better way."

Separately, several participants said that it is essential for the U.S. to achieve progress in key policy areas, such as stabilizing Iraq and seriously engaging in the Israeli-Arab conflict, to improve its image abroad and communicate its message effectively.

## Summary

The participants in the discussion fundamentally agreed that there is a need for more effective long-term strategies to counteract the challenge of extremist ideologies in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Some caution was expressed about new U.S. initiatives, especially if unilateral. Congressman Turner's multilateral and tailored approach was applauded as a place to begin dialogue over these issues. One Middle East Ambassador summarized the situation in the following way: "We all realize we have a problem. We all realize we want to solve it. We are on the same side."

Several participants called for additional discussions such as this one, to address these and other initiatives, as well as some key existing problems. It was agreed that such discussions are vitally needed to broaden understanding, improve communication and facilitate concrete programs of cooperation among the U.S., the EU, and various Middle Eastern countries.

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<sup>i</sup>*The War on Terror as a Political Issue*, Daniel Yankelovich, Presentation for the Center for National Policy, Washington, D.C. April, 2004  
see: [http://www.cnponline.org/Press%20Releases/Events/yankelovich\\_event\\_summary.htm](http://www.cnponline.org/Press%20Releases/Events/yankelovich_event_summary.htm)



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