

**Memorandum presented to the U.S.-Islamic world Forum:
A strategy for “a popular diplomacy” proposal
By Gamal al-Banna**

Since the beginning of the twentieth century up to the end of the World War II, the Egyptian-US relations were praiseworthy. The United States did not take part in colonial conspiracies concocted by Britain and France. It opposed by virtue of its own origin, to colonialism and advocating freedom. As far as I know, among the prior countries -if not the first- that recognized the United States, was Algeria which at that time, was enjoying independence and owned the strongest fleet in the Mediterranean Sea after the destruction of the Egyptian one at Navarin, in 1827.

Before the arising of the 23rd of July's military movement, there were connections between the Free Officers and some American circles. Even after the success of the movement, the CIA officers were frequently meeting them, notably Kim Roosevelt, Miles Copland -and others- who were good friends of Egyptian prominent journalists at the time Mohamed Hassanein Heikal and Mostafa Amin. At that point, Egypt could have become a US ally and could have built the High Dam with American funds and expertise if it hadn't been only one thing which engendered -and still engender- hostility towards the United States, namely its aligned policy to Israel. Regardless of psychological, emotional and religious strong ties that connect Palestine to Egypt, Israel's question is linked up with national security, and means a direct threat to Egypt at the heart of the Arab region. Such a policy might have had a justification during the cold war against the Soviet Union, as to consider Israel as the fortress of democracy and capitalism in the region, which is no more a relevant argument considering the new context. And it is not in the interest of the US to antagonize one billion Muslims and 200 million Arabs in return of satisfying Israel's policy -while the international community condemns its aggressive nature- which survives only thanks to the American veto.

It is an important issue that US policy makers who seek Arab support should know and realize that the persistence of such a partial policy would remain an obstacle to the establishment of real friendship and cooperation with the United States.

Contemporary, the US has adapted its positions in dealing with the Arab region according to the needs of formal diplomacy. This can be of benefit to the US on the short run but a cause of ruin on the long run. As a

consequence of its oldest action, the thwarting of Mussadaq's movement, Iran missed the opportunity of realizing its bourgeois revolution; so, the alternative was Khomeiny's revolution. Hence, the US appeared to be somehow responsible for this outbreak. Later, this diplomacy led the US to be the allied of Saddam Hussein and to arm him with weapons of mass destruction, pushing him in war on Iran.. Then, it overlooked his intentions to annex Kuwait in order to use this war as a pretext to broke into the region and to guarantee a permanent American presence and bases, the costs of which will be payed by the region itself. But the region didn't see this fact as a positive achievement, which inspired hostile feelings. The US has adopted the same approach towards Usama Ben Laden during his resistance to the Soviets, providing him with missiles, then requiring the weapons once the latter accomplished his mission. The US acted likewise with Iraq, providing it with weapons of mass destruction then inciting the whole world against this country in order to get weapons back. So, except for the way it has been carried out, 9/11 attacks were not surprising but was the political outcome of tensions due to former US stances which created an atmosphere of suspicion. Plans to attack oil region were actually on the agenda, ("Why give the meat to those who have no Teeth"), and were concomitant with the US turning against Ben Laden and Saddam after former friendship, with the first Gulf War, with the failure of the Oslo peace process and Israel's iron grip backed by the US, which all contributed to deteriorate the political atmosphere and increased tensions to the outmost. Thus, politics related to formal diplomacy based on avidity and expansionism conveyed in the end to the 9/11 outbreak. It would be untrue to link this event to Islamic terror. The two partners, the US as well as its former allies, Saddam and Ben Laden, **were playing a political game. Islam has nothing to do with it although Islam has been used as a "camouflage" to beautify the ugly face of these attacks.**

I do not expect this memorandum to change the US policy after the "war economy" has become the pillar of American's economy based on turning a profit of world destruction then turning a profit again of its reconstruction, to put an end to unemployment and to economic depression (which is in fact the essence of Nazism and fascism). This change of policy cannot occur through such a memorandum nor through millions similar... But the aim from this paper is that **the US will embark on "popular diplomacy" for the sake of mutual understanding with the world. Little by little and thanks to modifications in atmosphere and public opinion,**

this diplomacy will be able to carry out the gradual change sleeked in American policy.

What we need now is to reach a truce because keeping peace is incompatible with the “miniaturization of economy”. Such a truce can be achieved by popular diplomacy originating from masses and from its civil organizations. In the meantime, the American government should back this new popular diplomacy and recognize it as an efficient force for reinstating peace, bridging gaps between nations and establishing democracy and freedom. However, this support should not affect the autonomy of popular diplomacy. We admit that it is a difficult equation but we are compelled to accept government support due to scarcity of resources and time constraints. And we are confident that there are many generous and wise elements with in the American administration who believe and support this idea.

In the wake of WWII, the liberal world deployed tremendous effort relying on popular diplomacy to resist the spread of communism. The American government -and probably the CIA- helped several thinkers, at the head of whom Stephen Spender, to edit publications such as the *Encounter* revue, and the Lebanese *Dialogue* periodical. A group of committees on freedom arisen. As well, many books has been published unofficially by the American administration itself. I, myself have been influenced by the excellent Arabic translation of Victor Kravchenko’s book / *choose Freedom*. Actually, these attempts bore fruit even if a large part of its funds went to some opportunists’ hands.

What we are in need now is greater, something similar to the establishment of a popular authority to be the counterpart of governmental one, which would give birth to a new *International* similar to those established by European workers in 1864 and 1919. For example, concerning the educational question, we can form groups of educators, teachers, school directors, university lecturers, etc. to deal with this issue through a popular perspective. So. to face blunt capitalism, the voracious globalization and the power of multinationals, many organizations should exist rallying experts in economy committed to people's cause, who will aim at an alternative development, as well as associations that provide guidance for consumers through the stream of misleading advertisements. Likewise, Trade Unionist movement should assist Trade Union organizations through the world to help Trade Unionism in getting freedom, representing workers and expressing their will. The US and German’s Trade Union movement, the wealthiest, in the world, should cooperate by sponsoring periodical sessions in order to stand up for freedom of association which is squandered in most

Arab and Muslim world countries. I know that there were similar aspects of cooperation between the educational workers association in Cairo and the African Center affiliated to the American Federation of Labor (A.F.L.). I myself took part in this cooperation. As well, I introduced the chairman of the Egyptian Federation of Labor to Friedrich Ebert Stiftung which funded the construction of Workers' University in Cairo. Meanwhile, we can also rely on the globally shared language of sports and art to support the cause of peace, freedom and peoples' mutual understanding. Additionally, liberal religious thinkers all over the world, should work on purifying religions from all aspects of fanaticism and narrowmindedness.

Amidst this darkness marked by the ferocious lure of gain, the brutal means of war and the tight grip of political regimes, I pin no hopes but on this "popular diplomacy". If this type of diplomacy is rationally managed, if it can benefit from civil associations' resources and from some governments' support, it can lead us to peace or, at least, it will ease tensions across the globe. Shall this call find an echo in this eminent forum of Islam and United States ?

If the US is adamant about fighting terror, spreading freedom and supporting democracies, it must be aware that these objectives could not be attained by the use of force. Terror cannot be resisted by terror, freedom cannot be established by canons and democracy cannot be brought by tanks. The reliance on these means would turn peoples against the US and bring America into the quagmire of popular resistance. The suitable and direct way is **to address peoples who strive for democracy and freedom and are even willing to hail the US call for religious reform but who are aware that there must be an affinity between means and goals**, that noble goals cannot be achieved by vile means. As well, no result can come from economic pressure that some are calling for. The unique solution is to resort to peoples, not to powers nor to weapons, and resorting to people comes only through popular diplomacy which is the issue of this memorandum.

Gamal al-Banna