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**Abstract – Luncheon Keynote Address**

“Obama’s Approach to the Muslim World:  
What lies Behind the Change in Rhetoric”

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Obama came to the presidency at a time when the reputation of the United States in most of the Muslim world was at an all-time low. Obama set out immediately to set a different tone, speaking in his inaugural address of a relationship with the Muslim world based on “mutual interests and mutual respect.” He followed this within days with a high-level appointment - former Senator George Mitchell - to be his special envoy for Arab-Israeli peace diplomacy. In addition, he announced that the prison at Guantanamo would be closed and that American troops would be withdrawn on schedule from Iraq by the end of 2011. Finally, he repeated that he was ready to engage diplomatically with regimes such as those in Tehran and Damascus that had been on the enemy’s list for the Bush II administration. All of this created a foundation for a new approach, but nine months into the new administration it is fair to ask how much has really changed. This presentation will provide a balance sheet of where Obama has been able to make progress, where he has fallen short, and what the reasons are for both.