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American Muslims: Community at a Crossroads – MAPS Fills Vital Gap

Prominent scholars focus on compelling issues related to Islam and Muslims in America in Project MAPS conference "American Muslims: Community at a Crossroads," held on April 23, 2002 at Georgetown University Conference Center

Project MAPS set out to fill the vital information gap about Muslims in America, said Professor John Esposito, University Professor and Director, Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University, in his inaugural address to the conference on "American Muslims: Community at a Crossroad" April 23, 2002. He commended The Pew Charitable Trusts for its foresight in funding the project. Dr. Esposito said that despite the visibility of Islam and Muslims in America, little actually is known about Muslims in America, adding a lack of information creates problems, particularly post-9/11.

MAPS, he said, will fill this gap through publications like Who's who among American Muslim, and Directory of Muslim civic institutions and mosques and centers, and that information will be available in libraries to journalists and to others as it is available for other groups.

MAPS co-director Professor Sulayman Nyang of Howard University said Muslims and the academic community owes it to the Pew Trust that helped compile the data on Muslims and make it available to the public. He said several scholars such as Prof. Yvonne Haddad had contributed immensely by providing information on Islam in America and Muslim Americans, when only most of the information centered on the Nation of Islam. Dr. Nyang said that the important process taking place in America that of greater understanding of the American-Muslim experience was now evident in terms of books and articles that are covering the wide spectrum of the Muslim presence in America.

Dr. Nyang, who praised the efforts of Project co-director Dr. Zahid Bukhari and of Ayub Alam, and Faisal Islam, said that what "makes the MAPS Project very significant, not only to Americans, but also to non-Americans interested in Islamic studies, or Muslim studies in America, is the fact that it makes it very clear to Muslims that they should be known. He said when people of a minority are invisible, the only way they can really fight back against bigotry is for them to be visible. And intellectual visibility is the highest form of being recognized anywhere, because if you don't have any kind of intellectual visibility, you are really out in the black hole."

He termed Project MAPS as torchlight from Georgetown with coopera-

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tion of the Muslim community to shed light on the Muslim presence so that Americans will come to recognize the reality. He said what 9-11 taught the American leadership is that those who wanted to perpetrate violence against the U.S., wanted not only to inflict collective pain on American society, but they also wanted to drive a wedge between the American Muslims and the rest of society.

Project MAPS, he said, had helped document some of the important milestones in America, such as the success of the interfaith movement that was evident in President Bush visiting the Islamic Center in Washington and joining faith leaders like Dr. Muzammil Siddiqui, then President of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). He said that another success of the project is that those who are interested in immigration studies, ethnic studies, and other forms of psychological, political, and historical analysis in American society under the rubric of American studies, are now going to also see that Project MAPS is adding to that stream of knowledge and learning that is developing in America. The volumes to be published by Project MAPS will help place knowledge about Muslims in thousands of American libraries.

He asked Muslims to further the work done by MAPS in making information about them readily available. He pointed out that a journalist or writer doing research on say Catholics can easily access information about the denomination and its churches nationwide but information about contacting Muslims are unavailable.

Dr. Zahid Bukhari briefly reflected on first ever systematic poll of American Muslims executed by Project MAPS whose findings are available on the Internet. He said that the poll reveals that the American-Muslim community is diverse, affluent, activist, religious and politically savvy.

Approximately two hundred people attended this conference. This gathering included representatives from various think tanks, US State Department officials, students and professors from local universities, officials from the PEW Charitable Trust and Pew Forum for Religion and Public Life, Social Sciences Research Council, Carnegie Corporation, MIT, and National Conference of Catholic Bishops attended the conference.

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr calls on Muslim Americans to focus on the humanities to craft an academic presence in America

Muslims Must Expand Intellectual Frontiers

Prof. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, university professor at George Washington, whose book the "Heart of Islam," is due to come out September 11, 2002, said some of the very important issues concerning Islam are both understood and misunderstood in America today. For American society, he said, September 11 is a watershed, adding every major empire and nation during its history had suffered a defeat, a wound, but this was the first time that this had occurred within the U.S., and therefore it meant a not only a psychological wound, but an important occasion to have a new sky and a new sun shine over the heads of people, the time of psychological transformation. He had hoped that some good would come out of this tragedy toward Muslims, and Americans would also increase their vision of what the world is like, and would realize that there are realities beyond the east and the west coast on either side of these oceans.

The past months have meant a great trial or test for Muslims in America. For many Muslims in America it was really a very great trial that has not gone fully away. Put on the defensive, and rather than speaking what they should say, they either kept quiet or tried to be constantly on the defensive to try to answer attacks made against them. Having to redefine what is Jihad, martyrdom, religion, terrorism, paradise, and hell. People forgot that Christians also believed in paradise, and still do, and that all of these major issues of religion became sort of tilted in such a way as if they were Islamic anomalies that had to be explained.

One of the most important consequences of this was that many Muslims, like other religious communities before them, have had to reexamine their position, at the same time becoming part of the mainstream, but never divorced from their original religious affiliation and homeland. The American-Irish, he said, have sent funds to Northern Ireland because it's natural to try to support your own. This became a great crime for Muslims, because the Irish Republican Army was not blowing bombs in New York, but in London. The situation creates a very important challenge for the Muslims to rethink where they stand. American-Muslims are American, as much anyone else, but at the same time, they have a very deep bond with Islamic world and with co-religionists worldwide. In addition, they are faced with a very acute political and military situation that bothers the conscious of even ordinary people, not just Arabs or Muslims.

Dr. Nasr said that the crass revision of history being enacted on TV poses tremendous challenge, and it is the responsibility and duty of Muslims who want to remain in America, immigrants or native born, to understand that they are part of America and prepare themselves for that. He said the call of Islam has been always a call to a moral order in society and the inner spiritual life, if Muslims cease to follow that call, there is no use calling themselves Muslims. The call of Islam is essentially a call to a moral and spiritual order. If Islam ceases to speak of this, it is no longer Islam. Among the unfortunate events following 9/11 is that many Muslim voices have become silent on these crucial matters, and in fact, many American non-Muslim voices. All of the vital issues are forgotten in the name of uprooting terrorism, but the Islamic voice has been particularly silent and this is something very sad. He said that if Muslims do not hold up to what is the Islamic ideal of the moral life, and are always on the defensive just to prove that they are merely human, it is no use talking in the name of Islam.

The fact is that the Muslims have not done well on the American scene in trying to explain the truth of Islam, said Dr. Nasr. Muslim Americans, he said, need to come out of their cocoon and stop thinking themselves as a small minority. He lamented that Muslims have built no institutions from which they can present the Islamic point of view. Muslims have to strive to change the intellectual situation in America, adding: "I do not know a single American professor who teaches Hinduism and who hates Hinduism, but I know dozens and dozens of American professors who teach Islam who hate Islam."

He termed Muslim ineffectiveness in using the media as one of the great shames of the Islamic community, not

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only in the U.S., but also throughout the Islamic world. The combination of indifference, laziness, and absence of proactivism are diseases from which many major Muslim countries suffer from, but the American-Muslims cannot afford that. Muslims in this country have fortunately a younger generation born in America, who know the Islamic and the western world very well.

Muslims, he said, must learn to sacrifice. In early Catholicism, one son would be given to the church as a priest, just like in early days of Islam, one child would become a scholar and the parents would be very happy. Now parents only want their own children to be successful doctors, and let somebody else take care of the media, Islamic studies, journalism, law, and everything else. He said while demand for literature about Islam and Muslims remains high, this thirst is being quenched by scholars, some of whom are good historians, but anti-Islam ideologues.

Dr. Nasr said Muslims while not lacking intelligence or wealth, lack qualified people in Islamic studies and the social sciences-people who could participate and opine on major issue be it biotechnology or religion. He said Muslims need scholars equally educated in Western learning and Islamic knowledge, and fluent in Western languages.

Islam, he stressed, must stand in America for what the Qur'an has always stood—the universality of revelation. The Qur'an has never referred to non-Muslims as kafir (which is a later application) and guarantees salvation even to non-Muslims if they follow their own religion. The danger today to religion is irreligion, not another religion, and in America, Muslims must take the lead because they do not have the theological difficulties of either Christianity or Judaism. The Christians have to accept salvation outside of Christianity and Judaism has to overcome the idea of the exclusivity of revelation.

Muslims, he said, must turn the other cheek, to prove to their detractors that the Muslims also respect Christ, because he said turn the other cheek. The message of Islam, he said, above everything else is the universality of the truth. If Islam does not present this, then we have not been good Muslims. Muslims in America today are in a very unique situation that perhaps world history has never presented in such a way. First, they are a small minority, but have already the remarkable impact upon that world intellectually. At no period in the history of Islam have so many people living outside of Dar al Islam had an influence, intellectually, in the realm of thought as there exists today. This is unique both in Islamic and American histories. There has never been a situation in which the U.S. wants to be friends with the vast world of over one billion people and at the same time it feels threatened by certain forces from within that world and it has within its own borders a large minority competent in every way to act as a bridge between America and the rest of the Islamic world. This is a unique opportunity and a tremendous responsibility on the shoulders of Muslims living in America. Muslims cannot afford to sidestep it, because if they do not play the role well, their existence would be in danger. It is paradoxical that although the U.S. is only 270 million people, what happens in the Islamic world is related to what happens in America, as it is nowhere else. This also is remarkable that one nation should be given such concentration of power, military and economic, and political influence by God to be able to do such a thing. How long it will last, only God knows, but for the moment we are living at the center of a power which influences the life of almost every Muslim on earth. Therefore one is in a very precarious, but at the same time serious situation that affords many positive challenges, and many positive opportunities. He expressed the hope that the Islamic world and that segment of it that is here would be able to live up to the expectations that God has of them.

Prof. Seyyed Hossein Nasr is presenting the keynote luncheon address, while E. J Dionne Jr. and Prof Nyang are sitting on the stage

E. J. DIONNE, JR., a columnist at the Washington Post, and senior fellow at Brookings Institution and co-chair of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, moderated the Q/A session after the luncheon speech. He said our objective is to raise public attention of the importance of our various religious traditions in shaping our public debate. The MAPS Project is part of this work under a series of grants from the Pew Charitable Trusts. It was only appropriate that Pew made these grants because they made grants to Catholics, Jews, and Evangelical and mainline Christians, and also they took a special look at religion among American Latinos and African Americans. The MAPS Project, he said, has done extraordinary work as part of this family of projects—the systematic poll of American-Muslims, both on their demographics, and on religious practices, and on political affiliations has been very important. They will be publishing two scholarly volumes with essays from more than thirty scholars on key issues affecting the Muslim community, and also publishing a directory of Muslim civic organizations and Islamic centers and mosques. At the Pew Forum, we have a central purpose—our emphasis is both on the right to religious liberty, and also the responsibility that religious liberty imposes on us, all of us.

In our country and by extension around the world, in respecting the dignity and the rights of those who come from other religious traditions and from none, he said. In his comments about 9/11, he said that at that moment, Americans were almost

emendous challenge for Muslims, and it is the responsibility and duty nd that they are part of America and prepare themselves for that.

schizophrenic in their response to the tragedy. There was an immediate inclination to blame what happened on religious fanaticism. And yet if many Americans saw this tragedy as a perverse—as rooted in a perverse religious impulse, what was our own response? As Americans we poured into churches, synagogues, and mosques to ask for God's consolation and help, and to seek understanding and also solidarity. This raises the question are we talking about different God's or different illusions? I think we can dispense with the obvious that every government and political cause will invoke the divine whenever doing so is convenient. You might say that this is not God's fault, but our own. To assume that religious opportunism invalidates faith is the same as assuming that political opportunism invalidates democracy, or that cheaters invalidate all market transactions. If faith is reduced to its uses and misuses, a profound skepticism is inevitable, but does this discredit faith.

Dionne said if we are to find common ground in the world, we must reach for that universality. The religious faith, he said, cannot be supported just because it brings comfort in moments of anguish, but neither can it be discredited by the hard acts committed in its name. Faith is suspect when God is harnessed to immediate human ends, and identified entirely with personal, political, or national causes. Faith is brought down by a pridefulness that expresses an unwavering conviction that our own desires and interests coincide perfectly with those of the divine. Dionne pointed out that there is nothing like being a religious minority to make you appreciate religious liberty.

Dr. Luis Lugo, director Religion Program of The Pew Charitable Trusts is addressing the conference audience

Dr. Nasr, responding to a question about religious liberty in Islam pointed out that 3 million Pakistani Muslims have converted to Christianity since 1947, and none was punished for apostasy. This, he said, showed a quantum change in Islamic theology because in the early, adhesion was also in political sense, and any conversion from it was an act of treason. He said Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians in Iran have a somewhat better time under the Ottomans than the Muslims and Jews had under the Spanish Catholic rulers.

Georgetown University's Muslim chaplain Imam Yahya Hendi pointed out that whether we are Christians, Jews, or Muslim, regardless of color, language or religion, we are the children of Adam. We are all on the same ship and if the ship of humanity sinks, we will all sink with it. Muslims, he said, have no choice but to stand up for the good of the Jews, the Christians, and every other human being, and in doing so they are not compromising on faith, or the teachings of their religion. The Jews and Christians are challenged to do the same—to stand up in the protection, not only of Christians and Jews, but also Muslims. Because if something good happens to any of us, that is supposed to be something good happening to all of us.

FR. ADAM E. BUNNELL, the University Chaplain, was presented an award from the Muslim community of Georgetown University for making Georgetown the first American university to ever create the position of a Muslim Chaplain as a part of its staff.

DR. LUIS E. LUGO, Director Religion program of The Pew Charitable Trusts, said that from the very inception of the Religious Communities and the American Public Square project we thought that it was absolutely essential to have American Muslims as part of that initiative. We came to a realization early on that this is a growing community, an important community within American society. And so we could not in good conscious leave it out of this initiative. From a broader American perspective, I think the growing presence of this community in our country, presents us with a new opportunity as Americans. To once again live up to the highest ideals, to our highest principles and to broaden that circle of religious liberty, that circle of inclusion which has been the pattern throughout our history. It is tough for societies to adjust to change and to become more inclusive in the way it understands itself as a body politic. But in the end, if you look at our history, to the extent we have lived up to those highest principles of religious liberty, to that extent we have become a stronger democracy.

We can dispense with the obvious that every government and political cause will invoke the divine whenever doing so is convenient.

PANEL I

From Isolation to Engagement: The Evolving Role of Muslims in a Pluralistic Society

Professor Yvonne Haddad of CMCU led the first session that included Altaf Husain, national president of the Muslim Students Association of the U.S. & Canada (MSA), Dr. Muhammad Nimer from the Washington based advocacy organization Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), Dr. Agha Saeed, executive director of the American Muslim Alliance (AMA), and Professor Aminah McCloud of DePaul University.

Muslim students are now involved in immersion, said Altaf Husain addressing the campus level participation of Muslims in the public sphere. However, this is not assimilation, but an embracing of the reality and the people around them. He said that after 9/11 one of the main reactions noticed from the critical mass of students was a sincere sorrow for what had happened—a sense of heightened identity and an awareness of what it meant to be a Muslim-American. It was a sincere sorrow as well as a heightened patriotism, bounded by their religious identity. Husain also spoke about the emergence of Muslim women students as colleagues and viable partners in addressing the post-9-11 reality where they came forward, took charge, and did a brilliant and spectacular job in speaking on behalf of Muslims. He said post-9/11 has also seen the embracing of and the involvement with non-practicing Muslims on campus, and coalition building beyond the community to include non-Muslim groups.

Husain said students had successfully thwarted the media's efforts to depict them as a sort of immigrant body living here. However, they wanted to be on record as saying that we were not only concerned about the Bush Administration and its domestic onslaught on the civil liberties of Americans, as well as we were concerned about the international affairs. The confusing aspect for a lot of sociologists, anthropologists, even historians will be that this new generation of Muslims is not as schizophrenic as people who came before us, whether from any background, any nationality.

Dr. Nimer pointed out that individually and collectively Muslims seek to maintain their religious and ethnic identities while working for the betterment of their lives and the lives of their children. Muslim Americans, he said, have established faith and ethnicity-based organizations, each doing its designated work. After September 11, Muslims have conducted outreach programs to ally the fears of neighbors and to seek their support. There is a shared feeling of threat emanating from ethnic profiling, religious profiling, stereotyping, and secret evidence laws, especially since the mid-1990s and most notably after September 11 with the rush passage of the USA PATRIOT Act, and several government measures that Muslim American groups, along with other minority and civil liberty groups have seen in terms of their impact of eroding the First and Fourth Amendments of the Bill of Rights.

He said the institutional development of the community demonstrates that American-Muslim leaders are, in fact, changing the very nature of Islamic activism, increasingly expressing views based on their own strategic interests as American Muslim citizens.

The growing involvement of Muslims in the American public square, said Dr. Nimer, is another sign that Muslims of America are seeking to situate themselves strategically within their countries civil and political structures. The experience of American-Muslims in public life during the past two decades has demystified the political process. However, the whole Muslim community is barely beginning to appear on the radars of the major political players in America. Whatever clout Muslims may have in the near future rests with empowering members of the more than 1,500 local Islamic centers and ethnic associations. The call for a political involvement strategy based on participation in local political and civic processes is gaining support. This is particularly the case since the necessary financial organization resources for achieving local results are not as big as they are in the high stakes national arena.

Professor Aminah McCloud of DePaul University, who chose to use the term "older and newer Muslims" based on "how long we've been here" said, for the older American Muslims engagement has always been what we've always done with others of other faiths, of other ethnicities, because people always lived inside of the pluralism in this society. And perhaps we just mixed in so well that the people forgot that we were Muslim as we move through working in prisons, and doing social work, and working with gangs, and involving ourselves in abuse centers and things like that. We did not, and I don't think, and perhaps it's been a hallmark."

Dr. McCloud pointed out: "Until 9-11 one part of the American Muslim family has more often than not chosen isolation, not because that they were choosing to not to be American, but more so because they had to deal with another set of problems such as immigration, those of settling families in a new space, and most of all learning about cross-cultural communication."

From L to R: Dr. Muhammad Nimer, Prof. Aminah McCloud, Dr. Agha Saeed and Prof. Yvonne Haddad. Altaf Husain is addressing the audience.

America is a society full of freedom and rights, she said, but it also has another component and that is volunteerism. There is an expectation that irregardless of the religious community or the ethnic community to which one belongs, that one takes the society as his or her own, and move toward the betterment of that society. Moving from isolation to engagement has also been felt internally as older American-Muslims have had to face shortcomings in their Islamic knowledge and especially in their world knowledge. They have been struggling since 9-11 to keep up with all of the various movements and activities out in the Muslim world. She added that it seems for many of the older American-Muslims that they have not thought through what their agenda is as American-Muslims, and therefore they are letting the tail wag the dog, spending most of their time in responses to the agenda of other people. She added that the issue for some older American-Muslims, patriotism has been a bit of a quagmire because of their legacy here in this country. For others it is uncomfortable because of what it stands for and what it has done in the world.

Dr. McCloud dwelling on the emerging McCarthyism, said, however, one of the ironic benefits of moving from isolation to engagement has been all of us learning where our skills are lacking, in what areas do we have to improve, where we need to put our time and resources, because we quickly found out that we did not have the resources necessary to speak for ourselves, and had to wait for others to invite us to speak about ourselves or our fellow Muslims out in the Muslim world. Ironically, again, 9-11, she said, also provided a catalyst for older and newer American-Muslims to come together to see how they were going to sort out a definition of Islam for America. Muslims must be wary of any engagement without analytical thought.

Dr. Agha Saeed said there have been paradoxical responses toward Muslim and Islam in the U.S. for the last decade, but that paradox has become more emphasized ever since September 11. He recounted the positive experiences such as Dr. Muzammil Siddiqui, former president of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) being invited to the memorial services at the National Cathedral after Sept. 11which he said was America's moment of dignity in the face of adversity. However, the pendulum swung in the other direction very quickly. The negative side was that there had already been a legacy of eroding Muslim civil rights and Arab civil rights in this country starting in 1980.

He said that even before September 11th the whole notion of equality before law had been called into question concerning Muslims and Arabs, adding that the PATRIOT Act has dispensed with the notion of equality before law and due process. Dr. Saeed said that Muslim organizations have shown a certain amount of courage and willingness to pay the price that they need to pay, and have refused to put up with political profiling. He said, however, such negative factors are outweighed by the fact that conversions to Islam in the US and Europe have increased manifold.

He said that the immigrants or the new Muslims have been placed at the cutting edge of the civil rights struggle, and Muslim organizations are learning to develop new competencies, capabilities, awareness, and methodologies. The Muslim community, he said, has gone from being an introvert immigrant community to being an extrovert community. There is a newfound unity between practicing and non-practic-

ing, and as immigrant Muslims are beginning to struggle on the civil rights front, they are discovering that the struggle is nothing new to Muslims. Previously it was a lip service or a mere acknowledgement, now it is an acceptance as a representation of one's own identity and that is beginning to cement the relationship between the indigenous and immigrant Muslims. Within the Muslim leadership, he said, we see this multiple roles and sort of negotiating these multiple roles, and learning to negotiate in these multiple roles with the purpose of learning to work in open societies, to succeed there. One of the major changes that is taking place in the ideological formation and self-understanding of Muslim institutions, he added.

PANEL II

From Isolation to Conceptualizing Islam: Internal and External Intellectual Challenges

Dr. Ahmad Saifuddin Turkistani of IIASA chaired the second panel which included the following speakers: Dr. Louay Safi, President, Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS), Professor Akbar Muhammad from SUNY—Binghamton, Professor Khalid Blankinship from Temple University, and Abdul Hakeem Sherman Jackson from the University of Michigan.

Dr. Safi said that the main intellectual challenge facing Muslims today is uncovering the deep seated ethos of Islam and then relating those into our modern society. This challenge, he said, is faced by both Muslims who live in Muslim societies—within a majority Muslim community—as well as those living outside those societies, particularly in the West. Islam, he added, is perhaps the most misunderstood religion today, not only by others, but also by its very followers. And the source of that misunderstanding has to do with the fact that for the last two centuries the main intellectual forces that have been shaping human society have not come from the Islamic but other worldviews. The main values of liberal democracy, equality, freedom, due process, tolerance, or pluralism, are indeed Islamic values. However, the problem is that while those values can be related to Islam, the combination of which, how they can be related to actual practices, meaning, how they can be institutionalized in society.

The process of the decoupling of the secular and religious is very interesting because while we talk about secularism today, and particularly in America, our very secular existence is founded on a very solid religious foundation, whether we realize it or not. Our secularism is not the pure secularism that was prior to the revelation of Islam. It was not the Roman type of secularism where you have religious life that has certain religious values, and you have the political life. Dr. Safi said that in the classical Islamic theory of the state, law and government were kept largely separate from one another, where every community—even Muslim school of thoughts-enjoyed autonomy of using their own laws and standards. He said that today one of the challenges facing Muslim Americans is to speak for the very values that have been important for the United States that is of keeping the state, that is the central authority in size, and allowing more freedom within civil society.

Professor Akbar Muhammad from the State University of New York at Binghamton pointed out that what was happening before 9-11 in the Muslim intellectual sphere was a resurgence of Islam, a revitalization of Islam in terms of knowledge. Several publications in the Muslim world have been affecting the reading Muslim masses. Not only have some of those publications led to the invigoration of movements that are now considered extremists. But they have also made Muslims who are not inclined to violence in their own societies rethink Islamic or Muslim societies and the acts of Muslim governments.

His own finding was that Muslim organizations have used the Qur'an and the Sunnah to identify themselves as supporters of the U.S. Government to reinforce their claim that Islam is peace, that Muslims are good citizens, that Muslims support the U.S. Government, that Islam is non-violent. However, he has not seen much in the way of using the Qur'an and the Hadith to actually deepen and further the Islamization of the ordinary Muslim. He lamented that with all the Islamic literature in this country many Muslims, old and new Muslims, the old group and the new group, do not really read, absorb, the Islamic material that is at their disposal. He stressed that there is more Islamic literature, more Islamic sources in the US than in many Muslim countries.

He stressed the need to look at the Qur'an and the Sunnah to redefine human acts in the categories of the Shari'ah as it is in the Qur'an.

Dr. Khalid Blankinship stated that modernism has been the globalizing ideology behind the drive that has tended to knit the world together. And it's not a plot or a product of any single person or small group of people, but rather it's the venture of a lot of people who have been directing things. But like all things that run their course, it has frayed the edges and become a little tarnished by this time. The two pillars of modernism are humanity and progress have evolved and changed over time. However, humanism is understood as a higher value has also been undermined, and modernism in the latter time by instrumentalism. This means the sacrifice of everything to efficiency, so that the ideal of humanism as being the real goal tends to be undermined by the existing systems and powers that be. He said that some people are pushing an agenda that is said to be in the name of liberalism while actually curtailing freedom, and in the name of the minimal state while actually making the maximal state.

Dr. Blankinship said the idea that we can go and say something nice in the favor of the ruler and so on, and make some kind of flattery is not our mission. Our mission as Muslims is to always stand up undeviatingly and unafraid for the truth and that should be what our main emphasis is.

Dr. Abdul Hakeem Sherman Jackson stressed the need for Muslim indigenization, which unlike assimilation, is a very deliberate and determined process of which one exercises agency. It is about identifying with the culture, the heritage, the history of the place — in which one lives. And this will only be successfully done when Muslims can accept American life as a primary fundamental legitimate basis for Muslim intellectual contemplation as opposed to be treated analogously on the basis of Islamic models coming from the Muslim world.

Among the challenges for Muslims in this country, Dr. Jackson said, is really to come to terms with this dichotomy, this dislocation between modern Islam and the classical tradition of Islam.

When people of a minority are invisible, the only way they can really fight back against bigotry is for them to be visible. And intellectual visibility is the highest form of being recognized anywhere.

He said that he was shocked to find that religion, even among Muslims, is often not the main or even the most important factor that informs the kinds of ideas, the priorities, and what is being advocated coming out of the Muslim community. Sometimes it is ethnicity, sometimes it is class, and sometimes it is simply being unaware of any other means of erecting priorities than sort of what we learn in college, which may or may not have little to nothing to do with Islam as a whole.

PANEL III

Muslim Community and the Foreign Policy

Professor John Voll chaired the third session of the day with Dr. Mumtaz Ahmad, Professor Nyang, and Professor Esposito as speakers.

From L to R: Prof. Sherman Jackson, Prof. Khalid Blankinship, Prof. Akbar Muhammad, Dr. Louay Safi and Dr. Ahmad Saifuddin Turkistani

Dr. Mumtaz Ahmad of Hampton University said Muslims are discovering that there is an integral relationship between foreign policy and domestic politics. Their interest in foreign policy issues is prompting them to become more active participants in public affairs in order to influence public policy.

He said that there is a tendency among foreign policymakers not to engage Muslim intellectuals in the policymaking process and even not to allow them to participate in the debate on foreign policy. The notion probably is that if you are a Muslim, you are not likely to be objective on foreign policy issues of concern to Muslims or the Muslim world. While it is perfectly possible for a Jew to manage the U.S. policy toward Arab/Israeli conflict and still remain objective.

He said foreign policymakers need to realize that Muslim Americans, the first line of contact between the U.S. and the Muslim world, can play a critical and extremely useful role in explaining the logic and the rationale of American policies to their Muslim brethren in Islamic world, and at the same time convey their concerns, apprehensions, and sensitivities to Washington. Washington has no greater asset in promoting friendly relationship with Islamic societies and in advancing its economic and strategic interest in the Muslim world than Muslims living right here. Muslims, they can be its ears, eyes, and tongues, provided their government is sensitive to their concerns and their demands.

Muslims may not speak out for the fear of being branded as unpatriotic, but the majority are deeply concerned, as there are many other Americans, the way we are handling the question of terrorism. If Israel, after 54 years could not stop violence in a tiny piece of land with all kinds of brutal force, how can we succeed in our war against terrorism at the global level if we use the same tactics?

We are a free society that requires us to see beyond the "homeland security" and reach out to a friendly, safe, and a more secular world. It is here that the American-Muslim community can play a critical role. Muslims have experienced various models in their struggle to have their say in American foreign policy. The important thing is where the Muslims have not so far succeeded is where there is no obvious conflict between the concerns and the demands of the Muslim community on the one hand, and the long term American national interest on the other, but there is a powerful lobby that creates an appearance of conflict.

Prof. Nyang said that what changed the influence of American foreign policy on part of the Jews, and this is going to happen with the Muslims as it happened to other minorities, when you begin to have votes that count. The African-Americans changed this country for the Jews, whether or not they have knowledge because once the Black Americans began to vote in the south, all the Dixie-crats anti-Semites, were booted out of Congress, which set the stage for a new day and the rise of Jewish influence.

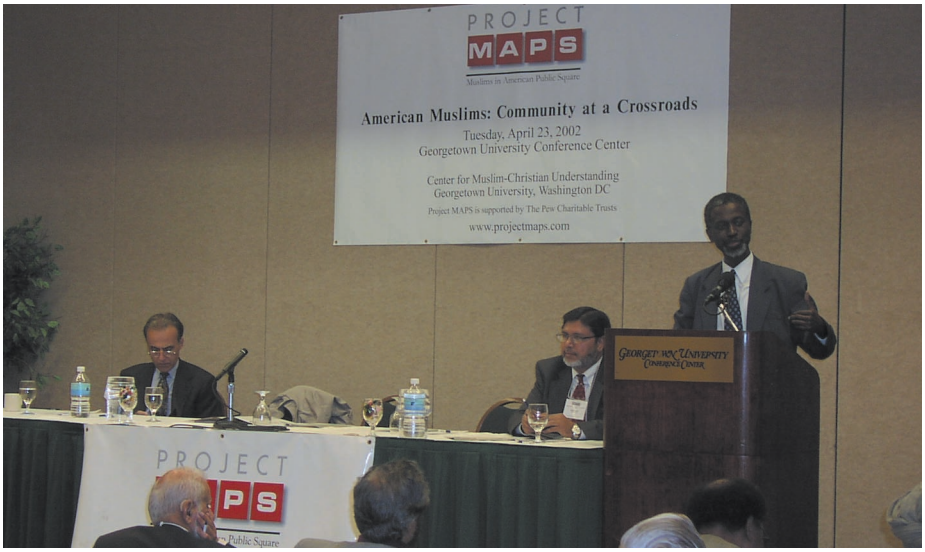
Dr. Nyang pointed out that the creation of MSA led to Muslim activism because prior to this, it was nationalism, and any activism was simply Arab nationalistic lobbying. Foreign policy in America and Muslim role in American foreign policy is going to be very much affected by the alliance of forces, the constellation of stars of interest in American society. If Muslims are not known to the key policymakers, then they are not going to be concerned about them.

Dr. Esposito stressed the need for Muslims to develop a culture of giving, a culture that goes beyond zakah. He said the community as it moves forward needs to think about how to mobilize and how to be more united, adding that the community needs to tackle the indigenous/immigrant divides. The pressures of assimilation and therefore the issues of participation and identity, he said, have surfaced within recent elections, but how often the myth of return is played out.

He emphasized the need for Muslim to be self-critical. For example, asking yourself how often have we been in meetings in the U.S. where we discuss what is important to the Muslim community, and where all people do is get up at a microphone and yell as if they are simply anti-American. They don't talk about why they're proud to be here, why they're here, and they'll have somebody from the State Department and all they'll be doing is shouting never about domestic issues but always about foreign issues. Therefore, what are they communicating?

There aren't enough Muslim organizations, and there certainly aren't enough strong Muslim organizations. And there isn't enough coordination between Muslim organizations. Even after 9-11 you have Muslim organizations holding the same type program, in the same city, on the same day. If you've got that level of competition, the community has a problem. And so it seems to me that it's many of you that have a significant role to play. You wouldn't be here if you didn't take this seriously.

In his closing remarks Prof. Sulayman Nyang, co-director of the Project MAPS said, "Muslims must be intellectually involved in American Society to the point that Muslims are not only grounded in western thought, but they must be equally grounded in Islamic thought so that they can operate effectively in American society. This is where brains count, not only in foreign policy making, but also in domestic politics, because Muslims would engage themselves in all debates in the United States." ◆



Prof. John Esposito and Dr. Zahid Bukhari are on the stage while Prof. Sulayman Nyang is addressing the inaugural session.

A view of the conference audience.

PROJECT MAPS
Muslims in American Public Square

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