



# SPECIAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

With the war against terrorism and an increased attention on the Muslim world, this report analyzes ways Muslims in the United States understand their roles as Americans in combating terrorism and their unique contributions toward conflict prevention and peacemaking. The assimilation and integration of American Muslims has effectively enabled the flourishing of dozens of national and regional organizations to work in areas of civil rights, human rights, interfaith dialogue, education, charity, public diplomacy, political activism, and other religious and secular activities. Despite the post 9/11 scrutiny of the Muslim community, American Muslim groups have devised sophisticated grassroots campaigns on counter-terrorism and anti-extremist ideology.

Qamar-ul Huda is the Senior Program Officer in the Religion and Peacemaking Program at the United States Institute of Peace. Formerly a professor of Islamic Studies and Comparative Theology at Boston College, he examines ethics, violence, conflict resolution and nonviolence in juristic and nonjuristic Muslim authorities in contemporary Islam. This report is part of a larger book project on American Muslim identity formation and Islamic approaches toward mediation and peacebuilding.

**The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policy positions.**

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*Qamar-ul Huda*

## The Diversity of Muslims in the United States

### Views as Americans

#### Summary

- There are approximately 6 to 7.5 million Muslims in the United States who identify themselves as Americans. The community consists of a combination of immigrants and second- and third-generation Arab, Latino, Asian, European, African, and African-American Muslims.
- The growth of the American Muslim community has fostered the development of a variety of religious, civic, political, cultural, economic, social, ethnic, feminist, artistic, and professional organizations.
- The diversity of American Muslim organizations provides a vast number of voices addressing such issues as terrorism, democracy, peacemaking, and human rights.
- American Muslims do not see contradictions between Islam and such ideals as democracy, pluralism, or political activism; rather, in recent years several national groups have made it their primary mission to reconcile all three with Islamic values.
- Some leaders see the blending of Islamic values with the American experience as a solid bridge to mutual understanding between the United States and the Muslim world.
- American Muslim advocacy organizations often collaborate with the White House and law enforcement authorities to devise strategies on public policy, civil rights, the war against terrorism, and other related issues.
- Many organizations emphasize the importance of self-scrutiny and education in relation to the larger Islamic heritage.
- Interfaith dialogue has taken the forefront on the agendas of many American Muslim organizations, demonstrating a belief that building trust, peace, and reconciliation will ultimately lead to harmonious interfaith relations in the United States.
- American Muslim scholars advocate greater involvement by Muslims in the political, social, economic, and cultural spheres of American society.

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- American Muslim scholars believe Muslims have an enormous responsibility and talent for resolving conflict and being agents for peace.

## Introduction

With recent attention on European Muslims in France, Belgium, Germany as well as with the London bombings of July 7, 2005, there is a focus on how Western Muslims integrate, assimilate, and contribute to society. This Special Report examines how American Muslims have expressed themselves as Americans in a post 9/11 world of suspicion. In doing so, this study analyzes different, major American Muslim organizations' activities and their distinguishing views on violence, terrorism, and conflict resolution. The objective of this Special Report is to identify key trends in American Muslim organizations; their major religious and secular activities, as well as understand the ways in which American Muslims are carving out a distinct American identity as citizens. This report demonstrates that unlike Muslims in Europe, American Muslims do not feel marginalized, isolated, or locked out of political participation. Social-economic mobility is far more obtainable. For the most part, American Muslims have successfully created professional, cultural, human rights, civil rights, educational, and political organizations as an expression of feeling included in the larger spectrum of American society and liberal democracy. The analysis presented here illustrates that American Muslims' contribution to the United States is a product not only of their own diversity, but also of the diversity of views in understanding themselves as Americans.

American Muslims face a range of challenges to which Muslim organizations are responding. After 9/11, American Muslims have had to confront widespread suspicion, challenges to civil liberties, a Muslim-specific response to Muslim radicalism (domestically and internationally), and the war on terrorism. In doing so, Muslim and Arab Americans have created a variety of new organizations and invigorated existing ones. The material in this report describes and analyzes the programmatic responses of key American Muslim organizations to these challenges. In addressing these challenges, these organizations walk a fine line between reassuring the American public about Muslims and Islam, while not alienating their constituents on issues important to them.

## Overview of American Muslim Nongovernmental Organizations

The American Muslim community consists of a wide range of ethnic, racial, cultural, and professional groups, all of which contribute immensely diverse opinions on contemporary issues, such as conflict and peacemaking. With the war in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as the implementation of the Patriot Act, American Muslims no longer play an undefined role in American policy; rather, many political analysts and congressional representatives are seeking them out as sources of information. In the aftermath of 9/11, American Muslim organizations became critical consultants for U.S. foreign policies toward Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition to offering policy analysis, several American Muslim organizations have made it a priority to work with law enforcement agencies in identifying intolerant attitudes within the Muslim community. Some American Muslim organizations created in the wake of 9/11 have a stated mission to support the armed forces unconditionally in order to defeat the global threat of terrorism. Other organizations have devised alternative strategies, such as fostering interfaith dialogue and examining ways to reconcile Islam with democracy in Muslim societies as a means of dealing with violence and promoting peacemaking.

The rich diversity of the American Muslim community illustrates that there is no single response or approach to confronting contemporary issues, such as civil and human rights vio-

lations, religious intolerance, and domestic violence. There are several religious organizations—both Sunni and Shia—dedicated to the spiritual development and religious life of American Muslims. Some prominent national civil rights groups based in Washington, D.C. are committed to the protection of American Muslim civil rights and interests. Several American Muslim legal organizations are also working toward increasing Muslims' legal knowledge and expertise to help them develop greater awareness of the American judicial system and the opportunities with democratic institutions. There are human rights and feminist organizations devoted to improving the lives of women by battling domestic violence in the United States and abroad. Several, new American Muslim organizations are devoted to combining education and activism in order to foster identity, promote social justice, achieve gender equality, and create a more meaningful interpretation of their Islamic beliefs. Some recently formed groups believe that interfaith dialogue with Christians and Jews on both local and national levels is critical to understanding their religion within a monotheistic tradition. Some organizations believe that for Muslims to be truly Americans, they must be active partners in U.S. efforts to eliminate global terrorism and radicalism, including anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and all forms of bigotry.

The Pew Research Center for the People conducted a survey immediately following the London bombings that indicated that 55 percent of Americans had favorable opinions of American Muslims, an increase from 45 percent in March 2001. The report showed that there was considerably less hostility toward Muslims in the United States and Europe than four years previously. Simultaneously, the survey showed that in predominantly Muslim societies, support for acts of terrorism in defense of Islam had vastly declined.

Shortly after the London bombings, the National Fiqh Council of North America, an American Muslim group concerned with Islamic jurisprudence, issued an extraordinary fatwa (a nonbinding legal opinion) condemning all forms of extremism, terrorism, and any destruction of property or human life, and it specifically called the perpetrators "criminals." The fatwa stated that it is forbidden for any Muslim to cooperate with individuals or groups involved with violence, and it is Muslims' civic and religious duty to support law enforcement efforts to protect the lives of all civilians.

The American Muslim community faces a complex set of challenges and debates after the 9/11 attacks. Even during a climate of Muslim suspicion, most American Muslims favor political involvement and are open to being involved in civil society institutions. While the community cannot be categorized as conservative or liberal, there is increasing participation in local activities, such as school boards, parent-teacher associations, interfaith programs, city councils, and chambers of commerce, compared to a decade ago. Also with the Patriot Act, stricter immigration regulations, greater surveillance over their religious and charitable institutions, and the Christian religious right discriminatory statements against Islam created instant challenges for American Muslims to develop coalitions and partnerships with law enforcement, politicians, and other organizations.

A decade ago, most studies on American Muslims simplistically categorized American Muslims into two groups: immigrants and converts. It was common for these studies to classify the American Muslims as a community in "diaspora"—referring to their non-indigenous and foreign origins. However, American Muslims are far more complex than the essential ethnic categories of Arab-American, African-American, or Turkish-American. These ethnic categories may capture a certain aspect of ethnic origins, but they miss the trend of American Muslims using alternative identities to express themselves. Over the past decade, or more, the emergence of Islamic centers, Islamic schools, community-based groups, social service and charitable organizations, public advocacy associations, political parties, professional associations, and research organizations have all contributed to multiple identities that go beyond a one-dimensional ethnic identity. American Muslims, like many Americans, have an amalgamation of identities—some have religious meaning; while others are linked to the variety of activities in which they are involved.

The diversity of American Muslim organizations demonstrates an interesting mosaic of perspectives on, opinions about, and approaches to being an American and the roles

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***“Targeting civilians’ life and property through suicide bombings or any other method of attack is forbidden—and those who commit these barbaric acts are criminals, not martyrs.”***

—Fiqh Council of North American Fatwa

of Muslims in conflict prevention and resolution. National umbrella organizations have endeavored to integrate all the ethnic and racial Muslim communities as a way to bring all groups together based on common issues. There is an overwhelming consensus within American Muslim organizations to promote mutual understanding through interfaith dialogue, political participation, education, activism, charity, public diplomacy, and an awareness of civil rights. American Muslim organizations, both religious and secular, contribute a distinctive voice to the national conversation on conflict prevention and terrorism.

## **Pew Research Study on Islamic Extremism**

Conducted between July 7, 2005 (the day of the first terrorist attacks in London) and July 17, 2005, the Pew Research Center for the People survey, *Islamic Extremism: Common Concern for Muslim and Western Publics*, reported that the number of Americans who believe Islam is more likely than other religions to encourage violence fell noticeably, from 44 percent in 2003 to 36 percent in 2005. A majority of Americans (55 percent) said they have a favorable opinion of American Muslims. That figure is significantly higher than the 45 percent holding favorable views in March 2001, prior to the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The Pew Global Attitudes Project, a seventeen-nation, 17,000-respondent global attitudes survey, found that the majority of Muslims believe radicalism poses a threat to the stability of their respective countries. There is very little agreement among Muslims on the causes of extremism; however, 38 percent of survey participants in Pakistan and 39 percent in Morocco pointed to poverty, severe economic disparities, and joblessness; 35 percent in Indonesia thought immorality was the primary cause; and 34 percent in Turkey attributed extremism to lack of education. However, in the more pluralistic nations of Jordan and Lebanon, respectively 38 percent and 40 percent cited U.S. policies as the primary cause of Islamic extremism.

The most important part of the Pew study shows that support for acts of terrorism in defense of Islam has declined immensely among Muslims overseas. In the past three years, support for terrorism fell in Lebanon from 73 percent to 39 percent, in Indonesia from 27 percent to 15 percent, and in Pakistan from 33 percent to 25 percent. In just the past year in Morocco, it declined from 40 percent to 13 percent.

Even in a post 9/11 world and with the uncertainties in the war against terrorism, there are favorable views of Muslims in most countries in Europe and North America. Hostility toward Muslims is actually much lower in the United States and in Canada than in Great Britain and other Western countries surveyed. Some have argued that rather than being isolated, both Sunni and Shia American Muslim organizations have facilitated an understanding with other Americans through active participation in the political arena with a coalition of grassroots community organizations.

## **National Fatwa Condemning Terrorism**

### ***The Fiqh Council of North America: U.S. Muslim Religious Council Fatwa Against Terrorism*** (religious/Islamic law)

As noted, on July 27, 2005, the Fiqh Council of North America, an American Muslim group concerned with Islamic jurisprudence, issued an historic fatwa, a nonbinding legal opinion, that condemned terrorism and religious extremism. The fatwa stated:

“Islam strictly condemns religious extremism and the use of violence against innocent lives. There is no justification in Islam for extremism or terrorism. Targeting civilians’ life and property through suicide bombings or any other method of attack is forbidden—and those who commit these barbaric acts are criminals, not martyrs.”

The sixteen-member panel of the Fiqh Council is composed of mainly Sunni scholars who traditionally comment on religious and secular life. The fatwa quoted the famous Koranic passage 5:32, which states, “Whoever kills a person unjustly, it is as though he has killed all of humanity. And whoever saves a life, it is as though he has saved all of humanity.”

Almost two weeks after the London bombings of July 7, 2005, and an astonishing number of suicide bombings around the same time in Iraq, the U.S. fatwa asserted concisely that (1) all acts of terrorism targeting civilians are forbidden in Islam; (2) it is forbidden for a Muslim to cooperate with any individual or group involved in any act of terrorism or violence; and (3) it is the civic and religious duty of Muslims to cooperate with law enforcement authorities to protect the lives of all civilians.

A scholar of jurisprudence usually writes and issues a fatwa to respond to contemporary disputed issues and the related legal challenges. The scholar must be grounded in the classical legal systems of thinking and be cognizant of the legal histories surrounding the issues. Unlike papal edicts from the Roman Catholic Church, a fatwa does not commit Muslims to the scholar's legal opinion; rather, it can be viewed as a dialogue between the scholar and the American Muslim community at large. The social and political function of the American fatwa means these legal-religious and societal issues are not only critical for the community, but in this instance leading American Muslim scholars are asserting their authority on the topic of conflict and terrorism. This articulated declaration is a demonstration that American Muslims are defining and affirming an unambiguous position on conflict prevention and terrorism—a position carefully constructed in a post 9/11 atmosphere. Two hundred American Muslim organizations and mosques supported the historic fatwa of July 2005, the first of its kind to assemble a consensus on such a grand scale. It concluded by affirming,

“We issue this fatwa following the guidance of our scripture, the Qur'an, and the teachings of our Prophet Muhammad—peace be upon him. We urge all people to resolve all conflicts in just and peaceful manners. We pray for the defeat of extremism and terrorism. We pray for the safety and security of our country, the United States, and its people. We pray for the safety and security of all inhabitants of our planet. We pray that interfaith harmony and cooperation prevail both in the United States and all around the globe.”

Although the fatwa urged the importance of the illegality and nontraditional nature of terrorism and extremism in Islam, some American Muslim critics felt it did not go far enough in identifying Osama bin Laden and his associates as terrorists. Muslim critics argued the fatwa was merely a symbol to demonstrate publicly the Fiqh Council's positions on the issues of violence and terrorism. Further, they wished the fatwa had used fewer scriptural references and shown a more contemporary global understanding of terrorism and the sociopolitical context of violence. Instead of issuing such statements as “God mandates moderation in faith and in all aspects of life,” many American Muslim critics said the Fiqh Council needed to address specifically issues of discrimination, injustice, and social and political inequality, and to express ideas that actually touch people's daily lives. This fatwa, like all legal opinions, was written to respond to a particular concern, but it also produced a vibrant debate within the American Muslim community.

## Religious and Interfaith Organizations

### ***Islamic Society of North America*** (religious)

The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) is the national Sunni association of Muslim organizations that provides a common platform for presenting Islam, supporting Muslim communities, and developing educational, social, and outreach programs, such as interfaith dialogue. ISNA's headquarters is located in Plainfield, Indiana, where they feel a

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comfortable fit in rural America. The combination of interfaith activities and charitable activities has made ISNA successful in integrating Muslims in the heart of the American social fabric. A major supporter of the fatwa issued in late July 2005 and one of the primary religious Islamic organizations in the United States, ISNA objectives include providing leadership and religious training to religious leaders (imams), developing community programs, educating young Muslims in religion, and expanding interfaith programs.

The annual ISNA Convention, convened during Labor Day weekend, is the largest gathering of Muslims in North America. This convention brings together more than 40,000 attendees, including individuals, families, businesses, scholars, nonprofit organizations, dignitaries, and people of other faiths. The attendee demographics encompass a wide spectrum of professions and backgrounds. The convention provides an opportunity to listen to and interact with eminent Muslim scholars and leaders and to meet and exchange views with Muslims and people of other faiths. In addition, ISNA holds regional conferences in different cities throughout the United States and Canada on subjects such as "The Islamic Education Forum," "Muslims Against Domestic Violence," "Muslims on the Information-Highway," and "Islam in America."

Viewed as the mainstream Sunni Islam group, ISNA was one of the leading American Muslim groups to voice criticism against Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney when he suggested in September 2005 that there be a national surveillance program of mosques instituted in the United States. American Muslim critics have repeatedly stated that ISNA's focus on religious and interreligious programs isolates them from critical issues like civil rights, public policy, immigration enforcement, and the war on terrorism. ISNA's deliberate refusal to engage in these areas has led to serious criticisms of their overall leadership role in the American Muslim community.

### ***Shiite Islam in America***

Overall, the American Shia community is a minority within the Muslim community, and it has experienced major transformations over the past two decades. Often faced with religious stereotypes and misunderstanding of Shiite Islam, the American Muslim Shia community consists of a diverse group from East Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Europe. Shia Muslim Americans form small centers called jamaats where religious services and educational programs are conducted.

### ***The North American Shia Ithna-Asheri Muslim Communities*** (religious)

The largest umbrella group for Shia Muslims is called the North American Shia Ithna-Asheri Muslim Communities (NASIMCO) and is an example of creating a central authority. NASIMCO formed the Islamic Education Board in order to have standardized books for religious schools. They also publish resources on Shia history and theology. The organization's website provides a database for research and maintains a calendar for Shia events. In 1994, the Council of Shia Muslim Scholars in North America was created as a central body of Shia American Muslim religious leaders, also known as imams.

Another important American Shia Muslim institution is the Imam Al-Khoei Foundation in New York, named after the famous Iraqi Shia philanthropist and scholar. In the United States, the Al-Khoei Foundation is a leading Shia Muslim institution that has a full-time accredited school from kindergarten through twelfth grades, and it conducts all religious rituals relating to Shiism in Urdu, Persian, Arabic, and English.

Both NASIMCO and the Al-Khoei Foundation maintain that violence, terrorism against noncombatants, and all types of extremist attitudes are illegal in Islamic law. With a hierarchical clerical class, trained jurists can only decide legal reinterpretations of war. NASIMCO, the Al-Khoei Foundation, and other Shia organizations feel that there is a gross misunderstanding of Shia Islamic beliefs and practices, and global politics more often eschew the essential teachings of their faith.

### ***Zaytuna Institute*** (religious/Islamic law)

Zaytuna Institute was founded in 1996 by Hamza Yusuf and Hesham Alalusi and incorporated in 1998 in Hayward, California. Zaytuna Institute is an educational organization established to revive classical training in Islamic jurisprudence and in Koranic studies in order to create a new generation of American Muslims to build upon the intellectual history of Islam. Zaytuna Institute adheres to the idea that American Muslims need to reconnect with the heritage of Islam in order to gain a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the world. The Institute believes that Muslims will become enlightened citizens through engagement with and critical study of Islamic texts. According to Zaytuna Institute's beliefs, one of the many illnesses in American society is disillusionment with the relativism, nihilism, and materialism of modern life that have created spiritually empty lives for many people. The Institute hopes education will fulfill the lives of American Muslims.

Hamza Yusuf was one of the many American Muslim leaders the White House consulted after 9/11 as a way of fostering tolerance and dispelling the fears of American Muslims about the rising backlash. Zaytuna Institute has aggressively condemned terrorism and sectarian violence in the Middle East and around the globe. It believes terrorism arises from individuals who have very little or no knowledge of Islamic ethics and religious principles and are misusing the religion for their own political agendas.

Zaytuna Institute believes the appropriate way for American Muslims to combat extremist ideologies is to recognize the level of ignorance that dominates their understanding of faith and the world. For the Zaytuna Institute, the struggle is to study, to examine oneself, and to connect with the diversity of religious ethics as guidance. Knowledge in itself is not the goal; instead, the purpose is to obtain wisdom from sacred scriptures and to learn from past and present eminent scholars. Their understanding of terrorism differs from typical political, social, economical, and ideological analysis; whereby, they view terrorism as a belief of ignorant nihilism as better than life. For them the best way to counter terrorism is to restore order with enlightened, broad-based, pluralistic, and tolerant education in order to cultivate values of citizenship. Major issues, such as economic injustice, racism, the oppression of women, classism, totalitarianism, and the lack of freedom of expression are all part of manipulating the natural order. The Institute believes human illnesses can be treated only through healing the hearts of humanity with spiritual truths and an understanding of the true purpose of existence. Zaytuna Institute's mission is to establish a leading educational institution for the cultivation of intelligent, open-minded individuals who are grounded in the Islamic tradition in their response to terrorism and all types of injustice.

### ***American Society for Muslim Advancement*** (religious/interfaith)

ASMA's mission is to build bridges with the Muslim and non-Muslim community through workshops, conferences, interfaith dialogues, and the arts. ASMA believes that American Muslim youth need to be empowered with a faith that is tolerant, forward-thinking, and develops a distinct American Muslim identity. Feisal Abdul Rauf, a prominent New York City imam, is the founder of the American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA) and author of *What's Right with Islam: A New Vision for Muslims and The West* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco 2004). He has worked in the area of interfaith dialogue not only nationally but also with interreligious organizations in Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and Australia. According to Imam Feisal: "Dialogue between the religions offers the opportunity for uncovering the common ground of shared values and goals that resonate in each of our faiths, even as we clarify real differences. Dialogue within a religion offers the opportunity for its adherents to be amazed at real differences that can arise from shared theology and ritual."

Since 9/11, Imam Feisal has been one of the most visible American Muslim leaders in speaking against terrorism and the misuse of religion to defend extremist ideologies.

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He called the London terrorist attacks “crimes against humanity” and said, “We cry out against such violence and seek to console those who have suffered from it.”

In December 2004, Imam Feisal spoke at a seminar entitled “Confronting Islamophobia: Education for Tolerance and Understanding” hosted by Shashi Tharoor, under secretary-general for communications and public information of the United Nations. Imam Feisal reiterated a famous hadith, or saying of the Prophet Muhammad, that the diversity of opinions is a blessing in his community, and explained how this saying not only advocates tolerance, but also mandates that Muslims understand traditions other than their own. He added that there need to be interlocutors in the American Muslim community to work with other religious traditions to communicate Muslims’ fears, hopes, and aspirations in order to engage each other in peaceful ways. Imam Feisal said that Islamophobia is an awful experience to live with; however, there is an opportunity to learn from Jewish and Catholic communities that have handled severe prejudices in the last century.

### ***Cordoba Initiative*** (religious/interfaith)

The Cordoba Initiative is a unique multifaith organization and an affiliate of ASMA that strives toward healing the relationship between the Islamic World and the United States. Named after the great medieval Spanish city known for its pluralism and religious tolerance, members of the Cordoba Initiative believe intercultural understanding and sincere educational programs will stimulate creative thinking on peace in the Middle East. The Cordoba Initiative has cooperated with Christian and Jewish religious leaders to examine the underlying roots of cultural intolerance and violence. Moving beyond descriptive analysis of political violence, the Initiative aspires to make an impact on religious self-understanding, identity, and the treatment of others.

Daisy Khan of the Cordoba Initiative stated that there is a real need for Muslims in America to accept their enormous responsibility to forge new creative thinking about religion, peace, and violence. She asserted that the freedom of thought and expression lacking in most predominantly Muslim cultures means there is a greater burden on American Muslims to work toward reforming these oppressive societies. In a short time, the Cordoba Initiative has been successful in bringing together younger Muslim scholars, activists, businesspersons, artists, physicians, and others from around the world to engage in serious scrutiny of their Islamic identity and tradition. Khan believes that freedom of expression allows American Muslims an incredible amount of space in which to be creative with their religious self-understanding, and this process is connected to helping Muslims self-discover their own meaning.

### ***International Islamic Conference on True Islam and Its Role in Modern Society***

In July 2005, both Imam Feisal’s and Khan’s groups attended the historic “International Islamic Conference on True Islam and Its Role in Modern Society” in Amman, Jordan, held by His Majesty King Abdullah II. The conference produced a final declaration of more than 180 scholars representing forty-five countries—supported by fatwas garnered beforehand from seventeen of the world’s major Islamic scholars, including Shaykh Al-Azhar, Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani, and Sheikh Yusef Al-Qaradawi. The scholars unanimously condemned the practice known as takfir, calling others “apostates,” which extremists use to justify violence. The Amman meeting also recognized the legitimacy of all eight of the traditional schools of Islamic religious law from the Sunni, Shiite and Ibadi branches of Islam, and identified their common theologies, ethics, principles, and beliefs. It defined the necessary qualifications and conditions for issuing fatwas, thereby exposing the illegitimacy of the so-called ones that justify terrorism and are in clear violation of Islam’s core principles.

The Amman conference was successful in bringing both Sunni and Shiite leaders from around the globe to cooperate against the rising tide of extremism. The King of Jordan will sponsor a subsequent conference titled “The Iraqi Islamic Reconciliation Summit,” which will engage Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani and major Iraqi Sunni scholars in discuss-

ing sectarian violence and intrafaith dialogue in Islam. This is an example of American Muslim leaders' gradual involvement with the affairs of the larger Muslim world and view that their work can go beyond local and national issues. The significance of American Muslims engaging in the religious, political, and social affairs of global Muslim politics demonstrates aspirations to contribute to global affairs and to express a distinct position and identity from the global Muslim community.

### ***American Muslims Intent on Learning and Activism*** (religious, social activism)

American Muslims Intent on Learning and Activism (AMILA, which means "to work" or "to act" in Arabic) is a well-known, California-based organization that builds community through activism, Islamic education, spirituality, and networking with other groups. AMILA's goals are to develop a community that helps each member to grow spiritually, to foster brotherhood and sisterhood, and to cultivate a greater divine consciousness. Recognized by many American Muslim leaders as one of the nation's most dynamic Muslim organizations, AMILA is entering its second decade as an influential voice among young American Muslims.

Founded by second-generation American Muslims born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area of northern California, AMILA has an introspective and undogmatic approach to religion. AMILA provides its members an array of events and groups, such as inviting Muslim and non-Muslim intellectuals to their lecture series, study groups, book clubs, and annual Ramadan spiritual retreats. AMILA has remarkably cultivated over five new cycles of elected leaders, both men and women. AMILA's inclusive message has bridged the differences between Muslims of different ethnic and ideological backgrounds by including Sunnis, Shiites, Sufis, African-Americans, and converts.

The organization stands adamantly against any and all acts of terrorism and any use of violence. AMILA views the outer conflict of terrorism as a mirror reflection of the complex social and political inequities that exist in Muslim societies. One critical response to eliminating terrorism is to focus on education and activism that will aid in bringing spiritual awareness and harmony to others. The lifelong process of learning and activism binds the members to one another, thereby helping them develop a strong sense of community.

Relying on the skills of its members with computer expertise, AMILA uses cyberspace and the media for coalition building with non-Muslim organizations, both secular and religious. AMILA has collaborated with groups on a "Walk for Remembrance and Peace," promoted a cultural and philanthropic program regarding Islamic art fairs, sponsored a multi-faith event called "Eid Festival for Everyone," and sponsored a biannual gift drive for hundreds of children in the Bay Area for the Muslim holidays. AMILA is at the forefront of forging an American Muslim identity that begins with communal faith building and fosters respect for the diversity of beliefs both within Islam and from other traditions. Increasing spirituality and Islamic knowledge has been a major emphasis in AMILA. Besides inviting speakers for monthly meetings, AMILA has sponsored intensive study groups on topics such as "The Science of the Qur'an" and "The Concept of Worship in Islam."

## **Civic and Political Organizations**

### ***Muslim Public Affairs Council*** (civic/political)

One of the supporters of the fatwa was the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), which, since 1988, has been working for the civil rights of American Muslims and a constructive relationship between American Muslims and their political representatives. MPAC promotes an American Muslim identity by fostering grassroots activities and by training a future generation of Muslim activists in the political process. MPAC is committed to the understanding that empowering the community requires educating individuals with the skills

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***The Muslim Public Affairs Council aims to enlighten religious awareness and education within the American Muslim community, stressing a zero-tolerance policy on terrorism or the suicidal destruction of human life or property as a part of its “National Grassroots Campaign to Fight Terrorism.”***

necessary for them to be effective American citizens. In addition, MPAC tries to encourage an accurate portrayal of Muslims and of Islam in mass media and popular culture by educating the American public about diversity within the tradition.

MPAC initiated a “National Grassroots Campaign to Fight Terrorism” that consists of the endorsement and participation of over 600 mosques and Muslim institutions across the country. MPAC’s “National Grassroots Campaign to Fight Terrorism” has three essential components: (1) enlighten religious awareness and education within the American Muslim community, stressing a zero-tolerance policy on terrorism or the suicidal destruction of human life or property; (2) protect mosques and Muslim institutions from external forces that wish to exploit them; and (3) train community members on the necessary skills to detect potential criminal activities and work with local and federal law enforcement agencies. The campaign training manual states, “It is our duty as American Muslims to protect our country and to contribute to its betterment . . . Muslims should be at the forefront of preventing [terrorist] attacks from happening.” MPAC has seen a visible change with its “Campaign to Fight Terrorism,” particularly by holding regular town meetings and training sessions in American Muslim communities.

In November 2002, MPAC testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee on “An Assessment of Tools Needed to Fight the Financing of Terrorism.” As part of its ongoing efforts to protect the civil liberties of American Muslims, MPAC sponsored a variety of forums on topics that included the following:

- “America’s Image in the Muslim World,”
- “Religious Freedom in the Muslim World,”
- “Nuclear Disarmament,” and
- “The Islamic Stand Against Terrorism.”

In the aftermath of 9/11, MPAC was flooded with reports of hate crimes and discrimination, which prompted creating a department specializing in victim assistance. By December 2001, MPAC had officially established its Hate Crimes Prevention Department and had partnered with Los Angeles County’s Hate Crime Victim Assistance and Advocacy Initiative to aid in victim assistance and hate crime prevention.

MPAC’s unambiguous position on terrorism, suicide bombings, and other illegal attacks on civilians and noncombatants has been its primary message to community leaders, the media, policymakers, and law enforcement officials. The organization aims to elucidate that global terrorism repulses American Muslims and that they could be active players in preventing attacks. As an important integral group in American pluralism and democracy, MPAC believes American Muslims must take on more civic duties to increase their presence in local and national discussions.

In March 2005, MPAC held a “Muslim Policy Forum to Enhance Government-Muslim Dialogue” with members from national Muslim organizations and the Justice Department, including the assistant attorney general—Division for Civil Rights, and the Treasury Department. Stressing the need for Muslim charitable institutions to become more diligent in identifying funding sources, Salam Al-Marayati, executive director of MPAC, said, “The creation of [a] National Council is a historic step in the coordination of activities and responsibilities within the American Muslim nonprofit sector.” In response to the London attacks that year, MPAC organized young Muslim leaders across the country, including members of the national Muslim Students Association, to announce that they “condemn all acts of terrorism and the ideology of hatred that fuels them.”

***Council on American Islamic Relations*** (civic/political)

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) is the nation’s largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy group, with regional offices nationwide and in Canada. The national headquarters, established in 1994, is located on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. After the

1991 Persian Gulf War and before CAIR became a formalized organization, the founding members met informally to promote a positive image of Islam and Muslims in America by providing the media with accurate information on Islamic beliefs, practices, and cultures. It naturally progressed to work toward education and advocacy on behalf of the American Muslim community. In addition to promoting Muslim representation in politics, the media, and domestic policymaking groups, CAIR encourages American Muslims to be politically active and to take their civic duties seriously in American society.

Since its inception, CAIR has been aggressive in condemning all acts of violence against civilians by any individual, group, or state. After the 9/11 attacks, CAIR was one of the leading American Muslim organizations to collaborate with the White House on issues of safety and foreign policy. CAIR devised a plan on domestic policies that studied the problems of limiting civil rights, permitting racial, ethnic, or religious profiling, infringing on due process, and preventing American Muslims and others from participating fully in American civic life. For over three years, CAIR has been running a public service announcement called “Not in the Name of Islam,” which explicitly denounces Muslim extremism and advocates dialogue between faith communities both in America and worldwide. In response to the London bombings, CAIR’s urgent announcement stated, “We condemned the barbaric bombings and (we) join Americans of all faiths, and all people of conscience worldwide, in condemning these barbaric crimes that can never be justified or excused.”

CAIR has been a critical player in asking Congress to conduct civil liberties oversight hearings on the implementation of the Patriot Act and to ensure that activities truly target terrorism—not civil liberties. In December 2001, CAIR appeared before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights to testify on 115 cases of employment discrimination following the 9/11 attacks. In January 2002, CAIR went before the Judiciary Committee in the House of Representatives to testify on the serious problems of racial and religious profiling faced by American Muslims, and it reported nearly 1,700 complaints from community members.

Mohamed Nimer, the research director for CAIR and author of *The North American Muslim Resource Guide*, published a policy bulletin entitled “Islam, Democracy and American Muslims” that discusses the diversity of the American Muslim community in terms of ethnicity, religious observance, race, and socioeconomic class. The report noted that democratic practices in Muslim institutions are evident in their formal membership, the inclusion of women in leadership, the election of a board, the terms of leadership, the thoroughness of their constitutions, and their visionary statement for the community. The policy bulletin highlights how American Muslims have established faith-based and ethnic-based organizations; some promote educational and social organizations and businesses, while others, namely Islamic centers across the country, function on a multidimensional level. According to Nimer, “American Muslims embrace democratic change and value pluralism as principles consistent with Islamic teachings,” which are crucial ideas because “the blending of Islamic values with the American democratic experience can provide a solid bridge of understanding between America and the Muslim world.”

CAIR’s work in defending the civil rights of American Muslims has not come without criticism. Some advocacy groups believe CAIR’s criticism of American foreign policy, particularly on the Israel/Palestine conflict, is excessively one-sided. CAIR has been criticized as being too soft on Palestinian suicide bombers or hypercritical of Israel. Some critics are American Muslims themselves who disagree with CAIR’s positions on domestic and foreign policy issues and advocate an open exchange of ideas in the American Muslim community. Within academia, several American Muslim scholars have asserted that CAIR’s vision of Islam is essentialist, and their statements on Islamic beliefs are presented often as simplistic and dogmatic. In the midst of all types of criticism, CAIR maintains that their primary mission is to protect the civil rights of American Muslims and to provide accurate information on Islam.

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### ***American Muslim Alliance*** (civic/political)

The American Muslim Alliance (AMA) is a national civic organization determined to transform the American Muslim community by training and supporting Muslims in the U.S. political system. The organization is working toward three goals: (1) identifying Muslims who are capable of running for office in the U.S. Congress or a state's legislature; (2) supporting qualified American Muslims elected as delegates to the Democratic and Republican state and national conventions; and (3) producing leaders for American mainstream politics. AMA views itself as taking active responsibility for U.S. homeland security, while simultaneously building coalitions with fellow Americans on a wide variety of social, political, economic, and moral issues. AMA is committed to the idea that political power is a result of a community's efforts in areas of initiative, innovation, and determination.

AMA believes the frustration of some American Muslims concerning U.S. foreign and domestic policy can be resolved in meaningful ways, such as by participating in a grassroots political process that relies on its citizens to articulate policy concerns. AMA supports workshops on volunteering with the office of a local representative, city council member, or state senator. AMA concentrates on political education, leadership training, campaign and issue analysis, developing political strategies, and gaining insight on policymaking decisions. As an organization, AMA issues endorsements and election advisories to educate Muslims about the candidates and the issues of concern.

On the topics of terrorism and senseless violence, AMA has consistently condemned these actions as baseless and horrific. AMA believes transforming present frustration and anger into constructive and meaningful action will empower the American Muslim community and will ultimately encourage its members to be more responsible citizens. One way of achieving this goal is to move beyond attempting to influence candidates and elected officials by actively participating in the American political system. At this time, AMA has ninety-eight chapters in thirty-one states and aspires to organize chapters in all fifty states and in each of the 435 congressional districts.

### ***Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy*** (political/research)

The Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID) is a nonprofit organization, based in Washington, D.C., dedicated to studying Islamic and democratic political thought and to merging these two streams into a modern Islamic democratic discourse. Founded in 1999, CSID consists of a diverse group of academics, professionals, and activists from all around the world who examine how democratic reform and liberal democracy can be institutionalized in the Muslim world.

CSID's primary objective is to conduct rigorous research on the principles of Western democracy and on Islamic principles of governance and law. CSID sponsors conferences, workshops, and training sessions in the Muslim world and holds its annual meeting in Washington, D.C. In 2005, the sixth annual conference had distinguished keynote speakers, such as Andrew Natsios, administrator of the United States Agency for International Development; Carl Gershman at the National Endowment for Democracy; Lorne Craner at the International Republican Institute; Michael Kozak at the Department of State; and Anwar Ibrahim, former prime minister of Malaysia and named CSID's Muslim Democrat of the Year.

CSID has been proactive in denouncing all forms of terrorism and acts of violence. In response to the London bombings, CSID's statement said, "These senseless acts are in complete violation of the basic moral and ethical principles of Islam and of other faith traditions, we maintain that there is absolutely no justification for them on any grounds." Asma Afsaruddin, chair of CSID's board and associate professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Notre Dame University, said, "CSID's primary mission is to promote democratic, pluralistic societies in the Islamic world based on the teachings and intellectual heritage of Islam itself. It is absolutely crucial that we continue to investigate nonviolent means

***“CSID’s primary mission is to promote democratic, pluralistic societies in the Islamic world based on the teachings and intellectual heritage of Islam itself. It is absolutely crucial that we continue to investigate nonviolent means of neutralizing the rhetoric of the militants and seek solutions to some of the festering political problems that breed extremism.”***

—Asma Afsaruddin  
Chair of CSID

of neutralizing the rhetoric of the militants and seek solutions to some of the festering political problems that breed extremism.”

Through its special reports and newsletter, titled *The Muslim Democrat*, CSID is active in conducting seminars and conferences in Muslim countries on the topics of human rights, democratic governance, Islamic law and democracy, women’s rights, and citizenship. CSID believes the best response to global terrorism is to transform authoritarian, closed societies—where there is no or very little freedom of expression, assembly, or representation—into open, mature, democratic, pluralistic institutions.

### ***Free Muslims Coalition*** (political)

The Free Muslims Coalition (FMC) consists of American Muslims and Arab Americans who agree that the Muslim community needs to reject religious violence and terrorism. FMC was created after 9/11 to promote secular democratic institutions in the Middle East and in the Muslim world by supporting Islamic reformation efforts. For FMC, reformation entails a modern secular interpretation of religion that encourages peace, democracy, and the acceptance of other faith traditions, and in particular, an agreement that no single religious tradition should dominate the judicial, executive, and legislature branches of government.

FMC clearly states that terrorism is a global threat and countering terrorism committed by Muslims is an ideological battle that cannot be won without the help of Muslims. According to FMC, “fundamentalist Islamic terror represents one of the most lethal threats to the stability of the civilized world. The existence of Islamic terrorists is the existence of threats to democracy. There is no room for terrorism in the modern world and the U.S. should take a no-tolerance stance on terrorism to avoid another tragedy.”

Kamal Nawash, the president of FMC, has publicly supported the U.S. government’s efforts in fighting global terror, including the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Nawash said, “Our goal is to defeat and discredit the ideology that leads to extremism and support for terrorism.”

FMC has been severely criticized by other American Muslim organizations as aligning itself too closely with the U.S. administration and their aims in fighting global terrorism. FMC repudiates these criticisms and stands firm on eliminating what its members understand to be the global terrorist threat. In addition to its fervent antiterrorism message, FMC’s open statements call for an elimination of anti-Semitism. The organization feels it is the responsibility of all to speak out against intolerance and hatred.

### ***Muslims Against Terrorism*** (civic)

Immediately after 9/11, young American Muslim professionals formed Muslims Against Terrorism (MAT) in New York City. Horrified by the terrorist attacks and unimpressed by the attempts of local religious institutions to respond, MAT members initially focused their energies on working with the media with respect to American Muslim perspectives on violence, conflict, terrorism, and peacemaking. Their niche was in strengthening interfaith dialogues among New York City churches, synagogues, and temples. MAT’s outreach efforts extended to the New York City Public School system, major corporations on Wall Street, and local activist groups.

MAT contends that any and all terrorism, whether conducted by individuals or state actors, is immoral, and that there is no place for it in a civilized world. MAT members felt it was necessary to go beyond condemnations of terrorism to working with local, national, and international Muslim organizations on the complete intolerance of terrorism. As a relatively young and professional organization, MAT’s strength lay in highlighting the humanistic aspirations of all people and the need to understand the commonalities that unite all people. They wanted to counteract the fear that the 9/11 terrorist attacks had implicated all American Muslims and the Islamic religion in the heinous crimes, and, even worse, that there was scriptural evidence for legitimizing violence. In response to such

***“Our goal is to defeat and discredit the ideology that leads to extremism and support for terrorism.”***

—Kamal Nawash, president of Free Muslims Coalition

attitudes, MAT worked toward outreach activities by talking about common American values.

MAT's primary mission was initially fundraising to provide assistance to the victims of terrorism. Its high-profile presence after 9/11 was intended to demonstrate its civic commitment to the United States and to play an active part in healing and reconciliation. The organization is interested in ensuring that younger American Muslims continue to be active in fighting terrorism.

### ***American Islamic Forum for Democracy*** (political)

A physician, Dr. M. Zuhdi Jasser, and several Muslim professionals in the Phoenix Valley of Arizona formed the American Islamic Forum for Democracy (AIFD) in March of 2003. With the increased attention on the Muslim world and on the war against terrorism, Dr. Jasser felt American Muslims needed to act aggressively in fighting terrorism by building an anti-terror ethos in the Muslim community and by publicly denouncing religious leaders who preach intolerance. AIFD's principal goals are to cultivate moderate, mainstream American Muslim voices on topics such as the separation of religion and state, which it believes is not contradictory to the ideals of Islam. Dr. Jasser is a former U.S. Navy Lieutenant Commander who served as a medical officer from 1988 to 1999.

Dr. Jasser believes that Muslims around the globe need to have a public debate on hate, violence, terrorism, radicalism, and such fundamentalist ideologies as Wahhabism. Identifying Muslim terrorists as Islamo-fascists, AIFD believes at the "core of terror is simply a barbaric evil tactic in a war of ideologies and it is only the Muslims who hold the keys to the floodgates that can drown the militants."

As Americans, AIFD members unconditionally support the armed forces. As citizens, they support their absolute pledge to the nation and to all of its national interests domestically and overseas. AIFD is committed to educating the public on the special relationship among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

AIFD's central goal is to defeat radicals who exploit the Muslim religion through militancy. AIFD views its goals as serving as a bridge between the West and the Muslim world by fighting terrorism and preventing the growth of radicalism. For many American Muslim critics, AIFD is too closely aligned with current foreign policies on fighting terrorism, and the organization has not seriously differentiated between the complexities of post-colonial Muslim societies and their various histories and economies that generate Islamic political activities. American Muslim critics believe AIFD is using the post 9/11 climate of Muslim suspicion as an entry into politics and positioning itself with the Bush administration.

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### ***The Muslim Peace Fellowship*** (peace and justice)

The Muslim Peace Fellowship (MPF) has existed for more than twelve years and is based in Nyack, New York. MPF is committed to cultivating peace and justice in American society. MPF was founded on religious principles of resolving conflict by nonviolence, a focus it believes is grounded in Islamic ethics and scripture. MPF's main concern is to teach the values of integrity and kindness that are based on Islamic teachings, a message it believes reveals the presence of the divine in all things.

In resolving conflict and establishing peace, MPF's position is that there are no quick fixes that have lasting results; rather, the focus should be on the long-term goals of transforming the inner chaos of the individual toward true peace. MPF believes that both pious and nonobservant Muslims are obligated to address violence and terrorism on the individual level by asking, "What can I do to establish peace?" According to MPF, the work of building peace and preventing conflict should not be left up to experts or nongovernmental organizations. Instead, individuals need to reflect upon their personal responsibilities for creating a harmonious society. This demands concrete steps in one's family and local community.

MPF's goals in combating violence extend from the personal to the larger human family; ultimately, the injustice in each person and in their relationships tears apart communities around the globe. MPF believes that a deeper understanding of nonviolence teachings and ethics in Islam will enrich the lives of Muslims and their communities. Eradicating global terrorism is part of a larger struggle to eliminate the daily violence existing in each person. Violence and terrorism are manifestations of several inner layers of discontent, and it is these myriad levels of hostility that need to be understood before an earnest effort at reconciliation can begin. MPF believes its efforts to work on these issues with the American Muslim community and the larger American society will enhance mutual understanding and respect.

## Legal Organizations

### ***National Association of Muslim Lawyers*** (secular, professional, legal)

The aim of the National Association of Muslim Lawyers (NAML) is to serve American Muslims, the general public, and the legal profession by promoting justice for all peoples as well as improvements in American laws and the American system of justice.

NAML believes a sustained involvement in American executive, legislative, and judicial decision-making processes is essential to the long-term prosperity and assimilation of Muslims into American society. The organization affirms that the community's interests are best protected by those with an understanding of and respect for the law, legal processes, and the role of the legal profession in developing, enforcing, and changing the law. NAML promotes legal representation for Muslims and thereby promotes Muslims' full, fair, and equal participation in American society overall. NAML also disseminates information on employment discrimination, harassment, gender, and civil rights, as well as religious, ethnic, and racial biases in the workplace.

Since 9/11, NAML has been overextended with discrimination cases and racial incidents. In addition, the organization has created the "Transparency Project," an initiative to encourage Muslim charitable institutions to implement operational guidelines and procedures that ensure compliance with law and increased transparency. The "Transparency Project" also assures donors that charitable institutions are in fact abiding by the law and adhering to their missions as charitable organizations. NAML believes expanding legal knowledge and expertise will increase civic responsibility in the United States. The opportunity for people to participate in politics, and in their own destiny, will diminish any extremist tendency.

### ***KARAMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights*** (feminist, legal, advocacy)

Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights (KARAMAH) works to protect the human rights of Muslims in the United States and in Muslim societies. KARAMAH, meaning "dignity" in Arabic, aims to provide support through education, grassroots advocacy, and activism. Since 1993, the organization has been committed to dialogue, peaceful conflict resolution, and democratic institutions. The organization's objectives are to transform misconceived ideas about women's status within Islamic communities. KARAMAH works to improve the treatment of women and to ensure that Muslim women take an active part in governing their lives and seeking leadership positions. It believes active involvement can counter the destructive effects of ignorance, silence, and prejudices against women.

KARAMAH is one of the few American Muslim organizations that openly proposes an Islamic perspective on issues of human rights, and members of the organization regularly publish their work in international law journals. KARAMAH's board of directors includes American Muslim women lawyers, experts in mediation and conflict resolution, and experts in Islamic jurisprudence. KARAMAH has worked vigorously to educate the general public about the role of human rights in Islam. In September 1995 the organization

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***Contrary to many analogies of terrorism to an infectious disease, El Fadl believes, “terrorism is an aberration, an extreme manifestation of underlying social and ideological currents in a particular culture. Terrorism is not a virus that suddenly infects the brain of a person; rather, it is the result of long-standing and cumulative cultural and rhetorical dynamics.***

participated at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. KARAMAH spoke against the Taliban's edict on religious minorities and published papers on educational rights of Muslim schoolgirls in France. KARAMAH views its activities as a way to bridge American Muslim women with women in the Muslim world and to simultaneously build coalitions with Muslim women nongovernmental organizations.

The organization has developed new programs, such as confronting domestic violence and advancing Muslim women's human rights globally. KARAMAH is an important resource for American Muslim women who seek advice on civil rights, spousal abuse, and employment accommodation on religious practices. KARAMAH members see themselves as partners with other civil rights groups advocating the protection of civil liberties in the United States.

Particularly since 9/11, KARAMAH has provided legal services and sponsored educational programs to women's groups, both nationally and internationally. It strives to educate a new generation of American Muslim women who can serve as experts in both American and Islamic law. KARAMAH's board member Amr Abdalla, a George Washington University professor, currently directs KARAMAH's "Conflict Resolution Project" with the goal of creating new thinking and awareness about conflict prevention and nonviolent measures to resolving conflicts.

## Views of American Muslim Scholars

Efforts to avert violence and promote conflict resolution and peacemaking have developed into a richly diverse and intellectual field among American Muslim scholars with different methodologies and perspectives. Ingrid Matson, vice president of ISNA and professor of Islamic Studies at Hartford Seminary, stated that American Muslims have a special obligation to stop violence: "Who has the greatest duty to stop violence committed by Muslims against innocent non-Muslims in the name of Islam? The answer, obviously, is Muslims." For other scholars, the primary issue lies in the narrow fundamentalist interpretations of Islam and in the way fundamentalists project themselves as the sole guardians of the religion. Professor Ali Minai, of the University of Cincinnati, remarked, "the interpretation of Islam can no longer be left to the most regressive segment of Muslim society. Muslims who believe that their faith is compatible with progressive humanist ideals will express themselves—not as apologists of Islam to the West but as proponents of new possibilities for Muslims."

One leading scholar who has examined the juristic history of war and violence in Islam is Professor Khaled Abou El Fadl, law professor at UCLA and author of *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy*, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam*, and *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law*. According to El Fadl, the world of the terrorists is tied to a puritanical theology that is responding to powerlessness and a crisis of identities. The major issues are that "there are profound feelings of defeatism, alienation, frustration, and arrogance. It is a theology that is alienated not only from the institutions of power in the modern world, but also from its own heritage and [Islamic] tradition." Contrary to many analogies of terrorism to an infectious disease, El Fadl believes, "terrorism is an aberration, an extreme manifestation of underlying social and ideological currents in a particular culture. Terrorism is not a virus that suddenly infects the brain of a person; rather, it is the result of long-standing and cumulative cultural and rhetorical dynamics. In Islamic law terrorism (hirabah) is considered cowardly, predatory, and a grand sin punishable by death."

Professor Muqtedar Khan, assistant professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Delaware and author of *American Muslims: Bridging Faith and Freedom*, operates an online column and website titled, Ijtihad, to help Muslims rationally reflect on their faith and contemporary issues. Critical of U.S. foreign policy and of the erosion of civil rights domestically, Khan believes that American Muslims

need to move from their difficult positions and be active in democratic processes. Khan stated,

“Democracy is not a function of numbers, but of participation. The [American Muslim] community needs to find a new way of thinking about its future in America. They have to transcend the Islam vs. the West, which still shapes their leaders’ politics. They need to listen more to the intellectuals and scholars who are seeking to chart a new path for the community.

Professor Khan thinks it is vitally important that every American Muslim contribute to the interpretative process of the Islamic tradition. According to Khan, when each person’s interpretation is viewed as an equal voice among experts, democracy has a greater role in Muslim lives.

Professor Asma Afsaruddin of Notre Dame University recalls the historical lessons of early Islam. Even though dynastic rule became the norm, accountable, consultative government remained the ideal; despotism was denounced as un-Islamic and unjust. She said, “modern democracies are fully consonant with Islamic values and in fact, principles of good governance were developed and practiced in early Islam. Democratic governments in vibrant civil societies are able to mediate internal conflicts and are answerable to their peoples through regular elections.” Afsaruddin believes that the existence of autocratic governments in the Muslim world and the lack of basic political and civic freedoms for most of the citizenry are the real root causes of violence. The most effective way of reducing conflict and terrorism is to work toward democratic reform and the strengthening of civil society.

## Conclusion: Multipronged Conflict Prevention

The American Muslim community is diverse in every conceivable way. There are numerous national and regional organizations dedicated to important civic, religious, cultural, educational, political, and social issues. On the subject of terrorism and conflict resolution, clearly all American Muslim groups have denounced it emphatically, while some have gone beyond words by becoming involved with foreign policy, lobbying efforts, and mobilizing grassroots campaigns in the community.

The Fiqh Council of North American fatwa is an example of American Muslims taking proactive positions on global terrorism, while practicing zero tolerance of violence and religious extremism. Their positions have examined conflict and peacemaking in Islam and have advocated the explicit need for American Muslims to cooperate with law enforcement.

National American Muslim organizations like MPAC, CAIR, ISNA, and AMA have focused on violence and religious extremism as critical issues with local and international strategies. MPAC’s “National Grassroots Campaign to Fight Terrorism” and CAIR’s “Not in the Name of Islam” efforts are examples of American Muslims’ innovative programs to raise awareness on issues of radical ideologies. The coordination of their efforts with those of law enforcement agencies demonstrates mutual recognition of the roles each group plays in conflict prevention.

Organizations like CSID, FMC, MAT, and AIFD exhibit new types of thinking in the American Muslim community by fostering, cultivating, and institutionalizing democratic reform in the Muslim world as the primary answer to extremism. Their own experiences in the United States confirm that Islamic values and democracy are compatible, and it is vitally important to institutionalize democracy in order to reform despotic totalitarian societies. Their activities display a conscious effort to make for themselves in American society, while contributing as bridge builders to the Muslim world. Their activities have already established a definite American Muslim model of inclusion and participation that

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differs from Muslim communities in Europe where Muslim communities are less involved in law enforcement and civic participation.

The participation of American Muslims in mainstream politics is to empower the community in many different levels of public life. American Muslim advocacy groups have tackled stereotyping of Muslims as a matter of public debate, and they have aggressively worked toward resolving incidents of discrimination and civil rights abuses. These achievements have shifted political attitudes that have enabled American Muslims to integrate in American political institutions.

Another strategy in the American Muslim community is to focus on human rights, gender inequality, and interfaith dialogue, and to increase the Muslim presence in the American legal system. KARAMAH, NAML, and ASMA represent specialized groups whose members believe that injustices can be overcome by addressing the various legal, socio-economic, political, and religious systems involved. ASMA's interfaith dialogue programs in the United States and around the world reflect the desire for reconciliation and humanizing of all people. Each of these groups recognizes that mutual respect is tied to taking real steps toward tolerance and is part of alleviating suffering.

Some organizations are concerned with improving the condition of all human beings through education and spiritual awareness, not terrorism. Other groups believe their particular expertise is not conflict resolution, but rather a focus on cultural, social, professional, artistic, democratic, and human rights issues. With such immense diversity in the American Muslim community, it is difficult to reduce it to a single voice. Instead, there needs to be greater appreciation for the efforts and contributions of Muslims in areas of conflict resolution, interfaith dialogue, peace building, education, political activities, civic work, human rights and women's rights advocacy, legal expertise, and humanitarian efforts. The immense contributions and growing involvement of American Muslims in the public square clearly reflects that Muslims in the United States are situating themselves within civic, governmental, and political structures of the nation. Each organization has its own vision for its members as Americans and for their contributions to contemporary issues of conflict and peacemaking.

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17. Ijtihad  
[www.ijtihad.org](http://www.ijtihad.org)

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