



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

Preserving American Jewish History

MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series C: Interreligious Activities. 1952-1992


Box 29, Folder 9, Islam, 1979.



Prepared by Lois Gottesman for

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE
Institute of Human Relations

165 East 56 Street, New York, N.Y. 10022



This study was commissioned by the American Jewish Committee as part of its general educational programs for the Jewish community and other interested individuals and groups.

By helping to increase understanding about the Muslim community in the United States, the Committee hopes to contribute to a relaxation of tensions between Jews and Muslims in the country and to open the way for new relationships based on mutual respect and cooperation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Arab Muslims	4
Turkish Muslims.	5
Other Ethnic Groups and Sects.	7
Cultural and Political Efforts	12
Major Muslim Organizations in the United States	
Federation of Islamic Associations in the United States and Canada.	15
Muslims Students' Association of the United States and Canada	18
The World Community of Islam in the West	20
Islamic Chamber of Commerce of America, Inc.	22

ISLAM IN AMERICA

The Muslim community in the United States began with mass immigration from the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire during the last quarter of the 19th century. At that time, great political and economic changes in the area supplied an impetus for migration to both Europe and the U.S.

It is not known how many people came from what are today Arab states and how many from Turkey proper, since until 1899 all immigrants from that part of the world were listed as Asians. Between 1871 and 1880, only 67 persons are listed as "Asians" in U.S. immigration records. In the decade 1881-90 there was a sharp rise: 2,220 immigrants from Turkey in Asia are listed. After 1899, Syrians (including persons from present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel) were listed separately, because they were arriving in far greater numbers. Between 1899 and 1919, an average of 5,000 Syrians a year entered the U.S., reaching a peak of over 9,000 in 1913.

The overwhelming majority of the Syrian immigrants were Christians. In the main, they probably came because they were relatively Westernized and had economic ambitions which could only be realized in the West; religious persecution in Syria also played a minor role. Muslims were not yet immigrating en masse, because of antipathy against Western Christian societies and fear that they would not be able to maintain their Islamic way of life in America. Before 1914, only a few hundred young Muslim men joined their Christian fellow villagers in emigrating to the U.S.

In the period between the two World Wars, Muslims came to the U.S. in small numbers, mostly for economic reasons and mostly from poor, rural areas. Many Arab Muslims went to Chicago, Toledo and Detroit, attracted by the development of the auto industry and high industrial wages. In 1934 they built the first mosque in the U.S., in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Turkish and Slav Muslims arrived in increasing numbers after the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire following the First World War; they first settled in port cities. A few Indian Muslims, belonging to the Ahmadiyya movement (a Muslim missionary sect), also came and soon began to seek converts, mostly in the black community.

A second great wave of immigration, politically motivated, occurred immediately after the Second World War. It consisted mostly of urban, relatively educated people. Muslims came from all over North Africa, the Middle East, other parts of Asia and Eastern Europe. From the Arab countries alone -- Morocco, Egypt,

Iraq and Yemen as well as Syria and Lebanon -- over 150,000 came between 1945 and 1977.

We are now in the midst of a third wave of Muslim migration, once more economically motivated. Poverty and lack of opportunity at home are driving hundreds of thousands to move to the oil rich countries, Europe or the U.S. Most come from Arab countries, but in recent years growing numbers have come from Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, India, the Philippines and Indonesia. As a result of a change in immigration laws in 1965, about 38,000 Arabs alone came to this country between 1968 and 1970. Most of these recent arrivals are urban, educated and highly trained; many come as students to get professional training and remain afterwards to reap the benefits of the rich, capitalist West. With growing numbers, Muslim and ethnic organizations and mosques have proliferated in the United States.

The total number of Muslims in the U.S. today is unknown. A census undertaken by the Federation of Islamic Associations in the U.S. and Canada is unfinished and likely to remain so. Many organizations do not even know how many members they have, or do not publish the figures if they have them. Estimates vary widely: the U.S. Government and the National Council of Churches claim that there are two million Muslims in the country; Islamic Horizons, a publication of the Muslim Students' Association, claims three million (March 1978); Muslim World, published in Pakistan, says there are five million Muslims in all of North America. Whatever the right figure, all sources agree that the American Muslim community has grown tremendously and continues to do so, primarily through migration from the Middle East and conversions.

The 1976 Annual Report of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service contains data on arrivals from Muslim countries which give an indication of the magnitude of Muslim immigration to this country since 1967 (Table 1). Unfortunately, the Immigration Service does not collect statistics on religion, so there is no way to learn precisely how many of the immigrants actually were Muslims. Furthermore, there are no separate entries for the North African countries, the Gulf states or the Muslim countries of Asia. Nor do the consulates of these countries have precise information on the number of their countrymen in the U.S. The best estimate, then, for the U.S. Muslim population remains the official government one of two million.

TABLE 1

Immigrants, by Country of Birth, July 1967 - September 1976
(Muslim and non-Muslim)

Iran	23,015
Iraq	16,897
Jordan	25,611
Lebanon	19,695
Syria	10,190
Turkey	19,345
Egypt	26,432

TOTAL 141,185

(No breakdown for other countries)

TABLE 2

Persons Naturalized, by Country of Birth, July 1967 - September 1976
(Muslim and non-Muslim)

Iran	5,001
Iraq	3,590
Jordan	8,265
Lebanon	5,340
Syria	2,666
Turkey	5,071
Yemen	1,321
Egypt	8,434

TOTAL 39,688

(no breakdown for other countries)

Arab Muslims

Arab Muslims constitute a large and ever-growing part of the American Muslim community. As of 1966, Abd Elkholy, the author of Arab Muslims in the U.S., estimated that there were 100,000 in the U.S., some 10 per cent of the entire Arab-American community. Today, the figure is much larger, thanks to vastly increased immigration under the changed law, which allows immediate relatives of American citizens to enter the U.S. The 1967 Arab-Israeli War gave further impetus to mass immigration. A quick look at what figures there are suggests that at least another 100,000 Arab Muslims must have arrived since 1967, giving a rough total of 200,000 Arab Muslims.

The Arab Muslims who came before 1966-67 were mostly unskilled and uneducated, and tended to work in heavy industry and agriculture. As noted, a large number (mostly Palestinians, Lebanese and Yemenis) are employed in the auto industry in the Detroit area. About 70,000 Arabs (10 percent of them Muslims) live in Dearborn, Michigan, which is said to be the largest Arab Muslim settlement in the U.S. Arab members of the United Auto Workers International, some 15,000 in a total membership of 1.4 million, have formed an Arab Workers Caucus in Detroit to agitate for better working conditions and pay. They have become involved with other Third World workers and American blacks who "view the Zionist state as one of the imperialist powers playing an exploitative role in Africa," and have obtained their support in an attempt to force the U.A.W. to get rid of its State of Israel bonds.¹

Arab Muslims employed in agriculture are usually from poor countries such as North and South Yemen and Iraq. Quite a few are migrant workers in California. TWA in Los Angeles, which arranges flights for Yemenis, estimates that a total of 100,000 Yemeni farm workers have come and gone in the past decade.²

In contrast to these groups, Arab immigrants of the years since 1966-67 are predominantly urban, educated, skilled and Muslim. They hail from all over the Middle East and North Africa. Many come as students and remain after completing their education. Middle Eastern magazines now frequently deplore a "brain drain" of students and professionals -- a drain that is caused by social, economic and political underdevelopment and instability in the Middle East, and aggravates these conditions further.

1. MERIP REPORTS; #34, January 1975

2. Ibid.

The recent newcomers bring with them a new strong feeling of Arab identity and political consciousness. Thanks chiefly to this vigorous, active influx, the Muslim community in the U.S. has emerged from a long period of inactivity and assimilation. The number of mosques and Muslim organizations has multiplied rapidly, the use and study of Arabic has increased, and new life has been infused into existing organizations, such as the Federation of Islamic Associations, which the Arab Muslims have almost taken over. (see page 15)

Of all Muslim groups, the Arabs are by far the most active and devout with regard to religion. The Islamic Centers now proliferating in cities and university campuses throughout the country are founded, funded and run almost exclusively by Arab Muslims. This renewed religious activity goes hand in hand with a revival of fundamentalist Islam in the Muslim world, particularly in Saudi Arabia, Libya, Egypt and also in Pakistan. These countries play a large role in financing the Islamic revival in the U.S., partly out of religious fervor and partly because of their close ties with many of the recent immigrants to the U.S. Religious articles and education materials from the Middle East abound, as do concerned visitors -- both government officials and religious dignitaries -- with fat checkbooks.

Arab nationalism, too, plays a large role in the Arab Muslim community in this country. Muslims from Arab countries work closely with their Christian compatriots in all matters affecting Arabs in general, through organizations such as the Arab-American Chamber of Commerce and the Arab lobby in Washington. However, the conflict in Lebanon has increased tensions between Lebanese Christians and Muslims here.

Turkish Muslims

Muslims of Turkish origin are a numerically large group among American Muslims. Statistics are scarce and often unreliable; estimates as of the mid 1970s range from 70,000 to 95,000. The Turkish Consulate in New York claims a much higher figure of 200,000 Turks in the U.S., but included in that number, besides Anatolian Turks, are Turks from the U.S.S.R. -- from Azerbaijan, the Crimea and Turkestan -- who hold Turkish passports.

The Turkish American community started much later than the Arab Americans. Small numbers of Turks arrived before the First World War, motivated by the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the attendant economic difficulties in Anatolia. They were illiterate lower-class workers; many of them returned to Turkey after saving some money. After the Second World War, immigration shot up as the Turks' admiration for the West,

particularly the U.S., increased. Earlier, Turks had been wary of contact with the West; at the end of the Ottoman Empire, the mood had been anti-Western. But that changed gradually with Kamal Ataturk's policy of secularization, the impression made by the Allied victory in 1945, and Turkey's membership in NATO in 1952. More and more Turks now went to Europe and the U.S. U.S. Immigration figures show 798 Anatolian Turkish immigrants in 1941-1950; 3,519 in 1951-1960, and 10,142 in 1961-1970.

The new Turkish immigrants in the U.S. are mostly professionals or small businessmen -- unlike their counterparts in Europe (some 656,000 in 1977), who are mainly industrial workers. They are motivated primarily by economic and professional ambition, though recently political unrest at home has also played a role. In the last few years, increasing numbers of Turks have been coming to the U.S., and more would like to come but are prevented by immigration restrictions. However, most of the immigrants will probably return to Turkey at some time. Many Turks refrain from becoming American citizens, because the present law in Turkey does not allow dual citizenship; and those who are not U.S. citizens have difficulty in bringing over family members. For these reasons, the Turkish American population grows slowly.

Since the earliest immigration, the community has remained concentrated around major urban centers. The biggest group (some say as many as 40,000) lives in the New York metropolitan area; large numbers also reside in the Midwest, primarily around Chicago, and on the West Coast. Many Turkish Americans are doctors, lawyers, engineers or professionals of other kinds. There are also 3,000 Turkish students in U.S. universities. The community has a high ratio of university graduates, and median income is relatively high.

Turkish Americans maintain strong feelings of communal solidarity. There are nearly 100 clubs and societies scattered over the country, including Turkish student associations on campuses. Most of these organizations have 50 or fewer members. Several professional societies exist, for example a Turkish-American Physicians' Association and a Society of Turkish Architects, Engineers and Scientists in America. There also are associations of Turks from outside Turkey, such as the American Association of Crimean Turks, the Turkestan-American Association, the Azerbaijan Society of America, the Turkish Cypriot Aid Society and the American Turk-Tatar Association. Three clubs specialize in soccer; the rest are essentially social clubs, sponsoring educational and cultural activities.

Two organizations stand out. One is the American Turkish Society (380 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017), founded in

1949 by businessmen "to promote cultural exchange." Through the Society, contacts are made between Americans and Turks active in the high echelons of business, banking, government and industry. Corporate members include several dozen major U.S. corporations. The group's activities are exemplified by a symposium on Turkish foreign policy and its effects on U.S.-Turkish relations, held on October 5, 1978.

The Federation of Turkish-American Societies (821 United Nations Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10017), founded in 1956, is an umbrella organization for some 20 associations. Its main purposes are to create and maintain close ties among Turkish Americans, and to represent their political views vis-a-vis U.S. policies and activities of other ethnic groups such as Armenians and Greeks. The Federation schedules social activities (among them an annual ball) and observances of Turkish holidays, and organizes educational programs. It has frequently coordinated relief campaigns for earthquake victims, and has publicly refuted allegations concerning Turkish-Armenian relations, and the Greek-Turkish confrontation in Cyprus. The Federation's most vigorous single effort to date has been a campaign, launched in 1975 to press Congress for repeal of the arms embargo against Turkey.

Religion plays a small role in the identity of Turkish Americans, because most of them were brought up in the anti-religious atmosphere of the Ataturk regime. Outside the home country, there are no Turkish mosques, and Turks have no strong religious feelings. Except for those from the Soviet Union, relatively few observe the traditional Muslim holidays. Turks in the U.S. thus have no common ground with other Muslim ethnic groups and do not identify with the Arab world at all. On the contrary, they go out of their way not to be grouped with Arab Muslims; many say they would rather pray at home (if at all) than go near an Arab Muslim mosque. Hence, it may be assumed that whatever foreign contributions made to Turkish groups in the U.S. come from Turkey, not from Arab countries.

Contact between Turkish Americans and other American ethnic and religious groups is minimal, but on the whole is cordial as far as it goes -- except for occasional friction with Armenians and Greeks, particularly over Cyprus during the last few years.

Other Ethnic Groups and Sects

Besides the large Arab and Turkish communities, a number of much smaller Muslim ethnic groups live in the U.S.

-- The Ahmadiyya movement has about 5,000 followers. Founded in India in 1870, it was brought to this country by

Indian missionaries after the First World War. Members are active in missionary activities in the U.S. and elsewhere, and it is estimated that several thousand Americans, mostly blacks, have converted and become members. California has the largest number of Indian Muslims belonging to the movement -- mostly farmers who came in 1906 from the Punjab and the Northwest Frontier region of what is now Pakistan. They publish a journal, Sunrise, and have their own mosque, the American Fazl Mosque.

-- The Albanian Muslim community is relatively small; exact figures are unavailable, as is other information on the community and its activities. There are Albanian Islamic centers in Chicago, Brooklyn and the Detroit suburb of Harper Woods.

-- The Baha'i movement was the first religious movement originating in Islam to be represented in the U.S. It was founded in Turkey in 1863 by a Persian named Baha'u'llah, and headquartered in Haifa; the U.S. community dates from 1894. According to the U.S. Religious Census of 1926, there were 2,884 Baha'is in the U.S. in 1916 and only 1,247 in 1926; but in recent years the membership has been estimated to be as high as 100,000. The movement attracts converts, primarily among American blacks, through its emphasis on small congregations, its study requirements and the absence of an official clergy. Until the 1930's, the Baha'i National Spiritual Assembly was headquartered in Teaneck, New Jersey; it has since moved to Wilmette, Illinois.

-- The Black Muslim Organization, known today as the World Community of Islam in the West (WCIW) is headquartered in Chicago, Illinois. The group is variously estimated to number between 7,000 to 50,000, though WCIW itself has at different times claimed a quarter million to two million members. Since 1975, the group has been led by Wallace Muhammad, who is called the Chief Imam. (see page 22)

-- Bosnian Muslims in the U.S. number between 10,000 and 12,000. They arrived here in spurts. Between 1900 and 1939, the immigrants -- mostly young unskilled laborers -- came primarily for economic reasons, chiefly from Bosnia-Herzegovina, a poor area of what became Yugoslavia. Immediately after the Second World War came families from urban areas; motivated by the political turmoil then prevailing. Recently, Bosnians have again been immigrating to the U.S., this time because of poor employment opportunities at home. The largest number, about three-quarters of the U.S. total, live in the Chicago-Milwaukee-Gary area. In 1955 they formed the Bosnian American Cultural Association, whose activities are primarily religious and social. In 1976, the community built an Islamic Center in Northbrook, Illinois, with substantial aid from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

The Center has a few non-Bosnian members (mostly Arabs and Pakistanis) but 60 per cent of the facilities is owned by the Cultural Association, and Bosnians predominate in the general membership and the leadership. A Bosnian Muslim owns the Precision Carbide Tool Company, which employs about 300 workers, many of them Bosnian Muslims, and is probably the largest firm in North America to give all employees paid vacations on major Islamic holidays.

-- Some Circassian Muslims settled in the U.S. after fleeing the Soviet Union, mostly in the late 1940s and the 1950s. In 1959 there were some 200, most of them in New York. Today between 500 and 1500 Circassian families are thought to live in the U.S., most of them in New York City, in and near Paterson, New Jersey, and in California and North Carolina. They have several organizations: a Circassian Benevolent Association in Paterson, a Circassian Community Center in Haledon, New Jersey, and a mosque, the Karacay Turks' Mosque, in the Bronx borough of New York City.

-- Croatian Muslims number only a few thousand in the U.S. When Austria occupied Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1878, thousands of Croatian Muslims left for Turkey, but only a small number sailed for America. Most of those here today came after 1908, when Austria annexed the two provinces; many had left their country illegally. In 1945, several hundred more Croatian Muslims arrived, settling primarily in Cleveland (since 1950 the largest colony of Croatian immigrants) and in Chicago and Milwaukee. In 1957 a Croatian Moslem Mosque and Cultural Home was opened in Chicago, in the presence of Muslims of other nationalities and of Croatians Catholics. This institution is also frequented by other Muslim groups, primarily Turks. But the Croatian Muslim's strongest tie is with other Croatians; for example, they participate in the American-Croatian Congress. They have religious and cultural organizations of their own, and there is a publication called The Voice of Croat Moslems from Bosnia, Herzegovina and Sandzak in Exile, the organ of the Society of Croatian Muslims from Bosnia, Herzegovina and Sandzak.

-- Members of the Druze sect in the U.S. are somewhat of an unknown quantity. The sect originated in Syria in the 11th century. Most of its adherents still live in Syria and Lebanon, but some joined the general emigration from those countries. Druzes avoid speaking about their religion and attempt to keep its doctrines and mysteries an inviolable secret, even from uninitiated members; to all outward appearances they are Syrian or Lebanese Muslims. Therefore it is difficult to judge how many Druzes there are, whether in Syria and Lebanon, or in the U.S. and Europe. (Size of community estimated at less than 100 around San Francisco, with others in Atlanta, Houston and

Alabama.) An American Druze Society was established in 1960, with headquarters in Michigan. Its primary functions appear to be cultural and social. A Druze may not marry a non-Druze; hence a meeting place for singles is indispensable.

-- In the large East Indian community in the U.S., Muslims are a minority among a large number of Hindus. Of some 100,000 Indians and Pakistanis believed to reside in the New York Metropolitan area, only 15 or 20 per cent are thought to be Muslim. The Indian Muslims, being predominantly Sunni (i.e. orthodox) have little to do with the Pakistanis, who tend to be mostly Shi'ites. They (Indian Muslims) have much more in common with Arabs and share mosques, religious schools and organizations with them. Most of the Indian Muslims arrived in the U.S. after the liberalization of the immigration law in 1965, motivated by the lack of employment opportunities at home and opportunities for advanced professional training in the U.S. Today many are doctors and businessmen. As far as could be ascertained, they have only one organization, the Consultative Committee of Indian Muslims in the U.S. and Canada, located in Chicago, where many Indian Muslims live.

-- Estimates of the number of Pakistani Muslims in the U.S. vary from 2,000 to 5,000. Most of them live in the New York Metropolitan area. They have two organizations, both primarily political: the Pakistan League and the Pakistan Student Organization of America. The latter was established 25 years ago as a nonprofit political organization; its President, Dr. Muhammad Zafar, claims it has chapters all over the country. Pakistani Muslims at one time had their own mosque in New Jersey; after it burned down, they joined with other groups, notably Arab Muslims, in religious and educational ventures. They have been very active recently in these two areas, reflecting the strictly orthodox and fundamentalist views of the Pakistani Government. (For example, the Muslim World Congress, headquarters in Karachi, has undertaken a comparative survey of Muslim minorities throughout the world and is working with Saudi Arabia in encouraging Muslim activities in the U.S. and elsewhere.) (See page 14)

-- The Iranian community is fairly small, though again there are no precise figures. There are said to be 50,000 Iranian students and 2,200 Iranian military trainees in the U.S. and, according to one source, at least 20,000 Iranians live in the New York metropolitan area. Approximately 6,000 Iranians live in and around Washington and large numbers are in California. Many are wealthy business people and professionals who are very assimilated to the American way of life. All are Shi'ite Muslims, but to date have not been actively religious; other Shi'ites consider them to be almost atheistic and do not include them when discussing the Shi'ite community at large. However, a religious revival now appears to be afoot, perhaps in response to the struggle in Iran against the Shah. A Persian Muslim Community is in the process of being formed in Westchester County, New York.

The most active group is the Iranian Student Association, which claims 3,000 to 4,000 members in the U.S. and gets some of its money from wealthy Iranians in this country. The group is part of a Worldwide Confederation of Iranian Students, which contains different ideological factions. Within the American branch of ISA there may be as many as 14 separate factions, ranging from Maoist to simple nationalists to theocrats. Experts point out that a severe split has developed between the Muslim students identified with the Ayatollah Khomeini and Marxist-oriented students who oppose the idea of an Islamic republic. The Iranian Student Association supports the Palestine Liberation Organization.

-- Shi'ism, a heterodox Muslim sect which began in the seventh century and today is widespread in parts of the Middle East, most notably Iran, is also represented in the U.S. There are no major religious differences between Sunni and Shi'i Islam, either in observances or customs, so that Sunnis and Shi'ites can and often do pray in the same mosques, especially in the U.S. The main difference between them concerns religious leadership; the Shi'ites do not accept the Sunni Caliphs as successors of the Prophet Muhammad; instead they have 12 Imams whom they consider to have been supreme Muslim leaders -- from Ali (the Prophet's nephew) to a Messiah-like, mystical figure known as the Mahdi. There are an estimated 300,000 to 400,000 Shi'ites in the U.S., from East Africa, Iran, Pakistan, India and Malaysia. At present there is only one Shi'ite mosque, in the New York City borough of Queens. Elsewhere Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims share mosques and facilities for religious education, though there are plans to set up a Shi'ite school. Shi'ite literature, published in Iran, is distributed free to all adherents. The Shia Association of North America, located in Queens, was set up in 1973, but this attempt to organize the community has been only partly successful. A census of Shi'ites remains incomplete because of lack of response, and membership in the Association is small compared to the estimated number of Shi'ites in the U.S. The organization is active in New York, Chicago, Houston and Los Angeles, and hopes to expand in the near future. Its president, Mr. Reza Hassanali, from East Africa, travels to the Middle East in search of speakers and, presumably, financial aid.

-- Sufism, a mystical Muslim sect which originated in Persia, appeared in the U.S. before the First World War. In 1910, Hazrat Pir-O-Murshid Inayat Khan was assigned the task of bringing Sufism to the West; he travelled to the U.S. and Europe, gathering disciples and forming Sufi centers. Today, there are about 5,000 Sufis scattered over the U.S. The center at New Lebanon functions as Sufi headquarters in the U.S. and publishes a monthly, The Sufi Message. Since Sufi worship consists of meditation, there are no mosques, hence, contacts with other Muslims are almost nil.

-- Finally, there are a few small groups of Muslims of

Turkic origin. In Brooklyn, New York, we find some 250 families of Kazan-Volga Tatars, some 4,000 Tatar Poles with their own mosque and 500 to 800 families of Crimean Turks (with an American Association of Crimean Turks). Elsewhere, there are Turkestanis (some 150 families) and Azerbaijanis, again with their own groups: the Turkestan American Association, the Azerbaijan Society of America and the Azerbaijan-Turkish Cultural Association of America, all in New Jersey. All these groups maintain ties with the Turkish community in the U.S.

Cultural and Political Efforts

Muslim political and cultural activity, like the Muslim population, is on the rise in the U.S. This is due in part to the current nationwide trend of ethnic consciousness and to a desire to organize at least as effectively as the Jewish community has done. But another reason is the growing importance of the Middle East and the revival of pan-Islamic ideology there.

Most of the new activity can be traced to the Arab-Israel war of October 1973, which changed not only Western perceptions of the Arab world, but also the Arabs' perceptions of themselves. The war itself (viewed by Arabs as a victory) and the accompanying oil embargo proved that Arabs could adopt and manipulate Western tools and methods, notably propaganda, to their own advantage. Both in the Middle East and elsewhere, Arabs have since put this ability to use.

It is primarily Arab Muslims who are behind the increased Muslim activity in the U.S. The more recent arrivals -- Palestinians and Syrians, who are influenced by the political instability in their home countries -- work in politically oriented organizations. The established citizens and residents -- such as the Syrian-Lebanese community -- are more concerned with maintaining group identity in the face of widespread assimilation and work in culturally and socially oriented groups. (The Lebanese War of 1975-76 has spawned some relief organizations, but no Lebanese nationalist associations in the Muslim community.) Whatever their particular agenda, all Muslim groups are agreed that Muslims in America cannot and must not assimilate themselves away, but should make themselves seen, heard and felt -- in keeping with their status as followers of a worldwide religion with 700 million adherents.

Their main activity is promoting Islam, about which most Americans know little or nothing. It is felt that, with correct information, erroneous notions of Muslims (and Arabs) can be corrected and American sympathies can be redirected to the (Arab) Muslim world. Many Islamic day schools and centers have been

opened in the past few years, as have new mosques in all parts of the country. Much of this building has been financed by Arab Muslim countries -- notably by Saudi Arabia, as part of a Saudi Government program to help revitalize Muslim minorities all over the world. (There is a new Institute of Muslim Minorities Affairs at King 'Abdul 'Aziz University in Jidda.) In June 1978, the Saudi Government announced grants of \$3 million for building mosques and Islamic Centers in North America alone over the next two years. Other countries, such as Egypt and Pakistan, offer religious scholarships -- which also provide educational materials, teachers and guest lecturers -- to American Muslim youths.

To help bring Islam to the attention of Americans, Muslims have begun to press for recognition of their religious holidays and prayer times. On many college campuses, rooms are reserved for use as mosques for Friday prayers; several schools (for example, the University of Wisconsin, and the University of Indiana at Bloomington) have their own Islamic centers. Others have begun to list Muslim religious holidays along with Yom Kippur and Christmas; Columbia Teachers College and Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge now recognize the two 'Ids as official holidays. Muslim workers in both the private and the public sector are demanding time off for prayers and holidays. Chicago was the first city where, by order of the mayor, municipal departments excused all Muslims from duty, with full pay, to celebrate the end of the month-long fast of Ramadan (in October 1977). Several companies are allowing Muslim workers time off for the five daily prayers.

The "Middle East connection" in these activities is strong. With the yearning for pan-Arab unity has come a revival of pan-Islamic ideology, the ultimate goal of which is Muslim unity, something never accomplished since the seventh century. The centers of this ideology are Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, with Egypt occasionally joining in, and each has something unique to offer: Saudi Arabia its petrodollars and its stewardship of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina; Pakistan its apparent success in molding a modern nation-state on an Islamic model; Egypt its ancient Muslim university, Al-Azhar.

Of the three countries, Egypt has less to do with the American Muslim community than the rest, probably because of its shaky economy. Former President Gamal Abdel Nasser gave some money to build Islamic centers in Detroit and Washington, but his main contribution was in the field of education. Scholarships to Al-Azhar have been offered through the Federation of Islamic Associations and the Muslim Students' Association. Imams and teachers, as well as books, have been sent to get Islamic schools in the U.S. going. An Egyptian, Dr. Muhammad Abd'al Ra'uf, the Imam of the Islamic Center in Washington, is

regarded as the patriarch of the American Muslim community.

Pakistan lately has supplanted Egypt as the prime source of teachers and teaching materials. Both the Pakistani government and the World Muslim Congress in Karachi see themselves as missionaries to, and protectors of, their fellow Muslims in the West. Delegations from Pakistan attend every major Muslim convention in the U.S. and Canada (a four-man group attended the 1978 Federation of Islamic Associations Convention in West Virginia); and Pakistanis living in this country are very active in Muslim organizations.

The Muslim World, the official weekly of the World Muslim Congress, is published in Karachi and circulated to members throughout the world. While it runs articles on Islamic teachings and the traditions of the prophet, it concentrates mainly on political and economic developments in Islamic countries. Also serving as a platform for the Palestine Arab Delegation (the successors to Hajj Amin al Hussein, former Mufti of Jerusalem and a founder of the World Muslim Congress), its strident anti-Israel propaganda calls on all good Muslims to liberate al-Quds (Jerusalem), which is "an Arab Islamic city forever." The Muslim World also reprints articles from American anti-Semitic publications as well as essays by such well-known anti-Zionists as Dr. Alfred Lilienthal and Norman Dacey.

Saudi Arabia is the main power at both the religious and the political level. The Saudis provide money, trained personnel and books, and serve as a role model for religious and political views, in perhaps conscious imitation of the Caliphs. They have set up several organizations, with branches in the U.S., which disseminate both political and religious information. Hence, not suprisingly, the views expressed by American Muslims strongly resemble those expressed by the Saudi Government. These Saudi organizations just named include:

1. The Muslim World League (Rabita), established in 1962 by the Government, and headquartered in Mecca. Its stated purpose is to provide international coordination among Muslim organizations, as well as financial assistance. Rabita has consultant status at the United Nations, and is thus in a position to be involved in all issues concerning Muslims. Its New York offices are located down the hall from those of the Federation of Islamic Associations, and the two organizations evidently work closely together.

An article in The Muslim World expressed the reaction of Rabita to the Camp David summit: "Jews along their dark history have been characteristic with injustice,

hatred and ill will against the humanity of the human being, divine religions, spiritual civilizations, moral values and ideas." The article went on to "advise Muslims everywhere to counter Jewish conspiracies." (The Muslim World, December 2, 1978)

2. The World Assembly of Muslim Youth, headquartered in Riyadh and funded by the Saudi Government. This organization has branches wherever there is a Muslim community; it concentrates on religious training and social activities (such as camps) for youth. The U.S. office is in Indianapolis, not far from that of the Muslim Students' Association.
3. The National Coordinating Committee for Islamic Work in North America (also known as the Islamic Coordinating Council of North America) founded in Mecca in 1974-75.

Other current Saudi interests include development of a recently founded Islamic Chamber of Commerce; establishment of a publishing house for Islamic materials; and dissemination of Islamic propaganda along Saudi lines -- strict and fundamentalist with respect to religion, anti-Israel and anti-Zionist in politics.

Few other Muslim countries in the Middle East, North Africa or Asia, are concerned with the world Muslim community. Except for Libya and some of the Gulf States (pulled in by Saudi Arabia), they do not give financial help to American Muslims or interest themselves in their activities.

Major Muslim Organizations in the U.S.

Following are brief descriptions of four leading American Muslim organizations: the Federation of Islamic Associations in United States and Canada, the Muslim Students' Association of the U.S. and Canada, the World Community of Islam in the West, and the Islamic Chamber of Commerce of America, Inc.

FEDERATION OF ISLAMIC ASSOCIATIONS IN UNITED STATES AND CANADA (FIA)

820 Second Avenue, Suite 200
New York, New York 10017

President: Dawud As'ad (New Jersey)

President-elect: Nihad Hamid (Michigan)

The FIA is a nationwide umbrella organization of Muslim

communities in North America, established in 1952 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

FIA currently has about 50 member organizations. Some are local associations, such as the Islamic Society of West Virginia, which hosted FIA's 1973 convention; others are ethnic associations like the Bilalian Association of American Black Muslims. The officers of FIA reflect this geographic and ethnic diversity, although its president has usually been drawn from one specific group, the Lebanese-Syrian Muslims. The most numerous and most active members are of Lebanese, Syrian or Palestinian origin -- either recent immigrants, or, American-born children of earlier immigrants -- who have steered the FIA toward a pro-P.L.O. position. Activities are financed primarily by members' contributions and dues, and in the past two years by grants from Middle East countries and international Muslim organizations.

FIA's stated objectives are:

1. To encourage formation of local Muslim associations for religious, cultural and social purposes;
2. To explain and publicize the teachings of Islam to Muslims and non-Muslims;
3. To provide for the religious, intellectual and social needs of its member organizations and tender them with moral, legal and financial comfort.

Toward these ends, FIA recently set up new headquarters in New York, with financial help from Saudi Arabia (through Rabita, the Muslim World League). Last year, to unify the religious network, FIA assisted by the World Council of Masajid (Mosques) in Mecca, organized a Council of Masajid in the U.S. and Canada, to which approximately 32 mosques across the country already belong. In a similar move, a Council of Imams in North America was formed in 1973 "to help coordinate the activities of the various Islamic centers in North America."

Because FIA believes the North American Muslim community is facing severe problems of assimilation, mixed marriage, and dwindling numbers, education and religious training are its primary concerns. With funds raised here and abroad, plans to set up more schools and Islamic centers are under way. For example, an international Muslim organization in Jidda recently contributed \$50,000, through the Saudi Arabia Embassy to an Islamic Center in Paterson, New Jersey. (The Saudi Charge d'Affaires was present at the inaugural ceremony for this institution in late 1978.) FIA recently acquired in New York City the block between 96th and 97th Street, from Second to Third

Avenue, on which to build another Islamic Center. As of July 1978, Libya, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iraq had donated \$8 million with smaller sums pledged by the United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, Iran, Jordan and Morocco.

FIA is also working vigorously in the press and broadcast media to counter false and unfavorable public images of Muslims and Islam. With the Islamic Press Association, it has set up a committee to plan, coordinate, and organize international publicity directed to Muslim and non-Muslim organizations; it has already sponsored special programs on local TV and radio shows and launched newspapers and magazines such as the English-language Muslim Star.

These publicity programs have a political objective as well: to "fight the Zionist machine which issues anti-Islamic propaganda" and present the Muslim view of Middle East politics to a broad audience. FIA both denounces Israel regularly, and supports the P.L.O. and the Arab countries' full right to liberate their land by any means. In January 1978, FIA issued a call to President Carter to "scrutinize efforts by the Israeli lobby and Zionist alien elements that may be detrimental to the good and welfare of our United States...."

Several resolutions adopted unanimously at the July 1978 FIA Convention in West Virginia reflect this organization's political position:

1. "The FIA supports world-wide financial, technical and industrial cooperation... President Carter should prevent pressure groups from adversely affecting U.S. policy."
2. "One year of futile peace efforts and Zionist intransigence is enough... The U.S. should go back to the U.N. forum..."
3. "President Sadat of Egypt did the maximum to promote peace in the Middle East. But Israeli intransigence and our soft handling frustrated this and enabled the expansionist Zionist regime to invade Lebanon and destroy hundreds of villages..."
4. "The FIA supports all American minorities, especially American Indians..."³

-
3. *A visitor from Canada delivered a progress report on his attempts to bring Islam to Canadian Indians. He considered them prime prospects for conversion and potential support of the Muslim -- meaning Arab -- cause.*

5. The FIA is opposed to the arms race... we call upon President Carter to conclude the SALT talks..."
6. The FIA is against all forms of racism, Nazism and Zionism, especially as practiced in South Africa and Palestine.
7. The FIA supports all Muslims everywhere."

Convention proposals for future political activities included letter-writing campaigns to protest Israeli "intransigence" and the plight of the Palestinians; the use of influential individuals and citizens groups to counteract Jewish power and the "Jewish lobby" in Washington; and the formation of a Muslim "Anti-Defamation League."

MUSLIM STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION OF THE U.S. AND CANADA (MSA)
P.O. Box 38
Plainfield, Indiana 46168

President: Rabie Hasan Ahmad

The MSA has been called the largest Muslim organization in the United States, though the number of members is not known. Subscribers to MSA publications (Al-Ittihad and Islamic Horizons) number 6,000 but the group claims to have 35,000 members and 190 chapters in North America. In any case, MSA is one of the most important groups, because its members are active, highly educated and, for the most part, Arab. It was founded in 1963 to help students adjust to life in the U.S. and at the same time keep their traditions and beliefs. Until 1967, this remained its main focus, but since then, Muslims of all occupations, backgrounds and professions have joined. Today approximately 60% of the members are working professionals, and three professional associations are affiliated with MSA.⁴ The

-
4. *The Islamic Medical Association; The Association of Muslim Social Scientists, devoted to research and development of a Muslim position in the social sciences; and the Association of Muslim Scientists and Engineers of North America, whose goals are to pool available talent and help the development of Muslim countries and peoples in Africa and Asia. All three organizations put out newsletters and publications of their own such as Muslim Scientist and Directory of Muslim Scientists and Engineers.*

organization's objectives, though still religious, cultural, educational and social, are now geared to the Muslim community at large rather than just to students.

MSA is a founding member of the International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations. As such, it participates in international conferences in the Middle East and Europe. Members of its staff go abroad on propaganda missions; delegates from Muslim countries participate in MSA's annual convention and speak in communities throughout the country. Recent activities have emphasized Islamic traditions and ideas; for example, many seminars are devoted to the ideal Muslim family.

Financial support for MSA's academic and religious activities comes from members' contributions and donations from Middle Eastern countries. In 1976, MSA bought 124 acres of land near Indianapolis for new headquarters and for a future Islamic Center of North America; a large part of the purchase price of \$375,000 came from the Middle East. (As of October 1977 the building of the center had not started, because of zoning problems.) Similarly, in 1977, more than \$395,000 was contributed towards operating costs by Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates; the largest share, about \$250,000, came from Saudi Arabia. Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia also offer scholarships to MSA and advertise for needed academic and professional personnel in its publications.

Since 1973, the U.S. has seen a big increase in the number of students from the Middle East, primarily from oil-rich countries seeking technical and managerial skills. Probably for this reason, MSA's two publications have printed more attacks on Israel, Zionism and Jews since 1973 than before. But even before the war of 1973, an annual convention adopted a resolution calling for a jihad (holy war): "Jihad is the only way to liberate occupied Muslim countries and, therefore, we support all Islamic liberation movements and struggles of Muslims in Palestine and Iran." During the October war, MSA formed a special Action Committee for the Middle East. Recently, Islamic Horizons has run a series of articles on Jewish influence in the U.S., which contended, "[The Jews'] ability to exploit media and to manipulate the political apparatus of both the Democrats and Republicans in and outside the corridors of power is beyond doubt. So powerful is their hold on the public opinion that those who oppose Israel's policies in the Middle East could be counted on fingers."

THE WORLD COMMUNITY OF ISLAM IN THE WEST (WCIW)
(Formerly the Black Muslims; also known as Bilalian Muslim
Organization)
7531 South Stony Island Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60649

Chief Imam: Wallace D. Muhammad

The Black Muslim movement began as the "Lost-Found Nation of Islam," "rediscovered" in the 1930s among American blacks. It was started by W. D. Fard, a peddler of unknown origin, who began teaching the "true" origins of blacks and their "true" religion, which resembled Islam, in the black ghetto of Detroit. His teachings grew into black nationalism.

In 1934, Fard disappeared without a trace. His most trusted student and follower, Elijah (Poole) Muhammad, took over and continued the established tradition teaching that the black is the original human, that whites are devils, that black Muslims must change their slave names and avoid certain foods. However, Elijah introduced a new slant: He claimed that Fard was Allah and he himself was Allah's prophet. This is heresy, according to orthodox Sunni doctrine, which proclaims that there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet. As a result, the movement split; those members who refused to accept Fard as Allah formed their own organization, the Hanafi Muslim Movement.

The two groups have occasionally clashed; during 1973-74, in Washington, several persons were killed, and the quarrels surfaced again in the years that followed. But since 1975, when Muhammad died and was replaced by his son, Wallace Muhammad, things have quieted down and the organization has moved closer to orthodox Sunni Islam.

The WCIW (or Bilalian Muslim Organization) is now considered the most important black nationalist movement in the U.S. and emphasizes this aspect, rather than its Muslim character. The organization maintains a nationwide network of mosques and schools, which is totally separate from other Muslim institutions. There are about 140 mosques at present, and plans are afoot to build more, with monetary aid from Middle East countries. The Black Muslim organization owns stores, restaurants, apartment houses, a bank, a publishing company which prints the country's largest black newspaper, Bilalian News, and 15,000 acres of farmland in three states. The value of properties held by them was estimated at fully \$70 million in 1973, but the organization then suffered from lack of cash flow and of technical and managerial skills.

During most of its existence, WCIW was shunned by orthodox

Muslims and in turn shunned orthodoxy. The Black Muslims barred Arab and other ethnic Muslims from their temples and frowned on intermarriage with them. (Such marriages are in fact unheard-of.) Contributions from Middle Eastern countries were neither sought nor offered. But since Wallace Muhammad succeeded his father, there have been changes.

Negotiations with Arab countries to get money began in 1973; they were not successful while Elijah was alive because of the strife and killings within the group, and because of its all-black philosophy. Today, however, Black Muslims feel a strong affinity and identification with Muslims throughout the world; Bilalian News now offers a regular feature on the Qur'an and the Arabic language. Black Muslim philosophy has moved closer to traditional Islam, which makes it more acceptable to the Arab countries. Since 1976, "Bilalians" have participated in events at the Islamic Center in Washington, primarily an Arab Muslim institution. They took part in the 1978 convention of FIA, though not recognized by that body. And the money has started to come in: Libya has loaned WCIW several million dollars to finance new mosques and schools; Saudi Arabia -- the most orthodox and conservative Muslim country -- now offers scholarships to Bilalian students and has offered several million dollars to help finance a proposed \$15 million mosque on Chicago's South Side.

WCIW has abandoned most of its original racial and religious ideology. Black Muslims are now very active in setting up schools to teach the fundamentals of Islam, with texts and educational aids from the Middle East. They engage in missionary activities in the black community, and the number of converts to Islam in the U.S. has increased greatly thanks to their efforts. Their distinctive dress and their upright, moral behavior are important attractions in proselytizing. In their religious zeal and strict approach to Islamic law (especially with regard to dress, behavior and prayer), they share common goals with Muslims in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Clearly, both of these countries will work closely with the WCIW in their efforts to bolster Muslim minorities throughout the world and to impose one version of Islam on all of them. (For example, Rabita has recently held training seminars for Bilalian imams).

WCIW is somewhat ambivalent, usually hostile, toward Judaism and Jews. Though recognizing the similarity of religious beliefs and practices and a common history of persecution, Black Muslims still tend to see American Jews as members of the "race of devils," and Israeli Jews as enemies of their brother Muslims in the Middle East. Wallace Muhammad calls for cooperation among American Muslims, Jews and Christians in the fight against poverty and discrimination, but follows the Arab Muslim line

with regard to Israel. Bilalian News recently put the blame for stalled peace negotiations on Israeli "intransigence" and "expansionism," declaring: "The State of Israel came about when Zionist Jews, using terror and deceit, forced the Palestinians out of Palestine in 1948." With the money from Middle Eastern Muslim countries, certain political and theological influences are evidently coming in.

The rival Hanafi group is much smaller than WCIW, with a membership estimated at 1,000. Whereas WCIW attracts poor people, and recruits and rehabilitates pimps, prostitutes and prison inmates, the Hanafis are middle class. Their Chief Imam, Hamaas Abdul Khaalis, in 1958, broke with the Nation of Islam, which he felt had abandoned its commitment to orthodox Sunni Islam. But aside from theological disputes and personal grievances, there are no major differences between the two organizations. The Hanafis, too, have generally rejected the racial doctrine of the early Black Muslim movement, but believe strongly in defending their faith against "the enemies of Islam."

In March 1977, with a group of 11 armed Hanafi Muslims, Khaalis took over the District of Columbia Building, the Islamic Center and B'nai B'rith Headquarters in Washington, leading the attack on B'nai B'rith himself. During a 39-hour siege, the 116 Jewish hostages were physically assaulted, threatened and subjected to Khaalis' anti-Semitic tirades. "Zionist-Jews," he said, were a world conspiracy against which he was waging holy war as a "soldier of Allah." By the time all the takeovers ended, fortunately without a shoot-out, one black reporter had been killed and another man paralyzed by gunfire. Khaalis, who along with his associates was convicted of second-degree murder and kidnapping, was sentenced to a minimum of 41 years in prison. The case is still being appealed.

A third group, the Islamic Party in North America, has recently emerged: A Sunni Muslim organization, consisting mostly of blacks and decidedly opposed to WCIW. The Islamic Party engages mainly in social welfare activities such as distributing food to the need and running a Prison Work Unit, promotes conversion to Islam among poor blacks, and publishes a magazine Al-Islam.

ISLAMIC CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF AMERICA, INC.

P.O. Box 484

Lenox Hill Station

New York, New York 10021

Director and Founder: Mehmet Alisan Dobra

In May 1976, an International Federation of Islamic Chambers of Commerce was formed to aid Muslim businessmen, with the help and encouragement of the Islamic Conference (of Foreign Ministers) in Istanbul and the Muslim World League (Rabita). The Federation, in turn, decided to organize on the North American continent. To this end, new organizations were formed, among them the first Islamic Chamber of Commerce of America.

The Chamber's Board of Directors is composed entirely of Muslims who have been active in Muslim government and business circles. They are:

1. Alisan Dobra: President of Trans-Orient Marine Corporation of New York; shipping agent for the Government of the Sudan; Honorary Commercial Attache of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen; foreign trade advisor to the World Community of Islam in the West; Director and Vice President of the U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce.
2. Raymond Sharrieff: Chairman of the Board of Islamic Overseas Corp. of America in Delaware (Isloca); former Minister of Justice, World Community of Islam in the West.
3. Adil Araboglu: President of the Crescent group of companies of Washington; Honorary Consul General of Tunisia in Maryland; and Public Law 480 agent for the governments of Tunisia and Afghanistan (a U.S. aid program under which countries pay for food and other goods with books and their domestic products).

The objectives of the Islamic Chamber of Commerce are:

1. To facilitate, develop and maintain financial and economic relations among Muslim businessmen in the United States and Canada, as well as with Muslim countries, with the help of the Islamic Conference in Jidda.
2. To explore the business potential of the Muslim community in the United States with respect to international trade with Muslim countries, assistance and advice to Muslim immigrants, and protection of Muslim economic interests in the United States.

The Chamber has raised specific questions about discrimination against Muslims in the letting of U.S. Government contracts, unfair hiring practices of American firms, and restrictions and embargoes directed against Muslims. In addition, the Chamber intends to focus on the role American Muslims can play in Middle East trade: through establishment of a Muslim bank, preferential treatment in trading with the Middle East, and hiring Muslim labor for work on contracts in Muslim countries.

Several concrete proposals are currently being considered by the Chamber. The last week of September 1978 was designated Muslim Trade Week, and reportedly meetings were held at the Turkish Center in New York. The Chamber plans to send an all-Muslim trade mission to Muslim countries some time in 1979; it will also set up contacts with a view to establishing branches all over the U.S. and Canada.

AMERICAN JEWISH
ARCHIVES



This is Jewish perspective, a program designed to share information about important trends of interest in the Jewish community.

- Israel Egypt / Muslims in U.S.
- Dr. Riffat Hassan, prof of relig, Univ of Louisville
- Iran / Pluralism
- women

Be with us with next ~~series~~ program in Jan Prep

M.

Abdul-Egypt

Khan- Algharmer in India

Iqbal-

Selfcriticism
Loa Suras



Single copy 50¢

Quantity prices on request

cc: Rabbi A. James Rudin
Susie Schub
Eugene Du Bow

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date January 16, 1979
to Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum
from Adam Simms
subject "Islam and Violence Among Nations"

I think you will be interested in the attached draft of the paper presented by Fazlur Rahman, of the University of Chicago, presented to a colloquium of the Chicago Institute for Interreligious Research last May.

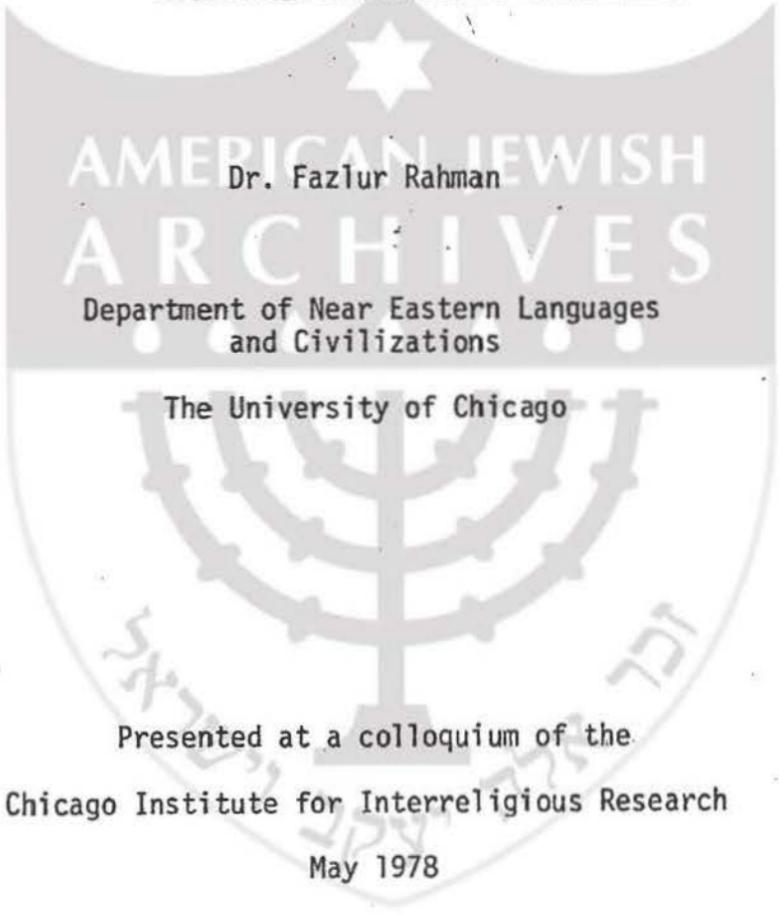
(Dr. Rahman submitted a ms. last month, and the ts. draft was completed this week by our office.)

As I have noted previously about Dr. Rahman, he appears to be an excellent candidate for cultivation. For one, he has an excellent academic reputation and draws graduate students from around the world to study at Chicago. For another, he has become something of a star among local Jewish audiences. After his participation at the CIIR, he received and accepted an invitation to speak before the Niles (IL) Township Jewish Congregation, and was the lead-off speaker for our Chapter's Arab Seminar this autumn.

Best regards.

Adam

ISLAM AND VIOLENCE AMONG NATIONS



Dr. Fazlur Rahman

AMERICAN JEWISH
ARCHIVES

Department of Near Eastern Languages
and Civilizations

The University of Chicago

Presented at a colloquium of the
Chicago Institute for Interreligious Research

May 1978

ISLAM AND VIOLENCE AMONG NATIONS

The background of the origin of Islam in Mecca in the early seventh century A.C. is hardly known to the world, although it seems indispensable for an adequate understanding of the nature of the Islamic movement as it was led by the Prophet Muhammed. Even the Muslims themselves have forgotten much of this background. It appears from the Qur'an that Muhammed was deeply troubled by certain problems in his society (which, it must be remembered, was a commercial society) and carried a "burden which was breaking your back" (94,1-3). There are two problems that are underlined in the early Suras (chapters) of the Qur'an, one concerning the idolatry of the Meccans and Arabs in general and the other concerning certain commercial malpractices, exploitation of the weaker and disenfranchised classes and an ugly socio-economic disparity between the rich and the poor. It is known that before his Call, Muhammed used to frequent the Cave of Hira [? - spelling] in the north of Mecca to pray to God about a solution of these and other problems and to contemplate. It was in one of these contemplative moods that Revelation came to him. When, however, ^{invited} he/~~visited~~ the Meccans to give up polytheism and to remove the stark socio-economic disparity in their society, they rejected him because both of these reforms hit directly at their vested interests (for his large and powerful tribe of Quraish were also in charge of the pagan religious cult besides being traders).

The Qur'an then warned the Meccans of a Day of Judgement when every individual will be answerable for his/her deeds, when

deed-sheets will be weighed - good against bad - and when nobody will be protected by his clan, tribe, friends or intercessors. A little later the Qur'an introduces another judgement-theme, the "judgement in history" and begins to dilate on the fate of certain earlier nations which did not mend their evil ways despite the summons to them of their "prophets" and good men and were hence destroyed. It interestingly repeats that peace and prosperity are great blessings of God but that nations forfeit such life when they misuse it and that, therefore, this life of peace and prosperity is both a blessing and a trial. It emphasizes that when nations go under, even these "good" men are enveloped by the same fate who had been passive and only those survive or are "delivered" from punishment who had actively protested against and opposed evil (11, 116; cf. also 5, 63). This undoubtedly encouraged the Prophet himself to remain steadfast in his protracted and painful struggle that lasted for nearly twenty-three years.

During this struggle, the basic theology, rituals and the ethico-social doctrine of the Qur'an gradually unfolded themselves. There is one and unique God, the creator and sustainer of the universe who created the world out of His sheer mercy; He alone deserves service and worship, the worst sin being to "associate any partner with Him." When He creates something, He also puts its amr [?-spelling] or command and its hidayn [?-spelling] into it; i.e., the laws of its behaviour whereby it fits into the rest of the universe to form a well-knit and firm system wherein "there is no [spelling?] _____ and no gap". The universe is,

therefore, autonomous since its laws are ingrained into it, but it is not autocratic or absolute since it points to a creator beyond itself: it is the greatest "sign" or miracle of God. Yet, man is so immersed in his immediate visible environment that he mostly does not see God in nature and becomes aware of Him only in his helplessness and in the failure of natural causes. When a ship is sailing smoothly and the sea is calm and winds favorable, man is apt "to forget" God, but when a storm suddenly ~~breaks~~ brews and angry waves strike the ship, man turns to God and asks His help, but "when He delivers them safely to the land, lo! they again begin to assign partners to Him" (29, 65). And yet, this universe is only a finite being while God and God alone is truly infinite.

All the faults and failures of man actually arise from his pettiness, narrowness of his mind and almost unmitigated selfishness: "Man, by nature, is unstable; when evil hits him he panics but ~~when~~ when good things come his way, he prevents them from reaching others" (70, 19). "If you were to possess the treasures of the mercy of my Lord, you would still withhold from spending them [on others] out of fear [of impoverishment]" (17, 100). It is Satan who whispers into the minds of people that if they were to spend of their possessions for the sake of the needy, they would be impoverished; God, on the other hand, promises well-being and prosperity for such investment (which the Qur'an often calls "establishing credit with God") (2, 268). The real and only remedy, then is for man to transcend his selfish and narrow interests for they are not his real interests, and to develop

a long range vision and to have the "end of things" in view. In fact, the Qur'anic teaching on the Day of Judgement essentially centers on this point, viz. "to send forth something for the morrow", words which occur so frequently in the Qur'an. Purely materialistic gods tend to obscure these long-range and higher goals and make man necessarily short-sighted, and in its critique of the Meccan businessmen it says, "they know the externalities of the worldly life but are heedless of the higher ends [of life]" (30, 7); "This is the height of their knowledge" (53, 30).

The goal the Qur'an sets for mankind is to establish an ethically based viable social order where the good will be ~~enjoined~~ [_____ ? _____] and evil prohibited. This was the task defined for the Muslim community which is described as the "Middle Community" and the best community brought out for mankind: "Those who, if we give them power on the earth, shall establish prayers, pay the Zakat-tax (i.e., the welfare tax), and command good and prohibit evil" (22, 41). But such a moral-social order cannot be established without the eradication of what the Qur'an constantly calls "corruption on the earth" which is [? _____] means all the negative tendencies in man but at the center of which stands the selfishness and narrowness of the mind spoken of above - be it at its individual, group, class or national level. Under all circumstances, justice and fair-play must be done and Muslims are warned not to resort to unfairness even towards their (erstwhile) enemies; "Let not the enmity of a people determine you to be unjust towards them -- be fair for it; nearest

to taqwa (piety) (5, 8; also, 5, 3).

This "corruption on the earth" can take various forms but its essence, then, is injustice of some kind or the other. But what makes the task of "reforming the earth" is not just the conscious rebelliousness and deliberate stubbornness of man but also, and more so, the self-deception of man as to his purposes and real motivation. Wanton destruction of human life and of the means of human sustenance is often there for men often resort to foolish transgression when they think their pride has been hurt, "When it is said to him 'fear God', his exaggerated pride leads him to commit follies" (2, 206); "When he turns his back [upon admonition], he [?] ?] on the earth, sowing corruption and destroying crops and life, while God does not approve of corruption" (2, 205; cf., 5, 64). But much more subtle and consequently far more dangerous are the corrosive acids of self-righteousness: "When it is said to them 'do not sow corruption on the earth', they say 'We are only trying to reform'. Beware! these are the ones who corrupt but they do not understand." (2, 11-12) It is in this connection that the Qur'an speaks of the "lightness" and "weightiness" of deeds and that "in the end" or "on the Day of Judgement" actions that seem very significant and weighty in the immediate perspective, will simply "lose all weight" and "shall vanish." "Say: shall we tell you about those who are the greatest losers in terms of [the consequences] of their actions? [It is] those whose endeavors have got lost in the immediate [material] life of this world

but who all the same think they have made great achievements" (18, 103-104).

While, therefore, it is absolutely necessary to actively resist evil -- as we shall elaborate presently -- it is equally necessary that those who resist injustice think well whether themselves are not transgressors. It is to this end of proper self-examination and assessment that the Qur'an develops its key term "taqwa" which we have translated above sometimes as "piety" and sometimes "fear of God". Taqwa actually is a state of mind that tells you what is right and wrong in a situation and provides the necessary motivation for choosing the right -- in order to avoid the evil consequences of a wrong choice. It is that indispensable instrument without which man cannot see the right from the wrong, let alone choose right over the wrong. Only when this inner perception has been developed adequately can a person or a people undertake resistance to evil and "restore the earth" to a state of justice. Indeed, after the development of such perception, man must, and, in fact, is compelled to undertake this task.

The Qur'an often speaks as though God chooses certain peoples at certain times for this task, because of certain qualities developed by those peoples for this task. We have spoken above of the fact that the Qur'an had called Muslims "the best community brought forth for mankind" because, when they achieve power on the earth, they would do so and so. This "choice", therefore, has nothing unconditional about it and the Qur'an is recurrently and abundantly clear that no people is indispensable for God's purposes and that no community may lay

proprietary claims to God: in fact, it was such claims made by Jews and Christians that made the Qur'an declare that "Guidance is God's guidance" and not that of Jews and Christians (2, 120); further, "Jews say Christians have nothing to stand on and Christians say Jews have nothing to stand on -- yet, they recite the same book" (2, 113). For the Qur'an, in fact, divine guidance is a universal phenomenon and no people has been left without it (35, 24; 13, 7).

But the same Qur'an that told Muslims that they were the "median" and the "best" community told them also that they had to live up to it and that they cannot take God for granted: "If you turn your backs [upon this teaching], God will substitute another people for you and they will not be like you" (47, 38; also, 5, 54). By the same token the Qur'an strenuously rejects Jewish claims of election while affirming that God had blessed them with his Messengers, above all Abraham: "[God] said to Abraham: I am going to appoint you leader over men; he said: And from my progeny? God replied: My promise does not extend to the unjust ones." (2, 124). When the Muslim community later tried to claim "immunity from error" through Hadith (the putative reports of the Prophet's sayings and deeds), it did so in spite of the Qur'an for which there is nothing more arrogant for a community than to claim to have God on its side as a matter of course.

Resistance to obvious injustices is patently sanctioned by the Qur'an and is called by the now well-known term Jihad. when the Qur'an sanctioned Jihad for the first time about a year and a half after the immigration of Muslims and the Prophet himself

from Mecca to Madina, its purpose was explicitly described as redressing of the wrong inflicted upon Muslims by the pagan Arabs in expelling the former from their homes and properties in Mecca: "God will defend those who are Believers [for] God is no friend of treacherous disbelievers. [Jihad] is now allowed for those who fight because they have been wronged -- and God is, indeed, powerful enough to help them. Those who have been expelled from their homes and properties without any just cause -- except that they said that God is our Lord. But for the fact that God causes some people to resist and crush [? - correct word?] others, churches and synagogues and places of worship and mosques -- wherein God's name is frequently mentioned -- will surely be destroyed..." (22, 38 - 40).

Contrary to the prevalent view in the West, Jihad is a general term covering a variety of closely related phenomena and does not mean only "war". In the late Meccan period of the Qur'an, at a time when a general persecution of the Muslims started, the Qur'an at best allows mere retaliation for aggression: "If you punish, then retaliate only to the extent that you have been punished -- but if you be patient [and do not even retaliate], patience is better for you" (16, 126). A little later, however, when still in Mecca, under the pressure of persecution, some weaker ones cave in, we have the following, "Do people think that they will be let go simply by making the statement 'We believe' and that they will not be put on trial? We put on trial earlier peoples too, so that God must know who are

steadfast in their belief and those who are liars. Or, do those who perpetrate evil think that they are going to outstrip us? -- Evil is what they judge!...Whosoever does Jihad, he only does it for himself, for God is independent of the whole world" (29, 1-6). The high point is reached when a general state of war is proclaimed against pagan Arabs and Muslims are warned, "Say [O Muhammed!], if your fathers and your sons and your brothers and your wives and your clans and the wealth you have accumulated and the trade of whose decline you are fearful and the homes you are so pleased with -- if all these are dearer to you than God and His Messenger and waging Jihad in His cause, then wait until God brings down His decision, and God guides not an unrighteous people" (9, 24).

As the passage 22, 38-40 quoted above clearly shows, Jihad's primary function is to defend human right, particularly the right of freedom of belief and religion, but also ~~the~~ considerations of social and economic justice which, as said at the beginning of this paper, were largely responsible for the genesis of the Islamic movement. Jihad, therefore, is liberation struggle par excellence -- liberation from bondage and of deprivation of rights in general. It is interesting that just as Jihad was formally launched about fourteen centuries ago permitting these Meccan Muslims who had been forced out of their homes and properties, the same story was repeated in the twentieth century when Muslim freedom-movements successfully used the instrument of Jihad to liberate their countries from Western colonial rule. What is even more interesting and significant is

the fact that these freedom-movements used Jihad even when these movements themselves were not religious and some of them were patently and declaredly secular -- like, for example, the Algerian liberation struggle, where 10 % of the population was lost [? - correct word?] fighting against the French. Further, most leaders of these movements themselves acknowledge the efficacy of Jihad: in 1962, the Tunisian ambassador in Cairo told the present writer, "But for [the principle of] Jihad, we would have been completely finished [i.e., by the French]." Some other movements, like the Morroccan liberation movement had, in any case, certain strong religious features and the Istiqlal [? - spelling?] Party of Moroco had decidedly religious leadership.

What explains this apparent paradox is that Islam looks upon the restoration [?] of the rights of deprived peoples as a sacred task in itself. Hence violence for the sake of violence and wanton destruction of life is incompatible with the principle of Jihad, since this principle itself came into being in order to stop violence. In strict doctrine and according to the requirements of Islamic law, the only resort to war is allowed in the form of Jihad and any war undertaken for sheer territorial gain is categorically unlawful. Further, the Jihad has certain definite rules according to which it must be constructed. Destruction of property and particularly that of crops and cattle is not allowed. The killing of children, (non-fighting) women, the old and the rich and of priests and other religious personnel is prohibited. Early legal schools of Islamic law discussed the question whether, if the enemies,

during active hostilities, shield themselves with women and children, it is permissible to shoot at them, and while there is a difference of opinion on this, the majority of the priests disallow this. An unarmed man may not be killed even if he is actively engaged in armed hostility.

Above all, Jihad is never waged against individuals but against organized powers, i.e., states. It follows necessarily from this that acts of terrorism, like hijacking of airplanes carrying innocent people and taking or threatening their lives would be criminal according to Islam. To do this is to invite Jihad against oneself. In practice, however, people can be driven to desperation if their rights are ruthlessly and persistently trampled upon and they may and, in fact, will resort to desperate acts which strict law does not sanction. This is quite a separate matter and passing judgement upon desperados; the extent to which they have been wronged and the nature of the wrong itself have to be taken into due account. The international scene let alone, we know only too well that the people of a country can take up arms against their own ruling people. In Islam, armed rebellion is strongly discouraged and yet civil wars and rebellions against governments are not among our rare experiences. Certain Muslim jurists, like the eleventh century Ibn Hazm [?] of Spain, think that if a government persistently ignores the basic needs of its masses and neglects to provide them with food, clothing and shelter, it becomes incumbent upon such have-nots to take the law into their own hands and wrest these things from those that have them in surplus - for if the masses do not do this and

die of starvation etc, they would be guilty of suicide!

This is undoubtedly an extreme position to take and, of course, the majority of the Muslim lawyers do not hold this view. Nevertheless, such phenomena underline the truth that, besides the logic of reason, there is also the logic of brute facts and that facts themselves have to be brought in conformity with reason. There is no doubt in the mind of this writer that should the Arab-Israeli question be settled justly and _____ [?] [?] with mutual trust - for there is no denying the fact that the basic source of the trouble is arising out of lack of real and effective communication and understanding due to lack of mutual confidence -, the two sides can not only co-exist, but exist in cooperation. It may well, of course, be that certain individuals who have become habituated to desperate acts of international terrorism, will continue to do so for some time to come (although recently such incidents have become much less frequent), but there is also no doubt that the world opinion does tell effectively in the long run if not in the short run.

Indeed, there are in Islam itself normative factors making for peace. The very fact that the Qur'an emphasizes the eradication of "corruption on the earth" means that warfare and feuding must be removed. The Qur'an sets very high value on peace and prosperity and considers them among the great blessings of God: "How about the fact that the Quraish (i.e., the tribe of Muhammad) have got so habituated to their trade-journeys of the winter [to the Indian Ocean] and the summer [to Byzantium] ? Let them, then, serve the [one] Lord of this House (i.e., the

Ka'ha Sanctuary) Who feeds them that they do not starve and Who has given them peace that there is no fighting (i.e., in Mecca)." (106, 1 - 4). Time and again the Qur'an reminds people that peace and plenty are the great favors of God (16, 112; 15, 82; 28, 57; 29, 67, etc.) and that to misuse them precisely constitutes the corruption of the earth. The original meaning of the term "Islam" itself (which technically means "surrender to God"), is to be whole, integral and of one piece as opposed to splitting and disintegration. The Qur'an, in fact, calls Muslims for general peace, "O you Faithful! enter all of you into peace" (2, 208) and asks them to hasten to peace "if the other party does so".

To the "People of the Book", (8, 61) in particular /i.e., Jews and Christians, Islam issued a call not only for peace but for cooperation fourteen centuries ago through the Qur'an: "O People of the Book! let us come to a platform (or a formula) that is common between us - that we shall not serve any except God and shall not associate anyone with Him..." (3, 64). This purely religious cooperation has unfortunately never come about in the past, but there certainly has been a great deal of cultural and scientific cooperation, bordering on theology as well. Not only did Muslims, Jews and Christians often work together in Baghdad and other Eastern cultural centers of the Islamic Caliphate, but what happened in Spain during Muslim rule offers us an unprecedented example of the flowering of an intellectual and scientific culture wherein Muslims, Jews and Christians freely and unstintingly participated. Most Jewish philosophers in the medieval period wrote philosophy in

Arabic, the most famous example being Miamonides' "Guide of the Perplexed". In this remarkable work Maimonides discusses, among other things, the doctrine of Prophethood which, after the fashion of al-Farabi [?] and Ibn Sima [?], he interprets as combining the highest pinnacle of intellectual development with a strong power of imagination. This is but one example among many of a common fund of thought created by followers of all three religions. It has also to be remembered that this intellectual output is not just secular, but is shot through with religious ideas and motifs which were the hall-mark of the religio-philosophical interpretation of the universe linked closely with the Scriptures of the three religious traditions. The echos of this "golden period of Spain" have been frequent in later history and are so patently present in the writings of the Jewish British Minister Disraeli who looks upon this period of Jewish history with great nostalgia.

One must not minimize, of course, the current bitterness in the Middle East and the present situation must be appraised realistically. But it remains a fact that the nature of the present animosity between Arabs and Israel is political and requires a political solution. But in the search for this solution - which must be just and reasonable - both religion and much of history can give considerable help. Religion and history pointing to common roots, common experiences, and a good deal of common heritage and, above all, common values, can help lessen fanaticism and tension under whose clouds the distinction between right and wrong, reasonable and unreasonable, harmful and beneficial, the immediacy of emotion and the farsightedness of purposiveness, can so easily be blurred.