

# **CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS**

**CHALLENGING ISLAMOPHOBIA:  
THE ROLE OF CIVIC AND FAITH GROUPS IN COMBATING ANTI-MUSLIM HATE  
SPEECH AND CRIMES**

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SALLY STEENLAND: Good afternoon. Welcome to the Center for American Progress. My name is Sally Steenland and I'm the director of the Faith and Progressive Policy Initiative at the Center for American Progress. I'd like to welcome you all on this rainy day to today's event, "Challenging Islamophobia: The Role of Civic and Faith Groups in Combating Anti-Muslim Hate Speech and Crimes."

We have a terrific panel of experts with us today who will talk about a variety of things: the dangerous spike in anti-Muslim hate speech and crimes that we've witnessed over these past several months. They'll discuss what's fueling it, who's pushing it and what their goal is. They'll also examine the many ways that civic and faith groups are combating Islamophobia and how their work is a truer reflection of America's values.

Our panelists will explore the global consequences of Islamophobia and they will discuss how we need to change the narrative in order to affect policy debates and help shape public attitudes and beliefs.

Before we get started, I'd like to very quickly introduce our panelists and our moderator. Wajahat Ali is a playwright, essayist, humorist and attorney. His play, "The Domestic Crusaders", is one of the first major plays about Muslims living in a post-9/11 world. It's sharp, funny and incredibly moving. Wajahat is an associate editor of Altmuslimah and GoatMilk, his personal blog – oops, Altmuslim, I gave him the wrong one – and GoatMilk, his personal blog and a frequent contributor to the Washington Post, The Huffington Post, Salon, The Guardian and more. Wajahat practices law in the Bay Area in California. And one more thing – he is currently writing an HBO pilot with Dave Eggers for a proposed TV series that features a Muslim American main character.

Haris Tarin is director of the Washington office of the Muslim Public Affairs Council. Haris has been active in Muslim communities for over 10 years and has spoken on Muslim American identity and civic engagement at many conferences, media outlets and symposiums throughout the United States, the Middle East and Europe. At MPAC, Haris has played an influential role in the national grassroots campaign to fight terrorism. Haris was also a first responder to the disaster zone in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Rev. Chloe Breyer is the executive director of the Interfaith Center of New York and an Episcopal priest in the Dioceses of New York. Chloe's extensive interfaith work includes her founding and directing the Cathedral Forums on Religion and Public Life. Chloe helped rebuild a mosque in Afghanistan and has worked with the organization 0/11 Families for a Peaceful tomorrow. Chloe was also one of hundreds of religious leaders who ministered to victims and their families at the site of the World Trade Center right after 9/11.

Ken Gude is the managing director of the National Security and International Policy Program at CAP. Before coming to CAP, Ken was a policy analyst at the Center for National

Security Studies, where he focused on post-9/11 civil liberties issues. He had stints at the Council on Foreign Relations and the British Labour Party, where he served as a policy officer working on the campaign against the privatization of British Rail. Ken has been published in The L.A. Times and many other places and has contributed to the book, "Protecting Democracy: International Responses".

Last but certainly not least, our moderator, Faiz Shakir, is a vice president at CAP and editor-in-chief of Think Progress and The Progress Report, two of CAP's most influential and successful products. Faiz worked as a research associate for the Democratic National Committee, was a legislative aide to Sen. Bob Graham on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee and a communications aide in the White House Office of National Drug Policy. Faiz has been published in numerous journals, papers, media outlets and you've probably seen him on his many media appearances. He's been on MSNBC, CNN, FOX News and CNBC and also has been a guest on many radio shows.

So we've got a lot to talk about and let's get started. So please join me in welcoming our panel. (Applause.)

FAIZ SHAKIR: Thank you, Sally. Again, my name is Faiz Shakir. I'm a vice president here at CAP and editor-in-chief of Think Progress, our blog. I want to thank Sally for her work in assembling this panel. It'll be an interesting conversation. Sally has been at the forefront of leading a project here at CAP on raising the voices of American Muslims, moderate American Muslims, as an effort to try to counter the hate narratives that we've seen from the other side and we have had an ongoing project here at CAP of trying to separate real from perceived threats.

Back in July, we had a conversation here. I moderated a panel with Rashad Hussain, who is President Obama's envoy to the Organization for Islamic Conferences, with Pradeep Ramamurthy, who's on his National Security Council, to talk about the real threats and today we want to try to discuss perhaps a little bit of the other side, which is some of the hatemongering and the Islamophobia, as we discuss here today.

This is Ken Gude. You've heard all the introductions, so just so you all know, this is Ken Gude. This is Rev. Chloe Breyer, Haris Tarin from MPAC and Wajahat Ali. So I'll begin the conversation by talking about a conversation that actually occurred yesterday on ABC's This Week. I don't know how many of you watched it with Christiane Amanpour and it was a discussion about – if I remember the question framed correctly was should Americans be afraid of Islam and she had a wide ranging debate. I'm going to answer that and say no.

So I will reframe that question and ask maybe Wajahat to begin. Why are Americans afraid of Islam? Before I came out here we were writing a blog post about the Murfreesboro mosque in Tennessee and one of the arguments of the mosque's opponents is that Islam is actually not a religion. It's a political movement and therefore they shouldn't get to build any houses of worship. So there's the underlying fear. It's coming not only from just ordinary people but from lawyers in courtrooms. Where's it coming from?

WAJAHAT ALI: I think one of the most fascinating statistics which I am always amazed by is that 60 percent – they say 50 to 60 percent of Americans don't know a Muslim. I think this is fascinating. They don't know a Muslim. They don't have a Muslim friend. They don't have any Muslim they can talk to about Islam and we have to remember that Islam doesn't speak. Muslims do. So I always say this. If I was a regular average Joe six-pack-drinking – I don't drink, but suppose I did – six-pack-drinking American and I don't know any Muslim and I was to see history, recent history, I would be terrified of Muslims. I will admit this. I would be terrified of Muslims.

Why would I be terrified of Muslims? I don't know a Muslim. I haven't gone to a Middle Eastern country. I haven't gone to Indonesia, which, by the way, is the country with the most Muslim population right now. I haven't been taught too much about Islam because I'm the product of American school system. I see Faisal Shahzad, a brown-looking, bearded man who seems angry trying to blow up a van in Times Square. I see 19 hijackers bring down the two towers. Anytime I hear about Islam and Muslims – violence, terrorism or Rage Boy, and Rage Boy is the media term of the angry anti-American brown-skinned, bearded man shouting at the camera, usually burning an American flag.

So if I see a story and I see a story of Islam filled with characters who are called Muslims – angry, violent, reactionary, anti-American, anti-Semitic, burqa-clad women trying to impose Sharia apparently – whatever that means – I would be terrified. I would be scared. I honestly would be. I honestly would be terrified and scared out of my mind.

Now, you have 60 percent of Americans who don't know anything about Islam. You have national tragedies which kill nearly 3,000 citizens, U.S. citizens, and you have nine years where a national conversation has not honestly happened; where people have not really honestly, openly discussed the fears, the thoughts of, if you will, doubt that exist about Muslim Americans outwardly in the open. So you have a catalyst such as the Ground Zero mosque, which is not at Ground Zero and not a mosque, but we can discuss that later.

Now, what you have are individuals with selfish political agendas, cultural agendas, religious agendas who have been working steadily over the past 10 to 15 to even 20 years who have now manipulated this moment of panic, fear, hysteria, ignorance for their own political agendas. So that's why you have 70 percent of New Yorkers who are against the Ground Zero mosque. As Haris and I were saying – maybe Haris can jump in – is that I think it's completely unfair to say that those 70 percent of New Yorkers are bigoted against Islam. I honestly think that's unfair because I would say that people just don't know.

So when you have this moment of hysteria, a moment of panic, a moment of fear, when you have this story filled in with examples of violence and terrorism and extremism and the actors and the characters in that story are always Muslims, it doesn't matter if your IQ is 180. It doesn't matter if your IQ is 210. You're a human being. You see the world framed through that story.

MR. SHAKIR: Let me pick up on that point about how individuals are – I'm going to put you on the spot here, Haris – are individuals inflaming the anger and the vitriol, particularly

some members of the right. I think most of this audience would know that Sarah Palin and Newt Gingrich have been amongst the leaders of cultivating some of the false anger. Who else? Who are some of the people who are behind this effort and what are their goals and objectives?

HARIS TARIN: That's a good question and I think that relates to a larger conversation that needs to be had. Wajahat talked about the personal and individual fear that average Americans have about Islam – is this better?

MR. ALI: There you go. You're good.

MR. SHAKIR: Yeah, great.

MR. TARIN: But I think there's also a conversation that we need to have about the environment that we're kind of living in today. The first is there's a real world – there are real world tragedies that are taking place. There's incidents that are taking place to set the stage for the fear of Islam to spread and I think the real world examples, especially in the past 18 months, the Faisal Shahzad incident, the Fort Hood incident had set the platform for this fear-mongering to start to take place.

Then you had, which addresses your question, the igniters, folks who have had a specific agenda for the past 15 to 20 years, as Wajahat mentioned, who have a political agenda, a monopoly on power and a monopoly on American narrative – I think this is the key – folks who have bought into the idea of the clash of civilizations. They have bought into that idea and they have been promoting that for the past 10 to 15 years. They have been engaging in that conversation and they've had an intellectual discourse.

People like Frank Gaffney, who just recently released his paper on Sharia and the subversion of the Constitution through a stealth jihad, as they called it, people like Pamela Geller, whose really only claim to fame was a blog that she had and videos that she had produced on the beach but who have now become a national security expert and an expert on Islam and the Muslim American community, individuals who really have no credentials from anywhere substantial that have been given the platform to have a conversation about Islam and the Muslim community.

That has a real life impact. That has a real life impact on Americans. That has a real life impact on our policies. So I think these individuals have been putting themselves out. They have a specific political agenda, a cultural agenda that says, you know, the monopoly of the American life and the American dream and the American narrative is ours and we cannot allow the Muslim community to integrate and become part of the mainstream and share in that monopoly and share in that pluralism. I think it's the concept of a religious or a cultural exclusivism or pluralism and I think these folks don't want the Muslim American community to engage in that pluralistic narrative.

So they are very specific. They have a lot of funding, especially after the midterm elections of 2006. You had this cottage industry that really put forth tons of resources, millions of dollars and videos like *Obsession*, *Obsession* that went out to over 15 million homes in the

Midwest and on the East Coast. This is a very sustained campaign and unfortunately the average American, who has the right to ask questions, who has the right to have specific concerns and who has a legitimate right to ask about the images that are out there in the media and the narrative that's out there about the Muslim American community, they are the ones who fall prone to this conversation that these individuals are having.

MR. SHAKIR: So Rev. Chloe Breyer, I think Haris talks about how exclusivists have a lot of money and a great PR machine around them who are organizing these messages that as we've seen play out in New York have been quite powerful and that poses a challenge to try and counter, to fight back, and you've been at the forefront of leading an interfaith effort on the ground in New York. So I wonder what are the challenges and hurdles you've had to undergo as you counter very well-funded resistance.

REV. CHLOE BREYER: So yeah, excuse me, I think the organization that I work with really has a very specialized approach to interfaith dialogue, which is that we get hundreds of grassroots and immigrant religious leaders from about 16 different traditions to really work together on very concrete – foreclosures, child health, domestic violence – and see if that's a way to build relationships that when – it reminds me a little bit of a book written by a guy at Brown, Ashutosh Varshney, who talked about the cities in India where communal violence happened and comparing violence that happened in cities where there've been established networks of interfaith and civil society relationships versus ones that didn't.

in some ways, I feel what is happening right now is this sort of wildfire that's happening over the Internet where you have a few people with a very disproportionate amount of power and the question is how will our cities respond, and not just our cities, but how will our civil society combat – it's not an easy question and we've been in New York, as you know, there've been a sort of real variety of approaches, everything from on Burn the Koran Day, we had a Read the Koran Day and at my parish in West Harlem we read the passage, the book titled "Mary" from the Koran, which seemed appropriate at St. Mary's.

We had a whole group of neighborhood coalitions, fields, of Park51, coming together; Jews in support of Park 51. There was a press conference that happened, among other things, enormous numbers of people writing op-eds and articles and this is nothing that no one – people have heard before. But I think also in the lead-up to the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we have another golden opportunity, frankly, and that is to do it right. We saw an example of the way not to honor 9/11 this year with combating deep vitriol, suspicion and fear.

We have an opportunity with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I think, if the lead-up on education on the ground, we're aiming to try to do 400 to 500 coffee-hour conversations, a media campaign that says for New York, are we ready, is New York ready, are we ready to take this one, have this conversation in a constructive way and admit the way that our grief has produced a lot of fear? Can we make a safe space to actually ask those difficult questions about Islam and not fear being called a bigot, which is silencing a lot of people's legitimate questions.

Then finally, can we have a big interfaith service on that day where we acknowledge that most every religious tradition in our society is capable of creating the kind of strong society

where we don't just act in our own little cells but we as Muslims, Christians, Jews and Buddhists give back to the wider community, which is something that we know but something we don't often see.

MR. SHAKIR: Ken, the operating premise of this conversation is that Islamophobia is bad. I hope we can find consensus on that. Can you stipulate some of the reasons why?

KEN GUDE: Sure, and of course everyone automatically think of its connection with terrorism and clearly there is a connection there. We here at the Center for American Progress in the run-up to the September 11 anniversary this past year and the threats to burn the Koran, we actually had two of our staff on the ground in Afghanistan, one in Kabul and one at a local polling station getting ready for the parliamentary elections that were held last month there and the reaction in Afghanistan to the stories here in the United States that somebody who had it turned out only 50 congregants was going to burn a Koran had a direct impact on the security that our staff felt in Afghanistan. There were several demonstrations. There were reports of violence and some people were killed.

But there were new no-go areas in Kabul that were directly attributable to the response to this particular incident. But I don't want us to think that this is exclusively tied to an increased terrorist threat. Of course, if we feed this narrative that America is at war with Islam, it will help terrorist organizations or extremist organizations recruit new members into their ranks. But frankly, there are a lot of things that we do that would help that and they generally don't need a lot more excuses.

But I don't want this conversation about the security implications of Islamophobia to be dominated by extremists on both sides, whether it's Reverend Jones in Florida or the Taliban in Afghanistan, because really I think the implications are much more significant when we realized that in the modern world, the credibility of American leadership is how we get things done around the world, how we accomplish our goals.

If people, whether they're in Kenya or in Germany or in Brazil are questioning the moral foundation of America's international leadership because we are turning on each other out of a misinformed fear of the other, in this particular case Muslims in American, that's going to harm our ability to actually lead the international community towards the objectives that we would like to accomplish.

So it's not just this implication associated with terrorism. There are bigger questions and challenges for America to make sure that we get this right about what we do here in the United States and what impact that has abroad.

MR. SHAKIR: Haris, you want to jump in?

MR. TARIN: Yeah, I think building on a point that Ken mentioned, I think it's extremely dangerous for us to make this an issue, an Islamic or a Muslim issue or even just about Islamophobia. I think this is a challenge for us as a country as Americans and this is not new to the American experience and to the American story. There has been communities who have

historically gone through this challenge, whether it's integration or ensuring that they become part of what we mentioned, the pluralism of this country.

I think if we reduce it to a national security issue, if we reduce it to a Muslim issue, then we do a disservice to America at large. This is a part of a conversation. There's always been individuals and groups, small groups of individuals, who have taken advantage of those who are marginalized in society. We've seen this continuously. We've seen this with Jewish Americans. We've seen this with the Japanese Americans. We've seen this with African-Americans. This is a continuation of that conversation that we as a country need to have now.

But it's in a different manifestation and yes, there are legitimate questions that need to be answered. There are legitimate conversations that need to be had about the Muslim experience, about Sharia law and about various other issues and not to minimize the national security threat or the issue of terrorism, but this is an American issue. The Muslim American community does not see itself as an extension of the Muslim world in America. The Muslim American community sees itself as an American body and they want to be part of this society.

So to say that this – we need to look at this issue through a national security lens I think does disservice to my children. I mean, my 8-year-old son on Saturday, I was in the kitchen cooking and he comes up to me and he goes, Daddy, do all Muslims stone people to death? I mean, this is an 8-year-old asking this question after watching a show on TV, after watching 20/20 or whatever else it may be. But this is not the type of Muslim Americans that we want to raise. This is not the identity formation that needs to happen. So to call this exclusively a national security issue or to call it an issue only for the Muslim American community to deal with internally I think does a disservice to our country.

MR. SHAKIR: Wajahat, let's talk a little bit about the media's responsibility in all of this. How fair a job are they doing of covering the debate? You mentioned the Ground Zero mosque. What complaints do you have of the media's coverage?

MR. ALI: I think when it comes to the Park51 controversy, because it's not – the quote, unquote, "Ground Zero mosque" is not at Ground Zero and it's not a mosque. I think hopefully we can agree on that but I'm sure the media will introduce individuals who will disagree. I think the media has been a little bit more fair on this issue and I think many Muslim Americans, as part of the Muslim American communities – I would actually like to disagree. I'd say there are Muslim American communities.

There's no such thing as a Muslim American community. I think it's a disservice to call it a monolithic community and I know Haris didn't mean that at all. But what's really interesting, at this point of view what's encouraging, is you have individuals like Haris who actually get to speak on camera on, say, MSNBC or CNN alongside Pamela Gellers and Robert Spencers and I think what's different between 2001 and 2010 is that there was a dearth of Muslim American voices that weren't tapped either for radio, op-eds, print or television appearances.

Now, what you see in 2009, 2010, which I something encouraging, is you see individuals from the diversity of the Muslim American communities, African-American Muslims, Arab American Muslims, Muslims who wear the hijab, Muslim women who don't wear the hijab, who are at least asked to represent their communities or represent a viewpoint. So that's something that's encouraging. The thing that's negative and the trend that's been negative for as part of the media, whatever the media is, is that the Muslim American story, or I should say the Muslim story as represented in America, if you go back 30 years, let's go back to 1979, Iranian Revolution, has always been this.

No story about Muslim Americans or Muslims, sensationalist crisis, violence, turmoil. Then you go back to a, no story about Muslims, no story of Muslims, Iraq war, no story of Muslims, some Muslim does something crazy somewhere, Harris is called in to apologize for all 1.5 billion Muslims in Islam, no stories about Muslims, 9/11, no stories about Pakistan, no one even knows where Pakistan is. They think Pakistan is part of India and then 2005, 7/7 bombing happens in London and all my friends are like, hey, aren't you Pakistani? What's up with Pakistan? Right? Negative story and so forth.

So what you see is this. The entire frame is filled in with sensationalist action, violence, reaction, commentary, silence. So if you're an audience viewer and you're looking at the Muslim American experience, the Muslim experience, the Islamic experience, all you're seeing is framed in violence.

What you don't see is the muhijab, the Muslim woman who wears hijab who works at a corporate law firm, comes home at 6:00, has three kids, makes biryani for her husband who probably was a corporate attorney, hated his job, quit, wanted to be a principal at a school and is trying to teach his kid how to throw a football. And they go to the Friday prayer and they watch the '9ers game – they've watched the '49ers lose four games in a row – on Sunday and then he takes them to his Jewish friend's house where they have pizza.

MR. SHAKIR: Ken, just to jump off that, my own observation on this is that we've also seen in the past two years a dominance, or I guess the emergence of a new rightwing media that is helpful in promoting some of the arguments against the mosque, promoting some of these acts of hatred. They have gotten quite a bit of attention and have helped create a dynamic in which the media feels like they have to cover this one side but also this other side and that other side happens to be pretty good at getting headlines. How do you deal with this?

MR. GUDE: It's clear that even in the media narrative that you describe, it's designed to promote attention. It's designed to promote a confrontation between two opposing viewpoints that could never meet and share views. That is not exclusive to this particular issue. Of course it's the dominant media narrative of the day on any particular issue. That's what they go out and they story and promote. But one thing I was struck by in listening to a lot of these comments, particularly when Chloe mentioned that they have a Read a Koran Day in response to the Burn a Koran Day.

While that is a very noble effort, it isn't hard to see why the media picked the Burn a Koran as its narrative. One thing that I would like actually to hear from you, what your reaction

is to this notion that they only – the voices that are speaking on behalf of Islam or Muslims in America are always Muslims and are Muslim Americans. It seems to me that that is – we need to get over that hurdle before we can begin to broaden the narrative so that it isn't this constant tension between one political faction and Muslim Americans on whatever the issue is. It can be a discussion between Americans about Islam in America.

MR. SHAKIR: Rev. Breyer, you've been at the forefront as a non-Muslim talking about Muslims.

REV. BREYER: Yeah, I mean, there have been – I feel that there have been efforts of people of other faith traditions and we've not perhaps been as successful at saturating the media as we should be and that only points to the work that we need to do. All the time, I just relate to your story of what's really going on and that resonates so much with what we know is happening in the mosques along 116th Street, where the masjids are where you go and you learn about HIV/AIDS awareness or the halal soup kitchens in the Bronx and the way that Catholics and Muslims in the Bronx are doing census bureau outreach together. Staten Island, we're going to have kids doing each – but it's really very tedious.

I mean, this is not the stuff of great glamour. It's really the clash of – I think it's the front line. I mean, of the quote, unquote, interaction of civilizations because the minute – let's talk about jury duty and how do you get an immigrant group to have on the one hand courts say we're going to make that extra allowance for the fact that maybe the Sabbath for an Orthodox Jew begins on sundown but maybe we hadn't fully taken in that you actually need to go home and help your wife prepare, so that we'll give that extra allowance of time just so you can be part of the jury pool and so that you will be judged by a jury of your peers and we can make that real for people in New York.

It's these very practical and totally mundane things that are about how do you move a community from being able to only identify themselves in an exclusive religious or ethnic mind where they view the dominant society as just out to get them to how do you – I can wear two hats. I can be a religious leader and an engaged member of civil society at the same time. There is nothing sexy about that at all. I mean, it's boring.

MR. SHAKIR: I'm going to turn to the audience in a second for questions. So if you're ready, be prepared. But Haris, I wanted to jump off this. One of my observations the past few years in politics has been that we used to have debated over disagreements about how to deal with public policy issues. But in the past few years, this is just my own feeling, we've had disagreements about the facts themselves. We're no longer assuming a set of facts and then making our arguments about we can do this or we can do that. It's let's dispute the fundamental fact itself. So it seems to me that one of the things that we've seen play out is on the issue of Islam itself, you're constantly having to define what a basic fact of the religion is. I mean, tell us what are the common misperceptions and help correct them for the audience. What are the common misperceptions that you hear about Islam itself?

MR. TARIN: It's interesting you mention that. Recently, Ali Velshi of CNN, which was quite surprising to me, he did a whole segment on the basic five pillars of Islam. I mean, this is

basic stuff. Prayer, testimony of faith, things that should be done at the local level by communities and I think before getting into the actual questions, I think there's a level of self-introspection that we as a Muslim American community need to go through and really admit to the fact that we have not been very successful in engaging our fellow citizens at the local level. We can talk about the media all we want. We can talk about the national conversation.

But the fact that the Muslim American community has not been able to work at the local level, whether it's at your PTA, city councils, the school board, engaging at the very, very local level, your neighbors, reaching out, and I think that is changing. That definitely is changing in various communities. But I think the fact that we as a community have to ensure that that becomes a priority for us will address a lot of those issues. It will address a lot of those questions because some of the misconceptions are is Islam a political force rather than a religion.

I mean, I've heard that repeatedly. Is Islam really a religion? You can address that all you want at the national level. You can bring in academics, experts who can talk about Islam, who can talk about its history, who can talk about the fundamental principles. But if a person doesn't know a Muslim, has never seen a Muslim pray, has never seen a Muslim engage in an act of worship, that doesn't become real to them. I think if you look at the communities, and moving beyond just the interfaith communities, we've done decently well in engaging our churches and synagogues, but engaging all Americans, secular groups, civil society at large, having a conversation with the various communities at the local level is what's going to address those issues.

It's not just having that national conversation. It's not just answering those very tough questions, whether they be on Sharia, whether they be on women's issues, gender relations, all of these different issues that are in the national conversation. But it's about engaging person-to-person, and the fact that, as Wajahat mentioned, 60 percent of Americans don't know a Muslim who they can go to, to ask that question – my godfather is a Jewish American. He is in his late 70s and he goes to his rotary club meetings on a weekly basis and he has conversations with his community members.

Every week he sends me an e-mail asking me for a clarification of one of those questions. But he has access to me. He's known me since I was a baby. We've had these conversations. But what about the 60 percent of Americans who don't have access to anybody to have that conversation with? What will they do? They'll go Google it and if you Google Islam or Muslims or women in Islam, it's not fun. I would not allow my son or daughter to Google Islam and Muslims. What we need to do in terms of the level of introspection as a community is ensure that we engage at the very local level.

MR. SHAKIR: Let's see if there's questions first in the spirit of open conversation. Let's start right here.

Q: I'm Diana Silver, unaffiliated citizen. I know it's preaching, or asking a question of the choir, but the country, given the Tea Party and other movements, has become more xenophobic even within the American community and this idea of separation of church and state and including all religions as part of the society has kind of – there's a big effort to push it to the

side. I'm thinking even though you're talking about the local community, I think it's still lacking on public TV and even regular TV where basic Americans can hear about the issues of separate of church and state, of including everyone and not just from Muslim Americans but from all non-Christians. I think there's a push to view this country as a Christian country and that's a concern. I think all religions should be a part. I'd just like some comments.

MR. SHAKIR: I guess to make that a more direct question, where do you suggest that people go to learn about Islam? Where are the places that you would suggest to people who are trying to counter the xenophobia in the country? Where should they go?

MR. ALI: That's a good question. Thank you for asking it. I want to tie in that question to what Ken had asked I think Haris and I, and hopefully Haris and Chloe can jump in. I think it's really important to talk about interfaith and civic engagement. I think this goes back to my point I think of the story and narrative of America, right? There's one group that says the narrative of American culture and identity is one that is Christian, white, heterosexual, what else would we say – throw in some more. Apple pie

MR. TARIN: Suburban.

MR. ALI: Yeah, suburban, some would say suburban, middle class. Can I throw white in again? Yeah, and very white, and non-multi-hyphenated, no, never multi-hyphenated. I think to answer Ken's point and to yours directly, I think what happens is you need to hear more Muslim American voices. Now, how do you hear Muslim American voices which are authentic, the voices that we want out on the media on the local level, national level, international level which say exactly what you want to address, that this is not only a Christian nation.

This is a country which is a multicultural laboratory where you can have a Christian voice, a Jewish voice, a Muslim voice, an atheist voice, a pagan voice and they all walk into a bar and the joke ends badly. (Laughter.) No, I'm just kidding. You have America as a country where we can have a panel such as this, everyone speaking English and everyone owns part of the American dream and the American narrative. I think where I would go first of all from a local level is I would go to a mosque.

Now, our mosques – honestly, as a Muslim American, need some clean up. They need some clean up. Some of those sermons need to be profoundly edited with wisdom and intelligence. I think we need Muslim American organizations and groups such as MPAC and others who also – I'm talking about MPAC but some other groups who are also evolving. This is a young community. You have to realize this. The Muslim American community has been here for several centuries but when it comes to engagement, we are not as sophisticated as other communities. I think I can say that out loud without – I'm sorry, Haris.

MR. TARIN: No, that's right.

MR. ALI: I think also when it comes to media engagement on a national level, when it comes to stories, this is the hierarchy, if I may share. If you're a Muslim or have a consistency of brownness I should say, or if you belong to some ethnic minority group, this is very common.

These are the three occupations you can have – doctor, all right, engineer and dubious businessman who somehow makes a lot of money but he has a Mercedes so no one really asks him how we got the money. Fourth is failure. Nowhere in there is there journalists, a person like Harris who does civic engagement, director, playwright, you could even say an imam.

MR. TARIN: Because we're poor.

MR. ALI: Yeah, because you guys – exactly. So the reason why I'm stressing this is how do you communicate the story of Muslim Americans, how do you communicate this idea that I can be a Muslim American who's practicing Islam and also American. I don't have a mutually exclusive identity. It's completely fluid and I don't want Sharia and I'm secular at the same time, if a person is not trained or skilled or that talent is not nurtured, that's a failure of the Muslim American community.

Now, what we see though, to answer your question, is I believe – I want to end on a good point. What Ken was saying is you see when it comes to the Burn a Koran controversy, or even the Park51, you see non-Muslims who've taken their space to say, you know what, this is not American. So you see Jon Stewarts. You see Michael Bloombergs. You see Rachel Maddows. You see people on NPR. You see comedians. I think that's how you get it across. When you see someone like Kanye on the "Power" remix talk about – Kanye West for those who don't know; some people just looked at me confused – talk about Ramadan and Muslims, that's very powerful.

MR. TARIN: That is.

MR. SHAKIR: Rev. Breyer, I want to jump off one point that he made there which I think is interesting that the Muslim community here in America is young, that they're in the midst of a transition. I think the last time I looked at the stats, the majority of the Muslim American community is first generation, that they just got here. So they're just having children who are in the second generation.

If I remember the stories of the Irish Catholics and the Jewish Americans, the first generation comes with the intention always to go back. The second generation has to learn to grapple with the identity and then you get to the third generation where they're fully American. I think we're obviously in the stages of that. Can you talk about some of the prior experiences America has gone through with respect to other immigrant and religious communities?

REV. BREYER: Sure. Just one thing, though, in terms of the African-American-Muslim community, which was not part of the 1964 change of immigration law wave of South Asian Muslims coming to this country and actually existing tension there as well being an important thing that's sometimes not addressed I guess.

But yeah, when you mentioned the Tennessee – the mosque in Tennessee and the lawsuit against Islam not being a religion, that was exactly what was said about Roman Catholicism in the 1830s in New York City, only a couple of blocks from where Ground Zero is. You had Old St. Patrick's Cathedral that the archbishop at the time had to actually arm some of his

congregants after these particularly fiery sermons from Protestants like Lyman Beecher talking about how freedom of religion is for everyone, every religious tradition except for Roman Catholicism, which is not really a religion because it is governed by foreign forces that are antithetical to our constitutional values, literally.

We've lost that. We've lost that sense of memory and I think the basic approach of many non-Muslims who get involved is there but for the grace of God go I and as you've already mentioned, the number – it's new every time and unique and yet it's also part of this story of tension about what it takes to integrate as the religious or ethnic other, quote, unquote.

MR. SHAKIR: Let's go to some more questions out here. Let's go back there on the right.

Q: Hi, my name is Charlie Martel. I'm counsel with the Senate homeland security committee, where outreach to – I was glad to hear you say Muslim communities – is part of what we're doing. I was very encouraged to hear the panelists talk about what I guess for lack of a better word I'll call the everydayness of the experience of Muslim Americans that people across all spectrums in our society would identify with, particularly if they actually know Muslims, which so many people don't.

I wanted to ask the panel, that's a really important part of the story because Muslims are woven into the fabric of their communities and into the tapestry of our society in a way that's beautiful but also, as you said, not sexy as the war narrative. How do you tell that story? Up on the Hill we had an end of Ramadan dinner. It was kind of the same thing. We were like, hey, we kind of have a lot in common but we have a chance to get together here and talk about it.

How do you tell that story in a society where so many people are disconnected because they don't know any Muslims? It's a challenge because it's not really a CNN headline story but it's a real important thing and if most people understood it better, maybe some of the divisions would be lessened.

MR. SHAKIR: Haris, I will let you answer that. I want to add one point to this conversation is that one of the things that I have observed is that a lot of non-Muslims are actually afraid of bringing some Muslims into the conversation because they don't know who to invite. They are always afraid of what the right of those who would be opposed to such a gathering would say about it. And that seems to be one of the things that is hindering the conversation is who is the appropriate Muslim to invite to our conversation?

MR. TARIN: Yeah, I think this is a very important question that I actually wanted to address. There is a deliberate component to this story. Those who seek to marginalize the Muslim American community and experience try to make the Muslim American experience a totally foreign one when it is not. I mean, that is why there is no – there is no insistence on the African-American-Muslim experience. The African-American-Muslim experience has been an extremely vivid and extremely rich cultural experience in America. It has historically been here.

Twenty-five percent of the slaves who were brought to this country were Muslims. And they continued to engage in that cultural and religious experience. I mean, there were Muslims who died in the Revolutionary War and people don't know that. And I think – so that deliberate nature of that campaign to make the Muslim American experience foreign is there.

And I think what we have to do is to get beyond that. What we have to do is to talk about those very indigenous experiences that take place at the local level, those very indigenous conversations that take place in local communities where you have got Muslims in Chicago, groups like IMAN doing amazing work with marginalized communities in Chicago and Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., who are part of the cultural mosaic of those cities and who have been there.

And I think what we need to do – and this is again part of the Muslim American community's self-introspection process is we haven't been able to highlight those voices, those very indigenous voices that can make Islam part of the American experience because at this point, those who want to make it a foreign experience are winning the conversation. And what we need to do is to make Islam part of the American experience.

MR. SHAKIR: Wajahat?

MR. ALI: I think – I know I am going to sound like a broken record by the end of this CAP meeting – I think the way to do it – and I am glad you brought up this point – and the way to challenge Islamophobia and I believe this wholeheartedly is to tell stories. I think storytelling is going to be the way to do it. And I have been saying this and people thought I was crazy for a while because I think, look, no disrespect to think tanks. I am a guy from the Bay Area. I know that is a really big deal in D.C. Average Joe is not going to sit there and read a policy paper. In fact, congressmen don't even read policy papers I just read according to a statistic.

What you need is stories. You need something like “The Cosby Show”. You need something like “Raisin in the Sun”. You need something like “Angels in America”. You need something like “The George Lopez Show”. You need someone like Richard Pryor. Okay? That is what works. I am sorry to say. That is because when a kid is sitting there in suburban America, he is not going to be reading a Brookings Institute or a CAP paper or an AEI paper, right? I mean, it sounds interesting. It does because we are nerds. We like that stuff. But, you know, no one is going to be tuning into CNBC. They are going to be looking at Dave Chappelle, right?

So how do you tell these stories, these – how do you illuminate the extraordinary in the ordinary, as Chloe was talking about? You tell stories. And I think the way you communicate those stories is through storytelling devices – movies, TV shows, plays, music. I think that is the best way to communicate it on a national level and an international level. And that can do – that can do in about one year what 10-years-worth of policy papers – and policy papers are important. I want you guys to keep your jobs, all right?

MR. : All right, we will watch an HBO show. (Laughter.)

MR. SHAKIR: Let's go actually in the back there.

Q: Rabbi Gerry Serotta. I am the executive director of Clergy beyond Borders. I wanted to follow up Haris' point about this being an American issue by asking a question about the premise and the use of the name "Islamophobia". I sent out a letter to our board two weeks ago because we are involved in combating Islamophobia, which is an easily recognized phenomenon. One of the board members, a very insightful woman, said she is not sure that using that term opens dialogue. In fact, it closes dialogue. It brought me to this workshop today because I wanted to hear from you all as experts the valence of that term and whether it is a positive contribution to what we want to do, which is to combat it. I mean, I am not questioning its existence. I am questioning a public relations strategy that all of us need to engage in.

MR. SHAKIR: Who wants to take it? Yeah, my own thought on this is that, of course, to call somebody an Islamophobe is probably hindering to the conversation, but to recognize that there is actually Islamophobia as a phenomena that needs to be countered is an actuality and worth having a conversation about. And that is why we are all here. If anybody had anything else?

MR. TARIN: I definitely think it is not a perfect word. There are a lot of issues with the word. I think as Faiz mentioned, you are making assumption already when you are engaged in the conversation. But unfortunately, it has become – fortunately or unfortunately, it has become part of the national discourse, part of the public discourse when it comes to hate speech or when it comes to hate crimes against the Muslim American community.

So I think groups and media outlets and think tanks and various other institutions have gone along with that narrative. And I don't know how successful we will be in kind of challenging even that term. But I think what we have to do is I always say this. We have to ensure that we don't lump the majority of Americans with those who ignite Islamophobia. And this is extremely important because if you call an average American who has real fears and real concerns that need to be addressed – there is no question about that – if you call them an Islamophobe, I think there is a really problematic feeling that they are going to have. They are not Islamophobes. They are not bigots.

What we have to do is extend the conversation and go beyond that and start to talk about what the issues are and how to address them and at the same time, marginalize and sideline the voices that are pushing this specific agenda, who are Islamophobic. I mean, those voices are Islamophobic, no doubt about it. There is no question about the fact that there were Islamophobes prior to 9/11. I mean, when Steve Emerson – when the Oklahoma City bombing happened, Steve Emerson engaged in a blatant act of Islamophobia by saying he saw two brown men walking by that building.

I mean, this is part of the conversation that needs to be had. But we cannot – what we have to do is ensure that the majority of Americans are not lumped into that category.

MR. SHAKIR: We will change the term to Islamo-curious, perhaps. (Laughter.)

MR. TARIN: Yes, exactly.

MR. SHAKIR: Let's come back in the front. We will start in that row right there.

Q: Hi, Mehreen Farooq from the World Organization for Resource, Development and Education. I think that the idea of a national conversation is great. But often what I see is that Muslim communities and non-Muslim communities often get caught up in this lexicon war of trying to be politically correct in their attempt to define the root causes of this problem and in defining Islam. And yet, Islamophobia stems from a misunderstanding of what is Islam.

So my question is how can we foster that national conversation and define and differentiate between moderate, mainstream Muslims, whatever you want to call them, from radical, violent extremists, whatever you want to call them?

MR. ALI: Well, great. I like how everyone looks at me for the tough questions. No, I am just kidding. I think something which has to happen – I will tell you a frustration and I want Haris to speak up on this – is for the individuals who I believe are responsible on both sides of the aisle of stoking the flames of extremism. Many times your average Muslim American is asked to apologize for crimes that he or she did not commit and asking to apologize for the actions and ideology of a diluted minority that should probably be called criminals.

And I think there is something within the Muslim American community, communities. What we saw actually in India, what happened after the Mumbai hotel bombing is that the India-Muslim community said these people are not part of our community. They even took a stronger step and they said we don't even want to give these people a burial, a Muslim burial. That was a strong step.

So Muslim American communities need to stand up more. And I think we have done a good job. This is what gets frustrating is for nine years, you have had so many scholars repeatedly – it is online. There is an online journal, Sheila Musaji, if you look at her website at the American Muslim, she has documented all this. We always get asked, how come more moderate Muslims don't speak out against terrorism? I am like, we have, you just haven't been listening, number one.

Number two, we would speak out more if we had the conch. You know, give us a talk show. Give "Al-Muhajabah" a talk show like Ellen DeGeneres or maybe give us a National Public Radio show. I'm just saying. (Laughter.) You know, just throwing it out there. And I think, you know, that is the frustrating aspect of this whole conversation. You know, Haris can talk about how to be more proactive on it, I think.

MR. SHAKIR: I think Ken had something –

MR. GUDE: Sure. I want to take a slightly different side of that, which is I think leadership matters in this context, in this conversation. I think there is a lot to be pessimistic about in the current dynamic. But that doesn't change my overall optimism about the direction

of American society and American culture. I mean, this particular episode is not unique. It is just simply an amplification of things that have happened before.

When we talk about the evolution and what appears to power of the Tea Party movement, the ideological underpinnings of that group isn't particularly – aren't particularly new. It is just they have found a voice at a particular time when they are able to grab the megaphone and perhaps command a significantly larger share of the dialogue than they possess or deserve.

My sense here, my hope is that when we – as we evolve in this and as we move forward, a more rational, broader-based leadership will exist. And we were talking before the panel about what has shifted. And I think you can obviously point to a partisan divide. But I think that is a vast oversimplification of what has happened. I think we have had a situation where political leaders of one political party don't have the responsibility of governing at all and in this current contemporary climate allows them to foster rhetoric and ideology that is actually detrimental to the task of governing.

That is going to change, whether that changes on November 2 or whether that changes in 2016, who knows? But that is going to change. And when we talk about the 60 percent of the American people who don't know a Muslim or the large percentages who register strong opinions about whether or not a mosque should be built here or shouldn't, those are largely uninformed decisions. It is not negative connotation of uninformed. It is just people don't pay attention to these things at the level in which a lot of people do. But they listen to the influencers. And whether those influencers are people like Frank Gaffney and Pamela Geller or even Newt Gingrich or people who would be in a position to command respect within a community like President George W. Bush, you had a much different reaction.

And so I think that hopefully over time, as these debates have evolved within other communities in the United States, we will see a similar evolution here.

MR. SHAKIR: Let's go right here, this gentleman.

Q: Sean Flax. I am with NHK TV. I am wondering if we could discuss the political component to this discussion. You know, there has obviously been – Islam and Islamophobia has been an issue in several campaigns across the country. And I am wondering is this any sort of national movement that you have seen or even local movements in places where there are larger contingents of Muslims, maybe Ohio, New York, Florida, California, to sort of stand out and say we are Americans, we are not terrorists or whatever and we are going to vote and that you need to listen to us for that reason? Has there been any sort of movement in that direction? Have you noticed that?

MR. TARIN: Definitely. And it is not just now. I think this started in midterm elections of 2006, where for the first time, you actually saw an organized kind of – start at the local level. Islamophobic campaigns and platforms for certain local candidates that decided to ignite and you had individuals who were running – who were running for city council. We are talking about Islam and Sharia and various other issues that really have – that are completely out of the scope of their mandate.

So you had this develop in 2006. And then that continued to rise up from the local level to the state level and then eventually to the national level and in 2008, culminating in a fact that, you know, the word “Muslim” was a bad word. I mean, how many times was Obama called a Muslim? And people were allowed to get away with that until Gen. Powell came out and said, you know, what is wrong with being a Muslim? If he was a Muslim – he is not – but if he was, what is wrong with being a Muslim? And then talked about the fact, you know, there were so many Muslims who had served this country.

But after you saw that, you also saw a larger contingency of the Muslim American community develop a civic attitude. And you have to remember that for the first generation of Muslims who came to this country, civic engagement was not something that they engaged in in the communities that they came from. I mean, if you came from Egypt, civic engagement is not something that you are really familiar with. If you engage with local law enforcement agencies or you engage with the city council, that means you are not coming back home. That is just the reality of civic engagement in the authoritarian countries that Muslim Americans came from and ran away from – that is the key – who came here and fled those authoritarian regimes.

And so when they came here, they had to get adjusted. They first just wanted basic survival skills. They just wanted a job. They just wanted to ensure that the faith of their children were preserved. They wanted to ensure that they had a place where they could congregate and worship together. And then they started to think okay, wow, now we need to actually organize. We need to organize socially. We need to organize politically. And you saw that. In the 2008 elections, I mean, we as an organization, we launched a campaign – election ‘08 campaign and we went around the country. We were in places like Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Florida, New York, California, Nevada. And you had Muslims coming out in large numbers, Muslims who were engaged in the local elections, people who were engaged as part of the national political process. They were involved in the parties. I mean, both parties.

So I think this sense of civic engagement and civic duty has started to creep up on the Muslim community and is going to continue to increase because people see the result of that quiet nature that they have had for a few years. Now they need to engage in the public discourse. They need to engage in the political process.

MR. SHAKIR: Rev. Breyer, out of the storm of hate, there seems to be a rainbow, at least I see that hate around the Ground Zero mosque did propel some people who were strong supporters to come out and show that they were in favor of the mosque being built there. And I think – and it seems like a lot of this hate is inspiring some people who would otherwise be neutral or agnostic to become actual peacemakers.

REV. BREYER: Yeah, I don’t know about Washington. But in New York – (laughter) – the way that one really flexes one’s political muscle if you are a religious community is to get on the alternate side parking day suspension rules. So in fact, you look, there is a sheet that you can download from [nyc.gov](http://nyc.gov) that lists all of the days in which alternate side parking is suspended. And that is not entirely perfect, but it gives you a kind of indication of those religious communities that have begun to really interface with government.

And it took about 25 years. But you now have two Eid holidays that are, so, you know, now that Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha are both on there. Diwali was the most recent addition. But it is that page that will, you know – there are quite a few missing, but a lot are on there. I think the most important battle now that is being focused locally is getting recognition of not one missing holiday, but two in the New York City public schools. And you can imagine how well that is going down, but it is happening. I mean, it is all about this sort of stuff.

MR. SHAKIR: Let's go to a question all the way over there, gentleman in the back.

Q: Thank you. My name is Warren Manison (ph). I am here by myself. The way you marginalize any kind of a phobia is actually to confront that phobia. And I wish we had the time here and I wish the panel could address what is actually motivating Islamophobia. And it isn't only a difference in religion, difference in color of skin or anything. I think if we look around the world today – and this has been true for a number of years now – before it hit us here in America, we have seen wars, we have seen killings, we have seen all of this and most all of it has had an Islamic dimension to it.

So when I hear you talking, then I hear, read some of the material of I am sorry to hear that some of the names you mentioned, yes, I have looked at what they had. I have tried to verify it. It seems like that is trying to vilify a school of thought which is addressing probably the basic reasons for the Islamophobia. And you hear this on some of the talk shows that apparently you don't approve of. But what you are hearing are the voices of Americans. You are not only hearing the individuals who are conducting those talk shows.

And this is important to understand what is motivating this Islamophobia and there is some justification for it. It is probably – and you never touched upon it – what is in the Quran and the Hadith and is in Sharia itself. This is becoming well-known, even though there is an attempt not to make it well-known. But I think this has to be addressed in the context of Muslims here in America, in the context of Islamophobia. And that is where the discussion has to go to get rid of that in order to do what you want or are advocating doing. So I would like to have you address that, please.

MR. SHAKIR: I appreciate you bringing that up. My own observation – I will let others chime in – is one of the other things that seems to propel the leaders of the Islamophobic campaign is that they happen to have strong disagreements on policy with the Muslim community. I think – I don't know about you guys, but when I talk to most Muslims, they want out of Iraq. They think Afghanistan is going in the wrong direction. They want to close Guantanamo. They don't want racial profiling.

Those happen to be on the other side of the policy spectrum that conveniently those who are leading the Islamophobic campaigns are for. So I mean, I think that there is a synergy there and there are a lot of people who are concerned about the policy and the political voice of Muslims emerging. That is an additional factor combined with the hate.

MR. TARIN: And I think the policy debate is part of it. But I want to thank you for asking that question because there are real issues that need to be addressed. There are definitely issues of identify politics that need to be figured out by whether it be the Muslim American community or any other community. There are issues of repressive interpretations, authoritarian interpretations of the Quran, exclusivist interpretations of the Quran or Hadith. There are definitely those issues that need to be addressed. They are being addressed.

I mean, and we were having this conversation prior to this is the fact that those conversations are going on. There is an intellectual battle within the Muslim American community.

MR. SHAKIR: Can I stop you there? MPAC, your organization, has actually led a campaign of religious leaders within the Muslim community speaking out against terrorism. Most people haven't, of course, seen the video. It is on YouTube. But one of the challenges is making people notice.

MR. TARIN: That is right. I mean, we brought together nine of the Muslim American community scholars, top scholars within the Muslim American community. And they produced the video together in unison; addressing the issue of violence, condemning it without any questions, without any "ifs," without any "buts". We sent that out. There was a piece on CNN that was done on it. We sent that out through various channels. But, you know, at times unfortunately, it is not heard by the majority of the country.

But getting back to the point is, you know, if we are going to have those conversations, which I think are legitimate and I think you are right, we should have those conversations. But how do we have those conversations? Are we going to have those conversations by accusing a community that its religion is inherently violent and that their religion is inherently problematic? We can't because the first thing that will happen is that community will become defensive. What we need to do is engage in the discourse – and I completely agree with you. You can have individuals even like Frank Gaffney and Steven Emerson that have their position. There is nothing wrong with having that position.

But that cannot become the dominant discourse that is featured in the headlines. That cannot become the dominant discourse because what that does is that undermines the work that the Muslim American community and other Muslim communities are doing on the ground. The National Grassroots Campaign to Fight Terrorism, engaging young people to understand their religion in a moderate perspective, engaging young people to take the civic and political process seriously. Those are the things that mosques, community centers, institutions are doing on the ground on a daily basis, allowing their identity politic to take place for that formation to take place.

But if we throw grenades, if we try to engage in a battle in a different manner, it is just not going to work. But I do appreciate that question and I think it is a valid question.

MR. SHAKIR: Ken, and the divisions sometimes have homeland security impact as well for law enforcement officials on the ground to try to work with these communities. What are the impacts?

MR. GUDE: Well, I mean, sure, when you look at what are some of the things that people are concerned about, they are concerned about some of the violence that we see around the world migrating to the United States from within these communities. Now, it doesn't appear as if there is any higher likelihood for that to happen than in any other community in the United States, but it is a connection that we can't disassociate ourselves from.

And one of the things that you were talking about earlier really struck me when we realized that we have to confront what is a broad perception of the Islamic world as being rife with instability, violence and authoritarian regimes. Correct me if I am wrong and I may be wrong about this, but many of the Muslim American communities in the United States are here in America precisely because of those reasons. They are here because they can enjoy a life that they aren't able to enjoy in their home countries.

And one of the things that we need to be able to do is differentiate the violence or instability that exists in any one particular region from a community of people that has actively chosen to separate themselves from it for a variety of reasons. And that is not the only cause of this kind of migration. But you see it in – this is not also a strand of this debate that only exists in the story of Muslim Americans. It also exists in our immigration debate with Latin Americans, particularly in Mexico. And one of the things that we are dealing with now on the national security team here is how do we address what is a growing problem of the drug cartels in Northern Mexico and what kind of impact that is having on the community in Northern Mexico and what that means for the Southwestern United States.

So these types of things are not unique to this particular debate. We have to realize, though, that some of the reasons that people have left, say, Egypt or Iran, are exactly the things that people raised about being concerned with Islam.

MR. SHAKIR: It is the pilgrim story.

MR. ALI: I wanted to address that question. Thank you for asking that. I think what happens is people who advocate that position – and we have mentioned those names – they intentionally suffer from a historical and cultural myopia, where they cherry pick moments in history and kind of conveniently disregard 1400 years of tradition and I would even say 2,000 years of tradition if you want to include Christianity and some of its less colorful moments in history – any religion, any culture.

I think what is detrimental – I kind of disagree with Haris on this. I agree that they have the right to hold that opinion. But I believe that opinion is poisonous because what it does, it stokes doubt and fear by lumping. We have a history of lumping in America. Everyone has gone through it. The Irish have gone through lumping. The Jewish Americans have gone

through lumping where you just lump an entire group of people together and you paint them with one broad stroke.

And what happens, though, is it causes suspicion and doubt, suspicion and doubt, suspicion and doubt, fear and doubt, doubt, the whispers, whispering campaign I always call it, stealth jihad, stealth jihadist, you know. Islam isn't inherently a violent and religious. Sure, maybe 95 percent of Muslims aren't, you know, violent, but 5 percent are. And how do we know that you aren't? I don't know. Maybe Obama is a Muslim; maybe he isn't. I don't know. I am just saying. Has he clarified it? Maybe he has. Whatever.

It is just you throw that out there. If you saw that ABC town hall debate yesterday, it was on Christiane Amanpour. If you see those three gentlemen, I think it was Graham Spencer and the other gentleman. They said, even to Daisy Khan, she says she is a moderate, but I don't know. He said it. It is on air. You can see it. She says she is a moderate, but we really don't know – stealth jihadist, stealth jihadist, creeping Sharia, creeping Sharia, you know. It is fermenting this doubt and these seeds of doubt in a historical myopic condition where you just cherry pick moments of history of violence, paint an entire culture, an entire religion, 1.5 billion people, an entire civilization with this one color of violence.

And what happens is you get this poisonous rhetoric, which is really dividing America. And this is what is really problematic and not effective is that the best partners to fight extremism are Muslim Americans. For Faisal Shahzad, the New York failed – thank God – Times Square bomber, there was a Senegalese Muslim vendor who was the first person who saw the burning vehicle. He is the first person who called it out. For the five Virginia Muslim kids who went to Pakistan to allegedly commit jihad, it was their own family and community members that went to the FBI.

For the underwear bomber – that is what he is called, right – the Nigerian kid, it was his father who first tipped off British security situations. And for the 19 hijackers who brought down the two towers, one of the first responders to that tragedy was Salman Hamdani who was born in Pakistan. He came to America when he was 13 months old. He was a paramedic. He was a New York police cadet. He saw the smokes. He went to the towers to help people and he was killed. He was one of the first martyrs. And I think – I just wanted to address that.

MR. SHAKIR: We have got 10 minutes. Hopefully we can get to some more questions. Let's go here and then we will go to you.

Q: There is a way forward that is a typically American way like the pilgrims do. They had dinner. And I think that if we could look forward to communities having Iftar dinner, I would like to see every college and university campus have an Iftar dinner. How much has Christian-Jewish understanding been built by Passover dinner? And it seems to me there is a media piece, there is a policy piece, but the missing piece – (inaudible) – is there is parking and there is school days and there is eating. And we can't forget that the fabric will be knit or unraveled at this parking, eating, school day level.

And as much energy as possible, I think, everyone in this room could make sure next year in their community there was Iftar dinner.

MR. SHAKIR: In case people in the back couldn't hear, Susan was talking about the importance of food and bringing cultures together.

MR. TARIN: That is a very interesting point that you make because there is a prophetic tradition, a Hadith that is sometimes vilified. But there is a Hadith, a prophetic tradition, that says when the prophet went from Mecca to Medina, the first thing he did that he asked his followers to do was spread peace and feed people. And this is a very – I mean, the Muslim community holds onto this quite strongly. When you go to a Muslim household, the first thing they will do is just feed you and feed you and feed you. And this is something they constantly bring up.

And I think there is something extremely important to that is that ability to sit down and talk and eat. That is a very American tradition, but that is a very Muslim tradition also. And the fact that we are able – and I think you see that. You see that on a lot of campuses where the Muslim student associations have now something called the fast-a-thons where the student body will come together. They fast together and then they raise money through the fast-a-thon and donate it to a local shelter or feed the homeless.

This is taking place. But that requires a more indigenous and authentic American experience. The first generation, they weren't able to go through that. They didn't understand that. For them, spreading peace and feeding people was to their own family. Now I think we are getting beyond that. That second and third generation is understanding that tradition in a broader sense and implementing it in a broader sense.

MR. SHAKIR: Let's go right here.

Q: (Inaudible.) Just to speak about examples. So what your opinion is about last developments, speaking about that group of jihadists in Hamburg who alleged to be part of al-Qaida's plot to launch terrorist attacks against European countries? And U.S. State Department issued the alert for the travelers. So either case, which may be because of Islamophobia, but they are real facts. What do you do in this case?

MR. GUDE: Well, I don't think anybody here has for one moment minimized the very real threat that exists from terrorism. What I think – at least, I would say and I don't want to speak for anyone else is that we shouldn't conflate terrorists with Muslims. Simply because they purport to share a religion does not mean that all Muslims or even any percentage of them would agree with that particular action. And I don't think anybody would say that or anything like that.

And so we – I think it is fair to understand why Americans would make that connection and why people would make that connection. But accepting that that is a connection that Americans could make doesn't necessarily mean that it is true. And that is where we have to start pushing back and that is what you have to – what you have to – what you have to do.

MR. SHAKIR: Okay, so here is the deal. We have got five minutes left. How many questions are out there? There are just a few. So let's run around. Let's hear all the questions and then we will wrap it up with some thoughts in response to them. Let's go right here. They can shout it out. I can just repeat it.

Q: My name is Ni Yang (ph). I think a lot of people are talking about this involve a lot of sort of defensive, you know, like they call racial profiling. They are talking about only they try at most to defend they are not guilty. But they don't really offend to say there is a police who rob their car, who rob their – (inaudible) – rob their belongings. And now we have forced road closures. It is really not as predatory forced closure. It is really just simply robbery people's home, but nobody defends them. So there is sort of the lawyers, they don't come out or something. And we are talking about even to run for council or political positions or you want to have town hall meetings.

The problem is those media on the microphone are really controlled and you are not allowed to speak. Now, in this election and 2006, the Democratic U.S. Senate candidates, they are not aired by Montgomery Community Television. And in this year and maybe some previous elections, the Jewish community or their council, they used it to invite all of the candidates for debate, but not anymore. So they have a sort of selective approach to do that, so silence people down. So if you are anti-conspiracies or you are sort of working with a Muslim group, they will be sent to maybe Guantanamo Bay while they are taking all their properties.

MR. SHAKIR: Okay, let's keep going here. Why don't you just stand up, this gentleman over here on the row? Yeah?

Q: I am James Palmer, Senior Service College, U.S. Army War College. I am just curious to see if you have seen anything in regards to this phobia that may have impacted our troops who are serving in Afghanistan or in Iraq.

MR. SHAKIR: And this gentleman – there are two people right here and we are done.

Q: Hi, Jenna with – (inaudible) – Vote. If you are a non-Muslim, can you actually attend a service in a mosque?

Q: Thank you. There is apparently a concept in the Quran that allows Muslims to lie to non-believers. This came up yesterday in the program because somebody was saying where are the moderate Muslims voices? And Daisy Khan said I am a moderate Muslim. And a gentleman who was sitting next to Franklin Graham said how do I know? How do I know you are not lying to me?

Now, if this concept is in the Quran, what does that say about the value of a dialogue because Islamophobists are going to say that everything that moderates are saying is a lie.

MR. SHAKIR: Let's go to finish it off here.

REV. BREYER: Yeah, I would just like to respond to your question about the jihad in Germany. I think lots of times extremists use Islam to elevate their cause because you want to then be a religious martyr. And just because people want that elevation is no reason we should give it to them. And as a comparable thing, if Terry Jones, who was a religious extremist, if he was the representative of Christianity and if all of Christianity had to be represented by him, most people would say well, no, of course not, he doesn't. And it is a mirror effect. I mean, it is the same thing.

MR. SHAKIR: Okay, so let's wrap it up. We will start with Iraq and Afghanistan impact and then we need to talk about non-Muslims going into mosque and the concept of taqiyya. So we will start with Ken on Iraq, Afghanistan.

MR. GUDE: I will try and be very brief. Around the Quran burning, there was an uptake in concern. We haven't seen any specific reported incident of a U.S. soldier being killed or attacked as a result of this episode. It is clear that it has – that people in Iraq and Afghanistan are paying attention as noted what I said before about the protests.

But again, I think we have to be careful not to allow our discussion of even this Islamophobia be dominated by extremists on either side here. And we didn't – when I talked to Colin (ph) who is there in Afghanistan, he said, you know, there was three or four days where there was a significant spike in protest activity and then there was a little bit additional violence. But it was relatively small and it was confined to a particular group who was making an issue of it in their own domestic political campaign. So you can't say that it didn't have any impact, but it seemed – (inaudible) – five people were killed.

MR. SHAKIR: It didn't hurt out –

MR. GUDE: Our troops were not attacked.

MR. SHAKIR: Our reputation didn't sink any lower? (Laughter.)

MR. GUDE: Yeah.

MR. TARIN: I will address the issue that you mentioned. The term that is used is taqiyya. And taqiyya is not a term that is mentioned in the Quran. It is not a Quranic concept. Where this term comes from is the initial Muslim community that was with Muhammad, the prophet Muhammad, they were facing some serious religious persecution issues. When the initial revelation came down and they were practicing their faith openly, they faced some very serious religious persecution issues.

The concept emerged that you do not have to practice your faith in public because that is how they used to identify people. You have to have a public expression of your faith. You can pray at home. You don't have to pray outside in the public where everybody can see you because you would get tortured, you would get persecuted. Now, interestingly, this is the same concept that both Muslims and Jews practiced when the Inquisition happened, when Muslims

and Jews were being killed together. They weren't able to practice their religion in public because of religious persecution issues.

But unfortunately what happens is when you have got the concepts such as these that are almost completely not even talked about in the intellectual discourse amongst Muslim scholars because they are forgotten topics. But you have people like Frank Gaffney, like Robert Spencer who come and look deeply and have this myopic understanding of history. They start to root out these very, very kind of old concepts and then they try to emerge these as being the topics that the Muslim community is engaged with or practice.

And to the extent where my 8-year-old son knows about taqiyya. I mean, I didn't know about taqiyya until I read a religious text in college. My parents never taught me that you hide your faith so you can subvert the constitution. No, for me, Sharia is our constitution being implemented in a just manner. That is my Sharia is our constitution being implemented. And I think the majority of Muslim Americans have that opinion also.

MR. SHAKIR: Wajahat, let's wrap it up with can a non-Muslim go to a mosque?

MR. ALI: I believe a non-Muslim has to go to mosque. I think they should be going to mosque. I think if the mosque does not allow non-Muslims to come, that mosque leader and that mosque leadership needs to be taken a task by the Muslim American community that is around it. So yes, thank you, please go to more mosques. And Muslims need to open up their mosques and not to be afraid.

And I just want to – can I just end because my last – oh, no?

MR. SHAKIR: No, you and then –

MR. ALI: My last thing is look, 16 Muslims died in the 9/11 tragedy. Muslims are the number-one victims of radical Muslim terrorist acts around the world.

MR. : Eighty-five percent.

MR. ALI: Yeah, 85 percent.

MR. : Of all victims, yeah.

MR. ALI: If Faisal Shahzad was successful, Muslims would have died, all right? The best partners in order to stop this extremist threat documented thoroughly in the past 10 years are Muslims. And I just want to end on a quote by the most recognized American in the world – this was a statistic – the most recognized American in the world who in 1996 lit the Olympic torch, Muhammad Ali, "Me, we." That is a Muhammad Ali quotation. I just want to end on that.

MR. SHAKIR: Rev. Breyer?

REV. BREYER: That's a good place to end. And I think, again, if you come to New York next week, Magellus (ph) – the mosque association of – has actually declared, you know, mosque open house week in New York. Actually I think it is next week, so come on over.

MR. SHAKIR: On behalf of the Center for American Progress, thank you for joining us.

(END)