Muslim Communities
in Domestic and Foreign Policymaking in The United States and United Kingdom:
Empowerment and Engagement

A Chicago-Birmingham Leadership Dialogue
June 4-6 and November 3-5, 2006

Presented by:

THE CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS

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FOREWORD

There is heightened interest and concern in both the United Kingdom and the United States about how to engage the Muslim world and about the related process of integration of British and American Muslims in their broader national communities. Muslims in both nations perceive they are alienated from the policy process and have had difficulty in finding a public voice in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in New York City in 2001 and London in 2005. This in turn has limited the contributions they can play in domestic and foreign policy discourse and in facilitating improved relations and understanding between the West and the Muslim world. Their participation in political life in both countries is, therefore, an important policy issue.

Working in the framework of the Birmingham-Chicago “Sister City” relationship, the Centre for Studies in Security and Diplomacy at the University of Birmingham (CSSD) and The Chicago Council on Global Affairs collaborated on a two-part dialogue on June 4-6 and November 3-5, 2006 to examine this critical issue. The focus of the dialogue was to compare Muslim experiences in the two countries and identify ways Muslim and non-Muslim stakeholders can collaborate to increase the engagement of Muslims in the domestic and foreign policy process and thereby reduce alienation and mistrust between Muslims and other communities. Particular attention was given to the experiences of Muslims in Birmingham and Chicago, two cities with large Muslim populations and a diverse grouping of non-Muslim stakeholders who recognize the need for their involvement in fostering better dialogue and cooperation.

Each of the two dialogue sessions had approximately thirty participants, both Muslim and non-Muslim, drawn equally from the United Kingdom and the United States. As this report of the dialogue sessions makes clear, this process revealed important similarities as well as differences in the American and British experiences. It also uncovered important practical conclusions and recommendations for policy-makers, the media, academics, NGO officers and others. These are encapsulated in this report, which the Centre and the Council believe is a useful contribution on this important subject.

We would like to extend our most sincere thanks to all the participants who made the dialogue such a productive and important initiative. We would also like to thank Ellis Goodman, CBE, chair of the Birmingham Committee of the Chicago Sister Cities International Program, for his guidance and contribution. The Chicago Council would like to thank William S. Graham, John Jeffry Louis, Ernest Mahaffey, and Imad I. Qasim for their crucial support which helped make the project possible. CSSD would like to thank in particular The Edward Cadbury Trust, without whose generous support the Centre would have been unable to undertake this initiative, and Birmingham City Council for their help and cooperation in connection with the Birmingham-based session.
The Centre for Studies in Security and Diplomacy was established within the University of Birmingham in 1998. It is part of the University’s European Research Institute, one of the world’s leading centres for the study of European affairs. It specializes in issues of security, governance, democracy, human rights and the law-based state. CSSD has long-standing and authoritative expertise on the post-Cold War security agenda for Europe, such as Russia, the future of NATO and the transatlantic relationship, and on many of the key security issues of the day.

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, founded in 1922 as The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, is a leading independent, nonpartisan organization committed to influencing the discourse on global issues through contributions to opinion and policy formation, leadership dialogue, and public learning. The Chicago Council brings the world to Chicago by hosting public programs and private events featuring world leaders and experts with diverse views on a wide range of global topics. Through task forces, conferences, studies, and leadership dialogue, the Council brings Chicago’s ideas and opinions to the world.
Muslim Communities in Domestic and Foreign Policymaking in
The United States and United Kingdom:
*Empowerment and Engagement*

Summary

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs and the Centre for Studies in Security and Diplomacy of the University of Birmingham jointly convened a two-part dialogue to discuss strategies to increase the engagement of American and British Muslims in the policymaking processes in their respective countries. The two sets of meetings, held in Chicago (June 4-6, 2006) and Birmingham (Nov, 3-5, 2006) were attended by a group of approximately thirty Muslim and non-Muslim leaders and experts from each country, representing various religious, public and private sector groups. The purpose of the dialogue was threefold: to foster enhanced understanding and dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims; to examine the comparative Muslim experiences in the two countries; and to develop approaches to increasing Muslim engagement in public life and policymaking in the United States and United Kingdom.

The dialogue included site visits to Muslim community centers in the host country, educational panels, and interactive working groups. Each meeting opened with an introductory presentation providing participants with an overview of the demographics of both nations’ Muslim populations, followed by breakout sessions of three working groups focused on: Muslim identity in the United States and United Kingdom; impacting public perceptions of Islam; and increasing Muslim engagement in the policymaking process.

The working groups developed both short- and long-term recommendations, based on the understanding that increasing Muslim participation in public life, and the policymaking process in particular, will require a complex and multipronged approach. Working group members then presented their findings and recommendations to the plenary group.

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1 See Appendix A for a list of participants.
2 See Appendix B for list of presentations and speakers.
Rationale

The United States and United Kingdom have long been destinations for immigrants seeking a better way of life. Many Muslims have participated in the waves of immigration to these two nations and there are now significant communities in both the United States (approximately 3-6 million) and the United Kingdom (1.6 million), although the Muslim American population also includes a significant number of African American and other native-born Muslims which adds to the complexity of the Muslim American situation. The American and British communities have experienced distinct integration challenges, made more complicated by the environment of heightened tensions and mistrust following the September 11th, 2001 attacks in the United States and the July 7th, 2005 bombings in London. There is a critical need for improved dialogue between American and British society and their countries’ respective Muslim communities on the issues of political and civic integration. Accomplishing this goal in an era of heightened fears and scrutiny will require the active engagement of all parts of American and British society. Policymakers in both countries must make a commitment to better engagement. Similarly, the Muslim communities in both countries must identify ways to more effectively engage civically and politically, thereby ensuring that their views and concerns are more clearly heard and incorporated within broader society.

The vibrant Muslim communities in the United States and United Kingdom are a largely untapped resource in the development of domestic and foreign policy for the respective countries. The spread of Islam, the second largest of the world’s religions, combined with the sudden saliency of the Islamic world for the American and British publics and policymakers, highlights both the constraints placed on the communities in the broader policy discourse and the potential roles and responsibilities they can play in contributing to this process. There are, however, internal and external challenges which limit the ability of the communities to fully participate in civic and political discourse. The communities’ diversity, significant immigrant composition, and underdeveloped bridge-building efforts to other communities all serve to limit Muslim political capacity. Externally, both communities are feeling an increased sense of alienation vis-à-vis government policies and public perceptions of Islam and Muslims in the wake of the September 11th and July 7th attacks.
Demographic Overview

Although no exact figures are available for the United States as the U.S. Census Bureau does not collect data on religious identification, it is widely estimated that the majority of Muslims in both the United States and the United Kingdom are immigrants who migrated in the last forty to fifty years. However, the differences in their racial, ethnic, socio-economic and geographic composition have led to unique integration experiences. The following section summarizes presentations made during the dialogue’s introductory sessions which provided an overview of each country’s Muslim populations.

Muslims in the United States

Dr. Aminah McCloud, professor of religious studies and director of the Islamic World Studies Program at DePaul University, provided an overview of the U.S. Muslim population.

Muslim immigrants to the United States originate from over 85 countries, concentrated in the Middle East and South Asia, but also including countries in Europe, Africa, and East and Southeast Asia. Today, two in three Muslims living in the United States are foreign-born. Among the native-born population are second- and third- generation immigrants, converts to Islam, and a large number of African-American Muslims. Muslim Americans are geographically concentrated in or near the major metropolitan centers in California, Illinois, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Massachusetts, Maryland, Texas, Georgia, and Florida. There are approximately 1,700 Islamic institutions in the United States, including religious houses, neighborhood centers and schools, but a majority of Muslim Americans are not affiliated with any religious institutions. Some estimate that only 20 percent regularly attend mosques.

Muslim Americans tend to have higher levels of educational attainment than other Americans. Many Muslim immigrants entered the United States to work as engineers or practice medicine. 59 percent of adult Muslim Americans have earned college or postgraduate degrees compared to twenty seven percent of the general population. Many Muslims work in professional, managerial and technical fields, with particular concentrations in the areas of information technology, education, medicine, law, and corporate management. “Indigenous” or Muslim Americans have not been as economically successful as Muslim immigrants.

Muslims born in the United States have, however, demonstrated a greater propensity to engage in the political process than Muslim immigrants, who like many other first

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3 The fourth and most recent wave of Muslim immigration to the United States came after 1965, when President Lyndon Johnson sponsored an immigration bill that repealed the longstanding system of quotas by national origin. Concurrently, immigration from Western Europe began to decline significantly, with a corresponding growth in the numbers of people arriving to the United States from the Middle East and Asia. Muslim immigrants began arriving in the United Kingdom in high numbers in the 1950s and 1960s after the independence and partition of the Indian subcontinent.
generation immigrants have been slower to integrate socially and politically. Muslim African Americans in particular have historically been more politically active and have formed stronger alliances with non-Muslims, as they did in large numbers during the civil rights movement. However, their engagement tends to be limited to local political participation. When Muslim immigrants do engage politically, it is usually in the realm of foreign policy, and specifically issues that relate back to their home countries.

The attacks on New York and Washington, DC on September 11th, 2001 further impeded the political integration of Muslim Americans by creating a climate of fear and suspicion between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The U.S. government, eager to demonstrate its commitment to strengthening national security, undertook a series of initiatives which disproportionately affected the Muslim community. These included the USA PATRIOT ACT, which dramatically expanded the authority of government agencies to address domestic and international terrorism; National Security Agency wiretapping and monitoring; and Federal Bureau of Investigation ethnic profiling and secret monitoring of mosques. None of these measures has uncovered a significant domestic terrorist threat. In contrast, many European countries, including the United Kingdom, have experienced post-September 11th terrorist attacks and uncovered terrorist cells operating within their borders.

Recently, some Muslim organizations, such as the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) have been working to both promote positive images of Muslims in American media and public life and encourage Muslim Americans towards civic and political participation. These organizations are often weighed down by negative public and media attention and are undergoing a long and somewhat difficult process of achieving public acceptance. However, the significant social and political contributions CAIR and MPAC have made towards furthering the integration of Muslim Americans should not be underestimated. There has been an increase in Muslim American voter turnout in the last two presidential elections and the small number of Muslim Americans running for elected office or participating in political lobbying is slowly increasing.

Indeed, Muslim Americans did witness some groundbreaking firsts in 2006: Keith Ellison, a Democrat from Minneapolis, became the first Muslim elected to the House of Representatives, and Ingrid Mattson, a professor at Hartford Seminary, was elected the first female president of the Islamic Society of North America, the largest Muslim organization in North America.

Muslim Americans still have many steps to take in the path towards full civic and political participation. These include the need to develop a distinct American Islam that captures the diversity of the community and creates a unified voice on domestic and foreign issues. They also include efforts to increase Muslim involvement in the media, educating the media about Islam, and building coalitions across race, religion and politics.
**Muslims in the United Kingdom**

Baroness Kishwer Falkner, a member of the House of Lords Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defense and Development Policy, and Liberal Democratic Spokesperson for Committees and Local Government, provided the participants in Chicago with an overview of the Muslim community in the United Kingdom.

Additionally in Birmingham, there were two panel discussions focused on the changing British Muslim identity. The first panel examined the structural and cultural inequalities within the Muslim communities and between the Muslim communities and the society at large, focusing on how such inequalities have impacted identity formation, leadership, gender relations, civil society, and community cohesion within the Muslim community. The second panel discussed the impact that events in the Middle East and British governmental policies have had on British Muslims.

The United Kingdom’s 1.6 million Muslims comprise 3 percent of the population and are the second largest faith group in the country. Muslims in the United Kingdom are less diverse than Muslims in the United States: nearly 73 percent are of South Asian descent, half of whom come from Pakistan. The first migrant wave took place in the 1950s, with subsequent waves in the 1980s and 1990s. Many come from rural areas of South Asia and lack a formal education. Consequently, Muslims in the United Kingdom have generally come from lower socio-economic backgrounds and are more concentrated by geographic origin than Muslim Americans. They live predominantly in urban areas and their education levels tend to remain relatively low among the second and third generations. Muslims in the United Kingdom average an 18 percent unemployment rate, triple the national average and higher in urban centers. Furthermore, many Muslims have mental health or other health issues that are not adequately treated for a variety of economic and cultural reasons.

The high urban concentration and greater homogeneity of Muslims in the United Kingdom have contributed to their organizations being less fractured than those in the United States. Since approximately 80 percent of Muslims in the United Kingdom attend mosques regularly, they remain the primary organizing structure and mobilizing vehicle for Muslims. However, according to one panelist, the mosques are not meeting the changing needs of their congregations.

Compared with Muslim Americans, British Muslims are far more segregated from mainstream society, with higher levels of distrust and hostility towards non-Muslims and the government. Such hostility has led to an open debate as to whether Muslim values and Western lifestyles are compatible. According to one panelist in Birmingham, race was used as the identifiable marker before September 11th, but religion has played a more prominent role in its aftermath. Although British Muslims have expressed an increasing sense of marginalization, they have made important strides in the political arena, and have had more success running for elected office than their American counterparts. There are four elected Muslim members of Parliament, five Muslims
appointed to the House of Lords, and several Muslims serving in prominent positions in local governments.

In the United Kingdom, several acts have propelled the Muslim community into the spotlight, enhancing a negative perception of the religion and its practitioners, thereby placing it and them under greater scrutiny. The head of the Metropolitan Police announced that the United Kingdom was the number one target for Al Qaeda-inspired terrorism, with an estimated 2,000-5,000 home-grown terrorists. The prime minister, however, subsequently downsized the estimate to 200. Jack Straw, the former Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and current Leader of the House of Commons, revitalized the debate on the niqab for Muslim women when he stated in a newspaper article that he preferred women to remove their niqab during constituency meetings. In another incident, an unarmed Muslim suspect was shot and wounded during a poorly executed police raid in East London that targeted two suspected Muslim extremists. Despite extensive forensic examination, no evidence of terrorism or illegal activity was discovered and subsequently the intelligence justifying the raid was deemed unreliable. A public discussion followed that addressed terrorism, extremism, civil liberties, the quality of police intelligence, and the alleged readiness of the police to act without sufficient cause and violence against Muslims or persons perceived to be Muslims.

Despite divisive internal and external debates and increased governmental and public scrutiny of Muslims, several positive developments have taken place that may deliver long-term benefits. Many in the British public, opposition parties and even the government’s own supporters have spoken out against antiterrorism legislation limiting civil rights. The House of Lords restricted the government’s ability to curtail the rights of suspects carte blanche and openly condemned the practice of torture. Mainstream media outlets such as The Guardian, The Independent, The Times, the BBC and Channel 4 have initiated a vigorous debate challenging the government’s policies and approach to the Muslim communities. The British government itself has taken concrete steps to try and alleviate some of the concerns of its Muslim population. First, the government transferred the “faith portfolio” from the Home Office, which handles terrorism related issues, to the Department of Local Governments and Community. This was intended to eliminate the perception that the government linked terrorism with Islam. Second, the government established a Commission on Integration, appointed a Sikh chairman and staffed it with a diverse and accomplished group of individuals. Even with this progress, the government has yet to formulate policies that garner strong Muslim approval and has not successfully engaged Muslim interlocutors who are credible to a majority of the Muslim community.

Several new Muslim groups have emerged during the last two years to address community concerns. The Muslim Council of United Kingdom, founded in 1997 and comprised of approximately 400 organizations, is the largest Muslim umbrella group in United Kingdom, with a strong working relationship with all levels of government. Four British Muslim organizations came together to launch a Mosques and Imams National
Advisory Board, a self-regulatory board aimed at supervising mosques and training imams in the United Kingdom. The Board was launched in response to recommendations by the Preventing Extremism and Terrorism Task Force formed after the July 7th, 2005 bombing and is in the process of compiling a best practices guide to addressing prominent issues for British Muslims. Muslims for a Secular United Kingdom, founded and promoted by a well-known Muslim journalist, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, was also launched after the London subway attacks. Finally, the British Muslim Forum was launched in March 2005 to represent Muslims at the grassroots level.

WORKING GROUPS

The following are summaries of the breakout meeting and subsequent plenary discussions of the three working groups, which convened during both meetings of the dialogue, and presented findings and recommendations at the end of each meeting. The second meeting of each working group was designed to further develop the work undertaken during the first session.

Identity Working Group

In the United States and United Kingdom, immigrant identity is a dynamic rather than static concept. While immigrants bring with them their own ethnic, cultural and religious identities, their experiences in their new home countries are marked by a constant negotiation between their multiple identities. Their identity is further shaped by the evolving nature of how communities define themselves internally and through their interactions with outside groups.

After struggling to define “identity” the working group engaged in a broad effort to determine common trends and challenges of Muslim identities in both nations. Muslim participants from both the United States and United Kingdom described the external pressures to be defined by a single strict identity. However, since Muslims are not racially, nationally, or culturally homogeneous, they questioned why unlike other immigrants or religious congregations they were expected to represent themselves in a singular fashion. Participants suggested that attempting to define the Muslim community by a single identity is both illogical and impractical and would only reinforce a negative “us and them” mindset.

Many in the group felt that Muslims consistently have to prove themselves as “good” and “loyal” to the United States and United Kingdom, and are not able to criticize government policy without undue scrutiny. In many instances, participants felt that constant suspicion has caused Muslims to adopt a “victim” mentality. Working group members said this was especially true among Muslim youth in United Kingdom who feel disenchanted and alienated. Many participants noted that some Muslims undergo a
difficult process of maintaining their Muslim identity while fully integrating into the social fabric of the country in which they live.

When discussing Islam and modernity, working group participants in Chicago suggested the use of the term “Islamic Renovation,” referring to the development of an honest internal dialogue on the challenges of modernity and applying Islam to a modern Western context. They felt that using the term “Islamic Reformation” was inappropriate because the term has been historically rooted in another religion, culture, and time. Many participants referenced Tariq Ramadan, a Swiss Muslim academic and theologian who has spoken forcefully of the need to purify Islam, separating the beliefs from the “cultural baggage,” as a leader in the renovation movement. The group noted that the Jewish community has been particularly successful in negotiating its own struggles with identity and integration, creating a number of modern Jewish identities.

A dialogue has begun in the United Kingdom exploring how Muslims engage in modern Western democracy and whether British law and Islamic law (Sharia) are compatible. This dialogue focuses on how Muslims can adapt to society without compromising their principles, and if and how Muslims in the United Kingdom should integrate. The group concluded that a central challenge to this process is that the ulama in Europe are importing teaching styles from Muslim majority societies that are not compatible with the norms of British society. The group questioned whether broader society can accept the idea of an Islamic way of life that is compatible with their rule of law.

In the United States, one of the main identity debates focuses on the creation of an “American Islam” that relates the religion’s core values to an American context. However, the group debated whether that expression of Islam would be considered legitimate among Muslims outside the United States, especially to those in the Arab world. Many group members also stated that the Muslim American community has been more successful than the British Muslim community in embracing joint religious and national identities. This may be due to the greater historical acceptance of immigrants in the United States, the lack of an ethnic or religious link to American national identity, and to the presence of a large and vibrant native Muslim community in the form of Muslim African Americans.

Finally, the group found that many identity issues are complicated by the debate around who speaks for Islam. Some of those claiming legitimacy have no or limited scholarship of Islam, its traditions, and jurisprudence, and are therefore expressing unfounded interpretations.

4 The idea of an Islamic reformation, or development of a liberalized Islamic religion, gained notoriety when the term was used and idea endorsed by novelist Salman Rushdie in guest editorial columns in the Washington Post and Times of London in 2005.
Recommendations

Group members made the following recommendations:

- Create institutions to encourage indigenous Muslim scholarship in both the United States and the United Kingdom. Muslims increasingly feel the need to stress an Islamic identity that reflects the core values that their faith shares with the culture in which they live and identify ways of applying their religion in different modern settings. At present, however, many high-caliber Muslim thinkers emerge from American and British education systems without proper support in their ability to study Islam as it is lived in the West rather than as an offshoot of another discipline.

- Better fund and develop institutions that ensure the new generation of scholars do not need to travel to the Middle East for “proper Islamic education,” i.e., Arabic training to interpret the Qur’an and the Hadith. Such programs would not only assist young scholars toward building their academic skills, but would also give them the confidence to interpret the Qur’an and the Hadith in a Western context.

  If these institutions can be developed, the United States and United Kingdom could provide a new locus for Islamic thinking on modern issues. In the United States, several impressive scholars on Islam have emerged who are producing vibrant thinking about Islam. Such scholars should be supported to develop publications targeted at a Muslim audience based in the West.

- Develop programs to educate imams on speaking styles that resonate more effectively with Muslims living in the West as well as with non-Muslims. Many U.S. imams are immigrants and have a tendency to use dogmatic styles that do not connect with younger generations. Consequently, young adults can feel disconnected from mosques and other religious institutions. The younger generation would benefit from imams and spiritual leaders who better connect religion to their daily experience.

- Convene Muslim and non-Muslim jointly sponsored town hall meetings with local communities and constituencies to promote inter-communal dialogue and address pressing local issues. This would provide community members with a neutral space in which to openly engage in dialogue. Universities often provide an appropriate forum for such dialogues.
The Policymaking Process

The policymaking working group focused on ways to increase the engagement of American and British Muslims in the policy discourse. While the landscape and institutions are different for Muslims in the two countries, there are opportunities for Muslims and non-Muslims in each country to work together on creating new avenues for enhanced Muslim participation in the policy process. The dialogue that took place in Chicago and Birmingham provides an essential starting point. Additional dialogues are needed in order to identify additional mechanisms for continual collaboration.

British Muslims appear to be more actively engaged in the political process than their American counterparts due to the larger concentrations of Muslims in a limited number of large cities and some proactive measures taken by the British government to engage the community. Furthermore, political campaigns in the United Kingdom require significantly fewer resources than those in the United States. Some participants felt that the affirmative action policies used to select candidates for political parties and a shared common language and history associated with the Commonwealth has allowed for easier integration into the political process.

Some Muslim communities in the United Kingdom have also progressed in developing local initiatives, with particular focus on broad-based community alliances. In Birmingham, for example, the community has worked to build an interfaith alliance, which proved vital in bringing non-Muslim communities to the table during discussions between the Muslim community and the Birmingham police.

With regards to domestic policy, the British government has taken steps not only to recognize rising Islamophobia, but has undertaken strong measures to attempt to counter such perceptions. This has helped increase Muslim engagement. In contrast, in the United States, Islamophobia has not been officially acknowledged as a distinct social issue.5

In the realm of foreign policy, British Muslims again perceive themselves to be more engaged than Muslim Americans. This is due in part to the proactive stance on behalf of the British government to include British Muslims in foreign policy discussions, in which Muslims are seen as possible mediators between the West and their countries of origin.

Muslims in the United States have found it difficult to break into the political arena with only a few legislators at the state level and a recently elected Muslim African-American congressman from Minnesota. Political activism, however, has been growing among Muslims in the United States. Some members of the group suggested that this was due

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5 The term Islamophobia has been used by many scholars and in many political and social commentaries to describe the growing phenomenon of prejudice against Muslims, which manifests itself in harassment, discrimination, and negative stereotyping,
in part to outreach by the Republican Party to Muslims, which provided Muslims with some access to the State Department and National Security Council.

Muslim Americans began organizing more systematically and collectively following the September 11th attacks, giving greater priority to internal issues related to civil liberties than foreign policy issues such as the war in Iraq, Middle East policy, Palestinian territories, and nuclear proliferation in Iran. This is primarily because Muslim intellectuals and organizations have perceived that they are unable to affect, or even enter, the debate on foreign policy issues given the current political climate and the relatively weak capacity level of their organizations.

Recommendations

Despite the different landscapes and challenges that exist in the United States and United Kingdom, both Muslim and non-Muslim participants supported increasing the participation of Muslims in the policymaking processes of both countries. As a group, they identified the following activities that the Muslim community could do to facilitate this process in collaboration with non-Muslim partners:

- Raise funds to influence policy. Fundraising is one of the most critical factors in influencing policy. Funds are needed to increase organizational capacity within both communities and to undertake relevant projects. Because of the wealth and large number of Muslim professionals in the United States, there is an opportunity to mobilize resources to influence the political process in the coming decade. Similar opportunities exist in United Kingdom. The non-Muslim foundation community could also help to strengthen Muslim institutions, specifically with the aim of increasing their engagement in civic and political issues. For many foundations, the diversity within the Muslim community could potentially provide a great asset in furthering many of the social justice issues they currently support and which resonate among Muslims.

- Mobilize Muslims to achieve political objectives. A better understanding of the workings of the political system assists any community to increase its participation in the political process. Therefore, the group felt that if the Muslim communities in the United States and United Kingdom develop a more nuanced understanding of the political process, they will begin to develop longer-term and more sophisticated approaches to providing policy input. This includes developing relationships with civil servants rather than simply targeting senior elected officials. Participants discussed the potential power in mobilizing Muslim students in universities, a traditional center for activism. Furthermore, participants noted the unique role that immigrant Muslims in both the United States and United Kingdom can play as bridge builders between their country of residence and their country of origin. During the present period of increased international tension, an engaged community can provide invaluable assistance.
with improving diplomatic efforts and fostering better dialogue and understanding across cultures.

- Use the Muslim electorate to influence decision makers. The Muslim communities in The United States and United Kingdom, although still a minority group, have grown to become noticeable constituents. The group felt that the Muslim community in the United Kingdom in particular had the potential to use their voices collectively to better translate their ideas into policy. This is especially true because Muslims are heavily concentrated in a few large metropolitan areas.

- Develop national and local leadership and organizational capacity. Building individual and organizational capacity is central to a community’s ability to engage and influence processes. There is a need to increase Muslim leadership at the local and national level, both within the Muslim community and in societies at large. Non-Muslim local and national government officials should be encouraged to nominate Muslims to public bodies, such as school boards, local agencies, and boards of civic organizations. Increasing organizational capacity among Muslim nonprofit, academic, and advocacy organizations is also critical to the community’s ability to influence ideas, mobilize, and provide services. Among the organizational capacity needs most often cited by Muslim organizations are the needs to build qualified staffs, broaden and diversify the resource base, expand and deepen the membership base, and improve communications strategies. Muslim organizations should work with American and British foundations to further capacity-building efforts.

- Form alliances and coalitions to pursue common policy objectives. Muslims in the United States and United Kingdom have traditionally not engaged in civic and political issues beyond those relevant to their community. This has been a disadvantage to Muslim and non-Muslim communities, which would both benefit from closer ties on issues of common salience such as social justice, migration policy, and free speech. Both Muslim and non-Muslim organizations should make more concerted efforts to build alliances with one another and create coalitions with institutions that share similar objectives. Such activities assist Muslims in participating more effectively in the public arena and empower the overall coalition addressing the specific policy issue. More newly formed Muslim organizations can benefit from coalitions with more established groups both within and outside the Muslim community, thereby increasing their understanding of how to access additional funds, develop proposals and manage projects. Within the past decade, several alliances between Muslim and non-Muslim organizations have evolved to address issues such as civil rights abuses. Both communities should continue to build upon these experiences. An example of how this can work is provided by the ongoing activities of the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago, which is working with other
organizations to build a coalition of Muslim and non-Muslim groups focused on health policy.

- Develop effective policy analysis using the community’s expertise. Although Muslim communities have limited capacity to engage in policy analysis, the community should work more closely with think tanks and academic institutions to develop policy papers that address pertinent issues about Islam, and specifically Islam in the West. Think tanks play a significant role in influencing policymakers in both the United States and the United Kingdom. However, the Muslim communities in both countries have had little experience with think tanks or with commissioning research and analysis on policy issues from a Muslim perspective. The community must encourage more of its youth to enter into disciplines such as political science in order to develop a larger talent pool equipped to address such issues. Providing scholarships and fellowships for Muslim students to acquire advanced degrees in fields relevant to policy analysis would be extremely valuable. Furthermore, among the few experts already working in academia or think tanks, acquiring additional resources and establishing research networks will help to improve their ongoing work.

- Achieve greater representation in senior public and government positions. Given the current climate of fear within both countries towards Islam and Muslims, increasing the representation of Muslims in public office could pose a challenge. However, the American and British governments should be encouraged to appoint more Muslims to senior positions. Additionally, Muslims in both countries should become more engaged in calling for such appointments. In the United Kingdom in particular, there is a real opportunity to increase the number of Muslims in public office through the growing number of eligible British Muslim voters.

- Develop an ability to influence the media on issues affecting the community. The media is a powerful player in influencing public opinion and the policymaking process, and journalists have an ethical responsibility to report on issues objectively and accurately. When covering stories about Islam, journalists in the West often profile self-professed Muslim leaders who are openly and loudly expressing radical views, but who may not have a constituency. Journalists would benefit from the creation of a credible clearing house of sources to guide them toward responsible spokespeople. Muslim communities could also improve their relationship with the media by better training responsible spokespeople on ways of engaging journalists, editors, and producers.
**Impacting Perceptions**

There is a significant problem with American and British media coverage and public perceptions of Islam and Muslims. The media, especially in the United States, does not generally provide substantive information and analysis and the news is often reduced to entertainment and sound bites.

Media stories on Islam tend to focus on negative, emotional and inflammatory topics such as violence, terrorism, security, and women and the *hijab*. Reports generally are accusatory rather than informative. They reinforce negative public attitudes towards Muslims by constantly linking “Islamic” with “terrorist” in news stories while failing to effectively cover statements by Muslim organizations denouncing terrorism. The Muslim community perceives the media to be both sensationalist and inaccurate. Forced to continually defend their faith, culture, and way of life, Muslims have either chosen not to engage with the media or to take reactive attitudes towards the charges made against them. This has perpetuated a broad public perception that Muslims condone such acts. In addition, the media’s lack of coverage of Muslims in human interest pieces reinforces the misconception that Muslims are a monolithic community and that all Muslims are responsible for the actions of fringe elements.

Rather than constantly reacting, participants discussed the need to take the initiative and reframe the discussion to put forth a more accurate picture of Islam and Muslims. This requires a complex and layered approach that goes beyond the current stale response of Islam as a religion of peace and enters the realm of disseminating information on the true nature of the religion and its adherents.

There is also a need to increase the Muslim community’s knowledge of the media. For example, Muslims and non-Muslims should work to increase the number of Muslim journalists and documentary filmmakers who are familiar with their culture and religion and can promote it creatively through art, comedy, music or architecture in mainstream popular culture.

Finally, it is critical to acknowledge the role civic engagement plays in changing perceptions. Many immigrant groups in the United States and United Kingdom have historically broken down barriers by increasing their participation in public life and in civic work. Muslim Americans have made progress in this arena, specifically at the local level. They have begun to engage in issues that are traditionally regarded as “American issues” rather than simply issues relevant to the Muslim community – such as inequality, poverty, and increasing access to economic opportunities.
Recommendations:

The working group produced recommendations that are broken down into two general areas around which Muslims and non-Muslims should focus in order to better influence perceptions of the Muslim community:

Improve the quality and dissemination of information

- Place greater emphasis on education about Islam in the public educational systems. School administrators and teachers should make concerted efforts to introduce Islam into their curriculum, along with the other world religions. High school curricula need to be developed and training should be offered to university professors offering courses on Islam and Muslims. Initiatives to monitor and correct textbooks that demean Muslims are needed. These initiatives would help decrease misperceptions about Islam in both countries.

- Cultivate relationships between journalists and Muslim organizations and spokespersons in order that more diverse and authentic Muslim voices are reflected in news stories. Relationships should also be cultivated between Muslims and editorial boards to ensure that stories are more accurately covered. The group suggested establishing a more advanced public relations apparatus that includes a wide range of spokespersons in various areas of expertise. Muslim organizations generally lack the capacity to engage in media outreach, and, therefore, assistance should be offered to such organizations to expand their ability to engage the media more effectively.

- Encourage the media to improve their reporting on Islam and Muslims. A guideline could be developed for standard media practices in the United States when reporting on Islam, similar to the guidelines established by the BBC in United Kingdom. A one-page index on Islamophobia could also be created and made available to media organizations. The media should be encouraged to be more sensitive to the ways they identify Muslim individuals that engage in terrorist acts. For example, when a non-Muslim commits an act, the act is generally emphasized, rather than the person’s religious identity. However, when a Muslim individual commits a terrorist act, the person’s religious affiliation is generally given greater attention. Finally, the media should also be encouraged to report on the contributions that Muslims have made in the past, and those that they are currently making.

- Encourage the media to work with the Muslim community to educate the public regarding shared values among Muslims and the larger society. Islam promotes universal values of democracy, justice, equality, peace, and the central role of the family. The media can appeal to commonalities across various cultures and religious groups, and in doing so, it can help differentiate between the democratic principles promoted by Islamic texts and by religious scholars and
the undemocratic regimes of many countries with a Muslim majority. Finally, Muslims must work with the media to more accurately explain the rights of women in Islam, distinguishing between cultural practices and religious beliefs. The discussion would need to address the purpose and practice of the hijab, an issue often criticized by Westerners, specifically Western feminists.

- Encourage more Muslims should to enter the fields of journalism and public relations. This should include creating scholarships at journalism schools and internships targeted at bringing Muslims into print and broadcast organizations. Participants also suggested establishing mentorship programs for those few Muslims already working in journalism. The media is ultimately influenced by the journalists, editors, and producers who make up the production teams. There are currently few Muslim journalists in the United States and United Kingdom and, therefore, the voice and contribution of Muslims in the pitch, development, and covering of stories has not often been reflected in the ways that stories are covered.

Building and enhancing cross-community civic engagement

- Encourage Muslims and non-Muslims to cultivate personal relationships so that Muslims are less marginalized and better understood. This is possible through more frequent and sustained engagement between diverse communities, such as through interfaith activities or through collaborative community organizing activities on issues of common concern. Relationship building can take place both at the leadership level, as well as among the youth within each community.

Conclusion

In general, participants in both dialogues expressed how they benefited from the experience and felt that Muslims in the United States and the United Kingdom should continue to share their experiences with one another in order to further the involvement of both communities in the policymaking process.
The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is a leading independent nonpartisan organization committed to influencing the discourse on global issues through contributions to opinion and policy formation, leadership dialogue and public learning.

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The Centre for Studies in Security and Diplomacy was established within the University of Birmingham in 1998. It is part of the University’s European Research Institute, one of the world’s leading centres for the study of European affairs. The Centre acts as a focal point for project work, training and research. It specializes in issues of security, governance, democracy, human rights and the law-based state. CSSD has long-standing and authoritative expertise on the post-Cold War security agenda for Europe, such as Russia, the future of NATO and the transatlantic relationship, and on many of the key security issues of the day, for example the implications of the Iraq crisis for Europe and for multilateral institutions such as NATO and the UN.

For further information about CSSD please contact The Centre for Studies in Security and Diplomacy, European Research Institute, The University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT, United Kingdom. Visit CSSD’s website at www.cssd.bham.ac.uk.

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Appendix A: Participants

SUNDAY, JUNE 4 - TUESDAY, JUNE 6, 2006 | CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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Appendix B: Agendas

SUNDAY, JUNE 4 - TUESDAY, JUNE 6, 2006 | CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

SUNDAY, JUNE 4, 2006

1730-1900 Reception at the residence of Consul General Andrew Seaton
161 E Chicago Avenue, apartment 61 P1

1900 Dinner
The Signature Room at the 95th, 875 N Michigan Ave

MONDAY, JUNE 5, 2006
Mid-America Club, 80th floor AON Building, 200 East Randolph

0900 -1200 Session I: Overview of the American and British Muslim Experiences
Comparing Muslim identities in the United States and England, including a review of the histories of the respective communities and their demographic, economic and social characteristics, status and perceptions of civic and political engagement, institutional capacity, and perceptions of self-identity.

0900 - 0915 Welcome and Introductions
0915 - 1025 Dr. Aminah McCloud: The U.S. Perspective
1025 - 1040 Coffee
1040 - 1150 Baroness Kishwer Falkner: The UK Perspective

1150-1250 Lunch: open seating and general discussion

1250-1705 Session II: Working Groups
Examining comparatively avenues and obstacles to community participation in domestic and foreign policymaking including the formal political processes, group advocacy, community and ‘mainstream’ organizations, and the media. Exploring strategies and mechanisms for community empowerment and engagement (education, institution and capacity building, creating alliances with non-Muslim institutions and groups, interaction with the media, political participation).

Group One – Identities
Group Two – Impacting Perceptions
Group Three – Policymaking
1250- 1405  First Session of Working Groups
1405 - 1420  Tea
1420 – 1535  Second Session of Working Groups
1535 – 1550  Tea
1550 – 1705  Third Session of Working Groups
1715  Depart Mid America Club

1800 - 1930  Chicago Council Program – Iraq: Mission Continued
(with General Mark Kimmitt, Larry Korb and John Mearsheimer)
Chicago Hilton, 720 South Michigan Avenue

1930  Dinner
Marquette Room, Chicago Hilton, 720 South Michigan Avenue

TUESDAY, JUNE 6, 2006
Mid-America Club, 80th floor AON Building, 200 East Randolph

0830- 1000  Rapporteurs finalize reports

1000 - 1300  Session III: Working Group Reports

  1000-1100  Presentation by Chair and Discussion of Group One Report
  1100-1200  Presentation by Chair and Discussion of Group Two Report
  1200-1300  Presentation by Chair and Discussion of Group Three Report

1300-1315  Coffee

1315-1415  Final Wrap-up Session

1415  Adjourn Conference: Buffet lunch available for participants
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 3 – SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 5 | BIRMINGHAM, ENGLAND

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2006

1245 Visit to Central Mosque  
\textit{Belgrave Road, Birmingham}

1315 Jummah Prayers and Guided Tour

1445 Afternoon tea and sandwiches  
\textit{Hotel du Vin, Abbey Well Room}

1515-1715 Panel Discussion: “Changing Muslim Identities in the 21st Century”  
\textit{Hotel du Vin, Abbey Well Room}

1515-1715 \textbf{Panel 1: The local dimension.}

Structural and cultural inequalities and how they impact on identity formation; issues of leadership; gender inequalities; mosques/imams; civil society; community cohesion.

\textbf{Panel:}

Mashuq Ally, Head of Equalities, Birmingham City Council  
Sajida Madni, Birmingham Citizens  
Rehanah Sadiq, Muslim Hospital Chaplain  
Faraz Yousefzai, Working Links, Birmingham

1615-1715 \textbf{Panel 2: The international dimension.}

The national and foreign policy framework; the “war on terror”; civil liberties/human rights; relations with the Ummah: the impact of changing Western European identities.

\textbf{Panel:}

Mohammed Imran, Islamic Relief  
Tahir Abbas, University of Birmingham  
Salma Yaqoob, Respect, Sparkbrook, Birmingham

1715-1745 Break

1800-1900 \textbf{Reception: Birmingham City Council, Chamberlain Room}

Host: Mr Mike Whitby, Leader, Birmingham City Council

2000 \textbf{Dinner: Café Lazeez}

\textit{The Mailbox, Birmingham City Centre}
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2006

0900-1130 Session I:

0900-0915 Welcome and Introductions

0915-1015 Discussion introduced by Baroness Falkner of Margravine
“Overview of past 6 months: Impact of current events on Muslims in the US and UK”

1015-1030 Discussion of Working Group objectives

1030-1100 Coffee break

1100-1300 Session II: Working Groups

Group One – Identities
Group Two – Impacting Perceptions
Group Three – Policymaking

1300-1400 Buffet Lunch

1400-1800 Session III: Working Groups

Group One – Identities
Group Two – Impacting Perceptions
Group Three – Policymaking

1600 Coffee break

1800-2000 Break
Rapporteurs finalise reports

2000 Drinks: Courtyard, Hotel du Vin

2030 Dinner: Abbey Well Room, Hotel du Vin
Host: Sir David Logan
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2006

0800  Distribution of Working Group Reports (in Hotel foyer)

0830-1000  Session IV: Working Group Reports

  0830-0915  Presentation by Chair and Discussion of Group One Report
  0915-1000  Presentation by Chair and Discussion of Group Two Report
  1000-1045  Presentation by Chair and Discussion of Group Three Report

1045  Coffee available

1045-1130  Final wrap-up session to discuss outcomes of dialogue
Appendix C: Reading Lists

**SUNDAY, JUNE 4 - TUESDAY, JUNE 6, 2006 | CHICAGO, ILLINOIS**

**U.S. Readings**


UK Readings


Sala@m. “Demographics/Charts - 2001 Census Data.” *Muslim Communities in Europe: Britain.* [http://www.salaam.co.uk/themeofthemonth/september03_index.php?l=0](http://www.salaam.co.uk/themeofthemonth/september03_index.php?l=0)


Ahmed, Sameera Tahira. "Young Muslims and Muslim Media in Britain." [link]

Cesari, Jocelyne. "European Islam: A Profile." [link]


"Muslims in Britain." [link]


Skerry, Peter. "Political Islam in the United States and Europe." [link]