MUSLIM POLITICS AND U.S. POLICIES: PROSPECTS FOR PLURALISM AND DEMOCRACY IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

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THIRD SESSION: "OLD AND NEW PLURALISMS"

THOMAS BARFIELD, BOSTON UNIVERSITY: "AFGHANISTAN: ISLAM AS A WAY OF LIFE VS. ISLAM AS IDEOLOGY"

MUHAMMAD QASIM ZAMAN, BROWN UNIVERSITY: "MADRASAS AND REFORM: SOME LESSONS FROM PAKISTAN"

GWENN OKRUHLIK, VISITING SCHOLAR, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS: "MUSLIM POLITICS AND PLURALISM IN SAUDI ARABIA"

MR. HEFNER: We now have three speakers discussing three countries that I think are of immediate and compelling interest, both to specialists and people who are perhaps not too familiar with the Muslim world. We have all heard a good deal about these countries recently. The countries are Afghanistan, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Our first presenter is Thomas Barfield, my colleague from Boston University, who is going to be speaking about "Afghanistan: Islam as a Way of Life vs. Islam as Ideology."

Tom.

THOMAS BARFIELD: Few places in the Muslim world present more paradoxes than Afghanistan. The country has one of the most thoroughly Islamic societies in the world, but it has no significant institutions of Islamic learning. It has experienced failed governments driven by both radical socialist and puritanical Islamists, and it has a population that has never been moved by any sort of ideology. It is a place where the concept of Islamic politics is little debated, but only because its people assume that there can be no other type of politics. It was home for many years to Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda training camps, and yet almost no native-born Afghans ever participated in the movement's terrorist activities abroad. It is a country that fought a 10-year jihad to expel the Soviet Union, but then deserted the Islamic Taliban within weeks to support an American invasion.

One explanation for this is that Afghanistan represents an older form of Islamic society in which religion is not considered a form of ideology but remains an all-encompassing way of life. Issues that spark debate in other Islamic countries originated in their experience of their colonial past: mass education, urbanization, rapid economic changes, mass mobilization through explicitly political parties that had little resonance in Afghanistan. Afghanistan was never a colony, has low levels of literacy, an economy that is overwhelmingly rural and subsistence, and it's a place where kinship and ethnic ties have always trumped political relationships based on ideology.

In this context, a pluralist Islam is not likely to emerge in Afghanistan as part of a formal political structure or through intellectual debate. It may emerge through negotiation among all the different regional and ethnic groups that are currently seeking to share power in a new government. Since each has its own variety of Islam, and the government lacks the power to define or enforce a single set of beliefs, then pluralism will be a natural byproduct of this process. On the other hand, this will not be a secularized civil society in which religion is compartmentalized and accepted as an individual's voluntary choice. Liberalism, in the immediate Afghan context, will be the acceptance and non-interference among different types of Islam in the country. It will not go so far as allowing individuals to choose non-Muslim faiths or atheism, forms of apostasy which will remain criminal offenses; they were under the Taliban, they were under the king and they will remain so.

So let's back up and take a little look at these individual aspects and ask why they came about, which has to deal very much with Afghanistan's history, and in particular its

culture, particularly this idea of religion as a way of life that permeates all spheres of Afghan life and cannot be separated from them.

Western travelers to Afghanistan almost always refer to the country as medieval – or biblical, because you see camels and donkeys. In one sense, they are in fact righter than they know, because it is a society like medieval Europe. If you were in Europe in 1100 or 1200, you would have seen Christianity so intertwined with society that the idea that state could be separated from church or religious law from secular law would have seemed an impossible question to ask. This still remains the case in Afghanistan with Islam. There is no relationship, whether it be political, economic or social, that is not validated by religion. Hard bargaining has always ended by an intermediary saying, let's pray over this deal. Both sides then have to smile and be polite to one another. Similarly, in terms of opponents refusing to cooperate with one another, somebody steps in and says, "I'm not asking you to compromise with each other; I'm asking you to do this in the name of God." Well, who could refuse a request like that?

Everything is constantly put in this idiom. But what's really important about this in Afghanistan, and somewhat different than other Islamic societies, is that there is no one segment of society – *mullahs*, *ulama*, political parties – that is seen as having the right to define what is or is not truly Islam. Afghans see themselves as native born, almost original Muslims (they sometimes even imply that it was only an accident that Islam established itself in Saudi Arabia because as soon as they heard about it, they were not converted; they converted themselves). Thus their way of life in Afghanistan must be Islamic because they are Muslims and everything they do is in accord with Islam. And they feel empowered to argue against anyone who makes the claim that *shari'a* law and Afghan custom are not perfectly in accord. This often puts them at odds with educated clerics, who point out that such things as blood feuds and various other types of Pashtun tribal traditions are in fact not compatible with *shari'a* law. These clerics argue that the people should listen to *mullahs* more because they know more, but ordinary Afghans only listen politely and then say no.

I was with a shepherd once in the mountains who told me that a man could have seven wives. We argued about this. I said, "No, this is not possible." He says, "What do you know; you're an infidel." And who should happen along the trail but a *mullah* who we invited to have tea. And the shepherd told the *mullah*, "Tell this foreigner" – he was now more polite – "that an Afghan man can have seven wives." And the *mullah* said, "No, that's not true." And I said, "See, I'm right." And the shepherd drank his tea quietly for awhile before responding by saying, "Well, you know" – and this was before the Soviet war – "that if a Muslim society is faced with the prospect of having *jihad*, they're entitled to three more wives." The *mullah* practically choked on his tea and said, "That's nowhere in the *shari'a* or Koran; and there is no *jihad* exception." But the shepherd said, "Yes, there must be because I heard that Haji So-and-so has seven wives," and he mentioned a few other examples he had also heard of. And then he looked at me triumphantly and said, "See, I'm right," while the *mullah* fumed. (Laughter.) Religious authority had no effect on an Afghan shepherd who was absolutely illiterate in any known language and had no

training in religion. But he knew what he knew, he knew it was Islamic and he was not about to be talked out of it.

This is one of the reasons that in fact al Qaeda's Wahhabism and the Taliban's puritanicalism had such a negative impact on Afghan society, because they were trying to tell the Afghans what was or was not Islam, and the Afghans rejected that. They would turn to them and say, "Who won the *jihad*, us or you? When Iraq invaded Kuwait, did you throw them out or did you have to call in the Westerners? So don't ask. We fought, we won the *jihad*, we're the true Muslims, and don't tell us how to practice Islam." And in particular, what they objected to was the Wahhabism's rejection of Sufi saints, shrines, music and other things that were a very strong part of their own Islamic tradition. They were not about to accept that these guys had the right to tell them that their way of doing Islam was wrong. They may have had the power to do it, they may have had the power to tell people to forcibly go to pray, but as far as the Afghans were concerned, they had no right to do so. The Afghans could not be cowed.

The second element that sets Afghanistan apart is a cultural sense of identity that's incredibly strong. They see themselves as naturally superior to all of their Muslim neighbors, let alone any non-Muslim populations in the world. As they say, the Uzbeks must have been asleep to allow the Russians to conquer and rule them for 100 years. Iran is a well-known nest of heretics who speak Persian with a strange accent. And most of Pakistan is populated by recently converted Hindus – with only 500 years of Islamic experience – who cannot exactly be trusted, unlike us. Even the Gulf Arabs who came to Afghanistan to fight *jihad* were welcomed only as guests. We're happy to have them, but we're not responsible for them and don't take advice from them. That's the attitude.

So there was this constant sense of cultural superiority, and Afghans often proudly pointed out that they were never colonized: We beat the Russians; we beat the British; we know what we know. And therefore they could not be cowed by the Arabs who were coming on *jihad* from the religious heartland of Islam. Nor indeed by Pakistani politicians or others who attempted to view Islam as an ideology that could be used for political purposes, who said, you must do it this way. Because in fact, if we look at almost all countries where Islam as a political ideology is powerful, what we find is there is some kind of fracture in that society where people are worried in some way: Maybe we aren't good enough Muslims because were occupied by a colonial power; maybe modernization has hurt us; maybe we (in Pakistan) need to set ourselves off from Hindu India; maybe this, maybe that. But in Afghanistan, no, we do not need to set ourselves off. And therefore they cannot be embarrassed by critics who say let us lead the way because we know more.

An Afghan bus would always stop for prayers but not all the passengers would avail themselves of the opportunity. That was considered an individual choice. But God help you should you tell such a person who didn't pray that he was not a true Muslim. In their eyes Islam was ultimately rooted in belief, not in outward practices as important as these might be. In excusing themselves from regular prayers or other aspect of orthodox practice, people would argue that those who had such profound belief were in fact good

Muslims who might be excused for not carrying out every little dot and tittle of Islamic law. Other people, of course, need to do it, but we do not.

So what we have here is an inability – and this was an inability of the Taliban – to embarrass their own people into feeling that perhaps these people do know better. That made it very difficult to use Islam as an ideology in Afghanistan because, effectively, the people did not see Islam as an ideology but rather a way of life: We are Muslims, you are Muslims; what are we talking about when we're talking about an Islamic government? An Islamic government is one that is composed of good Muslims, not one where there is specific set of beliefs or practices that should be imposed on everyone.

And this went so far as the questions of joining in international terrorism. Although al Qaeda had its base in Afghanistan, practically no Afghans joined the movement because they believed in *jihad* in one country: their own. Let Muslims in other countries fight their own *jihad*s or take on the unbelievers themselves. Afghans were willing to die for Islam in Afghanistan but not in foreign lands for other people's Islam. People must assume their own responsibilities.

The also looked upon martyrdom as a consolation prize and not something to be sought. And typically, the Afghan style of fighting is to shoot from behind a rock so that you can't be shot back at. It's a very pragmatic way of doing business. And pragmatism is at the heart of Afghan politics because it and not ideology drives Afghan factionalism; ties of kinship and ethnicity trump any kind of ideology.

One of the most accurate examples of this was when the Communist government fell in April 1992; its most radical communist Khalq faction joined with Hekmatyar's most radical Islamic faction. Why? They were all fellow Pashtuns. The one thing they could agree upon was that in a new Afghanistan they, as opposed to other ethnic groups, should rule. The fact that they had fought for 10 years, representing ideological extremes, now meant nothing. New wars, new allies. Ahmed Shah Massoud, "the lion of the Panjshirs," who had fought the Russians to a standstill when they occupied Afghanistan later allied with them in his war against the Taliban. The Russians, many of whom he had actually fought earlier, now drank tea with him and listened to jibes about how they were lucky to get out of his valley in the 1980s.

What are the implications of this? The implications are that Islam will continue to be the basis of Afghan society and government, but that an Islamic government to Afghans means a government composed of good Muslims. It doesn't have any necessary intellectual content, because "good Muslims" will naturally be an Islamic government. However this common belief may put it Afghanistan at odds with the international community that is advising on its reconstruction. For example, if we're talking about freedom of religion, as Afghan see it this would mean that all Islamic sects will be treated equally. Such a view of religious freedom is a great step forward in Afghanistan where almost the entire population is Muslim and where Sunni dominance has put other groups at a disadvantage. But from the international perspective where an individual right to choose or reject any religious belief is enshrined, it is undoubtedly too narrow

since all non-Muslim faiths will still have a lower ranking and apostasy will remain a capital crime.

When such dilemmas arise what should we do? In dealing with Afghanistan and its long history, I would argue, the greatest success is to be had by understanding that Afghans have such have a firm sense of themselves and how things should be done that they are unlikely to be impressed by outside advice even when it is accompanied by large sums of money. The reconstruction of Afghanistan must take into account how the Afghans themselves wish to structure their own society, religion and culture, because that's the only way things are going to work there in the future.

(Applause.)

MR. HEFNER: Tom has been the very successful chair of my department of anthropology at Boston University, and many of us who have watched his successes at securing faculty appointments and unexpected pools of funds from nowhere it seems, think that we see a little bit of Afghan learning in that leadership style – without any of the difficulty, of course.

Our next speaker is Muhammad Qasim Zaman from Brown University, who is going to be drawing on an impressive body of knowledge that he has on South Asia as a whole, but to speak more specifically about "Madrasas and Reform: Some Lessons from Pakistan."

MUHAMMAD QASIM ZAMAN: Thank you. I think there's an interesting juxtaposition between Professor Barfield's paper and mine. I want to briefly touch on certain facets of thinking about Islam which seek to explore a third way of discourse, other than talking about Islam as a way of life – which certainly it is – or talking about Islam as an ideology, which is also a major facet of contemporary Islamic contestation on matters political. I want to talk about Islam as a religious tradition and the sort of contestation that that arouses, or the contestation which takes place on the site of the idea of Islam as a religious tradition. And hopefully, as we proceed, what that means will become clear, specifically with reference to the traditionally educated religious scholars, the *ulama*, on whom I have done some work recently.

The institutions of traditional Islamic education, or *madrasas,* of Pakistan have received unprecedented media attention in the aftermath of the September 2001 terrorist attacks. It was in Pakistani *madrasas*, after all, that many of the Taliban of Afghanistan, including a substantial proportion of their top leadership, were educated. As the United States prepared for military action against the Taliban, thousands of Pakistanis, many of them associated with *madrasas*, decided to go to Afghanistan to fight alongside the Taliban, even as other traditionally educated religious scholars, or the *ulama*, and *madrasa* students actively sought to rally support against the policies of the Pakistani president, General Pervez Musharraf. A number of militant Pakistani organizations, blamed for terrorist activities both before and after the September 2001 terrorist attacks, have likewise been closely allied to *madrasas*. And in January 2002, General Musharraf not

only banned many of these organizations, but also declared a new resolve to better regulate the affairs of the *madrasas*, of these seminaries.

That resolve has remained largely unimplemented so far. Official committees have periodically been constituted by the government to suggest ways of reforming the *madrasas*, and these have typically been led by government officials. For such committees, reforming *madrasas* essentially meant the introduction of "useful subjects" into the curriculum of these institutions. And by "useful" they often mean modern science, the English language and other disciplines which comprise the country's so-called educational mainstream. To the *ulama*, however, governmental initiatives towards integrating *madrasas* into the educational mainstream are but a thinly veiled effort to undermine their status as bastions of what the *ulama* call "an unadulterated Islam" in society and politics.

In the 1990s, when government officials repeatedly pointed to links between *madrasas* and sectarian terrorism in Pakistan, the *ulama* often labeled any effort towards reforming their institutions, these *madrasas*, as an excuse to shut them down altogether. In the aftermath of the September 2001 attacks, the government's renewed efforts to regulate *madrasas* came to be seen as the result of international, and especially American, pressure to do so as part of the global war on terrorism.

The contradictions of government policies as regards *madrasas* meanwhile remained largely unresolved. But this is not the only problem. The issue also relates to the severely limited alternatives that the state itself offers to some of the services that the *madrasas* provide in society. In a country where almost half of the population is still illiterate, *madrasas* often provide all the education that many from the poorest segments of the population will ever have. Such education is typically free, as are the food and boarding that *madrasas* provide to their students, and graduates of *madrasas* are frequently able to earn a livelihood as religious functionaries – at the bottom of the scale, but still a livelihood which allows them to get by. Again, in a state with large-scale unemployment, this is not an inconsiderable achievement. The point here is not that *madrasas* provide most of such needs, or that they provide them well, it is rather that in an arena largely left vacant by the inefficiency and perceived corruption of the state, *madrasas* have, in many cases, offered services that are not otherwise available, and such services may arguably seem the more attractive to at least some segments of the population because they are provided in the name of Islam.

But many Pakistani *madrasas* often also maintain ties with militant sectarian organizations and terrorist groups in the country, as already noted. And the views of the *ulama* on such things as the position of women or on pluralism or on democracy are often far from being conducive to civil society. In and of themselves, however, such illiberal proclivities do not exclude the *ulama* and their *madrasas* from the landscape of civil society. Rather, they remind us that not all civic institutions or associations are necessarily committed to democratic civility. Some, indeed, help foster what some have called a "bad civil society."

Are there prospects, then, for a genuine reform of the *madrasas*, a reform that would enable them to contribute toward a good, rather than toward a bad, civil society? More specifically, under what conditions might such an effort successfully take place?

In very broad terms, there are at least two conditions for the reform of *madrasas* to have some reasonable prospects of success in a society like Pakistan's. First, the state must act together with the *ulama*, with the traditionally educated religious scholars, in a genuinely synergistic effort to canalize the *madrasas'* activities in particular directions. And second, any reform of the *madrasas* ought to involve a serious grappling with the Islamic tradition, of which the *ulama* see themselves as the custodians.

A genuinely synergistic effort requires that those governmental officials who are concerned with the *madrasas* be perceived as at least not hostile or indifferent to the *madrasas'* welfare. If government functionaries at the local levels work with the *ulama* and *madrasas* in their community, for instance, it might be possible to create and broaden significant forms of trust between the *ulama* and the representatives of the state. This would be one manner of bridging the much-debated state-society divide, whereby (as Judith Tendler and others have suggested in other contexts) the state is able to shape the direction in which institutions of civil society move while remaining responsive to the particular concerns of those institutions.

The second condition which ought to attend upon any effort to reform *madrasas* is that this be done, at least in some measure, by engaging with the resources provided by the Islamic tradition, something to which I referred at the outset of this talk. What does such engagement mean to the *ulama*? It means being guided by the rich and complex history of the Islamic juristic and exegetical discourses in a way that acknowledges their integrity, coherence and continuing development. This is what they mean when they say that they would like a continuing, serious, coherent engagement with the Islamic religious, exegetical, and juristic tradition. But there is a problem. Taking the tradition seriously also means to the *ulama* that they be recognized as the experts, so to speak, in all matters Islamic, on a par, that is, with "experts" in any other area of modern life. This is a patently exclusionary position, compounded by the highly illiberal views that the *ulama* often espouse.

Some contemporary observers of Muslim society have responded by proposing their own exclusionary strategies, strategies in which some engagement with the Islamic tradition is intended, but in a way that is predicated on *bypassing* the *ulama*. The idea here is to find what the philosopher Akeel Bilgrami calls "internal reasons" for reform – reasons that can somehow be located within the Islamic tradition – even as what are seen as the most inflexible or reactionary voices in the community are excluded or marginalized. Such strategies, I fear, are too simpleminded in their view of the *ulama*, of their complex roles, of their discourses and, indeed, of the Islamic tradition itself.

The history of Islam in colonial and post-colonial South Asia reveals instances of reform through internal reasoning, in Muslim family law, for example, and as regards the

rights of women. Some of this, with reference to Egypt, was touched upon also in the paper earlier today by Professor Singerman. But these instances have typically involved internal reasons being given by the *ulama* with reference to their juristic tradition. My point is not, of course, that the *ulama* alone are qualified to offer such reasons. It is rather that any appeal to the need for internal reasons would be shallow and unconvincing if it doesn't seriously engage the Islamic religious tradition. And to try to do so means, among other things, being able to converse with those who see themselves as a representative of that tradition rather than excluding them from any conversations for being reactionary.

The state does have a role in this effort to find internal reasons for reform, for instance by creating, "the model *madrasas*," as proposed by the government of President Musharraf of Pakistan. Yet the purpose of governmental reform, and even the logic behind the proposed model *madrasas*, has typically been to introduce modern Western sciences to the *ulama*, and thereby to integrate their institutions into the educational mainstream. While that objective remains worth pursuing, of course, it does not necessarily offer the panacea to the ills that the *ulama*'s detractors see them as representing in society. It is rather a different sort of reform that seems to be called for, a reform for which the state-sponsored model *madrasas* can very well be one possible site.

This reform involves encouraging the *ulama*, the traditionally educated religious scholars, to have a more vigorous engagement with facets of their own tradition, reminding them that this tradition is rich enough to allow arguments against some of the views that they now hold, and indeed that even many modern *ulama* have themselves appealed to the available variety of traditional options in trying to get out of some particularly difficult or messy situations in recent history.

The idea of reform in this sense has largely remained foreign to many Muslim modernist intellectuals, policymakers and governing elites. This has much to do with the dim view of the Islamic legal and religious tradition that many of these modernist elite hold, and it has as much to do with the ignorance of this elite with that tradition itself. The result is for modernist policymakers to often begin their reformist arguments and initiatives by effectively writing off the tradition, rather than viewing it as a site on which varied internal reasons for reform might in fact emerge. Yet it is in such internal reasons, with the *ulama* as crucial but scarcely the exclusive interlocutors, that the best prospects for reform might lie, reform that would have very considerable implications for all facets of Islam in the modern world.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

GWENN OKRUHLIK: Good afternoon. Having just returned from seven months of research in Saudi Arabia, it is with the utmost confidence that I can say things are complex over there. (Laughter.) It has been a turbulent year of petitions presented

to the crown prince, of shootouts throughout the country, of a new dialogue of tolerance among people who usually don't even talk to each other, massive arrests and the discovery of weapons arsenals in every nook and cranny of the country. It is a time of serious ferment in Saudi Arabia. Political, economic and social problems can no longer be managed from above. If problems are addressed in a meaningful manner, the attraction of the radical flank of Islamists will diminish. On the other hand, if there are not serious structural reforms, the call of the jihadist will continue to resonate in the country.

My point is that the war on terrorism must be matched by a war on authoritarianism. Structural reforms are every bit as important as rounding up the terrorists. If that does not occur, they will simply continue to reproduce themselves as they are now.

This is a defining moment in Saudi Arabia, and the task is not an easy one. In these few minutes, let me try to explain how Saudi Arabia found itself in this very difficult position, what the obstacles to civility and representative governance are, and to suggest some possible carriers of civility in the country.

Contentious voices resonate in Saudi Arabia because the exclusionary structure of governance simply does not represent the diverse reality of the population. From above, that sprawling religious and political bureaucracy does not represent the heterogeneity of the population. From below, there's precious little room for people to organize, to debate and to contest the state. And in between, those old social contracts that link together the ruling family and the citizenry are simply deemed irrelevant today.

For two decades now, there has not existed a safe political space for civil Islam to assert itself. The social carriers, the cultural resources of civility, are certainly there. They permeate the country. The problem is that civil Islam is not politically empowered. The carriers must be politically and institutionally empowered. I think a fruitful way to do this is to thoroughly integrate civil Islam into the emerging and still embryonic debate over "who we are" – that is, over the construction of a national identity.

So how is it that Saudi Arabia has found itself in this difficult position? Certainly the historical roots are deep, but I think 1979 is the contemporary turning point. In that year, we saw, of course, the Islamic revolution in Iran, Shi'a riots throughout the eastern province of Saudi Arabia, and then the takeover of the Great Mosque in Mecca by Juhaiman Al Utaibi. It was the panicked response of the regime that produced two decades of political paralysis in Saudi Arabia. Rather than confronting the religious right, King Fahd wrapped himself ever tighter in the mantle of an official and conservative Islam. Throughout the 1980s, a narrow and intolerant vision of Islam dominated the national discourse. And as one Saudi observer has said, "different groups ended up competing with the fundamentalists to see who could appear more conservative in the public eye."

So by the end of the 1980s, one very narrow strand of Islam dominated. The religious right had been empowered in that decade. It was further transformed with the

Gulf War. With the stationing of U.S. troops at the time of the Gulf War, what had been a very private and spiritual religious resurgence during the 1980s became explicitly political and organized. So with the early 1990s, what was private and inwardly focused and about proper social norms and religious practice suddenly became public. The private became public, the spiritual became political, the individual became organized, and what was an inward focus on the just believer became an outward focus on the just state and the just society.

Today, then, there are many structural obstacles to civil society and representative governance in Saudi Arabia. Of course, most immediate and obvious is the rise of this *jihadi* movement, or radical right, that we see in the country. There are other problems as well. First and foremost is the entrenchment of the official religious right in institutional positions throughout the country. From low to high bureaucracy, from education to judiciary to the *muttawa*, the religious right is simply over-represented.

Second, an obstacle to civil Islam continues to be power struggles within the ruling family. Crown Prince Abdullah does have good reformist instincts, but he does not have the capability to implement those instincts. He is hemmed in by less reformist members of the ruling family who use the religious right to solidify their own position, their own power base in governance and that of their sons.

Third, though there is an opening and a reform movement in Saudi Arabia, it's not yet institutionalized. It is dependent on individual personalities. If reforms are to endure beyond Abdullah, it means they must be given an institutional grounding in order to survive any kind of extremist backlash.

Fourth, international imbroglios deflect attention away from pressing concerns, and particularly from the empowerment of a civil, diverse, tolerant Islam. Such things as Israeli aggression against Palestinians, the U.S.-led war in Iraq, and the incessant Saudi bashing in the U.S. media divert energies from reform of politics, economics and society. Instead, these actions fuel anger and humiliation, and that's a very dangerous combination and one which propels young people to the jihadist cause. In the process, it is a radical Islam that is empowered.

Fifth, any kind of backlash from the religious right will immediately inflict damage upon the status of women. Anytime there is a crisis in Saudi Arabia, it's women who are especially vulnerable. We saw it in 1979 and again in 1991, at the time of the Gulf War. Women are symbolic markers of much larger political issues in the country.

Finally and importantly, the religious right has an organizational base that liberals lack. Even if it is fluid, the right does have a leadership in place that allows it to promote an agenda. Liberals are only now just beginning to coalesce and construct leadership. The assertiveness of the religious right in Saudi Arabia is matched by the hesitancy of the liberals.

Despite these obstacles – and there are many, I understand – there are rich cultural resources in Saudi Arabia. Indeed, I returned from this trip more confident and

more, I think, enthusiastic about the power of social forces. I have never seen so many people in Saudi Arabia engaged in debate and feeling passionate about the future of the country. It's an exciting time.

But these cultural resources must be harnessed to nurture a civil society. Civil society does exist in Saudi Arabia, it just doesn't look like what we expect to find. It exists in the home and in the *majlis*, in the mosque and in the *souqs*, in philanthropic associations of women, in NGOs where women are active in Saudi Arabia, and in new professional associations of lawyers and journalists and doctors. There is a small but emerging public sphere in Saudi Arabia that has never existed before, where people hope to trade ideas without threatening the integrity of the family unit or the state. This is a radical innovation in the country; there is a nascent public space where you can trade ideas and talk.

In order to promote a healthy civil society, these social carriers that already exist must be empowered so that they have the confidence necessary to challenge the religious right. Social carriers of civility that are already there include outspoken journalists – I'm sure you've been reading about many of them who are taking powerful positions, and then losing their jobs – women; large and small business owners who are tired of business as usual; artists and writers and poets who are continually pushing the edges in Saudi Arabia, pushing the envelope back further; mothers and fathers who realize that their world is different from that of their teenagers. About sixty percent of the population of Saudi Arabia is under the age of 17. It's a young country. And of course, dissenting shaikhs and clergy are also carriers of civility.

But at this time, a pacted transition to civility and to pluralism cannot simply be assumed in Saudi Arabia. The radical right has far more organization and ideological attraction than any other social force. At this time, they're the only viable alternative to the al Saud. If there is a pacted transition to pluralism and civility, then the radical right will of course diminish in its magnetism. But if there is no pacted transition, Saudi Arabians are left in the unenviable position of either an unacceptable status quo (an authoritarian ruling family) or the triumph of the radical right. That middle ground must be empowered.

It is not yet clear whether the ruling family has the skill or the desire to empower civil Islam in the same way that it empowered the religious right after the turbulent events of 1979. So today – after the turmoil of '79, after the rise of the radical right in the 1980s, the politicization of Wahabbism with the Gulf War, the events of September 2001, and now the war in Iraq – Saudis from all regions and all walks of life are actively engaged in debate about their future. The larger debates are about construction of meaning as a nation: Who are we? Why are we together? What does it mean to be a Saudi? How do we relate to the larger Arab and Islamic world? These are big questions, but this tremendous political ferment that exists in the country is an effort to define the proper relationship between religion, state, ruling family and citizenry. How Saudi civil Islamists assert themselves, or do not assert themselves, will shape the contours of this new national identity.

I want to end on a positive note: It's a dangerous time; it's a "fluid" time. (That's the operative word everybody uses – things are fluid – meaning people don't know.) But the good news is that social forces are vibrant in Saudi Arabia in a way I've never seen them before. People talk about religion and politics and the economy and their children not working and the future of their daughters in ways they've never talked before. So there's a new cadre, a new middle ground of social leaders in Saudi Arabia that need to be harnessed and cultivated to seize this moment of opportunity.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. HEFNER: Thank you very much, Gwenn – spoken in a way that reminds me of the first time that I think I heard you speak, where I was really quite stunned by this very, very rapid survey of a very complex society, but a survey that manages, in its rapidity, nonetheless, to capture something that is both complex but also touching. Thank you very much.

The floor is open, and we do have a few minutes in this panel for questions. We'll start here, and then over here.

Q: Yes, I'm David Abramson. I work in the Office of International Religious Freedom at the State Department, and I have a question on Saudi Arabia. From all I've observed, you've provided a very accurate picture of the situation there, and you raise the question, how do we cultivate this new unprecedented emerging social sphere? And I'm just wondering, from the standpoint of what the U.S. government can do without causing a backlash – and I'm talking about whether they're doing this publicly or privately with respect to the government or working with non-governmental forces – do you see any room for us to promote and cultivate this social sphere that you're talking about?

MS. OKRUHLIK: Well, that of course is the most difficult question of all. You know, I was surprised, to be honest with you. I expected, as the Western intellectual going over to do fieldwork, that everybody would want the United States absolutely, positively out, off limits, we want nothing to do with you. I was surprised to find instead that many people want U.S. pressure. They don't want a U.S. agenda, they don't want U.S. direction, they don't want U.S. personalities. They want U.S. and external pressure – not just U.S., international pressure, NGO pressure, human rights pressure – to create a crack in the wall. That's all they want. They want the crack. And then Saudis want to fill that crack. They want to make the change happen, but they know that they can't force the crack in the wall without external pressure.

So it's a complex situation. The hardest point of all, of course, is that the term "liberal reform" has come to mean "Americanized" in Saudi Arabia, which is just way to exclude you from the discourse and to say, you don't count; you're not really Saudi.

So it's a very difficult situation. You can't taint the reform movement with any connotations of an American connection, because it will doom it to failure.

Q: Roger Conner. I was struck by the contrast in the last two papers. The term "religious right" is one that carries tremendous political baggage for Americans trying to understand the situation. I heard Muhammad counseling a beginning place of respect for the people he described, and an appreciation that they may hold a piece of the wisdom that we don't, and trying to create space for them to come toward us as opposed to us excluding them.

So I'd invite a dialogue between Gwenn and Muhammad on whether there is a term that we could use for American discourse about these groups that would convey less of a sense among ourselves that this is another untouchable to be excluded, to be feared, because that's what the term "religious right" conjures up, I think, for many American listeners. Is there a term that would open Americans up to being willing to listen to this group and their concern and allow ideas that emerged from them to be acceptable to an American ear, instead of them being shut down. I fear that for many Americans, if that is our only tool for understanding them, it will be understood on both sides of the ocean as an expression of disdain, and send the message that we don't want to hear you. And I know that's not what you intend, and so I'll just say, could we have a little dialogue on alternative words that we could use to help this along?

MS. OKRUHLIK: Let me respond in a couple of ways. It's very interesting to hear you say this, because in Saudi Arabia, people routinely speak about the rise of the religious right in American politics, and often draw parallels between Wahhabis and the neo-conservative movement in Washington. It's a common conversation. So they understand these terms very well and what that means in terms of political life in a nation-state.

I use the term "religious right" because it captures two different movements in Saudi Arabia that are quite different. One is the radical jihadist movement: the people who advocate violence to change things, the people going into Iraq. It's that violent kind of movement. But the religious right also incorporates the traditional official state-appointed *ulama*; that is, those very conservative men who have written many social absurdities into law and routinely pass *fatwas* that further restrict social life. So I use it because I can capture two different kinds of Islamists, but I don't think either one of them would promote the most healthy future for the country.

What needs to be cultivated are those many layers of contending Muslims, of alternative clergy, of conservative religious writers who are quite tolerant and quite open. It's that alternative Muslim thinker that needs to be cultivated. And they are rich in Saudi Arabia, and interestingly, they're writing in the newspapers and they're not getting fired. They're reaching out to other actors in Saudi Arabia, and they continue to be able to keep their columns, and I think that's a powerful population that could be nurtured.

MR. ZAMAN: Just a few further notes to this. I think this is an excellent question, for more than one reason, but let me just touch on one reason why it's especially appropriate. A number of people on today's panels are among the foremost scholars who have contributed to delineating the different groups that make up the "Muslim public sphere" – which might actually be another way of characterizing this diversity of voices that inhabits and has shaped the discourses in contemporary Islam across Muslim societies.

There are, in this public sphere, people of the sort that I have been speaking of, the traditionally educated scholars, the *ulama*, who are found in one guise or another in a number of prominent Muslim societies. Then, there are the people often characterized as the "fundamentalists," who are yet distinct from these traditionally educated scholars precisely by virtue of the attitude that they have toward this historically articulated Islamic tradition, a tradition whose evolution extends over 14 centuries. Sometimes overlapping and sometimes separate from these are what Dale Eickelman and others have called the "new religious intellectuals." So I think one of the crucial tasks that one has, either as a scholar or an observer or a student of Muslim societies, is to try to at least begin to appreciate the diversity of the forms of discourse that there is in practically any major Muslim society to speak of, and not therefore to lump them together in any term, whether that term has resonance in this country with many people or it doesn't. Any umbrella term that is not sufficiently nuanced may impede an adequate understanding of these matters more than it illuminates.

Q: So your suggestion is, ditch such terms and talk in more precise language?

MR. ZAMAN: I'm suggesting that we become aware of the diversity of voices, and realize that Islam today is not, anymore than it has ever been in its 14 centuries, a static, monolithic, unified entity. It's a way of thinking about the foundational texts and learning the meaning of those texts in particular configurations and particular local circumstances. I think there are different people who engage differently in that process of articulation. So it's best to try to start educating ourselves about that diversity. Whatever terms you finally settle on – and we probably would not settle on the same set – just to be aware of that diversity is, I think, a crucial start.

MR. HEFNER: We have time for perhaps one brief question. Right there.

Q: I'm D.C. Rao with the Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington. Addressing Professor Zaman, you suggested that you engage the *ulama* in going back into their own rich, Islamic tradition to try and reform the *madrasa* system. A phrase that often comes up in this kind of discussion is the need to open the gates of *ijtihad*. So I was wondering if you could comment on how necessary that is for this process to work. What are the barriers and what are the prospects?

MR. ZAMAN: Well, a very quick answer to that: I think part of the issue here is the need for good, historically contextualized understanding of the issues involved, including the issue of *ijtihad*, meaning a creative engagement with the foundational texts in order to arrive at rulings on matters not already ruled on by these texts or by the

consensus of the earlier jurists. This, broadly speaking, is the meaning of this contested term. There has been this view, both among some Western scholars of Islam and among some Muslim scholars themselves, and at some point – and people like to choose their own centuries – the gate of *ijtihad*, so to speak, was closed, and after that, the best thing for people to do was simply to follow what had already been said rather than to look into problems afresh.

That is something of a myth, as increasingly sophisticated scholarship on Islamic law has come to demonstrate. More recent scholars of Islamic law, both in the West and elsewhere, have now come to recognize that there was actually no such thing as the closure of the gates of *ijtihad*. After all, it is true that once a tradition crystallizes, if you will, people have to come to agree on certain things, which would be the poles around which their identity would be articulated. Otherwise, if everything is in flux, you wouldn't really have a tradition. But that having been said, there always have been new ways of expanding, broadening, deepening the horizons of Islamic jurisprudence, juristic thought, as in any other area. So the whole idea, therefore, that this is closed and has been closed for now 1,000 years is something of an influential but unfortunate myth. And I should note, finally, that the *ulama*, or some of the more sophisticated among them, actually recognize this. This doesn't come as news to them.

MR. HEFNER: For those of you who at all read political philosophy – Western political philosophy, you may note that there was a slight Alasdair MacIntyrean twist to Qasim's remark there, and one that he develops in a quite explicit way in his most recent, remarkable book from Princeton University Press.

Our time is up, and I guess we will move, as is our manner, as quickly as possible to the next and final panel, which is in the other room.

Thank you very much. Thanks to the panelists.

(Applause.)

(End of panel.)