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## WASHINGTON REPORT ON MIDDLE EAST AFFAIRS

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### Muslim-American Activism

## President Bush Holds Iftar Dinner at White House

President George W. Bush welcomed 50 ambassadors from Muslim nations and other distinguished guests on Nov. 19 to the first White House *Iftar* dinner in the State Dining Room. During the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims break the daily sunrise-to-sunset fast with an *iftar* dinner.

The president took the opportunity to speak to Muslim Americans and ambassadors of Islamic countries. "America is made better by millions of Muslim citizens," Bush told his assembled guests. "America has close and important relations with many Islamic nations. So it is fitting for America to honor your friendship and the traditions of a great faith by hosting this Iftar at the White House.

"Ramadan is a time of fasting and prayer for the Muslim faithful," he noted. "So tonight we are reminded of God's greatness and His commandments to live in peace and to help neighbors in need. According to Muslim teachings, God first revealed His word in the holy Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad during the month of Ramadan. That word has guided billions of believers across the centuries, and those believers built a culture of learning and literature and science.

"All the world continues to benefit from this faith and its achievements," the president said. "Ramadan and the upcoming holiday season are a good time for people of different faiths to learn more about each other. And the more we learn, the more we find that many commitments are broadly shared. We share a commitment to family, to protect and love our children. We share a belief in God's justice, and man's moral responsibility. And we share the same hope for a future of peace. We have much in common and much to learn from one another."

—Delinda C. Hanley

### Powell Hosts Ramadan Dinner for U.S. Muslim Community

Secretary of State Colin L. Powell hosted a Ramadan *Iftar* dinner Nov. 29 for representatives of the American Muslim community. Dinner guests included several Muslim fire and police personnel who took part in the relief efforts following the recent terrorist attacks in Washington and New York.

Powell told the gathering that there still remains "much ignorance and confusion" about Islam, and encouraged American Muslims to reach out and educate others about their faith. Secretary Powell also noted that, as a member of a minority community himself, he had to deal with the same kind of profiling many Muslim- and Arab-Americans have experienced since Sept. 11.

Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) communications director Ibrahim Hooper presented Powell with Ramadan greeting cards made by local Muslim students. The cards wished the secretary of state a happy Ramadan and asked that America help feed the hungry in this country and in Afghanistan.

—Delinda C. Hanley

### CAIR Combats "Islamophobic Smear Campaign"

On Nov. 8, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) called for an end to what it says is an "Islamophobic smear campaign" against the American Muslim community and its leaders. CAIR also called on media professionals and elected officials not to allow themselves to be used as unwitting tools in this campaign or to undermine President Bush's efforts to show that the war on terrorism is not a conflict with Islam.

"Since the terrorist attacks on our nation in September, American Muslims and groups that represent them have been the target of an unprecedented smear campaign. These smears have been distributed by fax, e-mail and direct communication with journalists and government officials in an attempt to create links between legitimate Muslim groups and terrorists," CAIR spokesman Ibrahim Hooper told journalists. "On almost a daily basis, we have been forced to defend our organization to well-meaning reporters who have been given information that is false, misleading or ridiculously out of context."

After the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, Hooper said, a number of groups and individuals who were alarmed at the growing prominence of Muslims began taking shameless advantage of those tragic events to push for their long-term goal of marginalizing and delegitimizing the American Muslim community and its leadership.

To support this assertion, CAIR cited a Nov. 3 article in the *Los Angeles Times* that, for the first time, laid direct responsibility for the smear campaign at the feet of specific organizations. *Times* reporter Solomon Moore wrote: "Pro-Israel or Jewish organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League, the Jewish Defense League and the Middle East Forum think tank have provided news organizations with reams of critical documentation on Muslim leaders in recent weeks."

A number of other media professionals and officials told CAIR of similar behind-the-scenes slurs.

The Middle East Forum's Daniel Pipes, one of the foremost sponsors of the current smear campaign, goes so far as to recommend "vigilant application of social and political pressure to ensure that Islam is not accorded special status of any kind in this country." The "special status" Pipes refers to includes ordinary religious accommodations for Muslims in the workplace and "inclusion of Muslims in affirmative-action plans," Hooper added. Employment discrimination is one of CAIR's main focuses.

Recent media reports also indicate that groups such as the American Jewish Committee (AJC) have warned that "the increasingly visible American Muslim lobby posed a challenge to U.S.-Israel relations," according to an Oct. 22 Associated Press report.

"This smear campaign is unfair, un-American and outrageous. It is based on distortions, fabrications, outdated and out of context information, and guilt by association," Hooper said. "Every major American Muslim group and leader, without exception, has been the target of these unjustified and politically motivated smears."

Hooper asked media professionals and elected officials to examine the agenda of those who are making these false allegations, and he asked people to refrain from assisting anyone who would seek to silence the voice of an entire American religious minority.

"The seven-million strong American Muslim community can serve as a bridge of understanding to the Islamic world during this time of national and international crisis," Hooper said. "It goes against our nation's interests to let vocal and politically influential special-interest groups dictate American domestic policy or to drag our country into partisan disputes that will impede efforts to form an international coalition against all forms of terrorism."

Hooper concluded with an appeal: "We ask our fellow Americans for their support in resisting attempts to divide us as a people or to drag our nation into a wider conflict with the Muslim world."

—Delinda C. Hanley

### **ADL and AJC Demand Muslim Panelists Be Excluded**

The Florida Commission on Human Relations (FCHR) on Nov. 13 rejected a demand by that state's chapter of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) to exclude a Muslim representative from a panel discussion at an annual civil rights conference in West Palm Beach. (See photo p.64.) The session, titled "Day of Dialogue, Communicating Across Ethnic, Cultural and Religious Lines," included panelists from the U.S. Department of Justice Community Relations Service, and the National Conference for Community and Justice. Despite ADL pressure, the panel also included Altaf Ali from the Council on American-Islamic Relations as originally planned.

"This malicious attempt at exclusion, which is ironically aimed at a conference on multicultural inclusion, is just one small part of a nationwide campaign by the ADL to marginalize and disenfranchise the Muslim community in America. We thank the FCHR for refusing to be intimidated," said CAIR national board chairman Omar Ahmad.

In a similar incident two weeks later on Nov. 18, the American Jewish Committee (AJC) demanded that Ghazi Khankan, executive director of CAIR's New York chapter, be excluded from a public forum designed to promote intercultural understanding. According to CAIR, "the AJC sent e-mail messages to religious and community leaders with false and defamatory accusations. In one e-mail from AJC, Ellen Israelson wrote, "Regarding Ghazi Khankan—I have an entire file on Ghazi...Ghazi has always been vocally anti-Israel."

In 1999, the ADL agreed to pay \$25,000 to a community relations fund and said it would not spy on other organizations as part of a settlement with the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and other groups. According to a Sept. 28, 1999 Associated Press report, the settlement resolved a class-action lawsuit filed in 1993 that accused the ADL of spying on Arab-American, pro-Palestinian and anti-apartheid groups and individuals.

The AJC's demand to exclude a Muslim from a panel discussion on "Understanding Islam—after 9/11," at the University of Connecticut's Broad Street Campus was rejected by event organizers,