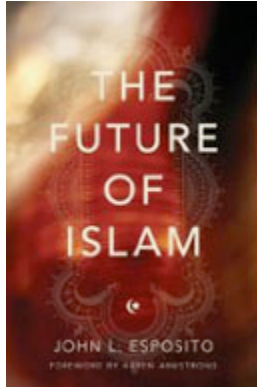




The Future of Islam

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Introduction

JOANNE MYERS: Good morning. I am Joanne Myers, Director of Public Affairs Programs, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council I'd like to thank you for joining us.

Today the discussion we are about to listen to is on the future of Islam. This is also the title of the newest book from one of the world's most respected scholars of this subject, John Esposito.

In [The Future of Islam](#) Professor Esposito, who teaches religion and international affairs at Georgetown University, draws on a lifetime of thought and research to provide a richly nuanced and revelatory account of the fastest-growing religion in the world.

It wasn't so long ago that Islam—or Muslims, for that matter—were not of particular interest to many in the West. But that was before the tragic events of 9/11. In just a few short years, the egregious acts committed by a group of extremists triggered immense interest in this religion.

While today Islam is a topic which is widely discussed, it is still poorly understood. Many Western officials and commentators see only the extremism perpetuated by a radical few and often fail to see the diversity that lies within the Muslim world. For example, for a long time we tended to equate Islam with Arabs, when in fact they constitute almost 23 percent of all Muslims.

In his book Professor Esposito is seeking to understand the struggle for reform and addresses the issues we often think about. Among them are whether Muslims have the ability to adapt to modern notions of democracy, rule of law, gender equality, and human rights; or when he investigates how representative and widespread Islam fundamentalism is and ponders how serious the threat of global terrorism is.

The book also turns a mirror on the United States and Europe when he ponders the salient issue of whether minority Muslim communities can be loyal citizens in America and in Europe.

As recent decades have brought extraordinary changes in the Muslim world, we are delighted that Professor Esposito is with us to share his expertise as he explains this complex picture of Islam and its diversity.

With this in mind, please join me in giving a very warm welcome to our speaker as he shines a light on the issues that face Islam and, in turn, will most assuredly affect us in the coming years. Thank you.

Remarks

JOHN ESPOSITO: Thank you very much. I'm delighted to be here.

I want to thank you very much for the introduction. One reason I don't like book tours is people saying things like, "Why did you write the book?" and, "What's it about?" after you've written it and you've moved on. In a strange kind of way, it summarized why it's there.

Let me begin by saying that this is a book that I intended to write, and I was contracted to write by Oxford, before 9/11. The reality of it was that when 9/11 came along, I had to put that on the back burner.

Now, what I intended to write before 9/11 is very different from what I now have written. Before 9/11, I was writing a book that was saying at the dawn of the 21st century Muslims had become far more integrated in the West; unlike when I got into the field, in the late 1960s and 1970s, Islam was not only invisible, it was the second or third largest religion in the West. I also was talking about the institutionalization of Islam and Muslims within America and Europe and talking internationally about the possibilities for democratization in the Middle East and the Muslim world—not naïve about the nature of those governments and how difficult that would be, but in terms of the potential, the movement that existed.

Well, everything changed when 9/11 came along, and Oxford asked me to write a post-9/11 book. So I did [Unholy War](#). Then my wife came up with the idea of a Q&A on Islam, and I did that. Then this book came along.

It has been a very difficult book to write for a variety of reasons. One is the context in which we live now. It's a very fluid context. I was talking to a friend of mine who was at the [National Security Council](#) with [Jimmy Carter](#). His last comment to me as I got in the car was, "I'm going to be retiring in a few years. Forty years ago when I got into the field I would have never thought that the situation would look worse rather than better."

Being from Brooklyn, I used to put it differently with my students. I would always say that when I got into the field I would think about all those poor bastards who were retiring who were Middle East experts and what it felt like. I knew in my lifetime a lot of these situations were going to get better, if not resolved. When you look today, where are we?

It's also a very difficult time to write this kind of book because, given the nature not only of events in the region but relations between the Muslim world and the West, there is a real problem. It's a very hot topic. It's a very polarized situation. We live, as I say to my students, in a world of a battle of experts. So people are torn between experts who have similar credentials, as it were, but take very, very different positions, whether they're experts on Islam, the Muslim world, experts on terrorism, or pseudo-experts on terrorism, of which there are many; or when you're dealing with policymakers.

So you've got all of those factors coming into play.

What I try to do in this book is, in a sense, pull together and summarize and then move forward with a lot of work that I have done in the past. But it also is greatly enhanced by a project that I've been involved with now for quite a few years.

But the reality of it is that one of the things that has really enhanced my excitement for where we are and where we can go in terms of thinking about policy is the [Gallup World Poll](#) and the influence I think that that data has and will continue to have. That is becoming associated with Gallup—I am a Gallup senior scientist—and their world poll, which is being done every year now, supposedly for the next 100 years, which not only looks at most of the countries in the world in terms of well-being, but within that at some 35 to 40 Muslim countries from across the world. As a result, [Dalia Mogahed](#) at Gallup and I wrote a book called [Who Speaks for Islam: What a Billion Muslims Really Think](#), and there will be a PBS show called "Inside Islam" based on the book.

What that allows us to do is to have access to the voices of Muslims. In other words, in this battle of the experts, whether they're policymakers or government or academic experts, they're always talking about "them," and the "them" often are the extremists; or they talk about "the street."

The reality of it is often, no matter how good the expert is, you can only be in so many countries so many times and interface with so many people. So when we want to know what do Muslims think about democracy or is democracy possible, in addition to our theologizing and politicizing, et cetera, one of the questions is: What do Muslims actually believe? Or if we want to know Muslim attitudes toward women's rights, what do men and women across the Muslim world want?

What we discovered with the Gallup data is that often the conventional wisdom is stood on its head when we actually look at what majorities of Muslims want. It often is different from what we expect and often different from what their governments would like us to believe.

So a lot of this then comes together in the book. Part of what I've tried to do in the book is to talk about what I see as the reality of Islam and Muslims at this juncture in history on the ground, in terms of the religion, the struggle for reform, if you will, the struggle for the soul of Islam.

I also look at the question of the prospects for change—who are the reformers in Islam? What are their ideas? I've professionally studied all of the world's religions, but four in particular, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Zen Buddhism. The reality of it is that if you're a historian of religion, all religions, whether they seem very traditional, or even see themselves that way or not, change over time. And certainly, as a Roman Catholic looking at Roman Catholicism in the 20th century and its movement to reform with [Vatican II](#) and then its swing back, I'm much more aware of that kind of dynamic.

[Sam Huntington](#) once said that there was one religion that he wasn't sure whether or not it could handle modernity, and it was Roman Catholicism. This was way back when. There were many Roman Catholics who felt that way, and under this [Pope](#) we still wonder about it. But that's another story. We don't want to go there.

[Abdurrahman Wahid](#), who passed away recently, he and I spoke in Japan to a group of foreign ministry people off the record in a huge ballroom. Most of the people who were coming, a lot of them, were Japanese diplomats. They were all saying, "Are Islam and modernity compatible?" We were answering the question. He was answering it from within. I was answering it, as it were, from without.

It was blowing my mind. Finally, I just said, particularly to the Japanese questioners, "You know, when I was a kid growing up in Brooklyn, for Christmas when I got something that was made in Japan, that meant it was inferior, I didn't want it. Now I'm a proud owner of a [Lexus](#)." And then the light went on.

I still have people say, "Is Islam compatible with modernity? Is Islam compatible with democracy? Can Muslims adapt to democracy?"

So part of what I wanted to do was to take a look and say: What's going on in Islam today? Is reform afoot? What does that mean? On the other hand, what are the counter-forces?

The other thing I wanted to look at was: What can we say about the nature of extremism and where it seems to be going, and its impact, not just on the West, but within Muslim societies, if you will, its attraction and its impact?

And then, a final question: How about the relationship between, in the future, the Muslim world and the West, and specifically the United States; and would an agenda for change, the kind of agenda that, let's say, Obama put out as a vision—what would one really need to do to begin to mend those fences, build those bridges, et cetera, and move forward?

I'm going to make a few observations and then I'd really rather go to questions and answers, because I find that it works a lot better if I'm answering people.

In terms of the situation of Muslims today, the diversity in the Muslim world is extraordinary. It took *The New York Times* a long time to pick up on it. If you go back and you look at *The New York Times* ten or 15 years ago, every time they had a story on women and Islam they had, it looked like, the same woman in Saudi Arabia. Since she's covered, who would know? But whenever they wanted to talk about women, it was always a woman in Saudi Arabia and the way she dressed. It wasn't a woman in Malaysia. And it was about a woman who couldn't drive a car, rather than in Malaysia where they drive motorcycles or scooters or whatever—the diversity in the Muslim world.

That's what comes out also in our Gallup data. There's an enormous, not just linguistic and cultural diversity, but diversity in terms of Muslim attitudes. And it's much different than we expect.

For example, if you ask Americans, "What do you admire about Islam and Muslims?" 57 percent say, "Nothing" or "I don't know," and almost 54 percent, on the other hand, consistently say, "I really don't know much about Islam and I really should." And those percentages don't change that much. In the last two years it's gotten maybe 2 or 3 percent better. That's something to think about.

On the other hand, most of us are convinced that they really have a problem with us, not just the extremists. And so we even use phrases like, "Why do they hate us?" and don't just apply it to the extremists, but it's almost like we equate it with anti-Americanism also, as if that means hatred of America rather than having a problem with our foreign policy.

When we actually ask Muslims, "What do you admire about the West?" they have lots of answers. They admire our rule of law; they admire our freedoms, our democracy. They admire our work ethic, our technology, our economic development—and, indeed, would like them.

When we actually talk and do a survey that represents the voices of a billion Muslims, we find that majorities of Muslims want these things for themselves. We find a minority of Muslims, whom we call the political radicals or potential radicals—this is about 7 percent of the world's Muslims—they're not people who engage in violence, but they are people who think for one reason or another that 9/11 was justified—but we find that potential radicals, even more than the mainstream, believe that democracy is the way forward and better relations with the West the way forward. But, unlike the mainstream, they don't believe that will ever happen. Their cynicism is fed by the belief that the United States and some European countries—not all; they distinguish clearly between the United States and Britain under [Bush](#) and [Blair](#) and European countries—their belief is that Western powers operate with a double standard when it comes to issues of democracy and human rights. The tendency not to promote democracy—what [Richard Haass](#) when he was with the Bush Administration described as "democratic exceptionalism," as America's history of its relations and the promotion of democracy in the Middle East—and the tendency to talk about human rights but to devalue Islam and Muslim lives, to feel that was denigrating to them.

All of that is there. It's a much more complex picture.

When we talk about women's rights, the amazing thing is there are significant problems in a number of Muslim countries when it comes to women's issues and women's rights.

On the other hand, what gets hidden often is that in many Muslim countries now women are not only in universities but women are doing much better than men do.

That's not surprising. As you know, when a lot of schools went coed 20 or 30 years ago, I remember—I went to Holy Cross the year it went coed—quietly what people did was skew the enrollment figures, because if they simply went by testing, the number of women admitted would have thrown the balance of the school off. Well, that's happening in a number of universities overseas in terms of the excellence, whether it's in Iran, in Saudi Arabia, a number of countries.

But interestingly, on the issue of women's rights, what we discovered, which surprises people, is that majorities in the Muslim world of men and women, although the figures are higher for women than for men, majorities in most countries, including a country like Saudi Arabia, believe that women should have

equal rights, equal rights to education, equal rights to jobs, equal rights to the most senior jobs that exist.

The fact that they don't have it raises a lot of questions about the nature of their government and also the nature of governments that we support. But that's what we have to think about. And also the continued issue of the hold of patriarchy within the society. But because all of those things are true doesn't mean that significant numbers within a country don't hold positions that we might not see as existing there.

When it comes to the issue of reform within Muslim societies, let me start with the obstacles. These obstacles are not simply restricted to Islam itself. For example, if you look at the tension between orthodoxy in terms of Judaism in Israel vis-à-vis [Reform Judaism](#), you will see some of this also existing, i.e., the power and strength of, if you will, conservatism and ultra-conservatism in many societies, reinforced by the authoritarian regimes, which then develop a relationship with the conservative religious forces within their society.

The hold of the conservative religious section, and their hold on the training of the new generations of religious leaders, and then the role that religious leaders obviously face in training the next generation. It's your local [imam](#), like your local [rabbi](#) or your local [priest](#) or your local [minister](#), certainly years ago if not today, that often is the person who winds up really mediating what the religion is about to the local community, which means also not just the kids, but the kids when they grow up who become the fathers and mothers. That's why, for example, in societies—I saw it in Roman Catholicism; you see it in many religions—even when education takes off, where the first generation that may go to college or university develops an educational level that goes like this [indicating], often their knowledge of their religion and tradition can stay here [indicating]. You don't get the same level of critical thinking and sophistication. So you've got that need for curriculum reform in the [seminaries](#) and the [madrasahs](#), et cetera.

I'm not even getting into the issue here of extremist madrasahs. I'm just talking about the conservatism of a tradition. It is part of the reason why even within Roman Catholicism the attitude of many clergy at the time of Vatican II was, "Who cares what these liberal theologians think? We're their troops. As long as we control the local churches and we control our universities and their curriculum, they're not going to have any impact and we can silence them." So you have those kinds of forces that are operating.

Then you have the problems that exist also that come from the fact that reformers are caught basically between a rock and a hard place in many countries, between authoritarian regimes on the one hand and between a small but deadly group of extremists on the other, when it comes to stepping forward and articulating, taking strong reform positions.

I remember being interviewed by a reporter with a very, very famous magazine. It was a little unfair, his question, because he was faulting intellectuals in some Muslim societies for not speaking out more. I wanted to say to him, "Easy for you to do. You report on those countries sitting in Paris on your tail. You don't even want to go into some of the countries. You don't realize that if somebody is a really outspoken reformer what that means: either the regime will put you in prison or somebody will try to assassinate you." I don't want to exaggerate the situation too much.

And then, a fourth significant factor is in some countries the whole need for economic and educational development in order for societies to move forward and the development of strong civil societies. Well, how do you develop a strong civil society if you have authoritarian regimes?

And what do people who don't want to see democracy really promoted in the Middle East say? "Well, you know, they're really not ready for it"—I'm sure that's what [King George](#), or whoever it was, said about the Americans: "and it's going to be messy. Because they're not ready for it, there's going to be a revolution and maybe a civil war"—gee, those are familiar phrases—"so what we really have to do is promote civil society."

But as one of my colleagues, [John Entelis](#), who teaches at Fordham, said years ago—we were on a panel—he looked at the audience and said, "What authoritarian regime is going to promote a strong civil

society?"

So one of the things we see today is the kind of "fig leaf" democracy, i.e., they had to have elections ten years ago. As soon as there was minimal opposition, as soon as [Ben Ali](#) in Tunisia could not win by 99.91 percent of the vote and his vote plummeted to, I think, 94 percent in the next elections, they suddenly discovered the danger of radicalism was really widespread, shut it down, or you look at [Mubarak](#).

But what do you do? I remember this at the World Economic Forum. Democracy is in. So suddenly, we're in a big session with foreign ministers, and representatives from Egypt and Jordan got up and in effect said, "Civil society is the way to go. Let me tell you about my country. We have burgeoning civil societies."

What they didn't mention was in Jordan they're called "royal civil societies" by those who have problems with it, and in Egypt they're called "government-regulated nongovernment organizations," a contradiction in terms. But it looks like a broadening. Then you hold elections, but you control the whole electoral process.

And then, the final issue is the relationship between the United States and the Muslim world. This gets into a number of areas. I'd be happy to tease this out in specifics.

But it does seem to me as if we have had an issue. The day after 9/11, I received an email from a woman in Cairo. She is very well educated both in Egypt and in the West. One of her areas is democracy. She's a political scientist. She is the mother of four. She is also Islamically oriented. She dresses like a Catholic nun, roughly speaking, in terms of her outfit. If she were here, she wouldn't like this phrase—she is a Muslim feminist. She's very strong on women's rights and women's issues. And she's very critical at times of U.S. foreign policy, but she's part of the legion that are.

She said, "This is terrible. I hope you and your family are okay. I know you're going to go after [bin Laden](#), as one would expect. But we wonder whether this is the beginning or the end."

I had a good sense of what she said, but I wrote back and said, "What do you mean by that?"

She wrote back: "Will this become an excuse for America to attempt to redraw the map of the Middle East?"

Well, if you actually look at our post-9/11 policy, for many people in the Muslim world that's what it looked like, and it looked like many of the architects, who had drawn up a document called "[New American Century](#)" almost a decade before, were out to do that, whether we agree or not.

The net result was we saw anti-Americanism skyrocket. So we saw a contradictory situation. On the one hand, we were engaging in a war against global terrorism, and in the Muslim world this was being perceived as a war against Islam and Muslims—and not just by "the street."

I've spoke in Bahrain in a huge ballroom. I was supposed to speak about American foreign policy. This was about a year and a half after 9/11. So I get up. The guy introduces me. He studied in America, got his Ph.D. in Economics at a place like the University of North Carolina. He says, "We have Professor Esposito to talk about America's war against Islam and the Muslim world."

I thought, that's a great introduction. That frames the whole thing in terms of the audience.

So at dinner after the event—and I was sitting at a table with very prominent businesspeople, all of whom had studied in the States, and they were all doing the requisite stuff, which is to talk about the basketball teams—Duke and UNC, their alma maters—and expect that I follow this and know what's going on—I finally said, "Why did you frame it the way you did?"

He just looked at me and said, "Because that's the way we perceive it." He wasn't anti-American.

I think if you look at [Obama](#)'s inaugural speech, if you look at his comments in Turkey when he was in

Ankara, if you look at his comments in Cairo, we see an Obama who is clearly aware of the realities today and wants to mend the fences.

On the one hand, he distances himself from the legacy of Bush, which in reality one can argue whether or not he really has thus far, but he says he's going to. He talks about and acknowledges what we see in our book, *Who Speaks for Islam?*, a book which I presented to him.

He distinguishes between extremist Islam and mainstream Muslims and what they represent. He talks about diplomacy rather than military intervention. He talks about moving away from unilateralism, more towards partnership. All of that is put out there. He even shows "sensitivity" when he says, in effect, "We're not out to occupy in Iraq or Afghanistan," but also shows the smart sensitivity or insight in talking about economic and educational development, et cetera. But at the end of the day, those are all the important things that need to be done.

The question is whether or not we live in a world in which that is going to be done, i.e., whether or not, not only the practical realities on the ground, but whether or not we will find that our administration has not just the vision, but is willing to engage in the kind of leadership that is necessary, and that means as part of the leadership that you not only reach out to those who have an iron fist, or a clenched fist as he talked about, and try to work with them diplomatically, but it also means that you realize you have to deal with those who have what I call an iron fist and a velvet glove—i.e., many of our authoritarian allies that we support—and come up with a program that has both short- and long-term perceptions and consequences.

And finally, whether or not one is willing to bite the bullet on—and this will set off a discussion—on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and whether or not we can have an American president who is willing to be fully independent in the decisions that he makes on that conflict, and is willing to really be outspoken and not be steamrolled by, for example, Mr. [Netanyahu](#) in terms of what's going on today. Unless those things happen, it's going nowhere.

Now I'll end with this. This is where the danger is. When President Bush a second time talked about jump-starting—it happened twice, but in his second term—when he talked about jump-starting Middle East negotiations, as well as promoting democracy, all of which were fine, one of the points I made then, and a lot of people made, was you don't make that statement, given past history, unless you really know what you have to do and you're going to do it. Among the reasons, why did I say that?

In the first term of President Bush, [Colin Powell](#) called a meeting at the State Department for American Arab and Muslim leaders. I was invited to it because I run a center that's relevant to the area. I'm neither Arab nor Muslim.

It was very interesting because at the last minute Powell's assistant secretary had to chair it because, he said, Powell was on the phone doing exactly what he was now communicating to these Arab and Muslim leaders. Now let me characterize what happened at the meeting.

He began the meeting by looking at everybody and saying, "Now I know that you're probably not going to want to believe this, but this is true," and then in the middle of it he stopped and said the same thing, and said it again at the end. Now, what was he talking about?

He said: "The Secretary of State recognizes that public diplomacy is not just about public relations, it's about policy, one."

"Number two, the Secretary of State as we speak," he said, "is calling Mr. [Sharon](#) and Mr. [Arafat](#) and telling each of them that, whatever their perception and however one may believe that the other side is more responsible, that they both have to acknowledge that they're both part of the problem in order for them then both to be part of the solution. And he's doing the same thing with regard to Pakistan and India, et cetera."

At the end of the meeting, he again said to people: "So what that really means is, on Palestine and Israel,

despite the fact that you've heard people say it before, we are going to be bolder in our approach."

Now, when Obama set out his vision in his Cairo talk, for example, the problem is he is repeating that kind of process. That's all okay, as long as, if you're going to do that, you're going to then back it up and deliver. The fact is, whatever the reasons and excuses one might want to give, that hasn't happened.

I spoke at Tufts—and I'll end with this—in a meeting that had senior military and others. When I talked about what I thought needed to be done and how I didn't think any American president had done it and I didn't have a sense that any American president might be willing to do it given the cost, someone said to me: "Well, having said that, then what?"

I said, "People will think it's naïve because of the way in which we are willing to be conditioned by the politics of the past. What we need is a president—we need Obama, on the issue like Palestine and Israel and other issues related to the region, to say exactly what he said on the economy, that he was going to do what he thought was best and the American people would have an opportunity to pass their judgment on it." I said, "That means politically that he will do his best knowing that that could affect his reelection." I said, "Now, that's a big sacrifice to make, but if you don't make it, then when are you going to do it?"

I briefed very senior Democratic leaders, a member of Congress, staff. Immediately, and in other circles also within the administration itself, you have people now saying, "Well, how could you expect to really get any traction on Palestine and Israel? Really, you can't expect anything. Nothing's really going to be done about it until the second term." Well, if you really believed that was the case, then you should have said it up front. If you don't, there's a problem.

So what is the future? I don't know. I'm still cautiously optimistic. But I think that, as far as I can see, unless this administration responds more forcefully and dramatically on these issues, we're going to have a problem.

One of the things I would ask you to do for a short list in terms of the problems is when you get a chance rattle off quickly to yourself five significant appointments in this administration in terms of handling the Middle East and the Muslim world. When you do, take a look at their background and history and see how many of them bring new and fresh ideas and diversity.

Thank you.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: You mentioned the Gallup Poll several times. How convinced are you that the Gallup Poll really is accurate in representing the various people?

JOHN ESPOSITO: I think that there are two criteria on this from my point of view. One, I look at Gallup's history and reputation. I note that it has, in terms of its methodology and its accuracy across the board on a lot of the work that it does, Gallup has an incredible record there.

If you go to the Gallup website, they have a [Muslim Studies Center](#) where you will see the methodology.

This is a poll that occurred over a prolonged period of time. Most people believed—I would have felt this way if they had asked me, and they didn't—I wasn't in on the beginning—that you wouldn't have access to many of these countries to be able to do what you want to do. They did to the countries.

It's a poll that was done very systematically. First of all, you have people who are local people, who were trained in the local languages. Not only in the questions put together, but even the way in which the questions are worded in the languages, are run by, first of all, two experts on language and then a third that's an expert on how the average person would understand things linguistically.

Then they go out, and the poll took place. If we had a map of the country here, you would see spots all over the country. So that means that they not only go to urban areas, they go to rural areas, they go to

remote areas. There's data on what that means. Some places it took hours on foot to get to in certain kinds of countries. The interviews are across educational levels, age levels, social class levels.

Within plus or minus 3 percent, that is a measure of accuracy. Where I also see it confirmed is that when you actually look at subsequent data by outfits like [Pew](#)—and Pew has extended this—on a lot of the critical areas of topics, they wind up coming down.

But from my point of view it's the comprehensiveness, the systematic approach, and I think that data has held up.

And certainly I would say this. It certainly is going to be as informative as simply having groups of individuals who, however much they travel throughout the region and however long they've been operating, speak for the people of the region.

QUESTION: I wanted to draw you out on Muslim attitudes toward martyrdom and blowing up airplanes or other terrorist acts and becoming a martyr. [Tom Friedman](#) had a [piece](#) a few weeks ago with regard to the father of this fellow who tried to blow up a plane in Detroit. He made the point that this man knew this was going to be murder and not martyrdom. He then said that he thought the change in the Muslim world would come when more leaders, whether religious or political leaders, would speak out very clearly and not endorse this concept of martyrdom. I wonder if you could comment on what you see, this dynamic. You were talking earlier about attitudes on women's rights and democracy and so on. But could you take that on?

JOHN ESPOSITO: Let me begin by subtly and modestly saying that one of the things that I often say to people—they'll ask me did I read this book or that book and I always say I'm too busy writing to read—I think Tom has become that way when it comes to the Middle East. I think he had a good track record when he worked in the Middle East.

Tom has written, for example, a column twice, one five years ago and one about two months ago, in which Tom said, yet again, that Muslims and Muslim leaders have not spoken out with regard to terrorism, et cetera. That's simply false.

In both cases, I and a colleague wrote a letter to the editor, which never got published. In fact, we wrote a letter and gave all the websites so Tom could look them up or have his researcher look them up. The letter was never published, and Tom certainly didn't see it, but he continues to say that, and there are significant statements that have been made.

The same thing is true on the martyrdom issue. Again, if you read my book, I talk about positions taken by the leaders.

So let me be really clear. You have extremist preachers—what I call preachers of hate—who advocate the kind of carnage that takes place between Sunni and Shia in Iraq and call that martyrdom. I'm not denying that.

But if you look at the issue of martyrdom as it's being debated currently in the Muslim world, I would break it out in another way. Putting aside those extremists, you then have two camps of thought: one represented by senior religious leaders, some senior religious leaders in Egypt and Saudi Arabia and other parts of the world, that see martyrdom, what's called martyrdom, as suicide, plain and simple, and as condemned by Islam. That would denounce, as one of them did, somebody like bin Laden and [Zawahiri](#) as vigilantes, et cetera. So you've got those leaders.

But where it gets complicated is on Palestine and Israel. Then you get some leaders who will say that acts of terrorism involving suicide bombing cannot be seen as anything but an act of terrorism and against Islam. But on Israel and Palestine they will have their rationale for saying that this is a different situation, that when you're dealing in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, you're not dealing with the killing of noncombatants.

So that becomes the difference between, for example, on the one hand, the leadership in Saudi Arabia,

which says any form of suicide bombing is suicide, and [Qaradawi](#), who denounced, for example, the 9/11 attacks within a week after they occurred, but when it comes to Israel and Palestine, and then more recently when it came to Iraq, frames it differently.

The other thing that you have to factor in here is to then look and say: What do the vast majority of believers think? I'm a Roman Catholic. Most people would say that they know that significant numbers of Catholics, the majority of Catholics, even if they identify themselves as Catholics, on some issues of sexual ethics would disagree with the Pope. Now, in the old days it would simply be you would define what Catholics are about by what the Vatican preached.

Certainly in Islam we see that. The way in which you can see it is we sometimes say that the down-side of Islam is that it has no pope. Well, wake up, folks. Only Catholics and [Coptic Christians](#)—maybe one other group—have a pope or the equivalent. Jews don't. Protestants don't. That's why we Catholics are so strong—no.

The plus side is, that it means that Muslim believers can hold diversities of opinions. In fact, when we actually look at extremists, for example—or, if you will, the terrorists—their first line of argument is usually citing something political rather than something Quranic. The Muslims who are against the killing of civilians, for majorities of them, the first thing they argue from is the Quran.

I think this is where we have a problem. It's not that there aren't the bin Ladens out there, it's not that there aren't the sheikh preachers who support the bin Ladens out there. But we can't let those visible voices that often are the voices that we hear predominate for the vast majority of Muslims and where they're coming from.

QUESTION: What can you tell us about divisions or possible divisions within the clergy in Iran and what that may tell us about the future of the country and our relations with it?

JOHN ESPOSITO: It's an excellent question.

I go to Iran fairly often. I think I was the first American academic into Iran after the revolution, during the [Khomeini](#) period, and I'm back and forth.

What we need to realize is that there is a significant division within Iran. We saw it during the [Khatami](#) days, in terms of the electorate and how it turned out, and we certainly have seen it recently in the streets of Iran.

That kind of division also exists within the clergy in Iran. The fact is in my experience—and again, I don't meet every clergy person, but I can tell you for example, to give you an example, of [Qom](#).

We did the first exchange during the Khatami years in which we ran programs both in Tehran for the foreign ministry but also in Qom, and I also got to spend a fair amount of time in Qom. What you discover is—everyone always talks about the, if you will, militant side of Qom. The fact is you also have madrasahs there that represent a very progressive, liberal social science. I would visit and they would immediately show me that they had *The Oxford Encyclopedia* and want to discuss these modern ideas. Of course they had Xeroxed *The Oxford Encyclopedia*, the copy they had they hadn't paid for. But that's okay.

They would actually in public during the Khatami years—and this I couldn't believe because it was in public—they would raise questions about [Velayat-e Faqih](#), the ruler of the [Faqih](#), and in fact the way they raised the question was actually to say that this was not a legitimate institution.

The divisions are there, but you have a hard-core minority that controls the levers of power. This analogy is not good, but it's like a number of countries. If you said, "Where are most Egyptians coming from?" then the next question becomes "Well, gee, if they're coming from there, then why do they have these people at the top?"

Well, you know, they're security states. That's what Iran is. The only difference between Egypt and Iran is

we support the Egyptian security state and we don't support the Iranian. So I would say that those divisions exist.

On the other hand, whether it's Iran or Pakistan, the thing we always have to be careful about is our rhetoric in terms of things like: "Well, why not bomb Iran to teach them a lesson?" That's going to mobilize everybody; everybody will become an Iranian nationalist—which is understandable. You know, I mean how would we, if we were in their shoes?

But the divisions are certainly deep there. How to break that power grip is another question. And these people at the top are desperate. [Khamenei](#) knows he's got a problem. But what we know from Khamenei's record is that this is a very bright person, and he's a very bright person who's willing to do anything. The same thing of course is true of [Ahmadinejad](#).

QUESTION: Thank you for your very insightful remarks. But I'm a little surprised that there was such a predominant emphasis on the Palestinian-Israeli contest, which is somewhat emotional, and when it comes to practical politics, often the Saudis and other nations that are concerned about Iran's power don't mind the fact that the Israelis represent a strong counter-force.

So I would like you to develop further the possibilities for reform, because one of the prime tenets of growing democracy is to encourage economic development, which you only touched on briefly, and the strengthening of a middle class that could develop independent views and so on. So where do you see the greatest potential for this middle class, and how can we support them?

JOHN ESPOSITO: Just to preface it, I didn't think that I spent a lot of time on the Arab-Israeli conflict. I just mentioned it at the end as one point, because I'm interested in the broader issues that you raise in terms of change.

The fact is that we do have in many societies now, many Muslim societies in Malaysia, Indonesia, and increasingly in Gulf countries, and certainly in Egypt, a developing middle class. But the problem that you have in countries like Egypt and in Syria, in a number of countries, is—well, in Egypt you have the problems of lack of resources, but also the nature of the governments.

The majority of Muslims, and this, by the way, is what majorities in the Gallup data show, basically admire our technology and economic development, and particularly the United States, rather than Japan, on the technology side, and say that what they would really like—they don't word it this way—rather than our drone attacks, what they would like is assistance. That's I think our challenge, far more the magnitude of that.

One of the disappointing things from my point of view in the first eight years of the Bush-Blair period was that both Bush and Blair, quite rightly, early on promised significant economic aid, and then it was never really developed, to rebuild infrastructures in the way that it could have been rebuilt. We have the same problem with regard to Afghanistan. I think that that's what we really need to invest in.

The problem I think we're going to run into is that, given the world economy now, given the budgetary problems, are we going to do it? And also, are we really in our psyche totally prepared to do it? I'll just give you one example.

I have a number of people who I know who are Afghan-Americans. They basically spent most of their lives, or were born, here, but they go back to Afghanistan. One of them was telling me—this was about two or three years ago—talking to the American ambassador there, who's really good—she prefaced this. But she was saying, "You know, you have to think about the next generation. So not only do you have to be doing what you're doing, but we need educational and economic aid here, and particularly," she said, "even where some schools are built, they're so shoddily built that a strong wind comes and it disappears." The ambassador honestly answered her and, in effect, said, "You know, what my directives are concerned about are not these kinds of issues."

So to what extent can we actually realize what needs to be done, and then to what extent can we get

that aid to actually do what we want it to do? I can remember ten years ago at a closed meeting at the Defense Department, we had senior Egyptian military as well as a couple of retired senior Egyptian military. We were talking about aid—not just military aid, but other forms of aid. At one point—it had to be a retired general, not a sitting one, who would say this—he said, "Let me just tell you what my president would say with regard to the aid. He would say that we welcome economic and educational aid. But he would say that that aid would be welcomed if it were given to us and then we decide what we're going to do with it." Then he smiled, as if to say "and it's not going to be used for those."

How do we somehow simultaneously in the short-term support some of these governments but back off a lot of our excessive military-security-type aid and put it into economic and educational aid? Unless that happens, and use a carrot-and-stick approach to open up the society—Egypt has become more oppressive when it comes to non-governmental organizations and elections, and so, even where you've got an educated middle class, that educated middle class, much of it, is totally frustrated.

I can think of, for example—and this is one of many examples—a young man who's invited often, or a fair number of times, to Washington and New York to speak and now is not allowed to leave the country because he writes pieces in the newspaper that are very well informed, but the regime doesn't approve of it.

Look at what happened to [Saad Eddin Ibrahim](#), and Saad is just the tip of the iceberg. On my last trip to Egypt, I went over to interview one of the people who's one of the leaders in the [Muslim Brotherhood](#), who's seen within Egypt and other places, and used to be celebrated by Mubarak as the mainstream person you could deal with, and people kept wondering is Mubarak trying to undermine his credibility. Well, I'm having breakfast in the morning in the hotel. I'm going to interview him at night. Front page: the man has been arrested, held for months. All part of a pattern there.

Now, we've got to figure out a way that we invest more in infrastructure development, education, as well as a way to put pressure on movement toward stronger civil societies. If we don't, we're going to have a problem. And if Mubarak's son is brought in through the back door and we just accept it, we're going to have a problem.

The way many people view it is as follows.

President Bush was quite right at one point when he was critical of both the Egyptians and the Saudis. And indeed, [Condoleezza Rice](#) made some strong statements in Egypt. But when the elections come in Egypt and when we're concerned about that ally, we then go silent. And the same thing could be true when it comes to Saudi Arabia, and that's where we need, it seems to me, a fresher approach.

I think [Aaron Miller](#)'s book is very interesting if you just take what he says when he talks about Palestine and Israel, but more broadly on Middle East policy. Whether one agrees with everything Aaron says is beside the point. But one of the things that Aaron kind of says is we have to recognize, for example, in Palestine-Israel, but I would say even more broadly in our Middle East policy, is that our paradigms have failed. If that's the case, we need to develop new paradigms. In doing that we can't have the same old players. Even if they say, after having done it for 20 years, they're now ready to think fresh thoughts, we can't risk that. We've got to really be looking for new and fresh thoughts.

QUESTION: [Hamas](#) and [Hezbollah](#) succeed because they are able to deliver social services better than their legitimate governments. Is that correct?

JOHN ESPOSITO: Yes. Let me tell you something interesting that happened.

About five years ago, I was speaking at the Foreign Service Institute and we were talking about the future of Palestine and Israel and the issues of leadership, that both sides did not seem to be able to produce the leadership that really was going to be forward-looking, but also that there were all kinds of issues of credibility. I was absolutely stunned when a member of the Foreign Service said, "Why don't we try some of the leaders of Hamas?" I said, "Excuse me?"

But the reality of it is you look at, after the Hezbollah-Israel war—I mean this was reported widely even in our own press—who were the first people in the streets, who were the first people delivering the social services, beginning the rebuilding, et cetera? I mean that is an issue.

If you look at Egypt—and it also happened in Turkey, but certainly in Egypt over the years—you got to a point where after tragedies the Egyptian government, in the name of assuring security, that things didn't get chaotic, said, "We're going to control what comes in." Why? Because the first people in were the Muslim Brotherhood and others delivering social services.

Unless we realize that and figure out ways in which to respond, many of these governments are incapable of providing some of those services.

The other thing related to this is that we have to realize that it's not just Hamas and Hezbollah, that indeed there are more mainstream Islamist groups that work within the system and also deliver those services. So now we've got two paradigms for delivering services. And then you have to say: What is the government doing for these people?

Now, the Egyptians are aware of this. I'll give you two examples.

One is I took a group around the world because I did a book with National Geographic on world religions. When we came into Cairo, what amazed me—these are people who were world travelers all the time. I mean they're an amazing group of people. Many of them are retired and they go on these trips—people who didn't even know the area immediately were coming up to me on the bus and saying, "My God, look at the people's faces on the street. They look so depressed and downtrodden."

Now, I've been going to Egypt for years, and the extent of it—but what does our tour guide do? We go by and the tour guide says, "There's a hospital and the government offers free medical." The fact is historically mainstream groups in Egypt—you talk about extremists—mainstream groups that do not engage in violence had been offering the services that the government cannot provide, tutoring students, et cetera. So now the government is aware of this so it needs to do that for its propaganda.

And then the final example from this young man, and to show you how sensitive they were, we went by [Al-Azhar University](#), the great religious university—he never even referred to it as we went by. This is supposed to be a tour of Islamic monuments.

When we went to a mosque, it was a museum, not a living mosque. When we went to one of the great mosques of the Muslim world in Cairo, I thought he was going to show it to people. Instead, he said, "There's this mosque and the bus will be parked right across. So after you have lunch and do your shopping, get back on the bus." He didn't even say "visit the mosque."

But to show you how the government is sensitive, he also gave us this insight, and you should keep this in mind. He said to us, "You often ask me, you wonder why women cover their heads, so many of them." He said, "You know, a little-known fact is it's not just piety. Egyptian women have very bad hair." I'm not kidding. This is an AUC [American University in Cairo] graduate, very bright and articulate. "Their hair is so bad"—it was like a joke, "How bad is their hair?"—"their hair is so bad that they have to go to the beauty parlor every week. Many of them can't afford it. So that's why they cover their hair."

Thanks very much.

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