

In coordination with American University's Center for Global Peace &

Mohammed Said Farsi Chair of Islamic Peace, Rumi Forum,

Salam Institute for Peace & Justice & The United States Institute of Peace:

**ISLAMIC TRADITIONS OF PEACE AND NONVIOLENCE: RESPONDING TO
CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES**

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CONTEXT FOR ACTION

Like the followers of other religious traditions, Muslims share a common calling to working for peace, and nonviolence has been an integral aspect of Islamic tradition since the time of Prophet Mohammed. An inquiry into the Islamic scholarship and history would provide plenty of examples where nonviolence has been employed by Muslims, and not without success. Indeed, Islamic tradition of nonviolence is a deep rooted one and there are sizable groups of Muslim scholars, activists, and practitioners of nonviolence, who have been working for peace and justice in their communities.

Islam is not only an abstract theological doctrine, but also a historical dynamic that finds expression in lived experiences and circumstances of people. The history of Islam is a story of never-ending efforts of Muslims to comprehend the ideals of Islam and then to transform these ideals into a lived reality. Interest in the Islamic tradition of nonviolence has been revived over the last few years and various Islamic movements and leaders are now searching for ways to employ nonviolence as a means to social transformation. In this context a dialogue and exchange among Muslim scholars, religious authorities, and practitioners regarding the traditions of peace and nonviolence and how they can be applied in the contemporary world, contributes significantly to constructively addressing the issues facing Muslims in our current world.

OVERVIEW

This one-day conference on **Islamic Traditions of Peace and Nonviolence** focused on linking theological and religious interpretations of peace and nonviolence with tangible practices at the community, as well as, policy making levels. More specifically, the conference offered space for critical reflection on these and many other questions:

- What are the theological and theoretical roots of peace and nonviolence in Islam?
- Are there any nonviolent movements in the Muslim world today?
- What are the conditions necessary to facilitate and support existing practices of peace and nonviolence among Muslims activists?
- How can Muslim women contribute to our understanding and application of nonviolence?
- What are some strategies to link nonviolent action to policy change?

Towards our hope that this conference will become a catalyst for a continuing dialogue and exchange on nonviolence among Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, community leaders, religious authorities, non-governmental organizations and policy-makers, below is a recap of the conference proceedings:

Panel One: “Conceptualization of Peace and Nonviolence from an Islamic Perspective: Theological and Theoretical Roots” Moderated by Ali Yurtsever, President Rumi Forum.

Currently Islam is depicted as a religion that is incapable of nonviolence, but there are many stories of Islam. Following the introductory remarks by Dr. Abdul Aziz Said, Mohammed Said Farsi Chair of Islamic Peace and Director of the Center of Global Studies at AU, in which the stage was set for these various stories of confrontation and ‘complimentarity’ to be explored, the panelists in this first panel began addressing the scriptural and theoretical roots of nonviolence in Islam.

“Peace and Justice in Islamic Narratives”

Imam Yahya Hendi, Muslim Chaplain Georgetown University

There are a number of sources for peacebuilding and conflict resolution in Islam and I have spent much time since 9-11 trying to make this point to both the US Government and the public in general. Ablution is one such repository of peacebuilding. It is the acknowledging of mistakes and can be seen as a fundamental source of peacebuilding. In fact, all rituals are important to helping parties to listen to each other. The concepts of Ta’aruf (knowing one another), Ta’awon (Cooperation), and Ta’kamul (Complementarity and completion) are all important concepts that can be seen in many places in the Quran.

What we as Muslims need to do is explore the faith. The connection between justice and peace is assured and has been outlined by many scholars, but there are many other concepts that support peace that are less studied and need further focus. We need to explore these narratives and make them more salient to others who are not so familiar with them so that peace and non-violence can be fostered.

“Islamic Tradition of Nonviolence: A Conceptual Framework”

Ayşe Kadayıfci-Orellana, Assistant Professor, American University; Salam Institute for Peace and Justice

I want to present a framework for Islamic Non-violence. Non-violence can be understood as both a way of life and a strategy. In either formulation there are some underlying principles inherent in non-violence. For example, there is a basic agreement/understanding that violence breeds more violence; there is a basic belief in the dignity of all humans, that there are sources of injustice, and that some generally observed facts about the notion of power. Finally, in non-violence approaches there is a positive understanding of peace – peace is a goal for Muslims through Tawhid we are all interconnected.

As the first speaker mentioned there has been an emphasis placed on justice by Muslim scholars, but there need to be more definition given to what justice means from an Islamic perspective. The five pillars of Islam all have a connection to non-violence. Take the first pillar as an example – submission – this is connected to power through disobedience. It is possible to use such a non-violent framework within Islam to foster dialogue and understanding as opposed to miscommunication and aggression. The work that we are doing as scholars and at organizations like Salam Institute for Peace and Justice is needed and timely in empowering this type of framework.

“Minarets without Muezzins: Why is it Important to have Peace Education Studies Programs in Muslim Communities?”

Qamar-ul Huda, Senior Program Officer, Religion and Peacemaking Program, US Institute of Peace

I want to speak to you today not as an academic, but from a very practical position. Working at the USIP I am very much concerned with trying to make practical headway with those that might be likely to revert to violence. There is very much a sense of victim-hood and disempowerment within the Muslim world and unless we are practical about addressing that we have a very long road ahead.

I have traveled to many Muslim countries and questioned Imams and influential leaders of Muslim Madrassas. You would be surprised how uniform some of their answers are to my questions about teaching peace. Most say “that is what we teach everyday – it is in the Quran!” But, they have not really explored peace from a Muslim perspective any deeper than this. How do you teach peacemaking within Islam? Those I asked this question say that you find it through prayer, Zakat, caring for elders and orphans. It is surely evident in these practices, but how then does this jive with the guilt, shame, and historical memory that Muslims seem to share? How do we address victim-hood (disempowerment) and maintain the non-violent values that Ayse was speaking about? I once asked a group of Madrassa leaders to imagine that you return home to find out that your brother has been sleeping with you wife. They immediately said things like, “I would kill them both.” I remind them that once they get over this anger the fact of their infidelity remains and in that hypothetical situation is a lesson: there is a need to think beyond just victim-hood and think of ways that you can empower yourself (harming others will not do this). This seems to resonate with some.

Panel Two: “Peace and Nonviolence in Practice” Moderated by Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, Assistant Professor, American University; Salam Institute for Peace and Justice.

This panel explored the current day Islamic social movements and application of nonviolence therein. Especially NGOs and other practitioners are invited to discuss how they are employing nonviolence in their societies.

“Peace and Nonviolence in Practice: Reformulating the American Muslim Discourse”

Sayyid M Syeed, National Director, Office of Interfaith & Community Alliances, Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)

Through my work with ISNA, I have been building a new identity among American Muslims through a gradual change in the North American Muslim discourse. We have come a great distance in a very short time, but it has not been fast or easy. I can remember when we started organizing and meeting there were many Muslims living in the United States that refused to change and adapt to this culture. They retained an Arab-centric view of Islam. Out of 57 Muslim countries (i.e. countries with at least 80% Muslim Population), 54 have a history that includes colonial occupation. This has left the Muslim identity and psyche both vulnerable and unwilling to change in any way.

It has been a great struggle for American Muslims to leave so many of the vestiges of Arab culture behind, but slowly they are doing so. ISNA has had Shia past-Presidents, but not until this year did we elect a woman President. But the fact is that ISNA has done this – elected a woman President – because she is the best for the organization and our goals. This is an example of how American Muslims have changed their discourse, before there was a patriarchal culture that dominated the Muslim discourse here in the US. But, over many years, and a consensus approach, ISNA was able to open up new ways of thinking among American Muslims.

“Teaching about the World and Its Faith Traditions--a Global Civic Enterprise”

Susan Douglass, Education Consultant, Prince Al-Waleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim Christian Understanding, Georgetown University

I am a teacher and, therefore, I am going to address you as fellow teachers. There are many different models for teaching history and religion, but I want to focus on two in my talk today. One has been called the “civilizations model” and the other has been called the “global perspectives model.” The civilizations model is one that we are all familiar with; it is most likely the way that you were taught

history in school. World history in this model is seen as comprising various civilizations which the student can study as distinct units. The problem with this model is that it is Euro-centric. With whole communities of human knowledge having to pass muster as a true “civilization” and limited amount of time to do units many important cultures get left out or brushed over.

The Global perspective model approaches history differently; it approaches eras as a slice of time. The advantage to such an approach is that it provides opportunities to teach about syncretism and integration between cultures. The student learning history from the global perspective model is able to make cultural connections and develop a less segmented view of the world. It allows students to integrate knowledge and see that knowledge is not the purview of any one civilization, but rather a cooperative process among various communities and cultures.

The importance of research on these new approaches to learning cannot be overstated in regards to Islam and peacebuilding. It shoots in the foot the theories like Samuel Huntington’s clash of civilizations and provides common starting points to develop coordinated interaction. The Berkeley Center on Religious Perspectives, among others, has been on the forefront of developing these new teaching methodologies and explaining their importance to peaceful co-existence. I encourage you all to think and use new approaches to pedagogy and can be contacted for further information.

“Nonviolence and Islamic Movements Today”

Manal Radwan, Doctoral Candidate, George Mason University

Many of the other speakers have saved me the time of listing the many scriptural examples of peace and non-violence in Islam, so I do not need to do that here. What I would like to do is focus on the roots of non-violence that exists in many of the Islamic movements that exist today (especially those that are often branded as being extremist and violent). I take as my prime example of this the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. If you look at the history and foundations of this group you will see that it was an early 20th Century response to British rule and was based on correcting social injustice through altruism and social renewal of a peaceful version of Islam. Of course today, despite officially renouncing violence, the Brotherhood and its many members do legitimate violence as a tactic.

The fact is that many of the current extremist movements around the world had their beginnings in non-violent expressions of Islam. We need to not only recognize this, but empower this historical fact as a means to redress the humiliation felt by many in the Muslim world. Following the talk by Susan I am a strong believer that changing the paradigm of education is one important way to achieve change in Islamic societies, but it is also crucial to remember the roots of many Islamic revivals have been begun with non-violent values in mind. We can empower these narratives, but first we must be aware of them.

“Taking Inspiration from Non-Violence in Muslim History and Present Challenges”

Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad, Ph.D., President, Minaret of Freedom Institute

Thanks to the other participant for providing a strong grounding for what I am going to speak about. Imam Hendi this morning provided a great overview of the scriptural basis for non-violence and peacebuilding in Islam. I want to focus on the non-violent expressions and activists that often get forgotten or missed by the mainstream media.

India has the second largest Muslim population after Indonesia and we rarely hear anything about Indian Muslims besides when there is violence between them and the Hindu majority. While Gandhi is well-known for his non-violent resistance to British rule people like Abdul Ghaffar Khan (often referred to as the ‘frontier Gandhi’) is seldom spoken of. It is people like this that we can and should study and bring to prominence as a means to instill non-violence and peacebuilding in Islam.

Keynote Address: “Peace and Nonviolence in Islam: Does it Really Matter?”

Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Professor, SIS, American University; Director, Salam Institute for Peace and Justice

Wherever I travel in the Muslim World I am struck by the response I get when I tell people that I am working to foster peace and non-violence within Islam. They say “peace and non-violence are integral to Islam why does it matter to talk about this?” There is a need for conflict resolution skills to be supported in the Islamic world, too often they are being forgotten and/or shouted-over by those that believe in violence as a viable tactic. I was in Sri Lanka recently and one salesman said “Oh, you are a Muslim I will give you a good deal, brother!” Then he ripped me off the same way he would any other person! There is a culture of empathy and brotherhood among Muslims, but too often it serves to enforce identity, but does not have an impact in practice. The same could be said about Islam’s relation to peacebuilding – many of today’s speakers have already mentioned the humiliation and disempowerment we are up against.

Many of the speakers already have spoken about the Muslim world’s equation of Arab culture with Islam. The fact is that Indonesia has the largest population of Muslims of any country and over 80% of the Muslim world lives outside Arabia. The media has portrayed Muslim as not only violent, but as culturally Arab as well. We know that Islam is much more diverse and multi-faceted than this. Still there remains a gap between the ideal and the real.

Globalization has indeed posed a challenge to Muslim identity and many Muslims think that there is no response to this other than violence. While it is true that there is really no simple response to this phenomenon that is happening across the Muslim world, there is a way to address it and I believe it is through both intra-faith and interfaith dialogue and communication. But I have, throughout my travels, noticed a number of obstacles to interfaith dialogue. There is a fear of conversion within the Muslim world for example. Communication and dialogue can certainly help Muslims overcome this fear. There is need to stress Bid’ah – innovation - as well. While the media is to blame for their portrayal of Islam, we cannot get fixated on that as the only problem, there are internal obstacles to peacebuilding too and we need to focus energy there if peacebuilding and non-violence are to germinate.

Panel Three: “Current Challenges and Future Possibilities for Nonviolence in Muslims Communities”
Moderated by Qamar-ul Huda, Religion and Peacemaking Program, US Institute of Peace

This panel discussed the links between nonviolent action and policy change. Panelists recommended specific policy-actions and strategies.

“Faith-based Diplomacy: Bridging the Religious Divide”

Dr. Douglas M. Johnston, President and founder of the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy

Thanks for persevering for the last panel of the day. For more than a decade defense planners have been dealing with what they call the asymmetric threat. Despite their progress, there is not enough money in the US treasury that can deal with all possible asymmetric threats. Because of the religious nature of this threat, I submit that we do not have much ability to work for change, but due to three main reasons we are slowed:

1. Our continued reliance on the rational actor model – we have assumed for too long that when dealing with rational negotiation and strategic interests religion is unimportant;
2. Our reliance on the idea of the separation of church and state;

3. This reliance on separation of church and state also creates operational constraints to what you can do – when we are constantly looking over our shoulder in fear that we break our sacrosanct idea of separating church and state it is limiting our means to take action.

Faith based diplomacy has shown to be a good way to deal with these constraints – making religion part of the solution in not only needed, but necessary. Much of our work at the Center for Religion and Diplomacy can be found in the 2003 book Faith Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik. Our center has been practicing this method around the world. I will use Pakistan as my example since that is all that time will allow.

In Pakistan we have been doing a madrassa reform program. The Western exposure to the madrassa system goes far back in history and is indeed connected to the current University system in the West. Pedagogical and administrative ideas that we use now were first developed in madrassas. Our program has a two-fold goal there in Pakistan: 1.) to expand the curriculum, especially related to HR and 2.) to transform their pedagogy – to transform the thinking of young people that are ripe for extremism. We have been having some success, which stands in sharp contrast to that of the Pakistani government. Those in the madrassas are fearful of losing their role in education – we have allowed them to take a role in making it their own changes to curriculum – given them ownership in the process.

In one madrassa, I told the leaders who were hostile upon our arrival that just as you can blame the US of double standards in the Middle East, you can also talk about Arab leaders double standards. I then said, but this is not what we are here to talk about. Our center is not a religious organization, but I asked them what would you do and say if Jesus or the prophet Mohammed were here. Rage converted to a feeling of fellowship. It is remarkable what you can achieve with a faith based initiative because it leads to a different type of dialogue. Despite the risks and discomfort the stakes are too high for us not to try.

“Bringing Theology to Life: Fethullah Gulen and the Practice of Peace.”

Dr. Zeki Saritoprak, Department of Religious Studies, John Carroll
University

First of all I assume that you have heard a lot of Islam teaching of peace – we know that peace is the foundation of Islam. As the prophet Mohammed said, pbuh, “All of you are peace and peace comes from you.” So there are many things on this subject, but I will develop how Muslims theologians have focused on putting peace into practice. I will speak of one Islamic scholar – Fethullah Gulen - -from Turkey, but now in the US. Gulen was, and is, very active in peace, education, and activism.

What makes Gulen different from other contemporary scholars? Comes out of the period of the 1970s in Turkey. This was a difficult time in Turkey because the fight between nationalist and communists was at its peak. During this time Gulen was a peacemaker. He comes from the mystical tradition (ala Rumi and others). Education and knowledge were crucial to this theology.

Gulen argued that there are three major enemies of Muslims – ignorance, poverty, and internal divisions. Education according to Gulen, will result in peace. Gulen idolizes a certain generation – the golden generation – based on morality not race or ethnicity. This future generation will create islands of peace and it is his goal to actively work to create this golden generation.

I will outline some practical examples/stories which illustrate this the need and Gulen’s influence: A Catholic priest that visited a Gulen school in Mindanao the Philippines described the school as a haven of peace. In reference to Dr. Johnson’s talk on Pakistan – Gulen admirers are working very hard to make the Pakistanis realize that modernity and Islam are compatible. Gulen’s supporters can be found all over the world.

One of my own stories illustrates what some of the other speakers have been talking about. When I was a student in the 1970s I was walking home from dinner with 3 other students from our divinity school. We were stopped by soldiers with guns (this was not uncommon during these times). After inspecting us and our items and seeing that we carried no weapons, they said “these religious people are sometime more dangerous than fascists.” This was the times – it was normal to be stopped by groups of people, either Marxist-Leninists or nationalists and this experience instilled in me the great power of religion.

“Middle East Peace Building: Engaging the Islamists”

Mohamed Nimer, Adjunct Faculty, American University

The presentations all day have pointed to the idea that the original state of affairs between Muslims and non-Muslims is a state of peace. My talk is focused on trying to bridge this gap between these notions of peacebuilding and peacemaking and the realities on the ground.

In the midst of the pessimism of peacebuilding in the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict there is a optimism in the fact that brute force will not create a change, both sides seem to have people that realize this. On both sides of this conflict there has been factionalism and a continued formation of the belief that conflict is better than peace.

Historical reconciliation entails mutual acceptance, but neither is willing to do this. We must change the peacemaking dynamic - spoilers must be engaged. Given this very brief introduction from both sides, the remaining of my talk I will only talk about the Arab side and try to see what must be done on this side to bring about peace. Engaging organizational structures- ISNA is doing this in the US.

Islamists are organized on the basis of wanting to build not destroy. They are not monolithic, but they have been exclusivist and unwilling to change – we need to engage that.

Moderate Islamists are global in their outlook – we need to engage this. Now there are Islamists members of the Knesset. Some Israelis might think of them as a fifth column, but they are there. They have to develop their own public policy decisions - they cannot be forced upon them. A peacebuilding approach must look to commonalities, not difference.

What could be the principles that could create peacebuilding:

Following UN resolutions

We cannot be proceeding into an action plan from a place of realpolitik, as Dr. Johnston said earlier. Religion needs to be engaged and moderates will then feel comfortable to come forward.

“Women and Youth as Changemakers”

Daisy Khan, American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA)

This is tough being the last speaker. I want to share a little about myself and how I came to this work. Born in Kashmir, sent to catholic school, taught by Hindu professor while playing with Sikh fiends I may not seem to be a person that would be speaking of the need for Islam in peacebuilding. At 15 I came to Long Island – predominantly Jewish and that added yet more confusion.

I saw the Rushdie affair and could not understand how Muslims could be seen as anti-intellectual. Then I encountered Rumi and was ‘born again’ in a Muslim sense. I married a man of God (good insurance I guess), an Imam. When 9-11 happened my whole identity was forced on me again. I was a successful businesswoman, but I could not escape the same questions. American wanted answers to three questions:

1. where are you leaders?

2. Why don't you speak out?
3. Why do you treat your women so poorly?

In order to combat these rather un-analytical questions we need to develop responses – we needed passion, but also a big vision matched with foot-soldiers on the ground. We devised these two programs at this point – young people needed a vision for the future. There are 1.6 Billion Muslim young people without anyone to look up to besides Bin Ladin – that is sad. We wanted to create a platform for these children to be able to develop visions of peace on their own.

I believe what Dr. Johnston said – we need to develop faith-based diplomats. Women must be at the forefront of this debate within the Muslim community. There are many women out there doing many things, but we are not connected. This is our moment. Change is not just in the air because Obama is saying that – it really is in the air I feel it. At the same time, social readiness is an important reality to be aware of. What is needed now is to set up a parallel constituency and move at a pace that doesn't create a disempowering dynamic or more fear and alienation among Muslims.

Five key points need to be taken into account for this to happen:

1. Understanding collective action;
2. Focus on our own messaging – we have to re-shape the Master narrative;
3. We have to create prominent place for women;
4. We have to create a communication tool;
5. We have to empower decision-making and leadership skills in women.

We must instill the right to independent decision-making and with that we will see peace flourish. Thank you.

Closing Remarks and Networking:

Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Professor, SIS, American University; Director, Salam Institute for Peace and Justice.

I picked up a few points that maybe I could address here as a way to lead into more discussion and comments. But, you have heard thirteen panelists talking at you today with very little interactions – probably less than I would have liked, or done usually. But given the format I think a lot of good points have been raised. So for that reason it may be more fruitful to open the discussion up to the floor as opposed to give you my responses and ideas.

Any suggests for making future such events more successful?

I will say that I did notice that we did not get bogged down on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as we did in previous years and I think that is good. What ideas or comments do you have?

Encouraging work – Question for Doug Johnston – have you had to hide your American nationality and do you work with other groups from Europe that are doing similar work?

Dr. Johnston – Not at all and in fact we at the Center see the fact that we are Americans doing this work is important for others to know since it goes against the stereotype in the Muslim world.

This has been good – I would like to see more coordination or even a report come out of this. Is there any repository of knowledge on actors working in the field of Islam and Peace?

Professor Abu Nimer – in fact at Salam we have begun a project to link these organizations together in a network, but there is no central location where we can go and find who is working where. We need to work on this for the web and will be doing so with appropriate funding.

Thanks you all for coming and please sign the contact sheet so we can all keep the discussion going!