

# Hardliners In Search of Moderate Muslims!

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**S**ince 9/11, we have seen a rash of articles by pundits who seek to identify moderates within the American Muslim community. After spending a lot of energy and efforts to find the elusive Muslim moderate, the pundits settle for less than perfect Muslim moderates by stretching the definition of "moderate", "Muslim", or both. Jen Shroder tells her readers that her hatred of Islam and contempt of the Qur'an does not prevent her from loving all Muslims. "I have liked every Muslim I have ever met." In an article appropriately entitled *The Plight of Moderate Muslims*, a *People without a Religion*, published in Alan Keyes's *Renew America*, she cautions against treating moderate Muslims harshly. "As America slowly admits the enemy is true Islam," Shroder stresses, "every effort must be made to embrace the moderate Muslim, not persecute them." Shroder goes on to explain why it is okay to be kind to moderate Muslims: "The answer is not to blind our eyes and try to convince ourselves that moderate Muslims represent true Islam. They don't. Islam is defined by its holy books, and the holy books proclaim death to all who oppose it [sic], even moderate Muslims."

The cynicism of the extreme Religious Right aside, the need to distinguish moderate from extremist Muslims is genuine. The

terrorist attacks on the American homeland have demonstrated the ruthlessness of the terrorists and their willingness to inflict harms on noncombatant civilians, and the terrorists who undertook these attacks were apparently religiously motivated Muslims. Americans of all religious and ideological backgrounds have a genuine interest in ensuring that religious fanatics do not threaten the safety and security of the public.

9/11 was particularly hard on the American Muslim community. In addition to suffering a high number of casualties, 9/11 attacks brought additional pain to the Muslim community, as Muslims had to deal with suspicious public and added scrutiny by law enforcement agencies. The Muslim community has had more than its fair share of the pain inflicted on Americans as 358 Muslims perished in the attacks on the twin towers and the Pentagon. American Muslim organizations were the first to issue condemnations of the attacks and their perpetrators. Despite several dozen statements by Muslim organizations and leaders denouncing terrorism, the Religious Right pundits continue to complain that Muslim leaders have not denounced terrorism, and continue to demand more condemnations.

The search for moderate Muslims has become a priority of highest importance in post 9/11. American leaders recognized the need to distinguish between Muslim

extremists who are willing to employ terror to achieve political ends, and moderate Muslims who abhor intolerance and indiscriminate targeting of civilians, and who share with their fellow Americans deep concern for the wellbeing of their country. George W. Bush's emphasis on the peaceful nature of Islam during a visit to the Washington Islamic Center, shortly after the 9/11 attacks, and his clear distinction between the peace-loving and law-abiding American Muslims on the one hand, and political extremism and religious fanaticism on the other, was important for reassuring the public and calming public fear immediately after the attacks.

The search for moderate Muslims has attracted a number of ultra-conservative groups, who have, for decades, displayed apprehension and anxiety about the growing presence of Islam in America. Taking advantage of the climate of vulnerability and fear brought about by the horrific attacks of 9/11, and the lack of knowledge on the part of the American public of Islam's values and civilizational contributions, hardliners embarked on an anti-Islam campaign to discredit and isolate mainstream American Muslim organizations.

Hardliners are engaged in cynical efforts to undermine the work of mainstream organizations who have been working for decades to develop Muslim institutions to nurture the needs of the growing American Muslim community, help the community integrate into the larger American society, and protect the civil rights and liberties of Muslims. Hardliners are busy in inventing Muslim organizations whose main missions are to roll back American Muslim achievements.

Daniel Pipes, whose whole career is built on bashing Muslims and confusing the public through half truths and innuendos, is yet to find moderate Muslim organizations or leaders. He has accused every Muslim organization and leader of reputation of extremism, militancy, and radicalism. His list of militant organizations includes: The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), Council of American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), Muslim American Society (MAS), and others. Muslim organizations have for years been the subject of his attacks and accusations. He, most recently, added the

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## *Muslim bashers can plot and deceive, but they cannot change the facts on the ground: American Muslims are proud citizens of this country and are intent on building their lives on the basis of the sublime values of compassion and dignity.*

newly founded Progressive Muslim Union of North America (PMUNA) and the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID) to the list.

Pipes collaborates with a group of off-centrists that includes David Horowitz, Kenneth Timmerman, Steve Emerson, and Steven Schwartz in attacking Islam and Muslims. The group employs smear tactics of "quotes taken out of context, guilt by association, errors of fact, and innuendo," and utilizes neo-conservative publications such as the Daily and Weekly Standards, National Review, Insight, and Front Page Magazine, to coordinate their attacks.

Pipes's mean-spirited and bigoted attacks against Muslim organizations came to the fore a few months ago when he embarked on a smear campaign against the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID). Using his leverage as a member of the board of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), he pressed hard to cancel a seminar the Institute organized jointly with CSID. Pipes accused CSID of being "part of the militant Islamist lobby," and contended that it was "well-disguised, and has brought in all the Islamist trends, giving them a patent of respectability."

After conducting a thorough investigation of Pipes's claims, USIP issued a statement that brought out the irresponsible nature of Pipes's attacks. "The Institute was aware of and took seriously the accusations made against CSID and some of the speakers at the event," Kay King, the director of Congressional and Public Affairs at USIP. "These allegations were investigated carefully with credible private individuals and U.S. government agencies," she went on, "and found to be without merit. The public criticism of CSID and the speakers was found to be based on quotes taken out of context, guilt by association, errors of fact, and innuendo." Pipes was defiant in the face of USIP's rebuke, contending that "President [George W.] Bush appointed

[him] to the USIP board in part to serve as a watchdog against militant Islamic groups." He was ultimately pushed out from the USIP's board as his recess nomination was not renewed."

Failing to isolate Muslim organizations and to scare them off, the Anti-Islam campaign is now testing the old strategy of divide and conquer with the Muslim community. Pipes has procured seed funds for a new organization whose main mission is to recruit "moderate Muslims" to undermine leading Muslim organizations. The Center for Islamic Pluralism (CIP), led by Steven Schwartz, who serves as its executive director, was created to serve as "a think tank that challenges the dominance of American Muslim life by militant Islamist groups," the Center's mission statement reads.

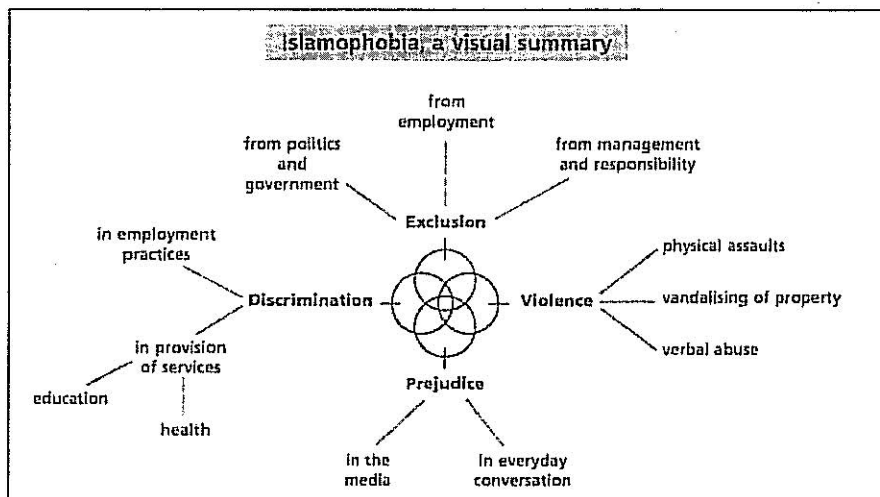
CIP executive director does show profound appreciation of Pipes's moral and financial support, and is fully committed to his agenda and completely behold to his jargon. Jim Lobe states, in a report that came out a couple of months ago, that Pipes was "working with Stephen Schwartz on a new Center for Islamic Pluralism (CIP) whose aims are to 'promote moderate Islam in the U.S. and globally' and 'to oppose the influence of militant Islam, and, in particular, the Saudi-funded Wahhabi sect of Islam, among American Muslims, in the America media, in American education ...

and with U.S. governmental bodies."

"The 'extremists,' according to the CIP proposal, are mainly represented by the 'Wahhabi lobby,' an array of organizations consisting of CAIR, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), the North American Islamic Trust (NAIT), the Muslim Students' Association of the U.S. and Canada (MSA), the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), as well as 'secular' groups, including the Arab-American Institute (AAI) and the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)."

Having failed to find moderate Muslims, Pipes and company is now ready to invent them. The great irony, though, is that those who are busy producing moderate Muslims have long time ago moved from the center to the ideological fringes of the American society. The fact that they are still able to procure funds to finance their hate mongering business speaks volumes to the deep seated prejudices against Islam and Muslims that lurk among Religious Right groups who finance and support both their public and furtive operations.

The pundits leading the anti-Islam campaign will continue their business as usual, and are unlikely to be deterred by a limited exposure of their deception and distortion. The exposure must be complete. The



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American Muslim Community cannot, however, continue doing business as usual. It must take responsibility for the fact that Muslim bashers are exploiting its inability to mount a strong response to stop those who are digging under its feet. More specifically, American Muslims must intensify their efforts and take more seriously their work in the following areas:

1. Building national institutions and supporting organizations engaged in building leadership capacity within the Muslim community, and defending the rights and dignity of American Muslims.
2. Joining hands with local and national organizations that provide public services, and channeling its human and financial resources to serve the larger American public.
3. Coordinating their activities so as to avoid duplication and bickering, and to act in unison in face of those who espouse ill-will and ill-intentions toward Islam and American Muslims.

Muslim bashers can plot and deceive, but they cannot change the facts on the ground: American Muslims are proud citizens of this country and are intent on building their lives on the basis of the sublime values of compassion and dignity. It only takes a direct and open exposure of the American Muslims' serious work, and the vanity of their detractors, for the deception to dissipate. "Thus does God show forth truth and vanity. For the scum disappears like froth cast out; while that which is for the good of mankind remains on the earth." (Qur'an 13:17) ■



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