The Women's Foreign Policy Group

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"Inside the Madrasas: Challenges and Dilemmas"

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Allan Goodman, President, Institute of International Education:
I'm a big fan of the Women's Foreign Policy Group and a big fan of the Carnegie Corporation. They were the foundation which made the first grant to the Institute in 1919. I think we were privileged to have a grant from Carnegie for about 72 of our 87 years. Currently, have a grant to explore developing a world wide index of academic freedom, a study of where scholars around the world are most dangerously threatened. So, it's a particular privilege to open the program and welcome a Carnegie scholar. But, Pat, most of all, thank you for bringing the group here for these very interesting programs, both times.

Patricia Ellis:
Well, thank you so much, Allan. Once again, we really appreciate IIE's hospitality. It's been wonderful partnership and we've had many wonderful meetings here. This is a very special meeting today and special greeting to everyone from IIE, but also, we have a number of people here from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Pat Rosenfield, and a number of her colleagues.
This series with Carnegie Scholars has been so special to us. This is the second year we've done this series. But, this is the first year that we've focused exclusively on the role of Islam and understanding Islam. It's been a real success.

This is the last program in this series. We do hope we'll be able to continue this, because it's been absolutely wonderful with the scholars, who've all been fantastic. We've covered everything from the meaning of jihad in South Asia and the Middle East, to a program about head scarves in France, Islamic public law, and how westerners understand Islam. It's been just absolutely fascinating. Everybody's learned a lot.

What's been so special is that it has allowed us to put things in the historical, cultural, and political perspective, as opposed to just dealing with, this happened yesterday and this is going to happen tomorrow. So, it's given us a framework for a deeper understanding.

Also what we've been trying to do, through our web site, is immediately put out all of the transcripts. We've also started- and we're excited about this idea- asking all of the scholars for some recommended readings that we're going to post, so that people can access them. That idea came from someone in the audience. So, we just consider ourselves fortunate to be part of helping Americans have a better understanding of Islam, which is crucial today.

So, I just want to welcome everyone. I'm Patricia Ellis, Executive Director of the Women's Foreign Policy Group. We promote women's leadership, women's voices, and pressing issues of the day.
In addition to our series on Islam, particularly in New York, we do a lot on the UN. Last spring, we had a wonderful addition to our activities. We called it a UN study visit. We had UN officials, male and female, and people talking about everything from Darfur, to women's issues, to Iran. Shashi Tharoor was our luncheon keynote speaker. It's something that we plan to continue on an annual basis, so that there's an opportunity to be fully briefed on all of these issues and to interact in a more intimate setting than in a lot of big meetings. That's one of the things that we can do here. We're really into dialogue and we hope that we'll have a great dialogue today.

We're really excited about the program today. The topic is "Inside the Madrasas," which couldn't be timelier. There's so much interest in Islamic education, not only in the United States, but around the world. It's a great privilege and honor to have today's speaker, Ebrahim Moosa. He's professor of Islamic Studies in the Department of Religion, and Associate Sirector of Duke Islamic Studies Center. He was trained in India's foremost madrasas in the 1970's. Then, he went on to become a journalist and worked in the UK and South Africa. He's a native of South Africa. He's written a number of books, "*Ghazali and the Poets of Imagination*." He edited the last manuscript of the late professor Fazlur Rahman, called "*Revival and Reform in Islam: The Study of Islamic Fundamentalism"*. In conjunction with his Carnegie scholarship, he's currently working on a book on the madrasas of India and Pakistan, focusing on Islamic religion education in the post-9/11 world. He's also working on another book on Muslim ethics. He frequently writes op-eds and is published in the *New York Times*, *Atlantic Journal Constitution*, *Star* of South Africa, and does commentary for NPR. So, please join me in welcoming Professor Moosa.

Professor Moosa:
Thank you so much, Patricia Ellis, and to the Women's Foreign Policy Group for inviting me, IIE, and thanks goes to my generous funders, the Carnegie Corporation, for nominating me as one of the class of 2005 Carnegie Scholars to do this work on the madrasas. It's indeed a privilege, and I promise to stay within the prescribed time, so we can have ample opportunity for conversation.

Since September 11, 2001, members of the US government, sections of the media, political pundits, and a whole range of people, have launched, what I would call -and I use this word advisedly, but, let's use it in quotes- kind of a "witch hunt" of madrasas, indiscriminately generalizing all madrasas as dens of terror, without isolating specific Pakistani institutions and labeling all madrasas as seditious.

Just give you a couple of examples. The US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, posed the question, in an October 2003 in a confidential memo leaked to the press. He said, "Are we capturing, killing, or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrasas and the radical clerics

are recruiting, training, and deploying against us?"

A year later, Secretary of State Colin Powell described madrasas as a breeding ground for fundamentalists and terrorists. Rumsfeld persisted with his allegation made during a talk show with host Charlie Rose, in August, 2005. He said, "There are a number of madrasas schools there, that is Pakistan, which train people to be suicide killers, and violent extremists."

Everybody knows that madrasas are very topical in the post-9/11 environment. But, in 2005, when the unfortunate London suicide bombings took place, Prime Minister Tony Blair made a blanket condemnation of madrasa leaders when he alleged that they espoused extremist views and imparted them to young students. "These mujahadeen," Blair said at a Downing Street meeting with Afghan president Harmid Karzai, "they are coming about by people indoctrinated at a very, very early age, to go to some of these schools, and these madrasas, and they get extreme teaching taught at them." Blair's prose, not mine.

What I want to say here is that the madrasas are obviously in the spotlight. Every time these institutions' names are mentioned then people conjure up all kinds of frightening things. When senior policy makers and people holding government offices actually say these things, they come with a certain kind of conviction and authority. But, when they lack the kind of insight that I believe they ought to have when they make the statements, etc., it also contributes to the dissolution of cultural bonds, links, and understanding between cultures and civilizations, especially with the kind of relationship that the West and the people led by the United States today has with various aspects of the world of Islam.

What are the madrasas? The word madrasa comes from the word darasa, which means to study. Madrasas are places of study. The madrasas of India and Pakistan have a long history. But, as you know, the madrasas also have an earlier history in the Middle East, in Baghdad, in Syria, in Damascus, in Egypt, and in other places. Some of the ancient and oldest schools of learning are in what is today Morocco. One of the oldest universities is known as Jamiya- Jamiya means a university, a place where universal knowledge is taught. Al Asa use to be another one, etc. As you move further east, you would find that in the 11th century, the nizamiyyah were founded. A major Prime Minister to the Seljuk government at the time, established a number of madrasas in Baghdad, in Herat, which is today in Afghanistan, in Damascus, and in several places.

And, these schools were basically brought into existence in order to train the bureaucracy and the intelligentsia, especially when these schools were initiated at the behest of someone in government with state funds. But, there are also a number of private initiatives. Study and education was always, for the largest part in Muslim history, a private endeavor. States only very occasionally intervened, as in the 11th century.

We move to India where my focus of madrasas is right now. We find in the 16th and 17th centuries, during the Mughals, madrasas established all over India, because there was a Muslim minority dominating, ruling, and governing a Hindu majority. In the early stages, these madrasas were also open to people of other religious convictions. It was not only isolated to Muslims.

I think the genesis of the current stage of the madrasas must be placed back to British colonialism. Before that madrasas played the role of educating the intellectual elite responsible for giving religious and intellectual guidance to communities, or they were incorporated into the Mughal bureaucracy. With the arrival of the British, this kind of knowledge became obsolete. Modern knowledge came in and the British established their institutions. Gradually, the madrasas began to lose their raison d'etre, what they were for, with the result that as British colonialism established itself, and as the agitation against British colonialism increased, a number of Muslims attempted to engage in resisting the British militarily. In 1857, the great Indian rebellion, which British called a mutiny, the clock started ticking towards the end of British rule in India. In 1867, a number of people who were engaged in jihad against the British, but who were defeated because of the superior British weaponry, decided that they could no longer do this, because the British are too powerful. They had to do this through education, resistance to education.

There were two kinds of people who resisted. One was a fellow by the name of (Serce al Makahn), who resisted by establishing a modern university. A contemporary of his, who studied by the same teacher, a man by the name of Muhammed Qasim Nanautavi, he decided to go to traditional Islamic education and make that the bastion of resistance, and became the founder of the school at Deoband. Deoband is the prototype of the 19th century Indian madrasas. There were other madrasas before that, but Deoband becomes the prototype of the madrasas.

I do have a video for you to show you sometime, in a couple of minutes. Deoband is built like a fort and was the place for cultural resistance against the British, and to preserve the tradition, the preservation of tradition. As the years went by, the big debate within Muslim society was, "Will this knowledge and this information be sufficient to deal with the modern world?" Qasim Nanautavi and those founders, their idea was that this should not be the end of the educational project. In fact Qasim Nanautavi was educated in Delhi College. Delhi College was established by the East India Company in order to cater for the Indian elite. But, they had two strains of education, both traditional education and the kind of the modern sector, and they came out of the traditional schools.

In the opinion of a good percentage of the Muslims on the Indian subcontinent and globally is that the intellectual tradition of the madrasas had reached a stage of stagnation. This is an internal debate that has been going on for centuries in the Muslim world. We can talk about these issues during question time about the ways in which that stagnation was present, the attempt to end that kind of stagnation in Egypt and other parts of the Middle East, but I will not go there.

Today, the typical madrasa education involves anything between 9 to 12 years. First, there is 9 to 12 years in kind of a primary or intermediate level of education. Then, a six-year program where you study advanced text. This means that from a very early age you are steeped in learning Arabic, Persian, and Urdu. Some also, right now, introduce Hindi. At some stage in Deoband, they also taught Sanskrit or they used to send the students out to go study Sanskrit in order to understand the text of the majority religion of India.

The syllabus or the template of the syllabus was devised in 1748 and is known as the nizami syllabus. This syllabus was weighted towards the Islamic classics, and its rationalistic tradition. On the syllabus,

there would be about 20 or 25 texts that the student studied, all having to do with philosophy, logic and various philosophies of Islamic philosophy. It is very centered on Islamic rational tradition. With, obviously, also, the study of the Koran and the study of Islamic law, and the prophetic traditions, and a whole number of cognate subjects that relate to the formation of the self.

Madrasas cannot be just compared to seminaries, if you think of Alban Seminary or Jewish Theological Seminary, because the seminary here is one where the formation of the self takes place. In other words, you go through a process of discipline. It's a life of prayer, it's a life of dedication, it's a life of study, and it's a place of training. You need to go back much deeper into Western European history to understand what the place of madrasa is about it. You need to go back to Herman Hess's novels or novels in that time, to understand what the classic intellectual tradition was.

In the last hundred years, there was huge debate within the madrasas asking "Do we need all these rationalist texts and philosophies that are outdated?" But, a lot of the philosophies, there, are pre-Copernican. They are classical texts that people study and, obviously, the world has changed. Therefore there has been a lot of debate about the place of modern science in the madrasas curriculum.

There's been a gradual move and shift towards greater emphasis on the core Islamic disciplines; the study of the Koran, the prophetic traditions. The prophetic traditions are more important in the Indo-Pak subcontinent than the Koran, because the prophetic tradition becomes the explanatory literature which the Koran is deciphered. So, that becomes one of the key lenses.

Now, there's a huge debate between different shades of madrasas. The Deobandi's and the Barelvis (another University). These two schools, the Deoband school and the Barelvis school, do not sit in front of one fire. The Deoband school is a more austere school of thought that follows the curriculum as set out. They dismiss popular religious practices like visiting shrines and they're reluctant to engage in what one would call folk religion, therefore sometimes people wrongly call them Wahhabis. In fact, the British called the intellectual forbearers of the Deoband school, the Indian Wahhabiyahs. They're not like Wahhabiyahs, because these people are steeped in mysticism. It's a very sober Islamic mysticism.

The Barelvis school of thought endorses folk religion, for instance, with the intersession of Saintly Figures. They believe that when you stand up and you recite a salute to the prophet, the prophet's soul becomes present. For the Deoband's, this would be a complete anathema. "What kind of religion is that?" they would ask. There's been a lot of conflict between the groups, but they have their own independent institution.

Thirdly, you have the Salafis. Salafi means those people who follow the pious ancestors. The intermediate tradition between modern and us, we shouldn't give too much time to that. The real McCoy lies out there in the first two generations of the prophet maybe, the third generation, there you find pure, original Islam. Those are the models of imitation that you have to follow. The salafis are very much centered on the Koran and interpretation of the Koran. The scripture had all the answers and all the answers lie in the scripture, the Koran particularly. They would subject the hadith to a Koranic interpretation.

You have learned a lot right now. You've now seen an interpretive tradition of the Deoband's, which is prophetic tradition centered; the salafi's are then Koran centered and everything else works around that. This Koran centered position becomes the dominant one amongst nontraditional Muslims. Modern Muslims like this approach because it's simple, it's quick, and it's straight into a text. But, we can talk about that later.

How many madrasas are there in the subcontinent? It's very difficult to quantify. People put numbers in India between 30 thousand and 50 thousand madrasas. What size of community do they cater for? I would say anywhere between 100 thousand and 50 thousand, maybe 200 thousand, maybe quarter million students.

One of the things we must not confuse is that sometimes when Muslims and people in the villages in India and Pakistan say, "my kid is going to the madrasa," sometimes, they mean Sunday school. In Indian villages and Pakistan the children get up early in the morning, because it's agrarian society, they do their morning prayers, and they go for two hours to get Sunday school lessons. Then they return home get a breakfast, and then go to secular school. The madrasas I'm talking about are seminary serious places of advanced Islamic education.

In Pakistan, people put figures of madrasas-and I think it's exaggerated- at about 80 to 100 thousand. I think those numbers are absolutely wrong, because I think they are including the Sunday schools also in this calculation.

Bangladesh also has a huge population of madrasas. All three countries, India and Pakistan, and Bangladesh actually has three tiers of madrasas; madrasas that are supervised by the state, and then more private ones, and those madrasas in Bangladesh have occupancies of catering to up to four million students. In Pakistan, too, we're talking about students in the millions.

Now, in Pakistan, very few madrasas are supported by the state. Largely, they are provided by, or they come into existence by private funding. In India most of the madrasas are privately funded, although, there are a few that historically have been inherited from the British period. They are supervised by the state, although the funding is so meager that most institutions are obliged to find funding elsewhere.

What are the sources of funding? In most madrasas in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the three countries on the subcontinent, the primary funding comes from the local communities. The local community, especially the business community, is intimately linked to the madrasas. You can ask me questions why that is so and why they have so much support. What have also helped a great deal in making the madrasas more viable are vast Muslims in Diaspora, in the UK, in particular, in Europe and North America, who repatriate funds to those institutions as either part of the annual zakat, which is the obligatory of religious taxes Muslims have to pay, or in additional donations.

Oftentimes, people want to attribute and make a link between madrasa militancy and more scripturalist attitudes connecting it to gulf funding and salafi- Wahhabi influence. I think those links are very tenuous. In the 70's and to today, certain sources in the Arabian Gulf provide funding for a number of madrasas. At the institution where I graduated from, that institution continues to get funding for setting

up libraries, buildings, hospitals and it's very openly known, and the Indian government knows about it. The salafis do not have a lot of traction in India, because they are much more smaller group, therefore, a lot of the salafi madrasas get a lot of Gulf funding, too, because there's closer ideological things between the salafis and the Gulfies, I'm sorry, the Gulf funding, etc. So, there's that kind of connection.

I do not think that translates into militancy. In fact, in my interviews with salafis in India with the major center of the salafis about the anathema suicide bombing, they absolutely say that suicide bombings are completely anathema to Islam. The Deobandi and Barelvis are a bit more circumspect in saying explicitly no, because they factor in a global war and Muslim resistance, so they're not as explicit as some of the others.

Really what we're talking about is the madrasas as the places of foundational planning of the religious leaders and intelligentsia of Muslim society.

There are problems in the madrasas. One of the big problems is that there is the whole question of, "how do the madrasas fit into the modern vision of Pakistan, Bangladesh, or India?" That's a big problem and people are having a huge amount of discussions about it. Since I left the madrasas 30 years ago, I haven't seen anything change. People are still walking around and treading water so to speak, on the same place.

But the madrasas are becoming more and more active; they are growing. They're getting bigger. One of the questions we need to ask is, "Why are the madrasas growing?" because these madrasas have to do with issues of Muslim identity. In a world in identity battles where religion is the major marker, or where religion is becoming the major mark of identity in several places, religion has to carry everything and therefore, religion becomes the major player. When religion has to answer your economic problems, your political problems, it has become your mother, your father, you grandmother, and everything at the same time, you can well imagine how much religion has to carry. When the cultural artifacts are not there, when there's not available with the whole question of the realization of the self through culture and other sources, when all things are absent, people fall on the Koran, people fall on what they know and they think it's going to be part of their salvation package.

There's this big issue about the state of mind and the psychology that fuels the race towards the madrasas. Let me just you an anecdote.

In 1975, when I ended up in India, I went to visit, during Ramadan, my father's ancestral religion, my mother's ancestral village there, because I was born in South Africa and raised there, but I had this wish to go learn Islam. I didn't want to learn Islam at a university; I wanted to study it from right from the feet of the authentics.

I get to the village and in the 70's everybody in India- in Gujarati in particular- is fleeing towards Europe, England. Everybody's waving their passport ready to go to England and here they found this guy from South Africa. They think he's got a great life in South Africa, apartheid South Africa but they still think that we have a great life in South Africa. I was economically much more affluent than they

were. They think, “He’s coming to India to come study in a madrasa. Is this guy mad? Is this guy crazy?” I mean the stares I got. But they also in some ways were indifferent, because, “yea he’s coming to study religion,” so they were indifferent 30 years ago. On the several visits I’ve had now in India to go back to those places. In the villages the braids are this long and there are dozens of kids who are studying at the madrasas and many of them are for the export market, for the UK, for the US. The communities and training is becoming a source of that. Things have changed; I could see it, with very strong anecdotal evidence. I know the social scientists amongst you will not believe me, but I don’t do science. I’m a humanist. So, I could care less.

The findings that I have are the following, and I’ll just quickly mark them out and then move on. They are; the madrasas are growing exponentially in the past three decades; internal competition amongst the madrasas has increased; and these ideological competitions amongst the groups obviously contributed to this growth in the madrasas.

The madrasas communities are acutely aware of the geopolitical focus of Western powers on their institutions. They’re absolutely aware, they’re clearly aware. I have an easy time going in, because I go into a very different persona when I get there. I’m completely transformed, because I can relate to that. There’s another side of me that you don’t see behind the suite.

Both domestic tensions with the internationalists, and the internationalists, the remnants of the internationalists, and the strong international place, like India in particular, has created opportunities to refocus on Indian Muslims in madrasas as dens of terror. When I was in India, the Indian newspapers, as most of my friends and authorities on the madrasas say, that these are stories planted by Indian intelligence in order to bring the madrasas into dispute. In Pakistan the secular groups are completely pitted against the madrasas and so on. These are problems. Jessica Stern in 2000 wrote this article in Foreign Affairs from which madrasas were notoriety, but she only looked at one madrasa in the whole attack.

The last thing I will say here is that by identifying the madrasas and the Ulema as the enemy in the campaign in the war against terror could prove to be counterproductive. If this current attitude of hostility is matched by direct hostile acts, as we are already doing, as the United States is already doing by Musharaff in Pakistan and other places, against the madrasas by the US government, its agencies, or proxies, then the madrasa communities of India, Pakistan, etc., and Bangladesh could be a self-fulfilling prophecy turning to real forces of hostility and militancy, which at the moment they are not. Are they anti-American? Yes. Are they institutions of militancy? No. That is the big wake up call that we need to address, and I’m quite happy to take your questions. I’m sorry I went over time. Should I show the film?

Patricia Ellis:
We would love to see it.

Professor Moosa:
Basically, this is to give you some idea. Thanks to Carnegie, I could afford to take a cameraman with me on one of my trips to Pakistan. I got a lot of footage I’m going to use in classrooms and I’m

thinking maybe with a book that might be a DVD or something of that sort.

[VIDEO PLAYS]

Patricia Ellis:
Thank you so much. We're going to open it up for questions, and I guess I'll just start it off. You were talking about the huge expansion of madrasas in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. But, there has been an amazing growth of Islamic schools all over the world, right here in the United States and in the UK. Is the explanation the same? What about the variety in these schools? Are they mostly the schools that strictly focus on study of the Koran, or do you see any trends of more openness?

Professor Moosa:
There are a number of Islamic schools that have grown all over Europe and North America, Canada, in particular, too, and also South Africa and other places. These are largely secular schools, with an Islamic ethos, like a Catholic school or like a church school that has an Islamic ethos to it. In fact, some of them are good. For instance, Cat Stevens used Islam to run an Islamic school of that nature in London. There are a number of these schools all over American cities, and I know some in California, in Illinois, even in New York.

These are not madrasas. These are largely inspired by what I would call Islamism. In other words, Islamic political thought, what people call political Islam. In other words, where people are contesting and wanting to achieve the identities, and they also want to be modern at the same time. That is how they put this together. The Islamic schools phenomena are something very different and almost separate to the madrasa phenomena. The madrasa phenomena are phenomena like this.

There are a couple of madrasas in the United States. There's one in Buffalo. There are two in Chicago, there's one in New York- Madrasas where classical Islamic learning takes place. There is also one that I know of in California.

Patricia Ellis:
But the ones that you know about in the US, which variety of madrasas are they?

Professor Moosa:
They are Deobandi, Salafi, Shia. In New York there are Shia madrasas, there is a whole spectrum there might even be salafi madrasas.

Patricia Ellis:
Where does the openness come in terms of madrasas, you were saying they had to adapt and that one of the things that bothered you and although it could be a big stereotype, it seems that they are not going towards more openness but they are staying the same.

Professor Moosa:
This is the big problem, and maybe because I made a journey and my mind was in the experience of a journey through the madrasas and I came out very different than when I went in because of this

constant conflict. People who buy into that project, and they make that project their life, and they work within the confines of the framework. It is like adopting any orthodox position, Jewish or Christian or etc. People have that kind of comportment, and mine was a much more dynamic process. Therefore, I cannot speak for all.

But, right now, even in the madrasas circles and all the interviews that I've done, there are professors in the madrasas there who do recognize the limitations of their curriculum. The thing is that they just don't have an out. When you put the question to them, "Are you opposed to your students studying and going to college after they graduate from here?" They say, of course not. But if you ask them, "Why don't you introduce some courses right into your curriculum right now?" Then they say- and this is across the board. This is Sunni, this Shia; this is Deobandi, Barelvis, salafi. - They say, "We already have a hard time in imparting this knowledge we have to the students. To get the other knowledge into the program will require a huge transformation within our whole system, and we don't have the means, and we don't even know how." Nowadays, in most madrasas, they teach computer literacy and a smattering of English, some civics and so on. Some madrasas, as I did mention in my formal talk, also offer vocational training, in mechanics, in electrician, in computer literacy, so when they get out of the madrasas they aren't dependent on the community, but they have a vocation.

There's a madrasas near Mumbai where they basically created an add-on that from the madrasa, you can go to college. They are now attempting to establish a medical college, too. But, this is a very kind of exceptional example because of this kind of visionary leadership at the madrasa. However, all madrasas have that kind of potential.

The problem is that in the madrasa environment, secular education is so much criticized that only the bravest of brave would venture to move out of the madrasa, or when they graduate go to Delhi University. Also, once you've made that move, even if you keep some kind of paraphernalia and some sign of belonging to the tradition, you cannot come back and teach there.
First, they will not be able to pay you the salary and the money that you can make outside, because the highest officer and professor earns after 30 years of service the equivalent of 300 dollars a month. This is like two meals at a restaurant for a family of three. That is tough even by Indian standards.

The second thing is this question of openness. You will find individuals who are open to those possibilities. In Deoband in 1981, when I ended my stay on the Indian subcontinent, Deoband had a strike and the institution was closed down because Deoband had a big break in the administration of the modernizers and the anti-modernizers. The modernizers were stigmatized that they wanted to completely undermine Deoband's tradition. It became a huge conflict. In fact, I did not mention before, but there's the Deoband A and the Deoband B. Deoband A is the one I went to. But there's another one, which was established after 1981, which is a separate institution. They've now buried the hatchet amongst themselves and the court cases and all the litigation amongst them has ended. But, there is not a separate institution in Deoband 2.

Furthermore, what would also kill all possibilities of transformation is when these institutions are targeted and made into dens of terror. The madrasas students are the most ill equipped and the most unfit students to fight the Jihad. They would hurt themselves if they used a gun. So, it's quite bizarre

that the Secretary of Defense can talk about things like the ones he's talking about. He should know how to use a gun. But, that's a different story.

Even in Pakistan and in Taliban madrasas are these folks sympathetic to the kind of resistance and to the different movements the Islamic world is giving the United States and the West? Yes. A resounding yes. Sometimes, they become apologists. September 11 never happened. All this kind of stuff is going on there and it was orchestrated and so on. There are very different visions and understandings of what the world is about.

Pat Rosenfield:
I'm Pat Rosenfield, and chair the Carnegie Scholars Program. I also have a lot of thank yous to say before I ask my question. First, I have to thank Susan King and colleague our vice president for public affairs at Carnegie Corporation, without whom the Women's Foreign Policy Group would not be able to hold these wonderful meetings, and we've been really thrilled with the discussions and the kind of new audiences that you've been able to bring to the field. And, we really appreciate the support. Also IIE has been wonderful in hosting some of the sessions in New York. But, Pat, I really want to thank you for taking this on, and really helping us because we do feel, and of course, we're just extremely grateful to the scholars who are tackling some of these very complex issues, and really the broadest issues of our times.

Patricia Ellis:
We appreciate your support, Susan.

Pat Rosenfield:
You just touched on my concern as how to one gets a different vision out. You have your piece on your personal vision, but I'm also wondering if there's a way of conveying the complexity of, how you intend to convey the complexity of the madrasa experience in a way that a broader public might understand. Because, certainly, as you said, the only vision is that of the Taliban type of madrasa. I just wondered how you're thinking about that because it seems like it is part of the reality, but if in fact those students aren't able to take guns and do anything and they can just talk about it, it's a different perspective of what's going on. I was just curious as to how you're thinking of this kind of transformative understanding that you're gaining from this work.

Professor Moosa:
I think the way that I'm going to approach this is partly a memoir. I've got diaries of my student days. I kept writing diaries of my own experiences. This way people can get an idea of how do you talk about sexuality. How do you deal with questions of gender? How do you deal with questions of politics or with questions of power? Going to the madrasas gave me the equipment to understand the struggle in South Africa in a very different day. As an activist in South Africa, we could take Muslim communities on to agendas of transformation in ways that seculars could not. We wrote an Islamic liberation philosophy for South Africa. Me, Farak Azak, a whole generation of us who came out of madrasas. We fought stand up battles against an early generation of Ulema who said we were the politicals, we are the political Ulema. But the Ulema are positive and the Ulema in India, for instance, were part of the independence struggle and were part of the making of independent India, together with Gandhi.

Deoband was an ally of Gandhi. Gandhi and all of Deoband leadership were all sitting on one platform and they worked together. These people gave up on militant Jihad; they believed that it would be the cultural Jihad that would be the alternative.

All kinds of peaceful transformation talk and resistance is nowadays in the Muslim world, given the posture of the United States, given the occupation of Iraq, what's going on in Afghanistan, which is a lose/lose battle all the way, these transformations are not taking place. You must give attention to Greg Moses piece in the New York Times a couple of days ago. Greg Moses is a South African who works in transformation issues and has been working for some authority. He's been saying that you have to negotiate with the Taliban, in the same way that you will have to negotiate with the insurgents in Iraq. The big question I tell audiences, and sometimes it's shocking, is if we're going to negotiate when 2000 American soldiers have died, or 20,000 or 200,000, that's a decision we have to take now. 100 thousand Iraqis already died, as they say. Do you want to make it a quarter million? That's the message we're working about. There's no other way. These folks who are talking about policy here, have no sense of the patina of life in those parts of the world, so it's impossible to do this kind of stuff.

We have what I call the OMDA: One Muslim Dukes All. That's what we are reduced to in this country. Where one person, one expert, dukes everybody. The policy makers are not open to complexity. So your question, and the whole question of complexity will be the way in which I tell the narrative and do a kind of before and after kind of conversation.

Patricia Ellis:
Now, just apropos that, one thing crossed my mind. Many organizations have alumni associations. Are you in touch with others from madrasas? Could there be a group of you who join together to kind of reflect the way that you have reflected; to be a group of people who are out there speaking and interacting. Nobody has seen anything really like your documentary and it can combine with that. I'm just talking about a force in numbers so that people see, this is a professor from Duke, he had this experience, he's okay, just real life anecdotes.

Professor Moosa:
I absolutely hear what you're saying, Patricia. In fact, there is a Deoband old boys association. There's also women madrasas which is a separate kind of issue and access for me would be limited, but I could get collaborators to do that.

One of the members of the Deoband old boys association was invited by the United States by the State Department and came here. Dozens of these Ulema from India and Pakistan have come. But, they moment they come here on a government ticket, etc., they get stigmatized when they go back. The one guy will come to the United States, and we will have frank and open discussion, or they can come to India. But they want to stay away, as far as possible, from the US government because the US government has become untouchable for now. I think private initiatives will be great and I think there are possibilities. It's going to be very difficult to transform Deoband and the schools of Barelvis and the salafi's., but we need catalysts. We need catalysts and there must be opportunities.

For instance, I went to old Delhi College in Delhi. Beautiful building. It's now turned into a vernacular

school with half of it lying in ruins. I said to myself, if I can get somebody to invest in this place and make this beautiful, I could make this into an institute of advanced studies for all these madrasa folk and give them English education, European languages, modern knowledge. Those people can become just like me, or better. My battle was that, when I come out of the madrasas, I had to learn the whole secular curriculum. I had to learn philosophy, modern philosophy, and it became a new synthesis, with new possibilities.

Patricia Ellis:
Just to follow up on that, because today India is experiencing such growth and modernization, might this not be another tactic that the madrasas need to adapt? Like one I mentioned to you and read an article about, because they cannot survive in this society they must adapt if they want to progress in the society. Could the whole economic side of the development in India have an impact?

Professor Moosa:
There's a lot of optimism of India becoming a very prosperous country in 2020. But there's also going to be huge oceans of poverty, unless this is going to be done properly. The big danger is going to be in many parts of the world, are these institutions, are these currents and ideological groups, going to be become part of the very heathen ones? Are the other ones going to wake up to society and be the problems in the society? So, I think policy makers the world over should give attention to this.

I've given a lot of thought to these things, as I'm looking at these things and I'm retrieving my footsteps, both in history and in terms of the archives. I thought about this Delhi College that came to become this important place. I was thinking, what if we get Microsoft, to give each of the two and a half thousand students and professors at Deoband a laptop or give about a thousand laptops or give senior students a laptop, and make the whole thing wifi. Will that create a kind of technological information revolution? Some people say, "Oh, they will be only talking on Jihadi chat sites," and that's one possibility, but some will also look at other complicated things, and make contacts.
A lot of people have those kinds of objections, such as what if you built in these kinds of pornographic sites and you went to those kinds of things. However, there are real possibilities.

The impression I left with is the madrasa communities are feeling extremely confident that they will triumph. They've triumphed for 250 years. They're going to triumph again. Now, this may be a fool's optimism, but they believe they're going to do it. They believe that time is on their side. This will blow over and they will move on. The more enlightened among them know that, where they are now, they were not 150 years ago and they know that change will happen. But they want to be the authors of change. They want to have that kind of autonomy.

I think the message that you get from various parts of the Muslim world is we just want to be left alone. People want to be left alone. If one wants to build bridges, they'll have to be negotiated bridges. How do we create life worlds? Can we live in the global world? Environmentalists have already told us that if half of China's population or if each household in China, has a refrigerator, this world will turn into an ice box. Can the environment and can we adjust? I don't know; I'm not an environmentalist. I'm just telling you the kind of scare stories I hear from my environmentalist friends. But, what I'm saying here is we need to be extremely sensitive to the human and cultural ecosystem that we have around us

and I think, in some of these wars, we are prepared to destroy life worlds.

Question:
I'm curious how politicized the education is in madrasas, or is it? Particularly in these non-Muslim countries I know you specialize in India. Are there any connections among the madrasas, are there any organizations relating them to one another?

Question:
It's related to his question actually, about the network, you mentioned about the Indian subcontinent and the connection to the Gulf for funding. Is there any administrative connection among the Deoband or Salafi madrasas outside the subcontinent to others and to what extent? The administrative networks. Is this just an Indian subcontinent, Deoband, and Salafi thing that you talk about, are they just on Indian subcontinent and they get funding from outside, or is there an administrative network of connections to other madrasa around the world. If so, what's the extent of that?

Question:
If you could say something about the alternative education system, for example, in a place like Pakistan, if madrasas are growing what's happening with the alternatives and if there are trends happening there, as well.

Professor Moosa:
In most madrasas, you are prevented from belonging to a political party. In most madrasas, do students have political views on things? Yes. I can remember during my student years of six years in India, I hadn't been to a single protest but given the environment now, madrasas students in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh go out when the political parties call for protests such as with the Danish cartoon, the Salman Rushdie affair, and the Pope's speech, they are connected to the larger political milieu.

When I was in Deoband, the Danish cartoon issue broke out. Deoband professors were speaking outside of Deoband. In other words, not in any of the Deoband premises but in a big venue outside the campus, where they mobilized and talked about and expressed their grievances and their outreach and so on.

These are obviously extremely heated and over-heated affairs where people are letting of steam. You can come away with a very skewed picture of what it's all about but its part of the reality of some very extreme views that people would have on those issues. I did not hear people talking for blood or ransom offerings, but people are extremely angry about that only reinforced by the whole Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq venture, the possibility in Iran. The whole thing just blows completely out of proportion.

How much are they aware of non-Muslim countries? Most students read the daily newspapers, but they read vernacular newspapers which would have less information than English speaking newspapers about the cosmopolitan world. So, information is also lacking in those places.

How do they view non-Muslim countries or non-Muslim communities? There's a strange kind of curiosity. Rodrigo Dorfman, who was my cameraman, who went with me, was a Sufi Muslim. So, that

made things easy for me. But he's of Jewish ancestry. If I said, he's Jewish it would make things more difficult. We just didn't talk about his Jewish ancestry because it would just make life easier, etc.

Professor Moosa:
Rodrigo has his own political views on a whole range of issues as my cameraman. There was a lot of curiosity of why did you accept Islam, what is this all about. Students were flocking around him most of the time because he was the curiosity. There's a lot of curiosity about people of other cultures and ways of life and so on.

The connection between madrasas, yes they do have networks. There are madrasas networks. They get together to talk about common issues about curriculum in each country. In each country in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, because they need that kind of synergies. But, it's mostly kind of academic and consensus making institutions, not fundraising. Each madrasa is very protective about their fundraising sources. But compared to Delhi University, their budgets are extremely basic because the salaries are low, the lifestyles are very basic. They can raise their money.

One younger teacher in my day is now the deputy vice chancellor of Deoband and is very close to me and buddy- buddy. He was giving me a full outline of the budget; how much they spend, how much they get, and how he says they have a surplus every year. They have these kinds of unions and so on between the various sects also and the subdivisions between the madrasas.

Where Indians get together there would be discussion of Muslim personal law issues, Muslim family law, where Sunni, Shiite, Deoband, Barelvis, everybody gets together on annual platform. The All Indian Muslim Personnel Board is one united platform they have issued by the government. In Pakistan, you have the two Ulemas, the Barelvis one and the Deoband one, where all the Ulema get together and they have conversations and annual conferences, about these issues.

The question on the network and Gulf administration, there is no global official network but there are lots of private networks and network societies are intense. For instance, there's a Deoband style madrasa in Matka. Indians who were exiled by the British during British colonialism established this madrasa in Matka, but they cannot be politically active and they have a clear opening on the part of the Saudi government to operate there. Lots of pious Muslims spend the last years of their lives in the holy land. It becomes a place of spiritual retreat and lots of Indians were deeply enmeshed into Islamic mysticism. They all spend the last five or ten years of their lives out there and they want to be buried there. There's that kind of networks there, too, and they would be supportive. Many of them are Ulema, who have turned into kind of saintly figures and there would be those kinds of networks. The other kind of network would be the organization of Islamic conference, for instance. This has a subcommittee on Islamic law and ethics. That's where multiple groups of people meet.

The alternative education in places like Pakistan. As you know, I think India might have a lesser madrasa population, compared to Pakistan and Bangladesh. That's because the state educational system in Pakistan, in Bangladesh, is so weak. That makes the madrasa education attractive for a whole variety of reasons. The affordability, the access you have, and that it fulfills some much more primal goal in one's life than just an education for salary or profession.

Audience:
Would that be the preferable route?

Professor Moosa:
Not for all people. For instance, in India and Pakistan, the madrasas draw on largely rural populations and you easily see that as you mingle among students, very few of them come from big cities. Urbanization forces people into adopting different lifestyles, modern lifestyles, which means you have to go to a secular school in order to make ends meet.

These urban settings also create other kinds of pathologies of identity. The urban settings are the recruiting ground of Islamism, of political Islam where people have much more definitive ideas about what Islam is and alternative political models. I don't know if I'm answering your question, but that's the way I understood it, the alternative education, the madrasas are the alternative education, compared to the state subsidized education because it fulfills such major roles and like providing for identity.

Question:
What do madrasas represent? Are they more focused on Islamic identity? How much of it is anti-secular, how much of it is anti-West? I know there's variety. The other question that's been on my mind was after the recent incident regarding the suspects who were going to bomb planes coming to the United States. Some weeks afterwards, they were looking at where these people might have met, or known each other. One place that they were looking into and I don't know if it was a madrasa or just Islamic schools, but it came out that some of them met there. This is not to say that everybody who goes to school is a terrorist, but could you just address that as the breeding ground or a meeting place for some people who do off into these activities?

Professor Moosa:
It's very difficult to quantify exactly. They do all of those, and other things, too. So, anybody going to a madrasa and looking for sympathy for America is going to be disappointed.

And, the question is that the education system, many people think it's all rote learning. This question of rote learning, one must understand, is also a cultural thing. Colleagues at the American University of Cairo complain that students memorize everything. They memorize sociology, they memorize literature. They memorize everything. It's a cultural thing how people just believe, how they internalize things, etc. It's different in those societies.

So, on the clip, you saw a student revising his notes. Sitting on the floor and they swing. I mean, it's the kind of embodiment of how you embody certain things. I mean, how do we move around to the music? It's with different kinds of rhythms. But, that doesn't mean that these are mindless educational feats that they are engaged in, etc. It's a very different kind of way of doing this.

Now, this thing about the suspects, I mean, the seven bombers were alleged, the ones in London, were alleged to have gone to get their instruction at the madrasa. William Dalrymple has written about this. He knows the terrain, etc. He's followed this up, etc. There's no trace leading to the madrasa.

What we have seen, the seven bombers, okay? Not the ones most recently over the summer, that the information that he shared with me, but we know now that, in places like Bangladesh, what you have is that people come and do fundraising, collecting for the madrasa, and they give you a receipt, but there's no such madrasa. It's a phantom madrasa they're fundraising for.

Now, you know one of the seven bombers was alleged to have gone to Pakistan to visit the madrasa or that's the story he told his family, or someone came to know that he said that. But, there's no trace for it.

Now, the question is, what are the madrasa communities doing about this? In Pakistan, when I interview people, they are totally opposed to suicide bombings, in some of the places. In other places, they provide a rationale for it. But, obviously, this is the more worrying aspect of it. Thirty years ago, madrasa communities and Islamism were two polar ends. In fact, the Deoband school had vitriolic literature and writings or the Muslim brotherhood, for instance. They would not see them as their equals, intellectually. This is a kind of a stripped down version of Islam. But, I think, over three decades, they've seen how political Islam can get them audiences. Political Islam has power. And, now, what I've seen that the Ulema and the madrasas abandoning the complex intellectual system, and getting more and more attracted to this rhetorical easy fix, what I call it do it yourself version of Islam, the Home Depot version, okay? So, this do-it-yourself version, which is very attractive to Protestants, of course, but, as a good Catholic, sorry.

So, the thing is that this is the problem, you see, in one way, this kind of do-it-yourself Islam is very empowering, is very Protestant. It fits in well with the modern ethos of each person figures their own Koran and their own tradition. But, Islam is a very complex tradition. The Koran is not an easily readable document. You just can't read it that easily and say let me start reading chapter this, and say, oh, my God; they talk about kill infidels wherever you found it. Oh, my God, let me put this down. I can't read this anymore. Okay. I'm an infidel, right.

So, it's not very reader friendly. You need an intellectual interpreter of apparatus for that, and those kinds of interpretive apparatus is not easily available, or people have to be taught that, and that's part of the challenge.

So, what has been happening is that I've seen a kind of merger. For example, nowadays in Deoband and Deoband, like madrasas, people are reading Modudi without any stigma. Now, not that Modudi is bad. Modudi never advocated violence. Modudi just wanted an Islamic state in Pakistan. And, he was going to do it through the ballot box. And, they never want it through the ballot box anyway. I mean, now, they have an alliance, a governing alliance, but they cannot do it on their own.

But, the question is, now, here is this thing that I think the madrasas are abandoning the complex tradition and they're going to this very stripped down version of Islam, which, for me, is a very worrying feature. Because, once the intellectual apparatus' go, then what are people going to have.

And, I mean, where are these intellectual – where is this intellectual complexity now evident? In American universities. I mean, we have very, very good professorate and resources in this country. We

have a lot of information and intelligent understanding of Islam is taking place. Therefore, a lot of students in the madrasas that I talk about, they want to know how they can come to these university schools. I mean, one of the ways that I would like to think in the future, and most of the people who are involved in policy making, etc., to create opportunities. Create opportunities as the one that I suggested, the Delhi College, or other opportunities where people can begin to learn things in much more complex ways, so they can preserve that complex tradition.

See, the modern tradition and the kind of do it yourself version of Islam, wants everything to fit into one paradigm. It must fit, it must be coherent. For Muslim traditionalists, you know, your politics can be this way, your economics another way, your spirituality there, and it would all fit in at some point, you know. You have an agonistic life. Everything doesn't fit in that well.

But, you see, when we present democracy and economic liberalism in such attractive packages, etc., without understanding the life worlds of those people, etc., we either are suggesting and promoting a certain kind of violence, or these things would never have traction in those places, unless it has some kind of trust with those people's deepest emotional and psychological, as well, as intellectual networks. And, that is something I think our policy makers have not configured.

But, I believe that the madrasas do have a potential to bring about gradual, but revolutionary change within Islamic thought itself, which will be authentic.

I mean, create those kinds of opportunities, and it cannot come from Mr. Bush, or other people, etc. It must come – and what are the possibilities that we can create those kinds of opportunities where critical thinking can take place. And, equip it that they can be the authors of change. That is a long road, that is the hard road. But, that will also, in my view, bold the kind of, and cement and bold the very, very important and sensitive textures between different cultural and civilizational subjects.

Patricia Ellis:
This has been amazing. I think we could go on for hours. Thank you so much. I am sure that the book and the documentary will have a great impact and they're really important for people to know about and this has been really wonderful. Thank you all so much for coming.

Professor Moosa: Thank you for inviting me. Thank you so much.