

THE Williamsburg CONFERENCE

Ubud, Bali, Indonesia
April 3 – 6, 2008



CENTRE FOR
STRATEGIC
&
INTERNATIONAL
STUDIES



Asia
Society®

Founded in 1956 by John D. Rockefeller 3rd, the Asia Society is an international, nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening relationships and deepening understanding among the peoples of Asia and the United States. The Asia Society presents a wide range of public programs, including major arts exhibitions, performances, lectures, international conferences, and K-12 educational initiatives about Asia. Headquartered in New York City, the organization has regional Centres in the U.S. in Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Washington, D.C. Regional Centres in Asia include Hong Kong, Manila, Melbourne, Mumbai, Seoul and Shanghai.

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Agenda

The 36th Williamsburg Conference was held in Bali, Indonesia, from April 3 to 6, 2008. The conference was co-hosted by the Asia Society and the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

Thursday, April 3, 2008

Opening Reception and Dinner

Friday, April 4, 2008

SESSION ONE: The Role of Islam in Multicultural Asia

Facilitator: Vishakha N. Desai, President, Asia Society

- What are the particular characteristics of Islam in the Asian countries listed below?
- What is the relationship between Islam and democracy in these countries?
- How is the experience of Islam in the multi-cultural societies of Asia different from elsewhere in the world, particularly the Middle East?

Discussants:

India

M.J. Akbar, Author

Indonesia

Azyumardi Azra, Professor of History,
Director of the School of Graduate Studies
Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University

Malaysia

Karim Raslan, CEO, KRA Group

SESSION TWO: The Challenge of Islamic Radicalism and Extremism in Asia

Facilitator: Gareth Evans, President & CEO, International Crisis Group

- How should the region and the international community understand and respond to the challenges of radicalism and extremism in Asia?
- Assess the validity of the quotes listed in the distributed document.

Discussants:

Abdullah Abdullah, Secretary General, Massoud Foundation

Sadanand Dhume, Independent Journalist & Author

Sidney Jones, Senior Advisor, Asia Program, International Crisis Group

Rizal Sukma, Deputy Executive Director,

Centre for Strategic & International Studies

SESSIONS THREE & FOUR: Building Bridges—Breakout Sessions

Facilitator: Jamie F. Metzler, Executive Vice President, Asia Society

- Conference delegates broke out into small groups to discuss several quoted concerns and the following questions:
- Based on issues raised in the first two sessions, is there a problem between Islam and the West?
- If so, how should it be characterized and what can and should be done to address it?

Saturday, April 5, 2008

SESSION FIVE: The Evolving U.S. Role in Asia

Facilitator: Richard C. Holbrooke, Chairman, Asia Society

SESSION SIX: The U.S. Presidential Election and Asia

Facilitator: James F. Hoge, Jr, Editor, Foreign Affairs

- Where do things stand in the U.S. presidential election?
- What are the key foreign policy issues in the ongoing race to the presidency?
- What policies toward Asia might be expected from a new president?
- What are the greatest challenges and opportunities that the new American president will face in the region?

Discussants:

Norman J. Ornstein, Resident Scholar, American Enterprise Institute
Anne-Marie Slaughter, Dean, Woodrow Wilson School of Public
and International Affairs, Princeton University

SESSION SEVEN: Asian Leaders' Advice to the Next U.S. President

Facilitator: Simon Tay, Chairman, Singapore Institute of International Affairs

Discussants:

Carolina G. Hernandez, Founding President and Chair of the Board
of Directors, Institute for Strategic and Development Studies
Kunihiko Miyake, President, AOI Foreign Policy Institute
C. Raja Mohan, Professor of South Asian Studies, S. Rajaratnam School
of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University
Wu Jianmin, President, China Foreign Affairs University

Keynote Address:

Mari Pangestu, Minister of Trade, Republic of Indonesia

Sunday, April 6, 2008

SESSION EIGHT: Open Space Exercise

Facilitators: Richard C. Holbrooke, Chairman, Asia Society
John L. Thornton, Professor and Director of Global Leadership,
Tsinghua University

SESSION NINE: New Perspectives on the Asia-Pacific Century

Facilitator: Jamie F. Metzl, Executive Vice President, Asia Society

Discussants:

Dennis Eclarin, Director, Training Development Centre,
Training and Doctrine Command Philippine Army
Aaron Maniam, Senior Assistant Director (Futures) Strategic Policy Office,
Public Service Division, Prime Minister's Office, Singapore
Damdin Tsogtbaatar, Foreign Policy Advisor, Office of the President, Mongolia

Foreword

The Role Of Islam In Multi-Cultural Asia & The Changing Role Of The United States In The Region

From April 3-6, 2008, in the tranquil hills and rice paddy terraces of Ubud, Bali, the Asia Society, in partnership with the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), convened over 50 leaders from government, business, academia, civil society, and journalism to discuss both the role of Islam and the United States in Multi-Cultural Asia for the 36th Williamsburg Conference. The last time that the Williamsburg Conference was held in Indonesia was in 1986 in Nusa Dua, and the last time Islam was a major part of the discussion was in 2002 in Kuala Lumpur. Six years ago, American and Asian leaders gathered seven months after the terrorist attacks in the United States to discuss the global economic downturn, the prospects for a new generation of leaders in Asia, the role of the United States in the region, and terrorism. These same pressing issues were examined even deeper in this year's conversation.

Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim majority country and one of the world's few Muslim majority democracies, was a wonderful setting to talk about ways to promote understanding of Islam in the United States and throughout the Western world. Following on its tradition of transpacific dialogue, the conference also addressed the issue of the changing role of the United States in the region and Asian advice to the next U.S. president. This topic was of high interest to participants given the closely watched and competitive Democratic primary and upcoming presidential election in the fall.

Mari Pangestu, the Minister of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia, graciously led a conversation about the current economic situation in Southeast Asia. In order to present the Society's multi-dimensional approach to U.S.-Asia relations, delegates were given the opportunity to experience the rich culture of Bali with trips to a local temple, cultural performances, and a tour of the NEKA Museum.

The Asia Society also undertook a number of efforts to extend the reach of the conference discussion. Vishahka N. Desai, Jamie Metzl, Abdullah Abdullah, Carolina Hernandez, and Pramit Pal Chaudhuri traveled to Jakarta immediately following the conference for a special afternoon session at CSIS. In addition, conference participants published op-ed pieces and articles. Vishahka N. Desai also had a special breakfast briefing at the Asia Society in New York.

Finally, Nermeen Shaikh, Managing Editor of Asia Society Online, has produced a multimedia piece to appearing in publications and on the AsiaSociety.org website. This report, with a focus on the U.S. policy toward Asia, will be given to the next U.S. administration.

For their excellent work, special thanks goes to the entire staff of the Asia Society and CSIS, led by Asia Society's Director of Policy Programs, Michael G. Kulma. From the Asia Society, Hee Chung Kim, the heart and soul of Williamsburg for so many years, managed all the details and planning of the conference. Justina Wong supported Mike and Hee-Chung in New York and Bali and served as the conference rapporteur. Rachel Cooper, Director of Cultural and Performing Arts and our resident specialist in Indonesian dance and music, arranged all the fantastic cultural performances. Nermeen Shaikh deserves credit for all her hard work interviewing participants. Appreciation goes as well to Noopur Agarwal for laying out the report. We would also like to thank M. Hadi Soesastro and the staff at CSIS for all their assistance.

A tremendous note of gratitude is owed to our Williamsburg Executive and Steering Committee, represented at the Conference by Gareth Evans and John L. Thornton.

We are most grateful to our sponsors: Lee Foundation, Pia Alisjahbana, Kartini Muljadi & Rekan, Santini Group, Saratoga Capital, ITOCHU Corporation, Kansai Electric Power Company, Inc., Mitsubishi Corporation, and Tokyo Electric Power Company, Inc.

Finally, there are few places in the world that can equal Bali in terms of culture, tradition, atmosphere, food, and beauty. We were thrilled to bring our delegates to such an exquisite location. But a large part of what made this year's conference surpass our highest expectations was the richness and depth of conversation made possible by our inspirational participants.

We look forward to continuing the Williamsburg Conference for years and years to come.

Vishakha N. Desai
President

Jamie F. Metzl
Executive Vice President

Executive Summary

Coming in the midst of a very heated U.S. presidential election campaign, where the U.S. is faced with numerous foreign policy challenges in the Asia-Pacific region and at a critical juncture in Islam's relationship with the rest of the world, the Asia Society convened over 50 Asian and American leaders at a very opportune time in Bali, Indonesia from April 3-6, 2008. Delegates discussed the characteristics of Islam in Asian countries with multiethnic or multireligious populations like India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. They also suggested ways of tackling radicalism and extremism by alleviating poverty, improving education, and reforming prisons and rehabilitation Centres, to name a few. During the second half of the conference, delegates engaged in a conversation about the evolving U.S. role in Asia. Contemporary affairs like the protests in Myanmar and Tibet, engagement with North Korea, and the impact of the Iraq war on U.S. foreign policy towards Asia were analyzed in light of the coming presidential election. Asian leaders were invited to give advice to the new U.S. president. Finally, young leaders from the Asia Pacific region shared their thoughts on what kinds of leadership and values are needed in the future.

The Role of Islam in Multicultural Asia

The opening session of the Williamsburg Conference focused on discussing the role of Islam in Multicultural Asia in a broad and general context. Conference participants assessed the following questions: What are the particular characteristics of Islam in Asian countries like India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines? What is the relationship between Islam and democracy in these countries? How is the experience of Islam in the multi-cultural societies of Asia different from elsewhere in the world, particularly the Middle East? It is important to note that while some delegates were experts in the field, others had almost no knowledge or background of Islam in Asia. Therefore, panelists and discussants were encouraged to talk about and explore "big picture" topics like the political implications and current trends in the Asian Muslim world.

Given the widening gulf between the West and the Muslim world, the focus of this year's conference was particularly timely and important. A Pew Survey on Global Attitudes found that America's image of much of the Muslim world is abysmal. Indeed, panelists overwhelmingly believed that Asian Islam is fundamentally misunderstood or outright ignored by those in the West. As one illustrative example, *The New York Times Book Review* in January 2008 presented an entire issue dedicated to Islam. Not one article mentioned Islam in Asia. Considering Asia is an extremely critical part of the Muslim world with over 65 percent of the world's Muslim population, conference participants expressed concern and felt motivated to bring this issue to the forefront of this year's conference.

Indeed, panelists overwhelmingly believed that Asian Islam is fundamentally misunderstood or outright ignored by those in the West.

Islam in Multicultural Asia

The conference started off with a broad discussion of Islam in Multicultural Asia between panelists and participants. Panelists gave an overview of Islam in Asia by focusing country-specific comments on Indonesia, India, and Malaysia. These countries served as an excellent starting point because while all three countries have many similarities like growing economies and multiethnic societies, the history and current state of Islam in each is very different.

Naturally, a large part of the conversation focused on Islam in Indonesia, the host country of this year's conference. Islam came to the archipelago of Indonesia in a major way in the late 12th and 13th centuries, brought mainly by Sufi teachers who were open to accommodating local customs and traditions. Because of this, Indonesian Muslims are largely inclusive of other followers of Islam. With 17,000 islands and hundreds of ethnic groups, Indonesia is a multicultural and multireligious society. There are many different types of Islam such as Java Islam, but in general Indonesian Islam is Sunni Islam with its strong Sufi tradition. It is important to underline that while a majority of Indonesians are Muslim (86 percent according to the 2000 census), Indonesia is not an Islamic state. In fact, it officially recognizes six religions including Islam, Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

Like Indonesia, India is an example of a country that tries to promote religious diversity and tolerance. India has a diversity of religious followers including those that practice Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Parsis, and Indian Jews. Muslims in India, who total around 151 million (according to a 2007 government census), make up around 13.4 percent of India's population. An Indian participant pointed out that India is a "secular" state, but not in the Western traditional sense which defines secularism as a clear separation of church and state. Instead, it is a secular state in that it makes space for religion. Pointing to a verse in the Koran that states "your religion for you and my religion for me (109:6)," the panelist argued that tolerance for religion is paramount.

While participants had a generally positive view about India's religious diversity, some mentioned the problems that Muslim Indians face like economic stagnation. One delegate expressed optimism that this minority group will be lifted up through education and the democratic process.

Islam in Malaysia was briefly discussed during this session as well. Malaysia is a multiethnic and multireligious country. Ethnic Malays, who are viewed as Muslims by the state, make up about 65 percent of the population, while ethnic Chinese and Indians, mostly Buddhist, Christian or Hindu, account for most of the other 35 percent. One panelist talked about how the recent election in Malaysia in May 2008 signaled an unprecedented moment in history. The Barisan Nasional (National Front), which has led the country since its independence 51 years ago, suffered major electoral losses to opposition parties, both in national parliamentary elections and in votes for state legislatures. Some commentators view this as a reaction to the growing Islamism occurring in society and in politics. Anwar Ibrahim, a former deputy prime minister and now one of the leaders of the opposition, even said that, "There is a wave, an outcry for democratic reform." Time will tell if these election results bring about change in Malaysia.

Delegates mentioned other parts of Asia with Muslim populations such as China (around 1-2 percent of the population) and the Philippines (about 5 percent of the population). They agreed that Islam in Asia is a complex topic because it is extremely localized. Each country has individual needs and challenges. But, they suggested that countries should universally treat their Muslim minority populations with respect, accord them with equal rights, and involve them in whatever political process they may have.

Issues in the Muslim World

At this point in the conversation, delegates turned to broader issues in the Muslim world and relations of Islam with the Middle East and the West.

Most delegates inquired about the growing number of devout Muslims especially in Southeast Asia (demonstrated by the increasing number of Southeast Asian Muslims making the pilgrimage or *hajj* to Mecca, wearing the *hijab*, enrolling children in Islamic schools, and so forth). Some panelists argued in response that this should not necessarily be construed as something negative in the Western world. In fact, the trend of growing religiosity has the potential to bring about positive developments.

For example, participants talked about sharia and how it is seen through a distorted prism. Westerners view sharia, as popularized in the media, simply as a brutal law that stones people for adultery. But, quoting a piece by Harvard Law Professor Noah Feldman, it was noted that, “for most of its history, Islamic law offered the most liberal and humane legal principles available anywhere in the world.” Nostalgia for sharia comes from the past when it was the only way people could be protected from the brutality of rulers. Participants agreed that sharia (and Islam in general) needs reform in the way it deals with gender issues. However, it was pointed out that Islam arguably preaches democratic tenets like justice and equality more so than any other religion.

The *hijab* was also an issue brought up frequently in the conversation. The *hijab*, which refers to women’s head and sometimes body covering, has become a symbol to the West of the repression of Muslim women. To the contrary, an Asian panelist explained that many women in Asia are wearing the *hijab* because it is part of a greater personal consciousness. It is also a way to reject modernization which Muslims feel might be destroying traditional values and culture. In other words, the *hijab* has become a symbol of identity for Muslim women, like those in secular universities like Jakarta University and high-level female government officials.

Listening to these comments, American participants wanted to know whether wearing the headscarf symbolizes women’s growing strength and power in society. One of the delegates commented that it is neither empowerment nor disempowerment, but a matter of choice. It was also noted by this delegate that Indonesia is trying to promote the rights and power of women by requiring all parties to include women in their political structure. Furthermore, the growing influence of political Islam does not appear to be correlated to the growing number of women wearing the *hijab*. For example, in the last two Indonesian elections in 1999 and 2004, the Islamic parties failed with only 14 percent of the total vote. One of the most conservative parties, the Welfare and Justice Party, only received 7 percent of the vote in 2004. In the next election in 2009, the Islamic parties are not expected to increase their share of seats.

Relations with the Middle East

Participants were interested in discussing the interaction of Asian Muslims with the larger Muslim world. Participants, particularly those from the West, expressed hopes that Muslims in Southeast Asia could have a greater influence on the Middle East, especially with the power of globalization and the influence of the Internet. Southeast Asia has been a great model of democratic development, and could perhaps spread these values to the larger Muslim world. Southeast Asian Muslims might also assist in taking the first step in resolving conflict. For instance, a delegate suggested that Indonesia might consider opening an Israeli representative office.

Participants were interested in discussing the interaction of Asian Muslims with the larger Muslim world.

Indonesian delegates felt somewhat pessimistic about this suggestion. The Indonesian government has tried to play a far greater role in resolving conflict in the Middle East. The President invited Hamas leaders and Al Fata leaders from Palestine to come to Jakarta to discuss possible peace settlements between the factions. Indonesian political and religious leaders are strongly interested in helping to promote democracy to fellow Muslims.

However, many hurdles stand in the way. First, one delegate commented that most Arabs do not traditionally look to Southeast Asian Muslims for advice. Second, Indonesia has limited political capital and resources, which must be used for their own ends, such as engaging with China and India. Developing countries in Asia simply cannot devote the time to take a lead in resolving larger international issues. Third, they are wary that if Asian Muslims try to get involved in Middle East affairs, their counterparts will lower *haj* allocations to Asian Muslims.

Lastly, language has proven to be a major problem in promoting Islam in Asia. While some are trying to popularize the development of Indonesian Islamic thinking, it takes a long time to translate. However, it was put forth that various organizations like the Asia Society, Asia Foundation, and others could start to promote greater dialogue by engaging in such a translation and dissemination project.

Relations with the United States

Towards the end of the session, an American delegate commented that while most people consider Indonesia anti-American it is perhaps the most democratic country in the region. As such, America should be supporting Indonesia's efforts, and the two countries should have a better relationship. An Indonesian participant countered that anti-Americanism is fueled by the Bush administration, but Indonesian people have good will towards the American people. For example, since Barack Obama spent his childhood in the country, Indonesians are closely following the U.S. elections and are interested in U.S. politics. In addition, many Indonesians are very interested in sending their children abroad to American schools.

The Internal Struggle in the Muslim World

Some of the participants, especially those with Muslim backgrounds, emphasized how destructive the war in Iraq has been on the "Muslim street." They expressed their view that the legitimacy of any foreign invasion must be based in international law and opinion. Muslims unanimously supported the war in Afghanistan because Bush was going after the Taliban. On the other hand, Iraq was viewed as an unjust war and is now seen as an occupation. A participant cautioned that the West must understand that the Muslim world is caught in a massive internal struggle – between the "moderate" and "radical" camps, or between the Asian Muslim and Arab Muslim world – it is not one unified place or religion.

The Challenge of Islamic Radicalism and Extremism in Asia

After speaking about Islam in Asia in a broad sense during the opening session, this session offered delegates a chance to look more deeply at the challenges of Islamic radicalism and extremism. In this effort, they discussed the following questions: What is the nature and scope of the phenomenon of radical Islamism and extremism? To what extent should we be scared of it? Violent extremism is a problem. What are the causes of it? Are they local in character? Is it being provoked by the West? What are the solutions to these problems? What should we be looking at?

Understanding Islamism

An International Crisis Group report entitled "Understanding Islamism" provided the basis for delegates in defining the distinct strands of Sunni Islamism. *Political Islam*, generally speaking, eschews violence and refers to a reformist and not revolutionary agenda. Some examples are the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, and its offshoots elsewhere (like Algeria, Jordan, Kuwait, Palestine, Sudan, and Syria). *Missionary Islam* proselytizes on behalf of the Islamic faith and is not interested in political power or violence. There are two main variants: the highly structured Tablighi movement and the highly diffuse Salafiyya on the other. *Jihad* is the last strand and represents the Islamic armed struggle – what many see as the violent dimension. The delegates used these categories in the context of discussing radical and extremist groups in parts of Asia.

Proposed Solutions

Extremism and radicalism do seem to be on the rise throughout Asia. Participants pointed out that minority Muslim groups such as the Muslims in southern Thailand or in the Philippines tend to be the ones who turn to violence to achieve their ends. A large portion of the discussion in this session focused on trying to think of solutions to this problem. While delegates did not necessarily agree with each other on these approaches, the conversation was very constructive.

Participants expressed the need to combat poverty, which is a major underlying cause of terrorism. However, they stressed that the current development model created by the World Bank and international aid organizations is not working. The world needs development models based on indigenous communities. In other words, seeing what works on the ground and implementing a tailored course of action.

Participants felt that education is key in combating violent radicalism and extremism. Education does not have to be limited to secular teaching. One panelist pointed out that some madrassas and schools are spreading good values and providing a social good to citizens. Indonesia has around 30,000 Islamic schools educating a fifth of the population. Of these, only about 36 schools are directly linked to Jemaah Islamia. (Jemaah Islamia is a Southeast Asian militant Islamic organization dedicated to the establishment of a Daulah Islamiyah or Islamic State in Southeast Asia. It was added to the United Nations list of terrorist organizations in 2002.) About 100-200 schools teach radical ideology. Around 300-350 schools teach Wahabi thought (a name sometimes applied to the conservative 18th century reformist call of Sunni Islam attributed to Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab). A vast majority of schools are not a problem, and are producing upstanding citizens.

Protecting minorities is important in fighting extremism and radicalism. This advice was repeated throughout the conference. Many of the radical Muslim groups in Asia represent local separatist movements who do not have ties to global terrorist organizations. Governments can play a role by better protecting the rights of minorities in their country. In addition, better law enforcement is needed in cracking down on extremist and radical groups. In this effort, developed governments could offer intelligence and security training to other countries. Retired military officials from developed or third world countries that have historically dealt with terrorist issues could be involved in an exchange program.

Delegates seemed to disagree on what should be done to assist terrorists who are jailed and whether prison reform is a worthwhile or lost cause. One participant argued that governments need to re-habilitate prisoners while they are detained or jailed, and help re-integrate them back into communities if they are released. Another participant disagreed and thought these efforts would be in vain, pointing out that prisons in Afghanistan are breeding grounds for terrorists.

The Internet has also played an integral role in allowing extremists to disseminate violent ideology. This issue was complex because delegates were not in favor of limiting freedom of expression, but felt that extremist ideas are being spread easily and widely. A participant offered the suggestion that those engaged in fighting these kinds of groups should enter the chat rooms and have debates with those espousing radical ideas.

Finally, delegates felt that the West should be encouraging Muslims who stand up for progressive and moderate ideas. Along these lines, the West should recognize that this is a war of ideas and support the good ones.

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Building Bridges—Breakout Sessions

Building on the conversation from the first two sessions, conference delegates broke out into small groups to discuss the quotes listed below. Each group was given the task to discuss whether there is a problem between Islam and the West. If so, how should it be characterized and what can and should be done to address it? Delegates from each group reported back to the larger conference hall with a short summary of their discussions.

Quotes

The Asia Society compiled the following list of quotes as a way to represent differing opinions about the Muslim World. This list is not comprehensive, but an attempt to highlight the major positions of scholars.

Position 1

“Though most of the media attention is directed at a marginal minority of radicals, millions of European Muslims are quietly proving every day that they can live perfectly well in secular societies and share a strong ethical pedestal with Jews, Christians and atheist humanists.”

—Tariq Ramadan, Muslim academic and theologian

“In our post-9/11 world, the ability to distinguish between Islam itself and Muslim extremism will be critical. Only thus will we be able to avoid pushing away mainstream Muslims around the world, marginalizing Muslim citizens at home and alienating the allies we need to help us fight global terrorism.”

—John Esposito, Professor of International Affairs and Islamic Studies,
Georgetown University

“It’s not enough to disseminate teachings showing that suicide is forbidden under Islamic law, because those who promote the practice do not consider it suicide. More important is understanding who they are, what their backgrounds are, how they get recruited, what arguments are used, and what criteria the recruiters are looking for.”

—Sidney Jones, Senior Advisor, Asia Program, International Crisis Group

Position 2

“It is a mistake to blame Islam (a religion 14 centuries old) for the evil that should be ascribed to militant Islam (a totalitarian ideology less than a century old).”

“The enemy is Islamism, a terrorist version of Islam. If militant Islam is the problem; moderate Islam is the solution.”

—Daniel Pipes, Director, Middle East Forum and Historian

“Islamists must be opposed since appeasement only emboldens them.”

—Sadanand Dhume, Journalist and Author;
2007 Asia Society Bernard Schwartz Fellow

“We believe in Islam as a progressive, liberal, pluralistic and democratic religion.”

—Tarek Fatah, Muslim Canadian political activist and Founder,
Muslim Canadian Congress

“For the first time in several centuries, the reform of Islam — not unlike the reform of Christianity over a long, turbulent history — is not simply a matter only for reform-minded Muslims to think about and engage in with all its attendant risks, but it has also become essential for the world to purge itself from the pathology of violent Islamic radicalism, much as it did with Bolshevism and Nazism.”

—Salim Mansur, Associate Professor of Political Science,
University of Western Ontario Canada

Left to right:
Sadanand Dhume (India),
Abdullah Abdullah
(Afghanistan),
Gareth Evans (Australia),
Sidney Jones (USA),
and Rizal Sukma (Indonesia)



Kecak Dance (Balinese Dance)



Left to right: M. Hadi Soesastro (Indonesia),
Minister Mari Pangestu (Indonesia),
and Vishakha N. Desai (USA)



Jusuf Wanandi (Indonesia)



Abdullah Abdullah (Afghanistan)
and Wu Jianmin (China)



2008 Williamsburg Conference Delegates



John L. Thornton (USA)



Richard C. Holbrooke (USA)

Position 3

“When a “moderate” Muslim’s sense of compassion and conscience collides with matters prescribed by Allah, he should choose compassion. Unless that happens much more widely, a moderate Islam will remain wishful thinking.”

—Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Resident Fellow, American Enterprise Institute and Dutch Feminist, Writer and former MP

“There is no moderate Islam. There are Muslims who are passive, who don’t all follow the rules of Islam, but there’s really only one Islam, defined as submission to the will of God. There’s nothing moderate about it.”

“Religion is no innocent bystander in the violence perpetrated by Muslims. Just as moderate Christians and Jews acknowledge the nasty side of their holy texts, modern Muslims ought to come clean about how our sacred script informs terror.”

—Irshad Manji, Director, Moral Courage Project, NYU and author of *The Trouble with Islam Today*

“There may be moderate Muslims, but Islam itself is not moderate. There is no difference between Islam and Islamic fundamentalism: at most there is a difference of degree but not of kind.”

—Ibn Warraq, Founder, Institute for the Secularisation of Islamic Society and secularist author

Position 4

“The continuation of grievances in countries like Iraq, Afghanistan and now Lebanon expand the breeding ground for terrorists to recruit more people to their cause. This comes at great cost to Islam because it is ultimately a religion of balance and compassion.”

—Akbar Ahmed, Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies, American University in Washington DC; former High Commissioner of Pakistan to Great Britain

“But the fact is that the Israeli predations in the West Bank and Gaza are a key source of rage in the Muslim world against the United States... If the United States is hit again, as seems likely, the fascist Likud demonstrators will be in the chain of causality.”

—Juan Cole, Richard P. Mitchell Distinguished University Professor of History, University of Michigan

“Fundamentalism is not bred in poverty... The violence stems from injustice, because people feel they have been treated unfairly, whether that means military occupation, starvation under U.N. sanctions, [or] that they have a dictatorship imposed on them, propped up by the West. This is why people turn to violence, because they have no other avenue left.”

—Robert Fisk, British Journalist and Middle East correspondent for the British newspaper *The Independent*

Breakout Groups

Participants grappled with defining the problems between Islam and the West. One group rejected the idea of using the language “Islam and the West” to describe the clash. They thought that it was an imprecise way of framing the debate because Islam is a faith and the West is a geography. They also wanted to avoid using the phrase “Islam versus democracy.” Democracy is a relatively modern phenomenon, while Islam is thousands of years old. They instead suggested using terms like the West and the Middle East, or the West and Southeast Asia. They felt that it was important to emphasize geographic differences.

Another group reported that to deal with the growing alienation among Muslims and those in the West, we all need to assist the building and strengthening of moderate elements and everyday citizens in the Islamic world. The world needs to stop backing illegitimate regimes that are actively feeding into the problem of terrorism and extremism, but instead support the people who are working towards reconciliation. Some suggested that the problems between Islam and the West will be resolved when the pressing issues of the Israel-Palestine conflict, war in Afghanistan, and Pakistan are addressed. Others thought about using cultural dimensions (like exchanges, performances, and so forth) to better address these problems.

Another group reported that to deal with the growing alienation among Muslims and those in the West, we all need to assist the building and strengthening of moderate elements and everyday citizens in the Islamic world.

Delegates further suggested that terrorism cannot be defeated but it also cannot win. Defeating violent Islamic extremism is a global problem, and the one way the world can come together is by attacking poverty, which often breeds terrorism. While individual terrorism does not always stem from the poorest people in society, it can serve as an outlet for those who are alienated and lack opportunities. Therefore, economic growth is a key weapon in the fight against terrorism, as described in the United Nations Development Program's Arab Human Development Report.

A participant suggested that there should be Muslim Centres that would imitate the Confucius Centres around the world. They could be established in Muslim and non-Muslim places and focus on a particular Muslim country or the tremendous achievements of Muslim communities. Another idea is to establish sister cities with Muslim countries and Western countries.

Lastly, delegates placed a major importance on public diplomacy as a way to constructively build relations. One way to advance this effort would be through open dialogue with Iran (delegates felt that this will happen under a new U.S. administration).

The Evolving U.S. Role in Asia

Delegates engaged in a conversation about the evolving U.S. role in Asia. Contemporary affairs like the protests in Myanmar and Tibet, engagement with North Korea, and the impact of the Iraq war on U.S. foreign policy towards Asia were widely discussed.

Myanmar

On most of the delegates' minds were the protests that started in the late summer last year in Myanmar. Tens of thousands of monks and civilians led peaceful marches sparked by the government's decisions to raise fuel prices. The international community reacted with outrage and some even went as far as to condemn the junta's actions and call for democratic reform, but with little result. The Burmese government eventually intervened, halting the protests sometimes with military force, enacting curfews, limiting communication, and detaining and jailing many protestors.

While ASEAN made some strong statements against the Burmese government, many delegates did not believe they did enough. They were concerned that ASEAN is not properly addressing the Burma crisis as a whole and would like to see a policy that results in changes on the ground. Delegates see ASEAN as being most capable in engaging in bilateral dialogue with Myanmar, but unwilling to touch such a sensitive issue. Some from the ASEAN region argued that it has taken steps in resolving the problems in Burma, such as meeting with leaders in the region. Adding to the tragedy of recent events in Myanmar, Cyclone Nargis hit the

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country a month after the Williamsburg Conference, killing at least 90,000 with a further 56,000 people still missing.

China

Relations with China in the United States and around Asia are now dominated by the 2008 Summer Olympics. Many delegates were concerned about the protests in Tibet, and suggested that groups like the Falun Gong and Uighurs in Western China might find this the opportune moment to bring their grievances before the international spotlight. Many participants felt that a boycott of the Olympics would be a feckless effort and would risk undermining the goodwill of 1.3 billion Chinese people, who take the Olympics very seriously and as a point of national pride.

The delegates suggested ways that China could move forward on the Tibet issue. First, the Chinese government is very pragmatic, so they should stop vilifying the Dalai Lama and perpetuating the notion that he was behind the protests. Second, the Chinese should allow more open coverage of the Tibet issue. If they do this, the world will see the true dynamics of what is going on in Tibet and coverage would be more balanced. Finally, they should consider starting a dialogue with the Dalai Lama, (In early May 2008, Chinese representatives resumed talks with Dalai Lama envoys and met in Hong Kong).

One particularly successful area of cooperation, delegates overwhelmingly noted, is between the U.S. and China on North Korea. Many in the Asia-Pacific region feel encouraged by the dynamics of the six-party peace talks and progress made since the last meeting in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia in June 2007. In connection with the North Korea peace talks, Japanese delegates reiterated the point that their citizens are very sensitive about resolving the abductions issue and hope the issue will continue to be a part of the peace talks. (The North Korean abductions of Japanese citizens from Japan by agents of the North Korean government happened during a period of six years from 1977 to 1983. While North Korea returned Japanese citizens, the issues have not been fully resolved to date.) As this report was going to press, North Korea demolished part of its main nuclear facility as a symbolic gesture of its commitment to nuclear disarmament.

Other Asian Matters

As in years past, Asian delegates would like to see the U.S. become more engaged in the region. For example, they recommended that the U.S. president should come at least twice a year to the region. In response, the Americans pointed out that concerns in the Middle East especially the war in Iraq is of utmost urgency and dominates the U.S. foreign policy landscape. Delegates also talked about the relationship with Taiwan and the lack of movement in the cross-straits relationship. With the recent presidential election of Nationalist Party candidate Ma Ying-jeou in Taiwan, delegates felt that there is a unique opportunity to revive the cross-straits dialogue.

As in years past, Asian delegates would like to see the U.S. become more engaged in the region.

The U.S. Presidential Election and Asia

This year's U.S. presidential election has been one of the most exciting and intensely followed in recent history. The change of administration will also have a significant impact on U.S.-Asia relations. In light of this, conference delegates talked about: Where do things stand in the U.S. presidential election? What are the key foreign policy issues in the ongoing race to the presidency? What policies toward Asia might be expected from a new president? What are the greatest challenges and opportunities that the new American president will face in the region?

What policies toward Asia might be expected from a new president?

The U.S. Presidential Election 2008

A participant briefly summarized the primary situation and analyzed the impact on the upcoming presidential election in the United States. First off, the panelist pointed out that Americans are deeply unhappy. A stunning poll recently reported that around 82 percent of Americans believe that the country is on the wrong track. Many reasons contribute to such a dismal outlook, but the panelist pointed out that the dissatisfaction with the Iraq war and the declining economy are paramount. Based on these polls, the presidential election this fall will be extremely interesting.

In terms of the primaries, while the Democratic race has been very close the panelist argued that at this point Senator Barack Obama has a better chance of winning the Democratic nomination (based on his lead in the pledged delegates and popular vote). The primary was long and drawn out, but most likely it will be decided in the next month or so given that the Democratic Party wants to be united and have its nominee before the convention at the end of August. (Barack Obama did win the nomination.) On the Republican side, the participant pointed out that Senator John McCain is the best representative for his party. McCain seems to be able to reach beyond the traditional Republicans, and appeal to Democrats and Independents.

Of course, much can happen between now and the presidential election. Issues like the economy, the Iraq war, or terrorist attacks could turn the tide towards one candidate or another. But, generally speaking, Americans do not want a Republican for the next four years. Things do not bode well for the Republican Party given the recent polls – a 30 percent approval rating for the President and Congress. Further, there is a 95 percent chance Democrats will keep the majority in Congress and a 90 percent chance to expand this majority. The delegate went on to analyze how there is a yearning for someone who can transcend partisan differences. McCain is not popular among the Republican conservative base, but appeals to people because of his willingness to work with others. Obama's appeal is widespread especially because he has proven to have a high learning curve. However, the panelist warned that an Obama administration would bring about moderate changes, not the liberal sweeping changes that some think he will bring.

In light of this exciting election season, enormous challenges face the next president, including difficult economic times. The next president needs a clear and immediate plan for the next rocky years ahead. A new president has to be prepared to face the enormous challenges right away, and be ready in case he or she is tested with a crisis in the first months of his or her presidency.

Other interesting characteristics of the presidential primaries include the enormous turnout of voters (especially young and minority voters and the unprecedented amount of money being raised by the campaigns. The Internet has become a powerful political tool for candidates to raise massive amounts of small donations from Americans. Previously disengaged voters are being brought into the process through social networks like blogs, MySpace, Facebook, and others.

International Opinion

For many of the delegates, the election has been the best thing to happen, in recent years, to improve the image of the U.S. abroad. Many foreigners are watching the race with great interest. Delegates were encouraged by the intense level of debate, openness, and willingness of candidates to examine hard problems. They also see American democracy evolving with a woman and bi-racial candidate on the ballot. On this point, participants pointed out that because Obama is a bi-racial American with a Kenyan father and white mother and spent many years living in Asia, foreigners believe that his views would be global and nuanced. Participants said that a change would be welcomed and a “big sigh of relief” after the past eight years. It would demonstrate that the U.S. is pluralist, humble, and understands that it needs to fix its problems at home before it goes out changing things in other countries.

What’s Next?

On a host of issues, delegates gave their advice to the next U.S. administration. There were strong recommendations that the North Korea peace talks stay the course and the U.S. needs to continue to encourage China to be a “responsible stakeholder.” Delegates also discussed how the next president will find it difficult to withdraw immediately from Iraq. Instead, more attention should be paid to developing a coherent strategy and involving other countries and people in developing Iraq’s democracy. Delegates felt that the U.S. needs to be as careful getting out as it was careless getting into the war. On the other side of the coin, the U.S. needs to remain committed to Afghanistan which is a war that the U.S. cannot lose and should continue to commit troops for rebuilding and peace efforts.

Going beyond Asia, participants thought that a new administration should get involved with institutions across the Atlantic. The U.S. needs to mend ties across the transatlantic, and find ways to strengthen relations with Canada and the European Union. A new president should work with and reform international institutions, and consider expanding the

G8 to add an Asian country. There is tremendous recognition that the U.S. needs to pay greater attention to Southeast Asia, especially ASEAN (which is a political grouping with over 550 million people and a large number of Muslims). The U.S. will have to decide which Asian forums it is going to support. In thinking

about structures in Asia, it would be useful to look at the EU and NAFTA as examples.

Participants commented that it would also be highly desirable for the U.S. to partner with China on a high-profile issue like global warming or trade (moving the Doha Round forward). The new administration needs to develop new counter proliferation strategies. They need to have UN Security Council Reform.

Finally, a participant called upon the U.S. to establish a formal institution that brings democracies together such as a league or concert of democracies. China, of course, must be included in such an institution and rightly so, as the Chinese are developing their own democratic process, including participation, deliberation, and ways to safeguard human rights. The way to help China is by having other countries assist in advancing this forward.

There is tremendous recognition that the U.S. needs to pay greater attention to Southeast Asia, especially ASEAN (which is a political grouping with over 550 million people and a large number of Muslims).

Asian Leaders' Advice to the Next U.S. President

This session featured a frank discussion of Asian leaders' advice to the next U.S. President and the general U.S. foreign policy community.

Advice from Asia

First, given the topic yesterday, Asian delegates urged that the next President stop alienating the Muslim world. The U.S. must focus on fighting terrorism and not on attacking all of Islam. For instance, when Bush used the term "Islamofascism," many in the Muslim world were insulted that he would associate the religion of Islam with fascism. (In April 2008, the Associated Press reported that U.S. federal agencies were advised to stop using the term "Islamofascism." Among other things, the memo admitted that it was a pejorative term.) One participant suggested that in this effort the U.S. should focus on resolving the Palestine issue.

Second, participants analyzed the past eight years of U.S.-Asia relations under President Bush. Generally speaking, most believed that the Bush administration has had a positive impact in Asia. The North Korea six-party peace talks, which have been very successful thus far, must continue forward no matter what administration comes into office. The administration has also successfully pushed forward the trilateral relationship between the U.S., Japan, and Australia as well as having improved relations with India. Asian countries understand the fact that American leaders have limited bandwidth when dealing with Asia right now given the Afghanistan and Iraq wars and other urgent foreign policy issues. However, one participant who spent time in Iraq immediately after the war started felt that Americans have been haunted by 9/11 and blindsided by the wars in the Middle East. They have failed to properly recognize the power shift going on in the world towards Asia. Americans will not change overnight, of course, but it is important for Americans to begin looking at the world in a new way and with better vision.

The next American President should focus more on Asia as a whole, not just India and China. Many Asians believed that too much attention has been paid to East Asia, and not enough to individual ASEAN states. ASEAN is evolving and last year adopted the ASEAN Charter at the 13th Summit in November 2007. ASEAN also hopes to work towards a regional security architecture. Those from ASEAN urged the U.S. to recognize and take advantage of the economic dynamism occurring in the ASEAN region. One way to work with ASEAN is to work out a plan on Burma. Here, Asian participants mentioned again that China needs to play a bigger role in solving this problem. China has been enjoying good bilateral relations with Myanmar, and has done quite well with North Korea.

Third, Asian participants recommended that less is more. This means that America must stop trying to solve all the problems in the world, and think about cutting back and having more restraint. The U.S. can do this in a number of ways. For instance, the U.S. could work with other countries on global threats. The coming challenges facing all of mankind are very severe including climate change, terrorism, pandemics, the rise of developing countries, and demographic issues. The U.S., China, and ASEAN could start by addressing the consequences of climate change and developing renewable energy. As another way of doing less, the U.S. could focus on economic issues. For example, American leadership should make sure that the international trading system will not collapse. These are all ways in which America can be more strategic about its role in world affairs.

Finally, Asian participants said that they expect the U.S. to get their own house in order before meddling in the world's affairs. For instance, Asians would like to see how the U.S. deals with its current economic crisis.

The next American President should focus more on Asia as a whole, not just India and China.

Feedback from the American Side

American participants in the room responded to some of these comments. One participant felt that there was a contradiction coming from Asia. On the one hand, Asians want the U.S. to do less, but on the other the U.S. is being asked to exercise leadership in areas like trade.

Another participant argued that Americans are results-oriented people, and will invest more in multilateral institutions if there is more action. For example, the EU has gotten ahead of ASEAN in many ways. In quiet functional areas like economic, scientific, and infrastructure, the EU has advanced quite rapidly. The EU gets more attention because member states are willing to take real action at great political cost. This is what Asians need to do. ASEAN needs to be pragmatic and solve problems on the ground quickly.

Another participant brought up the fact that the U.S. would be more than happy to give up leadership in Asia, and wants to see countries like India and China step up and take leadership positions on a number of issues. But, as one of the participants inquired, they would like to see where China stands on issues like Darfur and Iran's nuclear program. The following questions were asked: Would China be willing to take a lead? Which Asian country will rise to the task?

Following on an earlier idea, a participant also felt that Asian powers are not coming out to help with the problems in the Middle East. In light of the constant criticism of the U.S. about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is the first time in the history of the Middle East that people are really free, and Asian countries are not helping in this effort as much as they should be.

An American participant stated that the U.S. is not abandoning Asia and has long paid attention to the region. There will always be friction but it has been a generally positive relationship. The U.S. has been an indispensable leader in the region in the past and will continue to be involved in the future especially because of business relations. One delegate even stated that Asia is "our history and our destiny."

On the one hand, Asians want the U.S. to do less, but on the other the U.S. is being asked to exercise leadership in areas like trade.

Where does this advice go?

Asian participants ended the session by encouraging Americans to use and spread this advice. They were struck by the fact that while the U.S. clearly has a huge pool of knowledgeable Americans on Asia (as demonstrated by the outstanding and distinguished leaders at the conference), this knowledge is not being filtered to the decision makers and policy makers. Asians would very much like to see the next White House make well-informed decisions. Asia is a diverse region so that it is important to have a deep understanding of its history, language, and culture.

Open Space Exercise

This session gave participants the opportunity to speak on any topic that they felt like highlighting or discussing at a greater length. Participants began the session by suggesting the following questions that should be addressed in more detail:

- Is it an Asian Century or an Asian-Pacific Century? How important is it to include “Pacific” in the equation?
- Is the U.S. getting its mind around the shift of the 21st century to Asia?
- Are we reaching an end to ethnic, racial, and tribal distinctions, and moving instead towards interconnectivity, globalization, and tolerance?
- What is the role of the U.S. in Asian multilateral organizations like APEC and ARF?
- How are the following things related: the age of interdependence and globalization, the rise of Asia, the gulf between the Muslim World and the West, and Islam in Asia?
- Is the U.S. foreign policy establishment ready to adapt to Asia as a whole power, especially given the decline in U.S. power? Is preparedness there? Is Asia ready to take on a different leadership role?
- Is India a Western or Asian power? What will be the global impact of India’s rise?

Delegates were given the opportunity to vote on which topic they wanted to talk about. Many wanted to discuss trends happening in the world and how the world will cope with the rise of Asia.

Trends in the World

Participants discussed how there are positive trends happening in the world including a downward trend in ethnic conflict and a general reduction in poverty levels. At the same time, negative trends that threaten peace and stability in the region include a regression in democracy and globalization. Globalization will lead to a loss of community and sense of identity in Asian countries.

It was also discussed that there is a paradox in the changing dynamics of the world powers and a shift towards the Asian region. Some did not feel that it was healthy to frame it as the rise of Asia and the decline of U.S. power. On the contrary, the rise of Asia could lead to a new parity because many countries are going to have to learn how to work together to solve transnational problems. Because we live in an increasingly connected world, one atom of carbon produced in China is like one atom produced in India, the U.S., or anywhere in the world. Asian countries need to be ready to play their new role and adjust to what some called “new realities.”

Participants spoke about the growing world economy (especially in the past 15-20 years) and the new aspirations that exist in Asia. Billions of people look forward to enjoying economic growth. There needs to be necessary adjustments on all sides. For example, there needs to be less fear of Asian capital moving into Western markets. The West should not feel threatened by this, and should understand that

In addition, delegates stressed that the growing gap between rich and poor needs desperately to be addressed.

there is a great amount of intra-Asian economic trade happening now. In addition, delegates stressed that the growing gap between rich and poor needs desperately to be addressed. Asian countries must be able to deliver domestically to their people and deal with rising food prices, inequality, and education.

The concept of “Japan as a middle power” was introduced by one of the participants during the discussion. Middle power is a term used in the field of international relations to describe states that are not superpowers or great powers, but still have large or moderate influence and international recognition. The delegate talked about how Japan fits this mold. For instance, Japan constructively serves as a middle power in many important trilateral relationships like U.S.-Australia-Japan and U.S.-Japan-Korea. Japan should use its strength in working on issues like human security, peacekeeping, and capacity building. Japan is also interested in brokering peace between the two Koreas.

As in years past, China was a focus of conversation. Many saw China as being resistant to becoming a major leader in the Asia-Pacific region. China urges multilateral action and deliberately avoids having sole responsibility in world affairs. Some argued it is part of the Chinese psyche to seek fair and equitable solutions to world challenges.

With the peaceful rise of China, improving relations between Japan and China in the future, and U.S.-China relations, a participant suggested that more reliable East Asian institutions should be developed. As a way to start, all Asian countries need to shed their historical ghosts and animosities. Discussed at great length at last year's conference, Asia will face quite serious environmental threats, which will in turn create huge governance challenges.

Final Thoughts

Participants ended the session with some final thoughts:

- They proposed that we must create a new model for economic growth because the Western model is simply not sustainable. Our level of consumption is high and unhealthy and cannot continue in the future.
- They agreed that far more attention needs to be paid to promoting the understanding and education of Islam in Asia.
- The rise of China will continue to play a major role in world affairs. Delegates want to see China step up into a leadership role and address major international problems head on.
- The American presidential election will likely have ramifications for policy in Asia.
- Participants strongly felt that issues like Myanmar and North Korea need to be dealt with, and not be let fall off the radar.
- The U.S. must adjust to a world that is not unipolar and accept the rise of "others." America should lead through consensus building.
- The U.S. and Australia could provide a balance of power and serve as an economic engine of growth in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Asian countries need to be wary of economic nationalism.
- China and India should be brought into the G8 (also known as the Group of Seven and Russia, an international forum for the governments of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States).

Closing Session: New Perspectives on the Asia-Pacific Century

As a way of showcasing different perspectives on the future of the Asia-Pacific century, the Asia Society invited its Asia 21 Young Leaders to share their thoughts with Williamsburg participants. The Asia Society's Asia 21 Young Leaders Initiative, now in its third year, aims to prepare tomorrow's leaders for the challenges and responsibilities of global citizenship by bringing together fellows from across the Asia-Pacific to generate creative, shared approaches to leadership and problem solving. The Asia Society hopes to continue bringing these fresh and dynamic voices of emerging leaders into the Williamsburg fold.

As a way of showcasing different perspectives on the future of the Asia-Pacific century, the Asia Society invited its Asia 21 Young Leaders to share their thoughts with Williamsburg participants.

Leadership Advice

One of the young leaders described what he thinks leadership means in the coming Asia-Pacific century. The participant, an Asian having spent a considerable amount of time being educated in the U.S., talked about how America will be the natural leader in the region. Having fought insurgents and terrorists in Mindanao, the young leader felt that he learned important lessons – ones that the U.S. should also take to heart.

First, servant leadership is by far the most important aspect of leadership. Servant leadership emphasizes the leader's role as steward of the resources (human, financial and otherwise) provided by the organization. It encourages leaders to serve others while staying focused on achieving results in line with the organization's values and integrity. In short, he learned that one bad decision can get you and your men killed on the battlefield; the same lesson applies in the real world.

In addition, one needs to pay equal attention to formal and informal leadership. America needs to tap into the network of informal leaders developing in the world, the ones that are slowly rising, like China, Indonesia, India, and Russia. These kinds of leaders need to be recognized and given the respect and importance due them. America also needs to realize that when there is opposition it is not necessary to take direct action.

Finally, America needs to understand that a “soft power” approach is just as valuable as a hard one. This participant who works to fight poverty and causes of terrorism through microfinance learned that the soft approach is usually more appropriate. For every ten people you kill, you will breed a new generation of people who will be fighting against you. The young leader endorsed an idea brought up at an earlier session: the middle power approach is the most important tactic to use. The young leader believed that you can never have double standards. You must always follow the harder right than the easier wrong. America should have integrity and set the example by leading in the right way.

Generational Challenges

The next young leader talked about the generational challenges faced by many young leaders. Mongolia served as a relevant example because it has been undergoing a transition from communism to democracy. Because of this communist past, there continues to be a strong populist drive in the country. Many of the older decision makers who were educated under the communist state have a preference for a socialist solution. However, Mongolia wants to transition to a market economy and needs consensus to move forward. For example, when there is a problem with global food prices, the people want the government to reduce the problems and control prices. Younger leaders do not think you should try to control the uncontrollable. On a global level, one can see the same things happening. He admitted that the past continues to haunt us but we must move forward.

Tensions versus Balance

The last young leader discussed the lessons learned coming out of the Asia 21 Young Leaders Summit, held Oct. 4-6, 2007 in Singapore. Singapore is a unique country that is similarly dealing with the competing attitudes of old and young leaders. For example, many of the older leaders in Singapore seem stuck in the past constantly reminding their citizens that the country is a highly vulnerable state. Given its small size, limited resources, and opportunities to trade, Singapore has of course much to fear. However, the panelist was far more optimistic about his country’s future. The younger generation of citizens feels that there are plenty of ways to be creative and work around these limitations. In fact, this vulnerability should not inspire paranoia, but rather opportunity.

The panelist also talked about how diversity versus unity has shaped his worldview. Many Singaporeans (an ethnic mix of Chinese, Malay, South Asians, Eurasians, and others) are used to pluralism in their lives. Within this complex and multiplicitous mix, there is a common space that can be found. He suggested that we are all different in the United States and Asia Pacific region, but we need to find the common things that hold all of humanity together.

Asian Identity

Delegates felt that the younger generation is moving in a new direction, and talked about the idea of this new Asian identity. What is it, and is it inherently a good thing? The concept of Asia has been debated since the 1920’s. It is difficult

Indeed, Asia is going through a transformation of changing identities from the local to the global, and the rise of a greater Asian self-confidence.

to construct this idea because Asia is not like Europe. Indeed, Asia is going through a transformation of changing identities from the local to the global, and the rise of a greater Asian self-confidence. While globalization is supposed to have contributed to this new identity, delegates felt that globalization is only known to a select few. Local communities in Asia need to learn

more about globalization, especially the poorest levels. For instance, it was pointed out that so many people in Southeast Asia do not understand what ASEAN is. Participants felt that the one way to improve this sense of ASEAN is through better community building.

Participants discussed how being small in size is sometimes to a country's advantage and being big can be complicated. Delegates were interested in where Mongolia considers itself especially sandwiched between China and Russia. How will Mongolia work in the long-term and how successful can it resist the two great powers? Mongolia feels like having two large countries as neighbors can be used to its advantage.

In order to create an Asian identity, many hurdles have to be overcome such as number, size, histories, ethnicities, and other factors. One participant believed that China and Japan must come back together and restore relations. The implied rivalry between the two countries must be overcome. In addition, China and India have so many things in common that they should not be pulled apart. If they came together, it would contribute to an enhanced Asian identity.

In the end, most participants agreed that Asians should come together on common issues: the future should be ours. Asians should work on common values and aspire to make people's lives better. Optimism should encourage the region to work together.

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