

EIR Conference Report

Muslim Americans seek 'knowledge and freedom'

by Umberto Pascali

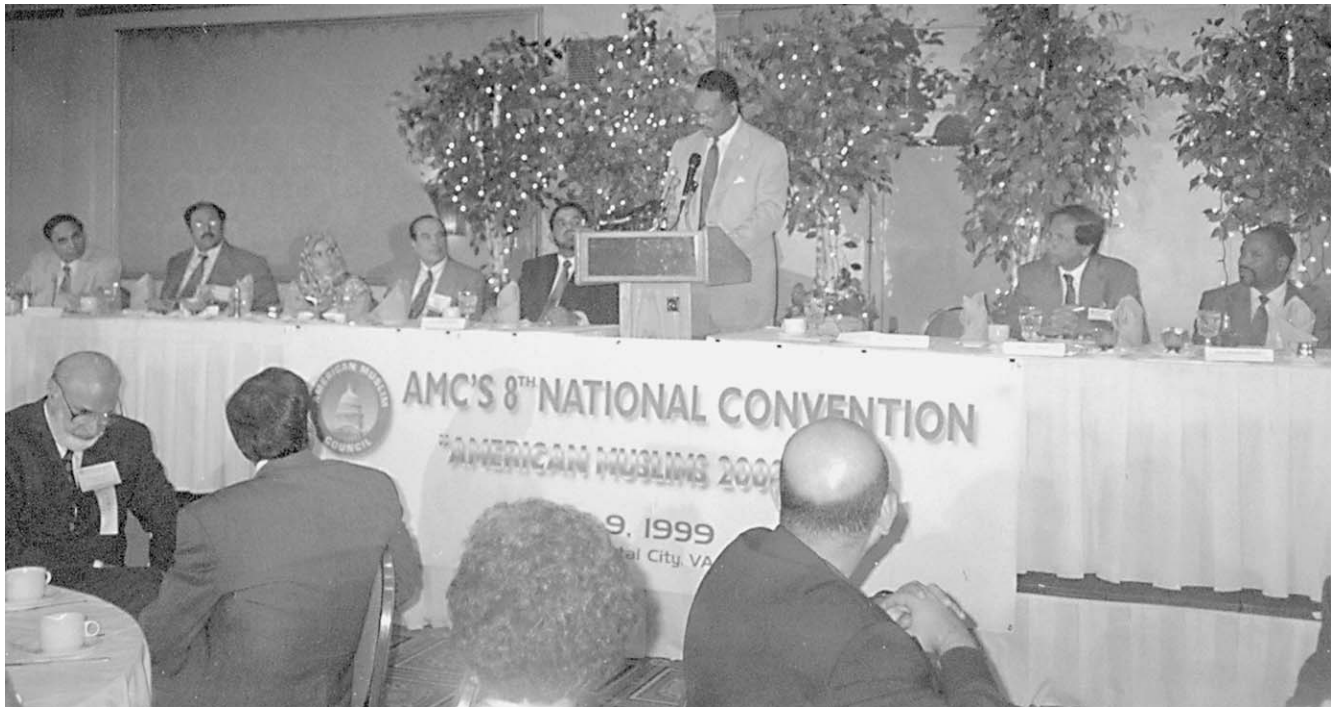
The Eighth National Convention of the American Muslim Council (AMC) took place on May 6-9 in Arlington, Virginia, in a dramatic, extremely dangerous, and yet potentially extremely promising moment. The annual meeting of the political organization of the American Muslims was clearly dominated by the situation in Kosovo, but the discussion also focussed on the continuing U.S.-British bombing of Iraq, and the issue of what American policy toward Muslim nations and peoples should be.

Most Muslim Americans are immigrants from countries traditionally dominated by the British Empire, and thus they have a direct and bitter understanding of London's colonial methods, especially its evil manipulation of ethnic and religious groups — "divide and conquer" — and its determination to prevent the economic growth of the "colonials." Indeed, most Muslim Americans of recent immigration understand the modus operandi of the British Empire in a way close to what must have been the experience of American colonists before the American War of Independence.

Dr. Nazir Uddin Khaja, the president of the AMC, stresses at every opportunity, including in his interview with *EIR* published in this section, that Muslim Americans identify "America" with two principles, which are basic teachings of the Koran: knowledge and freedom. This was one of the basic motivations that convinced many Muslims to immigrate to the United States. Because of this faith in "American principles," most Muslim Americans feel very strongly the contradiction between those principles and the unfortunately too frequent reality of a U.S. foreign and economic policy that suicidally tries to imitate that colonial modus operandi against which the War of Independence was fought.

The reflections of this drama were visible throughout the conference, although at times the necessary broader strategic perspective was lacking. For example, several delegates expressed relief that now the West and America are using all their military might—the NATO war machine—apparently on behalf of a Muslim population in Kosovo. This misses the real British plan, in triggering and pursuing the war at any cost—including the use of ground troops, even against the opposition of President Clinton. London's plan is to create a "New NATO," as the 21st-century version of the British imperial navy, set up to enforce the "gunboat diplomacy" of the globalization era. Paradoxically the Muslim Americans are potentially the group that can most readily understand this colonialist modus operandi, which, if successfully carried out in the Balkans, will be unchained all over the countries of the South, breaking the resistance and the sovereignty of many Muslim countries. But the constant psychological pressure from the campaign that projects them as the image of the "fanatic," the "fundamentalist," and the "terrorist," tends to make Muslim Americans vulnerable to specious British "benevolence," even if they know that, in fact, these "benefactors" cannot be trusted.

The bombing of Iraq by the "New NATO" combination was there to remind everybody of the reality. During the panel discussions, the issue of Iraq came out more than once, and with forceful and polemical tones. One delegate described the U.S.-British policy as "bombing a dead person." Many delegates, in public and in private conversations, underlined that the continuous bombing of Iraq has nothing at all to do with Saddam Hussein, and that it is incomprehensible how anybody can think of re-establishing peace and democracy in



The Rev. Jesse Jackson addresses the convention of the American Muslim Council on May 8. AMC President Dr. Nazir U. Khaja is to his left. Dr. Khaja was part of Jackson's delegation to Yugoslavia, which secured the release of three American prisoners.

the Gulf area, by further destroying an already-destroyed country.

Sandy Berger's participation

On May 7, the delegates were invited to a meeting at the White House with National Security Adviser Samuel Berger. The delegates appreciated fully the fact that one of the closest and most prominent collaborators of President Clinton came to talk to them, after a few hours of sleep following a visit to Germany, where he had accompanied the President in a mission on Kosovo. It was a clear sign of the importance that President Clinton attributes to the Muslim Americans.

During the discussion with Ambassador Bruce Ridel, the right-hand man of Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, that followed Berger's speech, questioners wanted to know, "What about Iraq? What about Palestine?" To me, one of a handful of non-Muslims who was privileged to participate in the meeting, another, deeper question lay underneath: "Why does the United States not follow its own founding principles on these issues? Why do we follow British colonial anti-American methods?" Again, this was not an expression of anti-American feelings, as the Anti-Defamation League and fanatic, pseudo-Christian "fundies" like to say. No! This was the painful protest of patriotic Americans — the kind of protest that, if listened to, could save the country.

Berger made an extremely useful point, rejecting "the claim that Islam and the West are locked in some clash of

civilizations." He further emphasized the attention devoted by President Clinton and the First Lady to the Muslim world and its culture.

Berger said: "From the time that President Clinton took the oath of office, he and the administration have reached out to the Muslims and the community of Islam. The President's respect for Islam proceeds from two basic facts: 1) Muslims, as you all know, constitute a quarter of the world's population. It is self-evident that they will play an important role in shaping the world over the next century. 2) Muslims are actively redefining our nation, because Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the United States, practiced by some 6 million Americans, with over 1,200 mosques and Islamic centers. And that's a fact the President very often cites, obviously to non-Muslims. . . . The President and the First Lady both have tried to learn more about Islam and the Muslim world in a variety of ways. They read extensively. They have travelled through the Muslim world from Indonesia to Central Asia to Africa, seeking to strengthen our bonds with our partners there.

"Last October's Wye agreement came about in no small part because of the President's insistence that the Palestinians, whether Muslim or Christian, be treated as full and equal partners in the peace process. . . . In November, he proposed sending \$400 million over three years to the Palestinian people, as part of the Wye supplemental, which is pending before the Congress. I think probably, quite honestly, that it is not



U.S. National Security Adviser Samuel Berger addresses the conference of the American Muslim Council on May 7. Berger rejected the concept of a “clash of civilizations” between Islam and the West, and emphasized President and Mrs. Clinton’s respect for Islam and their desire to reach out to Muslims in America and abroad.

going to move until after the Israeli elections, and we see whether we have a peace process that’s moving forward or not. In December he delivered a historic address in Gaza to members of the Palestinian National Council . . . one of the most moving experiences over the last seven years. And just last week he wrote to Chairman Arafat to reaffirm our support for the aspirations of the Palestinian people to determine their own future in their own way.

“We have also committed to bolster Jordan’s economy as it undergoes the transition to a new leader, and to strengthen our relations with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait.

“Here at home, the President and the First Lady both have been with and reached out to members of the community, personally inaugurated what I hope will become a long tradition at the White House by celebrating the end of Ramadan with Muslims. Just this week, the President appointed a prominent Muslim as a member of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. . . . And I think perhaps most importantly, the President has made a conscious effort in his speeches and public remarks to dispel old stereotypes of the Muslims, both in his aggressive search for peace in the Middle East, and, as I say, in what he has said publicly.

“Last September, you may recall, he gave the keynote speech at the opening of the United Nations General Assembly. The session of the General Assembly was focussed on terrorism, a problem that many Americans have mistakenly linked to Islam. The President stated what has always been our position: that we abhor terrorism and its pursuit of innocent victims. But he went to great lengths to say that there is no contradiction between Islam and America.”

London plays the ‘Muslim card’

Many participants — from Dr. Khaja, to Berger, to several Muslim and non-Muslim participants — stressed the strategic importance of the Muslim Americans’ role. Indeed, an organized Muslim American community could become a positive reference point for many countries and a precious asset for a truly *American* U.S. foreign policy.

I had the chance to personally express this concept at the AMC “General Body Meeting.” Indeed, the fact that a non-Muslim was welcomed with great cordiality and attention to express his thoughts, says volumes about the lies concerning “Muslim intolerance.” I stressed how crucial it is to organize the Muslim American community and to give it the role it deserves in the U.S. political life. To realize the political potentialities of the community is of crucial importance, not just for the welfare of the community itself, but because of the irreplaceable contribution in terms of strategic and economic thinking and direction it can give to the United States, and the world. As Dr. Khaja had stressed, the two principles that motivate Muslim Americans are knowledge and freedom, and the need for economic and individual development are the “American principles.” Thus, an organized community can become, in a short period of time, a powerful and precious propeller to push on the American Revolution, to make the United States a “more perfect Union.”

Of course, this process will not be easy; the advocates of the oligarchical and imperial model — the policy grouping that *EIR* has identified as the British-American-Commonwealth (BAC) elites — see the development of this positive potential as a huge danger to their strategic domination. On one side, the British way of dealing with Muslims includes the ferocious campaign that identifies all Muslims as “terrorists.” On the other side, the oligarchical psychological arsenal has another weapon: to try to manipulate the Muslim world toward British imperial ends. The model for this was what the British Arab Bureau did with Lawrence of Arabia and St. John Philby (the father of the famous triple British agent Kim Philby) during World War I, when they needed to destroy the Ottoman Empire, in order to prevent it from forming a permanent pro-development alliance with Germany and other continental European powers.

Most striking in this respect, was the intervention of Lord Nazir Ahmad of Rotherham (his speech is excerpted below), the first Muslim male ever to be appointed to the

House of Lords by Queen Elizabeth. Lord Nazir emphasizes the favors which the British oligarchy, and Prime Minister Tony Blair in particular, are graciously bestowing on Muslims in England. Remember the warning in Virgil's *Aeneid*—"timeo Danaos et dona ferentes" ("beware of Greeks bearing gifts"), enunciated by Laocoön, when he tried to prevent his fellow Trojans from introducing the giant wooden horse, a gift of the Greeks, into the walled city of Troy.

The choice is between a British and an American model. By "American model," we mean not what pragmatically exists, but the model of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln, and Benjamin Franklin. The British model means manipulation on behalf of London's imperial aims. London, like the witch in a fairy tale, is ready to give as gifts many poison apples, if this will allow it to control the Muslim world.

Many hot spots will be triggered and exploded by the British war machine. After having promoted the creation of the modern Greater Serbia at the beginning of this century, there are several reports that British psywar specialists have been working hard trying to sell to the Albanians the idea of a modern "Greater Albania." Up to now, this poison apple has been rejected, but the pressure is increasing. To accept such an "offer" would guarantee for the British-American-Commonwealth faction, the geopolitics of war that they desperately need as their rotten financial system explodes around them. It will also guarantee misery to the Albanians, a spiral of destruction and degradation.

London is already looking for other hot spots to explode. Kashmir appears to be on the top of the list. Tony Blair's group could not care less about the sufferings of the Kashmir people; but Kashmir represents a detonation point for Pakistan, India, and China, with consequent destabilization and war among these countries in a broadening spiral of destruction. In order to ignite the fuse there, the new colonialists need the docile obedience of a large sector of the Muslim world. The words of Lord Nazir of Rotherham, his incessant praise for Tony Blair, and for Blair's supposed pro-Muslims initiatives, and his reference to Kashmir, remind us how doggedly the British oligarchy are pursuing their goal.

Clearly the interest, and the ideals of the American Muslims, are not to be fulfilled in this scheme. Quite the opposite. The Muslim world represents the geographic heart of the Eurasian Land-Bridge. The development of that vast area from China's Pacific Coast to the Middle East and Europe, is what so many Muslim countries are demanding. This is also the solution for the Balkans: a new Marshall Plan, as was discussed at the AMC conference. And a new financial system, a New Bretton Woods that guarantees the financial base for such historical development projects. This could indeed trigger a new Islamic Renaissance. This is the only American and Muslim way, the only "human way" to guarantee peace, prosperity, and freedom.

Interview: Dr. Nazir U. Khaja

American Muslims and the war in Yugoslavia

Dr. Khaja is the president of the American Muslim Council. He was interviewed by Umberto Pascali on May 7 at the AMC's eighth national convention in Arlington, Virginia. The AMC is the political organization of American Muslims, and the producer of "Islam," a TV program broadcast throughout the United States.

EIR: Dr. Khaja, you were in Belgrade a few days ago, as one of the most prominent American leaders in the delegation led by the Rev. Jesse Jackson, negotiating with Slobodan Milosevic for the successful release of the three U.S. soldiers taken prisoner at the beginning of the bombing against Yugoslavia.

Your action, as a leader of a political organization of the American Muslims, is particularly remarkable because, so to speak, you "broke the profile" of what was expected from you, in terms of the false—but still strongly perceived by many—idea of a Clash of Civilizations between Muslims and, in this case, Serbs, as peoples and religions. Could you tell *EIR*'s readers, first of all, your first-hand impressions of the Belgrade mission, and then comment on where this initiative is leading?

Dr. Khaja: As you rightly pointed out, the general image of Muslims and Islam is inconsistent with the trip that was taken. American Muslims are realizing more and more that, not only are we fighting stereotypes that have painted us with such a broad brush, but also we are fighting this whole issue of self-identity in our society. So, the more we work on the issue of the American Muslim identity and presence, the more it will become clear, hopefully in the future—with the work of the AMC and other organizations—that American Muslims are more or less along the same lines with the rest of American society, concerning the diversity of thinking, in ways we approach issues. So in that sense, when a peace forum of that kind [Rev. Jesse Jackson's delegation] was put together, a coalition of different churches, the American Muslims needed to be present, and that is why that trip was taken.

EIR: And your impressions, Dr. Khaja, of the Belgrade mission? Indeed the situation is moving very fast. We just learned that Kosovo leader Ibrahim Rugova has arrived in Rome, and new peace initiatives are taking place now. Your

courageous contribution has certainly been extremely relevant. Tell us, if you would, your impressions of the meetings you had in Belgrade with Slobodan Milosevic.

Dr. Khaja: Milosevic is a self-righteous, arrogant dictator. His tragedy is that of any other dictator who begins to lie in order to maintain his power, keeps repeating the lie to everybody around him, and then he himself begins to believe the lie. That is the same notion of the Big Lie that caused mass hysteria. Consequently, the view in Belgrade and Serbia is 180 degrees opposite to what is believed here in the West. No amount of dialogue can convince Serbians that the aggressor is Milosevic and that the victims are the people of Kosovo, just as the people of Bosnia were. Serbian people have been conditioned by this propaganda, and now they are facing the constant NATO bombings, so you can easily imagine that they are extremely angry. This has been the prevailing condition at the present time in Belgrade.

EIR: In 1993, I was part of an organization called International Parliamentarians Against Genocide in Bosnia, which brought a delegation of ten members of Congress and parliaments to Sarajevo during the siege. I remember, in those horrible times, how strong, despite everything, were the hopes of the Bosnians, of President Alija Izetbegovic, that after all the sacrifices, finally they would be able to have a country, a process of reconstruction and establishment of a modern economy, of a future. This did not happen; the war ended, but peace did not come. There was not the promised economic reconstruction.

There was a proposal at that time for a new Marshall Plan for the Balkans. Recently, President Clinton has talked about a Marshall Plan for the Balkans in the postwar period. A call for the reconstruction of the area was recently issued by the former Chief of Cabinet of President Izetbegovic, Faris Nanic, and by Schiller Institute founder, Helga Zepp-LaRouche. The fact that Bosnia was not allowed to have reconstruction brought the country to a present potential danger of a new ethnic explosion.

Looking at the large masses of suffering, desperate Kosovars, we are reminded that the alternative is clear: Either they will be sent away from Kosovo permanently and/or put in some form of concentration camp, or a large program of reconstruction is needed immediately in the Balkans, a Marshall Plan that obviously is to be extended to the whole Third World.

Dr. Khaja: I think there is a discussion on what will follow after peace and security are established. I think one of the options being discussed now, is to have a Marshall Plan, for that area at least, and I think President Clinton struck a chord and is probably committed to it. How other nations will participate in it? Germany has shown some willingness in the past to do something about it. Yes, indeed, there will be a need for massive reconstruction for the whole area, so that with economic stability, these problems which have

always caused conflicts, will go away. After all, we are becoming more and more cognizant of the fact that if you have economic growth, this will stabilize the political system. Yes, definitively we have to look at this.

EIR: Dr. Khaja, would you comment on the future of your organization and the role of the American Muslim community, not only for the United States, but as a reference point for the rest of the world?

Dr. Khaja: I think the American Muslim community is beginning to realize it is the most important asset of the whole Muslim world. I say that, because if one looks to the Muslim world, from Mauritania to Malaysia, there are areas of the world where there is some freedom, but there is no education, and there are some areas where there is education, but no freedom. Where else in the Muslim world, or anywhere else Muslim, have both of these elements: knowledge and freedom, which are part of the teaching of the Koran? The American Muslims are uniquely placed because of that, and they will continue to play a more positive role, which will have a necessary impact on all the Muslim countries also.

Interview: Dr. Muhammad
Aslam Cheema

Balkan reconstruction is the key to peace

Dr. Cheema, a former president of the American Muslim Council, is now its treasurer and a member of its board of directors. He is a retired surgeon, who has dedicated his life to giving a voice and an adequate role to the American Muslim community. He explains: "I retired early for health reasons, but this gave me the opportunity to serve the community. I am totally wedded to the idea that the American Muslim community has now reached the point that it has to start shouldering the responsibilities that fall upon it. And I am now literally spending all of my time pursuing these objectives." Dr. Cheema was interviewed by Umberto Pascali on May 7.

EIR: Dr. Cheema, this morning we were at the White House, and National Security Adviser Samuel Berger came to talk to the AMC convention participants. Someone commented that, whether one agrees or disagrees with everything he said, it is striking that, after a few hours of sleep back from Germany where he accompanied President Clinton to deal with the Kosovo issue, Mr. Berger came to give his remarks personally to the American Muslims. What was your evaluation of this

morning's meeting, and what does this convention want to achieve?

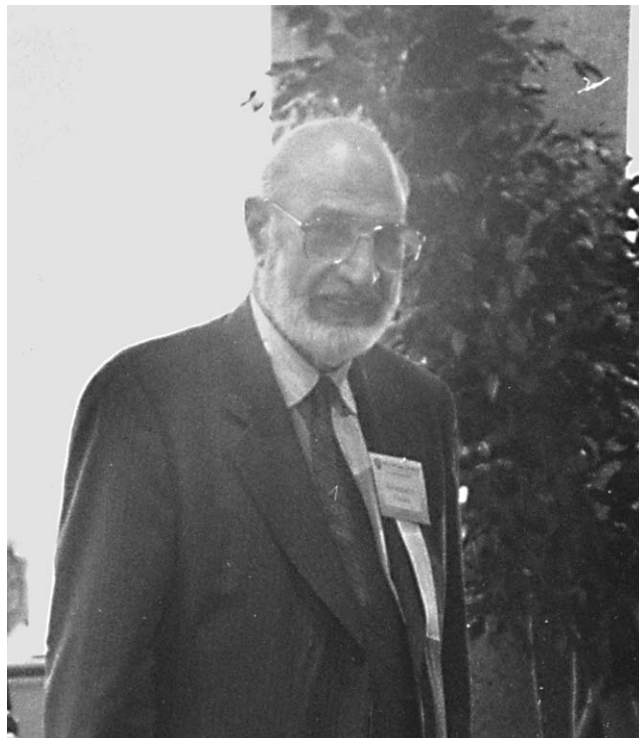
Dr. Cheema: What Mr. Berger said this morning was very interesting. Some of the things I totally agree with and some I don't. The AMC does not agree with all of them, but we need to keep a positive attitude, to welcome the things we were told, to keep the doors open, so that we can change the posture, the thinking, and the actions of the American government, to be more friendly and positive toward the Muslims, in this country and, of course, worldwide. What he said was fine, but there are things that need to be worked out further with the administration.

EIR: I was discussing with Dr. Khaja the parallel between the terrible situation in Kosovo and what happened in Bosnia, especially concerning the fact that after the hot phase of the genocide against Bosnia, the country was not allowed to have a real reconstruction and a real economy. The problem of Kosovo now is even more dramatic. You saw President Clinton's reference recently to the need for a Marshall Plan for the Balkans. The former Chief of Cabinet of Bosnian President Izetbegovic, Faris Nanic, and the founder of the Schiller Institute, Helga Zepp-LaRouche, presented an urgent and detailed appeal on this issue. The proposal is circulating among elites and governments in the Balkan area and worldwide. Indeed, we have a similar situation in Iraq, where the economy has been destroyed, and the country is still under bomb attack. In reality, the chance for peace and survival, as several delegates to this convention were stressing, can come only from the re-establishment of a viable economy.

Dr. Cheema: You presented to me several issues. Each issue has its own merits.

What is happening in Bosnia is not what was hoped for, and what will happen in Kosovo is not known at this point. In fact, the only thing I can see in the position of the American government and NATO, is that they are asking for three basic things: return of the refugees, presence of some kind of effectively armed international group to maintain the peace and to help the Kosovars to move back into their homes—or what remains of their homes—and then, of course, the third point is that they are helped to rebuild all that was destroyed. As Sandy Berger said this morning, the refugees have been placed in different locations, including the United States, but all of this is only temporary, and they will go back to their homes, and we will help them to settle down again, and develop their own potential, their own housing, and their own economics. This is obviously something we will have to work on, and we will work for it.

As far as Iraq is concerned, there is a tremendous amount of bigotry in some of the statements coming out, as was brought out by the speaker in the noon session [Edward Peck, former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq]. We need to work with the American administration to try to prove to them that the present continuous bombings are not helping anybody. In my



American Muslim Council official Dr. Muhammad Aslam Cheema. "We very much welcome the fact that the President is already thinking in terms of possible economic help and developmental help to the Kosovars, and a Marshall Plan-like proposal for the whole Balkans."

opinion, it's not helping the Iraqi people, it's not helping Saddam, it's not helping the American people, it's not helping anybody, other than increasing the misery and suffering of the Iraqi people, the old people, health problems, hunger problems. We have to further raise this issue and have changes in this policy.

EIR: Do you think that this repeated reference that President Clinton made recently to the necessity to launch a new Marshall Plan for the Balkans, could give us some optimism that we can go now in this direction, that is, to help create prosperity, and, politically, in fact to create new allies and friends for the United States, instead of a policy based on military power?

Dr. Cheema: My answer to this question is that we very much welcome the fact that the President is already thinking in terms of possible economic help and developmental help to the Kosovars, and a Marshall Plan-like proposal for the whole Balkans. It is very important. But, as it is now, more details need to be worked out. The initial step is that these people have to go back to their homes, that the proportions of the different populations must be maintained the way they were before the atrocities, and that whatever autonomy or independence will come out, development and reconstruction is the key problem to be solved.

The economic dimension of war and peace

On May 8, the third day of the American Muslim Council convention, one of the most important panels was “The Ambassadors’ Forum: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Muslim World,” moderated by AMC Board member Prof. Ali Mazrui. Among the participants were Khalid Abdullah, the Ambassador of the League of the Arab States, and the Ambassador of Albania, Petrit Bushati. The debate focussed on Kosovo, although several interventions from the delegates stressed the need to act also to save Iraq. Ambassador Bushati discussed the tragedy that is facing not only Kosovo, but also his country. Indeed, Albania after the so-called financial pyramid scandal (speculative schemes against which post-communist Albania, eager to follow any advice coming from the International Monetary Fund, had no defense) had its economy devastated.

Ambassador Bushati stressed that Albania is ready to do anything it can to save the Kosovars. He stressed that what is happening in Kosovo is “not a war of religion” — thus throwing water on the attempt to pursue a “Clash of Civilizations” between Albanians and Serbs as peoples. He also rejected the idea that Albania intends to pursue a “Greater Albania” scenario.

During the debate, EIR’s Umberto Pascali was given the chance to speak.

Pascali: I have a single question for Ambassador Bushati. The horrors we saw in Kosovo remind us of what happened in Bosnia. And what I would like to ask you to comment on, is the economic dimension of war and the economic dimension of peace. What happened in Bosnia is that the war was stopped, but peace did not come, in the sense that Bosnia was not given the economic means to implement its own reconstruction.

I remember that President Izetbegovic and the group around him were ready to create a sovereign, independent prosperous state in Bosnia, which was not going to be a “Muslim state,” as Henry Kissinger sometimes would say, but a country including the Muslims, the Croats, and the Serbs. The fact that the Bosnian elected government was not given the financial and economic instruments — investments, not charity — to create an economy, was the cause of the very dramatic problems we see in Bosnia — with Republika Srpska on the verge of splitting again, and the weakness of the federal government.

Recently, President Clinton spoke about the necessity for

a new Marshall Plan for the Balkans. My question concerning Kosovo is: If there is no reconstruction, what do you think will happen to all the millions of refugees? What do you think will happen in Albania, that would allow it to be reconstructed immediately, with an effective plan? And what do you think can be done to prevent a spiral of new wars in the area? Recently, an appeal for “Peace Through Development for the Balkans” was issued by the former Chief of Cabinet of President Izetbegovic, Faris Nanic, and Mrs. Helga Zepp-LaRouche, founder of the Schiller Institute. It calls for a vast plan of in-depth investment in infrastructure all over the Balkans, which would link Europe to the Middle East, and with the new Silk Road. This, I believe, is the development plan that Kosovo, Albania, and all the other Balkan countries need right now, not just to stop the war, but to have real peace.

Ambassador Bushati: Concerning the question on the need for economic development. It is very important to stress that one cannot find a long-lasting solution without economic development, and we saw some positive signs recently. The key solution is in the economic development of the region. . . . My fellow Albanian mentioned that Albania is the poorest country in Europe, but also Kosovo and other bordering countries are very poor. Economic development can do very much to prevent conflicts in the future.

President Clinton has been advocating also, during the NATO summit, the need for the Southeast European development plan. We hope that not only NATO and European Union countries, but also other countries, such as the OIC [Organization of the Islamic Countries], will advocate this.

Rev. Jesse Jackson

Build a bridge of trust, communication

The Rev. Jesse Jackson gave the opening speech at the May 8 AMC Banquet Dinner. Here is a summary.

We must stop the bombing, remove the ground troops, and pursue a diplomatic solution in Kosovo, building a “bridge of trust and communication.” Last week, in the meeting with Milosevic, we attempted to build that bridge between Russia, NATO, and Milosevic. If Milosevic had kept the three U.S. soldiers, there would have been no room for communication. The fact that he released the prisoners unconditionally is a small key-hole. In my experience, if you take a key-hole and twist it, you can open doors. It is our mission to bring about reconciliation and reconstruction.

Jackson told the audience that “a call to human-understanding politics will work . . . morally it is right.” He urged

them to “join the struggle as American citizens, to make this a more perfect Union, not to retreat in isolation, but to join the American struggle.” Register and vote, he said. “Be involved in the daily affairs of that which makes America America.”

Jackson emphasized the struggle for public education for all of America’s children, laws guaranteeing fair wages, the rights of women, universal health care, and adequate housing. Dealing with these struggles, he said, gives one the ability and authority to work with coalitions. You have to accept that concept of equal protection under the law.

“Getting American Muslims involved in America is a good thing,” Jackson said. “Remain involved in America. You need a coalition, you need friends.” Jackson concluded by recalling the days in Belgrade and the courage and strength showed by Dr. Nazir Khaja: “Thank God for Brother Nazir.”

Dr. Nazir Uddin Khaja

American Muslims can make a difference

Dr. Nazir Uddin Khaja, president of the American Muslim Council, addressed the AMC dinner on May 8, after Jackson. Khaja is a medical doctor, and said that what is paramount in his profession is to save lives, without consideration of the religion, color, or affiliation of the victims. Khaja began by stressing his internal conflict when he was asked to join the delegation going to Belgrade to negotiate the release of the American soldiers. On one side, he felt instinctive resistance to dealing with Slobodan Milosevic, who “for me represented the image of something close to the idea of evil.”

In previous interviews, Dr. Khaja had revealed that he told Milosevic to his face that he considers the Serbs to be victims as well. “Who then is responsible?” asked Milosevic. “You are,” replied Khaja. But Khaja decided that he had to go and give his contribution to the peace effort.

Here are excerpts from Khaja’s speech:

I knew there were 200,000 Muslims in Belgrade, and that the media never even acknowledged that, or even reported it. Literally, for me, this is living in hell, not only since the NATO bombing started, but also in the form of the oppression that has been unleashed on us Muslims. So, it was my duty to go forward, at least to find out and bring the situation to the media’s attention.

When we arrived there, I told my host that, since the next day was Friday, I would not participate in any of the activities, but that I had to go to pray with my fellow Muslim brothers in the mosque in Belgrade. It turned out that there is only one

mosque in Belgrade, and I found out the name of the Mufti through Brother Sacirbey, who is on the AMC board of advisers here. I had that introduction, I arrived there, I met the Mufti, and obviously I sensed that he was in no position to say anything candidly or clearly.

The mosque is serving the needs of 200,000 Muslims in Belgrade, who are scattered all over. You could see clearly in their eyes what they thought, and yet they couldn’t say much. The mosque was so packed that one had to pray almost on each other’s back. My discussions with the Mufti were: How come you aren’t going to expand the mosque? And where are your schools which will teach your children about Islam? Because in another 10 or 15 years, if you don’t have the schools for the children, Islam will be lost.

He said, “Well, we have a problem here. We asked the government to expand this mosque, for them to give us a new space. We have been requesting this from the government for seven years, and it has not occurred.”

The next day, at the Presidential Palace, when we finished the three-hour meeting — very tough negotiations with Milosevic — and we were coming out, his hand reached out to me as a good-bye gesture, and I grabbed that hand, and I said, “Mr. President, I have a request of you.” He looked at me and he said, “What is it?” So, I said, “There are 200,000 Muslims in Belgrade. . . .” And right away, he took away his hand and said, “Yes, and I have been telling you that they all live peacefully; they are living very comfortably here.”

I said, “That may be the case, but I want to draw your attention to the fact that there is only one mosque in Belgrade.” He said, yes, and I said, “Due to your courtesy, I went and prayed there yesterday and found out that there is hardly any room, even for standing. So the prayers are very difficult. And they have had a request with your government for the last seven years, and it has not been given any approval. Would you kindly look into it? The American Muslims are very concerned about the Muslims in Belgrade.” Milosevic nodded his head and said, “I will look into it.”

I am telling this story to point out to you that by being candid, American Muslims can make a difference and make life easier for other Muslims anywhere. I think that we have a great community, and in the program that you see, I make the statement that American Muslims are the single best asset of Muslims and Islam in the world today.

Let there be no confusion about it, because we are a group which has two essential commodities which are the basic principles in the Koran: freedom and knowledge. Where else in the Muslim world do you see these two qualities? So, from that point of view, I submit to you that our work here is very, very important and will make a difference. It is up to you: If you want an organization which will do your political mandate, which will organize the community, which will interact with other brother and sister organizations which are doing the same kind of work and having an effective presence in America — this is the opportunity. If you don’t want it, this

organization will go into the dustbin of history. But here is an opportunity. So let us just join hands. . . .

While we were coming back on the bus from Belgrade to Zagreb, on the first day of freedom for the three prisoners — they got on the bus with us; they were very happy. They are young kids, they wanted to talk, they enjoyed talking with the American Ambassador and all of that. Suddenly, an idea occurred to me, to talk to one of them, and I said: “Well, this is your first day of freedom, what does freedom mean to you, and how do we teach our children freedom?” So they started talking and then I said, would you mind if you just scribble, each of you, what freedom means to you, in my yellow pad. And this is the essential part of living in America — freedom — and unless you guard your freedom, it will be lost, and we will always be worrying about who is going to do what to us.

So, I want to read this: These are three brief faxes, addressed to my nine-year-old. The first prisoner says: “It is great to be free. Freedom is a great and wonderful thing. The price we paid is huge and I thank you for your support during my capture.”

The next message is from Sgt. Christopher Stone: “Freedom is a feeling that is never truly felt until it is gone. To be free is the most important quality and should be guarded at all costs. My deepest gratitude for your support and that of your father during our captivity and release.”

The last one is from Specialist Stephen Gonzalez. He says: “Freedom is a very valuable release from pressure and fear, often taken for granted. Freedom is a gift to be thankful for. It is a deep feeling and understanding of oneself. I convey my greatest thanksgiving to you and your family for your support for our cause.”

Think about it. Think about what freedom is. I really do not want to go on talking about it. There are many more stories related to that. And with that I will end my remarks and I hope that you will support the AMC.

Lord Nazir Ahmad

‘Can you imagine Union Jacks flying in Mecca?’

Nazir Ahmad was appointed to the British House of Lords by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth on June 20, 1998, and took the title, Lord Ahmad of Rotherham. Ahmad was introduced in the House of Lords on Oct. 13, 1998, as its first Muslim Lord and also the first Pakistan/Kashmiri to take a seat in the British Upper House of Parliament. Ahmad has worked for more than 25 years in trade unions and the Labour Party.

In his speech at the AMC conference, Lord Ahmad upheld the policies of the British Crown (see the introduction to this

Conference Report). He claimed that the attitude of a large part of the British elite, especially Prime Minister Tony Blair and his government, has changed toward the Muslims. A series of concessions is being made, he said, giving as an example his oath when he was sworn in at the House of Lords. When Ahmad said that rather than swear on the Bible, he would prefer to swear on the Koran, he was told that it was against the rules of the House, but that, according to the rules, “whoever breaks the law in the House of Lords, makes a new law.” And so now, he said, “there is a new law in the House of Lords, and it is Law to swear on the Koran. And I took an oath on the same day.”

Here are excerpts from Lord Ahmad’s speech.

Everybody was so happy and wanted to help me on my first day, when all of the doorkeepers and the police officers were saying to me, “Good afternoon, M’Lord.” I was just looking around to see if there was somebody coming behind me. And I was asked: “Is there anything that you like?” “Can we help you with anything?” And I said, “You can, you can get me a room where I can make ablutions and I can pray in the House of Lords.” So I have a room now.

I’ll tell you more about the House of Lords in a minute. But I can tell you that in Britain, we have over 160 Muslim Councilors who are elected, and local authorities up and down the country — not only in the Labour Party, but also in the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats; and the Scottish Nationalists now have put up candidates also who are Muslim. We have dozens of Mayors and Lord Mayors throughout Britain. We have one Member of Parliament who was elected.

And for the millennium celebrations, the biggest celebrations in Great Britain ever held, we will have a Muslim who is Mayor, so the Millennium Mayor will be a Muslim in the United Kingdom.

The government, of course, consults with us. The Ministry of Food and Agriculture, the Foreign Commonwealth Office, the Home Office, have now started to consult with the Muslims on any matters and issues that are related to Muslims and Muslim countries. We have over 1,000 mosques and 2 million Muslims living in Britain. We have 60 Muslim schools, and two are now government funded — which the Tories did not accept before. But since Labour has been in government, they have accepted them and two are now government funded, which opens doors for the rest of the schools. If they wanted to apply they could get funding too.

[We have] doctors, engineers, social workers, judges, and business people who make contributions to society. Recently [one British Muslim] was knighted, because of his contribution to the British society and also to the Muslim community in Britain. Last Wednesday, the Muslim Council of Britain — Can I say that we have copied, we have followed in your footsteps. The American Muslim Council has led the whole campaign, and we are following in your footsteps — for the first time ever, we had the Prime Minister of Britain come to

the Muslim Council of Britain dinner last Wednesday [May 5]. He gave a speech, and I'll quote from what he said.

Tony Blair's speech

Tony Blair said: "Look at your contribution to the richness of British Society, which often goes unrecognized. Worse than that, you are subject to a lot of abuse, what is sometimes called 'Islamophobia,' In too much of the media and through it, in the rest of society, Islam is equated immediately with fanatics, extremists, fundamentalists, and is seen as a threat to the West. This is prejudice. Pure and simple. It can only be spread by those who have never come into contact with Britain's hard-working, peace-loving, generous Muslim community."

Blair went on and made a commitment to supporting the Kosovo refugees, and also to ensure that Britain will support the Kosovo people until each and every one of those Kosovar people returns back into their country. And we are supporting the government.

Can I say that as a Muslim here? And as a Representative in the House of Lords, when the refugees arrived, coming from Kosovo, I was there at the Heathrow London Airport. Muslims in Britain have already raised more than £2.5 million and have already donated to the Kosovo refugees.

I have to say that everything is not rosy. There are problems as well. And I just want to briefly say, that I think that the problems that Muslims have in this country — we too have problems. We have the terrible thing that I have already explained, Islamophobia. And because of this Islamophobia we have debates in the House of Lords and on the 19th of this month, we are having a debate where a minister of government will be there and he will answer questions from the Muslim community in Great Britain.

But, more importantly, you may have seen on television that we have had nail bomb attacks in London, and, thank God, that it was just one person that has been caught, and hopefully he will be dealt with. We have social deprivation, high unemployment among the Muslim community. And in Britain, we have one of the highest populations of Muslim prisoners in Great Britain. Between 1991-97 the Muslim population has grown, it has doubled, and in my maiden speech on Oct. 13, one of the things that I asked the government, was that the British government should employ a full time adviser who will advise the government on the issues related to the Muslim community and the Muslim inmates. And, thank God, they have now appointed a Muslim adviser who will be advising them from now on. And that's not all.

I have debated many issues in the House of Lords which affect the community — small things, like water meters: If churches can be exempted from water charges, then why should the mosques and synagogues and temples have to pay; I have argued that they should be exempted too. Similarly, if I could just tell you, that I asked the British government to extend its consulate office from Jedda to Mecca and Medina,

to Mina and Arafat, and other parts during the period of Hajj Mabruur [the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca and other Islamic holy places in Saudi Arabia] and, thank God, they have agreed that they will do that, providing that the Saudi Arabians' embassy representatives here, providing that the Saudi government will cooperate with them.

And when I was in your State Department yesterday, I told them that this is what we are doing in Britain, and I hope that the State Department will do something for the American Muslim people as well. Because it works both ways. They are not only there to serve Britain or America; they are there to promote Britain and America. Can you imagine having Union Jacks flying in Mecca and Medina, and having two Muslim people or four Muslim people, who are serving from those countries? It is good for their relations. It is good relations for the country as well.

But as British or American Muslims we will have a facility, which we must pay for, and we do pay for. Because this year we had 40,000 Muslims going for Hajj from Britain, and I am sure that the figure would be double or three times from America as well. I think that it is up to yourselves to take it up with the State Department.

Take my appointment: One of the most important things that I have raised is the issue of human rights abuses of Kashmiri people. And since my appointment, I took a delegation to Pakistan, and then to Kashmir, to see the Line of Control, and to see for themselves the atrocities and the abuses of human rights. I can tell you that there is peace between India and Pakistan. But in 1998, over 4,500 violations of the Line of Control were monitored by the United Nations. Over 100 civilians were killed on this site. Over 250 people were injured and 60,000 were displaced.

Now, there are 700,000 soldiers in occupied Kashmir; it is the most heavily militarized area in the world. And what I am saying as a Kashmiri, as the American Muslim Council has already supported the American Kashmir Council, please continue your support. And if you can, put pressure on your politicians and your State Department to ask that America demand that those soldiers withdraw from the streets of Srinigar. In East Timor, there are only 15,000 soldiers. In Kosovo — and rightly we support the Kosovo people — there are 40,000 Serbian soldiers. But in Srinigar there are 3:1 soldiers [for every civilian] that are occupying the streets of Srinigar. There are nine interrogation centers in Srinigar, and you see the reports of Amnesty International, but you don't know because the reports of the human rights committees are blocked, and you don't know [about this] as you know about Europe and the rest of the world.

As you said, you have freedom in this country. You are the Muslim people who will be the most important voice in the whole world in the next few years, and, in fact, I believe that within 12 months, starting now, you have the most important voice. I think it is a challenge for us all. Let's meet that challenge.