

# SPEAKING OUT

## *Reaching Out to Muslims*

BY RICHARD S. SACKS

Our national response to al-Qaida must reflect our awareness that to isolate our enemies, we also need to reach out to Muslims around the world. Regrettably, that message is not always reflected in the welcome we give to Muslims when they visit our country.

The jihadists who attacked us five years ago on 9/11 caused the biggest loss of American lives in a single day since the Civil War. One of their aims was to spread fear. But their main goal was to provoke the West into a war with Islam.

Terror is the tool of the weak. The Islamic miscreants responsible for the atrocity of 9/11 were weak and they were few. Without an over-reaction from us, they had practically no means to unite the world's Muslims under the banner of their unpopular and discredited cause. In fact, ordinary Muslims — in Egypt, Algeria, Sudan, Bosnia, Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan, even in Iran — already had rejected the Islamic dictatorships those fanatics wanted to impose.

For five years, like it or not, we have been engaged in a global ideological struggle, with strong military and political overtones, similar to the Cold War. That struggle — the War on Terror — is being played out through argument, example and perception, as well as through economic aid and development. It is a war for globalization, for individual liberty and human and political rights. It is a war for hearts and minds. Security and politics are important parts of this fight, but the main struggle is ideological.

*As the greatest  
nation in the world,  
the strongest weapon  
in our arsenal is the  
power to persuade.*

The United States and the West have much at stake. Our enemies want to expel the West from Muslim lands, impose backward-looking Salafist regimes, like that of the Taliban, that yearn for an imaginary, seventh-century utopia, and impose a permanent state of “neither war nor peace” between Islam and the West. Such regimes naturally will be inimical to our interests. Our task in the global contest for ideological supremacy is to minimize the number of new recruits for the jihadist cause. Avoiding missteps in the war on terror is crucial, lest our mistakes become valuable recruiting tools for the enemy.

Naturally, after 9/11 Americans became more concerned about their security. And as the attackers were all Arab Muslims, the idea that a “War of Civilizations” was at hand surfaced. But that is not what we are facing, and it is imperative that we avoid the perception that we are at war with Islam. Today confusion on this point is rampant. Just listen to the talk shows and you'll hear average Americans say, “Since we're at war with the Muslims...”

Because the principal fight in the

war on terror is in the realm of ideas, U.S. national strategy must not permit security concerns to overpower or undermine our chances for success in that realm. Ultimately, our security will depend on our success in the struggle for hearts and minds. The last thing we want to do is to turn the Muslim world against us.

The United States was in a strong position to win a global ideological contest with Islamic extremism. The outpouring of global support and sympathy for the United States after the 9/11 attacks was instantaneous, genuine and deeply felt. I was in Seoul at the time. I still remember how hard it was to get to the front gate of the embassy through the mass of flower bouquets on the sidewalk.

### Horror Stories

In Panama, where I was stationed for the past three years, there are around 10,000 Muslims, mostly second-generation Lebanese and Gujaratis. Not long after I arrived, we started getting increasingly dire reports from Muslim travelers. They told us chilling stories about their treatment at U.S. ports of entry.

People who had been traveling to the United States on business for many years, some of them rather large investors, who had gone to school or who had children in school in the United States, were being stopped at our airports, forced to miss their onward flights and interrogated for hours. They told us that U.S. port-of-entry officials had accused them of being terrorists or terrorist supporters,



*Avoiding missteps in the war on terror is crucial, lest our mistakes become valuable recruiting tools for the enemy.*

humiliated them in front of their wives and children, and sometimes informed them that “our embassy in Panama told us to cancel your visa” or “our embassy in Panama told us that you are a terrorist.”

Some were chained and shackled hand and foot and sent to overnight lockups, sometimes in dreadful conditions, sometimes deprived of food and drink for more than a day. Then, given the choice between voluntary deportation and having their visas canceled, or appearing before an immigration judge, they chose deportation.

One Panamanian told us that throughout his ordeal he kept expecting someone to jump out and say, “It’s all a joke. You’re on ‘Candid Camera!’” Alas, that did not happen.

Granted, the al-Qaida attackers were brutal killers, and we have a right — a duty — to protect ourselves. But why turn friends into enemies in the process? The cases I came to know about convinced me that we were on the wrong track. We must be clear and avoid doing exactly what will profit al-Qaida.

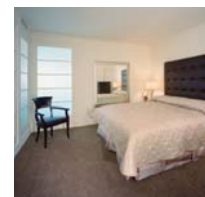
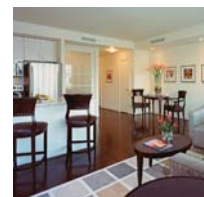
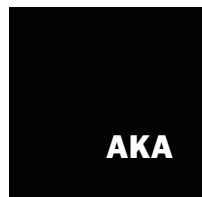
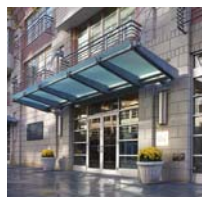
Unfortunately, solving the problem involves confronting some unsettling attitudes and practices that we have adopted. For example, an emphasis on risk avoidance above all else may be making us less secure. We have filled sensitive positions with untrained personnel who often act as if our security

**live better.**

**a brand new custom designed extended stay high rise just two blocks from the White House.**

**we accept government per diem**

AKA reinvents the extended stay experience: fully appointed one and two bedroom furnished apartments with custom mahogany furniture · fully equipped kitchens with stainless steel appliances and limestone countertops · plush towels and linens · king-sized beds · digital premium cable and high speed internet · sony wega tv, dvd, cd stereo · spa services · fitness center · business center with workstations and conference facility · weekday club breakfast with starbucks coffee · afternoon tazo tea · weekly housekeeping · 24/7 front desk and concierge services · on site private parking



**luxury furnished apartments by korman communities**

1710 H STREET NW · WASHINGTON DC  
866.567.6264 · 202.904.2500  
KORMANCOMMUNITIES.COM  
NY NJ PA DC NC



## IMMEDIATE BENEFIT PLAN

*Open Enrollment is currently underway!*



*What can you do now—to help those you love in a time of need.*

The **Immediate Benefit Plan** provides the enrollee's beneficiary(ies) \$15,000 to assist with some of the immediate costs such as funeral arrangements, visits from family and friends, final medical expenses, and unforeseen travel expenses, which can cause a significant financial burden. For \$2 per pay period, you can provide immediate assistance to those you care for.

**Act now!**

*Open Enrollment ends November 15, 2006*

**Prudential Financial**  
Prudential Financial and the Rock logo are registered service marks of The Prudential Insurance Company of America and affiliates, 751 Broad Street, Newark, NJ 07102, USA.

**AMERICAN  
FOREIGN  
SERVICE  
PROTECTIVE  
ASSOCIATION**

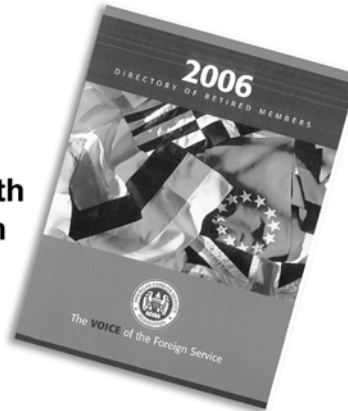
TO LEARN MORE CONTACT AFSPA AT

1716 N Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone: 202-833-4910  
Fax: 202-775-9082  
Web Site: [www.afspa.org](http://www.afspa.org)  
E-Mail: [ibp@afspa.org](mailto:ibp@afspa.org)

## RETIREE DIRECTORY

**ARE YOU IN  
HERE ?**

**Keep AFSA up-to-date with  
your contact information  
in the 2006  
Retiree Directory.**



**Please send changes of address, name and  
telephone number to AFSA Membership Department,  
2101 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037**

**or call toll-free (800) 704 2372, ext. 2  
Or (202) 338-4045, ext. 2**

**or go online at: [www.afsa.org/comment.cfm](http://www.afsa.org/comment.cfm)**

## SPEAKING OUT



*We have a right —  
a duty — to protect  
ourselves. But why turn  
friends into enemies in  
the process?*



increases each time they deny a Muslim entry. There are many instances where Muslims selected by our embassies for the International Visitor Program have encountered similar rejections upon arrival in the U.S. Do we really want to give the impression that adherents to that faith are no longer welcome here?

In addition, our use of raw intelligence data to screen visitors is a good example of "garbage in, garbage out." We are throwing unsubstantiated reports containing thousands of names into a computerized hopper called the National Tracking Center. Once a name is in the system, we are reluctant to remove it. Our officials also seem to be making little effort to vet reports on individuals.

Further, our ports of entry apparently have made no real provision for handling detained passengers who have committed no crime.

In response, more and more Panamanians — not just Muslims, either — are changing their plans to avoid coming to the United States. Instead, they are traveling directly to Europe or China, whether for business, tourism, exchanges or education. Yes, it's more expensive for them, but who wants to risk going to Houston or Miami anymore? Even the real estate boom in Panama is partly due to the ease of getting there and the difficulty of getting to Miami. And the same is

## SPEAKING OUT



true of many other countries around the world. Panama, after all, has a relatively tiny Muslim population.

### Taking Corrective Action

Beginning in 2005, Embassy Panama took some important steps to correct a perceived imbalance in relations with local Muslims. The ambassador hosted Iftar breakfasts marking the end of the Ramadan fasting period, and other meals on religious holidays, for the local Muslim communities. These simple acts of kindness generated a large amount of good will, as participants noted that no U.S. ambassador had ever before invited them to the official residence. Woody Allen once remarked that 90 percent of life is just showing up. Well, sometimes 90 percent of diplomacy is just being polite.

*Sometimes 90 percent  
of diplomacy is  
just being polite.*

The embassy has been focusing attention on individual cases of Muslims turned back at the border to discover what remedies, if any, can be found. It also began a series of frank discussions with local Muslim groups to explain the complexities of visa issuance, in close consultation with State and DHS. More attention is being placed on evaluating information in the National Tracking Center database.

The public affairs section has augmented its speakers program; for instance, the ambassador has made a point of meeting frequently with members of Muslim communities in Panama. The embassy is also playing an important part in the mission's outreach by donating books to local mosques and seeking Muslim participants in the International Visitors Program.

I am sure that Embassy Panama is taking additional steps, for several months have passed since I left post.

As the greatest nation in the world, our power does not come from instilling fear. Rather, the strongest weapon in our arsenal is the power to persuade. And we have that power because people admire our values as a nation: because we are champions of human rights, because of our sense of



Manufacturer rebate subject to change without notice. \*2002-2005 Escape models. \*\*EPA-estimated 24 mpg city/29 hwy on 2.3L I-4 engine with FWD and 5-speed manual; 20 mpg city/25 hwy on 3.0L V6 with FWD and 4-speed automatic.

- ◆ Exclusive invoice based pricing ◆ Custom factory-ordered vehicles
  - ◆ Worldwide delivery ◆ Worldwide warranty
  - ◆ Satisfaction guaranteed ◆ Manufacturer incentives and rebates available
- Proud sponsors of the Foreign Service Youth Foundation

Chrysler • Dodge • Jeep • Audi • Volkswagen • Ford • Lincoln • Mercury

## "Get out of Town!"

In a brand new 2007 Ford Escape

You'll be amazed by all the features the Ford Escape offers...  
all at an exclusive Diplomatic price, including a

### \$2,750 Rebate

"Best Buy" 4 Years in a Row\* — Consumer Guide®

"The Escape is a very capable small SUV thanks to its [available] powerful V6 engine, spacious cabin and car-like handling." — Edmunds.com

- Excellent fuel economy\*\*
- Enhanced peace-of-mind with the available Safety Package
- Extra versatility with the available Cargo Convenience Group
- Luxurious amenities in the available Limited Luxury Comfort Package
- Smooth ride thanks, in part, to its standard 4-wheel independent suspension

Contact Diplomatic Automobile Sales today!

Phone: (516) 496-1806 Fax: (516) 677-3701

[www.diplosales.com](http://www.diplosales.com)

*Diplomatic Automobile Sales* 

Diplomatic Automobile Sales is an authorized distributor  
for the International Diplomatic Community.

## SPEAKING OUT



fair play and justice, our freedom, and our respect for the freedom of others.

Let me close by saying that American officials sometimes tell foreign travelers that having a U.S. visa only allows them to “knock on the door.”

As Americans, we should make sure that what happens after the door opens reflects our ideals. Nothing less will improve our security, enhance the image of the U.S. abroad or increase the odds that we will win the struggle against Islamic terrorism. ■

*Richard Sacks is this year's winner of AFSA's William R. Rivkin Award for constructive dissent by a mid-level Foreign Service officer. Since joining the Service in 1989, he has served in Panama (where he was political counselor), Seoul, Hanoi, Casablanca, Mexico City and Washington, D.C. He*

***As Americans, we should  
make sure that what  
happens after the door  
opens reflects our ideals.***

*currently is deputy director of the Pakistan and Bangladesh office. Prior to joining the Service, he worked as an Associated Press newsman, daily newspaper reporter, and as a World Bank publications editor. He also co-authored Paraguay: The Personalist Legacy (Westview Press, 1991) with Riordan Roett.*

### ***Need to Sound the Alarm About Something?***

Why not write a “Speaking Out” column for the *Foreign Service Journal*?

“Speaking Out” is your forum to advocate policy, regulatory or statutory changes affecting the Foreign Service. These can be based on personal experience with an injustice or convey your hard-won insights into a foreign affairs-related issue.

Writers are encouraged to take strong stands, but all factual claims must be supported and documented.

Submissions should be approximately 1,500 words in length and should be sent via e-mail to [journal@afsa.org](mailto:journal@afsa.org).

Please note that all submissions to the *Journal* must be approved by the Editorial Board and are subject to editing for style, length and format.

# Home Suite Home



The next time you're going to be in DC for an extended stay, make yourself at home at Georgetown Suites. With our discounted monthly rates and large, comfortable suites, you'll feel right at home. Plus we're near the State Department. Call today!

## Georgetown Suites

[www.georgetownsuites.com](http://www.georgetownsuites.com)  
[sales@georgetownsuites.com](mailto:sales@georgetownsuites.com)

**the fun place to stay in DC** 1-800-348-7203