



following areas: Approaches and Challenges for Muslim Communities; Assessing September 11th and the “clash of civilizations” thesis; The Roots of Anti-Western Sentiment; The Applicability of Democracy in Muslim Countries; and Policy Options for Canada.

Key recommendations include:

- Canada could undertake specific initiatives to address the “root causes” of conflict such as improving literacy and skills education in societies undergoing modernization transformations;
- As Canada expands its dialogue with Muslim communities across the world, further collaboration with diaspora communities in Canada could be useful in creating links and potentially strengthening civil society in Muslim countries;
- Canada has an important role to play in developing better models for discourse with others and in creating fora to foster dialogue among Jews, Christians, Muslims and others;
- Canada’s education projects at home could focus on rectifying misconceptions about Islam, and recognizing the existence of debates within Islam, and;
- A balance must be maintained between respect for human rights and combating what some have called “militant Islam.”

The Muslim World: Approaches and Challenges

Muslim communities have often been characterized as a unified, monolithic bloc

known as the “Muslim World.” This description, it has been argued, represents an essentialization of Islam that does not reflect the diversity in Islam and among Muslim communities around the world.³ In addition, both Muslims and non-Muslims have often incorrectly assigned a ‘Muslim’ label to a wide array of cultural, educational and scientific practices. Therefore, instead of a unified “Muslim World,” academics and policy makers should be thinking of communities of Muslims. The “Muslim World” notion is useful only in a limited way, perhaps as an umbrella concept for understanding the more specific challenges and opportunities of Muslim communities across the world.⁴

In public discourse in the West, and among some Muslims, a uniform, uniquely “Muslim” history is portrayed that does not reflect the diversity of Muslim societies and historical experiences. Some historians argue that a unified “Muslim World” existed only until 930 AD. After this point, local interests exerted a powerful influence on Islam. Despite some semblance of uniformity in education and ritual practices, the Muslim communities evolved in a highly diverse and localised way, and the sense of nostalgia for a universal Islamic state only held sway with a minority of Muslims. Colonial experiences, by contrast, illuminated local perceptions of Islam, and as a result, nationalism became very important for Muslim societies. The inability of Muslim communities to work together was demonstrated throughout history, and is still reflected in international organizations.

³ Mushirul Hasan, interview in online video for Thinkers’ Retreat: Clash of Civilizations? (2002), available at the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development website (www.cfp-pec.gc.ca); see also “Discussion Paper for Thinkers’ Retreat: Clash of Civilizations? (2002): September 9-11 and its Aftermath,” available online at: www.ecommons.net/ccfpd-thinkers2002/main.phtml?section=ottawa&show=hasan.

⁴ Roy Mottahedeh, interview in online video for Thinkers’ Retreat on Canada and the Muslim World (2002); available at the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development website (www.cfp-pec.gc.ca); see also Tareq Ismael, interview in online video for Thinkers’ Retreat on Canada and the Muslim World (2002), also available at the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development website (www.cfp-pec.gc.ca).