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Report: Muslims not only group with anti-American feelings

Muslim, U.S. relations studied, discussed

By: Everdeen Mason

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A mix of academics, students and Columbus locals gathered Friday at the Moritz College of Law to discuss deteriorating relations between the Muslim world and the United States.

"Changing Course: A new direction for U.S. relations in the Muslim world," is a report created by 34 Americans with different political orientations, professions and cultural backgrounds, that outlines a peace process with the Muslim world.

"We've produced 5,000 copies and they've all gone," said Paula Gutlove, U.S. Muslim engagement project manager and deputy director for the Institute for Resource and Security Studies. "Columbus, Ohio is the first to see the second printing."

Although the second version of the report was recently published, the project has been in the works for awhile.

"This project started years ago," said Robert Fersh, co-director of the U.S.-Muslim Engagement Project and executive director of Search for Common Ground-USA. "It was in the wake of our military action. ... We wanted to know if the U.S. was on the right course. One of the things we did was say, 'Let's do a search for wisdom. Let's bring together a multidisciplinary approach.' "

The report included research from former politicians, Gallup Center experts, clergy and businessmen. Two of those involved in the report, Dalia Mogahed and Thomas Dine, presented their contributions to the report Friday.

Mogahed, the executive director of Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, presented data from more than 40 countries about perceptions of the United States.

"Anti-American sentiment is not purely an issue on the part of Muslims," she said. The data suggested that a similar anti-American sentiment is present in Europe. It concluded that Muslims admire the freedom of Americans, social justice and technology, but that Americans are arrogant, ruthless and are religious extremists.

Dine said that Muslims and Americans probably agree on criticisms of Western culture.

"If you ask Americans and Muslims what they dislike about the West, they say the same thing: the breakdown of moral and traditional values," he said.

Dine, Principal of the Dine Group and former executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, discussed some of the four pillars of improving relations written in the report. The pillars are diplomacy, better governance, economic reform and mutual respect.

"We've always heard, 'Don't take the military option off the table.' Why don't we put diplomacy on the table?" Dine said.

"The United States is not at war with Islam. Hopefully we can present the right side, the real side, the good side of America to those abroad."

Mohamed Soltan, a junior in economics and member of the Muslim Students' Association, said students should join the dialogue about the report's findings.

"I think we need to relay it to the rest of the student body ... study it more," he said. "Rallies and protests are OK, but they don't do much. You get it out of your system, you don't get in contact with your senators and public officials."

Melanie Mann, organizer of the event and Mershon program and research associate, also said OSU should take part in the discussion.

"'Changing Course' is a call to action for professors," she said. "One professor brought his class here. I would challenge [professors and students] to consider dialogue."

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