

Together, Building a Better America

Once I watched a C-Span TV program of a Jewish society hosting a conference where the Democratic House minority leader Nancy Pelosi delivered the keynote address. In the time of America's "disaster" foreign policy (Democratic Congresswoman Barbara Lee) mainly due to its catastrophic Middle East policy, Congresswoman Pelosi confirmed America's determination to defend Israel's interest. That is just one of the many Jewish influential lobbying activities in the US. I hoped I could have a chance to learn what the Islamic society is acting politically in the US.

I had this chance on September 18, to attend the 10th annual fundraising banquet of Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). I arrived the hotel much earlier and seated at the best observing position (a back corner table). I counted the tables (about 75) and attendance (about ten each table) and realized this is perhaps the largest political gathering of Islamic society in the US. Except three friends (a San Jose city councilmember and his wife, and a lady peace activist), nobody knows me. I have been used to and very confident to be in this kind of environment, because I can learn many new things in such situations.

I am disappointed to notice that one announced speaker, the independent Presidential candidate Ralph Nader, did not come. Although the mainstream media described Nader a "consumer advocate" against corporate domination of American politics, the majority of the Islamic society voted for him mainly because of his Lebanese background, which makes his Middle East policy distinctive from the two parties.

However, the banquet is worth to attend. Congresswoman Anna Eshoo (Democratic) came to accept CAIR's leadership award and delivered common-sense speech. She denounced America's current political situation as a "dark time" and vowed to break through it. The first time I remembered her name when she announced endorsement of Denis Kucinich's bid in the Democratic Primaries early this year. Actually, just in that morning, I was invited and went to host Green Party's table at a community event. I walked over to Republican Party's table and knew that they are now making great effort to prevent Eshoo from being re-elected. She is a trustful friend of the Islamic community in particular, and the progressive society in general.

The keynote speaker is Professor David Cole from Georgetown University Law Center. As an expert, he explained America's national security is hurt, not strengthened by sacrificing the civil liberties and criminal due procedure of any minority part of our society (Islamic community in particular). This is a voice of reason. In fact, as I learned gradually, the majority of law and Middle East academic fields hold this kind of reason and logic. The question is how and why this knowledge of reason is politically marginalized in the US. Compared to

Japan or China, where (social sciences or humanities) knowledge is somehow relevant to policies so reason is oppressed, should we consider the US academic world is blessed because it is basically irrelevant to policies?

This banquet is for fundraising and I watched how the organizer could raise US \$250,000 in this single gathering, “in the name of Allah, most gracious, most merciful“. Assalamu Alaikum (peace be upon you)! Without a revenue over 1 million US dollar (\$1,250,126 in 2003), how could CAIR for one decade dedicate “to improving the American Muslim experience through education, political activism, community interaction and media relations” (from CAIR’s mission statement)?

I once read a Chinese local newspaper reporting the case of the former Guantanamo chaplain Captain James Yee. I am proud that, Justice for New Americans (J4NA, <http://www.j4na.org/>), a Wen-Ho Lee support group, has done a lot for James Yee [1]. CAIR also supported Captain Yee’s right for a fair and open trial, and the result was Yee’s honorable discharge from the army. How excited when James Yee showed up at the stage in person! At least at the conference, there were two Chinese-Americans with the Islamic community for justice of all. Be peace upon him! Be peace upon the Islamic community in the US!

Assalamu Alaikum.

[Note]

1. Thank Lester Lee to remind me J4NA’s wonderful work.

Jing Zhao
Comparative Policy Review, October 2004

