



News & Views

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Our Own Worst Enemy

WASHINGTON, DC—While many voice the slogan, “united we stand, divided we fall,” few realize what is required to achieve unity—common purpose, goals, objectives, and fewer still are willing to surrender their personal ambitions, or perhaps their hidden agenda, for the good of the community. The organization needed to determine such goals and objectives does not exist.

Informal organization are formed when the desired goal requires the resources of two or more persons. Informal organizations become formal organizations to overcome the limits of informal organization. Formal organizations cooperate informally with other organizations to overcome the limits of individual organizations. Ultimately, informal cooperation is insufficient, and organizations enter into formal relationships, thereby, augmenting informal organizations.

Washington is home to a few thousand such organizations representing the common interests of their member organizations, but Muslim organizations remain the exception. During the last decade, Muslim organizations have had modest victories through informal cooperation among ad hoc groupings of Muslim organizations, but have yet to move toward more effective formal cooperation among member organizations.

Prior to the 2000 elections, several Muslim organizations announced their support for candidate George Bush who was elected by a very narrow margin—the Muslim vote in Florida helped get him elected. Following his election

as president, George Bush, launched a massive attack on Iraq, announced his intention to move the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, and gave the green light to Ariel Sharon to attack Palestinian civilians with tanks, and U.S. made fighter planes.

Now Muslims are asking: How was the decision to support candidate Bush made, and what did we get in return for our support? Should Muslims support issues, rather than a party or presidential candidate? What are the goals and objectives of those Muslim organizations claiming to represent us? What are the sources and uses of funds received by these organizations? How can we work together to determine common objectives, and leverage our resources to achieve those objectives?

The answers are not forthcoming.

And while our organizations flounder, our competition is getting ahead. As a minority community in the U.S., with less resources than our competition, the only way to beat the competition is not merely by working harder. We must also work smarter.

In his classic text, *The Functions of the Executive*, Chester I. Barnard defines three essentials for successful organizations: common purpose, communication, and willingness to cooperate.

Common purpose requires the participation of as many representatives of the Muslim community as wish to do so, and effective participation requires a formal organization. Let us, for ease of identification only, call it the American

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Muslim Congress or Conference (AMC), a brief description of which follows:

The mission of the AMC would be to achieve consensus on goals and priorities for the American Muslim community, and to facilitate cooperation toward those goals among AMC member organizations.

Initially, AMC would meet annually. At these meetings, resolutions prepared by task forces and committees drawn from member organizations would be submitted to a vote. Resolutions passed by the AMC would form the basis of a briefing book which would aid AMC members in presenting their position to legislative bodies and other organizations. Using structured decision processes, the resolutions would also be used to determine AMC's goals and priorities.

Membership in the AMC would be open to all Muslim organizations registered with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. As a condition of joining AMC, each organization would be required to submit its IRS tax status determination letter. To retain its membership, each member organization would submit annually its income statement for the preceding year, a letter certifying the number of its contributing members, and pay its assessed fee or dues.

The initial Board of Directors would be the nominees of the first 20 organizations to join AMC, and they would be selected annually from among the top 20 organizations based upon the voting triad described below. The chair would be rotated annually within the Board of Directors.

Funding for AMC (essentially a virtual organization with a part-time person for the first year, and one or two persons in later years) would

be provided by fees paid by member organizations. The fee would be a percentage of the member organization's gross income—the AMC Board of Directors would determine the percentage based on the budget they approve for AMC.

A 75 percent vote, based upon an equally weighted triad—number of member organizations, number of contributing members in each organization, and the organization's gross income—would be required to pass resolutions, and would form the basis for all decisions by the AMC.

AMC would publish an Annual Report which would include the text and voting results of resolutions passed by its members, together with the tax status, membership count, and income statements of its member organizations.

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organizations—on an organization chart, AMC would appear below its member organizations. Its substantive work would be done by committees and task forces drawn from its member organizations. It's own very limited staff, described in a previous article as the organization service provider, would merely facilitate this cooperation, thereby,

leveraging the resources of the entire American Muslim community.

The choice is ours. We can either continue to make marginal gains while our competition gets ever farther ahead, or we can stand united to achieve our common goals—it takes just two motivated organizations, with the right resources, to begin the process of uniting the community. Will we rise to the challenge, or remain our own worst enemy?

