

Running Head: Roxbury Mosque Conflict

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# Conflict over the Roxbury Mosque Construction

## **ABSTRACT**

The paper studies conflict between several Muslim and non-Muslim organizations and individuals over the construction of a mosque and Islamic cultural center in Boston, Massachusetts. The author explores the history of the conflict as well as motivations and roles of the major stakeholders. He tries to understand why the conflict arose and why it has not been resolved for almost four years.

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## **INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND.**

On November 6, 2002, the Mayor of Boston and other government and city leaders gathered on the piece of land near Roxbury Community College at 1 Malcolm X Boulevard in Boston. They participated in the ground breaking ceremony for what was to be the biggest Islamic Cultural Center and Mosque in New England. The Islamic Society of Boston (ISB), which is the oldest and the most influential Muslim organization in the Boston area, nurtured an idea of building the largest mosque and cultural center in New England in Roxbury. After many years of waiting, in 2003 the organization received permission and land from the Boston Redevelopment Authority to build the project. However, the idea met strong resistance from local community and Jewish organizations, especially from the David Project for Jewish Leadership, supported by local press and mass-media. In 2003, a series of articles appeared in the Boston Herald newspaper uncovering alleged links between ISB and organizations suspected of supporting international terrorism. Furthermore, in 2004, a local resident named James Policastro filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the land deal between the ISB and the City of Boston. The ISB responded by a lawsuit against the Mosque opponents claiming that they conspired in order to prevent local Muslims from executing their right to build a place of worship. The conflict is ongoing since all the efforts to resolve it through dispute resolution have so far been unsuccessful.

Why has construction of the Islamic Cultural Center in Roxbury caused so much controversy, and why is the conflict so difficult to resolve? This paper seeks to analyze the roots of this conflict and to explore potential alleys for its resolution. The conflict is an interesting example of how several persons with their sets of biases and beliefs may be able to launch a major conflict that impacts inter-religious peace in the whole city. The

paper will also show how a patchwork of explicit and hidden interests of a rational and sub-rational nature may fuel multi-party conflicts. Not only do these hidden interests explain the deadlock, but a deeper understanding of them may offer avenues for resolution.

### **Interests and Positions as Key Elements of the Conflict.**

In order to explain the roots of the conflict over the Roxbury mosque, we must first examine rational interests and positions of the major stakeholders and the identity concerns from which some of those interests and positions derive. Identity, as a person's or organization's self-affiliation with a particular social group, category, or set of values, will better explain the origins of some people's interests and positions.

The theory of interest- vs. position-based conflict resolution was developed by Fisher and Ury in their famous book *Getting to Yes*.<sup>1</sup> According to the authors, while studying a conflict, one should differentiate whether parties experience conflict over interests or conflict over positions. Interests are desires and concerns that motivate people to act as they do. The most powerful interests are basic human needs, such as security, economic well being, sense of belonging, recognition, control over one's own life, and so on. Usually people have multiple interests in different areas of life at the same time. Some of those interests are compatible and shared with the interests of other member of the society while others are not. When two or more individuals have conflicting interests in the same area of life, a conflict is more likely to emerge. Positions are the concrete and explicit interests of people, which they present to their adversaries in the conflict, typically in maximal form. Simplifying, interests are what people want while positions

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<sup>1</sup> Fisher and Ury, 1981

are what people say they want. Fisher and Ury say that interests are typically the silent movers behind positions. Behind opposed positions people may have interests that are compatible with those of the opposing party. With skill, dispute resolution practitioners or the parties themselves can uncover the real interests of the parties behind their explicit positions and can use those interests in order to build consensus between conflicting parties. In order to succeed in negotiations, a party should understand and acknowledge the interests and position of the opponent and explain one's own interests in the clearest way. Shared interests and differing but complementary interests can both serve as building blocks for a wise agreement.<sup>2</sup>

In the Roxbury Mosque case, the real interests of the parties are significantly different from the positions they expressed in press throughout the conflict. Some of these hidden interests are even shared by major parties on the opposite side of the conflict. Those shared interests may be used by dispute resolution practitioners to build a durable peace agreement between the parties.

### **Ethnocentric Biases and their Role in Conflict**

Although concentration on the real rational interests of the parties often helps them to overcome differences in their positions, sometimes this strategy does not work. Such failure is often due to sub-rational trends such as emotions, unexamined beliefs, or attitudes that accompany interests of certain stakeholders in conflict. By rational I mean interests of which an individual is consciously aware, and which are perceived by individual through a cost-benefit calculus. In other words, rational interests are ones that, as an individual has concluded, will bring that person the most benefit at the least cost.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Interests that have not been subjected to this conscious reflection of how they benefit the individual – typically emotions, but also some beliefs and attitudes – are considered sub-rational. It is important for the dispute resolution practitioner to understand these potential obstacles for the peace building process.

Ethnocentrism is one of the most common of these sub-rational trends that may explain the reluctance of certain conflict parties about resolution of their disputes. Ethnocentrism is a view of things in which one's own ethnic group is the centre of everything and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it<sup>3</sup>. According to the theory, once an individual affiliates him/herself with a particular group, the notion of superiority of this group influences the relations of this individual towards other members of the group and towards society members who do not belong to this group. An individual influenced by ethnocentrism tends to perceive others not as individuals but primarily as members of either his/her own ethnic group (the in-group) or of numerous other ethnic out-groups. Ethnocentrism involves different mechanisms that function within society which mutually reinforce each other and promote in-group integration and out-group hostility. Folkways and historical narratives that are hostile towards other groups are examples of such mechanisms. Ethnocentrism is a “universal concomitant”<sup>4</sup> of the formation and differentiation of social groups because ethnicity is the easiest category for people to be united around and to differentiate themselves from other groups. Ethnocentric sentiments often provide conditions that sustain conflict and competition over resources between different groups as people use their ethnic differences as ground and justification for struggle for resources against competitors.

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<sup>3</sup> Brewer, 1986

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

The most important element of this syndrome is a favorable attitude towards the in-group as opposed to an out-group, which is called ethnocentric bias. Following Brewer<sup>5</sup> one can distinguish two elements of ethnocentric bias: positive vs. negative and strong vs. weak group misperceptions.

First of all, the group influenced by ethnocentrism tends to perceive itself as generally positive with its own standards of value as universal and intrinsically true. On the other hand, it perceives the out-group as generally negative and with wrong values. Such misperception often nurtures conflicts between groups and prevents them from making rational conclusions about each other because perceived superiority does not allow the group members to agree that their opponents' interests may possibly be as legitimate and rationally justified as their own. Brewer argues that there is also a correlation between the proximity of the groups and their negative perception of each other, with conflict highest between immediately proximal groups, lower between groups at intermediate distances, and higher again for more remote groups.

Ethnocentric bias as a set of positive vs. negative misperceptions plays a very important role in the Roxbury Mosque conflict, explaining why certain stakeholders are unwilling to understand the interests of their opponents. Some of the parties may be focused on their own positions as more legitimate simply because of their ethnocentric bias towards their in-group, while they perceive their opponents as an out-group with *a priori* illegitimate claims. Interests of both Jewish and Muslim groups may result not only from their rational needs but also from the notion of their own superiority and righteousness. Jewish groups may view the conflict in relation to their Jewish identity and their perception of Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East, which is an important

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

part of this identity. At the same time, Muslims may not be willing to listen to the allegations from the Jewish side simply because they may perceive any Jewish claims as illegitimate per se because they emanate from an unfavorable out-group of lower magnitude than their own in-group.

Groups that are influenced by the ethnocentric bias not only perceive their own group as the only right one, they also perceive it as the strongest one, while opposite groups are perceived as weak. “It is the belief that if we attack the other group severely enough, they will become demoralized and fractious, unable to remain united, and will give up; but that the more severely the other group attacks us, the stronger we will become and the more we will stand united and dedicated to the victory”<sup>6</sup>. This view was likely present among the anti-mosque stakeholders when they originally planned the media campaign against ICC construction.

Therefore, the interests and tactics of the key stakeholders could be influenced by ethnocentric biases, which a dispute intervener cannot ignore. I will examine what role ethnocentric biases play in the conflict.

### **Perceived Threat and the Role of Interdependence Biases**

If ethnocentrism explains some of the stakeholder interests and tactics, David Project’s opposition to Islam and motivations and biases of the other anti-mosque group members may be explained through interdependence theory. Unlike ethnocentrism, interdependence theory states that ethnocentric identity alone rarely plays a key role in the formation of in-group boundaries. Rather it is interdependence, which results from a shared threat rather than similarity alone which brings people together and strengthens

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<sup>6</sup> Brewer, 1986; Weitzman, Kew, 2002

the in-group boundaries. Flippen and others <sup>7</sup> mention that people form social categories on the basis of similarity/dissimilarity with others but that these categories do not become in-groups/out-groups until some kind of perceived interdependence creates the belief that members of different categories will act for or against self-interest. If certain individuals have similar interests they tend to form a group in order to achieve those interests more easily. Nevertheless, they may, to a certain extent, act against each other even within the newly formed group since they do not share 100% common interests in all things and may be competitors with each other in other ways. However, should some external force threaten the shared interests of the group, its members will feel that they are dependent on each other in an attempt to protect their shared interests, and this in turn activates the in-group/out-group bias against the out-group that is the source of the threat. External threats make group members forget their competition and act unanimously for the sake of their common interest. For example, thirteenth century Japan was torn apart by feuding landlords for almost 200 years, but those landlords were able to unite in less than a year when faced with the common threat from the Mongol empire. Similar trends are observed in smaller social groups as well.

Interdependence biases develop in a manner resembling ethnocentric biases. The in-group members, who have a perception that they are dependent on each other in their attempt to withstand the external threat, perceive their group members as right and positive as opposed to the wrong and negative out-group, which originally created the threat. In order to ensure the success of a struggle against the threat they need to believe that their in-group members, whom they rely upon, maintain better characteristics and are stronger than the out-group members who threaten their interests.

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<sup>7</sup> Flippen & others, 1996

Groups that oppose each other in the Roxbury Mosque conflict are quite diverse. Perceived threats from their opponents may be the reason for them to stay united. Their negative perception of each other may also be influenced by threats they see in each other's activities. I will examine if the key stakeholders perceive their opponents as a threat and how these perceptions influence their interests, positions and generally their behavior. I will also try to understand why exactly stakeholders believe that their opponents constitute a threat for their in-group.

To summarize, relations between interests and positions give the most comprehensive explanation of the conflict by uncovering its origins and driving elements. Hidden interests behind explicit positions should be uncovered, understood and addressed in order to resolve the conflict effectively. Ethnocentric and interdependence biases, beyond rational interests, explain some of those hidden interests, and are often the ones that are the most difficult to address. Such biases can explain why some stakeholders are unable to accept dispute resolution even though it could address most of their rational interests.

## **RATIONALE AND METHODS OF STUDY**

Fortunately, the conflict over the construction of the Islamic Cultural Center in Roxbury did not involve broad audiences of Boston residents. As a result, those who are interested in the issue obtain most of their information about the conflict through the press. However, I found out that the way mass media describes the key participants of the dispute does not reflect the complexity of the relationships between them and makes it

hard to outline their interests, positions, and identities, which are needed for the comprehensive analysis of the conflict. For example, *The Jewish Advocate*<sup>8</sup> described the group of people supporting the Mosque as a Boston Muslim community. At the same time, many Muslims argue that the diversity within them makes it impossible to speak about a single Muslim community within any American city<sup>9</sup>. On the other hand, mass media often refers to David Project as a Jewish organization that is the main group opposing the ICC construction, while no publication mentions that this organization was not the one who started the conflict. Therefore, in order to correct these and other misperceptions of the conflict, I decided to use the court findings and the oral statements of my interviewees in order to create a more comprehensive outline of the key parties of the conflict. It is impossible to pursue any attempts of dispute resolution of the conflict until the interests, positions, and relations among different participants are carefully and fully understood.

Therefore, the study will follow the following order. First, I will discuss if economics, specifically land, played any role in the conflict escalation. Then, I will examine rational hidden and explicit interests and positions by each stakeholder. After that I will study sub-rational factors which influenced stakeholders in addition to their rational interests. Finally, I will apply my findings to the attempts to resolve the conflict.

It is hard to uncover the identity and interests of the parties without comprehensive interviews with the parties themselves. However, the pending lawsuits make interviews with direct participants in the conflict extremely hard. Representatives of the Islamic Society of Boston, David Project, and several other stakeholders refused to

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<sup>8</sup> *Jewish Advocate*, November 3, 2005

<sup>9</sup> see for example *New York Times*, March 11, 2007

participate in the study referring to their obligations as parties to a lawsuit. Therefore I decided to interview key people who were somehow involved into the conflict but are not stakeholders per se at the time of the research. Each of the participants was a source of information about a particular element or participant in the conflict. At the same time I asked each of them about their general understanding of the conflict, its dynamics and origins. Here is the description of the five participants, whom I interviewed for the purpose of this study.

**Salma Kazmi** was an Assistant Director of the Islamic Society of Boston in 2003-2006. She was responsible for the marketing and outreach related to the Roxbury Mosque project. She oversaw the project on behalf of the ISB at the time when the conflict escalated in 2003 till the time when the first mediation efforts were made in 2006. She is a valuable source of information regarding ISB itself, its policies, composition, and motivations. At the time of the research she no longer worked with the ISB therefore she was able to talk about most of the issues not through the ISB representative.

**Father Raymond Helmick** is a Jesuit priest and Dispute Resolution professor at Boston College. He was one of the initiators of the first mediation effort that was made through the Inter-religious Center of Public Life organization. He is knowledgeable about variety of religious organizations in Boston area and about the personalities of some of the key stakeholders as well as about the details of the peace building process.

**Charles Radin** is a Boston Globe reporter who covers the Roxbury Mosque conflict story in Boston Globe since 2005. His perspective of the conflict is one of a

professional journalist of a major newspaper. His opinion is important for me in order to understand role and motivations of the Boston Herald, Fox-25 News TV channel and their journalists as important stakeholders of the conflict. He is also familiar with the legal dimension of the conflict and personally knows lawyers of the parties.

**Michael Felson** is one of the leaders of the Workmen's Circle Jewish community organization. This organization became involved in the conflict in its later phases but took a very active position. It has now issued a second call for mediation and tries to bring the parties as well as their former mediators to the negotiation table. As a left-wing Jewish leader, Michael Felson expressed interesting perspectives on the conflict, which helps to understand how the non-conservative Jewish community feels about the conflict. I was also interested in his vision of a possible solution to the conflict.

My last respondent asked me not to identify his/her name and organizational affiliation. He/she is a chairman of the Boston chapter of a US Jewish organization of right-wing pro-Israeli orientation. He personally knows several members of the anti-mosque group and is very knowledgeable about the structure of the Jewish community of Greater Boston as well as on the national level. He/she provided extremely valuable information on the identities of William Sapers, David Project and their affiliates. Besides that, he/she was able to explain how some Jews may feel about the conflict and about Muslim community of Boston in general.

Interviews are only one part of the research. In order to outline the identities and interests of the key stakeholders it was not enough to record other people's opinions about them. I had to examine their own opinion as far as it was possible without actually interviewing them. Therefore I studied the web-materials and news-paper articles which

included the public statements made by the parties. Although most of such statements represented explicit positions of each stakeholder, sometimes it was possible to uncover the real interest that was hidden behind this or that statement. These conclusions were later verified by my interviewees' statements and only then I was able to draw conclusions about this or that party's hidden interests.

The factual material about the sequence of events and developments of the conflict were obtained primarily from other valuable sources, which are court decisions. Since the conflict is in its litigation phase, there are at least two full-scale lawsuits pending against both pro- and anti-mosque group. In each of the lawsuits, courts did a significant job of fact discovery, made through subpoenas and affidavits of different participants. Therefore I did not have to write my own narrative of the conflict but could use the already verified court conclusions in such cases as Policastro vs. City of Boston, and ISB vs. The Boston Herald.

For this study, I refer to the Islamic Society of Boston as to the ISB and to their Islamic Cultural Center project as ICC project or simply as Roxbury Mosque. I also summarize the ISB and the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) under the term pro-mosque group as opposed to the anti-mosque group comprised of David Project, *Herald* and their affiliates.

## **LAND AND ITS ROLE IN THE CONFLICT**

Land plays a dual role in the conflict between the Islamic Society of Boston and the David's Project group. One role is rather obvious. The land deal between ISB and

Boston Redevelopment Authority itself is highly criticized by the anti-mosque group members. Therefore the appropriateness of the land acquisition by ISB is a major explicit cause of the conflict. The second role the land might have played in the conflict is not as obvious. It is possible that the land parcel, designated for the ICC construction, could have been an interest of some other party and therefore triggered the negative reaction of the anti-mosque group. In this paper I will examine the history of the land parcel and its obvious as well as hidden role in the conflict.

### **History of the Land Parcel**

The controversial piece of land, where the ICC construction is currently taking place, is located in Boston district of Roxbury, between King Street, Malcolm X Boulevard and Dudley Street, and across the street from Roxbury Community College. The precise history of this property is described in the Suffolk Superior Court decision in the *ISB, et al. vs. Boston Herald, et al. case No.05-4637*. According to this document, the property was owned by the City of Boston until 1970, when it was included into the Urban Renewal Plan, adopted by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) and was assigned the code name R-14. One of the plan's goals was to upgrade the distressed areas in the city through development, which will benefit the surrounding community. In 1990 the BRA suggested that the R-14 property should be designated as a Community Facilities District and be used as a community center, place of worship, or adult learning center<sup>10</sup>. In 1992 the BRA tried to attract potential developers of the R-14 property through the Request for Proposals that was published in *Boston Herald* on October 31 and November 03, 1992. The Muslim Council of Boston was the only organization to

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<sup>10</sup> Roxbury Neighborhood Zoning Amendment, 1991

respond to the Request. It proposed to build a large mosque together with the educational center on the property described. The significant growth of the Muslim Council membership at that time was coming from Roxbury neighborhoods, therefore the organization's interest in the land was natural. On December 22, 1992 the BRA accepted the Muslim Council of Boston as an official developer of the land R-14. However, difficulties with fundraising prevented the project from being started until 1998 when the Islamic Society of Boston (ISB) expressed interest in the parcel. The ISB already administered the small mosque in Cambridge but needed a bigger place of worship for its growing community. The Muslim Council recognized the ISB as its partner and asked the BRA to substitute it as a developer of the land parcel in Roxbury. The substitution took place on 10/29/1998, almost six years after the original developer was assigned.

The Islamic Society of Boston started to move forward the project that was originally approved by BRA. It obtained all necessary permits from the public agencies and held preliminary consultations with local communities regarding the project. It developed and submitted to the BRA a Project Notification Form which set forth all the aspects of the project including the public benefits for the local community, especially for Roxbury Community College, next door to the project. After the minor BRA remarks were addressed by the developer, the BRA issued the "Certificate of Compliance" (01/12/2000) and "Scoping Determination" (02/09/2000) – two documents required for the final designation of the land. Over the next several months, the ISB completed the required Article 80 review and negotiated the final terms of the land sale with the BRA. According to the Term Sheet signed by the parties, the BRA was ready to sell the Parcel R-14 to the ISB for the purpose of the Islamic Cultural Center and mosque construction.

The ISB agreed to pay \$175,000 in cash and provide local community with the benefits valued at \$465,326. Additional \$43,820 was credited to the ISB to cover the cost of land clean-up that it had already performed. The local community benefits included the development of the research library and lecture series for Roxbury Community College. The ISB also promised to assist the College Foundation with its ongoing fundraising campaigns<sup>11</sup>.

On August 10, 2000 the BRA finally approved the ISB as a final developer of the Parcel R-14 and agreed to follow the Term Sheet of the purchase that was signed earlier. However, the ground-braking ceremony and the official closing on the land were postponed because of the financial and technical difficulties encountered by the ISB. The ground-breaking occurred on November 07, 2002 and the closing ultimately took place on May 16, 2003. The final documents such as Land Disposition Agreement and the Quitclaim Deed were drawn up and ISB's obligation to provide the public benefits was incorporated into its Cooperation Agreement with BRA.

Prior to October 28, 2003 when the first newspaper article targeted the project described, there was no conflict as such and the land did not play significant role in it. Two of the four major parties of the conflict identified themselves at this stage of the conflict development. The Islamic Society of Boston acquired control over the land and began construction while the Boston Redevelopment Authority generally assisted the ISB in its efforts. The David Project and affiliated institutions and personalities were not active at that point. Whether the Parcel R-14 became a hidden interest of an anti-mosque group prior to the ground-braking ceremony will be discussed at the end of this section.

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<sup>11</sup> see *SSC, ISB, et al. vs. Boston Herald, et al. case No.05-463*

### **Land Deal Illegitimacy as a Reason for Conflict.**

The ground-breaking ceremony for the project that took place on November 07, 2002 also inaugurated the long-lasting conflict over the Islamic Cultural Center construction. As it was later discovered by the Court, the most active anti-mosque group members found out about the project after the ground-breaking ceremony was widely publicized in press. However, it was not before the autumn of 2004 that the land deal issue became the major explicit point of disagreement between the opponents in the conflict. In October 2003, the first series of articles appeared in *Herald* targeting the ICC construction. This was followed by the second series in January 2004 authored by *Herald* journalists Jonathan Wells and Kevin Wisniewski. Although the articles put pressure on the ISB and its plans to build the mosque, the question of the relevancy of land deal was never raised by either series. The only concerns of the anti-mosque group at that point were terrorism links of the ISB members and their anti-Semitic statements<sup>12</sup>.

The situation changed rapidly in summer of 2004. At that point the anti-mosque group was replenished by what became its most active member - the David Project of Jewish leadership. The new allies decided to reinforce their media campaign with the legal action. The land deal between the ISB and the BRA was chosen as a target of a lawsuit in September 2004, sixteen months after the ground-breaking ceremony for the project actually occurred. As part of the discovery process for another lawsuit, the court studied the e-mail correspondence between the anti-mosque group members. The court discovered that none of the anti-mosque group members lived in the neighborhood where the construction took place. They also did not have enough support from the local

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<sup>12</sup> see Mass-Media part of Anti Mosque Group Chapter, and Herald, January 14, January 15, 2004; October 28, October 29, 2003

community, which generally favored the project. As a result, they had to find an appropriate plaintiff, who was a local resident and therefore had a proper legal standing and could question the land deal in the plaintiff lawsuit. These activities resulted in the lawsuit *James C. Policastro vs. City of Boston et al. No.04-4279C*. In his lawsuit James Policastro challenged the terms of sale agreement between ISB and BRA because he believed that the land was sold to the ISB at a price below market value and that the BRA together with Roxbury Community College gave unconstitutional preferences to Islam as a religion when they arranged a deal with a religious institution. The lawsuit was supported by the series of immediate publications in press, where the issues of terrorism and anti-Semitism gave place to the concerns about constitutionality and the fairness of the land deal<sup>13</sup>. The journalists found out that the BRA originally valued the land parcel at \$ 2 million rather than the \$465,326 of the final price. Furthermore, the *Herald* reporters discovered that the Deputy Director for Special Projects at BRA, Muhammad Ali Salaam also acted as a fundraiser for the Islamic Cultural Center - a fact, which gave the anti-mosque group further ground for the critique of the project.

The reaction of the pro-mosque group to the Policastro lawsuit and related press publications was quick but not very intense. The ISB limited its response to the affidavits for the court<sup>14</sup>, written explanations on its website<sup>15</sup> and to several interviews to mass media. The summary of their counterarguments was as follows.

a) The price of the land was determined by the independent appraisal prepared by Meredith and Grew Inc. on 12/16/1998.

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<sup>13</sup> *Herald*, Oct. 2004

<sup>14</sup> court affidavit

<sup>15</sup> Policastro Lawsuit Fact Sheet, (no date) [www.isboston.org](http://www.isboston.org)

b) The nearby properties of the same size were valued at prices comparable to the one of the R-14;

c) The BRA has conveyed land to no less than seventeen religious organizations of various denominations since 1962, and therefore did not give special preferences to Islam as a religion.

d) Muhammad Ali Salaam was involved in fundraising activities for the ICC project, but he did that as a regular member of the ISB and his actions were approved by the Massachusetts Ethics Commission.

The response resulted in the further discussion in the anti-mosque press. After October 2005, when ISB filed the anti-defamation suit against their opponents, the land issue was usually discussed together with the issues of alleged terrorism threats and anti-Semitic statements that used to be a subject for separate discussions. Most of the arguments of the ISB opponents repeated that of the late 2004 early 2005 publications. *The Boston Globe*, *Boston Herald* and *Thee Weekly Dig* were the main mass media covering the debate.

The last attempt to bring the public opinion to the land issue of the conflict took place in spring 2006. By that time the city Councilor Jerry McDermott tried to hold the public hearing in order to publicly raise questions of the land deal between BRA and ISB. However, both BRA and ISB refused to participate in hearings, scheduled for April and mid-May of 2006 referring to the pending litigation in Policastro suit.

The Policastro lawsuit itself passed several reviews and was finally dismissed by the Suffolk Superior Court on February 16, 2007 for the reason that the plaintiff failed to

file the lawsuit within 30 days after the land deal, as it is stipulated by law. As of March 02, 2007 the plaintiff and his attorney have not announced if they will pursue the appeal.

### **Hidden Land Agenda as a Reason for Conflict**

This was a brief story of the explicit role that the land played in the dispute. The question one should raise after studying this information is: whether the issue of land deal fairness really was the main concern of the anti-mosque group and therefore was the prime cause of the conflict, or whether it was an effective tool for them to stop the Roxbury Mosque construction while the real reason to do so remains far from the property issues. Chronology of the events may help the investigator to answer this question. While the anti-mosque group members keep saying that the controversy of the land purchase always was their concern the Policastro lawsuit history and its media coverage do not support this claim. As it was mentioned earlier, there was no single publication about the ICC construction questioning the fairness and legal appropriateness of the land deal between the ISB and the city of Boston. All of the publications prior to the October 2004 only raised different kinds of concerns about the ISB ties to various terrorist and anti-Semitic organizations and individuals. It is hard to believe that the individuals from the anti-mosque group were indeed concerned about the details of the land deal but remained silent for almost sixteen months since the deal was finalized. The lawsuit preparation could have taken time but it would have looked natural if at least several publications would have appeared right away after the deal. The fact that this did not happen speaks in favor of my earlier statement that the land issue drew the anti-mosque group's attention later in the process of conflict development as an effective tool

to stop the project. The inter-group correspondence, disclosed by the discovery process of the anti-defamation lawsuit actually proves this statement. The e-mail written by Anna Kolodner, one of the directors for David Project, on 09/02/2004 said:

“...Evan Slavitt [attorney for Policastro] is preparing to file a lawsuit. The BRA will be a defendant and we have identified a viable plaintiff...Filing the law suit will serve to trip the switch on the larger agenda of exposing the radical fundamentalist underpinnings of the Mosque and its leaders.”<sup>16</sup>

The use of land deal issue by the anti-mosque group is a perfect example of positional bargaining as it is explained in “Getting to Yes” by Fisher and Ury (1981). As it was discussed above. According to the book, conflicting party often tends to hide its real interests behind convenient explicit positions, which they articulate to their opponents. The opponents, however, take this position in all good faith as a real interest of the party and try to bargain over it. That is exactly what happened between the anti-mosque and pro-mosque groups when they disputed in press the fairness of the land relocation agreement. Although it was not the real interest of the anti-mosque group, the ISB took it seriously and was able to prove via court the groundlessness of the land-related accusations. Nevertheless, this did not resolve the problem but contributed to the further alienation of the parties and further law suits, such as an anti-defamation lawsuit discussed further. This outcome shows that the parties did not uncover each others’ real interests, and were stuck negotiating over positions<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, the land deal issue itself should not be a central concern in order to resolve the Roxbury Mosque dispute.

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<sup>16</sup> *SCM, ISB vs. Boston Herald, No. 05-4637*

<sup>17</sup> Fisher, Ury, 1981

If the fairness of the land deal was not the real concern of the anti-mosque group, the last question that needs to be answered is whether the land itself, not the land deal, became the reason for conflict. From an outsider's perspective, it looks quite possible that the valuable land not far from downtown Boston might have been an attractive property.

However, this statement seems to be far from reality once the situation is examined closely. First of all, the geographical location of the land does not seem interesting for any of the Jewish community organizations. Roxbury was a predominantly Jewish neighborhood until the Civil Rights movement of 60's. Once African Americans were allowed to move into the white neighborhoods, Boston authorities, dominated by Irish and Italian communities, encouraged them to move to traditionally Jewish areas such as Mattapan and Roxbury instead of Catholic quarters of North End and South Boston. Banks issued low interest loans for African Americans if they purchased property in certain areas; as a result, Roxbury, Mattapan and large parts of Dorchester became predominantly Black neighborhoods and Jewish population moved to Brighton and Brookline areas. Most of the synagogues and community centers were closed due to the declined population of Jewish people, who did not feel comfortable within Afro-American cultural environment<sup>18</sup>. At the same time, many of the newly arrived African-Americans became Muslims due to such organizations as "Nation of Islam," active in the 1950-60's. Several small mosques began to function in Roxbury and Dorchester since that time (Masjid Al Hamidulillah, Masjid Al-Noor, Masjid Al-Quran). Therefore it is unlikely that the Muslim and Jewish organizations would have been competing for the land parcel mainly because of the lack of social base for any Jewish activities in the neighborhood accompanied by the growing Muslim influence. There were no indications

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<sup>18</sup> Gamm, 1999

in press that any of Jewish organizations expressed interest in the mentioned parcel of land for any religious or cultural purposes.

The parcel was reserved for development in 1970 Urban Renewal Plan. In 1992 the Muslim Council of Boston was considered as a developer for the land. In 1998 the ISB succeeded the deal from the Council and started a public hearing process for the project. Until 2002, when the ground breaking ceremony for the Islamic Center occurred, no other organization expressed an interest in developing the land<sup>19</sup>. If any organization or individual had an interest in acquiring the land, it would have tried to break the deal on the early stages of the project, but there was no opposition to it until 2003, when the construction had already begun.

Hence, it is hard for me to say that the land itself became a stumbling block for the parties of the conflict. In the next part of this paper I will explore the real interests that pushed the anti-mosque group to start the conflict over the Islamic Cultural Center construction.

### **THE PRO-MOSQUE GROUP AND ITS ROLE.**

For the purpose of this study I refer to the supporters of the ICC project as the pro-mosque group.

#### **The Islamic Society of Boston.**

The Islamic Society of Boston plays a central role in the conflict described. It is usually referred to as a major party to the conflict. There are two reasons for such an attribution. First, the organization was the major developer of the ICC project that

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<sup>19</sup> *SCM, ISB vs. Boston Herald, No. 05-4637*

provoked to so much controversy. Second, the ISB is mentioned as a party in two lawsuits, which resulted from the original conflict<sup>20</sup>.

The ISB was founded in 1981 by a group of Muslim student activists from Harvard University, Boston University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Northeastern University, Wentworth Institute of Technology, Suffolk University, and Tufts University for the purpose of preserving their Islamic identity and helping them observe their obligations as Muslims. One of the group's leaders at that time was Abdurrahman Alamoudi – a controversial public figure who is now serving 23 years in prison for participation in a plot to kill a Saudi royal family member<sup>21</sup>. This connection played an important role in future accusations from the anti-mosque group. The ISB originally held its gatherings on MIT campus, but later it was able to purchase the property in Cambridge, Massachusetts at 204 Prospect Street, where it is located now. The group administers a mosque and a library on Islam. It is currently led by Imam Basyouny Nehela and offers number of educational and holiday programs for Muslim children and adults. There was some controversy about how much the group does represent the Boston Muslim community. The wide attention that the press devoted to the ISB may create an image that the organization represents the majority of Muslims in the area. However, my conversations with the respondents who are knowledgeable about this issue do not support this notion. Salma Kazmi, the former assistant director of the ISB said that the organization has roughly 700 members, but the staff that is responsible for most of the activities never exceeded 3-4 persons. She said that unlike other denominations, relationships between Boston Muslims are mostly informal. There is no

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<sup>20</sup> SCM. ISB vs. Boston Herald, No 05-4637;  
SSC. Policastro vs. BRA, Civ. No. 04-74292

<sup>21</sup> *Washington Times*, 5 October 2003

single Mufti (Muslim leader) for the city of Boston, each mosque has its own imam, and each Muslim organization is financially and organizationally independent from the others<sup>22</sup>. This information is confirmed by Father Raymond Helmick<sup>23</sup>, who is one of the directors of the Inter-Religious Center of Public Life in Newton, MA, and a Dispute Resolution professor at Boston College. It is also supported by the members of Muslim Student Associations of several Boston universities whom I talked to in private. There are at least 14 active Muslim organizations accessible by Boston public transportation, with some of them (Islamic Center of New England) maintaining the same membership size as the ISB does<sup>24</sup>. However, most of the Muslims whom I talked to referred to the ISB as to the most credible Muslim organization in the Boston area. The construction of the New England's largest mosque would have enhance the status of the ISB and perhaps make it the major voice for the Boston Muslim community, but this did not happen so far.

Summarizing these facts I feel inappropriate to say that Boston Muslims all together became a party of the Roxbury Mosque conflict. Although the conflict itself was definitely discussed within certain Boston Muslim circles, the ISB does not directly represent the majority of them. Therefore an observer should not generalize and should refer specifically to the ISB as an organization when talking about the Muslim side of the conflict.

Since we defined who the major group is that supports the ICC project it is necessary to understand how this group defines itself within society and what are the interests and positions of the group in the conflict discussed. On its web-site, the Islamic Society of Boston proclaims that "We, the Islamic Society of Boston, practice and

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<sup>22</sup> Kazmi, p.c. 2007

<sup>23</sup> Helmick, p. c. 2007

<sup>24</sup> see <http://www.pluralism.org/directory/>

promote a comprehensive, balanced view of Islam. We strive to embody the “middle path” to which our scriptures call us – a path of moderation, free of extremism, and representative of the Islamic vision of a healthy community.”<sup>25</sup> According to the same source the Society follows such values as: Commitment to the Qur’an and the example of the Prophet Muhammad, Sincerity, Sanctity of Life, Respect for the Individual, Condemnation of Bigotry, Equality of Genders, Engagement with Broader Society, Cooperation with Regulators and Authorities, and Service.<sup>26</sup> The values and principles listed create an image of the organization that follows the self identification of what is often called “moderate Muslims” as opposed to “pure” or “extreme” Muslims.<sup>27</sup> It is interesting that the opposite side often condemn the ISB members of being militant, xenophobic, intolerant, uncooperative, etc.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, in order to verify that the ISB’s claimed identity is close to the real self-identification of its leaders, it is necessary to look, how the other sources describe the organization. Imam Abdullah Faaruuq, president of the Islamic Society of New England and an Afro-American Muslim said that he sees the ISB “as a very balanced group trying to find their way in America.”<sup>29</sup> Reporter Charles Radin, who covered the ICC conflict in *Boston Globe* for several years, mentioned that he heard from several sources that the ISB’s Imam Basyouny Nehela has a reputation of a very moderate and modern Muslim leader.<sup>30</sup> Father Helmick from Boston College has the same opinion about the ISB leadership in general.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “History of the ISB” (no date);

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> see for example El Fadl, 2005

<sup>28</sup> see for example Charles Jacobs in *The Boston Globe*, December 25, 2005

<sup>29</sup> *Herald*, October 28, 2003

<sup>30</sup> Radin, p. c. 2007

<sup>31</sup> Helmick, p. c. 2007

Being moderate and Muslim is only one element of the ISB's identity. The second important element of this identity is the immigrant culture. Although the organization never positions itself as an immigrant one, it is clear that the immigrants' culture is an important part of the ISB's identity. According to Pluralism Project database, the immigrant population of the current ISB mosque in Cambridge is significant and the society offers English classes for its members who are non-native English speakers.<sup>32</sup> Finally, the organization itself was founded by international students who later decided to stay in the US and to become citizens.

The immigrant element of the ISB identity is important for outlining the interests of the ISB in the Cultural Center construction. One of the central features of any immigrant group is striving for unity in front of alien environment of an unknown country. This is typical for any group that tries to preserve its identity and compete successfully with the larger and competitive out-group, which may sometimes be perceived as a threat to a weaker in-group.<sup>33</sup> Being a minority in front of the perceived threat of hostile non-Islamic foreign society is a powerful stimulus for immigrants to maintain stronger relationship with members of their group. However, groups that are based solely on ethnicity are usually too small, dispersed and economically insignificant to have a notable voice in huge and diverse American population. Therefore, different ethnic groups tend to find broader common categories that may unite them into a more visible minority. Religion, and Islam in particular, is one of the common categories that can bring together large numbers of immigrants to one place where they can establish connections with other people who share their values and immigrant experiences. "The

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<sup>32</sup> Harvard Pluralism Project (no date);

<sup>33</sup> Taifel, Turner 1985;  
Flippen & all, 1996

intermingling of all nationalities, colors and cultural and linguistic groups can be observed in any mosque at Friday prayers.”<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, native-born Muslims tend to cooperate with immigrant organizations too, both because some of them may share the immigrant legacy and also because they are a minority within American society as well. Therefore it is natural for any organization with a significant immigrant, religious or other minority component to attract as many new participants as possible in order to enhance its influence in an alien environment. The ISB is not an exception and it seems clear that its major interest in the conflict is to open the Islamic Cultural Center in Roxbury. The fully-functional ICC with the biggest mosque in New England would attract hundreds of new members, both immigrant and American-born, to join the ISB community and to make the ISB an organization with the largest membership in the area. This, for its part, would allow Muslim immigrants to feel the significance of the Boston Muslim community and enable them to produce a political voice that city and state government will hear. The ISB’s explicit position fully corresponds with the interest described. The ICC will become “a highly visible testimony to the presence of Muslims in Boston” says the project web-site.<sup>35</sup>

The final element of the ISB identity is its composition of American people. Although a significant number of ISB members are of foreign descent, many of them have obtained or plan to obtain American citizenship and to enjoy full set of rights of American resident. “American Muslims support strong law enforcement. We also treasure civil rights. Your right to be politically active or to hold different beliefs/views is

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<sup>34</sup> Ghayur, 1981

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.isbcc.org/>

protected by the Constitution”<sup>36</sup>; this citation from the ISB web-site proves that American identity is an important part of the overall identity of the organization. One should keep in mind this important identity element in order to fully understand a position of the ISB in the Roxbury Mosque conflict. After the project was attacked by media and by court, the ISB leaders felt that their fundamental civil right to hold different religious beliefs was threatened. This notion became the organization’s position when it filed the anti-defamation suit and called it a Civil Rights Claim. According to Jessica Masse, who is the ISB’s director of outreach, “the ISB’s lawsuit is an important civil rights case. It seeks to battle discrimination and secure for area Muslims the same rights of freedom of worship and assembly that all faith and non-faith based groups in our society hold.”<sup>37</sup>

Let me summarize my observations about the Islamic Society of Boston as a party of the Roxbury Mosque conflict. The Society identifies itself as a non-profit organization of moderate Muslims of largely foreign descent, who nevertheless value their status as American residents and try to be protected by the rights this status grants. The main interest of the organization and its leadership is to finish the construction of the largest mosque in New England, to provide its members with a bigger worship place, and to expand its membership. This is also an openly articulated position of the ISB in court and in the press. Such a desire to bring together different groups of immigrant Muslims may be explained by perceived interdependence felt by local Muslims in front of an occasionally hostile American society. However, their interest to build a mosque has far more rational elements involved and is not much of a derivation from sub-rational interdependence. Muslim children need to have the choice to attend Islamic schools if

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<sup>36</sup> <http://www.isboston.org/v3.1/viewitem.asp?DocID=1023&ItemTypeID=1>

<sup>37</sup> ISB, (2007)

their parents wish, just like religious parents of other faiths. In addition, there is no special Islamic morgue in the city of Boston. Both amenities are planned as part of the ICC. Therefore, inter-dependence biases did not play a key role in the formation of the ISB's interests and therefore do not have a significant impact on potential resolution of the conflict.

The other position of the ISB is that the Society's and generally Muslim's civil rights were threatened by the anti-Mosque party. The major interest under this position is probably a need for security that is felt by the majority of US Muslims after 9/11. However, this interest is not attributed specifically to the Mosque conflict and was brought to the case when the conflict reached its litigation stage. The opponent's claims that the other ISB interest is to promote radical Islam do not correspond with the Society's moderate identity, which seems credible. My overall conclusion is that the ISB is generally consistent between its interests and positions that result from specific identities, maintained by the organization.

### **City of Boston**

The Islamic society of Boston is not the only proponent of the Islamic Cultural Center construction. It performed the project in close cooperation with Boston city authorities, specifically with the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA). Many observers, whom I talked to, usually referred to the BRA as to an independent party of the conflict. However, I prefer not to distinguish it from the general pro-mosque group

and to associate it with the Boston city government in general. Although the BRA became deeply involved into the Policastro lawsuit, and was involved in discussions and press campaign surrounding the conflict, I see this involvement as fortuitous. The thing is that the BRA was targeted predominantly because it issued the land for the Mosque construction. In the “Land and its Role” chapter as well as further in this chapter I discuss that the land issue was not the main concern of the anti-mosque group and did not cause the conflict by itself, rather it was used as an effective tool to stop the construction of the ICC. Therefore it is not necessary to focus on the BRA separate interests and positions since they do not have impact on the origins and possible resolution of the conflict. However, I would like to give an overview of this participant.

The BRA was established in 1957 by Boston City Council and Massachusetts Legislature as a major agency to oversee city planning, zoning and development activities. Its board of directors is appointed by the Mayor and approved by the City Council. The BRA managed so-called Parcel R-14, and sold it to the ISB for the ICC construction. I understand that the organization’s identity is close to that of the other city’s public organizations. Therefore its main interest, as of the organization, is close to what is described in the Boston Urban Renewal Plan (1970): “upgrade physically and economically certain distressed areas in the city through development which will benefit the surrounding community.”<sup>38</sup> The other interest – inter-religious peace, corresponds with that of the city authorities in general. As Boston Mayor Menino said during the ground breaking ceremony for the ICC “By creating the space for inter-faith dialogue, this center will bring both the Muslim community and the community at large closer

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<sup>38</sup> SCM. ISB vs. Boston Herald, No 05-4637

together.”<sup>39</sup> These interests were explicitly repeated by the BRA throughout the conflict and therefore correspond with the organization’s position on this issue.

If interests and positions of BRA do not cast any doubts the interests of some of the BRA’s officials may be questioned. It is necessary to take into account the active involvement of Mohammad Ali-Salaam, the BRA’s deputy director for planning, into the construction of the ISB. This person can be referred to as a public servant, as well as Muslim and the ISB member. This complex identity may have resulted Mr. Salaam to have several different interests. As a Muslim and the ISB member he was interested in the construction of the new place of worship. At the same time, his affiliation with public institution made him to comply with principles of professional ethics and impartiality of the state serviceman. The anti-mosque group emphasized his involvement into fundraising for the ISB, trying to prove that his personal interest as a Muslim became the interest of the whole public institution.<sup>40</sup> The opponents think that it was due to Salaam’s efforts that the land for the mosque was sold to the ISB at a discounted price. However, I found that Ali-Salaam carefully distinguished his personal interests from the interests of his organization. Salma Kazmi (p.c. 2007) mentioned that he preferred to restrain from several ISB fundraising activities because of his public servant status. He also requested a State Ethics Commission to issue him guidelines of how he should behave to comply with the conflict-of-interest ethical and legal standards in 1989 and 2004.<sup>41</sup> It seems unlikely that the public institution would have allowed itself to follow the agenda of one man, who publicized his ties to the ISB. It is more likely that the BRA interests in land

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<sup>39</sup> *Herald*, October 28, 2003

<sup>40</sup> *Herald*: March 8, 2006; May 18, 2006

<sup>41</sup> *Globe*, March 20, 2006;  
Radin, p.c. 2007

development and interfaith cooperation coincided with Ali-Salaam's interest to help his Muslim community.

The official position of the BRA and the city government is slightly different though. They used to deny any impact of Ali-Salaam in the Parcel R-14 decision making at all. "He did not have a say in the price. That's not his department,-" said the Boston Mayor according to *Herald*;<sup>42</sup>

Summarizing, the BRA and the city of Boston had its interests in the ICC project. They wanted the land to be developed in a way that could improve the neighborhood and interfaith relations in the city. These interests remained valid after they got involved into the lawsuits and negative press campaigns. Preserving good face in front of media allegations became their more current interest. Both interests generally correspond with official BRA's position in court and press, but as I mentioned earlier, this position does not have significant impact on the conflict development since the land issue does not explain deep roots of the dispute.

### **Roxbury Community College**

The Roxbury Community College is not a party of the conflict as such. It is not involved into any lawsuit and it hasn't been vocal in press about the issue. However, its interests and position puts it in line with the other two major proponents of the Mosque project. As in the case of the BRA, the RCC involvement in the case was somewhat accidental and has to deal mainly with the geographical location of the R-14 Parcel, designated for the ICC construction. RCC – "is a co-educational public institution of higher education offering Associate Degrees and certificate programs. RCC's primary objective is to provide residents of the Commonwealth, specifically those individuals

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<sup>42</sup> *Herald*, March 8, 2006

living in the greater Boston area, optimum opportunity for access to a college education consistent with their interests and aptitudes and to reduce to a minimum economic, social, psychological and academic barriers to educational opportunity."<sup>43</sup> It is located in Roxbury right next to the land that was purchased by the ISB for the purpose of the ICC construction. As any public educational institution, the College is always in need for an additional funding. *Roxbury Community College Foundation* is an independent non-profit organization whose only goal is “to raise funds from private sources to support the educational opportunities for the students of RCC and support the programs, projects and activities that benefit both college and its students.”<sup>44</sup>

Such identities explain why the RCC and the Foundation were generally supportive to the ICC project that was going on next door to the College. Since the ISB had to perform preliminary consultations with local community before starting its construction project, the RCC was one of the first organizations to be consulted. As a result of these preliminary consultations, the RCC became one of the major beneficiaries of the project. According to the final land deal between the BRA and the ISB, the College would receive from the ISB an Islamic research library and a series of lectures about Islam. The ISB would also assist the College Foundation with its fundraising campaigns. Collaboration between the RCC and the ISB followed the interests of both the College and the city authorities since it contributed to interfaith dialogue and materially supported public educational institution. Therefore, the Roxbury Community College itself took a supportive position towards the Mosque construction although it did not take an active part in the conflict itself. However, one individual in the RCC Foundation – William

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.rcc.mass.edu/About/Default.asp>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.rcc.mass.edu/About/Foundation.asp>

Sapers did not agree with such a position of the College management. His role became crucial in the conflict, but I will describe it together with the rest of the anti-mosque group later in this chapter.

### **Other Members of Pro-Mosque Group**

Apart from the ISB, the BRA and the RCC I do not encounter any major party on the pro-mosque side. Since the conflict was ongoing for almost 4 years there is a group of community leaders, organizations and individuals who share the pro-mosque orientation and appear in press with public statements. Harvard based Pluralism Project<sup>45</sup> and Muslim internet bloggers like Mohammed Khodr,<sup>46</sup> are examples of such supporters. They may have different reasons to support the mosque construction, but their common feature is that they do not have a direct interest in the conflict. Therefore, in case of a dispute resolution effort, their position in the conflict should be carefully distinguished from that of the major participants and should not be granted too much attention, since it has minimal impact on the conflict itself.

### **THE ANTI-MOSQUE GROUP AND ITS ROLE.**

The group of individuals and organizations, which opposes the construction of the Islamic Cultural Center in Roxbury, is more diverse and complex than the described

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<sup>45</sup> [www.pluralism.org](http://www.pluralism.org)

<sup>46</sup> Khodr (2006)

pro-mosque group. It comprises of larger number of participants, and links between those participants are more complicated. Each participant's role, therefore, should be studied carefully in order to define the key players, whose interests and positions have the major impact on the conflict development.

The easiest way to define the anti-mosque group members is to look at the anti-defamation law-suit brought by the ISB to the court on October 31, 2005 as a response for the mass media accusations of ISB supporting terrorism. The ISB first listed the *Fox 25 News* TV channel and *The Boston Herald* and their reporters as defendants. It later added such organizations as David Project, The Investigative Project, and Citizens for Peace and Tolerance organizations and individuals such as Steven Emerson, Anna Kolodner, Steven Cohen, Dennis Hale, and Ahmed Mansour as defendants.<sup>47</sup> Let me analyze identity, interest and positions of each of the key participants according to their appearance in the conflict. After that I would like to say a few words about the parties that are involved in the conflict but are not listed as defendants in the lawsuit. Since many of the anti-mosque group members maintain elements of Jewish identity I need to digress from my story and to say a few words about the Jewish community of Boston in general.

### **Who is Who in Jewish Community of Boston.**

The press often refers to the anti-mosque group as Jewish organizations and individuals. In fact, many of the group participants do maintain different aspects of Jewish identity. However, the diversity of the Jewish population of Greater Boston and the US in general makes it impossible to use the words "Jewish people" or

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<sup>47</sup> *Jewish Advocate*, November 03, 2005

“organizations” in the contexts of the conflict. I believe it is necessary to clarify how the modern Jewish community of Greater Boston looks.

Boston has a Jewish population of about 200,000 people.<sup>48</sup> These people belong to a number of different organizations that represent a variety of opinions, activities and religious views. The key Jewish organization in Boston is “The Combined Jewish Philanthropies.”<sup>49</sup> It coordinates the fundraising efforts of most of Jewish local community service organizations with an estimate of \$ 37 million raised over the last year. Some of these funds go overseas to support different charity programs in Israel. Some are used nationally, but most of the funds are distributed among the same local Jewish community service organizations, synagogues, schools, etc. through Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) of Boston<sup>50</sup>. There are also numbers of independent national Jewish organizations such as American Jewish Committee (AJC)<sup>51</sup> and Antidefamation League<sup>52</sup> that have their offices in Boston area. There are also independent Jewish organizations that are active primarily in Boston and Massachusetts area, such as the David Project of Jewish Leadership – an organization, which I will describe in detail later. Most of the organizations can be traditionally attributed to the left or right, depending on their views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Jewish religion and culture, relationships with non-Jews, etc. Right-wing organizations, such as Temple Israel<sup>53</sup> show adherence to the close US-Israeli alliance, orthodox or traditional Judaism, Jewish settlements on Palestinian territory, Hebrew language culture, and so on. Leftist

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<sup>48</sup> [www.ajc.org](http://www.ajc.org)

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.cjp.org/>

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.jcrcboston.org>

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.ajc.org/>

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.adl.org/>

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.tisrael.org/>

organizations, such as Workmen's Circle<sup>54</sup>, support dialogue with Palestinians, Reformist Judaism or secularism, Yiddish language culture, etc. Most of Jewish community organizations, however, share some identities of both right and left wings.

### **William Sapers**

This person's role is the most controversial and the least studied in the conflict. The mass media, both anti-mosque and neutral, did not pay much attention to this person's involvement in the conflict. Mr. Sapers himself never made vocal statements to the press either. However, I can say with confidence that he was the person whose actions actually started the full scale conflict over the ICC construction in Roxbury.

William Sapers is a co-president of Sapers&Wallack real estate insurance agency in Cambridge<sup>55</sup>. At the time of the BRA-ISB land deal he was a member of the Roxbury College Foundation – a non-profit dedicated to a fundraising campaign for the benefit of the College. The Background section of the *ISB vs. Boston Herald* case<sup>56</sup> gives the precise narrative of Sapers' involvement in the early stages of the conflict. Although Sapers was on the RCC Foundation board, he did not know anything about the conflict until October 3, 2002. After he discovered the details of the project, he showed some concerns about it. His main concern was the ISB's association with Yousef al-Qaradawi, a Muslim cleric who resides in the Middle East and who "supported suicide bombings in Israel and Palestine and other terrorist activities."<sup>57</sup> He also stated that he had concerns about the land deal itself, although the courts could not verify this statement. My

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<sup>54</sup> <http://www.workmenscircleboston.org/>

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.sapers-wallack.com>

<sup>56</sup> *SSC, ISB, et al. vs. Boston Herald, et al. case No.05-463*

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

confidential informant, who had known Sapers in person for a long time, noticed that Sapers was also concerned about the mosque being funded from Saudi Arabia, where Wahabi teaching of Islam is practiced. His concerns strengthened when he received a report from a freelance reporter saying that Qaradawi was listed as an ISB member on the ISB's 2000 tax return and that he indeed made several pro-Palestinian statements in press. Sapers raised his concerns at the RCC Foundation Board of Trustees meeting that took place on November 7, 2002, the next day after the ground-breaking ceremony for the project was held. The Board responded that the direct involvement in the College affairs was beyond the Foundation's responsibilities. Sapers tried to reach the Board of Trustees for the College and the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education. However, those organizations responded that the ICC project was negotiated between the ISB and the city of Boston, and their responsibilities were limited to the observance of the public benefits for the College included into the deal. Sapers then tried to use his connections to express his concerns directly to the Mayor's office, but did not gain any success. He later contacted a well known Islamic terrorism investigator Steven Emerson and his organization Investigative Project and obtained more information from him about the supposed ties of the ISB to Islamic terrorism. As he gathered new information about the terrorism associations of the ISB, he contacted the Boston Herald reporter Wells, who expressed the mentioned concerns in a series of articles, starting on October 28, 2003. Soon after publications, Sapers contacted the Mayor's office warning that the Mayor's support for the Mosque project would soon be discussed in a new series of newspaper articles. In May 2004 William Sapers joined efforts with Anna Kolodner who was a vice-president of David Project for Jewish Leadership organization, as well as with the rest of

defendants, who later formed another organization: “Citizens for Peace and Tolerance.” All together those people, whom I refer to as an *anti-mosque group* named themselves an “ad-hoc mosque group” and coordinated their activities to launch a political and media campaign against the ICC project. At that point Sapers stopped playing a separate role in the conflict and the David Project became the central driving power of the anti-mosque group.<sup>58</sup>

What made William Sapers launch such an active campaign against the project? The question cannot be answered without a deep look at Mr. Sapers’ identity. Most of my respondents characterized him as a right wing Jewish activist, with nationalist views of Israel and hostile attitudes towards Muslims in general. However, my anonymous Jewish respondent, who personally knows Mr. Sapers, said that he is well known in Boston Jewish circles by his philanthropic activities, particularly towards the African American community of the city. He used to be a developer working with projects in the Roxbury area. He later joined the RCC Foundation Board and actually donated money to the College. My respondent disagreed that William Sapers was hostile towards Islam in general. Rather he was concerned about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, about the sources of funding for the Mosque, and generally about his own participation in the RCC affairs. It is very unlikely that he had any personal financial interest in the land parcel since he has a well established business and generally retired from most of his financial activities. Therefore, I can say with a degree of confidence that his interests were to ensure that the newly erected ICC would not be a place for anti-Israeli propaganda and teaching of Wahabi Islam. After he received more information from Steven Emerson, William Sapers

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<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*

probably became more hostile towards the ISB in general, but I do not believe he opposed the idea of a new mosque as such.

Therefore, there are two elements of Mr. Sapers' identity that made him start the conflict. As an active *right wing member of American Jewish community* he was concerned about Israel, terrorism and had cautious attitudes towards Muslims in general and certain Middle East countries in particular. I will explain this phenomenon when I will talk about the David Project. As a *philanthropist*, he was concerned about his role in the RCC.

As I mentioned, nobody from the College Board had ever consulted Sapers about the details of the ICC project, although the project involved close cooperation between the ISB and the College. At the same time, Sapers spent time, energy, and money benefiting the College, i.e. doing almost the same thing as the ISB was supposed to do according to the land deal terms of agreement. It is quite possible that William Sapers felt offended because his role in the College affairs was ignored both by College officials, who did not inform him properly about the deal, and by the city officials who chose to ignore the RCC Foundation's opinion during the preliminary consultations between the ISB and the College. This situation seems to me as a case of conflict over authority, when William Sapers felt that his authority as a Jewish philanthropist was threatened by the Muslim philanthropic activities in the College.

Competition over some sort of benefactor's authority probably made William Sapers actively engage in the anti-mosque campaign, but I do not think it was the key element. The fact that nobody from the RCC Foundation board supported Sapers proves to me that there was something else that made him do what he did. The fact that the

competing party represented the ideological opponents of his pro-Israeli attitudes seems to be more important. Not only did college ignore his status as a contributor, not only did it invite a new benefactor without consulting the old ones, this new benefactor was a Muslim organization whose ideology and teachings might have been opposite to the values he believed in as a right wing Jew. What might have been seen by an outsider as an extra opportunity to raise some money for the College from a Muslim community might have been an ideological betrayal in the eyes of William Sapers.

The combination of breached authority and betrayed values of a single person – William Sapers - became a trigger for the conflict to escalate. However, later the conflict was driven by slightly different dynamics, which I will describe in the next section.

### **David Project Center for Jewish Leadership**

As I mentioned before the David Project Center for Jewish Leadership joined the conflict in May 2004, when its executive director – Anna Kolodner - e-mailed members of the anti-mosque group about the “need to develop a media campaign and ... develop a presentation that can be used with media, politicians, and community groups ...” in order to “expose the radical fundamentalist underpinnings of the Mosque and it’s leaders.”<sup>59</sup> It is unclear for me what connection William Sapers had with the David Project and vice versa. The David Project was created long before the conflict started for the purpose of training young Jewish leaders on American campuses so that they can “defeat the ideological assault on Israel that is taking place on campuses, in high schools, in churches and in the general community.”<sup>60</sup> My confidential informant suggested that it

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<sup>59</sup> SSC, *ISB, et al. vs. Boston Herald, et al. case No.05-463*

<sup>60</sup> David Project (2005) Mission;

is not unusual for Jewish activists to know each other in person and therefore the cooperation could have been based on personal contacts.

David Project took an active part in the conflict from the very beginning of its involvement. It took the leading role in the anti-mosque group. The group continued to work with journalist Wells in developing a media campaign against the project. Furthermore, it arranged the lawsuit targeting the land deal itself, which I described in detail in the “Piece of Land or Land with No Peace” chapter. David Project’s director Charles Jacobs had a column in *The Jewish Advocate* – local Jewish newspaper - and used it for further publications where he uncovered supposed ties of the ISB to the world Islamic terrorism. The vocal press campaign resulted in the decline in donations for the ISB and damaged reputation of its leaders. As a result, two ISB leaders – Osama Kandill and Dr. Abu Allaban filed the anti-defamation lawsuit on their personal behalf against Steven Emerson, *Boston Herald*, Fox News TV channel and their journalists. They claimed that the allegations in press damaged not only the ISB’s reputation but also their personal lives. The discovery procedure for this personal lawsuit, however, discovered the e-mail exchange between the media defendants and the rest of the anti-mosque group and proved that the media campaign was part of the well planned action. Therefore, the ISB extended the original lawsuit by adding itself as a plaintiff and David Project and “Citizens for Peace and Tolerance” organizations as defendants.<sup>61</sup> David Project and other defendants, who hired a lawyer to represent them, tried to dismiss the lawsuit on the basis of the anti-SLAPP Statute. This document bans developers from filing intimidating lawsuits against residents who protest their construction projects. However, the court denied the motion to dismiss the suit since nobody of the anti-mosque group

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<sup>61</sup> SSC, *ISB, et al. vs. Boston Herald, et al. case No.05-463*

actually was a resident of the Roxbury area<sup>62</sup>. During one of the hearings, the Suffolk Superior Court Judge Janet L. Sanders suggested in private that the conflict is damaging for the inter-religious relations of the whole community and therefore the Court would prefer the dispute to be settled out of the court. The Inter-religious Center for Public Life organization volunteered to mediate the dispute, however the anti-mosque group was reluctant about the procedure and sent its lawyer in stead of attending the hearings.<sup>63</sup> The anti-defamation lawsuit is currently pending in the Massachusetts Superior Court, and the Policastro lawsuit, initiated by the anti-mosque group, was dismissed by the Suffolk Superior Court on February 16, 2007. There is information that the group has hired new lawyers, and is currently looking for legal basis of a new lawsuit.

This is the brief history of the David Project and its allies' involvement in the conflict. There were numbers of publications, public statements and newspaper articles released by this group of people since it get involved into the conflict in 2004. However, I am interested in the motivations and interests of these people.

The position of the David Project is clear and well articulated on their web site. I must note that the organization' website, which was recently renovated, has a special directory dedicated to the Roxbury Mosque lawsuit. According to this directory, the David Project has the following concerns about the ICC construction:

1. "The founder of the Islamic Society of Boston (ISB), Abdurahman Alamoudi is currently serving a 23-year sentence in a U.S. prison for illegal financial transactions and for his involvement in a scheme to assassinate Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia.

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Helmick, p. c. 2007

2. Dr. Walid Fataihi is a current trustee of the ISB. While engaging in interfaith dialogue with a prominent Boston Rabbi, Dr. Fataihi was at the same time publishing in Arabic newspapers horrific, hateful attacks on Jews as “... rapists of the worshippers of Allah.”
3. Sheik Yusef al-Qaradawi, a prominent leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, banned from Egypt and barred from entering the United States by President Clinton, openly advocates suicide bombings, the killing of Jews and abductions of Americans in Iraq. The ISB’s website publicly listed Qaradawi as its trustee as late as March of 2003.
4. Yusef Abou-Allaban, the current director of the ISB, now in the Middle East, arranged in 2002 for Qaradawi to speak to potential ISB supporters at a fund raiser held in the Boston Sheraton. Abou-Allaban arranged for the message to be delivered via video conference... here are quotations from Qaradawi in other settings: “We will conquer Europe, we will conquer America.”
5. Osama Kandil, the former Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the ISB, is listed as Director of Taibah International, designated by the US Treasury as a Global Terrorist organization.”<sup>64</sup>

The position expressed on the group’s website shows that fighting terrorism and anti-Semitism are the two key interests of the group. However, the closer look at the group’s identity gives an observer a deeper understanding of those interests. The group was described by most of my respondents as an extremely right-wing pro-Israeli organization. The group is dedicated to the fighting against what they call “the ideological onslaught against the Jewish State – in the media, mainstream churches, and

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<sup>64</sup> David Project (2005). Background

on campus.”<sup>65</sup> The group produced documentary “Columbia Unbecoming” about the ideological struggle around Israeli-Palestine conflict in Columbia University. On a website dedicated to the documentary the group openly states that “We believe in Jewish political self-determination in the Middle East, and are proud to be called Zionists.”<sup>66</sup> Fr. Helmick (p.c. 2007) mentioned that some of the David Project members and William Sapers himself might have had affiliation with another Jewish organization CAMERA (Committee on Accurate Middle East Reporting in America), which has a reputation of a very influential on American Media and shares with David Project the same kind of views on Israeli supremacy. The David Project’s concerns about the Qaradawi’s supposed prizing of suicide bombings fit well into their general concern about Palestine-Israeli war, since most of the suicide bombings are performed by Hamas and Hezbollah terrorists against Israeli military and civilians. If we take a closer look at the conspiracy grid, which I have constructed after the publications of Jonathan Wells (please, see appendixes), the ISB’s links to Hamas and Islamic Jihad is an important part of it, although those organizations never waged war against the US directly. Therefore, it would be legitimate to say that the American identity, probably to some extent contributed to the organization’s fear of Islamic terrorism in general resulted from many factors, 9/11 being the major of them. However, the main reason of their concern about terrorism was the link of many terrorist organizations to the Palestinian anti-Israeli militant groups. The David Project’s repeatedly emphasized on the Al Qaradawi’s *fundraising* video played in 2002 at the ISB event, may be a good example that the group is simply afraid that if the Mosque was built and connected to the world terrorist

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<sup>65</sup> David Project (2005). Mission

<sup>66</sup> <http://www.columbiaunbecoming.com/>

network, it would eventually attract large numbers of Muslims with their donations, but the raised money would be used for support of Palestine intifada in Israel. “It’s their local Arab-Israeli conflict, which they fight in Boston,”- said one of my informants, whom I don’t want to identify.

### ***Role of Ethnocentric and Interdependence Biases***

I do not want to evaluate such a position since every person has its right to exercise beliefs he/she considers appropriate. I only want to mention that such behavior is a perfect example of ethnocentric bias – as a tendency to look at the world from the perspective of one’s own culture. Ethnocentrism, as I mentioned earlier in this paper, is a view of things in which ones own group is a centre of everything and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it (Brewer, 1986). The David Project participants obviously maintain a conservative Jewish culture, where the support of Israel is an important element. Although most of them live in Boston area and deal with the local American Muslims, they rate the ICC project with a reference to the politics of Israel – a social group to which they claim to belong to. They are concerned that the Palestinian perspective on the Arab-Israeli conflict would be spread through the ICC as if it is *a priori* wrong and the official Israeli perspective is *a priori* right.

Since they see the local conflict in Boston from the perspective of Jewish people in Israel, the interests of Israelis are more important for them then interests of American Muslim community in Boston. I feel that William Sapers may share these same

attitudes, but his ethnocentric views are probably less extreme, since he was actively involved in a philanthropic work outside of Jewish community.

Although the ethnocentric interests and position of the anti-mosque group explains its reluctance about the ICC project I suspect that it is not the main cause of it. According to Fisher and Ury (1983) the parties are more likely to reach a decision if they would negotiate not about their explicit positions but about the underlying interests. In the case of the Roxbury Mosque it would mean, that if the David Project would be sure that the ICC construction would not benefit the fundraising for the terrorist groups and would not be used for an anti-Israeli propaganda, they would be ready to negotiate the terms of the ICC construction. The ISB was obviously ready to consider some of those interests of the anti-mosque group. The ISB obtained a “thank-you” letter from the federal authorities stating that all the monies raised for the Mosque construction were screened by federal investigators and did not have any connection to the world terrorism.<sup>67</sup> The organization’s leaders also agreed to attend mediation sessions scheduled by the Inter-Religious Center for Public Life in summer of 2006. However, the David Project was, and still is hostile to any negotiation efforts. This fact made me think that there are certain other interests of this group, which it does not want to articulate. And my anonymous respondent from the Jewish organization explained these interests to me.

According to his/her words, *David Project activists are not simply concerned about terrorism and anti-Semitism of certain ISB members, as they try to show in their position. Rather they see Islam in general as an anti-Semitic religion and their main interest is to prevent further expansion of this religion in the United States* (emphasis

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<sup>67</sup> Kazmi, p.c. 2007

added). This statement, if it is true, makes it clear why David Project was so reluctant about any negotiation effort. If those people really perceive Islam as a threat, the whole idea of the ICC is unacceptable for them and they are not interested in any negotiations over the Mosque, which is almost finished. In addition, a perceived threat from Islam contributes to interdependence bias of David Project's members. This bias makes them view their anti-mosque group as positive and right, while the opposing pro-mosque group is viewed by them very negatively. Such bias does not allow the anti-mosque group members to listen to the rational arguments of the ISB and mediators and result in statements such as "we do not negotiate with terrorists."

It is very hard, if not impossible, to find any evidence, other than the oral opinions, to verify such a serious statement. It is unlikely that anybody from the anti-mosque group will publicly express anti-Islamic views, since they spent a lot of effort to avoid a Jewish vs. Muslim perception of the conflict in public. However, I think that I have found evidence of David Project's anti-Islamic position. On the David Project web-site, there is information that the controversial Muslim cleric Al-Qaradawi recorded a video message in support of the ICC fund raising and the message was shown at the fundraising reception at the Boston Sheraton Hotel, in 2002. David Project could not obtain the video, but they suggest that Qaradawi once said among other things that "You shall continue to fight the Jews... and the Muslims will kill them, and the Jew will hide behind the stone and the tree, and the stone and the tree will say: Oh, servant of Allah, Oh Muslim, this is a Jew behind me. Come and kill him."<sup>68</sup> I, personally, have doubts that such an offensive statement was said, especially in the United States, however, it is more important to admit that the David Project uses exactly this quote to blame

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<sup>68</sup> David Project (2005). Background

Qaradawi. The thing is that the citation mentioned is a famous Hadith (saying about the Prophet Muhammad). It was recorded by Sahih Bukhari, in the Book 52 “Fighting for the Cause of Allah” (Jihad), Hadith 176 and 177. Here is the full text of the Hadith:

*176: Narrated 'Abdullah bin 'Umar: Allah's Apostle said, "You (i.e. Muslims) will fight with the Jews till some of them will hide behind stones. The stones will (betray them) saying, 'O 'Abdullah (i.e. slave of Allah)! There is a Jew hiding behind me; so kill him.' "*

*177: Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah's Apostle said, "The Hour will not be established until you fight with the Jews, and the stone behind which a Jew will be hiding will say. "O Muslim! There is a Jew hiding behind me, so kill him." <sup>69</sup>*

The Hadith talks about the Muslim version of the Apocalypse (The End of Days) when Muslims and Jews will fight each other until the Muslims will win. It has nothing to do with the current calls to fight against Israel. However, the mentioned Hadith is often used by various Jewish activists to prove that Islam is in fact an anti-Semitic religion. I, personally, have heard from two people, whom I interviewed independently from this research, about the Hadith mentioned. The fact that the group chose to use this very common citation on its website speaks in favor of the general anti-Muslim attitudes of the David Project. Because of the quotes, like the one mentioned, many Jews including David Project activists believe in extremist nature of the whole Islamic religion. Now let me explain why Islam is perceived as a threat by many people including David Project activists.

### ***Why Islam Becomes a Threat?***

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<sup>69</sup> Bukhari (no date)

*Many non-Muslims including Jews perceive Islam as a threat because of their non interpretative understanding of Islam* (emphasis added). This phenomenon is well explained by el Fadl (2007). He mentions that every Muslim should comply with the number of divine rules and regulations which are commonly known as Sharia, or the Islamic jurisprudence. According to him, Sharia is both a legal system and religious rules that include ceremonial, legal, ethical, and political obligations that every Muslim should follow. Islamic law is not based on positive commands issued by the government or a single religious authority. Rather, it is produced by jurists interpreting textual sources and applying particular methodologies according to a fairly complex set of rules. The sources of Islamic law is Qur'an, which Muslims believe is the literal, unadulterated word of God; the Sunna, which is a body of oral traditions describing what the Prophet and his companions said and did; rule by analogy, which is effectively the following of precedents so that a judgment in an old case is adhered to in a similar new case; and consensus of the jurists. Some jurists believe that reason, public interest or custom may also become sources of Islamic law.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, in classical Islam, it is impossible for a person with non-religious education to understand the exact will of God simply from reading Qur'an and Sunna. It should be interpreted and explained by a person (jurist, mullah, imam) who is knowledgeable in the other sources of law as well as in Arabic language, Islamic history and methodology of Islamic research. "Muslim jurists exercised the dominant role in producing the set of judgments and rulings that we know as Islamic law. ...they exercised considerable leeway and discretion in deciding what is valid and invalid, what is legitimate or illegitimate, what to count and what to abjure,

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<sup>70</sup> el Fadl, 2007

what to rely on and what to exclude.”<sup>71</sup> Such interpretative way of understanding Islam is called *taklid*. As a result, in Islam, there is a variety of opinions on most of the key issues expressed at a different time by different schools of jurist thought. Therefore, it is necessary for the researcher to know most of these opinions in order to choose the most appropriate solution for any given problem. It is important that all the opinions are considered legitimate with different levels of religious authority and each jurist’s opinion is believed to interpret the real will of God at least to some extent. What seems to be an obvious rule from the Qur’an or Hadith may, in fact, have much deeper meaning according to jurist interpretation..

The problem mentioned by El Fadl<sup>72</sup> is that due to the variety of reasons (colonialism, secularism, break of Ottoman Empire, etc) the number of qualified Islamic jurists in the world and their influence on society decreased tremendously over the last 200 years. As a result, many of the Islamic communities chose to be led by non-qualified individuals who claimed to be jurists but lacked knowledge of interpretative traditions of earlier generations of scholars. Those new leaders hid their incompetence behind the slogans of “Puritanism”- return to the primary sources of Islam, free from burden of the later interpretations. They tend to read Qur’an and Sunna and give their own interpretation of the sacred texts. Moreover, they often choose to support their own political agendas by carefully selected citations from the Scriptures. There are many places in Qur’an and Sunna that talk about the war and relations with other religions. Some of them may be controversial as they reflect the difficult and violent time when the first Muslim Caliphate was established in 7th. century. However, during the following

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

centuries the interpretations of the texts tend to avoid controversial and extreme passages and direct Muslims towards moderation. Rather tolerant attitudes of Muslims towards other religions were developed during Ottoman Empire and are a foundation of classical Islam until now.<sup>73</sup> The modern Islamic schools, such as Wahabis, who reject the deep interpretative tradition of Islam, believe that Muslims have to read and literally follow the directions set by Qur'an and Sunna, even if they contradict the general notion of moderation, which became a traditional approach for most of the Muslim scholars over the centuries of Islamic history. For example, although Sunna requires to stone to death those charged with adultery, such a punishment was considered inhumane in 18-th century pre-Saudi Arabia, while now, when the Wahabi teaching prevails in Saudi Kingdom, such an execution is a quite widespread practice.<sup>74</sup>

Although the majority of Muslims continue to practice the traditional approach, a literal, non-interpretive understanding of Islam followed by so-called “puritans” contributes to a general image of Islam as a violent and intolerant religion in the eyes of non-Muslims. Furthermore, the “puritan” voice is rather loud in contemporary world due to the enormous financial and political support of such countries as Saudi Arabia. When concerned individuals, like the ones from David Project, listen to the emotional proponents of the “puritan approach,” they may become threatened by the calls to wage the holy war (jihad) against all “infidels” (including Christians and Jews). When they follow the reasoning of such “puritan” extremists they may go to the Qur'an and Sunna in translation and find the anti-Semitic statements there. However, they usually are not able to go further and to familiarize themselves with how this or that rule is interpreted

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

by the majority of Muslim scholars. Nor do they in general have enough qualification in Arabic language and history of Islamic thought to be able to give more or less comprehensive interpretation on their own.

As a result, many of non-Muslims who try to understand Islam on their own, without a careful guidance of an experienced and qualified cleric, become easily influenced by the puritan ideologies such as Wahabism or Salafism but do not understand the real nature of Islam as it is practiced by the majority of Muslims in the world. They may hate Islam for its xenophobia although in fact they hate the simplified and non-interpretative approach that some of the Muslims take. I believe, and my statement was supported by my confidential respondent who used to know the director of David Project, Charles Jacobs, that the David Project group sees extremist teachings of Islam as reflecting negative attitudes of all Muslims in general. The group does not distinguish between radical and moderate Islam and perceives any expansion of Islamic teaching as a threat for Jews in general. According to my several respondents, such anti-Muslim attitudes are not necessarily shared by the other Jewish organizations in this conflict.

Such fears that Muslims are fundamentally anti-Semitic permeate the American Jewish community. One American Jewish opinion survey (2005) found that 76 % of American Jews believe that anti-Semitism in the Muslim world is currently a very serious problem and 31 % of Jews agree that Muslims are the most anti-Semitic ethnic group within the United States. These attitudes relate to those of the general American population. For example during one of the polls more than 50% of respondents described “all or most Muslims as warlike and bloodthirsty, treacherous and cunning,...

barbaric and cruel.”<sup>75</sup> It is hard to say whether such perceptions also track their roots from the non-interpretative understanding of Islam, but the fact is that David Project’s strong opposition to the ICC project may have a deep silent support within wider Jewish and even non-Jewish populations of Boston. The next participant whom I will discuss contributed the most to such support.

### **Role of Mass Media.**

Although, I don’t think that the press had deep interest in the conflict, it contributed a lot to its escalation and spent a great deal of energy covering the history of the dispute. Although there are several clear roles the press played in the conflict, the “escalator” is the most obvious. As I mentioned earlier the Islamic Society of Boston filed the lawsuit against *The Boston Herald* newspaper, *Fox-25 News TV* channel and several of their journalists for defaming the ISB and its members. As a result, these given mass media representatives became a party in the conflict and are now called “media defendants” as opposed to David Project, William Sapers and others as “non-media defendants.”<sup>76</sup> Several newspapers such as *The Boston Globe* and *Jewish Advocate* followed the conflict history and regularly published different perspectives on the conflict in their articles.

The active involvement of the mass media into the conflict began in 2003 when William Sapers released the information about the ISB to *The Boston Herald* newspaper journalist Jonathan Wells. Wells started his own investigation of the supposed ties between the ISB and the international terrorist organizations. He then published his

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<sup>75</sup> Gerges, 1997

<sup>76</sup> *SSC, ISB, et al. vs. Boston Herald, et al. case No.05-463*

findings in the series of *Herald* articles starting from the one on October 29, 2003. Later, in 2004 Wells started working with the *Fox-25 News TV Channel*. He continued his investigative work on the ICC project, but at that time he already worked with the anti-mosque group in its full compliment. He produced a number of short reports about the project which also uncovered the supposed terrorist ties of the ISB. The investigative activities of Wells fuelled the fire of the conflict both because of the journalist's conclusions and because of the methods he used to support those conclusions. According to Salma Kazmi (2007), the ISB did not have the clear image of the conflict until the *Herald* published its first article about terrorism and the ISB.

### ***Terrorism in Journalistic Interpretation***

Wells tried to construct a comprehensive scheme which could prove that the key ISB leaders had ties to the world Islamic terrorism and to claim that there was a threat of the ICC to become a place where radical and violent Islamic teachings could have been taught. Eventually, he had to show the ties between the ISB and several key individuals on one side and between those individuals and the recognized terrorist organizations on the other. His attention was riveted to three key individuals who had different affiliation with the ISB: Osama Kandill, Yousef al-Quaradawi, and Abdurrahman Alamoudi. Walid Fitaihi was not charged by the journalist of terrorism ties, but his anti-Semitic statements were often cited in press.

Osama M. Kandil a chairman of the Board of Trustees of the ISB was accused by The Boston Herald of being a board member of the Taibah International Aid Association, a Muslim charity, which was suspected by the federal authorities of funding

terrorist organizations. Simply because he rented an apartment that was owned by a key member of “Safa Group,” the journalists also accused Mr. Kandill of being in this network of U.S. based corporations, charities and individuals currently under investigation for backing Islamic terrorist groups. Through number of individuals, journalists identified Taibah as part of “Safa Group.” In addition, Kandil’s participation in Muslim Arab Youth Association (MAYA) and Islamic bank Al-Taqua was presented as a proof that he is part of international Islamic terrorist network. The ISB denied any associations of Mr. Kandill with “Safa Group” mentioning that he never found himself under any sort of federal terrorist investigations.

Sheikh Yusuf al-Quaradawi was listed on the ISB documents as a member of Board of Directors. He is an Islamic cleric who currently resides in Qatar working as a journalist for the well known al-Jazeera TV station. Quaradawi was blamed by *Herald* for making supportive statements about the Palestinian suicide bombers in Israel (he was banned from entering US and Egypt because of such statements). He was also accused in serving on the Shariah Board of al-Taqua Islamic bank, which was suspected by federal investigators in financing terrorist networks. The ISB said that Quaradawi was listed on the organization’s tax returns as a honorary member of Board of Trustees and he does not influence the day-to-day activities of the ISB.

Abdurrahman Muhammad Alamoudi was a founder and the first director of the ISB back in 80’s. He later founded an American Muslim Council organization for the purpose of lobbying Muslim interests among American politicians and even served as an Islamic advisor to President Bill Clinton. In 2004 he was arrested and sentenced to 23 years in prison for his association with Libyan regime in a plot to kill Saudi royal family

member. Reporters emphasized this controversy while talking about Alamoudi's role as a founder of the ISB. They also tried to connect Alamoudi to Kandil through Taibah organization, where both served at the Board of directors. The ISB replied that although Alamoudi was a founder of the organization, he left Boston more than 20 years ago and did not have any association with the organization since that time.

Walid Fitaihi is a doctor from Saudi Arabia and serves as a current trustee of the ISB. The reporters found that he published anti-Semitic statements in several Arabic newspapers saying that Jews have "betrayed the trust of Heaven," "killed the Prophets" and "perpetrated the worst of evils."<sup>77</sup> The ISB has distanced itself from his statements and claimed that his words represented his own personal beliefs and did not reflect the position of the whole organization.

The topics described were presented in a series of *Boston Herald* publications in 2003.<sup>78</sup> They were further developed into a series of TV reports by Fox-25 News channel when Jonathan Wells moved to work for the Fox TV channel. It is important to note that although the information released was based on several documental sources, such as tax returns, most of the accusations, especially those related to terrorism issues, were supported by indirect evidence. However, the language of the newspaper publications never questioned plausibility of these statements. In both opening publications<sup>79</sup> there is no single statement that the information presented might have been unverified. The articles are constructed as a list of facts which lead the reader to make his own conclusions about the terrorism ties of the ISB leaders. The ISB replies to the accusations remained uncommented by the journalists. Fox-25 News journalists,

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<sup>77</sup> [www.hatefreeamerica.com](http://www.hatefreeamerica.com)

<sup>78</sup> *Herald*, October 28, 2003; January 14, 2004

<sup>79</sup> *Herald*, October 28, 29, 2003

however, stated at the beginning of each show that they do not have direct evidence of the ISB's connections with world terrorism. Nevertheless, as a result of the publication, the ICC construction project experienced unexpected difficulties with fundraising because potential benefactors preferred to restrain from giving money to the organization that might have been connected to world terrorism. The ISB itself and its officials were suddenly deluged with questions from both their partners and other mass media about their possible connections to world terrorism.

Such a discrepancy between the plausibility of the evidence and the strength of the accusations became the first reason to provoke the ISB's reciprocal lawsuit. The second reason was the method, used by the journalists to obtain the information presented. It is hard to say how much of this information was originally collected by William Sapers and Steven Emerson, but Jonathan Wells employed rather aggressive tactics to find new evidence for his story. For example, he unexpectedly approached one of the ISB leaders Dr. Kandil in the parking lot and asked him in front of the camera if he was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood terrorist organization. When Dr. Kandil refused to answer, his name appeared in publication as an alleged Muslim Brotherhood member.<sup>80</sup> As a result, Dr. Kandil lost most of his therapist practice and had to move his family to the Middle East being afraid of the possible violence. This example shows how irresponsible the journalist's behavior was in relation to the people that might have been affected by the publications.

As a result of the publications, Dr. Kandil and Abou Allaban filed a personal lawsuit against *Herald* and *Fox News* for the defamation that resulted in personal losses

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<sup>80</sup> Kazmi, p.c. 2007;  
Helmick, p.c. 2007;  
Radin, p.c. 2007.

and hired Howard Cooper – a lawyer who had a successful experience of sewing *Boston Herald* (Radin, p.c. 2007). Later on, when the discovery process for this lawsuit uncovered the e-mail exchange between David Project, William Sapers and Steven Emerson, the ISB expanded the lawsuit and added David Project as a defendant with new charges of conspiracy to defame the ISB as an organization. The conflict moved from its latent phase into full-scale court battle.

### ***Interests of Mass-Media***

The fundamental question that needs to be answered about the press role as an escalator of the conflict is as follows: did Boston Herald and Fox-25 News TV channel intentionally defame the ISB in order to stop the ICC construction due to the terrorist ties of the ISB members or was their interests somehow different from those of the non-media anti-mosque group members? After the ISB has discovered the e-mail exchange between Anna Kolodner of David Project and Jonathan Wells it filed an anti-defamation lawsuit accusing media defendants of conspiracy. Journalist Charles Radin, who covered the story in *Boston Globe* questioned this statement. He mentioned that obtaining certain information from individuals for the further presentation to the broader audience is a natural and general practice of journalists in the United States.<sup>81</sup> I couldn't find any evidences that Jonathan Wells shared any of the identities of the non-media members of the anti-mosque group. He was not marked for being particularly ethnocentric or Islamophobic. He also did not have particular conflicts with the Islamic community elsewhere. The only identity he was closely associated with was the one of an investigative journalist. I think the main interest of this person as a journalist was to use

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<sup>81</sup> Radin, p.c. 2007

the interests of the other anti-mosque group members and the information obtained by them in order to produce a major investigative story that would be interesting enough to grant him a place at the *Herald* cover-page. The fact that he obtained a more prestigious job position with the Fox TV channel after the series of articles were published may be indirect evidence of this case. This interest corresponded with the interest of *The Boston Herald* newspaper to own the big investigative story that would be followed by other newspapers and draw readers' attention for an extended period of time. As it was mentioned by Radin because of the intense competition between major newspapers it is a normal practice for an American newspaper to obtain a privilege from the informant for the information that may potentially become a big story.<sup>82</sup> In addition, the general right-wing conservative identity of *Boston Herald*, which belongs to the media holding owned by pro-Israeli Australian businessman Rupert Murdoch, matched the anti-Islamic nature of the Wells' investigative story. Finally, the general anti-Islamic attitudes of the American public in 2003-2004<sup>83</sup> following 9/11 and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, increased mass-media's interest in stories about Islamic terrorism.

The Fox TV channel's interest in the story seems alike. The channel was also owned by Rupert Murdoch and it was as well interested in the breaking news about the terrorist plot.

No other newspaper had a major impact on the conflict. *The Boston Globe*, which is the major rival of the Boston Herald tried to follow the story of the conflict but it did not try to launch a separate investigation of the accusations against ISB of terrorism and anti-Semitism. *Boston Globe* journalists tried to follow further

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> see for example Schildkraut, 2002

developments of the conflict, for example, they covered the mediation attempts in summer 2006.<sup>84</sup> They also tried to cover the Policastro lawsuit and general accusations of BRA's land deal with the ISB.<sup>85</sup>

The *Jewish Advocate* published primarily statements of different Jewish organizations, primarily of David Project whose President Charles Jacobs has a column in it. Several other newspapers in and outside of Boston occasionally publish materials about the conflict, but I do not consider them having any impact on the situation.

Summarizing, the mass media, specifically The Boston Herald newspaper, Fox-25 News TV channel, and journalist Jonathan Wells, contributed a lot to the escalation of the conflict. They formulated fears and concerns of William Sapers, David Project and other anti-mosque group members in a structured series of cover page articles and TV programs. They expanded the original conflict between small groups of people to the broader audiences. The offensive language of publications, bad publicity and aggressive methods of information gathering provoked the ISB for the personal and later for the general lawsuit. The mass-media anti-mosque group members that were later named on the lawsuit did not share the identities of the non-media defendants like Sapers or David Project. They did not necessarily care about the expansion of Islam or about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They had their own interests and agendas, such as publishing breaking news about Islamic terrorism that would draw attention of the wider American audience, widely anti-Islamic after the 9/11. These interests, however, strongly corresponded with the interest of the non-media defendants to stop the ICC construction and to express some of their concerns to the broader audiences. As a result, mass media

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<sup>84</sup> *Globe*, July 4, 2006

<sup>85</sup> *Globe*, March 4, 2006

came out as an effective tool for the David Project and its associates to fulfill their interests. As it was mentioned by one of my respondents, the media tried to make a sensational story but did not necessarily expect that it would lead to such serious circumstances as a lawsuit. They were too confident in publishing unverified information that had very serious impact on the ISB and its members. After the lawsuit was launched the media defendants found themselves in a difficult dilemma. They can disprove their own statements and in this way to compromise their own credibility or they have to join the position of non-media defendants (David Project and Co.) and to carry the defamation and conspiracy charges which, in case they are proved, will compromise the media's credibility as well. At the same time, David Project felt and still feels comfortable having such a powerful ally as a credible non-Jewish American newspaper *Boston Herald*, which allows for the conflict to be presented as "Americans vs. Muslim organization" instead of "Jewish organization vs. Muslim organization" as it originally was.

The same strategy of employing the allies outside of its own identity was used by David Project and William Sapers in their relationships with the rest of the anti-mosque group, whom I call "experts."

### **Experts**

There are three main participants of the anti-mosque group whom I refer to as "experts". Although, only one of them – Steven Emerson refers to himself as an expert, I see that their appearance in the conflict was caused by the same reason – to give a

justification to the claims of William Sapers and David Project. Each of them, however, had his own interests, which nevertheless corresponded with the interests of the David Project and William Sapers.

### *Steven Emerson*

Steven Emerson referred to himself as an expert in Islamic terrorism for more than fifteen years. He is a director of The Investigative Project<sup>86</sup> – a non governmental organization that gathers information on Islamic radical groups in the United States. He authored six books focusing on the Islamic terrorism. He became famous by the documentary *Jihad in America* (1994) and his congressional testimony (1998) where he warned Americans about the terrorism threat of Osama bin-Laden's extremist network. After 9/11 terrorist attacks his credibility as an expert strengthened. However, his self-identity as an expert is not always substantiated by others. Most of my respondents referred to Steven Emerson as a virulently anti-Islamic and anti-Arab writer. "It is enough to have an Arabic name to appear on the terrorist list of the Investigative Project," - mentioned one of them. In his interview for *The Today Show* on February 26, 2002 Steven Emerson admitted that he received death threats made by a radical Islamist group from South Africa. This fact also makes others question the objectivity of his conclusions and might have strengthened anti-Islamic attitudes of Steven Emerson. I would identify Steven Emerson as an investigative journalist rather than an objective expert. He used to work for the CNN and PBC TV networks, but his current occupation is director of The Investigative Project. Therefore, uncovering of the radical Islamic groups is his main occupation and interests. In his interview for the *Front Page*

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<sup>86</sup> <http://www.investigativeproject.org/>

Magazine<sup>87</sup> he mentioned that the US senate and law enforcement agencies are the major clients of his organization. It is natural that uncovering of an alleged ties of the biggest mosque in New England and world Islamic terrorist networks was an interest of Steven Emerson as a professional “Islamic terrorism fighter.” Those ties, if proven could have brought more credibility and authority to him as an expert. This interest corresponded with ethnocentric views of Sapers and later of David Project. Both participants shared hostile attitudes towards radical Islam, but for different reasons. While Sapers and David Project viewed it as a threat to Israel, Emerson saw it as a threat to America and, perhaps, his personal life. Both were concerned that the new mosque could become a nursery for such radical ideology.

It is unclear if Steven Emerson knew William Sapers before the conflict, or if the conflict brought them together. Regardless, in 2003 William Sapers asked Steven Emerson to prepare a report about the terrorism ties of the ISB leaders. The investigative report later became a basis for the Herald publications discussed above.

In my view, the anti-mosque group recruited Steven Emerson for two main reasons. The first reason was to obtain information that could be later published and could eventually stop the ICC construction. The other reason was to enlist the support of a person who had substantial credibility with government circles and at the same time represented conservative American rather than Jewish-American opinion. I think, before bringing the conflict to the broader audiences, they tried to hide their right-wing Jewish identity, which was not always positively accepted by Americans, behind the American identity of Steven Emerson. At that point, their claim, supported by a supposed expert, had more credibility and more chances to be published in a major American newspaper.

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<sup>87</sup> The Front Page Magazine, October 16, 2006

The same tactic, I believe, was used by David Project when it joint efforts with *Citizens for Peace and Tolerance* group.

***Citizens for Peace and Tolerance (CPT).***

This group was created in October 2004 by three individuals: Ahmed Mansour, Dennis Hale, and Steven Cohen for the purpose of “education of the community about events that may threaten it.”<sup>88</sup> The group does not specifically mention that it was created because of the Roxbury Mosque conflict. However, there are direct links to the *Boston Herald* publications and to the *Fox-25 News TV* channel programs on the group’s website. This and the fact that the group was incorporated right before the Policastro lawsuit was filed make me confident that the ISB vs. anti-mosque group conflict was the main if not the only reason for the creation of this group. The identity of the key members of the CPT may give an answer to the question of why they became allies of the David Project and its associates in the Roxbury Mosque conflict.

*Ahmed Mansour* is described by mass media as a moderate Muslim cleric, who was expelled from Egyptian al-Asnar University for opposing Islamic extremism.<sup>89</sup> Salma Kazmi mentioned that he was expelled because his interpretation of Islam did not mach any of the established schools of Islamic thought. He basically expressed an opinion that the hadith, or saying of the Prophet Muhammad, on which large part of the Islamic tradition is based, are unverifiable and should be set aside in favor on concentration on Qur’anic values.<sup>90</sup> Such ideas, that may seem a heresy even for the moderate Muslim, resulted in his expulsion from the prestigious Islamic university of al-

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<sup>88</sup> SSC, *ISB, et al. vs. Boston Herald, et al. case No.05-463*

<sup>89</sup> *Globe*, May 17, 2006

<sup>90</sup> *Globe*, April 3, 2006

Asnar and later imprisonment by Egyptian government. He had to flee the native Egypt after the wahabist fetwa (ruling) was calling for his assassination and he was granted asylum in the US. He visited the ISB library where he found some of the writings which he considered anti-American and anti-Jewish.<sup>91</sup>

*Ebrahim Moosa* is a Duke Professor who fled Cape Town after radical Muslims bombed his house. He also advocated for the return to Qur'anic values and for an opportunity for women to lead prayers in mosques. His identity and experiences are very much alike with those of Ahmed Mansour.

*Radwan Masmoudi* is a director of the "Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy" in Washington, DC. He attended the ISB prayers while studying in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. As the previous individuals, he is a devoted fighter against the Islamic extremism. He left a well-paid job of engineer to spend time promoting the moderate view of Islam<sup>92</sup> (Ibid.).

*Dennis Hale*, a leader of the CPT, is a Boston University faculty member who had prior associations with several American conservative foundations (Bradley Foundation, Olin Foundation, and Earhart Foundation). More importantly, he is also a founder and a director for the "Episcopal-Jewish Alliance for Israel"<sup>93</sup> neoconservative organization.<sup>94</sup>

An observer can see that the major interest of almost all of the CPT members is to fight what they perceive is Islamic extremism. Like Steven Emerson, Moosa and Mansour experienced the life threats from Muslim radicals. They both belonged to the

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> <http://www.episcopaljewishalliance.org/>

<sup>94</sup> Khodr, January 13, 2006

clergy but were expelled from it for expressing their views. Therefore, their conflict with Muslim clergy of any kind is deeply personal. Masmoudi also shares an element of his identity with Emerson since they both are full time professional investigators of the Islamic extremism. Prof. Hale shares the pro-Israeli identity of the right-wing Jews although he in fact does not belong to Jewish community. All together they are perfect allies for the David Project in its struggle with the ISB over the Roxbury Mosque construction. On one hand, they share David Project concerns about the extremism ties of the ISB members, on the other they do not represent the Jewish community. In my understanding, the CPT was incorporated by Dennis Hale, who already had ties to the right-wing Jewish community, in order to bring the voice of Muslim dissidents to the broader American audiences. David Project could appeal to Mansour's opinion as to the objective criteria since he was Muslim and had Islamic legal education. CPT played the same role as Steven Emerson did. If the latter one served as an "independent" authority of an American descent in support of David Project position, the CPT members represented "independent" opinion of Muslim scholars.

Such a tactic is a perfect example of appealing to objective criteria (independent authority) as to an effective bargaining tool, described by Fisher and Ury (1983). According to the theory, a party has a better bargaining position if this position is supported by the fact or an authoritative opinion that is not immediately associated with the party itself. As for the average American observer, Steven Emerson and Ahmed Mansour's opinions appeared as an objective justification of the David Project's opposition to the ICC construction. However, the closer look at these individual's identities show that their opinion is far from neutral and that their position is influenced

by certain personal experiences and specific interests of fighting Islamic extremism anywhere they can find it.

The last member of the anti-mosque group whom I want to mention also acted as an expert for David Project and its associates. However, its opinion was more neutral, therefore I am describing it together with the other Jewish organization and outside the anti-Mosque group.

### **Anti-Defamation League and other Jewish organizations.**

The reaction of Jewish community of Greater Boston on the Roxbury Mosque conflict was rather silent. There were several organizations that expressed vocal support for the David Project's activities and there were organizations that publicly confronted its position. However, as it was admitted by Boston Mediator David Matz, most of the Jewish community organizations remained silent and did not want to publicly comment on what was happening.

According to Salma Kazmi (p.c.2007) the ISB did its best to reach out to key Jewish organizations of the area right after the first anti-mosque publication appeared in Boston Herald in October 2003. The organization already had established positive relationships with such right-wing organizations as: Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC), American Jewish Committee (AJC), Temple Israel Boston, as well as with more leftist organizations such as Jewish Voices for Peace,<sup>95</sup> Tekiah: A Jewish Call to Action<sup>96</sup> and Workmen's Circle. After the first publications about the anti-Semitic statements of some of the ISB leaders appeared in press, the ISB sent letters to the

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<sup>95</sup> <http://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/>

<sup>96</sup> <http://www.tekiah.org/>

organizations mentioned above explaining that the ISB is not responsible for the statements whose authors do not have impact on the ISB's activities. Leftist organizations and the Boston chapter of American Jewish Committee expressed understanding of the situation with the conflict.<sup>97</sup> Temple Israel and JCRC supported the David Project position in the conflict, however, most of the JCRC affiliates, such as synagogues and local community organizations, remained silent.

The ISB also tried to outreach the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), whom they described as a very important organization whose opinion about anti-Semitism is very authoritative.<sup>98</sup> The main mission of the ADL is “to stop the defamation of Jewish people ... to secure justice and fair treatment for all.”<sup>99</sup> According to Kazmi, the organization was known for the objectivity of its conclusions, therefore both anti-mosque and pro-mosque groups were waiting for its conclusions regarding if anti-Semitism was or was not present. In this way, both parties acknowledged the expert identity of the ADL and its interest in uncovering the real not supposed cases of anti-Semitism. The ISB tried to contact the ADL and in March 2004 a meeting between representatives of the two organizations took place.<sup>100</sup> As a result of those meetings, the ADL expressed its concern about the statements of Quaradawi and Fitaihi, but it did not deny the Islamic Cultural Center construction per se. In my understanding, the ADL actually acted as an expert in the situation as opposed to the other “experts” from the anti-mosque group. It did not have underlying interest in the conflict itself, therefore it was capable of giving the comprehensive assessment of the situation. While it alarmed that some of Quaradawi's

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<sup>97</sup> Salma Kazmi, p.c. 2007

<sup>98</sup> Salma Kazmi, p.c. 2007

<sup>99</sup> <http://www.adl.org/>

<sup>100</sup> Kazmi, p.c. 2007

and Fitaihi's statements were unacceptable it acknowledged that their connection to the ISB was too indirect to say that the project as a whole should be stopped.

The other Jewish groups of Greater Boston area did not become actively involved in the conflict, although the anti-mosque group tried to form a wider coalition to oppose the supposed terrorism at the ISB. On the other hand, none of the organizations, except of several leftist ones, such as Tekkiah, made public statements criticizing the David Project campaign. The Boston chapter of the American Jewish Committee tried to speak against the anti-mosque group, but the national leadership of this organization later withdrew any support from the ISB. I have two explanations for such behavior.

It would be natural for the Jewish organizations to unite in the face of the threat of the perceived anti-Semitism originating from the ICC. This is well explained by the interdependence theory of social behavior, which states that different groups tend to unite closer in the face of the common threat. The fact that did not happen may prove that unlike David Project, the rest of the Jewish community did not perceive the particular project of Roxbury mosque as a threat to their Jewish identity. Although most of the Jewish population in Boston felt deep connection to Israel, most of the Jewish community organizations did not necessarily perceive the ICC construction through the pattern of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Nor did they oppose the spread of Islam as a possible danger for the Jews in general. Therefore they did not share the ethnocentric and Islamophobic beliefs of the key anti-mosque group members.

At the same time, the notion of Jewish commonality in front of the unclear but still possible enemy did not allow them to openly criticize David Project and its officials. This became especially visible after the ISB filed its anti-defamation suit against anti-

mosque group members, and several organizations, such as JCRC condemned the lawsuit. On the other hand, and several my respondents confirmed this,<sup>101</sup> David Project's extreme ethnocentric beliefs were shared by some of the persons who play the key fundraising roles in the Jewish community of Massachusetts. For example, Seth Klarman, a successful businessman and a Chairman of the David Project, co-chairs the fundraising campaign for the Combined Jewish Philanthropies – the organization which most of the Jewish organizations in the area depend upon.<sup>102</sup>

There is another Jewish organization in the area that was recently playing a visible role in the conflict. This is the Workmen's Circle. This secular leftist Jewish organization had a prior working relationships with the ISB on the issues of the Middle East. When the litigation started the ISB attorney Howard Cooper asked Workmen's Circle to file an amicus brief on behalf of the ISB. Workmen's Circle leadership held public hearings on the issue and decided not to take one side of the conflict but to act as mediators in the conflict. It issued a statement where it called for all parties in the conflict to accept professional mediation as the only possible solution of the conflict. On April 5, 2007 this organization sponsored the private talk by Walid Fitaihi, whose anti-Semitic statements were one of the reasons to provoke the anti-mosque campaign in press. Fitaihi allegedly apologized for his statements before a group of Jewish activists including a representative of the David Project.<sup>103</sup> After the meeting, Workmen's Circle was seeking support for its mediation efforts from the other community organizations through the series of community meetings, one of them held on April 17 at Temple B'nai

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<sup>101</sup> Radin. p.c. 2007

<sup>102</sup> David Project (2005). Jews under siege [please, see appendix]  
Combined Jewish Philanthropies (2007)

<sup>103</sup> *Jewish Advocate*, April, 12, 2007

Brith in Somerville, MA. As of April 2007 there were no other major activities inside the Boston Jewish community regarding the conflict except of the mentioned initiative undertaken by Workmen's Circle.

## **SUMMARY**

### **Preliminary Analysis**

In this paper I took a close look at the conflict over the construction of the Islamic Cultural Center in Roxbury. I tried to analyze the conflict through the perspective of the major stakeholders. On the pro-mosque group side I considered the Islamic Society of Boston and the Boston Redevelopment Authority. On the other side of the conflict I reviewed William Sapers, "David Project for Jewish Leadership," the Boston mass media, Steven Emerson, and "Citizens for Peace and Tolerance." I tried to describe each stakeholder's identity and explicit position in the conflict. At the same time I tried to understand whether the stakeholders have their real hidden interests behind their positions and whether this affects the possibility of conflict resolution. Along with this, I tried to examine whether the main causes for the conflict were the scarce material resources, such as land, or whether they were conflicts of interest of the identity of the stakeholders.

I started my analysis with a close study of the history of the land parcel where the Mosque was meant to be, as well as the history of Roxbury in general. I concluded that the land was not a major interest for any of the stakeholders of the conflict except for the Muslim party, nor was the land deal between the ISB and the BRA, although it resulted in

the Policastro lawsuit. It became clear for me that various land issues were used by the anti-mosque group as a tool to achieve other interests.

My next step was to look at the identity of the major stakeholders and to understand what made them unite loosely into two opposing groups. I found that identities of the stakeholders within anti-mosque and pro-mosque groups are very diverse, yet those stakeholders have stayed together for almost four years. Interests and positions are the most obvious categories, which different stakeholders could unite around. Ethnocentrism and interdependence may be the other ones.

### **Positions and Interests at Play**

(See Appendix A)

At this point, the conflict between explicit positions and hidden interests can explain the conflict situation around the Roxbury Mosque. I analyzed the interests and positions of the major stakeholders and realized that for most of the anti-mosque group members those two categories do not correspond, in that their explicit positions are significantly different than what their real interests appear to be. This may be a reason why dispute resolution efforts were so far unsuccessful. In addition, one of the interests of at least one of the members of the anti-mosque group in particular – halting the spread of Islam in the United States – is fundamentally opposed to central interests of the ISB.

The ISB and the BRA's interests are generally consistent with their positions. They both advocate for the ICC completion in the nearest possible future. As far as I understand, this is the major interest of both of them in this conflict. However, this shared interest has different origins for each of them. The ISB is interested in the ICC

construction primarily in order to expand its membership and to gain more political influence within Boston community. As a Muslim and immigrant organization, the ISB tries to bring together other organizations and communities with similar identities in order to address more effectively such issues as Islamophobia and immigrant rights. The ISB position also has the element of a Civil Rights struggle since the organization emphasizes that its right to build the place of worship was threatened by the anti-mosque group. Nevertheless, I do not see civil rights struggle as a primary interest of the ISB, at least in this particular conflict, since it appeared in the middle of the conflict together with the anti-defamation lawsuit against David Project and the mass media. The BRA emphasized its need to develop certain city areas and the ICC is an opportunity for it to improve the Roxbury neighborhood by attracting people every Friday for prayer and possibly some Muslim-owned businesses. This interest corresponded with the ISB's interest to expand its membership and resulted in the land deal between two organizations. Both original interests are openly articulated by both organizations' leaderships. Later in the conflict, the ISB and the BRA developed another shared interest which was protection from mass media accusations and lawsuits. Although, the ISB was blamed primarily for terrorism and anti-Semitism and the BRA was accused of unfair land distribution, those accusations, which came from the same source, resulted in the same interest of protection. Generally I did not see any hidden interests behind the explicit positions of both parties. Rather sporadic and accidental connections of the ISB to anti-Semitic and extremist individuals make it nearly impossible to say that the ISB's real interest was to spread radical Islam as it is alleged by the anti-mosque group.

On the other side of the conflict the situation seems different. All of the anti-mosque members articulated in the press and courts that prevention of Islamic terrorism in Boston is their main interest. The anti-mosque stakeholders, however, have their own reasons to fight extremist Islam, both because of their identity and past experiences. However, I found out that almost each of them had his own agenda behind this articulated position. William Sapers, who served as a trustee of the Roxbury Community College had a personal conflict with the College administration because his authority as College benefactor was ignored during the land deal. He also was concerned that the ICC will serve as a fundraising institution for the Hamas terrorist networks in the Middle East.

David Project for Jewish Leadership, who calls itself a Zionist organization, shared Sapers' concerns about the Middle East terrorism but its interests went even deeper. I suspect that this organization perceives Islam in general as a threat to Israel and Jews in general. Therefore, its interest is to oppose the construction of the mosque simply because it will contribute to the spread of the religion, which they perceive as a threat for the social group they identify themselves with.

The Boston Herald newspaper and Fox-25 News TV channel was also interested in fighting Islamic terrorism. As for the mass-media, this was a chance to produce (to "own") a big story that would draw attention of a broad American audience because the terrorism issues were major interests for Americans since the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center. Reaching broader audiences also served the interests of the David Project, William Sapers, and Steven Emerson by allowing them to recruit supporters from various levels of Boston community and to bring pressure on the ISB. This resulted in close cooperation between them and Herald journalist Jonathan Wells.

As for Steven Emerson, fighting Islamic terrorism was his full time job as an expert, who regularly testified before Congress and different law-enforcement authorities on terrorism issues. Launching an effective media and legal campaign against individuals and organizations that he identified as terrorist could help him to strengthen his reputation as an expert and to obtain additional possible benefactors from the conservative part of the Jewish community. In addition, he probably had personal bias towards any Muslim group since he received death threats from the radical South African Islamists and had to secure his life.

“Citizens for Peace and Tolerance” organization was not among the original stakeholders of the conflict. It was organized by David Project supporter Dennis Hale to support the anti-mosque group’s position with an expert opinion of independent Muslim clerics and activists. This group seems not to have any other agenda except for the struggle against perceived Islamic extremism; therefore their position corresponds with their explicit interests. However, at least two of the group members were interested in struggle against Islamic extremism because of the death threats they experienced from different radical Islamic groups. They experienced the same kind of in-group bias as Steven Emerson did.

All of the anti-mosque group members developed another interest during the conflict the same way as the pro-mosque group. As soon as the ISB filed the anti-defamation lawsuit and included all of the anti-mosque group members as defendants, they become interested in avoiding the accusations as much as possible. They often

referred to the lawsuit as unjust and unethical<sup>104</sup>, and that they would prefer to get rid of the lawsuit.

We can see that the pro-mosque and anti-mosque groups share some interests while other interests remain in conflict. Both groups are interested in dismissal of the court cases against each other. At the same time, the David Project's interest in the prevention of the spread of Islam is completely incompatible with the ISB's interest in building a new mosque.

It is absolutely critical to understand the hidden and explicit positions of the parties in order to work out the appropriate model of conflict intervention. The mediation effort in Summer 2006 failed primarily because the mediation panel was unable to uncover and address the hidden interests of the parties. By June 2006 the pro-mosque and anti-mosque groups found themselves stuck in a deadlock of the court conflict. Both parties had pending lawsuits against each other and none of them seemed to win the competition over public opinion. The judge who was hearing the ISB's anti-defamation lawsuit against mass-media suggested that it would be better for the Boston community if the parties would resolve their dispute through mediation. The Inter-Religious Center for Public Life organization responded to the court and offered to mediate the dispute with a panel of four prominent priests and rabbis. The ISB responded positively to the call for mediation and presented their case in front of the panel. On the other hand, the David Project and its affiliates refused to attend the hearings and sent their lawyer to represent the organization.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Robins, p.c. 2007

<sup>105</sup> Helmick, p.c. 2007

The mediation effort was built on the notion that the anti-mosque group's position of fighting the spread of Islamic terrorism and anti-Semitism in Boston was the real and main interest of the group. It appeared possible to reconcile this interest to the ISB's intention of Mosque construction. The combination of monitoring ISB services, the verifications of donations for the project, and ISB's public denial of Quaradawi's and Futaihi's statement could have addressed the major explicit concerns of the anti-mosque group. However, this did not happen even though the ISB had shown that it was ready to make concessions in order to be able to finish the project in general. The mediators did not take into account that the real interest of at least the David Project was not to allow the construction of *any* mosque. A solution that would allow for the construction of the ICC would not address most of the real interests of the anti-mosque group members except for, perhaps, the need for security. It did not address the issue of pro-Palestinian perspectives on the Arab-Israeli conflict being articulated at the ICC and Roxbury Community College campus, which was a concern of Sapers. Neither did it reinforce Emerson's terrorism expertise, nor did it satisfy the CPT's fight against Islamic clergy. And it definitely could not reconcile with the Islamophobic views of David Project people. As a result, the anti-mosque group decided to ignore the mediation process and to remain on their unchanged positions. I personally do not believe that an interest-based, rational mediation could resolve the conflict, at least while the David Project is at the table. The key idea of Fisher and Ury (1981) is that shared interests and differing but complementary interests can both serve as building blocks for a wise agreement. In the Roxbury Mosque case, however, the shared interests of protection against accusations are of a secondary nature and developed later in the process of conflict. At the same time, the

differing interests are not complementary and differ over the question of whether the Mosque should or should not exist. There is very little room for the creation of additional value or for putting aside the differing interests as suggested by Fisher and Ury (1981). The ISB cannot give up the \$22-million construction project, and for at least the David Project, the whole construction of a mosque is unacceptable. This creates a zero-sum situation in which gains of one party mean loss for another, and which is extremely hard to resolve through traditional interest-based, rational bargaining. Rational bargaining is also difficult because some of the stakeholders' interests, which I just discussed, derive from "sub-rational" trends.

### **Sub-rational Factors at Play**

Some of the stakeholders' interests that are at play in the conflict described resulted from certain beliefs and views of these individuals and cannot be described by their rational needs.

For example, a very important interest at play is William Sapers and David Project's interest to protect the Israeli perspective on the Israeli-Palestine conflict. As conservative Jewish individuals, they are concerned that the Palestinian perspective on the Arab-Israeli conflict would be spread through the ICC as if it is *a priori* wrong and the official Israeli perspective is *a priori* right. Such a favorable attitude towards the in-group as opposed to an out-group is one outgrowth of the ethnocentric bias. Groups that are influenced by the ethnocentric bias not only perceive their own group as the only right one, they also perceive it as the strongest one, while the opposite groups are perceived as wrong and weak. This bias appears to have been underpinning the

motivations of the David Project and William Sapers when they planned the media campaign against the ICC construction. Therefore, both the interests and tactics of the two key anti-mosque group members were influenced by their ethnocentric biases, which dispute interveners cannot ignore. Ethnocentric biases may characterize some individuals within the ISB as well, but it is far less articulated and does not appear to play a significant role for the escalation of this conflict. This is primarily because it does not influence the real interests of the ISB to build a Mosque. As mentioned, the ISB tried to build the ICC not only because Boston Muslim immigrant groups feel interdependent in the hostile environment of a foreign country and want to stick together, but also because they do not have enough places for worship and study, such that the Center will host a number of valuable services for them (a school, morgue, library). Furthermore, the interest of becoming the leading Muslim organization of the area through administering the biggest Mosque is also quite rational. Therefore, even if the ISB members and leadership do not perceive interdependence-based threats to their group, they will still remain on their position that the mosque should be built because of the multiple rational interests that are served by its construction.

Ethnocentric views explain William Sapers' and some of the David Project's interests and tactics. David Project's overarching opposition to Islam, however, and the motivations and biases of the other anti-mosque group members, may also be explained through the framework of interdependence.

The anti-mosque group comprises individuals and organizations that are too different to build their alliance on the basis of their ethnocentric biases. The explicit and hidden interests among the anti-mosque alliance may keep them together, but an even

more important explanation behind their unity is the threat each of them perceives from Islam. As discussed, the David Project perceives Islam in general as a threat to the Jewish social category because of its non-interpretative understanding of this religion and their exaggeration of the influence of “puritan” Islamic groups.<sup>106</sup>

In addition, Ahmed Mansour and Ebrahim Moosa of “Citizens for Peace and Tolerance,” and Steven Emerson all experienced death threats from radical Islamic groups. Therefore, they also perceive Islam or traditional Islamic clergy as threats to themselves. This common perceived threat may be another powerful factor that brought and keeps together the David Project, Steven Emerson, and CPT organization. It is less in play for William Sapers, who stays with the group according to his ethnocentric concerns. It does not impact the behavior of the mass media, which stays with the group primarily due to rather rational interests: to sell newspapers. Later, the lawsuit that was filed against the anti-mosque group became another threat to all of the group members. It brought them together even closer than the perceived threat from Islam. All the group members feel dependent on each other in the face of these threats and this interdependence has restricted their independent activity in the conflict. The fact that all of them gave up their personal attorneys and allowed Jeffrey Robins (David Project’s attorney) to represent them all speaks in favor of such conclusion.

It is important not only to understand why the anti-mosque group acted as it did, but also the impact these actions have had on the possibilities for resolving the dispute. Interdependence theory states that in the face of a threat to a social group, members of the group develop a negative bias towards the out-group members who threaten this social

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<sup>106</sup> el-Fadl, 2007

in-group.<sup>107</sup> This bias is close to the ethnocentric bias in that the in-group members perceive their own group members as right, positive, and just, while seeing the opposing group as wrong, negative, and unjust. In both cases, in-groups exaggerate the negative characteristic of the opposing out-group. For example, in the Roxbury Mosque case, there was little direct evidence that the ISB leaders had any connection to world terrorist networks. However, the anti-mosque group exaggerated the small amount of tangential evidence into a nation-wide conspiracy which was published in the *Boston Herald*. Such behavior reflected various interests of the anti-mosque stakeholders, but it also reflected the ethnocentric and interdependence biases of most of the stakeholders. Underlying the rational interests of the parties were the ethnocentric and interdependence-based biases, which became a hidden barrier for the anti-mosque group to engage in dispute resolution. The mediation panel for the conflict was apparently unable to uncover those interests in summer of 2006.

Interdependence theory may also explain the behavior of the pro-mosque group. The ISB and the BRA were both threatened by the media campaign organized by the anti-mosque group. This threat resulted in interdependence between the organizations and a likely bias against their opponents. Unlike the pro-mosque group, however, the anti-mosque group members developed their biases long before the conflict when they started perceiving Islam as threat. The conflict over the mosque just strengthened this bias. The pro-mosque group developed its biases in the process of the conflict, and nothing suggests that it perceived Jewish groups as threats before the conflict started. Therefore, their biases are less deep than those of the anti-mosque group, which in part explains why

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<sup>107</sup> Flippen, 1996

the ISB was much less reluctant to enter mediation than the David Project and its affiliates.

### **Final Thoughts on Resolution**

Given these deep ethnocentric and interdependence-based biases, I do not see many opportunities for the peaceful resolution of the Roxbury Mosque conflict. Incompatible real interests of the conflicting parties, as well as ethnocentric and interdependence biases make it extremely hard to bring parties to the table. A victory on the part of one party through a court battle seems to be the likeliest outcome of the conflict. The ISB seems to have more chances to win, because the ICC construction is almost over and the Policastro lawsuit was dismissed by the court and went to appeal.

Another organization – Workmen’s Circle – is now trying to mediate the dispute. It convinced the ISB to invite Walid Fitaihi to Boston so that he could apologize to the Boston Jewish community. Workman’s Circle is currently recruiting various Jewish organizations to put pressure on the David Project so that it would agree to participate in mediation. As of April 2007 the David Project refused to participate in any mediation until the anti-defamation lawsuit is dropped.

Despite the dim prospects for mediation in this conflict, the above analysis indicates some tentative leads that could be used by a potential mediator for the Roxbury Mosque dispute:

1. The anti-mosque group has to be divided. I do not see other chances to bring at least some of its members to the negotiation table. The mass media defendants (Herald, Fox-25 News, Jonathan Wells) are the only group members whose interests in the

conflict are rational. They may be willing to give up their positions in exchange for dropping the lawsuit against them. Their interest of being secured against the lawsuit does not contradict the ISB's interest to build the mosque, therefore the possibilities for settlement are good. In addition, it is more likely that David Project would follow other group members and agree on mediation.

2. Mutual dropping of the lawsuits should become part of the agreement, not a precondition to it, since the lawsuit is the only possible tool for the pro-mosque group to press on their opponents, while the anti-mosque group still has the mass media in their favor. It would, however, be hard for the intervener to convince the anti-mosque group to agree on this, since it blames the ISB for calling for mediation while at the same time pursuing the lawsuit. This particular element could potentially be negotiated privately between Howard Cooper and Jeffrey Robins - lawyers for the parties. In addition, if a separate deal with the media could be achieved so that mass media defendants would be removed from the anti-defamation lawsuit, this could become a signal to the rest of the anti-mosque group members that the ISB is trustworthy and that the lawsuit could be dropped as a result of negotiations, not as a prerequisite to them.

3. Ethnocentrism should be addressed alongside the rational interests. Ethnocentric biases are extremely hard to change, but they are surprisingly easy to address in this conflict. William Sapers and David Project members are concerned that the newly erected Islamic Cultural Center would become a place where Palestinian perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would be presented to Boston audiences. They also are afraid that the mosque will morally and financially support Islamic suicide bombers in the Middle East. Therefore, a mediator should work out a deal which would

ensure that the Jewish organizations would have a chance to present their perspectives on the Arab-Israeli conflict to the Center's visitors. On the other hand, the ISB should be willing to disclose its financial transactions for independent monitoring in order to ensure that the money raised in the Mosque would not be fed into Arab militant groups. Such measures, if introduced by mutual consent, may address ethnocentric biases of the pro-Israeli anti-mosque group members, because they send an underlying message that creation of the ICC will not challenge the "superior" status of the ethnic identity of the anti-mosque group. It is unlikely that mediation will change their views of Israel as the only one right party of the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, there is a chance that anti-mosque group members would be less reluctant about the idea of the ICC construction if they would ascertain that the Center would not become a source of ideological and militant assault on Israel.

4. Interdependence fears should be put aside if not addressed. I do not think that the biases that result from interdependence may be changed or even addressed in this conflict. The David Project's belief that Islam is a threat for the Jewish social category and its interest in preventing the spread of this religion are deeply embedded in its members. It would be too difficult for an intervener to change those perceptions over several mediation sessions. It is not even certain that David Project people would agree to change their beliefs, with which they seem to be comfortable. Rather, an intervener should use coercive tools to bring them to some sort of settlement that would address their ethnocentric concerns about Israel in the Arab-Israeli conflict but will put aside the general anti-Islamic beliefs of David Project.

Approaching Seth Klarman as an informal leader of David Project may be an example of such coercive tools. Since his name never appeared in press, his success as an investor may depend on his good reputation which may be damaged if information about his involvement in the anti-mosque campaign would be emphasized by journalists. He may have business partners in the Middle East who would not be happy to find out that he is chairman of a group that opposes mosque construction in Boston and publishes anti-Islamic articles<sup>108</sup>. Being faced with a possibility to appear in the newspaper headlines as an anti-mosque group inspirer he may be ready to make concessions and to persuade the rest of David Project members to accept a settlement on conditions described in the previous point. An intervener should approach Mr. Klarman with an explanation that his role in the ICC conflict would sooner or later be revealed by the ISB and neutral journalists, therefore it would be in his interest to engage into mediation with the ISB and to convince the other David Project members to do the same. In order to preserve neutrality of such mediation, an intervener should probably be a different person or organization from the mediator.

5. Since the mediation must deal with some very personal ethnocentric and interdependence biases, it has to be strictly confidential, involve key participants only, and should not be covered in press. Publicity of negotiations, especially separate negotiations with different anti-mosque group members, may encourage other group members to unite closely, since they would perceive the negotiations as a threat to the integrity of their group. They may even try to break such negotiations with separate anti-mosque group members. Furthermore, parties may have to put aside some of their biases in order to reach some sort of settlement. Such a compromise is easier to make when the

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<sup>108</sup> Please, see Appendix E.

parties do not feel the pressure of broader audiences, which may have similar biases.

Therefore it is better not to disclose any kind of deal to broader audiences until the deal is finalized.

6. A broader public process, such as a deliberative or other form of interfaith dialogue, should follow the confidential mediation in order to heal any mutual biases that arose in Muslim, Jewish, and general American communities during the conflict. While approaches discussed in points 3 and 4 deal with ethnocentric and interdependence biases they only address those biases in relation to the settlement but do not actually change mutual perceptions of the parties. Nor do they deal with wider populations of Boston Muslims and Jews who generally are rather tolerant towards the conflict but may share some of the biases immediate stakeholder have. Deliberative interfaith dialogue hosted in the newly erected Cultural Center may actually heal some of the biases shared by the parties and their supporting communities for a longer term and to prevent re-escalation of similar conflicts in future. An intervenor should consider a dialogue between major stakeholders and their supporters to follow the formal settlement that would be achieved through mediation. Such a dialogue would be a chance for the stakeholders to speak about their concerns and beliefs without trying to prove their cases to court, press, or broader audiences. Certainly, such a dialogue would be possible only after the parties would reconcile some of their rational and sub-rational interests and leave aside the rest through formal mediation. There is a chance that, if professionally facilitated, such a dialogue may help the parties to get over their ethnocentric and interdependence biases through positive experiences of out-group ethnicities acquired through face-to-face conversations. Hopefully, the parties would understand that their opponents do not

constitute the real threat for their social categories and that they are biased people, and have to rethink their behavior.

It may be hard to get the anti-mosque group members to participate in dialogues like the one described, but the participation clause can be incorporated into the settlement agreement reached before. The series of dialogues may start from immediate stakeholders and later involve representatives of broader audiences.

The conflict over the Roxbury Mosque construction shows how tentative the interfaith peace is between some American religious communities. The conflict uncovered a complicated network of interests and biases that can undermine generally peaceful interaction among those communities. It also showed how easily a disagreement between several individuals may become an explicit conflict that involves broader audiences. It damaged both Muslims and Jews of Greater Boston and sowed seeds of mutual distrust that may affect future relationships between those communities. The hope is that it will soon end constructively and will serve as a lesson for other religious groups within and outside the US.

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**Appendix A:  
Interests, Positions and Irrational Element at Play among Stakeholders of Roxbury Mosque Conflict**

<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Explicit Position</b>	<b>Real Interests</b>	<b>Irrational issues at play</b>
Islamic Society of Boston	We want to build the mosque in order to have place of worship and interfaith dialogue; Land deal is fair.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. to build the Mosque</li> <li>2. to extend membership</li> <li>3. to acquire more influence in Boston community</li> <li>4. to be protected against accusations of terrorism and anti-Semitism.</li> </ol>	Interdependence in-group bias against Jews because of the media campaign and the Policastro lawsuit
Boston Redevelopment Authority	We want the Mosque to be built; Land deal is fair	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. to have territory developed;</li> <li>2. to be protected against accusations of corruption</li> </ol>	None
Roxbury Community College	We welcome the Mosque	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To bring attention to college;</li> <li>2. to receive help in fundraising</li> </ol>	None
William Sapers	We are against the Mosque because the ISB has connections to Islamic terrorism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. to oppose the spread of Palestinian perspective on the Arab-Israeli conflict;</li> <li>2. to oppose fundraising for the Islamist militant groups in Palestine;</li> <li>3. to punish the RCC for ignoring his opinion as benefactor;</li> <li>4. to be protected against lawsuit.</li> </ol>	Ethnocentric in-group bias towards Israel;
David Project for Jewish Leadership	We are against the Mosque because the ISB has connections to Islamic terrorism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. to oppose the spread of Palestinian perspective on the Arab-Israeli conflict;</li> <li>2. to oppose fundraising for the Islamist militant groups in Palestine;</li> <li>3. to oppose the spread of Islam as a religion hostile to Jewish identity;</li> <li>4. to be protected against</li> </ol>	<p>Ethnocentric in-group bias towards Israel;</p> <p>Interdependence in-group bias against Islam because of non-interpretive understanding of Islam and because of the ISB lawsuit.</p>

		the lawsuit.	
Press ( <i>Herald, Fox,</i> Jonathan Wells)	We are against the Mosque because the ISB has connections to Islamic terrorism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. to own a big story on interesting topic;</li> <li>2. to be protected against lawsuit.</li> </ol>	None
Steven Emerson	We are against the Mosque because the ISB has connections to Islamic terrorism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. to be claimed as a terrorism expert;</li> <li>2. to fight Islamic extremism everywhere;</li> <li>3. to be protected against lawsuit.</li> </ol>	Interdependence in-group bias against Islam because of death threats and because of the ISB lawsuit.
Citizens for Peace and Tolerance (A. Mansour, R. Masmoodi and others)	We are against the Mosque because the ISB has connections to Islamic terrorism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. to fight Islamic extremism everywhere;</li> <li>2. to be protected against lawsuit</li> </ol>	Interdependence in-group bias against Islam because of death threats and because of the ISB lawsuit.