

AMSS 38th ANNUAL CONFERENCE

“Islamic Traditions and Comparative Modernities”

Cosponsored by:
The University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA
September 25-26, 2009

Abstract Only – Work in Progress

“Ulama and their Attitudes Toward
the US: Evidence from Bangladesh and Pakistan”

By: Mumtaz Ahmad, Ph.D
(Hampton University, Hampton, VA)

The paper reports the findings of a survey based on a representative sample of *madrasa ulama* in Bangladesh and Pakistan with regard to their attitudes and perceptions of the United States. Based on the analysis of the survey data, it is argued that the political consciousness and worldviews of the *madrasa ulama* are informed and influenced not only by what happens in their immediate vicinity, but also what happens around the globe and by what they read and watch in the media. In the *madrasa* environment and curriculum, therefore, the *ulama* do not have any added reasons that may influence their perceptions of, and attitudes toward, the West or the United States. In this respect, as the US is engaged in two unpopular wars in Muslim lands, the political views of the *ulama* in global perspective may not be very different from those of the vast majority in the larger society. Contrary to the general perceptions, our survey found no fanatical tendencies among the *ulama* to substantiate theories that consider *madrasas* as breeding grounds for anti-Western, and, for that matter, anti-American tendencies.