

# Muslim Democrat

www.islam-democracy.org

Published by the Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy (CSID), Washington, D.C.

Volume 2, No. 1, February 2000

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## Dear Colleagues:

During the 1999 Annual Convention of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) in Washington DC, I attended a panel on 'Democratization and Human Rights in the Middle East', organized by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights. The four speakers exalted the benefits of democracy and described the problems faced by human rights activists in many of the Arab countries. During the questions and answers period, one of the speakers was asked about the relationship between Islam and democracy. He answered, in some detail, that "Islam is against democracy", as well as against human rights, especially women's rights, and basic freedoms.

This answer explains why democracy has made so little headway in the Muslim world. If democracy is presented as something not only alien, but also antagonistic to Islam, Muslims will continue to view it with suspicion. If forced to choose between their religion and democracy, the majority will obviously choose to keep their faith, which they inherited from their fathers and grandfathers and in which they strongly believe. If we wish to convince the Muslim people to accept and embrace democracy, we have to start by convincing them that it is, indeed, compatible with their religion.

There are different interpretations of Islam, just like there are different interpretations of Christianity and Judaism. If some interpretations are contrary to democracy, freedom of thought and expression, other interpretations are fully compatible with freedom and liberty. It is these interpretations that must be fully developed and put forward by those who wish to promote the ideals of democracy and human rights in the Muslim world. The problem of democracy is that the democrats have mostly been secularists, and secularism in the Muslim world has become antireligious. Muslims have been forced to choose, for the most part, between democrats who are against Islam, and Islamists who are against democracy. This is a dead-end street.

Democracy will be adopted in the Muslim world only if it is explained and developed from within an Islamic framework. If we can show that Islam is against dictatorship, compulsion, and oppression, and fully supports the right of the people to choose what type of government they have and to hold those in power accountable, democracy will be welcomed with open hearts. Genuine Muslims and genuine democrats should realize that neither Islam nor democracy can be imposed on the people. If democracy is presented in an Islamic context, using Islamic principles, the people will understand and support it and the governments will also understand that it is in their best interest to embrace it. This is the task of true democrats, and this is exactly what I said to our respected speaker.

Radwan A. Masmoudi  
Executive Director

## A MODERNIST PERSPECTIVE

by Ali A. Mazrui  
CSID Chair

The Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy is interested in connections across time, as well as connections among different societies. There has been such a thing as the shadow of the Crusades on relations between Muslims and Christians across centuries. Should we recognize this reality?

Does the shadow of the Crusades lie on recent debates about “clash of civilizations” and “dialogue among civilizations”? Are clarion calls in the West about “the Islamic threat” a latter day manifestation of the Crusade syndrome?

The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has initiated an international project on “Dialogue among Civilizations”.

And the reverberations of Samuel Huntington’s article in *Foreign Affairs* (1993) and his book on “Clash of Civilizations” (1996) continue to be heard in American classrooms and policy chambers.

Were the Crusades a special stage in the history of “Clash of Civilizations”? Did those two centuries of the Crusades set the agenda for a millennium of dialectical relationships between creeds, cultures and civilizations?

Such questions may even affect prospects for democracy and Islam today. Impediments to democratization in Muslim countries are of two broad categories:

(I) Impediments arising out of being



underdeveloped countries (Third World syndrome)

(II) Impediments arising out of being Muslim countries (religio-cultural constraints)

To illustrate the two senses, let me cite a triangular exchange between me, a friend in Muscat and Samuel P. Huntington at Harvard. In May 1997 Samuel Huntington, John Esposito and myself were involved in a panel discussion recorded in the USA for Dubai Television.

When the Program was shown in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), it was seen by (among others) an Omani friend of mine. He interpreted Huntington as saying that Islam was a militaristic religion. My friend sent me an angry fax, denouncing Huntington for his remarks. He had interpreted Huntington as saying that Muslim countries were militaristic because they were Muslim. Was this another shadow of the Crusades?

I wrote to Professor Huntington to tell him about the anger and anguish of my Omani friend over Huntington’s suggestion that Islam was a militaristic religion.

Huntington wrote to me to explain that if his remarks had been mistranslated in Dubai, he was sorry. He did not mean that Islam was doctrinally militaristic; he meant that there were demographic factors in the Muslim world right now which helped to cause a disproportionate volume of violence in the Muslim world or between Muslims and their neighbours. Such demographic factors as the percentage of young people in relation to old people; the pace of population growth; the pace of rising economic expectations in relation to rising political frustrations. Huntington was saying that Muslim countries were disproportionately militaristic not because they were Muslim but because they were demographically distorted by underdevelopment.

We must therefore distinguish between a) developmental factors affecting democracy in the Muslim world and b) Islamic factors affecting democracy in the Muslim world. But the shadow of the Crusades and clash of civilizations still persists.

Inevitably a Center on Islam and Democracy does also have to be interested in such brutal modern concepts as “genocide” – the purposeful attempt to annihilate and obliterate a people.

The question which arises is whether the Crusades were among the earliest

instances of genocide. Long before the Jews were subjected to the Nazi Holocaust they were subjected to the Holycaust of the Crusaders (if you would forgive the painful pun). Of course, thousands of Muslims were similarly annihilated.

A Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy may also be intrigued by the interplay between historical interpretation and political consciousness. It was a French philosopher-historian who once argued that the secret of nation-building was to get one's history WRONG. Turning brutal aggressors into moral Christian Crusaders helped to forge temporary Christian solidarity and national pride and cohesion.

But above all, after 900 years, we need to get the balance of the facts right. We need to seek an approximation of the truth. What really happened 900 years ago? Let us explore these issues in the new millennium.

The Crusades of 1095-1291 ended with the fall of Acre, the last Latin outpost. The Crusades constituted one of the bloodiest periods in relations between Christians and Muslims. Were the Crusades an early instance of North-South conflict?

In Samuel Huntington's phrase this was more than an early instance of "clash of civilizations". Indeed, there were times when the Crusades were not merely Christian against Muslim – but the North against the South. Certainly the Fourth Crusade initiated by Pope Innocent III in 1198 to strike against Egypt, moved against Constantinople – a Christian metropolis. Constantinople fell to the Crusaders in 1204, and the Crusaders sacked the city almost to the ground. The attack did almost irreparable harm between the Latin church and the Orthodox Greek church.

But we still need to know more. What happened 900 years ago? What has happened since? Let us explore together in

*continued on page 12*

## CSID in the MEDIA

*The Washington Post*

### IN BRIEF

*By Caryle Murphy*

Saturday, October 9, 1999; Page B08

## Islam and Democracy

A group of American scholars has formed a Washington-based organization to promote study of the relationship between Islam and democracy. The Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy is a nonprofit organization open to persons of all faiths, said Executive Director Radwan A. Masmoudi.

It is meant to serve as a think tank for those interested in melding traditional Islamic concepts with the political experiences of modern Muslims, widen an understanding of democracy in the Muslim world and foster dialogue between secular and Islamist scholars. The center is looking for office space, Masmoudi said.

Ali A. Mazrui of Binghamton University is chairman of the center, and John L. Esposito, director of Georgetown University's Center of Muslim-Christian Understanding, is vice chairman. Its Web site is: [www.islam-democracy.org](http://www.islam-democracy.org)

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## Live Debate on Islam & Democracy

On November 24, 1999, Dr. Radwan Masmoudi, Executive Director of CSID, participated in a live debate on "Islam & Democracy", on the "Educate Our families (EOF)" radio talk show (WNZK radio). The discussion centered on compatibility between Islam & democracy, freedom of expression in Islam, and equality between men and women. The host of the program was Mr. Osama kadi, President of Thought & Education Club. The program is heard every night by almost 300,000 Arab-Americans in Michigan and the Mid-West.

## *We need your HELP!*

1. CSID is a new *non-profit* organization dedicated to a comprehensive study of the critical issues related to Islam and democracy, democratization in the Muslim world, and to educating Muslims and non-Muslims alike about compatibility between Islam and democracy. In order for CSID to grow and achieve its objectives, we need your moral and financial support.
2. Due to budgetary constraints, we cannot continue to send this newsletter to our large database of about 5,000 names. If you wish to continue to receive the *Muslim Democrat*, please send your subscription fee (\$25) or become a member (\$50), fellow (\$100), or founding member (\$1,000) of CSID.
3. We invite you to attend the CSID FIRST ANNUAL MEETING on April 30, 2000, in Georgetown University (see call for proposals on page 9).

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# ‘SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD’

*or*

# ‘SOVEREIGNTY OF THE PEOPLE’?

by M. Fathi Osman  
CSID Director



The controversy over the relationship of the sovereignty of God vs. the sovereignty of the people is theoretical, dealing with semantics more than substance. It is often raised by some Islamists to stress the difference between a Muslim state, which relies on Shura (consultation), and a democratic state in which the government is “of the people, by the people, for the people”. This argument arises from a basic misconception about the extent of divine legislation in Islam. In the Quran, only about 228 legal verses are related to worldly dealings (*‘mu’amalat’*), while the total number of verses in the Quran is 6236.

The Prophet said: “I am but a human being: if I command you with a matter of your religion, carry it out, but if I command you with something according to my opinion, I am merely a human being” [reported by Muslim and al-Nisa’i]. In another hadith, the Prophet said, “You know your worldly affairs better” [reported by Muslim]. When someone asked the Prophet about the location of the Muslim army in the battle of Badr, whether it was decided according to God’s revelation or the Prophet’s opinion, the Prophet answered that it was merely his opinion. The man criticized it and suggested another position to which the Prophet agreed.

Muslim legal scholars have developed many ways to determine whether what the Prophet said or did was meant as a legislation for the successive Muslim generations or just for his Companions in the given circumstances, and whether it was meant to be a strict order and prohibition, or merely an encouragement

or discouragement.

A voluminous heritage in Islamic jurisprudence was the result of successful efforts in understanding and interpreting the legal texts in the Quran and Sunna. The Prophet himself stated, when he appointed Companion Mu’adh ibn Jabal as a judge, that some cases which would be presented to him might not meet in a direct way a specific text in the Quran or Sunna. He agreed with Mu’adh that he should use his mind to the best of his capability in such a case. The Prophet’s companions and the successive generations of jurists developed and used intellectual methods in introducing an enormous amount of legal rules to meet the different and ever-changing circumstances in different places and times. They were developed using intellectual methods such as analogy (*qiyas*), preference for certain legal or practical considerations (*istihsan*), or merely considering the general social benefit (*maslaha mursala*). Furthermore, jurists have indicated that the general rule for anything is allowance, and prohibition should be proved by evidence from the

Quran or Sunna. The goals of Islamic law, which guide any intellectual effort for introducing new laws, have been pointed out by the prominent jurist Ibrahim ibn-Musa al-Shatibi (d. 790H/1380 C.E.), and capably developed in modern times by the distinguished Tunisian jurist Muhammad al-Tahir ibn ‘Ashur (d. 1973).

Islamic law aims, as the jurists have taught, to secure the essential needs of humans, guarding and developing human life, the family and children, the human mind, freedom of faith, and property, both private and public [1]. Reliance on *‘istihsan’* and *‘maslaha’* underscores the human basis of the Islamic law. The jurist ibn al-Qayyim stated: “God sent the conveyors of His messages, and brought down His revealed books, so that people might secure justice in dealing with one another. Thus, whenever justice is secured, there is God’s law” [2]. Accordingly, Muslims adopted several administrative and financial precedents from others in their laws, such as land-tax (*kharaaj*).

Jurists have classified “the rights” in Islamic law as rights which belong to God, rights which belong to human beings, and rights which combine both in different degrees. They have considered among the rights which belong to God, in addition to worship, areas of public interest such as land taxation and penalties [3]. However, this does not exclude the need for a human guard of the “rights of God”, which may mean in most cases, the “rights of the people”. Consensus of the people, (*ijma’ al-umma*) which is distinctive from “consensus of the ulama”, has had its place in Islamic law. Several traditions were reported on the reliance of *‘ijma’ al-*

*umma'*, and even on following “the overwhelming majority, *al-sawad al-aazam*” [reported by ibn Hanbal, ibn Majah].

It may be argued that this successive effort in developing Islamic jurisprudence has been done by Muslim scholars (*ulama*), who have always been jurists-legislators, not by the people. But who are those jurists? Aren't they human beings? It may also be argued that their efforts have been based on the texts of Quran and Sunna. No doubt about that, but if such texts could provide a broad basis for such a huge and diverse human legal product, which has been developed through centuries in different circumstances, why can't these texts continue to guide the Muslim 'people' in the same way in a contemporary Muslim state?

Why would not the people today be legislators in a modern state, if their representatives were aware of the needs of the people? Some representatives may be Islamic lawyers, and others may be informed or influenced in different degrees by Islamic legal culture, being citizens in a Muslim state. In any case, the constitution may state that God's guidance, in the Quran and Sunna, is the supreme legislative source, and the Supreme Court can guard this principle.

Every Muslim believes that “Sovereignty belongs to God” in the whole universe including the Muslim state, but who represents this sovereignty in a Muslim state? The jurists, or the ‘ulama’ in a wider sense, cannot claim divine power or a clerical disposition, and are always there as legal experts in the different state bodies and as Judges in the judiciary. The Quran states that God created the human being as a “vice-gerent” (‘khalifa’) on earth [2:30]. The prominent commentator Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310 H./922 C.E.), commented on this verse that this vice-gerent is appointed by God to rule over his creation with justice. The conversation between God and

the angels as indicated in the Quran has been used as a basis for the obligation of establishing a caliph or imam (or a governing body) to secure public order and justice [e.g. Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Qurtubi (d. 571 H./1272 C.E.), also: Ibn Kathir].

Accordingly, the people are viewed as guardians of God's justice and guidance, which is represented in the divine sources. Sovereignty of God can only be secured through humans, and no ruler or jurist can claim infallibility. A Muslim state can never be a theocracy, and the *ulama* are not a clergy. The people, and their

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*“those from among  
you who have been  
entrusted with  
authority by you”*

*The Qur'an[4:59]*

---

representatives, practice what they are entitled to do as guardians of God's justice on earth. If they make mistakes, their mistakes are naturally expected to be less, and can be corrected by other bodies of experts, especially the judiciary, and the well-known process of “check and balance”. In addition, voting against a government or political party that is linked to Islam cannot be interpreted as voting against Islam, but against a particular human interpretation and/or policy. No one can claim to monopolize Islam.

The Quran commands Muslims to obey, after God and the Conveyor of His message, “those from among you who have been entrusted with authority by you” [4:59]. Thus, the source of political authority for the rulers (‘uli al-amr’), is “the people” from whom the authority is derived (“minkum”), as the verse indicates. Muhammad Abduh strongly supported the representative system

[comment on verse 3:159]. The distinguished Mufti of Egypt (d. 1905) commented on the above verse: “Some made the obedience of any ruler an obligation and overlooked ‘minkum’. I have come to the conclusion that it is meant for ‘those who are entitled to binding and dissolving from among the people’, if they freely agree on something of public interest that does not contradict a divine text” [4].

The Quran mentions, without reservation, that the Arabic title “malik”, which indicates dominion and sovereignty was given to human beings, such as the Egyptian king in Prophet Joseph's (Yusuf) time and Prophet Joseph himself, and Prophet Solomon (Sulayman) [2:246-8; 12:43, 50, 54, 72, 76; 38:20, 35]. The same word is repeatedly mentioned in the Quran as one of God's attributes [e.g.: 20:114; 23:116; 59:23]. A tradition of the Prophet reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim rejected only the title “malik al-muluk” (monarch of monarchs).

I hope that the reader will be convinced by this discussion that “sovereignty of God” and “sovereignty of the people” are not contradictory, just as ‘shura’ and democracy are not contradictory. If believers cannot guard the “sovereignty of God” and their faith and values through a government based on “sovereignty of the people”, it should not be imposed upon them by force which would only be a pretext for arbitrariness and despotism! It is time for Muslims to devote their energy to dealing with the concrete realities of life, rather than continuously engaging in semantic arguments.

#### *References:*

1. e.g. see al-Shatibi, ibn Ashur; see also Muhammad ibn Abi-Bakr ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751 H./1350 C.E.), *I'lam al-Muwaqqi'n*, Cairo n.d., vol. II p.1, Abdul-'Aziz ibn Abdal Salam, *Qawa'id al-Ahkam fi Masalih al-Anam*, Beirut: 1980, vol. I, p. 4-17
2. *I'lam al-Muwaqqin*, vol IV, p. 309-10
3. Khallaf, *Ilm Usul al-Fiqh*, Kuwait: 1978, p. 210-13
4. *Tafsir al-Manar*, Cairo: 1374 H., vol. V, p: 181

# Crafting Democracy: Problems and Prospects in an Islamic Context

By John P. Entelis, Ph.D.  
Fordham University

*This paper was presented at the CSID Symposium on "Is There a Future for Democracy in the Muslim World?" at the Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, Washington, D.C., November 19, 1999. For the full text of the three lectures and discussions, please visit the CSID website at: [www.islam-democracy.org](http://www.islam-democracy.org)*

This paper is intended to provide a tentative outline of some of the major operational obstacles confronting Islamic political movements in their attempt to "craft" democratic orders. Several working assumptions inform this perspective:

1. the assumption that Islamic belief and democratic politics are compatible in practice if not in theory;
2. the assumption that essentially non-violent means will be used to establish an Islamically-based democracy;
3. the assumption that an open, free, and pluralistic political environment will have already been established if not institutionalized; and
4. that such an environment does not exclude the participation of Islamists willing to play by the rules of the game.

Obviously, to the extent that regimes reject any possibility of Islamist political participation, there is little hope for crafting an



Dr. Louay Safi, of IIT, captivated the audience with his lecture on "Shura & Democracy: Similarities & Differences".

Islamic democracy based on non-violent principles.

## ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS

Probably the single greatest obstacle to democratic inclusion rests within the Islamist movements themselves—the lack of participatory experience. Whether inspired to action by deep socio-economic grievances, cultural alienation, spiritual aridity, and/or political oppression, Islamist organizations have emerged in the first instance as spontaneous expressions of mass discontent. Such expression has been channeled into existing or para-institutional religious structures where problems have been diagnosed and solutions proffered. The intimacy of those experiences has personalized the response procedures making it almost unnecessary to worry about organization, discipline, strategy, tactics, and leadership. Self-appointed leaders gaining the respect if not the admiration of their followers on the basis of personal conduct and ideological vision have often found it much easier to mobilize popular enthusiasm than to create political organization.

What is particularly remarkable about such experiences, however, has been the relative speed with which the transition from mobilizational to bureaucratic organization has taken place. Looking at the Islamic Salvation Front or FIS in Algeria, for example, the movement emerged from the riots of October 1988 as a prototype of a "people's" movement, spontaneously created, broadly based across class and regional lines into a "Front" Islamique du Salut.



Prof. John Entelis speaks at the CSID symposium

The label "party" seemed too ambitious and, in any case, would have been untrue.

Yet, by the time the first ever multiparty pluralistic elections in Algeria had taken place in June 1990, the FIS had demonstrated impressive skills of campaigning, organization, mobilization, and participation. Despite lacking vast experience in organizational politics and depending, perhaps excessively and naively, on the moral, ethical, and spiritual universality of their message, the FIS adapted remarkably well—but perhaps not quickly or thoroughly enough to satisfy the anxieties and challenges that were to emerge among other segments of civil society.

## CIVIL SOCIETY

One unintended consequence of the FIS electoral victories both in the local/regional elections of 1990 and the first round of parliamentary elections of December 1991, was the anxiety and concern it created among groups in civil society who, while mostly democratic themselves and sharing in the FIS's deep opposition to the existing authoritarian order, were concerned that a secular dictatorship would soon be replaced by a theocratic one. However inaccurate or misleading such categorization may have been, the FIS failed to appreciate the deeply contested nature of an Algerian civil society operating, for the first time ever, within a pluralistic environment. Berberists, feminists, Marxists, westernized intellectuals, among others, were unnecessarily excluded from the kinds of dialogue that would have been needed to pursue a democratic agenda rooted in Islamic principles.

One result was the creation of an artificial polarity that had so-called “democrats” now challenging the validity of the Islamist project however democratically arrived at. To be sure, it would be unfair and unrealistic to assume that given the newness of the whole democratic experience and the relative naïveté if not amateurishness of the FIS’s organizational efforts, that “community outreach” would be given political priority.

## THE STATE

Islamist participation is most profoundly challenged in the Arab-Islamic world by the actions and reactions of the state however liberal or democratic its political credentials. Given the limited nature of democratization in that world, it is no surprise that the Islamist effort at inclusion in a pluralistic process should be so difficult.

The examples of Algeria and Turkey bring home clearly the difficulties Islamist political parties have in gaining acceptance even if they disavow violence, play by the rules of the games, commit themselves to democratic principles, and abide by existing treaty arrangements and other aspects of international diplomacy and behavior. Whether accomplished overtly as in Algeria or covertly as in Turkey, the role of the army even in seemingly civilian political orders undermines Islamist efforts at democratic participation. The greater tragedy of this process is that in denying Islamist participation, army-led or influenced regimes are effectively constraining the rights of other opposition groups and organizations from participating as well. This then speaks to a broader concern in democratic participation in the Islamic world—can there ever be a full democracy if Islamist political movements are denied the right to participate? Evidence to date seems to indicate no. For while denying such movements the opportunity to contest elections and participate freely—the twin foundations of procedural democracy—the way is left open for any and all groups to be denied such opportunities if they are perceived as lacking in the requisite attributes of “democracy” as defined by that class least qualified to provide such guidance—the military.

## GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT

In the post-Cold war era the role of international actors in influencing if not determining the domestic politics of states has increased significantly. This is especially the case in Third World systems whose fragile polities and dependent economies have made them open to outside influence if not intervention. The fact that human rights and democracy have joined the market economy as foreign policy goals of Western countries to whom many Arab-Islamic regimes look, has increased the potential for influencing the political calculations of incumbent regimes in ways that opposition movements, Islamic or otherwise, would find reassuring.

The hard reality has proven otherwise as the experiences of Algeria, Turkey, Tunisia, and Egypt, for example, have clearly shown. Neither France nor the United States have applied sufficient pressure on incumbent regimes to change their ways as condition for greater bilateral and multilateral engagements. Indeed, the opposite seems to have been the case. In the instances cited above, Washington and Paris have either remained silent or actually encouraged regime intervention in democratic processes where Islamist parties have come to power (Turkey) or were on the verge of doing so (Algeria).

Other global actors have followed in the footsteps of the big powers as international business, the IMF and World Bank, the United Nations, the OAU, and the Arab League, just to name the most significant actors, have remained consistent supporters of the status quo at the expense of genuine democratic change.

Only the work of human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Journalists Without Borders, among others, have shown themselves sincere in linking words to actions. Sadly for all Muslim peoples, these latter groups are no match to the power and persistence of the global actors identified above.



Prof. Ali Mazrui, and the panel of speakers, entertained many questions....



... from the audience.

## PROSPECTS

Given these many obstacles confronting Arab-Muslim societies in their efforts to establish and consolidate an enduring democracy that recognizes the right of all political groups to participate and contest political power so long as they do so nonviolently and according to democratically-established rules of the game, are there recommendations that could be made that would have any chance of success?

Let me suggest the following. First, at the organizational level, all democratically-oriented groups need to take seriously the effort at building organizations from the bottom up. The experiences of Islamist parties like the FIS and Refah provide a model of how principles and practices can be fused into effective organization. Such efforts need to be restarted, maintained, deepened, and widened within all political organizations that make any serious claim to representativeness, democracy, and participation. To date only Islamist groups have demonstrated such commitments but others must follow their lead.

Second, civil society needs to be more fully democratized. As one astute analyst has written: “Civil society in order to be democratic, requires as its basic precondition the fact that people engage in debate, discussion, dialogue and contestation on the principle of

*continued on page 12*

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# Sovereignty is with God and His Khilafa are the Ulama

**B**asheer M. Nafi has written a deeply reflective essay entitled, “Embracing History in Turbulent Times” which argues that sovereignty originates with God and it is not the state that is His khilafa but rather the ulama. His argument is founded in scripture but becomes compelling in his historical analysis of the relationship of the state and the ulama. This argument is that historically it was the ulama that exercised religious authority on the one hand and on the other hand acted to constrain the state. The ulama used the sharia as both the basis of its authority and its actions to restrain the state. Its authority was exercised by being not only the interpreters of the letter of the sharia but also by being the fuqaha who could adjust and tailor that law to fit the changing circumstances of history. Viewed in this fashion, the sharia is termed by him a system of, in effect, social discourse. The preceding appears to be the generalized state of affairs until the advent of either Western influenced Ottoman reform itself or more indirectly, Ottoman inspired reform.

The Islamic revival has witnessed the repetition of the premodern pattern of the “ulama” (i.e. those who may be the emerging ulama of the contemporary period) organizing the essential social services of society. These services include social welfare, medical, educational and other services. Both these structural features, as well as a renewed intellectual vitality, have been occurring dialectically under the intellectual leadership of many who had earlier supported leftist and nationalist positions but who are now writing critically of the need for a return to Islamic principles while at the same time not abandoning the modern and progressive project. Their writings as Muslim intellectuals suggest the new vitality of Islam and the emergence of a new ulama based upon the model of the premodern ulama. In other words, as the khulafa of God they are the custodians of sovereignty and continue to constrain the state. Implied in this argument is the acceptance of the sharia as the forum of discourse between an Islamic state on the one hand and the populace on the other.

This would appear to be illustrated in the political drama of contemporary Iran and its great Islamic importance (even though the specific issues there are Shii). Is sovereignty in the Islamic state

This paper was presented at a conference of the Circle of Tradition and Progress (Halaqa al-Asala wa al-Tuqaddum), The Islamic Foundation, Leicester, UK, October 1-2, 1999. Regarding the Halaqa, see the statement of principles and list of members in [Middle East Studies Association Newsletter](#), Vol.19, No. 3, August 1997, p.11.



by Louis J. Cantori  
Univ. of Maryland

to reside in the hands of a single ayatullah (viylayat-i faqih and Khameni) and a narrow grouping of ulama and therefore control the state or is it to reside more broadly and more popularly in the ulama (Khatemi and his supporters) as a constraint upon the state? Will Iran's future be authoritarian or will it be shuracritic/democratic? In other words, isn't popular participation in the present period an interactive product of mass sentiment being filtered by the

ulama along with other members of a democratically responsive political class? Might not this political class within which the ulama are located have the political potential for democratic leadership?

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## Re-Imagining Politics and Society at the Millennium: Creating a Just, Caring and Sustainable World

May 18-20, 2000

The Riverside Church, New York City, New York

Sponsored by the Foundation for Ethics and Meaning, the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, and numerous other organizations. Join Nobel Peace Prize nominee Wei Jingsheng, Cornel West, Radwan Masmoudi, Michael Lerner, Riane Eisler, Ali Mazrui, Matthew Fox, Saskia Sassen, John Entelis, David Korten, Jean Bethke Elstain, Neil Hicks, Rep. Major Owens, Cherie Brown, Rev. Jim Wallis, Arturo Escobar, Elizabeth Lesser, Corinne McLaughlin and Gordon Davidson, and an incredible array of leading scholars, activists, business leaders, politicians, clergy, and concerned lay people to discuss new strategies for imagining and creating an alternative to the emerging mono-polar, corporate driven world system—one that respects and encourages human rights, true democracy, the right to cultural authenticity and diversity, and nurtures the creation of a loving, just, spiritually and ecologically sensitive society.

This conference offers an opportunity for those who embrace holistic and ecological values, and who have often felt excluded from the existing liberal/conservative political debate, to come together to discuss how ethics, a concern for the common good, and a community spirit of caring can begin to replace the cynical self-interest and corporate-technocratic worldview that currently dominate public discourse.

For a complete list of speakers, co-sponsors, and registration information call 1 888 LETS CARE, or visit: [www.meaning.org](http://www.meaning.org).



## Conference Announcements

**American Council for the Study of Islamic Societies**  
Annual Conference, April 28-29, 2000  
Villanova University, Villanova, Pennsylvania

### Islam and the West: Building Bridges in the New Millennium

Friday, April 28, 2000

9AM-10:30AM Roundtable: Tradition and the Challenge of Modernity  
Taha al-Alwani, The School of Islamic and Social Sciences  
Tamara Sonn, The College of William and Mary  
John Voll, Georgetown University

10:45AM-12:15PM Roundtable: Muslims and Christians Together  
David Burrell, The University of Notre Dame  
Abd al-Wahhab al-Massiri, Ein Shams University  
George Irani, Washington College  
Salahuddin Malik, SUNY Brockport

12:30PM-2:00PM — Lunch

2:00PM-3:15PM "Revisiting Islamization in Pakistan"  
"Pakistan's Zakat as an Economic Policy" Grace Clark, Baltimore  
"Update on Islamic Reform in the Judiciary"  
Charles Kennedy, Wake Forest University

3:30PM-5:00PM Film Preview and Discussion: John Williams, The College of William and Mary  
"The Grandeur of Cairo" and  
"The Word, the Vine, and the Star: Spiritual Dimensions of Islamic Art in Cairo," by Caroline Williams

6:00PM – Banquet: Keynote Speaker:  
Khurshid Ahmad, Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad  
**The Implementation of Islamic Economics  
over the Last 20 Years**

Saturday, April 29, 2000

9:00AM-10:30AM Roundtable: "Secularism, Pluralism, and Democracy"  
Louis Cantori, University of Maryland, Baltimore County  
David Commins, Dickinson College  
Radwan Masmoudi, Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy

10:45AM-12:15PM Roundtable: "Taking Stock"  
Khurshid Ahmed, Institute of Policy Studies, Pakistan  
Louis Cantori, University of Maryland, Baltimore County  
Abd al-Wahhab al-Massiri, Ein Shams University  
Munir Shafiq, Amman, Jordan  
Antony Sullivan, University of Michigan

Registration: \$35 (members), \$45 (non-members), Banquet: \$32.00 (Friday evening)  
Membership: \$35.00 (includes subscription to Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies or Muslim World)

Send checks (made out to: American Council for the Study of Islamic Studies) to:  
Ms. Susan Hausman, Program Coordinator (610 519-4791), 421 SAC, Villanova University, 800 Lancaster Avenue, Villanova, PA 19085.

Lodging: \$119 plus tax until April 14, 2000, Radnor Hotel, 800 537-3000, mention ACSIS.

## CALL FOR PROPOSALS

The Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID), Washington, DC, was established in 1999 in order to provide a forum for the analysis and understanding of the relationship between Islam and democracy. CSID is requesting one-page proposals for papers to be presented at its first annual conference, outlined below. Each of the below listed panels will be in the format of a roundtable discussion. We ask that a one-page proposal be submitted on the subjects listed below for which a person is not already assigned. Alternatively, you may propose a topic not defined below, but within the overall parameters of the panels: "The Theory of Democracy in Islam" and "The Praxis of Democracy in Islam". If your proposal is accepted, we will ask you to write a 1000-word "brief" in which you summarize your argument. This "brief" will be circulated in advance to all participants in order to promote informed discussion. The one-page proposals should be sent by mail, email attachment or fax no later than **March 17, 2000** to:

Dr. Sana Abed-Kotob  
10026 Parkwoods Lane, Burke, VA 22015  
Fax: 703-425-1992, sakotob@aol.com

### Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy First Annual Conference

#### THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF DEMOCRACY IN ISLAM

Georgetown University  
Salaam Conference Room (7<sup>th</sup> Floor)  
International Cultural Center  
Sunday, April 30, 2000

9:00AM *Keynote Address:* "**Economics, Democracy and Islam**" (Tentative)  
Dr. Khurshid Ahmad, Chairman of the Board of Directors, Islamic Foundation, Leicester, UK (Invited)

10:00AM Panel One: "The Theory of Democracy in Islam", Chair: Prof. Tamara Sonn, College of William & Mary  
"Islam and the Separation of Powers"  
"Islam and Governmental Accountability"  
"Shura and Democracy", Dr. Muqtadar Khan, Washington College  
"The European Enlightenment Theory of Democracy and Islam" (Tentative) Dr. Abdelwaheb Elmessiri, Professor Emeritus, Ein Shams University, Cairo (Invited)

11:30AM Panel Two: "The Praxis of Democracy in Islam", Chair: Dr. Sana Abed-Kotob, U.S. Department of State  
Good Governance vs. Democracy: Islamic Principles of Government",  
Dr. Louis J. Cantori, University of Maryland, Baltimore County  
"The Preconditions of Islamic Democracy"  
"The Democratization of Religion"  
"What Does Praxis Mean in Islamic Democracy?" (Tentative) Mr. Munir Shafiq, Amman, Jordan (Invited)

3:30PM **CSID Business Meeting** – for CSID Members Only.

5:00 PM **CSID Board Meeting.**

Registration: \$25 (members), \$45 (non-members), Registration deadline: April 15, 2000

## BOOK SUMMARY

### *On the Relation between*

# *Democracy and Secularism*

*This is a summary of a new book by Prof. Raja Bahlul, Program in Democracy and Human Rights, Birzeit University, Palestine. The book will appear in March 2000.*

This book examines a widely shared assumption to the effect that democracy entails secularism. This assumption is of considerable interest and importance in the context of the debates that are taking place now in Arab and Muslim societies, where democracy and secularism are subjects of great controversy. It is an assumption that is shared not only by Islamists who reject democracy, but also by different proponents of democracy (liberals and others) who want to take Islam out of politics.

The conclusion, which the author arrives at, is that one's opinion on the relation between democracy and secularism depends on two things: a semantic point and a factual one. The semantic point concerns the meaning of the term "democracy", and the factual one concerns the kind and degree of social-political consensus that is available in the society under discussion.

With regard to the first point the author dwells on two broad views of what democracy means. According to the first, democracy is a minimal set of rules needed to regulate the public-political life of individual who have different doctrines and values. Thus democracy is inconsistent with "totalizing visions" of life (such as religion) which are liable to give society too much power to interfere with individual liberties.

According to the second view of democracy, which derives from Weber, Schumpeter and others who emphasize the procedural aspects of the democratic

process, democracy is basically a method for making political decisions, which is neutral with respect to the values and doctrines which different communities may have. The author argues that Islamic writers who profess to believe in democracy tend to espouse the procedural view. According to these writers, democratic methods and mechanisms (elections, opposition, accountability, pluralism, etc.) can be practiced within an Islamic framework.

The author argues that there is no reason in principle for rejecting the application of the term "democracy" to an Islamic system of government, provided that there is a considerable degree of agreement (consensus) on rejecting secularism, and espousing Islam as an integral way of life.

However, consensus is not forthcoming in contemporary Arab and Islamic societies, which are characterized by a plurality of competing doctrines (Islam, in a variety of interpretations, being currently the most widely held). Thus, the only way one can hold on to a meaningful notion of Islamic democracy is to search for an inclusive, liberal interpretation of Islam, one which can neutralize the role which the state plays in religious affairs, and which moderate secularists and perhaps non-Muslim minorities can live with.

Above all, the author believes in the need for dialogue between Islamic and secular democrats, and others who are exploring political alternatives to the despotic systems, which prevail in Arab and Islamic countries.

### *Letters from Our Readers:*

## Islam is Greater than Materialism

There are few matters as pressing as 'Islamizing' democracy. By that, I mean that democracy needs to be revived and renewed by faith in God— whether that faith is Islam, Judaism or Christianity. Western democracy was rooted in a belief in God, which led the founders to presume that mankind's highest possibilities could be freed when the least oppression was present.

What the founders of democracy did not foresee, however, was the extent to which man's technological abilities would also be freed, and with these abilities, his inclination for consumption. They did not foresee the excessive materialistic consumption, which has become pandemic around the world. The vitality and clarity of faith in God, which is Islam's wealth and heritage, may go a long way to temper these excesses.

The Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy may well bear the standard for Islam at the crossroads. Will it follow the way of Christianity and Judaism by rationalizing away its spiritual vitality in the name of accommodating a materialistic way of life much desired by Muslims, and other peoples, around the world? Or will it seek to invigorate the democratic forum with genuine faith in God and respect for all lives?

There are some who say that, just as love among family members does not need to be spoken about but must be assumed; so "faith" does not need to be spoken, since it can be assumed as well. But, the truth is, both love and faith need to be affirmed regularly and sincerely if they are not to be bracketed out of the consideration, and regarded as axioms that are irrelevant to the problem at hand.

We must struggle to prevent this from happening to Islam as Muslims actively engage with the culture of materialism and democracy. Islam (surrender to God) must be greater than democracy and materialism: it must be able to embrace these without being swallowed and destroyed by them. This, it seems to me, is the challenge facing the CSID.

Kenrick W. Hackett, Jr. LSW  
Philadelphia, PA 19131



**Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy**

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**Note:** If you wish to support CSID's goals and activities, please consider becoming a Founding Member. The membership fee of \$1,000 must be received by April 30, 2000. That amount is 100% tax deductible and will cover your membership fees for the next 5 years. In addition, you will receive a nice plaque as a token of appreciation for your support. Please **donate generously** and help us put CSID on the right track.

*Ali Mazrui, continued from page 2*

the new millennium. The answers may help us build better relations among the Abrahamic religions, and strengthen the foundations of democracy for the future.

The Crusades undermined TRUST between Christendom and the global ummah for nearly a thousand years. The Crusades have continued to cast a shadow on issues like church-state relations, secularism, and interfaith trust. We need to know more about the long-term shadow of the Crusades before we can eliminate it once and for all. Let us continue the quest.

## CSID MISSION STATEMENT

**The Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy (CSID) is a membership-based non-profit (501-c-3) research organization based in Washington DC. CSID is dedicated to the study of the relationship between Islam and democracy, especially how they contribute to the realization of just and prudent government. CSID proposes to sponsor meetings, seminars, conferences, and workshops that will be open to anyone interested and qualified to explore these themes. CSID will also publish periodicals relating to the foundations of sound government: Conflict resolution, political participation, and a strong civil society. Its membership is open to Muslims and non-Muslims alike.**

*John Entelis, continued from page 7*

freedom and that of equality" (Chandhoke, 1995: 165). In this regard and as both Turks and Algerians have now learned, to exclude one group is to invite the exclusion of all groups. As long as violence is disavowed, Kurdish nationalists should have the same freedom to express their political opinions as do radical Marxists. So too should Berber culturalists be given equal opportunity to influence the decision-making process as their co-religionists who advocate an Islamically-based ideology. Appreciation of the interactive and interdependent nature of a dynamic civil society will enhance the political potential for democratic transformation and consolidation.

Third, the military must once and for all be removed from politics. Simply put, there can never be democracy, in the Islamic world or elsewhere, when the army governs whether

directly or indirectly. The examples of Pakistan, Sudan, Libya, Algeria, Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Iraq, and so forth are all stark testimony to the complete incompatibility between army rule and democracy. As long as elements of civil society entrust their political fate in the hands of generals, the longer it will take to democratize civil society and institutionalize political pluralism.

Finally, increased political pressure needs to be applied to international actors so that they will not only do as they say but say to those governing the Islamic world what they must do. It is a measure of how far we still need to go that progress is now recorded with the appearance of ads in *The New York Times* by Shell Oil indicating that it is now committed to cleaning the environment in Nigeria and supporting transparency and honest government, concluding that "democracy is good for business!"

### Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy

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