

Muslim Democrat

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Dear Colleagues:

On April 30, 2000, CSID organized its first ever Annual Conference on Islam & Democracy. The event was held at Georgetown University, and was hosted and co-sponsored by the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding (CMCU). Approximately 70 people attended the conference, including many people from overseas. The keynote speaker was Prof. Khurshid Ahmad, President of the Islamic Foundation in England. Three speakers came from Algeria, and one speaker from the West Bank, to participate in this conference. The conference, and all the panels, were very informative, interesting, and thought-provoking. Many thanks to the Organizing Committee, Tamara Sonn, Sana Abed-Kotob, and Lou Cantori, for putting together such an outstanding program.

On March 20-22, 2000, I attended a major international conference on Islam & Democracy, in Algiers, Algeria. The conference was organized by the High Islamic Council of Algeria and included more than 400 participants and 30 papers. The conference was inaugurated by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria. This major event represented the first international exposure to CSID. In addition to presenting a paper, I was interviewed by more than 10 newspapers, 3 radio programs, and 2 major (1-hour long) TV programs. I was really impressed by the level of openness and freedom of expression I saw. I hope that Algeria will finally be able to stop the violence, and build a free, open, and democratic society which includes all tendencies and opinions.

On April 1, 2000, our dear brother, colleague, and friend Hesham Reda passed away after a brief struggle with lung cancer. I, along with all CSID directors, were greatly saddened by this sudden death. We shall miss Hesham tremendously, and can only pray that God will bless his soul and grant him paradise. In memory of Hesham, CSID has established a special memorial fund that will be used to organize an annual keynote lecture on Islam & Democracy. The lecture will be called the **Hesham Reda Memorial Lecture**, and will become one of the main activities of the Center. I urge all the Friends of Hesham to donate generously to this Fund in order to keep Hesham's memory alive.

Finally, CSID is launching a campaign to raise \$100,000 within 6 months. This money is desperately needed to establish an office -- and a small staff -- in Washington DC. Please help us in raising this money by donating \$50, \$100, \$250, \$1,000, or any amount you can to help us achieve this important goal. Your financial support is needed to build a strong and independent think tank organization. We cannot do it without your help and support.

Radwan A. Masmoudi
Executive Director

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ISLAM & DEMOCRACY

CSID Executive Director, Dr. Radwan Masmoudi, participated in a major international conference on Islam & Democracy, organized by the High Islamic Council of Algeria, in Algiers, on March 20-22, 2000. Speakers from all over the world attended this 3-day conference and debated very important questions dealing with the relationship between Islam & democracy.

The Conference was inaugurated by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, of Algeria, who urged the scholars and *Ulamas* to help him stop the bloodshed in his country, and put Algeria back on the path of genuine peace, reconciliation and democracy. He stated that he “often dreamed of being able to announce a general amnesty, that excludes no one” so that Algeria can finally turn the page of violence and destruction.

In his presentation: “Islam & Democracy: Between the past, the present, and the future”, Dr. Masmoudi said: “When Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) was on his deathbed, many Muslims were alarmed at the prospects of disunity among the new nation and asked him, to appoint a ‘successor’. Prophet Muhammad refused to do so clearly sending the signal that his mission as a prophet was complete and it is up to them to choose who and how they will be ruled. This important point is a fundamental principle in Islamic democracy and is what we call today ‘self-government’.

“Therefore the Islamic State is not a religious state (theocracy), ruled by a religious elite. Rather, it belongs to the people, who are collectively responsible for organizing themselves in a way that best serves their interests and in a way that is also compatible with the principles of Quran.” Masmoudi said.

Addressing the issue of political violence, Masmoudi narrated the story of the Second Caliph, Omar Ibn al-Khattab, who was giving a sermon in the Mosque and told the crowd that he was elected as their leader but he was not the best among them. Omar said that he would try to rule

according to the teachings of Allah and his prophet, but that if he made a mistake, they should correct him. One person rose from the crowd and told Omar that if he deviated from the book, they would correct him with “the edge of the sword”. Unfortunately, neither Omar nor the rest of the companions saw the dangers of this approach to ‘correcting the ruler’. “Someone should have jumped and said that it was not an acceptable way, and that Muslims needed to develop a better way of correcting the ruler. Unfortunately, no one did.”, Masmoudi added.

According to Masmoudi: “The Muslims failed to establish a system that would accomplish their objectives of uniting the Ummah, and yet hold the rulers accountable.” Occasionally, Muslims would get lucky and get a good ruler. One such ruler was Omar ibn Abdel-aziz, who upon inheriting the throne from his uncle, realized that he inherited something that did not belong to him or to his uncle. He announced to the nation that he



gives them back their ‘baya’, which his great grand-father took by force, and that they were free to choose the ruler that they wanted. Upon hearing that, Muslims realized that Omar was a special person and chose him of their own free will.

Turning to the current situation in the Muslim world, Masmoudi said: “The modernizing efforts of the secularists could have succeeded if they did not become “anti-religious”. The true definition of secularism is separation of religion and state, however, in the Muslim countries, the state wanted to destroy the mosque because it felt



Dr. Radwan Masmoudi
CSID Executive Director

threatened by it.” It is true that the interpretations of Islam that the new rulers were confronted with, at the beginning of this century, were mostly archaic and old-fashioned and probably not suited for the modern age. However, the correct and proper response should have been to revitalize and modernize Islamic thinking (using *Ijtihad*), and to ‘Islamize’ modernity. “Unfortunately, modern Muslim rulers did not have the training nor the patience to initiate such an intellectual effort,” said Masmoudi.

As for the future, Masmoudi said that: “the old methods of oppression are simply outdated. More than half the population of Muslim countries is under 30 years old. They are highly educated, they speak several languages, and they watch CNN and al-Jazeera. Many of them have access to the Internet. They see how other people live, in terms of prosperity and freedom, and they want the same. They watch other peoples vote and elect their new leaders, while they are stuck with the same rulers for what seems like eternity. The new generation is fed up with the status quo. Change is inevitable. The only question is: What kind of change?”

Masmoudi concluded that Muslims must learn to live with differences of opinions, encourage diversity, and benefit from the opinions and experiences of everyone. They must find an acceptable way to resolve political differences without resorting to violence and intimidation. “In my humble opinion,” he said, “there are only two ways to resolve political differences: the first is to fight with arms and guns and let the winner rule. This way leads to unspeakable violence, destruction, and fear, and is clearly against Islam. The other way is through dialogue, debate and discussions. Allah (*swt*) ordered his Prophet to: “call to the path of your Lord through wisdom and good advice and do not argue with them except in the best of manners”. If we are ordered to deal with the non-Muslims in this manner, then, surely, we can treat other fellow Muslims with dignity, respect and tolerance.”

For the full text of this paper, please visit:
www.islam-democracy.org

THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF DEMOCRACY IN ISLAM



The Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy (CSID) held its first Annual Conference on April 30, 2000, at Georgetown University, Washington D.C. A number of scholars came from all over the world (England, Canada, Palestine, Algeria, and Indonesia) to present and discuss their papers. Co-sponsored by the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, The Earhart Foundation, and the Center for Policy Research. For more information this conference, please visit: <http://www.islam-democracy.org/>

The Theory of Democracy in Islam

The conference opened with a discussion of theoretical issues relating to Islam and democracy, in a panel chaired by Dr. Tamara Sonn, William and Mary University. Professor Raja Bahlul, of the M.A. Program in Democracy and Human Rights at Birzeit University, noted the popular opinion that democracy is inherently un-Islamic, since the idea that human beings can initiate legislation conflicts with the belief that only God can rule (*al Hakimiyya li'Allah*, or sovereignty belongs to God). But he argued that the conflict between these two notions is more apparent than real. It is possible, Bahlul claims, to maintain both divine sovereignty and popular sovereignty, by distinguishing between levels of legitimacy. Popular sovereignty is a procedural matter, whereby human beings agree among themselves on the best ways to implement shared principles in specific socio-historical circumstances. However, that process is not reducible to the criteria and standards upon which their decisions are based. Divinely revealed principles and standards of human conduct transcend the vagaries of human efforts to actualize them. Revelation is

therefore the ultimate source of human efforts to realize the divine will, while human beings must work together to determine the best ways to do that. Prof. Bahlul added that many Muslim thinkers, such as Khatami of Iran and Turabi of Sudan, have argued that popular sovereignty is an expression of the sovereignty of God

Professor Muqtedar Khan of Washington



A view of the audience during the first CSID Annual Conference

College next discussed the relationship between “Shura and Democracy.” He was critical of those who assume that the forms of democracy prevailing in Europe and America are the standards by which political systems must be measured. Rather, Muslims must assert their own forms of government, based on Islam’s unique sources and forms of legislation. Dr. Khan argued that the question of democracy must arise in this context and not in the pursuit of democracy as an end in itself.

Professor Tamara Sonn of The College of William and Mary was the final presenter, discussing “Elements of Government in Classical Islam.” She agreed with Professor Bahlul that a distinction must be made between the principles and procedures of government. In Islam, that amounts to a

distinction between revelation and the work of scholars whose job is to determine how to translate revelation into legal codes. Sonn also agreed with Khan that there is no need to justify Islamic forms of government based on Western models. Instead, she argued that classical Sunni texts reveal clear principles of good governance. While leaving specific forms to the discretion of various communities, the classical sources agree that an Islamic government is one whose laws are

based on Islamic revelation.

The sources further agree on the distinction between legislative/judicial authority and executive authority. The former is the work of scholars who base their decisions on the revealed roots of Islamic law, while the latter — the authority of the political leader — is limited to making sure the legislative/judicial decisions are carried out.

Finally, classical sources assume the independence of the legislative/judicial

authorities from the executive branch, an independence ideally maintained through economic autonomy. Dr. Sonn argued that the pattern of the adaptation of religious law (*sharia*) to the changing historical reality of Muslim society is well established in legal practice (*fiqh*).

The second panel in the morning was devoted to Algeria. Mr. Rafik Aloui, Secretary General of the High Islamic Council in Algeria, presented a paper on the “sources of sovereignty in Islamic law”. He addressed the question of popular sovereignty and argued that under Islamic teachings, the ruler must receive “authority to govern” from the people. Dr. Miloud Meziane, a Member of the Algerian parliament and a member of the Movement for the Society of Peace summarized the steps toward

democracy in the early 1990's in Algeria and the outcome of the recent elections and changes in policy under President Bouteflika. He stated that, although, Algeria is still far from being a democratic state, progress is being made in that direction.



John Esposito introduced the Keynote Speaker, Dr. Khurshid Ahmad, during lunch.

eignty” (or the fundamental freedom of a people to make its own decisions free of external coercion or tyranny) and “popular sovereignty” (which in addition to factual

sovereignty implies the rule of the majority in matters of morality) and argued that Islamists need not oppose factual sovereignty when rejecting popular sovereignty. He then explored the implications of this for divine sovereignty in light of the writings of leading Islamists such as Ghannouchi and Turabi, arguing that divine sovereignty is supreme by being a normative principle according to which all people are judged, but not necessarily as a law to be forced upon all. Finally, Bahlul noted the parallels between this approach and the Western political tradition, which also acknowledges “principles higher than the human will”.

“Shura and Democracy”

by Dr. Muqtedar Khan, Washington College

Dr. Khan began by noting the importance of studying Islam first and democratic theory second, rather than assuming a priori that democracy is compatible with Islam. He then challenged a number of problematic assumptions in many discussions of the relationship of Islam to democracy, arguing that to evaluate Muslim countries exclusively by their present level of democracy without first exploring the cultural, historical, political, religious, and economic context in which modern Muslims live is to completely misunderstand the issue. The role of economic underdevelopment and colonialism should not be overlooked when examining the Muslim world's lack of democracy, he pointed out, as these factors actively discourage the development of good governance. “Democratization is the natural result of the desire of people to rule themselves.” Lacking confidence in themselves, many Muslims dream of “a benevolent dictator sent by God like Umar ibn al-Khattab” to solve all their problems for them. Also, the Muslim world will never be democratized so long as it lacks justice, equality, morality, and stability; and, he

notes, many of these deficiencies are to a great extent the legacies of the West's exploitation of and attacks on Muslims over the last few centuries. Finally, he addressed the importance of a sense of personal security for democracy to develop within a society.

“Democracy in Light of Classical Islamic Sources”

by Dr. Tamara Sonn, College of William & Mary

Responding to politically-motivated claims that Islam is inherently authoritarian, Dr. Sonn explored the stands of key scholars from the classical tradition such as al-Muwardi, ibn Taymiyyah, and Juwaini on democracy and its status within the Islamic legal tradition. She underlined the central role of law within Islamic faith and the importance of jurists in keeping Muslim societies anchored in the Islamic tradition. Sonn also explored certain democratic concepts within the classical tradition, such as its strict separation of authority between the political leadership and religious leadership; the overt subordination of political authorities to the Ulama in matters of morality; the requirement for a ruler to consult the fuqaha on all decisions; the establishment of the legislature as an institution that is financially independent; the electoral college-like approach of the early Muslims to elections; and so on. “Difference of opinion is allowed,” Sonn concludes, “so long as the commitment to moral authority, the sources [of Islam], remains.” Assuming these and other requirements are met, democratic approaches to government appear to be quite Islamic.

Keynote Address on “Economics, Democracy and Islam”

by Dr. Khurshid Ahmad, Chairman, Islamic Foundation, England

Dr. Ahmad discussed the many problematic assumptions at work in Western discussions of democracy, and pointed out the troubling aspects to the West's “shift from God to Man”. Whereas Islam is a spiritual experience, dynamic tradition, and historical movement that has existed for over 1400 years, democracy is a political idea and

The Practice of Democracy in Islam

The practice of democracy in Islam was the subject of the afternoon panel chaired by Dr. Louis J. Cantori, University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Dr. Charles Kurzman analyzed the contemporary reform movement in Iran as an Islamic democratic phenomenon. He stressed how political modernization is occurring but this is happening in the form of a movement expressing gradualism and consensus. Dr. Dicky Sofjan, Northeastern University and Indonesia emphasized that while the Islamic label is used frequently in political reporting about Indonesia, in fact the conflicts there are not ones of religion but rather ones of political grievances. Dr. Salim Mansur, Western Ontario University, expressed the view that the understanding of democracy must begin first by locating it within the parameters of modernization theory, in order for it to focus upon the individual and to introduce an appropriate separation of religion and state.

Summary of Papers:

“Divine Sovereignty vs. Popular Sovereignty”

by Dr. Raja Bahlul, Bir Zeit University

Dr. Bahlul made “an analysis of concepts with the purpose of determining what it is that Islamists are insisting on when they say ‘Sovereignty, belongs to God’ (al-Hakimiyya lil-Allah), and what it is the secular-minded democrats are laying claim to when they place ‘sovereignty’ in the hands of the people.” He then proceeded to “determine the nature and extent of the gulf that separate them from each other.” In doing so, he differentiated between “factual sover-

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Arab Nationalism and Political Islam:

Issues of Identity and Problems of Democratization



Prof. Adeed Dawisha

On March 28, the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID) sponsored a lecture at the University of Maryland by Adeed Dawisha, professor of Government and Politics at George Mason University. The lecture was co-sponsored with the Earhart Lecture Series Program, the Organization of Arab Students, and the Sadat Chair for Peace and Development.

The presentation focused on Arab nationalism and political Islam as the two most potent ideological forces and political movements of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries that aimed at the fundamental restructuring of Arab society.

Growing up in Baghdad in the 1950's and 1960's, at the height of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's charismatic leadership of the Arab nationalist movement in the Middle East, Dawisha admits that he himself was a product of this nationalist movement. He recalls being among the Iraqi youths who flocked to the Baghdad Hotel in July, 1958 to hear lectures by the renowned Syrian Ba'thist leader, Michel Aflaq, who held court in Baghdad during the Iraqi revolution. Looking back at the nationalist movement of his youth, Dawisha reflects that it was more an affair of the heart than of the mind.

The central mission of the modern reform movement in the Arab world, which began in the second half of the nineteenth century, was not political independence, but the reformation of Islamic life. At the same time, there was an effort by the custodians of the early movement, such as Muhammad 'Abduh and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, to make sure any criticism of the West would be contained. As a political movement, there is no doubt that Islam, rather than Arab nationalism, was the more authentic. To a man, Dawisha insists, the Arab nationalists

were Christian writers of Syrian and Lebanese extraction, such as the Syrian author George Antonius and the Lebanese publisher Salim Taqla. The Islamic modernists, on the other hand, were Arab Muslims living within the Ottoman Empire, who were most concerned with preserving their religion and whose call for separation from the Turks was couched in Islamic language. Never did al-Kawakibi, for example, advocate the political separation of Arabs from the Ottoman Empire. Rather, the Islamic modernists put their efforts towards



A view of the audience during Prof. Dawisha's lecture.

creating a new and glorious age for Islam.

Arab nationalism, in contrast, was the offspring of political activities by various Arab revolutionaries and secret organizations in Istanbul. Dawisha contends that the actual number of these groups, although highly exaggerated, was in fact very small. He also believes that the myth of the great Arab revolt in 1916 was popularized by proponents of Arab nationalism. In *The Arab Awakening*, George Antonius, for example, describes the revolt as the reaction of a seething Arab population struggling to extricate itself from the Ottoman empire. In truth, says Dawisha, the Arab nationalists constituted an isolated segment of the Arab population that was completely out of touch with the feelings and

loyalties of the Arab majority. For one thing, many Arabs considered the Ottoman sultan the custodian of Islam and the Islamic heritage, not the enemy of the Arab people. It is also telling that Sharif Husayn, who led the revolt against the Ottoman empire in 1916 to establish a single Arab kingdom in the empire's Arab provinces, tailored his call to rebellion to Islamic, not nationalist, sentiments. More importantly, Arab support for Husayn's movement was virtually non-existent, given the hostility that was shown him by Egypt and Syria, the real bastions of Arab nationalism.

Jumping ahead to the resurgence of political Islam and Arab nationalism in the second half of the twentieth century, it was their polemics against the West, which Dawisha describes as the mobilizing "other," that helped crystallize the contemporary movements and propel them into power. Interestingly, while both movements clearly avow hostility towards the West, this hostility is nuanced differently in the two ideological narratives. Arab nationalists, on the one hand, present their opposition to the West entirely in terms of Western imperialism, the political manifestation of the West. It is no coincidence, says Dawisha, that the glory years of the Arab nationalist movement in the Middle East took place during the 1950's and 1960's, at the height of Western domination in the region. The Islamists' assault on the West, however, stems from a deeper, cultural antagonism to Western modernity. Sayyid Qutb, the well-known author of *Signposts on the Road* and *Social Justice in Islam* and a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, dubs this the "new jahiliyah," or "the new age of ignorance" (the original "jahiliyah" being the time of pagan worship that preceded the revelation of Islam). The Pakistani fundamentalist as well as Qutb's contemporary, Abu al-'A'la Mawdudi, calls

the three principles of Western civilization—secularism, nationalism, and democracy—“imported solutions,” which he sees as corrupt to the core and the source of every evil and disaster to befall humanity. Thus Mawdudi urges that all means be used to destroy these obstacles blocking the way to the liberating practice of Islam.

Finally, Dawisha asks, where are the two sides located in relation to democracy? Not surprisingly, the Islamists and nationalists, who have been hostile to the West, are hostile to democracy. Again, it is not a coincidence, says Dawisha, that the flowering of Islamism and Arab nationalism comes at a time when the *ancien régimes* in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria have been discredited because of their association with the West. There is continuing hostility to the West and its institutions, such as elections and majority rule, because they are seen as the heritage of Western imperialism and Western culture. One thing, in particular, says Dawisha, that Islamists cannot accept about Western-style democracy is the notion of sovereignty by the people. To Islamists, there can be sovereignty only by God—not by the people who are the servants of God. Moreover, the idea that the laws are given by the people is rejected as absolute apostasy. Laws are God-given in “shari’ah,” or Islamic holy law, which is divine and hence timeless and immutable.

As for the objections raised by Arab nationalists to democracy, the Syrian intellectual and pan-Arabist, Sati al-Husri, rejects the notion of freedom in the Anglo-French tradition that regards the state as instrumental in founding the nation. Al-Husri derives his idea of freedom instead from the 19th-century German concept of nationalism as cultural, meaning that the nation is an organic creation formed long before the state. This German notion of freedom affects the theory of democracy insofar as liberty is rendered freedom from the outsider, whereas freedom in the European tradition means guaranteeing liberty and rights to individuals within the nation. According to al-Husri, individual freedom is strictly secondary, even subservient, to the freedom of the nation. To illustrate the prevalence of this understanding of freedom in the Arab world, Dawisha notes that the cognate “al-dimuqratiyah” in Arabic is rarely used, while the word

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CSID Conference, continued from page 5

movement that has existed only 400 years and which was born as an attack on the authority of the clergy in the West. However, Westerners tend to treat democracy as if it were monolithic (which it isn’t); as if it always empowers the masses (which has not been the case for many Muslims in the Third World); and as a “stick” to selectively beat uncooperative Muslim countries. “Muslims want democracy, but not an imposed democracy or an imported democracy,” Ahmad explained. “Western ideas must not be ‘exported’ but rather discussed and voluntarily adopted by those who accept them. People should be free to express themselves and choose their future.” The greatest violence of the colonial era was the its destruction of Muslims’ cultural, religious, and political framework, the secularization of Muslim societies, and this must not be repeated in the name of democracy. Dr. Ahmad closed by noting that on an “operational level”, there is little dividing democracy from Islam, but that some secular conceptions of democracy are antithetical to a Muslim’s faith.

“Political Reform in Iran”

by Dr. Charles Kurzman, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Using Iran as a case study and approaching the issue of Islamic reform movements from a sociological and empirical standpoint rather than a theological or philosophical one, Dr. Kurzman set out to analyze and contextualize the various arguments used by reformers today around the world. He sees a marked shift in political discourse between today and the early days of the Islamic Revolution, with wide segments of the population employing arguments that once were forbidden from public discourse. These arguments are divided into three categories: “Liberal Shariah”, “Silent Shariah” and “Interpreted Shariah”. Proponents of a Liberal Shariah outlook argue that the Quran and Sunnah mandate democratic forms of government. In “Silent Shariah”, however, democracy is not divinely mandated, but it is among those things left to people’s discretion depending on his circumstances. Finally, Interpreted Shariah—which is the most radical approach of the three approaches—argues that, while the authority of God is absolute, the interpretation of His word is not, as it is

produced by fallible human beings. Kurzman closed by noting that he sees these arguments being made all over the Muslim world, and, most interestingly, by thinkers who do not appear to be aware of each other, and, thus coming to these conclusions independently.

“Islam and Democratization in Indonesia”

by Dr. Dicky Sofjan, Fulbright Scholar at Northeastern University

Dr. Dicky Sofjan’s focus was on the influence of key mass Islamic organizations such as the Muhammadiyah and the Nahdat-ul Ulema on reform in Indonesia. Sofjan’s began by highlighting the historical role played by the Muhammadiyah under the leadership of Amien Rais in “modernizing Islamic political thought and involving the urban middle class” in political debate. Sofjan gave Rais much of the credit for the creation of an activist, assertive atmosphere among Muslims that left to the Reformasi movement and the fall of General Suharto. President Abdurrahman Wahid and his Nahdat-ul Ulema is also credited with shoring up stability in Indonesia through a surprising mixture of pragmatism, traditionalism, and reform. Wahid’s successful campaign to remove the influence of the military from Indonesian politics was discussed as well.

“Muslims, Democracy and the American Experience”

by Dr. Salim Mansur, University of Western Ontario

Dr. Mansur changed the emphasis from textual interpretation in the Islamic tradition to an awareness of Islam as a lived experience, cultural tradition that exists independently of—and sometimes in conflict with—the message of the Quran. Mansur argued that the greatest barrier to the spread of democracy in the Muslim world is not the dominant interpretation of Islam but rather a widespread culture of deference among rank and file Muslims to authoritarianism on the part of orthodox ulema. Mansur argued that Muslims need to come to terms with the political values of the West and understand the West on its own terms. Democracy, he points out, can only function in a culture characterized by respect for the sanctity of the individual.

Summary by Svend White

The Washington Times

Democracy no stranger in Islamic world But states differ on interpretation

By Nader Abed (May 6, 2000, page C7)

The essence of Islam is not anti-democratic, but forces of history and economics have worked against the establishment of democratic governments in much of the Muslim world

This was the general theme discussed at a conference, on "The Theory and Practice of Democracy in Islam," organized by the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID) at Georgetown University on Sunday.

Nine speakers came as far as Algeria, Great Britain and the West Bank to discuss whether democratic principles are inherent in Islam, and the status of the application of such principles in the Muslim world today. They discussed the impediments to democracy in such countries as Algeria, Indonesia, Iran and the Muslim world at large

According to the panelists, long before the establishment of modern-day one party states and authoritarian governments, the Muslim world had the makings of democratic government

Tamara Sonn, professor of religion at the College of William and Mary, said that in the classical Islamic era, Muslim Systems featured an independent judiciary and separation of powers. This is in marked contrast to current Systems, other speakers noted, in which the judiciary and those who interpret religious codes of conduct, are often manipulated by the ruling powers

Whether Islam is inherently democratic or not, said Muqtedar Khan of



PHOTO: Miloud Meziane (left) of the Algerian parliament, Radwan Masmoudi of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID), and Rafik Aloui of the Algerian High Islamic Council attend the CSID conference.

Washington College, Muslims will not soon enjoy democracy because they face obstacles of poverty; authoritarianism and political insecurity.

In his keynote address, Professor Khurshid Ahmad, chairman of the Islamic Foundation in Leicester, England, stressed the need for economic development in order to facilitate democratic government.

Speaking about the new system of democracy in predominantly Muslim Indonesia, Dicky Sofjan, a Fulbright exchange fellow from Northeastern University in Boston, said that military disobedience and financial instability must be resolved. If these problems "are not addressed quickly enough," he said,

"Indonesia may no longer maintain its newly attained international stature as [what President Clinton called] 'the third-largest democracy in the world:'"

There are different interpretations of the ideal system of rule in the Islamic belief system. There are those Muslims who believe that democracy has no place in Islam, while many believe that a nation cannot be Islamic without being democratic.

In the first issue of CSID's newsletter, Executive Director Radwan Masmoudi said the organization views "democracy as an Islamic principle that was taught and practiced by the Prophet Mohammed and his companions. The synergy between Islam and democracy offers the best hope for the Muslim world."

A nonprofit organization founded by both Muslims and non-Muslims in May 1999, CSID brings together scholars and activists to discuss the compatibility of Islam and democracy. It considers itself an open forum that encourages the discussion of principles it sees as fully compatible with Islam: rule of law, freedom of religion and expression, elected and representative government, and separation of powers.

None of the speakers at the conference argued against any of these concepts. On the contrary; they promoted such democratic principles, but also stressed the need to overcome economic hurdles and domestic instability in order to allow these basic democratic principles to blossom.

Mr. Masmoudi said the conference was "an excellent beginning for [CSID's] efforts to study the critical relationship between Islam and democracy."

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BETWEEN SYRIA'S HAIDER AND AUSTRIA'S HAIDER

Ali A. Mazrui
Chair, CSID

One of the most remarkable coincidences of the year 2000 concerns how democracy collided with two people called Haider — one a Syrian and the other Austrian, one liberal and the other extreme right-wing, one a writer and the other an activist and politician.

In Austria Dr. Jorg Haider was Deputy Governor of Carinthia and Chair of the neo-Nazi FPÖ party which joined the government coalition in the year 2000. The coalition was the outcome of electoral democratic forces in Austria. And yet pro-Democracy fellow members of the European Union have turned against the government of Austria and have tried to squeeze Haider's party out of the democratically elected governing coalition. Was democracy fighting against democracy in the European Union over the Austrian question? Certainly most members of the European Union have decided that there is a limit to freedom of political participation.

The other Haider is Haider Haider, the Syrian, who published in Cyprus in 1983 a novel entitled BANQUET OF SEAWEED. Lebanon republished the novel in 1992 without any earth tremor. In November 1999 Egypt's Ministry of Culture followed suit. It published the volume among the major works of modern Arabic literature. There was delayed reaction — until EL-SHAAB, a pro-Islamist newspaper, published extracts ostensibly insulting to the Prophet Muhammad and Islam.

Was the Syrian Haider as much of a threat to the fundamentals of his own Arab civilization as the Austrian Haider had been to his own European civilization?

When individuals threaten the fabric of civilization, should democracy give way? If Arab and Islamic civilizations are threatened by a Syrian Haider, should democracy be subordinated to higher values?

If Western civilization is threatened by the Austrian Haider, should Austrian democracy be subordinated to European civilization?

In reality both Islam and the West have put limits to freedom of expression and indeed to democratic outcomes. Over Austria the European Union has decided that the values of Western civilization are more important than the outcomes of Austrian democracy. Should the novel BANQUET OF SEAWEED be judged by the standards of Islamic civilization or by the criteria of democracy? The dilemma is crucial and unresolved. But when in doubt, it is better to err on the side of freedom if possible.

HESHAM REDA MEMORIAL FUND



HESHAM REDA

The Board of Directors of CSID would like to solicit contributions to the newly created Hesham Reda Memorial Fund. The Fund was established to commemorate our dear brother, friend, and colleague, Hesham Reda, who passed away on April 1, 2000. Hesham was a dedicated human being who cared tremendously about every human being and about the future of Muslims in America. He was a Founding Member and a Director of CSID, and he played a critical role in the establishment of CSID.

Hesham Nasser Reda was born in Egypt in 1952. He immigrated to the United States in 1972. Mr. Reda was the National Director of *Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)* based in Washington, D.C.. He received his bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Minnesota in 1978. He was involved in many Islamic, Arab, interfaith, political, and humanitarian activities and organizations. In 1993-94 he served on *Senator Paul D. Wellstone's Foreign Policy Advisory Group*. He also served on the National Advisory Board of the *American Muslim Council*. Hesham is survived by his wife, Katam Ahmad Falou and his two children, Omar and Rima.

We shall miss Hesham tremendously, and can only pray that God will bless his soul and grant him paradise. The newly-established memorial fund will be used to organize and support an annual keynote lecture, by a prominent Muslim thinker, on Islam & Democracy. The lecture will be called the **Hesham Reda Memorial Lecture**, and will become one of the main activities of the Center.

We urge Friends of Hesham to donate generously to this Fund. Our objective is to raise at least \$10,000, which will be invested into an endowment. Please write "The Hesham Reda Memorial Fund" on the check, and send it to CSID, P. O. Box 864, Burtonsville, MD 20866, USA.

For the CSID board;
Ali A. Mazrui, Chair



Islam and Democracy in the Contemporary Middle East

During the Annual Conference of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA'2000), CSID will co-sponsor a panel discussion. The session will be held on Sunday, November 19, 10:30am-12:30pm, and will be chaired by Prof. **John L. Esposito**, CSID Vice-Chair and Director of the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University. The speakers are:

Democracy as a Contemporary Implementation of Islam
M. Fathi Osman, CSID

Islam & Democracy
Tamara Sonn, College of William & Mary

Shura and Democracy
Taha J. Alalwani, Graduate School of Islamic & Social Sciences

Reconciling Western and Islamic Conceptions of Democracy: A Shared Democratic Elitism
Louis J. Cantori, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Discussant: Augustus Richard Norton, Boston University

The Conference will be held at Disney's Coronado Springs Resort, Lake Buena Vista, FL (phone: 407 939-1000). For more information on the MESA conference, please visit: <http://w3fp.arizona.edu/mesassoc/MESA00/ mesa00.htm>

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IBN RUSHD FUND FOR FREEDOM OF THOUGHT

59939 Olsberg, P.O.Box 1216, Germany
Fax: 0049 2962 802424 <http://www.ibn-rushd.org>

Ibn Rushd Prize for Emancipation of Women in the Arab World

The IBN RUSHD Fund for Freedom of Thought announces that the IBN RUSHD award will be given this year for Emancipation of Women and Struggle for Equal Rights in the Arab World. The prize winner will be given the award - like last year - on December 10, 2000 in Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin / Germany.

Competent persons are invited to contact the Ibn Rushd Fund immediately to name the persons they consider as worth awarding and give the reasons of their choice and a short curriculum vitae. The Prize is endowed with 5000 German Marks. Last day of submission is the 30th June, 2000. Contact: Nabil Bushnaq: info@ibn-rushd.org

Re-Imagining Politics

The Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy (CSID) sponsored a panel discussion during a major conference on: "Re-Imagining Politics & Society at the Millennium: Creating a Just, Caring, and Sustainable World". The Conference was held on May 18-20, 2000, at The Riverside Church, in New York City, NY.

The Conference was co-sponsored by CSID, The Foundation for Ethics and Meaning, The NY Open Center, The Riverside Church, The Nation, The Interfaith Center of New York, and more than 20 other organizations.



During this three-day conference, CSID hosted a Panel Discussion on:

Islam, Democracy, and Globalization: What We Can Learn From the Middle East

The panel included Dr. Louay Safi (Center for Balanced Development), Prof. John Entelis (Fordham University), Dr. Radwan Mas-moudi (CSID), and Mr. Neil Hicks (Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights). The panel explored what the experience of the Middle East can teach critics and activists in the United States in Europe about the future of our societies in the global era. The panelists examined the experience of the Middle East during the last two decades to understand how globalization and the policies of privatization and economic and political liberalization that fueled it have affected societies and cultures in the Region. Specifically, the views of secular and religious critics of the relationship between economic development, cultural globalization, and democracy were discussed.

For more information on this major conference, please visit: <http://www.meaning.org>

The second CSID Annual Conference will be held on Saturday, April 21, 2001, in the Leavy Center, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Please mark your calendar. A Call for Papers will be published in the next issue of *Muslim Democrat*.



Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy

P. O. Box 864, Burtonsville, MD, 20866
Phone: 202-251-3036
Fax: 704-846-0629

www.islam-democracy.org

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Become a Member today.**

**CSID Membership Form
2000**

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I would like to join CSID as:

- Student Member** \$35
- Member** \$50
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I also would like to volunteer for the following positions:

- A Director
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- Other _____

Please include my name in the CSID directory Yes No

I would like to make a tax-deductible donation of \$ _____

Tax-deductible Donation to **Hesham Reda Memorial Fund** \$ _____

Comments and/or suggestions:

please send membership form, with payment, to: CSID, P. O. Box 864, Burtonsville, MD 20866



CSID Founding Members

- ◆ Mr. Ahmad M. Khatib, Herndon VA
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- ◆ Prof. John Esposito, Washington, DC
- ◆ Mr. Abdulwahab Alkebsi, Washington, DC
- ◆ Mr. Iftekhar Hussain, Malvern, PA

Note: At its April 30 meeting, the board of directors decided to extend the deadline for becoming a "Founding Member" until Dec. 31, 2000. The membership fee of \$1,000 is 100% tax deductible and will cover your membership fees for the next 5 years. Every Founding Member will receive a nice plaque as a token of appreciation for his/her support. We especially invite women to join as Founding Members to keep CSID a gender-inclusive organization. Please **donate generously**.



During the CSID Conference, Founding Members received a 'plaque' in recognition and appreciation for their support. Here, Dr. Jamil Fayeze receiving his 'thank-you' plaque from Ali Mazrui (Chair) and John Esposito (Vice-Chair)

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.

Adeed Dawisha, continued from page 7

"hurriyah," meaning freedom from imperialism, is a central concept especially in the political thinking of Ba'athists. In terms of democracy, then, there seems to be equally ingrained hostility in the two movements.

In closing, Dawisha stressed that Arab nationalism and political Islam are not the only two ideologies in the Muslim world. Although the Islamic militants seem to have "cornered the market" on Islamic political discourse, there are other influential positions being taken by prominent Arab and Muslim thinkers. For example, Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazali, although also a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood, stands diametrically opposed to the teachings of Sayyid Qutb. Al-Ghazali maintains that if Muslims were more open to the concept of

"ijtihad," the idea of independent judgment in religious matters, things like democracy could be accommodated within Islam. Whereas the notion of "ijtihad" has been part and parcel of the Shi'i intellectual tradition, it is necessary to bring this concept back into currency in the Sunni tradition. In addition, al-Ghazali calls for Muslims to adopt the operative principle attributed to the Prophet, "my community will never agree on an error," which provides an Islamic basis for believing in the people to rule and judge rightly for themselves. To apply this principle of the "Ummah Islamiyyah," or Islamic Community, to reinterpret Islam, al-Ghazali holds, can bring new ideas to Muslims living throughout the world.

Report by Rima Pavalko

Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy

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