

Muslim Democrat

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THE MUSLIM WORLD ON THE DEFENSIVE: CAN DEMOCRACY HELP?

Keynote Address at Fundraising Ramadhan Dinner, on behalf of the Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy, Friday, December 15, 2000, held at the Georgetown Conference Center, Georgetown, Washington, DC.

If a Muslim society is under attack by a non-Muslim government, how can democracy help? Will democracy help if the Muslim society under attack is democratic? Or will democracy help if the non-Muslim government is democratic? Do we need to democratize the victim or the oppressor? With regard to Chechnya it looks as if we need to make Russia truly democratic before its war in Chechnya can be accountable. In Kosovo many still believe that the democratization of Belgrade and Yugoslavia is a precondition for the true pacification of Kosovo. In such cases it is assumed that we need to democratize the oppressor in order to save the Muslim victim.



By Ali A. Mazrui, Chair
Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy (CSID)

And yet we know that the fact that Israel is a democracy at home has not saved its Muslim neighbors. On the contrary, Palestinians have sometimes suffered because the Israeli regimes are too accountable at home. The Israeli public's obsession with security has cost many Palestinian lives. Similarly, the fact that India is basically a democracy has not saved the people of Kashmir from the oppression of India's troops. The democratic credentials of the oppressor are not a sufficient safety-net for the Muslim victims.

What about the democratization of the victim or the victimized society? It would perhaps help if Yasser Arafat was more of a democrat, or if the Chechens had been more democratic when they had autonomy. However, it is difficult to maintain the niceties of democracy under the weight of either external aggression or internal oppression.

Within multireligious Third World societies democracy may sometimes precipitate conflict rather than mediate it. The Ivory Coast [Cote d'Ivoire] in West Africa has more Muslims than Christians. Muslims have been under-represented in the political institutions throughout the postcolonial period. However, the Muslims were better off when the Ivory Coast was a one-party state under a particular Christian leader (Felix Houphouet-Boigny) than they are now that the Ivory Coast is a multiparty system with Christians more terrified of Muslim numerical strength at the polls. Under a one-party state, a Muslim leader (Alassane Ouattara) rose as high as Prime Minister of the country. Under a multiparty system the same man is prevented from running even for a seat in parliament.

In Nigeria more people have been killed in Christian-Muslim clashes since Nigeria's return to democratic civilian rule in 1999 than were killed in such clashes in the preceding 10 years of military rule. The debates about instituting the Sharia in some Northern Nigerian states have been non-violent in most of the North, but Kaduna state especially experienced one of the worst outbursts of sectarian bloodshed in less than a year from the restoration of civilian rule in Nigeria. Hundreds of people were killed in the year 2000, and thousands were displaced.

Globalization and the Abode of War

There are different conflicts in the Muslim world which dictate an agonizing reappraisal. The majority of the victims are Muslims, but there are conflicts where Muslims are also the villains. In the era of globalization has the ancient Dar el Islam (the Abode of Islam) now become the modern Dar el Harb (the Abode of War)? In traditional Islamic international law, Dar el Islam designated the lands where Muslims were free and secure. But now Muslims are caught up in conflict in different lands. In this regard we have three main categories of societies:

a) First, those societies where Muslims are the victims of the violence of others. This has included the wars in Bosnia, Chechnya, Kashmir, southern Lebanon, and occupied Palestine. It once included Afghanistan under Soviet occupation. This is the paradox of globalized regional wars.

b) Second is the category where Muslims are at war with each other. This includes Afghanistan, Iraq, Turkey, Algeria, the city of Karachi in Pakistan, and to some extent Egypt.

c) Third is the category where Muslims are more culprits than victims — where Muslims victimize others. Although the war in Sudan is not primarily a religious war, its net effect casts Muslims as the greater culprits in the conflict. What about the November 1995 terrorist act in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

against Americans? Or the bombing of US Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998, or the bombing of the American ship USS COLE in the year 2000 in Yemen? In

military coalition against Iraq in the Gulf War. But the new school of thought asserts that these democratic countries are systemically unlikely to go to war against each



Professor John Esposito, Vice-chair of CSID, speaking at the CSID First Annual Fundraising Dinner.

such cases Muslims used violence against non-Muslims.

Within the Abode of Islam where conflict was not supposed to be the order of the day, we now have anguish and discord. The universalism of faith has yet to find a universality of peace. The United Nations is involved in some of these conflicts affecting Muslims, but not in others. There are UN resolutions about Kashmir, and many more UN resolutions about Palestine. The UN has sometimes attempted to help in the civil war in Afghanistan. The UN kept out of the war in Chechnya. What is heartrending for the Muslim world is how much fratricide, as well as victimization, there is.

While Muslims have failed in maintaining peace towards each other, Westerners in the age of globalization, have found peace among themselves. A whole new body of literature is emerging based on the premise that “democracies do not go to war against each other.” The literature is not based on moral wishful thinking, but on what is presented as systemic and scientific analysis of the nature of the democratic process, especially in the liberal West. There is nothing in the democratic process to stop the United States from invading Panama, or to stop Britain and France from joining a

other. In Huntington's phrase, “Military conflict among Western states is unthinkable”. But how much of this peace is due to the presence of economic prosperity and nuclear weapons?

In Afghanistan, the West did the right thing for the wrong reasons — it helped Muslims in order to checkmate the Soviets. In Bosnia, the West for quite a while did the wrong thing for the wrong reasons — appease the Serbian invaders partly because of sectarian indifference.

Rather belatedly the international community did the right thing for the right reasons — help Bosnia survive even as a fragmented independent country rather than let Serbian aggression triumph.

In Search of Muslim Unity

The shadow of cultural prejudice persists. Would the West and the UN have been slow to react in Bosnia if it was a case of Muslims slaughtering and raping Christians instead of the other way round? Would the U.S. administration and the Senate have been slow if the Serbian concentration camps were for Bosnian Jews rather than for Bosnian Muslims? Would the

UN not have been forced to respond more robustly and energetically if Jewish women were being raped by Muslim men as an instrument of war, instead of Muslim women being raped by Orthodox Christian Serbs?

Indeed, there is reason to believe that if it were Jews who were being subjected to such unspeakable humiliation, Israel would not have waited for either the UN Security Council or the U.S. Senate. Israel would have staged a major international spectacular event to grab the world's attention — even if it meant bombing Belgrade. And Israel would certainly have got the world's attention. Fifty Muslim governments, on the other hand, were content to timidly obey the demands of the Security Council, refrain from arming the Bosnian Muslims or even evacuate refugees. The conclusion to be drawn from all this is that the universalism of Islam has yet to forge a unity of the Muslim ummah.

Where Muslims are on the defensive against a non-Muslim oppressor, the democratization of the Oppressor needs to be supported by the unity of will of the Muslim ummah. In the final analysis the fact that India is a democracy would have helped the people of Kashmir if there was a unity of will in the rest of the Muslim world to put pressure on India.

The fact that Israel is a democracy would have helped the Palestinians if there was unity of will among Muslim states ready to put pressure on both Israel and the United States. The democratization of the oppressor would make it more accountable for its oppression provided the ummah as a whole is united in its political, economic and even military counter-measures.

When the ummah was united, even the United States could be humbled. It has at times been possible to pass through the General Assembly, for example, highly contentious points of principle bitterly opposed by the United States. The state of Israel is based on an ideology which says that a Russian who claims to be descended from Jews, and whose family has had no connection with the Middle East for the last two thousand years, has more right to go and settle in Israel than a Palestinian who

ran away from Israel during the 1948 war. Was such discrimination racist? When Muslims were united in 1975, they managed to persuade the UN General Assembly to pass a resolution affirming that Zionism was a form of racism in spite of massive Western opposition. But when Muslims were divided in 1991, that resolution was repealed by an overwhelming majority.

When Muslims were united they could persuade the General Assembly, on another occasion, not only to defy the United States but move the Assembly itself out of New York in further defiance. Thus when in 1988 the United States refused to grant a visa to Yasser Arafat, thereby preventing him from coming to New York to address the UN General Assembly on his initial declaration of an independent Palestinian state, the General Assembly denounced Washington's action as a violation of the host country's legal obligations under the 1947 Headquarters Agreement. The General Assembly then shifted this December 13-15 session to Geneva, Switzerland, to make it possible to listen to Chairman Arafat. It was the first and only such move in the history of the United Nations. The unity of the Muslim members of the UN helped to persuade others to join their ranks. Muslim consensus became an irresistible force in diplomatic affairs.

Muslims in America

What about Muslims as participants in American democracy? Are they on the defensive too? Will integration with American society remain compatible with Muslim unity? What have been the lessons of the elections of 2000 in the United States? Over 70% of immigrant Muslims tend to vote REPUBLICAN. Over 70% of African-American Muslims favor DEMOCRATS. If the two groups vote as individuals, that is compatible with Muslim unity. It can be both democratically healthy and compatible with Muslim consensus across the racial divide.

But if immigrant-led Muslim organizations continue to endorse a Republican Presidential candidate in the name of Islam, that could be a prescription for a permanent

cleavage between African Americans and immigrant Muslims. Among all native born Americans whose American roots are longer than a hundred years, African Americans are the most fertile constituency for Islamization. Islam has gone further in attracting African Americans to its fold than any other group of indigenous Americans. But 90% of African Americans of all faiths voted against George W. Bush in the year 2000. Yet George W. Bush was the candidate publicly endorsed by immigrant-led Muslim organizations before the presidential elections of November 2000.

If this divergence is repeated election after election, will it not eventually appear that our love for the success of the Republican Party in this country is outweighing our love for the success of Islam in the United States? Are we putting at risk the spread of Islam by being insensitive to the concerns of African Americans?

What is the solution? Individual Muslims should of course vote for candidates of their choice. That is what democracy is about. But Muslim organizations should endorse policies rather than candidates.

Many Muslims are comfortable with some of the social concerns of the Republicans—family values, distrust of abortion, distrust of gay rights, acceptance of prayer in schools—provided school prayer is based on freedom of worship for different creeds.

Many Muslims are also attracted by some of the imperatives of social justice championed by Democrats — concern for the rights of minorities, defending more compassionate immigration laws, promoting some kind of affirmative action to help the historically dispossessed groups, a more generous minimum wage.

In foreign policy both American political parties have often put the Muslim world on the defensive. It was a Democratic President, Harry Truman, who helped create the state of Israel in 1948. It was a Republican President, George Bush Senior, who unleashed Desert Storm on Iraq in 1991. Bill Clinton authorized the bombing of Afghanistan and Sudan. Ronald Reagan authorized the bombing of Libya and

Continued on Page 6

Open Letter to President Bush

On February 9, 2001, the American Muslim Council (AMC) and the Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy (CSID) sent the following letter to the newly-elected President, George W. Bush. The letter was released to the media during a press conference, on Monday 2/12/2001, and received wide coverage in both national and international news media.



Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On the occasion of your inauguration as the 43rd President of the United States of America, the American Muslim Council (AMC) and the Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy (CSID), would like to congratulate you and wish you success in your presidency. America today is home to a growing number of Muslim Americans who are an integral part of American society. It is estimated that, by 2010, Islam will become the second largest religion in America. During the recent elections, 74% of American Muslims voted for you, after the American Muslim Political Coordination Council (AMPCC) endorsed your candidacy.

The American Muslim leadership is uniquely positioned, and stands ready, to support you in advancing the security of our nation, while building real alliances and friendships for the U.S. with the 1.2 billion Muslims in the World. As Muslim Americans, along with those who study Islam's role in the world, we want to work with you, and with your administration, to build a more diverse, united, and compassionate America, and to bridge the gap between the U.S. and the Muslim world.

On January 12, 2001, AMC and CSID convened a panel of 25 American experts (Muslim and non-Muslim) on the question of how relations between the U.S. and the Muslim World can be advanced. This letter and the attachment include some of the major recommen-

dations resulting from this meeting. We hope that they can serve the important function of advancing your administration's foreign policy goals in the years ahead.

The Muslim World contains more than 55 countries, including such strategically important countries as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Islam is the second largest religion in the world, and third largest in Europe and the U.S. The 1.2 billion Muslims in the world, nearly half of whom are under the age of 30 with unemployment rates between 20 and 25 percent, are torn between the values of the modern secular West and their own Islamic values and traditions. While they want to benefit from the technological and scientific achievements of the 20th century, they also do not want to give up their own heritage and religion. Unfortunately, the Muslim peoples are increasingly alienated from their own govern-

'Governments in the Muslim World must find new modes of politics that operate on popular participation and consultation rather than coercion'

ments, many of which are highly ineffective, corrupt, and authoritarian. If the Muslim World is to enter the 21st century with self-confidence, peace, and stability, governments in the Muslim World must find new modes of politics that operate on popular participation and consultation rather than coercion.

The problem is that in much of the Middle East, the U.S. is perceived as particularly close to and protective of some of the least democratic countries in the world. The U.S. should not allow authoritarian regimes to justify their repression of all opposition movements as a defense against "fundamentalism" or "extremism". It is precisely dictatorship and authoritarianism that fuels extremism and

radical change. Change is coming, and it is in our American interest as well as in the interest of peace and stability in the world that this change be gradual rather than abrupt, peaceful rather than violent. To achieve this, the U.S. needs to be a persistent advocate of political and economic liberalization, including a greater allowance for civil society. There is only one long-term solution: making governments more accountable to their citizens through the rule of law, guaranteed

‘U.S. policy-makers must be better informed on Islam, a religion and civilization that is, and will remain, a powerful force in the new century.’

freedoms, and free and fair elections.

Building good relations between the U.S. and the Muslim world requires nurturing more respect toward Islam and Muslim civilization and cultures. U.S. policy-makers must be better informed on Islam, a religion and civilization that is, and will remain, a powerful force in the new century. The Middle East policy team needs to be reorganized in order to bring greater understanding, balance, and diversity of



A Panel of Experts was convened by AMC and CSID to discuss how relations between the US and the Muslim World can be improved.

viewpoints in the policymaking process. We need to initiate and encourage a civilizational dialogue with the peoples of the Muslim world.

American Muslims, as represented by our two organizations, want more access and a voice in our foreign policy apparatus. We want improved relations between our country and the Muslim world. The specific policy recommendations in the attachment are designed to show the world that the U.S. is not the enemy of Islam or Muslims, and that we can indeed look forward to stronger ties between your

administration and the Muslim countries.

Finally, we urge you to appoint more American Muslims in your administration at senior level positions and to continue to consult with us, as you do with leaders of other major religious groups, on these and related issues. In addition, we hope that you will soon appoint a White House liaison with the American Muslim Community, and work toward inclusion of more American Muslims in the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

We pray that God Almighty will bless you with further success, and guide you in leading our nation and the world to peace, stability, and justice for all.

Sincerely;

Dr. Yahya Basha

President

American Muslim Council (AMC)

Prof. Ali A. Mazrui

Chair of the Board

Center for the Study of Islam &
Democracy (CSID)

Main Policy Recommendations

I. U.S. Values and Muslim World:

American foreign policy should be based not only on our own national interests but also on the fundamental values of the American people: freedom, justice, equality, and democracy. The American people want to treat other people with fairness and justice and strive to be a moral force for human dignity in the world.

II. Iraq and American Compassion:

Our current policy of economic strangulation in Iraq has seriously damaged the U.S. image across the Arab and Muslim world. The economic sanctions have had a devastating impact upon innocent civilians, children in particular, whose only fault is that they are ruled by a dictator. According to UN sources, more than 1.3 million Iraqi children suffer from chronic malnutrition. It is time for a new U.S. policy in Iraq, which meets the U.S. security objectives without punishing the Iraqi people by economic sanctions.

III. The Arab-Israeli Impasse:

The U.S. must be an honest broker in the Middle East conflict. American uncritical and unlimited support for Israel is hurting our interests in the Muslim World. In the 21st century, no people can be expected to live submissively under a military occupation that has lasted more than 30 years. Since 1988, all Israeli governments have



Alkebsi, Abuzaakuk, Mazrui, Masmoudi, and Cantori (from left to right) presented the contents of the letter in a press conference on February 12, 2001

continued aggressive settlement and road construction on confiscated Palestinian lands, and the settler population in the West Bank and Gaza has doubled since the 1993 Oslo Accords. These settlements are a roadblock to a long and lasting peace in the Middle East. Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories, and an end to the illegal practice of settlements will pave the way to a lasting peace. Such a peace must include a viable Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its Capital. Jerusalem must be shared between two people (Palestinian Muslims and Christians and Israeli Jews) and three religions. The resolution of the Jerusalem issue will advance cooperation and understanding between the three major monotheistic religions of the world: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

IV. The U.S., Iran, and Libya:

Mazrui, continued from Page 3

Lebanon. Both American parties have been insensitive to the suffering of the people of Kashmir. On the other hand, both political parties contributed to the liberation of Afghanistan from Soviet occupation and control.

Bill Clinton's first administration virtually abandoned Bosnia to its fate in spite of the worst crimes against humanity since World War II. Bill Clinton's second administration refused to tolerate crimes against humanity in Kosovo – and took military action under NATO to rescue the Albanian Muslims of Kosovo.

In short, there are pluses and minuses in both political parties – sometimes a minus in the first administration and plus in the second administration of the same president. Muslims should judge the parties from election to election. They should not become so predictably supporters of one particular party that their influence on either party is diluted.

Muslims should be like the Jews were in the 20th century – and not like fellow African Americans were in the 20th century. The Jews could switch votes if Jewish concerns were not addressed. African Americans allowed themselves to be predictably Democratic at every

A measure of rapprochement between the U.S. and Iran would not only help U.S. interests in the region, but also improve relations between the U.S. and the Muslim World. The Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (the D'Amato Bill) has outlived its usefulness and should be repealed. We should also settle all outstanding U.S.-Iranian claims currently under adjudication at The Hague.

V. Kashmir and Nuclear Proliferation:

One of the major flash points of the world is in South Asia, especially relations between India and Pakistan. Now that both countries have nuclear weapons, it is more urgent than ever that the root cause of their dispute be resolved. That root cause is KASHMIR. U.S. policy towards making South Asia a nuclear-free zone is unlikely to succeed without first resolving the future of Kashmir. India, Pakistan, and Kashmiri leaders need to be induced to come to the negotiating table. The nuclear issue is inseparable from the Kashmir issue.

VI. Indonesia: Democracy vs. National Integrity?

In the history of the Soviet Union, democratization (glasnost and perestroika) resulted in territorial disintegration. Many Muslims worry lest democratization in Indonesia should also be leading towards territorial disintegration. We must stop the appearance that democracy is a threat to national integrity in Indonesia, Nigeria, or Pakistan. The United States should try harder to be a stabilizing force for the territorial integrity of Indonesia, Nigeria and Pakistan.

election. Too much loyalty to one particular party results in being taken for granted by that party – and virtually ignored by the opposing party. The Muslim vote should float in the direction of a pro-Muslim tide.

Notes:

1. On the bombing, see The New York Times (Tuesday, November 14, 1995), Section A, p. 1.
2. A recent evaluation of the literature may be found in James Lee Ray, *Democracy and International Conflict: An Evaluation of the Democratic Peace Proposition* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995). Also, several leading scholars on this subject, such as Bruce Russett, Christopher Layne, David Shapiro, and Michael W. Doyle, assess the state of the field in their contributions to the *International Security*, Vol. 19 (Spring 1995) issue on this topic.
3. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (Summer 1993), p. 39.
4. Witness the airlift of the "Falasha Jews" from Ethiopia, detailed in Ruth Gruber, *Rescue: The Exodus of the Ethiopian Jews* (New York: Atheneum, 1987).
5. On the change, see "Zionism No Longer Equated With Racism," *UN Chronicle*, Vol. 29 (March 1992), p. 67.
6. For a report on this incident, see The New York Times (December 3, 1988), Section A, p.1.

Prof. Esposito's speech will be published, incha'Allah, in the next issue of Muslim Democrat.

Conference Announcement

A	merican
C	ouncil for the
S	tudy of
I	slamic
S	ocieties

18th ANNUAL CONFERENCE April 27-28, 2001 Dougherty Hall, Villanova University Villanova, Pennsylvania

Pre-Registration: Pre-Registration by mail – Deadline April 13, 2001. On-Site Registration: Friday, April 27, 2001 beginning 8:30AM.

1. Turkey and the West

Moderator: Michael Bishku, Augusta State University
“Destination European Union? The Politics and Economics of Turkey’s Case for Admission” Michael Bishku, Augusta State University
“The Role of Turkey in European Security” James Sowerwine, Kutztown State University
“Turkish-American Relations” John Vander Lippe, SUNY New Paltz

10:45AM

2. China, Tibet, and Central Asia

Moderator: Michael Bishku, Augusta State University
“Xinjiang: China’s Muslim West” Yi Sun, University of San Diego
“Muslims in Tibet” Gray Henry, Fons Vitae and Islamic Texts Society
“Iran’s Relations with China, India-Pakistan, and Central Asia” Ahmad Tariq Karim, University of Maryland

3. Contemporary Developments in Pakistan

Moderator: Grace Clark, Baltimore, Maryland
“Post-Islamism in Pakistan” Tamara Sonn, The College of William and Mary
“Contemporary Development in Pakistan” Mumtaz Ahmad, Hampton University
“Religious Minorities in Pakistan” George Irani, U.S. Commission on

International Religious Freedom
“The Kashmiri Problem” Ahmad Tariq Karim, University of Maryland
3:00PM Break
4. “Jinnah” – Film Preview & Discussion Akbar Ahmed, Princeton University

6:00PM Banquet, Dougherty Hall

Keynote Address: “Islam and the End of Time: Living Dangerously in the 21st Century”

Akbar S. Ahmed, Princeton University

Saturday, April 28, 2001 9:00AM

5. Muslims, Distorting Media, and American Politics

Sponsored by South Asian Muslim Studies Assn. (SAMSA)
Moderator: Theodore Wright, SUNY Albany
Respondent: Mumtaz Ahmad, Hampton University
“Treatment of Muslims in the American Media: the Arab-Israeli Dispute” Mir M. Ali, Consultant, Washington DC
“Iraq: From Virtual Ally to Enemy in the Gulf War to Target of Sanctions” Dilnawaz Siddiqui, Clarion State University
“Kashmir: From Freedom Fighters to Fundamentalist Mercenary Terrorists” Ghulam Nabi Fai, Kashmiri American Council
“The American Media and the Balkan Conflicts: A Reverse Case?” Abdul Malik Mujahid, Soundvision

10:45AM – 12:30PM

6. Muslims in Southeast Asia

Moderator: Vivienne Angeles, LaSalle University

“The Arab Musical Aesthetic in Indonesian Islam” (with video presentation) Anne Rasmussen, The College of William and Mary

“Muslim Movements in the Philippines” Thomas McKenna, University of Alabama

2:00PM - 4:30PM

Additional Panel Sponsored by Muslims in the American Public Square Project (Project MAPS), Georgetown University:

“Islam, Pluralism and Participation: Conceptual Discourse and Practical Concerns”
Moderator: Zahid Bukhari, Georgetown University
Discussant: Mir M. Ali, Consultant, Washington DC

“Living as a Muslim in a Pluralistic Society and State” Omar Khalidi, MIT
“Pluralism and Muslims’ Political Participation in the USA” Sulayman Nyang, Howard University

“American Muslims and US Foreign Policy in South Asia and the Middle East” Mumtaz Ahmad, Hampton University

“The American Muslim Community and the Kashmir Conflict” Ghulam Nabi Fai, Kashmiri American Council.

The American Council for the Study of Islamic Societies was established in 1983 to bring together scholars engaged in the study of Islamic societies and states around the world from religious, cultural, economic, and political perspectives. Annual membership is \$35.00. For more information, please contact Tamara Sonn, ACSIS President at txsonn@wm.edu, or: Ms. Susan Hausman, Assistant to the Director, at SHausman@villanova.edu

CSID Needs Your Help

CSID was established, two years ago, to promote peace, stability, freedoms, and democracy in the Muslim World. We urgently need your financial support to continue our mission. Please join CSID *today* as a member, a fellow, or a founding member. To receive the *Muslim Democrat*, please send your annual subscription fee of \$20. Due to our limited budget, we regret that we will not be able to send the newsletter *free of charge* in the future.

Islam and Democracy in the Contemporary Middle East



The Middle East Studies Organization (MESA) is the largest organization in the world for those who are interested or involved in Middle East Studies. It has more than 3,000 members, and its annual convention draws between 1,000 and 1,500 attendees every year. MESA's annual convention is usually held in the third week of November. CSID has developed a tradition of participating in the MESA Annual convention by renting a display table and by co-sponsoring a panel on Islam & Democracy.

On Friday, November 17, 2000, CSID sponsored a panel on Islam & Democracy in the Contemporary Middle East. The panel was attended by more than 80 people (the room was packed) who enjoyed listening to, and participating in, a lively discussion on the relation between Islamic and democratic ideals, especially as they relate to the Middle East. The panel was chaired by **Dr. Tony Sullivan**, of the Earhart Foundation, and the discussant was Prof. Augustus Richard Norton, of Boston University. The following is a brief summary of the presentations:



A view of the audience at the CSID panel at MESA

Democracy as a Contemporary Implementation of Islam

Dr. Fathi Osman

The basic Islamic principles in government are:

a. The source from which the ruler draws his/her authority is the public will. The ruler cannot claim divine right to rule the people nor can he force himself on the people.

b. The ruler has to rule through participation and consultation (shura) with the people or those whom the people elect as their representatives. In the past, the representatives were the leaders of the

tribe (ahl al-hal wal aqd). Today, they clearly must be elected.

c. Authority must be used to secure justice for all, without any discrimination.

All the citizens must have their rights protected, especially the

weakest in the society. Oppression (Dhulm) is strongly forbidden.

All these Islamic principles can be practically implemented through democracy. Such democratic principles and ideals as human and civil rights, representation, free and fair elections, separation of powers, etc. are examples of how democracy can implement Islamic principles in government and fulfill the goals of Shariaa. The argument about sovereignty, whether it belongs to God or the people, is merely theoretical since God has created men and women as His vice-gerants (Khalifa) on earth. Furthermore, the will of the people will be guided by the constitution and the supreme court to make sure that the majority does not abuse the rights of minorities. The people have the responsibility to choose to be governed according to Islamic rules and principles. These principles cannot be forced on them.

The Islamic state was never a theocracy that claims a divine right above the people. Modern Islamic thinkers have defended democracy in their reform plans since the late 19th century (e.g. Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi (d.1899), Abdel Rahman al-Kawakibi (d.1902) and Muhammad Abduh (d.1905)). Even Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi (d. 1979), after long reservations, said that "democracy is congruent with the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah... It simply means that the country does not belong to a particular person, class, or group but to all those people who live in it. Therefore, its administrative system should fall in line with the wishes of all these peoples, or at least of the majority of them. Their right to elect their rulers, by the exercise of their free will and to replace them in a similar manner should be conceded in principle. No one can deny that democracy has many shortcomings. However, despite acknowledging these shortcomings, the fact remains that democracy is the only way to avoid the failings of a people and turn them into a grown-up nation. Any nation commits mistakes in its early phase and also suffers from the unpleasant consequences of these mistakes. But it cannot achieve a correct sense of direction without making those errors." (*Democracy and National Solidarity*).

Islam & Democracy

Tamara Sonn, College of William & Mary

Democracy is not a univocal term. It has been used to describe political systems as diverse as those of ancient Athens and contempo-



Dr. M. Fathi Osman (speaking) and Dr. Tony Sullivan (chaired the panel).

rary Israel, for example. If there is any characteristic shared by governments claiming to be democratic, however, it is that at least some portion of the population has a voice in shaping the laws by which they are governed or, to put it another way, the rejection of dictatorship. In this paper I discussed the components of classical Sunni Islamic thought that support this democratic approach to government. The Qur'an does enjoin believers to "obey God, and obey the Messenger, and those in authority among you." (4:62) That has been interpreted by some as support for authoritarian rule in Islam. But there are other components of Islamic thought which, taken together, indicate the opposite conclusion. First, the Qur'an unequivocally condemns obedience to any laws that go against the divine will. Those who have in the past obeyed unjust rulers are held up as examples of the danger of submission to authoritarian rule.

Furthermore, it was understood by the Muslim community from the beginning that human effort was required to devise ways to implement the Qur'an's guidance in all circumstances. Based on the Qur'an's advice to the Prophet himself to guide his community through consultation (3:153), and the widely accepted hadith according to which the Muslim community's earnest consensus was authoritative, the Islamic legal system developed a number of characteristics designed to thwart dictatorship. First, any member of the community capable of the requisite study was eligible to enter the ranks of the jurists. Secondly, the authority of the head of state was limited to executive power, implying the primacy of the juristic (legislative/judicial) branch of government. Third, numerous schools of Islamic law developed; that, combined with the legality of non-Muslim courts (Rabbinic and canonic, e.g.,) allowed for legal pluralism in Islam, again, countering any tendencies to authoritarianism in the executive branch.

Reconciling Western and Islamic Conceptions of Democracy: A Shared Democratic Elitism

Louis J. Cantori, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

The contemporary political dialectic of the Middle East is one of Arabism being contradicted by Islamism to produce a synthesis of *Islamic nationalism* throughout the region. This Islamic nationalism in Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia etc. is conflicted between the desire for democracy and the end of Israeli colonialism. The result is that democracy is not high on the political agenda. Even if it were, one thing is clear: the so-called "universal" democracy of the West and especially that of the American model and American policy with its secularism and individualism is not culturally appropriate. One needs to get away from the cultural ethnocentrism of the European Enlightenment and the institutional features of democracy and try to identify what might be termed democratic *functions*.

At least two major such functions might be the constraint of the state and political representation. As Tamara Sonn has pointed out in *Muslim Democrat* (vol. 2, no. 3) citing the theory of al-Mawardi, there is no such thing as an abstract theory of an Islamic state. Instead, the Islamic state is always anchored in the empirical reality of its security and taxation concerns. The result is that the state becomes adapted to

local culture and at the same time it is constrained by the ulama and the *fuqaha* (Basheer Nafi). In the same spirit, the function of political representation is achieved via *shura* and *ijmaa*. This in turn suggests democratic elitism and group and not individual representation. This is a formula of *functional Islamic democracy*. ■

Letter to the Editor

December 16, 2000

The Editor of *Muslim Democrat*
Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy
P.O. Box 864
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Dear Sir:

Prof. M. Muqtedar Khan begins his article, "*Have Muslims Arrived?*" in the November 2000 issue of *Muslim Democrat* as follows: "Nearly a decade ago, Daniel Pipes published an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* titled "Muslims Are Coming, Muslims are Coming".

This opening sentence contains no fewer than three errors – and they foreshadow the inaccuracy of the rest of what Prof. Khan writes about me. (1) My article appeared not in the *Atlantic Monthly* but in the *National Review*. (2) It appeared not "nearly a decade ago" but precisely a decade ago, in the issue dated November 19, 1990. (3) It was titled not "Muslims Are Coming, Muslims are Coming" but "The Muslims Are Coming! The Muslims Are Coming!" – a very specific and humorous reference to the mock-panic title of the classic 1966 movie "The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming!"

(By the way, the editors of *National Review* gave this title to my article without checking with me; I wish they had given it a less comedic title, for the intended mock-panic quality has been widely misunderstood as real panic.)

Worse, Prof. Khan then goes on to assert that in this article I was trying to incite fear and hostility towards Islamic resurgence by representing Muslim search for authenticity and self-identity as an anti-West movement threatening its core interests.

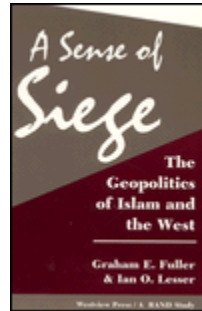
Oh, really? Here is an excerpt of what I actually wrote: "The movement of Muslims to Western Europe creates a great number of painful but finite challenges; there is no reason, however, to see this event leading to a cataclysmic battle between two civilizations. If handled properly, the immigrants can even bring much of value, including new energy, to their host societies".

I wonder if Prof. Khan could reply to a question: What purpose does this distortion of my written record serve? Insisting that I am hostile to Islam both insults me and complicates the lives of American Muslims (by suggesting that Islam has more enemies than in fact is the case). So, why do it?

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Pipes

A Sense of Siege



A Sense of Siege: The Geopolitics of Islam & the West, by Graham E. Fuller & Ian O. Lesser, Westview Press / A RAND Study 1995

The book explores the nature of the friction between the Muslim world and Western states, looking at legitimate perceptions and grievances on both sides involving historical, political, economic, cultural, psychological, and strategic elements. A central theme of the book is that political Islam can be best circumvented by integrating Islamist forces into the political process.

The authors point out that in the past it was the Europeans who were affected by the Islamic societies. The modern West tends to associate the Muslim world with the Middle East, or what eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europeans called the Orient. But until the retreat of the Ottoman Turkey from Europe, the Orient was widely seen as beginning where Hapsburg influence ended in the Balkans. Much of what Europeans conceived of as the Muslim world existed within the geographic confines of Europe. [Pg. 14]

The authors try to explain the viewpoint of the Muslims and their perceptions: Two key themes most distinctly characterize the Muslim perception of its relationship with the West: the reversal of Islamic civilization's long preeminence and a broad sense among Muslims that they are under siege from the West and are operating from a position of weakness and vulnerability. [Pg. 27]

In many ways the central question of this study is not Islam and the West but Islam in the West. Migration into Europe

from Islamic countries around the Mediterranean and further afield has emerged as a leading issue at public and official levels. Muslim migration to Europe and the United States also has potentially serious implications for relations at the broader level of foreign and security policy. It will be nearly impossible for Islam to play the formal institutional role in daily life in a non-Muslim setting. Indeed, Islam in the West is also likely to become more "secularized," that is, set apart from the government and social institutions, and to evolve increasingly into the expression of personal faith and conduct rather than a set of laws for society. In short, the presence of Islam in the West may hasten its move toward a process similar to the Christian Reformation. [Pg. 88]

In blunt terms, Islam in the West faces two basic alternatives: Euro-Islam or ghetto-Islam. Euro-Islam implies the choice of full Muslim integration into European society (to the extent Europeans socially permit it) while preserving Islam as a matter of personal faith and cultural preference. The alternative, ghetto-Islam, is to seek to recreate Islamic society, even with its religiously imposed social prescriptions, within European society on the basis of separatism. [Pg. 90]

In short, major adjustments may be underway in the character of Muslim societies abroad. These developments may have considerable impact on the evolution of Islamic religious and political thinking in the Middle East as a result, for the same question are being raised there, even in the Muslim cultural context. Just what are the implications of secular government in the Middle East? . The West has now become

one of the primary laboratories for rapid, virtually "forced" Islamic evolution. [Pg. 93]

In the end, the future of Islamic law in the contemporary legal order, especially the international legal order, can take one of three directions: The first possibility is that Islam can bring about reform within itself through already existing mechanism. The necessary foundations exist in the Qur'an, the Hadith that could, in principle, justify numerous contemporary, more flexible interpretations. This will happen only if Muslim scholars or the Muslim community at large wishes it to happen, enabling reformist views to replace those of the more literalist or radical interpreters who dominate the Islamist political scene today. [Pg. 99]

The second possibility is that Islam will not undergo the interpretive process necessary to make it fully compatible with existing international law. Islamic law will thus remain relegated to increasingly narrower areas of life while supplemental law is adopted from Western system. The third is that Islamist vision will be rejected by the majority of Muslims. Islam will, in short, completely fail to make the transition to modernization and reform that would allow it to be the foundation of a modern legal system. Islamic holidays would remain, and Islamic traditions would remain in much of the cultural and social life, but society and state would become formally secular [Pg. 100-101]

A policy of inclusion is based on the belief that once Islamist movements enter the political process several different things will happen: The movement will have to move beyond facile slogans to declare its own position on a variety of difficult issues; it will have to adopt a platform open to public scrutiny. Islamist politicians will have to deal with others whose principle they do not necessarily accept, forcing them to compromise their abstract principles in the direction of reality. They will be forced to take public position on important issues against which they will be judged at later elections. This process has in fact happened in Turkey and Pakistan, where Islamist parties are a normal and, very often, unexciting part of the political spectrum. [Pg. 120] ■



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CSID on VOA

On Tuesday, December 26, 2000, Dr. Radwan Masmoudi, Executive Director, and Dr. Louay Safi, Director of Research at IIIT and Founding Member of CSID, participated in a live TV show on “Islam & Democracy”. The Arabic program was broadcast *live* on Voice of America (VOA) to millions of viewers throughout the world, who were able to call-in with their questions and comments. Calls were received from Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Jordan, Australia, and Europe.

During the program, Dr. Masmoudi said that Muslims should not have a hang-up with terminology. “Whether we



Louay Safi and Radwan Masmoudi with Hayat al-Khateeb, Host of ‘Hello America’.

call it Shura or democracy is not the issue. The issue is to have representative and elected governments that are accountable to the people”, he said. Dr. Safi added that Abu Hamed al-Chazali stated, in his work *al-risala al-mustansiriya*, that in political matters, we should follow the opinion of the majority.

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