

# Muslim Democrat

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## In This Issue:

- 2 *Reason and Freedom in Islamic Thought*



- 4 *Interview with Sheikh Taha*



- 6 *Islam & Democracy: The Struggle Continues*



- 7 *Call for Papers: CSID'2002*



- 8 *Recovering the Core Values of Islam*

- 9 *Responding to Post Sept. 11 Challenges*

## What's Next For Afghanistan?

Destroying Taliban and al-Qaeda was the easy part in the war against terrorism. The US has enough weapons and intelligence to destroy all of Afghanistan if it wanted to. The difficult part is what comes next. Will we leave Afghanistan destroyed, demoralized, impoverished, and hungry? Or are we going to help build Afghanistan into a prosperous country and society? Are we going to impose another undemocratic regime on the Afghani people? Or are we, for a change, going to help build a democratic and representative government in Afghanistan? The ultimate success or failure of the war on terrorism will depend on the answers to these questions.



By **Radwan A. Masmoudi**  
Center for the Study of Islam  
& Democracy (CSID)

If we leave Afghanistan impoverished and devastated, the public opinion in the Muslim world will continue to see the U.S. as an enemy and the war on terrorism as revenge. However, if we help to build a new, democratic, and prosperous nation, then people in the Muslim world will begin to see the U.S. as a friend and an ally.

Building a democratic regime in Afghanistan is not going to be easy because the country is in ruin. However, sometimes it is easier to build from scratch than to revamp an existing and failing system. After defeating Iraq in the Gulf War, the U.S. missed a great opportunity to either get rid of Saddam Hussein or, at the very least, help establish a democratic form of government in Kuwait. This failure has led to mounting skepticism and distrust of the U.S. in the Arab and Muslim world.

We should play a leading role in establishing and contributing to a special "Marshall Plan" fund to rebuild Afghanistan. A minimum of \$15 Billion must be set aside for rebuilding Afghanistan's infrastructure (roads, schools, hospitals, mosques, universities, government buildings, etc.) that has been devastated during the last 20 years. We also need to train and educate a new generation of Afghan leaders with the concepts of tolerance, human rights, and democracy from an Islamic perspective.

A lot is at stake in not only how this war is conducted but also on how peace is established. Defeating terrorism will require winning the hearts and minds of the Arab and Muslim peoples, not expanding the war to other countries.

**Dr. Radwan Masmoudi**  
Executive Director

# Reason and Freedom in Islamic Thought

The following are excerpts from the Keynote speech, given by Dr. Abdolkarim Soroush, at the CSID 2nd Annual Conference, held on April 7, 2001, at Georgetown University. The speaker was introduced by Professor Charles E. Butterworth, Program Committee Chair and Director of CSID.

It is a great pleasure to welcome Abdolkarim Soroush to this conference. Dr. Soroush is currently a visiting research associate at the Center of Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University. Normally, he is in Tehran at the Institute for Epistemological Research. Such formal affiliations aside, Abdolkarim Soroush is known above all for his writings on the subject of Islam and democracy, and for trying to bring philosophy and theology, from both Islamic and Western traditions, to bear on those questions.

Before turning the floor over to Dr. Soroush, let me add one quick note: a new book, "**Makers of Contemporary Islam**", edited by John Esposito and John Voll, has just been published. It contains a chapter on the thought and impact of Abdolkarim Soroush, as well as much information on other leading political thinkers in the Muslim world.



Thank you, Dr. Butterworth and everyone else. Since we are talking about new books, allow me to note that a book of mine is now in print in English under the title of "**Reason, Freedom and Democracy in Islam**". There, I talk about the relationship between democracy and Islam. Most of the points I will be discussing today are dealt with in greater detail in this work.

Coming from Iran and its *Shi'i* tradition, I have a lot of room to introduce philosophical ideas, including extra-religious ideas. *Shi'i* Islam has long been very comfortable with philosophy and has produced great metaphysical philosophers. The tradition lives on today in Iran, being taught in seminaries and universities across the country.

Things become very difficult and



Dr. Abdolkarim Soroush, addressing the CSID Second Annual Conference.

tortuous when one comes to the concept of democracy and Islam. On one hand, democracy has its roots in ancient Greece and comes down to us through Western philosophers, political thinkers, leaders, and so on. As a result, democracy seems a foreign idea and, thus, alien to Muslims. On the other, we have our own Islamic tradition, our own interpretation of religion and text. Reconciling the two can seem a futile and dubious task.

In the past, Muslims thinkers were not generally faced with secular traditions; their focus was always on the Islamic tradition, or that of another religion, such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and so on. Now, however, Muslims are before a new phase of history, where Muslims must adapt to a great civilization that is not based on religion, i.e., modern Western culture. There are all sorts of secular ideas and theories that must be addressed. Coming to terms with these non-religious ideas is the most challenging task facing Muslims in modern times.

Most of you are probably familiar with prominent reformers in the Muslim world such as Muhammad Arkoun, Hasan Hanafi, Hamid Naser Abu Zeid and others. What they are doing is reviving *Mu'tazilite* experience in the *Sunni* Islamic world. As you know, within the *Sunni* tradition there are two

rival theological traditions, the *Ash'arite* school and the *Mu'tazilite* school. Since their defeat, the *Mu'tazilites* have been marginalized in Islamic societies.

The *Ash'arite* tradition has produced great poets, mystics, and especially theologians, but few philosophers. One of the main principles of *Ash'arite* Islam is that there are no objective, external values; all values must come through religious revelation. This is a crucial point for understanding the problem we have at hand, that is, the conflict between democracy and Islam.

Though there are democratic values in Islam and though there is no conflict between democracy and Islam on a procedural level, the theoretical basis of democracy is problematic. Values of democracy and its criteria are extra-religious values which *Ash'arite* theologians reject, which makes it very difficult to explore this topic. Due to its secular value system, democracy cannot be reconciled with Islam without first unearthing sources for democratic values within Islam itself. Otherwise, the task is futile, as without this grounding, democracy will never be acceptable to a religious mind.

What most reformist thinkers in the *Sunni* world are trying to do is revive the *Mu'tazilite* school of thought. Their goal is to show that rationality per se is acceptable in the Islamic milieu, even when not based on religion. They strive to demonstrate that there are values that need not be derived from religion.

I am very happy about these developments, as this moves the *Sunni* world closer to a solution. We once had philosophers, theologians, and jurists who believed that ideas could be independent of Islam without being incompatible with Islam, and today their fertile work is being gradually reassessed around the Muslim

world.

Having written on this subject in Iran, I have suffered considerable hardship and criticism, but one consolation is the fact that there is such a large, welcoming audience to these ideas, as there are few epistemological obstacles in the *Shi'i* tradition to this project. Of course, there is opposition, but it comes largely from dogmatic traditionalists who fear change, as opposed to thinkers with genuine philosophical problems with rationality. The majority of Iranian society does not share the worldview of the dogmatists, so stimulating dialogues and lively philosophical debates are common in Iran among the religious classes as well as in university circles.

Contrast this to the case of my friend in Egypt, Dr. Hamid Nasr Abu-Zeid. As a result of a campaign against him—against which he received very little support from colleagues—he was declared a *murtad* or apostate. Dr. Abu-Zeid's offense was writing a book that argues for interpreting the Qur'an according to the *Mu'tazilite* tradition. The *Mu'tazilite* ideas of this book—which he considers his most important work—ran afoul of the *Ash'arite* sensibilities of the Egyptian religious establishment.

Isn't it time that we acknowledge that there are extra-religious values that are independent of religion, and that we do not need to justify everything using religious texts or prophetic tradition? You need only resort to your own reason, we're now being told, and not by non-Muslims, liberals, or

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***“We in the Third World have suffered greatly from the absence of freedom”***

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secularists, but by our Muslim forefathers. *Mu'tazilite* thinkers have already explored this area extensively and provided us the tools to solve many of our problems.

In a democracy, we need a new epistemological grounding today to calmly and reasonably engage with modern ideas; we need to embrace these new democratic ideas

rather than reject them as foreign to Islam. We can appropriate them—they are not the exclusive property of the West—and make them our own. I'm not saying that we should uncritically accept Western ideas, either; all ideas must be carefully examined in light of our tradition.

In fact, my forthcoming book is entitled “*Reinventing the Mu'tazilite Experiment*”, so this relates to my current research focus. I think that the Muslim world needs the re-invention and rethinking of *Mu'tazilite* tradition. Muhammad Arkoun, for example, is keen to reexamine the defeated philosophical movements within the Islamic tradition, giving them the credit and attention that they have been denied in the past. Arkoun is doing this



More than 125 people listened attentively, over lunch, and participated in the debate.

from a postmodern perspective, it is true, but the outcome is welcome, nonetheless.

In an Islamic milieu, there is no contradiction whatsoever between having a democratic rule and basing it on religious duties. There is no separation of church and state, as it were. Since Islam enjoins no particular form of governance, the specifics of governance are left in the hands of the people. The Prophet has left no rulings about whether a society should be led by a President, Prime Minister, or other type of leader, for example. It is up to us to decide.

What is more important is what our motivation is in seeking political power. Do we do it because it is our religious duty or because it is our secular duty? If you could convince your people that it is your religious duty to have a democratic system of governance, you would have succeeded in resolving the problem and obviating the distinction between secular rule and religious rule. This is gradually happening in Iran.

Islamic thinkers in Iran are working to show society—both the masses and the clerical establishment—that reformers are not heretical or weakening people's faith in Islam. To the contrary, they argue, reformers are actually strengthening the faith by reminding believers to exercise their religious duties, one of which is to have a democratic system of politics.

Muslims must be, after all, lovers of justice. 'Adl (justice) is the floor, as it were, of ethics and *ihsan* (generosity) is the ceiling. Thus, ethics lies between the two limits of justice and generosity. If we can not attain *ihsan*, we must at least strive to implement 'adl in society.

Muslims need to familiarize themselves with the theories of justice, that of the past—this important topic has been the focus of great thinkers since the time of Plato—but we must not forget that justice varies with time and place. We must figure out how justice is to be attained in modern times, under the conditions of modern life.

In the past, the focus of political theory was exclusively on the existence of a just ruler. A just society was assumed to result inexorably from the presence and leadership of a just ruler—nothing more needs to be done beyond giving leadership to this person. This naive view of society as depending on personal justice lives on in some societies, such as Iran (though, ironically enough, the nation's constitution tacitly endorses the separation of powers). Emphasis must be shifted from the lone leader to institutions, laws, and processes. There is no alternative to structural justice, we can not return to personal justice.

We in the Third World have suffered greatly from the absence of freedom. We have complained and written a lot, but justice has not been given enough attention. Now it's time for us to give prominence to the notion of justice. Justice is the mother of freedom. With structural justice—drawing on our past defeated traditions—we can have freedom and perhaps eventually create a better political system.

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To read the text of the Conference Proceedings, please go to: [www.islam-democracy.org](http://www.islam-democracy.org)



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## Interview with Sheikh Taha

# “There is no justice with dictatorship”.

*Q. Can you please introduce yourself to the readers of Muslim Democrat?*

A. My name is Taha Jabir Alalwani. I was born and grew up in Iraq. After I graduated from al-Azhar University in Cairo in 1959, I went back to Iraq and worked as a professor of Islamic Studies in the military academy and Imam in one of the famous mosques in Baghdad. When the Baath party took over, I decided to go back to Cairo to get my Master's and doctorate degrees. I graduated from al-Azhar in 1972 with a Ph.D. on “*Fakhrud-dine al-Razi and his contributions to usul al-Fiqh*”. I then taught Islamic Jurisprudence in Saudi Arabia for eleven years. In Saudi Arabia, I met with the late Dr. Ismail al-Faruqi, Dr. Abdulhameed abu-Sulayman, and their colleagues, and we decided to establish the “International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT)”. We came to America and established the Institute in 1984. I am now teaching at the Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences (GSISS) in Leesburg, Virginia. I am also the President of GSISS and the chairman of the Fiqh (Jurisprudence) Council of North America.

*Q. In your opinion, what are the main challenges facing the Muslim Ummah today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?*

A. Muslims need to know themselves and know the others. They don't know who they are, what their role in life is, and what kind of relations they should have with others. They tend to choose naive and simplistic answers. They like to summarize everything by saying it is haram (forbidden) or halal (allowed). But Fiqh (jurisprudence) is not everything. It is only one aspect of life. Life is not based on law alone. You have legal, economic, social, and political needs. The majority of Muslims, in the west and abroad, think it is enough to say this is halal or this is haram, this is OK, this is not, this is 'kufr'. What about the gray areas, and what about our role in life?

Some of us think life is only a path to death, and that all you need to do is take short cuts to *al-Janna* (paradise). Is this the only purpose in life. What about life itself? Allah tells us we are His vicegerents on earth and gave us his trust (amana). He gave us certain



**Sheikh Taha Jabir Alalwani**  
President of GSISS and CSID Director

responsibilities. In the Qur'an, Allah says “He who created you from this earth and gave you the responsibility to build it”. Our task is to build a civilization with values. Unfortunately, this concept is absent from our lives.

Muslims now have an “individual” mentality. They think of the need of the individual not the Ummah, or community, needs. In our religion, we have many obligations called “*furudh al-kifayah*”, i.e. the obligations of the Ummah/community. You must have hospitals, doctors, engineers, schools, roads, food, etc. These obligations fall on the community. The individual must cooperate with others to fulfill these requirements. Muslims think, by mistake, that if you pay to build a Mosque, you will get more reward from Allah than if you pay to build a hospital, for example. A Muslim can feel the link between the Mosque and Allah, but he or she can't feel or see the link between a hospital and Allah, in the same way. This also applies to other societal needs such as housing students, publishing books, or building an institution fighting against dictatorship and calling for Shura and democracy.

This is a misguided and distorted understanding of Islam. We need to rebuild our concept of life and help Muslims understand their role in life and how to have a balance between life and the hereafter. How to build a strong Ummah or community? This is the big

challenge and the responsibility of the elite of this Ummah. Anyone who has some education must do his or her best to help the Ummah understand these needs.

*Q. What about the concept of an Islamic state. Is there such a thing as an “Islamic State” and how would you define it?*

A. I would like to be very frank on this issue. In all of my studies, I never felt that Islam was too concerned about building a state. Islam, from the beginning, was working to build an Ummah and there is a big difference between building an Ummah and building a state. Building an Ummah means you have certain concepts and values. The Muslim Ummah is based on three main values: *tawheed* (oneness of God), *Tazkiy'ah* (purification of the human being), and *Imr'an* (building a civilization with values). These three values are considered as the main goals of Islam (*maqasid al-sharia*). When you build an Ummah, on *Tawheed*, *Tazkiy'ah*, and *Imr'an*, you will have a strong Ummah. Ummah means a community built around certain values. For example, the founders of this country left Europe and came here with certain values. They did not find room to implement those values in Europe, so they decided to find another place. They came here with their values to build this country. This is an Ummah, and not a nation, because nation is built around a piece of land, and not values.

This means that God does not want to be governor or mayor. God created us, and gave us certain values. He told us if you like to fulfill your duty on this earth, you must follow these principles. The details of how to build your political or your economic system are up to you. God has not appointed a Khalif (leader) for us. It is up to us, the Ummah, to appoint a Khalif, but this Khalif cannot be responsible for everything. He must be guided by the Ummah, through a parliament or Majlis As-Shura, and he must be accountable to the Ummah.

This understanding of the sovereignty of God is part of the legacy of the children of Israel, not the Islamic legacy. In the beginning, Allah swt decided to lead this experience by himself. He told them “I am going to build you as a model. Your land is a sacred land, you are my nation and my people, and I will be your governor and leader. Your prophets and messengers will be my assistants”. That's why when you read the old testament, you find that their relationship with Allah was a relationship between a people and their leader, not their God. For example, they ask him we need lentils, we need onions, we need this and we need that. When they asked for water, Allah said “O, Moses, hit the stone with your cane, and you will get water”. He did, and every tribe got their own water.

The relationship was based on miracles of the unseen. Then, they got bored from that. When they saw other people worshipping a cow, they said we need a God we can see as those people have their own God. We need to talk to him directly, and the Sameri made a cow for them. They said to Moses, we dislike to deal with somebody we can't see. God changed from direct divine sovereignty to the King/ Khalif. "O David, we have appointed you as vicegerent on earth".

The direct sovereignty of God is over. Allah swt mentioned those stories in the Qur'an as lessons. Unfortunately, some colleagues from the Islamists misunderstood the stories. They thought that sovereignty of God still applies, and Muhammad peace be upon him, like Moses, came to implement sovereignty of Allah. No, he did not. He did not even talk about it.

*Q. What about the verse that says "Whoever does not rule according to Allah's wishes are the unbelievers". Many Islamists use this to justify the need for an Islamic state?*

A. That verse means rule according to Allah's teachings as Ummah. This means you have sources, which are the Qur'an and Sunna, and you have to develop the system to implement those values. Your obligation is to implement justice. How? It is your business. I need from you to build freedom, How? It is your business. I need from you to establish fairness and trust, How to do that? It is the business of the community, the Ummah.

The message of Islam is not for a specific nation. It is impossible to develop a political system for the whole world and put all of humanity under one system, regardless of differences in languages, cultures, backgrounds, ethnicity, etc. The message of Islam is a message for all humanity. If we try to put all human beings under one Sultanic system or kingdom, or dictatorship, or whatever, no one will accept Islam. But, Allah says I have these values I want you to implement. You should develop a system, according to your own needs, to implement these values.

*Q. When we attempt to develop a system according to our needs, there will invariably be different interpretations. How do we resolve these differences?*

A. Islam teaches us that we need to agree on certain values, but the system is up to us. The system is something under our *Jfithad* and our understanding. When you neglect the Ummah, the whole nation, and take your decision by yourself, what does that mean? That means you think you don't need the Ummah and the people. You are highest and you are above them. The Qur'an says "Man becomes an

oppressor because he thinks he is highest". That means when the governor or ruler starts to think that his people are inferior to him and that he does not need them, they should stop him and get him away from power. Why? Because he will cross all the lines and become a dictator. You don't need to wait for him until he says like Pharaoh did, "I don't know any other God for you except me". From the beginning, we should put the ruler under certain laws and restrictions to help him see the picture in a proper way. If he says "I am responsible before Allah", we should tell him "no, you are responsible before the people."

If we use these three values to build our system, we will never allow a dictator to come to power riding a tank or forcing the people to accept him as a leader. I remember, on August 2, 1990, when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait I was in Egypt. Many people around me were very happy to see Saddam invade Kuwait. I told them "he will never succeed because the Qur'an teaches us that "The oppressors will not reach my covenant" and that "Allah does not guide those who are oppressors". When you practice this kind of dictatorship and oppression, you will never be able to succeed in the long run."

*Q. One of problems that some Muslims have with democracy is the rule of the majority. They say we don't have to follow the majority because the majority can be wrong. Therefore the rule of the majority is not required. What do you think about this?*

A. This is wrong. Sometimes, Muslims look at one part and forget the other parts. I call this the "Jurisprudence (Fiqh) mentality", because as a Faqih I always look at the small details of the case and forget about the others. But when you look at the whole picture you will find something else. Allah told us to implement justice, truth, trust, purification, civilization, etc. This responsibility falls on the Ummah, which means the majority and not the minority. If there is any protection from Allah, it is for the majority not the minority. Prophet Muhammad said, "My Ummah will never agree on wrongdoing". There is about 18 hadiths like this, about the guidance and protection from Allah to the Ummah. The Ummah always reaches the truth, but the minority sometimes reaches the truth and sometimes misses it. The Prophet says "You should follow the majority (Sawad al-atham) of the Ummah". That's why the concept of *Ijmaa* (unanimity) should be revived to move away from individual and minority rule?

*Q. But if we don't have a unanimity (Ijmaa), is it OK to accept the majority?*

A. It is better to accept the majority than to accept a minority. If I follow the majority, I am always

on the safe side. Following the minority will open the door to other minorities to take over by claiming to know the truth. We can't open this door because it will lead to unspeakable violence and confrontations.

*Q. A major hurdle facing the Muslim world today is dictatorship or lack of freedom, because it does not allow people to discuss different ideas, strategies, and approaches and to evaluate solutions. Are you optimistic about the ability of Muslims to overcome this hurdle? And how do we get out of this situation?*

A. When we look at history, we find that dictatorship in Europe's history was much stronger and harsher than dictatorship in our countries. However, with time, Europeans developed an acute awareness about this problem. Unfortunately, in our heritage we have some 'viruses', and the dictators always use them. When I was a student in Egypt, Jamal Abdel-Nasser invited some of the writers and journalists. He told them: "some of you were talking before the revolution about justice coming through a dictator (a just dictator), I see some of you now objecting to my role, Why? I am a dictator but I am also just!" This concept was, unfortunately, even mentioned by al-Afghani himself who used this term (al-mustabid al-Aadel). He said that the Muslim Ummah needs a "just dictator". Allah, swt, told us there is no way to put these two together. There is no justice with dictatorship. You cannot have both. This kind of thinking needs to be changed in the minds of Muslims.

*Q. Finally, do you have any advice for CSID? What do you think we should be doing and should be emphasizing?*

A. I am always thinking about CSID, and about how to bring freedom to the Muslim countries, but I feel you have a very difficult task ahead. America and the West can help in many ways, but it is difficult, because our culture and our mentality are based on Islam. If you don't bring new ideas through Islam itself, those ideas will be resented and rejected. In Saudi Arabia, for example, America from time to time raises its voice about the need to implement democratic reforms. Saudi officials reply that our religion talks about Shura, and we have a Majlis for Shura and we don't need anything else because this is our culture and mentality. Even religious leaders and scholars can't accept democracy because they see it as foreign to Islam. We, therefore, need to try to find something from our legacy and from our heritage, and ask them to implement it. Yes, certain groups may raise some objections, but they are much more likely to accept the proposed reforms, if we can show them that they are from our own religion and heritage, and not in contradiction with it.

## The Struggle Continues..



**By Dr. Muqtedar Khan**

Adrian College and CSID Director

The Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID), a Washington based think tank organized its second annual conference at Georgetown University on April 7th, 2001. The think tank is the initiative of Muslim intellectuals, academics, and activists seeking to promote democracy in the Muslim World and several non-Muslim academics who have over the years demonstrated a remarkable lack of prejudice or ill-will towards Islam and Muslims in their scholarship and their politics.

In the two years since its inception, CSID has grown in membership and in its role and has become an important institution of the American Muslim civil society. Muslim scholars and activists from all over the world have joined CSID in its mission. CSID and its ideas now receive attention from Western as well as traditional Muslim scholars who have all welcomed its endeavors to increase an appreciation for democratic values in the Muslim milieu. CSID's contributions are particularly exceptional because they demonstrate the compatibility between Islam and democracy by underscoring the Islamic basis of many democratic ideals such as equality, justice, tolerance, freedom and openness.

CSID's founders share two fundamental ideas. One, that democratic values, and by that I mean a lot more than just procedural elements of democracy, are indispensable for establishing a society that can pursue the will of its people – whatever the will may be (including Islamization). Two, the absence of democracy in the Muslim World, particularly in the Arab World, is not the fault of Islam.

These shared ideas have galvanized CSID into launching two parallel programs. The first project is activism among Muslims to educate them about the Islamic basis of

democracy values and to encourage them to seek the institutionalization of democratic practices as a means to reform their societies and renew the spirit of Islam. The second project is intellectual. The scholars involved with CSID have undertaken the challenging task of exploring the philosophical roots of democracy and examining its compatibility with the Maqasid al-Shariah (the objectives of the divine path of Islam). In doing so they are indeed attempting to develop a political theory of Islam. CSID's newsletter, The Muslim Democrat, its annual conferences and its lecture and seminar series are instrumental in both programs.

Allah has already blessed the founders of CSID by giving them the opportunity to work on this noble project. It is time that more and more Muslims showed their support and appreciation of CSID by opening their minds and their check books to CSID (<http://www.islam-democracy.org>).

### Islam and Democracy: Two Opponents

Two extremely different groups, one from the West and one from the Muslim World, have been arguing vehemently that Islam and Democracy are incompatible.

On one hand some western scholars and ideologues have tried to present Islam as an anti-democratic and inherently authoritarian ethos that precludes democratization in the Muslims World. By misrepresenting Islam in this way, they are seeking to prove that Islam as a set of values is inferior to Western liberalism and is indeed a barrier to the global progress of civilization. This argument is also helpful to Israel, which regardless of its egregious human rights violations against Palestinians, continues to enjoy the reputation as the sole democracy in the Middle East. Positioned as a solitary defender of democracy

in the Middle East, Israel enjoys immense moral and military support of the West, which includes overlooking its dismal human rights record against Arabs. As an “in principle advocate of democracy” Israel with its horrible record is preferred over Islam that has an exemplary history of tolerance and freedom but is presented as “in principle antithetical to democracy”.

On the other hand many Islamic activists, using extremely broad, simple and sometimes crude notions of secularism and sovereignty, reject democracy as rule of Man as opposed to Islam which is rule of God. Islamists who reject democracy falsely assume that secularism and democracy are necessarily connected. Secularism is a liberal tradition not a prerequisite for democracy. Religion does play a significant role in democratic politics. The contemporary US is a case in point. These Islamists also do not make a distinction between de jure sovereignty and de facto sovereignty. For example, even though God is supposedly sovereign in Afghanistan, in fact it is the Taliban who were sovereign there. Those who think that Allah was sovereign in Taliban's Afghanistan perhaps worshiped Mulla Omar.

Rejecting democracy because Man is sovereign is a big mistake. What we really need to worry about is how to limit the de facto sovereignty of Man. Democracy with its principles of limited government, public accountability, checks and balances, separation of powers and transparency in governance does succeed in limiting Man's sovereignty. The Muslim world plagued by despots, dictators and self-regarding monarchs badly needs the limitation of man's sovereignty.

CSID and its scholars have been working on these issues. They are not only exposing the politics behind the arguments made by



those Westerners who hold malice against Islam, but are also exposing the fallacies in the assumptions of those Muslims who misunderstand democracy and Islam.

### Is Islam Responsible?

There is nothing in Islam and in Muslim practices that is fundamentally opposed to democracy — justice, freedom, fairness, equality or tolerance. There are a few Muslims who reject democracy. But they do so only because they falsely allow the modern West the ownership of a universal value. They reject democracy only because they reject the West. The large number of Muslims who came out to vote in the Presidential elections in the US and those Muslims who vote in hundreds of millions in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey, Egypt and elsewhere testify to their comfort with democracy. In the minds of these nearly one billion Muslims who practice some form of democracy there is no dispute between Islam and democracy.

It is time we moved onto a more fruitful line of inquiry. If not Islam, what has precluded the democratization of the Muslim world? There are structural failures in the Muslim societies due to the legacy of colonialism and the debilitating corruption that preceded and made the Muslim world colonizable. Can we find a way to remove these seeds of underdevelopment?

I hope that in the years to come the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy will focus on this line of inquiry. If it can pinpoint the structural problems that prevent the political and economic development of the Muslim World, it will accomplish a great task. Policy solutions sensitive to local conditions can then emerge to tackle the prevalence of underdevelopment. As one of the directors of CSID, I invite all American Muslims to join us in this monumental endeavor. Let's join forces to build a free Muslim society. Free from tyranny, poverty, corruption, illiteracy, injustice and also, we must not forget, from the humiliating domination of the West. We need to emancipate the Muslim world, from the self as well as the other.

Dr. Muqtedar Khan is Director of International Studies at Adrian College in Michigan, and a director of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy. His articles are archived at: [www.ijtihad.org](http://www.ijtihad.org)

## CALL FOR PAPERS

Third Annual Conference of the  
Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy

# Democratization and Political Violence in Muslim Societies

April 6-7, 2002

Sheraton Crystal City Hotel  
Arlington, VA

**Deadline for Abstracts: February 10, 2002**

To be considered, abstracts must address one of the following Panel Themes:

\* **Islam and Political Participation: Ideals, Actors, and Processes**

This panel addresses issues relating to both the theory and practice of democratization in Muslim societies, and explores concepts, theories, obstacles, organizations, and strategies relating to democratic concerns, Islamic values, and the socio-political realities of these societies.

\* **Western Democracies and authoritarian Muslim regimes: Understanding the Relationship**

Western democracies provided crucial help and nurtured democratic movements in the Asia, East Europe, and Latin America. But these democracies seem to be less interested in the process of democratization in Muslim societies, and continue to provide vital support to autocratic and authoritarian regimes in Muslim countries. This panel addresses the various aspects of the relationship between Western democracies and authoritarian Muslim regimes.

\* **Human Rights in the Muslim World: Meanings, Movements, and Obstacles**

Do Muslim societies and cultures articulate clear notions of human rights? Are there organized efforts to advance human rights in Muslim societies, both on the level of theory and society? And what does it take to develop a human rights tradition among Muslims? These are some of the concerns to be addressed by this panel.

\* **Political Violence in the Middle East: Causes and Consequences**

Political violence and bloody conflicts are frequent events in many Muslim societies. Recent records show that violence has been perpetrated by both state and non-state actors. What are the causes of politically inspired violence? Why are political groups unable to achieve a political resolution to their conflict? And what are the implications of the perpetuation of political violence in the Middle East to world peace? These questions are the focus of the panel.

\* **Fighting Terrorism and Protecting Democracy**

Questions to be addressed in this panel include: what is terrorism and how do we distinguish it from legitimate resistance of occupation and aggression? What are the root-causes of terrorism in general, and global terrorism in particular? How can we fight terrorism while protecting democracy, human rights, and civil liberties, here and abroad?

Abstracts should be submitted to Dr. Louay M. Safi, Program Committee Chair, no later than February 10, 2002. Final papers are due by March 20, 2002. You may e-mail your abstract to [louay@iiit.org](mailto:louay@iiit.org), fax it to 703-471-3922, or mail it to PO Box 669, Herndon, VA 20172.

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# Recovering the Core Values of Islam

By *Dr. Asma Afsaruddin*  
University of Notre Dame  
CSID Fellow

Just – and accountable – government has long been considered a desideratum in Islamic political and religious thought. The Qur’an states that the righteous “inherit the earth;” righteous in this case referring to the morally upright rather than the members of any privileged confessional community. A righteous and just leader ruling by at least the tacit consent of the people and liable to being deposed for unrighteous conduct remained the ideal for most Muslims through much of the Middle Ages, even though dynastic rule replaced limited elective rule about thirty years after the Prophet Muhammad’s death. The memory of the first thirty years of non-dynastic rule by the closest associates of the Prophet, marked though it was by strife and dissension, became cherished in the collective memory of much of the Muslim polity as the golden era of just and legitimate leadership.

The consequences of this memory has potentially far-reaching consequences for the reshaping of the Islamic world today. The Qur’anic concept of *shura* refers to “consultation” among people in public affairs, including political governance, and was practiced in particular by the second caliph Umar in seventh century Arabia. It is a term that resonates positively with many contemporary Muslims who wistfully recognize the intrinsic value of this sacred concept but find it rarely applied in the polities they inhabit today. Contrary to certain popular caricatures, Muslims are not somehow genetically predisposed to accept tyranny, submit to despotic potentates, and crave religious absolutism. There is a healthy respect for honest, reasoned dissensus in the Islamic tradition; this attitude finds reflection in the saying attributed to the Prophet, “In the differences of my community, there is mercy.” The large majority of Muslims do not harbor contempt for the civil liberties and political freedoms of American society; rather they admire these freedoms and wish they could somehow magically

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*“There has never been a better time for collective self-examination and moral house-cleaning.”*

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transport them to their own societies and convince their governments of their desirability, without imperiling their lives in the process.

With interpretive zeal and good will, much common ground between the modern Western democratic perspective and traditional Muslim aspiration for just, legitimate government can be discovered. Long before the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution

were formulated, some medieval Muslim jurists developed what may be called an Islamic bill of rights meant to ensure for the individual protection of life, religion, intellect, property, and personal dignity under Islamic law. Non-Muslims such as Jews and Christians (and later Zoroastrians and others) also had specific rights in the Muslim community. Above all, they had the right to practice their religion upon payment of a poll-tax to the Islamic state. The Qur’an after all counsels, “There is no compulsion in religion.” Within roughly twenty years after Muhammad’s death, Islam lay claim to the former domains of the Byzantine and Persian empires in Persia, Syria-Palestine, Iraq, and Egypt. It is important to point out that territorial expansion did not mean forcible conversion of the conquered peoples. Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, for example, remained largely Christian for about two centuries after the early Islamic conquests. Popular anecdotes recount how Coptic Christians in Egypt, weary of being persecuted as heretics by the Byzantine church, celebrated the arrival of the Muslim Arabs on their shores in the seventh century. Individual Christians and Jews sometimes obtained high positions in Muslim administrations throughout the medieval period; two Christian physicians, for example, attended to Harun al-Rashid, the famed caliph of the Arabian Nights. When one of them, George, the son of Bakhtishu, was invited by the caliph to embrace Islam, he retorted that he preferred the company of his fathers, be they in heaven or in hell. George appears not to have been reprimanded for his candid reply. Centuries later, Jews fleeing from the “excesses” of the Spanish *Reconquista* would find refuge in Muslim Ottoman lands and establish thriving communities there. Clearly, the Qur’an’s injunction of non-compulsion in religion was taken quite seriously by those who revered it as sacred scripture.

To deny these lived realities of the Islamic past which point to what we would term in today’s jargon a respect for pluralism and religious diversity is to practice a kind of intellectual violence against Islam. Islamic militant radicals who insist that the Qur’an calls for relentless warfare against non-Muslims without just cause or provocation merely to propagate Islam and certain Western opinion-makers who unthinkingly accept and report their rhetoric as authentically Islamic are both doing history a great disservice. Radical Islamist fringe groups with their desperate cult of martyrdom are overreacting to current political contingencies and not obeying any scriptural imperative.

So, the question remains, if there is so much in the history of Muslims and their tradition that may be understood to be consonant with the objectives of civil society, where and why did it all go so horribly wrong? And how can it be set aright; or can it be set aright? What must happen is concerted engagement by Muslims in a process of recovery and revalorization of genuine Islamic core values, such as consultative government, religious tolerance, respect for pluralism and peaceful coexistence with diverse peoples, that are part and parcel of their common history. There has never been a better time for collective self-examination and moral house-cleaning. A contrite Christian Europe after the debacle of the Holocaust was forced to question some of its interpretive traditions and their moral and social consequences. After the atrocities of September 11, the virulently militant underbelly of Islam can and should be eviscerated, first by denouncing and then by debunking the interpretive strand that, in clear violation of the most basic precepts of Islam, fosters the glorification of violence and self-immolation. Muslims should do this not because they merely wish to appear modern or moderate but because the best of their religious and intellectual tradition demands nothing less of them.



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# RESPONDING TO POST SEPT. 11 CHALLENGES

*By Louay M. Safi*  
IIIT  
CSID Director

The events of September 11 and their aftermath have put the American Muslim community face to face with new and difficult realities. We increasingly confront tough questions: How should we respond to recent events? What sense, if any, can we make of the attacks on New York and Washington? How should we react to the efforts of those who are bent on equating Islam with terrorism? How do we reconcile the American and Islamic parts of our identity?



The answer to these questions differs pursuant to whether we are comparing principles or practices. On the level of principles, there is no contradiction. On the level of practice, contradictions may occur, based on the instance and the time frame we focus on.

Being Muslim means that one should stand for the principles and values of Islam, including the values of goodness, peace, justice, compassion, and charity. Being Muslim does not merely mean having social or religious identity, but also means having moral commitment to the universal principles of Islam.

Being Muslim means that one should cooperate with all those committed to improving the human condition; (Qur'an 5:2) that one should stand against injustice, even if this means that one must stand against his or her beloved ones if these were the source of injustice; (4: 135) and that one must stand against aggression, regardless of the political or religious affiliation of its perpetrators. (2:190)

Being American, on the other hand, means that one should commit oneself to the high principles upon which this country was founded: freedom, equality, accountability of leaders, and the rule of law. To be American means to pledge to defend the constitution against its enemies, foreign and domestic. This is the allegiance of all Americans, including American Muslims. The American Constitution recognizes the equal freedom of all peoples. It recognizes individual rights to freedom of religion, speech, and association. And it provides for due process of the law. These principles and values are both American and Muslim, and hence no American Muslim should ever

feel that he or she has to reconcile his or her Muslim and American identities.

However, as we move from the level of principles to that of practice, the picture becomes immediately fuzzier. For here we find that American practices have not always risen to the moral principles enshrined in the constitution, as we are bound to find that Muslims have frequently fallen below the ideals of Islam, sometimes by inches and sometimes by stretches.

The founding fathers fought for equality and rejected British rule because the British monarch failed to recognize the equal freedom of all peoples. But the founding fathers did not live up to their words, when they kept slaves. Ultimately the principles of freedom and equality won through the long and protracted struggle of back Americans, supported by many American whites, particularly those who recognized the importance of reconciling American political practices to the constitutional requirements.

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*“Successive American administrations have supported autocratic and repressive governments, in the Middle East and elsewhere.”*

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Similarly, The Johnson Administration unleashed, during its war against Vietnam, America's military might against Vietnamese civilians, prompting protests by the American public, and ultimately leading to America's withdrawal from Vietnam, and the collapse of the South Vietnamese puppet regime. The moral principle of self-determination eventually won.

Most recently, successive American administrations have supported autocratic and repressive governments, in the Middle East and elsewhere. The Clinton and Bush Administrations turned a blind eye to Russian atrocity in Chechnya, and ignored China's repressive policies in Tibet and the Muslim region of Xinjiang. And for four decades, the United States government failed to pressure India to give Kashmir the right of self-determination, as it failed to pressure Israel to leave the Palestinian territories it occupies, despite standing United Nations resolutions, and in defiance of international law.

American Muslims have the right, indeed the duty, to speak out against corruption and injustice regardless of its source. Neither should their American, nor Islamic, identity prevent them from being true to their values and beliefs.

American Muslims, it seems, are destined to play a decisive role in keeping America true to its constitutional principles, which some shortsighted public opinion leaders seem to be willing to compromise under the pressure of the moment. But American Muslims should always remember that to fulfill their historical role, they must base their positions on the high moral principles they embrace, and must be consistent and fair in their application.



## The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism

Abdulaziz Sachedina

Reviewed by Joseph Montville

Islam is the second-largest religion in the world. For several decades, this global community has struggled with issues of national independence, cultural identity, modernization and development, the challenge of fundamentalism, democratization, and pluralism. The way in which these questions are resolved will have an incalculable effect on world politics in the coming century. This book tackles these important issues. The author argues that as Islam enters the twenty-first century, it is necessary to reopen the doors of religious interpretation—to reexamine and correct false interpretations, replace outdated laws, and formulate new doctrines that respond to changing social contexts.

Always using the Qur'an as his yardstick, Aziz Sachedina demonstrates how and why Islamic law came to reflect political and social influences, leading to regulations that violate the letter and spirit of the Qur'an. He critically analyzes Muslim teachings on issues of pluralism, civil society, war and peace, violence and self-sacrifice, the status and role of non-Muslims, and capital punishment. In every case he does not shrink, where warranted, from speaking of "the irrelevance of past juridical decisions." In their place, he provides alternative resolutions, grounded in Qur'anic interpretation and contemporary realities.

Offering a sophisticated new understanding of Islam's intrinsic democratic tendencies, this remarkable work will be essential reading for all concerned with

Islam's role in the coming century.

The teachings in the Qur'an that Sachedina explains in *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* are essential in establishing the basis for mutually respectful and democratic relationships among Muslims, and between Muslims and the non-Muslim world. Democratic pluralism thrives on the ability of citizens to value each other and respect each other's dignity and human rights. In terms religious Muslims, Christians, and Jews can understand, democratic pluralism succeeds where citizens accept that the individual is created in the image of God and that all religions share membership in a loving relationship with God.

All religions have at times in their history experienced periods of hate-filled repression and violence led by "fundamentalist" authoritarian clerics. The Roman Catholic Church had such moments during the Crusades and in the Inquisition aimed at Muslims and Jews in Spain. In British America, New England Christian Puritan leaders dealt harshly with dissenters. They hanged Quakers, burned rebellious servants to death, and maimed political deviants. Some political rabbis in Israel have used degrading and dehumanizing language against the Palestinian people, and even inspired the psychological environment that enabled the assassination of the peacemaking prime minister, Yitzhaq Rabin, by a young, Jewish religious fanatic.

Muslims usually begin every written

and oral statement with the phrase, "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful." This is the God of humane Islam, not of ideological murderers. I believe that *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* can help Muslims reclaim their religion and set a path for themselves for the rest of the twenty-first century.

However, the United States can also help in this process by doing a critical retrospective analysis of its policies and the use of military power during the last 30 years. We must ask ourselves what in our behavior toward Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Lebanon, Israel, and the Palestinians sent messages to the Arab and Muslim people, not just their defiant leaders, that the U.S. government put minimal value on their lives and dignity. What allowed Osama Bin Laden to work without serious hindrance and succeed in his evil plot to hurt America in a way we will never forget? Some neoconservatives might say that these questions reflect the "blame the United States first" point of view. We would respectfully ask them to pause to consider the five thousand killed on September 11 and other innocent U.S. citizens who might still be at risk if we do not take a hard look backward at our security policies.

**Abdulaziz Sachedina** is a senior associate in the CSIS Preventive Diplomacy Program and a professor of religious studies at the University of Virginia. He was recently elected as Director of CSID. This book was published by the CSIS Preventive Diplomacy Program and Oxford University Press.



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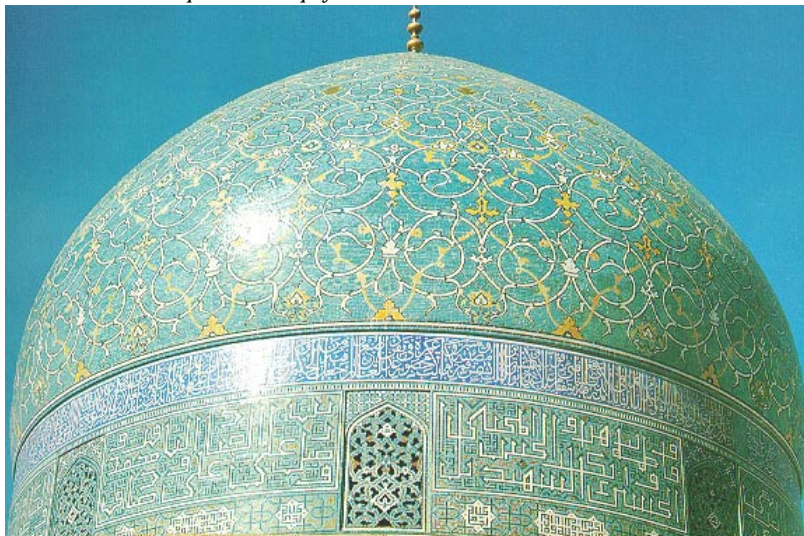
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## Objectives of CSID

- Promote democracy in the Muslim world.
- Promote a better understanding and a common platform between supporters of democracy and human rights and the proponents of the "Islamic State" in the Muslim world.
- Encourage and foster dialogue between Islam and the rest of the world, especially the West.
- Encourage American Muslims to partake in the American political system and to become full active members of the American democracy.
- Discourage fanaticism, radicalism, violence, and oppression in the Muslim world, whether in the name of Islam or in the name of secular and Western values.
- Encourage the development of Islamic political thought based on modern principles of democracy, human rights, political freedom, religious and cultural diversity, and tolerance.
- Support the efforts of those individuals, groups, and governments in the Muslim world who espouse the ideals of democracy and human rights.
- Encourage attempts in the West, and particularly the United States, to play a positive role in promoting democracy in the Muslim world and establishing a constructive dialogue and engagement with the Muslim people.
- Advocate dialogue and constructive cooperation between the three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and promote a just and peaceful resolution to the conflict in the Middle East.

## American Muslim Organization Expresses Grief

WASHINGTON, Sept. 12 /PRNewswire/ — The following statement was issued today by the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy:

It is with a great sense of loss, grief, and sadness that we followed the horrific incidents at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon yesterday. The members and the board of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID) wish to convey their heartfelt prayers, sympathy, and condolences to the victims of this horrible crime. Killing innocent people and civilians is against Islam and against humanity, and cannot serve any just cause. We urge our fellow Americans, especially in the media, not to jump to conclusions, as the identity of the perpetrators is not yet known. Whatever faith these criminals claim to profess, they will pay for their terrible crime in this life and again in the Day of Judgment before the Almighty God.

May God's peace, mercy, and blessings be with all the victims of this tragedy, their families, and their loved ones.

"Whoever kills an innocent soul, it is as though he has killed all of humanity. And whoever saves an innocent soul, it is as though he has saved all of humanity" (Qur'an 5:32).

## Regional Seminars

On June 2, 2001, Dr. Radwan Masmoudi, Executive Director of CSID, gave a lecture on "***Shura, Democracy, and Accountability in the 21st Century***" at the Islamic Society of Central Florida, in Orlando, Florida. He also introduced CSID to the local Muslim community.

On Aug. 10-12, 2001, Dr. Radwan Masmoudi participated in a conference on "Muslim Political Thought: Introductions and Limitations" in Chicago, IL. The Conference was organized by the American Center for Civilizational & Cultural Studies (ACCIS). Dr. Masmoudi gave a lecture on "***How can we implement***

### ***Shura in the 21st century?***

Both meetings, attended by 30-40 people, were very informative and very well received by all participants.



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