

Muslim Democrat

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DEMOCRACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Watching what the U.S. does as well as what Bush says

By Radwan Masmoudi

President Bush's speech at the National Endowment for Democracy on November 6, 2003 was brilliant and inspiring. I was in the audience and found myself nodding in agreement and moved by almost every sentence. The speech could become a major historical development for the Middle East and for relations between the United States and the Muslim World. Finally, U.S. policymakers seem convinced that supporting dictators and oppressive regimes is not the way for peace and stability. Even if friendly dictators serve some short-term benefits and interests; in the long run, they create desperation, anger, and hopelessness that ultimately result in chaotic and violent situations.

People in the Middle East, however, received this speech with skepticism and disbelief. They don't believe that the U.S. really wants democracy to succeed in Afghanistan, in Iraq, or elsewhere in the Middle East. During the past thirty years, or more, the U.S. been more than willing to turn a blind eye while friendly dictators murdered, kidnapped, and tortured their opponents on a daily basis. People are also suspicious of President Bush's motives and sincerity because they have not seen improvements on the ground in Palestine, Iraq, or Afghanistan. The issue of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict continues to be the prism through which Americans view the Arab Middle East and through which most Arabs and Muslims view the United States. If the U.S. is genuinely interested in peace and freedom, why is it turning a blind eye to the suffering of the Palestinian people, most Arabs and Muslims ask.

Despite our numerous mistakes in Iraq (going to war prematurely and unilaterally, disbanding the Iraqi army, very slow pace of reconstruction, appointing rather than electing the ruling council, neglecting and marginalizing the Sunnis), I believe that Iraq can become a real democracy and that we must stay the course and make sure this happens. Failure to do so will spell disaster for the U.S. and for the region for decades to come.

There are some experts who argue that democracy would destabilize the region. Clearly, they have not been in the region lately to see how people there live in extreme poverty, corruption, lack of education, and lack of dignity. The current regimes have failed, and if they want to remain, they must change. In many countries of the Middle East, and the wider Muslim world, unemployment ranges between 30 and 50%, illiteracy is between 50 and 70%, and more than half the population is under 25 years of age. If this is not a recipe for disaster, I don't know what is! Arab and Muslim countries are rich in natural resources, yet only about 5 to 10% of the population is benefiting from these resources. While these privileged

few live in luxury, the majority of the people are struggling to put bread on the table. Economic development is simply impossible without transparency and accountability.

Corruption and economic deprivation is only one sign that these regimes have outlasted their usefulness. What is worse is the level of oppression under which all society, especially the youth, lives. This situation will lead to increased violence, anger, and acts of desperation, which in turn will be used to justify more oppressive policies. The cycle of hatred and violence must be broken.

Arabs and Muslims watch on their TV and computer, screens as other nations elect and replace their leaders, while they are stuck with the same leaders for life. When they do have elections, outcomes are pre-determined, and anybody who dares criticize them is swiftly taken away and punished. People feel left out and oppressed and this sense of oppression and hopelessness feeds radical groups and ideologies. Democracy will not solve all the economic, political or social problems overnight, but it will quickly return to the people their dignity and their humanity. The people of the Middle East

“The people of the Middle East cannot be deprived of their rights to equality, freedom, and dignity.”

cannot be deprived of their rights to equality, freedom, and dignity, and the pursuit of their dreams and aspirations. Democracy will, above all, give people and citizens a sense of belonging to a nation and to a society that cares about them, and in which they have a role and a stake. The principles of democracy (i.e. equality before the law, freedom, accountability, and justice) are strongly embedded in Islamic jurisprudence and value system.

For over a thousand years, Muslims have advocated and practiced freedom of thought, freedom of religion, and respect for human dignity. Islam emphasizes that there is "no compulsion in religion", and that faith must be a matter of personal choice and convictions. God created us free and gave us the freedom to believe or not

“The U.S. must align its foreign policies with its own -and universal- moral foundations of freedom, justice, equality, and dignity for all.”

to believe and to obey his commandments or not to obey. Freedom of religion and freedom of conscience are therefore prerequisites for human life and human dignity. That is why Muslims, Christians, and Jews have lived peacefully for centuries in the Middle East. Many Americans do not know that 20 to 25 percent of the Palestinians are Christian, and that there are millions of Christian and Jewish Arabs who live from Morocco to Egypt, and from Lebanon to Yemen.

The authoritarian regimes of the Middle East have -by far- been secular and not religious. Many, in the name of secularism, have fought against religion, prohibited religious practices, and tortured and killed religious leaders. As a result, Islamic groups and movements are seen as victims of oppression and are gaining in strength and popular support, while the popularity of the secular leaders is dwindling. It is only in the two countries of Sudan and Iran - that have been ruled by so-called Islamic regimes- that secularism is gaining in popularity because people have learned that an Islamic government is led by human beings and not by saints, and that these human beings are also prone to mistakes.

It is encouraging that the U.S. is not trying to impose secularism in Afghanistan or in Iraq. The role of religion in politics has to be negotiated by political and religious leaders, but will probably remain important in the context of Muslim societies. From Morocco to Indonesia, Muslims are struggling with the question of how to be a good Muslim in the 21st century. This will require a new interpretation and adaptation (*Jtihād*) of Islamic principles and jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) to the realities and challenges of the modern age. True *Jtihād*, however, cannot take place in an environment of fear, repression, and violence. Democracy and freedom will pave the way for a dialogue between Muslim leaders, scholars, and populace for how Islam and Muslims can thrive now and in the future.

The road to democracy in the Middle East will not be easy. There are risks involved. But the benefits of democracy far outweigh the risks, and the certain negative impacts of oppression and dictatorship are much more lethal and dangerous. Supporting democracy is the best strategy for the United States and for the people of the region. However, a speech or several well-meaning speeches will not be enough, no matter how inspiring they are. We need to see policies on the ground that translate words into actions and dreams into reality. For this:

1. The U.S. should communicate to Arab and Muslim leaders that if they want good relations with the US, they must implement immediate political reforms that include freedom for all political prisoners, free and fair elections under international supervision, legalization of all political parties (including moderate Islamic parties), term limits for how long a president can stay in power, and an independent judicial system.
2. Countries that do not implement democratic reforms should be isolated and U.S. officials should stop visiting them

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Prospects for Democracy in the Muslim World Today

By Svend A. White
Secretary and Member of the Board

Change is in the air in the Muslim world, and, unlike in the past, democracy is at the top of the agenda in Washington and other Western capitals. An unprecedented international consensus has emerged that human rights, the rule of law, government accountability, and other trappings of democracy that many Americans take for granted, are not a luxury in the case of Muslims, but rather a sine qua non of durable peace and stability around the world. At the same time, many Muslim countries are inching their way towards increased political participation and freedoms. Finally, as widely reported international surveys have revealed, the Muslim masses are not only comfortable with democracy in principle, but yearn impatiently for it. The stage would seem to be set for dramatic breakthroughs.

Unfortunately, to paraphrase Charles Dickens, we live in both the best of times and the worst of times for Islamic democracy. Dickens' memorable description of Victorian England could easily be applied to the prospects for the spread of democracy in the Middle East, South Asia, elsewhere in the Muslim world, as formidable barriers to the establishment of a culture of democracy remain.

It is widely acknowledged today that America has an "image problem" in the Muslim world and that the situation is only worsening. It seems reasonable to wonder whether the image problems of the world's most visible and influential proponent of democracy might not

undermine support for democracy among Muslims

However heartening they are, the aforementioned polls are, they should not be taken as evidence that the debate is over, or even that it has truly begun. Most respondents to these surveys have in fact never known or participated in democracy—sadly, most Muslim-majority states are secular dictatorships, military juntas,

"We live in both the best of times and the worst of times for Islamic democracy."

theocracies, tribal oligarchies, or some blend of the four—so what do these responses really mean? Have Muslims made an intellectual and cultural transition that took the West centuries overnight? I think the explanation is much more mundane: Muslims around the world like the freedom, security, and prosperity that they see in Western societies and rightly perceive this thing called democracy as a means to that end.

This highlights the need to remember that the battle for the hearts and minds of Muslim has only begun. Until Muslims around the world have experienced democracy—warts and all—firsthand, the pendulum could swing back. There is nothing inevitable about the spread of democracy, especially in today's volatile

world.

This is why the widespread anxieties and grievances of Muslims around the world matter. From Morocco to Mindanao, Muslims are becoming increasingly polarized by an American-dominated international order that they perceive as systematically marginalizing Muslims. Whether viewing bloody, lopsided conflicts involving Muslims in Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya, Xinjiang, and elsewhere; the selective application of international law in those conflicts; or the systematic erosion of once "inalienable" civil rights for American Muslims, Muslims around the world wonder about the international community's intentions towards them.

Thus, the case for democracy must be made by Muslims as Muslims, in an idiom that speaks to other Muslims, and in a way that shows respect for Islamic tradition.

Unfortunately, even defining "tradition" is a challenge today, and many of the most influential spokesmen for Islamic tradition have questionable credentials. A rarely noted byproduct of oil wealth over the last few decades has been a dangerous eclipse of the rich, varied spectrum of ideas found in Islamic tradition by a narrow range of permitted beliefs, often called "Wahabbism". While I think extremism has rarely been a goal of this process, the result has been no less grim for it.

The treatment of Sufism by much of the Islamic religious establishment is illustrative of the depths of the problem. A student of Islam in the holy city of Medina is taught today that Sufism is deviant—if not heretical—even though by any objective standard Sufi beliefs and practices are clearly rooted in Islamic scripture, tradition and history. Inconvenient facts or differing opinions are literally written out of history. This is alarming, as if the voices of Sufis can be arbitrarily silenced, what hope is there for reformers tackling thorny, sensitive contemporary issues, like

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WHY DEMOCRACY AND WHY NOW?

On May 16-17, 2003 the Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy (CSID) held its Fourth Annual conference on the theme of “Why Democracy and why now?” in Washington, DC. The turnout and caliber of participants this year was exceptional, gathering



CSID President Radwan Masmoudi introducing Mr. William Burns, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs

together a stimulating collection of activists from the Muslim community, scholars from academe, embassy officials, journalists, and representatives of think tanks, foundations, and government agencies to discuss the prospects for democracy, reform and renewal in the Muslim world.

The conference began with an opening address by Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, **William Burns**, on “Democratic Change and American Foreign Policy in the Middle East”. Burns stated that the U.S. is giving high priority to democratic change in the Middle East and acknowledged criticism of past U.S. policies – which promoted stability over democracy — as “fair.” He added that this policy shift is part of a broader strategy

that seeks a resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, rebuilding Iraq, and modernizing Arab economies. Political reforms by Middle Eastern states would need to be gradual, he conceded, but they must be meaningful and sustained. Mr.

Burns noted that gradual but real change must come from within these countries, “but we can help”.

The first panel of the conference, chaired by **Azizah al-Hibri** (University of Richmond), concerned “The Role of Women and Gender in the Governance of Muslim States”.

Nimat Hafez Barazangi (Cornell University) discussed “Domestic Democracy: The Road to National and International Democracy”. **Nazia Khandwala** (University of Texas at Austin) discussed “The Correlation between the Status of Women and Weak Democratization: A Case Study of Pakistan”.

Meena Sharify-Funk (American University) discussed “Overcoming the Barriers: The Role of Critical Islam in Empowering Muslim Women”. **Charlotte M. Ponticelli** (U.S. State Department) discussed “U.S. Outreach to Muslims on Women’s Issues: From Theory to

Practice”.

Barazangi argued that the active process of the Qur’anic gender revolution stands in antipathy to the analysis of Muslim women’s role in the political discourse and the governance of Muslim societies employing extraneous gender strategies. In order to achieve a more fair society - respectful of individual autonomy, mindful of divine, civic and natural laws, Muslim women need to gain admittance to the knowledge of Islam, law, and obtain autonomous personal action devoid of any intermediary hindrance.

Khandwala sought to establish a causal link between the bleak social status of women and the weakness of democratic norms, culture and democratization in Pakistan. Addressing the subordination of women in the Muslim world by analyzing the cultural interpretations of Islam, she demonstrates how these notions hinder the advancement of women, thus constructing barriers to democratization. Women disenfranchisement in Pakistan is



Charlotte M. Ponticelli (U.S. State Department) speaking on “U.S. Outreach to Muslims on Women’s Issues”

exacerbated by the fact that merely 29% are literate. She argues that this



CSID President Radwan Masmoudi, with National Endowment for Democracy President Carl Gershman, presenting Saad Eddin Ibrahim the 2003 "Muslim Democrat of the Year" award.

marginalization adversely impacts the progress of democratization.

Ponticelli, Senior Coordinator, International Women's Issues, offered three examples of their current efforts in applying a practical approach to democratic transitions and women's rights in the Muslim world. In various countries throughout the Muslim world, the U.S. government is working on wide-ranging projects to advance the progression of the role of women and the well being of their families and communities. Accomplishing this requires an understanding of culture as well as a dedication to the ideals of women's full empowerment.

Sharify-Funk argued that the three relatively diverse branches of reformist Islam, (modernism, feminism, and critical theory) share the similar intention of challenging the traditionalist's patriarchal nature of regarding women as "separate but equal." With the objective to examine the provocative research questions asked by this emerging critical discourse of interpretation and its impact for Muslim women, this paper is an exploratory analysis of the major themes of a coherent burgeoning reformist movement in Islamic thought and practice. Many Muslim reformists - intellectuals and activists, are challenging the prevalent

conservative interpretive practices, with varying implications for the emancipation of women.

The second panel was entitled "The Two Cities - Religious and Secular in Governance of the Muslim Peoples" (chair: **Louay Safi**, International Institute of Islamic Thought). **Douglas E. Streusand** (independent scholar) discussed "The Historical Muslim City: Lessons for the Discourse on Islam and Democracy". **Elizabeth Shakman Hurd** (Northwestern University) discussed "Secularism and Democracy in the Middle East". **Benjamin Jensen** and **Lynn Kunkle** (American University) discussed "The Nexus of God and Citizen - Decoding Natural Law: Christian Traditions in Western Democracy and Their Parallels in Islam".

Addressing the challenge of developing a democracy that averts the snares of both authoritarian secularism and radical Islamism, **Hurd** argued that secularism must be re-fashioned to function as a successful and sustainable basis of public order in the Middle East. Analyzing secularism in theoretical and historical terms, she suggested how the secularist resolution might be modified so that it will contribute more efficaciously to the democratization of the Middle East.

According to **Streusand**, the discussion on the compatibility of Islam and democracy rests upon the assumption that Muslims will recognize only political forms derived from the Shari'ah. Critiquing this postulation, he placed it into its intellectual context and demonstrated that it does not fit the historical record. Streusand said that, "Historically, a substantial proportion of Muslims have recognized political structures, institutions, and symbols not derived from the Shari'ah as fully legitimate, not merely as necessary evils or compromises."

Jensen and Kunkle argued that modern Western democratic governments emerged from an inherent attempt to connect the Divine, the sovereign, and the citizen. Investigating questions concerning the conceptualization of individual as both citizen and believer, the goal of the essay is to (re)discover an Islamic metaphysical arrangement that conceptualizes individuals within their private and public lives as citizens as well as believers.

The banquet dinner featured addresses by **Lorne Craner**, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor; **Saad Eddin Ibrahim**, founder of the Ibn Khaldun Center and leading advocate for democratic reform in Egypt; **Ali Mazrui**, CSID Chair at the time of the conference and Director of the Institute of Global Cultural Studies at Binghamton University; and **Abdelaziz Sachedina** (University of Virginia), current CSID Chair and author of *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*.

Speaking on "Building Democracy in the Muslim World", **Craner** declared that America "has made the commitment to



CSID Chair, Aziz Sachedina spoke on the need to reach out and work with the Ulama (religious scholars)

freedom in the region, and we will stick to it," despite the admittedly serious obstacles ahead. On the pessimists who discount the possibility of democracy ever taking root in the Islamic world, he recounted how similar skepticism once reigned among experts regarding Latin America in the early 1980s. Experts "noted how few Latin countries were democracies" and declared that "the situation could never improve"

because of cultural traditions such as the *hacienda* system which, the experts believed, “had ingrained servitude into the minds of Latins.” Today, he said, such attitudes “sound ridiculous, not to mention condescending,” especially given that Latin America’s “generals and *caudillos* are gone” and that “[o]ver the last fifteen years, the people of Philippines, Mongolia, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and the world’s most populous Muslim nation, Indonesia, proved that there is no bar to democracy in Asia”.

In his keynote address on “Democracy and Human Rights in the Middle East Today,” and after the first Annual CSID “Muslim Democrat of the Year” award, **Saad Eddin Ibrahim** recounted some of the lessons he learned as a political prisoner in Egypt about the universal challenges facing *all* political reformers in the developing world, regardless of religion or culture. Even during his two-year imprisonment as a political prisoner, he felt stronger than his oppressors. He gave an overview of the political and philosophical significance of the Constitution of Medina—a historic treaty between Muhammad and the mostly Jewish tribes of Medina—that, “appear[ing] 500-600 years before the Magna Carta,” in many ways anticipated modern notions of democracy. In the Constitution of Medina, Ibrahim explained, “you will find all the elements of pluralism, which is the prerequisite of democracy.” Finally, he urged Muslims to embrace democracy not because “we are looking for another utopia” but because it is “the optimal solution” available.

Ali Mazrui explored a few of the many varieties of democracy in existence and the implications of this diversity in the world for Muslim societies as they plot their own path to democratic governance, which, at its best, “protects and stimulates the individual without sacrificing the community... and seeks to promote liberty without sacrificing equality”. Mazrui

added that while democracy is the most “humane” system of government, it is not the same all over the world. In Scandinavian countries it is combined with socialist principles, and in England it is combined with Monarchy and formal theocracy. He advocated for the development of “Islamocracy” as a synthesis between Islam and democracy. He stressed the importance of gradual movement toward democratization and cautioned against promoting democracy abroad while letting it lapse here at home.

Abdelaziz Sachedina’s banquet address explicitly addressed the conference theme, “Why Democracy and Why Now?” focusing on cultural and social barriers to the dissemination of democratic ideals in Muslim societies, especially the attitudes and training of traditional religious



Louay Safi introducing the second panel

scholars, or *ulama*. In addition to the widespread existence of anti-democratic attitudes in Muslim cultures, a fundamental problem is how advocates of reform and democracy rarely communicate their ideas in an idiom that is accessible to the masses, whereas the *ulama*—from whose ranks the leaders of resistance to democratic reform often hail—communicate in the language of the people.

Sachedina urged academics and intellectuals to become more relevant to the Muslim people in the street. They cannot be oblivious to their moral responsibility to lead politically and religiously. It is “the moral indifference to political and social injustices that grip our

people around the world,” that, in Dr. Sachedina’s opinion, cannot be addressed without taking seriously the religious factor in Muslims’ collective conscience. We need to show the learned and the lay in Muslim societies that democratic ideals are very much of the Islamic culture. Toward this goal, we should avoid shortcuts to secularism. Instead, we should gear our intellectual endeavors to demonstrate that the core Islamic beliefs are in concert with all levels of human experiences.

The second day of the conference began with a panel on “Critical Assessment of Islamic Resources and their Appropriateness for Building Democratic Institutions” (chair: **Joseph Montville**, Center for Strategic and International Studies). **Asma Afsaruddin** (University of Notre Dame) discussed “Obedience to Political Authority: An Evolutionary Concept”. **M.A. Muqtedar Khan** (Adrian College) discussed “The Islamic State: Classical Understanding and Postcolonial Departures”. **Kamran A. Bukhari** (University of Texas at Austin) discussed “Operationalizing Islamic Democracy: Challenges and Opportunities”.

According to **Afsaruddin**, the diverse understandings of the Qur’anic verse (4:59), “O those who believe, obey God and the Messenger and those in possession of authority among you,” shed light on religious and political authority in Islamic thought. Discussing the early exegesis of this verse and comparing them with later, as well as modern interpretations, a dramatic narrowing of the concept *uli’l-amr* is detected. She asserts that understanding this critical verse allows one to more fully understand not only past, but present concepts of religious and political authority in Islamic thought.

The fourth Panel, chaired by **Nimat Hafez Barazangi** (Cornell University), was on “Ijtihad and its Application in Providing Cultural Legitimization to Democracy”. **Margo Hoef** (American

University) discussed “Prosperity, Fundamentalism, and Democracy”.

Muhammad Sharafuddin (George Washington University) discussed “Reviving the Spirit of Islam: Democracy Now”

Expanding on current research, **Hoef** examined the “determinants of democracy,” within the Middle East and Africa, in order to clarify the relative importance of economic developments and the size of Muslim population. Employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, her research finds that economic prosperity does not have direct influence on democracy ratings and that countries with a higher Muslim population have lower democracy scores. Previous studies have statistically shown that countries that identify themselves as Muslim are less likely to be democratic, regardless of economic developments. “This finding is particularly important because economic prosperity is one of the most popularly supported mobilizers toward democratization.”

At the keynote luncheon, **Zainah Anwar**, founder of the Malaysian women’s advocacy organization Sisters in Islam, gave the **Hesham Reda Memorial Lecture** on the subject of “Islamisation and its Impact on Democratic Governance and Women’s Rights in Islam: A Feminist Perspective”. Anwar gave an overview of the many cultural, political and legal barriers to the empowerment of women in Malaysia, and the complex, often counter-productive role played by traditional Islamic scholars, or *ulama*, in debates about women’s rights. “More than ever,” she argued, “there is a need for Muslims to differentiate between what is divine and what is human.” Those advocating “the imposition of Islamic law as conceptualised traditionally” need to address the loss of the “fundamental liberties protected by a democratic state” that their system would seem to entail. She concluded by asking, “Why would

those whose equal status and rights are recognised by a democratic system support the creation of such a discriminatory Islamic state?”

Anwar challenged, based on references from scripture and history, the traditional interpretation of Islam. She urged that we must expand the public debate for interpreting Islam and open widely the door of *Ijtihad*. She strongly criticized the “hudud” law as adopted in one Malaysian province because it discriminated against women and upheld the most restrictive and punitive interpre-



Zainah Anwar, from Malaysia, spoke on the need to open the doors of Ijtihad.

tation of scripture. Anwar declared that we must uphold Islam’s eternal commitment

*“We must uphold
Islam’s eternal commitment to justice, freedom and dignity.”*

to justice, freedom and dignity as we address new 21st century problems. This requires intellectual rigor, moral courage, political will, and the public opening of the doors of *Ijtihad*.

The final, and fifth, panel was chaired by **Louis Cantori** (University of Maryland, Baltimore County) and concerned “The Urgency of Dialogue and Cooperation between the Traditional and Modern Institutions for a New Political Discourse”. **Hossein Seifzadeh** (Tehran University) discussed “The Impact of Academic-

Seminary Correspondence on Approaches to Democracy”. **Nadeem Kazmi** (Al-Khoei Foundation, UK) discussed “Terrorism, Civil Rights and Discrimination”.

Attempting to utilize Foucault’s genealogical conceptual framework of interpretation, **Seifzadeh** argued that it is irrelevant to question the compatibility of Islam with democracy. Asserting that it is more reasonable to query about the multiplicity in readings of Islam, he elaborated on the impact that the social context of higher education organizations have on the particular readings of its graduates regarding Islam and democracy. The hybrid institutes, controlled and influenced by the ulama, such as Imam Khomeini University, Shahid Motahhari, and Imam Sadegh University, affirm their pro-right agendas to uphold a traditional historical understanding of Islam. However, leftist fundamentalists who were less inclined to allow the subjugation of academia to the control of the ulama, established institutes critical of rightists, such as Baqir-al-Olum University and Mofid University, even though they both shared the similar antipathy towards western culture and concepts of liberalism and capitalism.

The conference was followed by a Business Meeting for CSID members, fellows, founding members, and board members.

This report was written by Svend White, Ibrahim Hussein, and Kerrin Wood. Conference papers and speeches are available at: www.islam-democracy.org

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Saad Ibrahim:

“You must help your brothers and sisters overseas”

Thank you, CSID, for inviting me to address this very distinguished gathering. I heard about this organization, the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, in prison for the first time. My wife Barbara, who is the real heroine of this saga, brought me the CSID newsletter (*Muslim Democrat*) one day. I didn't know the organization or the articles' authors, but it gave me comfort to know that others were working for the cause, that there would be others to hand the torch for democracy in the Arab world, in the Middle East, and the Muslim world. And I'm so glad now to be here and see CSID in the flesh.

This is a different world from that of June 30, 2000, when I was arrested at gunpoint by a swarm of security agents. Just one of these tall men would have been enough to arrest me, yet at least 30 of them stormed the house in the middle of the night. When they brought me out of my house, I was surprised to see a small army outside—over 200 armed soldiers, some in armored vehicles, had surrounded my house in Cairo. It was enough to conquer a small town. All this to arrest an unarmed sixty year-old intellectual. The “crime” was to merely advocate what you are all here to support, democracy.

The Islamic state began in Madinah after the flight of the Muslims from Mecca [in 622 CE]. One of the very earliest acts of this state was the signing of what the historians call Saheefat al-Madinah, the

Charter of Madinah. That Charter appeared some 500-600 years before the Magna Carta. If you read it carefully—and I urge you all to do so—you will find all the elements of pluralism, which is the prerequisite of democracy. Democracy is not the practice of



Saad Eddine Ibrahim
Muslim Democrat of the Year

people who think the same. It is a system of governance that regulates relations between those who are different, not those who are similar. This fact must always be born in mind when discussing democracy,

“Democracy is not the practice of people who think the same.”

and this is what the Charter of Medina is all about.

The Charter emphasized two key points: First, in matters of the soul, each person had his own religion and would be held accountable by God, not the State. Second, in worldly matters, all citizens of Medina were equal, regardless of their religious affiliation. The first point established religious freedom. With the second point, the principle of equal responsibility and enfranchisement of all citizens of the same polity, was laid down in the Charter.

Democracy is the answer. Not because democracy is perfect. It is precisely because it is imperfect. We are not looking for another utopia; we are looking for an

optimal solution based on the systems available to us. By that standard, there is no contest. But democracy must be grounded in our values. It must not ignore the cultures and values of the societies in which it is implanted. Otherwise, it will never take root or be embraced by the masses.

And there is no justification for further delay. For decades after independence, many of our populist regimes told us that democracy had to be suspended until “national liberation”; until Palestine had been liberated; until we have economic development; until we have true social justice, and so on. As it turns out, after fifty years of depriving ourselves of democracy, we find ourselves with none of these things! And we're no closer to democracy.

We must not continue to allow ourselves to be manipulated by these false messiahs—these *masih dajjal*—who use empty promises to keep democracy on hold and deny the people justice and accountable governments. Now we know better than to fall for the despots' delaying tactics.

There is no better group to lead this effort than Muslim Americans. The responsibility of American Muslims is not only to serve as a bridge between cultures, but to get involved on both sides. It is your right and duty as citizens of a democratic society to participate fully in the political process and make your voice heard. You can do this, because you are part of the system. It's your right as a voter and taxpayer.

You cannot do this in much of the Muslim world. Trying to do so can reduce one's freedom dramatically, to a dark, cramped prison cell. That's why we're all here today. You must remember this lesson. You must use your good fortune, as citizens of America, to help your brothers and sisters overseas, to bring democracy to a world that is dying for democracy. I think you can do it. With the help of God, you will.

William Burns:

Stability is not a static phenomenon

Thank you, Dr. Masmoudi and Dr. Mazrui, for that kind introduction. I am delighted to have this opportunity to meet with all of you, and speak about an issue that is so central to America's interests and values in the Middle East in the years ahead.

Four points are especially important to consider in framing the issue of democracy and American policy in the Middle East. First, the whole challenge of opening up political systems in the region must be given much higher priority on the U.S. agenda than in years past. Second, support for democratic change has to be an integral part of a broader strategy that seeks with equal vigor to solve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; build a stable, prosperous, democratic Iraq; and modernize regional economies. Third, as all of you know far better than I do, democratization is about gradual but real systemic change. It is about more than just conducting elections - it involves the whole painful, difficult, evolutionary and sometimes risky process of building sound institutions, the rule of law and vibrant civil societies. Fourth, democratic change must be driven from within societies in the region. It cannot be sustained by outside preaching or prescriptions. But there is lots that the United States and others in the community of democratic nations can do to help support home-grown reform. Let me briefly explain each of those points. It is a fair criticism of all of our efforts during those years to say that we have never paid adequate attention to the long-term importance of opening up some very stagnant political systems, especially in the Arab world.

That is not just a matter of American values, or of ensuring basic human rights, crucial as both of those concerns are. It is also a matter of hard-headed American interests. Stability is not a static phenomenon, and political systems which do not



William Burns
Assistant Secretary of State

find ways to gradually accommodate the aspirations of their people for participation will become brittle and combustible. The Middle East is no more immune from that reality than any other part of the world. I know that there are some who argue for a kind of Arab or Muslim exceptionalism on this score, but I simply don't agree. Of course it's true that Arab societies have more than their share of problems and dilemmas to reconcile, and their own peculiarities and unique challenges, but that doesn't mean that they are incapable of democratic change. Assuming otherwise is both flawed analysis and a dangerous basis for policy.

Some Arab regimes will find it much harder than others to change. Some may not move far enough or fast enough. And some may not try very hard at all. Those are the regimes most likely to join the ranks of other failed states around the world. And, as a matter of policy, we also have to recognize that the emergence of more democratic systems in the Arab or Islamic worlds doesn't necessarily mean that it will be any easier to get our way on particular issues - just look at Turkey's disappointing reaction to our requests during the Iraq crisis. But I believe - and much more importantly President Bush and Secretary Powell believe - that it is profoundly in our long-term interest to support democratic change.

Arab leaders must take on the hard work of making elections more inclusive and more fair, and giving more power to those institutions whose members are chosen through open elections, like the many parliaments that are now gaining credibility and power throughout the region. As we all know, elections alone do not a democracy make. They are vulnerable to manipulation or distortion—either by parties who will seek to use them only once to gain power; or by leaderships (the most vivid reminder of which may be the image of Iraq's inimitable former Minister of Information smugly confirming 100 percent voter approval for Saddam). Yet without regular, free and fair elections, no country can call itself a democracy.

This is a momentous time in the

“Yet without regular, free and fair elections, no country can call itself a democracy.”

Middle East. I am not naive, nor do I have any illusions about how big the challenges and difficulties will be. But courageous thinkers and leaders in the region - many of you in the audience among them - have begun to identify a path of hope and opportunity. President Bush is determined to do all he can to help.

If we can apply American power with a sense of purpose and perspective as well as humility; if we can support democratic change in the framework of a broader strategy for economic modernization, Israeli-Palestinian peace, and a prosperous new Iraq; if we can understand the connections between those issues and what's at stake for American interests for many years to come - then a time of crisis can become a turning point, a turning point in which hope begins to replace the despair on which violent extremists breed.

Lorne Craner:

We will listen as you tell us what you need

Thank you Radwan. It's a pleasure to address the annual conference of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy. Dr. Masmoudi and his team at CSID are doing extremely important work to lay the foundation for the spread of democracy in the Muslim world. I cannot stress how important such efforts are.

The U.S. Government has turned an important corner in our thinking. From the President on down, support for democratic reform in the Muslim world has moved to the very top of our agenda.

This approach is not solely a result of September 11. There have been voices who understood the need for such a policy for years – Bill Burns and Colin Powell among them – and our numbers were increasing even before that awful day.

But September 11th catalyzed the process and moved the doubters in our government to their proper place. The same old three- decade long approach to the Middle East specifically, and the Muslim world in general, is no longer tenable. There is no longer a Middle East exception.

You are looking at some of the underlying issues that must be resolved for democracy to flourish alongside Islam. The recurring question is whether Islam is compatible with democracy. I believe it is, but we need to discover not just how the two can be compatible, but rather how democracy and Islam can thrive from each other. Most importantly, your Muslim brethren must understand that democracy does not threaten their religion, but improves their lives.

So if you remember only one thing

from my talk tonight, remember this: the U.S., for many reasons, has made the commitment to freedom in the region and we will stick to it. I know that many people think that, even if the U.S. is committed, it may be impossible to achieve the



Lorne Craner
Assistant Secretary of State

goal. We all know many skeptics, American, Europeans and Muslims, who simply believe that democracy can't be built in the Muslim world. The skeptics point to history or religion or other factors to justify their point of view.

But the skeptics are wrong here, as they've been wrong before. I know, because I've met their type, the first time half a world away and twenty years ago, in Latin America in the early 1980s. Then, as Carl

“The U.S. Government has turned an important corner in our thinking.”

Gershman, Steve Steiner and others remember, the skeptics, “the experts”, noted how few Latin countries were democracies. They said that, for a variety of reasons, the situation could never improve.

The reason most often noted by the expert skeptics was that the Spanish-inspired “hacienda system” – essentially plantations – had ingrained servitude into the minds of Latins, and that they could therefore only understand rule by “big men”, generals and caudillos. Today, that sounds ridiculous, not to mention condescending. Today, all but one or two of the almost three dozen nations in Latin America are democracies – not perfect and not without imperfections, but democracies nonetheless. And the generals and

caudillos are gone. With them went the skeptics of democracy in Latin America.

I could go on and on with stories of the skeptics I've met in other regions – the Balkans, Africa, on and on. Anyone who supports building democracy in the Muslim world will be operating for sometime in the space – which is growing – between such skeptics here and abroad. We need to overcome these new skeptics, the ones who say “it may have worked elsewhere but it can't work here because.” We need to show them that people in the Muslim world, as elsewhere, want what people around the world now have – more control over their own lives.

The shortest way to make my point is to note that just twenty- five years ago, there were perhaps thirty democracies in the world. Last fall, I attended the ministerial meeting of the Community of Democracies in Seoul, attended by 107 countries considered either fully democratic or well on the road to democracy.

That is why when I hear people accusing the U.S. of wanting to impose our model of democracy on Iraq or other countries, I laugh. We know that such an approach is doomed to failure. The United States cannot impose democracy on a country. Our model is suitable only for our own country. We can only help those who want to bring democracy to their own country. Democracy must come from within.

That is why we need to and will listen as you tell us what you need to craft and implement a democratic model that is compatible with your culture, your religion, your society. And indeed, across the Muslim world, people are doing exactly that. This is a monumental task, but the moment has never been more conducive to democracy-building in the Middle East. So I wish you the best in this conference and with this historic task. The United States stands with you in words and deed. And you will see our actions speak for our sincerity.

Aziz Sachedina:

We must engage the Ulama

There has not been any other time in the history of the Muslim peoples when they were required to evaluate their political heritage critically in the context of modern political developments. I am aware of the hurdles that are in place to obstruct dissemination of democratic ideas connected with civil society and civic responsibility among Muslim citizenry. Undoubtedly, these ideas empower the people to demand the minimum from their leaders, whether political or religious - that is, accountability of those who hold public offices. And, yet, not to take a stance in such matters in public has made the Muslim intellectual irrelevant to the ongoing struggle for self-empowerment among Muslim peoples.

Ironically, it is this indifference to the political empowerment of the average people on the streets of Cairo, Tehran, or Karachi that has provided the religious leadership - the *Ulama* - an opening to become the sole spokesperson for the contents of people's political and social education. It is worth keeping in mind that our academic discourse is least accessible to the average educated reader in the Muslim world. In contrast, the *ulama* communicate in the language of the people, reinforcing the traditional and sometime conformist attitudes towards the governments in power.

Although many of us in the academia speak about the *ulama* in pejorative terms, describing them as obscurantist, fundamentalists, and so on, as intellectual elitists we have, ironically, facilitated their emergence as the sole spokesperson for the Muslim *umma*. Moreover, our neglect of adequate preparation in meeting the religious establishment on its own terms,

has allowed the *ulama* to discredit us as "outsiders" to the tradition. So while our colleagues in the western universities applaud us for our critical scholarship in sociology and anthropology of Islam, the community at large, and even the one



Aziz Sachedina
CSID, Chair of the Board

living in the West, continues to read Sayyid Qutb and Maulana Maududi. They actually shun Fazlur Rahman and the likes of him.

We cannot cry out "Democracy now, democracy now," without commit-

"The ulama communicate in the language of the people."

ting our intellectual and religious resources to make the case for the cooperation of the *ulama*, and to make them our allies in the struggle to build democratic institutions that would dismantle any form of political or religious authoritarianism. The experiment with reform since the 19th century has demonstrated, time and again, that the seminarian discourse on political Islam has failed to generate political participation of the people in Muslim countries. And unless academically trained Muslim scholars come forward to lead the young educated men and women through intelligent

exposition of Islam and their personal commitment to it, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to share the platform of change with the *ulama* in the foreseeable future. We simply cannot afford to dismiss them outright and expect average Muslim to believe in what we are saying. Remember the secret of the Prophet's political society: consultation (*shura*) and consensus building (*ijma*) even with those who disagree with us.

If this new Islamic rethinking that is taking place in our midst here can find proper platform for its dissemination, then it could lead to a badly needed reform in the Muslim communities. I am under no illusion that such an acceptance of the 'dissident' scholarship in the North American Muslim communities is distant. The influence of narrow-minded and stultified Islamic tradition funded by the petrodollars for over a quarter century will take much longer to dismantle.

The time has come for CSID to enter the serious business of building the bridge between Muslim academicians and the Ulama. The success of CSID, as I see it, is intimately tied to forging the working relationship between the two centers of influence and power in the Muslim world. The key is to work towards an inclusive epistemology, without any claim to absolutism about the past heritage. Will it happen? That depends on all of us, men and women, Muslim and non-Muslim, working together to make the ideal attain reality.

RAMADAN & EID MUBARAK

May God (Allah) accept our good deeds, forgive our sins and shortcomings, and help us build a more peaceful and tolerant world. We especially pray for the poor, the hungry, and the oppressed, so that they may find peace and the blessings of Allah.



Gender and Human Rights in Islam and International Law: Equal Before Allah, Unequal Before Man?

by Shaheen Sardar Ali

Reviewed by Nimat Hafez Barazangi

The objective of this book is “to engage in a conceptual analysis of human rights in Islam and international law, and application of this analytical discourse to explore women’s human rights in the Islamic tradition” (p.3). Sardar Ali is responding to the question “of whether Islam is opposed to women’s human rights and equality” that has assumed a special significance in the post United Nations (UN) era. This accorded significance to international law and norms is, however, faced with skepticism from many Asian and African UN member states, perceiving the rights language and concepts instruments “as manifestations of cultural imperialism and euro-centrism. In the Islamic context (within Asia and Africa), the situation is further aggravated where some aspects of international human rights law are considered both culturally and religiously alien” (p.1), and, I must add, when the meaning of *Shari’a* is confused with the legislative process of law.

The author argues that “women’s human rights in Islam are not entirely irreconcilable with current formulations of international human rights instruments...”. The basic premise of her argument stems from a “recognition that the Islamic legal tradition is not a monolithic entity... and Islamic law lends itself to a variety of interpretations that have far reaching implications for women’s human rights in Islam” (p.3). She assumes two underpinnings to her thesis: (a) that patriarchy has been

silencing the more egalitarian aspects of Islam by adopting a ‘literalist’ as opposed to a ‘progressive’ interpretation of the sources of Islam, and (b) that “contrary to the common perception, the principles of Islamic law, or *Shari’a*, do not consist of immutable, unchanging set of norms, but have an in-built dynamism that is sensitive and susceptible to changing needs of time” (p. 3-4).

The focus is on developing a framework for understanding Islamic law vis-à-vis international law in order to achieve the goals of the study. Chapter I presents a

“The intention of the Qur’an is to remain open to reading and re-reading in context.”

conceptual analysis of human rights in Islam and International law, particularly the debate about the definition of ‘rights’ and ‘human rights.’ Chapter II presents a theoretical framework of women’s human rights in Islam. In Chapter III, the author discusses the ‘public’ and ‘secular’ under constitutional law and its implications for women’s human rights. Chapter IV addresses “private’ and “Islamic’ while discussing Muslim Personal Law and its implications for women’s human rights. In Chapter V, customary practices and ‘cultural Islam’ are presented to show the emergence of the ‘operative’ Islam law on women’s human rights. The author discusses in Chapter VI the development of

the international norm on non-discrimination on the basis of sex, and in Chapter VII, the response of Muslim states to international human rights instruments affecting women in light of reservations to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

The book is a good source of documents on human rights, Pakistan personal law, as well as some debates and perspectives on Muslim women’s role and human rights (see Appendices and Bibliography). Although the author failed to site some relevant works (such as *Muslim Women and the Politics of Participation: Beijing Platform*. Edited by Mahnaz Afkhami and Erika Friedl, Syracuse University Press (1997)), I will focus my critique on her conceptual framework and related definitions as it determines the validity of the argument and the understanding of related documents, as well as the credibility and sustainability of the recommendations for the issue under discussion.

The author prides herself on distinguishing her work from most scholars writing on Islamic law by “defin[ing] the *Shari’a* as principles of Islamic law as opposed to Islamic law itself” (p.19, fn.37). Yet, she, like most scholars, confuses the meaning of *Shari’a* with the construct “Islamic law.” Also, she mixes the sources of Islamic *Shari’a* (the Qur’an and *Sunna* or *Hadith* Books) with the instruments or measures (*Ijtihad*, *Qiyas*, and *Ijma’a*) of interpreting these sources.

Perhaps it is these confusions throughout the centuries that have resulted in both misunderstanding the meaning of *Shari'a* and misappropriation of its principles. Further complexity is added when mixing the authority of these two sources with Muslims' interpretations during different eras and in different places.

What is known as "Islamic law" neither represents the Qur'anic *Shari'a* (the collective guidelines of the Qur'an that encompasses an intertwined moral and legal binds once the individual accepts these guidelines as his/her belief system) nor its principles. "Islamic law" is mainly used by Orientalists in reference to jurisprudence opinions, documented in books of *Fiqh* and supported by some Qur'anic verses and *Hadith* narratives. By giving these opinions the legal character, known in the West as 'law,' Orientalists and most contemporary Muslims have confused the Qur'anic *Shari'a* (guidelines) with other legislations or canonized laws. Furthermore, even the jurists themselves never intended the jurisprudential opinions to be codified as "cannons of law." That is so because the very nature of Qur'anic guidelines is that they should be re-interpreted again and again in time and place. Thus, by equating the *Fiqh* opinions with 'law' and by giving them the title "Islamic", Muslims and non-Muslims have given more authority to these opinions than what is intended in the Qur'an. Whether the issue is human rights, or women's equality, the intention of the Qur'an (the Arabic word meaning "being read") is to remain open to reading ('*Iqra*' or 'read' is the first revealed verse) and re-reading in context.

Therefore, if we realize the fact that only the *Shari'a* principles in the Qur'an are binding, and not the collective of interpretations, we will not need to go through the lengthy discussion that Ali used to prove her argument. I do, however, recommend this book as an important addition to collections on Muslim women, human rights, and law. ■

CSID-USIP Symposium on *I j t i h a d*

You are cordially invited to a Current Issues Briefing that the United States Institute of Peace is co-hosting with the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy:

I j t i h a d - Reinterpreting Islamic Principles for the 21st Century

Friday, December 5, 2003, 10:00AM - 12:00NOON, at the USIP 2nd Floor Conference Room, 1200 17th Street NW, Washington, DC.

Presenters:

TAHA JABIR ALAIWANI, President of the Fiqh Council of North America

MUZZAMIL SIDDIQI, Director, Islamic Society of Orange County, CA

INGRID MATTSON, Professor, Hartford Seminary

HASSAN QAZWINI, Imam, Detroit, Michigan

Distinguished Islamic scholars will address:

1. What is *Ijtihad* (religious interpretation in Islam), and how can it be used to address the needs of Muslim societies in the 21st century?
2. How can the door of *Ijtihad* be reopened, and who has the right to perform *Ijtihad*?
3. What are the main problems, challenges, and handicaps facing the Muslim world and how can we address them?
4. How can Muslims resolve their differences of opinion without resorting to violence or repression?
5. What is the role of American Muslim leaders and organizations in promoting a more tolerant, modern, and moderate interpretation of Islam?

The presentation will be followed by Q&A. Seating is limited and RSVP is required! Please RSVP to 202-429-3832 option 2, or by e-mail to rstuebner@usip.org.

WORLD MOVEMENT for DEMOCRACY

Third Assembly: Building Democracy for Peace, Development, and Human Rights

During the World Movement's Third Assembly, entitled "Building Democracy for Peace, Development, and Human Rights," on February 1-4, 2004, at the International Convention Center (ICC) in Durban, South Africa, CSID will co-sponsor a Workshop on:

Democracy in the Muslim World: Obstacles, Difficulties, and Best Methods

Organized by Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy and Sisters in Islam – Malaysia, on Wednesday – February 4, 2004, 9:00 AM – 12:00 Noon.

For more information, please visit: www.wmd.org/third_assembly/agenda.html

We hope to see you there!

CSID Lecture Tour in the Philippines

During September 9 -17, 2003, Dr. Radwan Masmoudi (CSID President) and Dr. Louay Safi (CSID Director of Research) traveled to the Philippines on a lecture tour that was organized by the Philippines Council on Islam and Democracy (CID). CID, a newly established organization headed by Aminah Rasul with a mission similar to that of CSID, organized a series of lectures and meetings with Muslim leaders and members of the religious leaders (*ulama*) in Manila and three other cities in Mindanao. The visit aimed at engaging Muslim leaders in discussions on issues relating to Islam and democracy, and to the efforts of Muslims to gain more political control over their affairs in Mindanao.

Masmoudi and Safi met with Muslim leaders and scholars both in Manila and Mindanao, which included visits to Marawi City, Cotabato City, and Zamboanga. They spent the first two days in Manila, where they spoke at the Institute of Islamic studies at the University of the Philippines and addressed a mixed audience of Muslim and non-Muslim leaders at the Asian Institute of Management (AIM).

In Mindanao, they spoke to the leaders of the Muslim community in Marawi City during a gathering hosted by the City mayor. They also spoke at a gathering of academics and students at the Mindanao State University (MSU). Dr. Safi gave the Friday sermon (Khutbah) at a city mosque, which was attended by the city mayor and other community leaders. Following the Khutbah, they both engaged more than two hundred Muslim leaders (both men and women) in a dialogue on Islam and democracy. The discussions evolved around the issues of the compatibility of Islam



Radwan Masmoudi and Louay Safi with Aminah Rasul, head of the newly-founded Philippines Council on Islam & Democracy (CID), in Mindanao, Philippines.

and democracy, the need to embrace peaceful political action to empower Muslims, and the importance of opposing actions and strategies that run against basic Islamic values, including violence against civilians, kidnappings, and hostage taking.

Participants espoused a variety of views ranging from the traditionalist and conservative to the progressive and liberal. Despite the great diversity of views, discussions were courteous and friendly. Exchanges were frank and open, and occasionally spirited, but at all time courteous and engaging. Among the main concerns expressed by Philippine Muslim leaders and participants:

- Economic opportunities and lack of sufficient investment in Muslim areas in the Philippines;
- The failure of successive governments to deliver on earlier promises and agreements to the Muslim areas;
- The limited budget appropriated by the central government to Muslim areas.

In Cotabato City, Safi and Masmoudi addressed a meeting of Muslim businessmen and community leaders. The meeting was hosted by the city mayor, and was attended by around 100 men and women. They also addressed a mixed audience of about 150 students, faculty members, and community leaders, both Christian and Muslim, at the Notre Dame University,

The visit to Cotabato City was concluded with a meeting attended by the *ulama*, who insisted on conducting the discussion in Arabic. The *ulama* espoused various positions regarding democratic rule, including criticism of the democratic process. Interestingly, though, critiques of democracy in the Philippines focused more on the deteriorating conditions of Muslims under the successive democratic governments that came to power since Ferdinand Marcos was



A meeting with the Ulama in Cotabato City

overthrown in 1986 than democracy *per se*.

In Zamboanga, Safi and Masmoudi spoke to a small group (40) of Muslim business people and community leaders invited by Senator Rasul, and also addressed a large audience of more than one thousand academicians and students at the Southwest University of Mindanao. Our visit also included a brief meeting with the city mayor and a visit to the Magbassa Kita Foundation. ■



Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy
 1050 Connecticut Avenue, Suite 1000
 Washington, D.C. 20036
 Phone: 202-772-2022
 Fax: 202-772-3101
 www.islam-democracy.org

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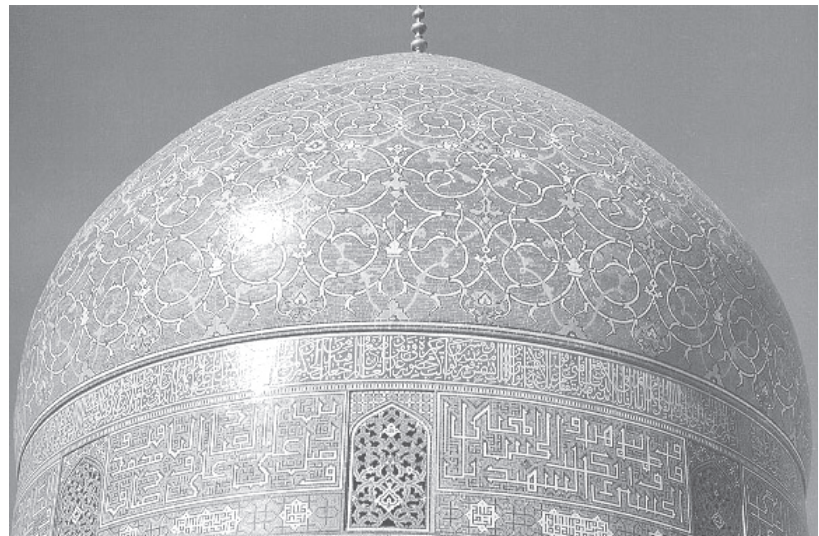
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By supporting CSID, **YOU**

- ◆ **Create** a better future for our children so they can have more opportunities for improving their lives and realizing their dreams.
- ◆ **Educate** and inform non-Muslim Americans about Islam's true values of tolerance, peace, and good will towards mankind, including peoples of other faiths.
- ◆ **Improve** U.S. relations with the Muslim world by supporting popular movements rather than oppressive tyrannies and corrupt regimes.
- ◆ **Replace** the feelings of hopelessness, despair, and anger in many parts of the Muslim world, especially among the youth, with a more positive and hopeful outlook for the future.
- ◆ **Encourage** young Muslim Americans, and Muslims everywhere, to participate in the political process and to reject calls for destructive violence and extremism.
- ◆ **Provide** future American Muslim leaders with the training, the opportunity, and the skills to learn how the American system of government works and to become actively engaged in the American democracy.
- ◆ **Build** a network of Muslim democrats around the globe who can share knowledge and experience about how to build and strengthen democratic institutions and traditions in the Muslim countries.

www.islam-democracy.org/get_involved.asp

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and showering their leaders with praise and diplomatic niceties. Leaders who are not democratically elected by 2008 should be thrown out of the UN.

3. Israelis and Palestinians should understand that the only solution for their conflict is to recognize each other's right to exist in secure, independent, and sovereign states. Israel should get out of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, and international forces should be sent to provide peace between the two countries. The occupation, the wall, and the settlements must end, as do suicide bombings that target innocent civilians.

4. Support independent and civil organizations that are trying, against all odds, to promote a culture of understanding, democracy, tolerance, freedom, and dignity.

5. Help Iraqis and Afghanis build truly democratic and prosperous nations. Turn Iraq back to the Iraqis and Afghanistan back to the Afghanis, and make both models for democracy and prosperity.

If these policies are implemented, the Bush doctrine of "forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East" will be a success and our children, both in the US and in the Muslim world, will live in a much more peaceful and prosperous world. For this to happen, the U.S. must align its foreign policies with its own -and

universal- moral foundations of freedom, justice, equality, and dignity for all. ■

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democracy, ijtiḥad, the role of women in society, or the rights of minorities?

In conclusion, the mission of CSID and its allies-Muslim and non-Muslim alike-must be more than just helping Muslims understand the affinities between Islam and democracy. In the today's strife-ridden world, Muslim societies must be "innoculated" against the siren call of extremism and intolerance. This is done not through advocacy or "spin", but with knowledge, by reestablishing an awareness of the richness and flexibility of Islamic tradition. As the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said long ago, *Ikhtilaf ummati rahma* ("Differences within my Ummah are a blessing"). Amen. ■

We need your Support!

CSID was founded in 1999, to promote democracy, tolerance, and freedom in the Muslim world and to build better relations and understanding between the United States and the Muslim world. We need your moral and financial support to succeed.

Please join & support CSID.

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