

Muslim Democrat

www.islam-democracy.org

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

Volume 6, No.1, May 2004

In This Issue:

- 1 *USIP-CSID Symposium on Ijtihad*



- 4 *Democracy in the Muslim World: Obstacles, Difficulties, and Best methods*



- 6 *Islam and Democracy: A Potential Symbiosis*

- 7 *Shari'ah and Ijtihad: The Sudanese Experience*



- 8 *CSID Workshops in Turkey, Jordan, and Iraq*



- 10 *Book Review: Islam Under Siege*

Ijtihad:

Reinterpreting Islamic Principles for the 21st Century

On March 19, 2004 the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy and the U.S. Institute of Peace co-sponsored a workshop entitled "Ijtihad: Reinterpreting Islamic Principles for the 21st Century." The discussion focused on how the sacred texts of the Qur'an and the Sunna can be reinterpreted to take account of contemporary realities and promote greater peace, justice, and progress within the Muslim world and in relations between the Muslims and non-Muslims. To address these issues, four highly respected scholars of Islam were invited to discuss Ijtihad and how it can address the contemporary needs of Muslims and Muslim societies. The four presenters, all experts on Islamic law and interpretation, were **Muzammil H. Siddiqi** who teaches at California State University and Chapman University and is a member of the Fiqh (Islamic Law) Council of North America; **Imam Hassan Qazwini**, director of the Islamic Center of America based in Detroit; **Muneer Fareed**, associate professor of Islamic Studies at Wayne State University; and **Ingrid Mattson**, professor of Islamic Studies and Director of Islamic Chaplainry at Hartford Seminary. The workshop was co-chaired by Radwan Masmoudi, president of CSID, and David Smock, director of the Religion and Peacemaking Initiative of the U.S. Institute of Peace.

Introduction

Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the literal word of God, revealed to Prophet Muhammad, through the Angel Gabriel, in the beginning of the seventh century. The Qur'an was revealed over the course of 23 years, one to five verses at a time. Most of these verses came in response to, and as guidance for, developing situations or conditions faced by the Prophet and the community of believers with him. There is a whole science in Islam, called *Asbab al Nuzul* (the causes for the revelation), which has to do with knowing and understanding the specific reasons, conditions, and therefore meanings of a particular verse. Any verse, when taken out of context, can be misunderstood or misapplied.

Masmoudi pointed out that, while there is no disagreement among Muslims that the Qur'an is the literal word of God, there can be, and there usually is, substantial disagreement about the meanings of certain verses and about how certain verses apply to different situations. That is why, since the death of prophet Muhammad and for at least the first eight or

nine centuries of Islam, there was a wide variety of opinions and schools of thoughts on almost every issue and question. A whole science, called Ijtihad – or reasoning and interpretation—was developed by Muslim scholars in order to understand and apply the message of the Qur’an to varying needs and conditions.

This process of Ijtihad allowed Muslims to be flexible, Masmoudi continues, and to learn from other cultures, and civilizations. Islam teaches that no one owns the truth, and that the true believer is always in search of the truth and of wisdom; wherever he finds it, he follows it.

Old systems and old interpretations can no longer provide answers to the difficult questions now facing the Muslim world. Muslims are still very attached to Islam and to the Qur’an, but they are burdened with outdated interpretations that were often made over a thousand years ago and do not address contemporary situations and challenges.

Who Can Perform Ijtihad?

The right to engage in Ijtihad, according to Hassan Qazwini, belongs to an individual who is a recognized expert in jurisprudence and qualified to derive Islamic law from original sources. This requires wide expertise and lengthy years of studying such fields of knowledge as jurisprudence, the fundamentals of jurisprudence, hadith, the biography of hadith narrators, commentary of the Qur’an, Arabic grammar and eloquence, and logic. Additionally, philosophy, economics, and sociology are increasingly required. A *Mujtahid* (a person who engages in Ijtihad) should also display such qualities as piety and moral integrity.

Muslim jurists generally have good knowledge of the classical sources, Siddiqi says, but their methodologies of interpretation are generally not updated through

knowledge of such fields as linguistics, logic, and semantics. Moreover, Muslim societies usually lack the required freedom for scholars to find resources and freely debate issues. Constraints on freedom are imposed not only by political authorities but also by religious establishments. In addition, Islamic educational systems are



Dr. Muzzamil Siddiqi, speaking at the USIP-CSID symposium on Ijtihad

usually outdated.

How Might Ijtihad be Revived?

Qazwini notes that closing the doors of Ijtihad has led Muslims to chronic intellectual stagnation and has prohibited thousands of potential *Mujtahids* and

“Old systems and old interpretations can no longer provide answers to the difficult questions now facing the Muslim world.”

scholars from offering solutions to newly emerging problems. Muslim thinkers have become captive to the rules that were made long ago, leaving little scope for liberal or innovative thought.

Governments in Muslim countries today, many of which are corrupt, greatly

benefit from the lack of Ijtihad. Moreover, these governments help keep the doors of Ijtihad closed as a means of controlling the religious establishment. Religious establishments in Muslim countries rely on government resources for their financial needs and this makes them captive to government policies. The domination of the religious establishments by secular governments has been so powerful that it has often made religious authorities look inept. The first step toward opening the door of Ijtihad, Qazwini continues, should be the liberation of religious establishments from the influence of political regimes.

There cannot be true Ijtihad, Siddiqi points out, unless scholars are free to express their opinions and other scholars are free to criticize them if they make errors. Freedom of expression is ingrained in the concept and practice of Ijtihad. This means that democratization of the Muslim societies and basic freedom for scholars is *sine qua non* for Ijtihad.

Reform of Muslim educational systems is also essential, including revision of the curricula of religious schools and seminaries. Instead of teaching only a single school of interpretation, all schools should be taught. Instead of only teaching the rulings and interpretations of the schools, the evidence and methods of interpretations should also be taught. Students should also study comparative religion, modern logic, philosophy, psychology, and history, as well as economics and political theory. Islamic schools and seminaries should pay more attention to the great Islamic literature on the objectives of the Shari’ah.

Ijtihad should be a collective endeavor, Siddiqi asserts. There are several national and international Fiqh Councils (councils of jurisprudence and interpretation of Shari’ah), but they need to be better

organized and they should work collaboratively. Shari'ah experts, both men and women, should be members of these councils and membership should not be limited to Shari'ah scholars. Experts from the fields of medicine, astronomy, economics, social and political sciences and law should also be included as consultants and advisors.

Qazwini points out that the CSID-USIP panel on March 19, in which the entire Muslim spectrum was represented—men and women, Shiites and Sunnis, religious scholars and academic scholars—can give the Muslim world an ideal image of Islam's tolerance and openness. There is no doubt that living in the United States gives one a sense of appreciation for the pluralistic life enjoyed

“Muslim Americans can project this positive perspective, including openness with each other, mutual tolerance, and participation in interfaith dialogue, to the greater Muslim world.”

here. Muslims in this country enjoy more freedom, even religiously, than in most Muslim countries. Muslim Americans can project this positive perspective, including openness with each other, mutual tolerance, and participation in interfaith dialogue, to the greater Muslim world. Hopefully, this can become a model for millions of Muslims around the globe.

An Alternative Approach: Creative Impulse and Imagination

Muneer Fareed and Ingrid Mattson give

a somewhat different emphasis in their interpretation of Ijtihad. Fareed points out that Ijtihad can be of three different varieties: Ijtihad as a legal tool; Ijtihad as legal reasoning; and Ijtihad as creative



Dr. Ingrid Mattson, professor of Islamic Studies at Hartford Seminary.

impulse. There remains lack of precision in Muslim thought about the precise nature of Ijtihad. When scholars emphasize Ijtihad as analogical reasoning, they are seeing Ijtihad as a legal tool. But until the precise meaning of Ijtihad is pinned down, specified, and fleshed out, we will not be able to do Ijtihad.

Ijtihad flourished in two periods of Muslim history, the ninth century and the nineteenth century. In the ninth century Ijtihad was performed as legal reasoning. Facing different circumstances and challenges in the nineteenth century, Muslims looked to Ijtihad as “creative impulse.” This creative impulse was seen as a means to unleash Muslim capabilities and create a new world, one that would allow Islamic civilization to thrive. But this movement was thwarted because the custodians of the tradition were disinclined to Ijtihad because Ijtihad was a threat to their status and even to their livelihoods.

The challenge, however, is for Muslims to determine whether in the future this creative reasoning will be complementary and therefore parallel to divine text, or

whether it will remain as it has been in the past, subordinate to the text. That is the great challenge Muslims face today. This challenge is faced by all Muslims who are concerned not just about Islam as a religion but about the civilization that still has so much to offer the world at large.

Ingrid Mattson points out that even though her Ph.D. is in Islamic law and she loves to do close legal reasoning, she would never want to live in a place where people just like her create the law and then hand it over for others to follow. Moreover, that is not how it happened within Islam either. Muslim civilization was not built by a set of scholars sitting in a room writing down rules about what is and is not permissible and then instructing people to follow the law. Islamic civilization was built by people with initiative, imagination, and creativity, trying to construct creative lives and figuring out how to get along with other people. What created civilization? What allowed people to have hopeful and optimistic outlooks? That was creativity built on the belief that the world is open to new possibilities and that God gave us this earth and this life with permission to use them creatively.



Dr. Muneer Fareed, speaking to a standing room only.

A verse in the Qur'an says, “Perhaps your Lord will put love between you and those whom you now consider enemies.” Mattson points out that this verse says that we need to be able to imagine a different

continued on page 5...

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

The World Movement for Democracy convened on February 1-4, 2004 in Durban, South Africa, for its Third Assembly on “Building Democracy for



Radwan Masmoudi (second from left) with Saleh Jourchi of Tunisia (left), (from left to right) Zainah Anwar of Malaysia, and Ayesha Imam of Nigeria.

Peace, Development and Human Rights.” More than 600 democracy activists, practitioners, and scholars from more than 100 countries participated in the assembly (www.wmd.org). During this large gathering of democrats from all over the world, the Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy (Washington DC) and the Sisters-in-Islam organization (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia) co-organized a workshop on “Democracy in the Muslim World: Obstacles, Difficulties, and Best methods.” The panelists were Haytham Manna (from Syria), Slaheddine Jourchi (from Tunisia) Zainah Anwar (from Malaysia) and Ayesha Imam (from Nigeria). The panel was moderated by Radwan Masmoudi, President of CSID.

Masmoudi spoke about the current crisis in the Muslim world despite all its potential and enormous resources. He indicated that Muslims feel obligated to

choose between Islam and modernity (or Islam and democracy) because they are faced with outdated and inappropriate interpretations of Islam that are hundreds of years old and not applicable to the modern situation. Masmoudi added that the international community and governments have been too willing to tolerate and acquiesce to undemocratic regimes in the Arab and Muslim world (in the name of stability) but this is beginning to change as people realize that real stability can only be achieved through democratic process.

Manna mentioned the historic development of the Muslim civilization, and earlier civilizations, up to colonialism. He spoke about the difficult situation that the political elite found in the Arab world after independence, and indicated that religious reforms (of both Christianity

“The only solution is to recognize the rights of the citizens, regardless of their religion.”

and Islam) did not succeed in changing the expansionist and empire-building tendencies in both religions. The only solution is to recognize the rights of the citizens, regardless of their religion, in order to build modern democratic states. Manna stressed the importance of engaging in dialogue (both internal and external) in order to build consensus and harmony.

Imam spoke about the experience of Muslims in Nigeria, and indicated that conservative Muslims are first and foremost concerned about protecting the Muslim identity. This is being done at the expense of Muslim women rights who were deprived of their right to vote until 1976. Strict adherence to Shari'ah and Hudud (punishment) laws have resulted in discrimination against women and poor



Participants in the Third Assembly of the World Movement for Democracy in Durban, South Africa, February 1-4, 2004.

individuals. While someone who steals \$50 can have his hand cut, people who embezzle millions of dollars often go unpunished (because there is no *hudud* punishment against embezzlement). She concluded that the Nigeria experience stressed the importance of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims, and the need to search for a positive definition of Islam and Shari'ah that protects and supports freedom and justice.

Jourchi spoke about the difficulties of democratic transitions in the Arab world, and explained that there is no society that

is against democracy in principle, but there are problems of implementation and practice. The failure is in the strategies adopted by the democrats, especially since Arab history does not provide many examples of democratic rule. Arab countries are not all the same, but each country has its own specificity. The challenges that remain have to do with how to weaken the hold of governments, and their control over the political process, without resorting to violence. Democracy promotion in the Arab world must take place with and without the co-operation of the regimes, and he called for ending the ideological wars between national and secularist forces on one hand and Islamic and Islamist movements on the other. There can be no democracy without the participation of the Islamists, and also that democracy will be in danger if Islamists dominate the state and public discourse.

Anwar stated that Islam is being used as a political ideology by some groups who want to monopolize Islam. Muslim women, in Malaysia and

other parts of the Muslim world, are now trying to defend their rights under Islam by putting forward their own interpretation of Islam. Conservative religious scholars do not have the right to speak in the name of Islam, which belongs to every Muslim man and woman. Even non-Muslims in Muslim-majority countries, such as Malaysia, have the right to express their concerns about Islam, and their rights as full citizens and equal partners.

After long discussions and debates about the best methods for promoting and strengthening democracy in the Muslim countries, most participants emphasized the following recommendations:

1. The necessity to continue this type of exchange and debate, and call upon the National Endowment for Democracy, and other democracy foundations, to support these and similar initiatives and networks.

2. Religious dialogue is also very important, not only between Muslims of various groups and tendencies, but also with members of other faiths in order to promote religious harmony, understanding

between civilizations, and peace.

3. Muslims need to develop a modern and tolerant interpretation of Islam, based on the Islamic principles of *Shura* (consultation), *Adl* (justice), and *Hurriyah* (freedom), as necessary conditions for developing democracy and peaceful coexistence.

4. Islamic movements and religious leaders must be engaged in a dialogue about their vision and social project in order to arrive at a consensus on the type of society and government that Muslims seek and deserve. Exclusion and oppression will only lead these movements to more violence and radicalism.

5. Secularism should not be forced as the main objective as it is currently misunderstood as anti-religion. True secularism is in fact a protection of religion from the State, and of religious freedom from government interference. Secularism is not a condition for democracy in the Muslim world, but can be developed through dialogue and common interests.

....continued from page 3

future, not just reason our way out of things. We must first have a vision of a different tomorrow and know that there is a possibility for the world to be different.

“Islamic civilization was built by people with initiative, imagination, and creativity, trying to construct creative lives and figuring out how to get along with other people.”

“Even when we are so mired in our own emotions, our own day-to-day struggles, our own difficulties that we cannot imagine a way out, faith and creativity help us know it is possible for God to create a different future. It is possible for God to put love between you and your enemies.” So imagination is key to a better future. It is the key to a good society. It must work hand-in-hand with but not be superseded by legal reasoning. Reason by itself, when misused, can lead to disastrous conclusions and actions. It can lead to the most terrible yet very rational projects. Without inputs from ethics and from imagination, reason can lead us seriously astray.

If we limit change and innovation to those who have qualifications to reason

from the text, we are not going to get anywhere, Mattson argued. “I believe there is another door open, a theological door, which places more emphasis on the natural law tradition in Islam. Reason is not the only complement to revelation. In Islam there is something called *fitrah* an innate, God-given sense of right and wrong. It can be squelched or cultivated. With the right support, it can make us moral people.”

This article is a summary of a USIP Special Report, written by David Smock. For a copy of the Special Report, please contact USIP at: www.usip.org

A Potential Symbiosis

By Asma Afsaruddin

CSID Board Member

The Global Attitudes Project of the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press released a survey in June, 2003 which established that a majority of the people in Muslim countries want democratic governments and that more inhabitants of these countries were in favor of democracy than residents of Eastern Europe, for example. This report was based on a poll of 16,000 people in twenty countries plus the Palestinian Territories. The results of this survey affirmed what many of us had been stating all along — that Muslims in a wide cross-section of the Islamic world desire democratic reform in their countries and wish to see democratic governments installed.

But to absolutely win over the hearts and minds of the people and to successfully thwart the anti-democratic agendas of extremist forces, Muslims need to be convinced that democracy in no way threatens their religious values and freedoms. (The ongoing hijab controversy in democratic France currently forefronts this issue in a dramatic way). This is a legitimate concern and needs to be addressed head on to facilitate the flourishing of democratic principles in a part of the world that is perceived as being rather resistant to such principles.

There are two persistent beliefs (perhaps even myths) which render the selling of democracy that much harder. One belief is that democracy is predicated on secularism and secularism, many aver, means evacuating religion from the public sphere and banishing it to the private one. The second belief is that in Islam, religion

and politics are forever joined at the hip and never can the twain be rent asunder for fear of violating a presumed divine commandment. Both beliefs or assumptions deserve revisiting and more rigorous scrutiny.

The first assumption proceeds out of a kind of “democratic fundamentalism” which holds that there is one recipe for establishing democracy and any system that falls short of total conformity with its prescriptions, including secularism, cannot qualify as a fully functioning democracy. This dogmatic view fails to take into account the different inflections of democracy in different parts of the world with varying degrees of secularism. It also ignores the resurgence of religious values in democratic America and India, for example, and the process of negotiation this has entailed between religious and secular values. For a democracy to live up to its name, it has to be accommodating of religious values and sentiment. As Abdul Karim Soroush has perceptively remarked, in a religious society, “any purely secular government would be undemocratic.”

The second assumption is based on an ahistorical reading of the growth of Islamic political thought and completely overlooks the lack of evidence in the early sources for a notion of sacred or sacralized politics in the formative years of the Islamic polity. Rather, political governance was deemed necessary for the utilitarian purpose of containing chaos in the temporal realm and maintaining order in society rather than as the realiza-

tion of some assumed religious imperative.

Furthermore, no particular system or mode of government was understood to be divinely mandated in the early period in order to attain these utilitarian objectives. This is, however, not the same as stating that the public sphere in the Islamic milieu, like the private one, was also expected to be infused with religious and moral values. Politics, as part of the public sphere, was believed to be subject to broad moral guidelines and any system of government that best reflected the Qur’anic prescription of consultative and collective decision-making (*shura*) could be deemed acceptable.

The twelfth century Andalusian scholar Ibn Atiyyah was of the opinion that an individual who did not confer with knowledgeable and morally upright people was liable to be removed from public office. Seven centuries later, Alexis de Tocqueville would remark that liberty “considers religion as the safeguard of morality and morality as the best security of law ...” One suspects that if Ibn Atiyyah and deTocqueville had met at some convenient point in history, they would have had much to say to one another on the topic of a moral and democratic political culture.

Morality, religious and rational, was meant to be the ally and reinforcer of consultative, accountable government and vice versa in the Islamic conception of the properly functioning society. This is an important manifestation, after all, of what we now deem to be the democratic process. ■

Conference Report:

Shari'ah and Ijtihad: The Sudanese Experience

The Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID) in cooperation with the Institute of Islamization of Knowledge (IMAM) of Gezira University held a conference on "Shari'ah and Ijtihad: The Sudanese Experience" in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, from the 19th to the 21st of April 2004. The International Forum for Islamic Dialogue (IFID) of the United Kingdom co-sponsored the conference.

The conference was inaugurated by President Omar Al Bashir, Minister of Higher Education Mubarak Mohammed Ali Majzoub, Gezira University President Isma'il Hasan Husain, CSID President Radwan Masmoudi and IFID Director Najah Kadhim. It was attended by a large cross section of Sudanese political life, with a guest list of in excess of three hundred that included ministers, diplomats, political leaders and media representatives.

More than 60 political, religious and NGO leaders participated in the conference. More than 10 international participants attended the conference, among them:

- Prof. Abdulaziz Sachedina, University of Virginia
- Prof. Abdulmajid Al Najjar, France
- Prof. Muhammad Abulqasim Haj-Hamad
- Prof. Deina Abdelkader, Tufts University
- Prof. Muhammad Habash, University of Damascus, Syria.

Among the Sudanese scholars were:

- Prof. Hasan Makki, Dean, Institute of African Studies and Research, Africa International University
- Prof. Muhammad Majdub
- Prof. Muhammad Salih, Nilayn Univ.



More than 70 Sudanese Political and Religious leaders participated in the 3-day conference.

- Professor Zakaria Bashir, the renowned philosopher,
- Mawlana Dafallah Alhadj Yusuf

The conference lasted three days and covered such wide-ranging topics as:

1. What is Shari'ah?
2. Ijtihad and tajdid [renewal]
3. The Role of Ijtihad and Tajdid in the Social Reform
4. The Challenges of the Application of Shari'ah in Sudan

“Islam is keen on achieving the values of freedom, justice, tolerance, and human dignity, in every aspect.”

5. The General Framework of Shari'ah Rule"
6. The Rights of Minorities
7. Democracy and Political Pluralism
8. The Role of Women.

The conference participants were divided into 5 working groups on:

1. Politics and government

2. Economy and Finance
3. Women rights
4. Minority rights
5. Justice and punishment.

The conference participants produced 5 recommendations, including:

1. Emphasize that Islam is keen on achieving the values of freedom, justice, tolerance, and human dignity, in every aspect including economic, political, legal, women rights, and minority rights.

2. Emphasize that Islam is not to be monopolized by any party or group, and that everyone has the right to express their opinions on religion and politics without exclusion or domination, according to the principles of peaceful transfer of power through free and fair elections.

3. Emphasize that Basic rights from an Islamic perspective are derived from the objectives (Maqasid) of Shari'ah, including the following basic necessities: right to life, right to freedom of belief, right to knowledge and education, right to free thinking and free expression, right to form and protect a family, right to work and own property, and all other human rights as defined in international treaties and conventions, that do not contradict Islamic teachings.

4. Call for correcting mistakes that have occurred during the implementation of Shari'ah, through review of reasons for misjudgments and miscarriage, and not to attribute these mistakes to Islam but rather to human error, and call for greater transparency and accountability.

A full report, with a summary of each paper, will be published by CSID, and posted on our website: www.islam-democracy.org ■

CSID Workshops on Islam & Democracy in Turkey, Jordan, and Iraq

The Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy organized a workshop on “Islam & Democracy” in Turkey on January 13-14 2004. The workshop was divided into three thematic sessions: Islam and democracy, religious pluralism and democracy; and Islam and woman’s role in public life. It was one of the first times



A view of the workshop on “Islam & Democracy” in Ankara, Turkey.

that Turkish secularists and Islamists sat together and discussed the compatibility of Islam and democracy.

Dr. Radwan Masmoudi, President of CSID, opened the conference and applauded Turkey for its pioneering efforts in being one of the region’s first democracies. He noted that while Turkey has endured many challenges in its history, it has resolved those challenges through democratic, peaceful means. That, he said, is the real strength of Turkey’s democracy. He did, however, outline some aspects of Turkey’s democracy that could be improved. Specifically, he considered forbidding women from wearing the headscarf in schools, universities and public places as incongruent to democracy’s ethos of free choice.

Atila Yalla, of the Association for Liberal Thinking, said that Islam should

not be blamed for Turkey’s current problems because democracy has not existed in Turkey until recently. Mehmet Ali Shahin, deputy Prime Minister, stated that Islam and democracy are required for the development of Turkey. Islam and democracy are compatible, because they both seek to secure and build a just society.

Laith Kubba, of the National Endowment for Democracy, said that Muslims need a good democratic model to emulate—a model that incorporates Islam, modern political thought, and democracy. He considers the regimes in the region as a main

obstacle to democracy. He added that the US has not always stood on the side of democracy in the region. Another formidable obstacle was the power and presence of the military in the region. If democracy is to succeed in the region, it will take a unique form that will be congruent with the values and wishes of the people and could be different from democracy as practiced in the United States or in Europe.

While most speakers were receptive to American ideals in the region, some speakers were critical of America pushing for democracy, given the violation of human rights in Iraq exercised by American troops. Others spoke about the policies of many European countries which openly discriminate against Muslims.

Others found problem with Turkey’s own understanding of secularism. Some

cited the issue of headscarf (*hijab*) and how ironic it is that in a secular country, *hijab* is prohibited. He said an indirect result of the ban of *hijab* was that illiteracy rose, in part because many parents refused to send their daughters to school. Others recommended that woman rights organisation press the Turkish government to secure their right to chose to wear *hijab* or not. Shari’ah, some participants said, needs to be more practical and compatible with modern times.

A second workshop was held in Amman, Jordan on January 21-22, 2004



More than 70 democracy activists participated in the 2-day workshop, in Ankara, Turkey.

focusing on Jordan’s experience with democracy. The event received considerable attention within the region and many international agencies, including the Academy for International Leadership and the United Nations participated.

The workshops focused on three thematic areas: 1) the compatibility of Islam and democracy; 2) the current state of democracy in Jordan; and 3) the importance of reforming civil society.

CSID Board Member and Professor



The Amman, Jordan workshop was attended by over ninety (90) leaders, from across the political spectrum.

Louis Cantori said that Muslims should aspire to democratize the nations in which they live. But there are two obstacles to achieving this, he said. First, democracy means limiting the control of the state over people. Second, democracy requires giving freedom and equality to all individuals. But these two aspects, he noted, are missing in the Arab world.

Other speakers, like Husni Ayesh, said that the Arab World needs to adopt secular democracy. This will help secure the rights of minorities living in the Arab World.

According to Faris Brezat, one of the biggest challenges to regional democracy is the economic state of affairs, Brezat quoted a survey carried out by the Jordan University Center for Strategies and Studies. According to the survey, 69.9% of Jordanians who feel unsafe about criticizing the state. More than 20% believe there is no freedom of the press. Half of people, however, feel safe about demonstrating. Surprisingly, only 1.7% declared that they are members in political parties.

Most participants agreed that Jordan had made promising strides towards democracy and that generally it was one of the most successful models in the region. Hamzeh Mansour and Abdelhaleem Al-Odwan called for the Jordanian government to become a parliamentary democracy, where an elected parliament appoints and controls the executive

branch.

Following the Jordan conference, CSID held a third workshop in Amman focusing on the efforts to establish democracy in Iraq. The sessions, held on January 23 2004, focused on the following themes: Islam and policy; democracy education and training in Iraq; federalism and ethnic group relations; and recommendations for moving forward. Due to security reasons, the workshop was held in Amman, Jordan—a testament to the volatile



Dr. Najib Ghadbian, speaking on a panel on Human Rights and Gender Equality in Islam, at the Amman, Jordan workshop.

conditions in Iraq

One session was dedicated to answer the question: what would you do if you have \$250,000 to promote democracy in Iraq? The idea behind the question was to anchor the discussion on Islam and democracy to more tangible ideas that could be implemented within the near future. It also gave the organizers a chance to understand how Iraqis prioritized the issues they are facing.

Most of the answers addressed the need for establishing a media network to promote an exchange of free ideas.

One respondent, Noor Al-Yasery, suggested creating private

institutions to educate people about democracy. Another participant, Ahmad Abed Ali, proposed establishing a committee for head of the tribes in order to unite the Iraqi nation. Another participant, Hamdeyah Abbas, called for publishing books and pamphlets that teach people the importance of democracy.

Dr. Hasan Ali Khazem supported this suggestion by proposing a planned cultural programme for promoting democracy in Iraq. Moreover, he highlighted the importance of informing men about the important role played by women in society. By integrating women, society will be secure from the state of disorder and authoritarian acts.

Many participants expressed widespread hope for the future among Iraqis. There were, however, lingering questions about how Iraqis would be able to attain their goals and aspirations given the current state of violence and disorder in their country.

Workshop participants expressed hope that CSID will continue to work with them to develop new ideas, methodologies, and principles for nurturing democratic traditions and culture within their own countries. Educating Iraqis on the basic principles of democracy, and on its compatibility with Islam, is necessary for democracy to succeed in Iraq. ■



Thirty six (36) leaders of new Iraqi NGO and civil society organizations came from Iraq to Jordan to participate in the CSID workshop on Iraq.

Islam Under Siege: Living Dangerously in a Post-Honor World

by Akbar S. Ahmed

Reviewed by Andrea Barron

Akbar Ahmed, who holds the *Ibn-Khaldun* Chair in Islamic Studies at American University, begins his new book by discussing the situation of Muslims who feel “under siege” not only in the United States but also in Bosnia, Chechnya, Palestine and Gujarat, India. In the US they are frightened by a “rising tide of Islamophobia” emanating from government officials, the media, and a few right-wing Christian leaders. The Reverend Franklin Graham, for instance, who gave the invocation at President George W. Bush’s inauguration, branded Islam a “very evil and wicked religion”. Jerry Falwell, founder of the conservative political action group, the Moral Majority, called the Prophet Mohammed “a terrorist.” In Bosnia, Muslims were expelled from their homes by Serbian forces and in Mahatma Gandhi’s home state of Gujarat, Hindu mobs massacred over 2,000 Muslims with police acquiescence in 2002.

But Muslims are not the only ones under siege. Ahmed describes how Osama bin Laden and other extremist Muslims have victimized non-Muslims in New York, Washington DC, Indonesia, and Afghanistan, when the Taliban destroyed the ancient Buddhist statues in Afghanistan. He faults both Muslims and non-Muslims for what he calls *hyper-asabiyyah*, or excessive tribal, religious or nationalist loyalty. The great medieval Arab social scientist Ibn Khaldun credited *asabiyyah* “group solidarity” for

creating strong societies by uniting people through a common language, culture, and values. But too much *asabiyyah* can be dangerous, it needs to be tempered by what Ahmed identifies as the principle Islamic values regulating human relations— justice (*adl*), knowledge (*ilm*) and balance and compassion (*ihsan*).

Despite Muslim conflicts with Christians, Hindus and Jews, Ahmed says the “real battle in the 21st century” will not be inter-religious but between *exclusivists* on one side and *inclusivists* on the other (p. 19). Exclusivists like bin Laden (or the terrorists who recently claimed credit for killing over 200 civilians in Madrid) focus on the differences between their religion, their tribe, their nation, and everyone else, especially the despised enemy. Muslim exclusivists may point to a Quranic verse such as 5:51 — “Do not take Jews and Christians as allies” — which reflects particular circumstances in the early history of Islam rather than the eternal principles of justice, knowledge, balance and compassion.

Inclusivists concentrate on the similarities between themselves and others despite religious and national distinctions. They draw on the famous Quranic “diversity verse” which says God made humankind “into diverse nations and tribes” so they could “come to know each other, not despise each other” (Q 49:13) and Q 2:256 which says there is “no compulsion in religion.” The inclusivists

are now being silenced by an aggressive exclusivist minority, which is betraying Islam’s concepts of justice and mercy and its commitment to equal rights for women and minorities.



Akbar S. Ahmed
CSID Board Member

Over ten years ago, well before 9/11 and the Taliban’s ascendance to power, Ahmed recognized the exclusivist danger to Islam. The religion of balance and was becoming increasingly associated with violence, persecution of women, and the silencing of scholars. He wanted to challenge the exclusivists by presenting one of the more inclusive Muslim leaders—Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, in what came to be known as the “Jinnah Quartet.” Ahmed launched the project when he was a fellow at Cambridge University in England. In a feature film, a documentary, an academic book and a novel, he portrayed Jinnah as a visionary who wanted to see a secular, modern, democratic Pakistan guided but not governed by Islamic principles.

He also initiated interfaith dialogues with Christians and Jews in the United Kingdom. When he was appointed Pakistan’s high commissioner to London

continued on page 12...



Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy

2121 K Street, NW, Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20037
Phone: 202-942-2183
Fax: 202-628-8189

www.islam-democracy.org

Board of Directors

Chair: Abdulaziz Sachedina

Vice-Chair: John L. Esposito

Akbar Ahmed

Asma Afsaruddin

Nimat Hafez Barazangi

Asma Barlas

Charles Butterworth

Louis Cantori

Radwan Masmoudi

Ali A. Mazrui

Joseph Montville

Louay Safi

Robert Schadler

Antony Sullivan

Svend White

Executive Committee

Radwan A. Masmoudi

President



Svend White

Secretary



Louay Safi

Charles Butterworth

Louis Cantori

Robert Schadler

The views and opinions expressed in the *Muslim Democrat* belong to their authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of CSID, or its Board of Directors. We welcome comments and letters from our readers, and will publish them subject to space limitations and editorial changes. Please e-mail comments and letters to:

editor@islam-democracy.org

CSID Membership Form 2004

Name: _____

Institution: _____

Address: _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Tel.: _____

Fax.: _____

E-mail: _____

I would like to join CSID as:

Student Member \$20

Member \$50

Fellow \$100

Newsletter Subscription \$20

Institutional Member \$200

Founding Member \$1000

Lifetime Member \$2500

I also would like to volunteer for the following positions:

A Director

Newsletter Editor

Journal Editor

Program Volunteer

Fund raising

Book reviews

Membership drive

Local seminars

Other _____

Please include my name in the CSID directory Yes No

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

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

Comments and/or suggestions:

please send membership form, with payment, to: CSID, 2121 K Street, NW, Suite 700, W. D.C. 20037



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

...continued from page 10

in 1999, Ahmed visited the Archbishop of Canterbury, the UK's highest ranking Anglican prelate, with Pakistani Christians. He also became the first Muslim to give a keynote lecture in one of London's most important synagogues. Exclusivist Muslims denounced him both for the Jinnah Quartet and his interfaith initiatives, especially after his public dialogues with *Satanic Verses* author Salman Rushdie. In particular, one of Ahmed's most zealous attackers was Sheikh Omar Bakri, a Syrian-born British citizen who presented himself as Bin Laden's representative in London.

After September 11, Ahmed continued his efforts to reach out to Christians and Jews from his position in Washington. The renowned Pakistani Islamic scholar, educated at Catholic boarding schools in Pakistan, criticized attacks against Pakistani Christian churches and schools in October 2001. Two years later, he was invited by Judea Pearl, the father of Daniel Pearl, to participate in a series of interfaith dialogues organized by the American Jewish Committee. Daniel Pearl was the Wall St. Journal reporter murdered by Pakistani radicals because he was Jewish, American or both.

In the final chapter of *Islam Under Siege*, Ahmed calls for a new "global

paradigm"—a dialogue between and within civilizations. Muslims need to put themselves in the place of non-Muslims who fear them. Westerners need to listen to what Muslims are saying instead of always telling them how to think. Akhbar Ahmed is certainly not the only Muslim intellectual to call for this dialogue. But what makes this book—and its author—unique is that Ahmed not only outlines the path forward to reclaim Islam; he has actually put into practice the inclusivist Islamic values he describes—the values that all Muslims must incorporate in their daily lives to defeat the exclusivists. ■

CSID needs your Support!

Since 1999, CSID has worked to promote democracy, human rights, and freedom in the Muslim world and to build better relations and mutual understanding between the United States and the Muslim world. In these difficult and challenging times, we need your moral and financial support to succeed in our mission.

Please support CSID.

Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy

2121 K Street, NW, Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20037-1801