Conference Reports

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

On April 6-7, 2002, the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID) held its Third Annual Conference on the theme "Democratization and Political Violence in Muslim Societies" just outside Washington, DC, at the Sheraton Crystal City Hotel in Arlington, Virginia. The conference was cosponsored by the Institute for Global Cultural Studies, State University of New York, Binghamton, NY, and the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), VA.

The conference got off to a lively start on Saturday morning with Panel One: "Islam and Political Participation: Ideals, Actors, and Processes" which was chaired by Charles Butterworth of the University of Maryland, College Park. Asma Afsaruddin of the University of Notre Dame, IN, explored links between early Islamic discourse of the *Khulafa' al-Rashidun* era and modern Islamic conceptions of leadership in "Medieval Islamic Discourse on Legitimate Leadership and its Modern Implications."

Wanda Kruse of the University of Guelph, Canada, discussed the underestimated role played by non-governmental political actors in the Middle East in "Civil Society in the Democratization Process: A Case Study on Cairo Islamic Women's Organizations." Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad of the Minaret of Freedom Institute, MD, focused on the cases where democratic decision-making in government enhanced law and order in early Islamic history in "The Anti-Correlation between Democracy and Political Violence in the Experience of the *Khulafa' al-Rashidun*." Moataz A. Fattah of Cairo University closed the panel with an overview of empirical evidence about Muslims' attitudes towards democracy in "The Compatibilty of Muslims' Beliefs and Democracy: Survey Results."

Panel Two which was chaired by Jamal Barzinji of the International Institute of Islamic Thought had as its theme "Western Democracies and Authoritarian Muslim Regimes: Understanding the Relationship." Auwalu Hamisu Yadudu of Bayero University in no, Nigeria, analyzed the Shari`a

controversies in contemporary Nigeria in "Shari`a Implementation in Democratic Nigeria: Between Muslim Popular Will and Libertarian Concerns." Mohamed Mestiri of the Center for Civilizational Studies in Paris discussed the complex and varying effects of globalization on the prospects for democracy in the Muslim world in "New Democracy's Globalization and the End of Universal Democracy: Remarks on the Cross Meanings and Islamic Perspectives."

Fred Dallmayr of the University of Notre Dame laid out the consequences of the September 11 tragedy for the United States, the Muslim world, and international peace in "Lessons of September 11." Savas S. Barkcin of Bilkent University in Turkey pointed on the problematic assumptions underlying many discussions of Islam and democracy in "Exporting Democracy to the Muslim World: A Relevant Debate?"

The 2002 Hesham Reda Memorial Lecture and Keynote Luncheon Address was delivered by Tariq Ramadan of the College of Geneva in Switzerland, whose address was entitled "Muslims in the West: A Bridge to Democracy." Ramadan, a prominent advocate of interfaith dialogue and spiritual renewal among Muslims, called on all people of conscience to challenge facile assumptions and double standards that hamper not only dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims but also the successful integration of Muslims into western societies. Needless to say, the luncheon address was followed by a spirited question and answer session.

Panel Three, the last panel on Saturday, dealt with "Human Rights in the Muslim World: Meanings, Movements, and Obstacles" and was chaired by Louis Cantori of the University of Marlyland, Baltimore County. Mashood A. Baderin of the University of the West England in Bristol, UK presented the first paper of the panel, "Identifying Possible Mechanisms within Islamic Law for the Promotion and Practical Enforcement of Human Rights in Muslim States." Arwa Hassan of Transparency International in Germany went over the implications of the experiences of various civil society organizations in the Middle East in "Transparency and Good Governance in the Arab World: The Importance of Combatting Corruption."

Avis Asiye Allman, an independent scholar, compared and contrasted the ideology of the AK Party to past Islamist parties in Turkey in "Democratization of the Anatollian Peasants of Turkey: The AK Party Experiment." Riham A. Khafagy of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign chronicled ways in which the governments of Turkey and Jordan have alternated between restricting and coopting Islamist parties in "Hijacked Democracies: A Study of Turkey's and Jordan's General Elections (1989-95)."

The first day's final event was the Banquet Dinner: "US Policy towards Democracy in the Muslim World." There were three speakers: Ali Mazrui, a world-renowned scholar on Africa and Islam, is Chairman of CSID and Director of the Center for Global Studies, State University of New York, Binghamton, NY. Laith Kubba, is a senior program officer for the Middle East and North Africa at the National Endowment for Democracy and a leader within the Iraqi opposition movement; a prominent writer and advocate of dialogue between Muslims and the West. Akbar S. Ahmed is the former high commissioner for Pakistan to the United Kingdom and holds the Ibn Khaldun Chair at the School of International Service at American University, Washington, DC.

Ahmed critiqued fatalistic assumptions that the future would be dominated by clashes of civilizations that pit the Muslim world against the West, calling for increased emphasis on the promise of dialogue between civilizations. Far from a departure from the Islamic tradition, dialogue is at the core of the Islamic worldview, he noted, but warned that meaningful dialogue will be impossible in the absence of substantial reforms in three areas: Improved education in the Muslim world; democracy in the Muslim world; and media reforms – in the West as much as in the Muslim world – that foster open, unbiased communication between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Kubba laid out some of the core challenges facing Muslims around the world that have become clear since the calamity of September 11. In his view, the most pressing issue is reconciliation of the Islamic tradition with modernity. For this project to succeed, however, it must be rooted in, and driven by, an awareness of the centrality of Divine Revelation in Muslim life, and must address three widespread problems in the Muslim world:

- Conceptual barriers within Islamic discourse to distinguishing between essences and appearances – or "inner" and "outer" – in the interpretation of religious texts
- Systematic distortions in Muslims' perceptions of themselves and reality (i.e., the world and their place in it)
- Widespread aversion in Muslim societies to critical self-examinations and a tendency to allow emotional factors and current circumstances to distort one's self-assessment.

Mazrui's keynote address, the banquet's final one, explored ways in which "terrorism" is not an entirely new phenomenon in American life. While the threat of political terrorism is perhaps a new concern for most Americans, the dangers of race-based terrorism were until relatively recently a fact of life for many Americans, Mazrui noted, and proceeded to lay out

unexpected parallels between al-Qaida and the Ku Klan Klan in terms of both ideology and societal impact.

The second day of the conference began with Panel Four on "Political Violence in the Middle East: Causes and Consequences," chaired by Antony Sullivan, an associate at the University of Michigan. Kamran Asghar Bokhari of the University of Texas at Austin gave historical background on the concept of jihad and compared and contrasted its contemporary inter-pretations by neo-traditionalist Muslim groups in "The Social and Ideolog-ical Roots of Jihadism." Najib Ghadbian of the University of Arkansas explored the widely differing readings of Islam's view of violence in "Poli-tical Islam: Inclusion or Violence?"

Mohyeddin Kassar of the University of Illinois, Chicago, analyzes the social and cultural consequences of the fact that – unlike Islamic societies of the past – today's weak post-colonial states can not guarantee their citizens' safety in "The Muslim World: A Nation with National Security Spirit Lacking National Security Policy." Ahmed Ali Salem of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign ended the panel by analyzing the roles played on the international stage by various Islamic movements in "Transnational Activities of Islamic Movements: Genuine, Instrumental or Reactionary?"

Panel Five was chaired by Radwan Masmoudi, the executive director of CSID, and had as its theme "Fighting Terrorism and Protecting Democracy." Theodore P. Wright of State University of New York at Albany uses the case of the marginalized Muslim community in India to show that the normal benefits of a democratic political system are contin-gent on the successful integration of minority communities into the society at large in "Does Democratic Participation Reduce Political Violence: The Contrary Case of the Muslim Minority in India." Robert Crane of Crescent University discussed non-violence in the context of the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict in "Peace Through Justice in the Holy Land: The Spiritual Jihad of Satyagraha." In "Islam's Egalitarian and Pluralist Ethos," Louay Safi of the International Institute of Islamic Thought underlined the critical role that Islamic spirituality and ethics must play in any serious effort to create a more democratic and peaceful world.

A special luncheon was held after Panel Five – which was the last event of the conference proper – in honor of CSID Founding Members and Members of the Board of Directors.

Svend W. White
CSID Executive Committee Secretary
Board of Directors member