Fifth International Conference

IAIS, Kuala Lumpur, 27th-28th November 2017

Democratic Transitions in the Muslim World

In 1993, seminal political scientist Samuel Huntington wrote, "Islamic concepts of politics differ from and contradict the premises of democratic politics." (*The Third Wave, Page 267*).

Fast forward 25 years. The Muslim-majority nations are now more democratic than ever. Arab Spring has unleashed new dynamics noting both progress and reversals. There is a simultaneous rise of political freedoms and authoritarianism in parts of the Muslim world and some countries have exhibited strong preference for a liberal democracy. The generalized assertion that Huntington made about incompatibility of Islamic politics and democratic politics may have been outlived by experience. The real question now is not an ideological one, but more empirical. How Muslim societies have dealt with Islamic Democrats in power and how they have been transformed after assuming power? For our fifth international conference, we turn to this question.

Istanbul Network for Liberty is pleased to announce its fifth international conference on *"Democratic Transition in the Muslim World"* to discuss one of the most sensitive issues of international politics today: compatibility of Muslim societies with the liberal democracy. **The conference will be organized by Istanbul Network for Liberty on 27ᵗʰ-28ᵗʰ November 2017 in collaboration with the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS) at IAIS, Kuala Lumpur**.

This is a call for participation in one of the most critical debates of our times. You may like to register as a participant, send a proposal to sponsor a panel or submit an abstract for a paper. Please feel free to email your interest at info@istanbulnetwork.org.

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Democratic Transitions in the Muslim World

Historical Background, Rationale and Context

The foundation of modern states is a secular-democratic dispensation, where the institution of religion is separated from the domain of public authority, though it continues to exercise social influence. The sovereign power belongs to people, who chose their representatives, where the public authority is expected to be neutral towards the people and their beliefs, and pluralism prevails. In the Muslim majority nations, this debate is still in progress. For a good part of twentieth century, most Muslim nations, in post-colonization times, have lived under authoritarian rule. Their experience with a democratic order is rather new. Under the authoritarian rule, the ruling elites have typically chosen to suppress all kind of opposition, but more restrictions have been imposed on groups with Islamic identity, that we refer here loosely as Islamic Democrats (political parties with strong Islamic identity and an Islamization programme, adhering to an elected form of the government, while excluding any violent groups).

Islamic Democrats have, over decades, invested in building social support mechanisms, and have now become powerful stakeholders. In many countries, they have actually acquired power to run governments with the support of voters. In some other countries, these groups continue to yield political and constitutional power even if outside the government. In Bangladesh, democratic elements have long fought a war against religious groups, and it seems the former is winning lately. In Egypt, Muslim Brotherhood was ousted from power already and in Tunis, the Islamic Democrats have found synergy with broad based political alliance. In Turkey, Islam, religiosity and conservatism have been a rising political debate in the struggle for pluralism, and democracy after a long history of state-sponsored secularism. In Malaysia, the mainstream party is under pressure from both the liberal opposition and conservative Muslim leadership.

It is clear that the paths which the Muslim societies have taken in context of religion and politics after the Arab Spring are divergent. In some countries, Islamic Democrats have questioned the credentials of incumbents on account of corruption and in some cases on account of incumbents 'loyalty' to the West. As it is usually believed, all politics is local. However, what can be generalized in the Muslim political world is presence of tension between the voices of liberal, pluralistic and inclusive order and dogmatic, monolithic, and exclusive order. Furthermore, this tension can be impregnated with a more violent and less harmonious social dispensation, which is not likely to be restrained within the geographic boundaries of the Muslim majority nations.

As compared with twentieth century, there are more Muslim-majority nations who live under democratic regimes. But at the same time, the political debate in these societies is influenced by particular interpretations of Islam even more. In addition, we need to look at the experience of non-violent, democratic Islamic political movements and separate them from the violent political groups. Finally, one may wonder, what are the possible consequences of more powerful Islamic Democrats for the democratic dispensation in Muslim societies and how they are coping with this rising power base? What does it hold for particularly peace, harmony and liberal democracy in these societies?

Overarching Questions

This Conference aims at addressing following questions from the perspectives of political theory, sociology, theology, social theology, law and constitution. Students and scholars in these disciplines are invited to contribute in this important conference.

1. What are the possible consequences of more powerful Islamic Democrats for peace, harmony and liberal democracy in Muslim societies and how they are coping with this rising power base?
2. How can we differentiate the experience of non-violent, Islamic democratic parties from the violent political groups?
3. How can we quest the traces of the ideas of liberal democracy, market economy, and civil society over the religious political movements in Muslim societies?
4. How Islamic Democrats have performed in power in terms of governance, nation-building and economic development?
5. What are the anchor points which define the campaign of Islamic Democrats e.g. corruption, hudood, foreign policy etc.?
6. What is the influence of political Islam on competitive politics in terms of discourse, public policy preferences and bureaucratic systems?
7. What changes in narrative, public policy and constitutions are necessary to strengthen peace, rule of law and tolerance in the Muslim world?

About Organizer

Founded in Istanbul in 2011, the Istanbul Network for Liberty was originally a group of individuals who are dedicated to advance universal human values such as liberty, peace, tolerance, respect, integrity, and equality under the law among the world's Muslim communities. Most are Muslims, others are friends of Muslims. They all believe that freedom is not an alien concept for Islam, and open societies, with a strong commitment to individual liberty, the rule of law, the protection of private property, free markets, free speech and limited government are possible in the Muslim world.

Transforming from a network of individuals, the Istanbul Network for Liberty (L) Foundation (LAF 00194) has acquired the status of a non-profit Labuan foundation in Malaysia. It is governed by a [Board of Directors](#) comprising a diverse group of think tank leaders active in various countries.

Since its foundation, the Istanbul Network has organized four international conferences, which have been held in Morocco, Pakistan, and twice in Turkey. The topics have included civil society, democracy and market economy, reason and tradition, and role of individual in the context of Islam.

Papers presented in these conferences are available here. One important milestone is publication of a book "Islamic Foundations of a Free Society" edited by Noah El Harmouzi and Linda Whetstone by Institute of Economic Affairs, that largely comprised of papers presented in these conferences. These conferences have been followed by several local activities in different countries. Examples of impact of this work can be read here.

Call for Abstracts & Papers

Istanbul Network for Liberty invites scholars of political theory, sociology, theology, social theology, and law to submit abstracts to participate in our fifth international conference *"Democratic Transitions in the Muslim World"* using following guidelines.

Last date for submission of Abstracts	25th June 2017
Notification of Acceptance	5th July 2017
Last date for submission of draft papers	25th September 2017
Comments on draft papers	10th October 2017
Last date for submission of complete papers	31st October 2017
Conference	27th-28th November 2017

Instructions for Contributors

- The abstracts and papers should follow APA referencing style and British English.
- Abstracts should be around 200-300 words. The Abstract should clearly establish a relationship between the planned paper and one or more questions and themes as announced.
- The accepted papers should be of 6,000-8,000 words and should not have been published or presented elsewhere. They should clearly establish author's opinion in response of identified questions/themes and should follow normal academic standards.
- Referenced/cited text should not exceed 19% of the paper.
- The papers presented in the Conference will be published in the proceeding volume.
- Joint submissions are acceptable, however travel grant for all co-authors cannot be guaranteed.
- ***Interested authors are requested to send their bio-note (maximum of 50 words) and Abstract to hakan@istanbulnetwork.org by 25th June 2017.***