



## **CSID Annual Report 2016**

The Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy is the pre-eminent non-governmental organization based in Washington DC, and dedicated to the study of Islamic and democratic political thought, to merging them into a modern synthesis, and to educating US policymakers and the public about the implications of this fusion for international relations and policy.

The Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy works on advocating for democracy, good governance, and respect of human rights in the Middle East with a focus on Tunisia. We do this by working and interacting with several institutions and experts to convince policy makers of our vision.

In 2016, with generous assistance from donors and funding institutions, especially the Sinan Wren Foundation, CSID enhanced its functioning around a new set of core objectives. Core objectives include:

- increasing CSID's presence in Washington DC, in the U.S., and globally
- supporting and showcasing research and scholarship on Islam and democracy
- promoting the Tunisian model and increasing support for the democratic transition
- educating policymakers, media, and the general public with regards to the roots of radicalization in the Muslim world
- organizing and cooperating with Muslim and diaspora communities to support the promotion of democracy in U.S. foreign policy and internationally.

## I. CSID Annual Conference and Muslim Democrat of the Year Award:

CSID organized its 17th Annual Conference around the theme of:

***"Democratization, Authoritarianism, & Radicalization:  
Exploring the Connections"***



on Thursday, April 21, 2016, Renaissance Hotel, Washington DC. In this annual meeting that has become a tradition for the Washington D.C. policy and academic community, roughly 200 U.S. officials and policymakers, foreign dignitaries and activities, and scholars and academics from around the world gathered to exchange analyses of the current troubling situations in the Middle East and North Africa as well as provide measured policy recommendations to combat violent extremism and restore hope for democracy in the region.

In her welcoming remarks, Dr. Asma Afsaruddin, Chair of CSID's Board of Directors, she called for special attention to be paid to the connection between authoritarianism and radicalization in order to better inform democracy promotion initiatives in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond. She noted the gap that persists between academics, researchers, and policy makers, and the need for policy makers to acknowledge the repercussions of decisions made in the name of

expediency and at the expense of a holistic and nuanced approach.



**Dictatorship as the Main Cause of Violence and Extremism - Congressman Keith Ellison**

Dr. Afsaruddin then welcomed

US Congressman Keith Ellison (D-MN), who opened the conference by saying that it is an imperative to not only spread the message of the compatibility of Islam and democracy, but to participate in making it a reality. In the battle of ideas, Congressman Ellison said that an organized and unwavering constituency must rally in order to support it and bring it to fruition. Connecting this to the case of Tunisia, the Congressman insisted that the United States must do more to stand by the country in what has been a very difficult democratic transition.

Congressman Ellison concluded by highlighting the impact that a democratic Tunisia will have on neighboring countries: *"I believe that if the Tunisian experiment lasts and sustains, it will be a great light for the region. I don't believe the flame of democracy has been snuffed out in Egypt; it has been suppressed. the flame of democracy is still burning in the hearts of the people."*

### **Panel 1: Countering Extremism, Promoting Democracy**

The first panel of the conference was chaired by Professor Tamara Sonn, Professor in the History of Islam at Georgetown University, who welcomed and introduced the panelists. The first panelist of the day was Hassan Abbas, Professor and Chair of the Department of Analytical Studies at the College of International Security Affairs (CISA) at the National Defense University (NDU). He presented his paper on *"Iraq's Anti-ISIS Militias: Implications for Democracy."* Because most of the writings regarding ISIS are policy-oriented and speak almost exclusively from the lens of security, Dr. Abbas traveled to Iraq 9 times in the last two years conducting interviews with religious and civic leaders in Baghdad, Karbala, and Samra in order to go beyond the security lens and bring a nuanced and informed reading of the spike in violence and discord in Iraq.

In this field work, Dr. Abbas explained that not many Iraqis were aware of al-Sistani's fatwa and still more expressed misunderstandings of its message, believing it to sanction armed group activity in general. While it is important to recognize that some of these militias have been successful in fending off ISIS' advances, Dr. Abbas



recommended that greater effort be put toward converting these groups into local police forces that may come to serve a common national goal.

Sahar F. Aziz, Associate Professor at Texas A&M University School of Law and a nonresident fellow at the Brookings Doha Center, presented her forthcoming article "Rethinking Counter-terrorism in the Age of ISIS" in which she explains that failing states have been serving as a haven for extremism. Dr. Aziz explained that although the causes of violent extremism are often local, the repercussions are worldwide and the approach to addressing it must therefore take these converging angles into account. ***"Global counter-terrorism strategies," she said, "often focus on the symptoms rather than addressing the underlying causes of the violence," leading to counterproductive results.***



Dr. Nader Hashemi, Director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Denver, spoke about, ***"Democratic Peace Theory Revisited."*** Dr. Hashemi posited his unique variation of peace theory: the more that democratization advances, the less the likelihood of violence. He continued, "when democratic openings are closed, when moderate Islam is pushed out, militant and violent Islamic groups are empowered," pointing to the example of Egypt under President al-Sisi.

Beyond excluding and persecuting the Muslim Brotherhood and consolidating power for the military, Dr. Hashemi drew attention to the experiences of Mohamed Soltan, a former political prisoner in Egypt, within the Egyptian prison system, and the extent to which prisoners were exposed to violent extremist ideologies and radicalized within. Noting the unfortunate statements of prominent U.S. politicians, including House Speaker Paul Ryan praising "democracy in Egypt," it does not appear that the United States remains committed to democratization.



## Panel 2: Strategizing Democratization

Qamar ul Huda, U.S. Department of State and moderator of this second panel, spoke to the need to build upon Congressman Ellison's morning remarks and address the next steps ahead to promote and protect democratic aspirations around the world. He then introduced the panel's first speaker, Kamran Bokhari, Fellow in the Program on Extremism at George Washington University, who assessed the difference between the reality of what is happening as opposed to what ought to happen regarding the path to democracy, "which remains unclear because we lose track of the reality on the ground."



Dr. Bokhari presented his assessment outlining three main dynamics shaping the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East and North Africa; those are autocratic meltdown (or, the breakdown of autocratic regimes), geo-sectarianism, and jihadism. While each of these dynamics have distinguishing features and effects of different shapes, they interact deeply; Dr. Bokhari remarked that one of the most evident interactive dynamics is seen in the way in which "both jihadism and geo-sectarianism are exploiting autocratic meltdown," particularly in Syria and Yemen.

Natana J. Delong-Bas, Assistant Professor in the Theology Department at Boston College, presented her research on "***Citizenship and Authoritarianism in Saudi Arabia after the Arab Spring***," which focused on the application of the two pillars of Saudi citizenship: wasatiyya and wataniyya, or moderation and citizenship respectively. Dr. Delong-Bas explained how wasatiyya and wataniyya are employed to sustain the Saudi monarchy, and the ways in which these terms are defined and applied to maintain divisions within the society while avoiding outright conflict. Dr. Delong-Bas noted the tension between "official opposition to extremism and leaving in place concepts that seem to promote or encourage extremism," such as the concept of "promotion of virtue and prevention of vice," which has been a rallying cry for groups serving as theological police.

Maria Holt, the final speaker on this panel spoke on "***Aspirations for a Dignified Life: Palestinians in a Post-National World***," with the rise of ISIS which seeks to erase the artificial borders that colonialism brought, the aspirations for a modern nation-state of Palestinians may fall by the wayside. Although feelings of attachment to a homeland called Palestine remain strong, the time of nations and their states seems to be passing, argued Dr. Holt. Palestinians, she said, have not been immune to the ideological debates between nationalism and Islamism, which sees beyond state borders and seeks an identity not bound by territory.

***Keynote Luncheon Banquet with Abdelfattah Mourou:***

Headlining the Luncheon panel was Abdelfattah Mourou, Vice-President of the Tunisian Parliament and Co-Founder of the Ennahdha party, who addressed the audience on the experiences of his party in participating in power in Tunisia and on the ways in which the international community, and the United States in particular, must help ensure the success of Tunisia's democratic experience. "While the Arab nations escaped colonialism and developed sovereign states," said Mourou, "they still don't have autonomy over their political, social, or economic realities," noting the influence of regional and international dynamics on the domestic situation in his country.



Knowing that the topic of extremism and radicalization was foremost on the minds of most American policy-makers and academics, Mourou said that "The world today is a world of communication, a world of diversity, a world of divergent opinions," and one that Mourou says requires all Tunisians to listen to one another and build a future together based on common purpose; "we want dictatorship to not come back, or oppression to return - how, then, can brothers oppress brothers after the revolution?"



Following Sheikh Mourou, Mr. Michael Kirtley gave a brief presentation about a new project that he is leading and directing, called "**Bridge to Hope**" which seeks to educate the American people about Islam and Muslims and replace the growing fear of Islam and Muslims with feelings of love, compassion, and understanding. He appealed to the audience to support this project which comes at a critical

time, when feelings of fear and confusion are rising on both sides of the Atlantic, which, if unchallenged, could make relations between Islam and the America (and the West in general) more difficult and complicated in the coming years and decades.



Muslim Democrat of the Year Award - Dr. Jamal Barzinji and Dr. Taha Jaber Alalawani (postmortem)

The second half of the luncheon panel was the presentation of the Muslim Democrat of the Year Award for 2016, particularly unique this year as it was awarded to two towering figures within the American Muslim community - Dr. Jamal Barzinji and Dr. Taha Jabir Al-Alwani -

both of whom have recently passed and were founding members of CSID whose legacies deserve great admiration.

### **Panel 3: Islam, Moral Authority, and Political Rights**

Luke Peterson, Assistant Professor in History at the University in Pittsburgh, who presented his research on "***Palestine-Israel and the Neo-liberal Ideal***." In this paper, Peterson argued that U.S. corporate expansion into Israeli and Palestinian lands was taking advantage of the "high reliance on state authorities by making deals that exploited local markets and benefited from low operational costs," effectively prolonging the conflict from both sides.

Peterson also showed how the cooperation between Israeli and American police forces was not only benefiting the Israeli security apparatus but also transforming American police units into "hyper-militarized forces," seen most evidently in Ferguson, Missouri. In addition to the "military-civilian technology exchanges" on

improving surveillance mechanisms both here and in Israel, expanded U.S. defense contracts with Israel serve to expand the already gargantuan U.S. army while ensuring that Israel remains in constant need for military equipment and training, thereby keeping American defense companies in business.

The second speaker, Anja Wehler-Schoeck, presented her paper on "***Preserving Stability in Jordan***". Beyond the need to improve educational curricula and focus on economic development and providing more employment opportunities, Wehler-Schoeck pointed to the fact that between seven and eight thousand mosques across the country have unauthorized Imams, of whom a significant percentage espouse ambivalent to outright celebratory positions on violent extremism. She therefore recommended that an education and official certification mechanism be instituted immediately in order to better control the rhetoric that prevails in mosques.

Alexis Thompson, PhD candidate in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at the University of Chicago presented his paper "***Negotiated Moral Authority in the Struggle against Violent Islamic Dogma***." Thompson stated that "our attempts to undermine a terrorist ethic fail because we are not them... We lose sight of the fact that our best intentions are not immediately obvious to our enemies," and this comes from the fact that the West fundamentally misunderstands motivations of violent extremist groups".

The last speaker was Arafat Mazhar, Director of "Engage", a non-profit organization in Pakistan, who presented his research on "***Challenging Blasphemy Laws in Pakistan***." Mazhar stated that Pakistan's blasphemy law is "a perversion of the Islamic legal tradition it claims to protect and uphold." Using the constructed binary of god-less secularism versus the custodians of God's religion, Mazhar explained the ways in which the marriage of Pakistan's religious leaders and right-wing movements has created a political climate in which any challenge to the immutability of the blasphemy law is extremely precarious.





#### **Panel 4 - The Future of Islam and Democracy after the Arab Spring**

The final panel of the Conference featured five leading academic and political experts to draw upon their experiences working on and in the Middle East and North Africa and assess the future of Islam and democracy in the region. Daniel Brumberg, Professor at Georgetown University, was the panel moderator and kept the discussion focused on pinpointing areas of potential rather than dwelling on the many pitfalls of recent years.

Professor John Voll rejected the facile assumption that authoritarianism offers stability, which he contends has allowed many U.S. administration officials and policy makers to argue that the road to democracy may include a period of authoritarianism and that this is an acceptable, perhaps even necessary, step in the democratization process. Insisting that all the evidence points to the contrary, and that "authoritarianism leads only to authoritarianism and does not lead to democracy," Professor Voll cautioned American policy makers from privileging short-term fixes that will have dangerous long-term repercussions.

Dr. Nathan Brown followed Professor Voll's recommendations by lamenting that politics in the Middle East is broken and that it no longer holds the promise that it did five years ago, as the post-revolutionary periods in most of the Arab Spring countries have slipped back into repression and authoritarianism. In one sense, Professor Brown explains, "democracy is very, very much alive," insofar as it remains the objective of political dissidents throughout the region, but it is a long way from being realized. As elements of old regimes reassume power, the fear, he said, is that faith in politics, that the political process can produce positive results, will be destroyed.



***Carl Gershman, President of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED),*** spoke about the "authoritarian resurgence," where 12 out of 18 countries in the MENA region hold lower political rankings now than before the revolutions, according to Freedom House. Gershman noted that respect for the important role of

civil society organizations as critical components of democratic life - as seen in Tunisia - must be emphasized for countries like Egypt to return to the democratization process anew.

***Amb. William Taylor, Executive Vice President of the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP)***, closed the final panel of the conference by speaking about the urgency of supporting Tunisia's democratic transition. ***The success of Tunisia's democracy is not only in its own interests, but "is an answer to the question of if democracy can succeed [at all]" in the Middle East and North Africa.***

### ***Concluding Remarks***

In closing, Dr. Radwan Masmoudi and Dr. Nader Hashemi reflected on the reports and analyses presented throughout the day. Dr. Masmoudi argued that, at a minimum, the United States and democracies around the world have an obligation to do no harm, which means they must stop supporting dictators in their oppression; more than that, however, the world's democracies must be more serious about strengthening and supporting the democratic aspirations of nations by offering real and tangible assistance, and quickly.

Tunisia has accomplished a great deal, particularly writing a new democratic constitution, and proving that democracy is possible. Now, with the economic challenges that remain, the United States and others must stand with Tunisia and help it realize the goal of seeing the world's first Arab democracy to fruition.

Dr. Hashemi rebuked the current approach of top U.S. officials to ignore gross human rights violations in places like Egypt and elsewhere and proclaim, as Sec. Kerry and House Speaker Paul Ryan did, that Egypt is on the path to democracy. Hashemi highlighted the coded messaging in such statements - namely, that authoritarianism can lead to democracy - and insisted that as violence only begets violence, so too with authoritarianism. It is therefore imperative that the United States and democratic allies across the world develop more sensible strategies for dealing with crises in the Middle East and elsewhere, and not continue to aid and abet corrupt tyrants and dictators across the region.

It is worth noting that attendees of the conference had the chance to listen to and interact with congressman Keith Ellison and state department officials. During the day, several important discussions and interaction take place as speakers and guests socialize over lunch or during coffee breaks.

Click **HERE** to watch the videos of the all the conference Panels:

<https://www.csidonline.org/events/annual-conferences/17th-annual-conference/>

## II. National Press Club Panels

CSID has organized several events to highlight the successes and the challenges facing Tunisia as it continues down the path of democracy. Almost all of these events are aimed at the typical Washington DC crowd of policy experts and policy makers. We hold many of these events at National Press Club or hotels in DC within short distance to think tanks and research institutions. The latest events are:

Over two hundred journalists, writers, and bloggers participated in these events, resulting in over three dozen one-on-one interviews with journalists following the events.

### A. Creating Jobs and Saving Democracy



On Wednesday, May 4, 2016, CSID organized a Public Event & Discussion on: Tunisia – Creating Jobs and Saving Democracy with **Mr. Zied Ladhari**, Minister of Vocational Training and Employment, at The National Press Club (Holeman Lounge)

Light lunch was provided from 12 to 12:30 pm, and the event was attended by about 60 people, experts, academics, and policymakers who follow Tunisia closely. Mr. Ladhari highlighted the efforts of the Tunisian government to create jobs and economic development in Tunisia, and asked for help and assistance from the US Government and the international community in facilitating and providing economic assistance and investments in Tunisia's nascent democracy.

## B. The Muslim Brotherhood Terrorist Designation Act of 2015? Implications for Egypt and the Region



On Thursday March 17th, the Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy (CSID) held a Conference at National Press Club on '***The Muslim Brotherhood Terrorist Designation Act: Implications for Egypt and the Region.***' Ebrahim Rasool, former South African Ambassador to the US, Nader Hashemi, Director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Denver, Neil Hicks, Director of Human Rights Promotion at Human Rights First, and Radwan Masmoudi, Founder and President of CSID, reflected their opinion on how this Congressional bill would affect Egypt and the region.

The Muslim Brotherhood Terrorist Designation Act passed by the House Judiciary Committee on February 24. The vote was along party lines (17 Republicans voted for it, and 10 Democrats voted against it). It calls on the State Department to designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group. In case the State Department rejects the bill, it should provide for sufficient evidence on why the MB is not a terrorist group.

Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool, believes that this bill will increase tensions in the Middle East. Quelling political dissent and labeling certain groups as terrorists will cause extremism to rise. According to Rasool, Nelson Mandela was previously designated by the US Congress as a terrorist even after he became a President. The designation was later removed only after Barak Obama became a President. According to Rasool, the recent suppressive measures which the current regime has taken in Egypt against peaceful protestors, torture, extra-judicial killing, and forced disappearance have prompted the European Parliament to issue a resolution against Egypt and recommend the suspension of military aid to Egypt. However, the U.S remained silent towards those atrocities and continued to support the Egyptian dictator.





Rasool also believed that the Islamists failure to accommodate the secularists and form an inclusive government, was a key factor that allowed the return of dictatorship in Egypt. Following the 2013 coup and the crushing of the protestors in Rabaa Square, extremist seized the opportunity and worked to convince the Islamists that democracy was a failure and Jihad was the only road for change.

Nader Hashemi, argued that Egypt is becoming another breeding ground for Islamic extremism. Hashemi discredited the recent congressional bill and described it as counter-productive, misguided, and a gift to ISIS and Qaeda, which will use it to further destabilize the region. According to Hashemi, the widely held belief that dictatorship promises continued stability is an optical illusion. For him, the collapse of long -standing dictators; Mubarak in Egypt, Ben Ali in Tunisia, and Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, is a clear evidence of the instability of dictatorship. Hashemi also believes that the argument that dictatorship is an alternative to chaos is not consistent with the Arab Spring which teaches us that the deeply rooted authoritarian regimes backed by the West are fragile and unstable.



Hashemi stated that the Arab spring led to the defeat of the Salafists and the Jihadists whose central ideological principle of armed struggle against dictator regimes, has been challenged by the success of Arab Spring's peaceful protests. During the post Arab Spring elections, Ayman Al Zawahiri expressed his dismay with the thousands of young men rallying

before the ballot box instead of lining up to fight for the cause of God. However, the violent crushing of the peaceful protestors in Rabaa Square in Egypt and the killing of thousands protestors in few hours had instigated more violence. For instance, before the 2013 coup, Egypt faced 90 terrorist attacks, however, the number of terrorist attacks increased to 700 after the coup.

Neil Hicks argued that the designation of MB as a terrorist organization is harmful to U.S interests and will increase instability and violence in Egypt and the Middle East. Some members of the MB such as Hamas, have been involved in terrorist attacks but others have participated in non-violent electoral processes. Tunisia exemplifies the non-violent faction of the Islamist parties. Ennahdha Party in Tunisia, managed to compromise with other political parties so as to push and accelerate Tunisian transition to democracy. Moreover, Muslim brothers have served in governments with which U.S has friendly relationship eg. Jordan, Kuwait and Morocco. According to Hicks, when given the opportunity to organize freely, Muslim Brothers showed diversity and commitment to pluralism and democratic practices.

Radwan Masmoudi, started that he disagrees with many of the Muslim Brotherhood's policies, but that in no way justifies the military coup or designating them as terrorist organization. When a group makes political mistakes, they should pay at the ballot box, not by taking away their human rights. This event is not intended to defend the MB, but rather it seeks to support and defend democracy which is the only mechanism to solve the problems of Egypt and the Middle East, Masmoudi added. He also underscored the suffering of the region for 60 years under dictatorships which have been corrupt and unresponsive to public needs. When young people who form 60% of the population in the region lose hope in the political process, the possibility that those young people join extremist groups will increase and that definitely poses numerous threats and intensifies instability. Masmoudi, believes that the U.S should refrain from supporting repressive regimes in the region and side with the aspiration of the people for freedom and democracy. But, democracy must be inclusive and the exclusion of the MB from the political process will mean the end of democracy and can not in any way lead to a genuine and smooth transition.

***Dr. Masmoudi said that the designation of the MB as a terrorist group would serve as a recruiting tool to extremist groups and prompt many young people to seek refuge in violence and join those groups which consider democracy as anti-Islamic.***

**Click [HERE](http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs104/1102084408196/archive/1124242470928.html) to see the full report and watch the videos of the event:**  
<http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs104/1102084408196/archive/1124242470928.html>

### **C. Supporting Tunisia: A priority for the Trump Administration?**

The Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID) organized a luncheon panel at the Washington Marriott Metro Center Hotel on Thursday, November 17, 2016. With over 120 of Washington's most influential political and civil society leaders in attendance, this event was a meeting of policymakers who are committed to advancing partnerships and collaborations between the Tunisia and the US.



Dr. Radwan Masmoudi, President of CSID, opened the panel discussion by citing a poll by Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) that revealed that 56% of Americans believe that Islamic values are incompatible with American values, with a staggering 76% among registered Republicans. This reflects the need for CSID's mission and programs designed to demonstrate not only that Islamic and democratic values are compatible, but that in many ways they go hand in hand. It is therefore a deep belief of CSID that Tunisia's transition to democracy must be supported morally, technically and financially, and that this ought to be a top priority for the incoming U.S. administration.

Amb. Faycal Gouia, Ambassador of Tunisia to the United States, opened his remarks by talking about ways in which to further develop the Tunisian-American relationship. Ambassador Gouia pointed to the strategic partnership between the two countries in terms of security and military cooperation as well as trade and investment. Combatting terrorism and extremism is no doubt a serious preoccupation of the United States moving forward, and "Tunisia is serious about fighting terrorism" as well, he insisted. ***The Ambassador explained that it is because democracy is "the antithesis of the terrorist [project]" that extremist groups have been targeting the country, trying to derail the democratic process so that it cannot serve as a model for the region.***

Mr. Gregory LoGefro, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Maghreb Affairs, emphasized that Tunisia is "of increasing strategic interest to the United States" and that while he cannot speak for the incoming administration, he is confident that the U.S.-Tunisian strategic relationship will continue to grow based on Tunisia's stand for the advancement of democracy. Speaking about the security threats that the country has confronted since 2011, LoGefro pointed to the obvious improvement in the professionalism of Tunisian military and security forces in resisting and

undermining terrorist efforts, a fact most evident in the events of Ben Guerdane in March 2016.



LeGofro explained that the United States is also committed to supporting Tunisia as it modernizes its economic policies, promotes entrepreneurship and explores opportunities to attract investment. All of these various avenues for deepening U.S.-Tunisian bilateral engagement are directly linked to the great importance and shared goals of the two countries, and demonstrate that the United States is indeed committed to Tunisia's success.

Ambassador William Taylor, Vice President of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), who had just returned from a trip to Tunisia, shared that the U.S. Institute of Peace is in the process of opening an office in Tunisia out of its firm belief in the promise that the Tunisian burgeoning democracy holds: "we are committed as an Institute to this country that lives peace in a difficult world." ***"Looking around to almost every other country in the region, it is self-evident that Tunisia represents a glimmer of hope for all, and has a vibrancy and engagement in its political and civil society that must be encouraged and continue to be supported."***

After hearing from the three speakers, all influential figures in Washington policy circles, the floor was opened for questions and comments from the audience, which included representatives of the current and incoming administrations, influential policy makers, and renowned academics and activists. It was a very lively and engaging debate which centered around some of the uncertainties regarding the foreign policy initiatives of the Trump administration as well as reinforcing the urgency of shoring up the Tunisian economy so that its democracy is not derailed from its path to stability and democratic consolidation.

**Click [HERE](https://www.csidonline.org/supporting-tunisia-a-priority-for-the-trump-administration/) to see the full report and watch the videos of the event:**  
<https://www.csidonline.org/supporting-tunisia-a-priority-for-the-trump-administration/>



### III. Banquet Events

#### A. Consolidating the First Democracy in the Arab World – Why Tunisia Matters:



On the occasion of the UN General Assembly in New York, **Former Prime Minister of Tunisia Ali Larayedh** made a brief visit to Washington D.C. to touch base with key policy makers, journalists and academics and refocus attention on the burgeoning democracy. CSID invited over 120 political and civil society personalities for a private luncheon event held on Sept. 22, 2016, at the Mayflower Hotel, Larayedh – who is currently the Vice President of the Ennahdha Party in Tunisia – spoke to the current successes and shortcomings facing the government in hopes of encouraging greater engagement with stakeholders in key sectors of Tunisian society.

Five and a half years after the revolution, Tunisia finds itself navigating murky waters. On the one hand, as Larayedh noted, elected officials managed to pass a new, democratic constitution, the most liberal and consensus-driven of the Arab world, and *“set up the necessary institutions to advance [along] the path of democracy; Tunisia declared war on terror and is now in full control using the judicial system as well as the security forces effectively.”*

While these are very important steps to securing the peace and stability of the country, Larayedh insisted that there is still a lot of work to be done to keep the country on the right path, particularly in addressing economic and social challenges that remain. As a current member of Parliament, he provided insights into the areas

identified for urgent attention, notably “financial, banking, monetary, investment, and tax reforms” that have already been passed.



Even with all these challenges and the progress being made to alleviate their negative impacts on society, **Larayedh** stressed that “the real demands of the Tunisian people and the real needs of the interior and marginalized areas in infrastructure, education, health sector, and other areas, cannot be ignored.” The national budget

of around \$14 billion has proven insufficient to meet even the minimal demands of keeping the administration moving, let alone covering new and much needed infrastructural projects as mentioned.

Audience members in attendance asked Larayedh precisely what role the international community, and the United States in particular, can play in lending support to Tunisia. In particular, two audience members inquired about the possibility of pursuing a Free Trade agreement and the Enterprise Development Fund to deepen the government’s cooperation with the United States. He answered that Tunisia not only needs direct financial assistance to be able to balance the federal budget, but would also benefit from greater trade with other nations, support to its once thriving tourism sector, and increased investment, the goal of an international conference **Tunisia2020** taking place in Tunisia in November of this year.



**Click [HERE](https://www.csidonline.org/consolidating-the-first-democracy-in-the-arab-world-why-tunisia-matters/) to see the full report and watch the videos of the event:**  
<https://www.csidonline.org/consolidating-the-first-democracy-in-the-arab-world-why-tunisia-matters/>

## IV. Legislative Branch Meetings, Organizing, and Outreach

### A. The House and the Senate:

Throughout 2016, we have engaged members of congress and the senate on a regular basis. Specifically, we maintain an open line of communication with the foreign relations committee in the house and the senate, and the Tunisia caucus staff. We meet with staff members on a regular basis formally and informally to give updates on the current situation in Tunisia and to hear from them on any developments on the Hill. At the center of our discussions is the US foreign aid package to Tunisia. Staffers from these offices are also regular attendees of CSID forums, panels, and roundtable discussions.



During delegation visits by Tunisia's political leaders some of whom were members of the Tunisian government, we set up high profile meetings on the Hill to accomplish two main goals.

- 1.Highlight the successes of the Tunisian transition to democracy and the need for US support though a robust and sustained foreign aid program in several key sectors (economy, military/security, civil society).
- 2.Inform legislators of the positive and stabilizing role that moderate Muslim Democratic Party Ennahdha is playing in the political scene in Tunisia.

One such high profile meeting took place on September 2016 between Former Prime minister Ali Larayedh and **House Foreign**

**Relations Committee Chairman Ed Royce and Ranking member Eliot Engel**. After the meeting Mr. Ali Larayedh met in the Halls of congress with several congressmen i.e. Keith Ellison, Jim Himes, John Louis, and André Carson.

The foreign relations committee and subcommittees held hearings during 2016 and we monitored in general the hearings related to the Middle East, with a special focus on Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. In some cases we are in direct contact with members of congress where we provide them with relevant information and we suggest questions to be explored during the Q/A session of the hearing. CSID provided testimony in some of these hearings as recent as 2015 at the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee on "U.S. Policy in North Africa."

See: <http://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/us-policy-in-north-africa-110415>

## **B. Executive Branch Meetings**

CSID participated in several meetings with government officials to advance CSID's advocacy for Islam and democracy, supporting democratic outcomes in our focus countries, and increasing aid and support to the same countries. This included discussion of our letter to Barack Obama emanating from the annual conference. The meetings included several meetings with White House officials and several meetings with State Department officials up to Special Advisor to the President level at the White House and the Under Secretary level at the State Department.

## **C. Tunisian Embassy:**

CSID has a good working relationship with the Tunisian embassy and the Ambassador. We communicate and meet regularly with the officer in charge of congressional relations at the Tunisian embassy to coordinate our asks and talking points especially around bills related to the US foreign aid. At the beginning of the year communications with the Embassy was not consistent and at times it was very difficult to get an answer from them on a timely manner. However, things are getting better especially during the past six months. We sensed that the embassy is worried about a Trump administration and came to realize that cooperating with our organization is beneficial.

## **D. Think Tanks:**

Institutions and think-tanks hold panels and roundtable discussions on various topics related to the Middle East. CSID monitors these events on a regular basis and participates in them in different capacities by providing co-sponsorship, speakers, or by commenting and raising relevant topics.

The latest panel discussion was held on Nov. 2016 at the Stimson Center on the topic of “***Politicizing Islam: Exploring Means and Objectives***” where Dr. Radwan Masmoudi was one of four panelists that offered their perspective on the topic. See: <https://www.stimson.org/content/politicizing-islam-exploring-means-and-objectives>.

## **E. Public and Private University Lectures and Dinners**

To further core objectives and enhance relationships with key partners, CSID co-organized or participated in over a dozen lectures and panels in several cities and states on the east coast of the United States. Among them,



- 121 U.S. Experts Call on President Obama to Visit Tunisia (<https://www.csidonline.org/121-u-s-experts-call-on-president-obama-to-visit-tunisia/>)
- Clear Set of Standards Needed for Engagement with 'Political Islamists' (<https://www.csidonline.org/clear-set-of-standards-needed-for-engagement-with-political-islamists/>)

## F. Democracy Promotion and Training:

In September, CSID won a new grant from the National Endowment for Democracy for programs in transitional justice and university-community dialogue and action. The Washington office continues to support the CSID Tunisia offices grant reporting and applications for grants and other support. CSID has met with representatives of every relevant funding program in the U.S. government to stay abreast of opportunities. This includes CSID's ongoing effort to win a grant with Georgetown University Law Center's Street Law program to update and implement democracy training curricula.

## G. Tunisian Community Outreach:

In addition, CSID has co-organized events with the **Tunisian United Network (TUN)** especially during visits by Tunisian leaders to the United States. These events are meant to bring the Tunisian diaspora and visiting political leaders together and engage in meaningful discussions over the situation back home. The most recent events were a dinner in Virginia in honor of sheikh Abdelfatah Mourou and a lunch gathering in New Jersey/New York area with former prime minister Ali Larayedh.



Note: TUN is non-partisan organization that brings Tunisians together in various occasions. It started in New York/New Jersey area and it has the potential of establishing chapters in other cities across the US where there is a concentration of Tunisians. For the second year in a row and during the summer vacation TUN has sent a group of American Tunisians youth to Tunisia where they volunteer to teach English and engage with young Tunisians in cross culture dialogue. The program has been a success and depending on funding, it could be expanded.

## **H. CSID Bulletin and Website:**

During 2016, CSID maintained and upgraded its website and social media pages, as well as its e-mailing list, which contains almost **45,000 people**, including 10,000 in Washington DC, who are policymakers, experts, academics, and activists in various NGO's throughout the world.

CSID Website: <https://www.csidonline.org/>

CSID Tunisia Website <https://www.csidtunisia.org/en/>

In addition to reports and announcements about CSID activities and conferences, CSID sends out a ***Monthly E-mail Bulletin*** which contains various articles, related to the topic of Islam and Democracy, or the future and challenges of democracy in the Arab and Islamic world.

### ***Sample Email Bulletins:***

1. Fight ISIS with Democracy - February 15, 2016 (2/15/2016)
2. Why the Muslim Brotherhood is NOT a terrorist organization - by (2/26/2016)
4. US must support Tunisia to defeat violent extremism... (3/4/2016)
5. Supporting Tunisia's Imperiled Transition - Monday, April 11, 16 (4/11/2016)
3. From Political Islam to Muslim Democracy - June 22, 2016 (6/22/2016)

**CSID Email Bulletin Archives.** You can view all previous CSID Bulletins, sent since June 3, 2008, on this page:

<http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs093/1102084408196/archive/1102122132113.html>

*Established in 1999, CSID is the leading non-profit, non-partisan research organization dedicated to studying Islamic and democratic political thought and merging them into a modern synthesis. It has had projects and activities in over 25 countries with support of the U.S. Department of State, the United States Institute of Peace, the National Endowment for Democracy, the UN Development Program, the UN Democracy Fund, and a number of private foundations and institutions.*

---

Visit the CSID Website for more information:

<https://www.csidonline.org/>

**Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy**

1050 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 500

Washington D.C. 20036

<https://www.csidonline.org/>

202-772-3370



*Many of the Activities of CSID in 2016 were funded by a generous grant from the Sinan Wren Foundation, Istanbul, Turkey.*