The Second International Conference on the Muslim Ummah organized by CIGA brings renowned scholars to discuss Sectarianism, Nationalism, Secularism, and Colonialism.

CIGA Student Society hosts British Speaker Mohammed Hijab for a Lecture on Liberalism.

‘Diversity in Islamic Thought’ by IZU Professor Dr. Fatimah Bint Abdullah.
This issue will start our second year of The Strategist, where CIGA’s news, views, and activities are briefly reviewed. Each quarter, The Strategist provides our regular readers with a digest of CIGA’s conferences, seminars, workshops, book discussions, publications, and other activities. In this issue CIGA’s Second International Conference on the Muslim Ummah is herein briefly summarized and reviewed. The theme of the conference had focused on investigating and discussing major fault lines within Muslim societies including the challenges of sectarianism, nationalism, secularism, colonialism, and the role of religion in society. These significant topics have been at the core of the problems that have been impeding the political stability, social progress, and economic development of many Muslim societies. Important contributions to the understanding and analysis of these issues were presented, debated, and examined by over twenty renowned scholars who attended this significant event held at IZU this past October.

This issue also includes four important book discussions that were organized by CIGA last fall, and authored by some of the most important authorities in the fields of international relations and Islamic political thought. In addition, this issue covers a major event organized by the CIGA Student Society for a British speaker on the effects of ‘Liberalism’ on the Muslim youth, especially those living in Western societies. Finally, two views on major issues, one political and the other intellectual, written by our research staff, are also included in this issue.

Geopolitics is the field of study that uses geographic influences on power relationships in the understanding of international relations. But the importance of using geopolitical factors in the analysis of international politics has expanded in the past century to include not only intrinsic factors such as topography, climate, and the environment, but also extrinsic ones including history, economics, military power, populations, resources, and culture. Hence, geopolitics is one of the most important fields of research that CIGA is currently working on. In the next few months, CIGA will organize three major events with a particular focus on ‘Geopolitics’: two conferences and a workshop. The conferences will be in April 2019 under the titles Islamophobia: Analyzing its Discourse and Geopolitics (April 12-14) and The Question of Palestine: Examining History, Geopolitics, and Future Prospects (April 27-29). In addition, a workshop on Civil-Military Relations in four Muslim countries and the Geopolitics of Pakistan and Kashmir will also be held this summer. Stay tuned.

Prof. Dr. Sami A. Al-Arian
Director

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The Center for Islam and Global Affairs (CIGA) at Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University (IZU) organized the second international conference focused on the topic of the Muslim Ummah, in cooperation with Alwaleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding (ACMCU) at Georgetown University in Washington DC, and the College of Islamic Studies (CIS) at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) in Doha, Qatar.

In his welcoming words of the opening session, CIGA Director Dr. Sami Al-Arian noted that currently there is much scholarly debate about the decline of power and wealth in Muslims countries and that the conference’s objective was to bring together scholarly and bright minds to appropriate answers to such challenges the Muslim world is facing. IZU Rector Dr. Mehmet Bulut observed that the problems faced by Muslims are not easy to discuss and are hard to solve. He referred to the move of the United States embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and the disruption of Turkey’s economy. In his opening address, Dr. Louay Safi, representing one of the conference sponsors - Hamad Bin Khalifa University, expressed his hope for the future of the Muslim world.

**Plenary session: ‘The Legacy of Colonialism, Liberalism, and Modernity’**

The session opened with Dr. Halil Berktay (Ibn Haldun University) explaining the intersecting and overlapping reactions to the challenge of colonialism by two important Turkish intellectuals of the early 20th century, Mehmet Akif Ersoy – a leading Islamist and reformer of his time – and Ömer Seyfettin – a modernist and a strong proponent of Turkism as against Ottomanism. In his talk Dr. Berktay concluded that both approaches, whether based on Islamism or secularism, rejected and confronted colonialism and its manifestations in the region. The second talk was held by Dr. Joseph Massad (Columbia
University). He spoke on the Arab world’s historical transition during the 1950’s -1970’s from political and economic projects based on the principles of national liberation to the values of Western liberalism. Dr. Massad examined the causes of the transformation and the differing principles and goals of liberation and liberalism and their impact on the contemporary world. Finally, Dr. Farid Esack (University of Johannesburg) spoke about the urgencies and challenges of Muslims and Muslim societies to commit themselves to their own liberation and to solidarity with the oppressed. As Dr. Esack believes, such a commitment must be unfettered from the ideals of Pax Americana and be realigned within the broader framework of inter-religious solidarity in struggles for justice. The session was moderated by Dr. Sami Al-Arian (IZU).

Session I: ‘The Challenge of Sectarianism’

The scholars of the first session, which took place on the second conference day, noted that the challenge of sectarianism in Muslim societies is shaped by geopolitical interests rather than Islamic theology or law. Dr. Nader Hashemi (University of Denver) argued that states can never achieve democracy, political order or human rights under a specter of sectarianism while also criticizing the Iranian foreign policy concerning Syria and the Saudi sectarian narrative that has been openly embraced by U.S. President Donald Trump. Dr. Ahmad Mousalli (American University of Beirut) addressed in his talk the history of the interplay between regional politics and the Sunni-Shiite divide in the Middle East, as well as their impact on the region’s wars and political parameters for development. In his comparative study
on ways to provide sectarian peace and reconciliation within the current state of the Islamic world, Dr. Mehmet Ali Büyükkara (İstanbul Şehir University) compared the supra-denominational approach with the multi-cultural post-modern methodology to explore which would provide the most effective and consistent solution to the sectarian crisis. The session was moderated by Dr. Ömer Çaha (IZU).

**Session II: ‘The Challenge of Secularism’**

The second session of the conference included a talk by Dr. François Burgat (National Centre for Scientific Research, France) who noted how people in France have been criminalizing the Muslim Brotherhood movement in the name of secularism while at the same time fake Muslim elites are being created who are not even representing the whole French Muslim population, raising the question of who is a good and who is a bad Muslim. Dr. Ömer Taşgetiren (IZU) discussed the importance of negotiations of secularism by Islamic political actors in Turkey and argued for its usage as a possible working model in Muslim societies. Turkey’s “authoritarian modernization” example was presented as a pre-condition of democracy in Muslim authoritarian societies outside a hard and revolutionary transformation. Finally, Dr. Heba Raouf Ezzat (Ibn Haldun University) explored in her presentation the core concepts that caused a shift in the discourse of Islamists since the “Liberal Age.” She addressed the question of how the Muslim mind sees the world, how globalization has affected it, what the ideas it has engaged in formulating of deconstructing it are, and how can we see the way forward. The session was moderated by Dr. Nagihan Haliloğlu (Ibn Haldun University).
Session III: ‘Role of Religion in Society’

In his presentation on religious and doctrinal challenges, Dr. Jonathan Brown (Georgetown University) raised an alarm as he noted that there is a concerted effort to produce Muslim scholars who will deconstruct elements of Islam in the United States. Dr. Louay Safi (Hamad Bin Khalifa University) maintained in his talk on Shari’ah and nation states that Muslims in earlier periods never forced non-Muslims to follow the sharia and called for critical evaluation of what the earlier generations have promoted, hence stressing the temporal context of Muslim life. Dr. Joseph Lumbard (Hamad Bin Khalifa University) again addressed the challenge of living and applying Islamic principles and teachings in contemporary societies. His thought-provoking presentation focused on the manner in which subtle forms of epistemic colonization persist. He also suggested ways in which the classical Islamic intellectual tradition can be employed to overcome this form of colonization. The session was moderated by Dr. Ravza Altuntaş (IZU).

Session IV: ‘The Challenge of Nationalism’

The third conference day commenced with a session exploring regional reactions and symptoms of Nationalism in Muslim societies. Dr. Hafsa Kanjwal (Lafayette College) offered insights into the forms of nationalism as a tool of empowerment but also as a tool of division in South Asia. By using examples from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Kashmir, she talked about the relationship between...
Muslim nationalisms and regional and religious identities as well as the implications of such movements for the broader Muslim Ummah. In her talk on nationalism and ethnic identities in the Middle East, Dr. Sarah Shields (University of North Carolina) addressed the interplay of political action and nationalism, the ambiguity of collective identities and the consequent necessity to define nationalisms accordingly. Similarly, Dr. Şener Aktürk (Koç University) spoke on the relationship of Muslim nationalism and Islamic multiculturalism to Turkish identity politics and especially the way in which Islamic multiculturalism has been used as a tool for approaching ethnic and linguistic diversity while distinguishing it from its liberal and socialist variants. The session was moderated by Dr. Abdullah Al-Arian (Georgetown University in Qatar).

Session V: ‘The Challenge of Colonialism’

In the last academic session of the conference, Mr. Mujeeb R. Khan (University of California-Berkeley) expounded on the structural and systematic basis for the unending cycles of war and authoritarianism in the modern Middle East. He assessed the realist and the idealist approaches in accounting for why the end of the Cold War and the still born Arab Spring phenomena did not break this regional cycle of continuous warm relationship between authoritarianism and external great power interventions. Dr. Joseph Massad (Columbia University) analyzed the examples of the Druze in Israel, Maronites in Lebanon, Egyptian Copts and Arab Shiites to illustrate the efforts to transform the Arab world in the image of the racist Israeli settler-colony into ethnicized and racialized states based on religious sectarianism and ethnic separatism. Lastly, Dr. Sami Al-Arian explored in his presentation the geopolitical and strategic imperatives of the American
empire and its hegemonic power worldwide by providing insight into its sources and broader objectives globally. The session was moderated by Dr. Erhan Içener (IZU).

**Closing Session: The Future of Muslim Societies in a Globalized World: Conversation with Scholars**

Over twenty international scholars came together on the last day of the conference and listed various ideas for institutional reform with focus on youth, institutional building and social change.

The first question concerned the challenges the Muslim community face due to the climate of fear created both by politics and the media but also by Muslims themselves. Dr. Jonathan Brown emphasized that Muslims should respond by committing themselves to the fight for civil liberties and use the momentum created by the post 9/11 America. Dr. Hafsa Kanjwal pointed to the global nexus to depoliticizing Muslims and the attempts to reform Islam, how there is a broader project at work in the realms of culture, and social engineering sponsored by the UAE for the War on Terror which can be countered only by institutional means. She noted that such work that confronts empires is dangerous and people need to accept some level of sacrifices. Dr. Joseph Massad reminded the audience of how also other groups such as German-Americans and Chinese-Americans had been targeted by U.S. government policies while it has always engaged in an ongoing war. Dr. Abdullah Al-Arian agreed that the American-Muslim experience should not be exceptionalized and spoke against the tendency of Muslim immigrants to overlook the historical connections and encouraged them instead to recognize how to interconnect their own struggle with the struggle of others within the larger society.

Dr. Heba Raouf Ezzat then directed the focus on the issue of representation of Muslim communities. Dr. Farid Esack argued that Muslims in the U.S. have internalized the hegemony of the empire and that they should ask themselves how they fit in with the power structures as citizens of empires. In his view, people must abandon the idea of the U.S. as an empire and must work towards creating coalitions with other marginalized groups within it. Dr. Esack also emphasized
the role of Muslims in the liberation struggle in South-Africa. He noted that this happened not only because they would have gained something but also because of the prophetic legacy and religious duty of Muslims to partake in the fight for justice. Regarding the issue of academics receiving criticism for promoting a positive understanding of Islam, Dr. Abdullah Al-Arian commented that after 9/11 there has emerged an approach of desperation for Middle-Eastern studies in U.S. universities to maintain their relevance during the establishment of the War on Terror infrastructure. In his view, scholars need to ask at what point they want to be at the table and how they should engage in the policy discussions and especially if they are located in overseas campuses of American Universities where scholars have, in his opinion, a great opportunity to take responsibility in engaging with their local surroundings. To the question of “What is the role of historians in the midst of the empire?”, Dr. Sarah Shields answered that it is to challenge the dominant narrative. Dr. Massad agreed with her but noted that many students fall victims to the dominant hegemonic understanding of the U.S. even though they are aware of the historical experiences. Finally, the scholars discussed the problems they and others face while navigating the intersections of scholarship and activism.

In the second part of the panel Dr. Sami Al-Arian stressed that unity and resistance among the Muslim societies with a culture of politics is needed to keep colonial powers at bay. Dr. Mousalli argued that Muslims need to put behind any differences “as propping up divisions and differences are part of propaganda of some states” and identified how the Sunni community was used as “a resistance against Shia community by certain powers.”

Dr. Al-Arian explained how the geopolitics of the US and Israel have been colonizing much of the Muslim world but regretted that there are “Muslim Zionists as well.” Dr. Safi agreed that there are lessons to be learned from Sunnis and Shias, but that “what we need is critical thinking from both sides” and lamented the fact that Muslim intellectuals were “speaking to people instead of powerful
Mr. Khan noted socioeconomic development among Muslims would have stopped “divisions and sectarianism” as Dr. Burgat maintained that there was no way out from the division among Muslims other than to go back to reconciliation.

Furthermore, Dr. Bulut emphasized that it was the first time that Turkey was following its goals and agenda for itself and the region by asserting its developmental model and independence, whereas Dr. Safi, drawing from the Turkish example, asserted that it was possible for Muslim political parties to embrace values of Islam and democracy and then implement them as well for the larger good of its people. Expressing his support at the institutional level, IZU Rector Dr. Bulut insisted that the “needs of people have changed...what we can do is to “focus on our youth who are our future and do whatever job is assigned to us with best of our capabilities.” Regarding the intellectual state of the Ummah Dr. Mousalli claimed that “the role of ulema is gone” and maintained that Muslims need new scholars with organic production of knowledge. Dr. Lumbard argued that Muslims have the capacity but “we need to get together and institutionalize it and create an intellectual vision” and regretted the lack of Muslim scholars who can produce knowledge in the light of religious sources. However, he noted that establishing institutions requires good funds and hence advocated for more fundraising by Muslim intellectuals. Mr. Khan followed by saying that democratic politics, pluralization ways of being, modernity are immanent in Islam.

On the relationship of tradition with the present and the future, Dr. Bulut stressed that “Muslims need to connect our present to our tradition for a new future” while explaining how, for instance, Turkey lost half of its intellectual and labor force potential by banning the hijab which forced women to sit in their homes because they did not want to compromise their Islamic attire for attending universities or to be employed. Making an emphatic plea at the end of the session, Dr. Raouf Ezzat maintained that “Muslim youth are the hope of Muslim societies and we need to guide and make way for them.” The closing session was moderated by Dr. Sami Al-Arian and Dr. Heba Raouf Ezzat.
On Friday, October 12, Dr. Miriam Cooke (Duke University) gave a lecture titled “Arab Women Writing about War.” Dr. Cooke argued against the “binarization of war” and the division of society to the spheres of war and peace, combatants and non-combatants. She drew on past figures in Arab and Islamic history to show the existence of active women in the times of war since the Prophet’s era. Dr. Cooke elaborated that this phenomenon still goes on in several theatres in Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and others. She emphasized the importance of claiming participation lest the society forgets and argued that in all of these cases, women had strategies and tactics that were more effective than that of the men, quoting Fanon’s term “Strategie de la Femme.” Regarding literary portrayal, which she understands to be crucial, Dr. Cooke mentioned several authors such as Sahar Khalifeh and how they play a role in potentially changing the binary narrative. She finished her lecture by stating that the problem of lacking representation of women in society can only be solved within a free democracy, where problems are all admitted, and that binarization can only be broken in a free society.

On Wednesday, November 21, Dr. Majed Al-Ansari (Qatar University), and Dr. Sami Al-Arian held a discussion in a seminar titled the “Political Assassination on the Bosporus and a Siege in the Gulf: A Geopolitical Perspective.” For the United States, as the two academics noted, control over Saudi Arabia has been a main concern in the region irrespective of who is in power. This explains Donald Trump’s unwillingness to punish the Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed Bin Salman, for his likely role in the recent death of Saudi journalist and dissident Jamal Khashoggi. The only political actor that has been pushing to hold Saudi Arabia accountable thus far has been Turkey. Dr. Al-Ansari remarked that the murder of Khashoggi is very difficult to understand in isolation, as “The conspiracy was systematic with a clear agenda.” He further noted that in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia became especially concerned with its survival and hence maintained the alliance with United States for the sake of protection. However, Professor Al-Ansari maintained that Saudi Arabia has antagonized almost all its neighbors in the process of securing itself. In Khashoggi’s murder, the Qatari professor remarked that Mohammed Bin Salman failed to play by the unwritten rulebook. Furthermore, he noted, “Turkey sabotaged every plan of Saudi Arabia to save itself.”
Despite these difficulties, Dr. Al-Ansari said that he does not believe Mohammed Bin Salman will be removed from power. He noted that figures like Muammar Gaddafi (in the past) and Bashar al-Assad (currently) have committed worse crimes but were able to maintain their power in the immediate aftermath of such crimes.

In his geopolitical assessment of the Khashoggi murder, Dr. Sami Al-Arian concurred with Dr. Al-Ansari that Saudi Arabia has been advancing a policy of self-survival, especially through “religious legitimacy” by being the custodians of two holiest cities for Muslims. He noted that in the Middle East, Turkey and Iran have been the only two players with a clear vision and project and cited Turkey’s soft power policy in Africa, the Balkans, and Central Asia, while Saudi Arabia has been focusing on the survival of its regime. Hence, Saudi Arabia has seen the rise of Turkey but especially Iran as a direct threat to its survival and has sought building alliance with Israel as it’s strengthening it with the US. Explaining the hegemonic character of Israel in the region, Dr. Al-Arian maintained that the Zionist project is an extension of American hegemony in the Middle East. He argued that the U.S. is exploiting this Saudi fear as it has been the policy of the U.S. to look for enemies, create splits among them, and make allies with the weaker in order to fight the stronger. Describing its divide and rule policy, Dr. Al-Arian explained that the U.S. was arming around thirty thousand Kurdish militia members, which Turkey says have ties with the PKK (a terrorist group in the eyes of both Turkey and the U.S.) He also explained that the U.S. has many objectives in the Middle East including protecting Israel and ensuring its legitimacy, controlling oil, the dollar as the world main currency, the stability of the region, maintaining military bases and sea lanes in the region, monopolizing arms sales, opening markets, containing or suppressing political Islam or any independent political actors, and asserting cultural and political hegemony. Dr. Al-Arian concluded his remarks by echoing Dr. Al-Ansari’s view that it will be very difficult to remove Mohammed Bin Salman from power. Complimenting Turkey for its role in the investigation of Khashoggi’s murder, Dr. Al-Arian said that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s government had set an example by creating a new playbook for international relations with how they handled Khashoggi’s case, while staying calm, meticulously calculating the strategic fall outs, and dealing the case with clarity and patience. “Turkey’s choice of words and actions regarding the Khashoggi case will likely be taught in political science courses in the future as an example of how diplomacy is done,” he noted.
On Tuesday, December 4, Dr. Ghulam Nabi Fai (Secretary General of the World Kashmir Awareness Forum) was invited by CIGA and Pakistan-Turkey Friendship Foundation to hold a guest lecture titled “The Geopolitics of Kashmir Dispute and its Future Prospects.” In his talk, Dr. Fai commenced his talk by explaining that Kashmir is internationally recognized as a disputed territory whose final status is yet to be determined by its people. Kashmir constitutes an issue on the active agenda of the United Nations and has been the subject of fourteen substantive resolutions of the UN Security Council.

Every human rights group, including the June 2018 report issued by the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights that has examined the convulsed scene in Kashmir, has reported harrowing human rights violations in Kashmir, including tens of thousands of extrajudicial killings, rape, torture, plunder, arbitrary arrests, and ruthless suppression of free speech and press. The people have suffered a brutal campaign of suppression by the Indian army that wants to crush their hopes for self-determination through terror and military forces. It is well documented that the crimes being perpetrated against the people of Kashmir are systematic, deliberate and officially sanctioned. World powers must endorse the recommendation of the United Nations High Commissioner that an impartial investigation needs to be made about the latest situation in Occupied Kashmir. Dr. Fai asserted that the United Nations must send a fact-finding mission to assess the situation there. The issue of Kashmir is a movement for self-determination inspired by a spirit for freedom, as it holds legitimacy in the United Nations Security Council resolutions. The United Nations could affect a positive resolution to the conflict and vastly improve the humanitarian situation by promoting the conditions of the original mandate. It is only through international recognition and inclusive representations that a genuine and lasting peace can ensue. The risks of maintaining the status quo – for Kashmir, South Asia and the world – are too great to ignore.
CIGA Director and Professor, Dr. Sami Al-Arian, participated in two events in Islamabad, Pakistan in the 2018 fall semester. On October 30, 2018, Dr. Al-Arian delivered the keynote speech in the annual international conference of the National Defence University (NDU) under the title: “Empire and Colony: Unveiling the Geopolitics of the U.S. and Israel.” On Nov. 1, 2018, Dr. Al-Arian delivered the Annual Dr. Mumtaz Ahmad Memorial Lecture in a symposium organized by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) on the “Interplay of Pluralism & Exclusionism: Dynamics of Relations Between Islam & West.” Dr. Al-Arian’s memorial lecture at IPS was titled “The Dialectics between Colonizers and Colonized, and the Revolutionaries and Counter-Revolutionaries in the Context of the Arab Spring.”

My Uyghur Friend, Where Are You?
By Fadi Zatari

The following article has been published by Muftah.org

Nearly a decade ago, while pursuing my Master’s degree at the University of Frankfurt in Germany, I became accustomed to spending most of my time in the library; I inhabited it from the early morning until late at night. While tiring, my extended time there afforded me the good fortune of coming across and getting to know one of the brightest individuals I have ever met: my Uyghur friend, Nurali. I had previously seen Nurali serval times at the student dormitory where I lived, but we never really spoke. I was new to Frankfurt and had few friends, but I was interested in getting to know serious students, who could motivate me and from whom I could learn. It was on an unassuming morning that I saw Nurali during my break in the library, and decided to finally greet him with a simple “hello.” With a delighted look, Nurali greeted me back, and we began to build a friendship almost immediately. After introducing ourselves to one another, we both wondered at how long it had taken us to speak, given the frequency with which we crossed paths in the library (and even at the dormitory).

It was during this initial, brief chat that I heard for the first time about the Uyghur people—a persecuted Muslim minority of Turkic origin that lives in the Xinjiang region in China. Nurali told me about the distressing history of
the Uyghurs and their life under the Chinese government. When I asked him how many “hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs” lived in China, he responded, with a smile, that there were “over 20 million.” I felt shocked and embarrassed, but even more curious to learn about these surprising people.

After spending more time with Nurali, I realized I had met perhaps the most polite, decent, benevolent, generous, and kind person I had ever known. In a short period, the library had become a place where I not only studied, but also went to spend time with my best friend, Nurali. During almost every break, and during virtually every weekend, Nurali and I would meet, often for tea. We even traveled together to other cities in Germany. I still remember our wonderful journey to Heidelberg, where we walked for hours around the old castle.

On top of educating me about the politics, culture, and history of his hometown, Nurali used to bring me Uyghur food—a most wonderful culinary experience. After staying for long hours in the library, we used to go home and cook together. Through this direct and intimate experience, I discovered some of my favorite Uyghur foods, such as Polo and Lagman.

I was extremely sad when Nurali left Germany in 2012. I took him to the airport, all the while wishing he could stay. Still, we stayed in contact. One year later, in 2013, Nurali received his PhD and became a lecturer at Xinjiang Normal University. That was the same year I moved to Turkey. We continued to email each other and communicate on Skype—he even promised to visit me in Istanbul. On the morning of Thursday, November 22, 2018, I finally heard from—or rather, about—Nurali. His name appeared to me, like a bullet in the chest, in a document titled “List of Uyghur intellectuals imprisoned in China from 2016 to the present.” I immediately understood why I had not heard from Nurali for so long: he was one of the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Uyghur Muslims who had been interned in concentration camps by the Chinese government.

I have been incredibly sad and frustrated to learn about my friend’s fate. As with other
Uyghur prisoners in these concentration camps, there is no real way to know what Nurali’s condition is. Is he alive? Is he dead? Is he being tortured? Is he in good health? The inability to know is numbing.

Nurali is a very talented, peaceful, and tolerant person, and is, in fact, a-political; I cannot imagine he would harm anyone. There is simply nothing Nurali could have done to justify the massive injustice and discrimination committed against him by the Chinese government. Nor can I understand how the Uyghur people (or any people) themselves could merit the punishment being meted out by the Chinese.

Reading about the concentration camps is horrible and shocking. Various reports have documented the unbearable psychological pressures placed on detainees, leading some Uyghurs, sadly, to commit suicide. In these camps, Uyghurs are forced to denounce Islam, adopt atheism, and even pledge allegiance to the Chinese state. They are forced to listen, repeat, and embrace communist party propaganda. Detainees are denied medical treatment and are tortured, often to the point of death. They are not even given suitable clothing to endure the freezing night temperatures. As reported by The Independent, Riam Thum, a professor at Loyola University in New Orleans, has said these camps “echo[] some of the worst human rights violations in history.”

China claims its concentration camps are “vocational training centers,” and are meant to prevent “acts of terrorism.” But if this were true, why won’t China allow international human rights organizations to visit or report on these “vocational” and “educational” centers? Why is the media not allowed to conduct independent investigations about what is happening in Xinjiang?

I am not an expert on China or its politics. I am simply a man deeply concerned about his old friend—a friend who may or may not still be alive. Like many other Uyghurs who are unable to obtain information about their imprisoned friends and family members, I am stuck between hoping Nurali will be released and praying upon his soul, as if he has already passed.

Diversity in Islamic Thought

By Dr. Fatimah bint Abdullah, Senior Research Fellow

Like many past and present Islamic scholars worldwide, the diversity of Islamic thought amongst the religious preachers in the Muslim world is not a shocking phenomenon. Al-Alwani (1986) has indeed stated in his book titled, The Ethics of Disagreement in Islam the historical contexts of diversity in Islamic thought and traditions, beginning even during the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) continuing until present day. Most of the companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him), including the four righteous caliphs and their immediate predecessors indeed had disagreements on various issues, but most of them were objective in their diversity. Meanwhile, Al-Oadah (2013) provides a succinct discussion on the interpretations on verse 22 of Surah al-Rum in his book when dealing with the subject concerning differences among
Allah’s creations, especially human beings. He concluded, “As for the differences in our tongues, there are a number of possible interpretations... it can refer to the content of people’s discourse, whether pleasant or abusive, optimistic or despondent, ethical or wanton.”

It is thus very important for us to accept the differences of opinions and disagreements in discussing various issues, especially that which concerns Islamic thought and traditions. Failure in doing that will make it impossible for us to view things objectively without prejudice and presuppositions. According to Yusuf al-Qaradawi, one of the many characteristics of the scientific spirit that ought to be instilled in every knowledge seeker, i.e. students, is appreciating the views and perspectives of others by giving them their due respect, as long as it is supported by evidence and proper argumentation (M. Kamal Hassan, 2015). Unfortunately, the phenomena is becoming more and more worrisome as having more graduates of various Islamic universities and institutions worldwide also means that they bring home their respective ideological orientations, with very strong opinions on various Islamic traditions and conducts. In their dissemination of Islamic thought and traditions to the Muslim community, some, if not many, have forgotten the basic morals and ethics of disagreements as taught by the religion and practiced by past scholars.

While it is normal to disagree, it does not necessarily mean that we should accept it as it is without trying to bridge the different parties together. Look at how the state of harmony through the concept of ijmā’ (doctrine of consensus) was eventually formed a century after the hardened split between two opposing groups called ahl al-hadith and ahl al-ra’y (Noel J., 1969). A bridging theory was formed partly based on the two extremely different approaches otherwise exclusively adopted by these contrasting groups of Muslims, and this has actually provided a common ground on which to agree. That is what the proper foundational ethics should be like when we disagree with fellow Muslims. We should work on finding the common ground instead of highlighting the differences and contrasting opinions too much. The differing opinions, once accepted with open hearts, may actually become fruitful in uniting the ummah instead of dividing them further (Al-‘Alwani, 1986).

On top of making efforts to find a common ground among members of a Muslim community, religious leaders, scholars and teachers must avoid disseminating points of disagreement unnecessarily to members of the public. The level of understanding of any
average man may or may not able to look at these differences of opinion objectively; in fact, many have actually become so absorbed in proving that they are on the right path while those who are of a contrary opinion must be condemned and warned about. The general members of the public get caught up in their emotions so easily that they have the tendency to miss out on the whole wisdom behind these differing views. Without doubt, having diverse opinions in religious issues is not forbidden in Islam unless it causes social division and split among members of the Ummah (Izal Mustafa, 2015).

In July 2005, H.M. King Abdullah II organised an international Islamic conference participated in by 200 Muslim scholars from over 50 countries during which they agreed on three fundamental issues which became the main points of The Amman Message. Based on fatwas provided by great scholars including Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the scholars unanimously agreed on “the validity of all 8 Mathahib (legal schools) of Sunni, Shi’a and Ibadhi Islam; of traditional Islamic Theology (Ash’arism); of Islamic Mysticism (Sufism), and of true Salafi thought. This remarkable effort was indeed made to strengthen the solidarity of 1.2 billion Muslims worldwide, and to prevent further marginalization and polarisation that could suppress progress within the Ummah worldwide. Despite the inevitable differences of opinions and diverse perceptions held by Muslims, it is vital to focus on the basic principles and foundations of Islam: attesting to the Oneness of Allah, belief in His Messenger, performing the ritual prayers, the fast of Ramadhan, paying the alms of Zakat, and performing the pilgrimage of Haj. Indeed, history shows that these basic principles have developed a resilient and cohesive nation and great Islamic civilisation (The Amman Message, 2009). An excerpt taken from the full text of The Amman Message is as follows:

“Whosoever is an adherent to one of the four Sunni schools (Mathahib) of Islamic Jurisprudence (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i and Hanbali), the two Shi’i schools of Islamic Jurisprudence (Ja’fari and Zaydi), the Ibadi school of Islamic jurisprudence is a Muslim. Declaring that person an apostate is impossible and impermissible. Verily his (or her) blood, honour, and property are inviolable. Moreover, in accordance with the Sheikh Al-Azhar’s fatwa, it is neither possible nor permissible to declare whosoever subscribes to the Ash’ari creed or whoever practices real Tasawwuf (Sufism) an apostate. Likewise, it is neither possible nor permissible to declare whosoever subscribes to true Salafi thought an apostate.”
On October 10, 2018, Dr. Sami Al-Arian, CIGA Director, and Dr. Mohammad Yaser Amro, President of The Academy of Refugee Studies (ARS), signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU called for the parties to develop together programs, curricula, and courses in different academic and professional fields, disciplines, and studies related to the Palestinian issue in all its aspects under the auspices of the school of continuing education at IZU-CIGA. The joint diploma programs shall be developed in the fields of Refugees Studies and Palestinian Studies. Moreover, the certificate program shall include intensive courses in the following subjects: “Jerusalem Studies”, “Prisoners Studies”, “Refugees Studies”, “International Law and Palestine Studies”, “Studies on Palestinian Popular Heritage”, “Studies on Palestinian History”, “Studies on the Media and the Palestinian Issue”, and “Using Multimedia to Convey the Palestinian Narrative”.
The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Professor John J. Mearsheimer, updated edition 2014) is one of the most significant international relations books in the past half century as its author has become one of the most important authorities in the field. In this book, Mearsheimer presents his new realist theory of international relations that he calls “Offensive Realism” as supposed to the Liberal theory and Classical or Structural Realism theory.

His theory is based on five assumptions as follows: (1) that the international system is anarchic as supposed to hierarchic (i.e. there is no central authority above the states); (2) that great powers possess some offensive military capability that gives the possibility of hurting or destroying other states; (3) that states can never be certain about the intentions of other states; (4) that survival is the ultimate goal of great powers including maintaining territorial integrity and autonomy of their domestic political order; and (5) that great powers are rational actors (this last assumption does not necessary always hold in all cases especially when ideology trumps strategic interest.)

Mearsheimer argues that fearing other states is the primary factor in state behavior. He effectively applies his theory on major conflicts involving great powers in the last two hundred years. The strength of his theory, he argues, is in its ability to have a high predictability value of the behavior of great powers towards each other (he suggests a success rate of predictability of at least 75%). He meticulously analyzes all major great power conflicts and convincingly argues when there are exceptions.

The book provides great insight in some of the most important and vital concepts in power politics and international relations such as global vs. regional hegemon, balanced vs. unbalanced system, latent vs. military power, land power vs. naval power or air superiority, insular vs continental power, strategies for gaining power, balancing, and many other important concepts.

This book is indispensable for any serious student of international relations. For example, Mearsheimer explains in detail on how the U.S. has become a great power globally in less than 120 years. One cannot understand how great powers behave unless one is armed with the tools needed to unlock the mysteries of such behaviors. This book is one such great tool box that paves the road to such understanding.

By Dr. Sami A. Al-Arian
Liberalism claims that spreading liberal democracy across the world can be accomplished through open international economy and international institutions for promoting peace in the international system. Throughout his mainly theoretical contribution, Mearsheimer argues that liberal democracy destructs and harms the United States and the international system. In his view, liberal democracy leads America to become a highly militarized state fighting unceasing wars. He proposes that understanding this failure can be examined by considering the interactions between liberalism, nationalism and realism and how they affect international politics.

Mearsheimer’s book elaborates on very significant questions, such as, what happens when a powerful state adopts liberalism as its foreign policy? Mearsheimer claims that liberalism functions well inside states; nevertheless, he acknowledges that it cannot provide a sound basis for a state’s foreign policy. In fact, it becomes a source for trouble as it is extreme interventionism involving regime change and social engineering to transform the state, be it even by military. For example, Mearsheimer demonstrates how the U.S. foreign policy failed in Ukraine, Georgia and the Middle East. He describes the failures in the Middle East by stating that, “Washington’s performance in Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Libya and Syria has been dismal. Not only has the United States failed to protect human rights and promote liberal democracy in those countries, it has played a major role in spreading death and disorder across the greater Middle East” (p.168). Despite the fact that the book presents liberalism as a good doctrine with a decent intention, Mearsheimer’s book is superb, very informative and well-argued in its critique of liberalism — especially liberal democracy — and how it failed in the past and why it will fail in the future.

By Fadi Zatari

Huseyin Yilmaz’s book stands out in a field of Ottoman studies which has been dominated by entrenched ideas of leadership and statecraft found in classical works by Erwin Rosenthal, Ann Lambton, and Patricia Crone. According to Yilmaz’s literature survey, these works present a one-dimensional view of more complex picture. One of the strongest aspects of Caliphate Redefined is its novel yet clear introduction to the sources of Islamic political thought found in the first chapter. Yilmaz’s focus on the multidimensional sources of Islamic conceptions of authority, especially his reliance on Sufi and philosophical ideas, opens the way to move beyond a juridico-
political scheme. In methodology Yilmaz seems to agree with Shahab Ahmed’s recent plea to move away from what he calls ‘sharia-mindedness’ in the study of Islam. This trend is joined by the work of Cornell Fleischer, Kathryn Babayan, Mercedes Garcia-Arenal, and Azfar Moin. These scholars, alongside Yilmaz, show how rulers after the destruction of the Abbasid Caliphate began to experiment with new modes of legitimation. This included depicting themselves as saintly, mystical, revivalist, millenarian and cosmological.

The most informative part of the book is chapters three and four. There, Yilmaz reads a plethora of archival sources and shows in fine-toothed detail how Ottoman scholars were constructing the image of Ottoman rule in mystical terms. Much of the argument relies on how imperial language and symbols borrowed their meaning from Sufi literature of the time. The work of Idris-i Bitlisi (1452-1520), a Kurdish scholar and Ottoman statesman, undergirds much of the theoretical framing for Yilmaz’s argument. Yilmaz’s work brings forward many such authors long ignored in classical writing on political authority. Students and scholars will have to contend with the massive original sources and documentation in Caliphate Redefined before jumping to any serious conclusion. The book is a rich resource for students of Ottoman political thought and Islamic political thought in general.

By Owais Khan

The first part of the book goes into much detail about the lineage and impact of these groups on later history, and contextualizes the development of Sunni theology within the particular political conditions of the time. The second part of the book introduces readers to a stream of thought—embodied in the life and work of Ibn Taymiyyah—that notably diverges from the trends and developments of the early classical period. Unlike certain figures before him, it could be said that Ibn Taymiyyah viewed politics not simply as the banality of necessities, but rather “the art of the possible” (p. 241). To better understand this, the book asks readers to reorient their understanding of the political. Rather than a self-interested, self-serving system that often yields to corruption and power for its own sake, readers are asked to consider the Taymiyyan understanding of politics, which is “the highest activity of envisioning and enabling the collective pursuit of the good of the community” (p. 9). In other words, there is a fundamentally moral endeavor at its core.

Ibn Taymiyyah’s unique contribution was closing the space between a fitra-based conception of politics, and the explicit justice of the Sharia as codified by the Quran and the Sunna. There is, in his view, no contradiction between the two.

By Riad Alarian
The CIGA Student Society is part of the organizational structure of the Center for Islam and Global Affairs and focuses in organizing student-related activities from seminars to film screenings. The members of the Student Society also actively participate in CIGA’s conferences as volunteers. The aim of the Student Society is to broaden the horizons of students through academic excellence and professional competence, in accordance with the rules and principles of CIGA and of Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University (IZU). The CIGA Student Society aims to allow students to engage and develop themselves in professional, academic, and recreational activities according to the highest ethical and professional standards. A further goal is to enable students to participate in tasks that will promote the work of CIGA and of CIGA Student Society.

Guest Lecture: Mohammed Hijab (U.K.) – “Liberalism and its Effects on Muslim Community”

On Saturday, December 15, CIGA Student Society hosted Mohammed Hijab (U.K.), a British debater and public speaker of Egyptian descent who engages in discussions and polemics on a wide variety of topics including religion, politics and society. Hijab completed a B.A. in politics and a M.A. in history from Queen Mary University. He has taught and instructed courses on humanities and languages in many contexts. He is currently doing further postgraduate research in Islamic Studies at SOAS University of London.

The lecture started with the welcoming words by the president of CIGA Student Society Fatma Er after which Hijab in his speech argued for the necessity of alternatives to liberalism for Muslims. He maintained that the Muslim communities should rethink their values and their lifestyle. In a lively Q&A session Hijab’s London-based colleagues joined him on the podium. The speakers reminded the audience about the importance of Muslims building their knowledge on the basic tenets of their faith and Islamic values.

The CIGA Student Society welcomes all interested individuals to participate in their future events!
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