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**Global Research in International Affairs (GLORIA) Center**  
**THE PROJECT FOR THE RESEARCH OF ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS (PRISM)**  
**OCCASIONAL PAPERS**  
**Volume 5 (2007), Number 3 (August 2007)**

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**Abstract:** This is a series of papers that translate and analyze articles, reports, religious decrees, and other documents, written primarily in Arabic by Islamist scholars, clerics, operatives, or intellectuals.

**The Coronation of the King of the Golden Path:  
Sheikh Qaradawi Becomes Imam *Al-Wasatiyyah* and a School and  
Movement by Itself  
By Reuven Paz**

**Introduction**

In 14-16 July 2007, a unique conference convened in Doha, Qatar's capital, which seems to be the highlight of activity of the 81-years-old Sheikh Dr. Yousef al-Qaradawi, one of the most prominent, influential, but controversial, Islamic scholars in modern times. His followers organized a huge meeting titled "Meeting of Imam Qaradawi with students and friends." The call for the conference came from three institutions: The World Center of *Wasatiyyah* (intermediacy) in Kuwait; The faculty of Islamic law in the university of Qatar; and the Center for the Contributions of Muslims to Civilization, in Qatar. The conference included nine panels, which encompassed almost every possible aspect of modern Islam, according to the teachings and thought of Sheikh Qaradawi, and received lot of publicity and coverage in his two websites ([www.qaradawi.net](http://www.qaradawi.net) and [www.islamonline.net](http://www.islamonline.net)).

Qaradawi, of Egyptian origin, moved to Qatar in the early 1970s, following his activity in the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. In the past 30 years of his residence in Qatar he managed to establish an international position as one of the best known, however controversial, Muslim scholars in both the Arab world and the West. His numerous connections in Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, and other Arab countries, opened the door for him to search for global position within the Arab and Muslim world, as well as many Western countries and Muslim communities there. He made it through endless efforts to



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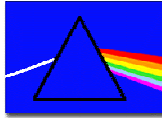
create new paths for reformist Islam that will find the golden path between traditional Salafism and modern innovation (*Tajdid*). Through his long career he became very controversial among many Islamic circles, especially for two reasons: his personal ambitions to become the most influential Islamic scholar and founder of global institutions based only on his personal thought and mindset; and his endless interpreting of every possible aspect of Islamic life and law. There are only few modern Islamic scholars who dealt with such a big spectrum of subjects, and presented so many initiatives and projects, as controversial as they are.

His personal ambitions and political calculations brought him several times to contradict himself, or issue contradicting rulings that changed according to political developments. Another source for controversy were his complicated relations with the Egyptian mother movement of the Muslim Brotherhood. In the past decade, especially on the background of the ideological stagnation of the Egyptian Brotherhood, the disappearance of the Sudanese Dr. Hasan al-Turabi as chief ideologue of the Brotherhood, and his religio-political guidance for Hamas, Qaradawi managed to post himself above any other spiritual leader of the Brotherhood. Moreover, he managed to accompany his religious activity with two organizational fields: he was the most significant Islamic legal adviser in the field of Islamic banking and finance; and he organized global institutions that sought to become a new kind of Islamic movement. A movement of one person.

The challenge of the radical Jihadi-Salafiyyah, either through groups like Al-Qaeda, or the new radical Jihadi-Salafi doctrines, did not harm his position and he knew very well how to deal with the challenge. In the past year he joined other Islamic elements to become a prime target for severe attacks by supporters of global Jihad, especially for his support for parliamentary democratic processes in the Arab world, his firm support for Hamas, and his conciliatory positions towards Iran and the Shi'a.

Nevertheless, for the extremists he is regarded the mentor of the legitimacy for Hamas' suicide bombings, which paved the way for numerous writings and fatwas in favor of this *modus operandi* all over the Muslim world. His contacts with Hamas in general, and the fact that the Palestinian Islamic group lack any highly respected clerics, led him to become the patron for the Islamic perspective of the Palestinian struggle. His corrective relations with the Islamic revolution in Iran, and his co-existence with Iran over the past decade, in which the Iranians sought to patronize Hamas and the Palestinians, have seriously affected the preservation of the positions of Hamas within a Sunni Brotherhood sphere.

For the moderates, Qaradawi is the mentor of *Fiqh al-Aqalliyyat*—the Islamic jurisprudence of minorities—which serves as a developing basis for the ability of Muslim communities in the West to establish a kind of “Non-territorial Islamic states,” and run



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comprehensive Muslim life among majority societies with different, sometimes in the past decade hostile, values.

For Muslim governments Qaradawi serves as the wizard of adjusting Islamic finance to modern world economy, with numerous innovative rulings. For many in the Arab world he is the only true follower of the reformist Salafiyyah of Muhammad Abdu and Rashid Ridha in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, second only to Hasan al-Bana, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood.

In Western countries he remained controversial, a kind of “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.” He could deserve also the title of “A man for all seasons,” if this title has not been used in a play about the utopian Sir Thomas More, totally the opposite of Dr. Qaradawi.

### ***Al-Wasatiyyah of Qaradawi***

Dr. Yousef al-Qaradawi has been calling for the “Middle Nation”—*Al-Ummah al-Wasat*—for the past two decades, in a series of books under this name. After he initiated the foundation of the World Center of *Wasatiyyah* in Kuwait, he published in the past decade several writings about his definition of *Wasatiyyah*—Intermediacy—above all in his book “Words of Islamic *Wasatiyyah* and its Characteristics” (*Kalimat fi al-Wasatiyyah al-Islamiyyah wa-Ma`alimiha*). His positions and philosophy is simple, and has been developed out of a previous doctrine of *Fiqh Maratib al-A`mal* (Jurisprudence of Phases of Acts), which he later called *Fiqh al-Awlawiyyat* (Jurisprudence of Priorities). In 8 August 2007, in an article based on the book in his website<sup>1</sup>, he claimed that human beings cannot create any real just and middle path society, and this is something that only Allah himself can do. Therefore, the Muslims are running all the time between moderation and extremism, in search of a middle and balanced path, and in order to do that they need a list of priorities.

However, these priorities change frequently according to changing situations, and hence, his doctrines are subjected to what his followers would call pragmatism, and his radical opponents – opportunism. A good example for Qaradawi’s pragmatism/opportunism from the mid-1990s, was his response to a famous article by the Egyptian Islamic scholar and publicist Dr. Fahmi al-Huwaydi. The latter claimed that recruitment for helping the Bosnians is more important and urgent than fulfilling the duty of the *Hajj* – the pilgrimage to Mecca. Qaradawi justified Al-Huwaydi, saying that unlike the defense of Bosnia, the Pilgrimage is something that Muslims can postpone for another time.

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<sup>1</sup> See on-line at:

[http://www.qaradawi.net/site/topics/article.asp?cu\\_no=2&item\\_no=5320&version=1&template\\_id=119&parent\\_id=13](http://www.qaradawi.net/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=5320&version=1&template_id=119&parent_id=13)



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Based upon this view of creating priorities, the controversy over Qaradawi's positions has been developed. In major questions, especially those under political controversy, he has not always been consistent. His *Wasatiyyah*, therefore, even though wrapped in religious argumentation, can be seen not only as a solid doctrine, but also a fragile one that changes with certain interests.



### **The Conference**

The conference that took place in July 2007, raises several questions as to the timing and nature of the event. One element was very clear from the reports about it – this was not a Muslim Brotherhood event, but Qaradawi's only. Many of the attendees belonged to the Brotherhood, but its role was hidden. It was the foundation of a new movement – Qaradawi's *Wasati* one, and a school of thought of one man. It looked as if Qaradawi, 81-years-old, was crowned by his followers—*Muridin* as they were called, like in a Sufi order—as a recognized *Mujaddid* – innovator of a school of thought, a title reserved in Islamic discourse to very few scholars. Indeed, Qaradawi modestly refused in the conference to be titled Imam, and the organizers were careful not to call his teachings a *Madhhab* (school of jurisprudence) but *Minhaj* (doctrine), but, the general atmosphere as reported, was like the inauguration of a new movement with a solid ideology.

The conference ended with the declaration of several new projects to follow “the glorious march of Qaradawi in the service of Islam and of the problems of the Islamic nation,” such as: Imam Qaradawi prize for the innovation of Islamic thought; two new endowments (*Waqf*), one for encouraging students of Islamic studies in Muslim countries, and the other for students in Al-Azhar; foundation of Qaradawi chair for modern Islamic studies in one of the best universities in the United States or Europe; and creating a mechanism of contacts between Qaradawi and his followers through an annual meeting to deal with major Islamic issues raised by Qaradawi, such as the relations between Qur'an and Sunnah, or the complex of relations between *Ijtihad* (doctrinal effort) and *Iftaa* (ruling). Alongside this annual meeting there will be founded in Qatar an association of Qaradawi's students. The association will serve as a basis for establishing an international forum of those who view themselves as belonging to Qaradawi's school.



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About 90 scholars, many of them from the first row of importance, took part in the conference. Each of them competed his colleagues in praising and glorifying Qaradawi. Among them were the Tunisian Dr. Rashid al-Ghanoushi, Muhammad abd al-Qaddus, Munir Shafiq, Sheikh Abd al-Salam Basiouni, and the American Dr. Taha Jaber al-Alawani. The latter also published a book dedicated to Qaradawi, in which he sums up and extraordinarily glorifies his entire activity.<sup>2</sup> In many ways, Taha al-Alawani might become Qaradawi's successor in developing his thoughts, especially in the field of Muslim minorities and communities in the West.

Two of the most important topics, which are very relevant to Qaradawi's activity, that were presented in the conference and were published in the form of long articles, were "The Institutional Activity of the Islamic Clerics – Qaradawi as Model" by Dr. Ali BaDahdah;<sup>3</sup> and "The Doctrine of Imam Qaradawi in the Jurisprudence of Minorities" by Dr. Abd al-Majid al-Najjar.<sup>4</sup> These two topics represented the main focus of Qaradawi's work in the past two decades, especially in Europe and among Muslim communities in the West: the attempt to create socio-religious Muslim norms of life outside of the Arab and Muslim world, within globalized institutions.

### **Conclusion**

In some way, the tendency of Qaradawi to focus on Muslim communities in the West has marked the choosing of the easier way to overcome the difficulties of Islamic activity within the Arab and Muslim world, as oppositionist and oppressed groups. In Europe and the United States he can find convenient atmosphere for executing his ideas in the form of institutions, even if there is recently a rising sense of real or fake Islamophobia, and Western governments and societies are looking at Muslim communities with growing suspicion. Such a convenient atmosphere is far from being found in the Arab world. Qaradawi cannot easily visit Egypt, Jordan, Syria, or Algeria, as much as he does in London, Paris, or Dublin. Even though he is approved by the Saudis, he is never invited to the Kingdom to give open lectures there. Furthermore, despite his tight contacts with Hamas and his links to charities that organized campaigns of fund-raising for the Palestinian Islamic movement, it does not harm too much his contacts in the West, especially in the United Kingdom and the Irish republic.

One of his tactics in promoting his ambitions in both Europe and the Arab world is by disassociating himself, at least publicly, from the old mother movement of the Muslim

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<sup>2</sup> See on-line at:

[http://www.qaradawi.net/site/topics/article.asp?cu\\_no=2&item\\_no=5327&version=1&template\\_id=119&parent\\_id=13](http://www.qaradawi.net/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=5327&version=1&template_id=119&parent_id=13)

<sup>3</sup> *Al-'Amal al-Mu'assasi lil-'Ulama – Al-Qaradawi numuzajan*. See on-line at:

[http://www.islamonline.net/arabic/in\\_depth/shariah\\_corner/Qaradawi\\_Friends/Topic\\_03/images/01c.pdf](http://www.islamonline.net/arabic/in_depth/shariah_corner/Qaradawi_Friends/Topic_03/images/01c.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> *Minhaj al-Imam al-Qaradawi fi Fiqh al-Aqalliyat*. See on-line at:

[http://www.islamonline.net/arabic/in\\_depth/shariah\\_corner/Qaradawi\\_Friends/Topic\\_04/images/01b.pdf](http://www.islamonline.net/arabic/in_depth/shariah_corner/Qaradawi_Friends/Topic_04/images/01b.pdf)



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Brotherhood. His main contacts in Europe are with a group of loyalists and ex-activists of the Brotherhood, usually of Egyptian origin, who prefer to declare that they are no longer linked to the mother movement. By doing so he manages to turn his Wasatiyyah—which is different from other forms of Wasatiyyah developed within the Salafist movement—into a new institutionalized movement, which may remain after him for a long time, especially that as it seems, this movement enjoys heavy financial resources.

One element was prominent in the conference. Qaradawi did not hint at any potential heir to lead his “movement.” The generation of his loyal aids, such as the Egyptian Dr. Kamal Helbawi in London, or Sheikh Faysal Mawlawi in Lebanon, is also part of the old ranks of the Brotherhood. Brotherhood “stars” like Dr. Tariq Ramadan, grandson of Hasan al-Bana, who is very prominent in Europe, did not attend the conference, and he is probably too ambitious for Qaradawi to join him.

The Doha conference seems as the highlight of intensive activity of an old man, who, controversial as he is, managed to influence and promote many Islamic initiatives, and wishes now to enter the “Islamic Pantheon” and leave after him a remarkable heritage.