Progressive Islam and the State in Contemporary Muslim Societies
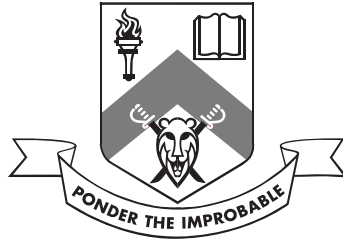
PONDER THE IMPROBABLE

PROGRESSIVE ISLAM AND THE STATE IN CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM SOCIETIES

REPORT ON A CONFERENCE ORGANISED BY

THE INSTITUTE OF DEFENCE AND STRATEGIC STUDIES (IDSS)

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Since the 1970s, with the greater prominence of extremist and Muslim movements and ideologies, the attention of analysts has been focused more on the militant and violent dimensions of Muslim revival. Since the Sept 11 attacks, there has been a concentration of political scientists and strategic studies experts who are more concerned with the study of terrorism and security issues. While it is not to be denied that these are serious issues and should be researched, there is also a need to study the progressive dimension of Muslim revival. Muslim revival as a modern phenomenon dates back to the 19th century and is characterised by a rational and cosmopolitan approach to the analysis of the problems of Muslim societies. Unfortunately, current developments have neglected this dimension of the Muslim revival.

The purpose of this conference is to take a closer look at this dimension of Islam in the context of the discourse on the state. This will encompass three frequently-discussed areas: a. the role of Islam in the state; b. the place of the syariah; and c. the relationship between the state and civil society.

The topic is deemed important for two principle reasons. One is that it is crucial to highlight the progressive nature of Islam in view of the bad press that Islam has been given lately, which contributes to the deterioration in the relationship between the Muslim world and the West. Secondly, it has become increasingly clear that one strategy to fight extremism is to empower the progressive elements in Muslim society and bridging, through them, the gulf between Islam and the rest of the world. This can be done by educating the community about these elements.

IDSS Director Mr. Barry Desker delivered the opening remarks

DAY ONE

Opening Remarks by Mr. Barry Desker, Director, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Nanyang Technological University:

In his opening remarks, Mr. Barry Desker pointed out that in the post-9/11 environment, Islam is often simplistically equated with terrorism. While it is true that Muslims have been associated with acts of violence, it is wrong to conclude that Islamic teachings condone such behavior. In fact, as Mr. Desker explained, Islam is a civilizational religion that has contributed to all fields of human endeavor throughout its history. Moreover, there has been an ongoing drive for reform within Islam ever since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1924. Islamic thinkers, Islamic reformers, and Islamic activists are currently engaged in attempts to recapture the glories of the Islamic civilization by reliving the progressive spirit of the pioneering Muslims that built it. Mr. Desker concluded by saying that he hoped the present conference contributes to a better understanding of their efforts, as well as of this much neglected aspect of Islam.

Opening Remarks by Mr. Zainul Abidin Rasheed, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs:

In his keynote speech, Mr. Zainul Abidin Rasheed noted that the progressive dimensions of Islam offer Muslim societies a rational and moderate approach to managing their affairs worldwide. The recent controversy over the Danish caricatures of Prophet Muhammad demonstrates the validity of the questions

Guest-of-Honour Mr. Zainul Abidin Rasheed, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, gave the keynote speech, in which he emphasized the progressive dimensions of Islamic revivalism

addressed by this conference. For one, there is an urgent need to counter negative stereotypes of Islam and of Muslims that have flourished since 9/11. A second important point, Mr. Abidin noted, is the call to re-imagine Islam as a civilizational project that carries a cultural heritage of both progress and reform.

In the new global environment, Muslims face multiple challenges to their aspiration and practices of progressive Islam. To facilitate their engagement, it is important to strengthen cooperative efforts between state and society, as well as to work together on defining and promoting the attributes of a progressive Muslim community. Singapore has taken its first steps in this direction with the local Muslim community debunking extremist calls and promoting its own identity, while also building a common foundation of civic interaction and participation together with other communities.

In conclusion, Mr. Abidin pointed out that while there are no easy answers to any of these questions, he is confident that Islam and progressive Muslims will be a positive force for change in our globalised and interdependent world. He thanked the Conference Co-Convenors and IDSS for their initiative in organizing this event, and felt confident that it will lead to follow-up events and further discussions.

SESSION I: REGENERATION OF MUSLIM SOCIETY: THE MEANING OF PROGRESSIVE ISLAM – SYED HUSSEIN ALATAS

Professor Syed Hussein Alatas explained that the term "Progressive Islam" does not imply any abstraction from or reduction in the totality of Islam. Rather, it is another way of saying that Islam is progressive by nature, because it possesses great richness and vibrancy due to its emphasis on rational thought. He claimed that there is an urgent need to prove the originality of Islam and the Muslim contribution to modern thought. Progressive Islam must preserve its universal and tolerant outlook, and be receptive to outside influences.

Such attitude is in stark contrast to the prejudices and misunderstandings that are prevalent towards Islam in the West. Various scholars have repeatedly stated that Islamic philosophy has contributed nothing original to Western thought. The denigration of Islam, Professor Alatas emphasized, has been promoted by scholars and policy-makers alike. It is not surprising, therefore, that when problems like 9/11 occur this attitude is immediately revived and brought into the public debate.

While it is true that a deeper appreciation for the Islamic point of view has been developing in the West, the Western media has been slow to catch up. Professor Alatas gave as example the labels used by numerous experts and journalists, such

Professor Syed Hussein Alatas speaks on "The Meaning of Progressive Islam"

as 'radical Islam,' 'militant Islam,' 'moderate Islam,' and 'liberal Islam.' In his view, these categorizations are an attempt to break up the Islamic community and sow lines of dissent in its Islamic thinking.

DISCUSSION

During the discussion, a question was raised about whether Professor Alatas agrees with the characterization that the Muslim world has been hijacked by terrorists post-9/11. He responded that this would be true if the majority of Muslim governments supported terrorism, and this was clearly not the case. Responding to another question on whether he believes that the Muslim world is undergoing a process of regeneration or degeneration, Professor Alatas expressed the opinion that it is the quality of Muslim leaders that has deteriorated, rather than the state of the Muslim community. Another question raised the issue of whether there could be more progressive Muslims if no prejudices against Islam existed in the West. Professor Alatas acknowledged that such outcome is difficult to predict since negative attitudes towards Islam are deeply ingrained in Western culture and power circles. However, it might be the case that if such prejudices did not exist, it would be easier to put pressure on Muslim leaders and chastise them on their performance records.

SESSION II: PROGRESSIVE MUSLIMS AND THE INTERPRETATION OF THE QUR'AN TODAY – ABDULLAH SAEED

Professor Abdullah Saeed outlined six broad trends of Islamic thought and attempted to locate the notion of "progressive Islam" and "progressive Muslims" within the Islamic tradition. He then proceeded to examine seven methods for Qur'anic exegesis and proposed an alternative methodology for interpreting the holy text in order to make its message relevant to the 21st century.

According to Professor Saeed, the main task of progressive Muslims is to rethink, reinterpret, and uphold the universal values of Islam. To this end, some of the terms used by them to describe "progressive Islam" are: justice, gender-equality, reclaiming Islam as a civilizational project, critical engagement with the Islamic tradition, and pluralism and inter-faith dialogue. The underlying rationale is that by adapting the ways that Muslims look at the Qur'an, they can also accommodate its message to address the needs of the modern world. As such, progressive Muslims must play the part of both academic intellectuals and social activists, waging a struggle for a better world. Professor Saeed then suggested that one possible path this struggle can take is the commitment to ijtihad or critical thinking. Based on disciplined and independent reasoning, ijtihad is traditionally carried out with the purpose of providing Islamic solutions to previously unencountered problems. This requires a fresh reading of the text, while also keeping in mind the traditional values of Islam.

In locating "progressive Muslims" within the Islamic tradition, Professor Saeed highlighted six trends of Islamic thinking, namely: 1) the legalist-traditionalists, whose emphasis is on laws as developed and interpreted during the pre-modern period; 2) the theological puritans, whose focus is primarily on ethical and doctrinal issues; 3) the political Islamists, who are more interested in establishing an Islamic state; 4) the Islamist extremists, who sanction violence against any one they consider their enemy,

Professor Abdullah Saeed proposes new modes of engagement between "Progressive Islam and the Interpretation of the Qur'an Today"

whether Muslim or non-Muslim; 5) the secular Muslims, for whom religion is essentially a private matter; and 6) the progressive ijtihadists or the modern interpreters of the faith. According to Professor Saeed, progressive Muslims fall under the last category.

Progressive Muslims are distinguished by ten key criteria. They exhibit a relative degree of comfort when re-interpreting or re-applying Islamic laws and principles. They believe that gender equality is sanctioned by Islam. In their view, all religions are inherently equal and must be constitutionally enshrined. All human beings are also equal. Progressive Muslims claim that beauty is an inherent part of the Islamic tradition, whether found in art, architecture, poetry, or music. They argue for freedom of speech, freedom of belief, and freedom of association. They exhibit compassion towards all living beings. They recognize the right of "others" to exist and to prosper. They chose moderation and non-violence to solve the problems of their own societies. And finally, progressive Muslims manifest ease and eagerness when discussing issues related to the role of religion in the public sphere.

In terms of the way that progressive Muslims look at the Qur'an, Professor Saeed pointed out that there are seven main approaches. The first one is attention to socio-historical context and dynamics. The second is the recognition that there are certain topics that the Qur'an does not expound on because their time has not yet arrived. The third is that any reading of the holy text must be guided by the ideals of compassion, justice, and fairness. The fourth is the acknowledgement that the Qur'an recognizes a hierarchy of values and principles. The fifth one is that it is permissible to move from concrete examples to generalizations and vice versa. The sixth is that caution must be exercised when using other texts from the classical tradition, especially with regard to their authenticity. The seventh approach is a pre-eminent focus on the needs of contemporary Muslims.

In conclusion, Professor Saeed articulated a new model for how progressive Muslims can interpret the Qur'an. He emphasized that they must first examine its role as a sacred text for its first recipients. Next, they must consider the worldview, customs, and beliefs of the people to whom it was addressed. By taking these into account, it would be possible to explain how the meaning of the Qur'an became contextualized to reflect certain social realities. Subsequently, parallels can be drawn between the forms of ijhtihad practiced by the Qur'an's first community and its current recipients. Only then, the universal truths of the holy text will shine through, grounded in the contemporary world.

DISCUSSION

In response to a comment that progressive Islam's supporters in Indonesia originate primarily from the legalist-traditionalist school, Professor Saeed explained that Indonesia has a long history of progressive Islam. In particular, this is evident from the fact that the majority of Indonesian Muslims no longer hold the view that the classical legal texts hold preeminence over all other forms of legal interpretation. Even though Islamic values and principles are held in high regard, there is a definite flexibility in terms of contextualizing different forms of Qur'anic exegesis and making them reflective of the needs and interests of the Muslims to whose time period they belong. On the issue of the limits of re-interpretation, Professor Saeed stated that the key values of Islam are not subject to questioning. However, this is because they hold universal validity. He also expressed reservations about the

maqasid al-syariah (the objectives of Islamic law) as a contemporary stream of thought designed to solve contemporary problems. In his analysis, this approach is yet to be extended and fully developed.

SESSION III: PROGRESSIVE ISLAM, ISLAMIC STATE, AND RETHINKING SHARI'AH LAWS – ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

Professor Engineer noted that Islam emerged as a revolutionary social movement in seventh century Mecca. Its holy text focused on four key values, namely: adl (justice), ihsan (benevolence), rahmah (mercy) and hikmah (wisdom). In Islamic tradition, peace is given priority over war. Whenever violence occurs, it is incidental. However, as Muslim history evolved, Muslims changed this position and made jihad central and peace incidental. Professor Engineer pointed out that Prophet Muhammad was welcomed in Medina precisely because of his ability to bring peace to the fighting tribes.

Professor Engineer claimed that even though the Qur'an does not provide a specific blueprint for an Islamic state, it does talk about the importance of a just and benevolent society. For the majority of Muslims today, there is a noticeable tension between the Qur'anic ideal and everyday reality. No matter how hard Muslim societies struggle, they find it difficult to achieve these ideas in practice.

Professor Engineer classified the Qur'anic verses into two categories, contextual and normative. In his opinion, the four values mentioned above belong to the normative realm. When converted to laws, they require stipulations that reflect them as closely as possible, while also taking into account the complexities of real life. This is precisely what Islamic jurists in the early centuries of Islam did. The laws they formulated were attempts to approach the Qur'anic ideals in any given situation, but from the perspective of the social realities of the time. As such, no

Professor Asghar Ali Engineer speaks on "Progressive Islam, Islamic State, and Rethinking Shari'ah Laws"

laws were viewed as final or absolute.

In conclusion, Professor Engineer pointed out that the Qur'an requires for Muslims to know and understand their own history and society. Independent interpretations or ijtihad are not only permissible, but also commended. Many changes have taken place over the years, which must be recognized and re-interpreted in the spirit of the Islamic tradition. The universal values of Islam will be the standard bearers for this transformation.

DISCUSSION

In response to a question about what he means when he speaks about Islamic values, Professor Engineer gave the example of Islamic justice. As a concept, Islamic justice is universal in the same sense that 'good' and 'evil' are universal. It becomes relative only when applied and in light of certain circumstances. To Professor Engineer, Islam is a revolutionary movement because it seriously questions many notions that have been uncritically accepted around the world. In conclusion, Professor Engineer defined "progressive Islam" not as a static concept, but as an ever-changing one. He explained that while laws can change, the universal values of Islam remain eternal. As such, any legal changes that occur must reflect these universal values to provide continuity and stability for contemporary Muslims.

SESSION IV: THE CONCEPT OF PROGRESSIVE ISLAM IN TURKEY - ALPARSLAN ACIKGENC

Professor Acikgenc defined "progressiveness" as the balance between the mysterious and the rational aspects of human nature. In his opinion, there are two explanations for the nature of the religious experience. The first one interprets faith as the immediate and mystical experience of the divine. The second one views it from the perspective of integrating the divine into every day life. As such, it gives rise to the concept of religion as a system of rational and practical guidance for human beings. Professor Acikgenc used the term "pure religion" for the former and "institutionalized religion" for the latter. In his view, both are complementary and necessary components of religion.

It is inevitable and, indeed, required by God, that "pure religion" be interpreted within a specific historical and cultural context. This is precisely the role of ijtihad or critical thinking in the Islamic tradition. Professor Acikgenc pointed out that religion is reduced to myth if such rational underpinnings are lacking. The Qur'an, however, also makes space for the mystical inclinations of human nature. It perceives them as God-given and advocates that they should be employed in a balanced way. Such balance is provided by practicing religion with the correct guidance, as a synthesis of the mysterious and the rational. This is precisely what is meant by progressive Islam as "the absolute Islamic vision of reality and truth as understood and applied in life from the position of a balanced mental state." The problem of Muslims today, according to Professor Acikgenc, is that they practice Islam in an 'unbalanced state of mind,' which results in the opposite of progressive Islam with regard to religion.

Moving on to discuss the concept of progressive Islam in Turkey, Professor Acikgenc noted that contemporary Islamic thought originated in the 18th century. He then provided glimpses into the works of key 18th and 19th century Turkish Muslim intellectuals, highlighting their attempts

Professor Alparsalan Acikgenc addressed the topic of "Progressive Islam in Turkey"

to grapple with the issue of Islam in both the public and the private sphere. In his opinion, their works reveal that Turkish intellectuals generally did not have extremist leanings. While they did espouse the idea of Islam in the public domain, they never, until recently, advocated the need for an Islamic state. On the contrary, they claimed that Islam does not stipulate any specific forms of governance and argued instead for freedom of belief, the right to life and private property, and respect for human dignity. Such progressive approaches towards Islam ensured that the 1920 declaration of a Turkish republican government was readily accepted by the people.

Unfortunately, after 1940 the country fell into the trap of dictatorship. The new government violated two key values, namely the freedom of belief and the freedom of association. To date, the Turkish state has been either falling into the trap of authoritarian rule or seeking to recover from it. The most problematic issue, in this regard, is secularism, interpreted as the sharp separation of religion and state. Such separation is actively perceived as excluding religion from the public domain. It is this extreme understanding of secularism that has created tensions in Turkey since some sectors of Turkish society interpret it to mean that the state is attempting to remove all traces of religious consciousness from the individual.

In conclusion, Professor Acikgenc noted that while the idea of an 'Islamic state' did emerge as a public discourse in Turkey in the wake of

the Iranian revolution, its manifestations have so far emphasized symbolic and formalistic issues, rather than rational Islamic principles.

DISCUSSION

The discussion which followed centered largely on comparing the case of modern Turkey with that of other Muslim states, and the feasibility of using Turkey as a model for other Muslim states. Parallels and contrasts were drawn between the work of Muslim intellectuals in Turkey and that of Muslim intellectuals in Egypt and Indonesia. Specific questions were also raised about the socio-political orientation of the ruling Justice and Development Party and their political stance regarding issues such as the role of Shari'a and the need for an Islamic state. Professor Acikgenc claimed that the Justice and Development Party successfully combined secularism with progressive Islam. He also highlighted that the party never described itself as an 'Islamist party,' but rather that this was a label thrust upon it by the West. Another question raised the issue of the opposition to progressive Islam in Turkey. Professor Acikgenc responded that while he did not cover this aspect in his presentation, it was important to study the views of those who were opposed to the proponents of progressive Islam in Turkey so as to gain a comprehensive picture of contemporary Islam in the country. He then pointed out that such opposition represented the views of a small fringe of the Turkish people.

DAY TWO

SESSION V: THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROGRESSIVE-LIBERAL ISLAM IN INDONESIA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES – SYAFI'I ANWAR

Dr. Syafi'i Anwar emphasized that there are two paradigms through which to analyze political Islam: (1) the legal-exclusive framework and (2) the substantive-inclusive framework. While proponents of the first approach believe that Islam is not only a religion, but also a universal ideology and a complete legal system, supporters

Mr. Syafii Anwar presented his views on "The Development of Progressive-Liberal Islam in Indonesia"

of the second approach maintain that Islam is a set of moral and ethical guidelines, instead of a blueprint for everything in existence. It is this difference that accounts for the divergent interpretations regarding the need for Muslims to establish an Islamic state and to implement the Shari'a. An Islamic state is an imperative for the legal-exclusive school, but a circumstantial issue for the substantive-inclusive school.

Dr. Anwar then turned to the issue of how the progressive liberal Islam (PLI) network and the radical Salafi movement (RSM) developed in Indonesia. In his view, the critical factor that explains their emergence was the generational gap between the old Muslim leaders (kaum tua) and the young Muslim leaders (kaum muda). While the kaum tua argued for shunning modernity and its equivalents of Westernization and secularization, the kaum muda believed that modernity should be embraced because the 'liberalization' of Islamic teachings would 'liberate' Islamic thinking and adapt it to the modern world.

According to Dr. Anwar, President Soeharto's New Order policy on Muslim education deepened such divisions. On the one hand, the expansion of the State Institute for Islamic Studies (IAIN) improved the religious orientation of the population by providing higher education in the field of Islamic studies. A younger generation of Muslim thinkers emerged, who rejected the traditional approach of politicizing Islam, and opted, instead, for a cultural form of Islam. In their view, only a

liberalized and secularized version of the religion will help preserve Indonesia as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state.

The collapse of Soeharto's regime in May 1998 created the opportunity for the older generation of Muslim leaders to fight back. According to Dr. Anwar, the mushrooming of political parties that accompanied this process allowed for some sectors of society to campaign on behalf of an 'Islamic solution' and an 'Islamic state.' In their opinion, only Islam could serve as a universal panacea for Indonesia's economic and political problems. Through persistent public campaigning, these originally small associations evolved into a mass movement.

The Liberal Islam Network (JIL) emerged in early 2001 as a response to this pro-Shari'ah political cluster. Instead of a mass movement, JIL constituted a loose intellectual forum for sharing ideas and experiences. Its members were young, urban, and well-educated Muslims, who believed that the entire corpus of Islamic teachings needs to be reinterpreted to account for historical realities. Its main intellectual tenets were: 1) the need to deconstruct the Shari'a on the basis of historical study; 2) the promotion of pluralism as the ideological basis for a multiethnic and multi-religious Indonesia; and 3) the promotion of gender equality as the core unit of social justice.

One of the biggest challenges to progressive Islam in Indonesia is the radical Salafi movement (RSM). This movement defies the activities of PLI intellectually, culturally, and politically. Its four defining characteristics are: 1) extreme Shari'a-mindedness; 2) a drive to formalize the Shari'a by presenting it as a universal blueprint; 3) an anti-pluralism agenda; and 4) a profound disregard for gender equality.

What Dr. Anwar found extremely disturbing is that the RSM is winning more and more supporters among the Indonesian public. In his view this is due to the PLI and JIL paying too much attention to the power of ideas, while ignoring the power of the masses.

In terms of recommendations for the advance of progressive Islam in Indonesia, Dr. Anwar suggested that the PLI needs to promote more recognizable values that actively resonate with the experience of ordinary Indonesians. In addition, PLI must focus on developing partnerships with the state and other non-state actors, working hand-in-hand with them to deny RSM public space and acceptance. Given the importance of the cause to protect Indonesian Muslims from RSM's demands to formalize the Shari'a, such endeavors should take priority in PLI's strategic thinking.

DISCUSSION

During the discussion, a question was raised regarding PLI's emphasis on promoting pluralism through alternative methodologies of Qur'anic exegesis. At what point should the line be drawn so as to preserve traditional Islamic values? Dr. Anwar responded that pluralism in Indonesia has a rather long way to go before it becomes a direct threat against Islamic beliefs and practices. In fact, it needs to be actively promoted through a comprehensive framework of secular laws since it forms the basis for Indonesia as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. In response to another question about the factors that explain the popularity of the RSM movement in Indonesia, Dr. Anwar pointed out that although the movement represents a numerically small fringe of 10,000-15,000 supporters, its teachings have been gaining steady ground due to the tactics of provocation and intimidation used by its supporters. He gave the example of conspiracy theories flourishing among the Indonesian public and how these theories have been given a new lease on life through the Danish cartoon issue. On the issue of the future trajectory of progressive Islam in Indonesia, Dr. Anwar replied that despite the fact that PLI has not been successful in spreading its message and acting as a united front for religious and social change, he is still optimistic. In his view, the key issue that PLI needs to resolve is how to fight RSM without undermining the power and authority of the traditional ulama.

SESSION VI: PROGRESSIVE MUSLIM MOVEMENTS IN THE ARAB WORLD - PROFESSOR IBRAHIM ABU RABI

According to Professor Abu Rabi, the beginnings of modern Arab thought can be traced back to the last days of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman elite were well aware of the stagnation and decay in their lands. They devised a program for the modernization and reorganization of their realm, known as Tanzimat. It was this program that gave rise to the three main currents of modern Arabic political thought, depending on which path to modernization their supporters endorsed.

The first trend was pan-Islamism. It was associated primarily with Sultan Abdul Hamid II and some prominent modernists, such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abdu, and Rashid Ridda. Another major trend was pan-Arabism, whose most vocal representatives were the Arab Christians. The last trend was Turkism, made famous by the founder of modern Turkey, Kemal Ataturk. By the end of WWII, however, both pan-Islamism and pan-Arabism had died out. Their place was taken instead by modern Islamist movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hizbut Tahrir, and Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). The organizational model they endorsed was that of a mass-based movement.

In addition to the issue of modernization, the second problem that defines contemporary Arab thought is the question of Palestine. Professor Abu Rabi explained that the two Arab-Israeli wars of 1948 and 1967 created a climate of self-criticism and self-doubt among Middle Eastern elites and their societies. The problem was not so much Israel's military victory, but rather the lack of scientific and technological progress in the Arab world. This was also a result of the absence of clear guidelines for Islamic thinking to address modern problems.

The third major topic of contemporary Arab thought is 'cultural decolonization.' According to Professor Abu Rabi, the establishment of modern nation-states in the 1950s and 1960s

Professor Ibrahim Abu Rabi answering questions after his presentation on "progressive Muslim Movements in the Arab World"

compelled many Arab intellectuals to debate the ideas of Franz Fanon about the relationship between 'colonizer' and 'colonized.' The most prominent school of thought argued that Arabs must free themselves not only from Western economic and military domination, but from its intellectual and cultural subjugation as well. In this regard, the ideas of Islamist scholar Yousuf al-Qardawi became extremely popular. He advocated the need to re-apply the Islamic model, while also warning against the hypocrisy and disunity of Islamic scholars, who had become veritable pawns at the hands of Middle Eastern regimes. In Qardawi's view, the lack of proper religious guidance is responsible for the deviant stances of violence and extremism among Muslim youth.

According to Professor Abu Rabi, the key concern for political Islamists today is not the right to ijtihad, but the problem of political leadership. Middle Eastern political elites are viewed as corrupt and alienated from their societies. They are often trained in the West and affiliated with Western programs of modernization and globalization. The Islamists, on the other hand, view globalization in the context of the deprivation of the masses from their resources. Ever since 9/11, the margin of dictatorship in the Middle East and North Africa has grown by leaps and bounds. Muslim elites have benefited by imposing severe restrictions on their societies and by enlarging their armies at the expense of ordinary citizens. Professor Abu Rabi suggested that we should re-think our presumptions about the prospects for a free and democratic Middle East. In particular, we should

ask ourselves whether it represents a new form of cultural colonization. According to Arab thinkers, this process has already begun.

DISCUSSION

A question was posed regarding the prospects for regionalism in the Middle East and North Africa. Professor Abu Rabi replied that this issue is not a priority for local governments since most economic projects are foreign owned or foreign funded. Another question tackled the relevance of democracy in the Middle East. If Islamists keep gaining at the polls, wouldn't the jihadists also benefit? Professor Abu Rabi responded that most Arab thinkers share the view that democracy cannot be imposed from abroad. Rather, they argue that the centuries-old democratic tradition of the Middle East must be revived.

However, Professor Abu Rabi also pointed out that European and American support for Islamist democratic experiments, such as the one in Turkey, have greatly contributed to their long-term success and moderation.

SESSION VII: THE ISLAMIC STATE ISSUE IN MALAYSIA: PERCEPTIONS AND REALITIES – CHANDRA MUZAFFAR

According to Dr. Muzaffar, growing identity consciousness among the Malay community has been an important driving force behind the so-called 'Islamic resurgence.' Malays have always perceived a strong correlation between their ethnic and religious identities. In consequence, advancing the interests of the community has become synonymous with advancing a pro-Islam agenda. Over the years, these interests have taken on different forms, influenced both by historical events and the political rivalry between the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) and the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS).

As identified by Dr. Muzaffar, the first phase covered the period between 1954 and 1969. In the early decades of independence, the Malay community's key concern was to improve its socio-economic and socio-political status. Due to British colonial policies, the Malays had been relegated from a dominant people to a community among communities. As a result, a strong desire to reassert Malay nationalism emerged. It expressed itself in attempts to safeguard the sovereignty of the Malay nation by promoting the supremacy of Malay power, language, religion, and culture. Whereas PAS envisioned these developments occurring within the framework of an Islamic state, UMNO insisted on Malaysia remaining a secular state.

The second phase took place between 1969 and 1982. According to Dr. Muzaffar, this period was characterized by the traumatic legacy of the 1969 ethnic riots and the 1971 inauguration of the New Economic Policy (NEP). Although there had been marked improvements in the status of the Malay community, the rapid urbanization caused by the NEP presented yet another challenge. Cities like Kuala Lumpur were predominantly Chinese and the new Malay denizens turned to religion as their primary identity-marker. This gave an unexpected boost to PAS' dream for an Islamic state as a marked increase in public religious observance occurred. To balance its opponent, UMNO responded by enhancing the status of the Malay language and introducing it as the main medium of instruction in the national education system.

The third phase covered the period between 1982 and 1998. Global developments such as the Iranian revolution and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan brought the Islamist cause to the fore in worldwide events. In Malaysia, PAS returned to power in the state of Kelantan and immediately introduced hudud laws, including the death punishment for apostasy. UMNO retaliated by Prime Minister Mahathir launching a comprehensive program for Islamization at the state level. The co-optation of ABIM leader Anwar Ibrahim into the government, the establishment of an Islamic Bank and an Islamic Insurance Scheme, the opening of an Islamic University, and the strengthening of the position of the Shari'a courts in Malaysia were some of its initiatives. According to Dr. Muzaffar, the third phase represented an important

Conference participants were able to share their views and exchange perspectives during the Q & A sessions

development in the quest for an Islamic state since it instituted Islam as a key dimension of state policy.

The fourth phase started in 1998 and is still ongoing. As Dr. Muzaffar explained, it has been characterized primarily by squabbles for political power and constituency support between PAS and UMNO. For one, PAS started making inroads into sectors of the Malay community that had previously been staunch UMNO supporters. The sacking of Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim from the government and the controversy this act engendered made UMNO rather unpopular among the Malays. After the strong challenge PAS mounted in the 1999 elections, Mahathir felt under pressure to re-assert UMNO's prestige. In 2001, he declared Malaysia an 'Islamic state.' He measured this not on the basis of hudud laws or Shari'a implementation, but rather on the basis of successful government programs for social justice, economic development, gender equality, and cultural Islamization. He defined 'Islamic state' in spirit, rather than in substance.

Surprisingly, the Malay community was not prepared to accept Mahathir's contention. In their view, an Islamic state had to conform to certain criteria, which were very close to the ones elaborated by PAS. In consequence, UMNO adopted a new approach to Islam. When Abdullah Badawi became Prime Minister in 2003, he articulated the idea of 'Islam Hadhari' or 'Civilizational Islam.' Embodying ten principles and a set of universal values, 'Islam Hadhari' was notable for portraying Malaysia as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. PAS' response was to denounce the initiative as antithetical to Islam.

In conclusion, Dr. Muzaffar emphasized that the notion of progressive Islam in Malaysia has had a rather meandering trajectory. The apparent concern of ethnic Malays with their identity has played an important role for the public promotion of their faith. The country's long-standing religious tradition has further strengthened such uncritical attitudes towards Islam. There is an obvious need, according to Dr. Muzaffar, for a critical re-evaluation of the key tenets of the faith.

This can be done only if Malaysia's ruling elites understand the need for alternative avenues through which to promote progressive Islam. Rather than present it as a modern version of PAS' Islamic State or re-cast its principles under the guise of 'Islam Hadhari,' they should focus on changing the Islamic educational curriculum and retraining Islamic teachers and scholars. In addition, they should harness the power of the mass media to reach out to the general public, while also leading the way to progressive ideas by their own examples. A comprehensive re-orientation in the way that Malays perceive and understand their faith must occur if Malaysia is to become a bastion of progressive Islam, Dr. Muzaffar concluded.

DISCUSSION

During the Q&A, a comparison was drawn between the circumstances of the Malay community in Malaysia and the Hindu community in India. As collectivities with clear demographic and political majorities, they are rather implausible targets for 'siege mentality,' yet both communities exhibit this syndrome. According to Dr. Muzaffar, explanations must be sought in both external and internal developments. British colonial policies had a lot to do with the inferiority complex these communities experienced, as well as their need to reassert themselves in the post-colonial era. Secondly, the hegemonic discourses of ethnic parties explain the community's exclusivist stance towards other communities. The lesson

to be learned is that whenever religion and politics mix, religion loses out and politics wins. Another question tackled the issue of whether Prime Minister Badawi should be given more time to advance the tenets of progressive Islam. Dr. Muzaffar responded that, throughout history, any association between the machinery of the state and a particular religion has had pernicious results. This is because any attempt to politicize religion tends to transform religious debates into political contests and zero-sum games. As such, even though progressive Islam re-emerged independently in Malaysia during the 1990s and early 2000, the recent attempts on the part of the government to actively promote it have compelled the conservative ulama in the country to rally against it defensively.

Session VIII: Contemporary Muslim Revival: Is There a Case for 'Protestant Islam'? - Syed Farid Alatas

Professor Alatas highlighted two explanations as to why the Muslim world is unable to catch up with the West. According to the first one, the problem does not lie with Islam, but rather with what is termed 'Islamism.' Extremists such as Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab in the 18th century, Sayyid Qutb in the 20th century, and Osama bin Laden in the 21st century have created hate-based ideologies that lack understanding towards other human beings. The only solution is for 'moderate' and 'peace-loving' Muslims to marginalize the logic of Islamism by launching broad-based 'Protestant-like' reforms.

The second view, according to Professor Alatas, attributes the problems facing the Muslim world today as originating within the faith. Islam as a religion is inherently irrational, legalistic, politicized, and unable to adapt to changing circumstances. Unlike Christianity, it has not undergone a process of religious transformation. In consequence, the Muslim world is stuck in its own Middle Ages. The only solution is for Islam to undergo a 'Protestant-type' reformation, thereby allowing Muslims to adapt to modernity.

Tea breaks were an opportunity to carry the discussion outside the forum

Professor Alatas explained that both views are misguided because their basic assumptions are wrong. The first one characterizes Muslim revivalist movements as having 'Protestant-like' features. Parallels are established between 16th century Protestant reformers and contemporary Muslim activists in terms of doctrines, institutions, and practices. For example, the Muslim reformers' refusal to apply without questioning the classical teachings of the Islamic tradition, are compared to Luther's refusal to obey the authority of the Catholic Church. In reality, however, the socio-political contexts of both transformations differ considerably. Professor Alatas pointed out that Muslim scholars and activists have exhibited critical attitudes towards political and religious authority throughout Islam's history. What they sought to reform were certain beliefs and practices among the Muslim community, rather than Islam itself.

The second view attributes the problems of the Muslim world to the backward stance of Islam. According to this interpretation, Islam has been inherently incapable of carrying out a 'Protestant-like' reformation due to the power of the clergy over the masses. What has been neglected, however, is that the original idea of 'Islamic Protestantism' came from within the Islamic tradition, most notably with Iranian activists in the context of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 and, later on, with Ali Shariati in the 1960s in Iran. Professor Alatas pointed out that even these reformers stopped short of advocating a complete theological

revolution for Islam, but argued instead in favor of social and legal reforms. This is because Islam inherently possesses the characteristics attributed to a reformed Christianity, since there is no equivalent to the papacy in the Islamic tradition.

As such, portraying the phenomenon of contemporary Islamic resurgence through the prism of 16th century Christianity is rather superficial. According to Professor Alatas, it is part of a larger tendency to Christianize all religions. Even though Islam and Hinduism are assumed to have universal validity, a hidden cultural Christianization is at work, if judging by attempts to ascribe to them characteristics specific to Christianity. The underlying assumption is that only Christianity is universal. Moreover, there are inherent dangers to attributing Christian features to all religions, since such intellectual speculations tend to disregard the self-perception and self-actualization of the practitioners of other faiths. In the context of Islam, this becomes most prominent when Muslim scholars and activists present genuine reforms under the rubric of the empowerment of tradition. As such, Professor Alatas concluded, the solution to the quest for progressive reformation in the Muslim world does not lie in its 'Protestantization,' but rather in attempts to understand the real needs and concerns of Muslims.

Discussion

During the discussion, Professor Alatas reiterated that while he is not averse to adopting Western terms and concepts to describe Islam, there is an urgent need to move beyond portraying Islam through the prism of Christianity. More attention needs to be paid to the self-conceptualization of Muslims today. This would provide us with an invaluable insight into how Muslims regard themselves and their problems, including the issue of terrorism. Professor Alatas also stressed that an accurate reconstruction of Islam would be based on authentic Islamic sources. Responding to a query on how Christianity was perceived by Islam, Professor Alatas argued that there are also problems with the way that Muslims perceive Christianity and Judaism.

Greater dialogue between the three traditions is needed in order to facilitate mutual respect and understanding.

Session IX: Panel Discussion: The Future of Progressive Islam

Professor Syed Farid Alatas explained that the aim of the panel discussion is to explore the ways in which the ideas discussed during the two day conference can be implemented at the policy level. He set the tone for the discussion by asking the panelist to address the following questions: 1) how they view and define progressive Islam; 2) how progressive ideas about Islam can be propagated among the general public; 3) how the panelists view the challenges and the opportunities facing progressive Islam; and, finally, 4) whether there is a difference between 'progressive Islam' and 'liberal Islam.'

Professor Abdullah Saeed defined progressive Islam as one of the many schools of thought in contemporary Islam. He noted that although there are various interpretations as to what is meant by progressive Islam, his way of defining it is through intellectual efforts that seek to incorporate the contexts and needs of modern Muslims. Professor Saeed observed that one of the main obstacles to propagating progressive ideas about Islam lies in the notion that there is only one set of Islamic laws that is acceptable. On the issue of who has the right to interpret Islam, he pointed out that although Islam does not have a clergy or a centralized church structure, Muslim religious establishments exert considerable influence in terms of how Muslims view and practice their religion. If they are antithetical to progressive Islam, their constituencies would be averse to it as well.

Noting that conservative Muslims do not label or qualify Islam, but rather claim to speak on behalf of all of Islam, Dr. Chandra Muzaffar refused to call Islam either 'progressive,' 'conservative,' or 'liberal.' In his view, such definitions tend to limit the speaker's ability to connect with his audience because they sow lines of division among the Islamic community.

According to Dr. Muzaffar, there are four main obstacles confronting the spread of progressive ideas about Islam. The first one is represented by Muslim conservatives, who either use violence to spread their ideas or refrain from using violence, but still hold extremist views. The second obstacle is posed by the work of Muslim intellectuals, who claim to be concerned about the future Islam, but who are rather much more concerned with refashioning Islam to fit with their interpretation of a post-enlightenment discourse. The third challenge is the behavior of the repressive nation-state. In this regard, Muslim activists must be prepared to take on governments which deny human rights and victimize the masses. The fourth challenge is posed by the global system of power, a system that allows no divergence of opinion when discussing economic and social issues. Muslim activists must be ready to oppose it as well. Dr. Muzaffar lamented that while many Muslims champion internal reforms; they have so far failed to stand up to global oppression. This has detracted from their overall credibility. To be effective, Muslim activists must reach out and engage with other communities since the battle for global justice is not restricted to Muslims alone. In fact, Dr. Muzaffar claimed that certain non-Muslims groups have been far more successful in their opposition to the global system.

Another task for Muslim activists, Dr. Muzaffar asserted, is that they must learn to speak from within the principles and practices of their own tradition. To this end, they must ensure that the ideas they propagate are rooted within Islamic history, theology, and ethics. In parallel, they must also be observant of the main requirements of the Islamic faith. The best kind of leadership is the leadership by example, Dr. Muzaffar emphasized. In conclusion, he noted that while the state might adopt and promote certain ideas about Islam, it is important that progressive ideas remain the primary domain of civil society.

Dr. Ashgar Ali Engineer also rejected any attempts to qualify Islam with terms like 'progressive,' 'liberal,' or 'conservative.' In his view, Islam is inherently progressive, liberating,

Professor Syed Farid Alatas gives the closing remarks to the two-day conference

and revolutionary. He noted that it would be much more useful to categorize Islam in terms of time periods. For example, one could speak of Islam in the modern age instead of modern Islam. Dr. Engineer pointed out that values such as justice and freedom are central to the Qur'an, even though these values are universal and not limited to Islam. He also noted that while the Qur'an contains only a few verses on legal issues, it has many more verses that expound on universal truths and principles. Muslim scholars, by contrast, have dwelt on legal issues far more extensively than on the ethical values of Islam. According to Dr. Engineer, there is a need to reverse this order.

Dr. Engineer also felt that the key obstacles confronting Muslims today are internal, rather than external in nature. In his view, lack of freedom and the absence of democracy are the main challenges of the Muslim world. Part of the explanation is that perhaps democracies, such as India, are more suitable grounds for the evolution of progressive ideas about Islam. Dr. Engineer also agreed with Dr. Muzaffar that Muslim activists must be prepared to stand up to the global system of power and that civil society has a key role to play in the future of progressive Islam.

Noting that the discussion so far has focused primarily on the needs and interests of Muslims in Musli-majority states, Professor Ibrahim Abu-Rabi sought to raise the issue of Muslim minorities in the West, especially those in Europe and the United States. The fact that many of the

imams of these communities are sent back to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Yemen for training ensures that they not only are unable to relate to the problems of their communities, but that they also lack essential language and cultural skills pertaining to their host countries. As such, these leaders have failed to engage their communities and to guide them successfully through the challenges of the modern age. Professor Abu Rabi hastened to clarify that he is not suggesting that Muslims in Europe and the United States should cut themselves off from Muslims in the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, or Southeast Asia. Rather, his suggestion is that Muslims in these countries need to adopt and adapt the traditions and the practices of their host nations, in addition to the great tradition of Islam.

Professor Abu Rabi highlighted three general trends that characterize contemporary Islam. The first claims that Islam can only be practiced within the context of an Islamic state and an Islamic society. The second asserts that Islam can be practiced communally and that there is no inherent need to implement the Shari'a at the state level. The third one stipulates that there is no need for Islam in the public sphere at all, since religion is a private matter. Professor Abu Rabi argued that the role of progressive Muslims is to encourage dialogue and compromise among these three trends. None of them individually bears true witness to the vibrancy and richness of Islam and its tradition.

Warning against the use of 'progressive Islam' as the new fashion slogan, Professor Farid Alatas opened the floor to questions and comments. Much of the ensuing discussion revolved around suitable definitions of 'progressive Islam.' Doubts were raised about the appropriateness of the label, especially since it suggests the existence of an 'unprogressive' or 'regressive' Islam. In addition, it connotes a very intimate link to the so-called 'liberal Islam,' if judging by experiences of certain scholars in Egypt and Indonesia. Many of them have encountered tremendous difficulties when attempting to negotiate with conservative or radical Muslims because their ideas carry negative associations of 'secularizing' or 'liberal' tendencies. As such, 'progressive ideas about Islam' is a much better term and concept than 'progressive Islam.'

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P R O G R A M M E

IDSS CONFERENCE ON PROGRESSIVE ISLAM

Day 1: Tuesday, 7 March 2006

8:15 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.	Registration of Guests
9:00 a.m. – 9:15 a.m.	Guests to be seated
9:15 a.m. – 9:20 a.m.	Arrival of Guest-of-Honour Mr Zainul Abidin Rasheed Minister of State for Foreign Affairs
9:20 a.m. – 9:40 a.m.	Welcome Address **Barry Desker** Director, IDSS **Syed Farid Alatas** Convenor, IDSS Conference on Progressive Islam &. Associate Professor, Dept of Sociology, National University of Singapore.
9:40 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.	**KEYNOTE ADDRESS** by Guest-of-Honour
10:00 a.m. – 10.30 a.m.	Reception
10.30 a.m. - 11.30 a.m.	**THE REGENERATION OF MUSLIM SOCIETY**Syed Hussein Alatas Professor, Institute of the Malay World and Civilisation, National University of Malaysia (UKM). Moderator: Sharon Siddique Director, Sree Kumar Siddique Pte Ltd.
11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.	**PROGRESSIVE MUSLIMS AND THE INTERPRETATIONOF THE QURAN TODAY** **Abdullah Saeed** Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies andDirector, Centre for the Study of Contemporary Islam, University of Melbourne. Moderator: Albakri Ahmad, Director, Corporate Development and Education, Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS)
12:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.	Lunch
2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.	**PROGRESSIVE ISLAM, ISLAMIC STATE** AND RETHINKING SHARIAH LAWS **Asghar Ali Engineer** Chairman, Centre for Study of Society and Secularism and Director, Institute of Islamic Studies. Moderator: Bryan S. Turner, Professor, Asia Research Institute and Dept of Sociology National University of Singapore
3:00 p.m. – 3.30 p.m.	Tea
3.30 pm - 4.30 p.m.	**THE CONCEPT OF PROGRESSIVE ISLAM IN TURKEY** **Alparsalan Acikgenc** Professor and Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Science Fatih University. Moderator: Ibrahim Abu-Rabi, Visiting Professor, IDSS
4.30 p.m.	End of Day I

Day 2: Wednesday, 8 March 2006

9:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.	**ISLAM AND PLURALISM IN INDONESIASyafii Anwar** Executive Director, International Centre for Islam and Pluralism (ICIP), Jakarta

Moderator: Merle Ricklefs,Visiting Professor, History Department, National University of Singapore

10.30 am – 11.00 a.m.   Tea

11.00 am – 12.00 p.m.   **PROGRESSIVE ISLAM AND THE PHILIPPINE EXPERIENCE**
Julkipli Wadi
Associate Professor II, Institute of Islamic Studies, University of Philippines-Diliman
Moderator: Premarani Somasundram
Senior Fellow, IDSS

12.00 noon - 1.00 p.m.   Lunch

1.00 pm – 2.00 p.m.   **THE ISLAMIC STATE ISSUE IN MALAYSIA: PERCEPTIONS AND REALITIES**
Chandra Muzaffar
President, International Movement for a Just World

Moderator: Joseph Liow
Assistant Professor, IDSS

2.00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.   **PROGRESSIVE MUSLIM MOVEMENTS IN**
THE ARAB WORLD Ibrahim Abu-Rabi
Visiting Professor, IDSS
Moderator: Yang Razali Kassim
Senior Fellow, IDSS & Co-Convenor IDSS Conference on Progressive Islam

3:00 pm – 3.30 p.m.   Tea

3.30 pm – 4.30 p.m.   **THE IDEA OF 'PROTESTANT ISLAM'**
Syed Farid Alatas
Convenor, IDSS Conference on Progressive Islam &
Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, NUS
Moderator: Yusof Sulaiman
Director, Centre for Research on Malay/Muslim Affairs (RIMA)

4:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.   **THE FUTURE OF PROGRESSIVE ISLAM**
Wrap-up Roundtable Discussion
Moderator: Syed Farid Alatas
Convenor, IDSS Conference on Progressive Islam
& Associate Professor, Dept of Sociology, NUS

5:30 p.m. – 5:45 p.m.   Closing Remarks

Attire: Shirt and Tie for 1st Day, Office Wear for 2nd Day

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About IDSS

The Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS) was established in July 1996 as an autonomous research institute within the Nanyang Technological University. Its objectives are to:

- Conduct research on security, strategic and international issues.
- Provide general and graduate education in strategic studies, international relations, defence management and defence technology.
- Promote joint and exchange programmes with similar regional and international institutions, and organise seminars/conferences on topics salient to the strategic and policy communities of the Asia-Pacific.

Constituents of IDSS include the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), the Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS) and the Asian Programme for Negotiation and Conflict Management (APNCM).

Research

Through its Working Paper Series, *IDSS Commentaries* and other publications, the Institute seeks to share its research findings with the strategic studies and defence policy communities. The Institute's researchers are also encouraged to publish their writings in refereed journals. The focus of research is on issues relating to the security and stability of the Asia-Pacific region and their implications for Singapore and other countries in the region. The Institute has also established the S. Rajaratnam Professorship in Strategic Studies (named after Singapore's first Foreign Minister), to bring distinguished scholars to participate in the work of the Institute. Previous holders of the Chair include Professors Stephen Walt (Harvard University), Jack Snyder (Columbia University), Wang Jisi (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences), Alastair Iain Johnston (Harvard University) and John Mearsheimer (University of Chicago). A Visiting Research Fellow Programme also enables overseas scholars to carry out related research in the Institute.

Teaching

The Institute provides educational opportunities at an advanced level to professionals from both the private and public sectors in Singapore as well as overseas through graduate programmes, namely, the Master of Science in Strategic Studies, the Master of Science in International Relations and the Master of Science in International Political Economy. These programmes are conducted full-time and part-time by an international faculty. The Institute also has a Doctoral programme for research in these fields of study. In addition to these graduate programmes, the Institute also teaches various modules in courses conducted by the SAFTI Military Institute, SAF Warrant Officers' School, Civil Defence Academy, and the Defence and Home Affairs Ministries. The Institute also runs a one-semester course on '*The International Relations of the Asia Pacific*' for undergraduates in NTU.

Networking

The Institute convenes workshops, seminars and colloquia on aspects of international relations and security development that are of contemporary and historical significance. Highlights of the Institute's activities include a regular Colloquium on Strategic Trends in the 21st Century, the annual Asia Pacific Programme for Senior Military Officers (APPSMO) and the biennial Asia Pacific Security Conference. IDSS staff participate in Track II security dialogues and scholarly conferences in the Asia-Pacific. IDSS has contacts and collaborations with many international think tanks and research institutes throughout Asia, Europe and the United States. The Institute has also participated in research projects funded by the Ford Foundation and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation. It also serves as the Secretariat for the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP), Singapore. Through these activities, the Institute aims to develop and nurture a network of researchers whose collaborative efforts will yield new insights into security issues of interest to Singapore and the region.