



**U.S. – Islamic World Forum
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Press Release:

**Governance, Religion, and Politics Task Force
The 2007 U.S.-Islamic World Forum in Doha, Qatar**

Participants at the Governance, Religion, and Politics Task Force at the 2007 U.S. Islamic World Forum, a global leaders' conference hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar and the Saban Center at the Brookings Institution, discussed issues such as how to make government more effective for its citizens, the role of religion in the public sphere, and the extent to which religious belief might inform public policy. Shibley Telhami, Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland and Nonresident Senior Fellow with the Saban Center, chaired the Task Force. Today's sessions included presentations by John DeGioia, President of Georgetown University, Charles Henderson, Executive Director of the Association for Religion and Intellectual Life, Hadi Semati, Professor with the Faculty of Law and Political Science at Tehran University, Khalil Shikaki, the Director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, Abdullah An-Naim, Charles Howard Candler Professor of Law at Emory University, James Donahue, President of the Graduate Theological Union, and Katharine Henderson, Executive Vice President of the Auburn Theological Seminary. The final session of the Task Force taking place tomorrow will be addressed by Al Sadig Rahman al-Mahdi, former Prime Minister of Sudan, Bob Roberts, founder and Senior Pastor of NorthWood Church, and Jillian Schwedler, Assistant Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland.

In the first session, the discussion focused on the challenge that globalization poses to states' ability to meet the needs of their citizens and what role religions sometimes plays in filling this emergent need. The discussion focused also on the question of religion's place in the public sphere. Participants discussed religion both as a challenge to state authority and as a motivating force in public life. An American participant noted that religion is so important because the state is not equipped to handle the needs of human beings. Religion therefore is an important source for human development and satisfaction. A participant from the Islamic world remarked that religion can not be chased out of the public sphere. Another participant from the Islamic world added that it is important to determine what the role of religion should be in the public sphere, in light of the fact that it will always have a part to play.

Participants spent much time discussing the question of why religious parties win elections and whether or not this actually represent a desire on the part of voting populations for religious leaders. An American participant noted that, based on recent polling in the Islamic world, Muslims do not desire religious leaders but feel strongly that Islamic law should be at least a source for the laws enforced by the government. A participant from the Islamic world brought up the notion that it is an illusion to believe that the separation of church and state inherently will lead to the separation of religion from politics. The participant insisted

that religion always finds a way to assert itself in the public sphere, usually through the vehicle of politics.

About the U.S.-Islamic World Forum: The 2007 U.S.- Islamic World Forum is a global conference bringing together American and Muslim world political, business, media, civil society, science, arts and cultural leaders. The Forum seeks to serve as both a convening body for American and Muslim world leaders and as a catalyst for promoting more positive relations between the U.S. and Muslim states and communities. The theme of the 2007 Forum is "Confronting What Divides Us." The U.S.-Islamic World Forum has quickly established itself as the premiere meeting ground for serious engagement between American and Muslim world leaders.

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For more on the U.S.-Islamic World Forum:

<http://www.us-islamicworldforum.org/>

For more on the Brookings Islamic World Project:

<http://www.brookings.edu/fp/research/projects/islam/islam.htm>