

## SPEAKERS

Dr. John Entelis is Professor of Political Science and Director of the Middle East Studies Program at Fordham University (Bronx, NY). He is also editor of *The Journal of North African Studies*. His latest publication on the Maghreb, "The Democratic Imperative versus the Authoritarian Impulse: The Maghreb State between Transition and Terrorism," appeared in *The Middle East Journal* in autumn 2005. He has also written and edited several full length books on North African politics.

Dr. Lise Garon is Professor of Political Communications at l'Université Laval in Québec. She chairs the International Political Science Association's Political Research Committee on contemporary North Africa. As an observer of political change in North Africa, her research works focus on democratization processes, public debates and the media. She is the author of numerous articles and books on the politics of the Maghreb, most recently *Dangerous Alliances: Civil Society, the Media and Democratic Transition in North Africa*. ■

## PATHWAY OR DEAD END?: CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE MAGHREB

An active and independent civil society remains the key to democratic change in North Africa and the broader Middle East, argued Lise Garon, professor at Canada's Laval University. Yet, most North African civil society groups have made a bargain not to challenge entrenched regimes, suggested John Entelis, director of the Middle East Studies Program at Fordham University. For that reason, Entelis said, these groups mostly ensure a consolidation of power rather than a devolution of it. He added that the only social movements in North Africa that were truly popular and committed to the rule of law, pluralism, and democratic change were non-violent Islamist groups.

Entelis and Garon spoke on December 16 at the second session of CSIS's Maghreb Roundtable. They struggled to define who the legitimate civil society actors are, to assess how strong they are, and determine whether they have—or ultimately will have—the capacity to promote genuine change in their societies.

Both speakers doubted regimes' willingness to devolve power and lead a process of genuine democratization. They agreed that many of them use a combination of coercion and consensus to manipulate and control the reform process. The states retain overwhelming access to resources, and the security apparatus remains the final arbiter of societal conflict and the guarantor of the regime's survival. In this way, regimes have often created an illusion of change through parliamentary debate and elections, while maintaining the status quo.

Yet, Morocco may not fit this model so neatly. Recently, the Moroccan monarchy and Moroccan civil society have partnered to promote reform, including a new human development initiative, a liberal family code (*moudawana*), greater political participation by women and the inclusion of a non-violent Islamist party in the public sphere. Participants wondered if the regime could lead the reform process rather than simply mediating it. In essence, they asked, could the regime itself be considered an agent of genuine reform?

Garon argued that regimes cannot be expected to reform themselves. With the possible exception of Morocco, regimes in the region lack the capacity to undertake reforms. The

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## THE MAGHREB ROUNDTABLE SERIES

The CSIS Middle East Program launched the Maghreb Roundtable in November, 2005 to examine the strategic importance of a broad range of social, political, and economic trends in North Africa and to identify opportunities for constructive U.S. engagement. The roundtable defines the Maghreb as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Mauritania. The roundtable convenes monthly, assembling a diverse group of regional experts, policymakers, academics, and business leaders seeking to build a greater understanding of the complexities of the region. Topics for discussion will include the role of Islamist movements in politics, the war on terror, democratization and the limits of civil society, the strategic importance of North African energy, the effects of emigrant communities in Europe, and prospects for greater regional integration. ■

speakers agreed that developments such as the new Moroccan family law were positive steps, but the true magnitude of its impact could not be judged until the law was fully implemented. Entelis argued that the true impact was not among urban elites, where women have enjoyed rights for many years, but rather among the rural poor. He further suggested that state-driven reforms could backfire if they fell short of societal expectations, leading to greater social unrest. Garon argued that such pluralism handed down from above was an inherently unstable process. "Democracy," she said, "cannot be given by the prince, it must be struggled for."

Entelis argued that a major failure of regimes in the Maghreb is the lack of any ideological project that mobilizes and unifies citizens. Instead, he said, "the only valid ideological project that mobilizes people today in North Africa is Islamic." Including Islamists as full participants is vital for the democratization process. He contended that their inclusion into politics would force them to make compromises. Entelis's argument provoked debate regarding the commitment of Islamists to democracy and whether Islamists would not actually end the democratic experiment after coming to power.

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Entelis failed to see a threat in semi-authoritarian governments run by non-violent Islamists. He argued that such governments would behave no worse than those they seek to replace, and, given the fact that they are more representative of society, they would enjoy more legitimacy than the current incumbents.

He further suggested that Islamists' political victory would set a precedent for peaceful transition of power. The essence of democracy, he said, is the willingness to lose elections. Incumbent regimes seem largely unwilling to lose.

Garon had far more faith in secular elite groups, suggesting that patient and long-term support from the West would allow them to develop as local systems sunk further into crisis. At the right moment, she said, these groups could present themselves as a viable pathway out of crisis. Communications make such dissident movements more viable, and she pointed to evidence of democratic opposition movements in Tunisia, many of which have at least some of their operations outside the country.

Entelis argued for broader political inclusion in North African politics, including Islamist parties. The results of elections should be respected and those who win should be allowed to perform and then judged by their effectiveness. North Africa is ready for such democratic change, he argued, and the only way short of violent revolution to address the socio-economic problems of North African states is through genuine and inclusive democratization. ■ -HM 12/20/05

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## Useful Links and Information

The third Maghreb Roundtable, "Foreigners at Home: North African Immigrant Communities in Europe," will be held on January 19. Joycelene Cesari, of Harvard University, and Peter Mandaville, of George Mason University, will lead the roundtable's discussion.

John Entelis's article, "The Democratic Imperative vs. the Authoritarian Impulse: The Maghreb State between Transition and Terrorism," as published in the Navy Postgraduate School's *Strategic Insights* in June 2005:

<http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2005/Jun/entelisJun05.pdf>

The website for the CSIS Maghreb Roundtable, with archived summaries of previous roundtables:

<http://www.csis.org/mideast/maghreb>

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