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ABSTRACT ONLY – WORK IN PROGRESS

“Contemporary Islamist Interpretation of the
Status of Non-Muslims in an Islamic State”

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The status of non-Muslims in Muslim society has always been a contentious issue. Although many Muslims claim and some historians maintain that non-Muslims were treated well under Muslim rule, opposite assertions and examples also exist. The age-old claim of Islamic egalitarianism and universalism has come under new scrutiny and intense debate recently, especially because Islamists have stated their goal of establishing Islamic state(s) in their respective countries many of which are multi-religious. Concerns and questions have been raised about the possible, or even inevitable, discrimination against the non-Muslim minorities under Islamic law (*Shari'ah*). Drawing upon the views of three contemporary Islamist ideologues: Mawdudi (1903-1979), Qaradawi (1926-) and Ghanoushi (1941-), this paper examines the nature of pluralism, and especially the scope of political participation by non-Muslims under an Islamic regime. While all of these ideologues argue that Islamic law is non-discriminatory and is compatible with the elements of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, their interpretations vary from one another and sometimes contradict and even belie their claim. For Mawdudi, Islam provides the following rights to minorities: status of *Dhimmi* or protected people, preservation of the self and dignity, equality before the law, maintenance of equal civil law and freedom of expression, and holding public positions. He also believes that an Islamic state is an ideological state, and therefore, non-Muslims can not hold key public representative positions and ministries. Qaradawi does not disagree with Mawdudi over the issue of *Dhimmi*. However, in view of the drastic changes in circumstances, and the fact that today taxation and military service laws are applied equally to all citizens, Qaradawi suggests that there is no reason for the imposition of *jizyah* as a separate tax on non-Muslim citizens. Ghanoushi has gone one step further by suggesting that Islam no longer requires non-Muslims to be treated as *protected persons*. Instead, they are to be accorded full-citizenship rights, just like their Muslim fellows. This discussion brings into focus some significant issues. First, contemporary Islamists understand the issue of *Dhimmi* differently from their predecessors. Second, divergences among the Islamists on this issue reveal that their views are all but conclusive. In other words, Islamist views are evolving. Third, and most importantly, second-generation Islamists are not necessarily more

conservative or radical, they could be more moderate. Furthermore, moderation in Islamism would lead to articulating a new discourse that would be more humanistic and universalistic.