

AMSS 40th ANNUAL CONFERENCE

“Looking Beyond 9/11: Islam in the West and
Democratic Trends in the Middle East and North Africa”

Cosponsored by:
Department of Sociology &
Dispute Resolution Consortium
at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY
&
Institute of Global Cultural Studies, Binghamton University, NY
Friday, September 23, 2011

ABSTRACT

“The Arab Revolts and the Prospects of People Power Democracy”

By: Mohamed Nimer, Ph.D
(American University, Washington, DC)

This presentation will explore the prospects of a people power democracy in the Arab world. A people power democracy is a political system whose main goal is to prevent the emergence of a power regime on the basis of a single ideology, sect, interest, ethnicity, or tribe. The paper argues that despite potential and real obstacles, the convergence of three major factors raise the likelihood of people power democracies aimed at preventing future military coups or factional hegemony over state systems. First, the popularization of Arabo-Islamic ideals that view rulers as servants of the public rather than claimants of a power prize aids the development of an Arab political culture that favors power sharing and transparent governance. Second, the leaders being deposed in Arab countries were heads of military regimes that did not allow the rise of non-military sources of power, except religious social movements that promoted the above notion about power and leadership. Third, the desire of Western powers to support democratic change while discouraging the advance of anti-Western factions leaves Western governments with one option: support the development of government systems that are structured to divide political power among these people. Using this framework of analysis, this paper will evaluate the *salafist* push for extreme Islamization; the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood as the center of gravity among Arab factions; the hesitancy of the remaining Arab military leaders to accept a diminishing role in politics; and the conceptual gap between the actions of Western power supporting Arab democratic change and their pre-January 14th policy articulations.