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## Washington Islamic Conference

# Zionist hardliners in, but PLO is excluded

By MARK A. BRUZONSKY

WASHINGTON, Oct 10: "The Arabs are often their own worst enemies". This often-mentioned aphorism about Arab political efforts in the U.S. seems about to be coming true once again as the Islamic Conference Organization gets ready this week to hold its "first-ever major political conference in Washington. The three-day conference scheduled for 13-15 October at downtown Washington's prestigious International Club is being co-sponsored by the American University after a number of foreign policy institutions turned it down. But what some Washington observers and Arab personalities find inexcusable and even scandalous is that the Jewish representatives invited as Israeli hardliners supportive of Zionism are totally opposed to a Palestinian State. Moreover, the conference is also being manipulated, albeit indirectly by the Egyptian government which

is using the gathering to show that Egyptian diplomats are fully accepted at such a meeting together with representatives from Arab governments who are scheduled, according to the organizers, to attend. Both Egypt's ambassador in the U.S., Ashraf Ghorbal, and Egypt's ambassador in Canada, Tahseen Basheer, have been aiding the conference organizers and will be personally attending. It appears that the ICO has gotten itself into this political mess through a combination of incompetence, ignorance and deception. "The Arabs aren't even able to organize one single affair like this in the right way. This proves their total incompetence. They are befriending the Arab world with this conference. They don't even know who their friends and who their enemies are", noted one former Arab diplomat in uncharacteristic exasperation. The Arab League ambassador Clovis Makoud, contacted yesterday for his comments about this unprecedented upcoming conference to which prominent American government and press personalities

have been invited, indicated he did not even know it was going to take place. In their usual way, those delegated with protecting Arab interests and watching out for developments such as this seem totally oblivious to what is going on around them. In an earlier report published on October 6 in this newspaper, the background to the ICO conference was gone over in detail. To summarize, nearly 3 years ago a Pakistani official of the ICO began attempts to organize a Washington conference on Jerusalem. He was completely unsuccessful after repeated attempts. Earlier this year Hamdi Salah, a young Egyptian on leave from the foreign service, began efforts to arrange a conference on Middle East peace. That conference was originally scheduled to be held at the Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies (SAIS). Somehow, through their purposes are substantially at odds (for the original ICO conference was not even going to allow Egyptian government officials to participate), the desired ICO conference

and the Hamdi Salah conference became merged. After a lunch that brought together ambassador Lucius Battle, the ICO official and Salah, an initial check for \$30,000 was presented to Battle who heads the Foreign Policy Institute at SAIS. But after further investigation, Battle—a former Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East and A. Savvy, a careful Washington personality highly knowledgeable about Middle East affairs—decided the conference was being improperly organized and would neither contribute to Middle East peace nor bring together the right persons for an Arab-American dialogue. Consequently Battle took the highly unusual step of returning most of the \$30,000 to the ICO and washing his hands entirely from the conference. In a town where money usually dominates such decision, and in view of the Foreign Policy Institute's known hunger for just such supportive funding, Battle's decision was all the more unusual though he remains unwilling to discuss the specific reasons

for his decision. Lacking a base for sponsorship, Hamdi Salah together with a former colleague for SAIS, Dimitry Simes, attempted to find other sponsorship from other institutions involved in foreign policy. Failing to do so they arranged to have the conference co-sponsored by American University—and in fact the ICO sponsorship is being greatly downplayed even though the entire budget is subsidized by the ICO and the Secretary-General of the ICO, Habib Chatti, is scheduled to give the keynote address. Unable to arrange himself for prominent American participation, Salah increasingly turned to Simes, a shrewd and capable Russian emigrant who has been in the USA for about a decade and who has been involved with a number of prominent Washington foreign policy institutions. Apparently being well-paid for his efforts with the ICO funds, Simes began arranging for high-level American participants with the guarantee from Salah that major Arabs would come. But

possibly with reservations of his own, Simes refused to accept co-directorship of the conference or any other official title, and uses to insist that the conference all the responsibility of Hamdi Salah. Yet Simes has played a major role in some of the most controversial decisions whom to invite. As reported in a previous article, the organizers added only to invite academic business-world Palestinians, finally ruling out any participation from Palestinians representatives. "They would be too extreme", the organizers are to believe. According to the organizers, the ICO is fully aware and fully supportive of the decision to eliminate any PLO participation a conference which is supposed to be a dialogue between Arab Americans about peace in the Middle East, including resolving Palestinian question. Even if this is so, it seems unlikely the ICO is fully aware of the Jewish participation chosen

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gely at Simes' suggestion.

Joseph Joffe, a well-known European writer is "one of the most arrogant and hard-line Zionists there is" according to one of the few Arab diplomats who knows him. And yet, he is on the small "sponsoring committee" organizing the conference. Joffe is known to be totally opposed to Palestinian self-determination and is a strong supporter of the current government of Israel and its policies toward the Arabs. He is definitely not connected in any way with any of the progressive Jewish and Israeli groups whom the Arabs have come to invite to previous meetings.

Last week, apparently aware of growing criticism, the organizers sent a special delivery letter to Philip Klutznick, one of the few world Jewish personalities who has spoken up strongly for Palestinian rights and a comprehensive peace, attempting to enlist his participation. Mr. Klutznick was unable to attend and so the organizers, possibly at the suggestion of Egypt's ambassador Ashraf Ghorbal, inexplicably turned to Rabbi Arthur Schneider in New York.

Rabbi Schneider, Chairman of the North American branch of the World Jewish Congress, is also known as a strong supporter of the Government of Israel and its policies. He too is totally opposed to a Palestinian State and Palestinian self-determination. Some of those who know Rabbi Schneider consider him an irrepressible "opportunist". There are also some who suspect Schneider has very close American government or CIA ties. Just as with Joffe, this will be the first time Rabbi Schneider has ever been invited to such a gathering of Arab world personalities.

A third Jewish person known to be advising the organizers is Dr. Joyce Starr at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Starr has worked at CSIS for a number of years primarily attempting to support the separate Egyptian-Israeli peace and to build support and understanding for Israel's invasion of Lebanon. It was Starr who arranged another highly controversial conference two years ago at which the Al-Ahram Center from Cairo co-sponsored a conference with CSIS at which the notoriously anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian commentator, George Will, was the main speaker. At that affair Sandbrahrer, a sociologist from American University in Cairo, had a heated and bitter exchange with Will. It was generally agreed by the Arab participants that "never again" would they allow themselves to be so manipulated.

And yet, it is happening again, in a few days, and this time with CO money and sponsorship and with even more controversial participants.