

Concerning Mr. Rachid Ghannouchi's Visit to The Washington Institute

Dec 20, 2011



Brief Analysis

On November 30, 2011, Mr. Rachid Ghannouchi, leader of Tunisia's an-Nahda movement, visited the offices of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy to address a seminar of the Institute's senior research staff and several select, invited guests. This was an on-the-record session, with a tape recorder sitting in the middle of the table; at no point did either the Institute or Mr. Ghannouchi indicate that this was an "off-the-record" event.

The original audiotape of the discussion can be heard below. This recording covers approximately the first 45 minutes of the event, including Mr. Ghannouchi's opening remarks as well as exchanges with the participants concerning his views on such topics as relations with the United States and prospects for future political change in Arab monarchies, including Saudi Arabia.

No audio exists for the final 25 minutes of the event, when the tape ran out and was not replaced. During this part of the seminar, Mr. Ghannouchi stated that an-Nahda opposes the inclusion of a prohibition on normalization with Israel in the Tunisian constitution, which he said was not the proper vehicle for addressing the issue. Most of the final portion of the event concerned Mr. Ghannouchi's response to a question about how to prioritize when democratic norms and Quranic law conflict. The question offered as an example the issue of conversion from Islam, which is protected under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but which most Muslim jurists say is forbidden by Islamic law. On this issue, Mr. Ghannouchi stated that he does not believe conversion from Islam is forbidden by Islamic law, a view he said is not yet accepted by Sheikh Yusuf Qaradawi, his superior in the International Association of Muslim Scholars.

In the spirit of openness and accountability, The Washington Institute releases this recording to clarify questions surrounding the substance of Mr. Ghannouchi's remarks during his visit.

Robert Satloff Executive Director The Washington Institute for Near East Policy



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