How Islamic is an Islamic State:

A Theoretical Debate on Islamic Political Order

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Abstract

The Muslim world is at the bottom rung of participatory democracy, representative governance, and political stability in comparison to the rest of the world. Prevalent and perpetual social disintegration, economic stagnation, and resistance to modernity are all problems in search of answers whose validity and relevance are constantly questioned. Some have vested hopes in the ideal of an 'Islamic state,' but very few have defined such a loosely defined state, and even fewer have critically analyzed or offered its theoretical parameters. In this regard, Islamist political activism suffers from a theoretical disconnect with the present political reality. They pursue two divergent paths: regression to a largely irrelevant political past or digression from historical models that the reformists claim to champion. In this writing, we delineate the inconsistencies between these arguments and offer solutions.

The Tradition of Governance in Muslim Societies

The concept of an Islamic state is misunderstood by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The ever-widening cultural divide and today's Muslims' inability to reconnect with their past in a meaningful way may be the main culprits, but there is also the challenge to re-contextualize the tradition of governance in the political reality of our times. Caught between a sense of mission and a veil of perception, the Salafists, for instance, idealize the Medina Caliphate and wonder why it worked so well then and why it doesn't seem to work now. Perhaps we should join them

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on that journey, not out of an idealized nostalgia, rather for an analytical look at the difference between the two realities and the historical events that bridge the present with the past of Muslim civilization.

When speaking about a model Islamic state, the city-state of Medina established by the Prophet of Islam is often cited. Medina, however, was not a city or an Islamic state, in the theocratic sense of the word as is commonly believed, but more akin to a republic: A government having a chief of state who was not a monarch but the equivalent of the modern-day president, governed by *Madani law,* a civil law that is even etymologically derived from the very name of Medina, serving the *ummah,* a religiously diverse constituency that is the modern equivalent of "we the people."

When Prophet Muhammad arrived in Yathrib, people favored him over, Abd-Allah ibn Ubayy,[1] one of the two contenders for the rulership of the city. Muhammad ended the political conflict by reconciling the tribes of Banu Aus and Banu Khazraj. He named the city Medina, a city of civil order, and under the provisions of *Mithaq-al-Medina,* 'the compact' or 'the Constitution of Medina,'[2] that he signed with the various faith communities, he established a politically and religiously pluralistic polity. By accommodating not just political pluralism, as is the norm in modern democracies, but also religious pluralism, the Medina model was more democratic than modern democracies.

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[1] Maxime Robinson, *Muhammad: Prophet of Islam* (2002), Page 156.
[2] The Islam Project. The Constitution of Medina and the Mayflower Compact

http://www.islamproject.org/muhammad/muhammad_09_PrimarySourceDocuments.htm

These faith communities followed their own scriptures in matters of faith, family law, rites, and

rituals, whereas in matters of social welfare, defense, and external affairs they all adhered to the

civil law:

> "Identity and loyalty were no longer to be based on family, tribe, kinship, or even
> religion: the overriding identity was membership in the *ummah* of Muhammad. The
> Constitution of Medina decreed that the citizens of the Islamic State were one and
> indivisible regardless of religion. Be they heathen, People of the Book, or Muslims, all
> those who were subject to the Constitution belonged to the same *ummah*. In so doing, he
> [Muhammad] created a tolerant, pluralistic government which protected religious
> freedom."[3]

The first paragraph of the Constitution of Medina unequivocally states that: "They [the

community of the faithful Quraish and the people of Yathrib] shall constitute a separate political

unit (Ummat) as distinguished from all the people (of the world)."[4] Specific provisions of the

Constitution of Medina state, for instance, that "The Jews of Banu 'Awf are one community with

the believers, the Jews have their religion and the Muslims have theirs…"[5] It follows, "The same

applies to Jews of Bani Al-Najjar, Bani Al Harith, Bani Saeeda, Bani Jusham, Bani Al Aws,

Thaalba, and the Jaffna, (a clan of the Bani Thaalba) and the Bani Al Shutayba."[6]

Orientalist Peters finds it fascinating that "The Jews of Banu 'Awf are one community with the

believers," adding, "If the Jews were permitted from the outset to practice their religion *within*

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[3] John Andrew Morrow. *The Covenants of the Prophet Muhammad with the Christians of the World*.
 Angelico Press/Sophia Perennis. 2013. Page 32.
[4] Muhamad Hamidullah. Constitution of Medina based on the Seerah of Ibn Hisham.
 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Medina#cite_note-18
[5] John Andrew Morrow. *The Covenants of the Prophet Muhammad with the Christians of the World*.
 Angelico Press/Sophia Perennis. 2013. Page 30.
[6] Woven Teaching | Human Rights Documents: Constitution of Medina (accessed February 7, 2019) Page 3.
 https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5097fe39e4b0c49016e4c58b/t/5c8153eeec212d7117477f8f/15519795
 03244/Constitution-Medina.pdf

the newly constituted *ummah*, then Muhammad's original Medinan 'community' was a purely secular one, and the word *ummah* was being used in a sense different from its Qur'anic occurrences"[7]

According to Martijn Theodoor Houtsma, "In the Quran the *ummah* typically refers to a single group that shares common religious beliefs, specifically those that are the objects of a divine plan of salvation. In the context of pan-Islamism and politics, the word *ummah* can be used to mean the concept of a Commonwealth of the Believers (أمة المؤمنين *ummat al-mu'minīn*)."[8] Since Islam is not a new religion, but a continuation of the monotheistic tradition, the Medina usage of the term *ummah* complies with the Qur'anic usage of the term *ummah*. "The apostle, and the believers with him, *believe in* what has been bestowed upon him from on high by his Sustainer: they all believe in God, and His angels, and His revelations, and *His apostles, making no distinction between any of His apostles*;"[9] (emphasis added). In stressing on the literal, "we make no distinction between any of His apostles," Muhammad Asad elaborates that, "Inasmuch as all the apostles were true bearers of God's messages, there is no distinction between them, albeit some of them have been 'endowed more highly than others'"[10]

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[7] Francis E Peters. *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994. Page 201.

[8] Houtsma, M. Th. (1987). E.J. Brill's First Encyclopedia of Islam, 1913–1936. E.J. Brill.

[9] The Qur'an: 2:285 *Al-Baqara* (The Cow). آمَنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِن رَّبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللهِ وَمَلاَئِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ لاَ نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّن رُّسُلِهِ

[10] The Qur'an: 2:285: *The Message of the Qur'an: Translated and Explained by Muhammad Asad for people who think*. The Ayah literally says, "We make no distinction between any of His apostles." Footnote 277 Page 64.

In essence, the spirit of this Qur'anic injunction was reflected in the body of the Medinan *ummah* comprising of Jews, Christians, non-theists as well as Meccan Muslim refugees and Medinan converts to Islam.

"The Prophet Muhammad's Community was a unique system which had never existed before and which has never been seen since despite honest efforts to emulate it."[11] The critical distinction of the Medina state lost on many in the West can be understood only when contrasted with the Greek and Roman models idealized in European political thought. In the Greek democracy of 5th century BCE only free adult males of Athens or Sparta were considered citizens, but not slaves, women, children, and foreigners, or peasants who constituted more than 50% of the population. Similarly, in the Republic of Rome, only the aristocracy and the landowners who controlled the Senate were represented, but not the common people. "[T]he plebeians, which comprised the vast majority of Romans… could not rule, elect rulers or make use of land, all of which was reserved for the patricians or nobles."[12] In fact, "The social structure of Ancient Rome revolved around the distinction between the patricians and the plebeians."[13]

Public perception and the prevalent slant in academia notwithstanding, the idea of a popular rule proposed by the Achaemenid Otanes in 522 BCE seems as original as that of his contemporaries in the Athenian *demokratia* in the Greek city-state.[14] Based on that proposal, Giulia Sissa

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[11] John Andrew Morrow. *The Covenants of the Prophet Muhammad with the Christians of the World*. Angelico Press/Sophia Perennis. 2013. Page 32.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Wikipedia. Patricians: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrician_(ancient_Rome)
[14] E. Harris, "Pericles' Praise of Athenian Democracy, Thucydides, 2.37.1", Harvard Studies in Classical Philosophy 94, 1992, p. 157-167.

considers democracy, 'a Persian Invention:' "The law ought to be the same for all, tight limitations are imposed upon the executive, and all the adult free-born male citizens can participate in the decision-making process."[15] Add to that the contributions of the many Muslim thinkers throughout the centuries that make democracy as much an Eastern tradition as it is Western.

Steeped in the lingering post-Umayyad revisionism, today's Muslims are ignorant of the fact that the *ummah* in the Medina model was a religiously diverse citizenry. The oversight of this critical distinction renders a modern Islamic state as a theocracy which stands in stark contrast to the pluralistic polity that the State of Medina was.

Fair governance is characterized not just by the relationship between the governing and the governed, but by the way each is defined. In the State in Medina, the governing body was headed by Muhammad, the Prophet, the philosopher-king, and more importantly a peacemaker who brought warring factions into a city-state of civil order. Equally significant was the governed, the citizenry, or the *ummah* in contradistinction to today's political terminology of *qawm, millat,* and/or *sha'b*.

In contemporary parlance, *qawm,* means people, *millat,* a national/ideological following, and *sha'b*, a nation with common ancestry or geography. The modern equivalent of *ummah* is a

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[15] Otanes' whole proposal reads: "firstly, justice is regularly administered and respected. The law ought to be the same for all. Second, tight limitations are imposed upon the executive. Access to the office is assured by elections at random, and magistrates are subjects to examination. Third, all the adult free-born male citizens can participate in the decision-making process, which relies on the majority." G Sissa, "Democracy: A Persian Invention?" *Anthropologies des mondes grecs anciens* N.S. 10 2012. p. 228.

supra-national community with a common history as reflected in its plural usage of *umam* meaning nations as in *Al-Umam Al-Mutahedah*, the United Nations.

Should we Consider Dar al-Islam an Islamic State?

With the rising power of the Umayyads, the word *ummah* was hyphenated as *ummat al-Islām*, 'the faith-exclusive Islamic community' depriving the concept of *ummah* of its comprehensive universality.

Once the term *ummah* became synonymous with Muslims alone, the relationship between the governing and the governed came into focus, particularly in regards to rites and rituals. Whether the payment of taxes to the state, for instance, be considered a religious obligation as *zakat* or a conventional tax known as *gizya* (jizya)? Conversely, will the governing body allow the free exercise of religious rites without coercion as the Qur'an prescribes it, or should the newly defined *ummah* make do with what's possible and permissible? Is a head of state obligated to guarantee, protect, or defend these rights if he himself is not of the Islamic faith?

Since believing Muslims were not a majority in the peripheries of the main population centers, there came the need for establishing certain parameters of duties and rights and responsibilities of the citizens in those territories. That's when the terms *dar al-islam* and *dar al-harb* were coined.

Dar-al-islam may have initially been perceived as a dominion of peace, a *Pax Islamica*, if you will, a historical counterpart to Pax Romana. This would've been reflective of the prosperous and

relatively peaceful Muslim societies in contradistinction to the warrior culture of Europe at the time that was referred to as *dar al-harb*, 'the abode of war.' With the passage of time, in the geopolitical reality, the emphasis of the terms took on a more legal sense than a political one:

> "The term *dar al-islam*, which literally means "the house or abode of Islam," came to signify Islamic territory in juridical discussions. For the majority, it is thus suggestive of a geopolitical unit, in which Islam is established as the religion of the state, in contrast to *dar al-harb*, [a] territory not governed by Islam. The signs of legitimacy by which one could speak of a geopolitical unit as *dar al-islam* would include a ruler or ruling class whose self-identity is Islamic, some institutional mechanisms by which consultation between the political and religious elite is possible..."[16]

The fact that *dar al-islam* "signify Islamic territory in juridical discussions," is clear. What is not clear is the reference to the geopolitical unit when it says where "Islam is established as the religion of the state." This could mistakenly be interpreted to mean the establishment of an Islamic theocracy.

There may be syntactic equivalency between an 'Islamic state' and a 'Christian state,' but semantically they connote two very different concepts. A Christian state often means a Christian theocracy of the Dark Ages where church and state were not just merged, but the church was the state, as the Holy Roman Empire, for example. In an Islamic state, on the other hand, there was a

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[16] Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Shaybani. The Islamic Law of Nations. Translated by Majid Khadduri. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966 contributed to the Encyclopedia of Islam, Richard C. Martin, Editor in Chief. MacMillan Reference USA – Thompson Gale. 2004.

separation of religion and state or *deen wa dawla*. A medieval Islamic state such as the Abbasids had a Muslim as the head of state or a caliph, i.e. a successor to the Prophet, who ruled over a religiously diverse society with religious freedom for all. This is why ancient religious communities survived better in Muslim lands than in Europe, until very recently. In essence, the Islamic state or the *dar al-islam* of the olden times was the equivalent of the modern-day Muslim-majority state. The concepts *dar al-islam* and *dar al-harb* are merely for the differentiation of Muslim spaces from non-Muslim spaces:

> "Dar al-Islam (literally, house/abode of Islam) is a term that refers to regions/countries/territories where Muslims are free to practice their religion without prosecution. It refers to territories where the government guarantees protection for Muslims."[17]

It must be emphasized that the term *dar* is not a city-state or a nation-state, but an undefined space that may be geographically identified, but not necessarily politically defined.

Thus, in contrast to a Christian state, the terms Islamic state or *dar al-islam* does not mean a theocracy. Neglecting this critical distinction has contributed to a great deal of misunderstanding among non-Muslims, but even more so among Muslims who, perhaps deliberately, extrapolate a theocratic interpretation from the casual use of 'Islamic state' to justify and gain support for their agenda of establishing a theocratic Islamic state.

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[17] Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology & the Ancient World Brown University website. EntryDar al-Islam/Dar al-Harb. *Posted at March 10/2011 07:43 PM*
https://www.brown.edu/academics/archaeology/search/brown?query=dar%20al%20islam

This interpretation may have been politicized during the anti-colonial struggles. With the arrival of British armies in Delhi in 1803, the Mughal empire was turned into a protectorate of the British East India Company. Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz, a prominent jurist issued a *fatwā*, '(a *shari'a*-based) legal opinion' declaring India *dar al-harb* (abode of war). This opinion "expressed most succinctly by Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz (d. 1824), held that the influx of British power meant that India was no longer *dar al-islam*. As such, the Muslim community was under an obligation to struggle and bring about the restoration of Islamic influence."[18]

This shift in the interpretation and emphasis of the terms from their juridical use to political ones may have served well in the anti-colonial struggles, however, their role as a hindrance in the democratization of Muslims societies in the 20th century cannot be ignored. The Deobandi literalists nestled in Pakistan, for instance, declare Afghanistan as *dar al-harb* in order to justify the militancy of their Taliban surrogates in Afghanistan. Other extremists consider the whole world as *dar al-harb* to be converted to *dar al-islam* which they interpret as the establishment of a global Islamic theocracy.

The Evolving Relationship Between Religion and State

Traditionally, *deen wa dawla* or the affairs of 'religion and state' were kept separate by the early *ulema* or Muslim theologians and jurists who took pride in the independence of their thought and resisted co-optation into government apparatus. Concordance was incidental and not necessarily obligatory. Muslim scholars and theologians consistently rejected theocracy both as a matter of

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[18] John Kelsay. Islam and War: A Study in Comparative Ethics. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993 contributed to Encyclopedia of Islam, Richard C. Martin, Editor in Chief. MacMillan Reference USA – Thompson Gale. 2004.

principle and practice. In essence, this separation of the state and the non-existing 'church' may well have prevented the formation of theocracies in the Muslim world.

The great jurist Abū Ḥanīfah (699-767 CE) "suffered severe persecution [as he] steadfastly refused a judgeship"[19] of a high standing offered by the Caliph Al-Mansur who wanted to make his Ḥanafī school of thought as the only official version of *shari'ah* jurisprudence throughout the Abbasid Caliphate. Abū Ḥanīfah rejected the offer saying that his systematization of Islāmic legal doctrine carried more weight and prestige in its own right and in competition with the legal opinion of other jurists and he did not want to jeopardize that by becoming a 'mouthpiece' of the caliphate. This obviously didn't bode well with the caliph.

Abū al-Hasan al-Māwardī, known in Latin as Alboacen (972-1058 CE), the first political scientist in Islam, did not see any incompatibility in bringing religious norms into politics but took the necessary steps preventing the formation of theocracy in the Muslim world.[20] In *Tashil al-Nadhar wa Ta'jil al-Dhafar* (Facilitating Administration and Accelerating Victory) al-Māwardī discusses the concept of 'checks and balances' between state and religion, but he "does not entertain in any way a theory of divine rights of kings. In his view, the ruler is needed to protect religion, but he is not a God-appointed person. He has to be chosen by the people, and he is only their *mandub* (deputy)."[21] Al-Māwardī certainly did not believe in the age-old custom of

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[19] Zafar Ishaq Ansari, *Abū Ḥanīfah: Muslim Jurist and Theologian*. ENCYCLOPÆDIA BRITANNICA. Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc. January 01, 2020
URL: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Abu-Hanifah
[20] Abūl Hasan Ali ibn Muhammad Māwardī, (Assadullah Yate. Trans.) *Al Ahkam As Sultaniyyah: The laws of Islamic Governance*. Dar ul Thaqafah, Doha, Qatar. 2018. Pp. 11-12.
[21] Abdulqadir Hamid Eltigani, *"Al-Mawardi's Theory of State: Some Ignored Dimensions,"* AJISS, Vol. 18, No. 4, 2001, Pp. 5-6.

Divine Intervention in bestowing sovereignty on some charismatic individual whole gains political power and ultimately becomes the ruler.

Al-Māwardī's work inspired Ibn Khaldun (1331-1406) who in his own right became the first social scientist. In his *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun advocated that any *shari'ah* law must protect an individual's right to the free exercise of religion, life, intellect and reason, progeny, and property[22]—the essence of the bill of rights.

The idea of the compatibility of reason and revelation that Ibn Rushd or Averroes introduced to Thomas Aquinas and Moses ben Maimon or Maimonides further enhanced and refined the concept of political pluralism in a more comprehensive and inclusive system of government. People in Western societies who enjoy guaranteed civil rights and liberties owe it to the thoughts of Ibn Rushd.

In the Mirror of History

In spite of all such great thoughts that Muslim thinkers presented to the world of political philosophy, there were occasional attempts by Muslim leaders with authoritarian tendencies who, short of establishing theocracies, were able to drag their religious convictions to the playing field of politics. The ensuing disasters of these tragedies are the result of the revisionist interpretation of *ummah* and its application as a privilege to an exclusive citizenry.

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[22] Abd Ar Rahman bin Muhammed ibn Khaldun. *The Muqaddimah*. Translated by Franz Rosenthal. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ (1970).

These efforts may have been successful for political mobilization for a time, but they all had devastating consequences, often with backlash from the affected non-Muslim citizenry. Often what was idealized was rarely analyzed or thoroughly thought out. The Medina model, whether it emulated Plato's Republic or as was later elaborated on by Abū Naṣr al Fārābī or Alpharabius (872 – 951) in *Al-Madina(t) al-Fadila*[23] has never been replicated successfully since, in a good many cases, among them:

- The Fatimid Caliphate (al-Fāṭimīyūn - 909-1171) that ruled over North Africa and Egypt where al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh, "The Ruler by the Order of God," the sixth Fatimid caliph and 16th Ismaili imam (996–1021) who deified himself by claiming sovereignty, vicegerency, and imamate or spiritual leadership, was not only intolerant of the Sunnis, he also began attacks on Christians and Jews calling for the destruction of the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem. These events set the Crusades in motion.

- The Almohad Caliphate (al-Muwaḥḥidūn, "the monotheists" - 1121-1269) resorted to the strict rules of Muslim orthodoxy in Spain that met with Christian resistance from the north, culminating in the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, the loss of nearly all of the Moorish dominions in Iberia, leading to the fall of Cordova and Seville to the Christians in 1236 and 1248 respectively, that eventually ended Muslim rule in Spain.

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[23] The complete title of al Fārābī's work is *Mabadi' ara' ahl al-madinah al fddilah*, 'Principles of the Opinions of the People of the Virtuous City' in which he sets forth his idea for the establishment of an ideal civil society, i.e. the best regime, with emphasis on opinions about natural science, the soul, and politics with religion.

- In the late Mughal period in India, the religiously conservative Muhi-ud-Din Muhammad Aurangzeb, Alamgir "Conqueror of the World" (1618 – 1707) who because of his conservative religious tendencies abandoned his predecessors' legacy of pluralism and religious tolerance, introduced the *jizya* tax and tried to impose policies based on Islamic ethics on non-Muslims. That resulted in a backlash by his Hindu subjects providing the British with an opportunity to exploit the chasm that speeded up the British colonization of India.

- The Safavid ("the pure ones," - 1501 - 1722) claimed their legitimacy to power in Persia on claiming descent from the Prophet[24] and established the Twelver Shi'i Islam. Even though they became great patrons of arts, literature, and architecture, their zeal for the forced conversion to Shiism and attempted Persianization resulted in political repression, the brain drain, and the flight of the intellectuals. Their persecution of the Sunnis led to the devastating seven-decade-long wars with the Ottomans and their eventual demise at the hands of the Hotaki Afghans in 1722.

The ghosts of the Safavid and Mughal theocracies that plundered Afghanistan in the 16th and 17th centuries was revived to challenge the stability of the Afghan state that fell to the Taliban in August 2021:

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[24] Historians believe that the Safavid were Kurdish lineage Turkicized in Azerbaijan where they thoroughly intermarried with Pontic Greeks, Georgians, and later Circassians.

Pakistan whose own national/religious identity is rooted in late Mughal era Islamism played the role of the Mughals. Propelled by the Deobandi puritanism and financed by Saudi Wahhabism they wreaked havoc on Afghanistan through Taliban raids and suicide missions while the U.S. deliberately look the other way.

The Islamic Republic of Iran assumes the mantle of Safavid Persia and links its regional interventions to the Fāṭimīds of Egypt/Syria. This label comes in handy for the recruitment of young Afghan refugees in the Fāṭimīyūn armies who end up as cannon fodder in the Syrian conflict or as a sectarian army in the Afghan civil strife.

These examples indicate that every time Muslim rulers have mixed *deen wa dawla,* 'religion and state,' the result has been irremediable devastations. These failures send political theoreticians back to the drawing board to review the most authentic sources for answers:

Rights and Responsibilities in the Qur'an

In addition to the misinterpretation and misapplication of the concept of *ummah,* other elements are missing from the current debate on establishing an Islamic state, namely the duties and responsibilities assigned to a government as the principle of representation. The Qur'an establishes moral parameters by saying, "and whose rule [in all matters of common concern] is consultation **among themselves**,"[25] and that of moral conviction, "and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong."[26] Both injunctions begin with the word وَأْمُر that

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[25] The Qur'an: 42:38. *Ash-Shura* (The Consultation) وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ

[26] The Qur'an: 22:41 *Al-Hajj* (The Pilgrimage) and 31:17 *Luqman* وَأْمُرْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَانْهَ عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ "And enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong."

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is a command in respects to rites and worship, but it is only encouragement and recommendation in regards to moral issues.

The first injunction also contains the words 'among themselves,' implying collectives responsibility, while the second injunction does not contain such wording. We can therefore conclude that:

A. The accountability of a government is collective as is clearly indicated by the wording, "consultation *among themselves***."**

B. A citizen, on the other hand, is individually responsible and is personally entitled to civil rights and liberties.

We can conclude that the different branches of government have a collective responsibility in their duties towards the people, while citizens are individually accountable. This individual accountability has been stressed through repeated Qur'anic revelations that, "no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear another's burden."[27]

Therefore, people who are individually accountable in regards to moral values and ethical issues should not be forced to follow the norms of an authoritarian regime on matters of free will and individual responsibility. Adherence to moral principles and ethical values are matters of a citizen's civil rights and should not be subject to a government's authority.

The so-called Islamic governments of today either deliberately misinterpret or otherwise misuse the clear injunctions of the Qur'an when it comes to consultation, instead they impose their will

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[27] The Qur'an: 6:164, 17:15, 35:18, and 39:7. وَلاَ تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَى

on the people in clear contradiction of the Qur'anic injunctions. People are denied their civil rights in matters of personal prerogatives that are not the responsibility of the government. They even use the wording of the Qur'an "and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong," in naming government agencies that strictly enforce what is merely recommended.

One could argue that the Qur'an uses the word وَأْمُر implying encouragement or recommendation and not the word وَأَحكم which would have clearly implied a command imperative. The semantic multidimensionality of Qur'anic terminologies presents a broad spectrum of meanings. The particular meaning an interpreter chooses depends on his or her intent. We will analyze the two words in question:

The infinitive أَمَرَ 'amara has three different meanings:

1- amr, 'the emanation of spirit from Godhead, e.g. "Say: 'This inspiration [of the spirit comes] at my Sustainer's behest."[28]

2- amr, 'to encourage, to recommend, to persuade'

3- amr, 'to command, having authority over someone.'

Similarly, the infinitive حَكَمَ hakama has three different meanings:

1- hakeem, 'wise/wisdom,'

2- hakam, 'judge/judgment,'

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[28] The Qur'an: 17:85 Al-Isra (The Journey by Night). قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي

3- *haakim*, 'sovereign/authority.' e.g. "Behold, God ordains in accordance with His will"[29] and "They have been called upon to let God's writ be their law."[30]

An authentic interpretation is one where the selected meaning follows the spirit of the overall message of the Qur'an. But some choose a meaning of Qur'anic terminology that serves their political agenda. A case in point, as discussed earlier, is the Fatimid Caliph Abū ʿAlī Manṣūr "Ruler by the Order of God, Servant of God "عبد الله ووليه الإمام الحاكم بأمر الله أمير المؤمنين" (996-1021) and His Apostle, the Imam al-*Hakim* bi-*Amr* Allah, *Commander* of the Faithful" (emphasis added) who used the most authoritative interpretations of the two words in question in order to make the state subservient to religion.

In addition to respecting the spirit of the message of the Qur'an, one must also pay close attention to a theological principle that fundamentalists deliberately overlook and distort clear Qur'anic injunctions.

Qur'an makes a clear distinction between obligatory acts of worship and recommended acts of moral conduct. Acts of worship fall under clearly stated commands of God in the Qur'an called the *muhkamaat*. These include acts of worship or *ibadaat* such as fasting. The Qur'an clearly states, "O YOU who have attained to faith! Fasting is ordained for you…"[31] Several subsequent Ayahs detail rules, prerequisites, exceptions, exemptions, circumstantial accommodations of fasting.[32] In all cases, the commands are clear and unequivocal.

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[29] The Qur'an: 5:1. *Al-Ma'idah* (The Table Spread). إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَحْكُمُ مَا يُرِيدُ
[30] The Qur'an: 3:23 *Al-Imran* (The Family of Imran) اللَّهِ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ يَتَوَلَّى
[31] The Qur'an: 2:183. *Al-Baqara* (The Cow). ...يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ
[32] The Qur'an: 2:184 - 2:187. *Al-Baqara* (The Cow). أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ فَمَن كَانَ مِنكُم مَّرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَر...

By contrast, in regards to issues of moral conduct, the Qur'an does not give commands, issue orders, or delineate obligations. It only recommends, suggests, and encourages moral conduct in a positive light. Take the most controversial of these issues that of 'enjoining the doing of what is right and forbidding the doing of what is wrong,' the hallmark of fundamental Islamist ideologies. *Not a single instance of the Qur'anic revelations state, imply, or ordain* any obligatory action in the descriptive imperatives:

> "…there might grow out of you a community who invite unto all that is good, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong…" 3:103

> "They believe in God and the Last Day, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong," 3:114

> "…they [all] enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and are constant in prayer," 9:71

> [It is a triumph of] those who turn [unto God] in repentance…, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong," 9:112[33]

What is most relevant to our discussion is that neither the acts of worship nor of moral behavior or their implementation or enforcement are relegated to anybody, but the believing Muslim him/herself. For this reason alone, governments, especially theocracies, are forbidden from interfering in people's religious or moral affairs.

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[33] The Qur'an: 3:104 and 114 *Al-Imran* (The Family of Imran) and 9:71 and 112. *At-Tauba* (The Repentance).

In addition, because in Islam accountability is individual and not collective, governments have no business in meddling in people's affairs in which people are directly accountable to their creator not to the created, for by doing otherwise the *sirat -ul mustaqeem*, or straight path to the Divine will be diverted.

Furthermore, based on clear Qur'anic injunctions, God hasn't even given His Prophet the authority to determine what ought to be permissible or forbidden,[34] let alone some Islamist ruler who claims such an exclusive authority and entitlement.

Some twelve hundred years ago governments such as the Abbasids, the Umayyads of Spain, the Ottomans, the Timurids… were great patrons of science, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, algebra, and geometry; they subsidized scientists who calculated the circumference of the earth, made maps to navigate the seas, diagrammed astronomical charts, and named constellations; theses governments were praised for their adherence to the freedom of expression, religious pluralism, acceptance of diverse philosophical and theological thought, establishment of houses of worship and houses of wisdom to debate the role of reason and revelation, the metaphysics and beyond; under these governments, scholars wrote literary and mystic prose and poetry and mastered calligraphy, arts, architecture and were responsible for countless inventions and discoveries … These states did a thousand things Islamic, *yet* they never called their governments 'Islamic.'

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[34] The Qur'an 66:1 *At-Tahrem* (The Banning) "O PROPHET! Why dost thou, out of a desire to please thy wives, impose a prohibition of something that God has made lawful to thee?" يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ لِمَ تُحَرِّمُ مَا أَحَلَّ اللَّه .

By contrast, today's Islamist governments call themselves 'Islamic,' but they do none of what defined Islamic civilization for a thousand years. Instead, they are preoccupied in deliberately misinterpreting Qur'anic injunctions to impose, curtail, and restrict, women's freedoms and movements: From the imposition of the hijab (burqa and chador) to forced marriages, stoning, and public flogging; from the restrictions of women's civil rights and liberties to women's schooling, education, career, and employment to the prohibitions of women's movement (without a legal guardian) for ordinary errands such as a doctor's visit, grocery shopping, or visitation of relatives. In a sense, these misogynistic theocracies, bent on implementing gender-inequity, have reduced the whole Islamic civilization to the confinement and seclusion of women–a psychological condition not too different from the pre-Islamic Age of Ignorance, except that now it is labelled and packaged 'Islamic.' As if in their fossilized minds no Islam has emerged, no Qur'an has been revealed, and no Islamic civilization has defined reality on the world stage for a thousand years.

The Principles of Hakimiya and Estekhlaf

Western political thought recognizes sovereignty as the only principle of legitimacy in governance. When perceived as the sole domain of the Divine, sovereignty results in a theocracy, but when transferred to the people, the result is a secular democracy. This black and white perspective rejects any alternative to 'Western' democracy.

As a matter of principle, Islam does not call for political sovereignty in the name of God and thus does not endorse theocracy. There are no Quranic injunctions that call for the establishment of a state in the name of God or under the name of Islam. Islamic political thought, however, talks

about the principles of *hakimiya* and *estekhlaf* in a secular pluralistic political context. It addresses the Western either/or approach to sovereignty with a both/and alternative based on two principles: 1) The principle of *hakimiya*, (حاكميه/ سيادة) or Divine sovereignty that delineates the duties of the government, and 2) The principle of *estekhlaf* (استخلاف) or popular vicegerency that guarantees the rights of the governed i.e., that every human being as a vicegerent of the Divine on earth has free will and is entitled to its exercise in the context of political freedoms and civil rights and liberties. This critical distinction, lost on many both in the Muslim world as well as outside of it, is called caliphate—not as a slogan, but as a principle in legitimate governance. Even in the Muslim world, the complementary principles of *hakimiya* and *estekhlaf* are missing from the agenda of those who argue for caliphate as well as the so-called Islamic states.

Just like democracy, the caliphate has to establish its parameters a safe distance away from hereditary authoritarianism. Given the prism of historical adversarial relations between the Muslim East and the Christian West, Western cultural relativism looks at the concept of the caliphate with recalcitrant suspicion. The abuse of the name 'caliphate' by corrupt governments and extremist movements doesn't help either. Muslims with cultural sensitivities, on the other hand, consider secular democracy a Western phenomenon and reject it. Western political interference in Muslim societies on the pretext of exporting democracy makes matter worse. Thus, an Islamic state presented in the context of a caliphate has become an unrealizable ideal for some Muslims and a boogyman for the rest.

The concept of *estekhlaf,* or vicegerency, a derivative of *khilafah* or caliphate, has no relevance in the Western world, but more critically, it has lost its place in the debate among Muslims too.

As the advocates of Islamist agenda essentially reassigned *estekhlaf* to the realm of the Divine along with *hakimiya*, they make people obey the laws of the state but deny the citizenry their own rights. In assigning both vicegerency and sovereignty to God, such 'Islamic states' are not much different from the suppressive Christian theocracies of the Dark Ages of Europe.

Eliminating *estikhlaf* or vicegerency from the equation amounts to ignoring clear Qur'anic injunctions that are essential to good governance.[35] For instance: "We have sent you the Book in Truth that you [O Prophet] might judge between men, as guided by Allah."[36]

While literally, as in the case of the Caliphal city-state of Medina, a *khalifah* or caliph is perceived as a political successor to the Prophet, in general, however, every human being is the *khalifah* of God on earth, as the progeny of the archetypal Adam. "Allah has promised to those among you who believe and do righteous deeds that He will assuredly make them succeed (those who rule) and grant them vicegerency in the land just as He made those before them succeed others."[37] The success and empowerment here obviously include political power.

A traditionalist view of bridging sovereignty and legitimacy in an Islamic political order with the concept of *ummah* is that of Siraj Islam Mufti who writes: "The people or the *Ummah* are the actual repositories of *khilafah* and those in authority must have the confidence and support of the Muslim population. In this context, *shari'ah* provides a broad framework within which the people under the umbrella of Divine Guidance participate in developing civil society and its

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[35] Inferences to *estekhlaf* are made in the Qur'an are in 2:30, 7:69, 7:74, 7:129, 24:55, 27:62, 35:39, and 38:26.
[36] The Qur'an: 4:105 *An-Nisa* (Women).
[37] The Qur'an: 24:55 *An-Nur* (The Light) and 6:165 *Al-Anfal* (The Spoils of War).

institutions including various organs of the state."[38] Mufti correctly identifies the *ummah* as 'the actual repositories of *khilafah*, however, he still defines the *ummah* as a 'Muslim population.'

In practice, the few instances of declared 'Islamic states' have totally ignored the critical duties of a government such as social welfare, economic development, and political freedoms, instead, they have trampled on the principle of people's vicegerency and have concerned themselves with issues of religious rites: prayer, dress codes, fasting… and the prohibition of arts, recreations, and cultural expressions primarily targeting women. But even if they can overcome all that, the perspective is devoid of the universality of the *ummah*.

Establishing an "Islamic" State is Un-Islamic

Based on the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, the tradition of the Prophet, as the primary sources of *shari'ah*, establishing an Islamic state is un-Islamic in principle because neither Qur'an sanctions political sovereignty nor has the Prophet established such as state. On the practical side, however, such a state would be un-Islamic for the following reasons:

1. A faith-based government that denies religious pluralism as prescribed by the Qur'an is not Islamic: "Unto every one of you [denoting the various communities of which mankind is composed] have We appointed a [different] law and way of life [for the Jews, Christians, and Muslims]. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto, you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works!"[39] The

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[38] Siraj Islam Mufti. 2014. Basic Islamic Dynamics: "*Major Principles of Islamic Governance.*" Pastoral Care Publishers & Mufti Publishing. Chestnut Hill, MA. P. 91.

[39] The Qur'an: 5:48: *The Message of the Qur'an: Translated and Explained by Muhammad Asad for people who think:* لِكُلٍّ جَعَلْنَا مِنكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا وَلَوْ شَاء اللّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِن لِّيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَآ آتَاكُم فَاسْتَبِقُوا الخَيْرَاتِ

Qur'an emphasizes this religious pluralism further, "Verily, as for those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], and those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabians, and the Christians, and the Magians, [on the one hand,] and those who are bent on ascribing divinity to aught but God, [on the other,] verily, God will decide between them on Resurrection Day."[40]

2. Perhaps the most convincing injunction of the Qur'an against coercion, especially in public life, is the following: "And so, [O Prophet,] exhort them; thy task is only to exhort: thou canst not compel them [to believe]." Lit., "thou hast no power over them".[41] In these two integrated Ayahs the Prophet is asked to **remind** people of their natural disposition to do good and by extension to exercise their free will in doing good. That should be enough to make coercion unnecessary. In essence, the Qur'an presents two mutually exclusive concepts, i.e. if reminding is done, coercion is not necessary; if coercion is allowed, reminding is irrelevant. If the Qur'an is telling a person of no less significance than the Prophet of God, as the head of state and the head of a religious community, that he is not authorized to use coercion in matters of faith or politics, that is a clear injunction that no other entity—political, religious or otherwise—has the right to compel people to their whims.

3. A state that is not established in the spirit of Medina, does not honor the religious pluralism of the Constitution of Medina, and does not adhere to the Sunnah traditions of the Prophet as put to action in Medina will not be Islamic. With the understanding that even if a state fully complies with the Medina model, like Medina, it should not be called

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[40] The Qur'an: 22:17 *Al-Hajj* (The Pilgrimage).إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِئِينَ وَالنَّصَارَى وَالْمَجُوسَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا.
[41] Qur'an: 88:21-22 *Al-Ghashiyah* (The Overwhelming) فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّمَا أَنتَ مُذَكِّرٌ ۝ لَّسْتَ عَلَيْهِم بِمُصَيْطِرٍ

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an Islamic state so that it would not give the impression of a theocratic state and alienate its non-Muslim citizens.

4. Islam recognizes the collective rights of all religious communities to exist in their equality before the law. "Islam does not restrict itself to providing merely a theological and philosophical framework for thinking about pluralism. Islam also provides a legal framework, the *shari'ah*, for the concrete practical realization of it in society, and the regulation of its societal expressions in the interest of the common good."[42] That common good must be all-inclusive regardless of faith.

5. The level of religiosity and the degree of adherence to it varies in every society. Outlining the strata and structure of a state based on a particular religion is a daunting task. Abdolkarim Soroush a contemporary Islamic thinker believes, "that no understanding of Islam can offer a detailed and effective blueprint for the foundation and administration of any form of religious government, democracy included. It is wrong, he maintains, to judge the religious nature of a state based on the degree to which its institutions reflect some aspect of religion. The institutional role of religion in government is at best limited to the establishment of a legal code that incorporates, and is congruent with, *fiqh.*"[43]

6. In an ideal Islamic state, the duties of the government are delineated through the principle of sovereignty and the rights of the governed are guaranteed by the principle of vicegerency. The absence of any one of these two essential components in a polity will result in a theocracy. A theocracy is un-Islamic because:

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[42] Osman bin Bakar, *Pluralism and the "People of the Book"* in Robert A. Seiple, Dennis R. Hoover (editors) Religion and Security: The New Nexus in International Relations. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2004. Page 105.
[43] Valla Vakili, *Debating Religion and Politics in Iran: The Political Thought of Abdolkarim Soroush*. Council on Foreign Relations. 1997. Pages 26-27.

  A. all citizens of the state would be obligated to adhere to the laws of one religion, and

  B. forcing other faith communities to Islamic laws constitutes "coercion in matters of faith" which is strictly prohibited in the Qur'an.[44]

The Contemporary Debate Between Democracy and Theocracy

In the course of the past half a millennium or so the Muslim East and the Christian West have gone through a complete role reversal, particularly in regards to governance.

Democracy is not the form or structure of a state. It is those principles of governance that are based on the expressed desires of a people for the ideals of governance, and people in every society manage their affairs by those principles. It's a pity that even in the dire circumstances of the Muslim world today, they avoid implementing democracy practically and deny it theoretically. The dissemination of this negative mentality adds to the miseries of the Muslim world.

A deeper understanding of this reality by today's Muslims is imperative for any search for a meaningful solution to their problems: moral bankruptcy, religious hypocrisy, political corruption, economic stagnation, resistance to modernity, and crises of political identity that muddle the superstitious minds of Muslims with pain and agony.

Islamists disown democracy without realizing that the contributions of Muslim philosophers, theologians, and jurists in the development of democracy are greater than those of the West. The name democracy may be rooted in Greek etymology, but the evolved concept of democracy is

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[44] The Qur'an: 2:256 *Al-Baqara* (The Cow) "THERE SHALL BE no coercion in matters of faith. لاَ إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدّين

more of a Muslim tradition. The Prophet established the first republic in Medina, Abu Hanifah effectively prevented the formation of theocracy, Al-Māwardī explained the division of power in government and wrote about the balance of power between state and religion, Ibn Khaldun wrote about the basic human rights and their guarantee in the context of vicegerency, Ibn Rushd wrote about the compatibility of reason and revelation…

Among the greatest achievements of the democratic political order in the West are Athenian *demokratia* in the Greek city-state[45] and the Athenian Constitution,[46] the principle that everyone is subject to the law, even the king, the guarantees of the rights of individuals, the right to justice, and a fair trial stated in the Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights achieved through the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the transfer of sovereignty from the monarch to the people of the French Revolution, and the separation of powers, checks and balances, judicial review, and individual rights of the American Revolution.

In the Muslim world, these principles of good governance have not only been debated by scholars and sages in treatises and books, as discussed earlier, they have also been the main staple of satirized popular literature, a unique genre that was popularized as advice to monarchs and caliphs, often written under pseudo names with the popular title of *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk*,

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[45] E. Harris, "Pericles' Praise of Athenian Democracy, Thucydides, 2.37.1", Harvard Studies in Classical Philosophy 94, 1992, p. 157-167.

[46] James A. Andrews, Pericles on the Athenian Constitution, Thucydides, 2.37, American Journal of Philology. 2004. https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Pericles-on-the-Athenian-Constitution-(Thuc.-2.37)-Andrews/d77996d2243cccf00fb7b55a7f707195466d9fd8#citing-papers

'Counsel to the Rulers.' One of the earliest of these is dated to the reign of Nasr II b. Ahmad Samani (914-43) in Balkh, Afghanistan.[47]

A critical distinction lost on most Islamists is that of administering an Islamic government versus establishing an Islamic state. An Islamic government implies that a political party with an Islamist platform, upon winning an election, can undertake the duties of the state institutions in the name of and on behalf of all its citizens. Such an administration has the political mandate to stay in power for a term specified by law. Islamists often do not differentiate between an Islamic state and organizing an Islamist party. When they come to power, they make the who state subservient to their party platform—they hoist their own flag, change the name of the state, and rewrite the constitution just like the communists did.

The 'dictatorship of the proletariat' that Lenin launched for political exploitation and political manipulation, to attain 'ideological legitimacy' became an instrument of totalitarianism throughout the communist world as they took over the state apparatus. Ultimately at the highest stage of their oppression, they dug their own grave. If Islamist movements and parties subconsciously imitate such a model and take over the state apparatus and impose their agenda on people in the name of 'the rule of God' and deprive people of their civil rights, their fate won't be much different.

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[47] Louise Marlow. A SAMANID WORK OF COUNSEL AND COMMENTARY: THE NAṢĪḤAT AL-MULŪK OF PSEUDO-MĀWARDĪ. Iran Vol. 45 (2007), pp. 181-192. Taylor & Francis, Ltd. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25651418

Alternatively, the many moderate Christian democratic parties in Europe, and some ultra-conservative Jewish and Hindu ones like the Shas/Likud and the Bharatiya Janata Party respectively, and the Justice and Development Party or AKP in Turkey; have successfully participated in the political process of their countries without creating theocracies. Their record, however, shows that over time, political parties with religious or ideological agendas have a strong tendency towards becoming oppressive and authoritarian.

If interpreted correctly, the Qur'an is as relevant today as it was 14 centuries ago, says Osman bin Bakar, because Qur'an addresses human needs in the context of changing time and circumstance: "Islamic *shari'ah* has to be necessarily broad and comprehensive in its treatment of societal laws and ethics since it is the last sacred law to be revealed to humankind. In this sense it must always be "contemporary" and even modern; it has to address itself to the needs of a world that is increasingly complex in its cultural makeup and societal organizations."[48]

The Salafist perspective on the "return to the time of the Prophet" constitutes a regression from the present reality and a digression from the belief that the Qur'an as the last revelation, is timeless, i.e. that its teachings and edicts defy the passage of time in principle, but the application of its commands may be interpreted to accommodate varying circumstances of time and place. The Salafists don't seem to be aware of this critical point and consider Islam so rigid and inflexible that the only way to apply it is to replicate the times of the Prophet of Islam. Must we

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[48] Osman bin Bakar. *Pluralism and the "People of the Book"* in Robert A. Seiple, Dennis R. Hoover (editors) Religion and Security: The New Nexus in International Relations. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2004. Page 105.

assume then that the many millions who lived Islamically in Muslim societies over the centuries were wrong?

Returning to the time of the Prophet may be a good spiritual journey, but in terms of the present reality, it doesn't make sense because the demands of a modern cosmopolitan Muslim society are very different and more challenging from the Medina city-state. While the universality of the principles of governance is timeless, the demands of the times and the methods and manners of their application are different. Idealizing the past is not to regress, but to learn from it and move forward purposefully.

Conclusions

A critical review of history shows that Muslim societies of today are not just adopting the medieval Christian theocracies of Europe, but in a complete role reversal, they are adopting the entire Dark Ages along with them. Today's Muslims are holding on to the ways that kept medieval Europe in the Dark Ages, but Muslims are avoiding the ways that elevated Europeans to the top of world civilization. Europeans who had been condemned to the Dark Ages of medieval theocracies ran to the Age of Enlightenment.

In the West, great achievements have often been made when the thoughts of great thinkers have moved people into great rebellions and revolutions such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's thoughts as the force behind the French Revolution, John Locke's ideas taking the American Revolution into fruition, Karl Marx being the impetus of the Russian Revolution and certainly Martin Luther's launching of the Protestant Reformation. Similar thoughts were rarely delivered through violence

in the political arena of the Muslim world. Perhaps that's why their effects didn't last—easy come, easy go. Thus far, most revolutionary movements in the Muslim world have been regressive in orientation, conservative in attitude, parochial in perspective, and suppressive in the free expression of thought. For these reasons, what the Muslim world needs is a Locke-Luther to launch a combination of a revolution and a reformation.

Muslim societies are at a critical historical juncture: they can either learn from the bitter and bloody experience of Europe, or they will experience such miseries themselves a la George Santayana: *"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."*

For the Islamist movements to succeed, they will have to make sure their political agenda is rooted in an authentic theoretical understanding of the Qur'an and in a more accurate interpretation of verifiable historical facts. They must also adjust their 7th-century ideals for a present-day reality. Muslims must reclaim their ideals in modernity and democracy, not because they are claimed as a 'Western' tradition, but because the Muslim's own tradition and dire and devastating circumstances demand them. Therefore, any agenda aimed at establishing an 'Islamic state' or forming an Islamic political party, as an alternative to a strictly secular system, must redefine the *ummah* based on the Sunnah of the Prophet and accommodate the principles of sovereignty and vicegerency to address the duties of the government and the rights of the people.

In light of these recommendations, the prevalent state of affairs demands a paradigmatic shift in the perceived roles of state and society in the Muslim world. The stakes are very high for the successful implementation of such reforms and launching such an endeavor is certainly beyond

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the power of any one political party, movement, or state. Yet, the challenge awaits any existing

or emerging political movement to carry the theoretical to the realm of a new reality.

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