MUSLIMS AND VIOLENCE

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Abstract:

This paper tries to explain the relationship between Muslims' problems and violence in the light of a clear distinction between Islam and Islamic political thought.

This research emphasizes on the fact that Koran and Sunnah aim at guiding mankind to the right path of knowing and worshipping God; they are not political treatises; Islam could live without a Muslim State even before the instauration of the prophet's State; nowadays, millions of Muslims live under the rule of non Muslim governments or Muslim governments that do not enforce the Islamic law, yet Islam continues to flourish; hence, no Islamic political thought, albeit useful and justified at a certain time, place, or circumstances is to be sanctified because that will certainly lead to a political blockage which could yield violence.

Key Words: Islam, Islamism, Muslims, violence

Introduction

Writings about a potential relationship between Islam and violence are abundant whether in the Muslim world or in the Occident. Islam is a fast growing religion but certainly not because of violence or constraint. On the other hand, Muslims are suffering from a multitude of crises, especially internal factions between Sunnis and Shiites, struggles for power, tyranny, conflicts with other religions and civilizations…

Some Islamists resort to violence to solve these problems on the basis of thoughts or theories they, somehow, relate to Islam.

This paper tries to explain the relationship between Muslims' problems and violence in the light of a clear distinction between Islam and Islamic political thought.

In order to attain the above mentioned aim, the two following points should be considered.

- The evolution of Islamic political thought in order to discern limpid Revelation from human thoughts or practices.
- The political blockage in the Muslim World in respect of power alternation and power organization.

Evolution of Islamic Political Thought

In this section, we will emphasize two points to shed necessary light on the evolution of Islamic political thought: power investiture and power organization. The mechanism of access to power is assumed to be the primordial rule of constitutional law[1]; therefore, it can help detect the genuine sense of political legitimacy in Islam; this could be attained by examining the initial political debates and writings therein.

The way in which power is organized can also illuminate us about the political genius of Muslims in State constitution. These two points are to be pinpointed all through this section in order to explain, in their light, the present Islamic political blockage in the following section.

Before tracking these two parameters, we should, initially, determine the scope of Islamic political thought to delimitate the field of research.

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[1] F. Z., La naissance du droit constitutionnel, in Kuweit Journal of Law, Vol. 3, Septembre 2009, pp. 14-15.

Scope of Islamic Political Thought

Concepts can have various definitions, especially in human sciences, and this may lead to confusion and ambiguity; therefore and in accordance with the aim of this paper, it would be useful not to give different and even contradictory definitions to Islamic political thought; instead, it would be better to limit its scope in order to discern what is not Islamic within the field of political thought. To this end, two determinants are to be used; the first concerns the sources of Islamic political thought and the other has to do with the thinker.

As concerns the first question, Islamic political thinking derives from two major sources, namely: the holy book of Muslims (Koran) and the Muslims prophet's sayings and conduct or his approbation of Muslims' sayings or conduct (Sunnah); any political thought that contradicts these two major sources is not to be considered a Muslim thought, but an illegal innovation (Bid'ā); on the other hand, this does not mean not to refer to other sources on condition not to contradict Koran or Sunnah.

As for the second question, it should also be said that Islamic political thinking, as is the case with Islamic thinking in general, must be conducted by a Muslim scholar else it is not to be qualified " Islamic " unless adopted by a Muslim scholar.

According to what has been said and within the field of politics, Islamic political thought is the outcome of a thinking process conducted or adopted by a Muslim scholar on the basis of sources that do not contradict Koran or Sunnah.

First seeds of Islamic political discussions

The very beginning of Muslim society and State goes back to the year 622 after the migration of the Muslim's prophet and some of his companions from Mecca to Medina where the prophet established the first Muslim State. After ten years, the entire Arabic peninsula adopted Islam and became part of the Muslim State[2]. At this point no one could claim power since religious and political power was vested in the Prophet by Allah.

After the death of the prophet in 632, some Arab tribes tried to live outside the Muslim state as a sort of denial of any political authority other than that of the prophet's; therefore, started the wars of apostasy for different pretexts: some Muslims argued about who deserves to succeed the prophet in political power, others rejected the Caliph's authority to collect the alms giving (Zakāt) , a third category admired the prophet as a man and could not accept the authority of the Caliph Abu-Bakr or any one else . In order to cut down this civil strife, the Caliph declared war on the apostates. Shafi'i, an eminent Muslim scholar, approved this stand assimilating it to other high crimes in Islam saying that: " … duty imposed on us to punish the fornicator with a hundred stripes, to scourge him who casts an imputation with eighty, to put to death him who apostatizes…[3]."

The Caliph Abu-Bakr was chosen by few Muslims during a meeting between the original inhabitants of Medina (Al Ansār) and the Migrants (Al Muhadjirine); the formers wanted to chose one of them as a successor of the prophet; when the Migrants heard about this meeting, some of them rushed to prevent them from making any hastened decision. After debating the matter, all agreed on choosing Abu Bakr, then the rest of the Muslims submitted to the choice of their elite and presented their allegiance to the successor of the prophet. After his death, he proposed Umar ibn Al Khattāb to succeed him and the Muslims submitted to his will. In his turn, Umar chose six of the senior companions as a small committee to elect his successor amongst them and thus Uthmān ibn Affān was the third to hold the office of the Caliphate. After his assassination, a big civil strife took place and blood was shed for the first time between Muslims: the supporters of the fourth Caliph, Ali ibn Abi Talib, who claimed that taking revenge of the assassinators of Uthman would lead to civil strife, and the supporters of Muāwiya ibn Abi Sufiāne who believed that justice should be done and therefore claimed the command of the Muslims to fulfill his objective[4].

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[2] Bessam Jarār, Dirāsāt Fy al-Fikr al-ISlāmy (Studies in Islamic Thought), Nūne Centre for Koranic studies and research, El Bīra , Palestine, 2nd Ed., 2006, pp. 15, 16.
[3] Al-Shafi'i, Treatise on the Foundations of Islamic Jurisprudence, translated by Majid Khadduri, Cambridge, UK: The Islamic Texts Society, 2nd Edition, 1987, pp. 247-290.
[4] Ahmet Turān, Les premières dissidences dans l'Islam et la naissance des différentes sectes [on line],
http://dergi.samsunilahiyat.com/Makaleler/1303285882_199307040282.pdf

What can be noticed here is that alternation of power had become more and more violent after the death of the third Caliph; this could be explained by the personality of the first four Caliphs who were deemed to be the most pious among the prophet's companions.

As for the organization of power, it was centralized in the hands of the Caliph as a religious and political leader who appointed a governor (Wāli) for each province under his direct command.

Total and unconditioned allegiance to the Caliphs facilitated the management of the State affairs and raised no serious problem to the centralized government. On the other hand, new mechanisms were invented to ensure security and welfare of the Muslims especially during the reign of Umar ibn Alkhattāb who, for example, established an organized financial accountability so as he could detect a mere deficit of one " Dirham " (one currency unit)[5].

Many of the general political principles decreed by Koran and Sunnah, were theoretically detailed and practically crystallized during the reign of the caliphs via the practice of Consultation (Shūra) of the senior companions in the management of governance: administration, judicial, financial, military… as well as in inferring the legal solutions to everyday problems. Till this point, political debates focused on the choice of the Caliph and then on how to manage the Caliphate. After the reign of the fourth Caliph, Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Islamic State witnessed a major change as for the mechanism of access to power for Muāwiya made of the command of the Muslims an inherited monarchy and thus closed a major door of political debate. This practice marked a stain in the Islamic political history and became a tradition in denying the will of the Muslims throughout the following ages.

As for the organization of the State during the Umayyad reign (661-750), the bureaucracy had witnessed an edulcorated centralization because of two facts, the first is the expansion of the Islamic State that reached its apogee during the reign of the Umayyad and hence tempted some powerful governors to rebel against the power of the Caliph as did Abdurrahman ibn al Ash'ath; the other fact is that the middle class, from which should derive the support of the Caliphate, lost its power in favor of clients (Mawāli), powerful governors, army commanders and their relatives[6].

The expansion of the State had created a multicultural context that influenced Muslim scholars to be in contact with foreign political thought and practice, hence started an important wave of political writings.

First Islamic political writings

During the Umayyad reign, a very active movement of translation emerged and marked that era; many political writings were translated from Greek, Latin and Persian; Abdullah ibn Almukaffā is known to be a pioneer in this field; one of his master pieces is " Kalila wa Dimna "   (Kalila and Dimna) which he translated from Persian to Arabic; he also wrote a famous book entitled : " Risalāt Assahāba Namuthajan " (The Message of the Companions as a Model) in which he tried to prove that the Islamic State was not only based on Revelation but also on cerebration[7]. What is to note here is that the Umayyad Monarchs were very much influenced by these writings to an extant that some scholars could say that their political regime was an imitation of the Persian and Byzantine regimes[8].

Could it be said that the Islamic political thought was only a refraction of foreign writings? The answer is certainly negative because the Islamic doctrine, due to civil strifes and political switch from Caliphate to Monarchy, treated three main political questions, namely: the legitimate access to power, allegiance and the possibility to rebel against the corrupt ruler[9]. An Umayyad Monarch called " Umar ibn Abdelazīz " crystallized the theoretical reforms proposed by prominent scholars like " Sa'īd ibn Elmusayab ", Sa'īd ibn Jubayr " and " Alhassan Albasri " and redirected the State once again into the path of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs and that is why he was nicknamed " The Fifth Rightly Guided Caliph ". Nevertheless, these doctrinal questions were not treated as an independent discipline; they were scattered in doctrinal books until the end of the Umayyad rule and the beginning

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[5] for more details see for example, Mahmūd Al Mursi Lashine, Altanthīm Almuhasabi Lila'muāl Al'āma (Accounting Organization of Public Funds), Beirut, Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnāny Lilţibā'h Wālnashr Wāltawzy', 1977.

[6] Roberto Marin Guzman, Arab Tribes, the Umayyad Dynasty and the Abbasid Revolution, in The American Journal Of Islamic Social Sciences, Vol. 24, Nr. 4, pp. 66-67.

[7] Erwin Rosenthal, The role of the State in Islam: Theory and Medieval Practice, in Islam, Vol. 50, 1973, pp.25-28.

[8] Muhammad Jalāl Abul Futūh Sharaf & Ali Abdel Mu'tī Muhammad, Political Thought in Islam, Alexandria, Dar Al Ma'rifa Al Jami'ia, 1987, p. 125.

[9] Idem.

of the Abbasid's; then political writings started to crystallize independently with the four great Muslim scholars: Abu Hanīfa Nu'mān (699-767), Mālik ibn Anas (711-795), Al Shafi'i   (767-820) and Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780-855)[10].

During two centuries, the Islamic political writings developed increasingly due to the accumulated experience of the Islamic State, the benefit from political thought and experience of other civilizations and doctrinal prosperity during the Umayyad and Abbasid reign. The Islamic political writings followed four different methods: one way is to dedicate separate chapters for questions related to State management within general doctrinal works as " Al Um " (The Mother), by Shafi'i, is an example ; the second method is to relate political subjects with a particular legal issue such as State finances as did Abu Yūsef (732-798), one of Abu Hanīfa' s students, in his book " Alkharadj "(Imposition) ; a third method is to devote a whole treatise to only political issues as is the case of " Al Ahkām Alsultānia " (The Sultanic Rulings) of Al-Māwardi   (975-1058); the last method is to dedicate a whole treatise to a particular political issue such as " Alnnidham Al Mali lildawla " (The Financial regime of the State) of Abu Ubeid Al Kacim ibn Salām (770-838)[11].

The Political Blockage in the Muslim World

This section deals with the main causes behind the present political blockage in the light of the two above-mentioned parameters, namely: power alternation and power organization.

Most rulers in the Muslim World are facing a double challenge: a severe crisis of legitimacy and an undeniable failure in managing State affairs. As for Muslim Scholars, many of them are imprisoned in the past from two points of view: they tend to resort to old fashioned thoughts in dealing with contemporary political problems in disregard of historical contexts and they confront religion with philosophy in block without deciphering the scopes of Revelation and cerebration.

Crisis of Legitimacy

Most of the Muslim World countries are suffering from a severe crisis of legitimacy; instead of seeking innovative solutions that respect Koran and Sunnah and benefit from the human intellectual heritage and successful experiences of other societies, many Muslim scholars drown in past conflicts and revive them in the present whether by nostalgia, hopelessness or to serve a certain political agenda as is the case of the permanent conflict between Sunnis and Shiites about who better deserved " Imāma " (Religious and Political Leadership of the Muslims), Ali or his three predecessors : Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman !? Meanwhile, those in power find this perpetual sterile arguing a successful distraction from being asked to justify their rule.

As far as the issue of Imāma is concerned , Abu al-Hassan Ali ibn Ismā'īl al-Ash'arī (874–936) is considered to be the most influential scholar in the Sunni school since he relied on reveled texts, after the fashion of the Shiites, to establish the proof of Abu Bakr' s legitimate reign[12]; this method inspired the majority of Muslim scholars to rely on Koran and Sunnah to find legal explanations to historical facts[13].

The eternal conflict between Sunnis and Shiites, for example, has enrooted hatred between Muslims of the two sects and gave way to translating political differences into violent clashes as it is happening in Iraq. The arguing is still going on for different reasons that have nothing to do with the essence of Islam. The nostalgic reasoning that aims at reviving the Muslim Empire to stand sturdy in front of the Occident is but a deformation of limpid Revelation; whereas, freedom of ideology and religion, assisted by peaceful and orderly means of practice and expression, is necessary for healthy, stable, expanding, and progressive societies whether in dealing with internal or foreign affairs[14].

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[10] Al Intisar, Les différentes écoles juridiques [on line]
http://alfatihoun.edaama.org/Fathul%20Moubin/FathulMoubin/Fiqh/Madhdhab.html
[11] Uthman Muhammad Fathi, Min Usūl Al Fikr Essiyassi Al Islāmi (From the Fundamentals of Islamic Political Thought), Beirut, Rissāla, 1979, pp. 32-34.
[12] Abu al-Hassan Ali ibn Ismā'īl al-Ash'arī, Al-Ibānāh Fi Usul ad-Dyānāh   (Clarification in the Fundamentals of Religion), Misr, Dār al-Ansār, 1977, p.251.
[13] Abdulhamīd Al Kattani, Nidhām Alhukuma Alnabawiya Almusamma Biltarātīb Alidāria (The Regime of Prophetic Government called Administrative Arrangements), Beirūt, Dar Alkitāb Al-lubnāni, Vol. 1, p. 3.
[14] Uthman Muhammad Fathi, op.cit. p. 100.

The limpid Revelation teaches us that God created people different and they will remain so[15]; they are meant to know each other through wise dialogue and not to interpret their differences into a desire to destroy each other; on the contrary, this is a flagrant disrespect of Revelation. Most causes of violence between Muslims or between them and other nations have nothing to do with brotherhood in Islam or tolerance; they either spring from narrow mindedness or serve a particular political agenda.

Failure in Performance

Theoretically, the aim of the Muslim State is to provide for the basic individual and collective needs; Sheikh Al-Shātibi, who died in 1388, would call those basic needs " Necessities " which are indispensable for the well being of Muslims in this world and hereafter[16]. These aims can be summarized into five: preservation of Deen (religion), Aql (intellect), Nafs (life), Mal (property) and Irdh (dignity)[17]. These aims cover the different aspects of life according to Muslim scholars and, thus, need complex and effective bureaucracy to fulfill them.

Most States in the Muslim world have poor political institutions that can take in charge the different aspects of life; therefore, the success of an economic pattern, for example, depends greatly on the personal qualities of the leader than an institutional organization; the United Arab Emirates is a striking example in this respect. With the exception of the Iranian complex effective institutions, Some researchers in the field of Islamic political thought, are astonished by the flimsy Islamists' vision of political institutions though they put great emphasis on politics in Islam or what they call " Political Islam "[18].

Power organization in many Muslim States is either weak or ineffective because it is either based on autocratic rule in which all the political decisions are enacted by the autocrat or based on a fake democracy that relies on institutions similar to western democracies with no real power; most Arab countries can be taken as examples in this regard, such as Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria…

The lack of a clear institutional vision may be the very cause of the failure in performance by many governments in the Muslim World; in juridical terms, these governments do not possess real constitutions that organize and limit power because a real constitution strikes a balance between liberty and power in accordance with the identity of each society; this is achieved by establishing a body of institutions with coherent competences to guarantee stability and by creating practical mechanisms to make sure that liberties are not violated. With the exception of rare successful Muslim States, studies demonstrating many features of failure: poverty, diseases, analphabetism… are abundant[19].

Conclusion

The aim of this essay is to try to explain the causes of Islamic political blockage and its relationship with violence relying on an impartial discussion of two sensitive issues in the Muslim World: Imāma and power organization.

In the following points, it is made clear that Limpid Revelation is a great source of intellectual guidance and freedom; our understanding of this Revelation depends on time, place and circumstances and these are undoubtedly variable; whereas, Revelation remains valid for all times and places.

First, it should be pointed out that the Holy Koran and the True Sunnah do not contain **conclusive provisions** about :

1. Imāma; no one can claim in the name of God that Muslims' political and spiritual leadership is inherent to a particular person; the prophet ruled the Muslims on the basis of Revelation; when he died, Revelation would not serve as a source of legitimacy to anyone else; using analogy to prove someone's merit of Imāma is inappropriate because no Muslim dares to claim the prophet's religious and political status. As a result, Islam is open to the human

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[15] Koran, Chapter 11 (HUD): " If thy Lord had so willed, He could have made mankind one People: but they will not cease to dispute, except those on whom thy Lord hath bestowed His Mercy: and for this did He create them: and the Word of thy Lord shall be fulfilled "

[16] Abdīn Ahmad Salāma, Tawfīr Alhadjat Al-Asasiya Fi Dhil Al-Dawla Al-Islamiya   (Providing Basic Needs Under the Reign of the Muslim State), in Abhath Al-Iktisād Al-Islami Journal , Vol. 1, Issue 2, 1987, p. 62.

[17] http://www.daralhijrah.com/SJ/Vol.%201%20Isu.%201.pdf

[18] Olivier Roy & Carol Volk, The failure of political Islam, Harvard University Press, pp. 168-175.

[19] see for example : Zaghlūl Al-Nadjār, qadhiat al-takhaluf al-Ilmi wal-tiqni fil-Ālam Al-Islami Al Muāşar (The Issue of Scientific and technical underdevelopment in the Contemporary Islamic World), Cairo, Maktabat wahba, 2006, pp. 6-13

intellect to determine the source of political legitimacy in concordance with particularities of time and place; what matters is the real contentment of Muslims with the source of legitimacy of their rulers which makes them real citizens and not mere subjects. Furthermore, a consensus of all Muslims on a certain thought or theory about the source of legitimacy is unattainable; this makes the plurality of Muslim States plausible; whereas, imposing a single State to gather all Muslims, on the basis of religious obligation or necessity, could incite internal factions as happened during the reign of the fourth rightly guided Caliph, Ali. In addition, even with multiple Muslim States, the accumulation of Muslims' spiritual and political leadership in one person is neither a religious obligation nor a necessity; on this basis, political leadership can be vested in State rulers and spiritual leadership can be the duty of Muslim scholars. As for the political leadership, autocracy is not taken for granted to realize Muslims' unity; so the choice of presidential, parliamentary, assembly government system or any other hybrid regime is a matter of adequacy; i.e., how adequate the organization of power in fulfilling the aims of the State, especially the five aims of the Islamic law " Shari'a": preservation of religion, life, intellect, dignity and property.

2. the technique of access to power; otherwise, the prophet would have been the most qualified to set a mechanism of power alternation as a tradition to Muslims; hence, Muslims are free to choose any mechanism of access to power that concords with the source of legitimacy they adopt and in accordance with the principle of " Shūra " (Consultation) that should be observed in choosing rulers and in managing state affairs.

Second, within the fundamentals of Islam, notably the six pillars of faith; namely, belief in God, in angels, in holy scriptures, in the prophets, in life after death and in divine decree, the different opinions concerning political issues such as the source of legitimacy, mechanisms of power alternation and power organization resulting from different interpretations of Koran and True Sunnah enrich the political jurisprudence, but no one can claim holding a unique absolute truth. For example, the differences between Shiites and Sunnis about Imāma can be accepted as a political divergence, but both of them cannot pretend monopolizing truth even if both parties scrutinize Koran and Sunnah to give some texts certain interpretations to sustain their claims.

Third, in regard to relations with non Muslims, Islam neither ordain nor recommend Muslim States or Muslims, as individuals or groups, to convince non Muslims with Islam via violence; on the contrary, this is explicitly and strictly forbidden on the basis of the five above mentioned aims of Shari'a . Therefore, what some would call conflict of religions is rather a result of misunderstanding Koran and Sunnah.

Forth, the field of Islamic political thought is wide enough to find solutions to political problems without inciting to violence; Muslim scholars are free to use cerebration and to benefit from non Muslims' findings since they do not violate Koran and True Sunnah ; in addition, a line should be traced between conclusive and inconclusive provisions in these two sources so as to widen the field of interpretation of texts in respect of time, place and circumstances; thus, Islamic and appropriate solutions can be reached .

Finally, Koran and Sunnah aim at guiding mankind to the right path of knowing and worshipping God; they are not political treatises; Islam could live without a Muslim State even before the instauration of the prophet's State; nowadays, millions of Muslims live under the rule of non Muslim governments or Muslim governments that do not enforce the Islamic law, yet Islam continues to flourish; hence, no Islamic political thought, albeit useful and justified at a certain time, place, or circumstances is to be sanctified because that will certainly lead to a political blockage which could yield violence.

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