

## Problems and Manifestations of Contemporary Islamic thought and the Contradiction of its Practices with Western Democracy

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### Abstract:

This article offers an analysis of the Arab-Islamic reality and its crises concerning the question of a suitable political system to govern the Arab nation, especially amid Western efforts to impose dominance by promoting the indispensability of Western-style democracy and attempting to apply it to Arab-Islamic societies. It also discusses the ongoing debate between those advocating for the adoption of the Western political model without fully embracing the criteria that Western countries themselves follow. Naturally, the discourse here remains rooted within the political context, as we examine the rising influence of political Islam currents aspiring to power by promoting the idea of returning to Shura (consultative governance). Meanwhile, traditional regimes in these countries advocate for following the path of Western nations, leading to a rupture between the ideas of Islamic movements and totalitarian trends within the Arab world. Furthermore, this has sparked conflict between Islamic movements and Western states, notably the United States. This raises a central question about the capacity of these movements to impose their logic in governance styles on Arab societies, on one hand, and on Western nations, on the other. This discussion may ultimately lead us to consider the necessity of developing a political philosophy that aligns with our cultural and humanitarian values, ensuring political integration that maintains the sustainability of Arab states amid the numerous challenges they face.

**Keywords:** Politics, Democracy, Governance, Islam, American Hegemony, Fundamentalism).

## **1- Introduction**

The new international order, whose essential formative features have crystallized and matured, is reflected in a series of contemporary ideas and applications, foremost among them being the persistent endeavor of the United States, as the leading power in this system, to compel nations outside the Euro-Western cultural sphere to adopt the liberal democratic model. This endeavor does not always garner acceptance from all its intended recipients; however, the American side appears determined to achieve this goal, even if it necessitates extensive and intensified use of direct military force to intervene in the internal affairs of sovereign, independent states. This intervention is often justified through claims forcibly taken from international society and its largest institution, the United Nations, under pretexts ranging from the authoritarian and oppressive nature of these states' ruling regimes and their extensive human rights violations to their support of international terrorism, whether by the regimes themselves, their societies, or even individual citizens.

Given that Arab and Islamic states seem most vulnerable to facing both the initial stages and outcomes of the "American policy of democratic coercion," which is implemented through direct military intervention masked by international legitimacy, this threatens not only their stability but their continued existence as well. Therefore, these states must respond to these challenges, including addressing all forms of Islamic political discourse, both within and outside governmental authority, as they are often accused of terrorism and opposing democracy. Accordingly, the primary goal of this paper is to discuss the Islamic response to the challenge of American democratic coercion, ranging between shura (consultation) and democracy, and to propose the most effective response that can represent the civilizational identity of the Islamic community and best align with the requirements of its revivalist project.

## **2. The Concept of Politics and Democracy in Islamic Thought:**

In Islamic thought, politics pertains to governing the human community and managing its affairs, making decisions related to protecting its existence, upholding its values, ensuring its interests, achieving its objectives, maximizing its capabilities, and organizing its relationships and interactions both internally and externally. Authority, defined as the ability of one governing body to control and direct another body or entities, whether accompanied by

legitimacy and acceptance or lacking them, constitutes two interconnected and challenging phenomena that have always and will continue to lie at the heart of every human existence and thought. The reason is that every political existence is inherently an authoritative one, where society is divided into rulers and the ruled, even when people govern themselves directly. In such cases, they are both rulers to the extent that they exercise the authority and responsibilities of governance, and they are also the ruled to the extent that they submit to the governing authority they wield and obey its directives.

Whether or not Islamic religious sources (the Qur'an and the Sunnah) or jurisprudential efforts (Muslim scholarly endeavors), or both together, explicitly state this enduring and inseparable connection between society, politics, and authority at a theoretical level, Islamic societies cannot, in any practical sense, be excluded from this relationship. This is affirmed and reinforced by the existence of political authority within them in diverse and varied forms and by the significant focus of Muslim thinkers, both past and present, on studying the conditions of these societies from the perspective of the interplay between social and political phenomena and their challenges.

If such intellectual efforts, based on human reasoning, were grounded in the Islamic creed and its historical socio-political experience, it led their proponents or those who agreed with their views to perceive politics and its applications in Islamic societies as imbued with a divine and absolute mystical character. This perception was supported and encouraged by historical and social circumstances, making Islam, through its lived experience, the most prominent monotheistic religion manifesting the bond between religion and politics after the Prophet (peace be upon him) integrated religious, social, and political responsibilities in managing the affairs of the Medina community (Sadeq Ibrahim, 1988, p. 118). The Caliphate State, after the Prophet's death (peace be upon him), was founded on this basis and lasted for nearly thirteen centuries. Although this state initially arose for religious reasons and was based on religious foundations, it also relied on social causes and foundations, making it, in its prophetic and Rashidun stages, a state that served religion, achieved its goals, defended it, and worked to spread it. However, the nature of this state changed in later stages due to the course of social and historical development, turning it into a state that employed religion to serve its own interests, strengthen its authority, expand its influence, and increase its spoils

and gains, using religion to grant sacred religious legitimacy to its rulers, governments, and policies.

Thus, during its foundational era (prophetic and Rashidun), the Islamic state embodied the precedence and supremacy of the religious over the political, or the divine over the human, subordinating and harnessing the political to serve the religious. In contrast, in its expansionary period and in all its subsequent ages and forms, it embodied the dominance of the political over the religious, or the human over the divine, subordinating and harnessing the religious to serve the political. This phenomenon is neither new to human practice nor exclusive to the state experience in Islamic societies. It reflects the outcome of all historical human experiences, in which political supremacy over the religious became prevalent whenever there was a connection between earth and heaven, religion and politics.

No matter how dominant religion might be over politics at the beginning of any historical human experience, controlling it with divine values and steering it with idealistic morals and goals, the dynamics always reversed over time. Politics would prevail over religion, dominating it with human values, manipulating it with utilitarian morals, and steering it towards materialistic goals (Ibrahim, 1988, p. 120).

This assertion is supported by distinction between the Caliphate, which he viewed as a continuation of the Prophet's legacy, meeting all legal criteria and lasting thirty years after the Prophet's (peace be upon him) death, thereby confining it to the era of the Rashidun Caliphs. In contrast, he regarded subsequent rule by Umayyad, Abbasid, and Fatimid rulers as devoid of the essential legal conditions of prophetic succession, existing in name only.

The emergence, albeit indirectly, of the issue of politics in Islam (Is Islam a religion or a religion and state?) can be traced back to the mid-18th century. This was linked to projects aimed at reforming the Islamic state and those comparing it with, or advocating for, a Western civil state model. The issue became clearer and more direct in the early 20th century, associated with the abolition of the Caliphate by the Kemalists in Turkey, sparking debates and differences among Muslims. The first clear manifestation of this debate was articulated by **Ali Abdel Raziq, an Azhar** scholar with global recognition, in his book "Islam and the Foundations of Governance," published in Egypt in 1925. He argued that Islamic law did not

present a coherent, clear, and comprehensive theory regarding the nature of the Islamic political system, its characteristics, or its governance methods. He contended that Islamic religious sources (the Qur'an and the Sunnah) did not explicitly address the issue of political authority, nor did they provide a detailed or systematic approach to its practice within Islamic society (Abu Halawa Karim, 1998, p. 100).

Moreover, Abdel Raziq believed that these sources did not contain any Qur'anic verse or Prophetic tradition upon which all Muslim sects and schools could agree, establishing a definitive and decisive arrangement for the Islamic governance system, nor did they specify the nature, attributes, duties, rights, or means of appointing, holding accountable, or changing rulers from an Islamic perspective. On the other hand, other scholars held the opposing view, asserting that Islam is both a religion and a state, with a strong connection between religious and political dimensions, which they considered one of Islam's most defining features as a creed and historical Process. In light of the aforementioned context, and without neglecting the diverse theoretical and political precedents established by Islamic thinkers who belonged to various jurisprudential, theological, philosophical, and socio-historical schools of Islam, the beginnings of the modern Islamic renaissance era in the mid-eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of the first features of a political Islamic discourse. This discourse adopted the idea that Islam is both a religion and a state and sought to implement it. These features crystallized, their principles were defined, and their foundations became clear from the early twentieth century. Since its inception, this discourse has enjoyed—and continues to enjoy—high dynamic momentum and a wide and deep influence within all Islamic circles due to:

- Its inherent appeal stemming from touching upon the deepest layers of religious consciousness within the human soul.
- Its recurrence of the model of a just religious state rooted in and operating according to divine law (sharia) as exemplified during the Prophetic era and the period of the rightly guided caliphate, with all the positive, benevolent elements within this model (Nasir Naeem, 1988, p. 67).
- Its advocacy of a model that has not been practically implemented in the modern era and has thus not suffered from the failures to achieve objectives, broken promises, and shortcomings that have plagued all other modern secular political discourses.

Within the framework of the ideal model of an Islamic religious state and its principles and policies, the concept of "shura" (consultation) appears and is used in some forms of Islamic

political discourse, if not in most of them, as an Islamic equivalent of the Western concept of democracy. This Western concept refers to a system of governance where the community assumes ruling tasks and responsibilities directly, according to ancient Greek applications, or indirectly through representative forms, as seen in modern Western applications. However, a comparison between shura and democracy reveals that the former is less precise and defined, and it sparks more debate regarding its terms and applications, both conceptually and practically. The term "shura," in its linguistic root, refers to seeking and extracting ideas and opinions through dialogue and discussion with others. It also denotes an issue under consultation. In its political sense, shura refers to surveying the opinion of the community on matters of public concern to understand its consensus, either directly or through its representatives. When minds consult with one another, paths become clearer, and options are revealed, ultimately leading to an agreement on the best course, which aligns with sharia principles or, at the very least, does not contradict them, while also meeting human needs, safeguarding interests, and achieving goals (Inayat Ahmed, 1969, p. 105).

### **3. The Islamic Political Discourse Between Origin and Application:**

The establishment of concepts and applications of Islamic political discourse is primarily based on the direct sacred texts of the two main religious sources (the Quran and the Sunnah) at times and on human interpretive efforts regarding these texts more often, particularly concerning shura-related matters. The word "shura" appears in the Quran in only two instances: in verse 35 of Surah Ash-Shura, describing the community of believers whom God praises, saying, "And those who have responded to their Lord and established prayer and whose affair is [determined by] consultation among themselves, and from what We have provided them, they spend." The second instance is in verse 159 of Surah Al-Imran, where Allah addresses the Prophet (PBUH): "So by mercy from Allah, [O Muhammad], you were lenient with them. And if you had been rude [in speech] and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from about you. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them in the matter. And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah. Indeed, Allah loves those who rely [upon Him]." The divine command to the Prophet (PBUH) may have been exclusive to him, but it can also be interpreted as a general directive for those after him. The Sunnah provides many examples of the Prophet (PBUH) consulting his companions on worldly and religious matters for which no revelation was given, such as seeking advice on where the Muslim army should camp at Badr, the treatment of captives in that battle, and digging the

trench during the Battle of the Trench. Thus, the Prophet's management of the nascent Islamic community and its emerging state heavily relied on shura (ibid, p. 109), not only in worldly matters but also in religious matters that had no revealed directives. Ultimately, he retained the prerogative to seek or not seek consultation and to accept or reject all or part of the advice received.

The works of Muslim thinkers, including the political aspects, do not rely solely on core religious sources; they also draw on secondary sources related to shura practices by notable companions and successors concerning matters crucial to Muslims' faith and worldly affairs not addressed directly by revelation or the Sunnah. It appears that the rightly guided caliphs, in their practice of shura, found no religious impediment to introducing new systems, policies, and practices for which there was no precedent in Islamic revelation, the Sunnah, or historical practice, such as adopting a *dīwān* (registry) system, creating military, financial, and ministerial systems, and dividing territories into provinces and districts. This can be seen as a product of their own creative jurisprudence to manage their affairs and regulate their conditions, this was something experienced and engaged in by many companions, successors, and jurists without any of them seeing it as contrary to divine law or conflicting with it. There is no record of anyone describing it as an innovation or rejecting it on the grounds that there was no explicit text regarding it in the revelation or Sunnah (Muhammad Ishaq Khalid, 1985, p. 35).

The differences among Muslims—individuals, sects, and schools of thought—regarding consultation (shura) go beyond its conceptual meanings and extend to disagreements about the methods of practicing it, the means of its application, and the qualifications and numbers of those eligible to provide or participate in it. The two verses on shura in the Quran do not contain any specific details about this matter. If one of the jurisprudential principles holds that "there is no *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) where there is a text," this same principle also generates or gives rise to an opposite implicit rule: "there must be *ijtihād* where there is no text." The absence of a religious text on an issue, accompanied by changing times and conditions, necessitates altering the content of this *ijtihād*, which is inherently a human product and not a sacred religious text. While humans are not permitted to alter divine religious texts (the Quran and Sunnah), they certainly have the right to modify their human jurisprudential interpretations. Otherwise, insisting on the absolute permanence and

immutability of such interpretations would elevate them to the same status as religious texts, implying they have universal validity and sacredness as well. The Islamic debate over shura expands to encompass two other fundamental issues:

- The obligation or non-obligation to seek consultation.
- The binding or non-binding nature of the opinion derived from consultation once it has been sought.

Regarding the issue of seeking consultation, Muslim opinions are divided between recommendation and obligation. Those who argue for its obligation rely on two main sources and a subsidiary source:

**2.1. The primary source for the obligation of seeking consultation is the two Quranic verses:** "Consult them in affairs" and "Their affairs are decided by mutual consultation." This source has both a direct and an indirect dimension. The direct dimension relates to the interpretation of the verse "Consult them in affairs," which has two aspects. The first aspect posits that the Prophet (peace be upon him), due to divine revelation, did not require advice, making this verse primarily directed at teaching people to adopt consultation in managing their affairs, extending not only to rulers after the Prophet (peace be upon him) but to all Muslims. The second aspect of interpreting this verse is supported by the jurisprudential rule that "what is intended for the specific is intended for the general," meaning what was directed to the Prophet in this divine command to consult applies to all Muslims, obliging them to practice consultation. The indirect dimension of the primary source advocating for obligatory consultation relates to interpreting the verse "Their affairs are decided by mutual consultation," which implicitly requires Muslims to practice consultation since it praises and distinguishes believers who apply it, indicating that such a distinguishing trait must be maintained consistently to retain its significance (same reference, p. 39).

**2.2. The second primary source for the obligation of seeking consultation is the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him),** who frequently sought advice on various religious and worldly matters, as evident to anyone who reflects on the Sunnah.

The subsidiary source advocating for the obligation of consultation refers to the practices of the companions and successors, who adhered to Allah's rulings and the Prophet's Sunnah in seeking consultation for their public and private affairs. However, what appears in the Quran, Sunnah, and the actions of the companions and successors, explicitly or implicitly supporting the obligation of seeking consultation, does not equally apply to the binding nature of consultation's rulings for those who sought it. While there is some evidence supporting the necessity of seeking consultation, evidence supporting the binding nature of its rulings is even less common. The division between recommendation, obligation, binding, and non-binding persists among Muslims, indicating that all conceptual and practical elements of consultation remain disputed issues without definitive or absolute resolutions.

Nevertheless, the differences among Muslims regarding the details of consultation and the varying bases for their opinions are not entirely negative. This diversity ultimately means there is a degree of freedom allowing them to choose their specific understanding or interpretations of consultation, as well as how to apply it. They may hold their rulers accountable for adhering to and implementing consultation's rulings, or they may opt not to. When considering that general human societies, including Muslim societies, increasingly strive for an active and real role in shaping, implementing, and monitoring policies within their communities—whether the term used is consultation, democracy, or popular political participation—it becomes clear how important it is to expand the concept of consultation and its applications in Islam and to push for its obligation on the one hand and the binding nature of its rulings for those who seek it on the other representatives of the various forms and manifestations of political Islamic discourse have oscillated in their positions on consultation (shura) and democracy, ranging from the far right to the far left. Some of these figures have argued that what Islamic societies need is shura, not democracy, basing their position on a claim of a complete disconnect between the Islamic concept and application of shura and the Western concept and application of democracy. Consequently, they categorically reject democracy, even in name, arguing that it is "a system not brought by Islamic doctrine." Therefore, they assert that Muslims must reject democracy as one would reject any new introduction into Islam that is not from it, considering it clear disbelief to be avoided entirely (same reference, p. 40).

In contrast, other Islamic thinkers hold an entirely different view, arguing for compatibility between Islam and democracy. One scholar states, "Islam is the father of democracy," while

another claims that "the governance of the four rightly-guided Caliphs, which represents the strictest form of Islamic rule in accordance with the Sharia, was purely popular and purely democratic." While the proponents of the first opinion have gone to extremes in their opposition to and rejection of democracy, ignoring the flexibility of Islamic law and its ability to respond to new circumstances—a point confirmed by the diversity of jurisprudential interpretations throughout Islamic social and political heritage that were never considered as disbelief by contemporary companions and successors—the second group has gone to the opposite extreme. They enthusiastically adopt democracy and attempt to align it with the Islamic concept of shura, incorporating it without paying sufficient attention to its specific and distinctive characteristics as a general concept that remains shaped by its broader religious and ideological context. Bridging this gap, other thinkers have sought to narrow or at least address this divide, suggesting that Islam has its own unique system, which they term "Nomocracy" (a system governed by law and Sharia). In this system, the ruler is the "nomos" (law/Sharia), making the Islamic state, in their view, a state governed by the rule of law within the community, where the divine law governs society. Another viewpoint suggests there are both similarities and differences between Islam and democracy, without denying that Islam encompasses "the best elements found within democracy" (Fahmi Howeidi, 1999, p. 119).

### **3. Divine Sovereignty and Democracy in Islam:**

The differences among Muslims—individuals, groups, and schools of thought—regarding politics and authority in Islam remain a complex problem that demands resolution. This need has intensified due to the emergence of two new factors: one internal and the other external:

#### **3.1 The Internal Factor:**

The spread of the concept of divine sovereignty and the associated political project, characterized by the growth and expansion of rigid and violent Islamist tendencies.

#### **3.2 The External Factor:**

The challenge posed by American democratic coercion policies, often accompanied by direct military intervention in many Islamic countries. Regarding the internal factor, the term "divine sovereignty" is relatively modern, entering Islamic literature in the mid-20th century as a translation of a Western concept typically rendered as "sovereignty" in Arabic sources. Proponents of divine sovereignty argue that it entails society and the state's submission to the sovereignty of God Almighty, who alone holds authority and is the source of all legislation. Democracy, on the other hand, denotes that sovereignty in society and the state belongs to the

people, who hold legislative power. Therefore, a positive Islamic response to the challenge posed by American democratic coercion policies that remains within the bounds of divine sovereignty—without leading to a religious state ruled by an absolute, sanctified leader—necessitates creating a political system capable of resolving ongoing and deep-seated disagreements among Muslims regarding political matters. At the same time, it must balance divine sovereignty with the community's genuine role in shaping the nature of governance, policies, and decisions. Such a system can:

- Preserve the nation's historical and civilizational identity.
- Provide the necessary dynamism and capability for the nation to fulfill the requirements of its renaissance project's success.
- Grant governing systems in Islamic societies the legitimacy and stability needed to confront American democratic coercion and to resist regional and international interference under the guise of protecting various ethnicities, religions, or sects, or under claims of countering tyranny, human rights violations, or terrorism support. (Warghi Jalal, 2002, p. 44)

The contemporary Islamic mindset, along with all its forms of political discourse, can indeed establish such a system. However, this is contingent upon its initial acknowledgment of the other's right to exist, to have differing opinions, and to express them, as well as its readiness to coexist and engage in dialogue. Secondly, it must accept the merging of two principles: divine governance in broad, general legislation and rulings, and popular governance in detailed, specific legislation and rulings. Historically, this mindset and its political discourse have accepted—and continue to accept—the ruler's or caliph's right to legislate on matters not explicitly detailed in divine legislation or that have no precedent. Why, then, should this right not now be transferred from the ruler to society, which is ultimately the intended beneficiary of this legislation? This merging is not an impossibility; these two principles are not necessarily contradictory or mutually exclusive. The existence of one does not inherently negate or nullify the other. Recognizing divine sovereignty, both initially and ultimately, does not preclude acknowledging the divine mercy embedded in the universal, general nature of the bulk of religious laws and rulings in the two primary divine sources (Qur'an and Sunnah). This allows for human endeavors and interpretations in specific, detailed matters, provided these do not depart from the overarching framework of divine legislation.

The general and absolute nature of the majority of rulings in the divine sources (Qur'an and Sunnah) makes them applicable across time and space. This broad applicability enables them to encompass and address the vast array of changes and innovations in human life, adapting to societal needs and the circumstances of the age without conflicting with the overarching principles of Sharia. This is evidenced by the relatively few overarching legal rulings in the sacred divine texts, which are typically general, necessitating a corresponding abundance of detailed rulings within human jurisprudential sources. The divine legislation, broad in its implications, remains universally valid across times and places. On the other hand, human-derived jurisprudential rulings, extracted from divine legislation based on human understanding, are numerous, specific, and applicable only within particular temporal and spatial contexts. This temporal and spatial limitation of human jurisprudential rulings arises from four interrelated factors:

- The various levels and forms of human understanding and interpretation of divine legislation, from its premises to its outcomes and objectives.
- The combined religious (Qur'an and Sunnah) and human jurisprudential sources (e.g., interpretations by the Prophet's family, companions, consensus, analogy, practices of Medina's residents, discretionary preference, and considerations of public interest) used in diverse ways to derive a multiplicity of jurisprudential rulings.
- The diverse tools, methodologies, and jurisprudential rules developed by humans and used to derive their jurisprudential rulings from these combined sources.
- The diverse and emerging needs of the Islamic societies to which jurists belonged, with their differing approaches to understanding, interpreting, and deducing within the unity and stability of the sacred texts. This has led to varied jurisprudential interpretations on similar issues, not just among followers of different legal schools but even within the same school.

This leads to the premise that jurisprudential rulings are ultimately human legislation derived from a divine source rather than divine legislation itself. Therefore, the cornerstone of the proposed political system model is a composite acknowledgment that ultimate sovereignty in any Islamic society belongs solely to God in matters of religion and worldly affairs covered by divine revelation or proven by prophetic tradition. Simultaneously, humans have sovereignty in the myriad and changing worldly matters, legislating as necessary to preserve their interests and achieve their aims without contravening the general principles and overarching rulings of religion. Within this framework, every Islamic society can

independently reason about matters not explicitly covered by the Qur'an or Sunnah and establish a system that reflects the majority view and garners the response of both the ruling authority and the opposing minority.

Although this approach aligns with key democratic principles, it does not require labeling the system as "democratic" or adopting the liberal Western democratic model. There is no obligation concerning names or practices, as Western societies themselves have not adhered to a single model of democracy; each society developed its own based on its circumstances and unique intellectual and historical frameworks. However, mere desire is not enough to achieve objectives; real-world challenges must be addressed. One of the most significant challenges in linking divine governance with democracy in Islam is:

- The general and contemporary Islamic political movements' tendency to engage with ideas and changes based on a dual framework of:
  - Historical sacred authority.
  - Ideal historical models.

These frameworks reflect the pervasive influence of history, positively or negatively, based on its interaction and resonance with these movements. The prophetic era serves as an ideal value-based reference point for all forms of Islamic political discourse, from moderate to radical, past and present. This sacred and idealized reference extends to include the continuation of this human legacy through the companions and successors, with varying adherence depending on the respective Islamic school of thought. This historically intricate blend of sacred and ideal references shapes Islamic movements' thinking and practices. Consequently, the political and governance practices during the prophetic and Rashidun eras have become the exalted ideal for political theorists in Islamic discourse. Many discussions revolve around what ought to be, neglecting practical, lived realities, and offering idealistic responses to tangible, pressing issues. Thus, much of the discourse remains an idealistic response to real-world problems, presenting a historically nostalgic perspective on contemporary realities rather than reflecting a current, nuanced understanding.

A realistic approach to politics, both conceptually and practically as the art of the possible, requires Islamic political discourse, and Arab political discourse more broadly, to reformulate

its understanding of Islamic consultation (shura), making it both necessary and obligatory. Muslims must define and agree upon the meanings and conditions of this principle, otherwise, those who make this principle their slogan and claim to pursue its application without specifying its content and conditions will be capable, under its banner and under the pretext of protecting it, of monopolizing power and unilaterally determining the manner in which divine legal rulings are interpreted and applied.

While Islamic rulings are singular in their divine religious texts and origins, they are diverse and varied in their human interpretative jurisprudential applications. Every major or minor sect within Islam believes it is correct and that others are mistaken; otherwise, they would not have differed in their interpretations from others. Consequently, the interpretation and application of Islamic rulings in any Muslim society will be determined by the sectarian views of those in power, leading to interpretations and applications that differ from those of other sectarian views within that society or in other Islamic communities (Al-Khidr Shukir, previous reference, p. 37).

This applies to all major contemporary Islamic sects, as well as the sub-sects within them, as every main sect is internally divided into sub-sects. No follower of a major Islamic sect can claim that differences of opinion are confined solely to the main sects without including their internal subdivisions. Even when differences among sub-sects of a primary sect seem minor and partial, they still exist and are impactful, as they ultimately lead to the fragmentation of the main sect into factions (Abu Al-Majd Ahmad Kamal, 1985, p. 33). Members of each faction strive to understand, interpret, and apply Islamic law according to their sub-sect's perspective, not that of other sub-sects, believing their view to be closest to the truth, if not the truth itself. This is reflected in the Qur'anic verse: "Every faction rejoices in what it has" (Surah Al-Mu'minun 23:53).

The long and painful history of Muslim societies suffering under individual or factional tyranny necessitates that any call for adopting and implementing the principle of divine sovereignty must also aim to place its application in the hands of the entire community, not specific individuals or groups, regardless of their identity or characteristics. This requires and demands structuring the relationship between society and its governing authority, defining society's role in and share of this authority through legal rules and institutional frameworks

that safeguard citizens' and society's rights and freedoms, while setting obligations and limitations for both. The majority of Islamic political discourse lacks the concept of a contract between the ruler and the ruled, which must now be embraced as a vital necessity to end a historical trajectory in which Muslim societies lived under rulers whose absolute and unchecked authority was limited only by God's will, which they interpreted for their benefit, often exploiting religion for this purpose. Throughout Islamic history, from the Umayyad era to the end of the Ottoman Caliphate, countless examples demonstrate how Islamic thinkers, including jurists from all sects, without exception, fell into one of three main stances:

-Supporters of the ruling authority, defending its policies and seeking to maintain it.

-Opponents of the ruling authority, working to undermine and overthrow it.

-Neutral parties who were neither for nor against it (same reference, p. 37).

Scholars from each stance used dual religious and jurisprudential evidence to justify their varying and contradictory positions, portraying themselves sometimes as defenders, other times as opponents, or as indifferent parties. The necessity and significance of the contract between the ruler and the ruled for the stability and continuation of our societies lie in its role as a foundational condition for establishing authority and governance legitimacy. This legitimacy is based on a combined principle of divine sovereignty over public and comprehensive matters and community sovereignty over specific and private issues that lack clear, agreed-upon divine legislation. The community's will must play a role in even the first principle since divine religious rulings on public and general affairs, while rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah, are diverse and subject to different jurisprudential interpretations due to the existence of multiple schools of Islamic thought and sub-sects within those schools. Thus, the community, either directly or through its representatives within the broader Islamic framework, has the right to participate in determining these interpretations and applications.

If ruling authorities and their scholars in Islamic countries have the right to interpret and apply Islamic law based on their knowledge and reasoning, the community equally has the right to choose the interpretation it deems appropriate. The best means to organize these rights, prevent conflicts, and ensure balance is to appeal to the collective opinion of the

society's individual and group components, adopting the view of the majority, whether religious or secular, without this leading to oppression or persecution of the minority. The minority has the right to hold its own interpretative opinion regarding divine texts that can bear multiple meanings and applications. We must remember that the noble Sunnah affirms the right to independent reasoning (ijtihād), rewarding and recognizing the sincere mujtahid, whether correct or mistaken, as long as the error is unintentional and the intention is for good and reform. The Prophet's family and his Companions after him had varying interpretations of the Qur'an and Sunnah, leading to different applications without denying others their right to differ.

The right to ijtihād remains open and guaranteed for any qualified Muslim, without turning past or present interpretations into divine laws or granting exclusive correctness to any interpretation. This has been a source of individual or factional authoritarianism in our societies, as all Islamic interpretations are human readings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. By virtue of their human nature, they hold equal potential for error and correctness and acceptance or rejection by Muslims (Ghanem Ibrahim Al-Bayoumi, 1992, p. 116).

Large sectors of Islamic political discourse overlook the dynamics and needs of real society, seeking instead to impose a particular historical model in all its details, assuming absolute goodness in this model and elevating it as an ideal representation of divine governance on earth. While this assumption is universally accepted regarding the Prophet's life, it does not extend to all his contemporaries or all who followed them, making this perfection specific rather than general. The disputes that arose within the Islamic community after the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and throughout the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, along with the numerous conflicts and wars among Muslims during that period, serve as sufficient evidence of the weakness of a significant part of this assumption.

The model of political authority advocated by Islamic discourse and its promises was inherently lacking a substantial degree of realism. Its proponents either forgot or intentionally overlooked the impossibility of applying the prophetic part of it, for no human, regardless of their position, can claim the ability to embody the policies of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who spoke through divine revelation and acted under its guidance. As for the other part of this realism, it was lost by Islamic political discourse due to its attachment to the

sacred historical references and the idealized historical model of authority during the Rashidun era without considering the necessary human conditions. The policies of the Rightly Guided Caliphs were ultimately human policies, even if we all agree that they strived to extend divine policies during the prophetic era. These policies varied based on their different approaches to issues and challenges, as well as the diverse opinions of the Companions, which ranged from support to opposition, and their methods varied between using the sword, words, or isolation.

Due to these differences, three of the Rightly Guided Caliphs were killed, and the Muslims of that era were divided into factions, each with a group of Companions, leading to wars that claimed the lives of many in what is considered the golden age of Islam. This fact highlights those representatives of Islamic political discourse, who ascribed ideal traits and characteristics to this era, ignored the tangible and practical realities of life, as well as its needs. Consequently, they became unable to differentiate between what is desirable and what is possible. This dilemma pushed them to resort to an "eradication approach" in dealing with the diseases and challenges of reality instead of a "therapeutic approach." The danger of the eradications' approach becomes evident when the entire social body is afflicted, leaving the advocates of this approach with two bitter options:

-Either eradicate the entire body.

-Or abandon their fundamental principles.

The names and labels given to ruling systems in Islamic societies and the characteristics attributed to them are not problematic by themselves. The real issue lies in the actual content of these systems, as reflected by principles that ensure community participation in managing its affairs and making decisions concerning its present and future, none of which contradict the pillars of the religion or divine law. These principles include:

-Popular political participation in determining the fundamental directions of society's life, its work, the ruling authority, and their interactions.

-Peaceful transfer of power based on the principles of pluralism, acceptance of others, and acknowledgment of the minority's right to differ from and peacefully oppose the majority.

-The right of all citizens to nominate, vote, and express their opinions.

-Equality of all citizens before the law in rights and duties.

These rules ensure the genuine and active participation of the community in the political decision-making process, its implementation, and oversight. They alone can provide legitimacy for the ruling authority, stability for the community, and essential and necessary elements for facing challenges, regardless of their origin, nature, or degree of severity. This allows society to take charge of such confrontations as both its subject and tool. (Layla Muhammad Kamal, B.S., p. 22)

#### **4. Problems of the Contemporary Islamic Movement:**

Undoubtedly, any attempt to revive what has been lost from a certain religion or civilization's legacy carries flaws, whether at the theoretical or practical level. The Islamic movement, according to many commentators, has faced numerous challenges known to scholars of the ummah and their followers. However, these issues do not stem from the internal nature of the concept or model but rather from the criticisms posed by opponents of the Islamic foundational methodology.

We will try to highlight these issues as perceived by opponents in the following way:

##### **4.1: The Epistemological Problem:**

This refers to the awareness of Islamic movement theorists regarding the validity of their different methodologies and their applicability to contemporary reality. This branch can be divided into two issues that may appear at the methodological level and at the applied interpretative level.

##### **4.1.1 At the Methodological Level:**

All contemporary Islamic movements consider the Quran and the authentic Sunnah of the Prophet as the primary sources for any renaissance today and at all times. Hasan al-Banna, for example, views the Quran as a clarification for everything and the Sunnah as its practical explanation, while the legacy of the righteous predecessors serves as a secondary source. The idea is that Islam is applicable to all times and places, a view shared by both classical and modern Islamists.

Opponents question the applicability of the absolute (the Quran) to the variable (time and place). Al-Banna sought to elevate his traditional method to a dogmatic level beyond time and place, making it an absolute methodology validated by its divine basis. However, this method

raises a dilemma by equating the divine with the human; while divine matters are certain, equating them with human endeavors leads to ambiguity since they differ in nature and outcome. Thus, equating them is invalid, or at least human judgments remain tentative, as they lack empirical validation.

In our view, the association between divine and human sources by al-Banna and others is not about equivalence but rather about connecting the ideal (infallible revelation). It implies that what occurred in one era can be replicated across all eras. Sayyid Qutb expanded on al-Banna's methodology, viewing it not just as a process or steps but as a consistent divine framework for regulating human life across the past, present, and future. (Shukair al-Khidr, Previous Reference, p. 110)

#### **4.2. The Political Problem:**

The epistemological problem mentioned earlier has logically resulted in a larger issue within both the Islamic and global arenas—a truly integrated political system capable of building an Islamic state. Has such a state ever been fully realized? Or is Islam merely a religion purifying hearts and souls, guiding humanity to virtue and sincere worship of one God, not a political theory capable of resolving the complexities of an ever-changing world?

In this context, the debate on religion and state emerged, with scholars producing extensive writings, both supportive and opposing, and establishing this theory. This issue first became a topic of discussion during the Abbasid era, coinciding with the flourishing of science, intellectual debates, and the translation of Greek works. It also coincided with the rise of a state that proclaimed a return to foundational principles and adherence to the Caliphate model, notably concerning the hereditary system initiated by Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan. The discourse on this theory persisted through the modern Arab renaissance, through figures like Ibn Taymiyyah in the 8th century, Ibn Abdul Wahhab in the 12th century, and later thinkers such as Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, Muhammad Abduh, Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, who shaped contemporary Islamic political and governance **discourse**.

There has been widespread debate over whether Islam includes a system of governance or if the early Islamic political experience was subject to worldly, civil management shaped by

human minds. In political philosophy, Al-Farabi wrote *Al-Madina Al-Fadila* (The Virtuous City) in the late 10th century CE (4th century AH), in which he heralded a prophet-philosopher who would rule this city. Al-Mawardi wrote *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya* (The Ordinances of Government), and in modern times, Muhammad Rashid Rida sought to revive the Islamic Caliphate. Following its abolition in 1924, Hassan al-Banna emerged in 1928 advocating for an Islamic system of governance in Egypt. Before that, Ali Abdel Raziq's book, *Islam and the Foundations of Governance*, appeared in 1925, one year after the Caliphate's abolition, arguing that Islam did not come with a governance system but aimed to perfect moral values, prompting responses from Al-Azhar scholars that cannot be elaborated upon here.

Taha Hussein asserted that the evolution of human life had long rendered religious and linguistic unity insufficient as a basis for political unity or state formation. The question of Islam as both religion and state are as significant in contemporary Arab-Islamic thought as it is artificial. Its proponents seek to confine Islam to rituals and worship, restricted to the self and the mosque. Secularists have continually raised this issue since the emergence of political Islam. (Ghalioun, Burhan, 1997, p. 87).

### **5. Sources of Political Theory in Islamic Thought:**

Sunni and Shiite Islamic fundamentalism holds that the source of Islamic political theory is fixed and well-defined: the Qur'an and Sunnah by consensus, with Shiite tradition adding the biographies of the Imams. Islamic fundamentalism views the Qur'an as the absolute source for deriving political and governance principles, reflected in terms such as "those in authority," "consultation," "justice," and concepts like "shepherd and flock" and responsibility. In Hassan al-Banna's vision, the Islamic state is built on the Qur'anic social system, symbolizing a state that a political authority, embodied in the Caliphate, must protect. Thus, the state represents the Muslim Ummah, governed by the Qur'an as its constitutional and legislative foundation.

The second agreed-upon source is the authentic Sunnah, including the Prophet's (PBUH) sayings, actions, and decisions regarding the necessity of appointing an Imam, the rules of leadership, and the limits of obedience and responsibility in this world (to the people) and the hereafter (to God). This gave rise to a political theory rooted in divine and implemented revelation. In Sayyid Qutb's thought, the Qur'an occupies a special position as an absolute source, upholding the concept of *Hakimiyyah* (divine sovereignty): only God is the true ruler,

and humans merely govern by God's law. The state must be led by a just ruler since justice is the primary attribute of governance in Islam.

Al-Banna and Qutb share a view on the Qur'an as the foundational source for the Islamic state. Shiite fundamentalism also adds the experience of the infallible Imams, from Imam Ali to the Twelfth Imam. (Same reference, p. 91). The roots of fundamentalist ambiguity in defining and deriving the concept of the state in Islam based on textual sovereignty lie in interpreting and implementing texts, so to speak. During the Prophet's (PBUH) time, revelation's authority was legitimate because it came directly from God, focusing on establishing divine order in Mecca.

During the Rashidun Caliphate, the collective memory of the Companions (may God be pleased with them) and the prevalent atmosphere in Medina partially maintained the values that prevailed during the Prophet's era. How does this view manifest today amid significant changes in collective vision, target groups, and contextual circumstances?

From the opponents' perspective, the community has changed; today's rulers are not the group nurtured by the Prophet (PBUH). The state has evolved over fourteen centuries and no longer adheres to the thought of the divine state but instead aligns with historical political interests, diverging from what contemporary fundamentalists call "divine politics." (Same reference, p. 83).

In matters of governance, the reference does not return to the Qur'an or Sunnah, according to Muhammad Abed Al-Jabri, as their texts do not legislate for political and governance affairs unlike acts of worship and personal status. Instead, the reference in the realm of the relationship between religion and politics and the application of Sharia lies in the Companions' actions. They engaged in politics, built the state, and applied Sharia based on a genuine understanding of Islam's spirit, preceding the varied interpretations arising from historical conflicts and disputes since the conflict between Ali and Muawiya over power.

Al-Jabri (Zakaria Fouad, 1985, p. 34) implicitly presents the dialectic of religion and state, arguing that political and governance issues are not grounded in the Qur'an and Sunnah, unlike modern Islamic movements' proponents. Instead, they are rooted solely in the actions of the Companions. Nevertheless, the Companions' actions remained consistent with the Qur'an and Sunnah as guiding references, serving as sources of principles rather than exhaustive details, leaving room for scholars to derive rules through systematic *ijtihad*

(independent reasoning) under the guidance of Islamic jurisprudence scholars. In this regard, Al-Jabri inadvertently acknowledged the Qur'an and Sunnah as references.

### **6. Islamic Political Thought in Confrontation with the West:**

The response of Islamic political discourse, specifically Arab Islamic discourse, to the challenge posed by divine sovereignty and American democratic coercion reflects the enduring struggle between old and new, inherited and acquired, indigenous and foreign, tradition and modernity. For this struggle to be beneficial, resulting in social renewal and progress, it must lead to a new proposition surpassing and transcending inherited and conflicting theories, including consultation (shura) and democracy, among others (Amara, Muhammad, 1990, p. 41). It entails blending divine sovereignty and society's right to self-rule and administration, achieving a synthesis between the constant (divine law) and the variable (human agency). Divine law provides fundamental principles for human life, while mechanisms like shura, democracy, or popular political participation allow for their adaptable implementation according to changing needs across time and place (Shakir Khidr, previous reference, p. 123).

This cycle of producing and reproducing society's values, governance rules, and institutions is vital for living, effective states and societies in the 21st century. While shura, democracy, or popular political participation may not solve every crisis or issue facing Arab societies, they create an environment conducive to identifying and growing solutions that ensure genuine expression of societal will. This results in a collective point of agreement, satisfying or at least tolerating minority opposition while respecting democratic norms of peaceful dialogue and waiting for future opportunities to shape majority opinion. Success lies not in perfect resolutions but in solutions shaped by society and acceptable to the majority, with provisions for revision and adaptation through democratic processes and popular consensus. (Same reference, p. 125).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be said that it is not simple to expect a convergence between Islamic political thought and the Western model of democracy. This is because large and fundamental sectors of Islamic political discourse neglect the mechanisms of living social reality and its

requirements, and rush to impose a historical model with all its details on this reality, after assuming the absolute goodness of this model and purifying it from all flaws in its individuals and components. Therefore, the dialogues within Islamic political thought regarding its conflict with the West will continue, while we will witness the West trying to impose more pressure on Arab and Islamic countries to deepen the issue of democracy with its Western fingerprint, especially as it controls their ruling systems, which are characterized by authoritarianism against their people, in an attempt to buy the silence of the West regarding the violations they practice. The important point to note is that the struggle between the Western democratic model and those who govern the Arab and Islamic world, particularly those with an Islamic political thought, will remain an ongoing war, and history will show who emerges victorious and who is defeated.

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