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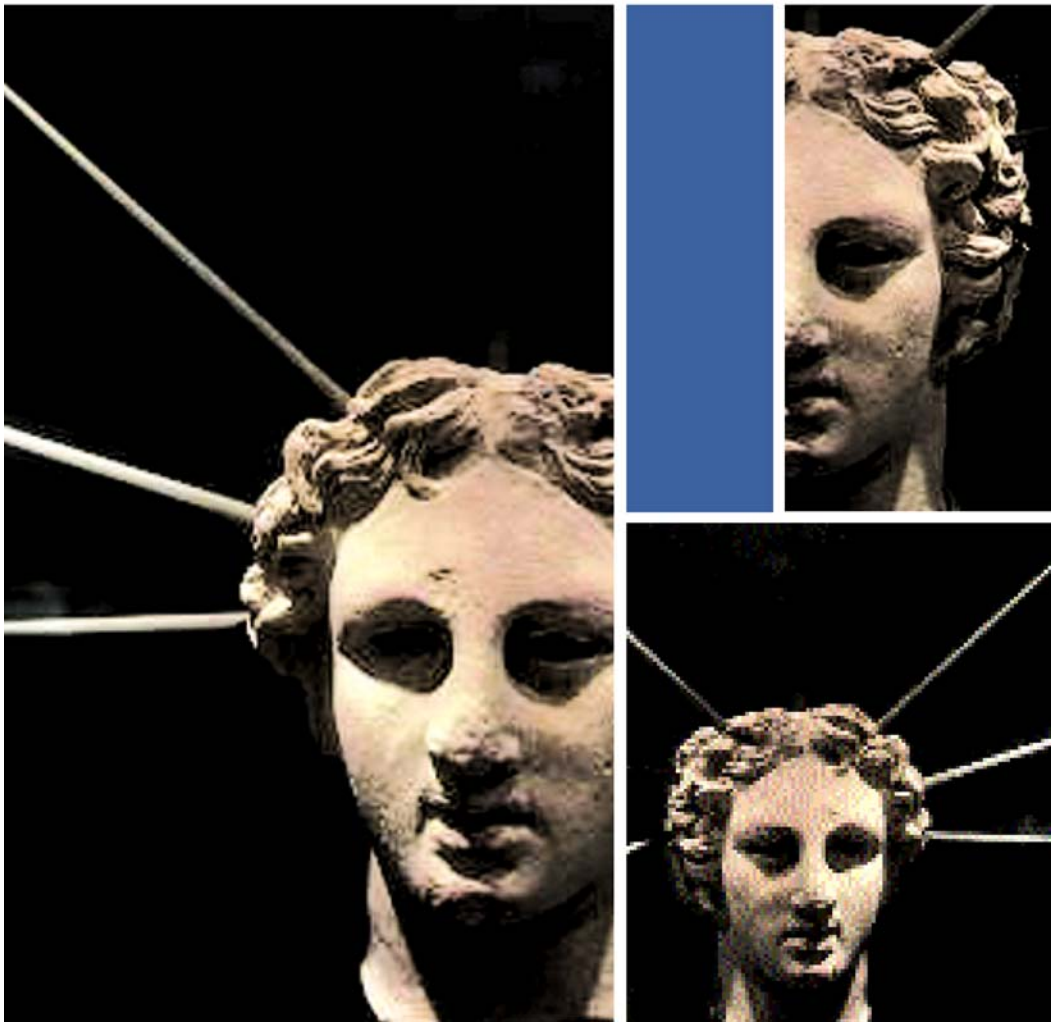
Prof. Abdel Mahdi Alsoudi



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Prof. Abdel Mahdi Alsoudi

Introduction

Today the Arab world faces different serious internal and external problems and challenges. Domestically, they suffer from poverty, unemployment, and absence of democracy, human rights, and lack of equal opportunities in education, employment, income, and political power. Externally, they had been subject to continuous threats, wars, and political, economic and military domination from some western powers since the beginning of the 20th century.

This confrontation between the Arabs and the West became more serious after the tragic attacks of 11th September and the discriminatory measures taken by America and other Western Countries against their Arab and Muslims citizens. The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, the American political support and financial assistance to Israel and the latest televised occupation of Iraq by American and British forces all added to this confrontation. These events created the condition for the continuation of resentment and hatred against USA and the West and drove large portions of Arabs and Muslims' youth towards Islam.

Moreover, this situation created two conflicting views among Arab and Western thinkers. Some Westerners argue that a "clash of civilization" between Islam and the West is inevitable and that Islam is anti-democracy, and Islamic fundamentalism forms a threat to Western culture and civilization (Huntington, S. 1993: 32).

On the other hand, some radical Islamists such as Osama Bin Laden and other extreme religious leaders and individuals in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Jordan, Morocco introduced these confrontations and wars as crusades against Islam and Muslims.

However, we must remember that the emerging of Islam as a guiding political ideology in most of the Arab and Muslim countries took place long before the 11 September attacks. The so called Islamic awakening came as a result of the very bad social, economic and political conditions, and the impact of modernization on social, cultural and educational spheres in these countries.

These conditions drove thousands if not millions of young educated, poor and jobless youth into the hands of some Islamic radical organizations, which promised them three things: 1). Fair Islamic political system with equal opportunities 2). Getting rid of the legacy of autocracy, corruption, social and economic hardships, 3). Gaining independence from western domination.

In other words, political Islam is expected to persist as a powerful movement and to seriously challenge Western interests and the incumbent regimes, at least until the underlying social, economic, and political causes of its appeal are addressed satisfactorily by the West and the Arab regimes. This means practically the transformation of the Arab regimes into democracies.

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Objective

The main objective of this paper is to find answers to the following questions:
Is it possible to establish democracy in the Arab World?
Whey is there no democracy in the Arab World until now?
Is lack of democracy is due to the influence of Islamic teaching and believes;
Or is it due to Arab regimes' interests and desire to stay in power?
Or is it due to the intervention of foreign powers and globalization?

Answering these questions requires us to consider and compare some Islamic teachings (Shura, freedom, equality, justice and human rights) and democracy from a theoretical perspective and to analyze Arab States' inter-play between Arab regimes' ideologies and their positions from Islam, democracy and the West.

Democracy

Democracy means the rule of the people and exists only when the most powerful decision-makers are elected in fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adults population are eligible to vote (Timothy, 1992). Democracy involves a basic principle of autonomy for individuals a high degree of accountability of the state, socio-economic liberties for individual citizens, and equal opportunities for political participation, and finally those elected should wield actual power and to be part of the decision-making process (Sorensen, G. 1993: 10-11).

Islam and Democracy in the Arab World

There have long been debates about Islam's proper role in political affairs, including, more recently, its compatibility with conceptions of democratic governance based on pluralism, and popular sovereignty. Some Western observers assert that democracy and Islam are not compatible because Islam does not tolerate competition, pluralism, and diversity. Islam, they argue, encourages intellectual conformity and an uncritical acceptance of authority. According to this view the "principles, institutions, and values of democracy are profoundly alien to the Muslim political tradition" (Kedourie, E. 1994: 5-6)

Among the most famous advocates of this view is Huntington (1993) who argues that "positive attitudes and values towards democracy are precondition for democratic transitions and such attitudes are not existent in Muslim countries" (Huntington 1993:13). Other observers argue that Islam supports totalitarian states (Choueiri 1996: 21-22; Lewis, B. 1994: 54-56). However, many analysts reject the suggestion that Islam is against the establishment of democratic governments. They point out that Islam has many views and tendencies, making uni-dimensional characterizations of the religion highly suspect (Halliday 1995:116; Esposito and Piscatori 1991: 437-440)

Much more common, however, is the view that democratic values need not precede, but can rather follow, democratic transitions involving the reform of political institutions and procedures (Rose 1997:98; Schmitter and Karl 1993:47).

Evidence in support of such assessment comes from a number of empirical investigations including a recent study from Taiwan and Korea. It argues that: "The consolidation of democracy requires that all significant political actors

believe that democracy is the right form of regime for their country" (Chu, Diamond, and Shin 2001:123). A Latin American study makes the same point by stating that one of the major factors behind the survivability of Latin American democracies revolves around changes in political attitudes, toward a greater democratization (Mainwaring, S. 1999: 45). This is also true for the Arab World as "democratic government needs democratic political culture, and vice versa" (Harik, L. 1994:56).

Others believe that "democracy is not attained simply by making institutional changes rather its success and survival depends on the values and beliefs of ordinary citizens" (Inglehart, L. 2000: 96).

Among these values and attitudes needed for a democracy are "respect for competing ideas and preferences, political interest with a willingness to participate in the political process, and an attitude toward government that distinguishes respect for the rule of law from blind and uncritical deference to those in authority" (Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998: 98).

This means that if the Arab States change into democracy, such development will create positive attitudes among the Arab people toward democracy. Indeed the absence of democracy in the Arab World does not result from Islamic teachings or values and attitudes rather it is in the dictatorships' mentality prevailing among Arab and Muslim rulers.

Support for this view comes from the finding of the World Values Survey of 2002. It suggests that Islamic orientations and attachments have support for democracy in Arab societies where most citizens have strong Islamic attachments. The finding suggests, so far as the individual level of analysis is concerned, that strong Islamic attachments do not discourage or otherwise influence support for democracy to any significant degree. It suggests that personal religiosity has little influence on attitudes toward democracy. It noted that those with higher levels of mosque involvement and those with lower levels have similar, and to a substantial extent favorable, views about democracy. So the answer to the question: "do the religious orientations of ordinary citizens retard the emergence of a political culture supportive of democracy and thus help to explain the persistent authoritarianism of the countries in which these men and women live? Is that Islam is not incompatible with democracy and does not discourage the emergence of attitudes favorable to democracy" (Tessler, M. 2002: 337-254.).

Similar support comes from the findings of a comparative Study about religious beliefs among university students in Jordan and Turkey. The study showed that religious socialization among university students in both countries is strong but not at the "expenses of democratic values". The vast majority of students (73%-92%) "accept democracy and see no contradiction between Islam, democracy, human rights and political pluralism" (alsoudi, A. 2001: 891)

While these and other possible explanations can be debated, what should be clear according to Tessler, "is that cultural explanations alleging that Islam discourages or even prevents the emergence of support for democracy are misguided, indeed misleading, and thus of little use in efforts to understand the factors shaping attitudes toward democracy in the Arab world"(Tessler, M. 2002: 337-254.).

The reasons that democracy has not taken root in the Arab world must therefore lie not in Islam but elsewhere. Perhaps in domestic economic structures, in the regimes' desire to keep full control of their countries' resources, in their fear of

loosing their unlawful wealth and properties or in their fear of persecution for their crimes and atrocities. Or in relations with the international political and economic order or perhaps in the determination of those in power to resist political change by whatever means are required.

However, debates about the compatibility of democracy and Islam have for the most part focused on issues of human rights, women status, doctrine, and historical precedent. Much less has been said about whether or not Islamic teachings permit the establishment of democratic governance.

Islamic teachings include numerous codes governing societal relations and organization. It guides that which is societal as well as personal, corporate as well as individual (Esposito 1991: 3-5). These debates have divided contemporary intellectuals in the Islamic world into two competing views.

The Liberal View

This view represents the position of the highly educated elite, who are mainly educated in America and the West and strongly believe in democratization in the Arab World (Alsoudi, A. 2003) and (Abed 1995: 128-129). They point out that values associated with democracy, including tolerance, freedom, human rights, and the accountability of political leaders, are well represented among traditions associated with the religion and thus entirely compatible with Islam (Esposito, 1991; Voll, J. 1994; Hamdi, M.E. 1996: 81-85; Mernissi,F. 1992).

> Others focus essentially on the concept of Shura as the means by which modern Islamic representative democracy can evolve out of traditional Islamic thought and practice. Their interpretation asserts that the underlying principles of shura provided an Islamic justification for democratic values and practice, and they therefore, provide a mandate for Muslims to pursue them (Al-Turabi, H. 1995: 186; Qutb, S. 1975: 66).

The liberal view however, has not taken hold because those in the liberal Muslim ranks are: first, limited to the elite class, second, it was never perceived as a genuine indigenous Islamic thinking by Muslim masses, but rather as an imported ideology (Al-Turabi, H. 1995: 186). Third, it kept on changing during the last fifty years; in the fifties and sixties they claimed that Islam and economic development were compatible, then Islam and socialism were compatible and today they try to prove that Islam and democracy are synonymous (Mumtaz, A. 1992; and sisk, T. 1992).

The Fundamentalists' View

Fundamentalism means making judgment based on the belief in the Quran and Sunna without new interpretation. Fundamentalists however, oppose democratization on the ground that it is not compatible with Sharia' (Islamic Law). Indeed some argue that the notion of popular sovereignty as the foundation of governmental legitimacy, the idea of representation, or elections, of popular suffrage, of political institutions being regulated by laws laid down by a parliamentary assembly are profoundly alien to the Muslim political tradition (Tessler, M. 2002).

The fundamentalists' view is weak and confined to the religious poor and less educated population. Islam allows Muslims to borrow political and economical ideas from other cultures and the second Caliph Ommar adopted some economic and administrative Ideas from the Persians. There is nothing in Islam that prohibits Arabs from applying democracy to replace dictatorship.

The present study however, argues that Islam contains the necessary principles for the establishment of democratic regimes in the Arab world based on Shura, freedom, justice and human rights.

Shura

Shura is a process of decision making similar to the modern parliamentary debate in Western democracies. Traditionally it is used to settle all kinds of political, and tribal disputes which ends with 'Sulh' -peaceful solutions to these disputes (Al-soudi, A. 1990). Today, it is used intensively to solve crisis between Arab states through Arab summits and during parliamentary election. Candidates consult their tribe members, and relatives to help them in their election campaigns. Some of the Arab and Muslim governments use shura [consultation], and Shura councils to run their political affairs like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Oman.

Some scholars argue that Shura's is more suitable for Arab-Muslim societies than any other process, because it is part of their religion and culture (Abu Hassan, 1987: 265-67). Quran, "Suna and igma" call for the use of shura in Muslim political affair. God describes the Muslims as: those: "who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation" (S. 42: 38). In another verse, God ordered Prophet Mohammed to be gentle and to consult his followers in Muslims affairs: "Passover [their faults] and ask for [Gods] forgiveness, and consult them in the affair" [S. 3: 159 (12].

> The Suna (Prophet's sayings and deeds) also calls for the use of Shura. The Hadeeth (prophet's sayings) says: "religion is advice" (quoted by Al-Tamemi, 1995:11) "Help your selves with mushawara" [consultation] (quoted by Al-Tamemi 1995: 22).

The process of shura was used immediately after the death of the Prophet to select the first caliph. And after a long discussion and mutual debate among the most senior and respected Muslim leaders, they decided that Abu Baker should succeed the Prophet as the first Muslim Caliph (Al- Rayees, M. 1960).

The most important example of shura is Abu Baker's speech after he was selected as Caliph, when he said: I was selected as Caliph even though I am not the best among you, if I do well help me but if I do wrong correct me (Al- Rayees, M. 1960).

However, there is no agreement among "Fugahas" [theologians] regarding the use of Shura. Some argue that the use of Shura is an obligatory matter. This is the more acceptable opinion among Fugahas and with which I agree. While others, believe that Shura is a voluntary matter and consequently the ruler may consult "Ahal al-shura" but he is free to consider their advice and opinion or disregard it and take his own decision (Metwally 1978: 34-36).

Indeed Islam took an open attitude to the adoption of useful ideas and institutions of foreign origin (Esposito1983: 230-232). And since democracy is not in conflict with Islamic teachings it "should be an obligatory duty of every Arab

government" (Al-Mahdi 1983: 233). It is possible for Arab and Muslim Countries to adopt any form of procedures for the organization of the public unless it is expressly excluded by the Sharia' (Al-Turabi, H.1995: 249) and democracy is not excluded.

Government

Islam did not recommend a specific form of government however, such government requires the fulfillment of two conditions: first, political organization of the society on the basis of Shura and popular participation, second, the requirement to apply legislation within the limits of the Sharya'. "Any system which fulfills those two conditions is entitled to be called legitimate Islamic system" (Al-Turabi H. 1995: 236). Contemporary Muslim political thought may abide by these two conditions and proceed to establish a political system, leadership, government, and institution which is both Islamic and modern (Quteb, S. 1975: 66).

An Islamic government is a very limited government. Classical jurists have developed the distinction between religious obligations and juridical obligations, the latter only being enforceable through formal, objective sanctions. Subject to the Sharia' it is up to the Muslim government today to determine its system of public law and economics. (Al-mahdi, S. 1983: 246).

The goal of the Islamic State is not merely to prevent tyranny, to stop evils of various kinds, and to protect its territory but, more basically, to foster a balanced system of social justice and to encourage every sort of virtue (Khurshid, A. 1967: 265).

Leadership

The process which was used to select the caliph called "Baya'". Baya' is a pact between the nation and the caliph or leader. It can be accomplished: directly, indirectly, in writing, or orally (Ibn Khldoon, 1980: 549).

Baya is a political process, which is executed in two phases: first, the private Baya' where a group of senior Muslim leaders nominate or select a candidate for the position of Caliph. Second, the public Baya', whereby all the population men and women declare and freely express their consent and approval of a candidate to assume the caliph position (Ibn Hisham, part 4. P. 21) and (Al-Bayyati, M 1994: 177-178).

Therefore, any Islamic political leader who may be elected can claim Islamic legitimacy whether he is a hereditary monarch, military officer, mullah, or a politician. And the most practical way to achieve such legitimacy today is through free public election (Sisk, T. 1992: 24)

The acts of the ruler must be within the limits of the law, and he is answerable to both God and the people. If he violates these limits he must become a subject to questioning and even deposing (Mermissi, F. 1992).

He enjoys no special immunities and can, therefore, be prosecuted for anything he does in his private or public life. This is a fundamental principle of the Islamic constitutional law, ensuing from the supremacy of the Sharia (Al-Turabi, H. 1995:186).

Unfortunately no Arab ruler is elected in free election or abides by the law rather their sayings and deeds are the law and they are above the law. Some of them appointed themselves as leaders for life others performs false election and win it in 99.9% of the votes.

Freedom

Freedom is a basic principle in Islam. There is solid evidence in the Quran that equality and freedom of religion are indeed stressed by Islam. The Quran says: "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (S. 2: 256).

Islam calls all Muslims to believe in God, all the holy Prophets and books, and set out the procedure how to argue with non-Muslims: "We sent thee not, but as a mercy for all mankind (S. 21: 107). The Quran says: "Invite [all] to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious" (S. 16: 125).

In another place the Quran says: "let there be no compulsion in religion, truth stands out clear from error" (S. 2: 54).

Regarding the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims the Quran stresses that: "nearest among them [non-Muslims] in love to the believers wilt thou find those who say we are Christians" (S. 5 : 82). Islam also respects and ordered Muslims to protect the holly places of other religions. "If Allah had not raised a group to ward off the others from aggression, churches, synagogues, oratories and mosques, where Allah worshipped most, would have been destroyed" (S. 22 : 40). Christians and Jews should enjoy freedom; equality and other human rights in any Muslim country, and they should be treated equally with Muslims. And Islam demands Muslims to treat them kindly, let them live in peace and freely practicing their religions. They are citizens of the Muslim State with different faith. They must be assured personal freedom, the freedom of religion, and opinion, the protection of themselves and wealth, and they are insured against poverty and eligible to state assistance and equality before the law (Metwally, 1978: 392). They have the right to regulate their private life, education, and family life by adopting their own family laws.

Justice and Equality

The other important principle in Islam is justice, which is indeed a major feature of Islamic teachings, and a conditions of all those who hold administration posts including the ruler. Justice in Islam is not confined to the legal system but rather it is a universal principle involving all aspect of life and it is emphasized by the Quran and Suna, the Quran says "God commands justice, and the doing of good" (S. 16: 90). And says "God do command you to render back your trusts to those to whom they are due, and when you judge between people, that you judge with justice" (S. 4: 58).

And says "O ye who believe stand out firmly for justice as witness to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it would be against rich or poor" (S. 4: 135). And says, "if you judge, judge in equity between them" (S. 5: 42). And says "let not the hatred of others to you makes you swerve to wrong and depart from justice be just that is next to piety" (S: 5: 6).

Human Rights

Human rights in Islam are not solely civil and political rights but rather a more comprehensive notion that while embracing civil and political rights, includes concern with basic and elementary needs in terms of socio-economic as well as social justice.

However, some Muslim governments have pressed their hostility to human rights by appeals to Islam, but the underlying reasons are their own vested interests. Their opposition to change and their dislike for values associated with human rights such as freedom, equality and individualism is self-serving.

Some scholars argue that Islamic teachings emphasis on the welfare of the nation and that may limit the scope of individual liberty; human rights in Islam are seen more as a way to better society than as protection for the individual (Sajoo, A. 1990). Ann Mayer echoes similar view and argues that: Muslim traditions emphasize the duty of followers to obey divine law rather than place importance on individual rights (Mayer, Ann, 1991: 49-50) Rosenthal, too, stresses that: the individual in Muslim countries is not expected to exercise any free choice as to how he wishes to be governed (Mernissi, F. 1992).

To the contrary the individual in Islam has the right to his physical existence, general, social wellbeing, reputation, peace, privacy, education and decent life. The Islamic state must guarantee citizens rights including: equality of status and opportunity, equality before law, freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship, association, assembly, movement, trade, business, and to hold and dispose of property (Al-Turabi, H. 1995).

Summery and Conclusions

Islam has the basic principles to allow the establishment of democratic governance and safe guards for Shura, justice, equality and human rights. The majority of Arab population believes that it is possible to establish democratic systems in the Arab World and that there is no contradiction between Islam, democracy and human rights.

There is little evidence to support the claims that Islam and democracy are incompatible or that a clash between Islam and the West is inevitable.

The truth is that the confrontation between the West and the Arab World, the bad social and economic conditions, and the refusal of Arab Regimes to change into democracy are the main reasons behind youth joining some radical Islamists organization, and the continuation of the mutual hatred between the Arabs the West.

There is great need for Arab countries to change into democracy, involving their people in the political process and exerting serious efforts to convince its populations that using violence and terrorism against Western interests inside or outside the Arab World is against Islam and the interest of the Arab countries.

There is urgent need for more dialogue between the Arabs and the West to solve the outstanding conflicts between the two sides including solving the Arab Israeli conflict ending the occupation of Iraq and encouraging real democratization in the Arab World.

Radical Islamists organization do not represent the Arabs or the Muslim people rather they are a tiny minority that use violence and terrorism to achieve political power.

Not a single Arab country qualifies as an electoral democracy. The reason for this is the Arab Rulers' (dictators) fear of loosing all their unlawful wealth, persecution for their crimes and atrocities committed against their people and not because of Islam values or culture.

Despite the fact that many Arab countries have constitutions, political parties, parliamentary election, parliaments, these institutions are nominal bodies without any political power. The regimes established these institutions to work under their guidance and the main purpose for their establishment is to improve their image before the outside World.

American and Western support for the undemocratic Arab Regimes is self serving and forms a cornerstone in the stability and continuation of those regimes. America and the West call for the application democracy and the protection of human rights all over the world except in the Arab World they support tyranny and dictatorship. They wrongly blame Islam for the Arab hatred instead of those regimes, something that needs more in-depth research and explanation.

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About the Author

Prof. Abdel Mahdi Alsoudi, Sociology Department, Jordan University