

## **Political Islam at the Age of Reason**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 heralded the victory of capitalism over socialism. In turn, the reinvigorated capitalist regimes have faced major economic crises over the past couple of decades. Historically, capitalism has exhibited instability and inequality. Instability or disequilibrium seems to be the norm rather than exception in capitalism. For that reason, John Maynard Keynes assigned an important role to the government and government policies to reestablish equilibrium.

The promise of continuous growth and accumulation of wealth in a world of finite resources seems to be an improbable proposition. This is particularly true at the present time. The capitalist regimes have exhibited a very slow economic growth, uneven distribution of wealth, and government debt at unprecedented level. The government debt, in turn, has turned the government and its policies ineffective to reestablish equilibrium. Consequently, many social thinkers believe that capitalism is on its deathbed and gradually will be replaced with a new system [1].

Interestingly enough, many Muslim countries have focused on political Islam as a third alternative to socialism and capitalism. Religion dominance in politics is not a new phenomenon. The church dominated European regimes for a long time. Finally, the Enlightenment movement in Europe put an end to this dominance. Philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke provided a strong argument against the divine source of political power and empowered people as the ultimate and legitimate source of political power. To this end, this paper attempts to analyze political Islam and people's choice and power within Islamic political regimes at the age of reason.

### **2. THOMAS HOBBS: POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

The English Civil War (1642-1651) was a struggle between parliamentarian that wanted to limit the power of the king and the royalist who believed in the divine right of kings and wanted to protect the status quo. The divine right of kings implied that king's source of power and authority is God. Hence, kings could not be held accountable to people's representatives in parliaments. This conflict was concluded in the Glorious Revolution (1688-89) that put an end to the divine right of kings.

It was during this chaotic period of time that Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) wrote his masterpiece *Leviathan* in 1651. Therefore, like many other political philosophers, his book was a remedy for the chaos that he observed in England. Hobbes is a social contract theorist. He believed in the voluntary act of people to join a social contract to form a government to end political chaos and uncertainty. To develop his theory, he imagines an original position (prior to the formation of government) that he calls the state of nature and investigates human's nature in the original position in order to show the necessity of a social contract for the formation of a government.

The state of nature is a hypothetical original position in which there is no government and hence there is no legitimate force to control the relationship between man and man. In this state, people are equal initially. However, this equality will not last long since according to Hobbes every man seeks quarrel based on three principals of competition, diffidence (distrust), and glory (vanity).

So that in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory. The first, maketh men invade for gain; the second, for safety; and third, for reputation [2].

In this state, there is no morality (no right or wrong) and nothing is just or unjust since there is no law. As a result, men will seek more power since they have desire for it. This in turn will result in the war of all against all [3]. This chaotic and uncertain environment will motivate men to accept voluntarily a social contract that gives them

protection through creation of a sovereign authority with supreme power that could make laws and enforce laws to convert the war of all against all to a peaceful environment in which safety of individual and protection of their lives and property are guaranteed by the government.

I authorize and give up my right of governing myself, to this man, or to this assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy right to him, and authorize all his actions in like manner [4].

It is easy to see that Hobbes had a pessimistic view of man. Leaving them to their own devices, they will seek competition and conflict. However, to avoid risk, they are willing to form a government to avoid the peril of living in the state of nature. It is important to note that although the social contract is voluntary and signed collectively, individuals forgo their rights afterwards and give the sovereign an absolute power that is not reversible.

### **3. JOHN LOCKE: POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

Like Hobbes, John Locke is a social contract theorist; however, he is a much more optimist political philosopher. He also believes in the power of individuals and rejects Hobbesian absolute power of the sovereign. His first treatise of his book, *Two Treatises of Government*, is a response to Sir Robert Filmer who believed in the divine right of kings and absolutism. Locke rejected this doctrine and defended the majority rule and the right to resist the government [5].

Locke's state of nature is very different from Hobbes's. Men are free and equal in the state of nature.

To understand Political Power right, and drive it from its origin, we must consider what State are all Men are naturally in, and that is, a State of perfect Freedom to order their Actions, and dispose of their Possessions, and Persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the Law of Nature. ...A State also of Equality, wherein all the Power and Jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another [6].

So, Locke's state of nature is not devoid of law. There is no civil law in the state of nature but there is God's law. Therefore, men live together amicably based on God's law. In the state of nature, God has given the earth to men in common. However, individuals own their own body and hence are entitled to the fruit of their labor. Individual's labor combined with common resources yields private property according to Locke.

Though the Earth, and all inferior Creatures be common to all Men, yet every Man has a property in his own person. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The Labour of his Body, and the Work of his Hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he had mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property [7].

Once private property is created, then the state of inequality will become the norm among the men based on their own industry (labor). This will create conflict among them since there is no civil law to protect private property. As a result, men by consent decide to join a civil society based on a social contract. The social contract is between people and not with the government. In the civil society, people will trade their natural liberty for civil liberty; however, this trade-off is not absolute. The laws established and enforced by a legitimate government guarantee the civil liberty and protect private property. Unlike Hobbes's social contract, individuals have preserved their supreme power through the rule of majority and the government's legitimacy is always conditional. Therefore, people have the right to resist a government that deviates from the will of people.

### **4. POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF ISLAM**

622 C.E. is an important benchmark in Islam. In that year, Prophet Muhammad and his follower immigrated to Medina. This date is the beginning of Islamic calendar and political Islam. In Medina, Prophet Muhammad ruled as a religious and political leader. The so-called Constitution of Medina declared a Muslim community (*ummah*) out of several tribes living side by side with the Jewish community and Muhammad as a mediator between the two groups adjudicating cases based on the divine laws. So, Medina of Muhammad is considered as a multi-religion state that still Muslims around the world desire to emulate.

Islam, as an Abrahamic religion, in a sense has renewed and fulfilled God's covenant with Abraham. So, Islamic faith is also a compact between God and Muslims to live their lives based on the divine laws. As a result, there are

similarities between this religious compact and the social contracts of Hobbes and Locke that we consider in this section.

Muslims believe that God had sent His laws to the previous prophets including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. However, these laws were not in operation in Arabia and in a sense, not practiced correctly elsewhere. So, we might compare Arabia before Islam and devoid of divine law to the state of nature in Hobbes and Locke's theories. Muslims refer to this period as the era of Ignorance (Jahiliyyeh) where the divine law was absent. The Prophet's immigration to Medina transformed the state of nature to a civil and religious community based on a compact with God.

The divine law governs the totality of Muslims' lives and makes Islam a legal religion. This is an important issue since Islam, similar to Hobbes, does not have a positive view of man and hence without law the result will be chaos. Here are few verses of the Qur'an describing the behavior of the mankind.

1. Mankind is weak

... man was created weak. (Qur'an, 4:32)

2. Mankind is unjust

...man is truly unjust and ungrateful. (Qur'an, 14:34)

3. Mankind is hasty and impatient

Man was created hasty: I will show you My signs soon, so do not ask Me to hasten them. (Qur'an, 21:37)

4. Mankind is contentious and quarrelsome

...man is more contentious than any other creature.

(Qur'an, 18:54)

5. Mankind lacks thoughtfulness and deliberation

...they have always been very inept and rash.

(Qur'an 33:72)

It seems that there are similarities between Hobbes's view and Islamic view of mankind. Without law, government, and a powerful leader, the 'war of all against all' is a definite possibility.

Right after the Prophet's death, Muslims were divided into two groups based on the legitimacy of a new leader. The Sunnis (majority of Muslims) sided with the institution of the caliphate while the Shiites (minority of Muslims) declared that the leadership should remain in the Prophet's family and sided with the imamate.

A. Caliphate

A caliph is the religious leader of the Muslim community. After the Prophet's death, four caliphs (Abu Bakr, Umar, Othman, and Ali) known as Rashidun (rightly guided) caliphs ruled the Islamic world 632-661 C.E. In 661 Ali was murdered and Muawiyah declared himself caliph and established the Umayyad dynasty as the keeper of the caliphate. In 749 C.E., the Umayyad were toppled by the Abbasids who ruled 749-1258 C.E. when the Abbasids were defeated by the Mongols and the continuous institution of the caliphate came to an end.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Emperor declared himself the ruler of the Muslims and assumed the title of the caliphate. This line of the caliphate came to an end when the Ottoman Empire was defeated in WWI and the new government of Turkey abolished the caliphate. And in 2014, the leader of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), Abu-Bakr Al-Baghdadi proclaimed the return of the caliphate.

Theoretically, the choice of the caliph was through consensus (ijma) of the community. The choice of the first caliph was left to a group of the Prophet's closest companions. The selection of the caliph was followed by an oath of allegiance (bayah) of the entire community to the selected caliph. Once the oath is taken, the individual Muslims do not have the right to change their mind. So, in a sense, the selection of a caliph is similar to the selection of a leader

a la Hobbes. Likewise, a caliph is an absolute monarch whose rule is not subject to question by people. Lockean ideas of a majority rule, and the right of resistance have no place in Islam and there is no peaceful way to remove a caliph according to the history. In Islam, no government has been formed by the voluntary consent of people and the continuous consent of the ruled is not necessary for the survival of the government. This is a grave matter since the caliph rules the entire Islamic world since nation-state is another oddity in Islam. As a rule, governments have come about through force and conquest in Islam. As the term sunnah (tradition) implies, customs and traditions have been the greatest force in Islam and not consent of the community.

#### B. Imamate

Unlike the Sunnis, the Shiites believed that the leadership of Islam was vested in Imam Ali, his cousin and son-in-law, and his children. According to Shiite doctrine, Imams are divinely inspired and they are sinless and infallible. Unlike caliphs who are ordinary men, Shiite Imams are divinely inspired and are knowledgeable about issues in Islam that are hidden to ordinary men.

It is important to notice that people (Muslims) have no saying on this matter. Therefore, the leadership in Islam is not a matter of choice by individual Muslims. As mentioned, the Shiites are the minorities in the Islamic world and yet they consider their version of Islam the true version. As a result, the truth has nothing to do with the majorities' belief and the majority rule is unimportant in such matters.

Although the Shiites are the minorities in Islam, they constitute the majorities in Iran. The Iranian version of Shiism, the twelver, is the largest branch of Shiism. According to this version, Imamate is vested in Ali and his descendants and the twelfth Imam is living in occultation and will return to establish justice in the future.

Another important difference between the Sunnis and the Shiites is about the Islamic law. The Islamic law (shariah) was composed from four different sources – the Qur'an, the sayings and tradition of the Prophet (the sunnah), qiyas (deductive reasoning), and the consensus of the community (ummah). When the law completed, the Sunnis declared that the gate of ijtihad (independent reasoning) is closed and, hence, the Islamic law should be practiced forever without alteration. The Shiite Muslims have kept the gate of ijtihad open and the Islamic law is subject to interpretation.

Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of Islamic revolution in Iran, argued that in the absence on the twelfth Imam, there is a need for a leader who is knowledgeable about Islam and the Islamic law to judge government policies as Islamic or non-Islamic. Therefore, the Supreme Leader in Iran is a jurist selected by a group of jurists (mujtahids) who are elected by public (assembly of the Experts). So, people have an indirect role in selecting the Supreme Leader. Since the Supreme Leader has the final vote on all matters in Iran, the political regime is an autocratic regime despite the democratic façade.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In Islam, sovereignty belongs to God.

...Authority belongs to God alone, and He orders you to worship none but Him. (Qur'an, 12:40)

Caliphs and Imams are his regents on earth to rule on his behalf and to implement his laws and ordinances. Since God's laws and ordinances are immutable, a society ruled by such laws is coercive and lack democratic tendencies. As such, political orders in an Islamic society are not prone to change and moderation.

As mentioned, people have had very little influence, if any, on the selection of political leaders. The oath of allegiance is simply an acknowledgment of continuous obedience to the ruler who is only accountable to God. In Islam, both in religion and politics, entry to the community might be free, but exit is not permissible. This basically makes individuals' freedom a moot issue in Islam and, in turn, makes political regimes in Islam undemocratic.

In Islam, as mentioned, the ummah (Islamic community) refers to the totality of Muslim population. Therefore, political institutions such as nationality and nationalism, nation-states, national identities are not meaningful concepts. This is the reason that the terrorist organization such as the ISIS is able to recruit volunteers from all over the world. These people see themselves only as Muslims and nothing else.

This paper chose purposefully two political philosophers of the Enlightenment, Hobbes and Locke, to discuss political Islam. Hobbesian political philosophy with its pessimistic view of mankind took side with absolutism while Lockean political philosophy considered a logical a reasonable role for people choosing their own leaders and keeping them accountable. Interestingly enough, both philosophers were open to reason and logic to reach a conclusion.

Islamic political philosophy is very much in line with Hobbesian view and rejects Lockean's move to empower people. Islamic institutions are constructed based on immutable laws and hence are not disposed to change based logic and reasons related to modern political issues such as the universality of human rights. Islamic social contract is in effect a Hobbesian social contract in favor of absolutism.

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