

# The Path of Guidance

## Landmarks on the Path to Islamic Liberation

Translation of the book:

سبيل الرشاد  
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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Most Merciful

To every worker for the cause of Allah in this difficult era...  
I dedicate this work...

Mohammad

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## Introduction

In the name of Allah, praise be to Allah, and may peace and blessings be upon the Messenger of Allah.

My conviction grows stronger each day that the contemporary dilemma facing Muslims is not about doubtful or obscure issues that require refutations, clarifications, or eloquence in explanation and interpretation. Rather, it is a problem of inability and failure that demands competence in action, achievement, building, and development.

This is because a suspicion, no matter how feeble it may be, becomes a strong fact when propagated by the dominant, prevailing winner. The truth, on the other hand, no matter how reasonable it may be, is scorned and devalued when expressed by the weak and oppressed. Such is human nature. When the balance of power shifts, the once-dominant dubious matter that reigned during times of strength vanishes like a summer cloud dispersing. Meanwhile, those previously oppressed and dismissed, when they prevail, their ideas triumph and people embrace them with ease and acceptance.

Despite this fact, providing guidance is a must as it is the first step towards action. Al-Bukhari, may Allah have mercy on him, devoted a chapter in his Sahih entitled: ‘Knowledge Precedes Speech and Action.’

This book is, therefore, intended for those committed to the path of reform — not for others. If reform is not your purpose, then set this book aside or, if you purchased it, return it and get your money back. It will serve only as evidence against you, not in your favour.

In these limited pages, I have gathered the essence of my thoughts from what I have read in books or experienced in real life, and I wish to instil them into every Muslim.

I see myself in this book taking the place of the believer from the family of Pharaoh, who said to his people: ‘O my people, follow me; I will guide you to the path of righteousness. O my people, this worldly life is but a fleeting enjoyment, while the Hereafter is the eternal abode.’

Initially, the believer from Pharaoh’s family addressed his people using various methods of persuasion. He appealed to their worldly desires and their fear of losing status, wealth, and power:

1. ‘Are you going to kill a man because he says, “My Lord is Allah,” when he has brought you proofs from your Lord?’
2. ‘And if he lies, his lie will fall on him.’ (That is, his lie will be revealed, and he will suffer the consequences of his lie).
3. ‘And if he is truthful, some of what he promises you will befall you.’
4. ‘O my people, you rule today and are dominant in the land, but who will

protect us from Allah's wrath if it befalls us?'

When Pharaoh, in his arrogance, held to his opinion, saying: 'I only show you what I see, and I guide you only to the path of righteousness,' the believer shifted his appeal. He warned them of Allah's punishment in both this life and the hereafter:

5. 'And O my people, I fear for you a fate like that of the [previous] confederates, like the fate of the people of Noah, 'Ād, Thamūd, and those after them. And Allah does not intend injustice for His servants.'
6. 'And O my people, I fear for you the Day of Calling, the Day you will turn away, fleeing, with no protector for you against Allah.'

This book is a journey through religion, history, politics, and the nature of the self and society, addressing both the people of this world and the people of the Hereafter. Through it, we strive to follow the path of the reformers!

So, Allah's help is sought, and upon Him alone is reliance.

Whatever success there is, it is from Allah alone, and whatever errors, slips, or forgetfulness occur, they are from me and from Satan. I seek refuge in Allah, lest I remind you while remaining heedless myself.

Mohammad Elhamy

Istanbul

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## **Why Islam?**

The question ‘Why Islam?’ would not have occurred to Muslims before the ummah (the Muslim nation) entered an era of weakness and suffered a general defeat at the hands of its Western adversary. Prior to this defeat, no one would ask: why must reform follow the methodology of Islam and be within its framework? This is because no other method but Islam was even conceivable in the first place.

However, as Western powers gained dominance, they imposed and disseminated their culture. Then emerged among the defeated people, those fascinated with imitating the dominating victor. Moreover, this dominating enemy established governing regimes modelled after its own ideology, and this enemy, along with the ruling regimes subordinate to it, controlled the media, educational curricula, and cultural outlets. Thus, this question arose, and Islam became one option among many, an alternative among alternatives.

Even within the Muslim community itself, some began to believe that Islam was responsible for the backwardness and weakness of the ummah. Thus, they argued that the first step toward progress was to abandon and renounce Islam, just as Europe had done with Christianity when it adopted secularism. Also, there emerged those who believe that Islam had been relevant in the past, producing a powerful civilisation, but time, events, and the course of history have rendered it now outdated — unsuitable as a foundation for future strength and renewal.

During these decades of weakness, the defenders of Islam were compelled to defend Islam and argue on its behalf to prove that it is a reformative methodology capable of addressing people's problems, that it is the religion of Allah sent for both the earlier and later generations, and that it is the foundation for future progress just as it was the foundation for past progress. In fact, it is the only solution, with no viable alternative, and progress and advancement cannot be achieved through anything else.

In these oppressive times, when the question ‘Why Islam?’ persists, it is imperative to answer.

And since we are now writing ‘The Path of Guidance’ during this era of weakness and while this question remains persistent, we must begin by addressing the answer to: Why Islam?

### **Because it is the Path to Salvation in the Hereafter**

Death is the most undeniable truth in this world, an absolute certainty about which no two people disagree. Every human being will inevitably die one day, and no one in all of humanity has ever been able to achieve immortality. It is

the ultimate law, the unavoidable destiny, and the indisputable reality.

We Muslims believe that death is not the end but a transition from one world to another and that this earthly life is merely a stage, actually the shortest and swiftest one. We also believe that it is a place of trial and test and upon death, each person enters the realm of retribution, where they will face their eternal destiny. Based on their deeds, they will be rewarded with eternal delights in Paradise or endure eternal torment in Hell.

A Muslim's faith is incomplete without belief in Allah and the Last Day. Every Muslim recites Surah Al-Fatiha in their prayers, without which the prayer is invalid. The opening verses proclaim: 'All praise is due to Allah — Lord of all the worlds, (2) The Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful, (3) Master of the Day of Judgment.' (Surah Al-Fatihah, 1:2-4). Belief in Allah and the Last Day is also the first characteristic of the pious, as mentioned in the Quran: 'Alif, Lam, Meem. (1) This is the Book about which there is no doubt, a guidance for those conscious of Allah (2), who believe in the unseen.' (Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:1-3)

The most important teaching that the prophets passed on to their people and that our Prophet ﷺ carried to the whole world is this truth: an afterlife awaits us after the life of this world. Allah, who created us and the universe for us, wants us to live by following a certain guide. Although we have a choice in this life, we will be held accountable for our actions hereafter. This is the crucial truth that the prophets passed on to mankind and requires everyone's attention.

The most important teaching that the prophets passed on to their people and by our Prophet ﷺ to all of humanity, is the declaration of this reality: that they are now in the worldly life, the lower life (ad-dunya), and that after death, they will face the Hereafter (al-akhirah). They conveyed that Allah, who created us and created the universe for us, wants us to live in it according to a specific guide. While He granted us free choice in this world, He will hold us accountable for it in the Hereafter. This is the most critical truth that the prophets came to reveal to humanity, and it is the great matter that every person must be aware of.

And if this is the case, and this belief is firmly established in the heart of the Muslim, then adopting Islam as a way of life becomes the only path to salvation in the Hereafter. For it is an undeniable certainty that he will die, no matter how long he lives, and that he will inevitably leave this world.

Therefore, if he desires happiness and salvation, he must act in this world in a way that ensures his eternal happiness and saves him in the Hereafter!

Let us take a decisive step forward in our thinking and pose a hypothetical question for the sake of argument and imagination: if Islam itself were deemed unfit for progress in this world (and far be it from Allah for that to be the case),

what then would the Muslim do?

Or, to rephrase: if Islam were not to grant Muslims strength, happiness, or empowerment in this world but were to grant them all of these only in the Hereafter; and if the condition Allah demands from them in this life is to live in poverty, hardship, humiliation, and defeat in order to grant them Paradise in the Hereafter, what then would the Muslim do?

And the answer is: even if Islam were a losing deal in this world (and far be it from Allah for that to be the case), it remains the winning deal in the Hereafter. No rational person, when faced with such a choice, would opt for this fleeting world over the Hereafter. For this worldly life is but a few numbered days, a brief period, and a passing existence, whereas the Hereafter is an enduring bliss, an everlasting Paradise, and a happiness that never ends or fades.

In reality, this very deal — sacrificing everything in this world in exchange for Paradise — is the deal accepted by those who fight for the sake of Allah. They willingly sacrifice their lives for the sake of the promised eternal happiness. And about them, Allah says: ‘Indeed, Allah has purchased from the believers their lives and their wealth [in exchange] for Paradise. They fight in the cause of Allah, so they kill and are killed. [It is] a true promise [binding] upon Him in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur'an. And who is truer to his covenant than Allah? So rejoice in the transaction you have contracted. And it is that which is the great attainment.’ (Surah At-Tawbah, 9:111)

The martyr is the clearest example to this deal; he sacrifices his life without witnessing in his lifetime the rise of the ummah, its empowerment, or its strength.

Moreover, the Muslim firmly believes that Allah is capable of all things. He can grant victory to His religion and enable this Muslim nation to dominate. Nothing is difficult for Allah: ‘His command, when He intends something, is only that He says to it, “Be,” and it is.’ (Surah Ya-Sin, 36:82). The Muslim does not render a service to Allah or bestow any favour upon Him, for Allah is fully capable of destroying the disbelievers, granting victory to the believers, and establishing His religion. Rather, the believer strives to support the religion, empower the ummah, and bring people out of darkness into light to benefit himself in the Hereafter: ‘Say, ‘O mankind, the truth has come to you from your Lord. So whoever is guided is only guided for [the benefit of] his soul, and whoever goes astray only goes astray against it.’ (Surah Yunus, 10:108).

If this is the case, we will not trade our Hereafter for our worldly life. We will cling to Islam as one who flees with it from the fire to Paradise; as one who escapes upon it from hell to eternal bliss; no matter the wounds, harm, or trials we endure in this brief worldly life.

## **Because it is the Ideal and Most Comprehensive System in Life**

The Muslim believes that Islam, besides being the only way to salvation in the Hereafter, is also the most suitable system for this worldly life. It is the most ideal, comprehensive, and complete system for reforming the condition of humanity. Thus, Islam is the path to salvation in the Hereafter and the path to happiness in this world as well.

That Islam is the way to salvation in the Hereafter is the fact that we have learned from divine revelation, and only a Muslim believes in this fact. We have also learned from revelation that Islam is the most optimal, comprehensive, and complete way of life in this world. Many non-Muslims have also recognised this truth through reason and observation, as well as through the evidence provided by the experiences of history.

The Muslim believes that Islam is the religion of Allah, and Allah is the most knowledgeable about His creation and what benefits them:

‘How could He not know His Own creation? For He [alone] is the most Subtle, All Aware’ (Surah Al-Mulk, 67:14).

This is similar to the example of a car, phone, or machine — the ones who created and designed it are the ones who know it best. They are the most qualified to provide instructions for its use and the precautions for its operation. Similarly, if a device malfunctions, its owner takes it to the manufacturer or its authorised representatives for repair. The more difficult or complex the problem, the more necessary it becomes to rely only on the engineers of the company that produced it to effectively fix the issue.

And Man is a creation of Allah, living in an environment entirely created by Allah, then none other than Allah knows him better or understands him more thoroughly. Likewise, no one but Allah is more capable of providing the sound and wise framework for this life. This concept is reiterated frequently in the Qur'an. Among such verses is Allah's saying:

‘Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while being a believer, We will surely cause them to live a good life.’ (Surah An-Nahl, 16:97)

And His saying:

‘And whoever turns away from My remembrance will surely have a life of hardship’ (Surah Taha, 20:124)

When this religion was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, he called the people of Quraysh to this Deen and gave them glad tidings of blessings in both this world and the Hereafter — a promise of empowerment and glory in this world as well as success and happiness in the Hereafter. The Prophet ﷺ would call out to them:

“Say: There is no god but Allah, and you will succeed.<sup>1</sup> Say: There is no god but Allah, and you will rule over the Arabs and the non-Arabs”<sup>2</sup>

And indeed, all this actually happened. It was not mere words, dreams, or wishful thinking, nor was it just ideas spoken by a philosopher. Rather, our Prophet Muhammad ﷺ established both a religion and a state, which later became a great global civilisation. Our Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has been recognised as the greatest figure in human history — even by the standards of materialistic people and even by those who disbelieved in him and did not accept his message. This is because no other man in human history has founded both a great religion and a great civilisation as Muhammad ﷺ has done. The other great figures in history fall into two categories: the first are those who founded lasting religions but did not establish a state for it like Christ, Jesus son of Mary, to whom Christianity is attributed and which remains widespread after two millennia, and Moses, to whom Judaism is attributed and which persists after three millennia. However, both Moses and Jesus ended their lives during times of weakness without founding or ruling a state. The second are those who established great states, civilisations, or empires but whose religions and ideologies have faded away, like the Pharaohs, Alexander the Great, Cyrus the Great, Napoleon, Genghis Khan, and others.

For this reason, the American writer Michael Hart explained why he ranked Muhammad ﷺ as the greatest man in history, despite being a Christian himself. He stated: ‘He was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels,’ and concluded that ‘the world has never known a man of such greatness.’<sup>3</sup>

If we were to compile all that has been said about the greatness of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ by historians and intellectuals who were not Muslim, we would fill numerous volumes. However, this is not the place for such an exhaustive account. The point here is to emphasise that Islam is the most complete, optimal, and comprehensive system of life, as evidenced by the fact that its Prophet is the figure behind the greatest achievement in human history!

Even for the one who is neither a believer nor a Muslim and who seeks success only in this life, history shows that the greatest success story remains the Islamic Renaissance.

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<sup>1</sup> Akram Al-Omari, *Al-Seerah Al-Nabawiyyah Al-Saheehah* (The Authentic Prophetic Biography), vol. 1, p. 193; Ibrahim Al-Ali, *Saheeh Al-Seerah Al-Nabawiyyah* (The Authentic Prophetic Biography), p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> Saad Al-Marsafi, *Al-Jami' li-Sahih Al-Seerah*, Vol. 4, p. 988; Mohammad Ilyas Al-Falootha, *The Encyclopedia of Authentic Seerah: The Makkan Era\**, p. 368.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Hart, (The immortal 100, greatest of whom is Mohammad) *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History*, pp. 13, 16.

It is logically impossible to question the ability of a great civilisation, which sustained political, economic, scientific, and cultural dominance for more than a thousand years and is still influential and inspiring to a third of the world's population, to renew itself and revive back.

The Islamic civilisation represented a major leap in human history. It achieved transformative milestones and delivered true miracles in the realms of politics and warfare. Furthermore, it produced a rich and fertile legacy across all aspects of life: politics, economics, administration, society, science, culture, architecture, arts, and beyond.

Islam encompasses a comprehensive framework for all aspects of life. The Quran and Sunnah provide extensive details and rulings on everything a person needs in their worldly life — from physical health and personal hygiene to removing harm from the road and caring for animals, all the way to international relations, governance, politics, and warfare.

This level of detail and integration is unparalleled in any other system or religion. Other known religions and ideologies either lack a worldly legal system altogether, leaning entirely towards spirituality (such as Christianity and Buddhism), or their laws are vague, abstract, and pieced together from ancient traditions and foreign cultural influences (such as Judaism).

The practical application of Islam, exemplified in the life of the Prophet ﷺ and his rightly guided caliphs, is conveyed to us with remarkable clarity and through the most rigorous scientific methods of historical authentication. This level of clarity is absent in the lives of philosophers, reformers, and founders of other religions. Historical accounts concerning them cannot withstand even the most basic rigorous scientific authentication.

These philosophers and reformers are of two types: those who never governed or managed a state at all, leaving behind no tradition or methodology of their governance; or those who governed and established states, but their recorded actions lack the detail and clarity that is abundantly evident in the life of the Prophet ﷺ and his rightly guided successors.

Thus, we find nothing other than Islam whose sacred texts can be trusted with the same degree of authenticity as the Quran and Sunnah. Likewise, we find nothing other than Islam that possesses the same clarity, detail, and comprehensiveness in its practical applications as what has been authentically transmitted with sound chains of narration about the Prophet ﷺ and his rightly guided caliphs.

No civilisation that has succeeded and dominated is without some flaws, scandals, or disgrace that has tarnished its reputation, one way or another — including the modern Western civilisation, which may appear shiny and dazzling. Many non-Muslim thinkers and historians have acknowledged that no civilisation has combined politics with ethics, power with compassion, and

dominance with tolerance as the unique Islamic civilisation!<sup>1</sup>

### **Because we are Muslims, and we have not been reformed except through Islam**

We adopt Islam as a methodology for reform because our people are Muslims, and we can only reform them through what suits and aligns with them. It is foolish, short-sighted, and unreasonable to compel Muslim people, who believe in this religion, to seek reform through other frameworks.

This approach has been proven wrong by reason and observation, as well as by experience and history. Over the past two centuries, ruling regimes have attempted to impose communism and socialism on Muslim societies. Other regimes have sought to make Muslim societies embrace liberal capitalism, while colonial powers tried to convert them from Islam to Christianity. Also, the battle for secularism continues to this day. All these attempts have ended in complete failure and enormous sums of money and immense efforts exerted for this were wasted. The final results to these attempts were negligible and insignificant compared to the resources and energies invested.

Even to this day, whenever free elections are held in our countries, the people choose Islamic representatives. Similarly, when popular uprisings occur, Islamists lead them. When such revolutions turn into armed struggles or when foreign armies invade Muslim lands, it is the Islamists who are at the forefront of the fighters and resistance. Even the most printed and best-selling books in Muslim countries are Islamic in nature.

Thus, in times of peace and war, in politics and culture, all matters ultimately revert to Islam and its believers, regardless of the differences among them.

Moreover, during the periods when the ummah was forced into adopting these foreign ideologies and imported solutions, there was no revival or progress for the ummah. On the contrary, those were the times when the ummah faced its greatest weakness and calamities: its enemies dominated it, its lands were occupied, and its borders, territory, and sovereignty were contracted. This is the lesson from recent history.

As for distant history, the Arabs before Islam were of no significance. They were fragmented and divided. Even during the periods when they had some type of civilisation, such as in ‘Ād, Thamūd, and Saba’, those eras are distant, and their civilisations have disappeared entirely. They were so erased and obliterated that nothing remains of their legacy to guide or benefit future generations. In fact, our knowledge of the civilisations of the Persians,

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<sup>1</sup> For further details, see the first chapter of the first part of my book *‘In the Corridors of History’*

Romans, and Pharaohs is clearer and more robust. Also, the little we know of those ancient Arab civilisations is neither praiseworthy nor worthy of pride. They were pagan civilisations that denied God, acted arrogantly, and oppressed others. They were not beacons of light to guide humanity.

And Allah has given us a better alternative: Islam. It is Islam that saved the Arabs, revived them from death, united them after division and fragmentation, and elevated them from herding sheep to leading nations. Islam remains alive, present, active, and vibrant among us. If we wish for the revival of our nation, there is nothing more suitable, harmonious, or aligned with our nature, souls, and character than Islam.

This applies to both Arab and non-Arab Muslims. Egyptians, Syrians, Iraqis, Persians, North Africans, and others. Even those with ancient civilisations like the Pharaonic, Babylonian, Assyrian, and others have little left of these civilisations that could inspire genuine pride, courage, or valour. These people embraced Islam so fully that most of them forgot their original languages and spoke Arabic. Only a rare few among them today can read the languages of these ancient civilisations or understand their inscriptions and artefacts.

Moreover, there were no attempts to revive these ancient civilisations by their own people. In fact, it is the West, when it dominated us during our periods of weakness, who kept unearthing the relics of such civilisation, giving voice to them to create narrow nationalistic identities as substitutes for the broader Islamic identity. They have made many attempts but achieved no significant or lasting results.

It is worthy of noting that those who raise the banner of pride in these ancient civilisations fail to find any practical example from such civilisations to adopt in their modern lives. For instance, those proud of the Pharaonic heritage do not dress like the Pharaohs, learn their language, or organise their personal and familial lives according to Pharaonic customs. The same applies to those who boast about Phoenician, Babylonian, or Assyrian heritage. Instead, such individuals are often more aligned with the West, adopting its languages, attire, customs, and traditions. Their declared pride in these ancient civilisations is, in its reality, a cover they use to detach themselves from the Islamic and Arab identity, which they oppose and attack. Their behaviour reveals the falsehood of their claimed attachment to these ancient civilisations and also proves that they are the tools the West uses towards its intellectual domination and control.

When we read the Qur'an, we find Allah's words: 'And messengers whose stories We have told you before and messengers We have not.' (Surah An-Nisa, 4:164) and 'And We have already sent messengers before you. Among them are those [whose stories] We have related to you, and among them are those [whose stories] We have not related to you.' (Surah Ghafir, 40:78). From

these verses, we learn that Allah chose to narrate to His final Prophet the stories of prophets sent to this land — Egypt, the Levant, Iraq, and the Arabian Peninsula. This should guide us to understand that this blessed land, chosen by Allah for His greatest prophets, will not prosper except through the message of those prophets. Man-made systems will not work in this land, and it was not meant to thrive under man-made systems or ideologies.

If we were to hypothetically concede and assume that we have two or more reformative systems, all of which are beneficial and effective. However, we find that the reform of our communities, our homes, and our environment can only be achieved with one of them as it is the most suited to their nature and composition, then it would be our duty to choose the most appropriate approach. Thus, if we were to hypothetically concede and assume that Islam is merely one reformative methodology among others, no sincere and honest individual who truly seeks the well-being and advancement of his people would choose anything but Islam. This is because Islam is the most fitting and compatible with these people and this land.

## **Because Islam is the Supreme Revolutionary and Dynamic Force**

The battle for reform and revival is not a theoretical or intellectual battle but a long, arduous struggle that requires immense effort and perseverance. It is a battle that cannot be led by theorists, thinkers, or writers alone; it needs brave and heroic fighters to be in the lead as well. It demands patience, tireless work, resilience, unshakable determination, unwavering conviction, and relentless persistence.

A person may adopt and believe in a certain methodology or idea, excelling in advocating for it, defending it, and refuting its opponents. Yet, their theoretical conviction alone does not propel them into action. This is because action requires sacrifice, effort, and often substantial losses. Similarly, personal desires, interests, and intentions may hold one back from supporting an idea or a methodology, even if they are intellectually convinced by it.

Thus, there is no doubt that a system capable of mobilising its followers and transitioning them from thought to action is superior and more effective than one that lacks a revolutionising and a mobilising mechanism.

Here lies the distinction of divine methodologies and religions that believe in the Hereafter and eternal life. Such beliefs instil in their followers a yearning for the Hereafter, detachment from worldly pleasures, and encouragement to fight, struggle, and work. This is similar to some man-made ideologies and religions which elevate the concept of sacrifice and martyrdom, portraying these concepts as the way to heroism and eternal remembrance. Followers of these ideologies are brought up to believe that the true meaning of life is to

leave the legacy of being heroically remembered throughout history. This notion was prominent long ago among pre-Islamic Arabs and the Japanese before being Westernised after their defeat in World War II.

In this context, Islam stands out as the most capable of all religions and methodologies in mobilising energies and producing great individuals. Islam is a factory of warriors and fighters and is focused on action, struggle, and effort. It disdains and preaches against inactive scholars. It abounds with texts that condemn laziness, inaction, and hypocrisy, as well as warnings to believers on saying one thing while doing another.

We could delve into a detailed comparison of Islam's dynamic nature and revolutionary spirit compared to other religions or ideologies. However, this will lead to long arguments and comparisons. It is more effective to examine the outcomes and effects of the Islamic ideology. The achievements of Muslims in their several movements, expansions, and struggles are among the miracles of history.<sup>1</sup> Whether during their initial rise when they changed the face of the world by the Islamic expansion across the globe in just one century or during periods of their weakness when Muslims demonstrated an astonishing example of resilience, challenge, and confrontation of the superpowers despite an overwhelming imbalance of power.

Islam strikes a unique balance between the mortal worldly life and the eternal Hereafter. Its followers renounce worldly pleasures in as much as they desire the Hereafter. Their detachment from the worldly life does not mean neglecting it, rather they strive to reform and have mastery in this earthly life without being attached to it. In Islam, salvation in the Hereafter is proportional to one's efforts to reform the world; efforts to reform this life are, in itself, the efforts to get rewarded in the Hereafter. Thus, the pinnacle of worldly reform is the most promising deed for attaining the highest ranks in the Hereafter; it is the main fight for the cause of Allah and for achieving the rank of martyrdom.

This is why Muslims eagerly pursue martyrdom in Allah's cause at every opportunity. The Muslim fighter believes that if he becomes a martyr he has won, and Muslims see a martyr victorious as well. Fighting for the cause of Allah and seeking martyrdom is essentially for reforming the world and for combating injustice, corruption, and disbelief.

Even in our contemporary state of weakness, whenever a jihad war ignites anywhere, many young Muslims rise to it, sacrificing their lives and wealth without the call of any ruling government or official institution to go to such a war. Many undertake this endeavour at great personal risk, knowing they may be captured, severely tortured, imprisoned for long periods, or even die under

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to the study '*The Miracle of the Islamic Conquests*' in the first volume of my book '*In the Corridors of History*'.

torture or in captivity. These are a type of people and actions that we do not see with such frequency or ubiquity in other nations, especially under such dangerous conditions and fears.

Therefore, one of the most compelling reasons why Islam is the solution, the methodology, and the path, is its unique ability to mobilise energies, rally forces, inspire souls, and channel resources into the battle for reform and revival. Indeed, we assert repeatedly that anyone sincere about the revival of his nation, even if they do not believe in Islam, would find, upon examining all alternatives, that Islam is the only viable path — even if their sole aim is worldly success. From a purely materialistic and pragmatic perspective, anyone committed to the revival of this nation and this region would find no system more capable of mobilising and uplifting them than Islam.

### **Because Islam is Salvation for Humanity and a War Against Injustice and Corruption**

The goodness Islam brings is not limited to its believers alone. Muslims are tasked with rescuing humanity and combating injustice and corruption wherever they can, even if such oppression and corruption affect non-Muslims.

Islam is distinguished from other systems and religions by this global vision, which was a fundamental principle from its very beginning during the period of weakness. Unlike other religions, ideologies, or movements, this universal mission of Islam was not a sudden phenomenon that emerged after achieving global expansion and dominance. From the very beginning, Muhammad ﷺ proclaimed this, even while he was still vulnerable in Mecca. In the Makkan Qur'an, Allah revealed, 'And We have not sent you but as a mercy to the worlds' (Surah Al-Anbiya: 21:107), and 'And We have not sent you except comprehensively to mankind as a bringer of good tidings and a warner' (Surah Saba: 34:28). Hence, we see that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ began corresponding with kings immediately after signing the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah with Mecca, even before the internal conflict in the Hijaz was resolved or Arabia was fully united under his leadership.

Islam is further distinguished by the preservation of its divine law and its sacred texts. These laws were not crafted by a ruler in a moment of triumph to legalise his dominance, nor were they designed to fulfil a ruler's personal ambitions or to lay the foundation for a system by which he can control the world. Instead, Islamic law is divine, revealed from the heavens. The Sharia (Islamic law) was completed, and its revelation ceased, while the Muslims had yet to leave the Arabian Peninsula. This eliminates any suspicion that it was shaped after achieving power and dominance, unlike the oppressive and unfair

treaties and charters drafted by victorious powers after World Wars I and II.

Thus, when Muslims strive to combat injustice and corruption globally, they do so as an act of obedience to their faith and out of hope for the Hereafter, not in pursuit of dominating the world to establish their own self-serving tyrannies after eliminating the existing ones. Also, Muslims do not turn a blind eye to oppression and corruption when it aligns with their own interests. This sets them apart from worldly empires that commit, as well as condone injustice inflicted by their allies when it serves their own interests or does not cause them any harm. Muslims have never acted in such a way. Muslims' sense of accountability before God to rescue humanity makes their fight against injustice a religious duty, contrasting sharply with the self-serving pragmatism of worldly powers. This distinction highlights the profound difference between acting based on faith and divine principles versus worldly objectives of gain and exploitation.

To illustrate, imagine if Western powers — such as the British and later the Americans — had truly believed in the human rights treaties they created, encompassing women's rights, prisoners' rights, and child welfare, among others. If they had treated these documents as sacred and mobilised their armies to rescue every oppressed individual to the best of their ability, the world would be an entirely different place. However, they treated these principles as idols of pre-Islamic paganism: revered and exalted when they aligned with their interests and discarded without hesitation when they did not.

Islam and Muslims, however, do not follow this strategy. This is because Islamic law was not written in moments of power and was not written to justify the Muslims' dominance. Instead, it is a divine religion revealed by Allah. As long as Muslims believe in their faith, they act upon it with a spirit of sacrifice and martyrdom, not with pragmatic intentions for selfish aims and ambitions to rule.

Moreover, the nature of Islam and its numerous texts make Muslims the most compassionate people toward others. It drives us to empathise with the oppressed and persecuted, even if they do not share our religion. Non-Muslims have testified that 'History has never known conquerors as tolerant as the Arabs nor a religion like theirs.'<sup>1</sup>

The above-mentioned differences between Islam and other systems are in terms of fundamental principles and general concepts.

If we delve into the details, we find three distinct aspects in which Islam stands apart from other ideologies and religions:

First, Islamic law addresses and eliminates injustice in minute details, such as:

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<sup>1</sup> Gustave Le Bon, *The Civilization of the Arabs*, p. 605.

- The prohibition of usury (riba), which concentrates wealth among the rich and turns it into a tool to oppress the poor.
- The prohibition of monopoly, deceitful sales, and fraudulent practices.
- Regulations on inheritance, ensuring fairness between men and women and to prevent the strong from stealing the rights of the weak.
- Safeguarding individual rights in marriage, divorce, and other interpersonal dealings.

All these aspects were addressed by Islamic law to block the avenues of injustice. The details were left to the interpretations and reasoning of jurists to ensure that new forms of injustice arising from contemporary events and circumstances are prevented. Later, God willing, we will delve into various rulings legislated by Islam that naturally instil in the individual Muslim, and the Muslim community, as a whole, a natural resistance to injustice and corruption.

The Sharia closes the doors to injustice in these matters, while jurists strive to refine these principles in response to evolving situations.

Second, all these rulings are surrounded by the sanctity, reverence, and majesty of religion in the hearts and minds of Muslims. Unlike secular laws imposed by the state, which individuals often seek to evade when enforcement weakens. Abiding by the Islamic rulings is seen by a Muslim as an act of worship to His Lord who oversees his actions. This minimises the urge for injustice and maximises the will to resist breaking or manipulating these rulings.

It is rare for individuals to rise against violations of laws imposed by the state, whereas, in Islam, you find many who command others to follow Islamic rulings and forbid wrongdoings. This is because they do not perceive the violation of these rulings as merely defiance of the state but as disobedience to God's command.

Moreover, the sacred nature of religious laws saves a significant amount of time and effort. For example, most people might not comprehend the harm caused by usury or the immense danger banks and financial institutions pose to the money of oppressed nations. Many are enticed by the fixed interest rates to deposit their money in these banks. Imagine a society where usury has become widespread, and economists strive to warn people about its dangers. In reality, an army of skilled economists explaining and persuading people against the dangers of usury would achieve far less than an army of preachers and righteous individuals who approach people from a religious perspective, explaining the prohibition of usury and the severe warnings associated with it in their religion.

Third, these Islamic rulings have been deeply rooted in Muslim societies for

centuries, often transforming into a profound culture ingrained in the minds and collective consciousness of many Muslims. They have been reflected in popular proverbs and common sayings, producing a strong societal and cultural unity. All these factors make the ability of an Islamic society and its individuals to respond and accept the Islamic rulings, to move forward, to save the world, much easier — far easier — than attempting to create a society that reacts to injustices and corruption and is ready to combat them without these conditions present in an Islamic society. Achieving that would require long eras and numerous generations.

**In conclusion:**

There is no system better, more suitable, or more effective than Islam to adopt, embrace, and adhere to reforming our reality and reviving our nation. Islam is:

1. The path to salvation in the Hereafter which is the eternal life that we must attend to rectify, even if we lose this worldly life or fail to achieve our aspirations in it.
2. The most ideal, comprehensive, complete, and beneficial system for this world, as it is the system brought to us by Allah, who created mankind. Islam represents the greatest successful human experience in the history of the world.
3. The most suitable system and way of life for our people, as it aligns with their nature, spirit, and history. It was through Islam that we emerged from an era of darkness and loss. When we turned away from it, we re-entered a state of confusion and despair. We did not benefit from any other system; instead, other systems only added to our misery and burden.
4. The system that can mobilise potentials, uncover hidden capabilities, and instigate efforts. No system is more fitting or effective for a people embarking on a journey of revival, liberation, and growth.
5. The system that trains its followers to be the most merciful among humanity, transforming them into soldiers in the battle to save others from evil, injustice, and corruption.

## **The Islamic Framework**

We have mentioned that the Islamic system is the most comprehensive, ideal, and effective framework for reforming the human life. This chapter will elaborate on this claim, with a specific focus on the political system in Islam. This is the main topic that we are concerned with in this book since it is the most crucial subject that has the most profound effect on our contemporary times. It is also the topic that we have entirely lost since the complete abolition of the Islamic Caliphate over a century ago. In today's world, the Islamic political system has become a central source of discord among Muslims, exacerbated by the dominant and overwhelming presence of Western civilisation and its liberal system. Many have come to perceive this Western model as a civilisation of freedom and liberation, juxtaposed against the Islamic system, which they mistakenly regard as a civilisation of despotism and tyranny. This deeply flawed perception has distorted many truths and misled countless people.

We begin here with certain foundational points and premises essential to understanding this chapter:

### **(1)**

To grasp the core of the issue, the reader must understand that the fundamental dilemma in political systems has always been the trade-off between security and freedom. Throughout history, various political systems have oscillated between these two extremes. Tyrannical and authoritarian systems provide societal security and stability at the cost of freedom, stripping people of dignity, honour, and chivalry. Conversely, systems that protect and prioritise freedom are generally weak and rife with instability, crime, and unrest.

This dichotomy has long confounded philosophers and thinkers, who have sought to devise a system that reconciles both security and freedom. Some proposed solutions or theories, while others ultimately favoured one over the other — either opting for a security-focused system despite the loss of freedom or advocating for a freedom-centric system despite the loss of security.

The challenge is intensified with the expansion of a state or empire. As territories of a state grow, it becomes evident that the only practical system is a strong, authoritarian one. At the same time, all aspects of freedom, collaboration, and consultation within the system diminish. Historically, major civilisations operated under this model — tyrannical systems that oppressed humanity but provided the necessary stability and security which fostered the advancements in science, knowledge, arts, and architecture that are still present.

By contrast, in smaller states or city-states, it is possible to find a governing system based on consultation, participation, and deliberation. In such systems, people experience a sense of self-worth and humanity. However, these systems

are often short-lived and collapse if internal discords erupt or if faced with external invasions by more powerful forces. When this happens, the previously cherished freedoms and participatory systems become useless to the people who lived in such a state.

Many may believe that this dilemma has been resolved in modern Western civilisation, which seems to have established a system combining both security and freedom — offering stability and security without tyranny and offering a sense of freedom and political participation without fear of external threats or internal insurrections. However, this, in fact, is a misconception due to a misunderstanding of the contemporary Western democratic system and its historical context. It is also rooted in the over-generalisation of a unique historical moment that is far from representative of the broader trajectory of nations. This issue will be further clarified in our discussion.

For now, the reader is invited to explore the Islamic political system with an awareness of this long-standing dilemma of security versus freedom.

## (2)

The term ‘politics’ has evolved in meaning over time. One of the closest definitions to its true meaning is: good care and management. The Arabic word for politics is derived from the root word ‘*sāsa*,’ which refers to tending to and managing of affairs — like training and caring for a horse. Over time, the term became closely associated with ruling governments and states and how they address public affairs.

However, the term ‘politics’ has also acquired negative connotations that are commonly related to governance and state, and hence often associated in people’s mind with deceit, manipulation, selfish ambition, etc. This has led some secularists to claim that ‘there is no religion in politics and no politics in religion,’ arguing that religion is sacred, pure, and untarnished, whereas politics is tainted, corrupted, and sullied.

This perspective is fundamentally flawed. Politics is, in fact, the profession of the prophets. Among them were kings and statesmen — like Joseph, David, and Solomon (peace be upon them). The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ mentioned that: ‘The Children of Israel were governed by the prophets; whenever a prophet passed away, another succeeded him.’<sup>1</sup> The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself exemplified this integration — he was a prophet, messenger, political leader, military commander, and legislator — a comprehensive embodiment of leadership.

For Muslims, politics is not divorced from religion or values. On the contrary, ‘politics’ for Muslims, as understood from the Quran and the life of The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, is the art of managing the interests of Muslims in a manner

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<sup>1</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari (Hadith No. 3268), Sahih Muslim (Hadith No. 1842).

conducive to both their worldly and spiritual well-being. In essence, politics in Islam is a continuation of the prophetic mission after he passes away; it is therefore the continuation of the prophetic mission for the Muslim community.

Muslim scholars have articulated this mission as follows:

- Al-Mawardi: ‘The Imamate (Islamic political ruling) is established as a succession of prophethood for safeguarding religion and managing worldly affairs.’<sup>1</sup>
- Al-Juwayni: ‘The Imamate is a comprehensive leadership and authority over public and private matters in both religion and worldly affairs.’<sup>2</sup>
- Ibn Khaldun: ‘It is to govern the masses in accordance with Sharia, ensuring their interests in both the hereafter and the worldly life, as all worldly matters are ultimately tied to the afterlife. Political leadership is, in its essence, a succession of the role of the divine legislator in protecting religion and managing the worldly affairs with the religious rulings’<sup>3</sup>

### (3)

Contemporary scholars categorise politics into three primary domains:

1. **Political Theory:** This refers to the foundational ideas, principles, beliefs, and worldview adopted by those in power. A ruler who adopts an atheistic and materialistic view of life undoubtedly has a different attitude and worldview than a leader who believes in God and the afterlife and who does not believe that life is just matter. These differences are reflected in the political model adopted by each.
2. **Political Systems:** Political systems differ in as much as their underpinning ideologies, beliefs, and worldviews differ. We are not able to understand a political system without understanding the ideologies, principles and worldviews governing and shaping it. These ideologies and principles define the relationship between rulers and subjects, the rights and duties of each, the economic and administrative policies, the social structure, the cultural practices, and even the arts. They also determine inter-governmental relationships, now commonly referred to as ‘international relations.’
3. **International Relations:** Originally, international relations were part of the political systems. Now, due to the expanding dominance of the State, international relations have become an independent domain in the last

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Ahkam Al-Sultaniyyah (*The Ordinances of a Government*), page 5.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Ghiyathi, page 15.

<sup>3</sup> Tareekh Ibn Khaldun (*The history of Ibn Khaldun*), Volume 1, page 190.

decades. Unlike earlier times, when the State primarily controlled capitals and major cities, the State now extends its influence to encompass the whole globe. Moreover, in the past, there was no one dominant power controlling all nations of the world as we see today, nor was there a global system or international institutions of the kind we now know. Governance in earlier times was largely the outcome of local interactions and conflicts among the people of a given region. However, the situation has become far more complex in modern times. International powers now have the ability to impose a ruler on a nation, support him with financial resources and military forces, and even deploy their armies to protect him from an uprising or to remove him and install another in his place. For this reason, it is said that the 'State' has become one of the subjects within the domain of 'international relations.'

In this book, we will discuss politics through this tripartite framework. However, instead of using terms like 'Islamic political theory,' I will use alternative phrases like 'Islamic political vision,' 'Islamic political belief,' or 'Islamic political perspective', to point to the fact that it is not 'a point of view', but rather a belief, a creed and a vision.

#### (4)

No one who carries a project for change or reform can avoid starting from their current reality. No reformer has ever been able to completely detach from their context or start from a vacuum or a blank slate. He is inevitably burdened by the challenges of his reality and simultaneously benefits from its advantages. Throughout his journey toward the desired reform, he must draw from his surroundings, endure its difficulties, navigate its constraints, and balance between benefits and harms to achieve his goals.

Such a reformer is necessarily gradual, persistent, willing to endure some discomfort, patient with certain dissatisfactions, and silent on some grievances in the hope of achieving the most important first, then the less important. At the same time, he capitalises on the positive aspects of his reality, even while working to change and improve it.

It is possible that he may pass away before seeing the fulfilment of his aspirations, but he will have laid the foundation, carved a path, and paved the way for others to continue.

Conversely, idealists who are overly attached to dreams, openly reject reality, and disregard natural laws have never succeeded in bringing about real change. Their endeavours often end in catastrophic failure or miserable isolation and withdrawal. More often than not, such idealists become fuel exploited by pragmatic individuals to advance their plans, even when those pragmatists are their adversaries. The idealistic dreamer — often labelled as radical or utopian

— is frequently used by his enemies to serve purposes and goals of which he remains unaware.

(5)

No matter how much has been written and theorised about balancing benefits and harms, in practice, this balance depends on the insight of those who are actually acting on the ground and their estimation of the consequences. The best, that theoretical discussion in this area can achieve, is to outline general principles, broad guidelines, and clarify objectives and goals, serving primarily as guidance.

The framework for weighing benefits and harms has been extensively studied and explained by scholars, not to constrain or paralyse those who act but to assist, guide, and enlighten them.

While balancing benefits and harms is an unavoidable necessity for those striving to reform, it carries risks from two opposing extremes:

1. That benefits-and-harms balancing becomes a gateway to pursuing whims and desires, veering away from Sharia and its rulings, seeking personal, partisan, or organisational interests at the expense of the broader interests of the nation, often inflating or downplaying harms and benefits based on subjective inclinations.
2. That benefits-and-harms balancing is used to discourage and demotivate those who act. If the benefit is not overwhelmingly guaranteed and the harm is minimal or speculative, some may accept mediocrity, abandon high aspirations, turn away from noble goals, and shy away from sacrifice and struggle, exerting effort to delay inevitable battles under the guise of prudence.

Balancing benefits and harms is a vital tool for those striving toward Allah and working to support this religion and raise its banner. It equips them with insight into facts of life, human nature, and what may be necessary or compulsory to make. Balancing benefits and harms should not hinder or discourage them, nor should it provide a pretext for following personal whims.

(6)

One of the gravest and worst sufferings of the Muslim ummah, especially in the past century, has been the marginalisation of scholars and jurists from the judiciary because of the abolition of Islamic courts. Prior to the abolition of Islamic courts, scholars had been side-lined from political affairs as regimes became subservient to colonial powers. In such regimes, scholars were mere ornaments, not genuine advisors. This marginalisation was compounded in systems that opposed religion and its adherents outright, keeping scholars around only for appearances before Muslim masses or to legitimise the ruler's desires.

This, among other consequences, led to the decline of political jurisprudence and the scarcity of scholars with knowledge of politics, its realities, and the ability to exercise *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) in its issues. They also lacked the capacity to foresee outcomes by observing the causes.

If a scholar practising *ijtihad* in general jurisprudence issues requires knowledge of both Islamic law and reality, then a scholar engaging in political jurisprudence must also grasp the distinctions between the Islamic model of governance and contemporary systems, both in theory and in historical and practical application. This demands knowledge of history, sociology, and various disciplines that have undergone significant transformations. Such expertise is difficult to acquire in countries plagued by tyranny and scientific stagnation.

As a result, disagreements often arise among different factions of Islamic political groups and schools of thought. These differences may occur in the *ijtihad* itself, its application to reality, or both. Furthermore, their practical implementation may be prone to errors, misjudgements, or be accompanied by unavoidable constraints and complex trade-offs.

The key is to assess the overall intentions and actions of those involved in Islamic political reform. We must be tolerant towards those whose overall conduct demonstrates a sincere desire to serve Islam and Muslims, even if we disagree over theory, application, or execution.

What we present in this book is a summary of what our *ijtihad* has led us to conclude. Any success is by God's grace alone, while any errors, shortcomings, or forgetfulness are from ourselves and Satan.

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With these six brief introductions understood and kept in mind, we proceed to explain Islam's approach to governance and politics, seeking God's guidance and support.

## **The Great Liberating Faith**

The foundational principle of Islam is the testimony that 'There is no god but Allah'. From this profound principle stems all other principles and branches that form the Islamic system in practical life. This declaration, 'La ilaha illa Allah,' (There is no God but Allah) is at the very core of the Islamic political vision.

The most significant implication that arises from this, which establishes the fundamentals of the Islamic political vision and perspective, is that the monotheism indicated by the phrase "*There is no god but Allah*" resolves the major issues and complex dilemmas over which secular political theories have disagreed. This is due to the clarity of the overall vision, the fundamental values, the ultimate objectives, and the nature of political and social relationships.

Among these fundamental issues that are resolved by the monotheistic declaration of the Islamic belief are:

(1)

All people are equal, as they are creations of Allah and descendants of Adam (peace be upon him). Allah states:

*‘O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women’* (Surah An-Nisa: 4:1).

Thus, no one is superior to another in their essential nature. There are no inherent ranks, levels, or castes among them. As the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ declared:

*‘O people, your Lord is one, and your father is one. You are all from Adam, and Adam is from dust.’*

Thus, Islam demolishes the myths that dominated humanity for ages and sustained oppressive regimes for centuries — myths that claimed a ruler, a family, or a class belongs to a superior nature or rank, positioning a ruler, his family or his class as gods, demigods, or divine descendants.

In Islam, there is no dispute over the fact that the ruler is a human being, acting as a representative of the ummah in his position. He is fallible, can make mistakes, and the ummah has the right to choose, appoint, oversee, hold him accountable, and even overthrow or remove him from his office.

(2)

Allah has reserved for Himself the authority of command just as He is the sole Creator. He states:

*‘Unquestionably, His is the creation and the command’* (Surah Al-A'raf: 7:54).<sup>1</sup>

No one has the right to command another, and no one is obliged to obey anyone else except according to Allah’s commands. Allah alone possesses sovereignty, and His law is the ultimate governing authority, binding both the ruler and the ruled. The ruler’s role is merely to implement and adhere to Allah’s law.

The concept of Sovereignty in Islam: ‘sovereignty’ means supreme authority; the entity that has sovereignty is the one that is not to be questioned about its actions. That is why, when we say, for example, ‘we are a sovereign state,’ this means no external entity can interfere, impose rules, or dictate on us how we run

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<sup>1</sup> The narration is authentic hadith reported by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (23536) and by al-Tabarani in *al-Mu'jam al-Kabir* (14444).

our state. Sovereignty implies ultimate ownership and the unquestionable right to act freely within one's domain. Thus, a sovereign master is not questioned about what he does or what he owns

One of the most significant aspects of sovereignty is the authority to legislate. A sovereign state or entity creates the laws and regulations that govern its people. If an external force dictates such laws or holds that state accountable, it ceases to be sovereign. Therefore, the right to legislate is inherently tied to sovereignty. Sovereignty belongs to the one who holds the upper hand, who is not questioned about what he does, and whom no one has the authority to hold accountable. Thus, sovereignty is inherently tied to power. The weak cannot be sovereign nor enjoy sovereignty!

Many people may not realise that the right to legislate is the most critical and impactful right in the lives of people. The individual — or entity — that holds sovereignty and the authority to enact laws essentially controls people's lives, their wealth, their honour, and even their minds and culture. Such a legislator establishes the standards of right and wrong, truth and falsehood. What is permissible is what he declares permissible, what is forbidden is what he prohibits, and the regime is what he defines and structures. He determines rights and duties and hence grants himself what he wishes and deprives others as he sees fit. It has rightly been said: 'Law is nothing more than an expression of the desires of the powerful.'<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to human-made systems, Islam asserts that the laws governing society are not authored by a ruler, ruling elite, or victors who seek to institutionalise their dominance. Instead, Islamic laws are divine, revealed by Allah for the benefit of all humanity. Allah does not show favouritism among His creation. His law is sacred, unchanging, and free from the deficiencies and biases of humans.

Additionally, Islamic law is clear; everyone knows it, learns it and abides by it. It is not confined to an elite class of clergy or experts who can manipulate it by additions or deletions at their own will or the will of a ruler.

Every attempt at tyranny over people begins the moment one individual prevails, drafting in his moment of triumph the documents and laws by which he will govern others. This transforms his victory into a state of legitimacy, while any resistance to it becomes a breach of legality warranting punishment.

Islam views such attempts to impose human-made laws on others as an act of

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that 'the rule of law,' as used in contemporary discourse, does not equate to the sovereignty of Sharia. Even by the state legal logic, the well-known legal expert Dr. Tawfiq Al-Shawi says: 'Sharia is binding on everyone: legislative, executive, and judicial authorities, and it restricts the hands of the ruler and the legislator from enacting unjust laws, while the rule of law is binding only on the executive authority. The door remains open for the issuance of man-made laws that allow for despotism and tyranny.' See: *Sovereignty of Islamic Sharia*, p. 14.

tyranny and ‘servitude to others than Allah.’ Muslims see their mission as to liberate humanity from this tyranny and domination over peoples’ rights and duties as well as the control over their souls, wealth, honour and their lives in general. This vision was encapsulated by *Rab’i ibn Amir* when he addressed the Persian commander Rustam:

*‘Allah has sent us to deliver people from the worship of creation to the worship of the Creator of creation, from the narrowness of this world to the vastness of this world and the Hereafter, and from the oppression of religions to the justice of Islam.’<sup>1</sup>*

Rab’i understood that Islam is not only a war against idols, but that idols are a manifestation of human control over humans, enslaving one another. It is a system that benefits those who execute it. There may be a system that enslaves people without the presence of idols. Rab’i ibn Amir, in his dialogue with the commander of the Persian army, was addressing this issue and the Persians did not worship idols, but they enslaved humans!

The Qur’an is explicit in affirming that legislation is the sole prerogative of Allah. Allah alone is the legislator, and the right to legislate does not belong to any human being. It is not permissible for anyone to set laws for the people from their own will or to create laws that contradict what has been revealed by Allah. Allah states:

*‘And whoever does not rule by what Allah has revealed—then it is they who are the disbelievers’* (Surah Al-Ma’idah: 5:44).

*‘And whoever does not rule by what Allah has revealed—then it is they who are the wrongdoers’* (Surah Al-Ma’idah: 5:45).

*‘And whoever does not rule by what Allah has revealed—then it is they who are the defiantly disobedient’* (Surah Al-Ma’idah: 5:47).

*‘And We have sent down to you the Book in truth, confirming what was before it of the Scripture and as a criterion over it. So judge between them by what Allah has revealed, and do not follow their inclinations away from what has come to you of the truth’* (Surah Al-Ma’idah: 5:48).

*‘And judge between them by what Allah has revealed, and do not follow their inclinations, and beware lest they turn you away from some of what Allah has revealed to you.’* (Surah Al-Ma’idah: 5:49).

*‘Is it the judgment of ignorance they desire? And who is better than Allah in judgment for a people who are certain?’* (Surah Al-Ma’idah: 5:50).

*‘Or do they have partners who have legislated for them in the religion that which Allah has not permitted?’* (Surah Ash-Shura: 42:21)

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<sup>1</sup> History of al-Tabari, 2/401.

Similar verses are numerous in the Quran.

In summary, Islam removes sovereignty and legislative authority from human hands and places it exclusively with Allah. In this framework, the ruler's role is limited to implementing divine law, which he neither creates nor has the authority to alter. He cannot even break it or abandon it.

### (3)

The nation holds the right to appoint and dismiss its leader, to monitor, correct, and hold them accountable, and even to resist and depose them.

If the ruler in Islam is only a human being — neither a deity, nor semi-divine, nor descended from gods — and if the ruler is stripped of legislative authority, serving only to implement the divine Shariah revealed by Allah, without the power to alter or replace it, nor the permission to deviate from or renounce it, then given these premises, Allah has granted this nation and its people the right to appoint their leader, to monitor and correct him, advise him, resist him, and even depose him.

It is remarkably notable that the first person to articulate this right was none other than the first leader in Islamic history, Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him). In his inaugural speech after being pledged allegiance, known as the “Inaugural Address of the Caliphate,” he said:

*‘I have been appointed over you, though I am not the best among you. If I do well, assist me; if I err, set me straight. Obey me as long as I obey Allah and His Messenger. But if I disobey Allah and His Messenger, I have no right to your obedience.’*

These words were more like an intellectual and political earthquake at a time when emperors, Caesars, and kings ruled with absolute authority. Rulers, at that time, did not consider themselves as ordinary people nor were regarded as such by their subjects. Also, subjects neither expected to evaluate their rulers, let alone correct them, nor did rulers entertain the notion of granting their people the right to rebel if they violated the law, as Abu Bakr declared!

This distinction is unique to Islam and its history. Rights in the Islamic tradition were not wrested from rulers by the people after prolonged struggles, bloody revolutions, and widespread devastation. Rather, these rights were ordained by divine revelation from heaven, outlining rights and duties, to which both rulers and the ruled were subject.

In saying ‘I have been appointed over you,’ Abu Bakr emphasised that the ruler in Islam governs by the appointment of the nation, not through divine mandate, hereditary succession, lineage, or any other means by which nations are subjugated.

Abu Bakr made a profound distinction between two types of deviations — a testament to his brilliance and piety. He differentiated between errors made in striving to implement Shariah and serve the public good, and deliberate deviation from or abandonment of Shariah. Regarding the former, he said: ‘If I do well, assist me; if I err, set me straight.’ But regarding the latter, he said: ‘Obey me as long as I obey Allah and His Messenger. But if I disobey Allah and His Messenger, I have no right to your obedience.’

The Quran and the Prophetic hadith are rich with verses and hadiths urging the nation to enjoin good and forbid evil, advise rulers, and even resist or fight against them when necessary. Remarkably, the title ‘Master of the Martyrs’ is granted to two individuals: one who dies fighting disbelievers, and one who is killed by a tyrant ruler for commanding him to do good and forbidding him to do evil, as stated in the hadith:

*‘The Master of the Martyrs is Hamza ibn Abdul Muttalib, and a man who stands up to a tyrant ruler, enjoins good, and forbids evil, and is killed by him.’<sup>1</sup>*

Among the relevant verses:

*‘You are the best nation brought forth for mankind: you enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah.’* (Surah Aal ‘Imran: 3:110)

*‘Pardon them, seek forgiveness for them, and consult them in matters.’* (Surah Aal ‘Imran: 3:159)

*‘Their affairs are conducted by mutual consultation among them.’* (Surah Ash-Shura: 42:38)

In summary: The people in Islam are a nation of accountability, monitoring, and correction, enjoining good and forbidding evil. They derive their rights and duties from the Shariah, which is not the creation of the ruler, and they hold the ruler accountable based on it. If he violates or deviates from it, it is their duty to correct, command, and forbid him. And if he abandons it altogether, they have the right to resist, depose, and dismiss him.

#### (4)

This great liberating faith is not significant merely because it eradicated the roots of tyranny and dismantled the pillars that tyrants have long used to enslave humanity — which is something that many philosophers, reformers, and revolutionaries have strived to achieve — but also because it is a religious creed that permeates the heart, soul, and spirit, as well as being firmly rooted in the intellect. How many great ideas captivate the mind but fail to penetrate the soul, settle in the heart, or energise the spirit? Such ideas, no matter how brilliant, offer

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<sup>1</sup> Reported by *Al-Hakam* (4884) and authenticated by him. See: *Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah (The Authentic Series)* by Al-Albani (374).

no benefit to their proponents! For true change in this world depends on those willing to sacrifice time, effort, labour, and even blood — not merely on those who limit themselves to writing and speaking.

Islam has always been a religion, not a philosophy. This is why it surpasses every intellectual or theoretical framework. It derives its strength from being both a faith and a creed, transforming the Muslim believer into a formidable force for change — not merely an intellectual carrying a revolutionary idea.

Islam elevated jihad to its highest peak, granting the warrior unparalleled reward and recognition, exceeding the reward of any other deed. Jihad even became an obligation at times, such that abstaining from it rendered a Muslim sinful and accountable. No other faith can mobilise people to reform life, rescue the oppressed, or confront tyrants with the same vigour as Islam — something it has demonstrated throughout history.

Humanity still struggles to produce a spirit as brave and invincible as the Islamic spirit! A fair-minded observer seeking the reformation of humanity would, after thoroughly examining the remaining ideas and systems capable of inspiring resistance against the rampant oppression, conclude that Islam alone retains this unique capacity. Muslims have shown extraordinary resilience and steadfastness, even in this era — the harshest of times against them — when they are at their weakest. The superpowers have faced no greater defiance than from Muslims, despite their lack of numbers, resources, and balance of power. The Soviet Union, at the height of its strength, encountered no fiercer or longer-lasting resistance than it did from Muslims. Similarly, the United States, during its peak, faced no other group as daring to challenge it — whether on its own soil or in occupied Muslim lands. All this, even though Muslims are lacking a unified state and are not receiving any external support. The story of Palestine alone suffices as proof: a small, besieged, and oppressed people, oppressed for seventy years, continue to rise, resist, and confront the heavily armed Israeli beast which is backed up by all forms of international support.

In summary, Islam is not merely a concept but a deep, strong spiritual religious faith. This gives it a unique ability to mobilise energy, ignite emotions, and awaken consciences, alongside its power to correct thoughts, raise awareness, and dispel myths and delusions.

But is this the entirety of Islam's greatness?

No. It transcends this to an even higher level: the establishment of a practical, applicable system that eradicates the causes of tyranny and safeguards societies from falling into the servitude of humans to other humans.

This is what we shall discuss in the following lines.

## **The Political System in Islam**

Islam is not a theory confined to books or an idea restricted to minds. It is a living, practical system in real life. Muslims believe their golden age of implementing the Islamic system occurred during the Prophetic era and the Rashidun Caliphate, from the migration and the establishment of the Islamic state in Medina until the end of Ali ibn Abi Talib's rule — forty years in total.

The deterioration in the proper application of the Islamic political system began with the Umayyad era and then it started to gradually decline — with some periods of revival, reform, and resurgence — until the great calamity of the fall of the Islamic Caliphate, marked by the collapse of the Ottoman state in 1342 AH (1924 CE). This marked the end of a 1,300-year history of the Islamic state.

Thus, the period of implementing the Islamic system with its various forms as well as the attempts to reform its shortcomings with all the associated intellectual and practical efforts, continued for thirteen centuries. This leaves us with an immensely rich, dynamic, and comprehensive legacy to analyse, understand, and extract its constants and fundamental principles.

These key principles are what we aim to clarify in the following lines.

### **(1)**

The Islamic political system was built on its foundational political theory and served as a practical implementation of it. Like any human endeavour, it inevitably reflected a gap between theory and application due to human error and shortcomings. However, there is a vast difference between having a divine, upright system that is implemented by humans who may fall into some mistakes and deviations, and a man-made system that inherently carries flaws, deviations, and human deficiencies in both its theoretical foundation as well as in its execution.

As a result, the Islamic system remained the best practical political model in history. Allah says:

*'You are the best nation produced for mankind.'* (Surah Aal 'Imran: 3:110).

This is a reality acknowledged by many fair-minded individuals, even those who are not Muslims.

The French philosopher and historian Gustave Le Bon lamented that Muslims did not conquer France and imagined what might have happened if they had. He stated:

*'What would have happened to Europe? Christian Europe, which was in a barbaric state, would have experienced the same flourishing civilisation that Spain enjoyed under the banner of the Arab Prophet. Europe would not have*

*endured the horrors of events like the religious wars, the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, the injustices of the Inquisition, and all the other terrible incidents unknown to Muslims, which soaked Europe in blood for several centuries.*<sup>1</sup>

The British military officer R.V.C. Bodley described Muslims as ‘like rain that fertilises wherever it falls.’<sup>2</sup>

French historian Édouard Perroy depicted the Muslim nation with these words:

*‘The dust of conquests and the clanging of swords settled to reveal a new and vast empire, a civilisation of unparalleled brilliance, and a society of unparalleled grandeur.’*<sup>3</sup>

The historian of civilisation Will Durant wrote:

*‘It was common for the Muslim to be a model of gentleness, humanity, and tolerance. Typically, he was quick to understand, sharp-witted, easily excitable, and quick to find joy and humour. He derived satisfaction from simplicity, endured his afflictions calmly, and faced all the events of life with patience, dignity, pride, and nobility.’*<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, the French scholar Dominique Sourdél noted:

*‘Cooperation, hospitality, generosity, honesty in fulfilling obligations to members of society, moderation in desires, and contentment — these are the virtues that continue to distinguish Muslims. They represent a genuine ideal, aspiring to elevate the forces of human nature.’*<sup>5</sup>

There are countless similar statements.

We present these testimonies to affirm that even with the flaws, errors, and deviations that crept into Islamic implementation over the years, the essence of Islam and its divine superiority remained intact. The ultimate result, even by human standards and the standards of non-Muslims, was something monumental and enduring in the history of humanity.

## (2)

The deviations in the implementation of the Islamic system, no matter how prolonged, never managed to transform into something acceptable or legitimate. Instead, the jurisprudence of scholars and the knowledge of the learned — written, studied, and preached — consistently reaffirmed that these deviations

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<sup>1</sup> Gustave Le Bon, *The Civilization of the Arabs*, p. 317

<sup>2</sup> Bodley, *The Messenger: The Life of Muhammad*, p. 147

<sup>3</sup> Édouard Perroy, *The Middle Ages*, in *General History of Civilizations*, edited by Maurice Croisette, Vol. 3, p. 109.

<sup>4</sup> Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, Vol. 13, pp. 143–144.

<sup>5</sup> Dominique Sourdél's “Islam,” page 107

were errors, sins, and transgressions, no matter how widespread or normalised they became. Thus, condemning and resisting these deviations remained a legitimate act and a central goal in the sermons of preachers, the reform efforts of reformers, and the revolutions of the revolutionaries.

No ruler was able to legitimise for himself or others what was forbidden — whether in his personal life or in matters of governance. For instance, in his personal life and desires, no ruler, regardless of how widespread alcohol consumption became or how excessive he was in drinking it, could declare it lawful or change its religious ruling. None could legitimise marrying more than four wives, permit the acts of the people of Lut, or make the immodest clothing of women Islamically permissible.

With respect to the system of governance, no ruler could permit the extermination of dhimmis (protected non-Muslim minorities such as Jews and Christians), enslave or expel them en masse, confiscate their wealth, or commit the atrocities common in other empires that oppressed minorities when they became burdensome.

Even though hereditary succession to the caliphate occurred over a long span of Islamic history,<sup>1</sup> this practice never became legitimate. Scholars permitted it as an exception to the norm due to necessity, aiming to prevent strife, chaos, and conflict among Muslims. This is why the caliph in Islamic civilisation could only assume power through a bay‘ah (pledge of allegiance) from those with decision-making authority. Admittedly, this pledge often became a formality, but it is worth asking: why was even a formal pledge necessary? The answer lies in the principle that a caliph’s legitimacy in the Islamic system does not stem from an absolute hereditary right, noble lineage, or descent from a sacred family. Rather, it comes from the people’s choice. This marks a significant departure from other civilisations of the time, where a fetus in the womb could be declared heir by virtue of lineage and inheritance alone!

The intent here is not to delve deeply into this issue but to present it as an example to show that any deviation or practices contrary to the original principles of the Islamic system never transformed, over time or through frequent repetition, into a lawful or an Islamically legitimate practice. They remained exceptions, allowed only out of necessity and in coercive situations.

The same applies to the case of the de facto ruler (the mutaghalib). A review of Islamic jurisprudence reveals that even prolonged de facto rule never became a legitimate or sanctioned practice among scholars. Instead, jurists’ consensus was that such rulers were only tolerated post facto, after their seizure of power and established control — not as an endorsement of their rule, but to safeguard the broader interests of the ummah (Muslim community) and prevent endless

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<sup>1</sup> This has historical and social circumstances that we have detailed in other places.

bloodshed when resistance was no longer feasible. Scholars labelled mutaghalib rulers as sinners and wrongdoers for their usurpation of power. They allowed obedience to such rulers only in matters aligned with Islamic principles. They also do not judge it permissible to defend such a ruler if challenged by another; unlike the case with a just and legitimate imam, for whom scholars state that it is obligatory to stand alongside him against anyone who rebels against him or attempts to seize power from him. Scholars also obligated a de facto ruler to formally establish his rule through a bay'ah to ensure accountability to the ummah.<sup>1</sup> These principles and similar ones were consistently studied, taught, and upheld in Islamic jurisprudence, even under mutaghalib rulers.

Thus, various deviations, errors, and shortcomings were either rectified during different periods — peacefully or through conflict — or remained unaddressed due to constraints or inability. However, the Muslim community, through its scholars, preachers, reformers, and revolutionaries, continuously acknowledged these as errors and never ceased striving for their rectification.

How starkly this contrasts with human-made systems, including the modern democratic system, where a parliament, constitutional court, or ruler with sufficient practical authority, can amend laws and constitutions at will — rendering what was forbidden yesterday permissible today and what was permissible yesterday forbidden today!

### (3)

The Islamic system ensures the application of its fundamental principle dedicated by the Islamic faith which entails limiting and minimising the powers of the ruler to the bare minimum necessary for managing and organising public affairs. Thus, authority in the Islamic system is confined to two main areas: security and defence, and what is related to them, such as collecting zakat (charitable tax), appointing judges, delegating governors, and similar administrative tasks.<sup>2</sup>

If we attempt to illustrate this by using the contemporary classification of powers, we will see clearly how even the most authoritarian rulers in Islamic history had far fewer powers than many of today's democratic leaders. This challenges the assumptions of those who admire the Western model. Let us demonstrate this point:

Modern proponents of democracy often consider the separation of powers a monumental innovation. These powers are divided into: the executive branch

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<sup>1</sup> In a situation similar to swearing an oath on the constitution in our contemporary context, this does not constitute codification or legitimization of the usurper's position but rather serves as a binding commitment to the rights and duties outlined in the constitution.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the duties of the Imam in: Al-Mawardi, *Al-Ahkam Al-Sultaniyyah wa Al-Wilayat Al-Diniyyah*, edited by Ahmad Jad, (Cairo: Dar Al-Hadith, n.d.), p. 40 and beyond.

(government), the legislative branch (parliament), and the judiciary (courts). Some even add a fourth power: the media.

In contemporary democracy, two major forms of governance dominate: the parliamentary system and the presidential system.

- In the parliamentary system, the centre of power is the prime minister.
- In the presidential system, the centre of power is the president.

The parliamentary system operates under two general scenarios:

1. **Fragmented and unstable coalitions:** If the parties are close in popularity and divided in their political views. In such a case, governments are formed through unstable coalitions, which can collapse with the withdrawal of one or two members. This results in repeated negotiations to form new governments or even hold new elections, leading to a state of instability and disorder.
2. **Strong majority party:** If one party dominates by an overwhelming victory in elections, it wins a parliamentary majority and forms the government alone which ensures stability in such a country. However, this dominance often leads to the prime minister having, in fact, control over all three powers:
  - **Legislative power:** By winning by a strong majority, he has control over the legislative power (the parliament) which has the power to draft and amend laws.
  - **Judicial power:** As a consequence, he also has control over the judicial authority which operates based on legislation passed by parliament, and the parliament can amend laws governing the judiciary itself.
  - **Executive power:** Since the prime minister heads the government, he has also control over the executive power.

With control over these three branches of authority, the prime minister can also easily dominate the fourth power, the media.

Thus, in the parliamentary system, the state oscillates between two scenarios: either instability and potential chaos or a totalitarian dominance when a single party has control over all authorities.

The presidential system is somewhat less bad than the parliamentary system but also operates in two general scenarios:

1. When the president and the parliamentary majority belong to the same party, and here also the president gains effective control over all three powers (executive, legislative, and judicial), and consequently the media as well.

2. When the president belongs to one party and the parliamentary majority to another, a struggle and clashes ensue between the one controlling the executive authority (the president) and the one controlling the legislative authority (parliament). Also, both will be competing to have influence over the judiciary and media, depending on constitutional allowances and the political skills of the actors involved.

Due to all that, Western theorists acknowledge that the principle of separation of powers is more theoretical than practical. In fact, the principle often achieves the opposite of its intended purpose.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, during times of crisis — whether genuine or fabricated — it becomes apparent that power is in the hands of the executive authority. In states of emergency, the head of state (nominally the head of the executive authority) has the power to suspend laws, enact new ones, override the constitution, declare a state of emergency, impose martial law, and even dissolve the parliament. This means that, in reality, the executive authority is the one that holds all power. It is the entity that grants permission for the other authorities to function, and if it deems that the situation does not allow the other authorities to operate, it can suspend them. Moreover, the executive authority has exclusive control over defining what constitutes a state of emergency, its duration, the ability to extend it, and the authority to declare its conclusion as well.<sup>2</sup>

Now, let us compare this to the powers of a ruler (or caliph) in the Islamic system in terms of legislative, judicial, executive, and media authority:

Undoubtedly, he holds executive power, as under his authority are the governors, military leaders, police, and the revenues collected by the state from the people!

However, the caliph does not hold legislative authority because the laws governing the Islamic state are derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah, which cannot be altered, replaced, or manipulated. Scholars and jurists throughout history extracted jurisprudence and rulings from these sources. They extracted these rulings independent of government influence. The Companions learned this scholarly tradition from the Prophet ﷺ, and from them, the Successors (Tabi'un) learned, and from the Successors, the Followers of the Successors (Atba' al-Tabi'in) gained their knowledge. It was during the time of the Followers of the Successors that the great imams of jurisprudence emerged, such as Abu Hanifa, Malik, Al-Awza'i, Al-Thawri, and others. They were followed by their students, including Abu Yusuf, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan, Al-Shafi'i, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, and others.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer here: Wael Hallaq, *The Impossible State*, p. 85 and onwards.

<sup>2</sup> On this concept, the renowned Italian thinker Giorgio Agamben authored his book *State of Exception*. For those interested in further exploration, it is recommended to consult this work.

Any caliph or ruler in the history of Muslims, therefore, would inevitably find themselves faced with the Islamic law, Sharia, that they neither created nor could alter or ignore. If they attempted to do so, they risked their own position and reign, exposing themselves to the anger and dissatisfaction of the people, and possibly even their rebellion and uprising. The only thing that a ruler can do is to attempt to circumvent this Shariah by seeking loopholes and interpretations through corrupt scholars and those aligned with the authorities. However, in doing so, both the ruler and these scholars would be exposed and widely discredited. The reason is that scholars, in reality, were not a confined class, nor an institutionalised organisation, nor did they have a leader who could govern and bind them. Instead, they formed a broad social current, free from any external authority over their learning and teaching of Shariah!

Moreover, the ruler in the Islamic state does not control the judicial authority, he can only appoint judges. However, these judges were scholars who had studied and progressed through mosques and circles of knowledge, acquiring their education independently of state influence. The authorities did not design educational curricula or dictate what should or should not be taught. Rather, these individuals received their knowledge from their teachers, who had in turn learned from their teachers, tracing back through the generations to the Tabi'un (Successors) and ultimately to the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ!

Thus, the ruler was compelled to select judges from among those who interpreted the Sharia and effectively held the “legislative authority.” As a result, the state was unable to shape or train judges within an authoritarian institution, such as a school, university, or ministry. Nor could it control the content of the laws they applied, as these laws were not formulated within the corridors of power or tailored to serve its interests. Instead, they were a body of knowledge inherited and connected through generations of scholars, ultimately tracing back to the Prophet ﷺ.

Finally, the ruler does not possess control over the media either! The power to shape and influence public consciousness was the domain of scholars, preachers, and even storytellers, not the caliph or ruler in the Islamic system. The most the ruler could do was issue statements, whenever necessary, informing the people about decisions made or prohibitions imposed. He had no means of directly influencing public awareness and minds other than selecting poets and writers to praise him, and the people would circulate those praises. The poet of the king or sultan was just one among many groups that held the people's ears and could shape their consciousness and emotions. The most powerful of these groups were undoubtedly the scholars who ascended the pulpits in the masjids, taught knowledge, and preached to the people. Furthermore, even though the poet's praise might delight the people, they were not necessarily convinced by it, as they knew the poet's position and motives, recognising that his words were often more a desire for rewards than genuine truth.

Thus, it is clear that the most despotic rulers in Islamic history had far fewer powers than many of the rulers in contemporary democracies.

(4)

We have thus concluded that even the most authoritarian rulers in Islamic history did not possess the same powers and dominance as many of today's democratic leaders in modern states. This is because the scope of authority in the Islamic system is far more limited than in the modern state.

1. In terms of function, Islamic governance was restricted to managing major collective affairs, such as security and defence. In contrast, modern state authority extends beyond security and defence to controlling nearly all aspects of human activity, including the economy, education, culture, media, healthcare, and more. Its laws regulate human life from birth to death.
2. In terms of power distribution, Islamic governance had no control over legislation, judiciary, or much of the media, whereas the modern state ultimately exerts authority over all these areas.

This is where we had previously stopped. Now, let us expand on these points further:

3. Even the most authoritarian ruler in Islamic civilisation was still — whether willingly or unwillingly — bound by deep-rooted moral constraints that are held strongly by society, constraints that many contemporary democratic rulers do not adhere to. This is because the rights and obligations established by Islam had, over time, transformed into deeply ingrained traditions and customs. They gained religious sanctity and societal force, making deviation from them a dangerous matter that rulers feared and authorities avoided as much as possible.
4. Moreover, the ruler in the Islamic system did not find subordinates who would blindly obey his orders as easily as employees in modern democratic states do today. This was due to the structure of the Islamic social system and the state's weak control over society, which in turn limited its influence over the formation of elites and state officials.

Thus, there is a vast difference between an instructor in a traditional Islamic school (kuttab), mosque, or madrasa, and a state-employed teacher in modern schools. The religious, intellectual, and social formation of the teacher in an Islamic society made him less loyal to the ruling authority and more independent from it. The state did not control his livelihood, intellectual formation, or social status.

The same applies to much of the Islamic elite, who played a major role in shaping society, electing its rulers, and leading its moral compass. Similarly, there

is an equally vast difference between a traditional preacher and a modern media personality, or even between a storyteller of the past and a contemporary actor!

This distinction becomes even clearer when comparing Islamic jurists (fuqaha) with modern legal experts. Their academic and social upbringing, as well as their path to societal prominence and political influence, differed significantly. In today's secular context, legal experts who draft laws for the ruling authority are generally not perceived as committing an immoral act. Rather, their close association with power and their role in legislation are seen as marks of expertise and competence. However, in the Islamic system, scholars who aligned themselves with rulers were often criticised and labelled as 'scholars of the sultan.' While Islamic jurists and judges tended to strive for justice, reform, and the least harmful solution, modern secular law often serves as a means to legitimise political realities and codify power struggles rather than uphold justice. Secular law is issued by a human authority at a particular moment of political contention.

In conclusion, even the most authoritarian rulers in Islamic history did not find the same degree of compliance from the societal elite and state officials as modern democratic rulers do. In contrast, contemporary state officials are conditioned to see themselves as employees who must obey the system.

The prevailing and deeply rooted sentiment in Islamic society — derived from the Islamic faith — was that governance and authority were mere tools for implementing divine law (Sharia). Thus, allegiance was not to the ruler or the government but to the supreme religious reference: Islam itself!

This belief system evolved into a structured tradition, explaining why historical Islamic rulers and authorities faced greater resistance and less obedience compared to modern governments.

At the same time, this principle also explains why obedience to the ruler occurred in other contexts. For example, jihad — one of the most demanding obligations — was undertaken enthusiastically by the Muslim community. However, it was not performed out of loyalty to the state or the ruler, but as an obligation to God Almighty. The Muslim community did not engage in jihad to expand the state's borders or enhance the authority of the ruling class, but rather to spread Islam, defeat criminals, and rescue the oppressed.

This marks a fundamental and crucial difference in understanding the relationship between the Muslim and the ruler, between the Muslim community and authority.

## **The Influence of Islam's Economic and Social System on the Political System**

We have stated that the Islamic system restricted the ruler's powers to the executive authority, thereby making his influence over other centres of power — legislative, judicial, and media — extremely weak and limited. However, this is only half of the picture!

The other half lies in how Islam established a strong, cohesive society with solid bonds and relationships, ensuring that the strength of the community supports its own progress and prevents it from collapsing or becoming corrupt under the power of authority. This makes it exceedingly difficult for the ruling authority to oppress or enslave the people, as such acts would constitute a violation of both Sharia and the deeply rooted social system.

Just as Islam established a government with limited powers, it also built a powerful and cohesive society.

We approach this topic from this perspective: examining the economic and social system in terms of its influence on the political system. Otherwise, the discussion on the economic and social system extends far beyond its political effects.

When viewed from this angle, the matter is truly remarkable, for hardly any act of worship, ritual, or transaction exists without playing a role in strengthening and unifying society and reinforcing relationships among people. We ask Allah for success in clarifying this matter, and we say, with His help...

### **(1)**

Islam came and made it one of its fundamental principles that a Muslim is the brother of another Muslim, and that all Muslims are like brothers to one another. This general brotherhood among Muslims takes precedence even over the bond of kinship between a Muslim and a disbeliever.

Islam established numerous rights and duties based on this brotherhood, extending even to minor details such as visiting the sick, following funeral processions, returning greetings, and saying “may Allah have mercy on you” to one who sneezes. In addition to fundamental rights such as not oppressing one another or betraying one another, Islam has declared that a Muslim's blood, wealth, and honour are inviolable to another Muslim. It commands standing against the oppressor, supporting the oppressed, and fighting those who rebel unjustly. Great rewards are promised to those who assist their brothers, relieve their distress, or conceal their faults. Islam warns against envy, hatred, and disputes, and considers belittling a fellow Muslim a grave sin. The ultimate goal is for Muslims to be like a single body — if one part suffers, the rest of the body

responds with fever and pain — or like a solid structure, reinforcing one another. These teachings, derived from the Quran and Hadith, are ingrained in a Muslim's life, and continuously reinforced through sermons, lessons and preaching.

There is no doubt that the influence of these religious teachings on a Muslim and within an Islamic society is incomparable to the effect of 'nationalistic' teachings in an individualistic, materialistic, and consumerist society that neither believes in the unseen nor in the Hereafter.

Muslims have applied these teachings since the very inception of the Islamic state in Medina, where a unique and unparalleled brotherhood was established between the Muhajirun (migrants, Muslims of Mecca) and the Ansar (helpers, Muslims of Madina). The newly formed Islamic state, despite its lack of resources, was able to absorb the crisis of the migrating refugees — something that remains an overwhelming challenge even for modern states with vast resources.

Since then, this religious brotherhood has worked to strengthen and unify the Muslim community, inspiring every Muslim to enjoin good and forbid evil — viewing this as both a right and a duty towards every fellow Muslim. Even today, this religious bond drives Muslims to leave their homes and homelands, engaging in jihad to defend other Muslims across the world, despite having no common race, language, or shared interests.

This religious bond was entirely established by Islam. But what did Islam do with the other bonds that existed before it or those based on something other than religion?

Here, we find that Islam also paid great attention to strengthening and reinforcing these bonds:

1. Islam encouraged maintaining family ties. Even though it emerged in a tribal society where tribalism was a barrier to its spread, Islam ensured the reinforcement of kinship bonds and the preservation of the tribe. Islam never attempted to break these bonds. However, it was careful to prevent kinship ties from overriding justice. Many Islamic teachings emphasise honouring and caring for parents, maintaining ties of kinship, and treating relatives with kindness. The Quran and Hadith associate maintaining family ties with increased wealth and longer life, while severing them is linked to corruption on earth.

This was implemented from the very first days of the Islamic state in Medina, where the Prophet allocated lands to the Muhajirun according to their tribal affiliations.<sup>1</sup> The social structure, thus, reinforced the tribal bond. This system continued in Islamic states, where Muslims established and divided cities

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Shabbah, *History of Medina*, 1/260 and beyond.

according to tribal affiliations, as seen in Basra, Kufa, Fustat, Kairouan, Baghdad, Qata'i, Askar, Wasit, Mansura, Mosul, and Cordoba.<sup>1</sup> Even in military campaigns and conquests, Muslim armies were organised along tribal lines, with each tribe forming a unit under its own banner.<sup>2</sup> Wealth, spoils of war, and administrative positions were often distributed based on tribal affiliation.<sup>3</sup> Historical records mention instances where a companion of the Prophet sought protection from his tribe against an unjust ruler,<sup>4</sup> or even called upon pre-Islamic tribal alliances to seek justice.<sup>5</sup> Undoubtedly, tribal solidarity prevented much oppression by rulers and governors or even deterred them from thinking about it in the first place. It also made justice and peaceful resolution of disputes the preferred course of action.<sup>6</sup>

2. Islam also emphasised the rights of neighbours, granting them unparalleled importance in any other religion or philosophy. Among the rights of a neighbour is that one cannot sleep well-fed while his neighbour is hungry. Also, a Muslim's faith is incomplete if his neighbour does not feel safe from his harm. The Prophet even thought that neighbours might be included among one's heirs due to the frequent divine revelations regarding their rights. The concept of neighbourliness in Islam includes Muslims and non-Muslims, the pious and the sinful, friends and foes, locals and foreigners, and both the good and harmful neighbours.<sup>7</sup>

This bond often incorporates the previously mentioned ties as well. As mentioned earlier, the natural arrangement in Islamic cities was that members of the same tribe lived together in one area, meaning that neighbours often shared the ties of religion, kinship, and proximity.

The result of reinforcing these bonds, and their interconnection and consolidation, creates a unique social fabric, moral traditions, a spirit of solidarity, and distinctive psychological traits. It also generates economic interests. All this collectively establishes a dominant atmosphere of cohesion and mutual support. This environment makes it difficult for tyranny and despotism to take root within such a society.

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<sup>1</sup> Shaker Mustafa, *Cities in Islam*, 1/321, 348 and beyond; Mohammad Abdul Sattar Othman, *The Islamic City*, pp. 49, 57, 58, 61; Abdul Jabbar Naji, *Arab-Islamic Cities*, pp. 163, 191, 214, 257, 305, 329, 403, 428, 471.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Tabari*, 2/278; Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya wa'l-Nihaya*, 6/357; Akram Al-Omari, *The Era of the Rightly Guided Caliphate*, pp. 407, 408; Ahmad Adel Kamal, *The Road to Al-Mada'in*, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Akram Al-Omari, *The Era of the Rightly Guided Caliphate*, p. 231.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, 5/123.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Albani, *Sahih al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah*, pp. 36, 37.

<sup>6</sup> For example: Ibn Khalkan, *Wafayat al-A'yan*, 2/500; Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala*, 8/373 and beyond.

<sup>7</sup> Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, 10/441.

(2)

In addition to this, the acts of worship and all Islamic transactions nurture and reinforce, within the Islamic society, a deep religious conviction, spiritual refinement, and moral dominance. As previously mentioned, almost every act of worship, ritual, or interaction has an impact on strengthening, uniting, and solidifying the community.

1. The mosque is the first and central institution in Islam, and it was the very first ‘institution’ built within the framework of the Islamic state, if we may use that term. In fact, it would be more precise to say that the mosque encompassed all institutions. It served as the centre of political and military leadership, a platform for media and communication, an educational institution, and a social welfare association for the poor — who lived and ate there. Medical treatment was also offered in the mosque, and at times, it was even used as a prison for captives. In many Islamic communities today, depending on the level of freedom they have, the mosque still plays these roles.

Performing prayer in the mosque is either obligatory or a highly emphasised Sunnah. It gathers the people of the same neighbourhood five times a day. In the early days of Islam, a Muslim in Medina would attend prayer even if he was weak, supported by two men to stand in the prayer row<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, Friday prayers bring together the people of a town or a large district in the main congregational mosque. In the early Islamic period, cities had only one central mosque, but as populations grew, multiple congregational mosques were built in a single city. The main point is that in a large district or a small town, the entire community meets at least once a week. One can imagine the level of familiarity, unity, and cooperation that develops among people who see each other five times a day in a neighbourhood and weekly in a town! These gatherings foster strong social ties and a sense of solidarity.

2. Similarly, zakat (charitable almsgiving) is considered the ‘right of God’ in wealth. It is taken from the wealthy and redistributed to the poor, the needy, debtors, travellers, and others in need. It also funds those who administer zakat, those whose hearts need to be reconciled (such as new converts or those who need encouragement to remain steadfast in Islam), and other societal needs. The default rule in zakat is that it should be spent within the local community and not transferred elsewhere unless there is no need in the local area<sup>2</sup>. Zakat has both social and economic effects: it strengthens

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<sup>1</sup> *Sahih Muslim* (654).

<sup>2</sup> This was stated by the Malikis, Shafi'is, and Hanbalis, while the Hanafis said that it is mildly discouraged (*makruh tanzihan*) to transfer it to another land. See: *Kuwaiti Fiqh Encyclopedia*, 23/331.

social bonds, reduces class disparities, stimulates economic activity, and serves multiple beneficial purposes.

3. Fasting (sawm) also plays a role in strengthening social bonds. Shared customs and traditions create a sense of unity among people. Acts of kindness, such as providing iftar (breaking fast) for others, engaging in communal prayers like Tarawih, attending Quran study circles, and increasing acts of worship and charity during Ramadan, all contribute to reinforcing these ties and renewing relationships. Ramadan offers an opportunity to reconcile differences and mend disputes. The spiritual and ethical atmosphere fostered by acts of worship deeply influences social relations. Furthermore, acts of charity, such as giving sadaqah (voluntary charity) and the obligatory zakat al-fitr (charity given at the end of Ramadan), contribute significantly to economic activity within the community and help finance its self-sustaining initiatives.
4. Hajj (pilgrimage) brings together people from all corners of the Muslim world, allowing for extensive social interaction. Pilgrims form connections along the journey, at major gathering points, and during the pilgrimage itself. This fosters long-distance relationships, knowledge exchange, and the sharing of experiences. Additionally, it facilitates trade, intermarriage, acts of charity, the pursuit of knowledge, and other activities. The pilgrimage routes historically became economic and social lifelines, giving rise to commercial hubs, educational institutions, and charitable establishments. Without Hajj, endowments dedicated to supporting pilgrims, maintaining pilgrimage routes, digging wells, and providing for the people of Mecca and Medina would not have existed. These endowments also played a crucial role in sustaining and maintaining the two holy cities<sup>1</sup>.

For brevity, this discussion has been limited to the pillars of Islam, which are obligatory for every Muslim. If we were to delve into the broader impacts of other acts of worship, rituals, and Islamic manners and virtues, the discussion would be endless.

The key point here is that a society, in which these religious practices are consistently and repeatedly performed, is inherently cohesive and resilient. Such a society cannot gravitate toward individualism. Consequently, it becomes highly resistant to tyranny and oppression.

This explains why, even in its darkest times, the Muslim ummah never experienced the same level of despotism that befell other nations such as Persia, India, China, and Europe. The Islamic world never witnessed the emergence of

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<sup>1</sup> We have mentioned in other books, lectures, and television interviews many detailed accounts of the profound impacts of these acts of worship on Islamic society throughout history. These details can be reviewed in their respective sources.

rigid social hierarchies or humiliating forms of slavery as seen in other civilisations. We can even go so far as to say that these states, which present themselves with a deceptive façade of democracy, implement oppressive practices in a way that has never existed in our Islamic world throughout its history.

It is crucial to emphasise here the unique advantage Islam offers as a religion, setting it apart from all other man-made ideologies. The impact of Islamic rituals and worship practices in strengthening society is unparalleled by anything produced by Western social structures, such as professional unions or civil society organisations. These religious practices are embedded in the fabric of Islamic society, forming its identity, traditions, and customs. Their power and significance are derived from the religious belief itself. The ruling authority has no power to abolish them, nor can it obstruct them. In fact, protecting and upholding these practices is a fundamental duty of the state. A government's failure to safeguard them delegitimises its authority and justifies resistance against it.

In contrast, in contemporary Western democratic systems, social structures such as unions and civil organisations lack sanctity. They can only function with government approval and within the framework of laws imposed by the state. The government has the authority to restrict or dissolve them at will or under exceptional circumstances.

### (3)

There are numerous teachings in Islam that strengthen society, enhance its effectiveness, grant it a degree of independence from authority, and empower it to function without waiting for the permission or approval of the ruling power. At times, these teachings even provide legitimacy for society to act against and resist authority.

Among the many examples that could be given, we will focus on just four: endowments (waqf), reviving dead land, rightful seizure, and taxation.

1. Endowments (Waqf): Islam introduced the concept of waqf, which allows a Muslim to relinquish ownership of a property so that its benefits or profits are spent on charitable causes. This endowment holds religious sanctity, as it is considered a transfer of ownership to Allah, and the role of the ruling authority is to regulate, oversee, and protect it, ensuring its proper management. Historically, this task has been a responsibility assigned to judges, who were independent of political power and well-versed in Islamic law.

Thus, waqf became a financial asset belonging to the Muslim community, independent of state control, to be spent according to the wishes of the endower.

Throughout Islamic history, the waqf system grew so extensively that it encompassed much of the wealth of Muslim societies. When the Ottoman Sultan Selim I entered Egypt, he found that most of its land was endowed property<sup>1</sup>.

This Islamic system ensured that the community retained control over its wealth, granting it a means of societal development and charitable spending without reliance on the state. The waqf remained protected and respected as scholars consistently resisted rulers and sultans who attempted to seize waqf assets, using every means to deter them. The authorities were unable to seize the endowments except after dismantling the Islamic system during the eras of foreign colonization and the governments subordinate to foreign colonization.

The waqf system facilitated a comprehensive civilisational advancement, providing self-sustaining financial resources for the Muslim ummah, even during periods of weak ruling authorities. Endowments funded scholars, warriors, students, the poor, the needy, those seeking marriage, orphans, widows, prisoners of war, divorcees, and even cattle and animals!

A waqf system like the one that existed in Islamic civilisation cannot be approved by the modern state, as it would deprive the government in the modern state system of a significant portion of financial resources, placing vast wealth beyond its control and administration.

This illustrates how waqf is an embodiment of removing sovereignty from humans and strongly acknowledging the role of Allah, the Almighty, as the Owner of this wealth. It is an integration of the seen and unseen worlds — something the modern state does not comprehend or recognise.

2. Reviving Dead Land: Islamic law allows a person to claim ownership of land by cultivating it. In Islamic jurisprudence, land and wealth belong to the Muslim community, and there is no concept of 'state property' or 'government-owned land.' Thus, for example, a debate occurred between Abu al-Darda and Mu'awiya (may Allah be pleased with them), regarding the term 'public wealth.' Mu'awiya called it 'Allah's wealth,' while Abu al-Darda referred to it as 'the wealth of Muslims.' Their disagreement arose because defining it as 'Muslim wealth' restricted the ruler's authority over it.

Similarly, if a person digs a canal or a well, they have the right to benefit from it, provided they do not deny access to those in need.

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<sup>1</sup> In the narration of Al-Ishaqi, it is stated that 40% of Egypt's land was endowed (waqf), while in the narration of Al-Safti, two-thirds of the land was endowed. See:

- Al-Ishaqi, *Akhbar Al-Awal*, p. 143.
- Isa Al-Safti, *Atiyyat Al-Rahman fi Sihah Al-Arsad lil-Jawamik wal-Atyan*, Manuscript at Al-Azhar Library, Private (372), General (49572), Folio 20, p. 38.

Crucially, most jurists — including the Malikis, Shafi‘is, and Hanbalis — agree that reviving dead land does not require the ruler’s permission. This demonstrates that Islamic governance does not constrain society’s progress but rather organises and facilitates it.

This setup is not accepted by the modern state system as it controls and owns all resources within its borders. In order for anyone to use any of these resources, he has to follow a complex system of permits and approvals. The state even confiscates private property if valuable resources, such as oil or antiquities, are discovered. Islamic law, however, grants ownership of discovered treasures to the landowner, subject to a 20% tax (*zakat al-rikaz*).

3. Rightful Seizure (*Al-Zafar bil-Haqq*): Islam permits an individual to reclaim their rightful property, if they are unable to prove their claim in court in front of a judge. The Hanafi, Maliki, and Shafi‘i schools consider this permissible, while the Zahiri school even deems it obligatory, arguing that failure to do so emboldens the oppressor. Shafi‘i scholars allow breaking into a house or dismantling a door to reclaim one's property if necessary.

This principle applies to disputes between individuals, such as cases of usurpation or injustice. However, if a Muslim is entitled to public funds, all four schools permit them to take his rightful share, as all wealth is owned by the Muslims. Thus, a Muslim is allowed to take his share of public funds which was either denied to him or neglected to be given to him.

Take note, dear reader, that this lawful act in Islam is considered a fully constituted crime under the legal systems of the modern state.

Here, we see an Islamic teaching that encourages individuals to reclaim their rights and wealth — even if it has been usurped by the government or when their rightful share of public wealth has been neglected.

4. Taxes and Tariffs: Islam mandates a limited set of financial obligations, such as *zakat*, *kharaj* (land tax), and *‘ushr* (customs duty), which are explicitly defined in the Qur’an and Sunnah, not imposed by political authorities or parliamentary legislation.

Islam strongly opposes taxation (*Mukus*), classifying it as a major sin, even greater than theft or adultery. If a ruler imposes an unlawful tax, resisting and refusing to pay it, is a legitimate right of Muslims.

The modern state, however, cannot function without continuously increasing taxes to sustain its growing expenses and to maintain its growing administrative system. Under modern democratic systems, it is a simple matter for a governing ruler to impose; it requires only a parliamentary majority or even just an executive decision. Once enacted, tax evasion becomes a punishable offence.

### **Conclusion:**

These examples — and many others — clearly illustrate the unique structure of the Islamic political, economic, and social system. They also highlight how Islam shapes a distinct individual character that fundamentally differs from that shaped by modern state structures and vision.

A ‘good citizen,’ in the Islamic model, is revolutionary in nature; he takes action to enjoin good and forbid evil. A Muslim does not see himself as subservient to the state but rather as its overseer, both the Muslim and the Islamic state are in submission to Allah’s law. A Muslim is also a member of a cohesive community with strong social ties — whether through tribe, neighbourhood, or the bonds of Islamic brotherhood.

By contrast, a ‘good citizen’ in the Western model is entirely subject to the state and its laws, no matter how often it is changed or altered. His reference is always the state law. The state, on the other hand, is its own authority, and citizens have no recourse but to follow legally permitted channels of objection. Every life detail of the citizen in this model is fully exposed to government surveillance, which can, at the push of a button, completely disrupt his life. Ultimately, he lives in isolation, an individualistic life, bound only by fragile and superficial social ties — if he has any — that offer no protection against the state's power.

This explains why colonial powers and their local allies were keen on dismantling Islamic social and economic structures to forcibly impose the modern state. Yet, despite this, the modern state has struggled to fully take root in the Muslim world, as Islamic societies continue to resist it. This is why the Islamic model remains the most viable alternative to immoral modernism.

Our discussion of the Islamic alternative is not mere religious fanaticism. Rather, it stems from an undeniable conviction that Islam is the saviour of humanity and the enemy of oppressors!

### **(4)**

Whoever examines the nature of the Islamic city will find that it reflects the dominant Islamic system. The Islamic city was often surrounded by walls, with neighbourhoods having gated entrances. These neighbourhoods’ alleys were typically organised along tribal lines, which allowed them to close their gates during times of security unrest or even when choosing to rebel against the ruling authority. As a result, soldiers could not easily breach these areas without considerable effort and military struggle.

The city managed its own affairs independently, with strong bonds of kinship, neighbourhood ties, and the bond of similar trades among its inhabitants, making it a self-sustaining independent society — economically, socially, and in terms of security.

Unlike modern cities, the Islamic city was not exposed to state control, nor were its streets open for government patrols to easily penetrate its depths. It also did not have the wide streets that allowed armies to effortlessly navigate and break through.

The Islamic city reflected the Islamic system, which minimised society's dependence on the state, reduced the state's interference in daily life, and established a society with a social, economic, and security coalition.

In contrast, the modern city is a product of the modern Western system, which centralises power in the hands of the state and grants it extensive authority to infiltrate and control all aspects of society. As a result, the modern city became an open, exposed, and easily controlled space — an inevitable outcome of a fiercely overreaching state and a weak, individualistic society.

## **Systems of Oversight and Resistance**

Because error is inherent to human nature, no society has emerged without the need for precautions, laws, and restrictions to prevent wrongdoers from persisting in their mistakes. This is the primary function of laws, which humanity employs to minimise errors and deviations to the greatest extent possible.

Islam, in this regard, possesses its own uniqueness and distinction. No matter how divine the religion is, those who implement it are human beings, who are not infallible; corruption seeps into them, Satan deceives them, their evil inclinations stir within them, and their desires overpower them. For this reason, Islam established a system that keeps mistakes and deviations at their minimum.

We will present an overview of this matter from two perspectives:

1. The uniqueness of Islam in upholding the value of enjoining good and forbidding evil, making it central to its structure and the lives of its followers.
2. The uniqueness of Islam in establishing a system and distinctive position for the social elite responsible for resisting deviation — the scholars — by ensuring their social and economic status is, at its best, enabling them to fulfil their duty of commanding right and forbidding wrong.

We will clearly see that these two aspects — the widespread value of commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong within the Islamic society, as well as, the distinguished position of scholars — are unique to Islam compared to all other systems. These monitoring systems are not even comparable to how things are run in contemporary democratic states that allow the broadest amount of freedom to civil society organisations.

(1)

By *removing sovereignty from human hands*, the general Muslim society attained an exceptional ability to evaluate the governing authority, monitor it, advise it, and reform it — even to the extent of rising against it. The reason for this is that deviation from Sharia nullifies a ruler's legitimacy and incites the believers against him.

Sharia, as we have mentioned, is a *supreme and overarching* reference, governing both authority and society alike. It is not a document issued by the state, nor was it written by the ruling power, nor does the state have any control over its interpretation. Thus, when believers resist deviations from Sharia, they are not merely asserting a right, but rather fulfilling an obligation — for a right may be waived, but *an obligation* must be fulfilled.

Since Islamic society, as previously discussed, was strong and cohesive, it had a high capacity for *rebellion and resistance against unjust rule*. In fact, this revolutionary potential was so formidable that scholars frequently debated whether it could lead to chaos. As a result, Islamic jurists extensively discussed the limits of obedience to rulers, balancing between two fundamental concerns:

1. Avoiding greater harm — Revolting against the ruler should not result in a situation worse than the existing one.
2. Preventing tyranny — Obedience should not allow the ruler to become even more corrupt and oppressive.

A simplified summary of the Sunni position, which represents the mainstream view of the majority of Muslims, is that oppression alone is a sufficient reason to revolt as long as doing so does not lead to greater corruption<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, obedience to authority is required only in righteous matters — a ruler must not be obeyed in committing sin<sup>2</sup>. If a ruler is unjust, his only legitimate rights over his subjects are:

- Leading legitimate jihad with him
- Giving the legally mandated zakat

This was the conclusion reached by the scholars.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars even formulated a crucial principle, best summarized by Ibn Taymiyyah:

*'An upright ruler must be obeyed in all matters unless it is known to be a sin,*

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<sup>1</sup> See: Ibn Hazm, *Al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Nihal*, 4/132 and beyond.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Bukhari (4085), (6647), (6725), (6726), (6774), (2796), (6830); Muslim (1839), (1840).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example: Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Al-Tawdih*, 23/283; Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, 13/6; Al-'Ayni, *Umdat al-Qari*, 24/177.

*while an unjust ruler must only be obeyed in what is known to be righteous, such as jihad.*<sup>1</sup>

Before him, Al-‘Izz ibn Abd al-Salam stated:

*‘We only recognise the actions of rulers to the extent that we would recognise the actions of just rulers and fair judges.’*<sup>2</sup>

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi also asserted:

*‘The entire Muslim nation agrees that obedience to rulers and sultans is only required in matters that are known by clear evidence to be just and correct.’*<sup>3</sup>

This distinction forms a foundational principle in regulating the relationship between rulers and the governed, based on whether the ruler is just or not. No modern democratic legal system has reached this superior level. We see that governing authorities can make decisions on divisive and controversial issues, as well as matters that people have different views about. Modern democratic systems typically force people to obey authority, except when a law is explicitly violated. In contrast, the Islamic scholars’ position grants people the right not to obey an unjust ruler unless his commands clearly align with Sharia, and it does not compel a Muslim to obey in matters open to interpretation and differing opinions.

History has demonstrated that the Muslim community is uniquely distinguished in its widespread practice of enjoining good and forbidding evil. This observation is affirmed not only by classical Muslim scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah, but also by modern orientalist academics like Michael Cook. Ibn Taymiyyah noted:

*‘No other nation has commanded every individual to uphold all that is good, nor prohibited every individual from all that is evil, nor fought for this purpose.’*<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, after conducting extensive research over ten years, Michael Cook concluded that Western and other Eastern cultures ‘lack a clear concept of a moral duty that obligates individuals not only to act righteously towards others but also to prevent others from committing wrongdoing or injustice. While the moral value exists in our culture, it has not been developed into a sophisticated, comprehensive framework.’<sup>5</sup> Cook only realised this value as a result of his researching studies on Islam.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmu‘ al-Fatawa*, 29/196.

<sup>2</sup> Al-‘Izz ibn ‘Abd al-Salam, *Qawa‘id al-Ahkam*, 1/107.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, 10/114.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, *Al-Amr bil-Ma’roof wa al-Nahi ‘an al-Munkar*, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Cook: *Commanding the Good and Forbidding the Evil in Islamic Thought*, p. 25, 26, 803 and following.

The Quranic and Prophetic texts emphasise the necessity of commanding individuals to do good and forbidding them from doing evil to such an extent that Muslims have memorised sayings such as: ‘Religion is sincere advice.’ Also, it has become engrained in their minds that they are obliged to stand against wrongdoings as much as they can, if they cannot change it with their hands, then with their tongue, if they cannot, then they reject it with their hearts. Whoever does not reject evil and wrongdoing with his heart, he does not have an atom of faith in his heart. Also, it is in the Muslim mind that if people allow wrongdoing to spread among them without objecting, they are like a group of people who allow some among them to make a hole in the ship that carries them all. Also, the righteous may perish if the wickedness among the people increases, and the punishment of Allah will descend upon everyone if they do not prevent the oppressor and stand against him.<sup>1</sup> Thus, scholars have declared that commanding the good and forbidding the evil is an obligation upon every Muslim.<sup>2</sup> Some scholars even warned: ‘Anyone who tells a person commanding good, “Mind your own business,” is at risk of disbelief.’<sup>3</sup>

This duty was so central that scholars debated when a person is excused from enjoining good and forbidding evil if doing so could result in death or severe harm. This is a research point<sup>4</sup> that is not relevant here, but we only mention it to show how fundamental and pivotal for Muslims this religious obligation of commanding others to do good and forbid them from doing evil. Imam Al-Ghazali described it as: ‘Commanding the good and forbidding the evil is the greatest pillar of religion, the very purpose for which all prophets were sent. If it were neglected or left off, prophethood would cease, religion would disappear, ignorance would spread, corruption would dominate, chaos would reign, and destruction would engulf society. People would not even realise their downfall until the Day of Judgment.’<sup>5</sup>

Whoever studies communities throughout history and up to the present times would clearly see that the Arab and Muslim societies have maintained deep-rooted traditions of striving for righteousness, discouraging wrongdoing, and upholding collective moral responsibility — contrary to Western individualism. Over time, enjoining good and forbidding evil has evolved into a deeply embedded social norm, making it rare to find individuals in Muslim societies who blatantly disregard moral values in public. This phenomenon can even serve as a measure of Westernisation in Muslim societies: the more openly wrongdoing is

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<sup>1</sup> See: Bukhari (2361), (3168), (6774), Muslim (49), (50), (55), (2880).

<sup>2</sup> See for example: Ibn Hazm, *Al-Muhalla*, 8/423; Al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an*, 4/84; Ibn Taymiyyah, *Al-Amr bi-l-Ma'roof wa-l-Nahy 'an al-Munkar*, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Abidin, *Hashiyat Ibn Abidin*, 5/106.

<sup>4</sup> See on this issue: Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, 2/319 and beyond.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, 2/306.

tolerated, the greater the level of Westernisation affecting that society. Conversely, societies that strongly uphold these values exhibit resilience against Westernisation.

## (2)

Likewise, the Islamic system established a distinguished position for scholars, who are the primary ones responsible for opposing, combating, and striving against wrongdoing. They are the heirs of the prophets — this is how they see themselves and how people see them, and it is their foremost mission in their society.

If we were to summarise the nature of Islamic scholars, their position in Islamic society, and their relationship with authority, we could clarify this through the following six points:

1. The first and most important foundation Islam established is the divine nature of scholars. Islam has nourished them with immense psychological strength by considering them the heirs of the prophets, entrusted with the mission of the messengers who are assigned by Allah to uphold and defend truth and justice. They are the first to be held accountable for this duty. While ordinary people may remain silent out of fear, this is not permissible for the leading scholars who serve as role models. Scholars deriving their mission directly from God grants them — both in their own eyes and in the eyes of the people — fixed, permanent, and enduring authority, or, if the expression is accurate, a form of supra-constitutional and supra-legal power. This source of legitimacy is stronger than any legal or constitutional authority derived from the parliament, the people, or the ruler which is subject to amendment, revocation, or suspension.

The Quranic and prophetic texts are filled with encouragement to seek knowledge, to deepen one's understanding of religion, and to do so purely for Allah's sake — not to compete with other scholars, debate with fools, or seek fame. Indeed, seeking knowledge for worldly gain carries severely punishable sins. Additionally, these texts urge respect for scholars, recognition of their virtue and status, having good faith in them and caution against speaking ill of them.

Thus, scholars attained a distinctive political power within the fabric of the Islamic political system. They always played a role, either in curbing the excesses of authority or in directly guiding and positively influencing it.

2. The Islamic system also ensured the independence of scholars' formation from political authority. If we look at the elite figures of a modern state, we find that they are shaped mentally, scientifically and psychologically by institutions designed by the state itself, starting from their school, university, and their official position. These institutions are designed by the

state to produce the administrative and political elite it needs, according to the mental, scientific and psychological framework that the state determines. However, scholars in Islamic civilisation were not products of state-controlled institutions such as schools, universities, or official appointments. The state, as previously mentioned, had limited scope and influence and did not dominate the intellectual and cultural movement of society. The state did not control education — neither in establishing educational institutions nor in setting curricula.

Most of the positions held by scholars — such as teaching, issuing religious verdicts, and serving as judges — were not products of a state-controlled career track beginning with formal education and progressing through the ranks of official positions. In the Islamic system, a scholar becomes a scholar through an independent process, untouched by state intervention. They study at a traditional kuttab (Quranic school) and then at a mosque or madrasa under the guidance of learned teachers whose chains of transmission trace back to the Companions of the Prophet and their successors. They teach their books or the books of the dominant Islamic school of thought in their region without government interference in their curriculum.

If a scholar rises to prominence and is appointed as a judge, this merely means that they are placed in an administrative role for which they are qualified by their knowledge and status — achieved independently of state patronage. Furthermore, he judges according to the knowledge he has learnt, not according to statutes issued by the state. Thus, the state has no influence over his intellectual or psychological formation, nor over his work, which should be conducted with the sole accountability to God.

This independence in intellectual and psychological formation is unparalleled, even by the relative independence enjoyed by judges, academics, or legal professionals in a modern democratic state.

3. As previously mentioned — and this point warrants repetition — scholars in Islamic history assumed three key authorities: legislative, judicial, and informational, while the ruling authority retained only executive power.
  - They held legislative authority because they were responsible for issuing religious verdicts and interpreting the Sharia.<sup>1</sup>
  - They held judicial authority because they served as judges, as they were the most knowledgeable about Sharia, and there is no separate system in the Islamic system for judicial appointments outside of the scholars' path.

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<sup>1</sup> We say “interpretation of Sharia,” which corresponds to “legislation” in the modern state. This is because, in the Islamic context, it is not permissible to say “legislation,” as God is the Legislator. Rather, scholars strive to understand God's intent—they interpret Sharia, but they do not legislate.

- They held informational authority because they were the ones delivering Friday sermons and prayer congregations, as well as preaching on religious and social occasions. This represented the most significant form of media in pre-modern times, before the emergence of newspapers and broadcasting.

Additionally, they were responsible for education through kuttabs (Quranic schools) and madrasas (Islamic schools). Thus, they are the ones who produced and shaped knowledge. In all these areas, the state does not intervene, and its role is limited to administrative organisation or restricted exceptional measures concerning specific times or a certain individual scholar. However, the content of religious rulings, teachings, and public discourse remained outside the state's influence.

4. Islamic scholars were deeply embedded in society due to the profound integration of religion within the Islamic community. Many fail to recognise that Islam holds a pervasive and entrenched presence in Muslim societies, unmatched by any other religion elsewhere — a fact often more evident to non-Muslims than to Muslims themselves.<sup>1</sup>

This deep religious integration strengthened the social position of scholars, as Muslims constantly relied on them for religious and worldly matters: they learn from them, follow them in prayers, seek their legal verdicts on worship and transactions, and rely on them for adjudicating disputes. In most cases, scholars enjoyed widespread trust, with people entrusting them with the distribution of their Zakat (obligatory charity in Islam) and Sadaqah (voluntary charity in Islam), or even preferring to give them their Zakat or Sadaqah in appreciation of their role (Sheikhs also managed various newly-introduced charitable dealings such as charity boxes and endowments at shrines, or the practice of hiring scholars to recite the Quran for the deceased and the like).

Due to Islam's ethical nature, scholars who were more ascetic and focused on the afterlife gained greater reverence and devotion from the people.

All this has led to a widespread social perception that scholars were the vanguard of society and the most suitable to confront rulers. The more courage a scholar showed against authority, the higher their standing in the eyes of the people.

Through this social stature, scholars had an honourable rank in society and formed a parallel authority to rulers throughout Islamic history, often serving as the natural leadership of the people against unjust rulers. This pattern is evident from the early revolts of the Quran reciters during the Umayyad era to the

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example: Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 2/205; Clot Bey, *A General Glimpse*, p. 290; Burton, *Burton's Journey*, p. 97; Thomas Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, p. 458; Le Bon, *The Civilization of the Arabs*, p. 417; Kissinger, *World Order*, p. 103.

opposition movements led by Al-Azhar scholars against the Mamluk rulers before the invasion of colonialism and modernity against our countries. As a result, Islamic societies maintained a strong resistance to tyranny and oppression.

5. A key characteristic of scholarly movements was their lack of a centralised hierarchical structure controlling religious discourse. Unlike the Catholic Church with its pope, Islamic scholars existed as a decentralised and deeply integrated movement within the broader society. This made it difficult for rulers to co-opt or control them, rendering state influence over religious discourse and knowledge production minimal.

Moreover, Islamic scholarly tradition developed a cultural aversion to scholars who aligned too closely with political power or accepted government positions. Any claims that political authority significantly influenced knowledge production in Islamic civilisation are more fictional than factual.<sup>1</sup> In fact, I assert that the Islamic civilisation is the only civilisation in which knowledge triumphed over state power. The best proof of this is that the higher rank and virtues of Ali ibn Abi Talib are more prominently recorded in the books of hadith than Mu'awiya or Al-Abbas — despite the latter being the founders of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, which opposed the descendants of Ali.

6. The Islamic system uniquely reinforced scholars' independence by providing them with economic support through endowments (waqf). This financial autonomy kept them free from reliance on the state, preventing rulers from fully co-opting them. Unlike government employees who depend on state salaries, scholars maintained their independence. Thus, the ruling authority was not able to always neutralise the scholars, it often asked only for their silence or withdrawal from public affairs.

These six aspects clearly illustrate that the status of scholars in Islamic civilisation is unmatched by any other group in any system — whether teachers, legal professionals, university professors, or others. Also, their role far exceeds that of trade unions, civil society organisations, or similar institutions developed in Western civilisation to limit state power.

It goes without saying that this reality does not imply an idealistic image devoid of scholars loyal to the authorities, free from the persecution of scholars by rulers, or from scholars failing in some of their revolts and oppositions. We are, after all, dealing with a human society. However, the point is that the position scholars

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<sup>1</sup> Among the distinguished studies that have examined the claim of political authority influencing the production of Islamic knowledge are: *Al-Muhaddithun and Politics* by Dr. Ibrahim Al-Ajlan, *Political Authority and the Movement of Hadith Narration and Criticism* by Dr. Ahmad Sanobar, *Imam al-Bukhari and Political Authority* by Dr. Nabil Belhi, *The Political Interpretation of Doctrinal Issues* by Dr. Sultan Al-Omari. Additionally, I have presented two research papers: *The Hadiths on Obedience to Rulers in Al-Bukhari*, delivered at the *Sahih al-Bukhari Conference* (Istanbul: Ibn Khaldun University, November 2019) and *Examining the Claim of Political Influence on the Compilation of Al-Muwatta'*, presented at the *Al-Muwatta' Conference* (Oujda: Mohammed I University, October 2019).

enjoyed in Islamic civilisation is impossible for any class to attain in a modern state, which structures every activity within an institution that controls its key functions, dictates its mode of operation, and dominates it through its own authority.

The difference appears vast between scholars in the Islamic society and judges, experts, and academics in the modern state. Even judges — who enjoy the most relative independence within the modern state — have been proven by experience to be employees aligned with the state, working to strengthen and legitimise it.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, Islamic scholars were generally aligned with society, not the ruling power, and were on the side of opposition and resistance.

The conclusions we seek can be summarised in the following points:

1. The political system we aspire to is one where the powers of authority are minimised to the lowest degree, and the empowerment of society is maximised to the greatest extent. We believe that implementing the Islamic system and values is the only viable path to achieving this goal.
2. Political authority should be reduced to a limited set of ministries that oversee the sectors of the military, police, judiciary, finance, and foreign affairs — sectors responsible for security, defence, and any matters related to them. Meanwhile, the sectors of education, media, culture, health, agriculture, industry, and other activities should be entrusted to societal, civil, and charitable initiatives.
3. Nevertheless, the sectors managed by the state should not be entirely detached from society. Rather, society should support and assist them with its efforts. For instance:
  - The people should be armed and trained, as widespread armament and the ability to use weapons protect the nation from the tyranny and oppression of rulers internally, make foreign occupation extremely difficult, and contribute to security and crime reduction. This would relieve a significant burden on the military, police, and judiciary.
  - The notable figures and leaders of society should have the right to resolve disputes through customary and communal arbitration based on Sharia law. This strengthens social security and eliminates many causes of fraud, rights violations, and slow litigation processes.
4. Similarly, the sectors managed by society can be supported by the state through guidance, planning, and participation — without dominance or monopoly:
  - The state can build hospitals and establish schools, universities, sports

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<sup>1</sup> Wael Hallaq, *The Impossible State*, p. 101.

clubs, and cultural activities, funding them from surplus lawful revenues.

- The state can also provide guidance and advice to capital owners, such as directing them to build a hospital in a specific location due to societal needs or investing in a particular region or sector. A well-planned economic map laid out by the state could balance societal activities undertaken by the community itself.
5. It should be clear that one of the state's responsibilities is to safeguard and uphold religion. This includes overseeing religious rituals such as prayer, zakat, fasting, and Hajj, etc., as these practices enhance the cohesion and resilience of society.
  6. The state must not impose taxes under any circumstances, as this is considered a major sin in Islam. There are many alternative ways to cover necessary resource shortages, such as borrowing, partnerships, or offering specific incentives to investors in less attractive sectors. If no other option remains, scholars have permitted taxation on the wealthy — excluding the poor — only to the extent of necessity, in an exceptional and temporary manner.
  7. Authority, at its core, belongs only to those freely chosen by the people. The people have the right to advise, hold them accountable, and remove them. The mechanisms for elections, oversight, and removal are left to the people of each time and place, as long as they remain within the framework of Sharia. Whether this is called 'democracy' or any other name is irrelevant; what matters are the meanings, not the labels.
  8. The independence and liberation of the nation is the foremost, greatest, and most important goal of any movement for change. No real empowerment can be achieved before attaining this independence — both politically and economically. Such independence is impossible without a strong, dominant religious ideology among the general population, especially among its activists and leaders. Likewise, independence cannot be achieved without military power capable of seizing and safeguarding it.
  9. The fundamental dilemma in the contemporary reality is that foreign colonialism and the regimes it established in our lands have displaced the dominance of religion from our reality, replacing it with state dominance. The state has exerted all its efforts to confine religion to a personal matter and ritualistic practices, barring it from the public sphere — except when it serves the state. Thus, religion has become a servant of the state instead of the state serving religion. As a result, the state has committed numerous crimes against the Muslim ummah, yet these crimes were presented as modernisation, progress, and practical policies. Among these crimes is the violation of people's dignity and freedom through excessive interference in

their lives by restricting their movement, marriage, trade, construction, teaching, and any activity without prior authorisation from the state. The state has also forced economic, educational, and cultural activities upon people, such as seizing religious endowments, imposing unjust taxes on them, as well as promoting moral corruption and societal decay, and much more. However, the fundamental issue is that these actions cannot be recognised as crimes unless an Islamic framework is in place. If this framework is absent or removed, these actions are portrayed as modern policies.

10. The very state created by colonialism is itself a unit within an international network established by foreign colonial powers and labelled as the 'global order.' This so-called global order embodies the very tyranny that Islam fought against. After World War II, the victorious powers devised a set of documents, rules, and systems that entrenched their dominance over the world, presenting them as 'the international order,' 'global culture,' 'international law,' and 'international legitimacy.' They granted themselves the right to punish any violators of these laws through various means, starting with diplomatic non-recognition, escalating to economic sanctions, and ultimately leading to military occupation.

## How do We begin?

We have reached the third chapter of this book.

In the first chapter, we discussed why there is no path to reform except through Islam. In the second chapter, we explained how the Islamic system is the most complete, comprehensive, and optimal among all man-made ideologies and philosophies. Now, we must transition from knowledge to action, from awareness to work!

If this is the reality we have reached after the West's dominance, the collapse of our civilisation, and our defeat, the first question for anyone seeking action is: How do we begin?

1. It all starts with an idea, and our idea is Islam. This book is an attempt to clarify it and explore its implementation in our contemporary era.
2. Then, a believing vanguard gathers around the idea and its bearer, forming the first nucleus or working group.
3. Once the path of action begins, questions arise: Should we start with authority or with society? Should we work on reforming society so that it produces righteous leadership, or should the believing vanguard seize power to reform the country and its people?
4. If we choose authority, organisation and planning are necessary. The question then becomes: Can this formation reach power? If so, how?

In this chapter, we pause at these questions — questions about action, effort, and movement — asking Allah for guidance and success.

## Lessons from History

The transition of a nation from humiliation and weakness to strength and empowerment is not a new phenomenon requiring invention. Behind us lies a long and rich history filled with the experiences of nations that have moved from being defeated and occupied to achieving independence and liberation.

I will not hide from the reader that I have found history to be the best entry point for those who seek action. In my life, I have engaged with all Islamic movements, either through affiliation and experience or through dialogue and study. One of the key conclusions I have reached is that all these movements claim to operate according to the Quran and Sunnah. The Quran and Sunnah are the slogans of everyone, much like the poet's words:

*'Each one claims to be connected to Layla, but Layla does not acknowledge their claims.'*

One of the worst consequences of disputes between Islamic movements has been the excessive confusion and noise in the field of defining the path to liberation, revival, and empowerment. Some believe the beginning must be with inviting sinners to the mosques. Others see the solution is in seeking religious knowledge and correcting beliefs, and nothing else. Some see it as spreading awareness, intellectual enlightenment, and understanding reality. Others see the solution is to engage in politics, elections, and parliament to reach power through these means. Some see the solution is in fighting, revolution and armed insurgency. Between all these groups, there exist numerous shades, each drawing from multiple perspectives.

Each of these groups holds some undeniable truths, yet all have flaws in either their theoretical foundations or their practical implementation, preventing them from succeeding so far.

I mention this because I want to emphasise the following: Attempting to answer these questions solely through religious texts — by citing verses, hadiths, and scholars' statements — often leads to lengthy and futile debates due to the numerous answers that have been given to these questions by the different Islamic movements.

My personal experience has led me to a conclusion that I wish to share with you, dear reader, and I wish to benefit from it as well:

Whenever we debated the path to revival and liberation, each movement would bring forth its set of Quranic verses, hadiths, and scholarly opinions, launching an endless discussion that branched into numerous subtopics before even resolving the first question. I immersed myself in these discussions, questioning, contemplating, and reflecting, until one day, I said to myself: *Let us try to understand the Quran and Sunnah through the lens of history.*

Just as we need the Sunnah to interpret and clarify the Quran, we also need history to understand and resolve our disagreements over Quranic and prophetic teachings. History is the *practical laboratory* of humanity. If we examine historical experiences, we can assess whether a particular idea, method, or approach has succeeded before. It is certain that there can be no contradiction between history and the Quran and Sunnah, for both originate from the same divine source — just as there can be no contradiction between sound reason and authentic revelation.

After years of studying history and seeking to understand the Quran and Sunnah, with its aid, I can confidently say that the matter has become incredibly clear to me. What confuses many in interpreting Quranic verses and hadiths no longer confuses me. When discussing action and movement, I prefer to begin with history, avoiding the endless and often fruitless debates that arise when starting to substantiate the argument through religious texts.

This does not mean abandoning the Quran and Sunnah — far from it. This is similar to our interpretation of the Quran through the Sunnah, doing this does not mean that we are abandoning the Quran. Also, if science proves certain points in the religious text, then it clarifies and aids in understanding what might otherwise be misunderstood from the Quran and Sunnah. Similarly, history serves as a tool: many interpretations that their proponents believe to be correct can be proven flawed through historical study. The truth is supported by multiple forms of evidence that complement one another, whereas misinterpretation, even if it relies on some evidence, is exposed when viewed from different angles.

The common historical pattern of state formation is as follows:

A new idea arises in the mind of a gifted leader. He gathers around him a group of competent founders who advocate for their idea, calling for significant reform and change in their society. This creates tension and turmoil, potentially leading to a confrontation with the ruling authority.

1. If they fail in their struggle against the existing regime, their idea and movement gradually fade and disappear.
2. If they succeed, their state begins to form, and their idea is given a chance to materialise.

Once established, the new state must fight for survival among surrounding powers. This struggle is as critical as the initial efforts of its founders who act as its preachers and activists within their own society. The state's ability to withstand external challenges depends on both the strength of its idea and the competence of its leaders. If it endures these challenges, it starts expanding, incorporating new territories.

1. If the state is defeated early on, its idea and movement decline and fade away, though they last longer and leave a stronger impact with a potential for revival than an idea that was crushed before reaching the state-building phase.
2. If the state wins its fights and withstands the initial challenges, and then expands and defeats its enemies, it eventually becomes an empire and a civilisation. It secures its place in history, integrating large populations, and can only be dismantled after centuries or even millennia.

This is the predominant pattern of state formation and ascent. Any variations are merely incidental details. Without a doubt, an idea needs dedicated believers. Both the idea and its adherents require power and governance to implement, promote, and protect it. In pursuit of this, they must seize opportunities and positions through a bitter struggle, enduring immense sacrifices. No one will hand them power peacefully, as an act of benevolence or just for experimentation.

## Is There Any Other Way?

Here, I address some ideas that have spread in our contemporary Islamic world, whose proponents believe they can deviate from the previously mentioned path, arguing that the world has evolved and changed. They claim that such change has created new conditions that may open up new horizons and alternative paths to independence and liberation without enduring bitter struggles and prolonged jihad.

### (1)

Can the Islamic movement undertake ideological modifications to pave the way, ease the process, shorten some stages to liberation, or convince the world that Islam is not evil or a threat?!

The entire world now raises the banner of freedom. Let us address the world in a language it understands and work for freedom, a value that no one dares to oppose. In our lands, freedom unites Muslims and non-Muslims, the righteous and the wicked alike. If these forces come together and succeed, the people will have the right to choose their system, values, and the religion that serves as their reference and source of legislation.

Some say this... and we respond with lessons from history, even recent history.

Over the past half-century, the Islamic movement has been subjected to a trial, confusion, or deception. This is because many times, journalists, politicians, or foreign researchers would ask an Islamic scholar or an Islamic movement leader: 'Which do you prioritise, freedom or Sharia?' Many, under the oppressive tyranny that grips our nations, were compelled to answer — whether out of conviction or as an attempt to escape the pressure of the question — 'Freedom first.' Even if it meant secular, liberal freedom, as seen in Western societies, they believed that Islam would naturally flourish in a free environment. They assumed that granting preachers the freedom to call people to Islam would allow its inherent appeal and the efforts of its advocates to flourish, ultimately leading to Sharia as the final outcome — Sharia as a fruit of freedom and a result of the people's free and fair choice.

But what was the hidden trick in this question, and what was the problem with this perspective?

The problem, though simple, is fundamental, decisive, and essential. It simply lies in the illusion that someone will grant you the choice between freedom and Sharia! The reality is that those who hold power do not offer choices to anyone. The authority that has the power to let you choose between two systems is the same authority that can impose one of them. And why would it offer a choice to the weak if it has the capability to enforce its preferred option?! Islamists, or any oppressed group anywhere in the world, cannot choose because they do not

possess the ability to choose in the first place. The weak cannot choose between two options if they cannot enforce either or seize the ability to enforce it. The one with power is the one who dictates terms, imposing what they wish according to the extent of their strength and capability.

Thus, no matter how much one concedes or manoeuvres intellectually, no one will grant him anything he cannot take over by himself. Intellectual concessions or compromises — no matter how extensive — do not lead to political gains. This is because intellectual compromises, no matter how great, do not alter the balance of power on the ground.

How can a rational person believe that an enemy would hand over to his opponent the very means of his independence and liberation? As if the West has suddenly begun distributing freedom and humanity as a global market for charity! The irony is that those who make this claim have, since birth, seen nothing from the West, in our lands, except harm and crime!

Conclusion: The issue was never about choosing between freedom or Sharia first. The issue is about possessing the capability to choose in the first place. When we acquire this capability, we will seize what we want through our own power and ability — not because someone will graciously grant us what we desire.

## (2)

Some argue: isn't there something in our religion, history, and heritage that actually frightens the world? Don't we need to review and renew our values, ideas, principles, and perceptions so that we and the world can find common ground? Shouldn't we eliminate what scares them and present our religion in a modern form that aligns with contemporary global principles agreed upon by the free world?

We respond to this, again using the lessons of history:

1. Those who propagate such ideas — no matter how well-intentioned — are victims of the ongoing battle between the dominant, victorious West and our subdued, defeated nation. They have absorbed so much from the prevailing culture of the triumphant that they have begun to doubt their own religion, history, and heritage. The most dangerous consequence of this is that such self-doubt is the most destructive factor that can defeat our nation's spirit during the phase of liberation, struggle, and resistance. Only those who firmly believe they are on the right path and possess the just alternative to the oppression and corruption they endure can fight effectively.
2. The terms used by the so-called 'free world,' such as universal values and global principles, are merely euphemisms and manoeuvring tactics to

express the Western civilisation alone — its liberal, capitalist, materialistic values and nothing else. The rest of the world is not even part of this intellectual dialogue. The clearest proof of this is that every controversial issue related to politics, jihad, women, or relations with non-Muslims always arises in areas where Islam clashes with the West.

3. If we closely examine any of the controversial topics that some among us claim frighten and alarm the world, and if we analyse them free from the pressure of the dominant culture, we immediately see that Islam provides the most complete, beautiful, and optimal solutions. Historically, the Muslims' implementation of these ideas was nearly ideal, while the West, on the same issues, is either intellectually inconsistent or has produced attractive ideas that it failed to apply properly — actually the West often contradicted the principles they themselves presented and at times, even unjustly and fiercely fought against it.

Let's give an example<sup>1</sup> to prove this point which is the Islamic concept called the '*Jihad for a Demand*' (Jihad al-Talab):

The core question for understanding this concept is: does the Islamic state have a moral responsibility to rescue oppressed peoples from the tyranny of oppressive regimes, even if those regimes pose no direct threat to Muslims or the Islamic state?

Islam asserts that Muslims have a duty to liberate these populations. After their liberation, they are not compelled to embrace Islam but are free to follow whatever faith they choose. Meanwhile, the West's ideological schools remain confused between two conflicting stances: 'we have no business interfering in other nations' affairs,' or 'the West has a moral duty to spread democracy, human rights, and overthrow tyrannical regimes.'

When examining what actually happened in history — both the Islamic and the Western — we find a vast and staggering difference between the ethical Islamic conquests, which spread mercy, morality, and knowledge, and the Western colonial occupations that operated purely on imperialistic policies under such slogans. If Western powers saw a tyrant oppressing and massacring his people but found it in their political interest to keep him in power, they left him unchecked — even if he massacred millions and destroyed his entire country. In many cases, they even actively supported such tyrants against their own people's revolutions to safeguard their own interests. Ask five centuries of history — starting from the Spanish conquests in the Age of Exploration to the very moment you read these lines — about the colonisation of Africa and the Americas, the enslavement of millions, and the voyages from Magellan and Columbus to today's military bases spread across the world's oceans.

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<sup>1</sup> See more in the article titled: 'The Four Obstacles to the Mind of Liberation and Resistance.'

The tragedy lies in the fact that some among us call upon the West (which they call ‘the international community’) to intervene to save oppressed peoples from their brutal rulers, as in Syria, for example. They see military strikes against the regime and support for its opposition as a noble, humanitarian, and commendable act. Yet, these same people want to ‘renew’ Islam by eliminating the Islamic concept of *‘Jihad for a Demand’* because it supposedly conflicts with contemporary standards and human progress!

If you believe that a powerful force must intervene to save the weak, then why is this principle acceptable when applied by Americans and their international organisations but deemed utterly unacceptable when found in Islamic teachings and jurisprudence?!

### **The First Steps: A Leader and Men!**

We have mentioned that the beginning of liberation, independence, and revival starts with an idea carried by a talented individual who gathers around him a number of competent founding men, and with them, he confronts the existing situation.

As Muslims, we do not lack the idea; our idea is Islam. In the second section, we mentioned a brief overview of its most complete and comprehensive system, which we believe to be the true and rightful alternative to the existing ignorant systems, and we see it as the only correct hope for the oppressed and the wronged.

Likewise, we Muslims do not lack a large number of men; we are a nation nearing two billion people. If only one man out of every thousand were to work for the religion and strive for its cause, the number would be two million acting reformers! If one man emerged from every hundred, there would be twenty million acting reformers.

What we truly lack is leadership, along with a specific type of men who are suitable for the founding efforts. Through them, the nation can transition from weakness and humiliation to victory and empowerment.

#### **(1)**

The Holy Qur’an tells us an astonishing story that reflects our situation: the story of the Israelites after Moses. These people were expelled from their homes and suffered humiliation. They realised they would not triumph unless a leader united them and turned them into an army to fight for the restoration of their status. So, they went to their prophet and said:

*‘Appoint for us a king, and we will fight in the cause of Allah.’* (Surah Al-Baqarah: 2:246)

These people had many flaws and corruptions, which became apparent in their story when Allah chose His servant Talut as their leader. However, all these flaws did not prevent or hinder victory once the leader took his position and selected an army of only three hundred men! With them, he defeated the army of Goliath and the mighty Amalekites, and the Israelites reclaimed Jerusalem once again. So, reflect on this story...!

Reflect on this:

- The leader was among them, yet they neither discovered him nor did he discover himself or attempt to seize the leadership he was worthy of!
- Victory was achieved with only three hundred men; they did not need a large multitude of people! Initially, they were defeated, expelled, and overpowered for one clear reason: their leader was not in his rightful place, and the three hundred competent men were not organised into an army!
- Also, notice that Talut did not waste time trying to convince those who rejected him as a leader, nor did he attempt to reform those who did not join his army, nor did he invest effort in training those who drank from the river. All of these individuals fell away on the journey, while he continued forward, not pausing at every flaw in the nation to figure out how to fix it. Had he done so, he would have died before completing his mission!

When we reflect on the essential and crucial flaw of the nation, we must set aside the rest of the diseases and ailments. For some flaws, people should be left as they are with them. Other flaws will resolve themselves when we attain liberation and victory, and some we can handle and treat by advice along our way to battle — but we must not stop to treat and wait!

What I want to say is this:

It is impossible to imagine a nation of two billion people without someone qualified for leadership. Since revelation has ceased and we no longer have a prophet to ask for a leader, our only option is to strive to discover these leaders, make every effort to empower them and ensure they take their rightful place. Also, a leader will not arrive by a miracle from heaven to convince people, as was the case with Talut, when their prophet said:

*‘The sign of his kingship is that the Ark will come to you, carrying tranquillity from your Lord and remnants of what the family of Moses and the family of Aaron left behind, borne by the angels.’* (Surah Al-Baqarah: 2:248)

Yes, some leaders may discover this within themselves, carve a path through their circumstances and environment, and fight their way to their goal. However, as we saw in this story, leadership potential may exist in someone who does not recognise it in himself, nor do people recognise it in him. This causes the entire matter to be delayed and the whole nation to be subjugated due to a flawed

perception that leads people to disregard such a leader:

*'How can he have authority over us when we are more deserving of power than him, and he has not been given abundant wealth?'* (Surah Al-Baqarah: 2:247)

The oppressed and subjugated nation contained within it a leader and three hundred men, but they were hidden among the masses. Yet, when they emerged, they achieved a historic victory that saved their people. This victory would not have been possible if the path to leadership had not been cleared for the leader and if, through his hand, a way to action and struggle had not been paved for them!<sup>1</sup>

If we examine the biography of the Prophet ﷺ, we find that he, being an expert in men, made way for talents and placed them in their proper positions. Khalid ibn al-Walid and Amr ibn al-As took command of armies and military expeditions in the year following their conversion to Islam. Meanwhile, Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him), despite being among the earliest Muslims, was denied leadership. Khalid and Amr possessed leadership qualities both before and after Islam. But the key point here is that neither of them took leadership except when the Prophet ﷺ gave them such an opportunity and assigned it to them. Both did not attempt to seize leadership by themselves and if the Prophet had withheld it, they would not have been able to take it.

This principle also applies to those who were reluctant to assume leadership positions despite being fully qualified. They did not compete for leadership but were pressured to be in those roles due to circumstances or direct orders from the highest authority. Abu Bakr, the best of creation after the Prophet ﷺ, preferred to put forward Umar and Abu Ubaidah instead of himself for the leadership of the ummah. Then, ultimately, he accepted the caliphate only when the people insisted upon him and when the Ansar approved of him. Abu Bakr was given the leadership because the people then recognised the worth of men, as evident from Umar's exclamation, 'Who among you would willingly step ahead of Abu Bakr?!'

And likewise was the case with Umar, who only assumed leadership by the command of Abu Bakr and with the approval of the Companions, who recognised the worth of men. None of them thought of competing with Umar for the caliphate, knowing that he was truly worthy of it. These are consistent stories, forming a long tradition that includes all ascetic leaders, such as Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, who initially refused the people's pledge of allegiance but ultimately accepted it with their approval; Abd al-Rahman al-Nasir of Umayyad Andalusia, who was pledged allegiance as ruler at the age of twenty, despite the presence of his older uncles; Yahya ibn Umar al-Lamtuni and Yusuf ibn Tashfin, the early

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<sup>1</sup> See more about this poem and its lessons here: [https://melhamy.blogspot.com/2015/01/blog-post\\_3.html](https://melhamy.blogspot.com/2015/01/blog-post_3.html)

leaders of the Almoravid state — the former assuming leadership by the command of Imam Ibn Yasin, and the latter receiving rule after his cousin Abu Bakr ibn Umar al-Lamtuni abdicated the throne to him; and Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, about whom it was said: ‘Some people are led to paradise in chains’; as well as Saif al-Din Qutuz, who assumed the sultanate of Egypt under the pressing circumstances of jihad and the Mongol threat; and Murad II, the father of Mehmed the Conqueror, who abdicated the throne twice in favour of his son — among many others.

The key point here is that some leaders reach their positions not through their own direct efforts, despite being fully qualified for leadership, but rather through the vision of an experienced leader, the wisdom of their people, or an extraordinary circumstance.

Our nation, which suffers from weakness and depletion, is in dire need of discovering its leaders. We must search among our people for those who have the power to change our reality and transform our circumstances. If we understand that a leader does not always seize power for himself but may remain hidden unless recognised by wise men or supported by capable individuals, then every one of us should strive to be the eye that discovers, the hand that assists, or the support that provides protection through knowledge, connections, or influence.

Whoever does this has earned great rewards and reached the highest ranks!

## (2)

This was about the leader — so what about the men?

In movements for liberation, revival, and the founding of civilisations, success has never depended on numbers but rather on the competence of men. Allah granted his Prophet ﷺ with his Companions as He says:

*‘It is Him who supported you with His help and with the believers.’* (Surah Al-Anfal: 8:62)

So, reflect on how Allah made these believers a means of support for the noble Prophet!

And our Exalted Lord pointed to the noble and dignified character, abundant wisdom, and sound intellect of these Companions in His words:

*‘So by mercy from Allah, [O Muhammad], you were lenient with them. And if you had been rude [and] harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from around you. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them in matters.’* (Surah Aal Imran: 3:159)

Reflect on how Allah praised His Prophet for his mercy, while also commending his Companions for their refusal to yield to harshness or submit to cruelty, as they would distance themselves from it. Furthermore, they were

described as people of intellect and wisdom — such that even the Prophet, despite his perfection as a human being, was commanded to consult them.

The founding men are a select group distinguished by intellect, character, ethics, talents, and abilities.

When we look at the men around the Prophet ﷺ, this becomes evident. Abu Bakr alone carried out the roles of multiple institutions:

1. He was the most knowledgeable among Quraysh regarding their lineage and history. In this sense, he was like an intelligence and information agency, understanding the map of society, its key figures, their relationships, alliances, and conflicts. This is why, on the day following his conversion to Islam, Abu Bakr brought five of the ten Companions promised paradise, that is, he brought five of Islam's pillars! He accompanied the Prophet in calling the tribes to Islam, recognising centres of power and their leaders. Moreover, he was the scholarly reference for the Islamic media apparatus, as poets like Hassan ibn Thabit would consult him when composing poetry to satirise the Quraysh, seeking insight into their lineage and the faults they could be criticized for.
2. He was a merchant, and merchants are among the most knowledgeable about people's character, their true nature, and the ways of deception. Additionally, a merchant has wealth, and what movement or mission does not require financial support? Abu Bakr was always present whenever Islam needed funding — whether for freeing oppressed Muslim slaves or financing the Muslim armies.
3. He was kind-hearted, approachable, and beloved by people. They enjoyed sitting with him, listening to his words, and were captivated by his knowledge and experience. In this way, he served as a public relations institution and a centre for outreach and religious propagation.
4. Above all, he possessed a deep, unshakable faith that never wavered or faltered. He was the ultimate example — after the prophets — of the foundational companion. It is no wonder that he became the Prophet's first minister and his successor.

Thus, no movement or mission that has an Abu Bakr-like figure among its ranks is destined to fail — its success is only a matter of time!

The failures of contemporary Islamic movements can often be traced back to these shortcomings: lack of information, weak awareness of the strategic alliances inside the country, with the enemy or with the governing authority inside the country, lack of finance, and weak connections with various segments of society.

Essentially, many contemporary Islamic movements have failed because they did not attract such capable individuals. Instead, they gathered those who lacked

talent and competence, making them a burden rather than pillars of strength.

The work of the Islamic movement is not merely a missionary effort to convert people from disbelief to Islam, but rather a dynamic endeavour that aims to select qualified individuals who can contribute to the real-world struggle and lift the burdens weighing down the nation. Therefore, the selection of these competent individuals, and the great effort spent in inviting and organising them, is the beneficial work, even if difficult. Without this, efforts will yield nothing in reality.

This does not mean neglecting those who come to us and are eager to engage in the movement. Allah reproached His Prophet for turning away from Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum, and revealed: 'He frowned and turned away (1) because the blind man came to him' (Surah Abasa: 80:1-2). But the point here is that the Prophet ﷺ initially sought a specific type of people, those who had competence, ability, and independence. He expended the utmost effort in inviting the leaders, notable figures, and tribal heads. The reproach was for turning away from the one who approached him, not for turning to the leaders and high-ranking individuals whom he hoped to guide.

There is no doubt that if the invitation to liberation and reform can attract people of status and position, it has shortened many long and arduous steps. For this reason, the Prophet ﷺ exerted all his effort to invite the leaders of Mecca, to the extent that Allah said to him: 'Perhaps you would kill yourself with grief that they would not be believers' (Surah Al-Kahf: 18:6), 'Perhaps you would kill yourself with grief that they do not believe' (Surah Ash-Shu'ara: 26:3). The Prophet was so overwhelmed with effort and sorrow over their rejection that he seemed as if he might die from grief and regret.

For all these reasons, the inclusion of men into the Islamic movement must rely on their competence and abilities, including their social and economic status. If this is the case, these types of individuals will benefit from all the intellectual, educational, and spiritual programmes that prepare them for the great task!

As for the weak and those with limited talents and capabilities, no matter how much intellectual, Islamic advisory, and educational effort is poured into them, their outcome will be limited, because their talents are not sufficient for the required task. The organisational work of a movement is not in establishing a refuge for orphans, a nursing home for the elderly, a care facility for the disabled, or a hospital to treat diseases. It is a specific type of work that requires strength, ability, talent, and resources.

This statement pertains to worldly preferences. It may well be that the weak, with limited talent, are better in the sight of Allah than thousands of talented individuals. They may be recipients of answered prayers and among the righteous allies of Allah. However, the work of establishing and empowering Islam in this world requires special types of people to move it from weakness and humiliation

to empowerment and dignity.

A noble reader pointed out an important issue I overlooked after the first edition of the book was published, which is the need for purification for these founding men, and this is indeed correct. When worldly desires take hold of hearts, they return with weakness and deficiency or deviation from the intended goal. How many states have deteriorated after their founder because of disputes and fighting among his Companions! And how many states have failed to reach their goals, either not rising at all or rising only to deviate because the enemy was able to entice and recruit some men with promises and threats, with temptations and intimidation.

It should be noted here what was stated in a study published by the RAND Corporation, one of the leading American research centres — if not the leading one — on eliminating movements they labelled as terrorist. The results concluded as follows:

- 43% of movements end by being integrated into the political process.
- 40% of movements end through security infiltration and the assassination of key influential leaders.
- 7% of movements end with military defeat.

The key point here is that 83% of the failure of movements in achieving their goals — more than four-fifths of movements — relates to two issues tied to the purification of character. When the temptations of entering political life and assuming high-ranking positions arise, the vision is distorted, goals change, and the movement dissolves into the very system it was established to dismantle. Likewise, security breaches leading to the assassination of influential leaders occur only when some individuals have weakened in the face of the enemy's temptations or threats, becoming an agent for them against their own people and movement.

Purification is a decisive and crucial matter, and there is no doubt about it. When I first wrote these words, I focused on the importance of selecting individuals with talent, work ethic, and capability, able to form and manage movements and engage in battles. I did not emphasise the inclusion of weak elements. People are like a herd of a hundred camels, and in it, you can hardly find a camel suitable for riding. Islamic movements need to be of the type that can ride, to rise, and to engage in the battle.

### **The Work Plan: Towards Power and the State**

So, if the leader is present and the men are present...what is to be done?

Should we work in preaching, education, and Islamic missionary activities

until we raise a generation or create a general Islamic environment that will later produce and yield an Islamic system and strong Islamic governance? Or should we work on preparing for confrontation or seizing power and governance for this Islamic system to be established?

And if we address the masses, should it be through mosques, schools, and institutions nurturing Islamic education and guidance? Or through the media, public gatherings in cafes, forums, meeting places, and social media networks? Or through scientific and academic excellence? Or through economic advancement to form a guiding elite capable of influencing the masses? Or should it be through all of this or some of it? And which should come first?

And if the focus is on power and the state, how should this direction be? Should it be through a popular revolution? Or a military coup? Or by forming armed combatant movements? Or by entering democratic elections? Or by taking control over the economic institutions to form an influential lobby? Or should it be through all of this or some of it? And which should come first?

Those are many questions over which Islamic movements have widely disagreed, each arguing for one or the other. What concerns me now is to mention fundamental matters that represent the general principle and the non-changing norms, and these matters are:

1. What is certain and beyond doubt for me — something I have spent many years of my life researching and investigating, and I even claim it was the most essential and fundamental question that consumed my efforts in seeking its answer — is that the path towards change, whether for reform or corruption, cannot occur without governance and power. The success of a call is for it to become a system, a ruling power, and a state, and authority is far more capable of influencing people than people are of influencing authority. The effect of the ruling power in changing people is much greater than people's ability to change such power!

Many Islamic movements have adopted the saying, ‘As you are, so will your rulers be.’ However, I have come to believe that this saying was embraced in times of defeat and weakness of Islamic movements, when they preferred the path of safety and pursued a preaching approach that addressed the masses with the illusion that if people became righteous, they would produce a righteous authority. This is absolutely incorrect, and history has never proven it true. What is consistently true throughout history is that ‘people follow the religion of their kings.’ To prove this matter, this chapter was written, and soon you will see the details.

2. Gaining power is an inevitable necessity, especially in the case of Islam, as it is a religion that cannot survive without a state, governance, and authority — this is intrinsic to the structure and foundation of Islam. However, the method of achieving power differs in each country and era depending on

the nature of that country, its circumstances, the nature of the Islamic movement within it, the extent of capability or incapability, and the opportunities available at certain times but not others. For example, some countries allow participation in elections if they are fair and if those who win them can truly rule rather than serve as mere decoration. In other countries, the only viable path is clandestine infiltration of the ruling apparatus, which could be a ruling tribe, a military elite, or a network of political and economic powers. In some countries, there is no solution except planning for a military coup, while in others, a popular revolution is the only option. Finally, in some cases forming armed militant movements is the only way forward.

The people of each country and movement are the best judges of their circumstances and what they can do within these options. In every case, the path to power will be difficult, exhausting, bitter, and fraught with deception, conspiracies, traps, manoeuvrers, and grand confrontations that require blending strength with wisdom and battle with politics.

Throughout my research into these matters, I have found that all above mentioned means are permissible — none are forbidden in and of themselves, but some may be prohibited due to external factors. In all cases, necessities permit prohibitions, provided they are true necessities and that those leading the Islamic movement act with sincerity to God and in the interest of Islam, rather than seeking personal safety or short-term gains, nor rushing toward destruction without careful thought and weighing of matters. No excess, no negligence! The one who is truly guided is the one whom God grants success, who is sincere to Him, seeks Him alone, and strives to discern the truth and seek guidance.

Now, I will proceed to prove that ‘people follow the religion of their kings’ and that there is no change or reform without obtaining governance and power. Anyone who avoids the issue of power will either end up failing or being used by those in power for their purposes and objectives, whether they realise it or not, understand it or not.

A remarkable statement by the Turkish Islamic leader Necmettin Erbakan expresses this reality: ‘Muslims who do not concern themselves with politics will be ruled by politicians who do not care about religion.’

He also said: ‘You want me to stay in the mosque and avoid politics, while you take my child and teach him politics in schools and universities according to your curriculum, so that he may later come and demolish the mosque over my head!’

The law of ‘people follow the religion of their kings’ is among the most consistent laws in human history, perhaps the most significant. I believe that no preacher or reformer can succeed in their mission if they do not understand this law. The evidence for this principle is abundant in the Quran, the Sunnah, the sayings of the Prophet’s Companions, wise men throughout history, and countless

historical events. The ruling power is the strongest force that shapes people's lives — it is the most influential factor in guiding or leading them astray. Every movement seeking change, whether for reform or corruption, strives to obtain power and governance to spread and establish itself, for nothing disseminates an idea more effectively than its victory in battle and its establishment in power.

(1)

This meaning appears in the Holy Qur'an in the verse:

*'When the victory of Allah has come and the conquest, and you see the people entering into the religion of Allah in multitudes'* (Surah An-Nasr: 110:1-2).

Masses follow victory and conquest, and the conquest here refers to the Conquest of Mecca.

The same meaning appears in the verse:

*'Not equal among you are those who spent before the conquest and fought [and those who did so after]. Those are greater in degree than those who spent and fought afterward'* (Surah Al-Hadid: 57:10).

Faith in the cause, spending for it, and striving in its path when it was weak and had not yet prevailed is a high rank that only exceptional individuals can attain. The 'conquest' in this verse refers to the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah.

A similar meaning is conveyed in the verse recounting the words of Pharaoh's propaganda machinery:

*'And it was said to the people, 'Will you congregate so that perhaps we may follow the magicians if they are victorious?'* (Surah Ash-Shu'ara: 26:39-40).

Ibn Kathir explains in his commentary: 'They did not say, "We will follow the truth, whether it comes from the magicians or from Moses." Instead, the masses follow the religion of their rulers.'<sup>1</sup>

This meaning is also evident in the verse:

*'And We wanted to confer favour upon those who were oppressed in the land and make them leaders and make them inheritors, and establish them in the land, and show Pharaoh, Haman, and their soldiers through them that which they had feared'* (Surah Al-Qasas: 28:5-6).

When Allah intended to bestow His favour and blessing upon the oppressed, He did so by granting them power and authority, making them leaders, i.e., rulers. This favour could not be realised without removing the oppressive rulers and bringing about their downfall.

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<sup>1</sup> Tafsir Ibn Kathir, 6/140.

If we reflect on the stories of the prophets, we see that in their missions, they always addressed the rulers and the elites — those in positions of power. The conflict was almost always between the prophets and the elites. If the elites believed, their people followed; if they rejected faith, their people did the same, except for a few individuals. These few were those with strong and independent personalities, capable of resisting the prevailing trend. The Qur'an frequently repeats this pattern, as in:

- ‘The chiefs of his people said, “Indeed, we see you in clear error”’ (Surah Al-A'raf: 7:60) (regarding Noah).
- Allah said in Hud's story: ‘The leaders of those who disbelieved among his people said, “Indeed, we see you in foolishness, and indeed, we think you are of the liars”’ (Surah Al-A'raf: 7:66).
- He said in Shu'ayb story: ‘The chiefs of those who were arrogant among his people said, “O Shu'ayb, we will surely expel you and those who have believed with you from our city, or you must return to our religion”’ (Surah Al-A'raf: 7:88).

Similarly, Moses directly confronted Pharaoh and his elite from the outset: ‘Then We sent after them Moses with Our signs to Pharaoh and his chiefs’ (Surah Al-A'raf: 7:103).

This is because Pharaoh was the key figure of the land and its people — if he believed, they would follow; if he disbelieved, they would follow as well.

## (2)

This same meaning is reflected in the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ. The Prophet ﷺ was deeply concerned about the conversion of Quraysh's leaders, to the point that he would kill himself trying as Allah mentions in His verses:

- ‘Perhaps you would kill yourself with grief that they will not be believers’ (Surah Ash-Shu'ara: 26:3).
- ‘Then perhaps you would kill yourself through grief over them, if they do not believe in this message, out of sorrow’ (Surah Al-Kahf: 18:6).
- ‘So do not let yourself perish over them in regret’ (Surah Fatir: 35:8).

This was because the conversion of Quraysh's leaders would lead the Arabs to follow, as Quraysh was the most prestigious and noble of the Arab tribes.

From a political perspective, the entire life of the Prophet ﷺ can be summarised as a struggle cantered around Mecca and Quraysh. When Quraysh resisted his message and insisted on disbelief, the Prophet ﷺ took his mission to Ta'if, the second most prestigious city after Mecca, and appealed to its three leaders. He

then presented himself to various tribes, seeking support and protection, always addressing their leaders. Eventually, Allah granted him the support of the leaders of the Ansar, leading to his migration to Medina, where he established the Islamic state and he was its ruler from the very first day. Then, the struggle continued over Mecca until the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah was signed, which was essentially a Meccan acknowledgement of the state of Medina. This is analogous to modern international recognition through the United Nations, which grants a state legal rights and sovereignty under international law. Once this acknowledgement was secured, in just two years, as many people embraced Islam as those who had done so in the previous fifteen years.<sup>1</sup> When Mecca was conquered, people entered Islam in multitudes, and the year following the conquest became known as ‘The Year of Delegations.’

Thus, we see that the Prophet ﷺ actively sought political authority as a necessity and duty, without which the mission of establishing the religion could not be fulfilled. He pursued this in Mecca, Ta’if, and various tribes until he achieved it in Medina. Eventually, the ultimate confrontation over the leadership of the Arabs took place between the Prophet ﷺ and Quraysh. Once Quraysh embraced Islam, the rest of the Arabs followed.

After the Prophet’s death, the Companions unanimously agreed on appointing a leader before even burying him. Abu Bakr fiercely defended the integrity of ‘the religion’ and his main motto was: ‘Shall the religion be diminished while I am alive?!’ This consensus persisted throughout the Muslim ummah across all schools of thought, except for a small divergent sect that denied the necessity of appointing a leader. Thus, the essential role of leadership and the leader in upholding the religion is quite evident.

The Prophet ﷺ also warned: ‘Indeed, I fear for my nation the misguiding leaders.’<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, in a hadith referring to ten specific Jewish leaders in Medina, he stated: ‘If ten Jews had believed in me, all the Jews would have believed.’<sup>3</sup>

In his letters to rulers, the Prophet ﷺ placed the responsibility of guiding their people upon them. He wrote to Emperor Heraclius: ‘If you turn away, then upon you will be the sin of the Arisiyyin (peasants under your rule).’<sup>4</sup>

And many scholars have mentioned this principle, the principle of ‘People

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<sup>1</sup> Tafsir Al-Tabari, 22/259.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmad (17156), Abu Dawood (4252), Al-Tirmidhi (2229), and Al-Hakim (8390), who stated that it is authentic according to the conditions of Al-Bukhari and Muslim, with Al-Dhahabi agreeing with him. It was also authenticated by Al-Albani (Al-Silsilah Al-Sahihah 4/110) and Shu’ayb Al-Arna’ut in his commentary on Musnad Ahmad.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Bukhari (3725), Muslim (2793).

<sup>4</sup> Al-Bukhari (7); and see the explicit mention of this meaning in: Al-Kurani, *Al-Kawthar Al-Jari*, 1/52; Al-Qala’i, *Tahdhib Al-Ri’asa*, p. 100.

follow the religion of their kings,’ when explaining the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ:

*‘Verily, in the body, there is a morsel of flesh; if it is sound, the entire body will be sound, and if it is corrupt, the entire body will be corrupt. Verily, it is the heart.’<sup>1</sup>*

They interpret this to mean that the position of the ruler, in relation to his people, is like the position of the heart in relation to the body's organs.<sup>2</sup>

### (3)

This meaning also appeared in the words of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. Abu Bakr was asked: ‘How can we remain steadfast in this righteous matter that Allah has brought after the days of ignorance?’ He replied, ‘You will remain steadfast as long as your leaders remain upright.’<sup>3</sup>

Umar said to Ziyad ibn Hudayr: ‘Do you know what destroys Islam?’ He replied, ‘No.’ Umar said, ‘The slip of a scholar, the argument of a hypocrite using the Book, and the rule of misguiding leaders.’<sup>4</sup>

Umar also sent a message to Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, saying: ‘Beware of indulging, lest your workers indulge.’<sup>5</sup>

Umar chose the moment of the Hijrah, in the presence of the Companions, as the starting point for Islamic history. This was because it marked the beginning of the Islamic state. Al-Kafiji said, ‘It was the time when the religion of Islam became stable, conquests<sup>6</sup> followed one another, delegations arrived in succession, and the Muslims gained dominance — this was more fitting because it was blessed and had a great impact on people’s hearts.’<sup>7</sup>

Uthman ibn Affan said: ‘Allah deters people through authority more than He deters them through the Quran.’<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bukhari (52), Muslim (1599).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example: Al-Sindi's commentary on Sunan Ibn Majah, 2/477; Al-Mulla Ali Al-Qari, Mirqat Al-Mafatih, 5/1893.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Bukhari (3622).

<sup>4</sup> Al-Darimi (214), authenticated by Al-Albani in *Mishkat al-Masabih* (269), and by Hussein Salim Asad in his commentary on Al-Darimi.

<sup>5</sup> Ibn Abi Shaybah, *Al-Musannaf* (34448), with an apparent chain break between Sa'id ibn Abi Burdah and 'Umar. However, considering that Sa'id was the grandson of Abu Musa al-Ash'ari and that his father, Abu Burdah, possessed a copy of 'Umar's letter to his father, Abu Musa al-Ash'ari (see: Al-Fasawi, *Ma'rifat wa Al-Tarikh*, 2/334), it is more likely that the chain is continuous and authentic.

<sup>6</sup> The *conquests* here do not refer to the military conquests that began during the era of Abu Bakr; rather, they carry the broader meaning of dominance, establishment, achievement, and a transformation of circumstances in a way that benefits the Muslims.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Kafiji, *Al-Mukhtasar fi 'Ilm al-Tarikh*, p. 332; Al-Sakhawi, *Al-Tibr al-Masbuk*, 1/36.

<sup>8</sup> It has been narrated with different yet similar wordings, most famously from 'Uthmān, and also from 'Umar

(4)

This concept also appeared in Arabic proverbs and literature: ‘People follow the religion of their kings,’ ‘People follow whoever prevails,’ ‘When the ruler changes, the era changes.’

Al-Tha'alibi dedicated a chapter in his book *Lata'if al-Ma'arif* titled ‘The Dominant Traits of the Umayyad Kings and How Their Subjects Adopted Their Morals.’ He mentioned that Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan was fond of poetry, so poetry became widespread among people. His son, Al-Walid, loved construction, so people competed in it. Suleiman ibn Abd al-Malik indulged in food and women, and so did the people. Then, Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz was known for his piety and asceticism, and the people followed his example. He concluded: ‘Indeed, it has been rightly said: People follow the religion of their kings. The rule is like a marketplace; whatever thrives there will be brought to it.’<sup>1</sup> Ibn al-Ta'awidhi said: ‘If the head of the household beats the tambourine, the entire household will dance.’

Usama ibn Munqidh described the era of King Al-Adil Nur al-Din Zangi and how his people were influenced by his piety and faith:

*‘Our ruler is ascetic, and the people have followed his example, eagerly pursuing good deeds. His days are like the days of Ramada — pure, free from sins, with hunger and thirst prevailing.’*<sup>2</sup>

(5)

Many scholars who were well-versed in psychology and social behaviour also addressed this concept. Mu'awiya once asked a sage to describe his era for him, and he replied: ‘You are the era — if you are righteous, your era will be righteous, and if you are corrupt, your era will be corrupt.’<sup>3</sup>

Abu Muslim al-Khawlanī once entered upon Mu'awiya and advised him, saying: ‘O Mu'awiya, we do not worry about the murkiness of rivers as long as the source is pure. You are the source of our water.’ Abu Muslim frequently used this analogy, comparing the ruler to a water source — if it is clean, the rivers and tributaries remain clean; if it is polluted, the entire system becomes corrupt. He said:

*‘The ruler is like a great, pure spring that flows into a mighty river. People*

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ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. See: Ibn Shabbah, *Tārīkh al-Madīnah*, 3/988, Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 5/172 (ed. Bashār), Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Aḥkām al-Qur‘ān*, 3/474 (Dār al-‘Ilmiyyah edition), Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, 11/416.

<sup>1</sup> Al-Tha‘alibī, *Laṭā‘if al-Ma‘ārif*, pp. 116–117.

<sup>2</sup> Sibṭ Ibn Al-Jawzī, *Mir‘at Al-Zaman (The Mirror of Time)*, 21/361

<sup>3</sup> Al-Ṭurtūshī, *Sirāj al-Mulūk*, p. 60.

*wade into the river and make it murky, but the spring remains clear and cleans back the river. If the spring itself becomes polluted, the river will be ruined.*<sup>1</sup>

It was narrated from multiple righteous predecessors that they said: ‘If I had a supplication that would certainly be answered, I would make it for the ruler, for his righteousness ensures the rectitude of the people, and his corruption leads to their corruption.’<sup>2</sup>

Al-Qasim ibn Mukhaimara, one of the Companions’ Successors, said: “Your era is your ruler — if your ruler is righteous, your era will be righteous; if your ruler is corrupt, your era will be corrupt.”<sup>3</sup>

The great Egyptian jurist, Al-Layth ibn Sa’d, once entered upon Harun al-Rashid and repeated to him the words of Al-Ahnaf ibn Qays to Mu’awiya. Harun asked, ‘What ensures the prosperity of your land?’ Al-Layth replied, ‘O Emir of the believers, our land prospers through the flow of the Nile and the righteousness of its ruler. Corruption starts from the source, and if the source is pure, the streams remain clear.’ Harun responded, ‘You speak the truth, O Abu al-Harith.’<sup>4</sup>

Al-Ghazali wrote: ‘The sages have said that the character of the people is a reflection of their rulers because the common folk imitate the conduct of their leaders. They adopt their corrupt ways and narrow-mindedness by following their example.’ He further stated: ‘The actions of the people mirror those of their ruler. Have you not noticed that when a country is known for its prosperity and security, and its people live in comfort and peace, it is a sign of a just and wise ruler? It is not because of the people themselves; it is mainly due to the ruler’s good intentions towards his people and his competent way of ruling. Indeed, the sages were right when they said, “People resemble their rulers more than they resemble their time.”’ It has also been known that: ‘People follow the religion of their kings.’<sup>5</sup>

Ibn Jama’ah said: ‘People follow the religion of their ruler. If he is just, the people will uphold justice and just laws, the truth will prevail, people will be fair to one another, injustice will disappear, blessings will descend from the heavens, the earth will yield its produce, wealth will increase, and trade will flourish.’<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-Awliyā*, 2/126.

<sup>2</sup> Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-Awliyā*, 8/91; Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, 28/391.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Bayhaqī, *Al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, (16429).

<sup>4</sup> Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-Awliyā*, 7/322.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Tibr al-Masbūk*, pp. 50,

<sup>6</sup> Ibn Jama’ah, *Tahrir Al-Ahkam (The Liberation of Rulings)*, 50; and also see something close to that: Ibn Al-Arzaq, *Badai’a Al-Salk (The wonders of the Path)*, 86.

(6)

Historians have frequently reiterated this idea, and some even dedicated entire works to it, such as Al-Ya'qubi in his book *Mushakalah al-Nas li-Zamanihi* (How People Resemble Their Era), in which he documented how each ruler's dominant traits influenced his people.

Ibn al-Tiqtaqa (d. 709 AH) wrote: 'Know that kings possess unique qualities that set them apart from common folk. One of these is that when a king loves something, the people love it too; when he dislikes something, the people also dislike it. When he becomes obsessed with something, people imitate him — either naturally or to gain his favour. That is why it is said: "People follow the religion of their kings."' <sup>1</sup>

Al-Dhahabi (d. 748 AH) simply stated: 'People follow the religion of their king.' <sup>2</sup>

Ibn Kathir (d. 774 AH) said: 'Al-Walid's ambition was in construction, and so were the people; a man would meet another and ask: "What have you built? What have you constructed?" His brother Sulayman's ambition was in women, and so were the people; a man would meet another and ask: "How many wives have you married? How many female slaves do you have?" 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz's ambition was in reciting the Qur'an, prayer, and worship, and so were the people; a man would meet another and ask: "What is your daily recitation? How much do you read each day? How much did you pray last night?" The people say: "The people follow the religion of their king." If he is a drinker, wine consumption increases. If he is a sodomite, so it is. If he is miserly and greedy, the people become the same. If he is generous, noble, and courageous, so are the people. If he is greedy, unjust, and oppressive, so are they. If he is devout, righteous, and benevolent, so are they.' <sup>3</sup>

Ibn Khaldun (d. 808 AH) dedicated a chapter in his *Muqaddimah* to the idea that the defeated are passionate about imitating the victors, and in this chapter, he predicted the collapse of Andalusia due to their widespread imitation of the Spaniards. He said: 'If a nation borders another that dominates it, a great share of imitation and emulation seeps into them. This is evident in Andalusia in this era with the Galician nations. You find them imitating them in clothing, insignia, and many of their customs and conditions — even in depicting statues on walls, plants, and houses. The observer, with a wise eye, may discern that this is a sign of their eminent subjugation — and all matters are by Allah's decree. Reflect on the secret behind the saying: "The common people follow the religion of their

<sup>1</sup> Ibn al-Tiqtaqī, *Al-Fakhri fi al-Adab al-Sultaniyya*, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'*, 17/507.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya wa'l-Nihaya*, 9/186; see also: Al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-Dhahab*, 4/250 and beyond; Al-'Abbasi, *Athar al-Awwal*, pp. 118–119.

king,” for it falls under the same principle, as the ruler dominates those under his authority, and the subjects emulate him.’<sup>1</sup>

Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani (d. 852 AH) said: ‘The people follow the religion of their kings; if the rulers deviate from the right path, they themselves go astray and lead others astray.’<sup>2</sup>

Ibn ‘Arabsah (d. 854 AH) said: ‘If the noble kings have good character, the subjects necessarily become righteous, whether willingly or unwillingly, and they strive eagerly in the field of obedience, for the people follow the religion of their kings and tread the paths of their rulers.’<sup>3</sup>

Tracing examples throughout history is an endless endeavour.<sup>4</sup>

It must be noted that the influence of authority is not limited to political and social affairs — justice, oppression, prosperity, corruption, and the like — but extends to inclinations in sciences, arts, and literature. ‘People gravitate toward what the ruler favours; if the ruler is interested in a particular field of knowledge, the people lean toward it.’<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, it must be understood that these statements were made before the modern state, when the ruler did not control knowledge and education, nor most societal activities. The ruler was primarily responsible for security, defence, taxation, policing, the judiciary, and the military, while education, culture, economy, and labour were left to societal initiatives. However, in the modern state, authority has penetrated every aspect of life and exercises control over all activities — to the extent that no window can be opened in a wall without permission, no preacher can speak in a mosque without permission, and no book can be published without permission.

So, what is the impact of authority on people now? The modern state has become a new god!!

## (7)

In our time, highly evident phenomena have occurred, proving the immense

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *Tarikh Ibn Khaldun (History of Ibn Khaldun)*, 1/184–185.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, 7/151.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Arabschah, *Fakihat al-Khulafa*, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> Other examples for those who wish to explore further: Al-Maqrizi, *Al-Suluk* (Scientific Edition), 2/490, Al-Maqrizi, *Al-Khitat* (Scientific Edition), 4/89, Ibn Taghri Birdi, *Al-Nujum al-Zahira* (Egyptian Ministry of Culture Edition), 9/178 and beyond, 15/348–349, Richard Burton, *A Journey to Egypt and Hejaz*, 1/97, Muhammad Kurd Ali, *Khitat al-Sham*, 2/67, Abd al-Rahman al-Rafi‘i, *The Era of Ismail*, 2/288, Muhammad Ilhami, *Fi Arwiqat al-Tarikh*, 1/224 and beyond, 3/155 and beyond, 4/170 and beyond.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Ajlouni, *Kashf al-Khafa*, 2/311. See examples of this in: Ibn Hazm, *Rasa’il Ibn Hazm*, 2/229; Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi, *Al-Farq Bayn al-Firaq*, p. 169; Al-Ghazali, *Ihya’ Ulum al-Din*, 1/41 and beyond; Ibn Taymiyyah, *Iqtida’ al-Sirat al-Mustaqim*, 2/348; Rifa’a al-Tahtawi, *Al-A’mal al-Kamila*, 2/24; Muhammad al-Tantawi, *Nash’at al-Nahw*, p. 205; Al-Tanahi, *Maqalat al-Tanahi*, 1/324.

influence of authority on people. A single country, a single nation, and a single tribe have been divided into two sections, with different systems of governance, making the distinction between them so clear that they seem like they are two different peoples. In the twentieth century, Europe was divided between Western liberal capitalist influence and Eastern Soviet communist influence. And here we are, more than thirty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, yet the difference between Eastern and Western Europe remains evident.

Likewise, Germany was divided into East and West — the former ruled under Soviet influence, the latter under Western influence — and the difference between the two sections and their peoples remains apparent in ethics and development. Even the Korean people have been split into North and South, with the North ruled by a strict communist regime and the South under a completely different system. The disparity between the two countries and their peoples in perceptions, ideas, and customs is almost unbelievable.

Even in our Islamic world, the border line between Pakistan and Afghanistan divides the Pashtun tribes. Yet, it has been repeatedly observed that when an Arab travels there, he feels that the border line between them transports him between two different worlds: one world sees the Arab as a treasure trove of wealth and a sack of money, while another sees him as a descendant of the Prophet and his Companions. The only difference between them is the variation in the governing system between the two countries!<sup>1</sup>

If we reflect on our recent history, we will witness that the great deviation in our countries began at the hands of foreign occupation or its governments. These did not spread their ideas in our lands through preaching and missionary work, but rather they came with fleets, armies, and warships. Once they established control over our lands, they enabled their missionaries and proselytisers to work peacefully under the protection of the power of authority and with the support of its resources. Had the West thought to send us its preachers first, it would not have achieved anything of what it has achieved.

The spread of Westernisation in our lands, among our young men and women, is simply because the West is dominant. Had we been conquered by the Indians, the Chinese, or the Africans, their traditions and customs would have prevailed among us, and the teachings of Islam would have been judged according to the teachings of Buddha and Confucius.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Islam has disappeared from the lands where the authority of Islam has vanished, as in Andalusia and vast regions of Africa and Asia, no matter how long or short the Muslims there persevered in holding onto their faith.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example: Abdullah Azzam, *Al-Dhakha'ir Al-Idham*, 2/17 and beyond; Fayez Al-Kandari, *Al-Bala' Al-Shadid*, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> For more, see: Ibrahim Al-Sakran, Sultat Al-Thaqafah Al-Ghaliba (*The Authority of the Dominant Culture*).

### **Conclusion:**

I have deliberately and intentionally elaborated on this example because comprehending this historically consistent law is crucial and decisive for the understanding of any preacher or reformer. There is a vast and profound difference between a preacher and reformer who understands this law and one who does not. The effect of governance and authority on people and societies is the most critical factor in their rectitude or corruption.

Whoever fails to understand this fact will continue to waste his efforts in vain, wandering aimlessly without achieving anything of significance! The battle over governance, power, and the ruling system is the fundamental, decisive, and core battle in every movement towards change. For this reason, it is the most difficult, strenuous, and harsh battle. Many shy away from it due to its difficulty and hardship, but when they do so, they are merely numbing themselves and their consciences. Their case is like that of Juha, in the well-known anecdote about him: Someone saw him searching on the ground and asked him, 'What are you looking for?' He replied, 'My money.' The man asked, 'Did you lose it here?' He said, 'No, I lost it over there.' Astonished, the man asked, 'Then why are you searching for it here?' Juha replied, 'Because this place is lit, while that place is dark!'

As long as reformers and preachers find it burdensome to seek reform in the dark place and find it difficult to engage in the tough battle, they will achieve nothing. They are like someone trying to hold back water to prevent his house from flooding instead of thinking to turn off the faucet or like someone trying to contain a fire without shutting off the gas cylinder. All efforts will be futile as long as preachers and reformers avoid dealing with governance, authority, and ruling power.

## **Where do We Begin?**

Amidst the reality of division that the nation already lives in — after falling under foreign occupation and then witnessing the collapse of its unifying caliphate a hundred years ago — there is no choice but for each reformer to start in his own place and homeland. That is what is feasible, as each one is more knowledgeable about the conditions of his own land, its people, its circumstances, and the most suitable solutions for it.

However, a group from this ummah must emerge to think about its destiny and affairs as if it were one nation. This group must consider itself as the people of authority and decision-making for the ummah or as the unifying caliph of the single nation, even if they have no real authority or influence. Even if they do not possess the commanding voice of a caliph, this is the first step! Great dreams, before they come true, were merely aspirations and fantasies in the minds of their holders, not realities on the ground.

Furthermore, a comprehensive thinking approach about the ummah leads to perceiving its major problems and key points of dysfunction. Such thinking inevitably drives one to search for the greatest solutions and the main centres of power. It compels one to distinguish between partial battles and battles of priority, between valuable opportunities and short-term gains.

After long contemplation, living with the concerns of our nation, and following its history and reality, I have come to present an endeavour in this regard, and I believe here that I am free from personal biases and partial affiliations. This is the fourth and final chapter — may Allah make it beneficial!

## **The Principle of Capitals**

If we wish to formulate a general plan for the entire Muslim nation, we will find ourselves looking at a broad perspective of the conditions of Muslims. We will see that the nation suffers from general weakness, from the farthest East to the farthest West. However, the approach to reform will not be by chasing after every individual in this billion-strong nation to correct him. The vastness of space and the sheer number of people, along with the experiences of other nations, suggest otherwise.

So, what do the experiences of other nations tell us?!

Here emerges the principle of ‘capitals,’ which is a consistently valid historical rule. Every people have a capital or a central base to which they belong, which governs and influences them. It is the centre of their political and financial power, and it houses their intellectual, scientific, and military elite.

The change that occurs in the capital quickly extends its effects to the rest of the districts and regions. However, change that happens in the suburbs and towns does not necessarily influence the capital. The position of the capital, in relation to the suburbs and towns, is like the position of the heart in relation to the body — if it is sound, righteousness spreads to the rest of the parts, and if it is corrupt, corruption spreads as well.

Working in the non-capital cities is much easier, and its results appear much faster, but they are also much weaker. On the other hand, working in the capitals is much more difficult, and its results take longer, but success there changes history. One of the established principles in life, and the course of history is that the victory of one state over another is determined by the moment its capital falls. As long as the capital continues to resist, the war is not over. A revolution succeeds when it takes control of the capital, and it fails if it does not.

The great battles in history are battles over capitals — whether it is the battle to seize them or the battle in which the main army perishes on its way to open the capital. The capital has the power to regain the non-capital cities no matter how weakened it may be, even if for a long time. Some revolutions and rebellions lasted for fifty years but eventually withered because they failed to control the capital.

**Reflect on these examples:**

**(1)**

We previously pointed out that our Prophet ﷺ was deeply committed, to the extent that he nearly perished from sorrow, in his effort to guide the leaders of Mecca. This was because Mecca was the capital of the Arabs, their religious, political, and financial centre of influence, as well as home to their intellectual and political elite. The importance of Mecca is evident throughout the Prophet's biography and even in pre-Islamic Arab history. Mecca was called 'Umm al-Qura' (Mother of Cities) because it was the most honoured, prestigious, and esteemed city among the Arabs.

1. The first deviation from the religion of Ibrahim originated in Mecca when 'Amr ibn Luhay al-Khuza'i brought an idol from the Levant and installed it there. From this point, idol worship spread across the Arabian Peninsula.
2. The Prophet of the Arabs was sent in Mecca, as it was part of the divine wisdom that prophets are sent among the noblest of their people.
3. The entire life of the Prophet ﷺ revolved around Mecca; he exerted immense effort to persuade its elite to embrace the faith and spent ten years striving toward this goal.
4. When they refused and hope was lost, he turned to the second most important Arab city after Mecca — Ta'if. In Ta'if, the Qur'anic verse was

revealed: ‘And they say, “Why was this Qur’an not sent down upon a great man from [one of] the two cities?”’ (Surah Az-Zukhruf: 43:31). The two cities refer to Mecca and Ta’if.

5. When Ta’if also rejected him, and he faced absolute resistance, he began presenting himself to various tribes until he found the Ansar. This led to the Medinan phase, which involved an ongoing struggle with Mecca itself, with all his major battles centred around Mecca.
6. When Mecca finally acknowledged the state of Medina through the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, Allah called it a ‘clear victory.’ Within two years, as many people embraced Islam as had done so since the beginning of the Prophet’s mission.
7. When Mecca was conquered, it was deemed ‘the greatest conquest,’ and only then did the Arab tribes enter Islam in large numbers. The year following the conquest of Mecca was called ‘the Year of Delegations,’ during which the verse was revealed: ‘When the victory of Allah has come and the conquest, and you see the people entering into the religion of Allah in multitudes.’ (Surah An-Nasr: 110:1-2). This signified the nearing end of the Prophet’s mission and his impending departure from this world.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the Prophet’s ﷺ biography demonstrates that he did not aimlessly wander between scattered Arab tribes, inviting them individually; rather, he concentrated his efforts on making the change in the grand capital, ‘Umm al-Qura.’ Once Allah granted him its conquest, the rest of the Arabian Peninsula followed suit.

## (2)

A testament to the importance of capitals and their decisive role in history is seen in the global powers at the time of the Prophet’s ﷺ mission: Persia and Rome. Why did Persia collapse after the first strike while Rome endured to this day?

One of the main reasons is that Muslims successfully conquered the Persian capital, Al-Mada’in, in Iraq, but were unable to capture the Roman capital, Constantinople, for more than eight centuries. Muslims overran Al-Mada’in and pursued the last Persian emperor from the very first wave of conquests, whereas the Muslim armies struggled for centuries to take Constantinople. These eight centuries provided Rome with the opportunity to establish new capitals — Vienna, Madrid, London, Paris, Moscow, and Washington — where both power and the influential elite are centred. Each of these capitals serves as a successor in leading the Christian Roman world, whenever one of the capitals or kingdoms weakens, another one takes over.

The great Persian commander Al-Hurmuzan, after converting to Islam, advised

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Bukhari (4685).

Caliph Umar about this crucial political and military strategy. When Umar asked him how to conquer Persia, he said: ‘The Persians who bear enmity towards the Muslims are like a bird with a head, two wings, and two legs. If one wing is broken, the legs and the head will support the other wing. If the other wing is broken, the legs and head will uphold what remains. But if the head is crushed, the wings and legs will collapse with it. The head is Khosrow... so order the Muslims to march against him!’<sup>1</sup> In another narration, from Ibn Abi Shaybah, he said: ‘Isfahan is the head, Persia and Azerbaijan are the wings. If you cut one wing, the head will lean on the other wing. But if you cut off the head, the wings will fall. So, begin with the head.’<sup>2</sup>

The key takeaway, regardless of variations in the narration, is that eliminating the head is the most efficient course of action, as it spares efforts needed to dismantle the rest of the body. This is what Muslims achieved against the Persians but failed to do against the Romans, allowing Rome’s power to persist to this day.

### (3)

Historical events have followed this pattern:

1. Though the Abbasid state initially established its capital in Kufa, its armies did not rest until they seized Damascus, the Umayyad capital, and pursued the last Umayyad Caliph, Marwan ibn Muhammad, until he was killed in Egypt. Without this, their rule would not have been secured.
2. The Fatimid state, despite its ambitions, was unable to seize Baghdad — the Abbasid capital — which marked the beginning of its decline. It eventually met its end at the hands of the Zengids and Ayyubids, who were loyal to the Abbasids.
3. The Ottoman Empire could not claim the caliphate until its armies conquered Cairo, which was the capital of the Islamic caliphate and housed the Abbasid Caliph.
4. The Islamic Caliphate itself was only abolished when Western powers and their allies seized its capital, Istanbul, from where they declared its dissolution.

In every case of occupation, true control over a country is only confirmed once its capital is taken. Likewise, in every revolution, success is only realised when the revolutionaries control the capital, forcing the king or president to flee, be imprisoned, or be killed.

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Bukhari (2989).

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Abi Shaybah, *Al-Musannaf*, (33793).

(4)

A capital derives its strength from a long historical weight as it is built over decades or centuries of political, economic, social, and military interactions that make it the most important city in its country. If that country is large, its capital influences surrounding regions as well. Thus, in addition to these material factors (political, economic, social and military), psychological and symbolic forces grant the capital even greater authority. The capital in the realm of policy and authority is akin to a sacred city for its people, especially those who follow a religion or a particular sect.

For instance: Iraqis recognise no authority except from *Baghdad*, Syrians acknowledge only *Damascus*, Egyptians accept only *Cairo*, and so on. Resisting historical facts and deeply ingrained material and psychological factors is futile.

One crucial point to note: in the realm of politics and power, *political capitals outweigh spiritual capitals*. This becomes evident when sacred and political centres are distinct. For example: if a force seeks to control Iran, its focus must be on *Tehran*, not the Shiite religious centre of *Qom*. Likewise, if a force aims to control Saudi Arabia, it must take *Riyadh*, not *Mecca* or *Medina*, and so on.

This pattern is evident in the history of the Levant's conquests. The Muslim-Byzantine struggle revolved around *Damascus*, the political capital of the region, rather than *Jerusalem*, despite the latter being the spiritual and religious capital for both Muslims and Christians. The Muslims did not capture Jerusalem until after Roman military power was completely shattered. Damascus' conquest was in 15 Rajab 14 AH, whereas Jerusalem was taken two years later, in Rabi' al-Akhir 16 AH.

Were the Prophet's Companions then negligent towards the place where the Prophet ascended to Heaven (i.e. al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem)? Far from it! The Companions were wise statesmen and strategists who knew that the natural gateway to Jerusalem was through eliminating the power of the political and military capital. Otherwise, conquering Jerusalem alone would have been futile.

Thus, if we seek to reform our ummah, we must identify the key centres whose transformation would create widespread impact. The battle at these pivotal locations will be harder, but also more effective.

In summary: this billion-strong nation can be reformed by improving key regions in it. If we identify the most strategic countries that influence vast surrounding areas, we can significantly shorten the path to its revival. And if we further pinpoint their central, inspiring capitals, we will have condensed the vast Islamic world into a handful of decisive cities.

(5)

After I wrote the previous text, I was surprised to find that this principle of capitals exists in the Holy Qur'an. I seek forgiveness from Allah for my heedlessness, and Allah has blessed me by drawing my attention to this point in His saying: 'And your Lord would not destroy the towns until He had sent in their mother city a messenger reciting to them Our verses.' (Al-Qasas: 28:59).

The meaning of '*their mother city*' here is their capitals, metropolises, and major centres, as determined by the scholars of interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

The main idea is that Allah's way in sending messengers, who reform the conditions of the people, is that they be in the centres of influence — in the largest cities, which are followed by the surrounding regions. This is because the reform of this large city leads to the reform of its surroundings and dependencies, as it serves as the root.

The scholars of Quranic interpretation have mentioned a point regarding this principle of capitals, which is related to the principle of governance and authority. The two principles are linked. They said: the messenger was specifically sent to the greatest city because messengers are sent to the nobles, and the nobles of a people are their kings, who reside in the places that are the *mother cities* of their surroundings.

This is the same path that reformers who follow in the footsteps of the messengers must take. Following this path is at the core of following the messengers and understanding Allah's established norms with people.

(6)

Having reached this point, the question arises: *what are the central capitals of this billion-strong Islamic nation?*

After long contemplation, extensive discussions with various intellectuals of the ummah over the past years, deep historical analysis, and thorough observation of current realities, opinions consistently converged on these cities:

Cairo, Riyadh, Istanbul, Damascus, and Baghdad.

These are the nerve centres, the hubs, and the capitals of the ummah. If the ummah can liberate these capitals and establish independent states that control their own decisions and can defend themselves, it will have taken more than half the path toward its final liberation. If we trace history, we find that these capitals were the last strongholds to fall during the Western occupation of the ummah, which began 500 years ago and continues today. The Western colonial wave first

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<sup>1</sup> See: Ibn Qutaybah, *Gharib al-Qur'an*, p. 334; Al-Samarqandi, *Bahr al-Ulum*, 2/615; Al-Wahidi, *Al-Tafsir al-Basit*, 17/430; Al-Baghawi, *Tafsir al-Baghawi*, 3/540; Al-Zamakhshari, *Al-Kashshaf*, 3/424; Ibn Atiyyah, *Al-Muharrar al-Wajiz*, 4/293; Ibn al-Jawzi, *Zad al-Masir*, 3/389; Al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, 25/7.

devoured the peripheries until the fall of each of these capitals struck a devastating blow.

These capitals have a profound, far-reaching impact on the entire ummah due to their historical depth, cultural presence, demographic strength, and strategic location. The enemy understands this perhaps better than we do. That is why the battle for liberation in these capitals is among the most difficult and challenging civilisational battles. There is no use in avoiding them, for this battle is inevitable — there is no alternative!

(7)

While these capitals influence the entire ummah, the reality is that each country now has its specific circumstances, problems, and conditions due to the long period of fragmentation. Some are closer than others to the moment of revolution, liberation, and change.

- If we were to adopt the mindset of a hypothetical ideal Muslim caliph — one who thinks in terms of the ummah's best interest and has the ability to direct its energies towards one decisive battle — the situation would appear as follows:
- Istanbul is currently the closest of these capitals to achieving independence and self-governance. It has a strong leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has achieved significant and impactful results in this capital. However, the challenge is that his success is still person-dependent, leaving concerns about what will happen after his departure.
- Damascus and Cairo appear to be closer to a potential liberation, as both are ruled by brutal oppressive regimes that have not yet fully secured their grip to the point of stability. Moreover, the spirit of revolution and the desire to overthrow these regimes still resonate within their peoples' minds.
- Other capitals, like Baghdad, seem more distant in the foreseeable future, as it has been ravaged by wars, occupation, foreign domination, and internal division. Its fighting force has suffered crushing blows.
- Riyadh is a subject of debate — some argue it is close to change, while others see it as distant.

If we focus on the two capitals most likely to experience liberation — Damascus and Cairo — I personally consider Cairo the most likely to undergo change. Even the mere escape of Cairo from Western foreign domination would be a major victory for the ummah and a major loss for its enemies.

For this reason, the battle over Cairo will be immense. However, several natural and circumstantial factors make the situation easier than in many past

periods:

- Natural factors: Cairo encapsulates all of Egypt, meaning a revolution in Egypt begins and ends in Cairo. Unlike other countries where a revolution may take years to reach the capital, Egypt's revolution erupts directly in Cairo. Moreover, revolutions in Cairo do not last long due to its unique social fabric and global geopolitical significance, which compels many external parties to seek stability rather than prolonged turmoil.
- Circumstantial factors:
  - The presence of a lingering revolutionary spirit that has not been extinguished instigates dreams of rekindling the revolution.
  - There is a widespread public resentment against Sisi and his regime.
  - The Egyptian security forces and the army are still unprofessional and incapable of withstanding a mass nonviolent uprising.
  - Additionally, the most likely alternative leadership in Egypt does not pose a radical threat to foreign interests or the global system, which makes foreign powers more inclined to explore alternatives rather than ignite a bloody battle to preserve Sisi.

A mere destabilisation of the military regime in Egypt would cause a political earthquake in the regional map, affecting Gaza, Libya, Sudan, the Gulf, the Levant, and Turkey. But if we are talking about a complete revolutionary victory that liberates Egypt, we would be in a whole new realm of possibilities and aspirations.

Thus, I believe that if the ummah had a caliph capable of mobilising its resources for one decisive battle, his only option at this moment would be the battle for Egypt. Moreover, if every individual dedicated to serving Islam were to channel their efforts into supporting the Egyptian revolution, the impact would benefit their own countries far more than anything they could achieve locally.

## **Egypt...why?**

In this chapter, I aim to present key facts about Egypt and its influence on the Arab and Islamic world.

My objective is to prove two things:

- That choosing Egypt and its capital, Cairo, as the focal point for Islamic activism is the correct decision — superior to any other city or country.
- That this choice is not driven by personal bias or subjective nationalistic emotions. Rather, I believe it was a choice made solely for the sake of

Allah and the benefit of the ummah. It would be a betrayal to the ummah for any Egyptian Muslim to withhold this truth out of fear of being accused of nationalism or racism. Our scholars have taught us that *'abandoning action for the sake of people's opinions is a form of hypocrisy.'*

(1)

In recorded human history, Egypt was among the earliest nations to develop a powerful civilisation. Several factors contributed to this. One factor is the Nile River, which provided vast fertile lands expanding from south to north of the land, ensuring abundant agriculture and a stable food supply. This led to a large, settled population in this land and also led to advancements in crafts, industries, and trade. Moreover, its strategic location between East and West made it a thriving commercial hub. Also, the natural geographic defences for this fertile Nile valley (deserts to the east and west, and seas to the north and east) provided its security.

As a result of all these factors, a strong and well-established state soon emerged in Egypt, ruling over a people who had settled there and needed it for organising irrigation, maintaining the river's function, and utilising its waters through dams and barrages. They also required the state to build storage facilities for crops, resolve disputes, and protect against external threats.

Surah Yusuf, which presents us with the oldest known depiction of Egypt, contains numerous indications of the stability of the state, its strength, and the development of its administrative, judicial, and financial systems. Among them is the verse:

1. *'And two young men entered the prison with him'* (Surah Yusuf: 12:36). The mere existence of a prison indicates an advanced state, as simpler societies resort to direct punishments such as execution, amputation, or exile — measures that require no effort, time, buildings, guards, or supervision over the prisoners' food and drink. The presence of a prison suggests that all these things exist. It also demonstrates the state's strength and ability to enforce imprisonment. A state that imprisons people must feel secure against revenge from the prisoners upon their release and against any group attempting to free them or attack the prison. The fact that imprisonment was a penalty shows that the state had the power to enforce it, that the prison's location was known to all, and that people either accepted it or were powerless to oppose it.
2. *'As for one of you, he will pour wine for his master; and as for the other, he will be crucified'* (Surah Yusuf: 12:41). This indicates the existence of a judicial system. The presence of a judicial system does not necessarily mean justice prevails or that oppression is absent, but rather that judicial affairs

are managed in an organised manner. In this verse, Prophet Yusuf (Joseph), peace be upon him, was addressing two prisoners in pre-trial detention whose cases had not yet been decided. Each of them had a dream reflecting their fate, which Yusuf interpreted: one would be acquitted and return to serving wine to the king, while the other would be sentenced to death by crucifixion. The key point here is the existence of a judicial system and a period of pre-trial detention.

Moreover, the statement of the wife of Al-Aziz, ‘And if he does not do what I order him, he will surely be imprisoned’ (Surah Yusuf: 12:32), also indicates a period between accusation and punishment. She accused Yusuf of attacking her, but her husband sought to suppress the matter, saying, ‘O Yusuf, ignore this, and [you, woman,] seek forgiveness for your sin’ (Surah Yusuf: 12:29). It was established that Yusuf was innocent, yet the rumour spread among the noblewomen, posing a threat to the state's reputation. Consequently, the matter was officially investigated, and a lawsuit was initiated. Thus, there was a time gap between accusation and punishment. During this period, the wife of Al-Aziz invited the women, presented Yusuf before them, and clearly warned, ‘And if he does not do what I order him, he will surely be imprisoned’ (Surah Yusuf: 12:32), indicating that Yusuf was still free in his master's house and that the case was under investigation and no punishment has been declared yet.

3. We also understand from her statement, ‘*And if he does not do what I order him, he will surely be imprisoned*’ (Surah Yusuf: 12:32), the power of authority and the corruption of the judicial system, which depended on the will of the powerful elite. Yusuf was imprisoned despite being innocent, simply because it was the will and the judgement of the wife of Al-Aziz. Later, he sought to secure his release by appealing to influential figures: ‘And he said to the one whom he knew would be saved, “Mention me to your master”’ (Surah Yusuf: 12:42). Yet, he was only released when the king himself intervened, showing disregard for judicial rulings: ‘And the king said, “Bring him to me”’ (Surah Yusuf: 12:50).
4. The advancement of Egypt’s economic system and its wealth is evident in Yusuf’s words to the king: ‘Appoint me over the treasures of the land; indeed, I will be a knowing guardian’ (Surah Yusuf: 12:55). He described Egypt as the ‘*treasures of the land*’ and emphasised the need for highly competent management — ‘*a knowing guardian*’.
5. The administrative development is also evident in several aspects, such as:
  - The process of trade and exchange. Merchants did not simply exchange goods directly; instead, they deposited their goods in one place and received their equivalent in another, even in sealed containers. The state was trusted to the extent that traders did not check their goods until they returned home, as seen when Yusuf’s brothers discovered their goods

was given to them only after reaching their homeland: *‘And when they opened their baggage, they found their merchandise returned to them’* (Yusuf: 12:65). So, reflect on how the goods remained sealed, stamped with the state's seal, trusted for their contents, and left unopened until they returned to their homeland! Yusuf could have simply instructed his servants to return his brothers' goods to them, fully confident that they would not discover this until they had returned to their country, as stated in the verse: *‘And he said to his servants, “Put their merchandise into their saddlebags so they may recognise it when they have returned to their people.”’* (Surah Yusuf: 12:62).

- Likewise, the advancement of the administrative system is evident in Yusuf's proposal for solving the famine crisis. There is no doubt that it was a strong state, one capable of preserving stored grains and crops and maintaining some of them for seven years. This was achieved in ancient times, without the modern capabilities that states now possess in terms of monitoring and oversight systems.
  - The administrative advancement in Egypt is also evident in Jacob's instruction to his sons: *‘O my sons, do not enter from one gate but enter from different gates.’* (Surah Yusuf: 12:67). This indicates that a single purpose (trade procurement) at the relevant ministry (such as the Ministry of Finance or Supply) could be accessed through multiple gates. Different people could enter through separate entrances without disrupting the system. There was no disorder or confusion; rather, each individual could complete their task whether they entered together through one gate or separately through different gates.
6. Egypt's industrial and economic sophistication is also apparent in the verse: *‘She prepared for them a banquet and gave each one of them a knife’* (Surah Yusuf: 12:31). Thousands of years ago, people in Egypt were using knives and reclining comfortably on couches, showcasing a high level of civilisation.

This is the earliest reliable depiction of Egypt's conditions, revealing its wealth, administrative development, and the power of its state and authority.

## (2)

In Islamic history, the prominence of Egypt is reflected in the statement of Umar ibn Al-Khattab to Amr ibn Al-As, recorded in books on Egypt's merits and history: *‘The governorship of Egypt is comprehensive; it equals the caliphate.’* This concise Umari or Amri statement encapsulates Egypt's role from that time to the present — Egypt has always been either a parallel caliphate or the sole ruling power.

History presents a well-known dilemma: any rebel or state founder faces the challenge of acquiring both wealth and manpower. A leader needs money to support his men in launching a revolution or founding a state, and as his power expands, he needs more men to maintain control, which requires even more wealth. He would then need to expand to gain the necessary resources, which in turn demands more men, creating a continuous cycle.

However, some regions defy this pattern — Egypt is one such exception. Due to its abundant wealth, it can always finance any project or state. Egypt has historically been a reservoir of money and manpower. When a competent ruler controls it and manages its resources well, he can build a formidable army and essentially become a caliph in his own right. He would be truly independent, even stronger than the caliph himself. Many times, in history, Egypt has played this role, including:

1. The governorship of Egypt was assigned to the top-ranked figures of the caliphate since the time of Umar ibn Al-Khattab. It was held by renowned leaders who were close to the caliphs, such as Amr ibn Al-As, Abdullah ibn Sa'd ibn Abi Sarh, Qais ibn Sa'd ibn Ubadah, Malik ibn Al-Harith Al-Ashtar, Utbah ibn Abi Sufyan, Abdul Aziz ibn Marwan (the brother of Caliph Abdul Malik ibn Marwan), Abdullah ibn Abdul Malik ibn Marwan, and Salih ibn Ali (the uncle of the Abbasid Caliph), among others!
2. When the caliphate weakened and some powerful governors managed to gain independence in Egypt, such as Ahmad ibn Tulun and later Muhammad ibn Tughj al-Ikhshid, they established two independent states separate from the caliphate. These two states became so powerful that they bore the burden of the caliphate in jihad, waging war against the Romans, and repelling their raids on the frontier regions. Their strength even reached the point where both rulers aspired to transfer the capital of the caliphate to Egypt and bring the Abbasid caliph there — a plan that nearly succeeded on two occasions.
3. When the Ubaydid (Fatimid) state was established in North Africa, it could not become a great power or thrive until it took control of Egypt. From Egypt, this state posed a real threat to the Sunni Abbasid Caliphate, almost overthrowing it — had it not been for the emergence of the Seljuks at the last moment.
4. During the Crusades, the unified Levant under the banner of Nur al-Din Zengi, along with its allies in Iraq and the Jazira (Upper Mesopotamia), could only maintain a balance of power with the Crusaders, preventing either side from achieving a decisive victory. This led to a race between them towards Egypt, in which Nur al-Din ultimately prevailed. Once Egypt was unified with the Levant, the liberation of Jerusalem was achieved at the hands of the Sultan of Egypt and the Levant, Saladin al-Ayyubi, who

inherited Nur al-Din's jihadist liberation movement.

5. Due to this, the Crusaders adopted the idea of invading and controlling Egypt before attacking the Levant and liberating Jerusalem, learning from history. The Fifth and Seventh Crusades attempted to invade Egypt to ensure a secure hold over Jerusalem, but both failed. Similarly, the Sixth Crusade managed to occupy Jerusalem without a battle due to a treacherous agreement with the Sultan of Egypt, al-Malik al-Kamil al-Ayyubi!
6. The Mongols were defeated by the Mamluk army ruling Egypt. Then the Mamluks, who controlled both Egypt and the Levant, liberated the rest of the Levant from the Crusaders and even reconquered major Mediterranean islands like Cyprus and Crete. Egypt became the capital of the Islamic Caliphate, and the Abbasid Caliph sought refuge there!
7. The Mongol sultan, known as 'the Hurricane' Timur (Tamerlane), feared facing the Mamluk army, despite having inflicted a crushing defeat on the Ottomans, even capturing their Sultan Bayezid 'the Thunderbolt.' This was due to his well-established strength in the Egyptian armies.
8. The most striking lesson from the Crusades, as recorded by Catholic Church historian Marino Sanuto Torsello, was that if the West sought to invade the East again, it should start with Egypt. Beginning with the Levant meant leaving the Crusader's backside exposed to Egypt, which could always supply the jihadist movement in the Levant with money and men. Europe followed this advice, launching the French campaign against Egypt first before turning to the Levant. Since then, the West has only been able to dominate the Levant through Egyptian efforts, Egyptian blood, and Egyptian wealth. This is because the ruling power in Egypt was a Western-aligned authority representing the West and serving its interests!
9. Throughout the history of the great Ottoman Empire, it never suffered defeats like those inflicted by Muhammad Ali's army, which swept through the Levant, defeated the Ottomans, reached Kütahya, threatened Constantinople, and stripped the Ottoman state of both its army and navy at the same time. These defeats marked the first true weakening of Ottoman power and the beginning of serious ambitions to dismantle the empire.
10. The British occupation then arrived, landing in Egypt first and ruling it for 35 years before controlling the Levant. They did not seize the Levant and take Jerusalem until they did so with the Egyptian army at their side, relying on Egyptian efforts, Egyptian economy, and Egyptian resources.
11. Looking at the history of revolutions against colonialism, we find that the spark often started in Egypt before spreading elsewhere. Egypt's revolution against British occupation occurred in 1919, followed by the Iraqi Revolution in 1920 and the Levantine Revolution in 1921. Another, smaller

wave in the mid-1930s also began in Egypt before spreading to the Levant and Iraq.

12. Israel was only established because the surrounding countries — most importantly Egypt — were under occupation. The occupation-installed authority in Egypt became Israel's greatest ally in its establishment and in crushing the resistance fighters who could have fought against it. Israel would not have come into existence if Egypt had not been occupied! Even now, Israel's strongest external protection from threats comes from the Egyptian government, which, since its founding, has provided the greatest assistance in strengthening Israel and fighting those who resist it.
13. When the Americans and Soviets sought to inherit British and French colonial influence after World War II, a race for Egypt began. The Americans initially won by orchestrating the military coup in Egypt (known as the July 1952 Revolution). While earlier military coups had occurred in Syria, the Egyptian coup triggered a wave of military takeovers across the Arab world and Africa. The Egyptian government became a powerful tool in supporting anti-colonial movements, which, in reality, were simply chapters in the new colonial inheritance by the Americans and Soviets, replacing the old colonial powers!
14. Egypt's defeat by Israel in 1967 was a second catastrophe. Though Israel overran three Arab countries, the most devastating and heart-breaking blow for all Arabs was the defeat of the Egyptian army and the downfall of Gamal Abdel Nasser, who was regarded as the leader of the Arab world. Even today — half a century after his death — many non-Egyptians refuse to criticise him and still hang his pictures in their homes!
15. No Arab country dared to pursue peace and normalisation with Israel except Egypt. Afterwards, the rest of the Arab world began to follow suit, either secretly or openly. This was the greatest and most devastating blow to the Palestinian cause. This is because although Egypt is only one country out of 23 Arab nations, it accounts for a quarter of the Arab population, sits at the heart of the region, and holds the Arab world's cultural and political weight.
16. In late 2010, the Tunisian revolution broke out, but it did not stir much reaction across the Arab world. The spark was only picked up in Egypt, leading to the January 2011 revolution. When this revolution succeeded in toppling Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011, four more revolutions erupted that same week: Yemen (February 11), Bahrain (February 14), Libya (February 17), and Morocco (February 20). The following month, the Syrian revolution began (March 15). This wave became known as the 'Arab Spring'. Without the Egyptian revolution and the Tunisian uprising, its success would have remained an isolated event, fading into history.

17. When the military coup in Egypt overthrew the elected president, Mohamed Morsi, in July 2013, and massacres began (such as the Rabaa massacre on August 14, 2013), a wave of counter-revolutions and bloodshed followed. Just one week after the Rabaa massacre, the first known chemical weapon attack against Syrian civilians occurred in Ghouta (August 21, 2013). Around the same time, protests erupted in Tunisia (July and August 2013), ultimately leading to the resignation of the elected government and the formation of one more aligned with the old regime. Then, in Libya (March 2014), Khalifa Haftar emerged to lead a new coup against the post-revolutionary system — continuing the cycle.
18. If we move away from politics and look at intellectual and cultural history, we see that Egypt's Al-Azhar University, even after two centuries of systematic weakening, remains the most famous Islamic university, attracting students from the Far East, deep Africa, and Muslim minorities in Europe. Egyptian scholars, Quran reciters, and intellectuals continue to hold the highest status in the Islamic world, despite the rise of other schools of thought and recitation styles during the last decades. The same applies to poetry — Egypt was home to the last great Arab poetry innovators, such as Mahmoud Sami al-Baroudi, Ahmed Shawqi, and Hafez Ibrahim. No one else in the Arab world has yet attained a similar level of influence in this field.
19. The same is true for Islamic movements. Egypt has been the cradle of modern Islamic movements and leadership figures, even when their origins were not Egyptian. For example, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, though Afghan, gained prominence and international weight through his years in Egypt — likewise, Muhammad Abduh and Muhammad Rashid Rida. Then, the Muslim Brotherhood and its leader, Hassan al-Banna, also originated in Egypt, as did jihadist movements like al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya and Egyptian Islamic Jihad, which later became pillars of the global jihadist movement. No one doubts that many of the most influential names in modern Islamic thought — such as Sayyid Qutb, Muhammad al-Ghazali, Metwally al-Shaarawi, and Yusuf al-Qaradawi — were Egyptians.
20. The same applies to corruption and those who corrupt. The Egyptian elite was at the forefront of secular intellectual elites that interacted with incoming Western modernity, translated Westernising ideas, and engaged in the battle against religion. A simple look reveals that the pioneers of secularism and intellectual corruption were Egyptians, such as Ali Abdel Raziq, who led the battle over Islam and its relation to governance; Qasim Amin, who led the battle over the veil of women; and Saad Zaghloul, the leader of liberalism in politics. This is in addition to Egypt's leadership in media, pioneering newspapers, radio, and television channels, and how it flooded the Arab world with an overwhelming torrent of films, series, and

songs, to the point that a singer or actor would not become famous unless they lived in Egypt!

These are twenty points, in which I have tried briefly, to demonstrate my argument that reforming the situation in Egypt will undoubtedly lead to reform in the broader Arab region and the Islamic world. Just as corruption in Egypt has generated great corruption across the Arab world and the Islamic world. Amidst countless statements that highlight Egypt's importance on the international political map, as seen by decision-makers, I will cite just two statements made 150 years apart:

1. Richard Burton, who is considered the most important colonial traveller of the British Empire, said in the mid-19th century: 'Any state that ensures control over Egypt has won a treasure, for Egypt is surrounded by seas to the north and south and by an impassable desert to the east and west. Egypt can equip 180,000 fighters, can bear heavy taxes, and can provide a significant surplus. If Egypt falls into Western hands, it will facilitate control over India and enable the conquest of all of East Africa by digging a canal to connect the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea at Suez.'<sup>1</sup>
2. Richard Perle, a U.S. administration official at the beginning of this century, in a moment of triumph after the occupation of Afghanistan and during the preparation for the occupation of Iraq, said: 'Iraq is a tactical target, Saudi Arabia is a strategic target, but Egypt is the grand prize.'<sup>2</sup>

For all these reasons, and without any kind of racial or national fanaticism, but merely by considering the well-being of the ummah, we see that Cairo is the most important capital at this moment for Muslims to try; to be liberated from Western dominance, even if they fail to rule it themselves. The continued presence of Egypt under comprehensive Western and American influence is akin to a stranglehold on the Islamic world, controlling its most vital centres and key points.

However, if Cairo is liberated, it will be the first step towards liberating the rest of the capitals. This explains why every Arab tyrant and every foreign occupier gathered to suppress the Egyptian revolution — by doing so, they abort the newborn before it is even born. I have no doubt that if this ummah had a caliph or someone observing the scene from above with the ability to mobilise resources, they would place all their energies into the battle for Cairo — for it is the battle of the entire Islamic revolution.

A new thought has just come to me as I write these lines, one that has never occurred to me before. Scholars have long pondered the wisdom behind the repeated mention of the story of Moses, peace be upon him, in the Qur'an. They

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Burton, *Burton's Journey*, pp. 98–99.

<sup>2</sup> Washington Post, the date 6<sup>th</sup> August 2002.

have exerted great effort in interpreting this and have presented insightful explanations, among them:

1. Moses, peace be upon him, was the first prophet sent to establish a nation responsible for upholding and bearing the burden of religion and jihad for its cause. Previous prophets were sent to their peoples, some of whom believed, and others disbelieved, after which God would punish the disbelievers and save the believers. However, after Moses' salvation and the revelation of the Torah, the Israelites were tasked with carrying the message, preaching it, and fighting for it. If they upheld this duty, they thrived and gained God's favour; if they failed, they were subdued, humiliated, killed, and expelled from the Holy Land by the non-believers. Moses and the Israelites serve as an example for the ummah of Muhammad so that it does not follow the same path as the Israelites when they failed to uphold their duty.
2. Moses, peace be upon him, faced the two greatest enemies that the ummah of Muhammad would encounter: tyranny and the Jews. This is why the Qur'an elaborated extensively on this story, illustrating the nature of these two enduring adversaries, unlike the other prophets who were sent to address doctrinal and moral issues that were not universal or persistent across all societies and times.

What has just occurred to me now is that another possible wisdom behind this repetition is to highlight the importance and centrality of Egypt in Islamic history, as later confirmed by historical events. My conviction in this idea is further supported by:

1. Tyrants throughout history have been many, and prophets have confronted them. In fact, the entire history of the world is a story of tyrants facing prophets and righteous reformers. Yet, God could have narrated to us the struggles of numerous prophets against various tyrants in the Levant, Iraq, Persia, Byzantium, India, China, and elsewhere. Why, then, did He choose Moses and Pharaoh from among all these prophets and tyrants to tell us their story in detail and repeatedly?
2. Moreover, the prophets of the Israelites were numerous, and their experiences in establishing jihad and a state — or failing to do so — were plentiful. Their common traits, such as killing and rejecting prophets, were evident from their stories with several prophets, and God could have narrated such stories. Yet, why did God specifically choose Moses, who was almost the only one among the Israelite prophets to be living in Egypt?
3. The majority of Israelite history took place in the Levant, where most of their events with their prophets occurred, where they established their kingdom and experienced their golden age under David and Solomon. Yet, God chose to narrate to us the chapter of their history that occurred in Egypt,

even though it was the shortest phase of their existence. Does this not indicate the importance of this land?

If this thought is correct, then it is from Allah, and this is His grace. If it is incorrect, then it is from myself and from Satan. Nonetheless, I now strongly feel that the repeated mention of the story of Moses, Pharaoh, and the Israelites in Egypt cannot be devoid of an indication of the significance of this country for the Islamic ummah — especially when history testifies to its importance and centrality, as previously discussed.

### **How do We Begin in Egypt?**

If reforming a nation begins with reforming its central capitals, and if Cairo is the most important of the central capitals of the ummah historically and generally, then how can we liberate this capital and reform its condition? And where should the beginning be?

Here, the assessment of reality may differ: does the current situation make the liberation of this capital a near and possible matter, or is it distant and impossible?

Those who see it as possible and near rely on the state of popular boiling that is expected to explode at any moment due to the accumulation of internal and external problems, which worsen daily. Especially since the Egyptian people have not yet forgotten that they staged a revolution that overthrew the previous ruler after thirty years of his rule, which means that hope remains, and that in their minds, neither making a change nor seeing another revolution is something impossible. Those who are of this conviction also argue that the current ruling system relies solely on a single man, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who has excluded all those around him. This means that any absence or disappearance of him, even by natural death, would lead to chaos and intense competition.

On the other hand, those who see it as impossible and distant argue that the ruling system in Egypt was structured after the 2013 coup to ensure that no revolution ever takes place again. The regime has pursued this path by dismantling all social forces capable of organising a revolutionary state and has become so entrenched and security-heavy that a revolution's success in the near term is impossible. Additionally, security forces still recall the vengeance and disaster that befell them, making them more brutal at any sign of revolution. Moreover, the global and regional system will not allow a revolution to recur in Egypt after the widespread instability they experienced in 2011. The situation may even escalate to the deployment of U.S. forces to prevent Egypt's liberation.

I lean toward the first view. However, regardless of my inclination and opinion on the matter, what concerns me here is presenting the fundamental conclusions derived from the history and the reality of this country so that reformers can make

use of them — regardless of their differing views on how near or far the liberation of Cairo may be.

(1)

We previously mentioned that power, governance, and the ruling system are the true paths to change — whether for reform or corruption — as *‘people follow the religion of their kings.’* The authority’s ability to shape people, spread its ideas, and produce a society similar to itself is far greater than the people’s ability to produce an authority that mirrors them.

This general rule is even clearer in the Egyptian case. The situation in Egypt cannot be reformed without seizing power and governance. Even if some might debate this general rule, in Egypt, there is no room for such debate due to the clarity of this reality.

We previously mentioned the story of Prophet Yusuf and its indications of the state's power. Here, we must note that Yusuf (peace be upon him) was only able to reform the financial system through the king’s decision to appoint him as Minister of Finance.

We must also highlight a more striking example:

Every prophet was sent to advise the ‘chiefs’ (al-mala’) of their people, the ruling elites and decision-makers. However, in Egypt, we see that Prophet Moses was sent directly to Pharaoh. Pharaoh alone was the head of affairs and the centre of decision-making. Upon deeper examination of the Qur'an, one finds something astonishing:

Sometimes, the mention of the chiefs (mala’) disappears entirely, as if Pharaoh ruled alone! As if Moses was sent to Pharaoh alone! Examples include:

- ‘We relate to you some of the story of Moses and Pharaoh in truth for a people who believe.’ (Surah Al-Qasas: 28:3)
- ‘Just as We sent to Pharaoh a messenger, but Pharaoh disobeyed the messenger, so We seized him with a severe punishment.’ (Surah Al-Muzzammil: 73:15-16)
- ‘Go to Pharaoh, indeed, he has transgressed. And say: Would you be willing to purify yourself, and that I guide you to your Lord so you may fear Him?’ (Surah An-Nazi’at: 79:17-19)
- ‘So Pharaoh turned away, assembled his scheme, and then came forth.’ (Surah Taha: 20:60)

At other times, the chiefs (mala’) are mentioned, but they are described not as the chiefs of the people or the people of the prophet, but *as Pharaoh’s chiefs, the chiefs of Pharaoh’s people!* For example:

- ‘And indeed, We sent Moses with Our signs to Pharaoh and his chiefs.’ (Surah Az-Zukhruf: 43:46)
- ‘Nine signs to Pharaoh and his people.’ (Surah An-Naml: 27:12)

A key verse summarises the matter:

*‘And We sent Moses with Our signs and clear authority to Pharaoh and his chiefs, but they followed Pharaoh’s command, and Pharaoh’s command was not right.’* (Surah Hud:11:96-97)

What is also striking is how Pharaoh’s name appears alone among the names of other nations, as if he were a nation by himself — or rather, as if the entire nation were reduced to him. Examples include:

- ‘Before them, the people of Noah denied, and so did ‘Ad, and Pharaoh of the stakes.’ (Surah Sa’ad: 38:12)
- ‘Before them, the people of Noah, and the dwellers of the well, and Thamud denied the truth, and ‘Ad, and Pharaoh, and the brothers of Lot, and the dwellers of the thicket, and the people of Tubba’—all rejected the messengers.’ (Surah Qaf: 50:12-14)
- ‘Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with ‘Ad? Iram, of lofty pillars, the like of which was never created in the lands. And Thamud, who carved out the rock in the valley. And Pharaoh of the stakes.’ (Surah Al-Fajr: 89:6-10)

I counted the occurrences of Pharaoh’s name alone versus when it appeared alongside his people and elite. Pharaoh is mentioned alone forty times, while he appears with his people and chiefs nineteen times — demonstrating the extreme importance of governance and authority in Egypt’s stability or corruption.<sup>1</sup>

A study of the rest of Egypt’s history shows that its internal conditions and its external influence have always been deeply affected by changes in its ruling system. As far as I know, no one has ever held decisive and effective influence in Egypt without controlling power and ruling the state.

This ancient country has shaped the lives of its people to such an extent that no independent social factions remain capable of standing up to authority, unlike other rugged, tribal societies. Egypt is not governed by a collective ruling elite but is, as Ibn Khaldun put it:

*‘The kingdom of Egypt is the most stable and deeply rooted due to the scarcity of insurgents and tribes; it is merely a ruler and subjects.’*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Napoleon says: "There is no country where the administration's influence on general prosperity is as great as in Egypt." *Napoleon's Memoirs: The Campaign in Egypt*, p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Khaldun's *History*, 1/207.

Thus, any talk of reform in Egypt that does not aim at seizing power and ruling the state is merely ploughing water and carving the air!

(2)

Some people here like to pause and say: The people of Egypt are submissive, subjugated, and humiliated... etc.!

Let us hypothetically and concededly assume this is true<sup>1</sup>, that we have a submissive, subjugated, and humiliated people who are easy to control. Let us look at the matter as active reformers should, not as mere critics and slanderers who argue but do not act.

What does it mean to have an opportunity in an important and vital place where its people are easily subdued and controlled?! It is a point of strength and a great opportunity since this scenario facilitates the process of seizing power and maintaining stability in it. Undoubtedly, ruling a country where tribalism, factions, and clans are widespread requires great effort, balance, appeasement, and political manoeuvring, and even then, success is not guaranteed! All this effort is needed initially to seize power and then to maintain and stabilise it.

Thus, just as the submissiveness and subjugation of the people make it difficult to incite and mobilise them into revolution, they also make it easier to seize and maintain power. Therefore, the matter does not require large numbers of people, nor does the leader of change need tribal backing or a strong force. Rather, a smaller number of well-organised and cohesive individuals, skilled in strategic planning would suffice. If they manage to take control, the country would then submit to them.

Looking at history, we see that most of those who ruled Egypt — or even founded independent states within it — had no deep social roots there nor any tribal or clan extensions. Ahmad ibn Tulun was a Turkish governor with no social roots in the country, as were the Ikhshidids, the Fatimids, and Saladin, the founder of the Ayyubid state. Likewise, the Mamluks, who were purely a military force, and Muhammad Ali Pasha, an individual Ottoman soldier who established a state for himself and his family. Even Gamal Abdel Nasser, who founded the military era we still live in today, was not of noble lineage or from a large Egyptian clan.

What does this mean? It means that if reformers plan, organise, and act effectively, they will be able to take control of this ancient state. Certainly, the matter is not easy, but it is easier than in many other countries.

(3)

If we approve so far on this point, we need to explain that gaining control of

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<sup>1</sup> Certainly, I do not see this nor agree with it, and it will be discussed later, God willing.

power and authority usually occurs in two ways: external conquest or internal coup. An internal coup can happen in two ways: either by infiltrating the system of power through patience, planning, seizing opportunities, maintaining a long presence, and penetrating the governing system; or by a sudden military coup, which also requires patience, planning, and seizing opportunities, but over a shorter period than infiltration from within.

As for external conquest, we no longer have a caliph or a caliphate that we await to conquer and liberate Egypt.

As for infiltration from within, it might be possible under a democratic or open system that allows it. However, the system in Egypt is entirely closed in this regard, a well-known fact that does not require further proof. Nevertheless, it remains an option for some talented individuals who may succeed in achieving it.

As for a military coup, it is also extremely difficult. After the military coup of July 1952, the Egyptian army was restructured in a way that made another coup nearly impossible. Units and battalions were divided based on weapons and specialisations, making communication between enough number of units for a coup virtually impossible. Additionally, there has been a massive infiltration of the army's structure, culture, and armament system following normalisation with Israel, to the extent that the Americans have complete control over it and its leadership. However, a military coup remains an option for some talented individuals who may achieve it.

The thwarted January Revolution (2011), the Stolen Revolution of 1952<sup>1</sup>, and the Stolen Revolution of 1919<sup>2</sup> all introduced another method: the popular revolution. In all these past experiences, the rebellious and uprising people were able to overturn the status quo. However, the leaderships that assumed control of these revolutions were either weak or treacherous, ultimately leading to a situation worse than before.

Many believe that global advancements in media and communication increase the likelihood of a revolution for at least three reasons:

1. The rapid transfer of culture — oppressed and marginalised peoples see how others live, which fuels their resentment and dissatisfaction with their own conditions and also inspires hope that they might attain the rights and

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<sup>1</sup> The American ambassador to Egypt at that time, named Jefferson Caffery, wrote that Egypt was pregnant with revolution. This assessment was one of the reasons for initiating a military coup to ride the wave of this revolution and benefit from it. Undoubtedly, this was one of the main reasons for the success of the coup, as the old regime collapsed before it as if it had never existed, or as if worms had devoured its staff, causing it to fall with the first push!

<sup>2</sup> The 1919 revolution was stolen by sidelining the Islamic leadership and bringing in a false leader who was one of the staunchest supporters of the British in Egypt—Saad Zaghloul. He changed his stance and rhetoric, and the British occupation paved the way for him, giving him the opportunity to lead the sweeping revolution and negotiate on its behalf until he dragged it into the labyrinth of negotiations and slowly suffocated it!

prosperity enjoyed by wealthier nations. This accumulates as a cultural force that continuously builds up and presents an ongoing opportunity for revolutionary movements.

2. Social media has provided technological tools that allow individual or collective leaderships to emerge. With simple and readily available means, they can address and mobilise people, gaining their love and leadership. This enables them, at the right moment, to incite and inspire the public and even engage in planning and strategising before or during a revolution.
3. The speed and diversity of communication methods allow some organised, secret groups to coordinate, collaborate, and operate unnoticed in various countries. They can form secret cells where members do not even know each other, making them difficult for authorities to detect. This enables effective action beyond the reach of the ruling regime.

These factors have been used to explain many events, such as the Arab Spring, new versions of insurgent movements — both Islamic and non-Islamic — and even new forms of organised crime, which have leveraged this technological revolution for smuggling, illicit trade, and other illegal activities.

Could this serve as a catalyst for a popular revolution in Egypt?

There is no room here for an extensive discussion, but what I understand and know can be summarised in the following points:

1. Popular revolutions remain unpredictable, even for sociologists and experts. They emerge suddenly from unexpected places and at unexpected times! People may endure prolonged oppression and accumulate all the conditions for revolution yet never revolt. Conversely, they may revolt under much better conditions than those they previously endured.

Thus, true reformers and leaders of change do not wait for a revolution, no matter how much they incite it in words, because it may never happen. Instead, they work toward military coups or the formation of secret resistance groups, and they watch for political, military, and even mass revolutionary opportunities. If their plans succeed as they are, so be it; if a revolution or another opportunity arises, it becomes a major advantage — or at least a significant leap forward.

2. Popular revolutions often lack leadership. While they are powerful upheavals that can overturn the status quo, the absence of leadership makes a popular revolution vulnerable to its enemies, who may manufacture false leaderships, infiltrate and divide their multiple leaders, or tempt them with offers that ultimately corrupt the revolution. Therefore, those watching for a popular revolution must prepare a leadership for it in advance, ensuring that it has the necessary military, security, financial, social, political, media, and religious readiness to lead if an uprising occurs. At the very least, they

should be capable of being influential and effective within it. This preparation will be arduous and challenging — it is like Noah building his ark, crafting something whose purpose and necessity no one understands, causing others to wonder why he is exhausting himself in this thing: ‘And he constructed the Ark, and whenever the chiefs of his people passed by him, they ridiculed him. He said, “If you ridicule us now, we will ridicule you just as you ridicule us.”’ (Surah Hud: 11:38).

This self-preparation is paralleled by a special preparation of information regarding the enemy. This information should include a clear map of the most influential figures in the existing regime, the key locations from which they manage governance, the most strategic storage facilities for essential supplies, such as food and medicine, as well as a map of the key measures taken in the first hours of a revolution. It also includes the media discourse that will be directed at the people at the very beginning of the revolution. All of these are crucial factors in determining the course of a popular revolution.

3. A popular revolution in Egypt does not last long. The nature of the country and its people, the lessons of past experiences, and the interests of regional and international parties do not allow for a prolonged state of unrest and chaos in Egypt. In my opinion, most likely, Western powers would prefer the rise of ‘moderate’ Islamists, in their view, to power, with whom they can engage in political manoeuvres, rather than letting the situation remain fluid in Egypt. This is because Egypt is a large country, and this state of fluidity poses a threat to many American and Western interests, both within Egypt and in relation to Israel. Moreover, the alternative of deploying American forces to attempt an occupation or control would be highly costly.

The point here is that if the revolutionaries cannot secure victory quickly, the situation will be difficult for them, just as it is for their enemy. However, their enemy is better equipped, wealthier, and more resourceful, which allows them to take greater advantage of the period of chaos and instability. They could manufacture false leaderships, or reach temporary, deceptive, appeasing solutions that preserve their interests. People, by their nature — especially Egyptians — tend to favour stability, particularly when chaos and hardship bite them hard.

Those looking forward to a revolution need extensive preparation, particularly in security and military aspects, intelligence gathering, recruitment, and planning, as well as preparations related to the political, media, and religious aspects.

However, the most likely and advisable long-term strategy, in my view, is working to infiltrate the ruling apparatus and the military, gradually penetrating it. If a revolution occurs, this will benefit both sides: the revolution would find allies within the government and the military, and those within the government and military would find in the revolution a great leap forward for themselves.

(4)

A revolution, however, requires a revolutionary people, and the common accusation is that the Egyptian people are inherently submissive. But is this true?

In my lifetime, I have witnessed two coups: the military coup in Egypt (July 2013) and the failed military coup attempt in Turkey (July 2016). Based on direct observation, I can say that the Egyptian people resisted the military coup with the utmost effort possible for a people who possess no means of power. Had their leaders from the Muslim Brotherhood not abandoned them, we would now be writing a different history!

Yet, those very leaders who abandoned their people vehemently rushed, with astonishing zeal, to explain the failure of the Turkish coup by claiming that the Turkish people are aware, courageous, and understand the value of freedom, whereas the Egyptian people are submissive, cowardly, and weak!

I testify that most of those who say this do so either out of ignorance or as a means to deflect blame from themselves and their failure. And I testify that what the Turkish people exerted in resisting the coup is nothing compared to what the Egyptians exerted. The difference was that the Turks had a strong and astute leader like Erdogan, whereas the Egyptians were afflicted with weak and incompetent leaders!

How disgraceful it is for leaders to fail and then blame their people for their failure! How disgraceful it is that we are forced to discuss such a matter when the events of the revolution are still fresh and not much time has passed! How disgraceful it is to see those who long dismissed the idea that this people could revolt and mocked those who spoke of revolution — how disgraceful it is for them now to turn against the very people who actually revolted, elected them in five electoral events, and continued to offer their blood in the streets despite the absence of leadership or revolutionary guidance! Is this the reward for their sacrifice — that they be accused of inherent submission, that servility is embedded in their genes, and that they are responsible for failure?!

No accusation against the Egyptian people regarding their submission and compliance is without a counterpoint that could be built upon positively. But ultimately, no people can achieve all their goals on their own without leadership. The public is like a steed — it needs a rider who can harness its potential and energy to lead it to victory. Otherwise, no matter how talented or well-trained, a lone rider cannot win battles on his own!

1. All nations have suffered from tyranny and oppression for decades or even centuries. If subjugation were hereditary and ingrained in nature, no nation would have ever broken free, including the Europeans, whose medieval history was filled with oppression and tyranny.

2. It may be said that riverine societies are more susceptible to despotism and tend to submit to authority. There is some truth in this, but it is not an absolute rule. After all, Europe, which appears today as a beacon of freedom, is filled with rivers! Those who make this argument also forget that rivers foster cooperative and cohesive societies, where people help each other out of mutual necessity, whether to ward off shared dangers or to protect their neighbours in anticipation of needing the same protection one day. This fosters traditions of solidarity among river communities, which often leads to a reduced dependence on authority. Even today, Egyptians tend to resolve their disputes outside of the state and its institutions.
3. The renowned Egyptian geographer, after contemplating Egypt's history, notes that 'ancient Egyptian history is a record of a long and eventful struggle, marked by successive popular uprisings, which may be separated by periods of patient anticipation, but can also sometimes turn into massive explosions and armed revolutions characterised by bloodshed, violence, and class consciousness. In this record, non-bloody revolts and movements generally outweigh the heavy, bloody revolutions. This is because Egypt, due to its size, is a massive and weighty entity that does not move with reckless haste but with calculated momentum. Hence, its comprehensive revolutions are relatively few in number but effective and destructive when they occur, making them prominent turning points and, at times, historically pioneering.'<sup>1</sup> He adds: 'Popular resistance, of course, never ceased nor relented. The medieval era is dotted and encrusted with uprisings and confrontations, culminating in the Turkish-Mamluk era when revolutions became an intermittent but unending stream, manifesting in various forms: agricultural revolts, urban revolts, Bedouin uprisings, peasant rebellions, and slave insurrections, occurring in both the Delta and Upper Egypt, as well as in the capital.'<sup>2</sup>

If the people rise and object, they cannot be held responsible for the success or failure of the revolution; that responsibility lies with the leaders and figures at the forefront. How can the people be expected to be both revolutionary and politically adept at the same time when that is not in the nature of the public? If a revolution fails, the blame falls on those who led it after the revolution elevated them to the rank of its spokespersons and entrusted them with its representation.

Anyone who seeks a people that revolts daily, or a people that has never suffered the flames of tyranny, should look beyond this planet!

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<sup>1</sup> Gamal Hamdan, *The Personality of Egypt*, (Dar Al-Hilal edition), 2/567, 568.

<sup>2</sup> Same source, 2/573, 574.

## Conclusion

In this book, I sought to convey a set of ideas, the most notable of which are:

### (1)

We need Islam because it is the cause of our salvation in the hereafter, the source of our honour in this world, and because our Muslim people can only thrive through Islam. Moreover, Islam itself is the most complete system and the best solution, as it is the religion of Allah, who created humanity and knows them best.

### (2)

The Islamic system, as presented in Quranic and Prophetic texts and as demonstrated in historical experience, is the antithesis of tyranny and the farthest system from producing a tyrannical state. This is because it is based on a ‘balance of power.’ In the Islamic system, the state does not monopolise the factors of power; rather, power is distributed between the authority and society. This balance is not achieved merely by the existence of texts that direct toward it and urge Muslims to uphold it, but rather, it is a deeply rooted idea reinforced through acts of worship, rituals, and social transactions. It is a system embedded in the very nature of the Islamic economic and social structure. In other words, tyranny cannot emerge in its absolute form, as seen in the ‘modern state,’ unless society’s social, economic, and religious structures based on Islam have been dismantled. This is precisely what happened during the colonial era, as no Islamic land ever transitioned smoothly into modernity; rather, they were forcibly subjected to this modernity and subjugated to the modern state system through massacres and wars.

Furthermore, the Islamic society is inherently equipped to resist the tyranny of the ‘modern state.’ Even after two centuries of colonial and domestic oppression, Islamic societies remain the most resistant to modernity, and modernity’s ideological system has not yet fully infiltrated their cultural fabric. It can be cautiously stated — acknowledging the need to liberate some terminology from its known references — that whenever these societies were given the opportunity to choose, their choice was against ‘*modernity*.’ In other words, the Islamic popular choice redefined ‘*modernity*’ by accepting it as a technological advancement rather than adopting its philosophical content. The Islamic society remains the most capable of resisting the tyranny of modernity, due to its entrenched cultural identity, social cohesion, and deep-rooted religious traditions.

Conversely, modern systems — even in its Western democratic form — leads to an increasingly weak society and an ever-expanding, overreaching authority. This makes it inevitable for democracy to transform into overt tyranny when

faced with a serious crisis that threatens contemporary Western dominance. It is worth noting that modern governments already represent a form of tyranny operating under the guise of a false democracy.

A critical flaw in the legal framework of the modern state remains unresolved: the terms ‘*state*’ and ‘*people*’ ultimately do not refer to a tangible, rational entity. In reality, there is always an individual or an elite that manages the state, leads the people, and executes its will under the pretence of being the will of the *state* and the *people*.

Thus, we find ourselves returning to tyranny once more. What practical difference is there between an emperor who claims divine lineage and a ruler who possesses sovereignty, capable of suspending the legal system and undermining — or even suppressing — the separation of powers, which is supposed to be the cornerstone of political philosophy against tyranny?

The ‘*modern state*’ has become the deity of this era, having developed extensive surveillance over all aspects of its citizens’ lives, penetrating every detail, and creating an ever-expanding bureaucratic system to oversee and control everything. This new deity is entirely devoid of the attributes of mercy, wisdom, discretion, and compassion that religious believers associate with their divine being. It is a god driven purely by utility and pleasure for the ruling elite, and it is one that has tools and technologies that no emperor or pope in history could have ever dreamed of.

A significant number of Western thinkers and researchers lament and denounce the fact that Europe did not benefit from the Arab-Islamic civilisational heritage, particularly its moral aspects.<sup>1</sup>

### (3)

The verses of the Quran, the sayings of the Prophet ﷺ, his purified biography, the words of his rightly guided caliphs, and the consensus of historians and researchers of human nature all confirm that reform requires power, governance, and a state — especially in the case of Islam, which is both a religion and a way of life, encompassing beliefs, worship, and social transactions.

Any attempt to divert people from the path of authority and governance is an act of misleading them, which inevitably involves falsifying and distorting religion — unless it is due to incapacity or weakness. In such a case, one must strive to convey the true essence of Islam to the best of one’s ability and work to establish it as much as possible, while being cautious that incapacity and weakness do not lead to falsification and distortion of religion.

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<sup>1</sup> For example: Roger Garaudy, *The Promises of Islam*, p. 17 and beyond; Gustave Le Bon, *The Civilization of the Arabs*, p. 317. Wael Hallaq’s book *The Impossible State* is a direct call for the West to consider the Islamic heritage in addressing the crises of modernity.

The pursuit of this reform requires leaders, men of action, and a strategy. Every Muslim has a role to play in this endeavour, according to their capabilities, opportunities, and means.

(4)

One who examines the path to reform in the Muslim ummah will find that the nation has centres of gravity and capitals of influence that are akin to the heart in a body — if they are righteous, the entire body is righteous; if they are corrupt, the entire body is corrupt.

The most important and impactful of these capitals in our present time is Cairo, due to Egypt's political, demographic, and cultural weight, its geographical location, and its long-standing influence throughout history and in contemporary affairs.

Change in Egypt necessitates obtaining authority and governance. If the Muslim ummah had a caliph, he would direct the efforts of all active forces toward liberating Egypt from Western dominance. Once Egypt is freed, it will, in turn, free the surrounding regions.

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Whatever success there is in this work is from Allah alone, and any error, oversight, or mistake is mine and from Satan. Allah has willed that no book be perfect except His own.

I pray that this is not the final meeting with esteemed readers and that He grants us success in what pleases Him. I also ask Him to make our deeds sincere for His sake alone, without any share for anyone else.

I welcome your feedback, comments, and additions at my email [moha.elhamy@gmail.com](mailto:moha.elhamy@gmail.com)