RELIGION AND STATE COEXISTENCE IN ISLAMIC POLITICS
AND ITS IMPACT ON DEMOCRATIZATION

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BY
BACHAR AL-KHATIB, MD, MPH

Dr. JOSEPH A LOSCO - ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
MUNCIE, INDIANA

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Introduction

The sluggish spread of Democracy in the Muslim countries has been noticed and analyzed by different scholars and politicians. The Economist Intelligence Unit has developed an index for studying the progression of Democracy in all countries of the world. This Index is based on five categories: electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political participation; and political culture. The scale is from zero to ten. The highest on the scale was Sweden with score of 9.88; the lowest was North Korea with score of 1.03. The Muslim countries which number around 58 with a population averaging 1.3 billion people scored very badly on this list. There were only a few Muslim countries with evolving democracies such as Indonesia with score 6.41, Bangladesh 6.11, Palestine 6.01, Malysia 5.98 and Turkey 5.70. Other countries scored less than 4, Pakistan 3.92, Egypt 3.90, Saudia Arabia 1.92, and Turkmenistan 1.83. As a reference the U.S.A score was 8.22, France 8.07, India 7.68, Russia 5.02, and China 2.07. (1)

This Democracy deficit has several important factors including political, economic, cultural and historical. The remedies that are prescribed by several thinkers and researchers to help the Islamic countries include democracy, freedom, the rule of Law, separation of state and religion, free markets and globalization.

It is presumed by many Western thinkers that the lack of advancement of Democracy in the Muslim countries stems from three major problems with Islam and the Muslims:
First, in Islam, there is no separation between state and religion. Second, Sharia (Islamic Law) is incompatible with modernity and human rights (especially for women). Third, Sharia is incompatible with democracy as it is derived from divine law, not human law.

In this paper the first misconception (the lack of separation between state and religion) will be addressed. This paper will explain that although the Sharia was the common law in the Muslim countries, the state or the ruler’s power was separated from religious power and institutions. The historical difference between Islam and Christianity played an important role in the misunderstanding of Western and some Muslims thinkers. The Church in the West was a strong and influential institution that was involved in politics for hundreds of years but later became disentangled. This did not happen in Muslim history. The majority of Muslim countries now are secular but religion continue to play some political role. This is due to continuation of the separation between the state and religion throughout the majority of Muslim history. The concept of the state is new, but it was used here to represent the old Empires and Dynasties for facilitation of the study.

Religion and State Separation:

This term is used in place of ‘Church and State separation in the West’ to make it more relevant to Muslim readers. The term ‘Church and State separation’ is a Western product and was alien to Muslim thinkers and the public until recently. In the last half century, this separation was intensified and produced two major separate political powers that are struggling to gain power in the Muslim countries, the Secularist and the Islamist.

Secularism is a Western concept and does not have a proper translation in the Arabic or Middle Eastern languages. Secularism was first translated as “ladini” which means nonreligious
or irreligious, the current most used translation is “Ilmaniyyah” form “Ilm” or science.

Secularism was introduced to Muslim countries from the West as almost all Muslim countries were occupied by Western powers. This concept was introduced as a top down ideology which was continued after the independence of Muslim countries. Vali Nasr wrote: “In the Muslim Middle East and Asia, Secularism was not a product of socio-economic, technological, or cultural change… it was not even an indigenous force. Secularism was first and foremost the project of the state, first the colonial state, and later the post colonial state.” (2)

Secularism in the Muslim World did not go through the same order which happened in Europe. In the West, religious reformation happened first, and then secularism took place. In current Muslim politics, it is the other way around, Secularism took place first then religious reformation followed. (3) Secularism is still viewed as a foreign concept in Muslim countries, multiple factors help this. First, it was a Western concept and is attached to colonialism and repressive current regimes. Second, it is still viewed by some as anti-religion and is attached to atheism. Third, the negative policies of the West toward Muslim countries and the attachment of Secularism to these policies. (4).

Islamism is a political concept describing those Muslims who think that Islam has an important role to play in politics. The Islamist refusal of Secularism gained force from Ayatollah Khomeini. In his famous lecture on “Islamic government”, delivered while in exile in Najaf, Iraq, in 1970, he wrote: “This slogan of the separation of religion and politics and the demand that Islamic scholars not intervene in social and political affairs has been formulated and propagated by the Imperialist, it is only the irreligious who repeat them…. Were religion and politics separated in the time of the prophet?… did there exist on one side, a group of clerics, and opposite it a group of politicians and leaders?... These slogans and claims have been
advanced by imperialists and their political agents to prevent religion from ordering the affairs of this world and shaping Muslim societies…” (5)

The Islamist believes that the only solution for the backwardness and the defeat of Muslims is the return to Islam. They mean by this the establishing of Islamic states and applying of Sharia as the law of these states. Most Islamists dropped the idea of uniting the Umma (community) as they realize that it would be impossible to unite the 1.3 billion Muslims under one state. They believe that other ideologies are temporary and some have already failed like Socialism. Capitalism and western ideologies will fail too as they derive their power from earthly concepts and not from divine laws. Secularism failed too in Muslim countries as it could not deliver solutions to help the misery of the majority of the population. The only solution is Islam. They do not agree that Western Democracy is important, some do not refuse it but affirm that democracy should adapt to Islam not vice versa.

The Secularist believe that religion is a personal matter and should be between the individual and God. Religion should not play any important role in politics. The new laws that are in practice in Muslim countries are a logical response to the massive development that happened in the last three centuries. They say that Islam is a religion and not a political system. Koran is a holy book, not a law book. Kamali explained that the verses in the Koran that concern legal issues are only 350 out of total of 6235 verses. He stated that “The Koran is neither a legal nor a constitutional document in the sense that legal material occupies only a small portion of its text”. (6) Shaltut divided the legal verses into 140 verses concerning devotional matters, like prayers, fasting, and so on. 70 verses are devoted to marriage, divorce, paternity, inheritance and so on. 70 verses concern commercial transaction and trade. 30 verses concern crimes and penalties. 30
verses are on justice, equality and the right of citizens. 10 verses concern economic matters pertaining to relations between the poor and the rich, and so… (7).

Some Muslim writers think that Islam cannot fit into modern life and the twenty-first century. They attack religion and the Islamists using western mentalities and analysis. Fatah explained his points against the Islamic state in his book, chasing a Mirage. He wrote: “Sharia is a legal framework within which the most private aspects of life are regulated for those living in a Muslim society. Medieval in nature and its origin, Sharia tries to deal with all aspects of modern day-to-day life…. However, most of these laws are the work of ordinary mortals and have never been debated in any parliament, nor would they be ever put through such scrutiny”. (8).

For those who oppose applying the sharia, they suggest that there should be a new look at the Sharia itself and distinguish between what is divine and what is man made. The Koran is the divine and the word of God. The Sunnah has thousands of Hadith or sayings of the prophet. But the rest is Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) which is the accumulation of 14 hundred years of interpretations and Ijtihad (independent reasoning). These should not be considered divine and New Ijtihad is needed to interpret the Koran in the world we are living in.

Modernist think that it is essential to get rid of ideas and beliefs that came to Muslims minds through generations where knowledge and science were either not available, or were the product of a completely different era. Tibi talked about “the historicization of Islam” and that real Islam is the product of Muslims themselves and that “man made Islam is not divine, despite all the efforts of Ulama to invoke God in it” (9). The conflict between the Islamist and the secularist is not only what should be included as Sharia and its role in the society, but also how to interpret Islam in the modern life. Islamists are very concerned about new interpretations of their religion and call anything they do not like, Bedda (innovation).
One of the many examples of conflict between both sides is applying Hudud (penalties) for stealing and adultery. There are very clear verses in the Koran that put the penalty for stealing by hand amputation and adultery by flogging for unmarried man or woman and death for married adulterer. The question is when these laws can be applied. According to the majority of Islamic law interpretations, you need to have an Islamic society that provides for people before you apply these harsh penalties. If these conditions are not available, these laws should not be applied. This example illustrates the difficulty of reaching a consensus between the Islamist and the secularist especially that these penalties were rarely applied during the last 14 hundreds years of Islamic history.

The current struggle between the Islamist and Secularist is just a continuation of the struggle that has been taking place in the last fourteen hundred years since the beginning of Islam. The two main powers were the rulers and the religious. The rulers dominated power and used religion for their consolidation of power. The separation between state and religion was evident throughout the history of the Muslim World. Khomeini in his writings in 1970 asked a very important question, “Were religion and politics separated in the time of the prophet?” The answer is NO. But this happened only during the time of the prophet because he was a prophet and there will be no prophet after him. It is understandable that religious people would like to relive the time of the prophet but this can not happen again. It is also important to remember that the prophet did not leave a political system rather he left a great religion to be followed.

Religion and State Separation in contemporary Muslim countries

It is important to explain some definitions that are usually confused in the media in the west. Islam is the religion that Muslims believe in, like Christianity. Islamism is the opinion of those
Muslims who believe that the religion has an important part to play in politics. Islamic fundamentalist are those Islamists who take things to the extreme and are adamant on applying their interpretation of religion and establishing Islamic states and applying Sharia even if this requires using force. Some authors give more classifications like dividing the Islamists into Traditional Islamist and Revolutionary Islamist.

The Muslim world is vast and as mentioned has more than 1.3 billion believers living in different countries. The development of political Islam as a power challenging the current regimes is different between these countries as they have different circumstances and structures. Political Islam should not be viewed as Monolith. Mohammad Ayoub explained this saying “Despite some similarities in objectives and even more in rhetoric they employ, no two Islamism are alike. Political activities taken by Islamists are largely determined by the context within which they operate”. (10)

The struggle between the two major powers in Muslim countries, Religion and the State takes different forms and shapes. If we think about it as a spectrum, on one side will be Turkey, a very secular state and on the other side will be Iran, an Islamic state. The rest of the Muslim countries lie within this spectrum with more countries tilted toward secularism. The effects of other ideologies are important but not decisive. Socialism and communism are weak; democracy is thriving and taking different shapes in different countries. It is understood that democracy thrives better in secular states. It will take more time to tell what is going to happen with Iranian Islamic democracy.

A few countries will be discussed here to explain how the two powers of state and religion interact and how they are acting separately. Later on, the examples of Turkey and Iran will be
studied in more detail. This will shed some light on religion’s and state separation in contemporary Muslim countries

Pakistan: Pakistan was created to establish a state for the Muslims and separate them from the Hindus. The influential Maududi who established Jammat-i-Islami (JI) worked to make sure the new country would be Islamic and that Sharia would be the law. However, the political leader at that time was Jinnah who was a secularist and opposed establishing an Islamic state. The (JI) managed to infuse Sharia into the legal code and had support in high positions in the government. The semi democracy in Pakistan allowed the (JI) to thrive and influence policies. The relations between (JI) and the secular president Ayub Khan (1958-1969) was tense. In later years, when general Zia-ul-Haq took power (1977-1988), the (JI) was powerful and Zia used a religious agenda to gain support and introduced Islamic laws. The (JI) gained support with the military as they actively got involved with the Mujahidin war in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union. The (JI) was against the PPP (Pakistan’s People Party) led by Benazir Bhutto. Bhutto wrote in her book “When I ran for prime minister in 1988, Maudodi’s party called me kafir (unbeliever), as they had my father before me. The people made their own decision on the attack against me by the Jamaat when they voted overwhelmingly for the PPP and elected me prime minister” (11).

The conflict between the secular and the religious in Pakistan still plays an important role in current events and it will shape the future of that country. The (JI) strategy is a top-down model. They work to achieve their political goals by influencing the leaders and the army.

Egypt: In Egypt, the circumstances were different, there was no element of democracy where the religious parties had a voice, the leaders of the Moslem Brethren were persecuted and later Sayyad Qutb, their leader was hanged by President Nasser. The Moslem Brethren have some
voice in the parliament now but not to the degree of affecting political decisions. The bottom up approach by the Islamists in Egypt was successful in gathering popular support but not to the extent of turning it into political gain. It may have been that the opposition was doomed whether it was Muslim Brotherhood or not. Asef bayat explained the struggle in Egypt as “The Islamist movement failed to alter policy not because Egypt’s Islamism itself was undemocratic, which it was, but rather because the state did not tolerate any formidable opposition, whether democratic or undemocratic, Islamist or secular. (12).

Indonesia: In Indonesia, the biggest Muslim country, several powers existed in the country after their independence in 1949, Secularist, Islamist and later the Communist. The country was ruled by two secular dictators. The first was Sukarno until 1965 when he was forced to cede power to the army, led by General Suharto who stayed in power until 1998. Later Abdurrahman Wahid was elected president; he was the leader of the largest Muslim organization, Nahdatul Ulama (NU). Under pressure from the legislature, he agreed to share power with Vice president Megawati, the daughter of late President Sukarno. He was later charged with incompetence and corruption and Megawatti became the president. In the 2004 election, in which 24 parties vied for 14000 seats at all levels of government, Suslio Bambang Yudhoyono won the presidency in a landslide victory. This was a major turn for Indonesia towards democracy. The secular parties dominated the voting and the religious parties stayed in the minority.

The history and diversity in Indonesia allowed several forces to compete for power. Although the country was ruled by dictators for a long time, Islamists were given space to develop and compete for the political decisions and helped in the development of Indonesia’s infant democracy. The Islamists found themselves in a position where they had to accommodate a secular regime and try to do the best they could to have their voices heard. Sukarno, emphasized
the importance of power separation between state and religion saying: “Separating Islam from the state would liberate Islam from the tutelage of corrupt rulers and unleash its progressive potentials”. (13). The secular state helped in the development of Islamic parties and their inclusion in the democratic process.

The Islamic Republic of Iran: What happened in Iran in the 1979 revolution was quite unique. This was the first Islamic state in history. The circumstances that produced it are special to Iran. The biggest factor is the predominant Shiism in Iran. As discussed earlier, The Shia believe in following the Imam and consider it an essential part of the religion. There is no similar thing in the Sunni sect. The struggle for power has been long standing in Iran and the shahs always had the upper hand. The Ulamma had significant power as they were not financially dependant on the shah. Several dynasties ruled Iran. The last one was the Pahlavi. In 1925 Reza Khan was crowned as shah of Iran. He managed to bring the country under his control. He was a powerful and effective monarch. He believed that religious leaders were an obstacle to modernization due to their control over the masses and their backward thinking. He started breaking their power by passing legislation that took land from them, establishing secular law and even prohibiting the wearing of traditional dress. He declared Iran’s neutrality during the Second World War, but was resentful of the British who had for a long time interfered in Iran’s politics. In 1941 the British and the Soviet armies occupied Iran and forced him to cede power to his son Crown Prince Mohammed Reza who followed his father’s policy of secularization, alienating the Ulamma and ruling as an absolute Monarch. He was a major ally of the U.S.A. His failed policies triggered widespread revolts led by Khomeini and he was forced to abdicate in 1979 when Khomeini returned to Iran from his exile in France and established the Islamic state of Iran.
In this state, sovereignty belongs to God, who delegates it to an Islamic Jurisprudent, the supreme leader, who happened to be Khomeini himself. In the Iranian constitution (Article 2) it reads: “The Islamic republic is a system based on belief in: 1. the one God … his exclusive sovereignty and right to legislate, and the necessity of submission to his command; 2. Divine revelation and its fundamental role in setting the law; …” The nature of the political system in Iran includes theocracy and some democracy. The regime requires that all laws and political decisions be in accordance with Islam. To insure this, the Supreme Leader has the power to veto any law. There is an additional body called the Council of the Guardians who also have the veto power. This Council consists of twelve members, six of them are theologians designated by the supreme leader and six are jurists who are elected by the parliament. Any candidate who runs for an official political post must sign a form affirming his or her allegiance to the constitution and the absolute guardianship of the Islamic Jurisprudent over policy. Those who run for the parliament are studied carefully and refused by the Council of the Guardians if they are found unsuitable. (14).

The election for the president and the parliament are democratic in the Iranian way, as candidates belonging to the same domain are competing, i.e. Clerics vs. Clerics. We do not see secularist, liberals or others here. Those leaders, who want to change the system and initiate reform, face strong opposition. It is difficult to simplify the Iranian politicians into Reformists and Conservatives as the media in the west portrays them; but some are sincere about developing the political system in Iran. The best example is the former president Khatami who won the elections twice. According to Ramin “While Khatami easily won the reelection in June 2001; he has remained unable to persuade the powerful conservative clerical and internal-security establishments to embrace his reformist project of bringing dialogue, tolerance and pluralism to
Iran’s political system. The Clerics and security officials still control most key power centers”.

The two important religious concepts that rule politics in Iran are the Velayat-e faqih (the rule of the jurist) and Marja-i-taqlid (the rule of the leading mujtahid). The first gives power to the supreme leader who was Imam Khomeini and now is Imam Khamenei, and the second gives power to the religious class. This designation of power has its roots in Shiism. The Shi’a developed the belief that their Imams, by their lineage to the prophet as passed through the 12 imams, have a kind of monopoly over the comprehension and interpretation of Islam. This gives them the authority to rule as they are representing the hidden Imam who went into occultation more than a thousand years ago. This concentration of power in people whose main credentials are religious rather than anything else is another form of dictatorship. Iran is an interesting case in contrast to other Muslim countries because the religious people rule and the separation between religion and state is non existent.

Turkey: After the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the defeat of the Turks in World War I, the people in turkey had to struggle to keep their country together and fought for its unity. Mustafa kemal Ataturk was the leader who established Turkey and abolished the Caliphate and the last Ottoman Sultan. He believed in a secular state and blamed religion for the ills that had befallen his country. He ruled as a dictator and abolished any religious power in the country. An elected Grand National Assembly was given the responsibility for legislation with executive power held by the president. Ataturk died in 1938 after he had secured the power of secularism in Turkey for years to come. The leaders who followed him were also secularist, and gradually more political parties were allowed to participate in the democratic process. The army had an
important power and worked as guardian of the secular state. Three times the army seized power and returned it to the civilian rule which is unusual in Muslim countries.

In the 1991 election, the Islamic Welfare Party (Refah) got 16 percent of the vote showing increasing strength. They did better in the 1995 election and won more seats than other parties but they had to form a coalition government. This triggered the military leaders to believe that the party was going to dismantle the secular state founded by Ataturk and replace it with an Islamized one. In 1997; they demanded the prime minister Erbakan’s resignation. Later the state prosecutors managed to outlaw Refah on the grounds that its programs were intended to impose Islamic laws on the society. In 2001 another Islamic party was formed by the name of Justice and Development party (AKP) and in 2002 it won the election by clear majority, 363 seats to its rival (RPP) Republicans People Party with 178 seats.(17).

The progression of democracy in Turkey was more advanced than other Muslim countries for several reasons. First, the country was not colonized by the West and it was a strong empire before its decline. Second, the earlier establishment of reforms during the Tanzimat period and contact with the West. Third, Turkey had a strong and large bureaucracy that helped it in building institutions and facilitated the spread of democracy. Fourth, Turkey found itself allied with the West after the Second World War and it was admitted to NATO. This helped democratic development and the multi party system. Fifth, was the long standing control of religious institutions by the Sultans and later by a strong secular dictator. And last was the continuous attempt by Turkey to join the EU putting pressure on the system to democratize and limiting the power of the army. (18)

The struggle for power between the secularist and the AKP (Islamic) party is ongoing and the future is not clear. It is hard to call the AKP an Islamic party as it really does not seek an Islamic
state or to apply Sharia, rather it calls for some involvement of the government to keep the religious heritage strong in the country. Compared with other Islamic parties in other Muslim countries, the AKP is far from Islamic. Hakan Yavuz described the Islamic groups in Turkey as “adopting new agenda” and “not seeking an Islamic policy, rather the freeing of religion from state control and removal of obstacles to living a religious life” (19). In describing secularism in Turkey, Yavuz considers it as different from the French or the American versions. He said in France secularism is the protection of the state from religion; in the U.S.A it is the protection of religion from the state. In Turkey it is the control of religion by the state. (20).

Following the election victory of the AKP party in 2002, they managed to get another victory in the 2007 election, getting 47 percent of the vote (which ensured 342 seats in the parliament) with turnout around 85 percent. The AKP managed to do this by adopting several policies that assured them victory. Firstly; they followed good economic policy and managed to improve the GDP and per capita income. They stimulated trade and opened markets and cut down on corruption. Secondly, they managed to present themselves as a progressive and dynamic party staying away from conflicting religious issues. Third, they are strong supporters of integration with the EU. Fourth, they accommodated the different powers that oppose them and did not antagonize them, especially the military. David Ghanim wrote that “the remarkable re-election of the AKP in 2007 provided evidence that ideology and Islam are less important issues than who is able –in deeds and not words- to offer the change and development to ensure better living standards”. (21)

Historical Background and Analysis
It is important to study the history of political Islam to understand the separation between religion and state. Most of the current political researchers do not talk about history and they neglect this important tool of research. Fernand Braudel emphasized its importance and called it the longue durée (the study of history as long duration).

In the next section, I will give a brief review of the history of political Islam with emphasis on the religion and state separation. The aim of this review is to explain that since the death of the prophet Mohammad, religion and state separation existed, but it is completely different from the church and state separation that took place in Europe and North America.

1. The prophet and the four rightly guided caliphs (570-661)

Muhammad was born in Makkah in present-day Saudi Arabia in 570. He belonged to the Qureish tribe. This tribe was one of the few tribes controlling Makkah which at that time had an important role in the Arabian Peninsula. Makkah has the holiest site which contained the Kabba which was believed to be built by the prophet Ibrahim and his son Ismail. It was also the center for trade and the caravans which travel north to the Syrian area and south to Yemen. At the age of 40, around 610 CE, he received the first divine revelation from the Archangel Gabriel in a cave at Mount Hira outside Mekkah. He started teaching Islam, a new religion, which teaches the worship of one god, equality and peace. Islam in Arabic means submission to God and peace at the same time. The tribes of Mekkah did not like the message that was brought by Muhammad. They felt it would endanger their economic and political position. It also brought new ideas that they did not like, such as freeing slaves, equality, and the ending of their pagan religion. After persecution and torture of the prophet and his handful followers, permission was given for them to emigrate to what is now Ethiopia, which was ruled by a Christian Coptic king.
who gave them asylum. The second immigration was to Medina, 200 miles north of Mekkah. In 622 after the an attempt to kill the prophet, he and his best friend Abu Bakr, escaped from Mekkah and were received in Medina with a warm welcome by its inhabitants. He would live in Medina until his death in 632. During his ten years in Medina, the prophet managed to complete the message of God and establish a nucleus for the future expansion of the Islamic religion.

There were three major wars between the early Muslims and the tribes of Mekkah and their followers. The first was the battle of Badr, which the Muslims won, and then the battle of Uhud, which was won by the Mekkanhs. The prophet, was almost killed. The third was the battle of Trench, in this the Mekkanhs gathered several tribes to finish off the new religion and surrounded Medina. The Muslims earlier built a trench around the city and prevented the Mekkanhs’s victory. After the battle, Muhammad ordered the execution of the Jewish men of Medina’s Banu Qureiza tribe for conspiring with the Makkans Qureish to attack Muslims after they gave their promise not to get involved in the conflict.

Later on, the number of converted tribes to Islam grew, and in 630, the prophet took over Mekkah without a fight. He destroyed all the idols that the tribes of Arabia worshiped and united the tribes of Arabia. In 632 Muhammad made a pilgrimage to Mekkah and delivered his last farewell speech on top of mount Arafat. He told the Muslims that he has received the last revelation and completed his message. The same year Muhammad died and was buried in Medina. (22).

The life of the prophet was one of the major historical events in the history of mankind. The message that he brought is believed by 1.3 billion people in the world today. The holy book, the Koran, plays an important role in regulating the life of the Muslims. The sayings and actions of the prophet are called the Sunnah. These two, along with the vast literature of Islam fiqh (Islamic
jurisprudence) constitute the Sharia. During the prophet’s life; he had combined the political and religious power in one person. As he was the messenger of god, he received the law and legislation from God through Gabriel. The revelations came down over 23 years depending on the need for them to explain the new religion and the orders of God. When people have questions about what they should do or how to behave, they came and asked the prophet. After his death, a vacuum occurred, not only in the legislative part, but also in leadership.

The Prophet and the new religion did not leave a political system that the Muslims should follow, and the prophet did not leave a successor. This, in retrospect, was the major challenge faced by the infant Muslim society at that time. The death of the prophet precipitated a religious and political crisis that left a power vacuum which had to be filled if the new community and its faith were not to disintegrate and collapse. But the prophet had delivered his message to the people and given them instruction on how to regulate the relationship between humans and God, and between humans themselves. The message entailed important and general directions, but left the details to the Muslims to work it out. As Islam was meant to be for all people and for all times, it was obvious that any specific political system might not be in the best interest of people at some specific time and place and this will contradict the core role of religion. Three main principles were declared in Islam pertaining to political issues, Shura (consultation), Ijmah (consensus) and Ijithad (independent judgment).

The Shura was a comprehensive concept and did not impose a specific form and left it to the Muslims to apply according to their specific situations. The Koran, 42:38 describes the good Muslims “who avoid grievous sins and lewdness and, when angered, are willing to forgive; who obey their lord, attend their prayers, and conduct their affairs by mutual consent”. The importance of consultation was mentioned immediately after praying. In another verse of the
Koran 3:158, God advised the prophet how to deal with Muslims affairs, “It was thanks to God’s mercy that you dealt so leniently with them. Had you been cruel or hard-hearted, they would have surely deserted you. Therefore pardon them and implore God to forgive them. Take counsel with them in the conduct of affairs; and when you are resolved, put your trust in God. God loves those who trust in him”.

The Shura has been practiced by the prophet during his message in different times and situations. If there was no revelation from God, the prophet would ask his people about what they think and what would be the best option to take. This happened sometimes with devastating results. During the battle of Uhud, the prophet consulted his companions and took their advice to fight the Qureish outside the city of Medina where they were living, although he thought it would be better to stay in, and they lost the battle. In the battle of the Trench, the prophet took the advice of Salman al-Farsi and dug a deep trench around the city which caused the defeat of Qureish. In another example concerning the adhan (call for the prayer). The prophet used the buq (trumpet) such as the Jews were using to call companions for prayers; then he used the naqus (bells) such as the Christians were using. However, one of the companions, Abd-Allah b Zayd, saw in his sleep the form of the call and told the prophet about it. The prophet adapted it and it is still in use all over the world to the present time. (24).

There are multiple examples of using the concept of Shura during the prophet’s life. There is no consensus among modern scholars whether the prophet had a Shura council consisting of specific people whose opinions were sought on regular basis. However, there were specific companions that were known for their wise judgment and consequently they were involved in matters of the community on a regular basis. These included the four later Caliphs, Abu-bakr, Omar, Uthman, and Ali and others (25).
As discussed above, the Muslims had the Koran and the actions of the prophet to guide them after his death. As he did not nominate a successor, several factors were important in considering who could be the next in charge. Those were blood or tribal relationship to Muhammad, priority in entering into Islam and the length of the companionship to the prophet, social status and others. Being religious or pious was not very important at that time as the majority had these characters.

The Saqifah debate: After the death of the prophet, people gathered in the Saqifah, which is an open, loosely roofed, meeting place to discuss who is going to be the successor. There are different accounts of what happened there according to different sources, and this varies a lot between the Sunni sect of Islam and the Shi’a. The Shi’a believes that the successor should have been Ali, the cousin of the prophet and his son in law. Muhammad had no brothers and no sons. The discussion in the Saqifah was heated as there were two main forces that wanted to secure leadership, the tribes of Mekkah and those of Medina. Within each force there was internal competition between the tribes in seeking this great position. Things settled later on Abu-Bakr, who was the old companion of the prophet and his father- in- law. The prophet had several wives during his life and one of them was Aisha, the daughter of Abu-Bakr. His reign was short (632-634) but it was very important in keeping the unity of the newly formed Umma (community). In 633, Abu-Bakr suppressed the rebellion of some tribes that did not want to pay the Zakat (taxes). In doing so, he consolidated his caliphate over the Arabian Peninsula. Before his death, he appointed Omar as a caliph, bypassing Ali, the prophet’s cousin, and angering Ali’s supporters.

Omar reigned for 10 years and he expanded the Muslim territory by defeating the two big empires at that time, the Persian and the Byzantine. He added Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Persia to the Muslim expanding empire. He was later assassinated by a Persian slave while he was praying in
the mosque. Before his death, he selected six men to consult and choose between them who would be his successor. Again, a lot of literature was written about it and how it was tilted toward Uthman, rather than Ali.

Uthman became the third caliph and reigned (644-656). The empire was expanded during his time and in 653 he ordered the gathering of the verses of the Koran and the standard edition of the Koran was written and sent to different parts of the empire. In 656, the Caliph was killed by Arabian rebels who were unhappy with the way he managed the caliphate and accused him of favoring his immediate family. These rebels justified his death as they claimed he did not follow the rules of Islam and mishandled the caliphate position. After his death, the choice of the next Caliphate was Ali, the cousin and son in law of the prophet.

During his reign (656-661) the crack in the Muslim community was deepening and, Ali faced the first Fitna or civil war. Talha and Zubair along with the prophets widow Aisha challenged Ali’s authority and fought against him in the battle of the Camel in 656 and lost. Talha and Zubair were killed and Aisha was sent back to Medina.

The next year, Muawiyyah, the powerful governor of Syria and a cousin of the third Caliph Uthman challenged Ali’s authority and accused him of not investigating and punishing the people who killed Uthman. They fought in the battle of Siffin, which was brutal. Many Muslims were killed. Muawiyyah negotiated a peaceful agreement with Ali, which a lot of scholars thought was a clever tactic as it split the forces of Ali between those who wanted to continue the fight, later named kharajite (Seceders), and those who wanted a peaceful agreement. The Kharajite did not agree with Ali about arbitration and later revolted against Ali who defeated them in the battle of Nahrawan. As retaliation, the Kharajite assassinated Ali while he was praying in Kufa in Iraq. In the same city, his eldest son, Hassan, was proclaimed as Caliph, but
later abandoned the claim and went and lived in peace in Mekkah. Muawiyah was proclaimed the next ruler of the Muslim empire and with that the period of what is known as “the four rightly caliphs” ended and, with it, a new political kingship system would rule the Muslims for long time. (22).

It was hard for the early Muslims to adjust to the new situation after the death of the prophet. He had the religious and political leadership of the Umma at the same time. He was there to teach them and answer their questions. He was there to receive the divine message from God to guide them on how to do things. As mentioned earlier, the prophet did not leave a successor. This however is not believed by Shi’a Muslim as they think the prophet groomed his cousin Ali and even told the people that Ali is his successor in the Ghader event.

After the death of the prophet, there was no new legislation coming from God and people started looking at what the prophet did by trying to follow his steps. Abu-Bakr, the first caliph spoke to the people in his Inaugural Address saying “O people, I am a man like you. Yet you may charge me with things only the messenger of God could endure. God surely preferred Muhammad over all of mankind and protected him from all ills. As for me, I am a follower, and not an innovator. If, therefore, I act uprightly, follow me; but if I deviate from the right course, then you must set me straight”. (26).

The selection of Abu-Bakr was not democratic in the modern sense, but it was based on Shura and Ijma. The leaders of the tribes and the strong people of the community were there. They had to negotiate and find the best man for the job, keeping in mind the balance and unity of the Umma. As he mentioned in his speech, Abu-Bakr said he was not an innovator. From now on, the split in the Muslim leadership was clear. There will be no leader who can have the political and the religious position the prophet had. Although through the ages and in different parts of the
Muslims world, leaders try to imitate what the prophet did, there would be no one who could do what he did, simply because he was the last messenger of God. The split between the political leadership and the religious leadership had started. Later on the split would increase during the period of the four rightly caliphs and would be established in the new empire of the Omayyad.

The second caliph was Omar, he was hand picked by the first caliph and there was no community selection for him. Some authors think that Abu-Bakr was worried about the unity of the Umma; especially since he had to fight some tribes of Arabia in the Redda wars. Others thought that Omar was the best option at that time as he was well known for his strength and courage. The choice of Omar made the people who supported Ali unhappy, as they thought from the start that the caliphate should continue in the prophet’s household. It is worth mentioning that Omar’s daughter was one of the prophet’s wives, so he was also a close relative to him.

In his Inaugural Sermons, Omar said “….any one among you who suffers wrong [at my hands], or wishes to speak words of blame for improper conduct, let him bring it to my attention, for I am only one of you”. (27). Omar was a great and a just ruler, he expanded the empire and created a number of new departments, including the police department, a welfare service to assist the poor and an education department. He also organized a sound financial system, and established a Shura body that deliberated on public policy and helped him in its implementation.

After the assassination of Omar, six candidates were chosen by him before his death were given the order to choose one of them as a caliph. In doing so, he implemented to a degree the principle of Shura. The six men were very good candidates but they were not selected by the people or the Umma. The third caliph, Uthman, was of a weaker character than his predecessor but managed to expand the empire. He made several decisions that made some strong people angry with him. He was accused of giving high positions to his relatives of the Umayyad family
instead of on merit, yet the people of Mekkah that he appointed were a good choice for the job. He also appointed Muawiyyah, his cousin and the son of the prophet’s old enemy Abu Sufyan, as governor of Syria. He also refused the commanders and the richest Meccan families to establish estates in the newly conquered territories. In the end, a group of Arab soldiers from Fustat (Egypt) returned to Medina and killed him in his simple undefended house (28).

This incident indicates that the position of the caliph as a religious entity was not as important as it was thought and that the new political situation had shifted power from the religious domain to the political one, resembling the areas the Arabs had conquered and drifting away from the prophet’s model.

The fourth caliph was Ali, who became the de facto successor of Uthman. Both men were the last contenders for the caliphate ordered by Omar. Ali also had large supporters who were unhappy with Uthman’s rule and thought that he betrayed Islam and the caliphate by his actions. The split in the Umma was grave and the wars that Ali fought made people feel bad about what was happening in the Muslim leadership. The first war was the Camel where he fought against Aisha, the Prophet’s Widow, and the second against Muawiyyah that split the Muslims against each other. The dilemma was that Ali was a great man; he was the first male convert and was very close to the prophet. He was the husband of Fatima, the daughter of the prophet. He was known for his great knowledge, piety and courage. He had all the qualifications to be the caliph. But the situation on the ground had changed. Power has shifted from Mekkah and Medina to the newly conquered territories. The newly formed empire absorbed a lot of new converts who were not tribes from Arabia and had different backgrounds of Persian and Byzantine heritage.

The continuous split of politics and religion that started after the death of Muhammad culminated during the reign of Ali. The victor would be a politician who can govern not a
religious and pious person. The sectarian split in Islam started at that time. The supporters of Ali or the partisans of Ali (Shiah-i-Ali) became the shi’a, who constitutes around 15% of Muslims; the rest are known as Sunni. To add more to this sectarian split, the son of Muawyyiah, Yazid, later sent an army and killed Ali’s son, Hussein, as he was traveling to Iraq on the invitation of the people of Kufa to declare him a Caliph. His death is mourned every year by the Shi’a in recognition of their failure to support him.

It is very noticeable that the political and religious powers overlapped during the period of the four rightly guided caliphs. But it took a short period of time to separate them; this will correspond to the time of the four caliph’s reign, (632-661). During this time, the overlap was gradually loosened and reality set in. To rule an empire that extended from North Africa to India did not require a religious person, it needed a dictator.

2. The Umayyad Empire (661-750)

Muawiyyah ruled the Islamic empire from Damascus. He developed an autocratic, monarchial, and hedonistic style of rule. He expanded the empire and strengthened it. Later, in 680, before his death, he handed power over to his son, Yazid, and started a new era of hereditary kingship. This was new to the Arabs; their tradition as Bedouin was to give the chiefdom to the strongest. They were not used to kings and kingdoms. The questions of what kind of man should be the leader of the Umma continued to haunt people. Should he be a pious Muslim as the Kharajits believed, or direct descendant from the prophet as the Shi’a believed? Or should the Umma accept the Umayyad with all their failing and non-religious behavior in the sake of keeping unity and avoid civil war? The Umayyad ran the empire as dictators though they had consultive councils. These replaced the shura method during the previous period and the duty of the council
was to give consultation only with no power in making decisions. The majority of members of the counsel were from the ruling family; other members consisted of tribal leaders and religious leaders, scholars and jurists. (29). This is not to say that the rulers were bad Muslims, actually the majority were good Muslims and ran an Empire that Muslims are still proud of. It was strong, expanding, and wealthy. But people still felt that they wanted the empire to be truly Islamic, where people are equal and justice prevailed. They were also bothered by the material life and the extra spending of the ruling elites. But the rules that were explained in the Koran affected their decision and they accepted the situation hoping that the just caliph would come one day. The Koran says : (4:59) “O you who believe, obey Allah, and obey the messenger and those of you who are in authority”. This may have convinced the Muslims to accept rulers that might not be applying religion as they should. The writer Carl Brown thought that this Verse laid the foundation of submissive attitudes toward political authority that reached its fullest flowering in the oft-sited maxim “better sixty years of tyranny than a year of anarchy”. (30). But Muslims also knew that leaders were required to apply the rules of God in the Muslim land to be obeyed, so there was a balance between when to accept and when to revolt. The Koran ordered Muslims to follow the path of God so they can be saved. The Koran says : (3:102) “And hold fast, all of you together, to the rope of Allah, and do not separate. And remember Allah’s favor unto you: how you were enemies and he made friendship between your hearts so that you became brothers by his grace”.

The patrimonial system of the Umayyad did not last long. There were several forces against them. The Idea of kingship and heredity was not embraced; the Shi’a were waiting for the right time to bring them down. The alienation of Muslims of non Arab race was strong as the Umayyad depended on Arab tribes and relatives for high positions. Some economic factors were
also important as the war with the Byzantines cost a lot of money. There was no significant effect of religion in the bringing down of the Umayyad rule.

The reign of the Umayyad established the separation between state and religion. The rulers were from one family and ruled as dictators. They appeased the religious Ulamma to get their support and give their reign legitimacy. The Shi’a who wanted the caliphate to be in the prophet’s succession and give it a religious character failed.

3. The Abbasid Empire (750-945/1258)

The Abbasid empire lasted for several centuries, but later they lost power as the empire was fragmented to smaller kingdoms. The Buyids ruled Iran and Iraq (945-1055). The Fatimid’s ruled Egypt (969-1171). The Seljuk’s later ruled Iran and Iraq (1055-1194). The Ayyubids ruled Egypt and Syria (1169-1260). The last blow to the Abbasids came from the Mongol attack which destroyed the capital, Baghdad, and finished this dynasty. (31).

The Abbasid came to power as a revolt against the Umayyad. They gained the Shi’a support first as they presented themselves as a supporters of their cause. Once in power, they took this camouflage off and showed themselves to be absolute monarchs like their predecessor. The first caliph was Abu al-abbas al-saffah (750-754) who made sure that the Umayyad would not come back. His successor was Abu Jafar al–Mansur who murdered all the Shi’a who he considered could be danger to his rule. During the time of caliph Harun al-Rashed (786-809), the empire was very successful and Bagdad was considered as the capital of the strongest empire on earth. To rule this vast empire, the caliph was an absolute Monarch; he broke with the Islamic traditions of how rulers should behave. He lived in his palace surrounded by guards and a large bureaucracy, in contrast to the way the prophet and the four rightly caliphs lived. The prophet
was a normal person who lived between the people in a poor house and ate what was available. He treated people equally and was very modest. The Abbasid caliphs called themselves “the shadow of god on earth” and average people could not see them. For those who were allowed to see them, they had to bow, something unislamic, as bowing is only allowed to God.

During the Abbasid period, Islamic literature grew immensely as did other fields of science. Distinct classes of ulama (religious scholars) developed. The Caliphs were patrons of religious scholars either due to their conviction, or as a political move to keep them on their side. Four different law schools (madhab) were established. The Hanafi following Abu Hanifa (d767), who was based in Iraq; the Maliki, following Malik Ibn Annas (d795) based in Medina; the Shafi‘i, following Muhammad ibn Idris Al-Shafi based in Bagdad and Egypt (d820); and the Hanabli, following Ahmad Ibn Hanbal based in Bagdad (d855). These schools varied between each other on the interpretation of religion.

After the development of religious studies and the intellectual expansion of the religion, more power was gained by the Ulama, and the Caliphs had to balance the power between appeasing them or confronting them. The historian Karen Armstrong showed how powerful the caliphs were, comparing them to the religious Ulama. She said “Both Malik Ibn Anas and al Shafi‘i took part in shi’a uprising against early Abbasids and both were imprisoned for their politics. Later they were released and patronized by the caliphs Al Mahdi and Al-Rashed, who wanted to exploit their expertise to develop a uniform legal system throughout the empire”. (32).

The struggle between the Caliphs and the Ulama went through different stages. The caliphs controlled the political power and the army while the Ulama kept control of legislation and law. The Caliphs tried to control religious affairs. This conflict came to a head in the first half of the ninth century and by the eleventh century it was settled in the Ulama's favor (33).
The four religious schools of the Sunni Muslims were mentioned earlier, it is important to mention the Shi’a School which is called the Jaffari. The majority of Shi’a belongs to what is called the twelver, where they believe in the twelve Imams. These imams are direct descendants of the prophet. They have special powers and they represent the spiritual authority of the prophet designated by God through the fact of their lineage. The prophet transmitted the message of God, while the Imams translate it for human beings. The Quran’s explicit message (Zahir) is obvious to all people, but the implicit message (batin) can only be explained by the Imams. (34).

The first Imam was Ali, the prophet’s cousin and son in law. He was also the fourth Caliph. The second Imam was Hasan, Ali’s son, who decided not to challenge Muawyyah and gave up his claim for the caliphate. The third Imam was Hussein, Ali’s second son who was killed by Yazid troops in Karbala, Iraq, trying to get support to challenge the Umayyad. The subsequent Imams were their descendants who lived through the Umayyad and Abbasid period. They challenged the authority of the caliphs and were religious and pious people. The tenth Imam, Ali Al-Hadi, was called by the caliph in Bagdad and was put under house arrest for fear of his political influence. When the eleventh Imam died in 874, it was said that he left behind a little boy who had gone into hiding to save his life. In 934 it was said that the Imam had gone into “occultation” and was concealed by God. He would have no further contact with the Shi’a, but will come one day and inaugurate the era of justice. Due to that, “the Shi’a Ulama became representative of the hidden Imam, but they ceased to take part in political life as in the absence of the Hidden Imam, the true leader of the Ummah, no government would be legitimate”. (35). This attitude would change in the fifteenth century during the Safavid era in Persia, and would change much further during the Iranian revolution in 1979.
After the Mongol invasion and the destruction of Bagdad, the Abbasids ceased to exist. The Mamluks took over rule in Syria and Egypt (1250-1517). The Ottomans began gaining power in 1280 and later on took over Syria, Egypt, North Africa and Arabia. The Safavid ruled Persia (1501-1722), and the Mughals ruled India from 1526 until the British took over around 1707.

State and religious separation continued during the Abbasid period. Although religion developed and expanded, the political power of the Ulamma was limited. The power remained with the caliphs and kings. The caliphs ruled using Sharia as a law, and used the Ulamma to give their reign the legitimacy they needed. At the same time in Europe, Church was a strong and established institution and had influential political power over kings and the politics of Europe. The Pope had a lot of power, waged wars, created and destroyed Monarchs and interfered in major political events on the continent. This difference is important when we try to understand the separation of state and religion in the Muslim and Christian worlds.

4. The Safavid Empire (1501-1722)

The Safavid Empire came to being after the collapse of Mongol power (1220-1500) in the Middle East. The Mongol Empire devastated the Islamic World. Centers of science, learning and trade, like Bagdad and Damascus were destroyed. The libraries were burned, and with them, a lot of written history about Islamic civilization and science was gone forever.

The Safavid Empire started in Persia, what is now Iran. In 1500, the sixteen –year -old Ismail succeeded his father and started to build a new power in Persia. He changed the course of religion by announcing that the Twelver Shiism would be the official religion of the new empire. This was also enforced by Shah Abbas I (1588-1629), who supported this vision by pouring money into building Madrasas and bringing religious leaders to his side. This did not work as
he hoped, as the Ulama wanted to have their own power and thought that they were the true legitimate representatives of the hidden Imam, not the shah. The Ulama remained financially independent from the rulers and this helped them later on to play a bigger role in the power struggle.

A religious group called the Usulis introduced the idea that ordinary Muslims were incapable of interpreting religion and the holy Koran, and only the Ulama had this privilege and authority. This concept continued to the present and was reintroduced into Iran after the Khomeini revolution in 1979. This is called Valyat-i- Faqih (the guardianship of the jurisconsult) and gave the Ulama ultimate power in approving or disapproving any legislation in the country. This concept is peculiar to the Shi’a and did not happen in the Sunni Muslim communities or countries.

5. The Ottoman Empire (1280/1389-1922)

The Ottoman conquered Constantinople in 1453 and changed its name to Istanbul. They expanded their empire into three continents. These included Eastern Europe, North Africa, Syria, Iraq and Arabia. They had wars with the Safavid of Persia as they clashed over eastern expansion. The Sultans in Istanbul ruled as absolute monarchs. They did not try to force one form of governance over the whole empire; rather they accommodated the different ethnic and religious groups. This tolerance was very successful in keeping the empire under control. They used Islam as glue to unite the empire, and gave other religious groups like Christians and Jews freedom to apply their own rules over their people.

The Sharia had a very important status in the empire. Using it was essential in keeping Arab alliance as the Ottoman portrayed themselves as the guardian and defenders of Islam. The Ulama
were happy to see an empire where Islam was applied and protected and they acted as intermediaries between the local people and the Pashas. The Pashas were the local rulers who were appointed by the Sultan and were directly responsible to him. This partnership between the Sultans and the Ulamas later developed into the inclusion of the Ulama under the bureaucracy of the Ottomans rule. This made the Ulama dependent on the Sultans for salaries and gifts. The writer Hakan Yavuz indicated “Through the integration of the Ulama into the Ottoman bureaucracy, the state established the most effective control. Thus the control of religion was the main function of the Ottoman system, and this institutional tradition has been continued in republican Turkey, where Islam has been subordinated to the needs of the state”. (37). The Ottomans used the Sharia for religious courts, but they also used another law called the Kanun. The Sultans issued these Kanuns to cover issues not covered by the Sharia. Having two systems at the same time helped the young Turkish republic after the WWI to develop a more successful secular regime, avoiding the establishment of an Islamic theocracy as happened in Iran. After a slow and long decline of the empire, the sultan, who had the inherent legitimacy of the kanun, issued the Tanzimat (Reform) edicts. The Tanzimat era (1830-1860) emphasized the importance of changing the system to try to catch up with the rising and threatening power of the Europeans. The Ottomans saw several parts of their empire being dominated by the Europeans and the Russians, and later lost control over Egypt, North Africa and Arabia. The Tanzimat changes were too late. The Ottomans later lost WWI when they allied with Germany, and they lost what was left of their empire.

The collapse of Islamic civilization (18th, 19th and 20th century)
The collapse of Muslim power in the last three centuries was not isolated. It was an essential part of the power shift from the Muslims, Indians and Chinese to the Europeans and North America. Several causes have been advanced to explain this international shift of power. The first is the natural progression of empires, their rise and decline especially in agrarian societies. The Muslims faced the same fate as previous empires like the British and the French. The second theory involves the Industrial and scientific revolutions and their massive impact on the balance of power. Third is the internal problems in the Muslim world, including the failure to realize important changes in world politics and the inability of solving their own problems. While the West was bustling with new ideas and inventions, discovering new continents and going around the world searching for new fortune and trade, Muslims closed the doors on themselves and refused to adapt to new ideas. However the speed of the change that happened in Europe was phenomenal and multi-dimensional. When the Mongols attacked the Islamic world in Asia and destroyed it, they did not bring with them a culture that would be a challenge to the Islamic one. Later on, some of the Mongols became Muslims and established a Muslim empire in India. The West brought new ideas that broke down the fabric of Islamic societies. The most important ideas were secularism, nationalism, and the concept of the state. These were alien to Muslims. The fall of the Muslim world under occupation by Western Christian powers was unprecedented. It was the first time the Muslims felt inferior to the West and started asking the question: What went wrong?

Deep in the Islamic religion, the Idea of Muslim superiority is well entrenched. The Koran says (3:109) “You are the best community that has been raised up for mankind. You enjoy justice and forbid evil. You believe in God And if the people of the book (i.e., Jews and
Christians) had believed it had been better for them”. Muslims thought that they have the right religion and the truth and that God is on their side, so why have they been abandoned?

The religious Ulama had a very simple answer. Muslims abandoned Islam and that’s why they lost. Other thinkers came later to suggest the opposite that, because of religion, the Muslims lost. These people looked at Europe and saw how they relegated their religion to the personal level as an important step in modernization and progress. The third group of thinkers thought that the Islamic religion had the answers but the interpretation of their religion and stagnation is what caused the illness of the society. They suggested opening the doors of Ijtihad (independent reasoning) to enable Islam to play a positive role in the development of Muslim societies. The door of Ijtihad has been closed since the 11th century and this made the Muslims weak and non-innovative.

The first traumatic contact with the West happened after the invasion of Napoleon and the taking of Egypt in 1797. The Muslim army was overwhelmed with new weapons and the organization of the Western army. The Ottomans could not do anything about it. The French brought new ideas, scientists to study the history of Egypt, and introduced the printer. French occupation did not last long due to conflicts with British interests. The reaction of the Muslims was weak and slow. They were paralyzed. New Ideas started coming to fix this gap. As discussed earlier, the Ottomans introduced Tanzimat and tried to modernize their army. However the speed of change in Europe was so fast and profound that nobody could catch up with it.

New ideas started to be heard in the nineteenth century. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-1897) championed the idea of Pan-Islamism. He was an Afghani who lived in Egypt and his writings have influenced many people. He revived the call for all Muslims to work together against the
invaders and establish an Islamic Umma. He attacked some thinkers of his era who were convinced that religion was responsible for social backwardness and stagnation, and that scientific progress would eliminate the need for religion.

Another famous thinker and writer was Muhammad Abduh who lived in Egypt. His main message was that Islam, properly understood, can easily accommodate Western ideas of democracy and can accept Westernization. The Ulama supported the people to resist and fight the occupation and had an important role in freeing their countries from occupation.

After the Second World War, with the appearance of the two new super powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, most of the Muslim countries gained their independence from the old superpowers, the French and the British. The effects of colonization are still evident in most Muslim countries. The introduction of nationalistic ideas and Western laws, and new borders which were erected between people were new to a Muslim world which was used to dynasties and kings and the concept of Umma. The reaction of ordinary people was mixed as what to do about the new situation. The idea of deriving ideology from the Islamic religion was put aside and new ideas were tried. The split between religion and state was obvious. The leaders of the newly independent Muslim countries were secularist: Gamal Abd al-Nassir in Egypt, Habib Bourguiba in Tunis, Ahmad ben bella in Algeria, sultan Muhammad V in Morocco, Sukarno in Indonesia, Riza Shah and his son Muhammad Rizah Shah in Iran, Afghanistan’s King Amanullah and Muhammad Ali Jinnah of Pakistan all had no religious training and were not religious leaders.

New ideas in the Middle East erupted and gained a lot of momentum. Arab Nationalism, an ideology aimed at uniting the Arabs in one country to be able to face new challenges especially
the creation of Israel. However this Idea failed after breaking the short unity between Syria and Egypt in 1961 and the humiliating defeat of the 1967 war with Israel.

In the meantime new Islamic thinkers tried to influence the course of Muslim politics and helped in the era of “The return of Islam” in the 1970’s. But why did this happen? There are multiple factors that caused the Muslims to turn back to Islam for an answer. The long colonization of their countries have affected them in several ways and introduced new ideas that the Muslims did not benefit from. After they gained their independence, all Muslim countries were poor; the majority had high population growth; and Illiteracy was high. The West made sure to leave theses countries weak and a client to their interests. The West did not help their colonies develop strong infrastructure or institutions that worked properly after they left, with the exception of Malaysia. They also did not help in the development of democratic Institutions, with the exception of India. Benazir Bhutto wrote in her book short time before her assassination, “The so–called incompatibility of Islam and democratic governance is used to divert attention from the sad history of western political intervention in the Muslim world, which has been a major impediment to the growth of democracy in the Islamic nations.”(38). In her book, she went through most of the Muslim countries and showed in detail how the colonizing power killed many infant democracies.

The turning of Muslims to religion was inevitable. No government in the Muslim world could fulfill their people’s aspirations in such a short period of time. The only way these newly created deprived nations could survive was through centralized, bureaucratized dictatorships. Other options were very limited. The relentless exploitation of the south by the north did not help this and made people in the Muslim and developing countries lose faith in Western ideologies and
institutions. The United Nations was viewed as a puppet of the West, and the World Bank and IMF were institutions to consolidate the poverty of the south.

The Resurgence of Islam (20\textsuperscript{th} and 21\textsuperscript{st} century)

There are several thinkers in the twentieth century who tried to push Muslim politics to the extreme, the most prominent of which are, Al-Banna, Qutb, and Mawdudi. There are also those who tried to accommodate the conflicting politics of religion and secularism and were moderate, such as Gannoushi, Soroush, and Kadivar.

Hasan al-Banna was born in Egypt in 1906 and was claimed to be assassinated in 1949 by the Egyptian secret police. He was the founder of the Muslim Brethren in 1928. He was a charismatic leader and organizer. His ideas involved adapting the Salafiyya movement and projecting it for regime change. The Salafiyya argued that the ills of Muslims happened because of the divergence from the Koran and Sunnah and the way to solve this problem was to go back to its origins and use the early Islamic golden age as a model. Al-Banna ran a well organized movement which was populist. He attacked the social structure in Egypt and the large gap between the rich and poor. His solution was the equality and justice of Islam. He had many followers. The two major political forces in Egypt at that time were Nasser and his fellow officers, who had more modern ideas and nationalistic aspirations, and the Muslim Brethren who had an Islamic agenda. When in 1954 a Muslim Brother attempted to assassinate President Nasser, the conflict turned into a clash between these two powers and Nasser won.

Sayyid Qutb was born in Egypt in 1906 and was executed by the Egyptian President Nasser in 1966. He had a good education and wrote important books. He had a taste of the West when he was sent by the Egyptian Ministry of Education to the U.S.A in 1949-1950. He detested the
Western way of life. When he returned to Egypt, he joined the Muslim Brethren and directed his
energy and writing to establishing an Islamic state. He explained that capitalism and communism
would fail and the only solution was Islam. He advocated violence to achieve this political goal,
using the Islamic doctrine of Jihad. He introduced a new dimension of interpreting Islam, calling
those who do not adhere strictly to the Islamic laws as “Jahel”, meaning ignorant and living in
“Jahiliyya” (the life of ignorance). In his book (Ma’alim fi’l Tariq), Signs in the Road, Qutb held
the view that those who oppose the Islamisation of society and the state, above all the supposedly
Muslim rulers, were to be regarded and treated as Jahili, that violence against Jahili regimes was
justified, and that the Egyptian regime was definitely un-Islamic and Jahili and consequently
could be overthrown legitimately (39). His teachings and politics clashed with the rising power
of Nasser. He was arrested and jailed for 10 years. He was released in 1964, but rearrested in
1966 with other Muslim Brethren on the accusation of planning to assassinate President Nasser.
He was tried and sentenced to death.

Abu al-A’la Mawdudi was born in India in 1906 and had a good education. He worked as a
journalist and was involved in Indian politics. He created Jama’at-i Islam in 1941 and worked for
the creation of a Muslim state in Pakistan. He Opposed Jinnah and the Muslim league accusing
them of not creating an Islamic state but rather a nationalist state. He wanted to create an Islamic
state using Shura (consultation) as practiced in early Islam. He advocated creating an elected
legislature (majlis-i- shura) and this was to legislate only on matters not already dealt with in the
Shari’a. After the creation of Pakistan, he and his Jama’a led an opposing force against Jennah
who preferred a secular state. He was accused of supporting the anti Ahmadiyya sect which
caused a civil disturbance in Pakistan in 1953. He was brought to trial before a military court and

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was sentenced to death, but this severe punishment triggered a popular protest and his sentence was reduced to fourteen years. He was later released after serving twenty months (40).

His influence in political discourse in Pakistan and the Muslim countries was important. His ideas of Islam and the West still resonate in different Islamic countries and among the extremes. In one of his writings, he accused the West saying, “It is a purely materialistic civilization. Its whole system is devoid of the concepts of compassion, fear of God, straightforwardness, truthfulness, urge for the right, morality, honesty, trustworthiness, virtue, modesty, piety and chastity which form the foundation of Islamic Civilization. Its Ideology is diametrically opposed to Islamic concept……In other words Islam and Western Civilization are like two boats sailing in totally opposite directions. Any attempt to sail in both boats at the same time shall split the adventurer into two pieces”. (41). The first ruler endorsed by Maududi was General Zia al-Haqq in Pakistan in 1977.

Rachid Al-Ghanouchi is a moderate Muslim from Tunisia. He founded the Movement de la Tendance Islamique (MTI) in 1981 in Tunisia. He called on the regime to share power and advance political pluralism. He was jailed from 1981-1984, then released with a ban from political involvement. He was later rearrested with a charge of plotting to change the regime and released. The MTI, renamed Al_Nahda in early 1989, took a modified religious stand and was allowed to be active in politics. Later this was changed and Gannouchi went into exile.

His thoughts resonate with a lot of people in the Arab and Islamic world. He thinks that Islam and Western values can coexist. He wrote, “The democratic values of political pluralism and tolerance are perfectly compatible with Islam”. He emphasized the importance of democratic development in the Muslim world and the right of free elections. He said “the only legitimacy is the legitimacy of elections”, and “freedom comes before Islam and is the step leading to Islam”.
Gannouchi has a better understanding of the Islamists and would like for them to share power in a peaceful way. In an address in 1995 at the Royal Institute of International Affaire in London he said “Once the Islamists are given a chance to comprehend the values of Western modernity, such as democracy and human rights, they will search within Islam for a place for these values where they will implant them, nurse them, and cherish them just as the Westerners did before”. (42).

Abdul Karim Soroush is an Iranian who supported the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 and played a role in working with the government in revising university curricula. He had ideas that were not accepted by the Clerics and, consequently, he found himself opposed to them. His ideas are moderate and he seeks reconciliation between Islam and democracy. He thinks that there is no contradiction between them and actually that they complement each other. He said, “Islam and democracy are not only compatible, their association is inevitable”. He emphasized the importance of people’s freedom in choosing their government. “The beliefs and will of the majority must shape the ideal Islamic state”. (43) He believes that Sharia should be the base of the modern Islamic state. But the Sharia is not a fixed interpretation and way of life that does not change; rather, it is a lively and changeable law that accommodates to different places and circumstances. Sorouch does not accept the authority of the Clerics as sole interpreter of religion and his ideas are similar to Sunni Muslims in this regard.

Mohsen Kadivar is an important Iranian thinker and writer who advocates for reform in the Islamic republic of Iran. He does not incite the overthrow of the regime; rather he wants it to be responsive to the will of the people. He is a Mujtahid (cleric qualified to interpret religious law). He was sentenced to prison in 1999 and was released after 18 months. He emphasizes the importance of freedom in religious thinking. For him freedom is the main power that governs
people’s choices. Living according to religion should be free and not imposed by anybody. He said “We live in an age of rational thinking. People do not see a conflict between reason and faith. Faith is strengthened by reason and principle, not by coercion and pressure.”(44).

Discussion

The intermingling of religious and political power has taken different directions in the religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Moses was the religious and political leaders of the Jews; he spoke with God, received the Ten Commandments and led his people across Sinai. Jesus had no worldly power; and, according to Christianity, was crucified. His mission was spiritual, he did not lead any revolt against the Roman Empire. Instead Mathew records that Jesus said (Mathew22:21) “Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s”. In Islam, the prophet Mohammad was the political and religious leader at the same time. He established a community where he taught his people to practice their faith and the rules of Islam; he led his followers into several battles.

As the Jews lived in different places and were minorities in most of their long history, the religio-political power struggles did not develop until the establishment of Israel in 1948. As for Christianity, the religion started slowly taking around three hundreds years to become the official religion of the Roman Empire. After the collapse of the Roman Empire, around year 500, there was a vacuum of power and the Church filled it. The Papacy became an important center of power that interfered in the politics of Europe for more than a thousand years. The kings and Princes of Europe had to accommodate the Church and worked either with it or against it.
Henry VIII of England challenged the pope’s decisions and later established the Church of England. The French revolution and the establishment of the Republic limited the power of the Church and separated the state and the Church in what is called in France, ‘Laicite’.

The American Revolution and the establishment of the Constitution separated religious and political powers. Jefferson announced a “wall of separation” to emphasize the country’s direction. This historical development in the West did not happen in the Islamic world. This is why the idea of separation of powers between the state and religion seems so foreign to Muslims. In Islam, there was no religious institution, such as the papacy in Europe which needed to be separated. That’s why the discussion of separation of these two powers in Muslim countries should be discussed and understood in a different way as it means different things to different people. The bottom line though, is the same. It is the struggle for power and leadership.

As discussed earlier, the prophet Mohammad had both, the political and religious powers, because he was the prophet and delivered the last religion according to Islamic faith. After his death this special status did not happen again and will not happen again as he was the last messenger from God. The four rightly Guided Caliphs who followed him tried to hold both powers, Abu Bakr and Omar succeeded, Uthman and Ali failed. When the power shifted to Syria and the Umayyad Empire was established, things went back as usual. The separation of state and religion returned. Political power always resided with the kings, Princes or Sultans and the religious institutions were there to give their rules legitimacy and inspire obedience of their people. The rulers were to be obeyed as long as they applied Sharia and upheld the religion.

The new Phenomena of Islamism and the example of the Islamic Republic of Iran are new to Muslims. In the past, applying Sharia was taken for granted; the ruler had supreme power and the last word. In contemporary politics, Islamists are asking for the establishment of Islamic states
that are ruled by Sharia. By doing so they are using religion as a tool to gain power. For those who are extreme, justifying the use of war and the killing of Muslims and non-Muslims for this purpose is acceptable and a religious duty. (their wrong interpretation of Jihad).

It is important to discuss Sharia in some detail so the conflict between state and religion become clearer. Sharia literally means “the path”. In general understanding, it means the body of Islamic Law. The revealed sources of Sharia are two, namely the Koran and the Sunnah (this comprises the thousands of the prophet’s sayings and actions during his message of Islam over 23 years). There are numbers of other sources or proofs which are found in Ijtihad (independent reasoning). Ijtihad consists of Analogy (qiyas), juristic preference (istihsan), presumption of continuity (istishab), and even ijma (consensus). Analogy and consensus have been recognized by the majority of Ulama, but some disagreement over the validity of other methods exists between the schools of jurists. (6).

During the first thirteen hundred years of Islam, religious rules were applied in the Muslim communities with some different local interpretations according to the four major schools in the Sunni sect and one major school in the Shiite sect. Despite the acceptance of standard texts and manuals, law in Islamic courts generally remained “jurist law” in the sense that it was uncodified and derived from jurists and their own judgments. The first time Islamic rules were codified was during the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century. After the scientific revolution and the expansion of the West, all Muslim countries were subjected to colonization and new European laws were introduced in the colonies. Gradually some Islamic laws were dropped and more European laws were adopted. In the majority of Muslim countries now, the laws are a mixture between Islamic law and European law. The Islamic laws are used more in personal status concerning, marriage, divorce, inheritance, the rest of the laws use the western model. Carl
Brown explained the development of two legal systems that still exists: “throughout the Middle East, the decision was made to maintain two separate legal systems, one based on Islamic law and the other on the new codes and procedures. Seen this way, the legal reforms were much more evolutionary than revolutionary”. (30)

After the independence of the Muslim countries post World War II, the religious institutions were brought under the central government authorities. This limited their power and even affected the Sharia itself. For example, the prohibition of women driving in Saudi Arabia. The Sharia law was implemented and undermined the Sharia itself in the eyes of the Muslims.

Another effect is the legitimization of some authoritarian regimes in the Muslim World. This was explained by Abu El Fadl: “This disintegration of the rule of Ulama and their co-optation by the modern state, with its hybrid practices of secularism, have opened the door for the state to become the maker and enforcer of the divine law, in so doing the state has acquired formidable power, which has further ingrained the practice of authoritarianism in various Islamic states”. (47)

Some secularists think that it is important to take part of the Sharia in forming laws and the constitution as a means to reach a consensus between the opposing sides. This is actually the norm in most Muslim countries apart from a few examples like Iran and Saudi Arabia, where sharia is the state official law.

An-an’im in his analysis of the relation between the state and Islam emphasized the importance of having a secular state as a guarantee for the balance between the two opposing sides. He said, “The modern territorial state should neither seek to enforce sharia as positive law and public policy nor claim to interpret its doctrine and general principles for the Muslim
citizens. The Sharia principles can and should be public policy and legislation, subject to fundamental constitutional and human rights of all citizens”. (48).

The dialogue between the Secularist and the Islamist is very important in the peaceful development of politics in the Muslim countries. The Algerian example is very important to study and learn from. In 1962 Algeria secured Independence from France. The major power at that time was the National Liberation Front (FLN) which seized control of the country and ruled in a form of dictatorship with the help of military and security forces. In 1989, a new constitution was ratified by the people of Algeria after a long struggle and opened the way to end the FLN’s monopoly over power. There were several political powers at that time and the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) had the most power. Later this power was translated into significant gains in the municipalities’ election. The FLN was poised to win the majority seats in the National Assembly. In 1992 the military intervened and cancelled the election and deposed the President and banned the FIS. Algeria sank into a civil war between the Islamist and the regime and around 100,000 Algerian died, mostly civilians. (49).

The struggle between Secularists and Islamists is not a local conflict; rather it is monitored carefully by other powers that have a stake in the outcome. In the Algerian crisis, France and the U.S.A interfered not to support democracy as might be expected but rather to make sure the Islamists did not win. This happened in other parts of the Muslim world as well like Palestine. Feldman explained that the U.S and other powers felt nervous about Islamists winning power and they supported their opposing power with force. He said “This paradigm was set first in Algeria, where France and the United states supported the military regime in canceling the election results and squelching Islamist rule. We have seen it again in Palestine, where the U.S
encouraged Fatah to deny Hamas the role in government that was in theory supposed to come with its electoral victory”. (50)

The governments in the Muslim World feel pressure from inside and outside. The inside pressure comes from the frustration of the people about slow progress and widespread corruption. People support Islamic movements and parties not only because of their agendas, but also out of desperation. The pressure that governments face from the outside is the need for support and help from other countries, mostly from the West, where having an Islamic state is deemed anti West from the start. The bitter experience of the West with Iran also did not help aspiring Islamist movements. However, the successful accession to power in Turkey by the AKP, an “Islamic party” did not trigger the U.S to take major actions against it. This can indicate that the reaction of the West can be selective and not generalized.

It is expected that the West will find itself in confrontation with Islamic movements in the future for several reasons; first, the West still thinks of the superiority of their institutions and looks down on other cultures ways of doing things, especially if they mix involves religion with political power. Second, the West still thinks that Islam has a major political power that can threaten its own dominion. and the future balance of power. So it is in the interest of the West not to allow a consolidation of Islamic power. Third, the emergence of extremists in Islamic politics who justify using violence against the West and the excessive and mostly unwise reaction by the West. Fourth, the continuation of the U.S.A support for Israel and the failure of the U.S to play a constructive role in the Middle East conflict. Fifth, the involvement of the West in Iraq and Afghanistan and the failed outcome so far. Sixth, loss of moral compass as explained by Graham Fuller “for many Muslims the problem in the West is not Christianity but its abandonment; it is the replacement of religious values with secular humanist values…” he also
explained that the West is not the best example for others to emulate “Muslims question the strength and efficacy of Western Humanistic legal and ethical codes that in the end produced the most vast and immoral killing machines of all history”. (51).

Conclusion

This paper illustrates the importance of understanding the historical facts in the study of the separation between state and religion in Islam. It also demonstrates the many factors that played a role in the formation of the two major political powers influencing Muslim countries today, Islamism and Secularism. Democracy as an ideology and political system has been used by both sides with different successes. We have seen, contrary to the belief of many thinkers in the West, that state and religion separation in Islam is possible and actually has a long heritage. The explanation of the different progression of both faiths, Islam and Christianity showed how understanding this separation is different in theory and in practice between Islam and the West.

The separation of religion and state existed in Islam after the death of the prophet and developed especially after the end of the four rightly guided caliph’s period in 661. Throughout Islamic history several dynasties ruled the Muslims in different part of the world such as Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid, Almohad, Mamluk, Seljuk, Moghul, Safavid, and Ottoman. All of them consolidated religion and state separation. Hamid Enayat wrote, “The majority of Muslims, for the greater part of their history, lived under regimes which had only the most tenuous link with religious norms, and observed Sharia only to the extent that it legitimized their power in the eyes of the faithful”. (52) The caliphate or rulers positions that took place after the death of the prophet swiftly moved from a religious authority to an imperial establishment and regimes that are governed not by religious norms but by laws of political survival. As for the religious groups,
they were independent of the state and were concerned with worship, morality, community
solidarity, education, law, and the upholding of the religion. Lapidus explained that “despite the
common statement that Islam is a total way of life defining political as well as social and family
matters, most Muslims societies did not conform to this ideal. They were in fact built around
separate institutions of state and religion”. (53)

The separation of state and religion took different shape recently. Most Muslim countries gained
independence after the Second World War. The colonizing powers did not help them in
developing democratic institutions and all these countries were ruled by dictators as the only way
available to rule newly formed, underdeveloped, poor, agrarian countries. The majority of
populations were illiterate, and establishing strong political institutions or democracy was almost
impossible. With time, the Muslim population became more aware of their dire situation and the
gap between them and the West. They started looking for solutions. Socialism was tried in many
Muslim countries and failed. Communism is very alien to Muslim culture and had only few
followers apart from some countries like Indonesia. Nationalism was tried in several Middle
Eastern countries and failed. People started looking again into religion seeking answers. Since
Islam gave Muslims power and they were successful adopting it in the past, it was felt that
religion could play an important part in the development of Muslims societies. Some Muslims
thought the opposite and blamed religion for the weakness of their nations. The development of
Islamic movements and parties accelerated in the last three decades and constitutes now an
important silent power in most Islamic countries. The Islamist filled the political power vacuum
that was generated by the dictators who prohibited the development of any parties or opposition.

The attitude towards Islamists and Democracy varies between Muslim countries. John
Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, from the Gallup organization conducted interviews over six years
which ended in 2007. They interviewed 50,000 Muslims from 35 nations with a majority Muslim population. The data revealed “that the majorities of Muslims want free speech and free press, and believe in self-determination, democracy, and the rule of law”. The data also showed that “They do not believe they must choose between democracy and Islam, but rather, that the two can co-exist”. The data also explained how only a minority of Muslims want the Sharia to be the only source of legislation “Only minorities in each country say they want religious leaders to be directly in charge of drafting their country’s constitution, writing national legislation, drafting new laws, determine foreign policy and international affairs”. (54).

Although Islamists are gaining power, it is anticipated that the Secular regimes will continue to dominate. However, they will be forced to adjust to the new reality on the ground and allow more expression of religious aspirations and allow political parties to form.

As discussed before, political Islam has many faces and plays different roles in Muslim countries. The two extreme examples discussed earlier were Iran and Turkey. Neither would be a model for the rest of Muslim world as each country developed according to different circumstances that cannot be replicated. However, the example of Turkey is more popular now as through secularism and democracy an Islamic party managed to gain power. This can be a solution for the future Islamic democracies. Muslims can use democracy as a political system and, through it, Sharia laws and the role of religion can be debated. There will be no contradiction because, in Islam, there are divine rules that can be part of the political system and other rules that can be left for people to debate. So the sovereignty of God will remain, and the rest will be left to the sovereignty of people through elective representation and democracy. There is no need to choose between Islam, democracy or secularism. All can be applied at the same time. In the West the balance was found by separation of state and religion in upholding
democracy. In Muslim countries, there could be secular states which help in integrating religion into the Law and allowing religious parties and freedom of speech. Democracy will be used to keep the balance between the secular and the religious powers. The new Muslim democracy will not be a copy of the Western one as there is no need for that and, actually, it could be counterproductive. John Esposito in his last book emphasized this point when he wrote “We need to remember that in a world of multiple models of modernization, Western secular liberal democracy is a way (one of many possible paradigms), not the way, the only path for modernization and political development”. (55)

It is important to remember the Verses from the Holy Koran to help keep the balance between the state and religion. In 2:256, “There shall be no compulsion in religion. True guidance is now distinct from error. He that renounces idol-worship and puts his faith in God shall grasp a firm handle that will never break. God hears all and knows all”. In 2:142, “Thus we have appointed you a nation of the middle that you may be witnesses over mankind”. The coexistence of state and religion will continue, and hopefully the state and religion will work together instead of against each other.
References


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