

Islam and Statism: At the intersection of the State of Medina, Modern Statism and the Islamic State

Faisal Ahmad Qureshi

PhD Political Science and International Relations

Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University

ABSTRACT

Since the Arab Spring and the rise of Islamic State, it has become a topic of discussion whether there can be a state based on Islamic principles or values. This paper argues that in modern times there cannot be a state claiming to be Islamic. So the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or simply the Islamic State were all misnomers. After the Hijra in 7th century CE, the short lived State of Medina incorporated some of the Islamic principles and it too did not last long enough so as to appreciate the feasibility of a State that was Islamic. However, this paper doesn't deny the fact that the States cannot espouse Islam as a directive principle in their state policy or declaration of Islam as the state religion. Nonetheless, it is argued that no state can be Islamic post the peace of Westphalia (1648). Therefore, in the 21st century there cannot be any actualization of any Islamic State unless the postcolonial history is normatively challenged. The so-called Islamic state that emerged in Syria & Iraq was a coalition of rebel forces and Mujahideen groups that tried to form a caliphate based on Islamic socio-political and economic principles, however a futile attempt. For any new Islamic State or a caliphate to emerge, the notion of Westphalian demarcation of boundaries stands as the greatest challenge against it.

Key Words: Westphalia, Islamic State, Statism, Modern, Medina, ISIL.

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of Arab Spring from Tunisia, gradually the uprising spread to many regional countries including Syria in mid 2011. Meanwhile Iraq was already destabilized due to years long of corruption and socio-political instability after its invasion during the USA's War on Terror. Since 2013, Islamists gained the tract in the civil war that had engulfed both Syria and Iraq. Consecutively, a phenomenon appeared that was called the Islamic State of Iraq & Levant (ISIL). Its operatives were internationally recruited and the territory it occupied included Iraq and Syria simultaneously. After an interplay of geopolitical interests between major powers involved in the conflict infested region, ISIL became overwhelmingly dangerous to the stability of nearby States like GCC and Turkey. Over a period of time, PKK & YPG challenged ISIL along with the Shabiha militias, Ketab Hezbollah, Hezbollah and the Shi'ite government forces of Iraq and Syria. Gradually, the decline of ISIL happened but not its complete eradication. However, during its peak ISIL was engaged in administration of its territories and diplomatic transactions as a sovereign body. Thus, it claimed itself as the Islamic State exclusively and subsequently. A Caliphate styled Islamic State emerged

with a modern bureaucratic framework. However, it did not succeed to portray a fine image of how a State governed on Islamic principles would be, hence the term Islamic State is a misnomer. It is argued in this paper that no modern state can be called an Islamic State. As modern states have a postcolonial temporal characteristics as well as a modern Weberian bureaucratic framework. An Islamic State to actualize, it shall be based upon the foundations, principles & values that the State of Medina was fashioned upon, however as an antithesis to the modern framework of “nation-state” that became the norm post the Treaty of Westphalia. To give an example Islamic State of Iraq & Levant, it is imperative to account for postcolonial histories and to analyse the rise & failure of the Islamic State. Thereafter, an analysis of “the Islamic State” shall be made in this paper to present the original argument about the sustenance and feasibility of such a state.

As the Treaty of Westphalia had its religious connotations derived from the Treaty of Augsburg, it was repelled by the church at that point of time. The “decision making” through papacy was subdued and infused in a secular state. Thus, it also brought about the principle of Sovereignty of a nation-state. The peace of Westphalia as it is called, created peace between the warring European sides by inculcating defined boundaries in their understanding of nationhood. The Peace of Westphalia is seen by many scholars in both history and in the field of international relations to be the basis for much of modern international law and professional diplomacy (S Patton . 2019), Consecutively, the European domination of the world began post Renaissance, and the similar form of sovereign nation-states were evolved from the colonies of the colonizing European countries like The Great Britain, Portugal and the Dutch Empire et cetera. For instance, India and Pakistan evolved out of colonial India that was a British dominion. Such states also endowed the Weberian type of bureaucracy.

Now comparing this with the Majlis-e-Shoora or the Shoora council of the Medinian State, such a framework of a nation-state is incompatible with the state based on the benchmark hitherto Islamic state of Medina. Also, the Majlis-e-Shoora is more inclined towards ‘Indirect Democracy’. Therefore, the modern framework of statehood originating from the Westphalian framework is directly incompatible with any form of “Islamic statist entity”. Hence, any State’s claim to be called as an Islamic State is frivolous. However, good governance based on Islamic principles is feasible and a practicality in many countries.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A brief account of Peace of Westphalia along with the era of colonization shall be enquired. Then, the analysis shall be made of the Weberian bureaucratic model and its compatibility with the bureaucratic model of the State of Medina. Thereafter, the State of Medina’s compatibility or incompatibility with the Islamic State’s idea shall be enquired as the Statement of Problem in this research. The research methodology implemented in this research is based on qualitative research using deductive reasoning. Therefore, the research approach uses a discourse analysis from general to specific findings.

PEACE OF WESTPHALIA & THE ERA OF COLONIZATION

It was with the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) that the statehood of nations came into being, subsequently called the Nation-States. The war or series of connected wars began in 1618, when the Austrian Habsburgs tried to impose Roman Catholicism on their Protestant subjects in Bohemia. It pitted Protestant against Catholic, the Holy Roman Empire against France, the German princes

and prince lings against the emperor and each other, and France against the Habsburgs of Spain. The Swedes, the Danes, the Poles, the Russians, the Dutch and the Swiss were all dragged in or dived in. Commercial interests and rivalries played a part, as did religion and power politics (Cavendish Richard . 1998). However, the peace of Westphalia also had its dark side; it unleashed the forces of colonization. That led to the major European powers competing with each other for dominions overseas (Raats Milette & Eckstein Reinhold . 2018). After World War II, the new states emerged with boundaries drawn by their colonial masters. Specifically looking into the modern history of Syria and Iraq, their statehood and demarcation of boundaries was managed by the hitherto colonizing powers. Whereby modern Iraq's were laid by the British mandate and Syria was ruled by both France and Britain post Ottoman decline until its founding as a modern nation state after world war II. Moreover, the post world war II era saw the decline of colonization and emergence of new modern states based on the normative Westphalian nation-state system.

Colonial delineation of boundaries & its purview over an "Islamic statist entity"

The modern delineation of boundaries has a post-colonial temporal & spatial variable. The modern boundaries of countries like Syria and Iraq were delineated following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. However, in an Islamic Caliphate, boundaries are fluid geopolitically. The Islamic State of Iraq & Syria was also taking the same form before it was limited by the popular alliance. The main point is that for an "Islamic statist entity" to usher, the old boundary ideational structure has to fall apart. For that matter, there has to be a normative shift in the geopolitical and geo-economic aspects of the respected modern states. As, the Islamic State became a modern phenomenon, the various Islamist groups pledged allegiance to the ISIL as part of a larger Islamic State. The free flow boundary less Islamic State seemed a probable reality. However, the concept of Islamic State is a misnomer as no modern state with a weberian bureaucracy can be truly Islamic or be like the short lived State of Medina. It also infringes upon the covenant based bilateral or multilateral relations such as the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah (629 CE).

WEBERIAN BUREAUCRACY'S FUNCTION VS. THE STATE OF MEDINA

There is an intrinsic relationship between Weber's theory of modern State and Weberian bureaucratic model (K Dusza . 1989). Weberian bureaucracy serves the bureaucratic institution per se or the organization it represents i.e. the States they form collectively. Hence, such a model cannot endorse and inspire Islamic values literally. A Weberian modern nation-state and its bureaucracy is sustained by the taxes 'imposed' upon the incomes of its citizens. Hence, it is an authoritative bureaucracy that 'imposes' obligation upon the governed subjects.

On the other hand, the State of Medina is a contract based State that is resourced by "Maal E Ghanimat". Also, it is not obligatory upon the 'governed subjects' to pay taxes rather it is a charity based system. That charity based collection of resources (monetary) for the successful functioning of the State is in correlation with "Maal E Ghanimat" as a fee for a service provided. However, this form of tax collection might have been voluntary but specific services were also taxed like providing security to a 'trade vessel' or a caravan. Whereas, "Maal E Ghanimat" was collected as War booty or as sanctions or in treaties imposed upon the losing party.

A major dichotomy between a 'modern nation state' and the 'State of Medina' has its basis in the variables of Interest rates and the trickle-down effect. Hardly, any modern nation state can escape the 'Interest' based global financial system. So, to say that a replication of the State of Medina is

nearly improbable now would not be a fallacious statement. Also, as modern-states espouse Weberian bureaucracies that make the 'trickle down' effect of service provided as difficult. It becomes very hard for the 'service product' to reach the lower levels of the socio-economic hierarchy. Hence, populations are deprived of the equity sanctioned for them in totality. Whereas, in a 'interest rate' free economy based on Islamic principles, any trickle-down effect is nonexistent as the charities need not to pass through the state's bureaucracy.

Therefore, a replica of the State of Medina cannot be sustained without bearing true Islamic values in the political and socio-economic realm. Whereas, a Weberian bureaucracy engendered in a modern nation-state is in contradiction with an utopian idea of an Islamic State that seeks to replicate the State of Medina; the true Islamic State. However, in the global scenario, the modern nation-state form of state is more visible & operable as a political reality.

POST-COLONIAL HISTORY AND THE ISLAMIC STATE

As the State of Medina was a paradigm shift per se over & among the tribal coalition governance, similarly the so called Islamic State of Iraq and Levant arose as a guerilla warfare group that did not emerge as per social contract. Both cannot be equated as ISIL reigned over the broken boundaries of two states that had colonially delineated boundaries, both "State Entities" had differing temporal-spatial factors aligned with different political equations. Additionally, the two states of Iraq and Syria had a colonial history and well defined boundaries as per the British Mandate and the French Mandate respectively. The ISIL tried to normatively break through the postcolonial features of the opponent state and succeeded to some extent but could not sustain its rapid emergence.

However, the historical continuity of Iraq and Syria as nation-states reigned supreme over the emergence of ISIL. Later on, when ISIL declared itself to be an over-encompassing Islamic State, it was explicit that the organization did not respect Sovereignty, geographical boundaries and historical legacies of the nation-states. On the basis of above arguments, it can be denoted that no "modern state" can be called an Islamic State. However, it does not mean that there cannot exist States that can imbibe Islamic values or implement Islamic laws and rules in governance. For example, Islamic values like the absence of interest rate based banking or sharia based governance systems. Therefore, an Islamic State has to break away from the post-colonial history of the geopolitical entity it encompasses.

STATE OF MEDINA VS. THE ISLAMIC STATE

According to Nazeer Kaka Khel, the Quranic concept of human nature is noble that led to the creation of the State of Medina with all noble intentions (MNK Khel . 1982). In contrast, initially ISIL and then the IS has turned out brutally violent flawed human rights (Brendan I. Koerner . 2016). In military aspects, the State of Medina had even non-Muslim soldiers whereas the Islamic State is a sectarian group among other sectarian groups operating in Syria and Iraq including the Iran backed Shia militias. Also, within the Islamic fold there were no major intrinsic sectarian divide during the evolution of the State of Medina. Whereas, even the major Sunni militant groups carried ideological differences against each other in that region. Such as both of them Sunni, Jabhat Al Nusra differed from Ahrar Ash Sham and they both differed from ISIL. Therefore, any replication or conflation between the hitherto State of Medina with the contemporary Islamic State is an Oxymoron. Hence, no modern 'statist entity' can be Islamic either based on Westphalian nation-state normative

concept or either the so called Islamic State. However, the nation-states or groups can endow Islamic values or principles.

State of Islam vs the Islamic State

State of Islam is primarily an individual realization about Islam and its tenets. An individual can be in a state of Islam per se or on a collective plane, an entity can be in a state of Islam. Such as Islamic banking is an economic operation in a state of Islam. Here the state of Islam is not a politico-religious entity but an existential phenomenon. The meaning of state in this context is the condition or the set of circumstances. The Islamic State is an oxymoron also with the state of Islam as the state of Islam is an inside-out phenomenon and the IS is an top-down ideology with a political body aiming to impose specific politico-religious objectives. To explain more, concept of the state of Islam moves from an individual plane to a collective plane and encompasses comprehensive Islamic values. Such as, the State of Medina emerged from the set of conditions best described as the state of Islam. Whereby, the so-called Islamic State emerged as a sectarian ideological and political challenge to its opponents. Therefore, there cannot be any State that can claim to be Islamic unless it passes the state of Islam's inside-out conceptual process, unlike the top-down creation of a politico-sectarian group with sectarian politico-religious objectives.

CONCLUSION

The peace of Westphalia laid down a normative concept of nation-states observed today. Colonial delineation of boundaries & the post-colonial history of majority of Muslim states makes it impossible for any of them to normatively convert into an Islamic State. Moreover, the Weberian bureaucratic models in modern nation-states are antithetical to the rise & sustenance of an "Islamic statist entity". Also, to conflate any modern Islamic establishment with the State of Medina is an error as the temporal-spatial factors of both differ from each other hyperbolically. Conclusively, any group claiming to be an Islamic State is at distance from the philosophical denotation of state of Islam, as the state of Islam incepts from an individual and it is an inside-out phenomenon, unlike the top-down dispositional approach of a political group.

References

1. Patton, Steven (2019) "The Peace of Westphalia and it Affects on International Relations, Diplomacy and Foreign Policy," *The Histories*: Vol. 10 : Iss. 1 , Article
2. Cavendish, Richard (1998) Volume 48 Issue 10 <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/months-past/treaty-wesphalia#>
3. Raats Milette & Eckstein Reinhold (2018) https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2018-09/coe-po091918.php or
4. https://www.uni-muenster.de/Religion-und-Politik/en/aktuelles/2018/sep/PM_Westfaelischer_Frieden_hatte_auch_Schattenseiten.html
5. Dusza, Karl. "Max Weber's Conception of the State." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1989, pp. 71–105.
6. Khel, Muhammad Nazeer Kaka. "FOUNDATION OF THE ISLAMIC STATE AT MEDINA AND ITS CONSTITUTION." *Islamic Studies*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1982, pp. 61–88.
7. Koerner, Brandon I (2016) <https://www.wired.com/2016/03/isis-winning-social-media-war-heres-beat/>