Irredeemable Failure: The Modern Nation-State as a Nullifier of Ummatic Unity

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UMMATICS

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1. Introduction

The early 2010s were a hopeful time for those of us who believed in the possibility of organically developed, community-centered Islamic governance transpiring throughout the Muslim world within the current nation-state model. After decades of utter hopelessness, it appeared that the door may finally be opening to something new and exciting. Ahmed Raafat Amin, a 22-year-old Egyptian student interviewed by a BBC reporter in December 2011, aptly captured the popular sentiment at the time: "Tahrir Square—the focus of the protests in Cairo—was like heaven. It was how you wanted Egypt to be. In the past I only focused on personal dreams but now I'm focusing on a national dream that we all share."[1] My doctoral dissertation was inspired by the Arab Uprisings that started earlier in that same year, and I specifically remember having a long conversation with my late dissertation advisor, Mike Weinstein, about my project idea shortly after the widely publicized self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia. After about an hour of constructive dialogue, Mike was, as he said, 'all in' and told me if there was ever a time to offer a normative model of an Islamic governed state, it was now, and that I should proceed without further delay.

That dissertation took three years to complete and another three years later morphed into my first book, published in Khaled Abou El Fadl's series at Palgrave, newly retitled, *The Contemporary Islamic Governed State: A Reconceptualization*.[2] It sought to lay out a realistic, political science-rooted normative framework for how a contemporary Islamic governed state could operate. It offered what I termed "a discursive approach to Islamic governance" as a workable alternative to the more totalizing and theologically contentious notion of an 'Islamic state,' further noting in the introduction that such an approach "ought to first focus on offering

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[1] Dhruti Shah, "Arab Spring: It was the first time I felt I belonged," *BBC News*, December 26, 2011, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-16275176.

[2] Professor Abou El Fadl found the work timely, commenting in the preface that he wrote for it that, "Since the end of the age of empires and the rise of nation-states, the subject of Islam and government has been the focus of much attention" and that "of the many writings in this field, Joseph Kaminski's contribution is necessary, comprehensive, pressing, and superlative." See, Khaled Abou El Fadl's preface in, Joseph J. Kaminski, *The Contemporary Islamic Governed State: A Reconceptualization* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2017), vii.

a set of coherent axioms or "guideposts" before formulating more specific, localized theories, and ultimately specific policies and programs."[3] The book's tenor was primarily grounded in works and ideas that represent what most Sunnis would label as 'the mainstream' of traditional Islamic thought. Sections of the work that referenced 'reformist' thinkers did so in a way that aimed to highlight the elements of their thought that still resonated with what I conceived of as a traditionally-minded iteration of an Islamic governed state.

However, as my book was finally hitting the presses in 2017, I was starting to have some doubts. It was during the arduous 9-month wait between the final draft and first print that I began to realize—perhaps—my dissertation and subsequent book were conceived of at a very unique time in modern history that saw an extremely small window of opportunity which, at this point, had already been slammed shut. By 2017, the Arab Spring had truly morphed into the Arab nightmare: Egypt's first democratically elected leader, Mohammed Morsi, was in jail, replaced by a military dictator more callous the Hosni Mubarak; Libya and Yemen were in flames with no end to the violence in sight; the various rebel groups in Syria had splintered into mafioso-like alliances that were fighting each other as Bashar al-Assad, backed by Iranian and Russian firepower, remained firmly in control; and most chilling of all, for much of the previous four years, ISIS was subjugating and slaughtering Muslims like cattle. Most certainly, *this* was not the promise of the so-called Arab Spring.

Looking back, I cannot help but feel a profound sense of sadness and disappointment, not because I was 'wrong' *per se*—I still believe many of the basic points made in the book regarding the importance of bureaucratic efficiency and inclusive, participatory politics have merit—but rather because I was so *naïve* and put so much faith in the Arab Spring and the possibility of a successful Islamic governed state coming to fruition within the current nation-state model. The book was written considering the more abstract possibility of an Islamic governed state being realized within the current nation-state model simply as a given that warranted no further investigation.

At the same time, however, how could anyone foresee the extreme levels of transnational treachery, demonstrated primarily *by Muslims,* against the democratically elected Morsi regime in Egypt, or the disaster that would become of noble liberation efforts against despotic regimes in Syria, Yemen, and Libya—all now marred by rampant tribalism, sectarianism, and brutality from all parties involved? How could anyone foresee Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates siding so unequivocally with Donald Trump and Israel and against the liberatory aspirations of their fellow brothers and sisters in Islam? Arguably, even the most cynical observer in 2011 would not believe that a decade after the start of the Arab Spring, the only unification amongst Arab states would be in support of secularization and American-led normalization efforts with Israel.

This essay will argue that the modern nation-state has been an abject failure in most of the Muslim world for many deeply structural reasons and that there is no salvaging it as an enduring solution for Muslims who desire to have Islam serve as the locus of socio-political and economic

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[3] Kaminski, *The Contemporary Islamic Governed State*, 6.

unity. It will go into greater detail, outlining how we got to this point along with some of the more specific institutional, economic, geopolitical, and ideational failures that have occurred in the Muslim world that the nation-state model is largely responsible for. In order for Muslims to reclaim ummatic agency, it is time to think outside the box, which means first recognizing that the nation-state is, in fact, an irremediable failure for Muslims, and then—after accepting this reality—theorizing and eventually forging altogether new paths forward that go beyond the confines of the nation-state as we currently know it and all the baggage that comes along with it.

2. The Modern Nation-State as a Source of Ummatic Disunity

Jonathan Laurence's *Coping with Defeat* is a critically important work for those interested in ummatic thought, even if, ultimately, his conclusion regarding a path forward for Muslims is not necessarily representative of it.[4] His book's title, *Coping with Defeat*, is indicative of his overall sentiment regarding the path that he believes Muslims ought to take, which is to, in essence, *accept defeat* and adapt to the demands of the modern nation-state in a manner similar to how the Catholic Church did. He concludes that Muslim-majority nation-states ought to embark on a path of 'soft restoration'—a type of *Islamic integralism*, if you will—in which domestic Islamic bodies are given more autonomy to act within currently existing Muslim-majority nation-states:

> Policy areas where states can initiate the soft restoration include religious education and life-cycle rituals related to births, marriages, and funerals, such as licensing clergy to perform circumcisions at home and in state hospitals, giving imams civil powers to officiate marriages on behalf of the state, and permitting burial without a coffin.[5]

Much of this article will be dedicated to explaining why the solution proposed by Laurence is unlikely to yield even the 'soft' restoration he calls for.

Despite Laurence's defensive posture, his work nonetheless offers much food for thought, specifically regarding his unique take on what led to the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the concomitant decline of Muslim unity that culminated in the twentieth century. Earlier scholarly arguments regarding Islam's civilizational decline and the eventual collapse of the Caliphate have revolved around four main shibboleths: (1) the cumulative effects of the supposed decline in "free thought" and independent Islamic juristic reasoning or "the closing of

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[4] See, Jonathan Laurence, *Coping with Defeat: Sunni Islam, Roman Catholicism, and the Modern State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), 435.

[5] Ibid.

the gate of *ijtihād*"[6]; (2) the insufficiency of 'Islamic economics' coupled with irreparably ossified legal institutions that contemporary scholars like Timur Kuran have argued prevented sufficient levels of private capital accumulation as well as the creation of corporations, large-scale production, and impersonal exchange[7]; (3) the Ottoman Empire remaining too decentralized and agrarian by the turn of the twentieth century,[8] and; (4) the Ottoman Empire choosing the wrong side in World War I.[9]

Laurence, on the other hand, contends that the Muslim world's ultimate fracture can largely be traced back to something quite different altogether—the phenomenon of the modern nation-state itself: "The controversial and inconsistent acceptance by Islamic authorities of the modern nation-state—and thus their renunciation of political office-holding—opened up an enduring fracture in Muslim communities worldwide."[10] In essence, when Islam lost its political edge, Muslims lost their sense of epistemic centeredness and unity as well and thus far have never reclaimed it.

Less than two centuries ago, it was the Catholic Church, not Islamic civilization, that appeared to be going backwards and was on the ropes. Approaching the mid-nineteenth century, after centuries of stagnation, it seemed like the Catholic Church might modernize a bit. In 1846, a reform-minded Pope Pius IX came to power and freed the Jews from the Roman ghettos to which they had been collectively confined since 1555. However, following the wave of mostly democratic and liberalizing revolutions beginning in 1848 that transpired throughout Europe—known as the Revolutions of 1848—and the assassination of his Prime Minister (*Ministro della Interno*), Pellegrino Rossi, on November 15th of that same year, Pius IX transformed into an ultra-conservative.[11] He sent the Jews back to the ghettos during the early 1850s, and in Laurence's words, by the 1860s, had "barricaded himself behind Vatican walls" and spent a good deal of his time "angrily asserting personal infallibility." In 1864, Pius IX published his controversial Syllabus of Errors [*Syllabus Errorum*] decrying all things liberal and modern including the idea of religious toleration and pluralism, and in 1870, the First Vatican

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[6] For more on the 'closing of the gate of *ijtihād* argument, see H.A.R Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1947); Joseph Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1964); J.N.D. Anderson, *Law Reform in the Muslim World* (London, UK: Athlone Press, 1976), and N.J Coulson, *A History of Islamic Law* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1978).

[7] For more on this, see Timur Kuran, *Islam and Mammon: The Economic Predicaments of Islamism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), and Timur Kuran, *The Long Divergence: How Islamic Law Held Back the Middle East* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[8] See for example, Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires 1908–1918* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[9] See for instance, Mostafa Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and Hijaz* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).

[10] Laurence, *Coping with Defeat*, 7.

[11] For a couple good surveys on the Revolutions of 1848, see, Jonathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions, 1848–1851*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), and Mike Rapport, *1848: Year of Revolution* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2009).

Council dogmatically defined the seemingly anachronistic, anti-Enlightenment and ultimately irrational doctrine of papal infallibility which holds that the Pope can *never* be wrong when speaking on matters of faith and morals *ex cathedra*, or "from the chair," a doctrine that no Caliph, no matter how tyrannical, would ever even dream of considering.[12]

Around the same time, the Caliphate, at the time under the rule of Sultan Abdülmecid (r. 1839-1861), was the entity being lauded as a bastion of religious pluralism, toleration, and progress by Western observers. An October 1859 article that appeared in the *New York Times*, for example, commented that, while the Pope "recoiled from the appeal of the times," the Caliph "appears as the champion and nearly as the martyr of Progress."[13] Even as the pressures of the rising nation-state model began to chip away at the Ottoman Empire, later Ottoman sultans nonetheless remained active in promoting international Islamic networks and in issuing hundreds of daily fatwas to Muslims all over the world.[14] Even if the Caliphate as a political institution was weak by the end of the nineteenth century, it still held significant moral authority and served as an epistemic center for Muslims all over the world. In the words of Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski,

> In much of the Islamic world by the beginning of the twentieth century, identity as a Muslim had come to mean political solidarity with the Ottoman Empire and manifested itself in declarations of allegiance to its Sultan/Caliph, acceptance of its theoretical authority as an alternative to final subjection by Europe, and support for it in the international crises in which it was involved.[15]

However, things changed dramatically as the twentieth century progressed. The end of what Eric Hobsbawm termed the 'long nineteenth century' (the 125-year period from 1789 to 1914) ushered in the end of the Ottoman Empire, and on March 3, 1924, the institution of the Caliphate was formally abolished by the newly created *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi* (TBMM) or Grand National Assembly of Turkey.[16]

Laurence contends that "today's theological disunity within Sunni Islam can be traced to Europeans' decisions to undermine the caliphate in lands they briefly ruled across the Middle

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[12] See, Pius PP. IX, *Quanta cura*. Romae, 1864, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-ix/la/documents/encyclica-quanta-cura-8-decembris-1864.html. For more on the pontificate of Pope Pius IX, see David I. Kertzer, *The Pope Who Would Be King: The Exile of Pius IX and the Emergence of Modern Europe* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018). For a critique of the doctrine of papal infallibility, see Hans Küng, *Infallible? An Inquiry*, trans. Edward Quinn (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co. Inc, 1983).

[13] Laurence, *Coping with Defeat*, 3. See also, "The Sultan and the Pope," *New York Times*, October 29, 1859, p. 4.

[14] See Mona Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate: A Transregional History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

[15] Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900–1930* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), 5. Also cited in Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate*, 10.

[16] For more on the long nineteenth century, see, Eric Hobsbawm's, masterpiece three-part trilogy: *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848*. (New York, NY: World Publishing, 1962), *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), and *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (London, UK: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1987).

East, North Africa, and South and Southeast Asia."[17] In the end, despite its earlier struggles, the Catholic Church managed to successfully integrate itself into the nation-state model and remain a theologically centralized institution while the Ottoman Caliphate did not. It was instead attacked from all sides—ranging from Wahhabi nationalists to secular, vehemently anti-religious Kemalists —ultimately leading to its outright abolition.[18] Laurence also points out that the European colonizers recognized the dangers of a unified Muslim infrastructure remaining in place after they left and, therefore, "undercut and disbanded the existing religious infrastructure in their occupied territories in the Middle East and North Africa because they did not want Istanbul influencing their subjects."[19] By the end of the 1920s, with Atatürk and the inward-looking secular-nationalists firmly in control of the newly created Turkish Republic, the European powers had little to worry about on this front.

Some seventy years later, prominent right-wing Republican Party activist and former Speaker of the US House of Representatives Newt Gingrich would remind us of the West's continued adoration of Atatürk, commenting that his "process of modernizing Turkey" (i.e., secularizing it, changing its Ottoman Turkish script to a Latin-based one, and effectively cutting it off from its Ottoman past) was "one of the great heroic acts of the twentieth century."[20] Divide-and-conquer was the logic that ultimately drove the European quest for forging European-style nation-states in Muslim lands. If the former colonizing powers had their way, every newly created Muslim-majority nation-state would have its own iron-fisted Atatürk.

Approaching a century since the Caliphate's abolition, the Muslim world remains deeply divided—not only along religious sectarian lines—but also by foreign-imported nationalistic impulses that have pitted Muslim against fellow Muslim in direct competition for power and *dunyāwī* treasures. Global Islamic unity was seemingly lost or at least relegated to an extended period of dormant status in lieu of secular ethnic-based ideologies such as pan-Arabism, Nasserism, and Ba'athism during the subsequent wave of decolonization that would transpire throughout the Muslim world in the decades immediately following the abolition of the Caliphate.[21] During the period of decolonization, much of the Muslim world saw the top-down imposition of secularism in one form or another—all with similarly disastrous results. As Hussein Ali Agrama reminds us: "secular power increasingly enables sovereign state

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[17] Laurence, *Coping with Defeat*, 7.

[18] For more on the operationalization of Wahhabism in fighting against the Ottoman state in the 20th century, see David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London, UK: I.B. Taurus, 2009).

[19] Ibid., 394.

[20] Connie Bruck, "The Politics of Perception," *New Yorker*, October 9, 1995, https://archives.newyorker.com/newyorker/1995-10-09/flipbook/051

[21] For more on Arab nationalism, see, Youssef M. Choueiri, *Arab Nationalism: A History. Nation and State in the Arab World* (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), and Lahouari Addi, *Radical Arab Nationalism and Political Islam*, trans. Anthony Roberts (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2017).

capacity."[22] On why European secularism 'succeeded' while the forced imposition of top-down secularism in the Muslim world failed, Nader Hashemi comments that,

> Europe secularism was an indigenous and gradual process evolving in conjunction with socio-economic and political developments while supported by intellectual arguments—and, critically, by religious groups—that eventually sank deep roots within its political culture. By contrast, the Muslim experience has been marked by the perception of secularism as an alien ideology imposed from the outside, first by colonial and imperial invaders, then by local elites who came to power during the post-colonial period.[23]

This perception of secularism as *an alien ideology imposed from the outside* led to deep-seated skepticism amongst devout Muslims who never bought into the European nation-state metanarrative. Regarding the imposed secularism of the modern Turkish Republic, for example, Salman Sayyid reminds us that it "was not a response to the demands of the Turkish masses but rather [that it] proceeded from the authoritarian project of Westernisation of the Kemalists."[24] Devout Muslims were astute enough to recognize that while the outward, formal structures of colonialism may have been removed, the foundational architecture of its divisive, secularizing ideology had not. These pre-existing structures would serve as the foundation on which the veneer of 'independence' and 'autonomy' would be grafted in the newly created modern Muslim-majority nation-states.

With the loss of the moral authority vested in the institution of the Caliphate followed by the ongoing usurpation of the moral authority of Islam itself as the central organizing political principle in the decades to follow, newly decolonized Muslim nation-states were created with a type of genetic birth defect—they were created without any historically recognizable central organizing governing principle. This, in turn, created power vacuums from the very start that could only be filled by the ambitious "local elites and autocrats that inherited

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[22] Hussein Ali Agrama, *Questioning Secularism: Islam, Sovereignty, and the Rule of Law in Modern Egypt* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 31. Also see, Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Islam, Christianity, and Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

[23] Nader Hashemi, "Rethinking Religion and Legitimacy Across the Islam-West Divide," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 40, nos. 4–5 (2014), 444. Despite being critical of how top-down secularism was imposed upon the Muslim world, Hashemi is a strong advocate of organically developed secular liberalism taking root in Muslim-majority nation-states. He contends that religious groups in these states need to "develop a political theory of secularism that is compatible both with the core functional requirements of liberal democracy and their own political theologies." See Nader Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism, and Democracy: Towards a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 172. The problem with Hashemi's position is explained in greater detail in my previous work in which I contend that his position amounts to "making Islam, *not* Islam" by necessitating Muslims to rethink "religious ideas with respect to individual rights and the moral bases of legitimate political authority." See Kaminski, *The Contemporary Islamic Governed State*, 76. I contend that individual rights and the legitimate bases of political authority are two things that make Islam irreconcilable with and distinct from modern liberal democratic modes of political thought and action. Also see Joseph J. Kaminski, *Islam, Liberalism, and Ontology: A Critical Re-evaluation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021).

[24] Salman Sayyid, *Recalling the Caliphate: Decolonisation and World Order* (London, UK: Hurst, 2014), 37.

the mantle of authority from [the] colonizers following their departure."[25] It was in this vacuum that the victors were truly able to take all the spoils and craft their newly created states along with their state's historical narrative and mission in the manner that best served their personal interests. Here we can see that from the very outset, and due to the lack of any historically recognizable central organizing governing principle, these newly formed Muslim-majority states were doomed to ongoing developmental deficiencies that would directly manifest in many of the ill-conceived policies and rudderless institutions that we see today.

3. Political Institutional Failures: Corporatism Run Amok

Muslim-majority nation-states have been plagued for decades by institutional failures that cannot be readily fixed with minor policy alterations or with more 'Muslim-minded' heads of state. The modern Arab state in many ways was thrust upon Arabs by the former colonizing powers. In the words of Nazih Ayubi: "The Arab state is not a natural growth of its own socioeconomic history or its own cultural and intellectual tradition."[26] New colored flags were raised and arbitrary lines were drawn up on the map, and that was about it. As a result, the modern Arab nation-state was never able to organically develop many of the social pre-requisites for democracy that have been laid out in meticulous detail by political scientists for the last sixty years, such as the need for certain levels of economic development, certain levels of class development and differentiation, pre-existing institutions, certain levels of civil society, and a sufficient level of enduring socio-political stability.[27] As Wael Hallaq notes, the post-colonial nationalist elites "inherited from Europe a readymade nation-state (with its constitutive power structures) for which the existing social formations had not been adequately prepared."[28]

Rentierism still dominates many Muslim-majority nation-states, especially in the MENA region. In political economy, rentierism or *rentier-states* refer to those states whose economies are primarily dependent upon the collection of *rents* which can be understood as "externally-derived, unproductively-earned payments" that "are most commonly royalties or other payments for oil and gas exports."[29] Rentier-states generally have low or no taxation, which results in people demanding little of their governments, thus reinforcing patterns of unaccountability and corruption. As Matthew Gray explains, "since the state receives this external income [regular rents from oil or other natural resources] and distributes it to society, it

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[25] Kaminski, *The Contemporary Islamic Governed State,* 14.

[26] Nazih Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 3.

[27] See Seymour J. Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *American Political Science Review* 53, no. 1 (1959), 69–105.

[28] Wael Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016), 2.

[29] Matthew Gray, "A Theory of "Late Rentierism" in the Arab states of the Gulf," Scholarly Paper (Doha, Qatar: Georgetown University Center for International and Regional Studies, 2011), 1.

is relieved of having to impose taxation, which in turn means that it does not have to offer concessions to society such as a democratic bargain or a development strategy."[30] Natural resources, most specifically oil and gas, remain the primary economic drivers of most MENA nation-state economies. When the price of oil is high, times are good for some; when the price of oil is low, times are bad for nearly all.

The one exception to this basic reality is the ruling elites and regional warlords; times are always relatively good for those situated at the highest echelons of power. Even when things are bad for everyone else, the leaders of these states have already taken extensive measures to make their regimes coup-proof, or unlikely to be overthrown via mass mobilization and/or popular uprisings. There is extensive literature on the notion of *coup proofing* and MENA region states are almost always used to illustrate how the process works. James Quinlivan, one of the leading experts on coup-proofing, comments that,

> Although every case of coup-proofing has its own unique elements, they do share some common characteristics, including: (1) the effective exploitation of family, ethnic, and religious loyalties for coup-critical positions balanced with wider participation and less restrictive loyalty standards for the regime as a whole; (2) the creation of an armed force parallel to the regular military; (3) the development of multiple internal security agencies with overlapping jurisdiction that constantly monitor the loyalty of the military and one another with independent paths of communication to critical leaders; (4) the fostering of expertness in the regular military; and (5) the financing of such measures.[31]

Pretty much all of today's most autocratic Muslim-majority nation-states have been following this blueprint almost to a tee for decades now. Many of these states, especially in the MENA region, have amongst the highest levels of their GDP per capita spending on the military and unquestioned loyalty is the key pre-requisite for military advancement.[32] This loyalty is often handsomely rewarded. Senior military officers in MENA autocracies usually receive excellent

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[30] Ibid. For more on rentierism (or rentier states) in the Muslim world, see, Hazem Beblawi, "The Rentier State in the Arab World," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (1987), 383–398; Hossein Mahdavy, "Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran," in M.A. Cook (ed.), *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East*, 1st ed. (London, UK: Routledge, 1970), 428–467; Michael L. Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* 53, no. 3 (2001), 325–361.

[31] James Quinlivan, "Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East," *International Security* 24, no. 2 (1999), 133.

[32] See, "Defense Spending by Country 2022," https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/defense-spending-by-country. For more on *coup-proofing*, see, Stephen Biddle and Robert Zirkle. "Technology, Civil-Military Relations, and Warfare in the Developing World," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 19, no. 2 (1996), 171–212; Ahmed Hashim, "Saddam Husayn and Civil-Military Relations in Iraq: The Quest for Legitimacy and Power," *The Middle East Journal* 57, no. 1. (2003), 9–41; Tobias Böhmelt and Ulrich Pilster, "The Impact of Institutional Coup-Proofing on Coup Attempts and Coup Outcomes," *International Interactions* 41, no. 1 (2015), 158–182; Andrew W. Bausch, "Coup-Proofing and Military Inefficiencies: An Experiment," *International Interactions* 44, no. 1 (2018), 1-32; Derek Lutterbeck, "Coup-Proofing in the Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) Region." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2021), 1–15.

benefits that include "disproportionately high wages and privileged access to a range of goods and services, such as housing, rare consumer goods, or high-quality medical services."[33] After retiring, many of these people are given special access to high-level/high-prestige public administrative positions and/or lucrative state-controlled business enterprises.

In recent years, some GCC states have sought to diversify their economies. However, they have often sought to do so in ways that do not actually help foster long-term development or increased industrial capacity. Despite efforts to build a middle-class, sustainable industry has not yet come to most MENA nation-states. Rather, the allure of places like Dubai lies in their being, as Vali Nasr notes, "a cross between Las Vegas, Disneyland and Rodeo Drive, all set in an Arab entity."[34] Globalization has brought high-end shopping malls and a steady stream of tourists to places like Dubai and Manama, but it has yet to really bring meaningful large-scale industrial development.[35] The neocolonial mode of production remains largely intact throughout much of the GCC states. As Nasr points out in his interview with Warren Hoge of the International Peace Institute,

> Now, you know, we engage the Muslim world as governments, as people, in many ways, but we really don't engage them economically. I mean, buying oil and giving finished products is not globalization. That's barter trade. It doesn't really impact anything. What matters is that large parts of the Muslim world will become part of the supply chain of the global economy so that you would buy things made in the Arab world or made in different parts of the Muslim world in Wal-Mart; that economic interests of key classes and those who they employ in the Muslim world would be tied to the health of the global economy.[36]

The countries of the MENA region still have not worked their way into the larger supply chain of the global economy—rentierism and crony capitalism still dominate in these places. They are not producing automobiles, airplane parts, computers, or any other large-scale industrial finished products. None of the places have made their way into the larger supply chain of the global economy, nor is there any reason to believe they will anytime soon, either.

Ultimately, in the modern Arab nation-states, "neither 'philosophical individualism' nor social classes have developed well enough to allow for the emergence of politics as we see it in Western, capitalist societies."[37] One must remember that philosophical individualism is a product of the European Enlightenment, not Islamic civilization which has always been more

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[33] Lutterbeck, "Coup-Proofing in the Middle Eastern," 4.

[34] "Interview with Vali Nasr by Warren Hoge," *International Peace Institute*, January 26, 2010, https://www.ipinst.org/images/pdfs/transcript_valinasr.pdf, 7.

[35] Vali Nasr, *Forces of Fortune*: *The Rise of the New Muslim Middle Class and What It Will Mean for Our World* (New York: The Free Press, 2009), and Vali Nasr, *Meccanomics: March of the New Muslim Middle Class* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2010).

[36] Interview with Vali Nasr, 10

[37] Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State*, 3.

focused on individual piety and communal obligations.[38] This reality has necessitated these different Arab states to adopt varying forms of authoritarian corporatism, primarily in the name of *raison d'état.* Manochehr Dorraj eloquently lays out the basics of corporatism as follows,

> Corporatist states are often strong, activist and interventionist in economic and social life as well as in inter-group interest mediation. They attempt to forge partnership between state, business and labor with the state playing the overarching role of setting the direction, control and the agenda. The hierarchical nature of corporatist states renders them as the ultimate judge and arbiter in interest articulation and mediation. They do so by building institutions and mass organizations that are 'incorporated' into the state. By putting their supporters in charge of them, these organizations are often hollowed out and tightly controlled, no longer functioning as representative democratic institutions that they were once advertised. Thus, such mass organizations are often devoid of independence and function as the arm of the state and a tool for the implementation of its policies.[39]

Dorraj's depiction of the corporatist state accurately describes the vast majority of today's Muslim-majority nation-states—especially those in the Middle East and North Africa—and supports Mehran Kamrava et al.'s contention that, "The private sector in all GCC states has for many years been highly state-dependent, with business activity closely linked to direct and indirect distribution of government wealth."[40] It is undeniable, especially in the Arab world, that the state plays a central role in determining the direction of labor and business—what is produced, how much of it is produced, and who produces it—often to the detriment of the broader public good.

In order to ensure this smooth top-down flow, Arab state leaders will often directly place 'their guys' in key administrative and business positions. This is why individuals with familial connections to the royal family are so frequently put in charge of key industries and business ventures in many of the GCC states, and as one would suspect, the only ones that can remove these hand-picked people from their positions are the ones who put them there in the first place. Throughout the earlier part of the twentieth century, while always controlling ministries and administrative agencies within the state, people closely connected to Arab royal families generally stayed out of large-scale private enterprise. Until the late 1980s, Talal bin Abdulaziz and his son al-Waleed were the only members of the royal family who were involved in business on a larger scale.[41] Saudi royal family involvement in private business dramatically began to increase in the 1990s, however: "Many second- and third-generation princes who held prominent government positions [in Saudi Arabia] during the reigns of successive kings took

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[38] For more detailed discussion on the fundamental difference between Enlightenment liberalism and Islam, see, Kaminski, *Islam, Liberalism, and Ontology,* 51–74.

[39] Manochehr Dorraj, "Populism and Corporatism in the Middle East and North Africa: A Comparative Analysis," *Chinese Political Science Review* 2, (2017), 294.

[40] Mehran Kamrava, Gerd Nonnemen, Anastasia Nosova, and Marc Valeri, "Ruling Families and Business Elites in Gulf Monarchies: Ever Closer?" Chatham House Report: Middle East and North Africa Program, (London, UK: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2016), 6, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2016-11-03-ruling-families-business-gulf-kamrava-nonneman-nosova-valeri.pdf

[41] Ibid.

up private business when they realized they would have no chance of advancing through the system."[42] A similar situation played out in the UAE as well. Only beginning in the early 2000s did members of the UAE's ruling family begin to actively involve themselves in running powerful private and government companies. Much has changed in the past two decades:

> Mohammed bin Zayed chairs the government company Mubadala, regarded as his foremost investment vehicle. Mansour bin Zayed (who is married to Manal bint Mohammed bin Rashid, a daughter of the ruler of Dubai) chairs Abu Dhabi's third largest wealth fund, the International Petroleum Investment Company (IPIC), as well as the Emirates Investment Authority, the UAE federal government's sole sovereign wealth fund. In addition to these government roles, Mansour bin Zayed controls holdings including the Abu Dhabi United Group for Development and Investment (which owns Manchester City Football Club) and DAS Holding.[43]

At the same time, Saudi Arabia and the UAE's small class of merchant elites—in Western parlance, *wealthy independent entrepreneurs*—are "subservient to the ruling families and are obliged to adapt to the latter's business priorities."[44] Such a system inevitably mitigates innovation and development and exacerbates already high levels of nepotism and cronyism.

In Iran, on the other hand, while there is no longer a ruling royal family anymore, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps [IRGC] serves a similar function. The heads of Iran's most critical and lucrative business ventures generally have direct links to the IRGC. Hesam Forozan and Afshin Shahi contend that the IRGC "controls up to one sixth of Iran's declared gross domestic product (GDP)" and that "[a]fter the election of IRGC veteran Mahmud Ahmadinejad to the presidency in 2005, the group gained even more political power and expanded its economic activities into giant oil and gas projects and Iran's financial and banking sectors."[45] The IRGC's economic activities are believed to limit the growth of Iran's private sector. While they do work with private contractors on many of the larger projects they oversee, they often do so by acting as an intermediary between the private sector and the government, making sure they get their cut along the way.[46] The key point here is that those put in these high positions are not there because they are the best and brightest business minds, and they most certainly are not going to challenge the interests of the state when it comes to business planning and operations, especially when considering that those occupying these critical positions—in many ways—*are* the state.

One can therefore see a clear pattern in most modern Muslim-majority nation-states that goes directly against ummatic unity, community-centered and transparent governance, open

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[42] Stig Stenslie, *Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia: The Challenge of Succession* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 57. For an older but more systematic, in-depth study of how members of Saudi Arabia's royal family got involved in private business, see, Sharaf Sabri, *The House of Saud in Commerce* (New Delhi: I.S. Publications, 2001).

[43] Kamrava, et al., "Ruling Families and Business Elites," 5.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Hesam Forozan and Afshin Shahi, "The Military and the State in Iran," *Middle East Journal* 71, no. 1 (2017), 67, 86.

[46] Thierry Coville, "The Economic Activities of the Pasdaran," *Revue internationale des études du développement*, 229, no. 1 (2017), 91–111.

and equitable economics, and public empowerment: as these nation-states grow richer and more powerful, rather than entrenched power networks being broken up and more fairly divided among the common people, the exact opposite has occurred—entrenched elites deeply connected to the state, often by blood, control more major public and private financial levers within these states than ever. Rather than such nation-states becoming more economically diversified, meritocratic, and transparent, they move in the opposite direction.

Modern Arab nation-states are what Ayubi called 'fierce states' since they cannot survive without repression and force:

> It [the modern Arab nation-state] is a 'fierce' state that has frequently to resort to raw coercion in order to preserve itself, but it is not a 'strong' state because (a) it lacks - to varying degrees of course the 'infrastructural power' that enables states to penetrate society effectively through mechanisms such as taxation for example; and (b) it lacks ideological hegemony (in the Gramscian sense) that would enable it to forge a 'historic' social bloc that accepts the legitimacy of the ruling stratum.[47]

Extending on Ayubi's assertions about the modern Arab nation-state some two decades later, Salman Sayyid would write that the dominant form of the modern Muslim-majority nation-state (what he not-so-affectionately calls *Muslimstans*) is what he terms "the mukhabarat state" or the police state. Such states use "extensive intelligence services and systematic torture to prevent popular mobilisations" that—with the help of global superpowers—have been "able to discard popular legitimacy."[48] There cannot be community-centered governance—even in its thinnest form—without a sufficient level of genuine popular legitimacy.

The fierceness of the mukhabarat state is, in fact—ironically—due to its *weakness* and inherent *lawlessness*, and little has changed since Ayubi and Sayyid's writings on the topic. In recent years, states like the UAE and Saudi Arabia have made efforts to better penetrate society via the introduction of modest taxation. In addition, both have engaged in expansive global public relations campaigns to manufacture—seemingly out of thin air—a new historical metanarrative and national mission that aims to legitimize the current ruling stratum's claim to power. In the end, these states will never disentangle themselves from the 'fierce' corporatist/mukhabarat model that is at the core of their regimes since this is what ensures their survival. They could not even if they wanted to; without the help of the superpowers coupled with *extensive intelligence services and systematic torture*, there *will* be popular mobilizations that would likely lead these regimes to collapse.

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[47] Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State*, 3. For more on authoritarian corporatism in the Arab world see, Nazih Ayubi, "Withered Socialism or Whether Socialism? The Radical Arab States as Populist-Corporatist regimes," *Third World Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (1992), 89–105.

[48] Sayyid, *Recalling the Caliphate*, 146.

4. The Rise of 'Traditional Islam' in the Service of Newly Created Muslim-Majority Nation-States in Central Asia— Moving Beyond the Arab World

The authoritarian, corporatist, rentier model that has dominated the Arab world in recent decades, as noted in the previous section, has also effectively stifled dissent and illegitimately curtailed free thought and speech (seen from an Islamic lens). These are some of the cornerstones of a healthy civil society, which itself is a cornerstone of political legitimacy and community-centered governance. What about non-Arab Muslim-majority nation-states? In recent decades they too have managed to harness the power of the nation-state for their own nefarious ends to the detriment of good governance and ummatic unity and flourishing. The way this has been done throughout much of Central Asia has been particularly interesting. Rather than outright banning or denying Islam from being expressed in the public sphere (i.e., some strict form of *laïcism*), many parts of the former Soviet Union have instead sought to actively co-opt and denature the more ummatic and emancipatory aspects of the religion in favor of a quietest-nationalistic 'traditional' alternative. In fact, this 'traditional' alternative, as we shall come to see, has very little that is actually traditional about it.

Focusing their research on the specific case of the highly secularized state of Azerbaijan—hardly the first country that comes to mind when thinking of state-led Islamic reform initiatives—Sofie Bedford, Ceyhun Mahmudlu and Shamkhal Abilov convincingly demonstrate that, rather than focusing "on physically targeting and eliminating sources of violent Islamic radicalism", the Azerbaijan government has been more keen "on establishing an alternative, mainstream, moderate and dominant Islamic narrative to protect the national Azerbaijani manifestation of Islam."[49] To do this, the Azerbaijan government, for the last two decades, has focused on fostering a state-friendly Islam, locally understood as *Ənənəvi İslam* or 'Traditional Islam' (TI).

According to Gunduz Ismayilov, the Deputy Head of the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan, TI "is purely local and opposes Islam introduced from abroad," and most importantly, it is "the only choice for the religious policy of the Azerbaijani government."[50] TI was first "introduced as a means of blocking radicalisation in order to protect Azerbaijan's national identity as a secular state" and in many ways mirrors other national counter-radicalization initiatives, though it does so in a less overtly Islamophobic and threatening way.[51] The basic idea is: *It's patriotic to practice the proper Azeri Islam, so come join the team (you have no other real choice).* However, the entire construct of 'proper Azeri Islam' is

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[49] Sofie Bedford, Ceylun Mahmudlu, and Shamkhal Abilov, "Protecting Nation, State and Government: 'Traditional Islam' in Azerbaijan," *Europe-Asia Studies* 73, no. 4 (2021), 691.

[50] Ibid, 694.

[51] Ibid, 691.

mired in numerous irreconcilable theological contradictions which render the entire concept devoid of any real meaning beyond the idea that *proper Azeri Islam* is whatever the Azerbaijan government says it is, which is exactly how they want it.[52]

TI in Azerbaijan emerges from a dichotomy all too familiar for those living in post-Soviet space: the dichotomy of 'official' (good) versus 'independent' (subversive and bad) religion. According to Bedford, Mahmudlu and Abilov, "Traditional Islam in fact works to extend state control over the religious domain and thus to prevent the development of any religiously grounded dissent against the authoritarian regime."[53] Though somewhat newer in Azerbaijan, the so-called 'retraditionalisation of Islam' has been present across post-Soviet Central Asia in various forms for quite a while. Sébastien Peyrouse contends that,

> There are thus two main common denominators in religious policy throughout the postsoviet space. First, the authorities will tend to identify a 'national' religion, show respect to other religions said to be 'traditional', but marginalise movements considered to be foreign. Second, they will exhibit a specific fear of the politicisation of Islam, whether it is in a minority position (as in Russia for example) or in a majority position (as in Central Asia and Azerbaijan).[54]

Traditional Islam in more recent years has even become a "powerful discursive tool of governance" in Russia.[55] One can even see it being put to service in Vladimir Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine in which Muslims loyal to Chechen strongman and Putin loyalist, Ramzan Kadyrov, are fighting against other Chechen and Ukrainian Muslims who are against Kadyrov.[56]

Practically, so-called 'Traditional Islam' serves a dual function; it keeps the state firmly in control of the 'official' and 'proper' operationalization of religion, and at the same time, it mitigates the possibilities of enduring dissent and opposition. Rather than the state having to turn to heavy-handed tactics that some may see as unIslamic, the state can invoke Islam itself to legitimize its dirty work. There is no reason to assume that nation-states in the Muslim world will ever *not* instrumentalize Islam in a manner that will serve its material interests, even if those interests ultimately go directly against basic Islamic principles. As Ovamir Anjum points

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[52] This is similar to how some MENA states in recent decades have aimed to craft their own "official Islam," known in Arabic as *al-Islām al-Rasmī*. Annelle Sheline (2021, 145) contends that in the MENA region, "Official Islam is primarily manufactured by state religious institutions like the Ministry of Religious Endowments/Affairs, as well as through other sources of official messaging like the Ministry of Education." The promotion of a particular 'official' or 'traditional' Islam seems to be a high priority for many modern Muslim-majority nation-states. See Annelle Sheline, "Evaluating the Resonance of Official Islam in Oman, Jordan, and Morocco," *Religions, 12* no. 3 (2021), 145–165.

[53] Ibid.

[54] See, Sébastien Peyrouse, "Islam in Central Asia: National Specificities and Postsoviet Globalisation," *Religion, State & Society* 35, no. 3 (2007), 248.

[55] Dominik Müller, "Appropriating and Contesting "Traditional Islam": Central Asian Students at the Russian Islamic University in Tatarstan," *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 3 (2019), 400.

[56] See, Neil Hauer, "Chechens Fighting Chechens in Ukraine," *New Lines Magazine*, March 3, 2022, https://newlinesmag.com/reportage/chechens-fighting-chechens-in-ukraine/

out, "Religious opinions and institutions are authorized by the state, not the other way around."[57] At the same time, if the state *is* Islam and Islam *is* the state, then to go against one is to effectively go against the other; it means being both a bad citizen and a bad Muslim at the same time since they are now one and the same. The type of quietist-nationalist Islam described above has already made deep inroads in the Arab world, and there is no reason to assume this trend will change anytime soon, so long as the nation-state remains the only game in town. Open dialogue and transnational ummatic unity stand in direct opposition and are a direct threat to the inward-looking goals of state-promoted, quietest-nationalist Islamic-oriented movements like those being fostered by political elites throughout the former Soviet Union and in the post-Arab Spring Middle East.

5. The Fusion of Western-backed Authoritarian Corporatism and 'Traditional Islam'– the Logical Outcome of the Contemporary Muslim-Majority Nation-State

As I near the conclusion of this essay, I will connect the two previously discussed constructs, those of authoritarian corporatism (AC) and 'Traditional Islam' (TI), arguing that the fusion of these constructs, supported by Western superpowers, to one degree or another is the logical terminus point for most Muslim-majority nation-states today due to their historical path dependency. The fusion of AC and TI in the Muslim-majority nation-state is ultimately wedded by what Walaa Quisay and Thomas Parker called a 'theology of obedience', which can aptly be summed up in Hamza Yusuf's assertion that, "We do not accept any rebellion (*khurūj*) against our leaders or our public affairs even if they are oppressive. This is the ʿ*aqīdah* of the Muslims."[58] A theology of obedience is the logical conclusion of 'traditional' Islam's emphasis on epistemic stability and a metaphysics that valorizes hierarchy. As Quisay and Parker comment:

> In the "tradition," because Muslims recognized the order and meaningfulness of the cosmos, they also recognized notions of authority and hierarchy. What this means is that political dissent today, such as the Arab Spring, is, therefore, not just a threat to order, but potentially cosmically destabilizing.[59]

Quisay and Parker's observations regarding dissent as being a threat to public order apply beyond the Arab Spring as well. It is particularly interesting that in the above-mentioned quote, Hamza Yusuf chose to describe what might be described as the 'quietist' position on rebellion as

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[57] Ovamir Anjum, *Who Wants the Caliphate?* Yaqeen Institute, 2019, 46, https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/who-wants-the-caliphate.

[58] Hamza Yusuf, cited in Walaa Quisay and Thomas Parker, "On the Theology of Obedience: An Analysis of Shaykh Bin Bayyah and Shaykh Hamza Yusuf's Political Thought," January 8, 2019, *The Maydan,* https://themaydan.com/2019/01/theology-obedience-analysis-shaykh-bin-bayyah-shaykh-hamza-yusufs-political-thought/

[59] Ibid.

a part of the ʿaqīdah of Muslims.[60] ʿAqīdah refers to the foundational, creedal beliefs that all Muslims are supposed to hold. This is to suggest that not accepting any rebellion against leaders, no matter how bad they are, is not a matter of ijtihād or just one of many possible legitimate positions a Muslim can take on this matter. Rather Yusuf's statement here suggests that the quietest position on rebellion is, or ought to be, a foundational belief of *Muslims*—not just a certain group or subset of Muslims, but rather *all* Muslims.

This sort of radical quietist position is, of course, extreme by traditional Islamic standards on the matter of khurūj or rebellion against political authority. Not only does it gloss over the nuances of the classical approach—which does disallow or discourage rebellion in many circumstances but also conditionally allows and encourages in it others—but it also makes the more basic, and more devastating, conflation of including any sort of active opposition to an oppressive regime—speaking out (inkār al-munkar), peaceful protest, civil disobedience, etc.—under the discourse of rebellion. Even more fundamentally, perhaps, it ignores the question of the ruler's shar'ī legitimacy and whether the texts prohibiting rebellion apply to the prevailing secular regimes at all.[61]

The extreme obedience position has become *en vogue* in more recent times amongst certain neo-traditionalists. It resonates with David Warren's analysis of Hamza Yusuf's mentor, the highly influential Mauritanian scholar Abdullah bin Bayyah, and his understanding of both democracy and *lèse-majesté*. According to Warren, Bin Bayyah understands democracy merely "as a contemporary method of government, but nothing more" and that, "protesting or seeking to hold a ruler or head of state to account through the media is inappropriate, because advising a ruler (naṣīḥat walī al-amr) "is not the same as advising other people" and must be done gently and respectfully."[62]

Citizenship in GCC states is not predicated upon any recognizable Western concept of individual rights or liberties. Rather, in the name of national security and public order—as well as supposedly 'traditional' Islamic mores—proper citizenship implies quietness and obedience, especially in matters of domestic politics and foreign policy.[63] As a matter of fact, many of the harshest penalties meted out by GCC states are reserved for those explicitly critical of their

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[60] 'Quietist' because it eschews any active opposition of regnant regimes, however oppressive. This of course reinforces the status quo and thus might more accurately be described as a passivist support of tyranny.

[61] For more on how Islamic scholars have traditionally viewed rebellion by Muslims against an unjust ruler, see, Ovamir Anjum's interview on Paul Williams's 'Blogging Theology' podcast, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d9M7MVf6UfI; Mohd Farid bin Mohd Sharif, *The Concept of Jihad and Baghy in Islamic Law: With Special Reference to Ibn Taymiyya.* (Master's Thesis: Edinburgh University, 2006); M. Abdul Qadir, "The Muslim Political Theory of Rebellion," *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 1, no. 1 (1939) 23–29; and Khaled Abou El Fadl's fantastic 400+ page work, *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[62] David Warren, *Rivals in the Gulf: Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Abdullah Bin Bayyah, and the Qatar-UAE Contest Over the Arab Spring* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021), 87.

[63] Warren, *Rivals in the Gulf.* Also see David Warren, "The Modernist Roots of Islamic Autocracy: Shaykh Abdullah Bin Bayyah and the UAE-Israel Peace Deal," August 27, 2020, *The Maydan*, https://themaydan.com/2020/08/the-modernist-roots-of-islamic-autocracy-shaykh-abdullah-bin-bayyah-and-the-uae-israel-peace-deal/

rulers' foreign policy decisions. A 2021 Amnesty International Report noted that, "The UAE continued to hold detainees past completion of their prison terms based on court orders under its "counter-extremism counselling" law which cannot be appealed."[64] This ought not to be too surprising since remaining in the good graces of the United States and other Western powers is essential for regime survival and what better way is there to do so than by appearing active in combatting 'extremism'? The UAE's leaders are fully aware that their own long-term survival still depends on the United States and if the US government sees them as insufficiently supporting its foreign policy and security agenda, then the US military is far less likely to be authorized to intervene on their behalf if there is domestic unrest or if the Houthis or Iranian armed forces decide to launch missiles at their vital infrastructure in retaliation for the UAE's on-going military offensive in Yemen.

It should be clear at this point how TI and AC nicely complement each other. AC is predicated on obedience to the state and following the state's guidance on matters of business and investment. Allowing business to transpire without the blessings of the state undermines its overall control. Contemporary Muslim-majority nation-states, almost by default, *must* maintain a tight grip on both social and economic matters if their house-of-cards states are to stay afloat. As a result, 'citizens' of Muslim-majority nation-states are hardly *citizens* at all and are more akin to *subjects*. As Hallaq aptly notes, the concept of citizenship today still looks much different in the Muslim world than it does in the West: "The paradigmatic concept of the citizen, without which no state can last, has been slow in coming [to the Muslim World], and the political lacunae left after the collapse of the traditional structures have not been properly filled."[65] The postcolonial historical trajectories of most Muslim-majority states make any alternative arrangement to the current *subject-ruler* model nigh impossible.

Despite the enduring *subject-ruler* model that continues to exist in much of the Muslim world, Muslim-majority states have increasingly paid lip service to the idea of citizenship, albeit on their own terms. Quisay and Parker note that both the idea of citizenship and the nation-state have become increasingly essential themes in recent UAE-sponsored Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies (FPPMS) events. They note that one speaker even went as far as to describe the modern nation-state as the "sixth 'maqṣad' or higher aim of the sharī'ah."[66] We can see here how some of the more stable autocratic Muslim-majority nation-states like the UAE have actually begun to sacralize the nation-state. It is no longer simply a neutral descriptive label for a mode of political organization. Rather, it is now a normatively positive end that itself is Islamic or at least is as Islamic as traditional, pre-modern forms of Muslim political organization. Turning back to Abdullah bin Bayyah in his own words:

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[64] "United Arab Emirates 2021," Amnesty International Report, https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/united-arab-emirates/report-united-arab-emirates/

[65] Hallaq, *The Impossible State*, 3.

[66] Quisay and Parker, "On the Theology of Obedience."

The nation-state in all its shapes and forms in the Islamic world is a valid and legitimate system of government. And so long as it is built on the principle of promoting benefit and avoiding harm—the axis around which all the laws of Islam revolve—it can be considered no less legitimate than the major Muslim empires of the past.[67]

If the nation-state is here to stay, then these states must also craft their own iteration of citizenship, since even the most autocratic minded ruler cannot ignore the fact that nation-states ostensibly are inhabited by *citizens,* not subjects.

Obviously, the idea that the modern nation-state is somehow a new, sixth *maqṣad* of Sharīʿah is ridiculous, especially considering that the modern nation-state did not exist for the vast majority of Islamic civilization's fourteen plus century history. However, as noted in the introduction, manufacturing new historical frames and missions seemingly out of thin air is a primary function of the modern nation-state. In the end, the nation-state model has worked out pretty well for ruling elites in most Muslim-majority nation-states; why would they want to see anything different emerge?

The final thing I will briefly touch upon here is the emerging trajectory of Middle Eastern geopolitics, in which the arc is undeniably bending towards the normalization of relations with Israel. Normalizing relations with Israel has become part and parcel of joining the big-boys table for Muslim-majority nation-states in recent years. It has also been a key to regime survival that has come at the expense of the local Muslim population. In the words of Jon Hoffman,

Israel's project of apartheid and the survival of regional Arab autocracies have become intimately linked. This autocracy-apartheid nexus has led to a Middle East that is more exclusionary and repressive, while reinforcing authoritarianism in the region and Israel's dominance over Palestine.[68]

While embracing the Jared Kushner-led 'Abraham Accords' has obvious immediate material and geopolitical benefits for many aspiring Muslim-majority states, such a union also nicely dovetails with the aforementioned fusion of *cultures of obedience* and 'traditional', state-sanctioned Islam. Embracing normalization with Israel serves as a way to discipline the local population into internalizing a certain distinct set of secular and nationalistic socio-political norms.

While calling for toleration and the peaceful coexistence between people of different faiths, the dialogue envisioned in the accords that ultimately will bring lasting peace, so it is claimed, is one brokered between 'States' rather than peoples or religions—"We believe that the best way to address challenges is through cooperation and dialogue and that developing friendly relations among States advances the interests of lasting peace in the Middle East and around the

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[67] Abdullah bin Bayyah, *The Nation-State in Muslim Societies* (Abu Dhabi, UAE: Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, 2019), 35.

[68] Jon Hoffman, "The Abraham Accords and the Imposed Middle East Order," *The National Interest*, October 3, 2022, https://nationalinterest.org/print/blog/middle-east-watch/abraham-accords-and-imposed-middle-east-order-205136.

world."[69] The Abraham Accords, and the broader normalization efforts, essentially a top-down, elite-driven process. In Hoffman's words, "they represent the formalization of a coercive political, economic and security order designed to maintain the status quo in the region" and represent an order that "is an artificial construct, upheld only via intense exclusion, repression, surveillance, and security guarantees from the world's preeminent superpower."[70] In essence, the Abraham Accords forced Muslim-majority states to play the game and embrace the secularized nation-state identity as their primary unit of identification. To join them is to formally and definitively shed one's transnational Islamic identity as their primary moral-political standard and, in a Faustian bargain, to accept Western-dictated terms of engagement at the expense of the Palestinian cause and ummatic unity.

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[69] *The Abraham Accords Declaration.* September 15, 2020, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Abraham-Accords-signed-FINAL-15-Sept-2020-508-1.pdf.

[70] Jon Hoffman, "The Abraham Accords."

6. Conclusion

After considering all the evidence, one can only conclude that representative—dare I even say 'legitimate'—Islamic governance transpiring in the Muslim world from within the crucible that is the modern nation-state is unrealistic. By the end of July 2022, Tunisia's political experiment—the birthplace of and last domino from the Arab Uprisings that began a decade earlier—finally fell via a largely boycotted constitutional referendum that was so blatantly rigged and undemocratic that even the US Secretary of State, Anthony J. Blinken, issued a formal statement condemning it, commenting that Tunisia's "new constitution limited the scope for genuine debate and also that the new constitution could weaken Tunisia's democracy and erode respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms."[71] One ought not to be surprised if Tunisia's aspiring autocrat, Kais Saied, soon seeks normalization with Israel as a way to get back into the good graces of the United States—after all, this is a formula that seems to have worked thus far for the other regional autocrats.

At the root of the impossibility of ummatic unity being fostered within the modern nation-state model are deeply seated moral and cultural differences:

> The political, legal, and cultural struggles of today's Muslims stem from a certain measure of dissonance between their moral and cultural aspirations, on the one hand, and the moral realities of a modern world, on the other—realities with which they must live but that were not of their own making.[72]

The post-Westphalian nation-state model was crafted by the West for the West and can be understood as one largely rooted in domination and control. As noted by the great early 20th century German phenomenologist Max Scheler, unlike its Eastern counterpart, the modern Western mindset possesses a peculiar "metaphysics [that] rests on an entirely different consciousness of self and entirely different interpretation of man himself, viz. as sovereign being *above* all of nature."[73] The thought structure that has underpinned the Western ethos since the Renaissance "sprung from an underlying, *a priori* will- and value-structure centered upon the

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[71] "Tunisia's July 25 Referendum", Press Statement, Antony Blinken, Secretary of State, July 28, 2022, https://www.state.gov/tunisias-july-25-referendum/. For more on Tunisia's July 25th Referendum and Kais Said's power grab, see Monica Marks's interview, "A Vote in Authoritarian, Unfair Context: Monica Marks on Tunisia's referendum", *Middle East Eye*, July 25, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcFXcnfnUz8. For more on why Tunisia's political experiment ultimately failed, see, Joseph J. Kaminski, "Secular Neutrality and the Failed Political Experiment in Tunisia," *Ummatics*, September 12, 2022, https://ummatics.org/2022/09/12/secular-neutrality-and-the-failed-political-experiment-in-tunisia/.

[72] Hallaq, *The Impossible State*, 3.

[73] Max Scheler, *Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. Manfred Frings (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1980), 98.

desire to dominate the material world."[74] This is to suggest that, since as early as the Renaissance, the Western world has aimed to cultivate knowledge primarily for the purposes of transforming and controlling the material world. Islam never posited such an adversarial relationship with nature or the material world. It ought not to be surprising then that European political forms would come to mimic the more general European approach to the natural world —a world that needed to be put firmly under its control by any and all means necessary.

Hallaq points out the inherent tensions between authentic community and the modern nation-state:

> In Islam, it is the Community (Umma) that displaces the nation of the modern state. The Community is both abstract and concrete, but in either case it is governed by the same moral rules. […] Whereas the nation-state is the end of all ends, knows only itself, and therefore is metaphysically the ultimate foundation of sovereign will, the Community and its individual members are a means to a greater end.[75]

The *raison d'être* of any authentically Islamic mode of political organization is rooted in upholding the Sharīʿah and promoting the well-being of the community within the framework of the Sharīʿah. The *raison d'être* for the nation-state, on the other hand, is its own survival in the most raw and literal sense. This has proven to be true even in so-called 'Islamic states' and is perhaps best embodied in a highly controversial statement uttered by the Islamic Republic of Iran's first Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, in 1988 in which he declared that, "the government, which is part of the absolute deputyship of the Prophet, is one of the primary injunctions of Islam and has priority over all other secondary injunctions, even prayers, fasting and *hajj*."[76] This statement made less than two years prior to his death, in the words of Hamid Mavani, elevated the "state's preservation to a primary injunction [*al-ahkam al-awwaliyya*] and downgraded rituals (e.g., the obligatory prayers and fasting) to secondary injunctions [*al-ahkam al-thanawiyya*]"[77] and effectively sealed the fate of what Iran would become in the decades to follow. There is no reason to assume that the same logic would not also be utilized in a Sunni-led 'Islamic Republic' as well—the logic of the nation-state transcends sectarian and creedal differences.

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[74] Werner Stark, *The Sociology of Knowledge: An Essay in Aid of a Deeper Understanding of the History of Ideas.* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), 114.

[75] Hallaq, *The Impossible State*, 49.

[76] Ayatollah Khomeini cited in Chibli Mallat, *The Renewal of Islamic Law* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 92. This was not the first time Khomeini made such a statement. In a 1981 speech commemorating the death of the renowned Iranian Shi'a scholar, ʿAllamah Tabatabae'i, Khomeini commented that "the preservation of the Islamic Republic is a divine duty is above all other duties. It is even more important than preserving the Imam of the Age [*emam-e ʿasr*]." Quoted in Farhang Rajaee, *Values and World View: Khomeyni on Man, the State, and International Politics* (Lanham, MD, University Press of America, 1983), 70.

[77] Hamid Mavani, "Khomeini's Concept of Governance of the Jurisconsult '(*Wilayat al-Faqih*)' Revisited: The Aftermath of Iran's 2009 Presidential Election," *Middle East Journal* 67, No. 2 (2013), 209.

The realization of the modern nation-state throughout much of the Muslim world thus far has been authoritarian corporatism fused with a mangled, state-centric iteration of 'traditional Islam,' both of which are nullifiers of ummatic unity. This is exactly what we should expect from a political project that was never meant for Muslims and their distinct modes of knowing and being in the world. There is no reason to assume that this tendency will change anytime soon either. Approaching a decade since I first embarked on my dissertation journey, I have come to an altogether different conclusion about the most reasonable path forward for Muslims who aim to reassert their autonomy and Islamic identity and break away from ossified autocracy. It is *not* that Muslims are inherently incapable of creating and operating a fair and representative Islamic political system due to their own personal shortcomings. Rather, it is that such a system simply is not possible under the current nation-state model, a model that has been unwaveringly hostile to such a mode of politics ever emerging at so many different levels. Muslims must think beyond the oppressive imagined boundaries of the modern nation-state if they are ever to reclaim ummatic agency.

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