

The Qur'an & Politics

A Study of the Origins of Political
Thought in the Makkan Qur'an

ELTIGANI ABDELGADIR HAMID

THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT

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TRANSLATED FROM THE ARABIC BY

ABDUL-WAHID LU'LU'A



THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT
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And say, “My Lord! Advance me in knowledge.”
(The Qur’an, 20:114)

Read! In the name of your Lord, Who created – created man out of a
clot of congealed blood. Read! And your Lord is Most Bountiful –
He Who taught [the use of] the pen, Who taught man that which
he did not know. (The Qur’an, 96:1–5)

It is He Who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers,
when you knew nothing; and He gave you hearing and sight and
intelligence, that you may give thanks [to God]. (The Qur’an, 16:78)

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FOREWORD



Of knowledge, we have none, save what
You have taught us. (The Qur'an 2:32)

The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) has great pleasure in presenting this treatise on the origins of political thought and the Makkan Qur'an.

The Arabic edition, *Uṣūl al-Fikr al-Siyāsī Fī al-Qur'an al-Makki*, which was published in 1995, generated a positive response and we hope that this English edition, will prove equally as successful. It is an important addition to IIITs Qur'anic studies project. This work is a study of the origins of Islamic political thought, and the philosophy of politics. It uses a unique methodology to argue that the major elements of the Qur'anic social and political thought are securely anchored in the Makkan verses of the Qur'an.

The IIIT, established in 1981, has served as a major center to facilitate sincere and serious scholarly efforts based on Islamic vision, values and principles. Its programs of research, seminars and conferences during the last nineteen years have resulted in the publication of more than two hundred and fifty titles in English and Arabic, many of which have been translated into several other languages.

We would like to express our thanks and gratitude to Dr. Eltigani Abdelgadir Hamid, who, throughout the various stages of the book's production, co-operated with the editorial group at the London Office. We would also like to thank the translator, Professor Abdul-Wahid Lu'lu'a for providing the initial translated manuscript as well as the editorial and production team at the London Office and all those who were involved in the completion of this book: Sylvia Hunt,

Sohail Nakhooda, Shiraz Khan, Dr. Maryam Mahmood, Melissa Dyson, Haggā Abugideiri, Kareema Altomare and Alexandra Grayson. May God reward them, the author, and the translator for all their efforts.

Dhu al-Qa^ʿdah 1424
January 2004

ANAS AL-SHAIKH-ALI
IIT, London, UK

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'anic discourse presents and deals with its major themes in a variety of ways. It is possible to identify three levels:

1. The Qur'an presents the cosmic, social, and human phenomena, in different degrees of detail. This may be observed in the treatment of family affairs such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

2. It presents general goals and values without going into detail, such as when it mentions the procedure of consultation, the realization of justice among people, and similar themes. In these cases, the details are left to the interpretation of the scholars.

3. The Qur'an formulates general lines of thought, and defines the perspectives and standards of interaction. This approach is most frequent when dealing with cognitive matters, whether in their entirety or in their specific cosmic and natural fields. In these cases, while overlooking the details, the Qur'an may point to the consequences of evading the rules discussed.

The Qur'an approaches the issue of "political thought and political science" as part of a comprehensive discourse which establishes their general goals and frames of reference. It is then left to the human mind to complete these with what it has learned from experiences in history and what the scholars understood from the Text about how to deal with reality.

Political thought is a human mental experience, which, like any other thought that regulates the affairs of life, is based on combining known premises in order to reach unknown conclusions. Since people's thinking stems from their overall world view, their references, methods, and theory of knowledge will be determined by their own particular doctrinal foundation and ideals. Thus Muslims will have their own political thought which stems from their own world view, which, in turn, is based on the Qur'anic origins of that thought. It is no wonder, then, that the author of this work has chosen to refer to

the Qur'an, for it is the only and absolute source in which the origins of Islamic political thought can be found. He then examines the various aspects of that thought and its effect on the social and historical Islamic reality, and addresses the issues raised by the different branches of political science.

This study, undertaken by Dr. Eltigani A. Hamid (former Director of the Department of Islamization of Knowledge at the Ministry of Higher Education in Khartoum, Sudan) is a good example of serious research in the field of the human and social sciences which consider the Qur'an to be a primary source of the origins of knowledge. These sciences and their methodology underwent a series of crises as a result of the deconstructive trends that arose in the periods of modernity and post-modernity, and led to the annihilation of history, liberalism, and even humanity itself.

Such deconstructive thought could lead only to nihilism or absurdity, or both, but never to reconstruction, as this would require a comprehensive world view. Thus, once humankind had tried to reconstruct its systems of thought, and failed, it had to resort to moral and spiritual resources. The Qur'an is the only source that can provide the grand view that will enable the post-modern human being to reconstruct the systems of thought. Indeed, the Qur'an can reconstruct the human being: "He created you from a single person; created, of like nature, his mate, and from both scattered countless [like seeds] men and women" (4:1). It can also reconstruct the universe, after it has been divided into provinces and countries that fight against one another, and suffer from war, hunger, and fear, in order to turn it into a wide and safe abode for man. Finally, it can reformulate the philosophy of the human, social, and natural sciences, and, in doing so, help them surmount their current crises. Those engaged in the human sciences are therefore urged to turn to the Qur'an and follow its directives when attempting to build their own philosophies and theories. However, it is important to note that the Qur'an does not present ready-made theories. It only provides guidance towards the discovery of theories and rules on which human beings can base their knowledge.

To add the attribute "Islamic" to any kind of thought or knowledge is not the concern of this work, which attempts to place itself in

an Islamic framework that depends, to a large extent, on the Qur'an. Moreover, describing any thought as "Islamic" does not suggest that it is above criticism or that the infallibility of the Qur'anic text should be projected onto the human thought – even if the latter depends on the Text alone – for it remains a relative thought, possibly accurate or inaccurate. Indeed, all human thought is open to criticism: people will accept it or reject it according to their own reading and understanding of the Holy Text.

It is essential that the study of the origins of any aspect of human thought in the Qur'an must take place within the limits of the Qur'anic methodology. It is therefore necessary to define the issue under discussion within this cognitive methodology. Indeed, it is well known that the concept of politics in Islam is not the same as that current in contemporary political science. It is a concept which stems from different cognitive origins and develops within a different frame of reference, where cultural dimensions affect all the levels of existence – from that of the individual and the family, to the establishment of society, the formation of a nation, and the setting up of a state.

This treatise has been read and widely praised by several scholars. The author has tried to present some aspects of this very important theme which will prove helpful to the scholar and student alike. The Qur'an is ever resourceful and helpful in every serious and scholarly research. We wish the author every success, and may Allah reward his worthy efforts.

DR. TAHA JABIR AL-ALWANI

AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE ARABIC EDITION

In our contemporary Islamic world, the difficulty is not in writing a book, but in having it published and distributed. In fact, the difficulties encountered may be so great that they deter one from writing at all. This is almost what happened to me, for I finished writing this book in 1983, yet had to wait until 1995 before the original Arabic version could see the light of day. In 1984, I was awarded an M.A. in Political Philosophy from Khartoum University for my work, but I then had to put it aside for several years because I was occupied with another project. From the time I started writing this book until the present day, I have been coming back to the Qur'an, searching and enquiring, over and over again. I make no secret of the fact that the intellectual and psychological enjoyment I found in the process is incomparable, and that the Qur'anic "phenomenon" has become the center of all my studies ever since I undertook this research.

Before proceeding with my work, I would like to clarify certain points. First, I do not intend to use as evidence Qur'anic verses which explain the sociopolitical phenomenon and rely on that to support one argument or another, as such evidence cannot go further than the cognitive surface. This has been a common practice among some scholars, who, after analyzing a particular social (natural or psychological) phenomenon, and reaching certain "scientific" conclusions, turn to look for verses, hastily pulled from the Qur'an, to support their argument. I have not chosen this method because I assume that the Qur'anic text is a "phenomenon" in itself whose content and context need to be closely and carefully examined and analyzed in order to be able to extract from it the knowledge and "key" concepts that could help in understanding certain social phenomena. Thus, I "follow" in the light of the Qur'anic verses rather than proceed before them, hoping that in so doing they will enlighten the dark avenues of my

research and open up the doors of understanding, providing me with the keys of knowledge that I need.

Second, this study is specifically about the origins of political thought. It is not a study on the political history of Islam, or the forms of the Islamic state. Moreover, my research into the origins of political thought is strictly limited to the Makkan surahs of the Qur'an, and does not include any of the verses revealed in Madinah or the legislations and events pertinent to that locale. Neither does it include the period of the Rightly Guided Caliphs or the following events and developments in thought, institutions, and relations. Furthermore, by being a study of the origins which precede the policies, it is situated in the field of political philosophy and not in that of political science – a difference which can be well appreciated by the specialists. Therefore, I hope the reader will not expect to find these elements, as I did not intend to present them in this book.

I would also like to mention the fact that many useful books on political thought in Islam have been published since I wrote my book. Yet, despite their great number, these books do not deal with the same subject as my thesis, as hardly any of them focuses exclusively on the Makkan surahs of the Qur'an in search of a philosophy of politics.

To conclude, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Ibrahim Ahmad Omar (former Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Islamic Studies at Khartoum University), who kindly supervised the first draft of my research, and without whose help, generosity, and patience, the project would not have been completed. My thanks also go to the staff of the Institute of Research and Social Studies (Khartoum) for all their assistance, and to my two special friends, Ahmad Kamaluddin and Abdelwahab el-Effendi, who hosted and assisted me in many ways. And last, but by no means least, special gratitude is due to my wife, Nawal, for her help in checking the verses of the Qur'an, and for her patience and encouragement. As for the one who filled my heart with love for the Qur'an – my father – I find no reward better than presenting this modest effort to his virtuous soul, in loving memory, praying Allah to forgive him and to multiply the reward for his good deeds.

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

It has been remarked that to leave a book without a preface is similar to arriving at someone's house for dinner and being conducted straight into the dining room. As with the visitor, a reader may prefer to know a few things about his host, the author, including how and why he wrote the book.

My interest in the Qur'an began in my early life. That interest grew out of an intense fascination with the Arabic Language and the poetic potential it contains. My interest in philosophical issues and political theory started when I was an undergraduate student at the University of Khartoum-Sudan in the late 1970s and early 1980s. What immediately struck me, while I was wrestling with the courses on Philosophy, was that many of the same philosophical issues were also addressed in the Qur'an; albeit in a different form. It appeared to me then, as it does now, that if I could probe into the Qur'anic hermeneutic and build a bridge between the Qur'anic language and the philosophical discourse, I could open new avenues of knowledge by helping students of both disciplines to dialogue intelligently with each other.

For a "traditional" *mufassir* (commentator), of the Qur'an, this endeavor might seem as an "encroachment" by the social sciences, philosophy, and politics on what was once the exclusive domain of *tafsir*. For a "traditional" political theorist, this study might also appear the same; an "encroachment" from the religious quarter on his domain. Hence, I would expect skepticism and criticism from both sides. Whatever the case may be, such an "encroachment" can have a positive effect on all of us, myself included. Hopefully, it will propel both the *mufassir* and the philosopher to examine not only their positions, but also their methodologies. If it succeeds in raising the question of how capable the *mufassir* and the political theorist are at

exchanging their ideas and questioning their sources, that would be a sufficient reason for supposing that such a work is worthwhile. For, as Isaiah Berlin once put it, unless we have some notion of what, how and why other men are thinking, feeling, and doing, we will continue to walk in the dark and will be faced by the unpredictable and sometimes appalling consequences of one another's activities. It goes without saying that we are now witnessing horrifying consequences that result from the assertions of certain Qur'anic commentators and political theorists, who have failed to communicate with each other.

Revising the translated edition of this work forced itself on me while I was engaged in other commitments. I hope it will not retain the marks of that distraction. No attempt has been made to update or add new material, though I had to track down the original sources of most of the quotations I used in the original Arabic edition, and to provide other missing information.

I must record a debt of gratitude to Professor Abdul-Wahid Lu'lu'a who has translated this work from Arabic. His creative rendering has "nearly" made me believe that this is what I wanted to say. I say "nearly" because translation necessarily entails omission and reduction. Reading the draft, I had to reinsert what he has left out. I had to leave out some of his sentences and expressions and replace them with my own in what came to be a silent struggle between us; albeit a struggle that proved to be important for the clarity and understandability of the text.

I am grateful to Dr. Fathi Malkawi, who generously offered to read the initial Arabic manuscript, and displayed sympathetic curiosity about it. I am also grateful to Dr. Jamal Barzinji who initiated the whole project of translating this work, and to Louay Safi who patiently took on the administrative burden and helped to speed the book to completion. Mrs. Kareema Eltomare and Mrs. Haggga Abugideiri deserve my thanks for checking the endnotes and inserting my last minute corrections into the final manuscript. The author alone is, of course, responsible for any errors which might have remained uncorrected.

DR. ELTIGANI ABDELGADIR HAMID