

Jihadism in the Functioning of the State?

The intrinsic relationship between state and religion in Islam is one of the most debated issues in the world of religious studies and politics. In Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Egypt and Iran, attempts to stabilize religion and politics at the state level are still being made today. This has deep historical roots in the Muslim religion, in which the idea of jihad has a special connotation.

Two important examples are Pakistan and Egypt. Pakistan established its own state after the departure of the British Raj (1947) and Islamist militants have been an important part of the security forces since the formation of the Pakistani state. In essence, it remains one of the most important armed forces for Pakistan today, alongside the conventional army and nuclear forces, and therefore jihad is a central part of its national security strategy. Pakistan faced a serious dilemma at its inception, as it lacked a founding ideology to provide moral and spiritual guidance as to why the country should exist and what Pakistan's purpose should be. The founders believed that religion could play a crucial role, because despite ethnic divisions, Pakistani society could find a common cohesive force.

„Pakistan's militant strategy has helped to ensure that, despite its weak domestic political foundations, the country has in fact had a plausible reason to exist. This, in turn, has helped Pakistan to promote internal political unity. The strategy has done so by offering a practical means of operationalizing Pakistan's Muslim identity. Given Pakistan's lack of firm political foundations, its early leaders decided to adopt an approach to state building that emphasized Islam.” – explained S. Paul Kapur.¹ Another example is Egypt where, after the Arab Spring (2011), the radicalisation of jihadi groups is taking place in close interaction with the state and the political environment, one of the signs of which is the institutionalisation of jihadi groups.²

But what is the ideological basis for the intertwining of jihad and the state in the Islamic religion?

Al Islam Din wa Dawla"

"Al-Islam Din wa Dawla.", meaning "Islam is religion and state." So reads a familiar formula both in the Islamic world and among Western scholars of Islam, suggesting that Islam has not only a religious mission but also a political one. Although attempts have been made to challenge this understanding of Islam by some 'enlightened' Muslims and some Western theorists, the immanent relationship between Islam and politics remains a topical issue not only in religious studies but also in political and state theory. Moreover, it may well become the most important religious policy issue of the 21st century in the so-called Western states, which will have to deal with and respond to religious changes at the level of society as a whole, partly through migration and partly through changes in ethnic background. Of course, in the process of 'westernisation', following the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the end of the Ottoman caliphate, attempts have been made to bring the modern conception of the state - and above all the separation of the secular and religious spheres - into line with classical Islamic theory. However, these attempts were not uniform in time and space, nor in theory: the 'reform movements' began, above all, in the second half of the 19th century and originated primarily in two distinct 'intellectual currents': one was a new generation of nationalists 'influenced' by the West, the other was the camp of 'moderates', a progressive small group of 'ulama', or Islamic jurists.³ Historical events in recent

decades and the steadily growing number of Islamic minorities in Western countries have demanded from leading intellectuals in Europe and the US an increasing space to explore and interpret the workings of Islam. Before delineating the intrinsic links between Islam and the political sphere, it is necessary to address two theoretical positions that contest, or at least relativise, the political content of Islam.

In 1925, after the fall of the Turkish caliphate, Ali Abd ar-Raziq published his important but controversial work, *The Foundations of Islam and Rule*. Ar-Raziq's work provoked heated debate because it argued that Islam was not representative of any form of rule. Indeed, Islam is essentially unconnected with politics. He argued that Islam is a message and does not represent a relationship of domination, that it is a religion without the need for political organisation, and that the Sharia should be understood as a 'spiritual law' without any relation to the existing relations of domination. He wrote: "The religion of Islam has in reality nothing to do with the form of caliphate that Muslims generally know. Nor does it have anything to do with the ideas, dignity, glory and power that are attributed to the caliphate. The caliphate has nothing to do with religious affairs. The same applies to lawmaking, government positions or the state administration. These are all purely political matters, which have nothing to do with religion, which neither recognised nor rejected them, nor prescribed nor forbade them. Religion has left all this to us, so that we may rely on the advice of our own reason, the experience of other nations, and the rules of politics."⁴

One of Ar-Raziq's most important arguments is that the political regime under Mohammed was unstable, with no clear system of power crystallized. Consequently, drawing dogmatic political conclusions from the structure of the political system of the time could have serious consequences for posterity. Ar-Raziq considered that the prophet's role did not extend to the mediation of any form of government, nor did Muhammad himself have explicit royal powers over the community of believers. The prophet was a religious leader, and his only duty was to transmit the Shariah - a kind of spiritual law. Accordingly, with his death, this kind of leadership ceased, and everything that followed opened a new chapter first for the Arabs and then for world politics. And this new chapter began with the rise to power of the first 'rightly guided' caliph, Abu Bakr, whose status as a ruler had indeed all the hallmarks of a modern state. This was the beginning of the caliphate, or Arab statehood, which ar-Raziq now regarded as simply an 'obsolete' institution.

Quran is the supreme authority

"With Ali Abd ar-Raziq, the phase of the formation of Islam, i.e. the years of the foundation of the religion, is detached from the history of the caliphate." - wrote political scientist Bassam Tibi in 2001 on ar-Raziq's position.⁵ According to Tibi, it is important to understand that the caliphate is the result of a historical process in Islam and is by no means a religious foundation. A decisive point in this historical process was when the Umayyad caliphs (661-750) began to call themselves "khalifat Allah", i.e. "representatives of Allah". By applying this title to themselves, the Umayyad caliphs simultaneously sacralised the system of rule. However, this change did not stem from the original 'divine' revelation of Islam. This conception of the sacralisation of power led to a contradiction, since Allah did not, in essence, endow man, including Muhammad himself, with any divine attributes. His role, according to Tibi, was 'only' that of Mohammed's acceptance of Allah's revelation, thus becoming Allah's messenger.

According to Tibi's argument, the Qur'an does not mention any ideal form of government, nor does it mention the concepts of daula (state), nizam (system) or hukumah (government). In Islam, the Qur'an is the most important and primary authority on both religious and secular norms. Tibi therefore disputes that Islam is really a "political religion". It can be inferred from his argument that he does not agree with the formula 'Al-Islam din wa daula' because the Muslim 'world community', i.e. the religious organisation of all Muslims throughout the world, the umma, is prior to the state in Islam in importance and role.

"Allah's order"

The time and circumstances of the founding of the religion and the time of Muhammad's intervention are therefore particularly significant in the relationship between Islam and politics. According to Islamic scholar Tilman Nagel, the emergence of Islam was a complex process, and only an accurate analysis can answer the question of the political content of the religion.

Before illustrating some of the points of the close intertwining of religion and politics in Islam, it is important to lay down some of Nagel's main theses: the most important starting point is that although Islam also speaks of this world and the afterlife, their relationship to each other is different from that in Christianity. Islam's dualistic worldview essentially balances the two spheres. And while in Christianity the distinction between 'this world' and 'the other world' ultimately not only made secularisation possible but also gave politics itself a specific meaning, in Islam the centrifugal force of politics is always located within Muslim communities. It follows that the 'Allah-willed' order is at the centre of Muslim political thought, since only this order can bring 'salvation' to the people. The Arabic word 'din' makes the intrinsic link between religion and politics even clearer: the word 'din', which occurs frequently in the Qur'an and is central to Islam, can be translated as 'faith - religion', but its meaning in Arabic goes beyond this and also means the 'divine order' revealed and implemented by the Prophet. Although the specific term 'siyasa' has existed in Arabic since the 11th century (and has been used since the 19th century in a similar sense to the Western understanding of the word 'politics'), attempts to separate the political sphere from 'din' have been unsuccessful in modernity.⁶

Muhammad received his 'spiritual' prophetic calling around 610. Muhammad also quickly became a political figure in Mecca, as he sought to influence his contemporaries with 'socially critical' sermons, admonitions and threats. The prophet's religious activity had two main political aspects: on the one hand, Muhammad at one point proclaimed Allah to be not only the 'greatest' but also the 'only' God, and on the other, he strongly criticised tribal leaders, including those in social positions, for their moral character.⁷ As far as Mohammed's monotheism was concerned, Arabia - and Mecca in particular - was still characterised by a certain religious diversity at the beginning of the 7th century. Since Allah was already preached as the only god who could not tolerate other 'false' gods, divisions and tensions arose between tribes and clans worshipping other rites and 'gods'. For the pagan clans and tribes, Allah was only one among many gods and these deities were linked to the cult of the Kaaba. In addition, there were other shrines and cultic sites immediately outside the city. Although initially the God of Mohammed ('the supreme god') did not differ in attributes from these other gods, the prophet did attempt to 'convert' worshippers of other deities, sometimes through powerful, one might say aggressive, preaching. Later, by proclaiming the "one god", he also put a heavy strain on the relations of his own tribe, the Quaris, with other tribes.

Muhammad's provocative actions seriously challenged the existing tribal power relations, as the leaders of the Meccan clans had gained wealth, albeit to varying degrees, through speculation and manipulation, including the practice of Meccan rites and religious traditions. Yet they did not help the local population in need. Muhammad also began to attack them for this way of enrichment and lack of community involvement, and gradually undermined the social position of the community leaders through his intense preaching. This increasingly unfavourable and uncomfortable situation was of course felt by the socio-political 'strongmen' of Mecca: the first decade of Muhammad's prophetic mission became, at least apparently, ineffective and the position of Mecca untenable, forcing Muhammad and his followers to flee the city. It was at this momentous Hijrah (and the beginning of the Islamic calendar) that Muhammad was forced to move from Mecca to Medina in 622, with the intention of returning. Given that the 'emigrants', i.e. Muhammad and his followers who had fled Mecca, who were not then very numerous, were initially unable to create a secure socio-political situation for themselves in Medina, Muhammad was forced to take a step or make a decision: either to compromise and lose the edge of his religious message, or to lose all authority for his message, or to risk exile, which could even mean religious martyrdom.

Decisive moment: a military victory

Without then deciding to abandon his religious mission, he sought to give space and validity to the "divine revelation" through diplomatic and political activity, tactics and warfare - initially "raiding" campaigns. After a series of small raiding campaigns against the Quraysh, perhaps Muhammad's greatest and decisive political achievement was to persuade the other pagan Medina tribes - the so-called 'helpers' - to join in a particularly risky war against the Meccans alongside Badr. And while the Battle of Badr in 624 will by no means go down in the history books as one of the greatest military confrontations of all time, its historical consequence is extraordinary: Muhammad's seemingly improbable victory - along with the considerable spoils - suddenly gave him enormous prestige, not only in Medina. The victory also sowed the seeds for the emergence of a hybrid political alliance: a community still characterised by the profane pragmatics and behavioural patterns of tribal alliance on the one hand, but now driven by religious, cohesive impulses on the other.

The fusion of the 'helpers' and the 'believers in Muhammad' created a warring community whose consequences in the long run went far beyond the prophet himself. The catalyst and driving force of this 'fighting community' was a religious motive, namely 'fighting for the cause of Allah'. In other words, the main motive of Muhammad's followers was to promote the message of Allah, even through fighting. However, pagan Arabs were also involved in this alliance: The coincidence of the religious interests of Muhammad's followers and the interests of the pagan tribes of Medina (later other Arab tribes) also played an important role in the formation of this military alliance.

The Islamic Empire

Mohammed achieved his long-standing goal when he and his warriors marched into Mecca as a political authority in 630. The road from Badr to Mecca was not only through further military successes (victory over a tribal coalition forged by the Meccans in 627; conquests in the north;

effective organisation and deployment of assault troops, etc.) and diplomatic means (strategic treaty with the Meccans in 628; tactical distribution of booty, etc.), but also required the use of open armed force. Such was, above all, the expulsion and destruction of the Jewish tribes of Medina in 627. With the entry into Mecca - and with it, of course, the gaining of the allegiance of the Quraishite (Quarishite) tribes who had previously been enemies - Mohammed was no longer merely an influential religious preacher: less than eight years after his flight from Mecca, he was the most powerful leader among the Arabs and, in the last two years of his life, he was able to extend his power to almost the whole Arabian Peninsula by further strategic moves, while at the same time managing to establish a strong political alliance. This was the foundation of the Arab (Islamic) Empire, one of the largest empires in human history.

One of Muhammad's most important legacies was the fighting community of believers, which underwent significant changes after the Prophet's death.⁸ The significance of the fighting community lay in the fact that the believers served the political aims of the Prophet - with their wealth and even their lives: initially to protect and provide for the community that had migrated to Medina, but later on the spread of the religious message and the realisation of a kind of radical Muslim interpretation of reality became more and more prominent. In addition, of course, preaching played an important role. It is therefore important to note that, as can be clearly identified from the Qur'anic texts, the militant community played a central role in the development of the religious-political face of Islam because, according to the prophetic directives, active participation in jihad, i.e. military action, was precisely the indispensable proof of faith (Qur'an, Surah 8, 72, 74): For all those who participate in military actions are believers, but all those who, although belonging to the covenant system of Islam, do not prove their faith by their active participation in the fighting community are Muslims, but not true believers, argued Tilman Nagel.

¹ S. Paul Kapur: Jihad as Grand Strategy. Islamist Militancy, National Security and the Pakistani State. Oxford University Press, New York, 2017. 112.

² Jerome Drevon: Institutionalizing Violence – Strategies of Jihad in Egypt. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2022. 35.

³ Heinrich Reiners: Die klassische islamische Staatsidee, ihre moderne Interpretation und ihre Verwirklichung in den Verfassungsordnungen muslimischer Staaten. Univ. Diss. München, 1968. 82.

⁴ Hans-Georg Ebert – Assem Hefny: Der Islam und die Grundlagen der Herrschaft. Übersetzung und Kommentar des Werkes von Ali Abd ar-Raziq. Peter Lang Int. Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2010., 114-115.

⁵ Bassam Tibi: Islam between Culture and Politics. Palgrave, New York, 2001. 37.

⁶ Nagel, Tilman (1981): Staat und Glaubensgemeinschaft im Islam. Verlag C.H. Beck, Zürich/München, 1981. 11-81.

⁷ Tilman Nagel: Geschichte der islamischen Theologie von Mohammed bis zur Gegenwart. Beck C.H., München, 1994. 20.

⁸ Tilman Nagel: Die islamische Welt bis 1500. R. Oldenbourg Verlag, München, 1998. 32.