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Politics in Muslim Countries Today Between the Political Philosophies of Imam al-Mawardi, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke

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Abstract

This paper makes a brief comparison between the political ideas of Imam al-Mawardi and two English political philosophers of the 17th century. The duties and responsibilities of Muslim politicians are expounded in the works of Imam al-Mawardi from Islamic religious perspectives and yet, in the 17th century, two English political philosophers revolutionized western political thought through their social contract theories in politics. There are some similarities and dissimilarities between the political ideas of these philosophers. This paper highlights some identical political theories of these three political scientists. This paper finds that neither the political idea of Imam al-Mawardi nor the political idea of John Locke has greatly influenced contemporary Muslim politics and yet, some political ideas of Thomas Hobbes have greatly influenced Muslim politics today in some Muslim countries. This paper finds that Muslim politics went wrong today because Muslim politicians do not meet the standards of justice as demanded by Islam.

Keywords: *Muslim politics, Political philosophy, Dictatorship, Democracy, Geopolitics, International politics, Political right*

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1. Introduction

Nothing went wrong in Muslim countries as politics did in recent times. The political leaders of Muslim countries are more inept, incompetent, and hopeless in the contemporary world than at any time in the past. Contemporary Muslim politicians have utterly failed in their local politics as well as in their international politics. There is no law and order in many Muslim countries. People in Muslim countries are oppressed and suppressed more than in many other countries. Corruption, fraud, injustice, and aggression are more widespread in Muslim countries than in many non-Muslim countries. Many Muslim countries have widespread despotism, dictatorship, autocracy, and tyranny. Mismanagement, political malpractice, abuse, and violence are more widespread in many Muslim countries today than in non-Muslim countries. In short, Muslim politicians have utterly failed in their politics today than at any time in the past. They have also utterly failed in their international politics too. Muslim voices are not heard, appreciated, and respected at all in international

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affairs. Muslim leaders do not have any influence either in international organizations or in regional organizations. The leaders of Muslim countries have been exploited, disappointed, and conned by some western countries. Muslim political leaders are not allowed to challenge or question western leaders in any international affairs, and they have been marginalised systematically and deliberately by western political leaders. Just consider how many times Arab and Muslim leaders have been humiliated, demeaned, and disgraced in international affairs such as Iraq, Syrian Afghanistan and the Palestine problems by some western political leaders.

How many times, western leaders have supported the state of Israel in the UN's resolution against the Palestinians? Almost all Muslim countries are made as western colonies today. Any western country could invade any Muslim country without any approval from Muslim leaders. The natural sources of Muslim countries are exploited by western countries as they like and yet, Muslim leaders are treated very badly by western leaders today than at any time in Muslim history. How did the arts of politics and public administration descend into this level of decay and disintegration? This is despite the fact, that many classical Muslim jurists produced some brilliant political theories, principles, and doctrines long before western political philosophers produced their political ideas. Books and treatises on politics and public administration by Imam al-Māwardī, al-Shaybani, Ibn Taymiyyah and others are par excellent than many western political philosophies and yet, Muslim politicians have utterly failed to apply Islamic political theories in their practical political life. As a result of this, Islamic political ideas are ignored and marginalized. Here I'm trying to compare the political thoughts of Imam al-Māwardī, with the political philosophies of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke to gauge and evaluate some similarities and dissimilarities between their political concepts and ideas. More importantly to explore why and how Muslim politicians have failed, and western politicians have succeeded?

The political ideas and ideals of Muslim countries are greatly influenced by classical Muslim political thoughts and doctrines. The primary sources of Islam have laid down some political ideas and ideals. Classical Muslim jurists devised some innovative political theories from the primary sources and historical precedents of Muslim rulers from the formative period of Islam. Imam al-Māwardī produced some brilliant Islamic political concepts and ideas in his writing long before western political philosophers *Abū al-Hasan Alī ibn Muhammad ibn al-Māwardī* (972-1058) C.E. is known for his political treatise in Islamic politics. He was famous for his book called *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya w'al-Wilayat al-Diniyya*: The ordinances of Government and public administration. In this book, he elaborated on the duties and responsibilities of rulers in his time. Al-Māwardī wrote his political treatise in the final epochs of the Abbasid caliphate which was inundated with internal conflict, civil wars, and disintegration. Al-Māwardī wrote his political philosophies to save the Islamic caliphate from political disintegration and decay as the 17th-century English political philosophers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke revolutionized western political thought soon after the civil war in England.

The fundamental political principle of al-Māwardī is that Islamic politics is based on imamate or caliphate. This means that Islamic politics is based on the footstep of the prophecy of the prophet Muhammed and the political precedents of the righteously guided caliphs. The primary rule of Islamic politics is to safeguard the religion of Islam and its religious doctrines, and the secondary objective is to regulate and administer the public affairs of the people. Here he had given a prominent place for the office of caliphate and imamate. He compared the leadership of the Muslim community to that of a lighthouse that directs people in the right direction. The imams or caliphs are like shepherds. Without shepherds and their guidance, the herd of goats can easily go wrong paths. Likewise, the Muslim community can go astray if it does not have a good political leader. He argued that the absence of authority and leadership would create chaotic conditions in any country. This was exactly what Thomas Hobbes predicted during the civil war in England.

According to Al-Māwardī, leadership in Islam is a religious obligation. It is like seeking knowledge in Islam. Seeking knowledge in Islam is an indispensable obligation without knowledge no Muslim can fulfil his religious duties. So, he argues that it is the religious duty of the Muslim community to appoint an able, qualified, and honest leader to govern their public affairs. Yet, he put some conditions to take leadership in Islam. How should people elect their leaders? Leadership selection can be done by different methods and yet, it had been a tradition during his time that some experts and community leaders were entrusted to elect their political leaders. He set some ethical and moral rules and principles for the rulers to follow if they want to stay firmly in their leadership. He strongly believed that the government and its stability depend on some fundamental principles. He believed that religion has a greater role in the stabilization of the government. Unlike Western political

philosophers, he did not separate politics from religion or religion from politics. Islam is a complete way of life and politics is part and parcel of Islamic teaching. Muslim politicians cannot enact laws contradictory to Islamic teachings and guidelines.

According to Māwardī, the defeat of government is unavoidable if the rulers do not promote justice, equality, and fairness. The stability of the government primarily depends on how the ruler maintains rule of law and justice in his country. If aggression, injustice, and discrimination continued in any government such a government would not long last. He also highlighted the importance of a strong economy, military, and resources to stabilize the government. Yet, he emphasized that merely wealth alone is not enough to form a strong government. Rather excessive wealth and money could lead some governments into disintegration as well.

Al-Māwardī had outlined all the official duties and responsibilities of the Muslim rulers in the 11th century.

1. Protecting the religious identity of his people.
2. Providing the basic needs and necessities of the people, such as, housing, health, education, and clothing.
3. Protecting the integrity and sovereignty of the country.
4. Establishing justice and litigating against all criminals.
5. Providing security and protection.
6. Providing all facilities to perform their religious duties.
7. Promoting their welfare and protecting the national interest.
8. Protecting the country from enemies.
9. Strengthening the economy of the country are some of the official duties and responsibilities of Muslim rulers in his time. Almost one thousand years ago, Muslim political philosophers invented and devised some brilliant political ideas on how to rule the country and yet, it is, unfortunately, Muslim political ideas and ideals are systematically ignored and deliberately neglected by Muslim rulers throughout Muslim history. In old days, Europeans strongly believed in the “theory of divine right.” They strongly believed that the kings have the divine right to rule over people forever. So, they expected people should obey them forever even if the kings exploited them with heavy taxes and economic burdens.

Some Muslim clerics strongly believed that the public should not protest the ruler even if he is wicked and unjust. People should not try to remove the ruler if he is aggressive, unjust, and corrupt. *Qur’an* the verse states: “you who believe, obey *Allah*, and obey his prophet, and those who are in authority among you¹.” Yet, if the rulers are not following Islamic teachings fully by the Holy *Qur’an* and Sunnah as we see today, do Muslims have to obey the rules?

Obedience to the ruler becomes necessary if he obeys *Allah*. The obedience is not binding if the ruler’s orders are not in conformity with the Shariah. In such a situation disobedience to the ruler is justified.² It can be argued that when Muslim rulers are violating the injunctions of Shari’ah, Muslims are not obliged to follow the Muslim ruler. Yet can Muslims rebel against the rulers in that case. Can Muslims protest and demonstrate against the government as Europeans did in their political revolutions? Some Muslim clerics argued that if such revolts bring more harm and damage, Muslims should not do it. If they think that a political revolution is more beneficial, Muslims should do it in the greater interest of their community and the country. Moreover, some Muslim jurists argued that it is permitted in Islam to appoint the less qualified ruler over the qualified ruler to avoid any political unrest and anarchy. Still, some contemporary Muslim clerics in the gulf country are holding these outdated views in this modern world. Some of these inappropriate political ideas have shaped the political thought of Muslims today. That is why Muslims can not succeed in their political revolutions in many Arab and Muslim countries.

Today, politics has dramatically changed like any other field and yet, the politics of the Muslim countries are still in their rudimentary stages. Today, Muslim rulers have politically suppressed and oppressed the Muslim mass. This is nothing but a form of modern slavery and yet, no human rights commission talks about it as western rulers want to keep Muslims and Arabs as their political slaves in this digital age. Muslim youths did try to make political changes through

¹ *Quran*. 4: 59.

² Al-Māwardī, *Tafsir*, 4:59.

the Arab spring and yet, many western countries preferred to have Muslim dictators in place of democratically elected leaders in Muslim countries. Nothing illustrates the political hypocrisy of some western countries than western support for the Egyptian dictator in the Arab spring. Although the Arab and Muslim public wants to see the real democratic changes in their countries, many western countries do not like to see any meaningful political changes in Muslim countries. That is why millions of Arab and Muslim masses suffer today from poverty and lack of basic human rights. Muslim politicians are violating the basic human rights of the public in many Muslim countries and yet, the innocent public could do nothing about it.

The political philosophies of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke revolutionized the politics of western Europe. Modern western political ideas and traditions were devised on the philosophical thought of these 17th-century English political philosophers. They advocated the social contract theory in their writing. Their social contract theory deals with some fundamental questions in politics. How should be people ruled and what should be the nature of government? How did the idea of government come about? What are the duties and responsibilities of the sovereign? What are the duties and responsibilities of people toward the sovereign? How much power and authority a ruler should have over his people? In his book *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes advocated the idea of political absolutism. His political ideas were crystalized after the civil war in England. He experienced the civil war and came up with some political ideas to reconcile political conflicts and disagreements. His ideas are reconciliatory political ideas to avoid civil war over authority. He argues that man is greedy for power, position, and posts by nature. Hobbes tells us to ponder what would be life look like in a state of nature without any organized system of government. He argues that such a state of nature would be like a "state of war" even worse, a war of "all against all." He says, "war of every man against every man"³.

Hobbes argued that without peace, people will have to live in a state of continuous fear and uncertainty even in a state of danger of violent death. Without a government, and law and order system, life will be chaotic "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Although Hobbes was arguing in support of monarchy in his life, he called for an effective system of government with absolute authority. Such absolute power is imperative to maintain law and order. He believed that people do not have the right to rebel against the government. For this reason, he argues that people should not protest the government. They should not make any political revolution to change the government rather they should always obey the government. People have the right to protest or disobey the government only when the government starts to oppress people or kill people. I do not think such 17th-century political thought is appropriate to the condition today. Contrary to what Hobbes argued, the politics in Muslim countries started with the misuse of executive power. Muslim politicians failed to develop an effective government. Consider, how some Muslim rulers have elections in their country.

In some Gulf countries, there is any proper election to choose their representatives and even to appoint a president or a prime minister. These political leaders are still following the old European theory of divine right in politics. In olden days, some European believed in the theory of "divine right." They believed that God awarded kings the power to rule over people. As a result of this divine right, people did not have the right to question the kings. People did not dare to fight for their rights. Hobbes strongly believed people should not revolt and protest, he feared that would create a chaotic situation. He witnessed the chaotic situation of the English civil war and he experienced it. As a result of his personal experience, he concluded that people should not protest and revolt against the rulers. That political opinion may have been a suitable one for his social context and yet, to copy such an idea today in this modern world is not appropriate. Yet, some Muslim clerics and Arab rulers are still maintaining this old political idea of Thomas Hobbes in this modern world. Many Arab politicians maintain that they have been elected as presidents and prime ministers forever till their death. Many Arab politicians have managed to fool their public with these old political ideas of Thomas Hobbes.

John Locke believed that people have every right to defend their life, health, liberty, and possessions. For this reason, people have the right to protest and make a political revolution to win their basic political and democratic rights. It is argued that the philosophies of John Locke laid the foundation for the political ideals of the USA and its constitution. He argued that rulers should be removed from the power when they failed to deliver and protect the basic political right of the people.⁴

³ *Leviathan*, Part first of the natural condition of mankind.

⁴ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/locke/#SecoTreaGove>

How they differ in their political thought.

Thames Hobbes	John Locke
<p>Promoted absolute monarch.</p> <p>People are obliged to obey the monarch and in return, it should protect them.</p> <p>Believed that people are greedy, selfish, wicked, and cruel and will fight each other for power.</p> <p>Absolute obedience is a must to maintain law and order.</p> <p>The primary objective of the government is to maintain law and order.</p>	<p>Promoted democracy and constitutionalism.</p> <p>People are born with some inalienable rights. They are life, liberty, and the right to own property.</p> <p>Believed that people are by nature good.</p> <p>People can be trusted to govern themselves and they can make the right decisions</p> <p>The primary objective of the government is to protect the basic right, freedom, and liberty of the people.</p>
(This is taken from this website) ⁵	

Islamic political philosophy does not promote absolute monarchy as Thomas Hobbes promoted. The Holy *Qur'an* does not promote any kind of political dictatorship rather *Qur'an* tells us Muslims should “conduct their affairs by mutual consultation.”⁶ At the same time, Islamic political philosophy does not promote liberal democratic political values as John Locke and others promoted. al-Māwardī explained the characteristics of Islamic politics. Islamic political ideas are taken from the *Qur'an*, prophetic traditions, and the precedents of the companions of the prophet. Muslim rulers have some religious and moral responsibilities toward their community. They must apply and implement the divine guidelines in private and public life. All political and public administrative affairs of the government should be under the guidance of the primary sources of Islam. This does not mean they promote any kind of theocracy as some Iranian clerics promote rather Islam promotes a different kind of politics. Islamic politics takes its moral and religious values from the primary sources of Islam and yet, Muslim politics and policymakers are given freedom and leverage to enact rules and regulations in conformity with the general philosophy of Islamic law.

Muslim intellectual and political heritage is very much rich with different political ideas and principles. Different election methods were introduced in Islamic politics since the time of the formative period of Islam. Yet, some dictatorial and totalitarian system of rule was introduced into Muslim politics at some point in Muslim history in the medieval age because of this, Muslim politics lost its right direction. Even in this digital age, Muslims find it difficult to put their politics right. We notice some dramatic changes in the field of politics in the world today in many countries and many non-Muslim third world countries are doing well in politics and yet, Muslim countries find it very much difficult to reform politics. Political reform is not merely an optional duty today for Muslims rather it is a collective duty of the Muslim public in each Muslim country because politics control every aspect of human life today in this modern world.

Classical Muslim scholars spoke about the duties and responsibilities of the politicians long before Thomas Hobbes and John Locke and yet, Muslims failed to apply Islamic political theories and ideas in their public life. Muslim public were never allowed to have their political freedom and liberty as people in Europe were allowed to enjoy their political freedom. The political history of Arab and Muslim communities is made up of some optimistic and pessimistic political narratives and anecdotes. Many Muslim politicians have been influenced by some negative political narratives of the past. The contemporary Muslim political leaders are still emulating the old fashion politics of some Muslim dictatorial rulers and they have failed to imitate the good examples of some exemplary Muslim rulers of the past. They are keen to follow the political model of Hajjaj ibn Yusuf instead of following the political model of Omar ibn Abul Aziz. The contemporary Muslim rulers justify their political views from the dark side of Muslim political history. They consider some dictatorial Muslim rulers as their role models in politics. People like Assad, SISI Mohamed Ibn Salman and many other Muslim rulers make frequent references to the dark chapter of Muslim political history to justify their political behavior and actions. Muslim politics is greatly influenced by past political heritage and history. It is not simple to detach Muslim politicians from their political history and heritage.

Humanity lives in a different world today. The political order of the modern world is dramatically changing. The old fashion politics is not viable in our modern world. Muslim youth are politically awakening in this digital world. They

⁵ See this. <https://reaction.la> > Hobbes

⁶ *Qur'an*; 42:38

know their political rights and freedom like many other communities in the world. Many political revolutions are taking place across the world. Humanity lives in the virtual world and learns new ideas, ideals, views, and concepts. People are bombarded with new political ideas and ideals. Neither Muslim political leaders nor western political leaders could enslave the Muslim populace politically in this virtual world. Sooner or later, some political revolutions will sweep through many Muslim countries. It would be difficult to control or subjugate the masses in the virtual and digital world. For this reason, it would be advisable for Muslim political leaders and their masters in western countries to review their policies and strategies in the politics of Muslim countries. I think that the politics in the Muslim world will dramatically change in the coming decades as we see dramatic changes in many other areas of life. Therefore, western political leaders must support and encourage the democratic forces in Muslim countries instead of supporting political dictators. How long these politicians could enslave the Muslim public?

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