Unveiling the Origins of the Islamic State: Tracing its Genesis through a Comprehensive Historical Analysis

Kafeel Ahmad Bhat

Research Scholar Ph.D. Dept. of Religious Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala

ABSTRACT

This research paper aims to meticulously trace the origins of the Islamic State through an extensive historical analysis that spans centuries, delving into the intricate tapestry of events, ideologies, and societal contexts that have contributed to its formation. The study commences by exploring the early stages of Islam and the foundational principles laid down during the time of Prophet Muhammad. It scrutinizes the historical developments post the Prophet's era, examining the divergent interpretations of Islamic teachings and the consequent schisms within the Muslim community. It investigates the role of regional conflicts, governance vacuums, and global interventions in shaping the conditions conducive to the rise of extremist entities. Moreover, the paper dissects the ideological underpinnings and propaganda mechanisms employed by the Islamic State, analyzing how it capitalized on grievances, identity crises, and disillusionment among certain segments of society to gain traction and recruit followers. By synthesizing historical narratives, geopolitical analyses, and socio-cultural contexts, this research endeavors to unravel the intricate historical trajectory that culminated in the emergence of the Islamic State.

KEY WORDS: *Islamic State, Caliphate, Sovereignty, Government, Vicegerency.*

INTRODUCTION

The current events in the Muslim world have highlighted the true essence and extent of the Islamic State. However, the leaders of some Muslim nations often employ the terms "Islamic State" or "Islamic Revolution" with a lack of precision, primarily driven by their own political interests. The true Islamic concept of State can be gleaned form a critical study of the terms Islamic sources use for the state system. Students of Islamic literature know that the Islamic sources do not employ the terms like state, kingdom or government for a political organization based on pure Islamic principles but quite use the terms *Khilāfah* or *Imamah.*

Asghar Ali Engineer in his scholarly work, *The Islamic State* (1980) states that:

In my opinion the holy Qur'an which is the source book for all the Islamic teachings does not spell out any fixed form of state; instead it strongly urges on the establishment of a just and egalitarian society.[i]

In view of its worldwide significance, use and abuse of the concept of Islamic State, it is necessary to clearly understand as to what it is all about. Asghar Ali Engineer further asserts that:

Theoretically speaking no two, *Ulema* (traditional scholars of Islam) agree on the interpretation of this concept even in broad outline, much less in details. The prophet did not

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leave behind any comprehensive theory of the Islamic State; certain of his practices and sayings provided guidelines to the Caliphs who followed him. However, the four pious caliphs over a period of 30 years faced vastly different and much more complex situation because of rapid victories the Muslim armies won over the territories of the Roman and Sassanid empires. The Islamic rule during the Prophet's time was confined to the Arabian Peninsula, which was mostly inhabited by nomadic tribes, and hence he did not have to face very complex problems as the later Caliphs did.[ii]

After the death of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the Caliphs or the companions of Prophet had to resort to innovations to run the government in the changing situation, as it was not possible to find direct guidelines for many things in the Prophet's practice. They also restored to the practice of Ijtihad (literally exertion or creative interpretation) while facing new situations and new problems. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the historical developments during the Prophetic era and immediately after the death of Prophet to understand the early character of the Islamic State.

Origin of Islamic State: An overview

In the pre-Islamic period, there was not a formal government or state structure in Mecca. Instead, different tribes and groups lived there without a central authority. This changed after the birth of Islam, which brought about new social and religious changes. Before Islam, Mecca was a busy hub for trade. People from various parts of the world came to buy and sell things. This made the city an important center for international commerce. There were also intricate financial dealings happening in Mecca, involving things like money and trade agreements. Therefore, briefly, Mecca did not have a government before Islam, and it was known for its busy trade and complex financial activities. Islam's emergence brought changes to the city's social and religious aspects.

Professor W. Montgomery Watt, a renowned expert in Islamic studies, has expressed his viewpoint that:

Mecca was more than mere a trading centre; it was a financial centre too. However, it is clear that financial operations of considerable complexity were carried on at Mecca. The leading men of Mecca in Muhammad's time were, above all financiers, skillful in the manipulation of credit, shrewd in their speculations, and interested in any potentialities of lucrative investment from Aden Gaza or Damascus in the financial net they had woven not merely were all the inhabitants of Mecca caught, but many notables of the surroundings also. The Qur'an appeared not only in the atmosphere of the desert, but also in that of high finance.[iii]

As mentioned earlier, Mecca was a significant city along international trade routes, but it did not have a formal government. Unlike ancient Greek city-states with elected leaders and administrators, Mecca did not have elected heads or senators to manage the city. There were no taxes, army, or police because there was no need for these structures. These social and economic circumstances led the prophet to introduce a new concept of a state in Arabia.

In his renowned scholarly publication *Muhammad_ Prophet and Statesman*, Professor W. Montgomery Watt goes on to elaborate that:

The Meccans had retained the attitudes and social institutions appropriate to the life of the nomad in the desert, such as blood feuds and clan solidarity. Even if they had not been pure

nomads for some time, they had remained sufficiently close to the desert to preserve much of its outlook. The essential situation out of which Islam emerged was the contrast and conflict between the Meccans nomadic outlook and attitudes and the new material (of economic) environment in which they found themselves.[iv]

In the context of the absence of formal governmental control, an important question arises: how was social stability effectively maintained within Meccan society. Asghar Ali Engineer provides an explanation for this by saying:

There was a decision making body called *Mala'a* (senate) looked after these functions. However, it does not mean that the members of the senate were elected or that the majority decisions were implemented. *Mala'a,* in fact, comprised tribal chiefs called *Sheikhs*. These *Shyukh* (plural of *Sheikh*) sat on the *mala'a* in Mecca and took unanimous decisions.[v]

Ibn Khaldun, the renowned Arab historian, makes an observation regarding the Bedouin community. According to him,

That the Bedouins are a savage nation fully accustomed to savagery and the things that cause it. Savagery has become their character and nature. They enjoin it, because it means freedom from authority and no subservience to leadership.[vi]

Meccan people resisted Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as they feared his acceptance as Allah's Prophet would elevate his status above theirs. They opposed this, particularly for an underprivileged orphan like Muhammad, who did not fit their societal norms.

H.A.R Gibb observes:

It displayed the familiar evils of wealthy commercial society, extremes of wealth and poverty, an underworld of slaves and hirelings, and social class-barriers. It is clear from Muhammad's (PBUH) fervent denunciations of social injustice and fraud that this was one of the deep inner causes of his unsettlement. However, the ferment within him did not break out in the preaching of social revolution; it was thrust instead into a religious channel and issued in a deep and unshakable conviction that he was called by God to proclaim to his fellow citizens the old warning of the Semitic Prophets i.e. Repent, for the judgement of God is at hand.[vii]

Muhammad (PBUH) displayed a significant concern for addressing the societal concerns in Mecca. His upbringing within a Bedouin tribe allowed him to comprehend their lack of wealth accumulation. Moreover, his engagement in business activities and participation in trade caravans to Syria provided him with a deep understanding of Mecca's economic dynamics and its role in international trade. Through his spiritual experiences in the *Hira* cave, he developed a conviction that the wealthy should contribute to the well-being of the less privileged. He recognized this as crucial for mitigating societal issues and establishing harmony.

Asghar Ali Engineer quotes Professor Mohammad Habib by saying:

Prof. Mohammad Habib has pointed out two things; firstly, agreeing with Maulana Shibli, the great Indian biographer of the Prophet, he says that the Prophet was a spiritual and moral teacher; secondly_ and this is what is most important from our point of view that from the viewpoint of Political institutions, his main work was to have established a security system for the whole of Arabia. [viii]

In Mecca, Muhammad faced resistance from wealthy merchants who opposed his influence. His humble origins as an orphan under his grandfather's care fueled this opposition. Economic importance amplified tensions, leading to severe persecution of Muhammad and his followers and became a reason for the Muslims to migrate to Medina.

I would like to quote Taqiuddin Nabhani, a famous Islamic thinker, who often says:

The presence of forces of Islam in Medina, the readiness of the people to receive the Messenger of Allah, and the establishment of the Islamic State were the only reasons, which promoted Muhammad (PBUH) to emigrate. It would be completely erroneous for anyone to conclude or even to entertain the slightest thought that Muhammad (PBUH) emigrated from Mecca out of fear that Quraysh would kill him. His (PBUH) emigration to Medina was simply the selfless pursuit of the Islamic *Da'wah* and the necessary establishment of the Islamic State to further that objective.[ix]

Medina, unlike Mecca, was not mainly commercial, though some Jews engaged in limited trade. Prophet Muhammad rather directly established the first Islamic State in Medina that eventually expanded across Arabia. He cautiously set up a constitution accommodating various interests. This framework established unity in Medina, marking a crucial phase in early Islamic history. Which later became a way to establish the first Islamic state in the 7th century.

The constitution/agreement written by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) between *Muhajirin* (the immigrants from Mecca) and *Ans'ar* (the helpers of Medina) in which the Jews were included. The Jews were allowed to follow their religion and retain their properties. The document began, In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. This is a writing of Muhammad the Prophet between the believers and Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib (i.e. Medina) and those who follow them and are attached to them who crusade along with them. They are a single community distinct from other people. The Jews would share the expenses with the Muslims so long as they fight. The Jews of *Bani'Auf* would constitute one *Ummah* with the Muslims. For Jews is their own religion and for Muslims theirs. Those Jews who follow us are entitled to our aid and support so long as they shall not have wronged us or lent assistance (to any enemies against us).[x] This agreement holds significance that goes beyond its initial purpose of creating a community; it also played a pivotal role in shaping the groundwork for a fully-fledged state. Rather than solely serving as a means of organizing a group of individuals, this agreement served as a foundational document that laid the groundwork for the establishment and functioning of a cohesive and structured political entity.

R.A. Nicholson remarks:

No one can study it without being impressed by the political genius of its author. Ostensibly, a cautious and tactful reform, it was in reality a revolution. Muhammad shifted the centre of power from the tribe to the community; and although the community included Jews, Pagans as well as Muslims. He fully recognized, what his opponents failed to foresee, that the Muslims were the active, and must soon be the predominant, partners in the newly founded state.[xi]

Montgomery Watt's comments on this document are equally important:

Muhammad was by no means the ruler of this community. The Emigrants were treated as a clan, he was their chief, but there were eight other clans with their chiefs. If the constitution is good evidence at this point, he was only marked off from other clan chiefs by two things. Firstly, the people primarily concerned in this agreement, which we are calling the Constitution, are believers, and that implies that they accept Muhammad as prophet. That should mean accepting as a binding rule whatever comes as revelation, and attributing to Muhammad, a certain prestige as the recipient of revelation and perhaps a wisdom beyond that of ordinary men, at least in religious matters. It does not mean the acceptance of his opinion in matter not covered by revelations. Secondly, however, the Constitution states that 'wherever there is anything about which you differ, it is to be referred to God and to Muhammad'. In these early months, then, Muhammad can have been no more than the religious leader of the Medinan community. In strictly political matters, he was only the head of the 'clan' of Emigrants, and probably less powerful than several other chiefs were.[xii]

As noted earlier, Mecca underwent significant socio-economic changes that necessitated a centralized state authority. However, tribal traditions and merchant opposition posed obstacles. Medina, in contrast, faced pressing circumstances due to protracted inter-tribal conflicts. His adept resolution of the *Aws* and *Khazraj* dispute marked a critical stride in establishing Medina's statehood, strengthening his reputation and garnering increased support from these tribes.

According to Maxime Rodinson, the people of Medina accepted Muhammad's role as arbiter. The movement began with the weakest clans, who had suffered from the activities of the more warlike chiefs. They wanted peace in the oasis and the cost was very small. They recognized Allah as the One God but they already knew him as the most powerful. The difference was not so very great. They acknowledged that the words uttered by Muhammad were transmitted to him by the voice of Allah; this too was not hard to accept. The Messenger's sincerity was obvious, and the words of Allah were good and accorded with the aspirations of the community as a whole. It was a valuable addition to the community of Medina their good luck that his Qurayshite neighbors had been stupid enough to deprive themselves of such a remarkable character.[xiii]

Upon assuming leadership of the state, the Prophet employed a tactic of acknowledging the existing circumstances and granting comprehensive self-governing authority to the Medinese tribes. He further permitted non-Muslims to exercise their religious observances alongside his followers, subject to their compliance with the agreement's terms and abstention from activities that could disrupt Medina's peace and and security.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the rise of Islam and the establishment of the state marked a pivotal juncture in Arabian history. Muhammad (PBUH) discerned the emerging dynamics within the established tribal society and demonstrated the capacity to shape these forces, realizing the society he intended. Hence, it is unsurprising that he acquired such an exceptional position. His contemporaries, as well as subsequent generations, sought his guidance, his revealed scripture, and his practices for direction in all matters. If they could not find direct answers, they resorted to *Ijtihad* and *Qiyas* (Analogy) to align indirectly with his teachings. From this perspective, Muhammad's (PBUH) established State can be seen as theocratic. The Qur'anic

revelations, which underpinned many state policies, held universal components surpassing immediate context. Consequently, the Islamic state can be characterized as ideological, rooted in these transcendent principles.

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