

# Session 24: Grand Strategies in the Realm of Governance and Implementation (Part 1)

## The exigency of government

*In initial discussions on Islamic political philosophy, I stated that, like any political system, the Islamic government has two basic axes: (1) law and legislation, and (2) management and implementation of law. Previous discussions were essentially about the first axis, dealing with the importance of law, characteristics of ideal law, legislation in Islam and its conditions, while addressing the skepticism regarding the above.*

*The present topic is management and implementation of law.* In order to have a clear understanding of the topic, we will realize that the more transparent and clear the goal and objective of an institution or organization, the easier it will be to understand its structure, working conditions and qualities in the people elected as its members. Therefore, to discuss the executive branch of Islamic government, i.e. its managerial aspect, we must be familiar with the reason for establishing the government including the goal of its management.

Notwithstanding the trend which considers government unnecessary, the majority of political philosophers regard the existence of government in society as necessary. That is, they believe that in society there should be a body which must issue orders, oblige people, implement ordinances acceptable to society and apprehend and punish violators. This premise is accepted by almost all thinkers and its need realized by every society. In Islam this premise is also affirmed, and in the words of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) recorded in *Nahj al-Balaghah*: even if a society does not have an upright and meritorious government, a tyrannical government is still better than the absence of any government.<sup>1</sup> It is because in the absence of government or the executive, there will be chaos, the rights of individuals violated and the interests of society trampled upon. So, according to Islam, one of the most important social obligations of people is the establishment of an upright government so as to guarantee the interests of society.

## Different approaches on objectives of executive power

We all know that executive power is for implementation of law, and thus, its objective is implementation of laws, but the nature and structure of the law which the state is trying to implement must be seen. The objectives of law are nothing but two: material and spiritual. In general, all those who are involved in debates on political philosophy acknowledge the fact that the state must secure material interests of people, but there is a difference of opinion about guaranteeing spiritual interests of people; whether they should be reflected in law, the government implement such a law and guarantee its implementation.

Since long, many schools of philosophy have believed that the government must also guarantee spiritual values and the law guaranteed by the government must take human virtues into account. Even in non-religious schools of philosophy some ancient Greek philosophers like Plato regarded paving the ground for the flourishing of human virtues as the duty of government. He asserted that the government must be run by men of wisdom and those who are the best in terms of moral virtues. The saying “The men of wisdom must rule” is attributed to him. So, non-Muslim and non-religious philosophers—those who are not followers of the religions with heavenly origin—have also laid stress on spiritual issues and moral virtues. Even the philosophers with no religious beliefs have emphasized the observance of moral virtues in society and the creation of an atmosphere for the moral growth of people.

After the spread of Christianity in Europe, the Roman Emperor Constantine’s conversion to Christianity and his propagation of it in Europe, and adoption of Christianity as the official religion of civilized countries in Europe, religion was attached to government and the goal of government was to secure religious objectives. That is, the statesmen also used to implement what they had accepted as Christianity. Since the Renaissance, the Westerners experienced an intellectual revolution and endeavored to separate moral issues from the realm of government concerns.

After the Renaissance many developments took place in Europe which became the origin of the new Western civilization, and their hallmark is the separation of religion from the realm of social concerns. It was during that time that philosophers discussed about politics, wrote books, founded schools of thought, and consigned moral virtues and spirituality to oblivion.

Among these philosophers was Thomas Hobbes, the English philosopher, who believed that the only function of government was to prevent anarchy. According to him, like wolves, human beings by nature would be at each other’s throats and destroy one another. Accordingly, a body was needed to curb the wolf’s instinct in them and prevent their aggression against one another. Following him, John Locke, who was the founder of Western liberal thought and whose ideas are still discussed and more or less accepted in all political and academic circles in the world, presented maintenance of security as the purpose of government.

According to him, what human beings need in life is a controlling agent called “government” in the absence of which social order will not come into being, anarchy will prevail, security will be lost, and the

life and property of people will be endangered. He says, “We want government to fill this vacuum, other matters have nothing to do with government.”

Of course, the separation of religion from government and social affairs does not mean that none of these theoreticians gave importance to moral virtues and spiritual values. In fact, they said that individuals would have to pursue these matters themselves because they had nothing to do with government. Those who believe in God have to go themselves to the temple, church or anywhere they wish and engage in worshipping God. Similarly, moral virtues such as honesty, good conduct, respecting others, attending to the poor, and others are valuable, but considered personal matters. Individuals themselves have to strive to acquire these pleasant moral virtues, for government has nothing to do with them.

So, the objective of social law, i.e. what government must implement, is only maintenance of security in society so as to protect the life and property of people. Likewise, executive power has no function except maintenance of security and protection of people’s lives and properties. In the words of Locke, apart from protection of life and property, protection of personal freedom is also considered part of security. Regarding moral and spiritual interests, the maximum thing he said was that social law must be such that it does not conflict with morality nor hinder the worship of God.

With respect to preservation of moral values, however, social law and government would not assume the responsibility of preserving religious values and creating an atmosphere for spiritual and religious growth. Nowadays, this statement of Locke is the gospel and constitution of most schools of philosophy. Their principal motto is that the only duty of government is preservation of security and freedom, and it has no responsibility towards religious and moral affairs. This is the fundamental difference between Western thinkers in the world today and Islam.

## **Aim of prophets (‘a) in establishing government**

The view of prophets (‘a), especially the Great Prophet of Islam (s) is that apart from securing the material needs and interests, securing the spiritual interests is also part of the duty of a government. In fact, securing spiritual interests takes precedence and is more important than securing material interests. The government must implement the law whose ultimate objective is to secure the spiritual, religious, moral and human interests—the same things regarded by religion as its ultimate purpose, because the perfection of man depends on them. It considers the purpose of the creation of man, endowed with freewill, to know and pursue this lofty objective.

The axis of these matters is nearness to God which is, thanks to God, well entrenched in Islamic culture today. In fact, it has gained currency among Muslims and even those who do not correctly know its meaning are familiar with its expression. Common people who do not know how to read and write, daily use the expression “*qurbatan ilallah*” [for the sake of nearness to Allah].

Law that is implemented in society must be geared towards the realization of the ultimate goal and purpose behind the creation of man which is nearness to God. The social life of man should progress in this direction and other issues and animal dimensions are valuable provided they are a prelude to his progress, spiritual perfection and proximity to God.

The goal of state can also be identified once it is proved that the purpose behind the codification of social laws is to secure both spiritual and material interests, as a matter of course. The state must consider protecting the life and property of citizens, paving the ground for the spiritual growth of human beings and combating anything that is against the realization of this objective, as part of its duty. This is in reality a preliminary and not the main goal. That is to say, it is a means to achieve a loftier goal. Hence, laws to be recognized officially in Islamic society should be totally concordant with religious foundations and geared toward the spiritual and religious growth of human beings. For them not to be inimical to religion is not enough; they must be attuned to the goals of religion. The Islamic state must also combat religious disbelief and hostility to religion and materialize religious objectives.

In a religious society, it is possible that certain material needs may not be provided temporarily because of the expediency to attend to some spiritual affairs. If the ordinances of Islam are implemented, in the long run material interests of people will also be better secured than in any other system. However, if to provide for all material interests will undermine religion within a limited period, one should only provide for material interests that will not undermine religion, because spiritual interests take precedence. But in Western countries what we have said is not credible. They are only concerned with material objectives and the state is not responsible for spiritual interests.

## **Impact of social challenges on conduct of liberal system**

Sometimes, people protest that in the West spiritual and religious interests are also attended to. Westerners also offer sacrifices and pay attention to social problems. Of course, this contention is correct and we acknowledge that not all Westerners are individualistic. Prevalence of liberal thought does not mean that all people in the West are influenced by it. What we mean is that liberalism dominates Western societies and because of social necessities they are sometimes compelled to act contrary to the dictates of their philosophy.

That is, because of some exigencies even those who are individualistic and liberal have social considerations, and in order to prevent an uprising and revolt by the majority of people, they have to consider the deprived. In practice, in many countries ruled by socialists and social democrats, a great portion of the taxes levied are spent on social services. Their materialist philosophy does not make such a demand but in order to maintain security, they are compelled to provide these facilities.

The point is that liberalism demands one thing and the action of its proponents exhibit something else. In fact, this criticism is leveled at them— liberalism and individualism does not expect them to take these things into account; so, why do they provide social securities and facilities which are in favor of the

deprived? The reply to this question is that these facilities are meant to safeguard the capital of the capitalists and prevent communist uprisings and Marxist revolutions. Before Marxist thought was put into practice in Marxist countries, it was prevalent in Western countries. Karl Marx, a German scholar who lived in the U.K, initially promoted his ideas and books there. Studying his works, the English statesmen realized the perils Marx had brought them and parried them in anticipation.

The Labor Party and socialist tendencies that came into being in Britain and the programs in favor of the deprived implemented there were all meant to counter Marxist tendencies, because it was predicted that the advancement of capitalism would urge the majority of people to stage an uprising. In order to preempt that they attended to the poor and silenced them.

This attitude was beyond the dictates of their capitalist school but it aimed at protecting the interests of the capitalists. In any case, liberalism asserts that the state does not have any responsibility in relation to spiritual affairs.

Possibly, they would complain to us, saying: “In principle, in the Western countries the state levies taxes from people for the church. Why do you accuse them of being heedless to religion and spirituality?” This is the reply: This is also not dictated by liberal thought. In fact, their purpose is to win the hearts of the religious and make use of the power of the church.

Our concern here is their philosophy and their frame of mind. If ever they engage in some religious activities, it is meant to protect their own interests. In a bid to win elections, they strive to win the hearts and votes of the religious. Sometimes, during the presidential elections in the U.S of America, presidential candidates are seen going to church and drawing the attention of people. It does not mean that they are proponents of religion in the affairs of government.

## **Reason behind individuals' inclination towards liberalism**

According to Islam, protection of spiritual interests which can be realized under the auspices of religion is among the essential and primary objectives of government. This is the key point of difference between Islam and other schools of philosophy dominant in the world today, and we cannot follow the West with respect to the mode of governance and duties of government because of this fundamental and basic difference with them. Once the objective is forgotten, the structure, conditions, duties, and prerogatives will change accordingly.

In reality, the reason behind the ambiguity and deviation in ideas and thoughts of individuals—even those who are not spiteful—and the ambiguities and deviations they express in their newspapers and books is that they have not paid attention to the objective of law and government from the Islamic viewpoint and the difference between Islam and other schools. They have accepted the essence of Islam. They also really believe in God, say their prayers and observe fasting. They do not deny and reject religion either. Practically, however, they totally follow the West in sociopolitical issues. They no

longer enquire whether a certain method is consistent with Islamic thought or not. They say, “Today, the world is administered in this way and we cannot go against the dominant current in the world. Today, the world’s civilization is Western civilization and the dominant culture is the liberal culture. We cannot go against this trend!”

We, however, must first understand what Islam theoretically says; whether it accepts whatever is practiced in the West or not. Secondly, in practice we have to see whether we can implement the commandments of Islam or not. Assuming that we cannot implement them in practice, at least we have to know that Islam does not accept the liberal approach and attitude. So, we should not attempt to present a non-Islamic approach as Islamic. During the time of the *taghut*, we could not also put into practice the Islamic methods but we knew that that government was not Islamic and some of its policies were anti-Islamic. Thus, the absence of the ground for implementation of the commandments of Islam does not make us say that Islam has been changed.

Even today, in some cases, we may not be able to implement Islam yet we are not supposed to say that Islam is exactly what we are doing. We have to understand Islam as it really is, and if we cannot practice an aspect of it, we have to beseech the forgiveness of God for our failure to do so, and if ever we have any shortcomings, God forbid, then we have to ask apology from the Muslim nation for our shortcomings in implementing Islam. So, we should not make any change in Islam and we should bear in mind that Islam is the same religion which was propagated by the Prophet of Islam (s) 1,400 years ago.

## **A perspective on the structure of Islamic government and state**

Therefore, the objective of the Islamic government is definitely the realization of Islamic and divine values in society and under its auspices the realization of material interests, and not the opposite. We also need to know the structure of the Islamic government and the qualities of those who should take charge of government.

No doubt, the principal duty of executive power in any political system is the implementation of law, and this point is acknowledged by everybody. The Islamic state guarantees the implementation of Islamic laws and the realization of the objectives of those laws. Now, the question is: In any political system—whether Eastern, Marxist, Western liberal, or any other existing system—what qualities and features should the institution that wants to implement laws have? In reply, it must be stated that law-enforcers in any political system should possess at least two qualities:

1. **Knowledge of law:** How can the person who wants to guarantee the implementation of a law implement it if he does not know and understand it? Knowledge of law is the first condition and quality that the state must possess if it wants to guarantee the implementation of laws for if it has no correct knowledge of the laws’ dimensions and angles, it will probably commit mistakes in implementation. As such, the ideal option is that the person who heads the government must be the most knowledgeable in law so as to commit the fewest possible mistakes in implementation.

**2. Ability to implement law:** The institution that wants to guarantee the implementation of law must possess sufficient power and capability to implement it. If it wants to rule over a nation of 60 million people, nay a nation of one billion people like China, and implement laws and ordinances for them, it must possess sufficient power and capability to implement them. This point is so important that nowadays in many schools of philosophy, “government” has been treated as synonymous with “power” and one of the key concepts in political philosophy is the concept of “power”. In any case, we should bear in mind that the government must have power.

Since time immemorial, along with developments in human society, there existed different concepts of power. In simple and primitive governments—like the tribal governments which existed thousands of years ago in approximately all parts of the world—power basically focused on physical power which existed in the tribal chief or ruler. In those societies, the person who was physically the strongest was recognized as ruler; for, if there were any violator, the ruler used his physical power to punish him. Thus, in those days, power was only physical.

When social conditions became complex and there was further social growth and advancement, the physical power of a person was transformed into the power of an institution. That is, even if the ruler was not physically strong, he could have people at his disposal that had considerable physical strength. He could have a strong army and military force composed of strong men. With the advancement of knowledge, power went beyond the physical realm and was transformed into scientific and technological power. That is, the ruler was supposed to possess instruments that could successfully perform physical tasks.

With progress and development in societies and advancement of various industries and technologies, including the daily qualitative and quantitative advancement of military equipment, the state had no option but to acquire and equip the military with sufficient physical, industrial and technological power, to be able to suppress any uprising, prevent violations and people from embezzling property and endangering lives, by means of the power at its disposal.

## **The government must be accepted by the people**

The power or force we have so far mentioned is confined to bodily or physical power which was considered important in primitive and advanced forms of government and which is still utilized. We can also observe that states strengthen their military and defense structure and stockpile military arms and equipments to make use of them in times of need. It must be noted, however, that the power and capability of a government is not confined to this. In fact, in progressive societies the power and authority of a state largely emanates from social influence and popular acceptability.

Not all demands and programs can be imposed on society by means of violence or brute force. Essentially, the people voluntarily and willingly accept and implement laws. So, the person who is entrusted with implementing laws and is at the helm of affairs must be accepted by people, as in the

long run, the mere use of physical force and power will not do anything.

Thus, the executive official must also possess social authority and acceptability. As such, in order to prevent any problem in the domain of management and pursue social interests, the distinctive qualities of executive officials must be determined so that they can guarantee the objectives of the government and law. That is, they really qualify to run the government and guarantee implementation of law. This is discussed in various forms in political philosophy and is usually known as social legitimacy and popular acceptability.

It means that the government must have a rational basis and adopt the correct way of implementing law, and people must consider it legally credible. In addition to the fact that the executive official must enjoy *physical power* to be able to prevent violations, the people must believe in his *credibility* and regard him deserving to rule. Thus, we have three types of authority. The first two types have been recognized in all societies. Of course, there are differences in forms of implementation in different schools and forms of government. Yet, what is most important for us is the third form of authority.

<sup>1</sup>. “The fact is that there is no escape for men from rulers, good or bad. The faithful persons perform (good) acts in his rule while the unfaithful enjoy (worldly) benefits in it.” Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 40.

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