

Civil-Military Relations: Western and Islamic Perspectives

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Abstract

Some Western scholars have asserted that the high frequency of military coup d'etats in Muslim countries is rooted in Islam. They claim that citizens of the Muslim world easily accept military rule because it does not run counter to the spirit of Islam. Is this true? Does Islam really allow military intervention into politics or coup d'etat? This article argues that in some contemporary Muslim countries the coup d'etat or military takeover has nothing to do with the basic spirit of Islam. Rather, in those countries, Western colonial rule laid the foundation for the subsequent takeover of civilian power by the army. Islam does not allow succession to power through force or coup d'etat. This article clarifies the position of Islam on the question of civil-military relations. A systematic study on this issue has yet to be done, therefore, there is room for controversy. In order to explain the civil-military relations in an Islamic polity, this paper first examines Western perspectives on civil-military relations then highlights Islamic perspectives. Finally, it offers a brief explanation of military intervention into the politics of some contemporary Muslim countries.

Since the end of World War II, frequent military intervention has occurred in many Third World countries, particularly in the Muslim World. One scholar pointed out that in the 1980s half of the Muslim world was directly under military rule and the other half was under military dominance.¹ According to some scholars, the frequency of military coup d'etat in the Muslim world is rooted in the spirit of Islam. Saleem Qureshi writes, "In the world of Islam no civil military separation exists, and therefore, the justification of the civil-military rule under the leadership of the army does not run counter to the spirit of Islam," and hence, the citizens of the Muslim

world easily accept military rule.² It has been further claimed that, while in the West there has been a development of secularism and with it a separation of civil and military authorities, the former being the controller and the latter being the subordinate professionals, in Islam, there has never been such a distinct separation of civil and military authorities. Consequently, "since in Islam there is no background of secularism and no distinction between the civilian and military components, an overwhelming majority of Muslim states are military ruled or military dominated."³

Hence the questions arise: Is this true? Does Islam really allow military intervention into politics or coup d'etat? In Islam, what is the exact relationship between civil and military authorities? Can the military rebel or conspire against a legitimate civilian authority for power? Since there has been no systematic study on this issue, there is room for controversy. This article explores Islam's bearings on the question of civil-military relations. To explain the civil-military relations in an Islamic polity, this article first examines the Western perspectives on civil-military relations and then highlights the Islamic perspectives on civil-military relations from Qur'anic verses and historical practices in the State of Madinah. Finally, it offers a brief explanation of military intervention into the politics of some contemporary Muslim countries.

Western Perspectives

Simply, from the Western perspective, the military is considered to be apolitical and civil-military relations are characterized by civilian control and supremacy. Accordingly, the military not only has a subservient position but is also constrained from developing any ambition of capturing political power. Western political systems maintain a high level of "civic culture." These systems are primarily dominated by politicians who come to power through an elaborate competitive struggle along party lines for a certain period of time. The members of the armed forces are neither expected nor oriented to intervene in electoral politics. Even national defense policy rests,⁴ by and large, in the hands of elected civilian leaders. Western scholars believe that the factors contributing to the distinct separation of power between civilian and military authorities and the consequent exclusion of the army from civilian politics originates from religious traditions that advocate the separation of civil and military powers, and the Western historical preference for a democratic political system.

Religious Traditions

A large majority of the countries in the West are rooted in Christianity which does not give primacy to military institutions. The norms of secularism, which arose out of Christian tradition, developed the concept of church and State separation. Jesus himself declared, "Render, therefore, unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's."⁵ Based on their interpretation of the teachings of Christ, the early Church fathers denied any inherent right of resistance against legitimately elected civilian authority. Subsequently, Protestantism added that "resistance to rulers is, in all circumstances, wicked"⁶ and taught the lesson of tolerance. Both Luther and Calvin, the foremost Protestant reformers, mentioned that the ruler is the vicar of God, and resistance to him is resistance to God. Therefore, rebellion or coup d'etat against constitutionally elected authority, even a bad ruler, is forbidden in Christian tradition. However, Qureshi says that "in the world of Islam, in contrast to Christianity, religious, political and military institutions took shape simultaneously, with a single personage exercising supreme power in all three spheres and thus laying the foundation for a distinct set of values and emphases. These values and emphases have continued to shape and influence subsequent development."⁷ In contrast to Islam, because of its different beginnings, he says, "Christianity developed a different ideology and State structure. Christian political institutions developed three centuries after the founding of the religion. Consequently, religious institutions, operating for at least two preceding centuries, had already acquired a powerful hold on the beliefs and behavior of Christians. As a result, according to Christian values, the formal institutions of civil and military power, though accepted as inevitable, were neither eulogized nor given primacy. The norms of secularism and the concept of the separation of civil from military roles, hence, grew out of Christian tradition and have given a seeming "universality" to Western political norms and concepts. Non-Western societies, however, whose background is completely dissimilar to the West, are not likely to be influenced by this so-called "universality."

Political Traditions

Not only have their religious roots enabled Western countries to remain free from military domination, but also subsequent political developments which have contributed to the growth of liberal democracy. Democratic political traditions have further prevented any kind of military resistance to

or takeover of civilian power. Historically, there have been three developments in the West: strong civilian institutions; relatively weaker military institutions; and integral, permeable, or fragmented military boundaries.

Strong Civilian Institutions

Western political systems have developed strong civilian institutions. Scholars like Huntington and Finer argue that "the military is more likely to intervene in politics if political institutions are weak and lacking in legitimacy."⁹ Irrespective of variations in the forms of government, parliamentary or presidential, Western political systems have the power to innovate and implement policy decisions for their societies. These are essentially "civic polities." The strength of civilian political institutions in the West can be measured by two key elements: first, the public support that political structures are able to aggregate; and second, the degree of mobilization.¹⁰ In the West, there are publicly agreed procedures for the transfer of power due to the effectiveness of political institutions. They are effective because they are considered legitimate and thus acquire widespread and stable allegiance to their symbols and procedures. Strong and stable structures are necessary for institutional legitimacy because through these structures people can participate and express their views. This legitimacy is quite durable due to its link to a solid institutional base at the center that legitimizes the internal patterns of action of these institutions and authoritatively resolves their social interests. Thus, Kurt Lang observes, "In the relatively small area of Northern, Western and Central Europe, where parliamentary institutions evolved out of an indigenous tradition and rested on a highly developed industrial base, attempts by the military to overthrow civil governments have been rare and, when they occurred, not difficult to quash. Thus, the most recent challenge to civil power in Great Britain was in 1914, when British officers staged an 'insurrection' against their government's policy toward Ireland. There was no clash of arms; the issue was quickly resolved by a mass resignation of officers."¹¹

Each nation in Europe, according to Huntington, made its unique contribution to the culture of Western society. Most nations established procedures for civilian control of the army. Factors contributing to this establishment were technological advancement, competitive nationalism, resolution of conflicts between democrats and aristocrats, and the presence of a stable, recognized, legitimate authority.¹² The first factor arose out of eighteenth and nineteenth century development of technology which led to the growth of industrialism enabling increased functional specialization. It

became impossible for the army to be expert in managing external defense while at the same time skilled in civil politics and statecraft for maintaining internal order. The functions of the military officers became distinct from those of the politician and the policeman. The second factor leading to civilian control of the army came from the growth of the nation-state, where competition among the states caused each to create a corps of permanent experts devoted solely to the interests of military security rather than paying attention to both internal and external orders. The third factor developed from the historical fact that in most of European countries the clash between democrats and aristocrats was resolved through periodic revolutions in which the democrats had the final victory. Democratic ideals and parties eventually gained a solid grip on the political system. The final factor, the existence of a single recognized source of legitimate authority over military forces increased the strength of civilian institutions.¹³ Originally, in every Western country, the king was the only leader recognized by the constitution and, hence, maintained supremacy in all areas of the political system. Gradually, however, power shifted to the parliament whose supremacy, then, became firmly established. Hence, there has always been a stable legitimate civilian authority that left no room for the army.

Weak Military Institutions

Western scholars also claim that military institutions in the West are relatively weak compared to those in the developing world. Broadly speaking, an army's institutional strength may be measured by three kinds of resources: coercive, organizational, and political.¹⁴ In the internal dynamics of Western politics, the coercive capacity of the military is very limited. Historically, there are few instances of massive deployment of the army in civilian disturbances. Second, the army's integration into civilian power structures is very limited. Soldiers in the West rarely participate in civilian decision-making bodies, such as cabinets and committees, and also have very few social links with political power groups. While the balance of power between civil and military authority in developing countries is one of mutual weakness, in the Western world it is one of mutual strength and greater institutional autonomy from each. Thus, Luckham comments,

The strengthening of civil institutions places much greater restraint on the military's ability to use this coercive capability to overawe them. Violence is quite easily transformed into power when it is just a matter of taking over one or two key institutions in a coup d'etat. But it cannot elicit the automatic compliance of well-established and diver-

The above table indicates that the West has integral boundaries where the military and civil powers are balanced at a fairly high level. In these countries, political constraint and professional self-interest keep the armed forces out of the struggle for political power. The army seldom generates the political resources to stage anything more than a secret sudden overthrow, at best changing one civilian group for another. On the contrary, the Third World countries, in general, have fragmented boundaries in which the military adopts a guardian posture. In these models, the military helps civilian groups because they often share common goals and interests. On the one hand, the military is a differentiated body, with distinct group interests and interests held in common with civilian groups. On the other hand, it acts like any other political elite in pursuit of its own interests. It is prepared to cooperate with civilian groups to their mutual advantage and to trade off its own goals in return for the support of other bodies.¹⁸

Critique of the Western Perspective

The above analysis indicates that civil and military institutions in Western political systems are distinct and, as such, the military plays an apolitical role and does not interfere in civilian politics.

This analysis though is faulty. Neither the inherent weakness of military institutions nor the clear-cut boundaries between civil and military authority, however, are true of Western political systems. The following analysis clarifies this issue.

First, Christianity never required the separation of civilian from military power. Historically, in Europe, both civil and military power remained in the same hands. Until the eleventh century, all powers were vested in the king or the prince and were absolute since nobody had the right to challenge his authority. Between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, the head of the Church, the Pope, claimed supreme universal power, both temporal and spiritual. The reforms that Gregory the Great introduced made the Papal case for supremacy irresistible. It was claimed that the two swords, representing spiritual and secular authority, were given by God to Peter from whom they have descended to the Pope who is the vicegerent of God on earth. In other words, both civilian and spiritual powers were integrated in the hands of the Pope. Eventually, the Reformation rested temporal authority from papal control. It is true that Protestantism subsequently instituted the separation of religious from civilian authority, but to say that it also separated civilian from military authority has no historical basis. The

monarch was the head of the army which could not move or engage in fighting without the order of the king. In fact, Christianity did not even raise the issue of the separation of civilian and military powers.

The idea that Western military professionalism does not grant military institutions any political role, separating them from society and politics (an implicit assumption in recent years), is not only historically unsound, but also unrealistic in modern times. In Western political systems, civil-military relations are based on a variety of informal and formal links between military professionals and the civilian elite, and involve a great deal of political interaction. It is a mere assumption that the military in the West is apolitical and that civil military relations are characterized by civilian control and supremacy. In an ideal sense, this may seem to be true, but in a more realistic and practical sense, this must be considerably tempered by historical reality.¹⁹

The fact is that in the recent past the military system in the West has passed through important phases of development and change. The primary purpose of the military, which is to win wars, has remained the same, but the means to obtain its purpose has changed. The military has significantly penetrated the sociopolitical areas of Western political systems and it has increasingly been influenced by values, attitudes, skills, and expectations of civilian life.²⁰ Also, the complex technological requirements of defense and warfare in the modern age, providing global security, and guarding against potential coercion have increased the bargaining power of the military elite, even granting them "veto" power.²¹

Western governments have to allocate large sums for defense, even taking money from nondefense sectors. Thus, "the continual competition for money between the military and nonmilitary sectors of society has brought military budgets and military strategy and technology into the mainstream of policy making. Deciding budget allocations now requires even the most 'nonmilitary' parliamentarians to develop some expertise in military matters. Similarly, this has required military professionals to develop knowledge of governmental politics in order to understand their own system and to have some impact on the military's access to money sources."²² The military's impact on society has made it necessary for civilian decision-makers to consider military factors as part and parcel of the decision-making process.

Not only the defense budget but also a number of other factors tend to draw military and civilian society together. Today's military families are

concerned about the upbringing of their offspring. Therefore, they want to make certain that the national annual budget includes expenditure for the military. "As a result," Sarkesian writes, "links between the military and society have strengthened and expanded. Equally important, boundaries between the military and society have become obscure. It is increasingly difficult to identify a purely 'military' problem."²³

The political and social impact of military force has become so deep-rooted that military professionals cannot properly perform as "professionals" without understanding political and social groups. Thus, considering military to be apolitical is false, and describing civil-military relations in the Western world in terms of civilian control and supremacy is too unrealistic. A variety of formal and informal channels enable the military to influence mutually advantageous political events in the pursuit of common goals. Military and civilian institutions parallel each other. Although they are not the same, they are interconnected by a variety of relationships, values, and norms. In reality, the military is partly a political institution possessing influence and access to the political process through a variety of informal and formal channels. Thus, in modern Western political systems, "the military profession and the institution cannot adopt an 'apolitical' status, nor can the concept of civil-military relations remain unrealistically based on civilian control and supremacy."²⁴

Islamic Perspectives

The above analysis indicates that in reality, the theoretical separation of military from civilian institutions is obscured in Western political systems. In contrast, while it may be true that Islam, in theory, does not emphasize the differentiation and separation of civilian and military institutions, this does not mean that they are considered one and the same. Neither in the verses of the Qur'an nor in the political tradition of the rightly-guided first four caliphs is there any evidence to suggest that there was no separation of civilian and military authorities. Also, there is no evidence that the Qur'an condones unlawful seizure of power from legally constituted authority surreptitiously by the army. Salem Qureshi wrote, "The Prophet Muhammad himself and his first four deputies, the righteous caliphs, bore the responsibility of being Amir al- Mu'minin, Commander of the Faithful, a title which asserted the unity in the ruler of the office of the supreme warlord as well as head of the civil administration."²⁵ Qureshi drew the conclusion that the

civilian and military entities were one in Islam. If this is the case then in today's world, the head of the State, be it president or king, is also the chief commander of the army. The declaration of war lies in the hands of the head of the State. Does this mean that in contemporary political systems there is also a unity of civil and military authorities? The real position of Islam on this issue can be explained both from religious roots and political traditions.

Religious Roots

In both Qur'an and Hadith literature, and also in the writings of the early Muslim jurists, it is found that only a legally constituted authority may rule the Ummah. The Qur'an clearly states that *baghi* (rebellion against the legally constituted authority of the imam) is unlawful.²⁶ The Ummah must render full obedience to the legally constituted authority of the imam or *khalifah*. The Qur'anic term for obedience is *tā'ah*. There are other related terms that frequently occur in the Qur'an, such as, *aḥī'u* and *ati'ana*, and *ata'a*, which mean obedience to the legitimate ruler. Whenever reference is made to a general obligation of the Ummah, it specifically applies only to God and His Messenger. Similarly, in the Qur'an wherever the question of obedience is mentioned, invariably, God and His Messenger are mentioned together. For example, in the following verses it is said:

Obey God, and the Messenger, God does not love the unbelievers."
(3:32)

Whoever obeys God and the Messenger—they are with those whom God has blessed; prophets, the truthful, martyrs, the righteous, good companions." (4:69)

And obey God and obey the Messenger, beware; but if you turn your backs, then know that it is only for Our Messenger to deliver the Message Manifest." (5:92)

And obey God, and His Messenger, and do not quarrel together and loose heart, and your power depart; and be patient; surely God is with the patient." (8:46)

Obey God, and obey the Messenger, then if you turn away, only upon Him rests what is laid on Him, and upon you rests what is laid on you." (24:54)

O believers, obey God, and obey the Messenger, and do not make your own works vain." (47:33)

In the light of the above verses it can be stated that the Prophet Muhammad exercised authority that was derived from God. He was both a prophet and a ruler. As the head of State, he was the head of both civilian and military entities. But the Qur'an clearly indicates that any kind of rebellion against the authority of the Prophet was considered to be illegal, and prescribes "police action" against those rebellious forces.²⁷

The Qur'an unequivocally forbids coup d'état against legally constituted governments.²⁸ Similarly, the hadith literature condemns revolt or coup d'état against a legally constituted ruler and prescribe severe punishment for those who rebel. For example, it is related by Abu Hurairah that the Prophet said, "In the case where an oath of allegiance is exercised on the hands of two caliphs then kill the second one" (Muslim).²⁹ Arfajah heard the Prophet saying, "In the near future there will appear schism; thus, if anyone causes dissension in the community and destroys the unity of the community, chop off his head whosoever he may be" (Muslim).³⁰ Ibn Umar relates that the Prophet said, "Anyone who owes allegiance to an imam and takes an oath of loyalty by placing his palm on the palm of the imam, and of his own volition agrees on giving fealty to him, then he should obey him to the best of his ability. If there arises another claiming to be the imam, then behead him."³¹

I believe the above citations from hadith literature clearly indicate that any army takeover of civilian power is unlawful. In my opinion this further indicates that Islam does not allow the overthrow of a ruler by unlawful means. If any ruler loses the trust of the people, the people have the right to change the ruler but, in this interpretation, only through election, not by force.

During the medieval period of Islam, on the basis of practices in the State of Madinah, many Muslim jurists and thinkers further elaborated the qualification of a legitimate ruler and the nature and mode of elections. They clearly enunciated that there is no scope for the army to capture civilian power. The most famous of these jurists were al-Mawardi, al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun, and Ibn Taymiyyah. Al-Mawardi held the view that the khalifah must be elected by the Ummah through an electoral college known as *ahl al-hall wa al-'aqd*. He enumerated three qualifications that entitled individuals to be members of the electoral college: knowledge, intellect, and justice. Thus, he posited that the seizure of political power by force cannot be

entertained. Al-Ghazali enumerated similar qualifications of a ruler. Ibn Khaldun laid down the same type of conditions for a ruler, such as, knowledge, justice, physical and mental fitness. Ibn Khaldun went beyond his predecessors who believed that the Shari'ah was the only basis of political authority, and as such they had not accepted kingship as a legitimate form of government. Similarly, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, the leadership of the Muslim State should be set up on the basis of a contract (*mubaya'ah*) between the ruler and the community. For Ibn Taymiyyah, caliphal authority is based on cooperation (*ta'awun*). These Muslim jurists and political thinkers clearly stated that the government must be based on the Shari'ah, which does not permit the military to capture political power.

Political Traditions

Not only in the Qur'an, Hadith, and the writings of the early Muslim jurists is coup d'etat prohibited, but also in the model Muslim State of Madinah there is evidence that the ruler could only claim legitimacy of power with the consensus of the community. In the early Muslim state, two separate authorities did not exist, that is, religious and political (church and state), as was the case with Christianity in the West; therefore, the theory of obedience in Islam developed in a very different social and political setting. The Islamic community (Ummah) grew up in a milieu of tribal anarchy, and, therefore, nothing similar to the Christian church could emerge as a separate institution. The Christian community had come into existence within the Roman Empire. But before the rise of Islam, no Arab empire existed, and, therefore rendering obedience to the ruler did not arise at all. Consequently, this basic difference between Islam and Christianity, the process of community building under the impact of Islam simultaneously involved ideological social and political integration of the Arabian tribes. Historically, however, during the later Abbasi caliphate and subsequently in Egypt after the installation of the Abbasi caliph by Sultan Baibars, the khilafah was reduced to the status of a purely religious institution, and the defacto political power came to be exercised by the secular rulers.³² In this manner, during the period of political decline, the offices of sultan and caliph were separated.³³

With the rise of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad exercised both temporal and spiritual powers and, therefore, he was both prophet and ruler. Mainly, he performed the following functions: received 'divine revelations; preached about Islam; embodied the divine injunctions by his own conduct;

organized individual and collective life of the Ummah in accordance with divine injunctions; established the institution of *hadd* (punishment) and organized the collection of zakah (poor tax); conducted the affairs of the community in consultation with his companions; and adjudicated disputes.³⁴

The Prophet used to conduct civilian and community affairs in consultation with his companions. He was only one among others, and his own civilian judgments (in contra-distinction with his prophetic judgments) could be overruled by others and, in fact, this happened many times.³⁵ For example, one year the Prophet asked some people to fecundate trees, but, unfortunately, the yield was low that year. Consequently, people came to the Prophet and complained about the low yield. The Prophet is reported to have said, "I am but a man. What I tell you in religious matters you should accept. When I tell you something about worldly affairs, remember that I am but a man."³⁶ In this way, the Prophet's role was limited in secular matters. In this situation, since the emerging Ummah had no central political authority, the Prophet continued to be the main focus. To regard the Prophet as a sovereign of the newly emerging Ummah in Madinah is not quite accurate. In determining the nature of authority exercised by the Prophet, scholars have failed to distinguish between the terms: community, State, and government. In fact, the Prophet was engaged in the task of community building that was free from politics, but not necessarily apolitical. This was because the Prophet was not concerned about his political role, and, therefore, his role in secular matters was incidental to his prophetic mission.³⁷

After the arrival of the Prophet in Madinah, the city-state began to emerge as the model of an Islamic polity. The Prophet Muhammad, as the vicegerent of Allah on earth, was both political and religious authority. In order to build the State, he delegated both his civil and military powers. The civil administration included central, provincial, divisional, and local administrators. The central administration included the deputies (*nuwāb*) of the Prophet, advisors (*mushī'irin*), secretaries (*kutāb*), envoys (*rusul*), commissioners or officers on special duty, poets (*shā'ir*), and orators (*khutabā'*). The main provincial functionary was the governor (*wula*). The local government included local administrators (*ru'usa*), local representatives (*nuqabā'*), judges (*quḍāh*), and market officers (*sahib al-suq* or '*ala al-suq*').³⁸

On the other hand, military administration was distributed among the commanders. Like the modern head of State, the Prophet Muhammad was

the supreme commander of the army of the Islamic State of Madinah. Commanders, however, were appointed to carry out their respective functions. Until the last day of the Prophet's life, commanders continued to be appointed and, in total, forty-nine persons held the position in seventy-four expeditions.³⁹ In other words, some of the commanders held this position on more than one occasion. The appointments were distributed widely among the various groups of Muslims in Madinah, but most of them went to the Quraysh, *muhajirun*, and the *ansār*. The western and eastern tribes were well represented, while the Muslims belonging to the northern and southern regions of Arabia had few representatives because, in terms of percent of the total population, they were a small minority in Madinah. The only criteria for appointment to a post was merit and suitability; other considerations, such as tribe, clan, region of origin, or degree of piety were not as important. In reality, the Prophet was never influenced by these ascriptive considerations in making high position appointments.⁴⁰

Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad, as head of State, appointed commanders for larger forces who were known for their leadership and military capabilities. Interestingly enough, the most striking figure among the Prophet's commanders was undoubtedly Zayd b. Harith, who not only commanded the maximum number of expeditions but also led the biggest ones.⁴¹ Other prominent commanders, listed in order of the number of their expeditions, were Usamah b. Zaid, 'Abd. al-Rahman b. 'Awf, Khalid b. Walid, Amar b. al-'As, 'Ali b. Abi Talib, and Alqamah b. Muhazziz. In the execution of their military duties the commanders were free to make decisions and act according to their knowledge and discretion. Notwithstanding, they had to abide by the Qur'an and Sunnah (the example and instructions of the Prophet) on all occasions and under all circumstances.⁴²

The military organization in the State of Madinah developed systematically. Traditionally, the pagan Arabs used the method of *al-karr wa al-farr* (literally, "attack and retreat"), but in the period just preceding Islam they adopted the formation of *ta'biyah* (mobilization) of the *ajam* (non-Arabs), a more appropriate method for their desperate struggle. The army's formation was called *al-khamis* because it was divided into five divisions: the *qalb* (center), the *maymanah* (right flank), the *maysarah* (left flank), the *muqaddamah* (the vanguard), and the *saqah* (rearguard).⁴³ In the early months of the Islamic State of Madinah, no attention was paid to military strategy, for there was no permanent army. All male adults of the Islamic

Ummah constituted the Islamic army. Moreover, since the Muslims had not yet experienced any serious challenge from an organized enemy force, they did not feel an urgency to organize their military system.

The Muslims of Madinah, however, soon faced an organized challenge from the Makkan forces at the battle of Badr in 624 C.E. At this time the infant Islamic State of Madinah began to organize its military tactics. By the time the battle of Uhud occurred, the Islamic army could sufficiently organize to counteract effectively the moves and tactics of its enemies.⁴⁴ According to one report, since the Makkans had placed Khalid ibn al-Walid on their left, the Prophet created two flanks in his army, presumably under two respective commanders. Though there is no specific mention of this, it appears that the *khamis* system was introduced fully at the battle of Uhud. During the Khaybar expedition, the *khamis* system was fully effective. Thereafter, the five flank formation system in the Muslim army was referred to, either explicitly or implicitly, in the course of all major expeditions, such as Umrah al Qaza, Mutah Fathi-i-Mecca, Hunyan, Awtas, Taif, and Tabuk.⁴⁵

Clearly, the Islamic State of Madinah, under the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad, had developed the *khamis* system of military formation. The establishment of a new social structure in Madinah entailed the organization of a military system which was distinct from civil administration. The military was always engaged in fighting with external forces that threatened the sovereignty of the State of Madinah. It never appeared to be a threat to the civilian leadership of the State during the time of the Prophet Muhammad.

With the demise of the Prophet, the Ummah was deprived of direct divine guidance through revelation, the Prophetic *ijtihad*, and his mature judgment. However, the Ummah had the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the institution of the *shura* (informal forum for deliberation on new problems). During the lifetime of the Prophet, the companions of the Prophet were trained in the methods of deducing rulings from the Qur'an and Sunnah,⁴⁶ and were quite familiar with the *shura* process and its decision-making procedures—*ijtihad* (effort, research) and *ijma'* (consensus).⁴⁷

After the death of the Prophet, the most urgent question confronting the Islamic community was who would be the Prophet's successor. With the intention of choosing a leader, the community fell back upon the institution of *shura* and met at Thaqifah, Bani Saadah. Three nominees stood out but no *ijma* could be reached. Eventually, the name of Abu Bakr was proposed,

since he was the most senior and closest companion to the Prophet, and he had been deputized by the Prophet to lead the prayers. Finally, his nomination was accepted by the people and a consensus was reached.

Immediately, a *bay'ah* by the elite took place followed by a general *bay'ah* the next day.⁴⁸ There were few like 'Ali who initially did not take *bay'ah*, but eventually they also did. Clearly, the institution of the *khalifah*, based on *ijtihad* made by the companions followed by *ijma'*, was a natural system of decision making in the political process of the early Islamic community. On his deathbed, Abu Bakr proposed the nomination of 'Umar as his successor but his nomination had to be confirmed formally by the *ijma'* of the companions followed by a general *bay'ah*. Before his death, 'Umar formed an electoral college consisting of six members who could elect a *khalifah* from among themselves. The members of the electoral college were 'Ali, 'Uthman, 'Abd al-Rahman, Talha, Zubair, and Sa'ad bin Abi Waqas. Finally, all but 'Ali and 'Uthman excluded themselves from consideration. In the competition between 'Ali and 'Uthman, the latter got an *ijma'* that led to their *bay'ah* to 'Uthman followed by a general *bay'ah*.⁴⁹

The murder of 'Uthman, however, resulted in a serious crisis of succession. At this point, 'Ali's name came to the forefront but there was no consensus. Those who did not like 'Ali, however, felt that if no *khalifah* was immediately elected, a state of anarchy could arise. Consequently, they decided to accept the nomination of 'Ali. Thus, a consensus emerged and 'Ali took the oath of office. The election of 'Ali settled the matter for the time being but gave rise to a new political conflict within the Islamic community that eventually led to the Battle of the Camel.⁵⁰

Thus, none of the chief executives assumed the office of *khalifah* by means of force or rebellion. Rather, all of them went through a process of consensus. After the death of 'Ali, however, the consensus process stopped. Mu'awiyah, governor of Syria during the time of 'Umar and 'Uthman, declared himself *khalifah* without formally being elected by the free choice of an *ahl al-shura* (council of leaders). This was a deviation. 'Ali had tried to dismiss Mu'awiyah from his post as governor, but he had already built-up support among the tribes in Syria. Naturally, a conflict arose between 'Ali and Mu'awiyah which prevented the process of *ijma'* in the matter of political decision making. During the turmoil that followed 'Ali was assassinated and Mu'awiyah became the self-declared *khalifah*. Eventually, Mu'awiyah appointed his son Yazid as his successor and employed all kinds of political strategies in order to secure allegiance from

the *shura* for Yazid during his life. When Yazid became the *khalifah* by force of his father, however, the Ummah refused to give their allegiance because he was not chosen by the *ijma'* of the *shura*, which led to a civil war culminating in the tragedy of Karbala.⁵¹ The victory of Yazid's forces put the last nail in the coffin of the *shura* (democratic) process of choosing the government in an Islamic polity.

In brief, the death of the Prophet resulted in a succession crisis that was resolved by the Ummah (community) according to their tradition and experience which conformed to the spirit of Islam. They followed a two-stage process in electing a successor: nomination and selection by the representatives of the Ummah, culminating in their *bay'ah*; and then confirmation by the public through general acclamation (*bay'ah*). The first four *khalifahs* were elected through this process. The Qur'anic principle of *shura* was the basis of the Islamic political order. With the assassination of 'Ali, however, the Umayyads came to power and the *khilafah* was transformed into a *mulk* (kingdom), a change from *siyasah diniyah* (politics based upon religion) to *siyasah 'aqliyah* (politics based on human reasoning) supported by *'asabiyah* (tribalism) in seizing power.⁵² Gradually, by the middle of the tenth century, due to political fragmentation and weakening of the caliphate, "army commanders began asserting their independence as rulers and subsequently became sultans exercising defacto rule over the emerging political entities."⁵³ Finally, in the mid-thirteenth century, the Mongols seized Baghdad, the Abbasid capital, which brought about the termination of the Abbasid caliphate and resulted in the emergence of Muslim sultanates. By the sixteenth century, three major Muslim sultanates emerged: the Ottomans in the Near East and Eastern Europe, the Safavids in Persia, and the Moguls in India.⁵⁴

The tremendous energy that Islam had generated within the Muslim community through political integration was, thus, consumed in the process of internal struggle for power. The *shura*, along with the process of *ijtihad*⁵⁵ and *ijma'*, which had been instrumental in bringing about the political integration of the early Islamic State, gradually degenerated and the system of rule was reduced to "oriental despotism." Islamic traditions clearly developed a system of civil administration distinct from military administration. The Umayyads felt the need for seeking legitimacy for their rule because they had deviated from the early political traditions of Islam and they never received the absolute legitimacy of the Islamic community since they came

to power through military means. The general masses had no allegiance to the Ummayyad dynasty.

From the above discussion some conclusions emerge: First, the Shari'ah enjoins the Ummah to render obedience to an imam who holds the office by virtue of the contract between himself and the community and by the due process of *bay'ah* between himself and the community at large. Second, the imam must be obeyed if he fulfills his mandate by enforcing the divine laws in the community and rendering justice to the people. Third, a *khilafah*, based on usurpation (*istila*), brute coercion (*taghallub*), and coup d'etat by military commanders, is not recognized by the Shari'ah as lawful. Fourth, the idea and institution of kingship or a military regime is not consistent with the basic political concepts of Islam. Fifth, the final power of decision-making lies with the community, which should resist tyrants and despots under all circumstances. Finally, Islam allows neither use of force nor interference by the army in civil administration nor an army take-over of power surreptitiously. Civil and military affairs are distinct and separate and there is no instance of interference by the army in the civilian administration of the early Islamic community. Civil and military powers are not integrated in Islam. Thus, it is not correct to assume that Muslims easily accept military rule because it runs counter to the spirit of Islam.

Explaining Coup D'etat in Some Contemporary Muslim Countries

Despite Islam's objection to army rule, in some contemporary Muslim countries the military has intervened into civilian politics. The army's intervention into civilian politics in some Muslim countries has nothing to do with Islam; witness the great number of non-Muslim countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America in which the military has intervened into their civilian politics. Obviously, the reasons for this development lie somewhere else rather than in religion. The real causes of military intervention into the civilian politics of these countries lie in their colonial roots, leading to an overdevelopment of the military, an erosion of the colonial bargaining strategy, and an undermining of the monetary interests of the military in the postcolonial period.

Overdevelopment of the Military

During colonial rule, the colonial government deliberately ignored the growth of political institutions because it posed a threat to its own existence. The only institution that the colonial government trusted was the army, whose development was vital for its own stability and order. Therefore, in every colony the armed forces were organized with specific qualities—a centralized command, hierarchy, discipline, esprit de corps, and a corresponding isolation from the civilian sector.⁵⁶ With their unbroken chain of command and unity of purpose, everything was structured to ensure centralized control and coordinated action. In contrast, the colonial government deliberately denied civilian leaders training in administration.

With respect to African countries, Liebenow writes, "In the postindependence era the pool of talent available both to run the State and continue the vital role of the political party in galvanizing society was dangerously shallow from the outset."⁵⁷ The political leaders were never trained or educated to manage a complex modern society, thus, experts in the fields of public administration, medicine, engineering, diplomacy, and the general areas of economics and finance were scarce. Furthermore, during the anticolonial struggle, the political leaders themselves gave low priority to economics and other fundamental matters. Serious planning regarding the nature of a postcolonial economy was long deferred. In addition, the emerging political elite overestimated their ability to organize the postcolonial State. The emerging political parties lacked organizational experience. In the postcolonial States, the weak party organizations were easily affected by factional strife, regional cliques, and ideological cleavages, thus severely limiting their effectiveness.⁵⁸

Consequently, in the postindependence period, politicians failed to meet the expectations of the people even though they had control of political power. The civilian governments became inept, ineffective, and corrupt. Using Finer's criteria of civil-military relations and Meheden's tabulation of military coups, Hopkins has shown how 111 countries in Southern Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America, Oceania and Southeast Asia, at different stages of development, became affected by coups and attempted coups between the years 1957 and 1964. According to his calculation, 75 percent of the countries having less than \$64 per capita product (in 1957) had military intervention; while only 6 percent of the countries having more than \$836 per capita product had military intervention. Of the 38 successful

coups he analyzed, 32 took place in countries with less than \$239 per capita product.⁵⁹

Due to economic deterioration, people become frustrated and inclined to fight the government, thus leading to disorder. Sometimes the level of violence and disorder causes the law-enforcing agencies to fail, thus compelling the civilian regime to call in the army to bring about stability.⁶⁰ Military deployment leads to disastrous consequences: first, civilian regimes become more and more dependent on the army; second, the military becomes aware of the civilian regime's weaknesses; third, the army's success in crisis management makes them increasingly confident; and finally, the military develops an appetite for power. There are many instances in which the military intervened to quell disorder and violence and then seized political power. The Syrian coup of 1949, the coup d'etat of 1965 in Indonesia, Pakistan's coup d'etats of 1958 and 1977, the Nigerian coup of 1966, and the Turkish coup of 1960.⁶¹

Erosion of Colonial Bargaining Strategy

Another important factor enabling army intervention into civilian politics in many Muslim countries is the power elite's inability to secure stability through bargaining with the diverse groups within the country. Officers of the colonial State were strictly neutral arbiters that managed the diversities and conflicts within society. Once power was transferred to the native leaders, it was apparent that many of them favored one ethnic group or another. Even those who had been part of the broad coalition to unseat the colonial administration, found themselves challenged by the party and the governing elite at the center.⁶² Politics took primacy over other legitimate types of activities and the party leaders increasingly turned against their fellow conspirators in the trade unions, the cooperative societies, student organizations, and ethnic or regional political associations. The competing organizations were effectively subordinated to the dominant party or to the post-colonial State itself, and few new competitors were encouraged to appear on the scene. Consequently, in many of these countries, the weakened condition of previous competitors to the political party leadership left only one other strong contestant in the field, the military, which was organized by the colonial ruler in such a way that it had no identity other than as soldiers.⁶³ Oliveira Salazar wrote, "For the soldier ... there exists neither the hamlet, nor the region, nor the province, nor the colony: there is for him nothing but the national territory. He has no family, no relatives, no friends, no neigh-

bors.”⁶⁴ Thus, when the governing party lost legitimacy, the military, as neutral arbiter, intervened in civilian politics. Welch and Smith comment, “Military intervention rarely occurs in countries marked by a high degree of legitimacy.”⁶⁵

Undermining Interests of the Army

In general, in many of the postcolonial States of the Third World, and in some Muslim States in particular, a tendency appeared among the civilian leaders to underestimate the amount of force that is required to maintain the colonial State. For example, the new governing elite in Bangladesh felt that it should direct its energies to and spend more money on economic development, expansion of educational and health facilities, and the other more positive tasks associated with nation building. Thus, the military was given lower priority than other categories in the national budget. Soldiers, however, were not accustomed to serving developmental roles in the colonial period and, therefore, were viewed by civilian authorities as exhausters of scarce resources. The military could not accept this change of fortune, for they had been enjoying lots of privileges under colonial rule.⁶⁶ When a budget crunch came, soldiers began to consider grabbing power. The complaint of the mutinous armies in Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya in 1964, and of the military leaders who toppled Nkrumah in Ghana in 1966, was that the civilian regimes had drastically undermined military performance by failing to provide the army with satisfactory equipment, housing, uniforms, and other materials.⁶⁷ Thus, the efforts to minimize the political role of the army in maintaining civil authority in the once European controlled colonial State were directly responsible for military intervention in civilian politics.

Apparently then, colonial rule is directly responsible for military take-overs in the postcolonial Third World, which includes some Muslim countries. During colonial rule, the type of administration that was imposed in these countries clearly isolated the army from society. The army was built as an “overdeveloped” institution that had a decided advantage and monopoly over law and order. In the postcolonial State it retained its advantage. The civilian institutions were, in stark contrast, very weak during postcolonial rule since they had not been given a chance to gain experience. Consequently, in postcolonial States, when the underdeveloped civilian institutions failed to manage the economy and administration, the overdeveloped military gained the upper hand. Thus, the rise of the military in

many Muslim countries is directly connected to a long period of colonial rule.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis of civil-military relations leads us to a few conclusions. The claim made by Western scholars that in Western political systems the military has not intervened in civilian politics due to religious and political traditions and that, on the contrary, in the Muslim world the military has intervened in civilian politics due to its religious and political roots is not correct. In the Western political system the military does interfere in civilian politics. The army may not directly take over civilian power, but from the foregoing analysis it appears that the military has a strong indirect influence in civilian decision making through formal and informal channels. Contemporary Western political systems cannot function in world affairs without consulting the army. That Christianity enables Western rulers to separate civilian politics from military interference is also not true. Protestantism separates religion from politics, but not civilian and military administration.

Furthermore, it is not true that military interference in civilian politics of some contemporary Muslim countries is due to their Islamic heritage. Clearly, as we have demonstrated, neither the Qur'an nor the political tradition during the first righteous caliphs allow the succession to power through force or coup d'état. Even Salem Qureshi himself admits that "theoretically, succession of rulers in Islam was supposed to be based on election, but institutionalized, orderly election almost never took root as dynastic caliphs took care to nominate their successors" patterned upon the establishment of the Umayyad and Abbasid empires. In this way the military came to the forefront of the State. But these turn of events are not rooted in the spirit of Islam. The use of force in the succession of rulers is, in fact, against the principles of Islam.

Thus, in some contemporary Muslim countries the coup d'état or military takeover of civilian power has nothing to do with the basic spirit of Islam. Rather, Western colonial rule laid the foundation for the subsequent takeover of civilian power in those countries. The West is primarily responsible for this postcolonial development in some Muslim countries. The existence of weak political institutions in the postcolonial State helped the army to come to power.

Notes:

1. Saleem Qureshi, "Military in the Polity of Islam, Religion as a Basis for Civil-Military Interaction," *International Political Science Review* 2, no. 3 (1981): 271.
2. *Ibid.*, 273.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Claude E. Welch, Jr., and Arthur K. Smith, *Military Role and Rule: Perspectives on Civil-Military Relations* (Boston: Duxbury Press, 1974), 44. See also, Sam C. Sarkesian, "Military Professionalism and Civil-Military Relations in the West," *International Political Science Review* 2, no. 3 (1981): 283.
5. George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (New York: Henry Molt & Co., 1951), 93. See the Bible, Luke 20:25.
6. Qureshi, "Military in the Polity of Islam ...," 273.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.* However, a critical estimate can be found in Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi's "Beyond the Post-Modern Mind," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 7, no. 2 (September 1990): 235-256.
9. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (New York: Vantage Books, n.d.), 31; and S.E. Finer, *The Man on Horse Back* (London: Penguin Books, 1975).
10. A.R. Luckham, "A Comparative Typology of Civil-Military Relations," *Government and Opposition* 1, no. 1 (Winter 1971): 11.
11. Kurt Lang, "The Military Push in a Developed Political Culture," in Jacques Van Doorn (ed.), *Armed Forces and Society* (The Hague: Mouton & Co. N.V. Publishers, 1968), 202.
12. Huntington, *The Soldier ...*, 33.
13. *Ibid.*, 81.
14. Luckham, "A Comparative Typology ...," 11.
15. *Ibid.* For the role of the French army, see John Stewart Ambler, *The French Army in Politics* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1966).
16. Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 196.
17. Luckham, "A Comparative Typology ...," 17-20.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Sarkesian, "Military Professionalism ...," 283.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.* See also, Veena Kukreja, *Civil-Military Relations in South Asia* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991), 21.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, 294.
25. Qureshi, "Military in the Polity of Islam ...," 278.
26. Manzooruddin Ahmed, *Islamic Political System in the Modern Age* (Karachi: Saad Publications, 1983), 204. See Qur'an 4:59.
27. *Ibid.*, 204.
28. See in the Qur'an (3:76; 5:1,13); (4:59); (61:14; 3:103-105; 49:13); (3:110; 5:2); (5:9-10); (67:20; 3:54; 2:191, 205); (17:36).
29. *Mishkah Sharif* (Urdu translation) subtitled *Mazahir-e-Haq*, translated by Maulana Qutb al-Din (Lahore: Shaikh Ghulam Ali & Sons, 1966), Tr.3676/2/1088.
30. *Ibid.* Tr. 3677/2/1088.
31. *Ibid.* Tr. 3679/2/1089.
32. Abdul Rashid Moten, *Political Science: An Islamic Perspective* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), 93.
33. Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History* (London: Huchinston University Library, 1964), 51-52.
34. Ahmed, *Islamic Political System...*, 184.

35. Chirag Ali, *The Proposed Political, Legal and Social Reform under Muslim Rule* (Bombay: 1983), 7.
36. Manzooruddin Ahmed, *Pakistan, The Emerging Islamic State* (Karachi: Allies Book Corporation, 1966), 17.
37. *Ibid.*, 20–21.
38. Muhammad Yasin Mazhar Siddiqui, *The Organization of Government under the Holy Prophet* (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1988), 158.
39. *Ibid.*, 164.
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*
44. AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman, *The Islamic Theory of International Relations: New Directions for Islamic Methodology and Thought* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1997), 93.
45. Siddiqui, *The Organization of Government ...*, 164.
46. Not only for political purposes could the laws be deduced from the Qur'an and Sunnah but also for commercial purposes. For this see Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "Islamic Commercial Law: An Analysis of Options," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 17–38.
47. Syed Serajul Islam, "The Western and Islamic Approaches to the State," *Muslim Education Quarterly* 14, no. 14 (Summer 1997): 42–54.
48. Louay M. Safi, "Islamic Law and Society," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 7, no. 2 (September 1990): 177–191.
49. For details, see Majid Ali Khan, *The Pious Caliphs* (London: Diwan Press, n.d.); and Abdul A'la Mawdudi, *The Islamic Law and Constitution*, trans. and ed. Khursid Ahmad (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1967).
50. Ahmed, *The Islamic Political System...* 148.
51. *Ibid.*
52. Moten, *Political Science ...*, 93.
53. *Ibid.*
54. John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 25.
55. Ijtihad plays a role in all aspects of life. For its role in capital markets, see Taha Jabir al-'Alwani, "The Role of Islamic Ijtihad in the Regulation and Correction of Capital Markets," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 14, no.3 (Fall 1997): 39–66. For the role of ijma in politics, see AbdulHamid A. Abusulayman, *Crisis in the Muslim Mind* (Herndon, VA: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1997).
56. Edward Sheils, "The Military in the Political Development of New States," in J.J. Johnson (ed.), *The Role of Military in Underdeveloped Countries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 24.
57. J. Gus Liebenow, *African Politics: Crisis and Challenges* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 240.
58. S. Decalo, *Coups and Army Rule in Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 17–22. See also, A.R. Zolberg, "Military Intervention in the New States of Tropical Africa," in *The Military and Modernization*, ed. Henry Bienen (Chicago: Alberton Aldrine, 1970), 84–85.
59. K. Hopkins, "Civil-Military Relations in Developing Countries," *British Journal of Sociology* 17, no. 2 (June 1966): 175.
60. S.E. Finer, *The Man on Horse Back* (London: Penguin Books, 1975), 5; and, Gavin Kennedy, *The Military in the Third World* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1974), 337–344.
61. Hasan Askari Rizvi, *The Military and Politics in Pakistan* (Lahore: Progressive Publishers, 1976); Hamza Alavi, "The Army and Bureaucracy in Pakistan," *International Socialist Journal* 3, no. 4 (March-April 1966): 149–81; and Manfred Halpern,

"Middle Eastern Armies and the New Middle Class," in J.J. Johnson (ed.), *The Role of Military in Underdeveloped Countries*.

62. An interesting example of this is the conflict between West Pakistan and East Pakistan which led to civil-war in 1971, resulting in the emergence of an independent Bangladesh. For details, see Syed Serajul Islam, *Bangladesh: State and Economic Strategy* (Dhaka: University Press, 1988); Tariq Ali, *Pakistan: Military Rule or People's Power?* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970); and Hamza Alavi, "The State in Post-Colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh," *New Left Review* 74 (July-August 1972): 59-81.

63. Morris Janowitz, *The Military in the Political Development of New Nations* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1964), 32.

64. Finer, *The Man on Horseback ...*, 10.

65. Welch and Smith, *Military Role and Rule ...*, 29. Also see C.E. Welch, *Soldier and State in Africa* (Evanston: North Western University Press, 1970).

66. William R. Thompson, *The Grievances of the Military Coup-Makers* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1973): 12-26; Edward Feit, "Military Coups and Political Development," *World Politics* 20, no. 2 (January 1968): 158.

67. Zolberg, "Military Intervention ...,"

