

THE MUSLIM

COMMENTARY

THE INK OF THE SCHOLAR IS MORE PRECIOUS THAN THE BLOOD OF THE MARTYR

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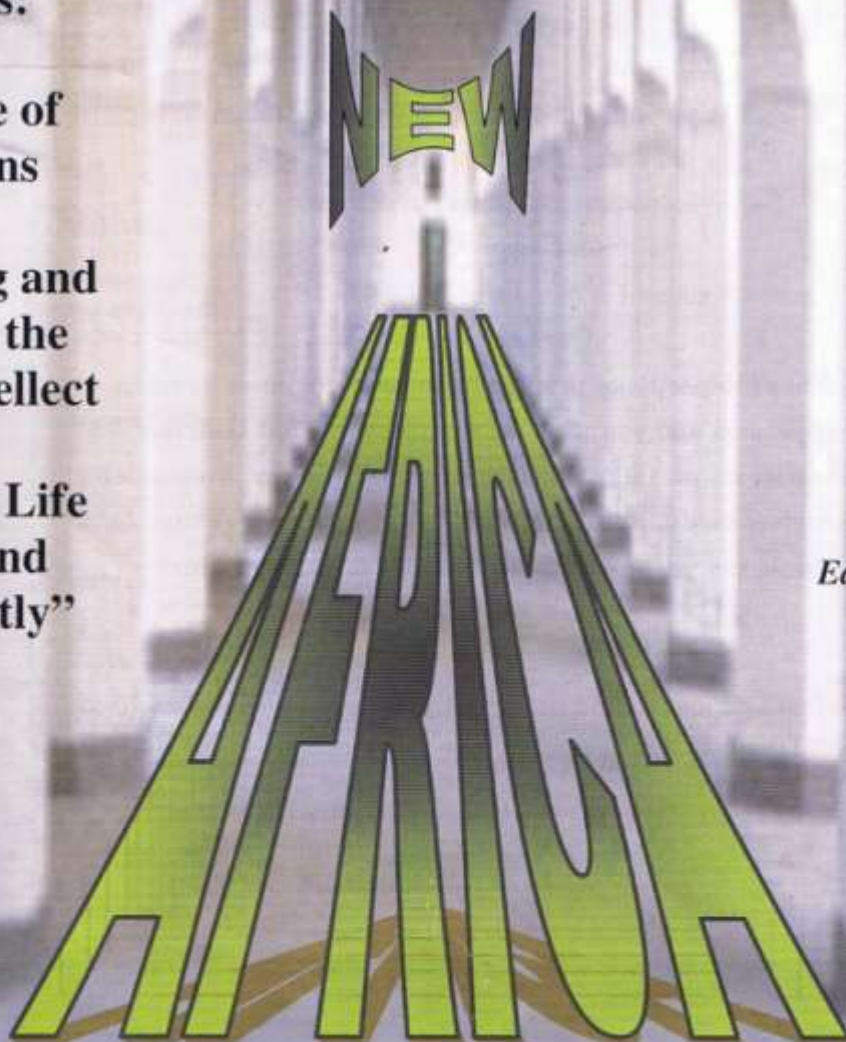
**“To Have Life
Better and
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Respecting and Trusting the Group Intellect

Essential Foundations in Islamic And American Democracy



by Hajji Mukhtar Muhammad

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How will Muslims play a greater role in shaping the future of America?

The answer is in the same way that others have in the past based on our society's respect and trust in its group intellect as given is such documents as our Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, the

Afghanistan: A Country Torn Between War And Peace

Pledge of Allegiance, and our Constitution. What is this concept of a group intellect I refer to and why is it important?

In our personal lives, we use 3 sources of authority to manage our affairs: The Qur'an, the Life Example of our Prophet (SAW) and our intellect (Fiqh, Ijmah-ul Ummah, Shuraiyat, Mushwara, Ilm ul Kalam, ijtiha). In Al-Islam, human intellect is the third source for decision-making, which we use to understand and apply the first 2 sources. And G-d has according to our Prophet, given man this intellect as a gift. From Al-Hadith: G-d has not created anything better than reason, or anything more perfect or more beautiful than reason. The benefits that G-d gives are on its account and understanding is by it; and G-d's displeasure is caused by it. And by it are rewards and punishments. Verily a man has performed the pillars and all good deeds; but he will not be rewarded

but in proportion to the sense he employs."

And we all know G-d says to us many times to us in Sura Ar Rahman: "And which of the favors of your lord will ye deny?". It is important then for leadership not to deny a gift of G-d and that is the right of the individual and the people to exercise their intellect...to participate in the problem solving. And G-d trusts Man. He believes in man, His khalifah. G-d informs us in Al-Shams:

"By the Soul, and the proportion and order given to it, and its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right;-"

When we make decisions as a



Kabul - Capital of Afghanistan



Historic Minaret in Afghanistan

group, we use the same 3 sources (2 remain constant). the third changes due to composition of the intellect. The affairs of the state or the community no longer rest solely upon my opinion, but rather with the consensus of the group opinion. A political structure is not given in Al-Qur'an because the political structure evolves through the group intellect. G-d commands us to use the process of consultation to establish the politic that is equitable and practical.

Now how did America's political structure and emphasis on Democracy develop?

Well it grew first out of their (America's founders) experience with an oppressive Church that stifled intellectual development and

debate; promoted class differences, and denied general education for the masses. However, dissatisfaction (alone) while serving as a motivator cannot suffice as a blueprint for changing one's circumstances and charting a course for progress.

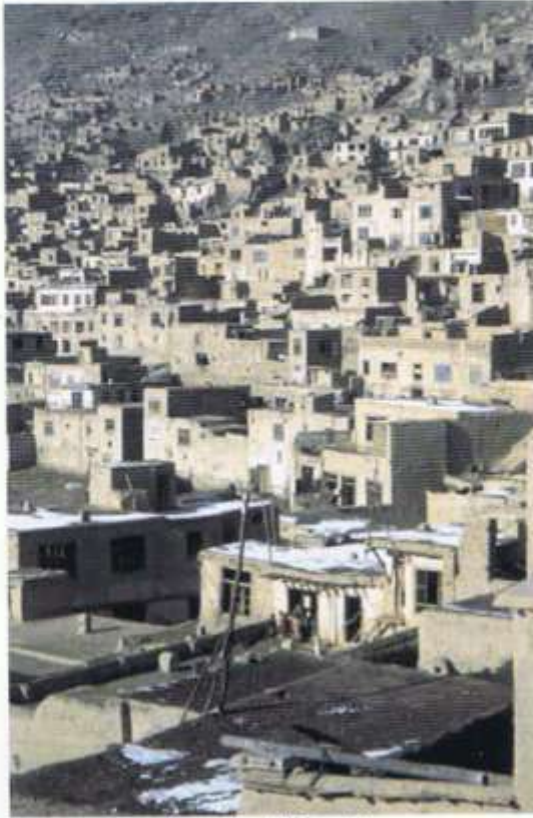
Many of my uninformed countrymen would say the structure and emphasis are based (exclusively) on Judeo-Christian models or principles, but more properly and by the evidence, they were influenced by the global group intellect which includes the known history of man, society and government including the history of Islam and the Last

Prophet.

Islam and Muslim countries were understood by the early American leaders from the point of view of the, "Other." Some Founding Fathers made serious efforts to educate themselves about Islam and its civilizations. Many of the Founding Fathers were not as uninformed about Islam as modern America presumes, even today. Indeed, some founders made a special effort to read about Islam and related ancient civilizations. Thomas Jefferson's library contained at least one copy of the Qur'an and was rich with books about ancient civilizations (Islamic and otherwise). Jefferson appeared to consider his knowledge of these matters important for the development of the American model of po-

litical governance; In that approach, he was not alone. Madison, for example, read about ancient confederacies before formulating his own proposal for a federal system in the United States.

America was founded only about 228 years ago. Thus the leaders fashioning this new government had the benefit of global history from both civilized and uncivilized man. The histories of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia and China were written. We had the history of power and authority exercised by kings, tsars and queens, shahs, sheikhs, sultans, khans and rajahs, conquistadors, popes, generals, emperors and governors. Empires and dynasties from the Ming to the Ottoman had already come and gone. The Renaissance and Crusades had already occurred. Rome and Greece had already fallen, and the last of the great Abrahamic Traditions and its Prophet had already changed the world. All along, man's global intellect and experience were evolving into a heightened capability for fair and effective governance. The West had the history of granting Women rights and including them in the group intellect and making them spiritually and intellectually equal under Islam. Islam's not mere tolerance, but indeed valuation of intellectual pursuit and appreciation for the faith of others became a hallmark for all societies to emulate. We already had the history of how Mohammed sounded the death knell to slavery, racism and elitism as his administration and those of the Sahaba reflected the diversity of nationalities and varying levels of socio-economics that were further underscored by his proclamation that there is no superiority of one



Town in Afghanistan

race over another. Islam gave us a spirit for studying the material world and preserving the fruits of man's global intellect and sharing it equitably through establishment of public education. That spirit caused the continual expansion of the individual and group intellect in its ability to read Qur'an and decipher the material world. The triumph of Muslim Spain 700-1492, before Spanish Catholics expelled Jews and Muslims, was part of the global historical record. At Cordoba Spain and Mali and Timbuktu, the world had already witnessed interfaith cooperation and government wherein there was freedom of religion. Ironically, while the Crusades were being waged, Christian scholars were studying the vast holdings of the great Cordova libraries-

translations and works that canonized Western tradition. In the West, scientists know of Averroes (Ibn Rushd) and Avicenna (Ibn Sina) and Maimonides (Moses Ibn Maymun) all of this period who believed Reason need not be in conflict with Revelation. The Islamic contribution to the Western Renaissance is part of the historical record.

There is strong evidence that the America's Founding Fathers were familiar with and directly influenced by Islam, the Qur'an and Mohammed! And that they were inspired to create a great vision for the future, that they themselves were incapable of living up to.

And that's okay. Because, "Man plans and G-d plans, and G-d is the Best of Planners." So the West and the Founding Fathers knew Islam and they also knew the oppressive Church at that time that stifled individual and group intellect.

It is known also that Muslim slaves many of whom were literate and assigned to house duties, worked in the homes of the aristocracy. Some of the Founding Fathers had meaningful contact with their Muslim subjects; this not idle speculation/ Labor assignments in the house, as opposed to those in the field, would have allowed Muslim slaves to have increased contact with their masters.

And there are other connections in the history of America that have

paved the way for Islam to take its rightful place as a powerful force for good in the lives of the people:

1. *Among the slaves that came to America's shores were many Muslims who helped build this country with free labor and with their lives.*
2. *Among Spain's Christopher Columbus' crew were Muslims. Columbus was credited with discovering America.*
3. *As Muslims, we have a strong connection with this democratic ethos. The first country to recognize the United States Independence was a Muslim Country. The first U.S. President, George Washington, wrote directly to Emperor Muhammad III of Morocco in the "Treaty of Peace and Friendship signed in 1787. Renewed in 1836, it remains the longest unbroken treaty in U.S. history.*
4. *Muslims from Eastern Europe and China, and other countries immigrated to this country in the 19th and 20th century and now their offspring are here and contributing as citizens.*

All praises due to Allah.

Today:

1. *The U.S. Senate and House and other State legislatures have opened their sessions with Al-Fatihah.*
2. *The U.S. Postal Service issued the Commemorative Eid Stamp Honoring our holy days of Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha.*
3. *Muslims are entering political offices of leadership in greater numbers.*

“And follow (or take) the best thereof”

The Qur'an establishes the need for fard Kifayah in the selection of leadership and in mutual consultation in the affairs of the people or state. Democracy is essentially respect for the group opinion, by which we manage our Community affairs.

Regarding the conduct of group affairs, Allah (SWT) says in Sura Ash Shura: “Whatever ye are given (here) is (but) a convenience of this Life: but that which is with Allah is better and more lasting: (it is) for those who believe and put their trust in their Lord; Those who hearken to their Lord and establish regular prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual Consultation.”

This idea of integrating the group intellect into the decision making process is a hallmark of American democracy, but is by no means unique to America. Long before America, the Qur'an and the Example of our Prophet laid the foundation for trust in the group intellect. Once a society understands how critical respecting and trusting the group intellect are to progress, the issues of discrimination dissipate in the face of moral decency, common sense and practicality.

“Have We not made the earth (as a place to draw together)”

What are the implications today for integrating the group intellect in the modern society? And what are the implications for leaders seeking to solve problems? The answer lies in something the great physicist Albert Einstein said: “The significant problems we face cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them.”



Afghanistan, a war torn country

World Historian J. M. Roberts published a work called *The Twentieth Century, The History of the World 1901 to The Present* (published in 2001) and he gives us something else to consider. He puts forth three major global events or mega events or trends that shaped all others for the 20th century and hence helped define the twentieth century and the beginning of the 21st century (of the Christian era). These events had a wider impact affecting more human beings than any other happenings and include:

1. *Population growth. In 1901, global population was an estimated 1.6 billion persons. Today we are approximately 6 billion.*
2. *Decentralization and shifting of world power away from Europe and within Europe a shift away from autocratic monarchies to constitutional democracies.*
3. *The changing role of women and their empowerment worldwide which has*

global implications for reshaping, intellectual, economic and political power.

Indeed all the events mentioned fundamentally change the capacity, scope of contribution and character of the global intellect. Women make up more than half the world's population and it will become exceedingly difficult for leadership to deny what equates to half of the group intellect, half of the creative capacity and half of the problem solving capability, without negative consequences for progress.

“Then which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?”

Again, all three of these mega events fundamentally alter the Global group intellect and mandates a corresponding respect and urgent need for participative responsibility in decision-making. Such views were echoed recently by U. N. Secretary General Kofi Annan when he stated “that the structures, methods and processes for global decisions



Prisoners of war being transported



The Hustle and Bustle in the Market Place in Kabul.

must be fundamentally reviewed in light of the new world order." To do so, governments, societies and leaders must look at the issues of respect for the group intellect.

Despite the emphasis in my comments today on respect for the group intellect, there are some particular dangers that can upset the balance of the political contract. The political contract in Islam is structured to establish a fair just order designed by the group intellect, respecting the common human dignity of all its citizens. The system of government in Al-Islam is designed to bring the greatest good to the greatest number using the highest principles established in the Qur'an and the Life Example of the Prophet.

The same spirit of freedom, justice and equality found in the documents that established this democracy, are also found in the Qur'an and Mohammed's (SAW) example...the spirit of Islam is present. For example, you will find these

words in the U.S. Declaration of Independence, which was a proclamation first to be free from oppression and to have among the rights of its citizens religious freedom: "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. - That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from consent of the governed." When an American citizen recites the pledge of allegiance, he says "One nation under G-d indivisible with liberty and justice for all."...Even the orders of the words contain the Islamic spirit of Tauheed (Oneness of G-d).

In Islam, government is the political contract among the individual, the society, and the leadership all of which are duty bound to Allah (SWT).

"We have indeed created man in the best of molds."

The specific dangers that upset the balance of the political contract include: the governmental denial of the G-d given rights and freedoms of the individual and group intellect; the imposition of individual rights over societal rights to the point of endangering the nation; and the most egregious is seeking removal of G-d from the political contract wherein "man thinks himself self-sufficient." The last two dangers may well represent our nation's greatest struggles in this century. Yet every modern nation must constantly examine its political structure to avoid becoming unbalanced.

Nations must learn from one another. One of the great problems we are facing now as an American society is the lack of a standard in adopting public policy. A major part of the debate is the misinterpretation of the doctrine of separation of Church and State. The terminology is misleading. It is this doctrine that has perhaps caused the greatest mistrust by Muslims of American democracy. But it is clear from examination of many documents that the Founding Fathers never meant separation of G-d from public policy. The terminology of "Separation of Church and State," was perhaps more acceptable at a time when the persons who represented the composition of the church essentially made up the composition of the state. Now the composition of the church and state has markedly changed. Our country's diversity challenges us as a society to respect the majority, protect the minority and obey G-d. No country as yet has perfected this balance.

... the more G-d is in the life of the person, the more G-d is in the group intellect.

I believe if that misconception (deliberate separation of G-d from public policy by the Founding Fathers) alone was clarified, it would do much to bridge the gap of misunderstanding abroad and curtail what I perceive as a growing trend of disagreement inside our country. Again, based on their experience and review of history, the Founders were seeking to protect the new world from institutional or state religious repression and oppression...in other words, church with a capital "C."

Now, I want to mention just briefly America's international political posture. With respect to America's global relationship and international policies, it might help us to remember that a country is not merely a collection or mass of people, but that they are individuals, related in one way or another. We (nations) all have our families. If we are not related directly through Muhammad the Prophet as Muslims, then we are related as People of the book under our father Abraham (AS). And if not through Abraham, then we are related through our father Adam and Mother Hawa (AS). And our Prophet said, a Muslim is not truly a Believer until he wants for his brother what he wants for himself. When we (the world's nations or communities) have

disagreements internationally, during those trying periods, we should not hold an entire national populace in contempt.

Muslims are not in the majority in America. We are a minority here. Public policy is currently being shaped more by those who say they are of the Christian faith. That is not a problem for us. What is becoming a problem however for us all (and what you and the rest of the world are witnesses to) is increasingly hostile legislation that seeks to balance minority secularist views at the expense of established proven standards of conduct found in Revelation. In fact it appears that such a problem is beginning to have a global effect. For our part as citizens in this country though, the Muslim American Dream is deeply rooted in the American Dream. No individual is perfect, therefore no body of indi-

viduals are perfect. That we have an obligation to contribute, to help shape the future of this country is not just based on the contributions of Islam and Muslims in the historical record of the United States of America, but because G-d tells us in Sura Ali-Imran: "Ye are the best of peopleš evolved for mankind enjoining what is right forbidding what is wrong and believing in Allah."...and that applies to all Muslims wherever they may live today.

In conclusion, the more G-d is in the life of the person, the more G-d is in the group intellect. America is not inherently antithetical to Al-Islam. All of us need prayers around the world that the people and the leaders will keep faith in G-d and in His human being, respect the worth of the individual and respect the group intellect and thus properly maintain the political contract. Diversity, pluralism, and tolerance are natural universal characteristics sought by Islam and Insha-Allah they will be practically reflected through our political processes in America, Afghanistan and throughout the world. We ask our Lord to bless our countries and our leaders and the people to serve the best aspirations of man...to follow the best thereof. As-Salaam-Alaikum.



Another view of a shattered city.

"When we (the world's nations or communities) have disagreements internationally, during those trying periods, we should not hold an entire national populace in contempt."