

**Influence of Religions on Strategic Decision Making**

**Contemplations in Present Time**

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**Lecture at Faculty of National Defense on 19 Dhu Al-Hijjah 1434 AH  
corresponding to 24 October 2013 AD**

**Given by**

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**In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful**

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Thank Almighty Allah for blessings, grace and generosity. May prayers and blessings be upon humanitarian guide and the best person; Mohammed bin

Abdullah Allah; may prayers and blessings be upon him, his family and companions.

It gives me pleasure at the outset of our meeting, to thank you for organizing this lecture, and inviting me to speak to you under the dome of the important Omani edifice. Here, we examine major strategies in security and defense, according to vision derived from wise unique commander whose main target is building Oman in the present and future, with creating the foundations of entrepreneurship and empowerment for Oman and its people. We pray to Almighty Allah to bless His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said with the best care and attention and to provide him with health, wellness and happy life.

Dear audience:

Influence of religion on strategic decision for states has three meanings and consequences:

**First:** position of religion in the states, its regulations, and its world vision. Religion is the basic element not only in forming state, but also in strategic ranges that influence determining State's interests, security, alliances or litigants. Austrian–Hungarian Empire, for example, has regarded itself as the guardian of Catholicism. Russian Empire was associated with Orthodoxy for Russian people and at the same time with Slavic element that is widespread in it and in its near surroundings. Religion has played a prominent role in forming America, and has become an essential part of its European Christian affiliation, even in the time of national state. What is true for the West at secularism time(s), is also true for the Islamic world in succession time and afterwards in the emergence of the national state.

Ottoman state considered itself (even in its weak times) responsible for "house of Islam". Indian Muslims who were never subjected to the control of Ottomans were looking for foster solidarity and mutual victory in the British colonial time. The same applies upon Central Asians and Caucasus even after the departure of Ottomans from there, and the submission of these vast regions to Russian and Austrian empires. There is no doubt that establishing national state, and then the international system after the First World War has changed the priority consequences. However, these two (national and international) tracks did not change much feelings and long-term interests. Emotions are linked to religious affiliation and perceived interests.

**Second meaning:** is the national meaning or the quality of religion's association to nationalism. This is apparent to small and medium sized nations, as previously mentioned regarding Slavs and their association with Orthodoxy, especially Serbs. Croats were associated in their nationalism with Catholicism, and Armenians were attached to Orthodoxy in their special form. We should not forget that the model for this regular, widespread and heterogeneous association in Pakistani situation, for example. Pakistan was separated from India trying to regard Islam as a kind of national collective religion. Afterwards, Bengal struggled with Punjab where ethnic considerations moved forward and the country was separated into two parts as known. The same applies on Iran even during time of Shah who had strong national trend, and considered himself responsible for the whole sense of Shiism. At the time of Islamic revolution, Shiism of Jaafari doctrine became as a national religion in Iran. Afterwards, Iran regarded itself responsible for the whole Shiism in apparent mixture

between State's national interests, and public strategies utilized towards Shiites outside Iran in a vision crossing borders, countries, regional and international arrangements.

**Third meaning:** effects of religion upon state, its strategies and its stability in the revival time; present time. Major and minor religions, particularly Protestantism, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism, witnessed strong revival movements, whether in life style, influencing internal politics and governance systems, or relations with other religions and nations.

Revival tendency that is currently widespread in the private and public lives focuses on the special identity, opposing or antagonizing other identities with religious depth. It is a new phenomenon in international relations due to its strong effects on stability and strategic decision. This new phenomenon does not mean, in most cases, contradicting the concerned above mentioned regarding the effects of cosmic religion. A kind of harmony between other elements and meanings is achieved, where one element dominates the other for a period of time. I would like to affirm that these revival rebellious identities do not always repel, but may converge and cooperate internationally to achieve a certain goal. However, they turn later to their prevailing nature of adversary and conflict. In order to avoid enumerating and theorizing, we mention an outstanding example of fundamentalisms' convergence, cooperation and re-conflict. At the beginning of eighties of the last century; Catholicism and Protestant converged with Islam revivals, in the midst of US-led campaign against the former Soviet Union, under her former Pope John Paul's slogan: Faith and Freedom. Campaign has already been able to, within no more than one

decade, to demolish Soviet Union and to distract its system formed after Second World War.

How religion influenced strategic decision in this example? Strategic decision to demolish Soviet Union and its system was already taken by US President Ronald Reagan. But who is President Reagan, and how he takes office? Neo-Evangelisms brought him to US President. They were Evangelisms that attack and conquest. It was the first time in American history when USA interfered in the internal and external policies of the world greatest country. President Reagan was struggling with the other greatest country, which he called evil empire. He used Torah expressions like battle of Armageddon which is according to Old Testament are signs of the Day of Judgment, and times of strife and epics according to Islamic traditions. It was Pope John Paul; who had Polish origin, opened a gap in the wall of Iron Curtain when supporting the insurgency of Labor Solidarity Union at Danzig, Poland, so as to support Faith and Freedom. Muslim revivals whether Afghans, Arabs, and others have competed to Afghanistan for jihad to liberate it from the communist government, to which the Soviets came for support. President Reagan was the first who called them (Mujahedeen; strugglers) as per Qur'an Arabic term, upon receiving their representatives at White House in 1983. The trend was new in terms of idea, but was inspired by models of old and intermediate times, and most importantly responded to Islamic Revival Movement. Islamists did not oppose being led by USA from behind Pakistani government. Moreover, mechanisms are traditional or old as they targeted supporting Muslims whose country was occupied by Russians. In case of occupation, jihad is a must to restore the country and its identity, or it is no longer Islamic

country! President Reagan has called that war as Crusades which was similarly called by President Bush the son on his war against Iraq in 2003.

President Bush the son is known to be evangelical and belongs to a sect of re-born as being called by movement's members themselves.

First question: How religion influences the strategic decision. Second question: Who used the other, America or fundamentalists? Through considering purposes and objectives, none of them was a loser. Americans wanted to conquer Soviet Union. Thus, they used their nation, Catholic and Islamic entities. Catholic and Islamic entities were able to confront their religious and geostrategic rival through the means supplied by USA. Thus, we have witnessed two things. First when religions turned to be power of influence on the strategic decision. Second that this power (s) may be locally and globally operated in case of common interests, and may diverge out of policies, trends and programs in case of believing in the ownership of these tools. What happened in the eighties of the last century is a proof of harmony capabilities between those religious agendas and the owner of political decision-making. However, the discord in the nineties and beyond is evidence of the enormous potential of new religious revival movements in spreading unrest, and creating problems to face strategic decision on one hand, and trying to create alternatives for the existing systems and their sponsors and the global system on the other hand.

We have observed religious Christian and Islamic revival movements' influence on strategic decision from response and harmony sites. Let us consider the conflict and collision of such revival movements. In USA, and after a specific truce between domestic political parties after the victory in

"Desert Storm" in Iraq, continued for six or seven years in Clinton's era (1992-1999), the new evangelisms returned to attack, through keeping tight link between their moral-religious agenda on one hand, and internal and external policies of US administration on the other hand. They are well-prepared for elections in House of Representatives, Senate, states' rulers and presidents to support personalities that oppose abortion, gay marriage and contraceptives, and struggle against terrorism, apostate countries and Israel threats, in foreign policy. In that nineties decade, revival movements of other religions witnessed developments such as papal alliance which is no longer supporting US strategy after American reluctance for the participation of others in domination and market's control. Afghanistan strugglers became international jihadists and anti-Muslim revival tendencies appeared not only at Protestant evangelisms, but also at Hindus and Buddhists. In the mid-nineties, literature spread regarding these two phenomena: return of religion, and conflict of civilizations. Thinkers and strategists considered the return of religion is general phenomenon including other communities, and affecting policies of states. Some like (Bernard Lewis, Fukuyama, and Huntington) considered the return of Islam in particular produces conflict of civilizations. This is as Islam, according to Huntington, owns bloody borders or boundaries. This means having tendency for expansion and engagement with others. On attacks of 11 September 2001, President Bush the son; the neo-evangelical candidate has reached the presidency. The well-known wars and invasions, in which, we live or not, still have repercussions.

In this regard, Arabs and Muslim critics quickly ask: Were Sept. 11 attacks really a preliminary initiative or reaction? However, Western media

professionals and strategists rush to the conclusion that this is the nature of Islam and believed in Huntington and his supporters! However, the expressions of mutual attacks are not suitable to be basis for understanding and thus for accord. Therefore we should make some specific observations for understanding. The first of these observations: that revival movements and fundamentalism in the last three decades, which influenced the strategic decision; this is incontestable matter. But how do they influence? Evangelisms have influenced through states and changing their policies. Accordingly, when the popularity of revival trends decreased in public opinion and especially young people, their internal opponents could, through the elections, push them away from decision-making environments, and change of the policies caused by them. Just as President Bush the son made desperate efforts to push USA into war with variety of pretexts; Obama; who is non-evangelic; has been desperately striving for five years to get away from foreign conflicts. Thus, Catholic Pope is the only one complaining the neo-evangelisms, where evangelicals ravished him the quarter of Latin America's Catholics in three decades. Of course, no one is talking about aggressive nature of Protestantism, for example, as the apparent shrinkage of their political and strategic implications distracts attention from the previous change it caused in the religious mentality throughout the world. Islamic revival movements started originally by Sunnis and Shiites, outside and opposing the state's system. Violence advancement of Shiites exploded opposing other religious, social or political advancements in the seventies, as Shiite religious establishment apprehended the rich popular movement against Shah, and established complex religious / political system to control the revival movement and leaders inside and outside of Iran. As soon as Sunni revivals took the office



in a state considered in the seventies, jihadist groups exploded in Egypt, and later in Afghanistan in the eighties by American assistance. Afterwards, jihadist groups intensified after the second Gulf War on Iraq, so violence was spread in other parts. Thus, Islam became a global problem. Religious revival movements in monotheistic religions, in particular, are general and comprehensive. However, it became a global problem in case of Arabs and Muslims, not due to the different nature of Islam; but as the political and religious institutions on one hand, and international policies on the other hand that tried to return it to discipline by force. Accordingly, it turned to be vast pure violence. Certainly, it was unable to achieve victory in any place not only due to the violent confrontation; but also as people in Islamic social environments do not desire it or accept it as a pattern for life and action. However, it exhausted everyone, and spread chaos in environments whose state structure was weak. I could see that violent aspects of the revival movement will disappear through change of international policies and the fall of military regimes that favor security solutions. However, progress of political Islam after the outbreak of movements for change presents a challenge that we have to face in the religious culture of communities, just as in the nation-building there are modalities of participation in its institutions and facilities.

Thus, religion influences strategic decision or strategic vision of states and societies, as it essentially contributes to create world vision for the people embracing this religion. However, religion is not alone practically, but is paired with nationalities, ethnics, elites and minorities. Thus, it equals, overcomes or shrinks without getting its effect completely disappearing. It does not create a persistent problem in normal situations, due to its ability to

express its power and influence in forms that fit with the general situation in the nation or the state. However, the second half of the twentieth century witnessed a revival of strong religious revivalism in monotheistic religions at first and in Asian religions finally. Difference between monotheistic and Asian revivalisms is that Asian and African public is still very attached to national and ethnic aspects (i.e. dual identity). However, monotheistic revival tends to independence and globalism. Additionally, monotheistic revivalism tends to regard itself as the sole representative of absolute truth. Accordingly, some observers regard the so-called of religion's return as considering phenomena of eruption in Asian and African environments non-revival, but kind of ethnic conflicts. Some Buddhists in Myanmar (Burma) persecuted the minority Rohingya people not due to being Muslim but odd. In Mali's recent financial turmoil (Muslim people is the vast majority), a campaign was escalated against Arabs excluding Tuareg (Tawarek). However, turmoil was raised by violent extremists on both sides of Arabs and Tuareg. This is as Mali people consider Tuareg as residents of region unlike Arabs. Accordingly, these observations reflect that violent and non-violent revival movements are new phenomenon of some kind in other communities and states. If we consider that violent explosion of Islamic revival is due to intensity of exposure to internal and external pressures; the evangelical extremism among wide environments in USA may not be claimed for rebelling against marginalization or persecution.

Let us go back to our lecture's main subject: How did these communities face these revival movements? At some powerful and ancient nation communities, apprehension was achieved from within institutions and by usual mechanisms. In countries with weak communities; even if revival

movements were mixed with ethnics and nationalities; they turned to intractable problems, as there are no mechanisms that may flexibly respond and apprehend. Additionally, some revival movements have extremist demands and practices so that the appropriate response is impossible. Thus, the matter turns to be violence and counter-violence. It must be said here that this is the case with some of phenomena, and manifestations of extremism and violence in Islamic societies.

Thus, we have two problems in time revival of religions, including Islamic revivalism. First problem is how to deal with the fundamentalist trends in our countries and surroundings so as to preserve the centrist nature of religion, its tranquility, stability of societies and the strength of nations. Second problem is how to deal with other religions and international policies in revivalism time here and there.

In first problem, researcher and observer may tell story in the last forty years of conflict between extremist groups and the authorities in different parts of Arab and Islamic worlds. These original movements have two attitudes: violent attitude called jihadist, struggling inside and abroad under the slogan and obligation of jihad in Islamic societies where Islam is only a name; as per the viewpoint of its supporters. The other attitude is regulatory, partisan and secretive, and which relied for long time on the conversion of concepts, leading to establishment of a theocracy ruled by party whose program is applying Sharia provisions to regain legitimacy lost in that way. It is known that violent jihadist inside Arab countries began at an early time in the seventies of the last century, and turned - as above mentioned - to a global problem after Afghan war in the eighties. Its violence was raised against other Muslims, Americans and Europeans. Its

absurd thesis means shedding blood and destabilizing security in communities and countries. Big rush to launch a global war on terrorism has been exacerbated before and after September 11. This is as terrorism perished in various countries of the world, especially Arab countries, tens of thousands of all parties; most of them are civilians who suddenly died in their homes, work or parks. What to do after lessons learned during more three decades of violence whose larger burden was borne by Arabs and Muslims? As previously mentioned, the world launched a relentless war on al-Qaeda and its branches, and it remains the same for more than a decade. Violence of the youth decreased due to strikes, and their isolation in their communities and among their people. But phenomenon is not over, despite "war of ideas" waged by Americans and waged on behalf of moderate Islam and moderate Arabs and Muslims. Arabs and other Muslims were inflicted damage through three ways: Abuse reputation of Islam and Muslims, bringing aggression from near and far, depletion of states and societies, smashing, division and spreading chaos in weak political and social structures, such as Somalia, now Libya, Syria and Yemen.

For the second and third times, what to do to face this phenomenon that corrupts religion, and morality, fragments communities, demolishes states and destroys our world relation?! We shall defend ourselves, our religion and our society. So far defense has been secure and strategic in cooperation with other aggrieved parties to combat phenomenon. This is necessary and legitimate matter. But the initiative should be wider to be more rewarding. I mean by more rewarding, the religious educational work to avoid the emergence of new jihadist or genocidal generations. Basis for

these crisis phenomena is the extensive processes that took place to interpret and convert concepts. It includes considering fighting within communities, nations and world as religious and jihadist duty! Certainly, we may not combat phenomenon of politicized religious parties by the same way, as they are not often violent. However, they have been vastly operating through decades in transforming concepts. Among of these concepts is considering that states and sometimes societies have lost religious legitimacy that shall be restored through applying Sharia. Sharia is religion, which is deeply rooted in our societies, and Almighty Allah says: {this day have I perfected your religion for you and completed my favor upon you and have chosen for you Islam as religion}. Thus, our religion is complete, safe, and secure and is present in our societies and nations. Almighty Allah also says: {Verily, We Ourselves have sent down this Exhortation, and most surely We will be its Guardian}. If purpose is to safeguard religion; it does not become intact if being removed from society and being put in the hands of a partisan group that has a reference in it and seizes through it political affairs under the pretext of applying religion or Sharia. There is no religious authority in Islam, even if Partisans denied creating a religious state. Restricting the meaning of religious authority to on priesthood authority in Central Christian times is not true, as Sharia is impeccable. Judging by Sharia in public interest matter and measures makes political affairs infallible also. Thus, the authority does not return civilian authority even if it was said that the intension is the supreme reference not executive administration!

In this regard; we, scientists, are concerned with preserving religion for security, tranquility and unity of societies. Preserving religion, its customs,

and ethics is not by politicizing it, delivering it to political party, letting it enter the state under the pretext of regaining legitimacy to State, or delegating the dominant party to apply religion. In addition to this wrong idea; State has hard structure, and fragmentation and shredding of religion if used for monopolizing power by a religious party.

I mean, we; elite of religious and cultural community; have responsibilities in addressing Nbioah processes confronting splits that aim converting religion into political dogmas and ideologies. Preventing them will lead to major interests of tranquility and unity of our communities, and safety of our religion to remain comprehensive of all its beliefs, acts of worship and morals. Violence is forbidden whatever its justifications and excuses. It is also forbidden to follow theses of politicization of religion in any pretext. People disagree on management of public affairs, and there are generally accepted world mechanisms to resolve differences within the political system. However, the religious division is very dangerous, as it leads to societal division and struggling in classes. It is never legitimate to use religion to support one team or another in political conflict due to its negative effects on unity and stability of communities.

Let us discuss the other aspect of problem: relation of Arabs and Muslims to other countries and international community in revivalism time and its effects on strategic decision, and relation of Arabs and Muslims to other religions and followers in revivalism time too.

I will start with relations with religions. Indeed, relations with the people of other monotheistic and Asian religions are not well in the recent decades. Many Christian leaders refer to that reason is Islamic fundamentalism

violence and inability to adjust it by communities and nations. There is much evidence from their points of view. The former Pope Benedict XVI upon approaching his concerns on Christians as being clear in synods he held for Christians of the East; did not advance contemporary facts as pretext, but returned as the neo-conservatives and neo-evangelicals to the natures of Islam in Middle Ages. He recalled assumption in nineties of fourteenth century between Persian (i.e. Muslim) scientist and Byzantine Emperor Manuel II. Emperor stated that faith of Islam is not embraced by mind, and has violent approach to force people to embrace. That angered Al-Azhar Sheikh who sent to Vatican a message of reproach. Pope two weeks later- in response to incidents of violence against Christians in Upper Egypt- demanded international protection for Egyptian and non-Egyptian Christians. Al-Azhar responded by cutting off dialogue with Vatican, and this status still remains the same. Yes, there are sporadic incidents of violence against Christians in the East, and their numbers are contracted in Iraq, Palestine and Syria for variety of reasons. Most reasons may not be attributed to Muslims revivals or extremists. File of Arab and non-Arab Christian in the East is less negative than the stress files between Muslims and others in Europe in particular. In Oman, we have approached, including Sultanate's strategic policies in the dialogue of civilizations, the subject of relations with Christian churches in Europe and the USA, since more than one decade. We established relations of partnership, cooperation and dialogue, whether through invitations and conferences, with Protestants and Catholics, or through initiatives, dialogues and writings of shared values and global ethics. I consider the file as promising and worth to be pursued. Christian churches have wide experiences that may beneficial upon abandoning the missionary goals. However, major Christian

churches have fundamentalist revivalisms in their heart and aspects, similar to what we have, but did not witness violence like that in some of our communities under the name of religion. Due to deep and long-term communication with the ecclesiastical institutions, universities and colleges of theology, multilateral dialogue arose between us. Dozens of American, European and theologian professors wrote in our magazine of tolerance / understanding for their contemporary experiences with their audience and their churches, their understanding of Islam and Muslims in the past and present, and the difference between American experience and European experience in the relationship between religion and state. This was in accordance with their multiple reports on religious effects on American strategic decision in this particular era. As previously stated, the imbalance in relations since the nineties of the last century due to changes in mood and priorities for them not us; yet dialogue with Christians has promising opportunities, and requires a serious follow-up. It may be useful in follow-up, understanding and influence, to consult with other al-Azhar and other Arab religious authorities to exchange experiences, reach kind of accumulation of knowledge and effect, and cooperation on joint initiatives towards Christians in Arab world and the whole world.

Let us move to the aspect of international relations regarding states' policies and strategies. World war on terrorism was not waged by churchmen, but politicians and strategists, as previously mentioned. Not only wars; but also strategic and cultural files with religious origins were raised by those strategists, such as conflict of civilizations, dialogue or coalition or alliance of civilizations. These titles, some of which have turned into institutions or initiatives, and in which Arab and Islamic countries



actively participated, are made by strategists and statesmen. If this reflects on one hand the mutual influences between religion, culture and information in strategic decision; it reflects on the other hand our need for cooperation and consultation between politics men, strategies and environments of decision-making from one aspect, and religion men and cultural science men from another aspect – for useful and appropriate response to challenges and options.

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At the end, religion influences in normal situations the strategic and geopolitical decision-making. However, influence escalated and took multiple and sometimes contradictory trends in the time of religious revivalism in the West and East. Political and religious institutions in the West enabled and sometimes customized revivalism for their strategic purposes; but that happened sometimes in explosive ways in our communities and our countries and with regional and global countries. Possibly, violent and non-violent revivalisms are about to produce or influence in the production of a new time or a new age. Some people say the twenty-first century is the century of rising religion or rebellious religion. Military men are concerned with the effects of this return upon states, communities and environments of decision-making, but religious institutions at West and East, are involved in or seeking to apprehend, review and renew forms of communication, combating reasons of litigation, in order to keep the unity of communities, and regulations and security of countries. All religion is still remained to Allah: {And strive in the cause of Allah as it behooves you to strive for it. He has chosen you, and has laid no hardship upon you in religion; so *follow* the faith of your father Abraham; He named

you Muslims *both* before and in this *Book*, so that Messenger may be a witness over you, and that you may be witnesses over mankind. Therefore observe Prayer and pay Zakat, and hold fast to Allah. He is your Master. An excellent Master and an excellent Helper!} (Al- Hajj: 87). Allah the Mighty has spoken truth.

Dear audience:

At the end of this meeting, I may only thank you for your attention and listening, wishing you all well and good, and wishing our beloved Oman prosperity and stability. May Allah bless leader and sultan of Oman; His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said with grace and favor. May Allah support and protect him.

Allah is the grantor of success and public interests

May Peace, mercy and blessings of Allah be upon you