

Globalization and Identity: Conceptual Paradoxes in the Middle East

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Abstract

The politics of the Middle East region in particular and the Muslim world in general have been characterized by the Islamic movement in the aftermath of the Islamic revolution in Iran. Alongside with nationalism, socialism and their variations, political Islam has been put forth as a construct and a prescriptive model for state creation mainly to enhance of political sovereignty as well as a social model for Muslim countries by the Islamists. Though in most countries political Islam is a movement or is organized around a political party, and some states like Sudan, Pakistan and Afghanistan have labeled themselves as "Islamic Republic," it is only in the case of Iran that Islam is modeled as a system of governance. During the same period that political Islam has stood both as a movement as well as a model of rule, the global system beginning in the early 1980s, has seen unprecedented levels of change. Significant among them are: the downfall of the USSR and the attenuation of the socialist model thereafter. Intensification of the global economic, technological and financial interdependence, intensive privatization of economic activity and the universalization of liberal democracy with its numerous variations as the model of governance.

This article intends to relate these two developments. A number of salient questions stand out as the two significant developments are correlated: 1) To what degree the Islamic movement since its introduction in Egypt in the 1930s and later on in many of its actual examples has produced a model? Second, to what degree has the Islamic movement been a political reaction to Western colonialism? And third, to what degree the globalization processes and the principles of the Islamic movement complement one another? In light of the aforementioned conceptual formulation, the major assumption in this article maintains that the economic and political dynamics of the current globalization processes led by the Western world are not only intensifying in the coming decade but are proving its.

Keywords: Globalization, Identity, Middle East, Political Islam.

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Introduction

Modalities for statecraft as the only possible and plausible means of conducting state affairs in the contemporary global order. A number of hypotheses can be advanced: 1) While in Sudan, Saudi Arabia and Iran, variations of Islamic thinking have been enforced, in much of the Arab world, political Islam serves as a movement and a platform for oppositional politics; 2) The principles of political Islam are not always consistent with the essentials of globalization, economic privatization and liberal democracy(1); 3) The practice of Islam in post revolutionary Iran illustrates the paradoxes of blending Islam and globalization: national interests versus collective Muslim interests, benefiting from the capitalist world versus struggling against imperialism, benefiting from international organizations versus regarding them as illegitimate, upholding intergovernmental relations versus support for liberation movements and maintaining national cultural and political sovereignty versus collective security and economic engagement with industrialized states. The purpose in this article is to substantiate some of the underlying paradoxes facing the political economy of the Middle Eastern region.

Globalization and Value Differentiation

In the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks in the United States, the concept of value differentiation and its impact on national, regional and even global cooperation has become more salient than ever before. Value differentiation means how local and global value systems interplay or conflict with each other. The entrance of a large number of state and non-state actors into the global economic, political and cultural processes has posed many dilemmas(2). Of course, it is clearly possible to trace these trends to the years after the WWII when some hundred countries became independent and the international community grew far more complex than before. It was commonplace in the past to view values as a derivative of culture. Culture was a manifestation of social

and interpersonal relations. Values were usually discussed within the internal sphere of a society or as an independent internal acting social

process. The key distinction is that culture and its impact were taken for granted and because economics dominated the shaping of national policies, rarely culture and its derivatives were regarded as influential independent variables(3).

In the 1950s and the 1960s however, economic development was considered as a dominant purpose acting separately and independent of culture. Moreover, the nature of polity was not posited as a very relevant factor for industrialization. As development theories were enriched and better examined, it became vividly known that political and cultural frameworks at least need to be conducive to the pursuit of economic development. A foundation grew with widespread conviction that a given cultural belief system needs to be supportive of wealth accumulation, property ownership and industrialization. Furthermore, political stability was upheld as a major prerequisite for ensuring benefits from engaging globalization. Nonetheless, the economic failures of the 1970s in Latin America and elsewhere in the third world raised alarming signals as to the inseparability of economic development from cultural and political indicators(4). As economic policies and attempts for producing political stability and even democratization processes failed or began to dysfunction, the concept of culture as an underlying independent determinant emerged as an influential premise of explanation. In the example of China, consensus among the elites for change and development that began even under Mao proved to be a crucial political facilitator. The tendency for harmony and team work in the Chinese culture also surfaced as significant elements leading to industrialization and sustained economic growth(5).

In the 1990s, there was extensive discussion regarding the comprehensiveness versus particular meaning of globalization. Can globalization be contemplated as a comprehensive and a universal approach to development whereby all states with diverse domestic structures can join or is it exclusively related to economic activity? It

appears that globalization outside of the Western European and North American spheres have the latter meaning and relevance. It is only in the “Western sphere” where there is a congruity between the cultural, political and economic entities as they have evolved, reinforced and cultivated one another simultaneously over a long span of time(6). In this context, economic globalization has no fundamental cultural or value related obstacle among the countries of the Middle East in particular and the Muslim World in general. However, because security or political cooperation deals with issues of national sovereignty and sovereignty is a particularly sensitive cultural issue in Islamic teachings, it might run into areas of “value conflict.” In substantiating this point, it should be pointed out that even among the most fundamentalist Muslim groups, economic cooperation between the Middle East countries and the rest of the world is not contested. At the heart of the conflict is political and particularly cultural sovereignty in Islamic thinking. Among the most credible theories explaining the causes of the Iranian revolution of 1979 is the theory that the Shah’s regime, pursued an objective of undermining Iranian cultural underpinnings and that the regime jeopardized Iranian national sovereignty(7). There was no objection to the Shah’s economic, privatization or industrialization policies. Below, I will delineate the conceptual parameters between various forms of globalization and argue that values do matter in security and political cooperation between Muslims and non-Muslims particularly when political Islam is practiced.

Globalization and Its Derivatives

Clearly, one can differentiate between economic, political and cultural globalization. However, it appears that there is a fine and unpolished conceptual and empirical overlap between the three aforementioned layers of globalization. Economic Globalization with its origins in the European reformation is now a universal achievement for the whole mankind. It is true that the current axioms of economic globalization has been achieved on the basis of a certain historical cultural and political setting but the Japanese and the East Asian examples of economic growth

and industrialization vividly demonstrate that producing wealth even in its modern capitalist example only requires a political determination and a harmonious social structure. Where people can organize themselves around economic targets, they can be productive irrespective of their cultural particularities and historical processes.

What liberalism, individualism and secularism have achieved in the sense of modern capitalist formations, Shintoism of Japan and Buddhism of China have similarly been able to produce wealth of capitalist nature(8). In other words, the philosophical rationality of Western liberalism and the philosophical rationality of Shintoism and Buddhism have resulted in the same outcome, namely, industrialization of the economy and the underlying capitalist axioms of finance, banking, and consumerism and investment strategies. I call the former, the philosophical rationality like liberalism and the latter, instrumental rationality like capitalist logic in economic growth. Societies will endure and prosper if and only if they can create conceptual and strategic congruity between the bases of philosophical rationality and outcomes of instrumental rationality(9). I believe that the main source of underdevelopment, political frustrations and lack of meaningful incorporation of the Muslim world into the international community are rooted in its inability or delay in reconciling and harmonizing its philosophical rationality, namely Islam, with the underlying international norms of instrumental rationality(10). It appears that the economic expectations of citizens around the world have become similar and homogenous. It does not matter whether one is a Spanish citizen, or a Chinese citizen, a Russian citizen or a Brazilian citizen. Economic expectations are now clearly defined, universally accepted and the pressures to realize them depend on the efficiency, organization and a strategic outlook of the state and its social and economic agents of construction.

What about political globalization? If all societies and states are more or less driven into the acceptance of economic globalization, is there then a choice when it comes to the notion of political globalization? The

evolving matrix that results from the interactions of philosophical and instrumental rationality now becomes further complex. States and citizens are confronted with an important question: Does the continuation of wealth production and an organized economy require pluralism, a party-system polity and the freedom of political expression? If the state is efficient like South Korea, Malaysia and Singapore, does it also have to delegate authority, be accountable for its non-economic decisions and be subject to media scrutiny? I believe that the response in the medium to long term is positive. Continued and successful expansion of the economy and the formation of the middle classes reshape the political life of societies. Economic prosperity leads to the necessity and the instrumentality of political diversity and the emergence of civil society. There is an unpolished and meticulous point of conceptual departure here: whereas economic globalization is a decision and a political decision, political globalization is a process and a long and culturally-bound process. The time span of potential success in economic globalization is much shorter than the achievement of political globalization. Moreover, the material production and reproduction of wealth is of more urgency and approximation to human instincts and survival whereas political pluralism requires preparation, awareness, education, group cohesiveness and more important of all, the relative satisfaction of economic needs(11).

What about cultural globalization? What does cultural globalization mean? Those who advocate universal cultural globalization make the following contemplation: that all human beings regardless of their roots and historical experience, religion, ethnic background once reach relative economic advancement, have no choice but to accept the conceptual, behavioral and cognitive underpinnings of capitalist societies. Cultural globalization is neither possible nor desirable as a policy pursuit. A number of reasons can be provided to refute that argument. First, culture is uniquely geography bound, it is history bound and it is particularly bound by a matchless and unparalleled social construct. Individuals can only explore themselves within their own social construct. They can learn

from other social constructs but they can only find meaning in their particular historical experience.

Economic products can compete but cultural and historical experiences can only lead to greater maturity of one another. No individual can ever escape or attempt to permanently disguise his or her roots, and no strategic and sophisticated planning can redirect the point of reference of a people in a fundamental way. Consumer behavior can be altered and people can be convinced of the benefits of a civil society structure but individuals cannot be denied their cultural references and roots.

Second, people tend to find happiness, and more importantly, freedom in the touches, art, passion, romance and the complex behavioral interactions of their own cultural framework. No Iranian can ever truly become an American and no British can ever be reproduced in the cultural settings of an Indian. As the British philosopher Isaiah Berlin asserts, people will find their freedom in their own culture and identity(12). Third, those who produce entertainment, should not mistake people's instant pleasure and appreciation of movies and other entertainment products for cultural acceptance of their production. Once most people leave movie theatres and move away from their television sets, they return to their cultural roots. Otherwise, the immediate joy of a production should not be taken as a permanent influence. Fourth, no individual and no nation, if given a choice, desire to be dominated. Whereas nations are willing to negotiate commercial and economic contracts, no nation will willingly negotiate its identity and cultural roots. Therefore, it is illiberal and irrational to try to pursue a strategy of creating a uniform human being with a uniform active and reactive system of behavior and belief structure. Moreover, what is the ultimate aim of globalization? They seem to be wealth, prosperity and peace. If peace is a genuine pursuit at the global level, then its essence needs to be based on the essentialist human instinct to be peaceful. To be peaceful is to be culturally attached to the local culture. Therefore, it is unnecessary to set a goal such as cultural globalization since interference in the local

cultures would disturb the peace structure of societies. Conclusively, the maturation of cultures requires exchanges not coercions.

Five and last, the idea of cultural globalization is neither an Asian nor a Middle Eastern or African or Latin American concept. It is originated in the political and economic traditions of the West. Liberalism opens the landscape of cultural freedom and allows cultural differentiation. Liberalism is essential in the economic field because it leads to competition and productivity. Liberalism is ultimately an important requirement in the process of political globalization because it allows a space between the state and the society. But the essence of liberalism in the cultural arena is its almost sacred foundation: individualism and its almost divine law in differentiation(13). In the Middle East and the Muslim world, cultural values sometimes are elevated to a level of sacredness. It is the most important source of identity for the people of the region. The significant difference between Islam and Other religions are that Islam is a highly politicized religion. The history of Islam and the reaction of Muslims to colonialism are indications that Islam is not secularizable. Attachments to cultural values in Islam immediately become meaningful in a political context. In Islam, therefore, politics and culture are intertwined.

The Arab-Israeli conflict on the one hand and the weak state of economic and social conditions in the Middle East on the other have cultivated and contributed to the emergence of political Islam as an alternative to other political frameworks. But there is a complex intervening variable here: the cognitive and psychological peculiarity of political sovereignty in the Middle East. Tensions and conflicts will continue as long as there is a substantial security and political intervention in the Middle East. Whereas in the East Asian states, there is the art of differentiating between security cooperation and the upholding of cultural values, in the Middle East, cultural values do extend into political arena and interpret security and political interactions in a cultural setting. Furthermore, if democracy as a Western concept evolved in a particular culture, then it is rather easy to witness the substantial

areas of conflict in the Muslim and Western cultures and lead us into the conclusion that democracy in the Middle East faces both philosophical and instrumental barriers. These barriers can be substantiated in three areas: the concept of the individual, the concept of the state and the concept of social interactions(14). There are salient philosophical gaps between definitions of individual, state and social interactions in the Muslim world and those in the West. As the domains of globalization widen in the decades ahead, theoreticians and politicians dealing with the Middle East (within and without) will be confronted with challenges to bridge these conceptual gaps. After all, without preparing the cultural context both in terms of elite political consensus as well as social education, democracy may neither be a suitable objective nor a practical strategy of political change for societies beyond the Western world.

However, as the examples of Malaysia, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey demonstrate, where religion can be conceived as a source of morality and ethics, it is certainly possible to proceed into areas of capitalist economic development with global reach and recognition. In Turkey, Islamic frame of mind will eventually be considered as a personal choice which is in conformity with Western notions of liberalism and individualism. Simultaneously, all layers of Turkish elites have reached a consensus to pursue economic privatization and political openness in accordance with global trends and traditions. In other Muslim countries as well, globalization will prove to be a force when religion is considered as an exclusively moral force. In this context for example, it would not matter whether one is Christian or Muslim in Egypt where the country as a totality pursues economic privatization and political pluralism.

Any country has its own specific identity resources and it is through the organization and systematization of these very resources and also its interpretation of society and the international order that it may achieve growth and development.

Complete uniformity among all identity resources; quite the contrary, the existence of a form of harmony and convergence alongside a certain

acceptable degree of contradiction is an essential prerequisite. In this context, the nature of thoughts and should these resources be varied, difficult task. Furthermore, if these in certain cases, these conflicts and way or another; otherwise they development and entrance into the progress depends upon the compete global identities. Evidently, one organizing and regulating them turns into a more resources were to be conflicting and contradicting contradictions have to be necessarily resolved one would lead to an identity crisis and impede processes of globalization. Ultimately, a country's ability of domestic identity resources with prevalent should avoid presuming that there should be interpretations within a society is presumed to be the most significant resource for progress and development. The harmony of various identity resources would indubitably play a fundamental role in setting national objectives and orientations. Alongside the importance of identity which may be defined as the nature of thoughts and interpretations of life within a society, identity also formulates and directs deeds and conducts on a global scale. As a consequence of the communications revolution, especially in the last two decades of the 21st century, the identity fates of domestic structures have become intertwined with the patterns of the international order. Domestic structures can no longer isolate their identity frameworks or stand immune against the influx of international political and economic inputs. If these equations were considered correct and real, the degree of the compatibility and harmony between prevalent globalization patterns and a country's domestic identity resources become crucial. The kind of response to this question illustrates the conditions of a country's development. In other words, domestic and international compatibility would clarify decisive corollaries for the future of a country.

Another important point is that any identity resource in a country creates a foundation for the conglomeration of political interests and attracts a certain part of society. In fact, identity crisis evolves when the political actors and their institutions arising from various identity resources fail to reach a written, reliable, and stable identity framework.

In the latter case, procedures such as elimination, stigmatization, and character assassination would become common practice among the bearers of different identity resources. Democracy is the outcome of resolving identity crisis; in other words, democracy can only be materialized in a country when the bearers of identity and power have succeeded in resolving their philosophical differences.

The Case of Iran

To resolve the issue of identity in Iran, a form of harmony should be introduced among the three identity sources of Iran, Islam, and Western Liberalism. While Iran and the Iranian identity is a territorial and historical identity resource, Islam is a spiritual and ideological identity resource and an extended sociopolitical worldview. Western liberalism is a philosophical resource with economic, political, and even cultural functionalities. It seems that since the Iranian identity is a source of belonging to a territory and historical continuity, it would have more compatibility with another identity resource which would be the means of administering the country in terms of its economic and political structures. This issue has a universal appeal attached to it. Different nations belong to specific histories, traditions, territories, and customs and thus strive to preserve them.

Culturally, Iran and Islam are complementary. The country's history reveals this interconnectedness. Nevertheless, as soon as Iran and the Iranian identity are defined as a national and nationalistic resource and gain an aspect of political power, it would not necessarily always remain in harmony with the Islamic and Muslim identity since Islam is a resource for political identity by itself. The unit and domain of the functionality of the Iranian identity is the geographic area of the country, i.e., Iran, whereas Muslims who believe in political Islam cannot merely restrict themselves to their territorial domain and define their objectives within them. Rather, political Islam transcends the geography of a specific nation and tribe and includes all Muslim nations or, in Islamic vocabulary, the Islamic Umah.

The fundamental premise in this argument is that Islam both as a religion as well as a political system introduces certain fixed axioms that are related to its egalitarian and ethical nature. Based on its philosophical foundations, Islam is far more than a moral edifice and is certainly a political ideology.

Moreover, for the most part, Islam places greater emphasis on societal interests and harmony than individual preferences. Given the relevance of Islamic jurisprudence in all spheres of social construct, it is rather conclusive that Islam cannot be secularizable. Though Islam does not impede market forces but it highly regulates the social sphere where the private sector operates within. In contrast, democracy rests on individualism, liberalism, secularism and a market economy. Democratic institutions are solely responsible to serve the interests of the state, the private sector and the community at large whereas in Islam, upholding a moral code is far more significant than material pursuits. In a much more paradoxical note, the idea of freedom and individual and civil liberties pose sharp contrasts between the two conceptual frameworks. In Islam or any other religion, the individual has to constantly conform himself or herself to a certain code of conduct for the ultimate purpose of ethical purification. In a democratic society, the individual is faced with personal choices but has to fulfill his or her social and legal responsibilities(15).

Furthermore, in Islam or any other religion, there are behavioral and conceptual domains that an adherent cannot enter. In a democratic construct, once the individual abides by the rule of law enforced for the maintenance of an economic and political order, the state does not interfere in the personal and political choices of the citizen. Such fundamental differences make the idea of “democratic Islam” a very skeptical one. To be fair, Islam and liberal democracy are two sets of worldview with narrow overlap. They pursue different objectives and therefore provide diverging definitions of life, state, individual and society. It is therefore no surprise that the confrontation between tradition and modernity in the Muslim world lingers on. Once Islam takes on a larger political role and responsibility, it actually distances itself from

democratic ideas. A comparative review of Islamic and democratic literature could reveal many of these paradoxes. Perhaps the most pertinent paradox in the Islamic and democratization matrix is the economic and political logic of the international system.

In the Iranian case, as soon as Iranian nationalism and Islam compete for political practice and assertiveness, they would not necessarily be complementary and the philosophical and ideological texts produced in the last century in Iran are very much demonstrative of this standoff and clearly illustrate the conflicts between the Iranian way and the Islamic road in determining the country's macro policies and orientations. In terms of the domain of tasks and responsibilities, the radius of being an Iranian is considerably smaller than that of being a Muslim. An Iranian citizen would stand merely responsible towards the issues of Iran and his/her compatriots(16).

As a Muslim, however, one's responsibilities are not only towards fellow Muslims but generally all the underprivileged masses in the Muslim world as well as the world. As an Iranian citizen, one would hold no responsibility to confront the world's superpowers. On the contrary, a Muslim is obliged to fight oppression and tyranny at a global scale and by virtue of being a Muslim, one bears a much larger set of responsibilities and would thus require greater means and instruments to perform these responsibilities. In this framework, globalization loses credibility since it necessitates political compatibility with the capitalist order and even its political tendencies. According to the religious script, a person or a system that believes in political Islam or an Islamic state cannot remain silent towards oppression both in regard to other Muslims or other human beings. Economics dominates the agenda of a country which desires to join globalization. Political justice and moral obligations are either diplomatically sidelined or comfortably ignored. Both Islam and political Islam view economics and the accumulation of wealth as secondary priorities. This element by itself is in contrast to globalization trends.

Iran's statecraft paradigm would be very much analogous to that of

South Korea, Malaysia, India, China, and Brazil if the Iranian identity were set as the decisive criterion: all the programs, policies, and strategies would be formulated within the terms of the interests of the country and its people. Based on the national and territorial identity, the political administrators would be responsible to increase the economic welfare of the people, establish security, plan for the country's future, defend its territorial integrity, and corroborate its global prestige and stance. Incorporating a religious identity would enormously encumber and complicate the administration's agenda. Following the Islamic Revolution of Iran, the Islamic identity has been the dominant identity in the country's administration playing a role in all the domains of foreign policy, economy, culture, education, and security priorities. Indeed, the resources and instruments of Iran have been exploited in a much larger realm.

The issue of identity crisis in Iran arises and evolves from the combination of the West, Western liberalism, and the paradigm predominant in the international arena into the equation of the Iranian identity. Historically, Iranians had not experienced identity crisis until the ending years of the Safavid Dynasty (1499-1741) and used to enjoy a reasonably efficient integration of their Islamic and Iranian identity. Even the Ottoman Empire was not suffering from identity crisis before it became exposed to the gradual emergence of the European civilization. As soon as the Western source for comparison came into existence, the Ottomans became entangled with deterioration from within since they were not able to compete and adjust to the Europeans(17). – Had the European civilization not become inclusive and had it remained within its own geographic boundaries, it would not have been conceived as a threat for other cultures and civilizations. The introduction of the new ideas of the West paved the grounds for crisis in the Muslim world and Asia. Prior to the Iranian Safavid Dynasty, an empire– like paradigm of statecraft based on Iranian and Islamic traditions was in effect. Upon the arrival of the new Western paradigm, worldview and logic in politics, economics and statecraft, the challenges, contradictions, conflicts and

crises began to surface. Consequently, the major competition within the matrix of Iran's identity crisis is between Islam and liberalism. The Iranian identity does not claim to bear a worldview as no territorial and historical identity would have such claims. The second layer of Iran's identity crisis lies in the fact that there is little common ground between the two rivals, i.e., liberalism and Islam, and this rivalry takes place under the circumstances whereby the dominant global order is increasingly attributable to patterns of globalization. Islam has a system of its own. Islam does have principles upon which various modalities of political, economic and social systems can be erected. But the overall orientation of the Islamic paradigm runs into direct confrontation with the essential features of liberal politics, capitalist accumulation and hands off cultural policies of secular states.

The common grounds between Islam and liberalism — be it in ideology or practical methods and details — appear to be minimal. There are invariable doctrines in Islam that violating them would be considered acts of sin whereas in liberalism, the founding doctrine is diversity and tolerance of diversity and generally most matters are regarded as being subject to controversy, debate and ultimately majority vote. Islam emphasizes a collectivistic approach towards human society while liberalism advocates individualism. Decision-making in liberalism is founded upon interests and consensus. Islam, however, does not always recognize interests as an acceptable basis and the consensus of people is no justification for undermining principles. The key definitions these two philosophical schools provide on the individual, society, life, right, world, wealth, power, and morality are very different and any attempt to reconcile them would end in vicious circles both conceptually and theoretically. It is not surprising then that all theoretical and practical attempts of Muslims in integrating their native systems with predominant Western models have mainly failed.

Western thinking and methods have overshadowed the international community especially in the early years of the third millennium. Muslim and non-Muslim states have to accept parts of this philosophy and logic

inevitably in relation to the international community, something that they have actually done in real practice. Globalization and communications have brought governments, companies, institutions and the public at large to work, think and interact in a global scale; Western methodology, power, politics, wealth and thinking is ubiquitous in this trend of events. Although culture has remained mainly local, work and life have become very much interconnected with the Western fabric. As a result, it is not just Iran and the Iranians that are faced with contradictions in worldview and practice and it is not just the paradigm of the Islamic Republic which is confronting a challenge. The majority of Muslim countries and even Asian states such as China and Latin American countries like Brazil confront these global events and developments. Perhaps, it can be stated at the hypothetical stage that all non-Western countries, and even those who have embraced globalization, would have to necessarily live in some degree of conceptual contradictions.

All in all, the identity crisis in Iran is the result of the confrontation between liberalist and Islamic thinking and worldview. Despite the fact that Islam has an inclusive presence in terms of public culture, the social and ideological code of beliefs, spiritual attachments, any Iranian would have to draw from the international resources upon entering any economic, scientific, technical, artistic, and foreign policy field of activity and would have to accept to participate in the framework which all other nations belong to. In current-day Iran, these distinctions are not neither transparent nor visible though people are practically live in a number of interrelated domains.

Conclusion

The experience of the Islamic Republic of Iran vividly demonstrates that as soon as Islamic thought were to be institutionalized as a system, it would confront liberalism. Islamic thinking and model may be enforced as a regional bloc in contrast to other regions at the global level if all Muslim countries ascribe to an Islamic code of conduct. Such was the case for a period of time when the communist model operated as an

alternative against Western capitalism and liberalism. Political Islam in most Muslim countries serves as a pretext for oppositional politics. It is only in Iran and to a far lesser degree in Sudan and Saudi Arabia where political Islam is in evolutionary practice. The paradoxical case is that should Muslims wish to advance economically, industrialize and enter the intricate world of IT, they are compelled to cooperate and even integrate with the liberal West and be prepared to compete in the globalization age. A related paradox is that if Muslims wish to enhance their economic power, they must bear political compromise. A Muslim state that desires to frame its politics according to political Islam is obliged to regard Muslim interests above the nation state and support revolutionary and liberation movements, oppose superpower politics and confront economic injustice. Such pursuits will subsequently.

Result in political isolation in international organizations, technological sanctions and political unreliability.

Moreover, it appears that the current level of congruity between “Middle Eastern values” and democratization is narrow(18). Examples of Eastern Europe illustrate that there needs to be adaptability and compatibility between the values of a society and its gradual acceptance and practice of democracy. Contemporary Middle Eastern discourses indicate that such adaptability is farfetched. The logic of the current international system necessitates that a country’s security be defined and pursued in a collective format. In other words, a country’s security is furthered when it engages the globalization processes(19). There is a close interdependence between national economic development and national security doctrine. Because Turkey, Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates have embraced intensive incorporation into the global industrial, financial and technological systems, the prospects of sustained security, political evolution and self actualization of the individual in these states are far higher than other Muslim countries. In these countries, Islam plays a transparent cultural role and an influential source of social and historical identity(20). Significant challenges face the Middle Eastern countries in their attempts to improve their status:

economic efficiency, good governance, state accountability, promotion of non conformist political culture, quality education and political openness. In this journey, entry into the globalization processes is a necessity that entails many risks. But no growth and advancement can be accomplished without risks either.

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Footnotes

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