Competing Islamic Narratives in the Middle East

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Abstract

Rivalry between different Islamic views is an old issue that the recent developments in the Middle East have revived in a more acute manner. Irrespective of the views considering economy, nationalism, civil war, democratization, etc. as the main cause of these developments, this article posits that Islamism is the main cause of recent developments in the Middle East. Accordingly, four different models are studied: Neo-Ottomanism, Salafi–Takfiris divided into Salafi-Courtiers and Salafi-Jihadis, Egypt's Muslim brotherhood, and the Islamic Republic of Iran. These four models are the most important rival Islamic views with distinct attitudes towards Islam. Now, the question is which model is more apt at influencing the recent developments in the Middle East? The main hypothesis of this article is that among these models, the only suitable ones are those capable of responding to demands regarding democratization that enjoy two characteristics: accepting the political status of Islam and the flexibility of political action. As a result, this article first explains the nature and attitude of each views regarding Islam. Then, given the above hypothesis, the ability of these models in responding to demands for democratization in the region is evaluated. The finding is that among the above models, the Islamic Republic of Iran has a more logical capability to establish a link between wisdom and faith to influence the developments in the Middle East.

Keywords: Islamism, Neo-Ottomanism, Muslim Brotherhood, Salafi-Takfiri, Middle East

Introduction

The developments in the Middle East which began in late 2010 have brought about different views to be analyzed. Some believe that these developments are centered upon people's demands for establishing Islamic government and other demands related to seeking democracy or welfare within the framework of Islamism (Ammar, 2011: 153-169). This article begins its work with this assumption. In other words, it considers Islamism as the main cause of the recent developments in the Middle East. However, a rivalry has existed among different Islamic thoughts for a long time. Examples are rivalry between Shias and Sunnis under Safavid and Ottoman rule, Zaydi Shia and Ithna-Ashari Shia as well as Sunni and Salafi-Takfiri sects. Also, scientific polemics between Motazala and Akhbari can be mentioned. Certainly, these rivalries did not mean physical clashes. With the withdrawal of colonialists from the Middle East and the independence of countries, rivalries among Muslims increasingly took on a political nature. The advent of a government supporting Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia, the emergence of the Shia government in Iran, and Turkey's return to its religious foundations after the Kemalism era, along with the permanent struggle of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and finally its victory in the second decade of the twentieth century have intensified ideological confrontations among Muslims. The recent developments of the Middle East provided an opportunity for rivalries to become more acute.

Now, if we consider Islamism as the main cause of these developments, which rival is logically superior? Since this article tries

to study the extent of the success of each view in the framework of their fundamental and ideational principles, irrespective of the economic and military assistance of regional countries or international powers, the term "logical" has been used. Also, the main hypothesis of this article is that "among different models, those able to respond to the Islamic demands of the region are the ones that have accepted the political status of Islam and the flexibility of political action. To do this, the article examines the capability of each view to respond to regional Islamic demands relying upon its hypothesis. Along these lines, among different views, the four views of neo-Ottomanism, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Salafi-Takfiris divided into Salafi-Courtier and Salafi-Jihadi, and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood are studied for the following reasons: 1- the theoretical nature of their religious beliefs, 2- the operationalization of these views, 3- the status of these views in the core of Islamic mainstream theoretical spectrum; neo-Ottomanism and Salafi-Takfiri at the two ends of the spectrum and the views of the I.R.I and Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the middle, and 4- the prevalence of these views in Islamic societies.

I- Different Narratives

Neo-Ottomanism: With the end of the Cold War, Turkish politics returned to Islam. Before, dominating Kemalist approaches were based on the struggle between tradition and modernity, and religion was considered as a part of tradition. Kemalism, with its pessimistic attitude towards Islam, tried to transform nationalism into a religion (Tahaii, 2001: 133). Economic growth was synonymous with Westernization, and the promotion of Western culture was considered as necessary to reach this goal. Since the 1950s and distinctively the 1970s, it was believed that with the removal of cultural differences between Turkey and the West, Turkey would automatically be located in the Western politico-economic frameworks. (Tahaii, 2001: 128). Turkey could become a NATO member and ensure its security under the alliance's protection. The

later stage was membership in the European Community which could guarantee Turkey's economic development. Despite Kemalism's success in reaching modernism and creating an industrial society, its failure in consolidating national solidarity, resolving the Kurdish issue, obtaining membership in EC, filling the gap between government and Muslim society, developing relations with Muslim and Middle Eastern countries (Omidi and Rezaei, 2011: 233), obtaining popularity among Muslim societies due to Turkey's strategic alliance with Israel as well as its huge military expenditure because of Turkey's membership in NATO and containing communism ensured the defeat of this approach.

With the coming to power of Turgut Ozal as prime minister (from 1982 to 1989) and as president (from 1989 to 1993), and also the tenure of the Justice and Development Party[1] (since 2002), Turkey left aside its previous approach to religion. The new approach was formulated on the basis of the legacy of the Ottoman Empire. Turkish leaders maintained that the glorious era of Turkey dates back to the era of Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire enjoyed a prestigious position among its Muslim population and also among Sunnis in the Middle East. Under its rule, ethnic differences between Turks and Kurds had been muted based on the common factor of Islam and there existed internal solidarity. In addition, the tendency of Sunnis in foreign societies for the Ottoman Empire had accorded it an international status. However, the monarchical and despotic structure of the Ottoman Empire had made difficult for it to adjust itself with the new international structure and conditions and to enter into modernism.

The new approach aims at combining the positive achievements of the Ottoman Empire with those of Kemalism. Neo-Ottomanism sees the combination of religion and democracy as the best way for reaching its goals. The proponents of this new approach believe that this method can revive national solidarity by strengthening the relation between society and government and resolving the Kurdish

problem, and in the realm of foreign policy, it can enhance the role and position of Turkey by boosting relations with Muslim nations. Therefore, neo-Ottomanists try to achieve the same international prestige for Turkey that the Ottoman Empire enjoyed by reviving relations between Turkey and territories formerly under the rule of Ottomans. For this reason, a new approach to Islam should lie somewhere between the laicism of Kemalism and Ottoman Islamism. Erdogan has frequently introduced his approach to Islam as secularism, and during the recent developments in the region, to include secularism in their constitutions[2]. However, the prescription made by neo-Ottomanism for reaching its envisioned goals enjoys the following characteristics:

Secularism: As said above, secularism is the most important principle of neo-Ottomanism. Neo-Ottomanism is not an enemy of religion, but it avoids religious radicalism and welcomes all faiths. On the other hand, it makes politics separate from religion, but unlike Laicism, it respects religious values. Decisions from above are taken in a secular manner and separation of religion from politics is an acceptable norm in this model (Keyhan, 2007:216).

Pragmatism: Unlike Kemalism, which ignored the realities of Turkish society and those existing in its surroundings in pursuing its goals, neo-Ottomanism has formulated its approach by taking these realities into consideration to overcome its challenges and enhance Turkey's present status. Despite efforts made by the military to put the Justice and Development Party on trial over the charge of violating the principle of secularism, the pragmatist approach of the party has prevented the judicial system from issuing any judgment against it. This approach has also prevented the military from conducting a coup against the party. Erdogan has shown that the approach taken by the party is in accordance with democracy and existing realities in Turkey, and has managed to attract Western support more than any other party in the past through enhancing the human rights situation in Turkey, and especially in dealing with the

Kurds. In addition, he has succeeded in taking further steps towards EU accession to boost national solidarity and ameliorate its relations with Islamic countries. The more pragmatist stance of Justice and Development party is distinguished from that of the Rifah party in its effort to obtain EU membership. The Rifah party had explicitly stated that the EU was based on Christian culture, which was in conflict with Turkey's Islamic culture, and accordingly it opposed Turkey's membership in the EU. The military used this policy and also the Islamic orientation of the party as a pretext to put its leaders on trial in May 1997 and to stop the party and its leader, Erbakan, from engaging in political activities. The mistake made by the Islamists was that they formulated their policies without paying any attention to the status of the military and the secularized ideals of Turkey's foreign policy. However, Erdogan, from the outset, declared that his approach was based on secularism and his most important goal in the realm of foreign policy was EU membership. Therefore, having accepted Turkey's political realities, he outmaneuvered his political rivals (Naghdinejad, 2001: 26-27).

The relationship between religion and state fluctuated between secularism and laicism in the Kemalist era. The domination of the military has been accompanied by that of Laicism, and the domination of a multi-party system has been coupled with that of secularism. From the military's point of view, there is no necessity for using religion (Tahaii, 201:131). Therefore, we witnessed laic Kemalism during the years 1930-50 and 1960-61, while secular Kemalism was otherwise mostly dominant (Tahaii, 2001: 135-161).

However, the coming to power of the military in the 1980's made them familiar with the effective role of religion, and they adopted secularism (Tahaii, 2001:147). But, neo-Ottomanism was completely based on secularism from the outset and unlike Laic Kemalism, it is well aware of the role of Islam in Turkey's politics, and for this reason, it tries to use Islam as an instrument to achieve its goals (Tahaii, 2001:131). Neo-Ottomanism, also unlike secular

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Kemalism during the 1980s, does not believe in radicalism and does not try to limit Islam to what the establishment introduces through increasing pressure on the other Islamic sects, especially Kurdish Sufis, but is rather based on a kind of mild control over Islam (Tahaii, 2001:153).

Pluralism and Religious Tolerance: Neo-Ottomanists have posited nationalism, just like Kemalists, as the basis of the definition of a Turkish citizen to achieve national solidarity among adherents of all religions. (Cagaptay, 2006: 122-24) Therefore, all citizens, Muslim or non-Muslim, enjoy equal citizenship rights and nobody is reprimanded for his or her beliefs. The basis of religious rights in neo-Ottomanism is based on the law recognized by non-Muslims and any individual's rights are only limited to the fact that the material rights of others should not be violated. This model believes that Islam is essentially tolerant (Movasaghi Gilani and Nayeri, 2010: 37-8). Therefore, in this model, we have witnessed few instances of violence committed in the name of Islam.

Respecting Islam as Respecting a Part of Culture: Secularism is based on "religion for us" and not "we for religion". This principle included the political demands of individuals and groups in the secularism of the 1980s that is the political experience of Rifah Party. In other periods, secularism aimed at establishing political stability and acting upon raison d'état (Tahaii, 2007:129). Therefore, Islam can be changed, not in principles, but in its secondary exigencies, taking time and space into consideration. This change depends on consensus. For example, if society wants an Islam without religious manifestations such as the veil, it is protected by the government. Protecting Islam is to protect only one of the cultural elements of the society. Therefore, the government protects not Islam but cultural roles complied by people at the present time (Zurcher, 2004:51).

Emphasizing the Economic Aspects of Islam: While Laicism ignored the cultural potentials of the Turkish society for

economic development, secularism tries to develop its economic foundations by understanding the cultural characteristics of the Turkish nation that is paying attention to worldly interests through honest religious faith (Tahaii, 2001: 128-29). The leaders of the Justice and Development Party are well aware that culture is the main cause of opposition to Turkey's accession to the EU. The indices of free market and democracy in Turkey are better than many EU countries, but this country has not yet succeeded in becoming an EU member. Poland, the Czech Republic, Estonia, and Latvia, which were part of the Eastern bloc, joined the EU, but Turkey which served the West by accession to NATO and CENTO during the Cold War era has not yet joined the union. Turks know that the EU has been founded on the basis of Christianity and despite the efforts made by them to introduce them as secular, Europeans still consider Turkey an Islamic country and in case of its entrance into the EU, it would become the strongest EU member in Parliament and Council of ministers after Germany because of the size of its population. It means upsetting the Christian balance in the Union (Kouzegar Kaleji, 200661).

However, the Justice and Development Party still insists on EU membership, so that some believe that the party is practically committed to the principles of democracy, secularism and reformism and not to Islam (Cheginzade and Khoshandam. 2010:190). But, the fact is that neo-Ottomanism tries to show that the culture of Islamic societies like the Western culture is based on economic rationalism. Therefore, ideological threats and fundamentalism are not consistent with existing Islam in Turkey. In addition, neo-Ottomanists have enhanced the necessary democratic indices for accession to the EU by respecting Islamic beliefs within their own society. On the other hand, Islamism advocated by neo-Ottomanists upgrades their status in the Middle East, and they try to convince Europeans that Turkey's entrance into the EU means that a country with much influence in the Middle East becomes an EU member.

Although those who believe in this model have not clearly

expressed their views on the actors in the beginning of the latest regional developments, given that intellectuals play the major role in this framework, this is the intellectual leadership of developments. In addition, this process began when Turkey achieved great success in different political and economic fields. Statements made by Erdogan in criticizing Israel, Turkey's assistance to the Gaza Freedom Flotilla and the increase in Turkey's humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip since early 2009 are among the main facilitators of the process of developments. Also, Turkey's economic successes have played a major role in attracting the statesmen of Islamic countries to its model.

Salafi-Takfiris: Salafi-Takfiris constitute the opposite front of the Turkish model. Salafis are a group of Sunni Muslims who believe that the only way for Muslims' redemption is returning to Quranic laws and Sunna as understood by "honest predecessors" (Sobhani, 2011:7). Although Salafi thinking could be found in narrations from the 2nd and 3rd centuries after the advent of Islam, it took a concrete formulation by Ibn-Teymieh (Farmanian Kashani, 2010:132). This group opposes following various religious sects and believes that all Muslims can readily refer directly to Quran and Sunna to learn them. The establishment of a Wahhabi government in 1902 in the Najd was a turning point for Salafi thinking which obtained political support and could be promoted (Sobhani, 2011:8).

However, unlike neo-Ottomanism, Salafis are divided into different tendencies: moderate and extremist Salafi-Wahhabi of Saudi Arabia, moderate and extremist Salafi-Deobandi of the Indian subcontinent, moderate Salafi-Zaydia of Yemen, Salafi-Taghribis of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi-Jihadis attributed to Seyed Qotb, extremist Salafi-Wahhabi of Saudi Arabia, extremist Salafi-Diobandi of Indian peninsula and Slafi-Jihadis attributed to Seyed Qotb as well as Salafi-Taghribis. Salafi-Taghribis believe that some Shias' behavior such as respecting the tomb of the deceased is impractical and not an ideological blasphemy and that Muslims are similar in principles, and all of them

believe that endorsed by honest predecessors. Although they want to alter the actions of other Islamic sects, including Shias, the unity of Islamic world is considered more important than magnifying minor differences (Farmanian Kashani, 2010).

Here, when we speak of Salafi, we mean extremist Salafi-Wahhabi of Saudi Arabia and Salafi-Jihadis attributed to Seyed Qotb. As Salafi-Tghribis are not sponsored by Saudi Arabia and are close to the Muslim Brotherhood, they consider unity among Muslims more important than fuelling differences. They are not Takfiris. Extremist Salafi-Deobanis of the Indian subcontinent have a marginal role and do not enjoy any independent theoretical foundations (Farmanian Kashani, 2010). In addition, Salafi-Taghribis of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood have been transformed into an independent branch which will be addressed later. Salafi-Takfiri Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia are called conservative or courtier Salafis and Salafi-Jihadis are characterized as radical ones (Alizadeh Mousavi, 2011: 176).

The first group has with the passage of time become an instrument for the legitimization of the Al-Saud regime, and the second group which branched out of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, is rather operation-oriented. Although the regional origin of groups such as Taliban and Al-Qaeda is Saudi Arabia, because of the importance of Jihad in their thinking, their intellectual foundations are placed in an intimate relation with Salafi-Takfiri-Jihadis attributed to Seyed Qotb. However, the first current is not welcomed among people in the Middle East while the second current has shaped its actions during recent developments. The ability of the internationalization of the second current is higher; therefore, it has played the greatest role in the Middle East developments. However, these two branches are similar to each other unless the strictures of courtier Salafis become exceptional in the case of Al-Saud.

Takfiris: As said above, this group accuses other branches of Islam of blasphemy, and is therefore called Takfiri (Alizadeh Mousavi, 2011: 173). Dr. Ghafari, one of the Salafi-Wahhabi scholars of Saudi Arabia,

believes that any interaction with opposing sects should be avoided, and that others should be criticized. They do not believe in solidarity and unity among Muslims and consider any proximity as becoming close to Wahhabism (Farmanian Kashani, 2010:137). Salafis attributed to Seyed Qotb do not contend themselves with blasphemy and place all other Muslims in "Dar-al-Kufr" and invite their followers to combat them (Farmanian Kashani, 2010: 146).

Strictures: This view of Islam, unlike neo-Ottomaism which was based on Islamic friendship, is based on Islamic hatred. Therefore, contrary to neo-Ottmanism, with its high tolerance, there is no tolerance. Wrongdoing is virtually unforgivable, and therefore, we cannot suppose a relationship between it and democracy (Movasaghi Gilani and Nayeri, 2010:36). In this view, there is no room for Islamic mysticism. Visiting the tombs of the deceased etc are among the customs considered as blasphemy.

Textualism and Opposition to Rationalism: Unlike neo-Ottomanism, the basis for the rationality of this model is not material benefit; rather Salafis are seeking blessings in both worlds. However, they do not believe in human wisdom and its ability to understand divine rules. In other words, the only instance for extrapolating divine rules is Quran and Sunna. Wisdom cannot adjudicate in determining criteria for truth and falsehood. Human wisdom cannot intervene in religion. Therefore, merely the appearance of texts should be a basis for knowledge (Jahangiri and Nasseri Moghaddam, 2008:43). This view believes that under these innovative conditions, the best way is restoring untapped texts in which human wisdom does not interfere with their understanding, analysis, interpretation and extrapolation (Ebrahimi, 2010:181).

Authoritarianism: Believing in domination and the appropriation of power, Salafi currents have resorted to some kind of authoritarianism which even at the stage of appropriating power considers using force and engaging in coups necessary (Seyednejad, 2009: 156). Authoritarianism among courtier Salafis prevents criticism

and combat against Al-Saud and seeks to confront other non-Salafi sects. But, authoritarianism among Salafi-Jihadis deems criticism and combat against Al-Saud regime necessary, because in Seyed Qotb's view, Dar-al-Islam is where the word of Allah occupies the highest position and Dar-al-Harb is where Kufr occupies the highest place and divine rules are not executed, even if all its inhabitants are Muslim. Governments are Dar-al-Islam or Dar-al-Harb (Farmanian Kashani, 2010: 145-47). Only the government of Rashidun Caliphate is acceptable and other governments are corrupt and cruel and must be overthrown (Tavakoli, 2010: 28). Not resorting to wisdom along with authoritarianism have led to the fact that among Salafi-Jihadis, jihad become a prevalent idea which is obligatory for all Muslim men and women, even if it leads to defeat. This way of thinking has led many Salafi groups to become armed and violent to eliminate perceived infidels (Panjereh Weekly, 2002: 5). In general, authoritarianism in both Takfiri approaches has led Salafi groups to resort to violent means to promote their political and religious goals and to eliminate their enemies, so that they know no limitations for combat and do not comply with the rules of Jihad such as not killing civilians and prisoners of war (Abbaszadeh Fathabadi, 2009:114).

Although the advocates of this model have not clearly expressed their view on the actors involved in regional developments and the time of its beginning, gives the characteristics of this model, it can be predicted that groups like Al-Qaeda play the greatest role in it, assuming the intellectual leadership of developments. In addition, the U.S. attack on Afghanistan and Iraq and thereby spread of Al-Qaeda's activities outside Afghan borders, and the U.S. defeat in Iraq and Afghanistan, are among facilitators of these developments.

Muslim Brotherhood (non-Takfiri): One of the other claimants for influencing and shaping recent developments in the Middle East are Ikhwans (followers of Muslim Brotherhood movement) who succeeded in Egypt and were able for the first time to enter into the sphere of political administration. Muslim Brotherhood is an Islamist

supranational movement considered as the largest opposition current in many Arab countries. Muslim Brotherhood is the oldest and largest Islamic political group established in 1928 in Ismailia, Egypt led by Hassan-al-Bana and then expanded its activities to other Islamic and Arab countries.

This movement emerged under the influence of thoughts advanced by Seyed Jamaleddin Asadabadi in response to the internal decadence of Muslims and the domination of strangers over Islamic countries, and especially Egypt. Muslim Brotherhood struggled in different cultural, military and political fronts to achieve its goals, such as reviving Islamic rituals, destroying strangers' domination and establishing an Islamic government - but was interdicted many times by King Faroukh's government and a large number of its members were arrested and executed. After the assassination of Hassan-al-Bana, some changes gradually took place in the movement. The most important of them was replacing armed struggle against the regime and stranger's domination with peaceful means of opposition. The decision was adopted after being frustrated with the ineffectiveness of the military solution, but it reduced the level of popularity and efficiency of the movement and led new Islamic group such as Egypt's Islamic Jihad, mostly inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood, insisting on military struggle to enter the scene. However, the deep influence of the Muslim Brotherhood on the struggles of the people in Egypt and the Islamic world is undeniable.

The ideas, goals, and organizational structure of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood were accepted by militant Muslims in Jordan, Syria and Sudan and similar organizations were established in these countries. Therefore, Muslim Brotherhood movements or organizations are now present in the political life of many Islamic countries.

Although the founders of this organization had adopted moderation, since the late 1970s, fundamentalist tendencies have grown. In the late 1970s, the group was transformed into the most organized movement in the Islamic world in response to events such

as Iran's Islamic revolution and Egypt's signing of the Camp David treaty. But after that, this organization was divided into two factions: 1- moderates who participated in parliamentary elections as well as student and cooperative unions during the 1980s and 1990s; 2- fundamentalists including moderate Islam-al-Muslimin of Egypt and its other affiliates like the Islamic Action Front of Jordan, Jamaah Islah of Kuwait, Jama'at al-Muslimin or Takfiri wal-Hijra, Islamic Jihad, Al-Qotbis of Egypt, Islamic Armed Front of Algeria and fundamentalist and Jihadi Al-Qaeda (Abbaszadeh Fathabadi, 2009: 116-7). The fundamentalist branch of the Ikhwan can be named as Salafi-Takfiri-Jihadis which was studied above. In this section, we examine the moderate branch of the Ikhwan, which prioritizes political activities over Jihad. The general principles of moderate Muslim Brotherhood are as follows:

Political-Saudi Islam: As believed by Iran and the Salafis, Hassan-al-Bana, the founder of the group, thinks that religion and politics are inseparable and their separation means the beginning of corruption in Islamic societies, the solution of which would be the establishment of Islamic government (Fowzi and Payab, 2012: 26). According to this view, all are obliged to establish and preserve the Islamic government and political and religious leaderships have been merged together. For this reasons all the leaders of this movement were religious scholars called Imams who concluded pacts (beya't). Hassan-al-Bana believed that the best kind of government was caliphate and not republic or monarchy. However, al-Bana was aware of people's role and believed that the ruler was responsible to God and the people, and that government was only a contract between the ruler and the ruled based on governmental expediency. This contract is concluded by beya't and as long as the ruler rules according to Islamic law, people must obey him (Fowzi and Payab, 2012: 28). In al-Hazibi's view, an Imam is not immune from sin; therefore, people can supervise him on the basis of religious rules (Fowzi and Payab, 2011:84).

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Pragmatism in Ancillaries: Al-Hazibi, the Ikhwan's general mentor, states that the Quran is a comprehensive constitution which speaks on all issues, but in case it speaks in general terms, it devolves on us the details to legislate on the basis of expediency. These laws must not be in conflict with the pillars of religion. He believes that God passes a part of lawmaking in Mubah affairs to human wisdom. Although Ikhwan considered the government of its time ominous, it adopted rational behavior. Al-Bana went to parliament two times. In addition, Omar-al-Talmesani, Ikhwan's third mentor, while accepting existing political realities, advanced for the first time the idea of creating a political party and recommended political actions in the framework of existing laws, even if cruel (Fowzi and Payab, 2011: 86). A selective approach to Western civilization is one of the other examples of their pragmatism. They agree with using many useful Western achievements in the Islamic society, despite their rejection of the perceived moral decadence of the West (Fowzi and Payab, 2011: 8).

Ambiguity in Determining Relation between Wisdom and Faith: Despite the fact that Al-Hazibi defends Ijtihad, he does not know any room for wisdom in extrapolating Sharia and thinks that wisdom is not able to analyze the instructions and prohibitions of Sharia and always needs to refer to religious and not rational documents (Fowzi and Payab, 2011: 83). The narrative nature of Sunnis has weakened the practical use of wisdom among the leaders and followers of the Ikhwan. For this reason, wisdom could not find an appropriate place in the Ikhwan's political thoughts. Therefore, the status of wisdom and its relation with faith is not clear in theoretical terms. This led their behavior to come in conflict in some cases with the principles of Sharia, because the constraints of Ijtihad prevent formulating wisdom compatible with religious principles. Therefore, everyone can involve his rationality for choosing tactics based on his knowledge of religion, while ordinary people don't have enough understanding of religion. This has led to the lack of a unique leadership among different groups of Muslim Brothers and thereby

lack of tactical coherence and operational paradoxes in the behavior of different groups of this movement. For this reason, many hard-line groups act in the name of the Ikhwan in a manner that can be characterized as fundamental misuse of labels. The Saudis and a number of other Arab monarchs have occasionally exploited the power, experience and influence of the Muslim Brotherhood to confront and weaken Pan-Arab, socialist and communist movements in their own countries.

The Islamic Republic of Iran: With the emergence of the Islamic revolution, Islam was for the first time brought into attention as a method for managing political and social affairs. Many theorists of revolution believe that Iran's Islamic revolution was the beginning of the idea of political Islam in the world (Afagh Mehr, 2011, 30-1). The impact of this revolution has directly or indirectly inspired other Islamic movements. It has even been effective in shaping or strengthening Islamism in the form of Al-Qaeda. However, their reading is completely different from that of Iran's Islamic revolution. Iran's Islamic revolution revived the hope that Islam could be represented as a full-fledged political and social model. Therefore, Islam attracted attention beyond individual dimensions. This revolution showed that struggling against foreign and domestic arrogance was feasible. For this reason, after the emergence of the Islamic revolution of Iran, we witnessed the growth of Islamic movements. Before that, the majority of movements in the Islamic world had been inspired by secular ideologies such as socialism and nationalism and in the best case they had used a combination of socialism and nationalism (Shiroodi, 2009: 84). For example, the Baath party was a combination of Arab nationalism, socialism and a little dose of Islam. In these movements, Islam had no role in intellectual and ideological structures and occasionally, party leaders spoke of Islamism to attract Muslims in the region. In other words, in the previous model, Islam was only a physical element used by demagogues. Certainly, there were some Islamic movements before

the advent of Iran's Islamic revolution which were based on an Islamic model such as Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, but in most cases, they were oppressed by the governments and thereby were marginalized or continued their activities covertly. Only after the Islamic revolution of Iran and presenting the Islamic modes, did these movements retrieve their coinage to assert themselves. However, the I.R.I's view has the following characteristics:

Pragmatism in Ancillaries: This view is contrary to that of the Salafis. It is based on the belief that Jihad and the implementation of religious affairs should be on the basis of a sound evaluation of the situation. Therefore, if executing Islamic rules faces negative feedback so that one cannot obtain one's goals, they should be postponed. Therefore, this definition of Islam compared to the Salafi model is pragmatic. Positing the "Umm al-Qura" theory and emphasizing Muslims' common values instead of particular Shia values aiming at reducing regional sensitivities (Derakhsheh and Glafari, 2011:19) and thereby prioritizing the interests of the I.R.I, the rational move and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries by supporting some Islamic movements – one of its reasons is not engaging in several fronts and preventing the weakening of the central power of the Islamic world, that is Iran – negotiating with the U.S. over issues such as Afghanistan and Iraq, putting emphasis on the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear activities and not diverting them to atomic weapons, issuing authorization for IAEA inspectors to visit Iran's nuclear installations and Iran's reluctance to intensify regional tension and conflicts are all indications of Iran's pragmatism.

But contrary to neo-Ottomanism, the I.R.I considers some limitations for its pragmatism and its limits are based on ancillaries and not pillars of religion. Therefore, pragmatism cannot be used for the principles of religion such as struggling against oppression. Rather, it can be a basis for the way of their execution considering the time and place requirements (Alidoost, 2011:5). For this reason, the I.R.I does not consider pragmatism as a useful means in dealing with

Israel.

Using Soft Power in Promotion of Political – Social Islam: Unlike neo-Ottomansim, the I.R.I pays attention to social and political dimensions in addition to individual ones. This view does not only cover individual aspects of Muslims' life, but also the social and political aspects of their lives. A Muslim cannot act as a secular individual in his political and social status.

He is obliged to apply Islam in all its dimensions and tries to persuade others to accept the Islamic mode. However, contrary to the Salafi–Jihadi model, persuading others to join one's cause is carried out not out of coercion but through soft power or by cultural means. This principle has made the export of revolution by violent means out of the question. Thus, the export of revolution is a model based on culture, soft power and public diplomacy which further its ideals through guidance and not coercion (Harsich, 2011:141).

Divine Rationality Coupled with Human Rationality: Contrary to neo–Ottomanism, which is based on economic rationality, Iran views happiness in both worlds as being in an intimate relation with each other. Therefore, the way of happiness in the other world passes through this world. But unlike the material rationality of neo-Ottomanists, the rationality of the I.R.I's view is beyond human nature and enjoys a divine aspect. There, it would be likely that in some cases short–term benefits are not in line with following Islam, but divine rationality envisions the long–term benefit for human societies. (Fazelinia, 2009:38 But in the I.R.I's view of Islam, the pillars of religion have priority over human rationality and history will show that. This rationality means Muslims' interests not be limited to the borders of the country, thus, Muslim citizens and the Muslim Ummah are brought to attention. However, given the principle of expediency, achieving the model of a single Ummah should be carried out given space and time requirements, hence without any expectation of finding a quick solution. As a result, goals are prioritized; for example the ideal of liberation of Quds and

protecting Palestine is a top priority for this reason, in some cases, the I.R.I has not done anything about oppression addressed to Muslims more than denunciation and taking political stances. In this view, taking action along the line of Islamic goals should be calculated given the actual power, consequences and time and space requirements. Certainly this does not mean leaving aside the principles, because they are unchanging. Coupling these two rationalities creates religious democracy in which a religious system is not possible without people's consent and thereby human rationality (Harsich, 2011: 145)

Contrary to the two previous views, proponents of the I.R.I's view have explicitly and bluntly exposed their opinion about actors and the beginning of the process of regional developments. Certainly, even if these statements had not been expressed in a clear way, given the characteristics of this view, we could have predicted that within its framework, religious parties and groups as well as religious scholars play the greatest role; that is the intellectual leadership of developments; and mosques, Friday prayers and collective prayers are among the most important venues for organizing developments. Also, while previous views were only able to facilitate the process, this view explicitly states that although Iran's Islamic revolution is one of the claims of the Islamic movement, this revolution has advanced for the first time a religious theory and practical method for Islamic movements (Fazelinia, 2009: 58). Therefore, it can be said that the advent of the Islamic revolution was a beginning for the process of new developments, so that the fall of Saddam, defeat of Arab nationalism, coming to power of Shias in Iraq, Hezbollah's successes in Lebanon and especially in the 33-day war, and finally Hamas' victory in Gaza election and in the 22-day war facilitated the process.

II- Narratives Revisited

Each of these views has had some victories. It seems that neo-Ottomanism has gained some successes in the occupied West Bank because of the achievements like the admission of the Palestinian

Authority as a non–member observer of the U.N. when it left aside Jihad to adopt political and diplomatic means to interact with Israel. In addition, it seems that the new governments in Tunisia and Libya act in a manner similar to what neo-Ottomanists prescribe. Also, the I.R.I's view has proved its definite success during the battles such as Hezbollah's 33-day war with Israel and Hamas' victory, and has displayed its soft power in confrontation with Israel's military power. The Ikhwan's view proved its victory in the 2012 war between Hamas and Israel. In addition, with the fall of Mubarak, the Muslim Brotherhood won Egypt's election and could enter into the political process of one of the most important Middle Eastern countries. The Salafi-Jihadi view has also had supporters among Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. However, these movements could never play a role as a constructive movement and have merely had a destructive role in the form of armed struggle, while Hamas and Hezbollah have not only proved their resistance capability in potential wars and battles, but have also displayed their ability in construction and political leadership of the society.

However, the lack of religious idealism in this model is one of the main causes of reduction in its advocacy by the Islamic community. In addition, neo-Ottomanism cannot be called an Islamic model, although in recent years, some efforts had been made to introduce this model as an Islamic model for the Middle East. In fact, neo- Ottomanism is not anti-religion like laic Kemalism, but it is secular and does not embrace Islam as a political – social program. Therefore, generalizing this model to the waves of Islamic Awakening is not relevant, because if we consider Islamism as the main cause of recent developments in the Middle East, we should also pay attention to people's demand for the role of Islam in their political and social affairs. Until recent developments in the Middle East, a lot of people were free to perform their Islamic rituals, such as Turkish Muslims, but they revolted. In other words, the status quo was not satisfactory for them, and they wanted to increase the role of Islam in other

realms including politics, given the fact that the existing Islam in the Turkish model does not have enough capabilities for playing a political role. This model cannot represent Islamism, and naturally, if we consider recent developments as a result of Islamism, political Islam is what the people of region demand.

In addition, the Salafi – Takfiri model has not necessary vitality to attract people. If we call courtier Salafi the representative of the Islamic model of Saudis, it should be said that this model does not enjoy enough credentials to be followed by Islamic nations because of its efforts to legitimize the non–Islamic behavior of the Saudi government including a luxury – oriented court and its reconciliation with the enemies of Islam such as the U.S. Additionally, since politics has its own rules and needs flexibility, the Salafi model could not be correctly applied even in Saudi Arabia and has been forced to leave aside some of its principles to be compatible with political realities. This means the defeat of the fundamental ideas of this model. Permitting women to drive, agreeing with constructing a railroad from Jeddah to Medina, agreeing with the participation of Arab women in London Olympic games in 2012 show that the strict principles of this model have been violated and it is on the verge of losing its raison d'être. In addition, the failure of this model in managerial, political and economic fields as well as its undemocratic nature have not made it attractive for statesmen in Islamic countries and has been criticized even in Sandi Arabia. In other words, the nature of this model has made it reactionary and prevented it from experiencing any growth in political thought (Jamshidirad, 2010: 184). Therefore, the most important reason for the failure of this view lies in its inability to make its thought and ideology dominant (Nabavi, 1995:172). For this reason, this model has not even succeeded in ruling in Saudi Arabia and to be present in the political scene. Thus, it could be said that the only factor contributing to this model is financial sponsoring of Saudi government of courtier Salafi thoughts in the region.

But if we consider the Salafi model resulting from radical Salafi-Jihadis, it should be said that this model at most can play a role in

Jihad, because it is incapable of administrating society and policy making. This model does not have a successful experience in social management and governing Islamic countries, except for a short time when the Taliban ruled a part of Afghanistan (from 1996 until 2001). Even during that time, the Taliban did not rule all over the country and those parts which were under its control were fraught of chaos and war. Contrary to neo-Ottomanism and Salafism, the Ikhwan and the I.R.I models enjoy necessary characteristics for responding to political Islam, and Islamic Awakening in its special meaning is compatible with the views of these two models. These two views are common in many principles and for this reason they have always supported each other. Of course, as for Syria, their views are somewhat different. However, many similarities between these two views would lead to their proximity. On the other hand, since Ikhwan's view in issues such as leadership and preserving solidarity among different branches runs in trouble, it is predicted that it manages the affairs in the long – term under the sponsorship of the I.R.I's model. However, the practical experience of Ikhwan for political management and governing is not significant. For this reason, we witness that despite minor differences, these two views gradually converge. But Egypt's need for foreign loans and aid such as U.S. and Israeli annual assistance to Egypt for maintaining Camp David treaty, is the most important obstacle not allowing new Egyptian leaders to make public their tendency to the I.R.I, while according to their intellectual foundations, they should have experienced some kind of convergence.

Conclusion

Islamism has been brought into attention as one of the views regarding recent developments in the Middle East. However, we cannot ignore the permanent rivalry between Islamic views. At the present time, the models of neo – Ottomanism, Salafi-Takfiri, non-Takfiri Muslim Brotherhood and the I.R.I are considered the most

important rivals in the region. Their attitudes towards Islam are different to the extent that the models are in conflict with each other. If we consider Islamism as the main root of recent developments in the Middle East beginning from late 2010, these developments have opened room for competition between these models. Therefore, only those models that have the ability to respond to the demanded Islamism can be competitive.

This article first studied the nature of these models. Tolerance and separation between religion and politics as the main characteristics of the neo-Ottomanist model, strict Takfiri and political Islam as the main characteristics of Salafi–Takfiris and rational political Islam as the main characteristics of the I.R.I's model and non- Takfiri Ikhwan were examined However, the lack of Ijtihad in this branch of Ikhwan which is taghribi and non-Takfiri, has made the compatibility between wisdom and religion a challenging issue.

Then, it was said that if we accept Islamist presuppositions, the new Islamism in the region cannot be limited to individual or social dimensions, because virtually in all countries affected by revolution, the society was free to take account of Islam in its individual and even social aspects. Therefore, new Islamism goes further to include political aspects. Accordingly, the people in the region tend to establish governments pursing their policies based on Islamic principles. On the other hand, politics has its own rational requirements. Thus, although Jihadi, they may not be instrumental in governing in a sound and successful manner. These two considerations help us in evaluating the logical success of rival models.

Findings are that neo- Ottomanism has many attractions for general tendencies, but this model is secular in nature and the role of Islam in it is marginal and rhetoric. In addition, if we posit that the main cause of recent developments in the Middle East is Islamism, this model cannot respond to religious demands of people and take into account religion in politics. However, tolerance and easygoing Islam is the main

cause of tendency for this model in the Middle East. Although the Salafi-Takfiri view is more powerful in theoretical terms and believes in religion as the basis of politics, its ability to adjust to political realities is not significant because politics needs tolerance and political action must be carried out given existing requirements. This factor has made this view unsuccessful in practice, leading to its setback in the realm of governance so that it could not overtly control the government, even in Saudi Arabia. Its only exercise in governing was limited to a short period when the Taliban ruled parts of Afghanistan. In addition, the priority of Jihad in this model, although increasing its competitiveness in conflicts, hinders stability which is necessary for governing. On the other hand, this view is not attractive among people in Islamic countries due to its strict and Takfiri nature, and is only popular among some Jihadi groups. However, Saudi financial assistance and some special situations – such as being against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan – have helped this strand. Besides, the importance of resistance in recent developments is another reason for the popularity of this view under present circumstances. But the Ikhwan and the I.R.I views can respond to religious demands advanced in the recent regional developments. These views are essentially based on political Islam and in contrast to the Turkish model, put Islam at the center of policy making, but unlike the Salafi-Takfiri view, it believes that applying Islam depends on political requirements. Therefore, it can be said that they have the capability for governing and political control as well as adjusting themselves to political realities.

Given the above, we found that Islamism is not a unique concept and could even pose more challenges against the I.R.I. However, showing the distinct features and strengths of the I.R.I's model can prove the theoretical and practical superiority of this model so it can be prevalent in recent developments in the Middle East. Of course, the manner in which these views are realized and how they can adjust themselves should be addressed in future research.

Notes

1. Although the founders and present senior members of this party are the disciples of Najmeddin Erbakan, leader of Rifah, Fazilat and Saadat Islamist parties, who separated from Rifah party in 2001 and considered by some experts as Ikhwani due to the tendency of Rifah party to Muslim Brotherhood, the performance of Justice and Development party shows that they follow neo-Ottomanism, which is different from the Ikhwan. Their differences are too large to study under the same category.
2.. http://ww.ourpresident.ir.

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