

SYED MANZAR ABBAS ZAIDI

TRIBALISM, ISLAMISM, LEADERSHIP AND THE ASSABIYYAS

Syed Manzar Abbas Zaidi

University of Central Lancashire, U.K.

Email: manzarj@hotmail.com

Abstract: This paper puts Assabiyya into its contextual paradigms related to leadership in the Islamic world. The different trajectories of elitist patterns of leadership in the Islamic world are elucidated, with their tendency to generate Islamist sentiments amongst tribalized masses. The Meta Assabic dynamics of this mobilization is described, which pertains to an excessive group loyalty feeling based upon the perception of an urgent redemption of honour. The centrist relationship trends between the modern Islamists and Islamic regimes are dwelt upon, in the backdrop of Petro Islam and the Islamist outreach to theatres, with the help of examples from Afghanistan and Pakistan, which is vital to comprehending the geopolitical undercurrents of perceptions of redemption of honour rampant within Islamist ranks today.

Keywords: Assabiyya, Islamism, Tribalism, Leadership, Political Islam, Petro-Islamism, Taliban

Islamism should not be equated with Islam, but equally, it is a blatant lie to deny that political Islam is a major stream within contemporary Islamic civilization. The Afghan Islamists' political failure to produce realistic agendas for change¹ is a widespread phenomenon in the Muslim world. It has been called many names, some unflattering; Olivier Roy for instance calling it 'the failure of political Islam.' Many analysts say that the evolution of this entity is due to the fact that Muslim societies seem to have been characterized in the twentieth century by two contradictory structures. The clan, tribe and ethnic group on one hand does not seem to exist in a peaceful equilibrium with the state and religion² on the other. Thus, it is usually the small group versus the larger faith, or the tribe versus the Ummah, or the religious clique against the state which has been the main focus of commitment, as opposed to tension against the state. This 'dualism', if you will, also manifests itself in the paradigms of Islam as opposed to Islamism. It is important to differentiate between the two; either all connections between them are cleanly severed, or they remain interconnected, in which case Islam gets paradigmatically linked to the latter. This dualism also manifests itself in the paradigms of Islam as opposed to Islamism, or what is more widely and inaccurately known as Islamic fundamentalism.³ It is this duality due to which Islam as a religion of peace is being overshadowed by the Islam of politics, which vies against the state for expression of its grievances. This politicized religion is the religion of the Taliban, Al Qaeda, Ikhwan, clerical leaders etc. in the Islamic world. It is certainly not the idea of religion of the overwhelming majority of the citizens in the country they wish to bring under their version of Islam.

This political variant is also the struggle of the small tribal cliques against the state which (they feel) has marginalized them. It is then a conjunction of traditional grievances, which have joined hands with the rebound phenomenon of radicalism 'coming home to roost' as it were, from neighboring and not so neighbouring ideologies. Thus, an insight into the tribal mindset is just as important as understanding the strains and roots of this religious indoctrination. For this, it is necessary to be introduced to the various strains of Assabiyya, which perhaps explains tribalism more comprehensively than any other hypothesis.

The Assabiyyas

In order to understand the concept of Hyper Assabiyya introduced by Akbar S. Ahmed, it is important to understand the concept of Khaldun's Assabiyya. Profound works from scholars of the stature of Gellner have placed Khaldun at the centre stage in their analysis of Islam, while others have dismissed his works as a polemicist; anthropologists like Gellner have compiled their work from analyzing society and change in the Islamic world, while the Khaldunian skeptics have tended to study text and

scriptures, which arguably, makes Gellner's postulates superior to the works of doctrinal interpreters. The root of the word 'Assabiyya' translates into group loyalty and cohesiveness. It is the feeling of group solidarity and group consciousness which holds a group or clan together, and it was (at the time Khaldun studied this cause and effect) most prominent in Bedouin clan groups, and was presumed to be lost to some degree in the opposite pole in Khaldun's cyclical history of societal change, the state. Any significant loss in group solidarity causes the collapse of the group which is involved in that particular Assabiyya relationship. Thus, Assabiyya is the entity which holds particular groups together through shared cultures, modes of behaviors etc. Assabiyya is the set of standards of a rural based society, but is broken down in an urban society, when rural and tribal peoples transmigrate from the rural areas to come and live in urban centers, which they start dominating due to their social cohesiveness. With time, their Assabiyya is marginalized as they absorb more urban values, losing their sense of solidarity with each other, making them vulnerable to oncoming trans migrations of rural people. Thus, Assabiyya is diluted with time, since the Assabiyya at the source dries up with the loss of vigor of the rural society and the advent of the urban one.

There is a dark side to Assabiyya. When it remains inflexible and rigid, it breaks down into tyranny. Excessive Assabiyya also leads to rigidity and can be counterproductive to secular notions of democracy, as demonstrated by the monarchy of Saudi Arabia. Social capital which is nurtured by Assabiyya has also been criticized by theorists as being elitist and exclusive.

Globalization appears to challenge the very roots of Assabiyya by attacking the familiar cocoons of cultural identity which surround individuals: Families are divided as individuals are forced to leave home to look for employment or in response to a political or cultural situation, sometimes never to return. The tribe is similarly affected; members gravitate to already congested urban areas, due to the constraints of the tribal resources to maintain themselves. This results in the weakening of central genealogical principle of common descent, which again engenders a loss of identity. The state does not escape unscathed; the idea of defined borders is attacked by transnational transformative ideologies like Pan Islamism or Supra nationalism. Religions are especially forced to be on the defensive as the material values of globalization attack the spiritual core of religions, which results in a variety of defensive and offensive responses, religious fundamentalism and Islamism being just two of them.

Akbar⁴ has suggested the entities which feel besieged by the ever encroaching phenomenon of globalization find solace by rallying under the concept of an exaggerated emphasis on group loyalty, which he has termed a state of "Hyper-Assabiyya". What Hyper Assabiyya does not explain in the context of Islamism is the intensity which it generates. An explanation can be offered by delving into the concept of Rabbaniya, or

Theo-centrism in Islam. The religiosity of Islam can be demonstrated by the fact that most Muslim countries are still profoundly Muslim, in a way and in a sense that most Christian countries are no longer Christian, with the clergy enjoying a degree of belief, participation, and immunity from critical comment that remains unmatched in the West. An average Muslim is a religious person, in much the same way as his western counterpart can empirically be defined as a non religious one. The Muslim religious synchronization with politics cannot however, suffice to explain the Muslim mindset toward religion pervading all walks of life, since this political attitude may be present in individuals and even in whole groups whose commitment to religious faith and practice is at best perfunctory. Also, the modern Muslim nation states have experienced too many different forms of governance structures in this century to offer a coherent explanation of the religious alignment with politics or based on group solidarity alone. The comparably higher level of religious faith and practice amongst the Muslims as compared with followers of other religions needs to be understood in the context of the overarching umbrella of Islamic identity and group loyalty⁵. Excessive group loyalty in the absence of Rabbaniya and a perception of redemption of honour may not lead to ossification of paradigms of ideology which occurs in Islamism, or indeed any other ideology. Thus Hyper Assabiyya may tend to become nationalist in character, instead of having a global appeal like an ideology unless there is a common undercurrent linking the different Hyper Assabiyya movements.

It can be hypothesized that Hyper Assabiyya has transformed in the Muslim world as an exaggerated group loyalty feeling which bases itself upon a particular ideology, in this case Islamism. Hyper Assabiyya can thus said to have further changed from notions of parochialism and ethno-nationalism, to a movement encompassing the different breeds and strains of Islam (which can be very divergent in their ideologies) but based upon some common ground. This is then Meta Assabiyya as opposed to hyper Assabiyya, as connoted by a sense of metamorphosis or change of this social solidarity feeling to one of socio-religious honour redeeming solidarity need, as I explain below.

Meta Assabiyya movements without the interpolation of a common variable which links the different Meta Assabiyya movements would not offer a coherent explanation for Islamism. Without a linking factor, the ultra Wahhabi groups may come up with a different version of Islamism than the Shiite orthodox groups; the Deobandis may clash with Barelvis over interpretative discourses of Islamism etc. unless there is a single common determinant which cross links all these disparate movements together. This undercurrent is provided by the exaggerated perception in Islamist groups that their honour is at stake, the concept of honour violated, which can be explained in context of the New World Order.

Modernization was not introduced gradually to the Muslim world as in the West, but was more or less sprung on the general populace in the wake of the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt. At the other end of the spectrum, there occurred a widespread breakdown of old social relationships and obligations, which created a new elitist modern class and an impoverished illiterate (by western standards) one. This also severely affected the tribal relationship structures; tribes are by nature anti-establishment; they don't construct towns and cities, make no permanent institutions (except for tribal conflict resolution mechanism such as Jirgas, which they need to resolve incessant feuds), and do not have too much property to defend. Debatably, these tribal attributes veer tribal based societal trajectories towards deterioration and marginalization, but not total annihilation, leaving pockets of tribal resentment against what is perceived as state hegemony. States (especially dictatorships) need to marginalize tribal sentiments since these tend to be independent minded, and thus there is usually tension between the state and tribes, unless of course the dominant tribes become the ruling elite.

The vacuum left by the collapse of the grand ideologies like Communism has generated the proliferation of localized indigenous sentiments as the new micro narrative, which link together with similar narratives to present the face of an ideology. Thus, the grievance of Kashmir and Palestine, Chechnya and Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq, hybridize their indigenous emotive grievances under the grand narrative of Islamism or Islam beset by the Western crusaders. History becomes all important in this respect; grievances relate to past and present reference points, which all point out to honour having been violated by a dishonorable enemy. Islamic fundamentalism or radicalism then, like any other political movement masquerading as a religious one, assumes the shape of a vendetta of retribution. Using empirical notions of honour can be misleading, unless they are alluded to under the overarching umbrella of a feeling of social solidarity with other Islamist groups, which has more to do with a perception of violation of honour related to some historical Islamic reference points rather than Islam itself. I have termed this group solidarity and a need of redemption of honour violated as Meta Assabiyya and Meta honour, as distorted variants of the original concepts. The oft invoked debate about Dar-ul-harb (house of war) and Dar-ul Islam (house of Islam) can also be revisited as an 'us against them,' paradigm, which of course smacks of tribal mobilization against an impending enemy. This tribal veneer is never very far from the surface, as Fouad Ajami explains in context of the modern Arab state, "Underneath the modern cover there remained the older realities of sects, ethnicity, and the call of the clans."⁶

In this context, Krueger and Maleckova⁷ have postulated that terrorism and extremism, encompassing violent Islamism, is primarily a political, rather than an economic phenomenon. Lipset has pointed to several mechanisms, by which poor people with their harsh upbringing

and authoritarian family patterns, are prone to militancy. The factors he points out are a low level of education, which tends to promote a simplified world view of politics, and an uncompromising nature due to economic insecurity, which leads to a heightened state of stimulus to perceived disturbing events. This insecurity leads to a search for immediate solutions to problems, including taking up arms. Lipset also postulates that impoverished people are isolated from the activities and controversies of the society at large, which effectively cocoons them from the intricacies of political problems. This also has deleterious effects on acquiring a spirit of tolerance. It is indeed striking how a snapshot of this behavior could also apply to tribal based societies; the simplified tribal world view coupled with an uncompromising nature due to incessant feuds does indeed tend to prompt immediate 'rectifying' responses observed in tribal societies.

Elitist Political Islamism

The Weberian model of authority assumed that societies which moved along a secular path would be guided by a rational bureaucracy set in a working democracy. The Nazi German state and the Balkans demonstrated in the heart of Europe that this would turn out to be a fallacy, since charismatic leaders would demonstrate the power to veer the trajectories of rationally functioning state governance frameworks into troubled waters. Purportedly, this is what has happened to a great extent in the Muslim world, where ruling leadership has charted the course for many of the Islamic countries onto Islamist trajectories, whether by default, design or misplaced intentions. It is also surprising that commentators of the status of Huntington and Fukuyama have not interpolated the exploitation of these sentiments by Muslim leaders, particularly in the post colonial latter half of the twentieth century.

In an Islamic context, Ibn Khaldun's science of culture explains the place of the leader in the Islamic weltanschauung; the leader is supposed to embody both political and moral authority, since the ummah purportedly needs to be guided by capable leaders.⁸ The disproportionate emphasis placed upon the revival of the Caliphate by the Islamists is a carryover theme from this discourse, even as it explains to a great extent the unflinching obedience given to 'Amirs' or 'Sheikhs' such as Mullah Omar and Bin Laden.

Zakariyya goes as far to argue that it is not just Islamism but religious movements as a whole which deviate from creating critical consciousness in their followers; according to him they foster obedience to a leader or doctrine without paying adequate self critical attention to socio-economic and political contexts of problems which arise in the mundane world. As these movements offer sanctuary "from the anxieties, barrenness and meaninglessness of an individual existence",⁹ they at the

same time inculcate unflinching obedience to a leader or a particular doctrine, which Zakariyya calls "the suspension of human reason."¹⁰ Islamism in many Muslim countries need not be considered as a revolt against modernity per se, but against the backdrop of failed attempts to impose a Western or Marxist 'imported' variant of it, which failed against the staunch resistance from the traditionalists, in the process veering many of these defensive entities towards Islamist trajectories. Dismal socio economic frameworks and income inequalities also ensured that the elite felt insecure about their power base, and tended to hold on to it by processes varying from brutal military dictatorships to appeal to Sharia. Zakariyya says that the recent resurgence of Islam is "a clear reflection of the lack of consciousness among the masses. The spread of these movements becomes inevitable after more than thirty years of oppression, the suspension of reason, and the domination of a dictatorial political system."¹¹

The supremacy of the leadership is a resonation of the colonial past in many of these post colonial countries; since the colonizing force was generally a symbiotic entity with the local elites, these elites opted for a favorable compartmentalization of policy, as against a uniform national political arena which would have allowed populist politics to flourish. The unbridled power of monarchy in the Gulf States, and tribal chiefs in East Africa and Nigeria, along with feudalism in Pakistan are an expression of the spectrum of elites, which went along with the center (a colonial power at one time) in order to negotiate as an entity on behalf of vested groups. When direct rule from the centre was preferred, as in Algeria, the system tended to break down, which espoused the cause of the elites in reaching centre stage in politics in many post colonial Muslim nation states. As a preferred governance framework, the inherent power relationship structures within colonialism were perpetuated in continuum by these elites, till they met expressions of resentment, most notably by the Islamist movements in these countries.

As for tribalism infecting the leadership and masses of the Islamic world, one needs to turn once again to Ibn Khaldun's cyclical theory of tribal settlement: "...outlying tribes tied together by kinship solidarities conquer, settle, and rule a state. In time kinship loyalties loosen, the rulers urbanize and their state loses control over distant tribes, and the cycle begins again." If we follow Khaldun's philosophy, then logically, the tribal cliquish mindset of the leaders in an Islamic country which has been raised from the ashes of tribalism would tend to persist even in a state framework. This seems to be somewhat the situation in present day Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, all states which are most affected by violent Islamism and tribalism; not coincidentally, autocratic leaders in these states have been blamed for the current dilemmas of these states. In the middle East, part of the reason why dictatorships have arisen so easily, and have been tolerated by the masses, is due to the fact that winning

against an opponent (whether it be the skeptical populace of a state or political opponents) counts as a victory; there is no credit in trying and failing, since victory counts for everything and victims are often despised, not pitied.¹² Purportedly, leaders in a state cultivate this tribal mentality as well, since they have tended to ruthlessly persecute political opposition, and put down dissenting voices as sedition. This is further espoused by disdain for persons with non membership of the tribal affiliation, aggravating the causal cycle of discrimination against the 'non members,' particularly by the ruling elite.¹³ As Ajami observes, in the Arab world, "triumph rarely comes with mercy or moderation".¹⁴ The ummah unity is only displayed by the masses when uniting against a common enemy, but in peace time the populace will often mobilize on a sectarian basis, as Sunni versus Shia, or even Sunni versus Sunni (as in Deobandi versus Barelvi). This is again a harking back to tribalism; tribes fought internecine warfare amongst themselves till they were confronted with a common enemy too formidable to be defeated by any one tribal affiliation without support from other groups. The outflanked tribes then forgot their differences temporarily and threw in their lot with other tribes against the common foe; when the opposing force or circumstances dissipated, the tribes would go back to fighting against themselves.

Delving into the universe of Muslim leadership in the twentieth century, a bewildering array of kings, military dictators, mullahs, democrats, tribal men (Taliban) emerges; adding to this motley arraignment of leadership are newly emerging aggressively literalist Islamist movements which are expressions of the ultra right or neo left. This has fostered the creation of three types of leadership which share the same characteristic of having a political agenda of survival or sustaining of foisted regimes on a populace; since this is a system of governance imposed by an elite driven by political motives of sustenance of a certain regime or agenda, it can loosely be classified as a an elitist- political Islamism. The connotations of this type of Islamism is that due to the top-down enforced agendas (whether political or Islamist), reactionary Islamism takes root in the society, much of which is due to state policies, whether as a direct or indirect consequence. The Islamic world has seen many monarchies and military dictators utilizing the device of elitist political Islamism; the Saudi regime is an example of the former while Zia in Pakistan symbolized the latter to the hilt. Many Muslim Middle Eastern countries, ranging from Morocco to Iran, are dictatorships, with countries such as Egypt, Iran, Libya, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, qualify as 'not free' countries.¹⁵

Even at a cursory glance, the tribal or clannish affiliations of many leaders of these states are obvious. In Saudi Arabia and many Gulf states, the dominant clan became the ruling elite when statehood was achieved, with the masses also arrayed along tribal lineages. It is also pertinent that even when Muslim states in the Far and Middle East such as Syria and Iraq

were taken over by military dictators, the late Hafez Assad in Syria and Saddam Hussein in Iraq tended to repose their trust in members of their own tribes and sects. Similarly, Zia in Pakistan reposed confidence only in the puritanical Deobandi persuasion of Islam which resonated with his own worldview of how things ought be run with religious fervor, particularly in the context of 'Jihad' in Afghanistan being brokered by him as a proxy American power.

Islam with its clarion call for implementation of the Sharia has been widely used throughout the Islamic world to mobilize the masses. The spectrum of ruling elite which has utilized it for the political purpose ranges from secular nationalist to pan-Arabist to Marxist, which utilized its populist appeal to support agenda of self preservation. Paradoxically, many of the same rulers created Islamist movements, which they then crushed with an iron hand. In Egypt Nasser attempted to make the prestigious Azhar University dependent on the government in order to lend religious legitimacy to governmental policies, including his ruthless suppress of the Islamic Brotherhood.¹⁶ A more recent example of this phenomenon was when Saddam Hussein, the leader of the zealously secularist Ba'th party, put "God Is Great" on the Iraqi flag, and engaged in speeches about the duty of jihad in a failed effort to get Iraqis to fight to defend his regime.¹⁷ Zia's ISI created the Jihadist groups, and then attempted to disown 'turncoats,' independent minded warlords like Masud which wanted an Afghanistan freer from Pakistani control.

The rise of 'petro-Islam' in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states is well documented. Two other broad categories of elitist Islamic leadership are also seen to have clearly emerged; the often Westernized post-independent nationalist leadership and its nemesis, the ultra rightist literalist Islamists which were often a reaction of the proletariat to the rise of former. The first type sought security in a transitional world by looking up to (often) Western and communist ideologies as a safeguard against volatile masses, while paying lip service to Islam and often advocating 'liberal' versions of it. The second type was often a reactionary organization of ideologies against what they perceived as the polluting of the 'pure' doctrinal governance frameworks by 'heretical' rulers.

Meta Assabic Islamist Frameworks

This variant of governance framework is clearly delineated by the state of Iran and prior to their fall, the Taliban in Afghanistan. This can be designated as a clerical leadership. Iran has a huge diversity of tribes and clans, standing at 96 tribes and 647 independent clans according to a recent census; however, some of these clans have become redundant as power structures over time, just retaining evolutionary historical interest. However, for the ruling Pehlavi elites, it was a dominant priority to suppress these tribal cultures in order to usher in the era of 'modernity.'

This made Raza Shah extremely unpopular amongst people in whom the 'conservative spirit'¹⁸ is deeply ingrained, and arguably contributed to the rise of Islamism. Thus, the ruling elites tried to supplement a modernist project on a populace wholly unprepared for the same; this tended to usher in the 1979 revolution. An observable phenomenon in modern day Iran is the alliance of politics with Islamism; arguably Islamism has proved more adept at integrating different tribes than modernism in Iran. The 'Ummah in peril against the great Satan' has been used repeatedly as a powerful symbolism of Islamism transcending tribal affiliations.

This had the usual result of integrating the tribals who have lost their power base either to modern ethnic nationalism, or on the other end of the spectrum, detribalization and absorption into ideology-based organizations; since Islamism dominated, recruitment to these organizations occurred to a grater rate, while ethno-nationalism sentiments of the Baluchis in Sistan and the Kurds were suppressed. Similarly, the Bakhtiari, whose khans constituted the pre-revolutionary elite, were ruthlessly put down; this has been a prominent feature accounting for the rise of Islamists, since they replaced the khans as dominant ruling elite. Both the modernity project and the subsequent Islamism could not accommodate the 'khan' power structures, which tended to lead the clans and the tribes into staunchly tribal trajectories; this was anathema for both the Islamism and the modernity project in Iran, so the khanate system was suppressed and eventually tended to die out.

The Shiite state of Iran is one of the very few examples of a clerics ruling as the leaders of the country. They are also prone to Meta Assabiatic feelings of redemption of honour; in essence they are the prime example of Meta Assabiatic Meta Honour clerical governance framework, the only one of its kind in the Islamic world. Similarly, the Taliban were such a phenomenon, their anti-Hazara and anti-Shiite sentiments expressing themselves in violent denunciation of the two main minorities in Afghanistan. Thus, these were governments taking over systems driven by a tribal mindset of how things needed to be run. It only needs engagement with the plethora of existing literature about these regimes, to comprehend how they foisted their versions of Islamism upon the masses, hybridizing their Meta Assabiyya Meta Honour shaped religious ideologies, and forcing them upon the populace. In order to comprehend how these movements obtained populist support and mobilization, it can be instructive to turn to a 'work in progress', the Hamas in Palestine.

Even though the situation for ordinary Palestinians has deteriorated, public support for extremism has steadily increased despite increasing Israeli retaliatory attacks.¹⁹ This rise in popularity needs to be contextualized in terms of changing socio-economic and political scenarios, as well as reasons endogenous to the Palestinian society²⁰ Bloom postulates that martyrdom operations tend to boost the reputation of the

organization causing them²¹, as evidenced by the case for Palestine. For instance, Nichole Argo argues that martyrdom or *shahadat* has become a mainstream Palestinian social paradigm, with social status being accorded congruent with the level of sacrifice: “You cannot win by yourself, but your sacrifice will help show the world the true nature of your sacrificial self, and of your inhuman opponent.”²² Dr. Abdel Azizi Rantisi says: “For Hamas, and Palestinian society in general, becoming a martyr is among the highest if not the highest, honour.”²³ This demonstrates how obsessed the Palestinian society is with notions of honour; it is truly a Meta Assabiatic state of affairs.

During the Oslo process, majority of Palestinians were opposed to violence.²⁴ In November 1998, as much as 75% showed opposition to suicide operations.²⁵ However, with gradually incremental ineffective governance, Arafat’s popularity plummeted: “When there is an ongoing peace process, the Palestinian authority is empowered enough to exercise its control over all of its citizens.....but after ten years of negotiations, Jewish settlements have doubled since the signing of the Oslo agreement...Hamas and Islamic Jihad are (now) political organizations that now have substantial standing in the [Arab] street.”²⁶ Along with an increase in political credentials, there was a simultaneous rise in the popularity of Islamic Jihad and Hamas, with a share of almost 70% going to Hamas²⁷. Islamic Jihad and Hamas started using a judicious use of the suicide bombing tactic, coupled with the provision of social services, to gain popularity in masses.²⁸ Against the back drop of economic decadence, rising unemployment and gloomy prospects, groups like Hamas which are seen to be “doing something” (using the suicide tactic) about the escalating Israeli aggression undermined a substantial market share of popular opinion of the Palestinian authority.²⁹

Even though there are differences between the Iranian clerical leadership and the Taliban as well as the Palestinian authority, the deterioration in socio economic opportunities for the middle class and income disparities between the elite and the lumpenproletariat were identical drivers of Islamism; arguably these operate throughout the whole breadth of Islamism today.

Post Nationalist Reactionary Meta Assabiatic Islamist States

An example of this rather unsuccessful type of regime in the Islamic world is the type of governments which modeled themselves on the Stalinist model. The ruling elite of these states used the rhetoric of the rising of the proletariat against the bourgeois, which petered out with the advent of the end of the cold war. As in Iraq and Syria, these ‘caring’ regimes evolved into little more than brutal dictatorships utilizing the devices of mukahbarat (secret police) as coercive instruments. An epitome of this variant is Nasser’s government in Egypt, and Numairi’s

government in Sudan, which prompted violent reaction by Islamists. Nasser's strong-arm tactics would later spark the Islamist movement, particularly the Islamic brotherhood, into a roaring flame. However, what is not very well appreciated is that Sadat, with his purportedly patronizing attitude towards Islamist groups, was perhaps even more instrumental in igniting these movements. The Islamists felt betrayed by Sadat's unkept promises, which would lead more radical Islamists like al-Jihad into a causal loop violence begetting more violence. Qutb's simplistic analysis has been inspirational for a vast majority of Islamists disillusioned by regimes which could be clearly discerned to have one agenda; self sustenance. Thus Qutb used the classical pre-Arabian Islamic concept of 'jahiliyya' or ignorance to denounce the Muslim leadership, which he saw as failing to overthrow the yoke of the West.

The ruling leadership in this category has skillfully tended to exploit the apprehension of the West regarding a communist advent in the Islamic world before the end of cold war, and an Islamist takeover after 9/11. The argument forcefully put forward by this ruling elite is that we are all that stood between the annihilation of the West by communists earlier, and by Islamist weapons of mass destruction currently, particularly in the context of nuclear Islamic state like Pakistan. Debatably, that is why the US was so anxious to appease Musharraf and bolster his military dictatorship in the garb of a 'chief executive' against the wishes of nearly the entire electoral mass, which conclusively ousted him out of office when relatively transparent elections were held. The leaders in this category have either been courted as darlings of the West, or as pariahs, depending upon the perspective. An allegation commonly leveled against this type of ruling elite is that he have tended to get away with literally anything, as long as they were being perceived by the West as seen supporting it.

There is some justice in one charge that is frequently leveled against the United States, and more generally against the West: Middle Easterners increasingly complain that the West judges them by different and lower standards than it does Europeans and Americans, both in what is expected of them and in what they may expect, in terms of their economic well-being and their political freedom... there is nevertheless a widespread perception that there are significant differences between the advanced Western world and the rest, notably the peoples of Islam, and that these latter are in some ways different, with the usually tacit assumption that they are inferior. The most flagrant violations of civil rights, political freedom, even human decency are disregarded or glossed over, and crimes against humanity, which in a European or American country would evoke a storm of outrage, are seen as normal and even acceptable.³⁰

The placing of Islamic tradition at the altar of political objectives and nationalistic causes has gravely affected the perception of Islam, particularly in the West. This is paradoxical inasmuch many of the leaders

in this category tended to woo the West, but caused a schizoid identity crisis in their conservative Islamist masses. Increasingly, since Islamic heritage was selectively sifted through to support shifting and temperamental political causes³¹, the intellectual revivalism in the Muslim world suffered greatly. Also, Islam started to connote a politics of identity, amongst which exploitation of Meta Assabiatic feelings of the masses by the leadership for their own ends became inextricably intertwined with political agendas; this also served to display to the outside world a distorted picture of political Islam.

Petro-Islamism

In order to understand this term, it is necessary to quote at some length from Zakariyya to comprehend the connotations of this term:

A specific type of Islam has been gathering momentum of late, and the appropriate name that applies to it is "Petro-Islam." The first and foremost objective of this type of Islam has been to protect oil wealth, or, more appropriately, the type of social relations underlying those tribal societies that possess the lion's share of this wealth. It is common knowledge that the principle of "the few dominating the largest portion of this wealth" permeates the social structure [of the Gulf region].... oil wealth has not resulted in lasting solutions even in the societies themselves and has remained, more often than not, a privilege in the hands of the few at the expense of the majority and in the hands of the present generations at the expense of future ones.³²

The 'Islam' that he speaks about is the predominantly the Saudi bred creed of Wahabism promoted by Muhammad Ibn Wahab, which carries strong undercurrents of Tribalism and Hyper Assabiyya. This has spread from Arabian Peninsula to distant theaters such as Afghanistan, due to Saudi financing and help to the Afghan Jihad. The Wahabi movement was in fact a religious expression of a pro-Arab ethnocentrism, that was as vehemently opposed to the Ottoman Turks (which epitomized the height of Islamic society in that age) as it was with Christians and Jews; Muslims deemed as non practicing by Wahabis were considered even more heretical..³³

It has been conclusively demonstrated by scholars that Wahabism was too radical to thrive in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and seemed to have gone into a nosedive. It might have gone into a terminal decline if it were not for a most unlikely conjunction of forces; the alliance of the House of Saud with the Wahabi movement against Ottoman rule in Arabia in the nineteenth century, and the tripartite relationship of the tribal house of Saud, Wahabism and British in the twentieth. Britain wanted to entrench a strong centralized governance framework in Arabia that would be 'friendly' to British oil-mining interests, in the process weakening the already moribund Ottoman Empire by putting Mecca and

Medina outside their sphere of control. With this end in mind, the British at one time or the other, counted on any tribal based family which had the potential to achieve their objectives, supporting the Rashidis, the Hashimis, the Banu Khalids, and the Al Sauds; these families were at the same time incessantly squabbling amongst each other for control of Arabia.³⁴

With the ascendance of the house of Saud in Saudi Arabia, Wahabism reigned supreme as the dominant ideological partner of the ruling elite. The Wahabis were vehemently opposed to the liberally pluralist traditions of Hijazi Saudi Arabia, and preferred the tribal confabulation of the more austere and rigidly tribal Najad, which became the dominant creed. In fact, the Wahabism in Saudi Arabia can rightly be called as the Najadi Wahabism. This variant was distinctly clannish in its outlook; the disdain expressed by the Wahabis against everything which was considered non-Wahabi and therefore non Muslim is a strikingly tribal attribute, with which Islam in Saudi Arabia was infected with. It is wrong to consider Wahabism as literalist and purely doctrinal; Ibn Wahab designed his version of Islam around his own marginal radicalized worldview, selectively picking up discourses which appealed to him. There is thus much in Wahabism which is based on apocryphal authority, unsubstantiated by a majority of the established literature on Islam.³⁵

The support of the British in the earlier formative years for the house of Saud and the discovery of oil enabled Saudis to export their brand of Wahabism to other Muslim countries. The discovery of vast reserves of oil in the Gulf region has been a boon for Islamism in the last century; the paradox inherent in this fact is that the predominantly tribal societies of the region now faced the onslaught of modernization and globalization, since it was imperative that they trade in the 'open' international oil market. Thus, when the ruling elite sought solace in religion as a countering force against the modernity project, and in order to camouflage rising income disparity levels, they tribalized Islam itself.³⁶ These states, in essence became Hyper Assabiatic, and after the Afghan experience, increasingly Meta Assabiatic.

The Saudi export of Wahabism and Salafism to different theaters is well known; Afghanistan merits particular mention here, since the confluence of Saudi ideology, and the ISI CIA nexus changed the ideological climate of this country during the Afghan Jihad, perhaps for years to come, endangering perhaps the whole world due to transmigration of these ideals. Adherence to Islamic ritualism is inbred in the lifestyle of the Afghanis and the Pakistani tribals, regardless of whether they really are religious or not. The panoply of adherents includes ex-King Zahir Shah, communist pro-Russian ministers, and Mujahideen warriors. That is the point, however, when the analogy breaks down; Islam in Afghanistan had historically been extremely tolerant, and not at all the 'push it down your throat' type³⁷. Minorities such as the

Sikhs, Hindus and Jews had enjoyed minimal persecution in Afghanistan; in fact they were quite wealthy and controlled the money markets. Even the Afghan mullah was a *laissez faire* variety of preacher who would admonish people for not coming to prayers regularly, but would rarely preach sectarianism and politics. The year 1992 saw a watershed; this year, not coincidentally, corresponds to the Taliban gaining strength in Afghanistan.

After 1992, the brutal civil war created irreconcilable schisms within Islamic sects and ethnic groups, setting the stage for the contemporary intolerant Afghanistan. Masud's massacre of the Hazaras in Kabul in 1995, the Hazaras' massacre of the Taliban in Mazar in 1997, and the Taliban massacres of Hazaras and Uzbeks in 1998 mark brutal 'Islamocide' perpetrated by Muslims in the name of their indigenous breed of ideology³⁸. This was a novel phenomenon in Afghanistan's history, creating the present religious divides. Minority groups all but fled the country, since the ethnocide committed above, coupled with the Taliban's deliberate anti-Shia programme, transformed the fiercely independent tribalism of the Afghans into a militant Meta Assabiatic fundamentalism.

Eighty per cent of people in Afghanistan belonged to the Sunni Hanafi sect, which is by large considered the most liberal amongst the four Sunni schools of thought.³⁹ The minority strains were the Shia Islam of the Hazaras in the Hazarajat, the beliefs of scattered Pashtun tribes, Tajiks and Heratis, and the Ismaelitis, the followers of the Agha Khan. The Sunni Hanafi creed prevalent in Afghanistan for ages admirably suited the loose Afghan confederal politics, since it was quite flexible; tribalism being the preferred state of government, state interference was kept to a minimum. The Pashtun village mullahs were the centre of village and social life, and Jirga the preferred adjudicative body.

As the emphasis was more on tribalism than religious inclinations, the more traditional tribal-based parties were thus preferred by the Afghan ulema as opposed to radical one. At the onset of Jihad, most joined *Harakat Inquilabi-Islami* headed by Maulana Mohammed Nabi Mohammedi and *Hizb-e-Islami* led by Maulvi Younis Khalis⁴⁰. Both men were maulvis who had studied for a time at the Haqqania *madrassah* in Pakistan, and then established their own *madrassahs* inside Afghanistan. After the Soviet invasion they set up organizations which were decentralized, non-ideological and non-hierarchical, but they rapidly lost out as the CIA-ISI arms pipeline supported the more radical Islamic parties.

Before the Taliban, Islamic extremism never really managed to gain a foothold in Afghanistan. The Wahabi sect for example, permeated from Central Asia and India, but was a movement of inconsequential importance before the ascendancy of the Taliban. However, the Saudis preferred the Wahabi warlords to give their money to; an early export was Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, who set up a Wahhabi party, the *Ittehad-e-Islami*, Islamic Unity, in Peshawar. He can be characterized as the archetypical

conservative, "anti-West," "anti-American" and hard line Islamic fundamentalist. He was a scion of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, and a member of the Afghani group *Ikhwan al Muslimin* (the Muslim Brotherhood) founded in 1969 by Gulbeddin Hikmetyar and Dr. Syed Burhanuddin Rabbani. This was defined by some as a chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

Sayyaf cultivated a close relationship with Osama bin Laden, establishing a network of training camps, bunkers and emplacements in the Jalalabad area with mutual collaboration, which were later utilized by Al-Qaeda personnel. The Wahhabi strain of puritanical thought was further distilled in the thought process of Afghans; this strain would distill the rigid trajectories of Salafism. The ordinary Afghans however considered this movement with disdain, because of their inbred distrust of anything foreign, whom they traditionally view with great suspicion. Even Bin Laden, when he joined the Afghan jihad, was considered as an 'outsider'; however, in war, finances tend to get depleted at an alarming rate and freely available money is welcome, which eventually enabled him to win a small Pashtun following. However, the Afghan Arabs continued to be treated as outsiders by the Afghans, who were not above murdering them at times out of disdain for their 'arrogance' and what the Afghans perceived as their 'holier than thou' attitudes. However, Saudi money and Pakistani expertise at running this Jihad created a whole new intolerant breed of Meta Assabiatic Islamism, the repercussions of which continue to be a predominant recurring theme of this century.

Pakistan had under its tutelage commanders of the caliber of Hikmetyar and Masud since 1975, before the Soviet invasion, both being forced to flee Afghanistan due to failed uprisings against President Mohammed Daud. They had been cultivated by the ISI for the purpose they were admirably suited to, when the invasion of Afghanistan began in earnest. President Zia ul Haq was thus the supporter of both these groups. Masud however was a commander with a mind of his own (and he was also more secular minded); this caused him to drift away from the Pakistani government eventually, leaving Hikmetyar as the sole recipient of the cash flowing in. Not coincidentally, Hikmetyar was also the most radically minded of all *mujahideen*. The continued Pakistani support to him sometimes flew in the face of facts on ground; he was not very well accepted in Kabul, Masud having greater credibility in the eyes of ordinary Afghans.

It can thus be seen that the ideological sanction for the Taliban was basically imposed by external sources, the most militant ideologies competing for the cash and ammunition.

It is pertinent that the Taliban, being trained mostly in the traditions of Pashtunwali, and lacking in the ideological and academic perspective of the Deobandi School, were far behind relative accomplishment which Jamiat al Ulema Islam (JUI), largely considered their surrogate parent, had

to impart at a later stage during the General Zia regime, because initially the JUI were not given official patronage. With the gradual collapse of the academic system and denial of educational facilities to the poor and the needy, the people living below subsistence level in Pakistan started acquiring religious education; after all it had the semblance of education simultaneously affording food, shelter, monetary benefits for the students and their families, and necessary military training in order to prepare combatants/ militants to fight for the cause of Islam. General Zia started heavy funding for these *madrassahs*; there were around 900 *madrassahs* in 1971, which exponentially shot up to 28,000 in 1988; and according to a source, 25,000 unregistered institutions existed at the end of Zia era. According to another estimate, *madrassahs* in Pakistan had sharply grown from 1,745 in 1979 to around 15,000 in the year 2000. In Punjab Province alone, the number of the registered students in *madrassahs* was 2, 19,000.⁴¹ According to another credible source, in 1997, there were 2,512 *madrassahs* and 218,939 students in eight districts (Lahore, Gujranwala, Rawalpindi, Faisalabad, Sargodha, Multan, D.G. Khan, and Bahawalpur) of the Punjab province. 972 *madrassahs* belonged to the Deobandi sect with 100,558 students, 1,216 to the Bareilvi sect with 95,190 students, 174 to the Ahle-Hadith sect with 18,880 students and 100 to Ahle Tashi sect with 4,281 students registered in them.⁴² The subsequent radicalization of Pakistan and Afghanistan, with the attendant problems of terrorism permeating to nearly every corner of the globe is, of course, *fait accompli*. One of the referential frameworks in which a study of this proliferation of radical ideology has happened can be undertaken in a Meta Assabiatic context.

Conclusions

The Islamist perception against the leadership in the Muslim world can aptly be summed up in the words of Abd al Salam Faraaj, who was executed on charges of involvement in assassination of President Sadat: "The basis of imperialism in the lands of Islam is these self-same rulers....There is no doubt that the first battlefield of the Jihad is the extirpation of these infidel leaderships."⁴³ This has been more or less a dominant discourse in the Islamist world, though there are many variations to the theme. There are of course some states in which Islamists have become the ruling elite, as epitomized by Iran. In some, they held on to power only briefly, though they left indelible marks on the polity, as in the case of Afghanistan and the Taliban. In some states, they were utilized as proxy wars by leaders to further agendas of self preservation by waging proxy wars with neighbors, as in the case of Pakistan. Others such as Sadat's Egypt flirted with the Islamists for brief periods, resorting to suppressive measures subsequently. States like Turkey, rooted in democratic and liberal, secular trajectories found to their surprise that, decades after Atatürk, the Islamists were still an emerging force to reckon

with. Even though fair and transparent elections are an exception, rather than the norm in Islamic world, some dictators gave legitimacy to their regimes by being 'elected', such as Libya's Qaddafi, Iraq's Saddam and Pakistan's Musharraf. However, Islamists also surprised the ruling elite by returning to the elected assemblies as emerging political forces, as in *Muttahida Majlis e Amal's* electoral successes in Musharraf's Pakistan. An intriguing phenomenon has been the emergence of 'centrist' states, where the establishment and the Islamists seem to have come to some sort of equilibrium, as epitomized by Hosni Mubarak's Egypt. Here, the Islamic brotherhood has sought political legitimacy by forming alliances with other parties, the organization of professional and student associations and establishment of a more effective network of social services than the state.⁴⁴ In return, the state tends to work with Islamists who have denounced militancy, though there the détente break-downs once in a while.⁴⁵ The centrist regime in today's Egypt serves as the prototype of an Islamist-state coexistence partnership that has, in fact, moderated down the radical tones of the Islamist, though the radical organizations like al jihad remain violently rooted to their terrorist past. However, this organization along with Jamma Islamiyya, are shadows of their former selves in Egypt. Many maintain that this 'moderate' Islamist resurgence is just a facade. Amr Moussa, Egypt's interior minister, mentions: "The Brotherhood is a greater threat to the safety of the state than the terrorists and the militant groups. We are determined not to go Algeria's way."⁴⁶ Khomeini's Iran, Qaddafi's Libya, and the Taliban's Afghanistan are poor models for what ensues when Islamists take over governance in a state, which perhaps unjustifiably casts aspersions on the Islamic brotherhood's admittedly non violent, modest political agenda. Time will tell whether this is a transient or a stable phenomenon.

Whenever Islamists have seized power or have come close to seizing it, the propaganda about retribution for 'honour violated' has seemed particularly strong. This perhaps reveals Meta Assabiatic fault lines, which are more easily exploitable in countries with un-democratically ruled frameworks, socio-economic inequality and rampant corruption and nepotism. Of course the Meta Assabiatic discourse has reared its head in democratic states like Turkey, but it has been considerably weaker than the nationalist movement of the Kurds and has tended to keep a lower profile, whilst this has been a dominant theme in regimes which have indulged in authoritarianism. This perhaps reveals that a leadership accountability deficit fuels the Meta Assabiatic feelings of tribalized citizenry of a state; tribalism is thus the undercurrent which runs through the gamut of this Meta Assabiatic discourse. It is also pertinent that in countries such as Iran where the Meta Assabiatic clerics have seized power, they have only done so after weakening their most formidable enemy after the Pahlavi 'modernists', the Khanate power structure of the Iranian tribes. This indicates that even though Meta Assabiyya can be

contextualized in a tribal framework, tribalism comes into opposition with it when Meta Assabiatic Islamism becomes the dominant ruling power elite. The relationships between Islamism, tribalism and Meta Assabiyya need to be further elaborated by insightful research.

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¹Bassam Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), ix-xxiii.

² Bassam Tibi, ix.

³ Bassam Tibi, ix.

⁴Akbar S.Ahmed, *Islam under Siege* (Lahore: Vanguard Press, 2003), 57.

⁵ Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy war and Unholy Terror* (London: Orion Publishing Group, 2003), 116.

⁶ Fouad Ajami, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs* (New York: Vintage, 1999), 155.

⁷ Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, "Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?", *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Volume 17, Number 4 (Fall 2003): 119–144.

⁸ Akbar S. Ahmed, *Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic Identity: The Search for Saladin* (London: Routledge, 1997). Also see Akbar S. Ahmed, *The Quaid: Jinnah and the Story of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁹ Fouad Zakariyya, *Myth and Reality in the Contemporary Islamist movement*, (London: Pluto Press, 2005), x.

¹⁰ Fouad Zakariyya, x.

¹¹ Fouad Zakariyya, *al-Haqlqah wa khayalf'l harakah al-islamiyyah al-mu 'asirah* (Cairo: Dar Sina, 1988), 15.

¹² For a readable, though arguably one sided discourse on Tribalism in Arab society see article by Philip Carl Salzman, "The Middle East's Tribal DNA", *Middle East Quarterly* (Winter 2008): 23-33, <http://www.meforum.org/1813/the-middle-east-s-tribal-dna>.

¹³ Bat Ye'or, *Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002).

¹⁴ Ajami, 134.

¹⁵ Subscores, website, Freedom in the World (Washington, D.C.: Freedom House, 2007).

¹⁶ Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft. Wrestling Islam from the Islamists* (New Delhi: Harper Collins Group, 2006), 42.

¹⁷ El Fadl, 42.

¹⁸ Karen Armstrong has aptly described this as the dominant worldview of primarily agricultural peoples who had not attained significant capacity of mass production through industrialization, and were constrained to conserving whatever resources they possessed in the society. Since resources were scarce and valuable, they grew would increasingly grow more rigid in their outlook in order to 'conserve' the resources (including values structures) they had in the society, hence the name. Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, (London: HarperCollins, 2000).

¹⁹ Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: the Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 19.

²⁰ As a symbol of public opinion being mobilized for killed Palestinians, see James Fallows, "Who shot Muhammed al Durra?", *Atlantic Monthly*, (June 2003): 49-56.

²¹ Bloom, 19.

²² Interview with an aspiring suicide bomber, Nichole Argo, "The banality of evil. Understanding Today. Human Bombs" Policy Paper Preventive Defence Project, Stanford University unpublished ms., 2003, 13.

²³ Interview with Abdul Aziz Rantisi cited in Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 187-188.

²⁴ Bloom, 25.

²⁵ Bloom, 25.

²⁶ Ziad Abu Amr, Independent Palestinian Cabinet member and minister of culture, Interview cited by Joyce M. Davis, *Martyrs: Innocence, Vengeance and Despair in the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 168-169

²⁷ Bloom, 26.

²⁸ Shaul Meshal and Avram Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence and Co-existence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

²⁹ Interview with George Habash, June 20, 2002, on PFLP website <http://www.pflp-pal.org/opinion/habash29-6-02.html>. JMCC opinion polls "Palestinian Opinion Pulse," 2, no.4 (June 2001); 2, no.6 (October 2001); 3, no.7 (January 2002) 3, no.8 (April 2002); www.jmcc.org/publicpoll.opinion.html. Ben Lynfield, "As Hope Dwindles, Hamas Thrives," *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 10, 2001. Also see the august 2002 JMCC Poll and Ha'aretz, November 28, 2002 "Poll: Majority of Palestinians support PA crackdown on attacks."

³⁰ Interview with Abdul Aziz Rantisi cited in Juergensmeyer, 187-88.

³¹ El Fadl, 42.

³² Fouad Zakariyya, *Myth and Reality in the Contemporary Islamist Movement*, (London: Pluto Press, 2005), xiii-xiv.

³³ 'Abd al-Wahhab, "Bayan al-Najah wa al-Fakak: al-Risalah al-Thaniya 'Ashra," (collected by Hamad al-Najdi), in *Majmu'at al-Tawhid*, 358-68, 375, 412.

³⁴ Efram Karsh and Inari Karsh, *Empires of Sand: The Struggle for Mastery in the Middle East, 1789-1923* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 171-98.

³⁵ For detailed discussion of these nuances see Zakariyya and El Fadl as according to references endnoted in the paper.

³⁶ Samir Amin, *The Arab Nation: Nationalism and Class Struggle* (London: Zed Press, 1987).

³⁷ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: The Story of the Afghan Warlords* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2001), 82.

³⁸ Ahmed Rashid, 83.

³⁹ Ahmed Rashid, 83.

⁴⁰ Ahmed Rashid, 83.

⁴¹ Suba Chandran, *Madrassas in Pakistan: A Brief Overview*, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 25 January 2000. <http://www.ipcs.org/index.jsp>, <http://www.ipcs.org/index.jsp>.

⁴² Kamal Matinuddin, *The Taliban Phenomenon* (Oxford University Press, 1999). Also see Kamal Matinuddin, *Power Struggle in Hindukush* (Lahore: Wajidalis, 1991).

⁴³ Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (London: Orion publishing group, 2003), 116.

⁴⁴ John Walsh, "Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood: Understanding Centrist Islam, Perspectives on the United States", *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 24, (Winter 2003).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*