

## **Introduction to the Concept of Power in Islam**

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### **Abstract**

Western Scientists throughout history express various definition and goals for power; Most of political scientists believe that power is the main concept of politics and power is the goal of politics. They categorized the power into various classifications. In this paradigm, power means Material instruments and there is no any place for the immaterial instruments. In the other hand Islam as a Monotheistic religion not only mentions the material aspects of political concepts; definitions that provided by Islamic scholars have differences and sometimes contradictory with western definitions. Power is part of politics (not purpose of politics) and it has not intrinsic value. Purpose of politics are guidance of the human to perfection, Establishment of order and justice and Prevention of cruelty. Unlike the western concept, the source of power and the source of its legitimacy is Allah. So in this paper I try to introduce the theory of power in Islam. The main question of this paper is: what is the definition of power in Islam and what are its differences with the western definitions.

### **Keywords**

Islam, Power, Source of Power, Goal of Power

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## **Introduction**

Power is the one the most complicated concept in the Social Sciences. Every school according to it's epistemological, ontologically and Methodology has its own definition.

Islam as a Monotheistic religion not only mentions the material aspects of political concepts. Existence of statements such as Happiness, guidance, divine, human dignity and divine purpose have led to expressing another definition that have differences and sometimes contradictory with western definitions. For example Morteza Motahhari said 'the relation between religion and politics is like the relation between body and soul and neither without the other has not value (Motahhari (c), 2002: 31).

In Islam, concept of power and all of its aspects such as instruments of taking the power, Preserving and display the power, legitimacy of power, source of power and its goal Regardless of the spiritual dimension is invalid. In this paper I will try to introduce the concept of power in Islamic paradigm.

### **1. Significance of Study**

The present study attempts to address the Islamic theory of power and its differences with the western theories. More specifically this study tries to address the following questions:

1. What is the definition of power in the Qur'an and what are its differences with western definitions.
2. What are the sources of power in The Qur'an?
3. What are the types of power in The Qur'an?

### **2. Procedure**

Most of the research's references of this study are from the Qur'an or from the credible interpretations of Qur'an. The Qur'an is the sacred text of Islam, which Muslims believe to be a revelation from God to Muhammad (who is

considered in Islam to be the greatest messenger and prophet). The Qur'an consists of 114 units, known as surah. The Holy Qur'an as the word of God and the miracle of the Muhammad (P.B.U.H) is a book that has come to Human Training in order to leads his from Darkness of Ignorance to happiness and guidance. So the following theory of power is not theory of a particular Islamic cult or group; therefore all Muslims should agree with that.

### **3. Definition of Power in The Qur'an**

At first glance, Qur'an see power as a blessing that can be used for achieving lofty ideals of human society. Allameh Tabataba'i said: "The kingdom (and power) is one of the bounties of Allah; it has the potential of using in the good way such as improving the human society" (Tabataba'i (a), 1996: 131).

In the Qur'an power and Strength is a prerequisite for combating corruption. In story of Moses in Qur'an, he asked God to empower him with courage, fluent tongue and Aaron:

Go to the Pharaoh; he has become a rebel. Moses said, "Lord, grant me courage. Make my task easy. And my tongue fluent. So that they may understand me. Appoint a deputy (for me) from my own people. Let it be my brother Aaron. To support me. (TA-HA, verses 24-31).

In other words, power is a tool and it is important that in which way (good or bad) to be used. Power in Islam is not Nietzschean power but the power that rises from it all excellent traits of humanity such as compassion and kindness.

The desire for power in humans is an innate and unlimited desire; in some verses, Qur'an show that this desire is an innate desire. For example in verse 120 of surah TA-HA the Satan whispered to Adam and said "shall I direct you the Tree of Eternity and a kingdom which never decays". In this ayah, kingdom is the symbol of power. In the next verse Adam accepted this suggestion and ate fruits of a forbidden tree; so these verses show that there

is the tendency to power in Adam and in every person. (Mesbah Yazdi, 1998: 126):

But the Shaitan made an evil suggestion to him; he said: O Adam! Shall I guide you to the tree of immortality and a kingdom which decays not? (TA-HA, verse 120)

In the Qur'an, power means dignity. Therefore, any power that is on a path outside the circle of dignity is corrupt power. Dignity (in Arabic: العِزَّة) in the word means invincibility that prevents human being from being defeated. In the Qur'an, the word dignity has been used in the same literal sense. One consequence and achievements of dignity is independence of society in different aspects of political, cultural and economic that tend to strengthen and political power (Hagh Panah, 2002). According to Qur'an, dignity is specific to God, the prophet and the believers:

Honor belongs to God, His Messenger and the believers (AL-MUNAFIQOON, verse 8)

According to this ayah anyone, any group or any country that seeking dignity must obey God in every aspects of their life; because he is superior to all of the universe. In ayah 139 of Allah says to the believer:

Do not be discouraged or grieved. You alone will have true dignity if you only are true believers (AL-E-IMRAN, verse 139)

#### **4. The Material Components of Power**

Power is a multifaceted phenomenon and includes Complex issues of politics, economics, culture and society. Political power needs Military

capabilities; so the Qur'an emphasizes on military power and defense preparedness and encourages Muslims to strengthening their military power:

Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies, of Allah and your enemies, and others besides, whom ye may not know, but whom Allah doth know. Whatever ye shall spend in the cause of Allah, shall be repaid unto you, and ye shall not be treated unjustly (AL-ANFAL, verse 60).

According to Allameh Tabataba'i Pretending to power also will cause to frightening the enemies (Tabataba'i (b), 1996: 117).

Islam is religious of power that does not accept surrender to the enemy (Motahhari (a), 1997: 322):

If anyone aggresses against you, so aggress against him with the likeness of that which he has aggressed against you.

Motahhari also said that Muslims at any time must be strong as far as possible In terms of military and defense against the enemy (Motahhari (b), 1998: 119).

### **5. Non-Material Components of Power**

Qur'an has more emphasis on Non-material components of power. In some verses, Qur'an has emphasized on metaphysical and unseen powers in war against enemies:

When you said to the believers: 'Is it not enough for you that your Lord should reinforce you with three thousand angels sent down upon you? (AL-E-IMRAN, verse 124).

And when you (Prophet Muhammad) prayed to your Lord for help, He

answered: 'I am sending to your aid a thousand angels in succession (AL-ANFAL, verse 9)

Perhaps the power arising from Angels not be under political power however that is the Spiritual factor that has political and social results.

### **5-1. Some of the Non-Material Component of Power in Islam**

#### **A) Belief in the Unseen**

Believing in the unseen is one the most important features of the believers in the Qur'an that emphasized in the beginning of Qur'an:

This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah [believers]; Who believe in the Unseen (AL-BAQARA, verses 3-4).

There are many example in Qur'an about 'unseen helps' to the Muslims and believers. In some verses of Qur'an, God helped the Muslims with the unseen army:

God gave confidence to His Messenger and the believers and helped them with an army which you could not see (AL-TAWBA, verse 26).

then God gave him confidence and supported him with an army which you did not see (AL-TAWBA, verse 40).

Believers, recall God's favor to you when the army attacked you. We sent a wind and the armies, which you did not see, to support you (AL-AHZAB, verse 9).

#### **B) Belief in Allah, Steadfast and Persevering**

There are some ayahs in Qur'an that talks about the importance of belief in Allah with steadfast, persevering and patience. These Features caused to unseen helps and victory of Muslims and believers in wars:

It will take only twenty of your men who are steadfast (in prayer) to defeat two hundred unbelieving men. Your two hundred men would defeat their two thousand (AL-ANFAL, verse 65).

### **C) Knowledge and Wisdom**

There are two major views on the kind of relationship of power and knowledge: Some experts know wisdom and knowledge as a prelude to power and other see power as prelude to knowledge (Feirahi, 2002: 18).

In Islam, who has knowledge has power; Knowledge has a valuable place In Qur'an; but according to following ayah, knowledge with faith in God has value in Islam:

Allah will exalt those who believe among you, and those who have knowledge, to high ranks (AL-MUJADILA, verse 11).

The Qur'an consider "those who know" superior "those who do not know":

"Are those who know equal to those who do not know? (AZ-ZUMAR, verse 9)

Encouraging Islam in learning knowledge caused to flourishing Islamic civilization over the centuries.

In another ayah of Qur'an wisdom and power have come together:

Dawood slew Jalut, and Allah gave him kingdom and wisdom, and taught him of what He pleased (AL-BAQARA, 251).

### **D) Unity**

Another non-material component of power from the perspective of the Qur'an is the unity of Individuals and members of the community. Power is not possible without unity (Motahhari (a), 1997: 131). In the Qur'an, God has given great importance to the unity of the Muslims and see the union as one of its blessings to the Muslims:

And hold fast to the Bond of Allah, together, and do not scatter. Remember the Favor of Allah bestowed upon you when you were enemies, and how He united your hearts, so that by His Favor you became brothers. And how He saved you from the Pit of Fire when you were on the brink of it. (AL-E-IMRAN, verse 103)

God emphasizes that if there is division among Muslims, dignity and power of the Muslims will be lost:

do not dispute with one another lest you should lose courage and your resolve weaken (AL-ANFAL, verse 46).

### **E) Leadership (Imamah)**

Usually the leader is the organizer of forces and power. Without leadership in society, Power cannot be held. Ali ibn Abi Talib, the first Imam of Shia said: 'The position of the head of government is that of the thread for beads, as it connects them and keeps them together. If the thread is broken, they will disperse and be lost, and will never come together again' (Nahjul Balagha, sermon 146). Also prophet Mohammad emphasized on Imam and leadership in community and said; 'If a man dies while he does not know the Imam of his time, he will die a death of ignorance' (al-Manaqib, 1960: 246).

### **6. Types of Power (Legitimate and Illegitimate)**

The Qur'an categorize the power in legitimate and illegitimate. If the power was in the hand of non-religious ruler and ruler was not appointed by God this power is illegitimate or idol (in Arabic: طاغوت). So according to the



Qur'an it is possible to be a democratic ruler while being an illegitimate ruler. Therefore Obedience of unbelievers is forbidden in Islam:

Believers, if you obey the unbelievers, they will turn you back to disbelief and you will become lost (AL-E-IMRAN, verse 149).

According to Qur'an, Muslims must obey God, His Messenger, and their 'qualified leaders':

Believers, obey God, His Messenger, and your (qualified) leaders (AN-NISA, verse 59).

These qualified leaders must have 'Ismah' (in Arabic: *عِصْمَةٌ*, means immunity from sin) and all Muslims must obey them (Fakhr Razi, 1979: 113). According to the Qur'an the main goal of every prophet has been an invitation to God's obedience and his worship:

We sent a Messenger to every nation, saying: 'Worship Allah and avoid the idols (AN-NAHL, verse 36)

### **Conclusion**

Regarding the presented and discussed ayahs and books, we can conclude that power in the Qur'an has some differences with the western definition. In the Qur'an, power means dignity; power in the Qur'an is a tool (not purpose) and it is important that in which way (good or bad) to be used. Qur'an has more emphasis on non-material component of power (and unseen helps) than material component; but also emphasizes on military power and defense preparedness and encourages Muslims to strengthening their military power. At the end, The Qur'an categorize the power in legitimate and illegitimate and asks all Muslims to obey God, his Messenger, and their qualified leaders (legitimate power) and avoid the idols (illegitimate power).

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